

'Kha Me' Jatra of Bhaktapur: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to explore and highlight the Kha Me Jatra as an important intangible cultural heritage of Bhaktapur and Nepal as well. Not only status and glory, but the unique identity of our nation is also represented by the temples, monasteries, images, feasts, festivals, the mountains, rivers, forests, lakes as well as various beautiful places. These globally renowned properties have made our nation peculiar, popular and prestigious in the world. Nepalese people observe and commonly participate the celebration of many wonderful festivals and fairs celebrated in different parts and days in the year. For instance, people of Bhaktapur celebrate different colorful festivals and Jatras on the special auspicious days of every year. Every festive event of Bhaktapur has its own specialties. Through the perspective of intangible cultural heritage among them, Kha Me is one of the important Jatra which is celebrated on the ninth day of Dashain, the greatest festival of Nepal. 'Kha Me' is a pure male buffalo which is reared in the name of goddess Bramhayani in Bhaktapur. It is brought in Gathemunga festival and kept in the ground floor of the temple of goddess Durga. During the ninth day it is taken in an open street for the procession. It is a typical Jatra which represents indigenous feature and identity of Bhaktapur, the cultural capital of Nepal. But, unfortunately, this peculiar and popular festival has still remained an untouched issue of the academia. No one has explored and highlighted it as an intangible cultural heritage from the perspectives of cultural, religious and social significance.

Key Words: Animal Sacrifice, Festival, Goddess Brahmayani, Jatra, *Kha Me*.

1. Introduction

A.L. Kroeber, an American Anthropologist, uses the term civilization as a synonym to what we would call culture (52). In Sanskrit language, the synonym of culture is '*sanskriti*' which has been derived from Sanskrit term '*sanskar*', the meaning of which is 'the refinement of soul' by various acts, through the series of birth and rebirths. The term culture thus has been used in different context for a long time, but its exact meaning is still vague (Roy 656).

The earliest definition was delivered by Tylor as follows: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by as a member of society" (1). Conventionally, some scholars have viewed *sanskriti* as a translated form of culture. But they are different in the root of their histories. It is obvious that the term 'culture' was introduced for the first time in 1871, whereas the term '*sanskriti*' existed in Vedic Literatures. The origin of these two terms is leading different historical evidence, differencing from each other in basic assumptions. The term '*sanskriti*' is archaic than the term 'culture'. Thus, 'culture' is sister term of '*sanskriti*'.

The term '*sanskriti*' has unique linguistic structured with '*sam*' prefix and '*ti*' suffix to the origin word '*kri*'. '*Sam*' means 'in nice way' and '*kriti*' means work. The combining form of these terms means 'the work to be done in a nice way' (Panta 13). According to Nepali Dictionary, *sanskriti* is an art and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively in the historical context that sum up customs, ideas, individual, social, religious behavior, assumption, feeling, thought etc. of a particular people or group. The convention is based on tradition known as *loksanskriti* i.e. folk culture (Pokharel & et al 1280).

Heritage encompasses a wider scope of meaning ranging from cultural and historical significances, political implications, spiritual and intellectual connotations to communications. Increasingly, heritage becomes an ephemeral and vague concept, which is a state of constant flux (Park 7). Heritage means the collective cultural and built inheritance and history of a group of people of a place that can be used to build an identity through the telling of stories. Heritage is often seen as the selective presentation and interpretation of elements of history (Hannam& Knox 92). Cultural heritage can also be addressed as the man made heritage. On the basis of structures, cultural heritage can be classified into tangible and intangible forms. Tangible cultural heritage has physical appearance, whereas intangible culture cannot be seen in the form of materials. It can only be observed by the inner feelings of human beings. The UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage 2003 defined it as follows:

... the intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skill as well as instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated there with that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a

sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (6)

UNESCO further classified intangible cultural heritage in five different domains which are oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship (8). What the UNESCO classified all domains are their own specific significance and features, which are known as the fundamental tools of establishing indigenous identity of the owner groups and communities as well. Out of the five domains, *Jatras* and festivals are categorized under the social practices, rituals and festive events.

As a whole, Nepal celebrates several festivals and *Jatras* as the national, regional, local and community level within a year. Therefore, Nepal is a unique country for the researchers to study colorful and meaningful festive events. Every festival and *Jatras* have their own special identities, features and significance. Among them, this paper deals with *Kha Me Jatra* which belongs to *Newar* community especially of Bhaktapur. It is celebrated during the ninth day of *Dashain* festival.

'*Kha Me*' is an important festival concerned with the procession of buffalo. It is a typical *Jatra*, which can reflect an indigenous feature and identity of the *Newar* ethnic people especially of *Bhaktapur* culture. Mainly, the *Newar* caste can be classified into six major hierarchical groups. Priestly castes, high castes, upper castes, lower castes, unclean castes and untouchable castes are the major divisions that can be observed in the *Newar* community. Religiously they are also divided into Hindu and Buddhist as well. Brahmins, *Chhathar*, *Pancthar*, *Tini*, *Jyapu* (level-1), *Tama*, *Kumha* and *Awa*, *Jyapu* (level-2), *Jyapu* (level-3), *Chipi*, *Cyo* or *Cya*, *Dwin*, the borderline- clean *thars*, *Nae*, *Jugi*, *Don*, *Kulu*, *Pore*, *Cyamakhala*, *Halahulu* are the major *thars* of *Newars* found in *Bhaktapur* (Levy 78-85). In this regard, some scholars mentioned that there are 336 different caste groups in the *Newar* community in *Bhaktapur* city including *Amatya* (*Mahaju*), *AwalAaganja*, *Aalubanjar*, *Aajakhya*...*Hamu*, *Hyaumikha*, *hyangwajhyauju*, and *Horra* (Dhaubanjar 59-61).

'*Kha Me*' is not only a festive event, still known as one of the important intangible cultural heritages not only for Bhaktapur but also of Nepal. Several studies on festivals and *Jatras* have been carried out by the natives and scholars from abroad. However, specific studies on *Kha Me* have not been conducted yet. It is an extremely painful situation and a matter of immense shame of the academic field. Hence, to fulfill the research gaps and address the problem which is mentioned below, this paper entitled *Kha Me Jatra of Bhaktapur: an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal* has been prepared.

2. Research Problem

Customs of sacrificing animals has become one of the most important cultural practices in Nepal. This practice is also found in the different cultural groups in India and even in the world. In the context of Nepal, there are several deities who are said to require animals sacrifice during their special occasions and *pooja*. The goddess of Gadimai of Bara district is one of the goddess who is said to require more than thousand animals sacrificed on the special festival. The *Durgapooja* festival known as *Dashami* of every *Dashain*, goddess *Durga* is offered plenty of animals in every *Shakti peeth* of the country. Similarly, in *Bhaktapur*, especially in the ninth day, special animal sacrifice offered to the goddess *Brahmayani* which practice is called sacrifice of *Kha Me*. From the religious and socio-cultural perspectives, the procession of *Kha Me* is to be taken as one of the important *Jatra* of *Bhaktapur*. However, due to lack of proper studies and researches, several aspects of this festival still remain unexplored and the main problem and research gap of this issue has not been yet highlighted. Obviously, the problems of the concerning subject always inspires the scholar to find out the facts. Thus various problems which were concealed during this study inspired the researcher to prepare this research paper raising the following questions:

- What is festive event and how it is existed in practice in the world and Nepal as well?
- What is *Kha Me Jatra* and how it is celebrated?
- What is their impact on society in *Bhaktapur*?

3. Objectives

This paper deals with the study of *Kha Me Jatra* of *Bhaktapur*. Therefore, the main motto of this study is to explore the different aspects associated with this festival. But as we discuss the main issue, this paper highlights introduction to *Bhaktapur*'s main festivals and *Jatras* of Nepal as the general objectives. This paper has been prepared specifically with the following objectives:

- To confine appropriate meaning and explore the historicity of festive events in the context of the world and Nepal as well,
- To examine the *Kha Me Jatra*, and highlight its celebration process, rites and rituals; and
- To analyze and describe the impacts of *Kha Me Jatra* on the societies of *Bhaktapur*.

4. Methodology

Scientific research methodology has been applied to every extent as far as possible in order to carry out this research paper. The methods and procedures have been followed to explore its objectives and generate valid data and information. Basically, there are two types of data: primary and secondary. Both data have been applied as the major sources of information. Field work is the main source for primary data. For this investigation, desirable primary data have been collected from the field

using observational and interview methods. The essential secondary data have been collected from journals, books and electronic versions as well.

During the study, researcher has reviewed different articles, reports, books such as Bashudev S. Agarawal's *Prachina bharatiya lokdharma*, Saphalya Amatya's *Archaeological & cultural heritages of Kathmandu Valley*, Mery.M. Anderson's *The festivals of Nepal*, Gopal Dhaubanjari's *Visketjatra Astapredesha Utsab*, Lok N. Dulal's *Cultural tourism in Bhaktapur*, Ramesh R. Kunwar & Usha Chand's "Natural disaster and heritage tourism: A study on the impacts of earthquake in Bhaktapur Nepal", Robert. I. Levy's *Mesocosm, Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal*, Trilok C. Majapuyria and other's *The festivals of Nepal*, Ram N. Pandey's *Nepal through the ages*, Davin Picard and Mike Robinson's "Remaking worlds: Festivals, tourism and change", Dilli R. Regmi's *Medieval Nepal*, vol-II, Yagna R. Satyal's *Nepal an exotic tourist destination*, Biswo S. Ulak's *Heritage tourism in Panauti*, UNESCO's *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage 2003*, and Dhanavajra.V.Vajracharya's *Lichchhavigalaka abhilekha* while collecting secondary data and information.

5. Findings and Discussion

Researcher has applied observation and interview methods for collecting primary data during the field survey. On the basis of research objectives, researcher has asked questions like "What is *Kha Me*? How and when is it celebrated? Why do the people of Bhaktapur celebrate it? What are its positive and negative aspects in the society?" to the local people while conducting field work. Finally, after completing field survey, the discussion and findings of this paper has been presented including the concept of festive events and historicity, festivals and *Jatras* in Nepal, *Kha Me Jatra*, and its process, rites and rituals positive and negative aspects as well in chronological order.

5.1. The Concept and Historicity of Festive Events

The word "festival" was originally used as an adjective from the late fourteenth century derived from Latin via Old French. In Middle English, a "festival *dai*" was a religious holiday. It was first used as a noun was in 1589 (as "Festifall"). Feast first came into use as a noun circa 1200, and its first recorded use as a verb was circa 1300. The term "feast" is also used in common secular parlance as a synonym for any large or elaborate meal. When used as a reference to a festival, most often refers to a religious festival rather than a film or art festival (*OED Online, March 2014*). In this respect Picard and Robinson mentions that:

A festival is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community, centering on some characteristic aspect of that community and its religion and cultures. It is often marked as a local or national holiday, *mela* or *eid*. Next to religion and folklore, a significant origin is agricultural. Food is such a vital resource that many festivals are associated with harvest time.

Religious commemoration and thanks giving for good harvests are blended in events that take place in autumn, such as Halloween in the northern hemisphere and Easter in the southern. The Philippines is one example of a modern society with a large number of festivals, as each day of the year has at least one specific celebration. There are more than 42,000 known major and minor festivals in the country, the majority of which are specific to the barangay (village) level. (1–3)

Festivals and *Jatras* are religious and cultural ceremonies which celebrate for recalling of special events, keeps patience to the gods and goddesses, celebrating the incarnation or birth day of the herons, for the protection of man and animals, and for the betterment of agro-farming (Dhaubanjari 3). Festivals and *Jatras* are known as the heritages of the nation which can establish separate identity of the countries in the world. Every year, on certain auspicious day and time with certain mottos, people venerate to the gods and goddesses. This religious and cultural ceremony is called festival and *Jatra* (Dulal 102-103). Zeppel & Hall state that:

Festivals, carnivals and community fairs and vitality enhance the tourist appeal of a destination. Festivals are held to celebrate dance, drama, comedy, film and music, the arts crafts, ethnic and indigenous cultural heritage, religious traditions, historically significant occasion, sporting events, food and wine, seasonal rites and agricultural products. Visitors primarily participate in because of a special interest in the product, event, heritage or tradition being celebrated. (69, Smith, 140)

Generally, *vratas*, fasting, *melas*, *utsavas*, *jatras*, *chadparva*, fair, festive are known as the common terminologies which denote to the festive events. However, there can be observed slight variations in them, in their rites, rituals and system of celebration. The term *vrata* is often used in South Asia for any calendrically prescribed religious activity, but it has a stronger sense of religious or ascetic observance taken upon oneself, austerity, vow, role, holy work such as fasting and continence (Macdonnell 304). Traditionally, in South Asia *vratas*, in contrast to many other forms of worship, *vrata* is proper to persons of all caste levels as well as to women (Kane 51). Similarly, *utsava* indicates traditionally festival or holiday (Levy 402).

Likewise, the ritual family *puja* as well as great community gatherings in the temples for that types of activities are called festivals. During this process the deity is honored, worshipped, appeased or beseeched for some blessing with offerings of flowers, lighted wicks, holy water, rice, coloured sacred powders and pastes, coins, often fruits and vegetable and sometimes liquor and blood sacrifice (Anderson 26). Regarding *jatra*, Levy mentions that:

While many cylindrical events are associated with movement of people to one or another temple or pilgrimage site in a more or less haphazard manner some cylindrical events are characterized systematic and formalized movements through some unit of space. Sometime a deity is moved through space, sometimes and more rarely devotees a deity is temple or shrine or to a series of them, in some prescribed order. Both the carrying of the deity and the more formalized movements of worshippers through the city is called as it is elsewhere in South Asia, a *jatra* (from the *sanskrityatra*, a journey, festive train, procession, pilgrimage).(420)

Jatra is a kind of event performed, when the idol is decorated and carried about religious procession for a variety of reasons-to honor him, give him a pleasurable outing, present him to other gods and goddesses, take him for his annual bathing ceremony or simply to allow him, the opportunity of watching some festival or ceremony with the celebrating populace (Anderson 26). Nepalese calendrical events can be sorted into *jatras*, *melas* and *vratas*. It has been noted that among upper caste in Indo-Nepalese tradition, participation in *jatra* and *mela* is collective, whereas *vratas* may be individual and done at home. Those calendrical events special to women are *vratas* performed for the most part discretely within family group (Bouillier 91; Levy 424).

Literary sources inform that in the Eastern culture and civilization, the tradition of celebrating festivals and *Jatras* began from the Vedic period where one can find an episode that the Emperors gave sacrifice of horse as the festival of “*AshomeghaYagna*”(Majapuria et al 2). According to *Haribanshapuran*, Lord Krishna had uplifted *Gobardhan* hill, the particular event is known as the “*Girimaha*” festival. A Jain literature ‘*Gayadhammakaha*’ mentions different *Mahas* and *Jatas* such as *Indramaha*, *Skandamaha*, *Rudaijata*, *Sivajata*, *Nagajata* (Agarawa 14-5).

The tradition of celebrating festivals and *Jatras* can also be observed in India. The *Viswamitra* and *Indrajatra* are very popular festivals of New Delhi (Sharma 27). The words “*Maha*” and “*Jata*” were used as the synonyms of festival and “*Jatra*” respectively in the Vedic Period. These episodes and events suggest that Eastern culture and civilization is revealed older tradition and history of celebrating festivals and *Jatras* than the Western one.

Nepal has also a long tradition of celebrating festivals and *Jatras*. There is lack of archaeological evidences during the *Gopal*, *Mahisapal* and *Kirata* periods. Hence, unfortunately, it is very difficult task to mention about the existence of festive events in those periods. Although inscriptional records suggest that during the *Lichchhavi* period these practices existed as the *Kailash* and *Varaha Jatras* (Vajracharya 275-27). During the medieval period this tradition of celebrating festival and *jatra* was very popular especially among the people in Kathmandu Valley.

Most of the festivals are religious in nature and are directly or indirectly related with the veneration and procession of the gods and goddesses. In this context Regmi, a renowned art historian, has mentioned that:

Nepal in the middle ages reveled in festivals. Not a day passed without a kind of festivity either in a locality or on a countrywide level which were all lavishly celebrated in an atmosphere of universal rejoicing. The festivals were seasonal but were dominated by religious considerations and the deities played important role in their celebration. They offered entertainment as well as an opportunity for the expression of devotional attitude and religious feeling. (639)

Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious country having diverse caste, religion and races from ancient period to the beginning of this twenty first century. It deserves its importance as an independent kingdom with full of antiquities and the relics of the past. It has been a country of extreme diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, ecology and economy and it will remain so in the future (Bhattachan and Pyakurel 31). According to the Census of 2011, one hundred and twenty-five different caste and ethnic groups have been living with their cultural identity in Nepal. They belong to ten religious sects such as Hindu, *Buddhist*, *Islam*, *Kirat*, *Christianity*, *Prakriti*, *Bon*, *Jainism*, *Bahai* and *Shikha* (CBS 3-4). As it is diversifying nature, several colorful festivals and *jatras* in different territories can be found. Therefore, it is said that Nepal is one such country in the world where there are more festivals and feasts than working days.

5.2. Festivals and Jatras in Nepal

The tradition of celebrating festivals and *Jatras* seem very old and is deeply rooted in the Nepalese society. Most of the festivals are religious and related with the procession of the gods and goddesses venerated in Kathmandu Valley. Festivals were strictly observed by the people in the past (Pandey 231). The people of *Lichchhavi* period were very enthusiastic for celebrating different types of festivals and *jatras* such as *varahajatras*, *dwarodghatanyatra*, *kailashyatra*, *sobhamyatra*, *lokapalawamiyatra* and *mandapiyatra* which can be witnessed in the inscriptional records (Chetty & Rayamajhi 33-134).

Though an exaggeration, Nepalese observe numerous festivals of different natures and categories. Some festivals are celebrated on a national scale, some regionally and some only by certain communities in certain areas and localities (Amatya 39). In this context Satyal mentions that:

Nepal is a land of paradise in terms of fairs, festivals and *Jatras* from the very early of the history. The people of Nepal are said to observe many fairs, festivals, *Jatras* and

traditional family ceremonies than there are days in a year. Nepal follows the lunar calendar. Different festivals are celebrated all the year round. The celebration of these festivals may be nation-wide, regional or just confined to the village or city. (22-23)

There is a grand festival occasionally observed which lasts four months, commencing in *Byasack*, and ending in *Swrawn*. It consists in viding the shrines of all the Gods in Nepal, which are said to be 2733 (Kirkpatrick 196). Bhaktapur is famous for its wonderful fairs and festivals which can be observed throughout the year. It was the cultural capital of Nepal from the thirteenth century to sixteen century CE, for more than three hundred years (Amatya 40).

Now days, Bhaktapuris famous for the celebration of colourful festivals in and around the Durbar Square. Many festivals are celebrated throughout the year to mark the seasons, to pay tribute to gods, and in remembrance to the historical and legendary events. *Bisnet Jatra*, *Bhoto Jatra*, *indrajatra*, *Nepal Sambat*, *Buddha Jayanti*, *Dashain*, *Tihar*, *Yomahri Punhi*, *Tamu Lhochhar*, *Sahi- manaa Punhi*, *Gaijatra*, *Krishnajanmasthanami*, *Teej*, *Janai Purnima*, *Naag Panchami*, *Gathemangal*, *Ram Nawami*, *Chaite Dashain*, *Holi*, *Shivaratri*, *Shree Panchami*, *Pishach Chaturdashi*, *Byaja Chaturdashi* etc. are the major fairs and festivals which are celebrated in Bhaktapur (Kunwar and Chand 18).

During the course of the year in Bhaktapur, there are some seventy nine of these festivals, as on some days there are more than one and as, in contrast, a few last for two days there are a total of seventy four days each year during which some part or all of the city is involved in one or another such event (Levy 402-403). Out of afore mentioned festivals, *Kha Me Jatra* is considered important one through the cultural and religious perspectives.

5.3. Kha Me Jatra

The sacrifice of male goat and in the absence of a fowl or duck has to be made with a sense of compulsion. Those who are habitual vegetarians and abstain from violence offer a pumpkin as *vali*, to the Goddess. But animals are preferred to every other thing (Regmi 674). During the *Dashain* festival, locally called *mahani*, the *Newars* offer animals to the goddesses. Specially, on the ninth day of the *Mahani*, *Newar* perform animal sacrificing ceremony which they call *Syakkotyakko*. On the occasion of *Syakkotyakko*, people of *Newar* community rush to the temple with gifts, animals and prayers for the Mother Goddess, with the belief of 'the more you kill, the more you gain' (Anderson 150).

If it lies within the means of a devotee, one may offer one animal for each of the nine days, because it is said that the goddess resides in the

house in different forms known under different names for all of these days (Regmi 674). As per the information provided by the priest of *Taleju* temple, during *Dashain* festival, in *Taleju* including *Dumaju* and *Kumari* and other *Saktipeeth*, about 108 animals have been sacrificed for the goddesses in Bhaktapur officially. Specially, the eighth or *Mahaastimi* and ninth or *Mahanawami* are the most important day for animal sacrifices in the names of such deities (Interview: Siddhiveer Karmacharya 2074/12/22).

Mahaastami is also known as *Kalaratry*. On this night, in the memory of killing the Buffalo demon, *Mahisasura*, twenty-five buffaloes are offered to the goddess. On the night between the eighth and ninth days, large numbers of goats and buffaloes are sacrificed to the Goddess *Taleju*. A flock of some thirty goats is first brought to the temple; the leading one is called *Nikhudugu*. *Nikhudugu* goat must be pure black in color without any physical defects. Similarly, the first male water buffalo called *Nikhuthu* must be all black and without blemish of defects, and is kept in a special shelter in Byansiarea of the *Kwachetwa*: (Levy 335). Similarly, during the ninth day of *Dashain* festival, there is a practice to sacrifice a male buffalo as *Kha Me* to the goddess *Brahmayani* in Bhaktapur with the procession which is called *Kha Me Jatra* (Dulal 260).

Khame is a *Newari* term which is derived from the word ‘*Kha*’ and ‘*Me*’. In local terms ‘*Kha*’ means pure and ‘*Me*’ stands for male buffalo. It means a special male buffalo which does not have any wounds and also has no physical defects. In this respect, Levy mentions that:

the buffalo is called *Kha(n) Me*:, *Me* means water buffalo and *Kha(n)* is a term of uncertain meaning here, although the same term is used as one name of the *Na: laswa(n)* room, where it is locally interpreted to mean “sword”. The *Kha (n) Me* has been kept in a special room on *chheli*, the ground floor of the Nine *Durga*’s goddess’s house.(546-547)

Whatsoever, ‘*Kha Me*’ is the pure male buffalo which is reared to the name of goddess *Bramhayani* from the *Gathemuga* festival in Bhaktapur. After buying, it is kept in the ground floor of the house of goddess *Durga*, few steps north from Dattatreya Square. It is reared by the *Banamala* clan group which belongs to *Newar* community. They are also known as *Gatha*. All responsibilities such as feeding, protecting and health caring of *Kha Me* goes to the same family. The buffalo should have seven *chakra* i.e. circles on the body. The hair in front of the middle part should be leaned down towards the front and back part towards the back. The purity of the buffalo is measured on the basis of the *Chakra* (circle of the skin) on the body. If unable to find this kind of buffalo on the specific day, a rope must be tied as the symbol of *Kha Me* in the pillar. There are four main members of Nine *Durga*’s which are called *Nayaka*, and they managed all the expenses in the past, but today other local people also

contribute for the purchase of the buffalo(Interview: Om Prakash Dhaubhadel 2074/12/23).

During the ninth day of *Mohani*, a buffalo representing the mythic demon slain by goddess *Durga* known as *Kha Me* is chased from the house of *Navadurga* Goddess towards the shrine of *Bramhayani*, east of the town. This buffalo chasing procession is popularly known among the local inhabitants as *Kha Me Bwakegu Jatra* (Shrestha 23). It is a typical *Jatra* which cannot be found occurring in other parts except Bhaktapur. Thus, it is considered an indigenous feature and identity of Bhaktapurculture.



Brahmayani temple

Kha Me can also be observed in Panauti too, one of the ancient *Newar* towns which is located about 15 Km southeast of Bhaktapur. But unlike a *Jatra*, here is observed only in the form of a *puja* in which offering are made to the goddess. *Kha Me* is put in a dark room at the first day of *Dashami* with *Tantrik Puja*. He is only fed *jand* (local beer) for 7 days considering him as the ghost. On the eight day i.e. *Asthami*, he is

killed and the meat is distributed to every households of Panauti (Ulak 73). The residents of Panauti still celebrate the *Kha Me puja* and *Nalaswang* (barley plants *jamara*) *puja* in *Dashami* at the Layaku in a way identical to that of Bhaktapur. The custom of sacrificing *Kha Me* and numerous male goats for different goddess and seedling the *Nalaswang* still continues at Layaku area. The custom of distributing meat of *Kha Me* and the male goats plus the *Nalaswang* to every household in Panauti has continued even after the Layaku Durbar has vanished (Ulak 73).

5.4. Celebration Process, Rites and Rituals

Before the origin and practices of *Dashain*, Newar people celebrated the *Mahani* as the great festival in their community. *Dashain* festival was popular among the Newar community in the late middle ages (Regmi 678). During the ninth night i.e. *Mahanawami* of *Dashain* festival in Bhaktapur, a special sacrifice of animal in the form of *Kha Me* is offered to the goddess *Brahmayani*. On this day, the buffalo is given alcoholic liquids to drink and is made fully drunk. Thereafter, the *Kha Me* is brought out from the house of goddess *Durga* in the evening. Firstly, *Kha Me* is brought into the Dattatreya Square for the demonstration of its unusual behavior. As per the expectation of local people, *Kha Me* performs his unusual attitude in a huge crowd. Formally, at about 5 to 6 pm, the *Jatra* starts from Dattatreya Square and finally comes to an end after reaching the temple of goddess *Bramhayani* on the bank of Hanumante River. About 1 Km. long distance has to be covered by the procession.



Kha Me on the procession

During the procession, nine male people of *Gatha*, a clan of Newar community with wearing costumes and masks of *Navadurga* goddesses chase to *Kha Me* (Levy 546). From Dattatreya via Chyamasingchok, procession of *Kha Me* reaches into the Hanumante River and has to be taken into the waterhole for bathing. Thousands of people participate on the ritual bathing occasion and they sprinkle holy water on the body of *Kha Me*. It takes about half an hour to complete. After the sacred bathing process has completed, *Kha Me* is taken into the courtyard of goddess *Brahmayani* for sacrificing which is done in the midnight. The sacrificing process is very different than any ordinary one. It is done by cutting the main vein of the throat and the blood is showered at the goddess.

Therefore, it is very difficult to observe the process of sacrificing the *Kha Me*. It is believed that ordinary people cannot see the sacrifice process if anyone who sees these things will face death. Hence, the process is strictly prohibited to the ordinary people (Interview: PurusottamLochan Shrestha 2074/12/23).



Kha Me in the Hanumante River for bathing.

Before sacrificing act is committed, flicking holy water, rice and flowers on his body, worshipped and offered food, a sacred magic tantric phrase is whispered in its ear, and asks him for assent to what is to follow, which will lead to his sacrifice and death. It is believed that while the mantra has taken effect, the spirit of the deity has entered into the soul of *Kha Me*. After that *Kha Me* starts to signal his assent by shaking his body, nodding its head with flicking ears. Then, finally, the sacrificing acts will be begun.

Kha Me represents the great demon *Mahisasura*. Therefore, it will be secretly sacrificed by the *Gathas*. The *Gathas* the nine *Durgas* are at the same time the sacrifices and the deities to whom the sacrifices are offered, and they will drink some of the blood of the *Kha Me*. The drinking of this blood, the “life blood”, is appropriate to dangerous deities but would be fatal to human. This thus signals that the *Gathas* have become the nine *Durgas* (Levy 547).



KhaMe on the courtyard of *Brahmayani* temple for sacrifice

After draining out the blood from the body *Kha Me* becomes lifeless. Next day early in the morning, firstly the corpse of the *Kha Me* that is laid in the courtyard of *Brahmayanipitha* is divided into two

sections: head and body. Again the head is worshipped as the demon king *Mahisasura*. The whole body is cut into tiny pieces for distribution as the *Prasad*, which means sacred food, to the local people. It is believed that if the *prasad* is taken into the house the evils cannot do anything in the family. At the day of *Laxmi puja*, a piece of the *prasad* is kept in the fire as incense to the goddess *Laxmi* (Dulal 260).



Local people and tourists observing the *Kha Me* procession.

5.5. Impact Analysis

Festivals, *Jatras* and ceremonies are known as the mirrors of the folktales, music and dance, history and traditions, way of life, religious beliefs, costumes and customary laws, dress and ornaments, social harmony, craftsmanship, joys and fears, dreams and sorrows, unity in diversity of the people and entire the country. Especially, they have religious and cultural significance which are celebrated with huge gathering of people on the special auspicious days and time for the fulfillment of certain desires of an individual and community as well. They are related with the memories of special events, to bring happiness to the gods and goddesses. Regarding the significance of Nepalese festive events Anderson has highlighted that:

Nepalese festivals are interrelated with each other which celebrates throughout the year, is literary a way of life, reflecting their joys and fears, dream and sorrow. They become a calendar, marking the changing seasons, the revolving of the years and ages giving continuity and meaning to their lives. They are considered as the means of mysterious, colourful and fun with ancient processions and rituals, the mythological, religious and historical backgrounds of the ceremonies, and the wealth of delightful legends and folktales surrounding them. They cement the strong and vital bonds between individual members in each family, as well as the ties within

established social groupings of caste, clan and class. And to a degree the festivals are instrumental in welding together the citizens of a recently democratized nation.(15)

Events are closely associated with human beings. Each and every event directly touches to the society. They do not take place in a vacuum. Therefore, they influence almost every aspect of our lives, whether the religious, socio- cultural, economic, political and ecological as well. By the nature and natural laws, every things and activities have both strengths and weaknesses, which generate two side influences that are taken as the forms of positive and negative impacts. Similarly, *Kha Me jatra* also creates both aspects in the society which has mentioned been below.

Positive Impacts

Festivals were inaugurated to celebrate annually in some event in the scriptures to pacify the gods, to thank them for the harvest, to honour their birth dates or to celebrate some miraculous performance attribute to them (Anderson 27). In this regard Picard and Robinson have mentioned that:

Festivals often serve to fulfil specific communal purposes, especially in regard to commemoration or thanking to the gods and goddesses. During the celebrations a sense of belonging for religious, social, or geographical groups, contributing to group cohesiveness is developed. They also provide entertainment, which was particularly important to local communities before the advent of mass-produced entertainment. Festivals that focus on cultural or ethnic topics also seek to inform community members of their traditions; the involvement of elder sharing stories and experience provides a means for unity among families. In ancient Greece and Rome, festivals such as the Saturnalia were closely associated with social organization and political processes as well as religion. In modern times, festivals may be attended by strangers such as tourists, who are attracted to some of the more eccentric or historical ones.(3)

The temples are known by the upmost consideration in Nepal, and remarkable festivals are annually celebrated by its inhabitants (Kirkpatrick 88). Due to closely related with religion and tradition, festivals are observed here in almost all the months of the year by taking out procession of the deities in the midst of various kinds of dances and music (Pandey 194).

Among the several festivals and *Jatras*, *Dasain* is the most important one in which people of Bhaktapur demonstrates the procession of *Kha Me* during the ninth evening. Generally, on the basis of nature, festivals can be classified into four different forms which are religious

festivals, art festivals, food and drinks festivals and seasonal festivals. *Kha Me* is one of the festivals which can represent all the four forms that mentioned above.

The procession of *Kha Me* is observed by thousands of local people, including domestic and tourists from abroad. Locally, there is a belief that donation given for managing and rearing to the *Kha Me*, observing, touching, bathing, worshipping and sacrificing the *Kha Me* during the procession will fulfill their desire and gate emancipation through all kinds of sins and ultimately helps to transformation of the soul into the heaven. Due to this tradition, procession of *Kha Me* is done in the evening. The streets, pavilions and roofs of the houses are fully covered by the local people, tourists and devotees as well to see the procession. Generally, every local person takes part in the procession, except some senior citizens, children and unwell (Dulal 260). Therefore, the significance, utilization and positive aspects of *Kha Me Jatra* in the society of Bhaktapur seem very wide which represents the following points:

- This festival helps to provide the folktales regarding the Goddesses *Navadurga* specially *Brahmayani*;
- It helps to gain information on the music and dance performed during the procession;
- This festival helps to conserve and preserve of history and traditions regarding the goddess *Brahmayani*;
- It can provide the information about way of life of the people;
- This festival helps to provide the religious beliefs of people regarding the Gods and Goddesses;
- It helps to protect the costumes and customary laws regarding such festivals;
- During the procession huge numbers of people participate with their traditional dress and ornaments, therefore, it helps to protect their dress and ornaments;
- This festival helps to create social harmony and unity in diversity of the people;
- *Kha Me* is a typical *Jatra* of Bhaktapur, therefore, it helps to preserve the indigenous identity of Bhaktapur and the entire country as well.
- It helps to increase the inflow of tourists in Bhaktapur.
- By celebrating this festive event people fulfil their desire, gate emancipation through all kinds of sins and stay safe through the unseen evils and finally after departure the soul will be transmigrated into the heaven from the earth.
- During the procession huge numbers of devotees and tourists participate for observing the demonstration, which makes full enjoy and satisfaction to them;

- It is an important intangible cultural tourism product which helps to develop tourism activities and helps to enhance the financial status of the people and Bhaktapur well.

Negative impacts

On the above-mentioned discussion, obviously, it is said that *Kha Me* festival has been generating both positive and negative impacts in the society and culture of Bhaktapur. On the one side, it is playing positive role somehow to preserve and conserve the socio-cultural values and to develop tourism activities for economic enhancement of the local people and Bhaktapur well. On the other side, it is bringing several negative impacts in society, culture, family and an individual. During the field survey by using questioning, discussing, interacting with local people and observing the particular event, the following negative aspects of this festival have been enlisted:

- It generates unnecessary financial burden to the community and individual households as well.
- Along with *Kha Me* other several animals have lost their life on this festive event as the name of celebration.
- Because of the uncontrolled crowd on the street some time unusual and suitable accidents have to be committed.
- Searching activities of *Kha Me* has begun at least half and a month before, in this process rearing period unnecessarily the time has to be lost the concerned people and community as well.
- Several challenges and problems such as feeding, protecting and health caring have to be faced by the responsible family and an individual during the period of its rearing.
- The sacrificing process is very different than any ordinary one. It is done by cutting the main vein of the throat and the blood is showered at the goddess which caused big pain to the *Kha Me*.
- During the procession *Kha Me* is given alcoholic liquids to drink and is made fully drunk, while fully intoxicated *Kha Me* performs unusual behavior. Sometime he also attacks to the participants which brought casualty.

6. Conclusion

Dashain is an important and the longest festival of Nepal. It is celebrated for about 15 days. It is specially celebrated as the *Mahani* festival in *Newar* community. There are special rites and rituals which are performed in Bhaktapur during the *Dashain* festival. *Ghatasthapana* is the first day of this festival. On this day, holy water pot is placed as the main religious performance. With the placement of the holy water pot, the barley seeds are sown by the priests at the auspicious time determined by the astrologer. In these functions, the priests like *Rajopadyaya* (Brahmin

priest), *Moolacharya* (main *Acharya* i.e. tantric priest) and Joshi (astrologer) pay special contribution for performing *pooja* to the goddesses. On the seventh day or *saptami* the symbol i.e. *Khadga* (sword) of Goddess *Taleju* is taken from its secret shrine to the Kumarichok in the form of a procession. After completing the *pooja* of *saptami*, the eighth day is celebrated as the day of *Mahaastami* or *Kalaratri*. In this night, twenty-five buffaloes are sacrificed in the memory of *Mahisasur* (buffalo Demon). The ninth day i.e. *Nawami* is also a special day of *Dashain* festival. On this occasion, special tantric *pooja* is performed for welcoming *Ekanta Kumari* and *Gana Kumari*. On this day, the *Moolacharya*, the main tantric priest, goes to the *Kumarighar* for performing rituals to the goddess. Finishing special *pooja*, he comes back to the *Taleju* temple and *Ekanta Kumari* is also brought into the Kumarichowk from outside the palace in the regal way.

Along with the above mentioned activities, on the ninth day the special buffalo is also offered to the goddess *Brahmayani* which is locally called '*Kha Me*'. In local terms '*Kha*' means pure and '*Me*' stands buffalo. Therefore, '*Kha Me*' means the special male buffalo which does not have any defective parts of the body. By observing the *Chakra* (circle of the skin) of the body, purity of the buffalo is determined. During the procession, firstly, *Kha Me* is brought out into the Dattatreya Square from the house of goddess *Durga* in the evening. At least 5 to 6 pm., the *Jatra* starts and finally comes to an end after reaching the temple of goddess *Bramhayani*. During the procession of *Kha Me*, the streets, pavilions and roofs of the houses are fully covered by the local people, tourists and devotees as well. After completing street demonstrations, *Kha Me* is taken into the Hanumante River for bathing. Thousands of people participate on the bathing occasion. When it completed, *Kha Me* is taken into the courtyard of goddess *Brahmayani* for sacrificing which is done in the midnight. It is one of the important intangible cultural heritages of Bhaktapur. As per the natural law, this festive event generates both positive and negative impacts in the society. It can be suggest that, no matter by minimizing its negative impacts; this festival should be continuously practiced, preserved and conserved as one of the renowned cultural traditions of Nepal.

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Annexation: I. Profile of Key Informants

Name	Address	Occupation	Expertise Area
Dr. S.V. Karmacharya	Kamal Binayak, Bhaktapur	Priest of the Taleju Temple	Tantric religion and worshipping system
Prof. Dr. P.L. Shrestha	Bhaktapur	Dept. of History Bhaktapur M. Campus	Nepalese History, Art/ Architecture Religion
Om Prakash Dhaubhadel	Bhaktapur Municipality	Tourism Information Centre	Art/ architecture, religion and culture of Bhaktapur