

Intangible Culture of Magar Community in Tanahun District: A Study of Bhimad Municipality

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Abstract

Magar is one of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal having their distinct cultural heritage, linguistic identities and social values. In this study it analyzes the introduction of Magar and their intangible cultural heritage that has been practiced by the Magar living in Bhimad municipality of Tanahun district. The main objective of this study is highlighting the major intangible cultural heritage of Magar such as religion, language, traditional belief and practice. The study only focuses on language religion and traditional practice of Magar in term of intangible cultural heritage. In this regard the study followed qualitative research design. Both primary and secondary source of the data were used. The study has been concluded on the basis of primary data collected from the field from the analysis of the opinion and perception of the respondents. The Magar has rich intangible cultural heritage that has been practicing in the study area, however, modernization and influences of different religions, like Buddhism, Christianity and create problems in the continuation of the traditional cultural heritage of the Magar living in the study area.

Keywords: Culture, intangible, traditional, magar, heritage

Introduction

The UNESCO has categorized two types of culture: the tangible and intangible. The intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge's, skills as well as the instruments, object, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith- that community groups and, in cases, individuals recognizes 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 the history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals and of sustainable developments. (Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage is one of the identity markers of the people or their community. In the context of Magar study area, some sort of intangible cultural heritage plays the vital role to preserve the traditional identities of Magar.

There are various myths and legends about the origin of the Magar. Hitchcock (1996) notes, "Magar (Monogoloid) of Banayan Hill are accepting the Hindu values and changes are

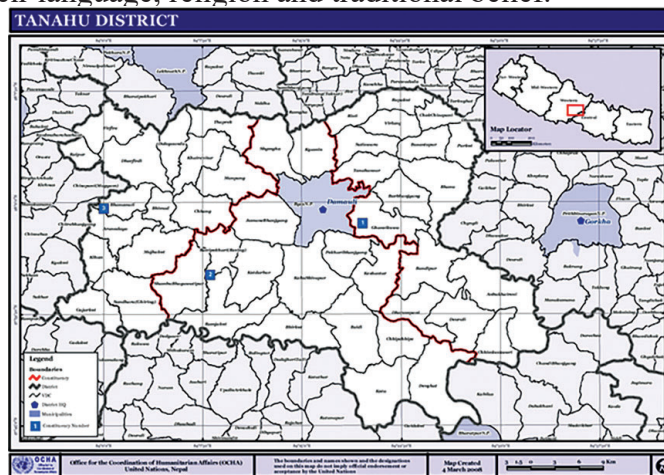
occurring gradually in the same way" (p. 31). In the same line Pradhan (2004) highlighted that Magar are the non-Hindu groups of western Nepalese who have accepted caste concept and he further states the distinction of adaptation and assimilation with other caste people. Magar tribe is the third largest group and the first largest group among the indigenous peoples of Nepal. Usually, the places, rivers, villages, forests and roads or tracks in Nepal are named by the Magar language. Most of these names are located in Gandaki region. Therefore, the Magar tribes are the indigenous people (Bhumiputra) of Nepal (Magar, 1995, p. 32). In the same line Magar, (2053) notes, "In ancient times Magar were called 'Mangal'. One caste of Mongol race is in Hungary is called 'Maigyer' believe to be migrated from the middle the origin of Magar word comes from mangala word" (p. 6). The Magar ruled while establishing their own kingdoms in ancient Nepal called the Barha Magaranth (12 Magar Kingdoms) located east of the Gandaki river and the Athara Magaranth (18 Magar Kingdoms) located west of the Gandaki river inhabited by the Kham Magar. Study area of this research is located in Gandaki region located in the zone of ancient twelve Magarant.

Objectives of the Study

Main objective of this study is to describe the intangible cultural heritage of the Magar like language and religious practices in the study area and specific objectives are what are the major factors that play the role to shift intangible cultural heritage of the Magar and how it can save from the rapid shifting process.

Study Area

Bhimad municipality is located at Tanahun district of Gandaki province. It is around one hundred and eighty kilometers far from the capital city of Nepal, and thirty kilometer south from the Pokhara valley, the capital city of Gandaki province. Magars are the first largest population in Bhimad municipality. In total Magar covers around 41% population of the municipality as per the census of 2011. Magar has different area to study. Magar has own culture and they believed on their culture and ritual. Their intangible cultural heritage has been reflected through their language, religion and traditional belief.



Source : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanahun_District#/media/File:NepalTanahuDistrictmap.png



Map of Bhimad Municipality
Source : <https://bhimadmunicipality.gov.np/>

Research Methodology

The study followed the qualitative research design and analyzes intangible culture of Magar community living in Bhimad municipality of Tanahun district. Data were collected by using both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were gathered from books, articles, reports web sites through library research and primary information were gathered through field survey and observation. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview. Five individuals were participated in depth interview.

General Information about Respondents

In this study five individual including two female and three males were participated. They expressed their opinion about the intangible cultural heritage of Magar living in study area. Participant one is given name (p. 1), participant two is given name (p. 2). Like that participant three is named (p. 3), participant four is given name (p. 4) and participant fifth is given name (p. 5). Socio economic background of the participants' areas is as follow:

P1 is 80-year-old man living in study area involves various cultural and religious activities. He had passed School Leaving Certificate involve in teaching profession. He expressed his opinion about the important of intangible cultural heritage.

P2 is 60-year male who has passed Master in sociology and studied about Magar language and culture.

P3 is 40-year-old living in study area and studied Magar culture and language. He is Magar activist and also representative of local government. He has been studying Magar culture since long time.

P4 is a woman age of 60 who can only read and write. She involves in various rituals and festivals and sings Magar song and involving in dance part since young age.

P5 is 25-year-old woman studying in master level. She takes interest in Magar culture and language.

Intangible cultural heritage of Magar

Language, religion, traditional belief and its practices are known as the intangible cultural heritage of Magar. The intangible cultural heritage is mentioned as follows:

Language

Magar has own linguistic and cultural identities. According to the national population report 2021 noted that 788,530 people speak Magar language in Nepal. The Magar language is one of the members of Tibeto- Burman language family. In study area, Magars also speak Nepali language in addition to its own Magar language. Linguistically, the Magars are divided into three groups. Barha Magaratis speak Dhut dialect, whereas Athara Magaratis speak Kham and Kaike dialects in Far Western Part of Nepal. In common, they all are known as Magar Language. Magars who live east of Kali Gandaki speak Magar Dhut and the Magars of west of Kali Gandaki speak Kham dialect. Like that Magar of Karnali region of Dolpa speak Kaike. The study area is located in Gandaki Region that is situated in twelve Magarats (Barha Magarats) where Thapa, Rana and Ale are the main layers of the Magar. Subedi (2054 BS) highlights that on the west by eighteen Magarats (Athara Magarts) where the dominants of Magar like Pun, Gharti, and Roka. Likewise, Magar of Karnali region of Dolpa area like Rokaya, Kayat Jhankri etc. have been living over there" (p.41). Linguistically, Rana, Ale, Thapa, Gaha, Saru speak Magar Dhut language. Like that Bura/Budha/Budhathoki, Pun, Roka, Gharti, Thajali, Garbuja, Sherpunja, Pahare, Paija speak Kham and Magars of Dolpa speak Kaike. Tarali Magar of Dolpa; Budha, Gharti, Roka, Rokaya, Kayat, Jhankri all Magar clans residing in Dolpa and Karnali districts use Akkha scripts as written script. About the script of the Magar, Magar, (2055) notes, "Many scholars have been in forefront to implement the Akkha script to write Magar language in Nepal. Akkha script is said to be closely associated with Brahmi script. Some researchers had found Brahmi script used during the time of Balihang Rana the Magar King of Palpa (Baldengadi) in the 12th century" (p.45).

Magars express their idea, emotion, feeling as well as their communal believe in their language so that language is one of the main cultural heritages of the Magar. In this regards p1 notes, "Without the existence of language we cannot express our knowledge system so that language is one of the main cultural heritages of the Magar so that young generation should conscious about it" (Personal Interview, 2023). Like that P5 notes," Young generation should conscious about the identities of the Magar so that young generation should think about cultural identities and not only focuses earning"(Personal Interview, 2023). It shows that both young and old generation is expressed worry about continuation of linguistic heritage of the Magar. In the context of the preservation of linguistic heritage of the Magar p4 opinioned that, "Government of Nepal suppressed Magar language in the past so that they could develop their religious belief and language. They are forcefully converting into Hindu and ordered to speak Nepali language. Now the situation has been changed and young generation takes interest to preserve the linguistic identities of the Magar but lack of the resource it is difficult to preserve

the intangible cultural heritage of the Magar."(Personal Interview, 2023)

Participants of this study are worried to preserve the linguistic heritage of the Magar, however, they are hopeful because in some extent young generation is conscious to preserve the linguistic identities'

Religion

Religion is one of the intangible cultural heritages of the Magar though they practice religious based rituals. Magars preserve their intangible cultural heritage such as *Baraju puja*, *Kul puja*, *Mandali puja*, *Jhankri puja* etc. In study area, Magars performs various dances and songs during the auspicious occasion like worshipping temple and worshipping in their house. Gandaki region is traditional home land of the Magar so that in some temples Magars have been holding the position of the priest and worship the goddess. Basically, they work as priest in the temple of goddesses. Except that they have expertise on Tantra and worship to the god / goddess by using the power of Tantra. Mainly they worship nature and ancestor. They follow both naturalism and animism. In this regard, p1 noted that we worship nature in the name of various *puja* like *Baraju puja*, *Kul puja*, *Mandali puja*, *Jhankri puja*, *Divara puja*, *Ban puja*, *Nag puja*, *Vayu Puja*, *Bhayer puja*, *Bhume puja*, *Simya puja*, *Chandi puja*, *Bhimsen puja*, and *Bhairav puja*. In all Puja, head of the community or family performs various rituals like song, dance, chanting, offering agricultural product etc. (Personal Interview, 2023). In the same line p2 notes, "Before Hinduization in Nepal the Magar has been following Jhankri tradition and worshipped nature.

After Hinduization in Magarant, they slowly and gradually leave the traditional religious heritage of the Magar is replacing by Hindu religion" (Personal Interview, 2023). After followed Hindu religion most of the Magar worship the same God and Goddesses and observe festivals, as Hindus do, majority of them follow Khas-Brahmin religious traditions, observe the same festivals almost exactly and many of them use Brahmin priest. In this regards p5 highlights, "We should think about our religious practice, however, the Magar had followed Hindu religion which had created difficulties in preserving religious heritage of the Magar. We should think about the preservation of the religion" (Personal Interview, 2023). Yong generation is also conscious about the preservation of religious belief of the Magars. The Magar worships nature, spirits, and supernatural beings. Similarly, they also worship hunting Gods and Goddesses within their own families and outside, the Gods of dead ancestors or their grandmothers and grandfathers.

Traditional belief and practices

Shamanic (*Dhami Jhakri*) tradition is one of the important traditions of Magars living in study area Bhimad municipality. There is long shamanic tradition in Magars; however, now it is only limited to treat the people. In the process of treatment, a shaman performs by chanting various song and dances related to guru, God /Goddess or wild spirit. Worshipping place and performance of a shaman represents the intangible cultural heritage of the Magar. There is long history of shamanic healing ritual of Magar that is reflected as form of chanting and dancing. Magars have belief of the spirit or ghost/ God/Goddess shamanic performance

and his/ her treatment has long history among Magars of Nepal because they believe illness is nothing than the divine will and it is necessary to fulfill the divine desire for worshipping the Goddess and Gods. In this regards p1 notes, "In my time there was no hospital shaman played great role to treat people. Psychologically they treated the patient" (Personal Interview, 2023). The priest goes to all the surrounding nature God like Ban Devi, Kali Devi, Seti Devi and Raktakali Devi and Shree Mahankal Devi Temple where the goats are sacrificed after performing the worshipping rituals whereas Goddess like Panchakanya Devi and Saatkanya Devi are worshipped with rice, vermilion, flowers, fruits, incense, money and water. In the worshipping day, the entire members of their families gather and experience their richness of culture by performing song and dance. In some cases, they worshipped Kul ancestors' or legendary Gods /Goddess of the certain communality also play role in the Magar community. In day-to-day life there is strong belief on *Kul* deities. Religious belief and traditional belief play important role on worshipping *Kul* deities. There are various kinds of traditions of worshipping *Kul* deities. Some traditions refer to the pastoral life of the Magar and some tradition refers the hunting life of the Magar.

Religious performance, linguistic activities like folk tales, riddles, songs dances are the Intangible cultural heritage that reflect the identities of both individual and community. In the context of Magar community of study area religious performance, verbal and non-verbal literature, shamanic activities are the main intangible heritage of Magar. *Jhakri* customs are known for their traditional healing system that uses Tantra, Mantra, and special rituals. A *Jhakri* acquires divine power through meditation, parental teaching, or guidance of the *Ban Jhakri*, a half-human, half-animal shaman spirit of the forest. *Jhakris* are widely believed to possess special spiritual powers; they have traditionally held prominent roles in Nepalese society. In most rural areas and even in some urban areas, they advise people on social and health affairs. They are also acknowledged as musicians, herbalists, diviners, and protectors, among other roles. Furthermore, *Jhakris* are believed to be able to help guide the souls of the dead into their next lives.

Conclusion

Magar is one of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal having separate cultural identities. They have both tangible and intangible culture. In Bhimad municipality, folk songs, dance, ritual performance, shamanic performance, religious performance all are the intangible cultural heritage of the Magar. Through the practice of intangible cultural heritage, Magars of study area have preserved their traditional identities. With the different multi-ethnic group, multi-linguistic and multi-culture in the world to identify itself among the others, Nepal is a rich country in terms of language, culture, religion, biodiversity and socio-cultural diversity. Nepal has its own importance and significance in the culture and heritage with the different indigenous ethnic group. Indigenous Peoples in Nepal have distinct cultures, languages and belief systems. In my opinion, without preservation of intangible cultural heritage, it is impossible to preserve communal belief, religious performance so that federal, provincial and local government of Nepal should have to make policy to promote intangible cultural heritage like preserving language, song, dance, ritual and cultural performance.

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