

INDIGENOUS INSTITUTIONS AS A BASE TO SUSTAIN RANA THARU WORK AND LIFE

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In this research an attempt have been made to depict a detailed account of the RanaTharu's way of life in the specific context of Nepalese society and culture. Moreover micro socio-cultural and religious institutions are also described so as to get a comprehensive understanding of the RanaTharus ethno-cultural practices, which provide a strong base for surviving their culture and society. The distinct type of social and cultural practices of the RanaTharu people forms their popular ethnic identity living for centuries in Nepal. There are hundreds of social and cultural institutions operating to maintain RanaTharu work and life. Through the different social and cultural institutions of their own ethnic and traditional practices, RanaTharu people are capable of sustaining their social and religious life properly. These venerable practices are not influenced by other factors so the way of life of the RanaTharu people is easier.

Key Words: Gautehara, Thulo, Bharra, Kurma, Pooja, Bhut, Daini, Deuta, Dekhan, Daru, Guruwa, Bhalmansa, Khel, Maghi, Mahaton, Ghardhuria, Chaukidar, Bhuiya, Ashadhi, Lohar, Khujani-Bhujani, Jamindar, Chakar, Karbariha, Agriha, Jajmani, Bista, Dangaura, Begari, Daggar, Jhaaraa, Pratha.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal symbolizes diversity in terms of caste, ethnicity, race, and religion. The great king Prithvi Narayan Shah rightly stated "*Nepal Char Varna Chhattis Jatko Phulbari Ho*" (Nepal is a garden of various castes and creeds). The reality is that all geographical regions of the country inhabited for centuries by the people of different castes and ethnic groups. On the other hand, it can be proudly said that Nepal reflects diversity in unity and unity in diversity in terms of her population composition signified by different caste, ethnicity, race, language and religion. Geographically, the country is divided in three geographical regions- *Himal* (Himalaya), *Pahad* (mountain), and *Tarai* (flatland). Sherpas and Bhotia People mainly occupy Himalayan region.

Likewise Bahun, Chhetri, Newar, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Damai, and Kami specially populate mountain region. The main inhabitants of the Tarai region are- Maithili Brahman, Rajput, Kuswah, Kayastha, Tharu, Rajbanshi, Yadav, Dhimal, Satar, Mandal, and Mushahar (Bista, 1976). The Tarai region of the western and far western part of the country is the native land of the different Tharu groups living for centuries as indigenous inhabitant- *Dharati Putra* (son of the soil) of the *Tarai* (fertile flatland) of the country.

Previously a lot of studies have been done about Tharu groups by Indian Anthropologists (Majumdar 1944; Srivastava, 1958). But the Indian Anthropologists

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cramped their studies only on the Tharus of Indian geo-political region. But there is a dearth of contemporary literature about the Tharus of Nepal. Later some foreign Anthropologists (**McDougall, 1968; McDonough, 1984; Krauskopff, 1995**) concentrated their studies to the Tharus of Dang valley from the mid western region of the country. Similarly, Nepali scholars Chemjong, 1967; Acharya, 1972; Regmi, 1978). D. P. Rajaure (1977) as a pioneer has done some of the previous works of Nepali Tharus- Dangaura of Dang valley. Other scholars who studied about the Tharus of Nepal are Pyakuryal; 1982, about the Tharus of Chitwan district of the country and ArjunGuneratne; 1994. Tharu, the Tarai neighbor edited by Harold O. Skar (1999) consists of various research articles on Rana Tharus.

The purely descriptive approach is represented by the work of Nepalese scholars like D. P. Rajaure (1977) for the Dangaura Tharus of Dang and R.R. Regmi (1973, 1978) for the Koshilas. A totally different trend of anthropological research has been started in late nineties, by Guneratne (1994). The focus was given on ethnicity, class and the state in Nepal. Which opens a new avenue to relate Tharu people's society and culture with broader perspectives such as ethnicity, class and state.

The Norwegian anthropologist Odegaard Sigren, did another most significant research about the Tharu; entitled – 'From Castes to Ethnic Group: Modernization and Forms of Social Identification among the Tharus of the Nepalese Tarai (1997)'. This provides more detailed information about the Tharus from Far East to far west in general and Kailali district in particular. She discussed excitingly about the cultural diversity of different Tharu people, Tharus of the Nepalese Tarai and far west. Similarly, Tharu unity in diversity and unifying functions of myth is also presented as well. Ethnic incorporation and making a breaking myth is also discussed properly. Furthermore anthropologists and sociologists some native Tharus Singh (1988) and Panjiyar (1993) have also written some scholarly articles about the Tharu history following nostalgic model. Previously it is said that Nepal Tarai is the native land of different Tharu groups. Among them Dangaura and Rana Tharus are the native of the mid western and far western Tarai. But Rana Tharus are the main native (son of the soil) inhabitants of Kailali and Kanchanpur district. In the context of Rana Tharus of Nepal, Skar and Gurung (1996) have carried out their studies on some aspects of the Rana Tharus of Kailali district. These scholars pointed out that all cultural practices of Rana Tharu people are guided and maintained by the old and indigenous institutions. Motivated by the works of Skar and Gurung the researcher decided to study about the ethno-cultural institutions of Rana Tharus of Kailali district. Rana Tharus are the native dwellers only of kailali and kanchanpur districts of far-western Nepal not of other place. For the research Urma and Urmi village of Kailali district is purposively selected. Urma and Urmi village situated to the east of Dhangadhibazaar, sixteen-kilometer distance from Dhangadhi, the head quarter of kailali district and one has to go through a forest crossing two rivers- Khutiya and Shivaganga.

Geographically, this area is entirely low land Tarai region, contains generally to the ethnic and caste group like - *Dangaura Tharu, RanaTharu, Bramhan* and *Kshetri* and other ethnic groups as well. The study area is well known because of the RanaTharu's native land or predominant area of the RanaTharus. This investigation centers on the RanaTharus of far-western Nepal, which have lived in happy isolation with their own mythology, customs, beliefs, rituals and lifestyle for centuries. As native dwellers of the area from very beginning they are maintained more specific and unique ethno-cultural practices, which made them very distinct ethnic group among others. So, it is thought as a very potential region to carryout study on RanaTharus.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze ethno-cultural institutions that exists among the RanaTharu people. Malinowski explains that an institution is a group of people united or organized for a purpose. They have a character or explanation, and they have the technology with which to achieve, or strive to achieve, that purpose (cited by Bohannan and Glazer; 1988). As earlier functionalist Emile Durkheim mentioned, "when society and culture transform from simple to complex, at that time the role of individual and group may change from mechanical to organic in nature". Parallel to Durkheim, most of the anthropologists and structural-functionalists also mentioned the role of ethno-cultural institutions to maintain social life of people in their own cultural context. That's why the significance of these institutions is quite important to perform their functions in respective nature as they are established to conduct their functions. Hence, RanaTharus of Far-Western Nepal are not the exception from all society and culture existing in this world. Definitely they do have their own ethno-cultural institutions to sustain their everyday life by performing their functions. Overwhelming importance of functional relations among different institutions has been observed among the Rana Tharus included in this research work. Hence, conceptual frameworks to carryout this research have been borrowed from the functional school of thought which primarily focuses on social, cultural and religious institutions and their interrelations and interconnected to form a meaningful functional- whole to the people who bear the culture and cultural institutions. This study was done in the far western Nepal. The study is mainly based on observed information. Apart from observation, interviews were also conducted to enrich the study. The fieldwork was carried out in Urma and Urmi village of Kailali district. The main assumption of the study is- " the practice of ethno-cultural institutions for managing the socio-cultural and religious life of the community and it is a system of adaptability for sustaining the distinct social and religious life among others in the area."

BASIC ETHNO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR PRACTICES AMONG THE RANATHARUS

The term institution is widely used in the field of social sciences in order to understand society. Institutions are universal in nature and have various distinct characteristics. These are social in nature, unanimous, have standardized norms, means of satisfying different human needs, controlling mechanisms. Institutions do not undertake suddenly rapid change or these are relatively permanent in its nature. Likewise social and cultural institutions are written and oral traditions and transformed in the base of oral custom as law of the community. In the primitive and indigenous societies they may be largely oral. But in modern and complex societies they may be observed in written as well as unwritten forms. Different social and cultural institutions may have their own material and non-material symbols. Every institutions are interrelated and interdependent with each other related institutions in order to maintain and satisfy the different needs of the community, society or individuals.

Different social scientists define the institutions differently. As defined by Ginsberg (1970) institutions are recognized and established usages governing the relations between individuals and groups (cited by Rao; 2004). Barnes (1938) opines that the structure and the machinery through which human society organizes, directs and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs (cited by Rao; 2004). Social, cultural, religious and economic institutions distinctly satisfy the different needs of the society. RanaTharu community is not exceptiontothe above-mentioned reality.

Each and every society has its' own culture, which is followed by one generation to another for the social and cultural surveillance in the society. Man has different kinds of needs such as social, cultural, biological, physical, economic etc. in order to satisfy these needs people have developed different material and non- material aspects of culture. Different human needs are satisfied through the social, cultural, religious and economic institutions. Thus the institution of a culture operate to satisfy the needs of the individuals that of society as a whole. This indicates that there remains the functional unity of the cultural traits. Though different cultural traits and cultural institutions contribute in different way but are interrelated and inter dependent. Thus culture fulfills the different needs of man through cultural institutions. Different institutions of a culture function to satisfy the needs of the individuals and that of society as a whole. Malinowski (1944) is of the opinion that every aspects of culture have functions, which are interrelated and interdependent. Rana Tharus has its amazing culture with many specialties. RanaTharus community is also not exception. Different kinds of ethno-cultural and religious institutions are developed by them to satisfy the different needs that are interrelated and interdependent with each other.

Ethno-cultural institutions are the agencies to provide continuity to the indigenous communities. The term ethno-cultural institutions have been primarily used to denote those socio-cultural institutions, which are highly indigenous, localized, remain stable and provide meaning to people who believe and participate the norms and values of institutions in their everyday life. Those institutions are as broader as other institutions like kinship, marriage, and family. But their link to broader social institutions is considered important and meaningful in the experiences of Rana Tharu people.

There are various ethno-cultural institutions among RanaTharus to perform various tasks and functions in their society and culture among them. Some of the functions are economic in nature, some are religious and cultural and similarly, some are social in nature. Some are political too. All socio- cultural functions are not centrally controlled by single institution and by single character but they are interconnected, inter dependent and inter related. In a RanaTharu village for maintaining the social and religious life with their relations among villagers, as well as conducting the village's affairs, there are various different ethno-cultural institutions, organizations, characters, roles and positions to conduct their functions. Some of them are described briefly in the following sections of this paper.

1. Gaon Bharra

In the RanaTharu community, for the regular worship of village deities, a person is elected by the villagers, is called the *Gautehara* or *Thulo Bharra* or *Gaon Bharra*. *Gautehara* is considered village level ritual specialists but not of a individual households. If they do not have their own *Gautehera*, from neighboring village a *Gautehara* is employed for the performance of all-important rituals. Mainly this practice provides a best example that the *Gautehara* makes the connections between villagers and village leaders. All the male member of every household heads of Rana Tharuactively participates to elect the *Gautehara* or village priest. It is not compulsion to have a priest from specific *Kurma* or household but he must know the method of rituals performance. In RanaTharu communities, to be a *Gauteharais* a matter of pride and reputation. This makes him enable to hold a precise position and respectable effort not his family background. This system is just opposite to the Brahmin priests whose position is already ascribed by birth among the caste Hindu, who 'are born not made' asDumont and Pocock (1958; P.39) explained that RanaTharu priests are 'self made', which is achieved in nature rather than ascribed. Howell (1989; P. 462) explained about the roles of priest-leaders among the Leo who perform 'life giving acts' for the people. According to the RanaTharus view worship of village deities as vital to the very existence of humans. The acts of the *Gauteharais* 'life-giving acts', because in the eyes of the RanaTharus 'the life of the community would come to a halt' (ibid) without these acts. He is associated with spiritual performance rather than other matters of the village. This type of

practices is also prevalent among the Dangaura Tharus as *Guruwa* who provides the service just like as *Gautehara* for the villagers. Despite the fact that Rana Tharu women never become the *Gautehara* even they play significant roles in the every religious matter.

This can be argues that the *Gautehara* is elected for one year at a time, and receive twenty Kilogram paddy and five kilogram rice or as per their village rule from each household per year for their service. If the villagers are not satisfied with his work, a new *Gautehara* replaces him. However, it seems that the *Gautehara* usually work in the same villages for years. Aasha Ram Rana, ward Chairman, social and political leader of the study area, described the relationship between his village Urma and Urmi and the village *Gautehara* this way: 'He has always been here, since, twenty-one years ago, he has been our village's *Gautehara*. He is very strong and wise, and he is the *Gautehara* of many villages. He has always done well for our village, so why should we replace him with somebody else?'

It is informed that the *Gautehara* is the one who performs all important village rituals, in fact he occasionally does. Each of these persons usually covers a large area, and thus cannot come to all village rituals in all their villages. Since such important rituals cannot be left to chance, there are substitutes appointed for the *Gautehara* in the study area. Although the *Gautehara* is the one who is respected and remunerated for doing the most prestigious religious work in the village, their substitutes are in fact the ones who actually perform the various worships.

This can be concluded that the *Gautehara* is a key person who works as a bridge between people and other aspects of the Rana Tharu society- social, cultural, natural and super natural.

2. Ghar Bharra

In the Rana Tharu community there is also another category of religious specialist, namely the *Bharra* or local priest-healers as a family doctor. The word *Ghar Bharra* is derived from a house and *Bharra* (healer). In fact a man cannot become a priest unless he knows a little of shamanic craft since shamanism is an integral part of Rana Tharu religious life. Each household, irrespective of clan, has one man as *Bharra* (shaman) from its member's usually household chief. His job is to look after the minor religious affairs (of a nature) of the house as well as to cure some small health complications. There are many *Bharras* in the study area, and people go to them for help when they are ill or have other health related problems. *Bharras* are known to be able to heal people's illness by chanting *Mantras* (magic words or incantation), distributing blessed items and by performing specific *Poojas* as the problem seen. First of all, he finds the problem by his own special techniques, and decides either it is *Bhut* (spirits or deities), *Daini* (witch) or an illness that is the problem. The deities can reason of problems for people if they are not satisfied by

the worship and offerings. If the *Bharra* considers a problem to be caused by some deity, he performs the *Devata Dekhan* (see the deities) in order to find out exactly which God or spirit is the trouble-shooter and what should be given in *Pooja*.

Bharra is considered as healer rather than the priest according to the practice as adopted by the Rana Tharu people. He is needed to perform the specific wedding rituals. *Bharra* performs the *Kastei Pooja* with groom and bride's father. There is no compulsion to employ the same *Bharra*. They can choose any *Bharra*s their requirements and the *Bharra*'s previous reputation and his success. *Bharra* receives his remuneration as his service in cash or kind as- some grain, a chicken, *Daru* etc. But in the minor cases he got only meal at patrons' house. The system of payment depends on the significance of the problem. This relationship is also similar to the Dangaura Tharus and their *Guruwa*. *Guruwa* also gets his remuneration in cash or kind as per his service deliver.

My observation shows that, *Bharra* is not a hereditary position but it is acquired. If anybody wants to be a *Bharra* he has to learn the *Mantras* and procedure of healing system by another *Bharra*. The senior *Bharra* provides knowledge and skills to his junior disciplines as his teacher.

People are key actors, agencies and beneficiaries to any simple to complex society. Society cannot be formed without people. Therefore, to make people healthy and live, society provides means of medication through formal and informal institutions. In Rana Tharu society *Ghar Bharra* provides all sorts of medications to people so that people live, work and support to provide continuity to their society.

3. The *Bhalmansa*

A novel system of power structure for village administration is another interesting feature of Rana Tharus through the *Bhalmansa*-a traditional head of the village or society. This is different from the post of ward chairman as observed in present political system of Nepal. A ward chairman is the representative of a particular political party in competition with different political parties. But a *Bhalmansa* is selected annually and unanimously. In case of the study area, the *Bhalmansa* would always be a Rana due to the absolute majority of the Ranas as my key informant and *Gautrhar* of Urma and Urmi, informed me. And they perceive their tradition of selection of *Bhalmansa* in the study area properly. The *Bhalmansa* is the traditional indigenous system of the village leadership, which still exists among the Rana Tharus. They give the equal importance to the *Bhalmansa* as previous days. As I have been informed that the *Bhalmansa*, generally are selected around *Maghi*- a *Chaudhari* festival and New Year of them which falls on mid January each year. The *Bhalmansa* can also be re-elected on the basis of his past performance. The same practice of village chief (*Mahaton*) is prevalent among the Dangaura Tharus also. *Mahaton* is elected by the *Ghardhuriyas* (Tharu household chiefs) from among themselves. *Mahaton* has today the different traditional

obligations; as-he is a senior priest, an administrator and judge of the respective villages. He is elected for one year by the performance of *Khel* ritual, which falls on *Magh* (mid January) month, every year (Rajaure, 1977; P. 43-47).

The village council elects the post of *Bhalmansa* for a year and it is never a hereditary position. According to the Rana Tharus' custom, only *Bhalamansa* (village leader) is elected from any family but not *Kurma* member. The informants told that the *Bhalmansa* could come from any household as long as he is a respected person in the village. And he should be known to able to direct the villagers. Only men can become village leader, while women are excluded from both religious and socio-political village leadership.

Bhalmansa also considered as the administrator of the village or community and calls the village council meeting when there is chaos in the village regarding particular issues when village work needs planning. He is the person who organizes the public works and invites villagers and to participate in public works for the betterment of community and household. He is the representative of the inter-village matters and cooperates with officials' also. Occasionally the role of *Bhalmansa* is considered as providing justice to the villagers. In the case of arguments between the village members first they approach *Bhalmansa* to settle the case. Though he arbitrates usually minor cases, he may try to settle major conflicts also. Usually the *Bhalmansa* is from one of the better off households in the village, it is because the freedom of choice in the election of village leader. It is because he can work for the village community without payment. This is a position of honor, while his assistant, the *Chaukidar*, is paid for his work just like the village priests and the local priest healers. At present the *Bhalmansa* of the study area gets annually twenty-kilogram paddy and five Kilogram rice as their remuneration from each house of the village for his service. This remuneration makes him free from homely problems and can work. So, a man plays double role or occupies double posts; *Bhalmansa* as well as *Chaukidar*.

In the study area, the respondents mentioned that the *Bhalmansa* sometimes also perform village *Pooja* in the *Bhuiya* in the absence of the main village priest (*Gautehara* or *Gaon Bharra*). However, others can also be appointed as substitutes to the priest and perform *Poojas*. The *Bhalmansa* is not a religious leader and does not have any specific responsibilities in religious matters. The informants stated that sometimes-same person could become a *Bhalmansa* and *Gautehara* or *Bhalmansa* and *Chaukidar*.

When the selection of *Bhalmansa* is essential, then all of the villagers are informed as mentioned by the present *Bhalmansa* of the Manahara from each household are asked to attend the meeting. I have been informed that the *Bhalmansa* in general is selected around *Ashadhi Pooja* and *Diwali Pooja*, *Maghi* (Chaudhari festival) that falls on approximately in mid January each year. Sometimes the present or previous *Bhalmansa* may also be re-elected on the basis of his performance.

Many people do not want to be re-elected because of its' voluntary role in the society.

Leadership provides union, guidelines, rewards and punishment to people in traditional and small-scale societies. The multiple political, social, cultural and economic roles performed by a *Bhalmansa* remain vital to run everyday life of the RanaTharu people for centuries in the Kailali and Kanchanpur districts of far-western Nepal. The role of *Bhalmansa* always remains meaningful to the people to move ahead their everyday work and life.

4. Lohar

In addition, a *Lohar* is another important component in social system of the RanaTharus of the study area. *Lohar* is an occupational caste, makes agricultural tools for other caste peoples. According to the traditional Hindu caste system blacksmiths got the lowest position. In general, the *Lohar* comes from hill districts mainly Doti district since very long. Now a day few *Lohars* have been settled in *Katan* (encroachment land) area and their service is available to them if they do not find *Lohar* in the village. A *Lohar* is treated as equal to *Bhalmansa*, twenty-kilogram paddy and five-kilogram rice from each house. If any body needs to make new agricultural tools they have to pay extra remuneration to the *Lohar* as the tools quantity. The *Lohar* or blacksmith is also elected and selected as *Bhalmansa*. If the villagers are not satisfied with old *Lohar*, they can select a new one. The *Bhalmansa* proposes the name for the post of *Lohar*. If the villagers are satisfied, they pass the proposal and if not it is rejected.

Rana Tharus are primarily either farmers or farm laborers. So they need agricultural equipment like- sickle, spade, plough etc. These agricultural equipment are made, supplied and repaired by *Lohar* (blacksmith). Hence the role of *Lohar* in the RanaTharu community is considered important and essential.

After the finishing of the selection of the *Bhalmansa* and *Lohar*, they collect some money from each of them, and they celebrate the moment. After few days of selection of *Bhalmansa*, first meeting is inaugurated which is very important and it is called '*Khujani-Bhujani*' or a ceremonial day for "Give and Take" between the two *Bhalmansa* the annual accounts of the village. The newly elected *Bhalmansa* is given the records by old one and in the same meeting a discussion may also held in different issues such as the forthcoming activities of the village.

Traditional power structure of the village and remuneration of *Bhalmansa* is also discussed with the ex-*Bhalmansa*, key informant of the research. He told that very long time ago, in previous days *Jamindar* was all in all in the village and everything was done under his guidance and supervision. *Bhalmansa* was the second man and he was the right person to look after the guests such as government officials and pay attention on village management and different contemporary issues. Third

official was known as *Chakar* who was responsible for food management to the guests; cooking the rice and cleaning the utensils.

5. Chaukidar

Other important official of the RanaTharu community is *Chaukidar* (watchman or messenger) with the allocated job such as pass the message to the villagers, and help the *Bhalmansa* in his work. The *village council also elects the Chaukidar* for one year at a time. Unfortunately, the officials; *Jamindar* and *Chakar* are not observable in Manahara village. In addition, a man in Manahara has been holding the post of both *Bhalmansa* as well as *Chaukidar*. This is due to reason that a *Bhalmansa* gets except social prestige for his service to the villagers. A *Chaukidar* has been given twenty-kilogram paddy and five-kilogram rice from every household of the village as the remuneration annually for his service. Nowadays, it is difficult to get a man to work as a *Bhalmansa* in the village with free service. So, the RanaTharus of the study area allocated the both jobs to a person because of whom he could maintain the economic balance as well.

Traditionally, in both villages Urma and Urmi also have a *Chaukidar*, who is a village messenger as well as the *Bhalmansa*. The *Chaukidar* is the one who does village *Pooja* in the absence of the village priest (*Gautehara*) and he is also responsible for collecting or buying the ingredients needed for village *Poojas*. The *Chaukidar* is the busiest person of all the elected village specialists. The *Chaukidar* also plays an important role in weddings also. In the proper wedding day he is the chief of the *Karbariha* and responsible for the welcome of the groom and his procession members because he is allocated for this. For his work he receives remuneration, as *Bhalmansa* from each household of the village but this is less than what the *Gautehara* receives, who holds a more prestigious position. This is the same case as Bleie (1995; P.182) explains that a similar position as *Chaukidar* (village policeman) provides a possibility for cash income to poor families among the Rajbansis in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, *Gauteharas* (SahebRana and Pyarchan Rana) informed that among the *Dangauras*, it was different from Ranas as *Agrihawas* the head of the village and *Bhalmansawas* the second man and was just like *Chaukidar*. But, due to the domination of the RanaTharus in the study area, the *Dangaura* system is not observable. He further told that in other neighboring village a *Dangaura* or *Chaudhari* has been the *Bhalmansa* due to the high population of *Dangaura* Tharus. In my research, in case of the study area, the *Bhalmansa* would always be a Rana Tharu due to the numerical majority of Rana Tharus living in the village. As observed in the study area, *Bhalmansa* and ward Chairman have been working complimentary to one another in village affairs. A *Bhalmansais* an important personality as a key person in village affairs. He still commands respect in the present changing political system of Nepal. The *Bhalmansa* of the study area is very strong man in his decision and he looks quite commanding.

The role of communication remains an important tool for the growth and development of any society. Communication provides information, knowledge and power to people. Hence, the role of *Chaukidar* have been established in the Rana Tharu society to share information among the people and develop new knowledge and get more power to their development and development of their society as a whole. The *Chaukidar* performs the role of a communicator among the people and the people know about what is going on in their society through the flow of communication from upwards to the downwards.

These all practices of ethno-cultural institutions are the features of Hindu caste system that maintains patron-client relationships among the different *Jatis* in a multi *Jati* village. It is a best way of surviving in the society. On the other hand we can say that the *Jajmani* system is the product of peasant culture for survival. In this regard Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon (1980) state that, "one of the most significant changes at present occurring within the peasant economy is that affecting the relationship between agricultural producers and members of occupational groups. This relationship traditionally involved kind payments fixed according to some rational idea of likely annual demand of a household for the services of each of the occupational groups (*Bista* system). It is the case of caste hierarchy but Rana Tharus maintain the patron-client relationship among the village within the same caste except *Lohar*. Because their practice of the relationship *Lohar* is represented by the Hindu caste group. It should be noted that *Lohar* represents the lower social position under the Hindu caste system.

6. Begari

A collective action for the development of entire society is a prominent feature easily visible in the Rana Tharu community. Collective actions are projected towards these projects, which are not easily done by an individual family. The Begari system provide collective labor force to the development projects organized, mobilized and managed by *Bhalmansa* in a particular area to a given time period.

Begari is a communal labor system that is still existing in the field area of the research and related with social and development work that is manual labor from each house. The village chief or the *Bhalmansa* organizes this communal work during village assemblies. Communal labor is also organized for the construction and maintenance of *Daggar* (roads), canal repairs, bridge construction etc. The *Begari* day is scheduled on the convenient day of the villagers. And *Bhalmansa* organizes it. According to M.C. Regmi (1978; P. 505) there are several words commonly applied to corves in Nepal: *Jhaaraa* or requisition of laborers from each family in a village for a certain number of days for public purpose; *Beth*, exaction of unpaid labor on a customary basis; *Begaar*, requisition of casual laborers for emergency requirements.

In the study area, *Begari* system is still exists but the nature of *Begari* has changed than earlier days. In the earlier times, people used to go to the *Jamindar* (landlord) house to do agricultural works. But now a day the *JamindariPratha* (landlord system) is abolished, so people do not have to go to for *Begari*. They go only for public and communal works such as construction and maintenance of canals, roads, bridge construction on the river, construction and repairing of school building etc. For this kind of public works, one member should represent every household. Men used to go for *Begari* in earlier days but women also represent these days.

An absentee in the *Begari* or community work according to their custom would be fined Rs.180.00 per day as penalty according to their village's rule. However everyone will participate in the *Begari* among the Rana Tharus. As observed in the study area, community solidarity is well maintained through *Begari*.

CONCLUSION

In every society and culture, various institutions perform vital role to make society and culture alive. These institutions play vital role in mobilizing different ethno-cultural elements to perform functions as survival strategy. In the case of Rana Tharus, *Gautahara*, *Bharra*, *Bhalmansa*, *Lohar*, *Chaukidar*, and *Begari* as an important institution play different roles and maintain harmonious relationships among the community members. The main objective of these institutions is to sustain socio-cultural and religious life. And helps to cope with different demands of the society for the maintenance of their livelihood. Equilibrium between demands of new generations and old ones are also being maintained through such institutions with the help of existing norms and values.

The village level ritual specialist *Gautehara* does the 'life-giving acts', because in the eyes of the Rana Tharus 'the life of the community would come to a halt' without these acts. He is associated with spiritual performance rather than other matters of the village. Similarly *Bharras* are known to be able to heal people's illness by chanting *Mantras* (magic words or incantation), distributing blessed items and by performing specific *Poojas* as the problem seen. Likewise *Bhalmansa* who is selected annually and unanimously is the traditional indigenous system of the village leadership, which still exists among the Rana Tharus. *Lohar* is another important component in social system of the Rana Tharus of the study area. The *Lohar* or blacksmith is also elected and selected as *Bhalmansa*. If the villagers are not satisfied with old *Lohar*, they can select a new one. Another important official of the Rana Tharu community is *Chaukidar* (watchman) with the allocated job such as pass the message to the villagers, and help the *Bhalmansa* in his work.

Begari is a communal labor system that is still existing in the field area of the research and related with social and development work that is manual labor from each house. The village chief or the *Bhalmansa* organizes this communal work

during village assemblies. Communal labor is also organized for the construction and maintenance of *Daggar* (village trails), canal repairs, bridge construction etc. The *Begariday* is scheduled on the convenient day of the villagers. These are the usual approaches as the ethnic institutions that preserve and give life to their ethnic identity. Even in the uncertainties of degrading identities the RanaTharus carry along their traditional beliefs and practices to sustain their identity amass of other groups.

All these above discussed small scale but highly localized indigenous community based institutions are still functioning in the eve of modernization, change and post modernization. These institutions are deep rooted in the mind and heart of the RanaTharu people as powerful agencies to lead them and their society ahead in the emergent days to come.

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