

ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt to document the traditional marriage practice and trend of change of the marriage practices among Rana Tharu within the analytical frame of continuity and change. It also explores the factors contributing to such trends. It investigates these questions with special reference to the Rana Tharus of Kailali, a Tarai district in the far western region of Nepal. It is hoped that through an analysis of marriage practices and its rituals that are prevailing, the contradictions between the continuity and the change are teased out. General objective of this research is to identify the various practices of Rana Tharu marriages. Specifically, the practices of marriage of Rana Tharu of Kailali, their procedures with various dimensions, culture, social context and time relative are studied in this researched. It explores more about different aspects of marriage of Rana Tharus “then and now”. The research has primarily relied on comparisons between the marriages customs among Rana Tharus in different times.

Nepal is culturally, racially, and ethnically a diverse country where the diversity of cultural values and norms seem to be practicing since the time immemorial. The cultural practices, followed by a particular community, make them survive in their own environment, however no culture does exist if adaptation is strictly imposed as a gradual change in the features of cultural practices occurs with a change in relation to time and context. In my understanding also the ritual of marriage in Rana Tharu community is not an exception. That's why the aim of this research is to identify the changes occurred in Rana Tharu marriage and continuity of it through an analysis of marriage practices and its rituals that are prevailing now a day. The contradictions between the continuity and the change over it is also over looked and tried to analyze the situation experience by Rana Tharus in Kailali of Nepal.

The Rana Tharus believe themselves to be the native inhabitants of the area. The traditional territory of the Tharu is called *Tharuwan* or *Tharuwot* (Bista, 1996; P. 130).

There are various Tharu groups with different nomenclature throughout the Tarai region of the country from east to west. They are *Rana*, *Khuna*, *Kathariya*, *Dangaura*, *Kochila*, *Lalpuriya*, *Lampuchhuwa*, *Lorangiya* and *Sunaha*. Each of the Tharu group is more or less confined to a specific area. For instance, the *Kochila* live in Mahottari, Saptari, Morang and Jhapa districts. *Rajhatiya*, *Solariya*, *Dangoura* and *Khas* live in Dang Deukhuri. *Mardaniya*, *Chitauniya* and *Suncha* live in Chitwan district and Rana Tharu live only in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts. The Rana Tharus are distinct from other Tharu groups in their own distinctive and significant cultural and social practices.

In the first chapter, I have discussed the general practices of marriage observable among the human societies. In addition, meaning and functions of marriage are also defined. Likewise historical construction of origin of Tharus in general and Rana Tharus in particular and their ethnic identity are also discussed briefly. Marriage is discussed as a significant rite among the Rana Tharus, which maintains a space that openly symbolizes their own identity as a distinct group. Marriage has symbolic meaning in other respects as well. Kinship and biological linkages are based on marriage. The status of Tharu community and especially Rana Tharus in the far-western regions of Nepal is also discussed in this chapter. I have also analyzed the common socio-cultural factors playing role in the change in the marriage of Rana Tharus. This research is influenced by the model of causal relationship between socio-cultural changes impacts on changes in marriage. Among the several micro social institutions like family, religions, customs, traditions and kinship marriage has been experiencing changes and this study can be expressed as “marriage among Rana Tharus: continuity and changes”.

In the chapter two, I have reviewed the literatures related to the different components of the research. I have discussed the several abstracts and research documents carried out in the past related to the research theme. Very interestingly, although the institution of marriage is, was and will be in each and every society, its processes, rituals, and procedures are changing day by day except its primary objectives.

Relevant theoretical perspectives are reviewed and discussed in this chapter. Marriage as a main theoretical framework is used to view the thematic issues. Various empirical researches on marriages, its processes, rituals and its various dimensions are discussed and many cases are identified to crystallize the research theme clearly. The literature review helped me to identify the research gap and establish my research theme. In order to establish my thematic issue on “marriage and its changes” review of various relevant thematic strands helped to narrow down in various dimensions.

In chapter three, I have presented the research methodology. In this chapter research design, methods, tools and techniques, ethnographic method are laid out. Ethnographic methods like participatory methods, interview with key persons etc. were used as methods of data collection and information gathering. Variables are defined clearly and their relations with other variables were presented. In this chapter, I have also described the time of the field study and the area of research.

In chapter four, information about study area, geographical and socio-cultural settings of Urma and Urmi village are elaborated in relation to Kailali district and the far-western region. It also describes the people and culture in detailed form. Various research, empirical data, theoretical proponents and relevant model along with references helped to crystallize thematic issue.

In this chapter a detailed account of the Rana Tharu’s way of life in Nepali culture and society, their micro socio-cultural institutions are described so as to get a comprehensive understanding of their past, current, and future condition and situation. The rites of passage of Rana Tharu as birth, marriage and death are also elaborately discussed. The economic condition that directly reflects in the ways of life of Rana Tharus is also identified. An indigenous deity of Rana Tharu and worshipping methods are also presented in religious practices that shape the religious life of Rana Tharu. Mainly, socio-cultural settings along with marriage as an institution in relation to other

micro-social and cultural institutions are explained. Various procedures of marriage practices of Rana Tharus have been given priority in the discussion in this chapter. Types of marriages, forms and functions, their meanings are discussed. Marriages its relations with other social institutions are in the center of analysis. Different types of marriage practices prevalent among the Rana Tharu are also defined. The role of education in molding the original Rana Tharu identity is also deliberated. Process of *Sanskritisation* and *Hinduisation* also briefly discussed in relation to the process of modernization.

Chapter five deals with the traditional marriage process and practices among the Rana Tharu. Marriage is one of the most important rites in Rana Tharu life cycle and its study elucidates many of the issues raised in this research concerning continuity and change. It is the most obvious way in which Rana Tharus have adjusted themselves to the cultural practices of their co-villagers of Dangaura Tharus and other caste Hindus. Whole processes of Rana Tharus' marriage and their various dimensions are elaborated. This chapter has traced out clear-cut concept about traditional marriage practices and their procedures. This chapter clearly presents the account of Rana Tharus' marriage in the past. It further deals the *Magani* institution, which is related to the proposal for marriage from man's side. It shows how this ritual reflects the essential communal character of Rana Tharu communities. How the close and vital relationship between humans and deities in Rana Tharu communities is reflected in the fact that the deities are included in the 'engagement' relationship at an early stage. The symbolic aspects of various steps followed in the marriage are discussed in this chapter. From the anthropological perspective, traditional marriage of Rana Tharu was closely related to the agriculture; calendar, role or contribution and rituals. So, change in agriculture as an occupation and as chief economic factor ultimately led to change in the religious worship of nature, land, water, forest and even in their cultural practices. The main components of this chapter are co-relationship between marriage and all socio-cultural factors- economy, politics, religions, psychology etc.

The open 'give and take' character of Rana Tharu *Magani* and marriage in addition also parallels the emphasis on reciprocity and inter-dependency in these communities as such. It was also noted that the specific certain prestation carry symbolic meaning. Sweet as a ritual plays the most vital role here, and it was suggested that sweets have a range of connotations mainly centered on the value of women and their fertility. Finally it can say that the *Magani* period creates long term relationships between two equal houses while they are getting ready to have the young couple married.

Chapter five further describes the elaborated process of Rana Tharu marriage, which includes preparatory rituals including the *Puchhaichho* ceremony. It was pointed out that the preparatory rituals are concerned with preparing the two families for the eventual transfer of the bride to the groom's side. The ways in which rituals are carried out reflects important norms and values in Rana Tharu community. First, the value put on village unity and cohesiveness is again underlined both in the use of personnel (*Karbariha, Bhujin, Dangiya, Chaukidar*) and in the auspicious *Bhuiya Pooja* and *Banaspati Pooja*. Secondly, it is properly described how aspects of femaleness are reflected in the roles women play in the preparatory rituals. Women's auspiciousness as married women, their fertility, and their roles as nourishes are again symbolized.

Chapter six covers the traditional wedding rituals of Rana Tharu. This chapter includes the core traditional practices of proper wedding rituals from- preparation for the turmeric rituals to *Gulta Ullaune* ritual properly. Women's positions are again reflected in the fact that no priest or male of the community or family lead rituals. Males only follow the women's preparatory rituals as a more formal sequence of the wedding. Women usually continue to play vital roles throughout the wedding process from beginning to end, although male also participate. This chapter discusses about the use of pan-Hindu symbolic objects and ritual sequences in Rana Tharu weddings. The meaning of symbol is highly versatile and can be altered altogether depending on the context. It is also pointed out that the meaning of a symbol or a ritual may recline simply in the fact,

which is regarded as tradition. In the study area, it was also seen and noted that Rana Tharu women hold a high position in the house and community also which makes them different from the women of other caste / ethnic community of Nepal. They enjoy more freedom and power in their daily life and cultural performances than that of women in other communities.

Chapter seven analyzes the continuity of traditional marriage and change on the practice of traditional marriage i.e. society and culture along with other changes in context of Rana Tharus of far-western Nepal. Various socio-political and economic conditions motivate change in value system, life pattern, status and position of Rana Tharus. They have been changing day by day and they are also described here with the help of changes in marriage among Rana Tharus. Various traditional customs, traditions, marriage processes and procedures are discussed as they form the core of this research.

Owing to the influence of western cultural pattern and the impacts of global culture, Nepalese cultural patterns are also changing over the years. New modified characters of marriage events are emerging and they are of either politically evocative in nature or socially more populists in its agendas which are rising in the name of “our own cultural character or identity or its preservation.” “Ethnic or cultural” based issue on cultural identity and common feelings, is at the center in Nepalese society. Due to the political instability and uncertainty, socio-cultural norms and values are being changed time and again. Moreover, the agents of change and the central factors are fluctuating because the components of society and culture are spontaneously forced to change. Thus changes are seemed and observed in marriage, family, kinship as well as in overall culture that relates on their society. So, Rana Tharu community is not also exception in this regard.

Both pull factors and push factors of cultural components are responsible for change in marriage. Globalization, life pattern, westernization, developments,

politicization, ethnic awareness, development of technology, adoption of the western values and norms, role of mass media, various international declarations, communication etc. are common factors to attract towards new values that help us observe the context of the culture and society. Similarly, remittance economy, cultural contact, cultural assimilations, cultural diffusion, adoption of technology, global opportunities, urbanization, development of road networks, contact and interaction with people etc. function as push factors to change marriage as well as their value system and its features.

In conclusion, the central aspect of the marriage and its changing aspects reveals how their life pattern seems to influence and enhance the overall experiences of other Rana Tharus in the case of their practices on changing pattern of marriage. At the end, a question remains, whether marriage among Rana Tharu is changing or not? And if yes, how significant is my orientation in this context? Lastly the central question of the Rana Tharu marriage is whether they follow continuity or change. In this sense, marriage as micro social institution is dynamic as society and culture and it is found that they continuously change while being adopted by the people. So, it is essential to change these factors as their requirements by themselves. Some factors that are core components of their culture cannot be changed and it is continuous even if they do not bear any meaning but continue as a practice handed over by their fore ancestors.

After all facts gathered, it is concluded that Rana Tharu community is undergoing social dynamics rapidly and economic growth and development of Dhangadhi as growth axis within far-western region, are playing a big role in this process. My fieldwork shows that Rana Tharu youths are not aware about their higher education before 2063 B.S., however they have dominant position in local politics due to the ethnic and regional situations. It is true that Rana Tharus do not have more highly class administrative jobs in governmental or private sector but they have occupied many political and constitutional posts at local and regional level. Rana Tharu youths are ignoring and refusing their traditional cultural systems and customs, so the main identity of Rana Tharu culture is

getting lost, though, it is not only common in Tharu community. It is a part of global social change and it is the central problem of all communities of the world. At present, Rana Tharu youths are struggling for their rights and new identity but they will never get a bright future if they do not respect their past. So the preservation of their socio-cultural traditions is the most important scenario of their identity. Many scholars are studying about the amazing culture of Rana Tharu but its youths are not interested in this matter. But at present this is their moral duty that they must know the importance of their own culture. Support and financial help from the government is a must for the protecting Rana Tharu culture.

At the end, I like to know, how useful is my research about Rana Tharu marriage in relation to its continuation and changes within time duration. It seemed likely that my theoretical orientation have drawn the focus of my research in a specific direction. How significant was my orientation in this context? In this sense, I also felt that how much Rana Tharu marriage change and how many the other changes make it possible to inspire the changes on Rana Tharus. There is always an unbridgeable gap between the Rana Tharu life and their cultural practices or culture in the present context.