

Chapter – 1

An Outline of the Research

1.1 Introduction

This research lays its focus on Lakshmi Prasad Devkota's narrative poems: *Muna-Madan*, *Mhendu* and *Luni* with the purpose of throwing light upon his realistic rendering of ethnic culture, his disappointment with the existing social arrangement and his attempt to reshape the world in a new way with inclusive cultural representation. In addition this research also places emphasis upon the political and social scenario of the poet's contemporary society. This work tries to answer the question why Devkota gives so much prominence to the ethnic culture in his aforementioned works. It tries to explore the thesis that Devkota gives prominence to the ethnic culture in these works in order to bring ethnic culture to the center of the society and thereby contribute to the preservation of ethnic culture. It also shows Devkota's culturally inclusive poetic vision and attitude towards his society. This thesis approaches Devkota as a visionary poet who has seen the unhealthy social practices of the past and inevitability of equal cultural treatment in the days to come. The research thus essentially sheds light upon Devkota's motive behind bringing the concept of cultural inclusiveness to the fore.

While studying Devkota's narrative poems, his contemporary Nepali society and the political scenario of that time have been given special attention. This is because, aforementioned literary volumes are the result of the same society, which brought cultural and linguistic homogeneity into practice with which Devkota was not satisfied.

1.2 Lakshmi Prasad Devkota (1966 B.S. - 2016 B.S.)

Lakshmi Prasad Devkota is arguably a prolific writer in Nepali language owing to the production of dozens of works on every conceivable subject: politics, culture, religion, psychology and even superstition. The vastness of his literary output is exhibited through the versatility of the form of his writing that includes plays, short stories, novel, long and short poetry and even translation of English literature. Taken individually, several of them are among Nepal's well-written works; taken collectively, they establish Devkota as a pioneer literary talent of his own age and, even more impressively, as a genius whose creative achievement has never been surpassed. His contribution reaches the apex vis-à-vis introducing the concept of modernism--persistent and multidimensional experiments in subject matter, form, style, and genre--in Nepali literary canon.

Devkota, specifically, wrote on the subject matter of ethnicity which was not thought worth writing about by his contemporaries. Therefore, any discussion about Lakshmi Prasad Devkota is always bound to be loaded with superlatives. While praising Devkota's contribution to Nepalese poetry, Michael Hutt, in his book *Devkota's Muna-Madan: Translation and Analysis*, writes:

Devkota's importance derives from the fact that he lived and wrote while the concept of literary modernity (adhunikta) was being articulated in Nepal for the first time, and because his philosophy strongly influenced the way in which this concept was incorporated into Nepali literature. For this he earned the title of 'Mahakavi', great poet. (2)

Before Devkota, the tendency of writing poetry followed highly Sanskrit metrical form. No poet wrote in prose style. It is only after Devkota that new trend of writing poetry in prose style and on so-far neglected subject like ethnicity was established. Use of varied style and subject matter in writing was his philosophy which changed the entire face of Nepali literary body. For this reason, he was entitled "the great poet".

Born in 1966 B.S. in a Brahmin family in Kathmandu, Devkota's schooling started from his own family at the age of five in 1971 B.S. It is not known where and what time he initiated learning the letters, but it is for sure that he learned all the Devanagari letters the day his schooling commenced. His father wanted him to study Sanskrit. In order to meet this end, Tilmadhava Devkota, his father, wrote a plea letter to the then Prime Minister Chandra Samser so that he could enroll his son in Tindhara Pathashala. Despite the Prime Minister's consent, Devkota's family could not enroll him in Tindhara Pathashala because his mother and elder brother wanted him to study English. This was because they thought that Tilmadhava himself can teach his son Sanskrit. So, at last they opted for Durbar High School and enrolled Devkota in grade five at the age of eleven from where he received his school leaving certificate. He joined Trichandra College thereafter for his further study and received his B.A. from there. Devkota can be said to be fortunate enough to get education in autocratic Rana reign where getting education was a matter of privilege. Consent of Rana was mandatory if any general Nepalese people wanted to study. But Devkota got education in such situation too. After the completion his of B.A., Devkota left Nepal for India in order to pursue his higher studies. He wanted to have his master degree in English literature but to no avail

because of some Indian academic constrains. As a result, he had to resort to the study of law there in Patna.

Reading and writing activities of Devkota go parallel. As a child, Devkota had to write in ink the poems composed by his own father, Tilmadhava Devkota. He was said to be impressed by his son Lakshmi Prasad Devkota's calligraphy. Therefore, he always asked his son to put down his poems in the paper which inspired Devkota to become a poet. Lakshmi Prasad Devkota started writing Nepali poetry at the age of ten under the influence of the woes endured by his sister-in-law. Nityaraj Panday in his book *Mahakavi Devkota* writes the first poem written by Devkota reads like this: "Ghanaghora dukha sagar sansar jana bhai/Nagare Ghamanda ekdin janu chha hamilaa" 'The world is full of sufferings know my brother/Don't be proud for one day we have to pass away' (my translation, 4).

Later Devkota's poetic theme shifted from family suffering to love and then to nature. He also wrote a dozen of love poems for college literary magazine in Patna but they were never published. In this connection, Chudamani Bandhu in his book *Devkota* writes:

For Patna College, he wrote poems throughout night. He posted his poems written in English to the editor of the college magazine the next day. But his poems were not published which disappointed Devkota immensely. A loathe feeling towards the college magazine germinated in his heart. One day, the editor apologized for his failure to publish his poems simply because they were love poems. (My translation, 19)

Devkota also wrote many poems on nature and its effect upon human being.

Devkota's treatment of nature resembles the treatment of nature by British romantic poet,

William Wordsworth. Regarding poetry, Wordsworth writes "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (165). Like the English romantic poet, Devkota was also lover of nature. He visited almost all the areas of Nepal irrespective of geographical features. He went to the dwelling areas of the ethnic people of Nepal; to the holy places for religious purpose; and to the remote areas where people were not able to meet their two ends. This is how Devkota came into contact with nature. Referring to Devkota's close affinity to nature, in his book *Mahakavi Devkota*, Nityaraj Pandya writes:

The great poet Devkota heavily draws on nature for his poetic theme.

He has keenly observed the nature. He was fond of nature from his childhood. While describing the nature, Devkota used to assimilate with the nature itself and thereby used to forget his surroundings. The poet has understood the nature in its real sense. Nature has always played the major role in the background of poet's creation. . . . (My translation, 68)

Devkota's thematic horizon is unlimited. His poetic creation is not confined within the boundary of nature and love. But he further goes to transcend these limitations and reaches the horizon of ethnic culture. He writes on ethnic culture and comes to the conclusion that the development of ethnic culture is a must for the all-round development of nation. While doing so he approaches the ethnic culture from expressionistic perspective and portrays them as they are.

After the death of Bhimsamser, a Rana prime minister, Devkota wrote some poems on the praise of the then prime minister and got them published. Thus initiated writing career of Devkota never stopped rather it continued in his school life, college life,

and throughout his life which earned him an honorable title 'Great Poet'. Since Devkota heavily draws upon his personal experience, the society he lived in--the structure of society, the system of cast hierarchy, and political milieu-- needs a close scrutiny.

1.3 Devkota and his Contemporary Society

The society of Devkota witnessed significant numbers of national and international dealings and their subsequent outcomes. This was the society when Nepal was ruled by Rana oligarchy. Nepali people were trying to get freedom from the chains of tyrannical rule. They launched several movements against the then government to set up democracy. In the international arena, the two World Wars were already over and the impact of the great wars was already being seen in the life of the Nepalese people. In the neighboring country India, the revolution for independence had already taken place and the British Empire had already left the country. Similarly, in the next neighboring country China, communism had come to power after a long period of armed revolution. Asia thus could be said to be in the dawn of a very important historical era. As an Asian country, Nepal also experienced a tremendous people's movement wrought against the Rana oligarchy. The movement came to an end with the establishment of democracy in the country which provided the Nepalese people with freedom and the fundamental human rights.

Even after the institutionalization of democracy, the dreams of the ethnic people were not properly addressed. Although Nepal was declared a democratic country, it was not democratic in practice. The country favored cultural homogeneity and set the ethnic

culture aside. It also put the slogan of one language and one culture into effect. All the organizations --be it government or private--used Nepali language and all the people were forced to follow Hindu culture as earlier in the period of king Prithivi Narayan shah and Rana oligarchy. As a visionary poet, Devkota was well aware of the pangs, depression, and frustration of the ethnic people living under the unbalanced social system which made him unhappy. Furious with the then government's apathy towards ethnic culture, Devkota started raising voice through the means of poetry for the equal treatment of all the people irrespective of their cast and creeds. In his world famous episodic poem *Muna-Madan*, Devkota states the equality of every cast. He writes:

Kshetriko chhoro yo paau chhunchha ghinale chhudaina

Maanisa thulo dilale hunchha jaatale hudaina. (20)

This son of a Kshetri touches your feet,

But he touches them not with contempt,

A man must be judged by the size of his heart,

Not from his name or his caste. (Hutt, 38)

One is not great by cast. Nothing lies in cast to render someone higher and some other lower. It is the compassion which makes a human really great. Do the people of higher cast hierarchy really have compassion? If the answer is assertive why is Madan left by his friends of so-called higher cast when he is in their need? However Madan is helped by a Bhote, a man thought to be an untouchable by the then society. By showing the victory of compassion over the cast, Devkota imparts the message that a man becomes great by his feelings of love not by his cast. Therefore, people of every cast and

culture should be treated on the same basis. Neither should they be privileged nor marginalized.

Thus Devkota challenges the cannon--traditional core of literature, made up of works deemed great, valuable, universal and timeless, and therefore worthy of continued academic study--by presenting something worthless as worthy. In contrast to writing about the mainstream culture he writes about marginalized people and their culture. He does not employ so-far used highly Sanskrit metrical form. Instead he makes a use of prose style which renders him different from the canonical writers and his contemporaries.

Devkota's contemporary society lacked educational institutions. Durbar High School was the only school run during his time. Since Ranas opposed the notion of educating the people due to the fear of being overthrown, no universities were established in Devkota's time. Tri-Chandra College was the only college in operation. Devkota was fortunate enough to get educated in such situation too. Having passed his B.A. from Tri-Chandra College, Devkota went to Patna to pursue his LLB. Despite his longing to have master degree in English literature, he had to resort to LLB because of some Indian educational constraints. That is why Devkota joined Patna Campus in India and did his LLB. But instead of practicing law, he opted for running tuitions classes. This was because, he never enjoyed law. His interest was deeply rooted in literature. It is because of his avid interest in literature that the horizon of Nepali literature spread to what we have it today.

Ranas never granted public the right to open Libraries and educational institutions. Having seen the libraries in Patna, a thrust for the establishment of public

libraries grew in Devkota. He was all set to open a library and in the leadership of him, Devkota wrote a letter requesting the then Prime Minister to let them open a public library. Devkota was punished severely for his attempt to establish a public library which is known as library Parba. In this regard Chudamani Bandhu writes:

In May of 1989 B.S. a letter was written to Prime Minister Bhim Samser requesting him to let them open a public library. This letter contained the signature of forty-six people including Lakshmi Prasad Devkota. But one of them revealed their secrecy to the Prime Minister and all the people who signed the letter were arrested subsequently. They were sentenced to imprisonment for three years each but due to the pleading of Keshersamser on their behalf, their punishment was altered into the one hundred rupees payment per head. (My translation, 17)

In the situation where even the people from Brahman community were not treated fairly, it was unimaginable to regard the ethnic people as human being. So, it was necessary to write about them to document their culture in order to keep them forever. It was necessary to support oppressed group by making them conscious about their culture and rights. And so did Devkota.

Devkota's Library Parba can be deemed as his revolution against the then power mechanism. Power, as Michael Foucault conceives, "... is not just repressive power, a tool of conspiracy by one individual or institution against another. Power, rather, is a whole complex of forces; it is that which produces what happens" (Foucault, 106).

Michel Foucault has strong, continental influence on present--day cultural criticism and

perhaps the strongest influence on American cultural criticism and the new historicism, an interdisciplinary form of historical criticism whose evolution has often paralleled with that of cultural criticism. Foucault sought to study cultures in terms of power relationships. And so did Devkota. Devkota closely observed the play of power during the Rana reign, the power which was all set to annihilate the ethnic culture. Ranas wanted to perpetuate their rule which, they saw, was possible by preventing ordinary people from gaining education. Devkota condemned the vary practice of Ranas by the means of his poetry.

No people from intellectual circle were content with the educational policy adopted by Ranas. For the Ranas, education should be granted only to their offspring. They held that educating the public means overthrowing themselves from the position they were enjoying. Disappointed by the Ranas' educational policy, literary writers started raising their voice against them through their different writings. Krishnalal Adhakari's *Makaiko Kheti* is a heartening example of revolt against the mal-practices of Rana reign. This book is a satire to Ranas where Ranas are presented as dogs. A dog can be better but Rana people can't. Publication of *Sharada*, a literary magazine paved the way for growing consciousness against evil practices of Rana. Although there was no freedom for publication, Rana Prime Minister Judha Samser somehow permitted the publication of this magazine. As there was no freedom for publication and speech, every writer had to go through different hardships in order to get their works published. It is only after the censorship of Gorkha Bhasa Prakasani that writers were allowed to publish their works. Against this backdrop, many writers emerged successful enough to get their works published which contributed a lot for the establishment of democracy in Nepal.

But unlike his contemporary writers, Devkota further goes to write about ethnic culture in order to make their voice heard which was suppressed till that time.

1.4 Cultural Criticism: A Tool to Approach the Primary Texts.

Cultural critics want to get us away from thinking about certain works as the best and worst produced by a certain culture. Rather they seek to be more descriptive and less evaluative, more interested in relating than rating cultural products and events. While some dominant cultural critics hold that it is necessary to counter the prevalent notion of culture as something that is whole and has already been formed but as something that is always alive, growing, and changing. Some other cultural critics have said that Cultural Studies should abandon the goal of giving students access to the text which represents a culture. Instead, it should show the works in reference to other works, economic contexts, or broad social discourses within whose contexts the work makes sense. Therefore, cultural critics should be present- and even future-oriented. They should be resisting intellectuals, and taking cultural studies as an emancipatory project. The very concept holds absolute truth when it comes to Devkota's identical treatment of both ethnic as well as main stream culture. Unlike his contemporaries, Devkota concerns over marginalized subject matter of writing. He does not place emphasis only on mainstream culture but also on so far neglected endangered ethnic culture exploiting the language of their own to some extent.

One of the goals of cultural criticism is to oppose what we sometimes call high culture. Cultural critics want to make the term culture refer to popular culture as well as to that culture which we associate with the classics. They are interested in writing about how they can break down the boundary between high and low, and to dismantle the

hierarchy that the distinction implies. They also want to discover reasons- often political- why a certain kind of aesthetic product is more valued than others. Cultural critics sometimes end up combating old definitions of what constitutes the literary canon, that is, the once-agreed-upon honor roll of great books. They tend to do so, however, neither by adding books to the old lists of texts that every culturally literate person should supposedly know, nor by substituting for it some kind of counterculture canon. Rather, they tend to combat the canon by critiquing the very idea of canon.

Cultural Studies does not begin with a general theory of culture but rather views cultural practices as the intersection of many possible effects. It does not start by defining culture or its effects, or by assembling, in advance, a set of relevant dimensions within which particular practices are described. Instead, cultural practices are places where different things can and do happen. Nor can one assume, in advance, how to describe the relation of specific cultural formations to particular organizations of power. Consequently, the common assumption that Cultural Studies is, necessarily, a theory of ideology and representation, or of identity and subjectivity, or of the circulation of communication or of hegemony, is mistaken. Foucault further writes:

Cultural Studies often addresses such issues, but that is the result of analytic work on the context rather than an assumption that overwhelms the context. Like a number of other often overlapping bodies of intellectual and academic work that have emerged since World War II, Cultural Studies is politically driven; it is committed to understanding power—or more accurately, the relationships of culture, power, and context—and to producing knowledge that might help

people understand what is going on in the world and the possibilities that exist for changing it. (108)

The project of cultural studies, then, is a way of politicizing theory and theorizing politics. Cultural studies is always interested in how power infiltrates, contaminates, limits, and empowers the possibilities that people possess to live their lives in dignified and secure ways. For if one wants to change the relations of power—if one wants to move people, even a little bit—one must begin from where people are, from where and how they actually live their lives. Cultural studies attempts to strategically deploy theory to gain the knowledge necessary to describe the context in the ways that will enable the articulation of new or better political strategies. Cultural Studies also approaches power and politics as complex, contingent, and contextual phenomena and refuses to reduce power to a single dimension or axis, or to assume in advance what the relevant sites, goals, and forms of power and struggle might be. Consequently, it advocates a flexible, somewhat pragmatic or strategic, and often modest approach to political programs and possibilities.

Two of the most important political assumptions of Cultural Studies are most controversial. Cultural studies refuses to assume that people are dupe, constantly manipulated by the producers of culture and ignorant of their own subordination. On the other hand, it does not assume that people are always in control, always resisting, or operating with an informed understanding of the context. That does not mean that Cultural Studies doesn't recognize that people are often duped by contemporary culture that they are tied to, and that at times--and for a variety of reasons-- either don't know it or refuse to admit it.

While it attempts to put knowledge in the service of politics, Cultural Studies also attempts to make politics listen to the authority of knowledge. It believes that its political commitment demands that it maintains a justifiable claim to authority in the face of the threat of a relativism often linked to constructivist projects. Cultural Studies does believe that knowledge is dependent on its context, and hence, that all knowledge is limited and partial. There is no knowledge that is not always marked by the possibilities and the limits of the position and perspective from which it is constructed and offered. In the connection to Cultural Studies, Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, in the book *Double Agent: The Critic and Society*, write:

Cultural Studies rejects relativism, for it assumes that knowledge and culture exist on a different plane from the context they assert to represent. But if the knower is a constituent part of the very context he or she is trying to know, the description plays an active part in the construction of the very context it describes. The question of better or worse knowledge is, then, no longer a matter of comparing two things as if there were some place outside the reality that we could stand in order to compare them. The question is rather a matter of the possible effects of the knowledge on the context—what possibilities for change does it enable? The better the knowledge, the more new possibilities it will offer for transforming the present. (67)

That is what cultural studies means when it talks about knowledge without truth, and about useful knowledge. Cultural Studies does demand a kind of self-reflection on its own limitations, but this is not, as in some other projects, a requirement that one define

one's identity as if it were determining, but rather that one offer a rigorous analysis of institutional conditions and a reflection of one's own contextual existence. Thus even a tyrannical aristocrat does not simply wield power, for he is empowered by discourses, accepted ways of thinking, writing, and speaking and practices that amount to power. Foucault tried to view all things, from punishment to sexuality, in terms of the widest possible variety of discourses. As a result, he traced the genealogy of topics he studied through texts that more traditional historians and literary critics would have overlooked, looking at memoirs of deviants, diaries, political treatises, architectural blueprints, court records, doctors' reports--applying consistent principles of analysis in search of moments of reversal in discourse, in search of events as loci of the conflict where social practices were transformed. Foucault tended not only to build interdisciplinary bridges but also, in the process, to bring into the study of culture the histories of women, homosexuals, and minorities--groups seldom studied by those interested in culture with a capital C. Of particular importance to the evolution of cultural criticism are the works of Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Walter Benjamin was a German Marxist who, during roughly the same period, attacked certain conventional and traditional literary forms that he felt conveyed an aura of culture. He took this position in part because so many previous Marxist critics and, in his own day, Georg Lukacs, had seemed to be stuck on appreciating nineteenth-century realistic novels and opposed to the modernist works of their own time. Benjamin not only praised modernist movements but also saw as hopeful the development of new art forms utilizing mechanical production and reproduction. These forms, including radio and films, offered the promise of a new definition of culture via a broader, less exclusive domain of the arts.

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist best known for his *Prison Notebooks* critiqued the very concept of literature and, beyond that, of culture in the old sense, stressing not only the importance of culture more broadly defined but the need for nurturing and developing proletarian, or working-class, culture. About Gramsci, Louis Althusser writes:

It is necessary to view intellectuals politically--and the need for what he called radical organic intellectuals. Today's cultural critics calling for colleagues to legitimate the notion of writing reviews and books for the general public to become involved in the political reading of popular culture and, in general, to repoliticize . . . scholarship have often cited Gramsci as an early advocate of their views. (482)

Finally, and most important, Gramsci related literature to the ideologies of the culture that produced it and developed the concept of hegemony, a term he used to describe the pervasive, web like system of meanings and values that shapes the way things look, what they mean and, therefore, what reality is for the majority of people within a culture. Gramsci did not see people, even poor people, as the helpless victims of hegemony. Rather, he believed that people have the freedom and power to struggle against ideology, to alter hegemony.

Chapter- II

Textual Analysis

2.1 Muna-Madan: Portrayal of Bhote Culture

Muna-Madan is an episodic narrative poem with unhappy ending. The poem begins the moment when Madan, the hero of the poem, resolves to go to Lhasa in order to grant his mother's last wishes. His wife Muna tries her best not to let him go but to no avail. She doubts Madan's safe homecoming for she knows that the jungle on the way to Lhasa and the place itself pose a threat for his well being. She cautions him of beasts' assault in the forest and makes a request not to have romantic affair with the Tibetan women. She is ready to eat "only nettles and greens with happiness" and "with a heart that is rich" then going through numerous troubles for money for she is aware of the fact that nothing "can be done with wealth". But to her dismay, all the efforts she made end in smoke. Eventually, turning his deaf ear to Muna's pleas, Madan sets off for Lhasa leaving his ageing mother and newly married wife at home.

It's been six months since Madan left for Lhasa. He has written no letter to her mother and wife. Back to Kantipur, the hometown of Madan, Muna laments the whereabouts of her husband. She is extremely worried and reflects over different potential misfortune Madan is likely to come across. She has wilted like plucked up bud. Meanwhile, a city rascal caught a sight of Muna, a fallen fairy. "He saw her cheeks, the tender lobes of her ears,/ her hair in locks and curls,/ and at this heavenly vision he stood stock still,/ then staged around and around the house,/ having become quite mad" (Hutt, 30). The beauty of Muna breeds a sense of longing in the rascal's mind and he leaves no stone unturned to have her. He asks Naini, the house maid of Muna, to persuade her so that she can get married to him. But Muna is determined and displays her loyalty towards her husband dismissing all the Naini's arguments. She argues when a heart blooms it is no longer a bud; once it becomes another's trust it is no longer your own.

Madan tarries in Lhasa. He has already spent more days than he has promised his mother and wife. Suddenly Madan remembers both of his relatives and promises he had made to Muna prior to leave for Lhasa. A wave of water rushed through his heart. He resolves to go back to his hometown. He gathers his purses of gold, packs his luggage and sets off for Nepal. Back to Nepal, Muna saw a dream in which she was being chased by a buffalo and at last it pulled her down in the mud. Now in the morning, she ponders over the possible consequences of her dream. She is too worried about whether her husband is well or not. Her mother-in-law consoles her saying that the dream that comes with the dew cannot harm them. On the one hand, Muna starts longing for Madan. She is on the window in the full moon night and remembers all the happenings and the words uttered by her husband. On the other hand, Madan falls sick on his way to Nepal. Despite his humble request to his friends, he is deserted all alone in the forest. There is nothing else except the chirpings sounds of birds in the forest. He is too scared to be alone in the jungle. He worries about his survival. Meanwhile, a stranger approaches him which latter turns out to a Bhote who is regarded to belong to the lower rank in cast hierarchy in Hindu society. The Bhote took him to his house and nourishes him back to his sound health giving him different herbs as a medical treatment. To pay back the Bhote's human deeds, Madan offers a purse of his gold, but the man refuses it saying that it is useless for him because he has no one to put on gold as an ornaments. He requests him to bless his children instead. Madan thanks the Bhote for his humble and human deeds and departs for his house.

Madan reaches his house to find his mother breathing her last. His Muna had already passed away because of heart attack caused by a forge letter by his friend which

reads that Madan has died in Lhasa. When Madan knows that Muna too has died, he too dies asking her sister to make a rest house and a tap to fulfill his mother last wishes. He hands over his purses of gold to his sister and closes his eyes for good. Thus, by showing the victory of Muna who advocates for spirituality in general and defeat of Madan who stands for all who prioritize economic advancement over spiritual advancement, the poem comes to its close.

Since Muna-Madan explores the Bhote culture, and the research is an attempt to discover the very culture and its relevance in structuring the society in the work, it necessitates to be closely observed. Therefore, the succeeding paragraph aims at presenting a glimpse of the culture thereof and because Bhote culture belongs to the ethnic culture I would like to introduce what the ethnic culture is prior to introducing what the Bhote culture is like.

Varying opinions exist regarding culture. Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary defines culture as "The customs and belief, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group." Similarly, E. B. Taylor, in his book *Primitive Culture*, defines culture as "... the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" (Taylor, 1). In his book *Men and Culture*, B. Malinowski maintains that "Culture is the handiwork of a man and the medium through which he achieved his ends" (Malinowski, 258). In the same way, in his book *An Introduction to Sociology and Anthropology*, Resha Raj Adhikari quotes, E. A. Hoebel's definition of culture thus: "Culture is the sum total of integrated learned behavior patterns which are characteristics of the member of society and which are, therefore, not the result of biological inheritance" (Adhikari, 46).

Thus by ethnic culture, one must understand the ethnic people's customs, art, food habits and their way of life. Still it is impractical to talk of ethnic culture without knowing who the ethnic people are in a real sense. For that reason, an attempt has been made here to define ethnic people primarily which can pave the way for the discussion over ethnic culture thereafter. Ethnic people are the people whose members identify with each other, through common cultural characteristics - knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and custom. These characteristics may be based upon putative common ancestry, history, kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance. Members of an ethnic group are conscious of belonging to an ethnic group. Moreover ethnic identity is further marked by the recognition from other groups' distinctiveness. When it comes to Nepal, Setmagurali community has always been recognized as ethnic people.

Nepal is a multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial country. People belonging to different ethnic group reside here. Among them, Bhote group deserves having a look at since it occupies remarkable space in Nepalese society. Bhotes are said to have come from Tibet long back. They do have their own language known as Bhote language, customs, rites and rituals. Mutual co-operation and sympathy towards their fellow beings manifests Bhote's honest and straightforward human nature. They further display these natures through the trade they engage themselves in for their business requires benefit for the both groups involved in the dealings instead of cheating the other group.

Bhote's social habit includes not only merrymaking, cracking jokes and gossiping but also drinking which is immediately followed by singing and group dancing. Since they live in colder climate, the food they enjoy and clothes they put on consume a large

portion of their income. Habituated to live in big wooden houses, they should labor hard so as to maintain their elite living style. Bhotes follow Buddhism. Religious background has rendered them more peace loving, anti-terrorist and religious prone. They worship the idols of Buddha which is kept in their sacred religious areas. Renowned priest (lama) and their disciple monks reside together in the famous monasteries. Though anyone can voluntarily become monk, the social obligation necessitates the second child in the family to be a monk if that family has more than one son. Everyone is subjected to take oath before getting entry into the monastery as a monk. A number of monasteries and canteens at different places are set up for the nuns and monks. As the numbers of priests and monks are quite many, so are the numbers of monasteries too.

Beef and homemade alcohol are the two food items that are exclusive in Hindu food habit. While the first item is used for consuming purpose only, the later item has great social and cultural significance in Bhote community. Alcohol comes into use in every ceremony from the birth to death. It can also be used in marriage ceremony. In order to develop the feeling of fraternity and mutual co-operation, Bhote people gather together and drink. Furthermore, they use it to welcome their guest. The above mentioned uses of alcohol prove that alcohol has great social and cultural importance in Bhote community.

Muna-Madan is the most famous literary writing in Nepali which remains unequalled even today. Various opinions come to controversy given the root cause of its popularity. Nityaraj Panday forwards his opinion that the description of natural objects has lent the poem its beauty and its strength. He writes:

Since the poem has Nepalese glorious story, it has received its aesthetic importance from the Nepalese brooks, hills, flower etc. It abounds in natural flavor. This flavor runs throughout the body and the veins of Nepalese. It is aesthetically superb for it does not contain fake and roundabout sentiments. Nepalese life in its true sense has bloomed in it. (My translation, 162)

Among the varied opinions on what renders the poem famous, a thematic aspect that deserves a close scrutiny is that of ethnicity. Ethnic culture runs throughout the work, especially ethnic food habits and ethnic human nature. Even the source of the poem is an ethnic folk tale in itself.

Ethnic people are by nature straightforward. They are hard working and helpful. They are kind too. They value the matter, riches, as something that is secondary, humanity being the primary facet of human life. They valorize humanity over materiality. Therefore, Devkota praises Bhote, a character in the poem representing the Bhote ethnic group of Nepal in the poem. Unlike the non-ethnic characters, the Bhote has neither the greed of riches nor of lust. He always has the healthy feeling towards the humanity. It is because of his belief in humanity that he does not accept a purse of gold offered by Madan. The Bhote protests the Madan's offerings saying:

What can I do with this yellow gold?

Does gold grow up if you plant it?

Better to sow a little kindness, as I have done for you.

Here are my children, left by their mother,

What use is gold, is wealth,

When fate has plucked her away?
These children can't eat gold,
These children do not wear trinkets,
And my wife is above the sky,
The clouds are her only jewels. (Hutt, 43-45)

Food habits occupy a pivotal role when it comes to the formation of every culture. To put the sentiments in other words, food habit is the major components of a culture. By portraying the food habits of Bhote people, Devkota has done a great justice to ethnic people; documentation of their culture. During the time when the work was written and even to this day too, ethnic people are not granted their full rights. In their every rites and rituals, ethnic people, especially Bhote and Rai people need the dry meet of cow. Furthermore, they enjoy it as a food item. But the government of Nepal is not ready to allow them to kill the cows and thereby prevents them to follow their culture. Having seen the ethnic culture being eliminated, Devkota felt sympathetic and started revolting against the malpractices of the then government. This was because he had realized that every people's progress can only lead the nation to its advanced state. Therefore, he started writing for equal treatment of every culture in order to make the nation inclusive. *Muna-Madan* is an outcome of his attempt to highlight the Bhote culture. To meet this end, he has portrayed the Bhote culture in a realistic way. The food habits of Bhote come in the book through the mouth of Muna, the writer's mouthpiece character. While requesting her husband not to go to Tibet, she makes her aware of different possible danger on the way. She says:

My Rama, my Krishna, there are jungles and mountains,

Tibetans on the cliff, who eat cows,
A smile of farewell is like sunshine at night:
Go if you must, but do not leave me alone,
I shall protect my lord's body and face with my love. (Hutt, 24)

Thus Muna's speech makes it clear that Bhote people enjoy beef as their food habits. Although Muna has referred Bhote people derogatively as cow eater, it is unwise to comprehend the sentiment literally since cow's meat is the common food of them. In addition, Bhote's food habit is exhibited in the narrative passage by the poet himself. The following lines exemplify it:

Dudhale nwauthin bhotaki rani, fulama sutdathin
Himalko hiusangama ispardha chhalale gardathin. (7)
Queen of Bhot would wash herself by milk, sleep in blossom
And she would touch the snow with her skin. (My translation)

Here it should be taken into account that taking bath in milk implies consuming milk to a great amount. Indeed, Bhote people rear ship and drink theirs milk a lot.

In addition to food habits of Bhote people, *Muna-Madan* has portrayed their straightforward and loving character splendidly. This nature is exhibited through the following lines:

Ko runchha bhani Bhotete herchha, dekhatachha birami,
Mayale bhanchha, "saathi ra bhaai rahechha haraami!
Mero chha ghara ek kos para, timita mardaina,
Ma boki lanchhua, hunchha ki hunna? Farak pardaina...!" (20)
A Tibetan looks to see who is weeping,

He sees the sick man there,
'Your friends were worthless', he kindly says,
'I have a house just one kos away, you are not going to die,
I shall carry you home, shall I not? No matter what you say.' (Hutt, 43)

These lines come when Madan falls sick on his way back to his home and deserted by all of his friends. Since Bhote was human by nature, he came forward to nourish Madan despite the fact that he was known to him. Had there not been Bhote but the people from other case, Madan perhaps would have died in the spot.

Muna-Madan also abounds in the portrayal of Bhote costumes. Since they live in cold climate Bhote people need warm clothes and well-built houses. They love to put on golden ornaments. This cultural aspect comes through the mouth of Muna. As she requests her husband not to go to Lhasa, she says: "Lhasaki thiti, aakhaki chhiti, sunama kudeki" (3) 'The maidens of Lhasa/ with their flickering eyes and golden forms' (Hutt, 29). Similarly, Bhote's love for gold is expressed through the lines:

Aakasha chhune pahaada jasto sunbutte tamako,

Sunako chhanaa, darbaar ajangaga tyo dale Lamako. (6)

The Dalai Lama's vast golden-roofed palace,

A filigreed mountain of copper,

So tall that it touches the sky. (28)

The essential elements of the story of *Muna-Madan* were borrowed from a tale current in Newari, the indigenous Tibeto-Burman language of the Kathmandu Valley,

which Devkota himself was able to speak. Thus the source of the poem is ethnic in itself. While living as a student in Patna, Devkota is said to have asked to one of his Newar friends whether any lyric poems had been written in Newari, and was told the tale of Udas, a Newar trader who leaves his new bride behind and travels to Lhasa at his mother's request. Dayaram Shrestha has argued that a Newari folksong entitled *Ji Vaya La Lachi Maduni* (Before I Had Been Married a Month) was the primary source of *Muna-Madan*. In an article published in 1976 he compared the two tales and demonstrated to the extent to which the main events of both stories correspond, while also pointing out that many elements of the plot of *Muna-Madan* differ from those of the Newari origin. Most of the words of the song come from the mouth of the wife who has been left behind soon after her wedding, while *Muna-Madan*, which is of course much longer, contains not only the speech of its characters but also long narrative passages. *Muna-Madan* also contains many episodes that are absent from the original: for instance, an episode in which a trader falls ill and is rescued by a Tibetan would have no real relevance in the older Newari tradition, and here Devkota is pursuing his own ideological agenda. Several of the many events the two tales have in common are treated somewhat differently in each, and Devkota sometimes picks up metaphors or similes from the Newari song and develops and extends that greatly. In the Newari song the heroine commits sati (an act of killing oneself to show loyalty to the husband when he dies) when she is told that her husband had died, whereas in *Muna-Madan* she simply faints away. Devkota makes much of Madan's mother's death, but in the Newari song there is no mention of the trader's mother dying. In the song, a friend of the trader is the one who lies to the trader's wife and tells her that her husband has died, while in *Muna-Madan* a

passing stranger who has become entranced by Muna's beauty sends her a letter to that effect. When the trader of the folksong returns from Tibet he cannot enter his house, because he has been pronounced dead in his absence and is therefore inauspicious, whereas no such prohibition affects Madan. In the song, a crow appears to mock the wife as it flies past her, while in *Muna-Madan* it becomes Madan's messenger. The trader of the song intends to be away for one or two years, whereas Madan promises to be home in six weeks. Devkota's version of the tale is stripped of most the Newari cultural references that occur in the song. In the latter the deserted wife worships Bhimsen, one of the Newar trader's protective deities, and addresses a verse to a Buddhist priest, but the deities to whom supplication is made in *Muna-Madan* are all central members of the Hindu pantheon who are worshipped throughout Nepal.

Although regularly described as an episodic poem, Muna-Madan is not structured in quite such a way as to fully merit this title: for instance, it is not divided into episodes of equal length. The poem is composed of metrical lines of equal length, with couplet rhyme; it divides into passages of unequal length, which often end in a restatement of the final rhyme e.g.

"Hataka maila sunka thaila, ke garnu dhanale?

Saga ra sisnu khaeko besa anandi manale

He mera pyara! anandi manale!" (2).

Devkota was the first Nepali poet to invest his poetry, quite deliberately, with a flavor that was quintessentially Nepalese, and *Muna-Madan* marked the first stage of this crucial development. The poem itself derives much of its considerable charm from its simple language, skillful alliteration and musical metre. The Nepali is wholly colloquial

and the Sanskrit-derived vocabulary employed by most Nepali poets of the day--and by Devkota himself in some other poems--is conspicuously absent. Many of the similes and metaphors are homely, drawn from everyday objects or natural phenomena, while the syntax is generally simple and transparent, apart from a few minor obscurities without which none of Devkota's longer poems would be complete. Like Bhanubhakta Acharya's celebrated *Ramayana* in the mid-nineteenth century, *Muna-Madan* was written to be recited or sung to an easily memorized melody. It was therefore possible for it to be appreciated more widely than Nepal's low literacy rate would suggest. In places the use of alliteration is quite dazzling, and cannot possibly be conveyed in translation.

Devkota broke new ground by becoming one of the first Nepali poets to employ the Jhyaure metre of folksongs instead of the classical Sanskrit metres that had dominated the genre thus far. Thus as cultural critics maintain, Devkota challenged the canon by using common literary style instead of classical one. The term Jhyaure is often used to denote folksong in general, but in its strictest sense it is actually the name of one particular metre among many others. Until Devkota and several of his contemporaries began to champion the cause of folk genres, they were considered vulgar and unfitting for serious poetry, because they were more usually the medium for titillating or saucy tales written for readers such as the large number of British-Gorkha soldiers who returned to Nepal between the world wars. A popular tradition has it that Devkota was first inspired to adopt this genre while listening to some young women singing as they planted rice in the fields. Chuda Mani Bhandu reasons that this incident, recounted in Devkota's first published essay, Ashadhko Pandra 'fifteenth of Ashad' occurred in 1933B.S. Perhaps

anticipating the scorn of his peers, Devkota prefaced his poem a verse which defended his use of the jhyure by appealing to patriotic sentiment:

How fine, how sweet this Nepali song called jhyaure,
This seedling I planted in a field I never saw tilled,
Despise not the jhyaure, dear reader,
Let it soften and lift you to the highest peak,
Let it set lips in motion like pure hill springs,
May it illumine the city's lonely chambers,
And light the heart's lamp in the village hut.
Nepali seed, Nepali grain, the sweet juicy song
Watered with the flavor of Nepal: which Nepali,
Who that is Nepali, could ever shut his eyes to it?
If a fountain springs from great brilliance,
Will it not touch the heart? (Hutt, 15)

The great affection Nepalese still feel for *Muna-Madan* ensure it of very special place in the history of Nepali literature. The literature that Nepali critics now describes as cynical and less trusting of eternal verities than anything that Devkota wrote. Today, one has the sense of a rupture with the world that produced the Mahakavi, of a loss of the bhakti, innocence and moral certainty of *Muna-Madan*. In a time of constant change and uncertainty, it is these qualities that ensure the poem of a cherished place in the hearts of its readers.

2.2 Mhendu: Portrayal of Tamang Culture

Like *Muna-Madan*, *Mhendu* too has tragic ending which begins with the beautiful account of Mhendu, the heroine of the poem. She is depicted as something that makes the hills and mountains look beautiful because of her golden hair. Her body possesses the flowery quality and her voice the flowing sound of rivers. Her laughter causes the flowers of every color to smile. As the girl grows adult, she falls in love with Gumbu, a boy from town. He is straightforward and loyal to Mhendu, his beloved, but he is misunderstood by the Mhendu's parents. Mindi, the mother and Gamboji, the father of Mhendu regard Gumbu as the city rascal of *Muna-Madan*. But he does not belong to the category of man as he is thought to be. Mindi persuades her daughter not to be enchanted by Gumbu who uses perfume to allure her. She tries to convince her saying that it is far better to live in Helambo than in town for town dwellers are always prone to cheating. She requests her not to abandon her paradise-like birth place where clouds and waterfalls are always following their regular course. Gamboji scolds his daughter for her conduct. Extremely saddened by the remarks of her father and mother, Mhendu once feels like drowning herself in Tadi River. Although Gumbu is a city dweller, he stands as a good lover and becomes ready to sacrifice his life for his beloved's sake. Their love grows strong as they perpetuate their meeting in lonely place. Meanwhile Rangaja Sherpa happens to catch a sight of Mhendu a day. Entranced by her beauty, Rangaja also falls in love with Mhendu. One day, Gunje Lama reveals the love affairs of Gumbu and Mhendu to Rangaja whereby he goes to the shore of Tadi where Gumbu and Mhendu are recreating and threatens Gumbu not to indulge in Mhendu for she solely belongs to him alone. A sword on his hand, Rangaja is dying to show what he is capable of. Since Gumbu is weak physically then Rangaja, he keeps quiet. Mhendu tries her best to convince him that their

love bond is true and sacred but she could not succeed. Therefore, he should not come in-between them. Realizing that she is the major root of all these spectacles, Mhendu drowns herself in the river and Gumbu follows suit. They are said to have united in the river. This is how the story of the poem comes to an end.

Now let's look at the Tamang culture and explore it in the work *Mhendu* by Devkota. Tamang, another indigenous ethnic group of Nepal, also believes in Buddhism. Straightforward and hard working, Tamang people comprise one of the oldest groups of Nepal having their own culture- tradition, language, belief, morals, law and habit. They largely live in the surrounding areas of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. According to a tale famous in their community, Tamangs are the offspring of Shiva, a lord worshiped by Hindu people too. It is taken for granted that Shiva was non-Aryan in the beginning. Some scholars define Tamang as horse rider armies. According to a tale popular in their community, they come to Nepal on horse- back during the kingship of Shronchong Gampo in Tibet whereupon they are named Tamang. Despite these tales, it should be taken for granted that Tamangs are inhabitants of Kathmandu surrounding areas.

Tamang people collectively follow Buddhism which is rooted in the religion practiced in Tibet by Ningamapa sects. The main hymn of Buddhism reads like " om mani padhme hun" which are kept in the monasteries in written forms. Buddhists go round the monasteries from right side while paying homage to God. While doing this, they ring their bell. Buddhist people keep the holy book to the front while reading it and the moment they finished reading it, they keep the book aside. They are peace-loving and

united thus perform their rituals collectively. The very loving nature of them is expressed in the following lines:

Haami sabailaai

Premle anagaalchhau.

Saaraa sansaarko

Priti sangaalchhau. (14)

We accept all with compassion.

Seek the love of world. (my translation)

Since they love the entire humanity, Tamang people are always united to meet this end. They hold that unity is the strength to get through every obstacle. This uniformity of Tamang is expressed in the given lines:

Bhasa ghumchhan, jaati milchhan

Yautai rukhama haaga fulchhan.

...

Aakhira saaraa rangagaharu milchhan

Aakhira sab swar mutuma milchhan. (11)

Languages walk, casts co-operate

Branches blossom in the same tree.

...

At length, all the colors come together

All the voices come to the heart.

Tamang people have their own concept about food habits too. They love to use the flour of millet, maize, wheat and barley as much as possible. They consume

rice only a few. Instead of consuming rice as food, Tamang people use it to make alcohol. They use different other food items in feast and festival. Alcohol is an essential part of Tamang's culture and is used unexceptionally by almost all the people in their community. Without alcohol, rites and rituals of Tamang people can't be performed. In this sense alcohol has much importance in Tamang culture. Perhaps it was well observed by Devkota himself that's why he depicts them superbly. He writes: "Raksi khanchha aghorko/Lagne huchha ghanghorko" 'takes alcohol a lot and gets intoxicated' (my translation, 19). Once they get drunk, Tamang people lose their control and thereby disclose their aggressive nature which is common to every ethnic people. The given lines result from the alcoholic intoxication of Ranja, antagonist of the poem.

Chhati kholi kabolchha

Mero Mhendu ko bolchha

Khukhuriko dhaarle

Tyasko garden ma molchha. (19)

I challenge openly

That anyone who claims over Mhendu

I will cut his neck with khukhuri.

Similar to other people, Tamang people too regard marriage, death and birth as of much importance. Their society validates all forms of marriages for instance- arrange marriage, love marriage, cousin marriage, and widow marriage- practiced in their community. Among them, cousin marriage is widely in existence to this day too in their society. Beside arrange marriage, love marriage is very popular and widely practiced in Tamang community because arrange marriage is too costly in comparison to love

marriage. This love marriage in *Mhendu* is expressed through the union between Mhendu and her beloved.

Mhendu is a poem written in Tamang melody, a typical folk music practiced by Tamang, an ethnic group of Nepal. It comprises five episodes altogether. Composed in a day, the piece of work of art is an outcome of the poet's excursion to Gosaikunda, a religious cite of Hindu. In his journey to the sacred place, Devkota has seen and understood Tamang's culture. He was enticed by their cultural dance, ways of talking, and word pronunciation. He was equally hypnotized by their simplicity and straightforwardness. The narrative poem was written in 2003 B.S. but could not come into print because of some social and political constraints. When it was first published in 2015 B.S., the writer was asked to write his opinion on the poem. In his note entitled "On Mhendu", Devkota has cleared how he happened to write it. He writes:

Mhendu is a flower in Tamang language. It has double enticing quality which blooms on the slope way to Gosaithan. The co-existence of Mongol and Aryan culture in Nepal has been strengthened here in this book through a love narrative. This everlasting co-existence of two cultures will be sung by the wild birds and waterfalls. I am profoundly enticed by Tamang's talk, dance, and their ways of pronouncing words, and their simplicity and melody. This is an outcome of my journey to Gosaithan in 2003 B.S. (my translation, preface of Mhendu)

The short poem has varying lines with the words that ranges from two words to seven words. Some stanzas have been written in classical Sanskrit metre. The poem was

written because of poet's attempt to quench his thirst for writing a poem in Tamang melody. He writes, "I always longed for composing a poem in Tamang rhythm as I did *Muna-Madan* in Jyaure metre.

The narrative *poem Mhendu* heavily draws upon ethnic culture whose composition was inspired by the Tamang culture. Therefore, Tamang culture finds its best expression in the work. All the characters belong to the Tamang community. Beside it, the work has made a use of words from Tamang language. For instance, the following stanza has the Tamang words:

Enge benge songe langa

Ke ke bhanchhin manki ganga. (10)

Enge benge songe langa

What says the goddess of my heart? (my translation)

Devkota, further, shows his talent in exploiting Tamang version of Nepali. He writes: "Bhudhi aaimailai/ Aamai bhanchhan." 'Aged women are addressed as mother.' (14) In addition to language and characters, *Mhendu* has also captured the linguistic tone produced by Tamang people. In this connection the following line is relevant: "chaahе jiu yo chhoddhula" 'If needed, I am ready to sacrifice my life' (my translation, 21). The word 'chhoddhula' is uttered as 'chhoddiula' in standard Nepali. It seems that Devkota used this Tamang version of Nepali to sound more realistic. *Mhendu* has also depicted the Tamang style of wearing clothes. In fifth episode of the poem, the poet has described the costumes of Sherpa king. Devkota writes:

Sherpa Ranja ramro

Aglo goro hamro

Ladaima chamro

Mirmire jughaothe

Baghalai marne khukhuri

Hanchha ekai chote

Hasamukha Tamanga Bhote

Bidma khopi khukhuri

Sirupate khukhuri!

Terso bhirchha, parera

Dusman sirko tukura!

Tyo ta kahilai harena

Ladaima patakai

Birko chhati farkayo . . . (19)

Handsome is the Sherpa king

Tall and white

Strong enough for war.

Moustache on his smiling face

Tamang Bhote can kill a tiger with a single thrust.

Making a whole on the haft of his sword

He carries it on his waist warped by a piece of clothes.

Never defeated in the war

He showed his bravery chest. (My translation, 19)

Rangaja, the antagonist of the poem is described as addicted to wine. But it should not be taken otherwise since every ethnic people enjoy it. Without wine, no rituals and

rites can be carried out in ethnic culture. By depicting ethnic costumes, food habits, ethnic name, and ethnic words, Devkota has made the ethnic people conscious about their culture and asked them to raise a voice against their suppression. He asks them to unite to fight for their equal treatment and equal representation in the major organs of the nation. The poet has known that Nepal can be advanced only when people of every cast and culture are treated alike.

Devkota is highly innovative when it comes to the style. During the time when he was writing, widely accepted and followed tradition was that of classical Sanskrit metre. The writer had to face a lot of obstacle when he used newer style in his writings. He had a verbal fight with the then president of *Bhasa Anubad Samiti* simply because he refused to use the classical tradition strictly bound by grammar. He always wanted to experiment newer and newer style of writing. Taking into account this intention of the writer, *Mhendu* can be a perfect example of innovative writing style where both classical and modern styles have been merged. Although the subject matter is trivial, its style is worth following. Devkota himself has written that *Mhendu* is just a thrust to the renowned poets to experiment newer styles. The poem reminds us of English ballad; the theme of immortal nature of love is what's established its height and importance. The poem is tragic but the tragedy itself can be a means of changing sorrow into happiness which symbolizes the eternity of peaceful afterlife. "Sacrifice is greater than war", a human natural quality inherent in ethnic people, is the major lesson the poem imparts.

Like other works of the writer, *Mhendu* too derives its title from the name of its heroine. It can be relevant if the character-centered plot of the poem is taken into account. The writer has done justice to this work by giving its title *Mhendu* for all the events in the

poem revolves around the character Mhendu. Chudamani Bandhu has talked about the title and different words referring to the same idea in different languages. He writes:

Devkota has given this episodic poem its title *Mhendu*. The meaning of Mhendu is flower. In Tamang and Thakali language, it is called 'Mhento', in Kaike 'Minda', and in Jirel and Sherpa, it is known as 'Mendok'. Devkota has called Mhendu a Tamang flower to mean that it's been written in Tamang melody. (My translation, 161)

Devkota worships nature. He has intimate relation with nature. By travelling many natural and rural areas of Nepal, Devkota studied nature well. For him nature is God. In the third episode of the poem, Mhendu in nature, Devkota has presented the beautiful description of nature and thereby shown the relationship between human beings and nature. In this context, Kumar Bahadur Jyoshi writes:

Based on the self-sacrificing love story between a Tamang girl, Mhendu who hails from the surrounding area of the way to Gosaitan and a boy, Gumbu from a city, *Mhendu* has an unknown touch on the description of the morning. In the third episode entitled "Mhendu in Nature", the writer has exhibited the human-nature relationship. By doing this, the poet is imparting the message that nature abounds in true people and their communication. (My translation, 196)

Devkota has displayed his poetic talent especially in the sentimental stanzas that describes the beauty of Mhendu which has assured Devkota's unique place in Nepali literary canon. Such literary quality of the writer has disclosed writer's affinity with the English romantic poets Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Byron whose works impressed

Devkota to a significant extent. Like them Devkota too has compassion towards nature. But somewhere in the poem, it seems that artistic quality of it has overshadowed its thematic development. In this way, Devkota has exposed his love for self, for nature and for ethnic people who are, for him, the major part of nature itself.

Despite these qualities of the poet, he has some weaknesses too. For instance, towards the end of the Mhendu, Rangaja, the antagonist of the poem, threatens Gumbu to kill him. This is the questionable point of the poem since no man stops him from committing crime whereas presentation of people over there is highly likely. Perhaps, the poet didn't take this aspect into account because Rangaja was almost mad in love and every effort to console him was likely to end in smoke. Again this logic too is unpersuasive. If Gumbu is ready to die along with the Mhendu, why don't Rangaja while both of them crave for her. Why don't other people try to save her? Can the loving villager be content to remain patient? It seems somehow ridiculous to portray straightforward ethnic people as someone who are apathetic to their fellow beings. Given to the date of his travel to Gosaitan which has inspired him to write this work, Devkota has made another error. While the book was on the verge of its publication, the poet was asked to write its forward where he has written that "it is an outcome of my journey to Gosaitan in 2003 B.S.". He had to recollect the events after many years which perhaps lead him to the error. In fact, he had travelled to Gosathan in 1995 B.S. His health was degrading during that time. He was therefore taken to the travel anticipating that he could recover shortly. Although there was no improvement in the poet's health, this journey granted the poet ample experiences to create many works based on ethnic culture. Well-

equipped with ethnic culture, Devkota has done enough justice to ethnic people by documenting their culture in his works.

Ethnic people believe in the dual existence of an individual: the physical body and the soul. When a man dies his soul comes out of the body and hovers around. The soul wants the things he enjoyed during his life. Therefore, the living people worship the spirit of the deceased by offering what he enjoyed during his life. The soul is likely to be destroyed if it is not duly worshiped. The point is that an individual lives even after the mundane body passes away. So what is impossible on this earth will be possible afterlife. The marriage of the two characters Mhendu and Gumbu could not take place while they are alive but they will reunite, so it is hoped, once they are dead. Therefore, both of them commit suicide in order to get together afterlife.

2.3 Luni: Portrayal of Sherpa Culture

Luni is a poetic work written in Bhote Selo, a form of folk music. A product of the poet's travel to Gosaithan, *Luni* deals with sacred love and its immortal character, a fundamental attribute of ethnic people, which is expressed through the love story of Luni and Changana, the two major characters of the poem. It imparts a message that love is supreme in the world which can transcend this physical reality. Beside it, the work is also an advocate for freedom in choosing life partner since it is the only way to render the conjugal life blissful. People's dream to cherish their married life can't come true if they are not allowed this freedom. They have to suffer a lot like Luni and Changana of the poetic work. Therefore, liberty for choosing the life partner is necessary.

As already stated, the plot of the poetic work comprises the ups and downs of the love affairs between Luni and Changana. Luni, the title character of the work who is the

daughter of Samba Songo, the king of the Longo palace of Helambu, is the heroine of the poetic work, *Luni*. She is a beautiful girl. Having seen Changana in an imaginative tournament Mardaun, Luni is fascinated by his unparalleled skill, gorgeous look, and outstanding bravery at the outset which gradually takes the form of love. But unaware of this truth, her father Samba Songo makes an agreement with Chhasi Lama to marry away his daughter to Lhano Lama, the son of Chhasi Lama. After their engagement is announced, Luni along with her friend Jinji goes to the beach of the river Kelendir for recreation, where she happens to see Changana uttering her name frequently so that God grant his wish. They both sing and dance there. But one day, Samba Songo discovers that Luni is dating with Changana whereupon he almost becomes mad with anger and urges the boy to become a saint and enter the Gumba thereafter.

Luni is married to Lhano Lama. She is taken to the palace of Lhasa. But she is not happy. She starts wilting as the time goes by. Although Lhano Lama provides her with every facility of a Palace, she is never attracted to him. Deeply touched by Luni's misery, Aanja and Jinji feel sympathetic to her and devise a plan to reunite Luni and Changana. With the help of reverent Lama of Lhasa named Lhosingo, they manage to take Luni to the Gumba through the palace of Helambu. In that Gumba, Changana was involved in study and meditation as Buddhism requires every Lama in the Gumba to do so. Luni sees Changana and embraces him immediately. Mhe Mhe Lama of the Gumba sees this event and announces that Luni belongs to Changana. After this, Lhano Lama enters the Gumba and Luni and Changana go back to their home and live a happy life.

Luni is an embodiment of Sherpa culture. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss in detail the Sherpa culture which paves the way for the exploration of it in the mentioned

literary output. In Tibetan language, shyar means east and Sherpa means the resident of the east. In recent time Sherpa word has been used to refer to the people of northern east of Nepal. According to Bal Chandra Sharma, a historian, "Sherpa people had come from Tibet. Therefore their language, religion and social customs resemble to that of Tibetan people." Some scholars are of the opinion that Sherpa people are believed to have come from Tibet some six hundred years ago. If we argue on the basis of above mentioned opinion, we can come to the conclusion that Sherpa people had come from Tibet to Nepal for the first time. Since Sherpa people have genealogical affinity with Tibetan people, like them, Sherpa people are also short and robust.

Like the people from other different culture, Sherpa people also value birth, marriage and death as three important events in human life cycle. Regarding Sherpa culture, Janakla Sharma, in his book *Hamro Samaj Eka Adyan*, writes:

Although both arrange marriage and love marriage are in existence in Sherpa community, arrange marriage plays a dominant role in their society. Therefore, every love marriage is changed into arrange marriage by following certain social customs. Generally, arrange marriage necessitates four different stages namely: Tichhyan, Demchhyan, Pechhyan and Genkutab. The first step of arrange marriage is known as Tichhyan. In this step, people from boys side go to the girl's house in order to ask for the girl's hand to her parents. People from boy's side take wine with them as a gift to the girl's house which is consumed by the girl's relatives as a symbol of their consent

to the proposal of marriage. And the rejection of wine should be understood as the rejection of proposal. (146)

The interesting thing is that if the proposal is accepted, the wine brought by the people of boy's side is consumed by people of both sides. In contrary to it, if the proposal is rejected, people from boy's side are given different wine and their wine is given back to them again. After Tichhyan, other three steps are observed accordingly in order to give the marriage legal acceptance.

After marriage, giving birth to the children is customary. Following the birth of the child, Lama is invited to name the child in six days time. On this occasion, along with Lama other people are also invited to enjoy the feast. Unlike Hindu people, Sherpa people do not keep their daughters away from the home during their menstruation period. Similarly, making the hole on the nose of girls is not in vogue in Sherpa culture. For Sherpa people, death ceremony is of much importance than the death ceremony. All the rites performed in death ceremony are of religious nature and are performed by the Lama of their own lineage. If anybody dies, the dead body should be immediately covered by new clothes. Subsequently, Lama and other people are called to perform the last rites. At last, dead body is buried. This way life cycle of Sherpa people come to an end.

Like other social customs, Sherpa's festival is also worth having a look at. Since Sherpa's festivals are guided by their religion, they are run by the Lamas. In the absent of Lama, Sherpa people cannot perform any social rituals. In order to avail themselves with Lamas, Sherpa people built Gumbas almost in every village. Different festivals are celebrated in such Gumbas collectively. Lohsar, Manirimdu, Dumji, Osho and ngiuna are some of the important festival celebrated by Sherpa people. Lohsar is a festival which is

celebrated on the occasion of New Year according to Tibetan calendar. If the Losar is the most important festival of Sherpa people, Manirimdu occupies second important role in hierarchical order which generally falls on the month of Mansir. Because all the Sherpa's festivals are religious by nature, they are not observed individually but communally in the Gumbas. Communal celebration of festivals relieves one from heavy economic expense for all the families contribute to it. As for poor people, they can share any amount of whole expense according to their wish. Every Sherpa festival necessitates dance and feast and attended by young and old people irrespective of their sex. In the feast, alcohol and meat, especially beef, are heavily used. This is the unique feature of their festivals.

Like poet's another episodic poem *Mhendu*, *Luni* too has portrayed the ethnic life and culture. Both of the poems extensively draw upon Buddhism; both of them have tragic end; and both of the works have made a use of characters that are entirely ethnic. Moreover, the works abound in the words from ethnic language-- Tamang words in *Luni* and Bhote words in *Mhendu* respectively. Like *Mhendu*, *Luni* too resulted because of the poet's excessively talked travel, at least in this thesis, to Gosaikunda. Thus it becomes crystal clear that the two works resemble to each other in many respect. Referring to the similar character of the two poems *Mhendu* and *Luni*, Chudamani Bandhu writes:

Luni has a picture of holy love and its immortal nature. It is known through its publisher note that it was written in 2001 B.S. Therefore *Luni* can be compared with *Mhendu* not only in terms of subject matter and technique but also in terms of the time they were composed. (My translation, 135)

The poet's splendid depiction of natural mountains and the Sherpa culture is based on the knowledge he acquired in his field visit of Gosaikunda. The melody and the words used in this work present the beautiful ideal of ethnic culture. While reading it one can feel as if the work is unrefined on the account of unnatural union of the hero and heroine, but for Devkota it was customary. Though the characters are the victim of situation, they are perfect in terms of ideal they held. By showing the surprising union of the hero and heroine and ideal they held, Devkota displays Sherpa culture in its true sense. Indeed Sherpa people are liberal in terms of love and marriage as depicted in the poem.

Luni consists of altogether eighteen episodes. Although it is called an episodic poem, it is also not structured in such a way to fully merit its title. Some episodes are longer and some are shorter of only one page. It has irregular rhyming pattern and no proper exploitation of metre which makes it different from those works following Sanskrit metre and classical poetic principle. But it is rich in alliteration and assonance which are impossible to maintain in its translation. The work has many new words derived from Sherpa language. For instance, 'lyambo', 'Longu', 'Ghalu' etc. are some of the new words in the book. Although, it was written in 2001 B.S. during which Devkota was working in Tri-Chandra College, it was published only in 2023 B.S. When it was written, the work was very much famous. Everyone enjoyed the work to a great extent. Students of the college sang the poem frequently. In this connection, Kamalmani Dikchhit writes:

In 2001 B.S. students of Tri-Chandra College used to sing the lines 'our Luni is beautiful like a fragile mimosa'. During this time the great the students, he would sit under the shade of a spice tree. Students

would ask "what have you written today?" And in his nasal voice, he would start singing 'why don't you listen the remaining half of my words Luni after having already heard the half of it. . .' (My translation, Luni's publisher note)

Despite its popularity, it could not come into print because of some social and political unfavorable situation. According to Kamalmani Dikchhit it could not be brought to publication perhaps because Sherpa Samba Songo represented the then prime minister Judha Samser. He was a cruel ruler who used to control many people's beloved like and sexually abused them.

Like a fable, *Luni* comes to an end with the reunion of the hero and the heroine, thereby teaching a lesson that love is immortal. This hints at the fact that the subject matter of *Luni* depends not only on the poet's personal experience but also on the fable. Its plot is not developed in chronological order and the events take place against what is commonly estimated. For instance, the sudden meeting of Changana and Luni in chapter six and incongruous rendering of nature and its dramatic presentation in a short chapter eight have broken the order of the story. However, the poet has maintained the spirit of fable by giving a message of immortal love through victory of Luni which brings her to Changana. The closing lines of the poem also match the style of fable. It ends with the lines:

Sunnelai sunako mala

Bhannelai fulako mala

Premko katha jhalki jwala

Samjhidaima aaijala

Syaba! Syaba! Syambo! (66)

Golden garland to the listener

Garland of flower to the teller

This love story, sparkles with flame

And comes when recollected.

Shyaba! Shyaba! Syambo! (My translation, 66)

Devkota was very much displeased with the then government's apathy towards ethnic people and their culture. Having seen the degrading condition of the ethnic culture, the poet came forward to preserve them at list in the form of literature by writing about them. For that reason, he made a use of Sherpa characters and Buddhism throughout the text. In this regard, Kumar Bahadur Joshi writes:

. . . all the characters of the poetic work belong to Sherpa cast. For instance, Luni, the heroine; Changana, the hero; Samba Songo, Tasi Lhama, Lhano, Anja, Jinji, Lhosungo, Mhe Mhe, and Helamba are the names of Sherpa people. For the development of the major characters, the poet has used short dialogue and for the description of the nature he has use sentimental language. (My translation, 127)

Luni is an example of Devkota's attempt to publicized ethnic culture. It is ethnic in terms of characters and theme. It has described the ethnic religion, food habits, customs, and belief in detail. When it comes to religion, the entire work has based on Buddhism, the religion which receives its foundation from the teaching of the lord Gautama Buddha who is also universally recognized as epitomize of peace. The religion abhors material advancement and necessitates spiritual purity, a human quality attained

through self control. Devkota has shown his belief in Buddhism by concluding his works where one that practices self-denial stands victorious over the one who always talks big about his power and his superiority. Luni, like Buddha believes in spiritual purity and love. She is never attracted by the riches of Tibetan palace and determined in her love for Changana. At last she got what she loves. Devkota writes:

Lhano Lama gumba pasyo

Changana Luni leei basyo

Kelendeeko tirama.

Naacha, aaja Sherpa Sherpi

Syaba syaba furki furki

Sansarbharma priti thulo

Jiu ho aakhir chihan dhulo

Ulto baato chhaina bhalo

Chainama parchha pirko polo

Naach naach, jhaljhal jhalki

Kelindeeko jaljhai talki

Nirmal bhannu satko baato

Jhuto riti bhujhanu laato,

Ishor dinchhan satko baato . . . (63-64)

Lhano Lama entered the Gumba

And Changana lived with Luni in the beach of Kelindee.

Dance Sherpa with happiness

Love is the greatest in the world

This is what counts is life, the body changes into dust after death.

The wrong way, hell the destination

Woes ravage happiness.

Dance and dance like the glittering water of kelindee.

Good is what leads us to good

To follow off beam tradition is to be naïve

God shows the way to heaven. (My translation, 63-64)

Marriage is one of the important social rituals of Sherpa which is displayed vividly in the poem. In Sherpa community, marriage is a private affairs and its decision depends upon those who are subjected to get married. Arranged marriage can take place provided both bride and bridegrooms show their readiness. The preliminary stage of this customs is the engagement of them. First, the men come to the girl's home with a bottle of wine in order to ask her hand. This custom is well expressed in the lines:

"Hami sano Shasi Lama

Lhasa gharko sano chhana

Binti aadar gardai aai

Magchha hajurko choori 'Luni'

Pachis Lhama gaau birta

Pachis baghako chhala bheti.

Pachis sapla sunako daijo . . . (22)

Meek Shasi Lama, I

From poor house of Lhasa,

Have come to ask gently for your daughter's hand,

Luni's hand to my son Lhani
With twenty-five village Birta.
Twenty-five pieces of coins in the tiger's skin
And twenty-five grams of gold as a dowry . . . (My translation, 22)

Lhani and Luni got married but their conjugal life could not remain longer since it was a forced marriage against Luni's will. Instead of enjoying her well-facilitated palace life, she goes on wilting like a flower and divorces Lhani and remarries Changana eventually. It may seem somehow ridiculous when Luni broke up her relation with her husband and remarries the boy she really loves. But this is the fundamental factor of ethnic culture. Devkota devised the plot of this work thus so as to meet his end of rendering the ethnic culture in a down-to-earth manner.

Sherpa people live in Himalayan region. Since it is too cold in the region, they have got to put on warm clothes especially with fur. Beside they drink alcohol, the use of which is common in ethnic rites and rituals, to get rid of chilling cold. *Luni* has aptly described their clothes in the first episode of the poem. The lines read:

Sil bhuwako bhoto
Makhamal alkhama;
Kan chireko topi,
Baghako chhalama; (3)
A short shirt of fur
Soothing cotton on its solder
An ear-cleft cap
Made up of tiger's skin. (My translation, 3)

By giving space to the details of Sherpa culture in his literary piece of works, Devkota has stopped it from being eliminated. During the time when the nation practiced the slogan of one nation, one language, and one culture, it was only the Devkota to fight back against such malpractices. Had there not been the great poet Devkota, perhaps ethnic cultures would have entirely been destroyed, and thereby the Nepalese culture as a whole. But the visionary poet Lakshmi Prasad Devkota was well aware of the inevitability of ethnic culture for the holistic development of Nepal. Therefore, he advocated for the preservation of not only ethnic culture but also of every culture and brought the concept of inclusiveness to the fore. In a multicultural nation like Nepal, the development of only a privileged culture can't ensure the development of the nation in its all spheres. Since Nepal is inhabited by the people of many casts and cultures, their culture should be developed alike; and they should be given every opportunity to take part in nation building actions. This is the voice the poet has raised in his narrative poem, *Luni*.

Chapter- III

Conclusion

Lakshmi Prasad Devkota's episodic poems *Muna-Madan*, *Mhendu* and *Luni* reflect the endangered and disappearing ethnic culture, the complex whole of their costumes, natural instinct, food habits, rites and rituals, belief, art, and language of ethnic people whose inclusion in every organ of the state paves the way for Nepal's holistic growth. While doing so, Devkota leaves no stone unturned to avoid having his head under cloud. Rather he adopts naturalistic and realistic approach in his depiction of long neglected culture.

In his short span of life, Devkota travelled across the seas which endowed him with an insight into how a nation can be well-developed. He visited oriental as well as occidental countries especially quite advanced European nations. He attended many seminars and took energetic part in the lively discussion pertaining to the potential ways of nation's enhancement which broaden his understanding horizon. He also visited many rural villages inhabited by ethnic people and through the regular contact with them he learned their true ethnic nature, devotion towards work, straightforwardness, language, and culture as a whole. He understood, by far, the inevitability of ethnic people in uplifting Nepal for they are, as Dor Bahadur Bista terms, "honest and devoted to the work" (6). He further points out socialism, equality, and hard-working as some of the traits inherent in ethnic people whose proper exploitation can pave the way for national holistic enrichment. They regard work as the God and worship it. It is because of these selfless temperaments that render the ethnic people committed to communal well-being. And if the people start working for their community, not only a nation but also the entire world can be developed instantly for every individual can contribute to this mission.

In the one hand, Devkota understood the praiseworthy natural features of ethnic people. In the other hand, he witnessed the degrading condition of these people, the true assets of Nepal. During the time Devkota lived, Nepal was suffering from the autocratic Rana regime. After the establishment of the democracy too, Nepal turned her deaf ear to the needs of the ethnic people. The country always advocated for the supremacy of Hindu religion and declared Nepal a Hindu state. It also promulgated Nepali language as the only official language. Such practice of the country played the decisive role in eliminating the ethnic culture. Against this inhuman social backdrop, Devkota came to

fore to preserve the ethnic culture. This Godly deeds of the poet results into the composition the three episodic poems with ethnic overtones and settings.

Devkota's portrayal of ethnic culture is realistic encompassing almost all the components of it. *Muna-Madan* presents beef as a food item of ethnic people. Beef serves not only as food but also as a means to perform every major rites and rituals of the ethnic people. Although the use of beef has been used in the poem to have something negative implication-- Muna warning her husband Madan to be careful of cow-eating men-- it should be read to denote something acceptable since beef is an integral part of ethnic culture. It keeps ethnic people and their culture alive at the same time however surprising it may be to non-ethnic reader. Beside it, *Muna-Madan* portrays a rudimentary human temperament of ethnic people recognized as selflessness through a minor character Bhote who works not for the sake of material gain but for the sake of entire humanity.

Culture includes language and costumes as its indispensable components in it which hold significant position in indentifying people of different cultural background. In contrary to invisible tenets of a culture like moral law and belief, language and costumes are open and therefore easily recognized by others. In the course of unfolding ethnic culture, Devkota's *Mhendu* employs considerably large number Tamang words and poetic stanzas in portraying their clothing. For instance, the very title "Mhendu" 'flower' is a Tamang words. Similarly, the words "enge" "benge" "songe" "langa" are some of the Tamang words used in *Mhendu*.

In the same way, Devkota makes Tamang clothing public through the description of one of the major characters Sherpa King. He is described to have carried a sword on his waist

wrapped in a piece of clothes. He is brave and never defeated in any war. In fact every ethnic people use sword or a Khukhuri to keep their honor intact.

Ethnic culture is even more vividly described in *Luni*. Luni's second marriage which takes place with the help of Mhe Mhe Lama, a Buddhist priest and its public acceptance exemplify not only the Sherpa's respect as well as strong belief in polyandry but also the ethnic people's freedom of choosing their own spouse. Indeed, getting divorce marrying again is a common practice in ethnic community. Along with the marriage ceremony, *Luni* shows some aspects of Buddhism too. Chhangana's entrance to Gumba- albeit as a punishment- where he is ordered to practice meditation and recitation of Buddhist hymns necessarily reflects the Sherpa's religion. Buddhism does not allow any monk to get married once they enter the Gumba for the stated cause. Throughout their life, they should take care of the entire Gumba; they should clean it. By presenting Changana as a monk and the duties he is supposed to carry out in the Gumba, Devkota demonstrates the Sherpa culture in its true sense.

Thus, Lakshmiprasad Devkota's narrative poems *Muna-Madan*, *Mhendu* and *Luni* portray the ethnic culture in a realistic manner. Nothing is made up in the poems. What the ethnic people do as a part of their culture is well expressed in the mentioned works. By portraying ethnic language, belief, costumes, rites and rituals, morality and religion, which otherwise would have been annihilated by this time, Devkota has performed a herculean task of documenting and protecting ethnic culture. At the same time, he makes an announcement for the equal treatment of all the cultures and brings the concept of inclusiveness to the fore.

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