



KMC Journal

[A Peer-Reviewed, Open-Access Multidisciplinary Journal]

ISSN 2961-1709 (Print)

Published by the Research Management Cell

Kailali Multiple Campus, Dhangadhi

Far Western University, Nepal

Life Cycle Rituals among the Rana Tharus of Far Western Nepal

Pirt Bahadur Bist

Central Campus, Far Western University, Nepal

Sita Bist

Janjyoti Multiple Campus, Mahendranagar, Nepal

Corresponding Author: *Sita Bist*, Email: sitabist33@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/kmcj.v4i2.47777>

Abstract

This article focuses on the life cycle rituals of the Rana Tharu community of Far Western Terai. The Rana Tharus are one of the significant ethnic groups mostly concentrated in Kailali and Kanchanpur district of Far West region of Nepal. The objective of this study was to explore the life cycle rituals of the Rana Tharus. For this purpose, the Rana Tharu community of Kalagaudhi and Kalwapur village in Shukalaphanta Municipality, Kanchanpur district was selected as a study area. The research tools of this phenomenological qualitative research design include semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, informal discussion, observation and oral histories in data collection. This study narrates the life cycle rituals performed by the Rana Tharus elucidating peculiar type of death ritual Ghada (Sharaddha) performed only by the Rana Tharus. This death ritual is organized only after the death of the family member. In this ritual, a dummy prepared for the deceased person and the relatives of the deceased mourns for the night assuming dummy as the corpse of deceased person. The various social-cultural institution, traditions and practices followed by the Rana Tharus have developed social solidarity and cooperation among the Rana Tharus and have functioned properly for the maintenance of the livelihood of the Rana Tharus. The performance of life cycle rituals among the Rana Tharus has become a structure and system among them and is becoming an instrument of identity construction.

Keywords: birth, marriage, death, Ghada, identity

Introduction

Nepal is the country with vast diversity in caste/ethnicity, religion, language and culture. According to 2011 census, there are 125 castes/ethnic groups and 123

Copyright 2022 ©Author(s) This open access article is distributed under a *Creative Commons*



Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

mother languages spoken in Nepal (Central bureau of statistics, 2012). The social system or structure of Nepal is based on the unity and diversity that integrates various caste, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural groups. Each and every ethnic group has its own language, arts, norms and values, morals, belief, society, culture and economic institution which are considered to be a primary identity of ethnic group.

The Tharus are one of the ethnic groups inhabiting a number of districts stretching from east to west in the plains and inner Terai and in the bordering districts of India and Nepal (Dhakal, 2013). They live throughout the southern belt of Nepal called the Terai from the east through to the west and the adjacent valleys between the Chure Range and the Mahabharat called the Inner Terai. Most of the Tharu people are known in terms of the territory they occupy or from where they have migrated (Guneratne, 2002). The majority of the population consisted of the indigenous Tharu people who were believed to have strong resistance to malaria. The term “Tharu” is “historically endogamous groups.” These groups differ from each other in language and cultural practices (Guneratne, 1992). The Tharus were divided into two sub-groups Rana and Dangaura that were significantly different in language and customs (Odegaard, 1997). They speak the Rana Tharu language, wear traditional dress and practice the same customs. All of these make them a distinctive ethnic group (Lam, 2012; Smith, 1986).

The Rana Tharus are probably among the oldest groups to inhabit the Farwestern Terai (Bista, 2013). Rana Tharu of Far-western Terai are an endogamous population that straddle the border between Nepal’s Kailali, Kanchanpur district and adjacent district of Lakhimpur Khiri of Uttar Pradesh and Uddham Singhnagar of Uttaranchal, India (Guneratne, 2002; Srivasatava, 199). They have different languages, social structure, folk story, norms and value, living style, food, dress, house structure, life cycle rituals and culture from other ethnic groups (Bist, 2015; Gurung, 1992).

The social structure and culture of the Rana Tharus are gradually being changed and during this process, their cultural norms and values are getting lost. Sociologically speaking, a number of powerful factors like modernization, westernization, sanskritisation and globalization have contributed to bring change in their society and culture. The Rana Tharus have historically marginalized from the state’s political institution, social and economic development sectors. No significant effort has been made to involve them in the state’s power institution, mainstream and the development process. Thus, this study aims at documenting the life cycle rituals and cultural practices system of the Rana Tharus for understanding their holistic life style.

Despite having affluent social and cultural system of the Rana Tharu community, there was insufficient research work carried out among the Tharu community. There was no in-depth information about the Rana Tharus. This study explains birth, marriage and death, ritual of Rana Tharu. This is a scientific study of the life cycle rituals of the Rana Tharu community and will contribute significantly to the knowledge of the practice of rituals. The study will provide specific information on the life cycle rituals of the Rana Tharu people in general. At the same time, it also contributes to providing material in the future study of the Rana Tharu culture.

Methods and Procedures

This paper is based on earlier field work carried out in 2020 among the Rana Tharus of Sukalaphata Municipality, Kalagaudhi and Kalwapur village of Kanchanpur district, Far Western Terai. The study area was purposively selected for the field research because of the high density and cultural homogeneity of the Rana Tharu people in the area. The nature of research is qualitative with phenomenological research design. Research tools include key semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, informal discussion, observation and oral histories in data collection. Altogether twenty five key informants including Bhalmansha (Village chief), Bharra (Dhami-jhakri of Rana tharu), Chakar (information provider), teacher and social worker, leader were consulted for this study. Basically this study focuses on life cycle rituals practice of the Rana Tharus. Audio and video recorders, a camera, and a field diary were used to record information. Participant observation was utilized for data collection for information on birth, marriage and death rituals of the Rana Tharus.

Results and Discussion

Human beings celebrate deferent types of rituals in each phase of their life, starting from birth, puberty, marriage and death, concerning the occurrence of single phases or movement from one stage of life to another (Saber, 2017). According to Dhurkhiem (1912), ritual is an approach through which collective beliefs and ideals are instantly generated, experienced and acknowledged as fact within the community. The ritual is the way by means of which individual views and behaviour are socially appropriated. So, rituals play a crucial role in the collective representations of social lifestyles and persons pastime (Bell, 1992). Ritual action is seen in all areas of social life and is one of the key means. A ritual is deeply connected with the individual or collective beliefs as Shils (1968) stated that “beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals however could not exist without beliefs.”

The lifecycle ritual is that ritual pertaining to the life in different stages and its consequences. Life-cycle rituals continue to have significance in both simple and complex societies. In each society, ritual action has its own meaning which

is culturally transmitted through custom and tradition. The individual and groups solve their problems in both the sacred and profane aspects of social existence. Customs and traditions remain alive from generation to generation with the cohesive attachment with their religion. In light of religion, Durkheim argued that religions are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts, they too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought (Durkheim, 1912). The Rana Tharus perform different rituals in different life phases. Each ritual has different connotations and carries different significances. Each ritual practice varies in term of its nature, performance and time period. The followings are the life cycle rituals performed by the Rana Tharus.

Birth Ritual

The birth ritual among the Rana Tharus is both interesting and strange. Earlier women used to give birth to the babies at their homes only. Nursing/caring mother (Dhai Maa) assists pregnant women during delivery. In Rana Tharu dialect, Dhai Maa is referred as 'Dai budhne.' As per the old custom, she used to care of pregnant women, massage her body, cut the umbilical cord of young one (newly born infant) and wash clothes of the mother. She carefully looks after the umbilical cord until it is completely dried and becomes normal as it may get infected. The sixth day of the birth is termed as chhaiti. Daai maa washes the baby and mother, dresses the baby in new outfit, ties black thread on the hands, legs and waist of the baby, puts kohl and vermilion mark on the forehead of the child. On this day (chhaiti), villagers are invited for the feast. Most of the family brings one mana (20 kg) of rice while some people provide money coming for the feast. After the feast, the child is dressed for the first time and everyone is allowed to play with the child. There is a custom of hiding the dress and naming the newly born baby by his aunt. There is also a tradition of taking money while returning the dress of child by his aunt. There is a custom of giving name to the newly born babies by their aunt in Rana Tharu community. In case of birth of a boy, boy's uncle is called for firing gunshot on the sixth day of birth (chhaiti). It is believed that firing of gunshot makes the boy strong and extrovertly clever.

Daai Maa is given three mana (60 kg) of rice in case of birth of a boy and two mana (40 kg) of rice for the birth of the girl for her nursing services of pregnant women and infant. In addition to that, when she is called for her services she is given some money and clothes such as sari. Earlier there was a practice to bury umbilical cord within the house but nowadays, it is buried outside the house. The naming ritual

is performed on the sixth day of birth. Earlier there was a custom of giving fish beast for the child whether boy or girl. In old days, the conceived mother was not provided food for three days after her delivery. However, she is provided with perfect blend of tea made from ginger, sugar, water and mustard at morning and evening but their traditional /custom has disappeared (does not exist) nowadays.

Marriage Ritual

Marriages bond two families together and lead to the formation of strong bond between husband and wife. “Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family” (Horton & Hunt, 1968). Marriage leads to the establishment of family and it is also the means of celebrations, happiness, togetherness. Marriage not only connects the two individuals but also brings two families together. Marriage is like a bridge which connects two individual legally and creates bond between two persons and their families. Marriage is one of the important religious as well as cultural aspects along with other different cultural aspect in Rana-Tharu community (Bist & Bist, 2021). In Rana-Tharu society different norms, rituals are performed before marriage and after marriage also. In Rana Tharu caste, there was a custom of womb engagement for the marriage. In case of birth of boys ‘Dilbar’, for birth of girls ‘Gunj’ and for birth of boy and girl ‘marriage’ is performed. In case when womb engagement is not done, early age (premature) engagement is done and marriage was fixed in old days. One has to marry according to choice or selection made by the parents. Baina ceremony is also performed where boy’s side families brings mithi puri and sweets to girls house. If in case the magani is broken off then the girls side have to pay back all that they have received from the boys families (Gurung & Kittelsen, 1999).

There was no custom to know the desire or consult with the children for marriage. Nowadays, this engagement marriage custom is changing rapidly. About 50% of boys and girls in Rana Tharu tribe marry to their desired/selected partner nowadays but still an equal percentage of boys and girls follow their parents’ instructions regarding marriage. Earlier there was a custom to marry at the age of about 20 to 25 years but nowadays there is an increasing trend of marring in early age (premature age). At present, three forms of marriage are prevalent in Rana Tharu community. First marriage is engagement marriage. Second marriage is arranged engagement marriage in which boys and girls like/dislike one another for their marriage. And third one is love marriage in which boys and girls marry against the wish of their parents.

There is a custom to organize marriages only on Sunday and Thursday in Rana Thura caste. After the end of holi (festival of colours) in Chaitra, the time

period for engagement begins and their period extends upto the month of Jestha. The months of Mangsir, Poush and Magh are regarded as suitable months for marriages. Usually most of the marriage is organized in the winter months. Before the beginning of the suitable months of marriages, boy's parents or relatives go to girl's house with a marriage proposal. Negotiations are done regarding marriages and when the agreement is reached regarding marriage between both the parties, the boy party sends turmeric and oil to the girl's house before 12 days of marriage. A traditional custom to prepare cooking stove (khana pakaune chula) is followed before marriage in Rana Tharu caste. There is usual practice to prepare 5 stoves in girl's marriage and 7 stoves in boy's marriage as an omen (*sakun*). There women are appointed to prepare delicacies for marriage. There women are known as '*Bhuijan*' in Tharu language. Women clean and smear the house with red clays before three days to marriage. It is termed as '*chiya chauka*'. Before three days to the marriage, the house is again smeared with clay, this time it is referred to as '*aachho chauka*'. In the same day, stove establishing custom is performed. For this custom, village women's are invited or called for establishing the stoves and singing folk songs.

At the evening, *bhuijan* establishes stoves in the kitchen by taking seven girls and one boy for boy's marriage, and five girls and one boy in case of girls marriage. From this day, *bhuijans* cook food and serve the food to the visitors /guests. The preceding days to marriage is termed as '*bhuiya bare*'. On this day in the morning the head of family along with the children visit forest for worshipping the tree. For this they carry juggery (moulded gur, sweets), threads, scented sticks and an axe to the forest. Tree is worshipped by rolling the thread seven times around it. Firewoods are collected by cutting the trees /wood and they are brought to the house for cooking food for the marriage. In the morning, Guruba (Bharr) is called, he collects small amount of all the food items (lentils, rice, oil salt, turmeric, etc. and blows air into their goods (blears) and perform some rituals while enchanting mantra and again mix collected food items in all goods brought for marriage ceremony. It is believed that by performing this ritual, there will be no shortage of food for marriage and food would be enough for all. Before worshipping *bhuiya*, patrilineal members are called for cooking fried bread (*puri*). After that bride and grooms mother wearing white clothes goes to worship *bhuiya* cleaned by a servant before the arrival of mothers of bride and groom for worshipping *bhuiya* god.

After offering seven pairs of *puri* to *bhuiya* god and others the fried bread is given to people present at the place as gift of god (*prasad*). After that, firstly *puri* is given to *padhana* (leader of village) ruler during *panchayat* period, nowadays to *bhalmanshaa*. After that *puris* are distributed among the neighbours and clan members (*kurma*). On this night, without sleeping and singing song fried bread are

prepared on the marriage day. Head of the family after turmeric to clan deity gives it to bharra. The bharra blesses the (blows air) turmeric and speaks mantra for the protection of bride and groom. Then bride and grooms sisters grind this turmeric. A colourful figure (rangoli) is drawn from charcoal, turmeric and flour at the place drawn in front of the room where kitchen god is established (kola) and at the place close to main gate /entrance of house where lineage deity is established. Before turmeric smearing ritual, grooms brother-in-law (elder sister husband) trims his hair and then turmeric smearing ritual begins. There is a custom according to which either bride or groom is touched with turmeric by seven girls and one boy firstly in this ritual. Then sister-in-law, elder and younger sister rub turmeric, sword is held and seven puris are pierced. Groom's brother-in-law stands behind his brother-in-law with sword for protection. The bride and groom are made to sit in after bathing and decoration and make up. Then groom moves to bride's house with marriage party (barat) and bride waits for the groom in her house.

Groom bows to lineage deity and outside deity and grooms brother-in-law lifts him on the palanquin (doli). The sisters of the bride wait for the arrival of marriage party at the decorated entrance of house with sweets, praying sticks and vermilion. A ribbon barricade is prepared in the entrance gate. The groom is welcomed at the entrance with tika, oil lamp (diyo batti) and sweets. Usually three or five girls offer sweets and fruits to groom and his brother-in-law. Few jokes are exchanged between boys and girls of opposite parties. When the groom says to open the barricade, the sisters of bride demands money for opening the barricade and letting them enter the house. A bargaining for the money occurs for a while and finally when both the parties settle for fixed amount of money to be paid as a charge for opening the barricade, the girls provide scissors to cut the ribbon and groom enters into bride's house with his marriage party.

There is a custom that when bride gets ready, two colourful figures (rangoli) are drawn in front of clan deity/situated in front of the main gate of house and two cooking stoves (chauka) are placed on the rangoli and bride and groom are made to stand there and their feet are washed and money is given to bride and groom. Feet are washed with ghee (clarified butter) and water is sprinkled on the groom and his brother-in-law. A lot of water is sprinkled by bride's sisters, brothers and sister-in-laws. The groom's brother-in-law (vinaju) provides his jacket to the groom in order to protect him from cold and there is a healthy, interesting discussion between boys and girls of both parties.

After feet washing ritual, groom's feet is cleaned by his brother-in-law and bride's feet is cleaned by her younger sister. when the slippery, oily feet of groom are

not cleaned properly , the brother-in-law asks for a cloth to the sisters of bride, the girls tease them and replies “Go and buy yourself, why did not you bring the cloth from home?” The place where feet are washed, kalash and lighted oil lamp is kept. At the same place, sister-in-law and brother-in-law ties knot between the hanging cloth of the bride and groom. Then both the bride and groom exchange the garland and groom puts vermilion on the bride’s forehead. They also take seven revolutions around the fire lighted in *kalash* assuming it as winter. After revolutions and putting vermilion ritual, the knot in the hanging cloth is unfolded. Meanwhile, joking talks continues between sister-in-law and brother-in-law.

Groom and his brother-in-law are invited for food by bride’s sisters and adequate arrangement is made for their seats. A lot of jokes and franks are exchanged between sister-in-law and brother-in-law. After the food, groom shows his respects and bows to father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt and sister-in-law, and all in turn. The brother-in-law along with the groom bows to show respect, everyone provides money as donation to the groom. In the marriage, groom’s brother-in-law arranges for entire expenditure. Groom’s father and elder brother has no significant role in the marriage. Brother-in-law is the potential figure for the marriage.

After the farewell of bride from her parent’s house, groom sits on his manual wooden carriage (*doli*) prepared by her parents. Bride’s carriage is lifted by her elder and younger brothers. The entire village mourns at the departure of the bride. Mother and sister-in-law and sisters follow the carriage to the midway of path. Before reaching the house, the brother worship the lamp of rice flowers and eggs brought from house. He breaks and throws these things in three directions. It is believed that by performing this custom, the evil spirits are prevented from entering in their village, i.e. this custom has symbolic meaning.

Groom’s younger sister decorates the entrance gate of the house in an artistic manner. When the marriage party reaches groom’s house, her sisters worship the couple at the entrance gate, a figure identical to betel leaf is formed which is illuminated by lights. The bride and groom are welcomed and brought to the lawn. The couple is made stand near the stove which is placed on the rangoli made close to the lineage/clan deity. Groom’s sisters offer prayers. This is termed as ‘*dalo dalwa halai*’ ritual /custom.

After that the bride groom are permitted to enter inside the house. A bag to containing rice and money is opened and emptied close to clan deity situated nearby by entrance gate of house. The couple is taken to the kitchen while entering the house. The groom’s sisters block the passage /way at the main gate of the kitchen and

demand money by singing songs and remove the block on getting money. Bride and groom bow to the house deity (kola) installed in the same room of the kitchen. They also bow to the deity outside the kola and stay in the kitchen. Cooked rice is placed in groom's hand and the same cooked rice is then placed on bride's hand and the bride put it on the plate. This process is termed as *sitkora khilaune rasam*.

Bride stays with her friends in the deity room for the nights whereas groom remains free. In the next morning, bride is taken to the brooke. After her return from the brooke, the custom to visit bride begins. People of entire village are called. The bride sits on the verandah where everyone pats red *tika* (vermillion) to her and her husband mother introduces her to everyone. During *tika* and introduction process, villagers and relatives give cloth, money and gifts to the newly married bride. Mother of husband introduces her to the relatives and explains how the persons are related to her.

After the end of bride meeting custom, the bride is bathed and dressed in cloth from her parent's house and taken to the kitchen ride assists in cooking food and outside the kitchen dancing continues in full swing. Although bride touches and works in kitchen but she is not allowed to touch water tap until water filling custom is not completed. The ritual is performed on Monday by some people whereas others perform it on Wednesday. The bride fills the water in bowl and provides it to all the members of family for drinking. From this day, she is permitted to touch the water tap. After the water filling custom, there is a usual practice in which the bride puts ghee (clarified butter) to the food in the evening. After the food, a programme is organized in which bride bows to grooms sister and brother-in-law. It is termed as *pai lagai* in Rana Tharu dialect. Husband's elder brother's wife escorts the bride and the bride gives bow to the relatives and receives money in return. This custom marks the end of marriage ceremony.

In the old days, there was a custom in which the bride returns to parents / maternal house on the next day of marriage and on the next day, brother-in-law of the groom brings the bride ion buffalo cart (dunlop) in which either canvas is hanged or its is covered with cloth. This is termed as *ninaro* and the cart is termed as 'ninaro wale dunlop' but nowadays this custom has disappeared. In case of marriage of youngest son, happiness exchange programme is organized one day after marriage. This is termed as *gulta ultayaune*. In this custom, groom's sisters and sister-in-law throw sweet, chocolates, biscuits, money, cigarettes, utensils, alcohol, etc. from the roof of the house on *gulta*. Children, youth and old people sit in the lawn /*verandah*. Sisters and sister-in-law go to the roof of house, dance and through the above articles are thrown into the lawn. In the lawn, people collect their falling articles with enjoyment.

In this marriage, brother-in-law is assigned the responsibility to end the marriage. One of the brother-in-laws stays with the groom holding a sword and the other brother-in-law performs other duties. In the marriage, where money is required, things are needed; all these things are supplied by brother-in-laws. Groom is carried to bride's home in the wooden carriage and then again brought to his house by carriage. At the end of marriage, brother-in-law discusses the expenditure with groom's father. Brother-in-laws are in pressure and stress till marriage is finished. After the marriage is finished, the brother-in-law enjoys enough food and rests. At the end of marriage, bride's parent's provide groom with either of their animal (cow, buffalo, or ox) and cash payment as dakshina as religious offering.

In the marriage of Rana Tharu caste, pure and sacred food is prepared for vegetarians and meat products are prepared for non-vegetarians. The *bhagats* in Rana Tharu community eat vegetarian food. In the marriage, meat products of the goat, chicken, duck pigs, etc. are prepared for non-vegetarians. When the marriage is properly and successfully finished, *karbariya*, *bhalmansa* and groom are paid some amount of money as custom by the host family.

Death Ritual

Death, the last phase of life cycle, is a universal fact of human life. Each society has found remarkable range of response to the biological fact of human life. When anyone dies in Rana Tharu community, all the relatives and family members are informed. People get assembled and all the clothes of the deceased are removed from his body and his body is oiled and covered with white cloth. An oil lamp is lighted near dead cushion. All the clothes of the dead in the house are collected. New clothes are kept and old clothes are packed for destroying. The dead body is placed on a bed with bedding / mattress and is covered with quilt and the dead body is taken to the brook where the dead body is either buried or burned in the Rana Tharu custom. In case of burning, firstly elder son or younger son or both together give fire to dead body and finally everyone gives fire to dead body by bunch of khar stick. All the patriarchal family member (*kurma*) join the funeral and everyone shaves head. The *kurma* takes bath in the river after the funeral and returns home. Meanwhile, the dead person's house is smeared with red clay and the place where the death occurred smeared with clay and ash is placed over it and is covered with a basket.

After the funeral, there is a custom to look the basket to know what kind of rebirth is taken by the deceased. It is believed that impressions of bird, cat, human hands and legs are formed inside the basket. The dead body is lifted before the dusk for funeral. Rana Tharu people believe that if the dead body is buried or burnt after the dusk (at night), then in rebirth blind child is born. After returning from the brook

if the day light exists, purifying ritual is done. If time is insufficient, then the ritual is done on the next day. It is termed as minor *shraddya*. In the *shraddya* various types of food items are prepared and deceased soul is offered meal outside the house in east direction and food is also given to all the funeral participants.

Ghada Rituals

The Rana Tharus strongly believe that the *shraddya* of the departed must be performed within one year of his death. They refer it as Ghada. There is a custom to organize *shraddya* of an individual only once after his death in Rana Tharu community. In Rana Tharu caste, *shraddya* is only done in the month of Ashwin and Kartik, that also on Sunday and Wednesday among the whole week. In Rana Tharu community, relatives, family members, affinal kins are invited for funeral similar to marriage. It is termed as ‘din dinu’ in Rana Tharu dialect. Patrilineal members visit one day before *shraddya*. They prepare a hut for departed soul in the lawn by suspending a sail (canvas piece). This is termed as *mundak*. Bedding is placed for the dead soul in the *mundak* and on the next day *shraddya* is done. It is termed as ‘prahari walo din’. On the *shraddya* day, water is filled in the earthen pot with panchada and brought to the house. Kush (holy grass) is rolled with thread and is buried near the *mandak*. Bedding is placed for the dead soul in the *mandak* and on the next day *shraddya* is done. A kurma member standing still takes water in their hand and remembers departed soul and sprinkles the water in the buried *kush* and then, they offer flowers to the buried kush in their turn. A lighted oil lamp and food items are kept at the same place. The food item is covered with the basket and a *dhakiya* is placed over the basket containing biscuits and fruits.

A dummy (puppet) is prepared decorated and placed outside. The stem of uak grass is used to prepare the dummy. 7 and 5 stems of *uak* grass are used for preparing male and female dummy and are decorated just like in marriage rituals. He looks after the dummy and distributes sweets during the night frequently. At the evening relatives, affinal kins kurma assembles and women also gather in the lawn crying loudly. The relatives used to bring vegetables, hens, ducks, cloth, etc. along with them for the dead. At the evening guests and relatives who come for the *shraddya* are served with cooked rice, lentils, vegetables, pickles, fish, meat, etc. Alcohol is also provided for those who drink. In the *shraddya* of male, he-goat and for female, goat is sacrificed.

The dummy is decorated by changing its cloth frequently. In case of *shraddya* of male, quilt, coat, pants, and sometimes dhoti and shirt are used to dress the dummy. However, in case of *shraddya* of female, churi, Sari, blouse, kurta, suruwal, bodice, etc. are used for dressing the dummy. Nobody sleeps during *shraddya*'s night

and *bhajan kirtan* is done whole night and fruits, beaten rice, puffed rice, tea, sweets are distributed from time to time. In the morning at 4 p.m., food is prepared and offered to the dead soul. At 5 am the dummy is opened and is taken to brook to flow it in water. When the dummy is taken to blow it in brook, women does not allow the sticks used to prepare dummy to take away from the house in the similar manners as they behaved when the deceased body was taken for the funeral. They used to mourn and yell loudly but the males uproot the dummy quickly and blow it in the brook. In the morning all the guests are provided with meal and are sent by giving puffed rice as prasad (religious offering). In the afternoon, as well meals are prepared for the relatives and eating is done. The relatives stay in the host (house of dead person) house for 3 or 4 days for *shraddya* ceremony as in the marriage ceremony.

The hut prepared for the dead soul is destroyed in the evening after the appearance of moon and *shraddhya* gets completed. After that the *shraddya* of the dead soul is never performed. The commodity or goods such as, cloth, fan, etc. are brought for the dead soul for the *shraddya* are given to daughters, granddaughters, and relatives as donation. One pair of sleepers and clothes are given to after the *shraddya*. Ancestral property /goods such as gold silver are equally divided and distributed among the son and daughters of the deceased. There is a custom to bury the dead body of children in Rana Tharu community. Also, there is a tradition to bury ascetic (person who lives solely on alms) and jogi under the earth.

Conclusion

The different life cycle rituals performed reveal that each ritual has specific implication to the life of Rana Tharu people. These mark a distinctive identity of the Rana Tharus. the Rana Tharus residing in Kailali and Kanchanpur district of Nepal are indigenous people of this place who are very rich in their traditional cultural practices. They have different social and culture systems. They have their own language, history, festival, social structure, norms and values, and practices. The preceding discussion marks out the rites and rituals of the Rana Tharus marked by three distinct stages of birth, marriage and death. Different socio-religious functions are associated with these three phases of life of the Rana Tharus. The celebrations of different kinds of rituals help to build strong solidarity, social unity among Rana tharu people. These types of celebration spread happiness among the people and are also sign of togetherness in spite of having cultural differences of all people coming together for celebration. This all process helps to preserve and promote different cultures along with diversity in it.

With the influence of the external world and different forces, the traditional way of thinking and perception of the Rana Tharus with reference to their birth,

marriage and death is now undergoing a change. In consequence of the impact of different factors like urbanization, modernization and sanskritization, some attitudinal changes are now taking place in the society of the Rana Tharus. Many cultural traditions and practices are on the verge of extinction, so efforts should be taken for their preservation and protection. Rana Tharu society and culture has been one of the major heritages of the Far West region with its own unique culture, it plays a vital role in social and economic development of this region.

References

- Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Bista, D.B. (2013). *People of Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Bista, P.B. (2015). Introduction to society and culture of Far-western. *Nav Dristi Journal*, 1(1), 1-12.
- Bist, S., & Bist, P.B. (2021). Changing patterns of marriage in Rana-Tharu communities. *Scholars' Journal*, 4(1), 203–215.
- Central Bureau of Statistics (2012), *Population Census (2011)*. National Report. Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Dhakal, D.N. (2015). *Rana Tharu grammar*. Nepal Academy.
- Durkheim, E. (1912). *Elementary forms of the religious life*. The Free Press.
- Guneratne, A. (2002). *Many tongues, one people: The making of Tharu identity in Nepal*. Cornell University Press.
- Gurung, G.M. (1992). Socio- economic network of Terai village: An account of the Rana Tharu of Urma-Urmi. *Contributions of Nepalese studies*, 19 (1).
- Gurung, G.M., & Kittelson, T.C. (1996). Kurma, Kola, and Kurmi as Community Concepts: Patrilineage, deities, and inside-outside dichotomy among the Rana Tharus. *Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology*, TU.
- Gurung, G.M., & Kittelson, T.C. (1996). Symbols of traditions, signs of changes: Marriage customs among the Rana Tharus of Nepal. *Bibliotheca Himalayica*, 19(3)
- Horton, P.B., & Hunt, C.L. (1968). *Sociology*. MC Graw and Hill.
- Lam, L.M. (2012). Land, livelihood and Rana Tharu identity transformation in Far-Western Nepal. *Himalya*, 31(1), 32-35.

- Odegaard, S.E. (1997). *From caste to ethnic group? Modernization and forms of social identification among the Tharus of the Nepalese Terai*. Institute and Museum of Anthropology, University of Oslo.
- Saber, B. (2017). Anthropological observation of life cycle rituals among chuktia Bhunjia tribe of Nuapada district. *South Asian Antropologist*,1(2), 145-155.
- Shils, E. (1968). Rituals and crisis. Donald (ed.), *The Religious Situation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, A.D. (1986). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Blackwell.
- Srivastava, S.K. (1999). Cultural dynamics among the Rana Tharus: The past and the present. *Bibliotheca Himalayica*, 16(3).