

Kulpuja: A Ritual and Behavior of Magar

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Abstract

Human beings take themselves superior for having the capacity of development of culture to their environment for survival. From the beginning of civilization, people prepared, accumulated the knowledge and preserved it as a form of culture. Culture is the body of thought and knowledge both theoretical and practical, which only man can possess. It is the sum total of achievements which develops traits by traits. Among them kulpuja ritual is one of the central traits. In this paper, I explore why rituals like kulpuja are celebrated and what relation they have with the behavior of the indigenous people—the Magars of Langaun of Baglung district, western Nepal. The research was carried out by using descriptive and explanatory research design. Participant observation, group discussion and key informant interview were carried out to collect the primary data. The Magars are rich in their ritual activities; among them kulpuja is the most important one. Like other castes and many ethnic groups of the world, the Magars of Langaun also sacrifice and offer chicken and black pig's heart for their ancestral god. They believe on supreme power which is able for the termination of the evil eyes as well as other obstacles and illness by the happiness of their ancestral god. The offering of a live heart is a unique feature which is carried out emotionally. The rate of generation gap is clearly seen between the members of Magars. The elders are worried about the increasing rate of dependency in their offspring and feel how the children are able to survive within their environment. The importance of this ritual bind among the members of the community is deteriorating continuously in the name of modernization in younger members of the community.

Keywords: Ancestor, ritual, the Magars, behavior, sacrifice

1. Introduction

This paper is based in field research carried out since December 2011 to February 2012 in the Magar community in Langaun of Baglung District, western Nepal. Human beings become superior to all other living beings due to the development of the knowledge on division of labor and the creative nature. Man always thinks how and why, in each activity natural as well as artificial from the ancient time, adopt in their environment. The accumulated knowledge was shaped as culture. McIver defines culture as the expression of our nature in our modes of living and our thinking, intercourse, in our literature, in religion, in reaction and enjoyment. The culture shows the people's way of living and their thinking about the world. It is the body of thought and knowledge both theoretical and practical, which only man can possess. It also refers to the social mechanism of behavior and to the physical and symbolic products of these behaviors (cited in Bhushan & Sachideva, 1999). In this sense culture is the sum total of human achievement which can easily separate human from other animal of the world.

Culture develops trait by trait. All the cultural traits- materials as well as non materials, have been invented at some time and in some place by some person. No single invention contributes a lot to the development of culture; it is only an addition to what already exists. A culture is actually a patterning of independent trait complexes. The existing cultural traits influence the discovery of new trait that is material or non- material which helps to improve over the existing cultural traits (Hardman, 2000). This process is continuously going on from ancient time to present time in the world. According to Clark Wissler there are nine basic cultural traits which give rise to cultural patterns; among them religious practices is one (cited in Bhushan & Sachideva, 1999).

It is not an easy task to give a definition of religion which will satisfy every people of the world. Many Anthropologist express their views about the religion. Sumner and Keller argue that religion in history from the earliest to very recent days has not been a matter of morality at all but of rites, ritual, observance and ceremony. Christopher Dawson writes, whenever and wherever

man has a sense of dependence on external powers which are conceived as mysterious as and higher than man's own, there is religion, and the feelings of awe and self-abasement with which man is filled in the presence of such powers is essentially a religious emotion, the root of worship and prayer. Certainly man is dependent on foods, shelter and sex (ibid.1999). He learned to use other animals as well as plants and their parts in different forms and texture. Plants and animals are dependent on energy which is provided ultimately by sun. How sun provides heat and light energy continuously has not fully in the knowledge of man till now. Similarly thunderstorm, volcano, lightening, earthquake etc. are out of human hand or knowledge which makes bashful for human beings seen in *Tsunami* of Japan as well as other countries. In my opinion human being is dependent on power or energy on the one hand but their thinking is vast on the other hand. In the practical life they are unable to fulfill the gap between thinking and practice which leads the belief on supreme power which they suppose to be god. The level of belief increases as human beings are brought into the world and given what is necessary for support by the creator or supreme beings. For the happiness of supreme power people prepared different activities and improved the process of it continuously in the name of religion which is acquired after the birth and not a genetic one. Different communities of the world worship supreme power in their own name and own way by the formulation and improvement according to their knowledge and environment. Among the different religious traits, ritual is one of the central traits.

Ritual is the prescribed order of rites, regular repeated action or behavior. According to Durkheim and Douglas ritual is any formal action which is set apart from profane action and which expresses sacred and religious meaning. It is any every day practice which is characterized by its routine nature and by its significance to mandate social interaction. It is the sacred profane domain of social life. Ritual behavior is the behavior which is devoid of meaning, rigid and stereotypical which is different in different cultural environment, while ritual action is imbued with shared social meanings which are culturally transmitted through customs and tradition. Ritual occasions may be regarded as social situations

which are separated and ceremonial and they may not be rigid (cited by Hardman, 2000).

Ritual may function as a conservative and cohesive force within a society but it may also be the means for demonstrating social, political and cultural resistance (Hall & Jefferson, 1997). It is present in secular society. Life-cycle ritual continues to have significance in both complex and simple societies. Ritual action may be seen to be present in all areas of social life and is one of the key means whereby both individuals and groups resolve problems encountered in both the sacred and profane aspects of social existence.

2. The Magars

59 indigenous ethnic groups are living in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country Nepal covering 37.2 % of the total population. Among them, the Magars are one of the largest indigenous ethnic groups, with the population of 7.14 % numbering 1,622,421 in total. Of this, 3.39 % can speak their mother tongue that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group (Thapa, 2008), but in the study area all the Magars speak Nepali language as mother tongue. The Magars are simple, having co-operative nature, normal height, Mongolian face with wheat-white complexion. The face of the Chiple Magar is flat and purple wheat-white in color but the Salami and the Serwai Magar have slightly elongated face, which may indicate the inter-breeding between the Magars and other clan (Sapkota, 2008).

3. Ritual of Magars

All the communities of the world have their own ritual system, formal action and behavior. The life cycle ritual action and behavior of Brahmin-Chhetry, Rai-limbu, Gurung and Magar is different from each other within Nepal, but the ultimate aim is the same i.e. happiness of supreme power, ancestral god. Although, Magars appear similar, their way of performing life-cycle rituals differ from one another according to their geological as well as inherited cultural activities from their ancestors. The birth of an individual is a truth of the beginning of life that brings a person

into existence in a group and community member. After the birth in socialization process, it needs to undergo some rituals for its coming future. Worshipping gods and their ancestors is one of the main activities of the Magar community. The newly born child should pass *Chhaiti*, *Nawaran*, *Bhat khuwai*, *Chhewar*, *Marriage* and many other ceremonies as well as rites and rituals.

Kul Puja

Worshipping ancestors is the main activity of many caste and ethnic groups. In Brahmin community worshipping *kuldeuta* is to make ancestors happy and sacrificing he goat, purified rice pudding and flat bread prepared by rice flour. Newar sacrifice goat, chicken, eggs for their ancestor. Similarly Thulung Rai sacrificed previously human blood and *kalo jureli* but later they changed into chicken and pigs. Similarly, worshipping *kuldeuta* is carried out by sacrificing male sheep, cock, pigs, he-goat and other bird species such as pigeons by the Magar of Karnali region (Magar, 2008). In the study area Chiple and Serwai Magar sacrifice chicken and black pigs for their ancestors. The Magars inhabitant of different geographical area give different names such as *Kot puja*, *Brahma puja*, *Jhakri puja*, *Barah puja*, *Kulami puja* for their ancestral god. In the study area the Magars use the word *Kul puja* and *Pitri puja*.

The key element of this ritual lies in sacrifice. It's taken for granted that offering blood is the effective way to initiate the existence. By offering blood, human being achieved their desired goal. They sacrifice as the ritual killing of substitutes as a way of ensuring contact and communication with ancestors. They employ the symbolism of killing, the shedding of blood in minute quantities to bring about rebirth of the original order and revitalization. For Magar the original effective rite was a blood sacrifice laying the model for later rites which work by communicating with the ancestors with the appropriate blood offering. These rites of Magar can be compared with Vedic and classical Indian sacrifices, in which every act of sacrifice refers back to the creation of the world. Every sacrifice may be said to replicate the primal act of Prajapati who produced creation by the sacrificial dismemberment of his own body... Any sacrifice... (Parry, 1982). The effectiveness of the communication which is linked to its correct performance is similar to the Brahmanism tradition in which in its very carrying

out, the order of the world is reproduced and maintained. The right order of sacrifice is, and assures the right order of the world (Herrenschmidt, 1982 cited by Hardman, 2000).

According to respondents, their ancestral god must be **Chandi Baraha** because he accepts pig sacrifice. There is not clear cut demarcation of the years for *Kulpuja*. In the study area, there is variation in the years of *Kulpuja* between the Magar clans. Generally, they arrange *Kulpuja* at the alternate year of 3, 5, 7 or 9 according to their condition. At the last of December or January's bright half of a lunar month on Wednesday or Friday they arrange this ritual. The small branch of **Jhakro** is kept on the tap on bath in the morning on that day. The house is purified and smeared by the oil of sesamum's (*Sesamum indicum*) seeds.

The already prepared pure *Jaman* (unpurified local wine- called *jand*), pure rice and ginger are eaten in the late morning. In the mid noon at twelve o'clock, all the members gather in the place of *kulpuja*. There is not any temple or fixed place for *kulpuja*. The clan assembles in an area and elder member determine the place in every ritual time. The older and knowledgeable member of Magar prepares a hut of *titepati* (*Artemisia vulgaris*). The side of the hut is covered by the broad leaves of *bhorlo* (*Bauhinia vahlii*). The hut has two steps, upper and lower. The ladder of **Jhakro** is kept against the hut to join two steps. Hens or cocks are also hung oppositely near the ladder of big branch of *katus* (*Castanopsis indica*). In the corner of the hut, hangs a *chino* (a dry cover of the gourd pot). Inside the *chino* pot they put barley and sesamum's seeds. Near the ladder, the effigy of *kul debata* is prepared by the mixture of rice, barley, sesames seeds, ghee etc. When the hens shake their feathers clearly, the people of Magars feel that the god is happy, then after they start the puja. The old and knowledgeable member of Magar worships their *kul debata* (ancestral god) with *aacheta*, *pati*, cooked rice, pure wine and flowers. At the end of worship, a lively heart of black pig is offered by him to their god. The ritual rule is that, if pig is female, the chicken must be male or vice-versa. From each family at least a chicken and a black pig must be sacrificed in that ritual. At the nearly end of worship, the priest or other older people catch the branch of **Jhakro** and tremble with speaking their past, present as well as occurring future events

of their family members. This situation is more terrible for all the members of the family because they believe that god is speaking, who has occult powers. After the end of worship, the priest puts tika to all the members. According to their respected level within their clan, they divide the different parts of the main sacrifices pig and chickens. Then they go to their home. They eat meat, rice, wine and share happiness to all the members (Sapkota, 2010).

Kulpuja and Plants

We, humans are heterotrophic organism and totally depend up on the plants and animals for our foods. Plants have been used by human from the early beginning of the civilization and developed to agricultural settlement continuously. Plants and their parts are used for food, timber, fuel, fibers, cloths, medicine etc. by the people according to the nature of the species. People continuously gained and accumulated the knowledge about plants and their proper use. They categories plants in to fuel, foods, timber, fibers, medicine, fuel, oil and recreation. The challenge of accumulation and preservation of knowledge about ecotone species as well as medicinal plant species are linked in certain rituals as well as ceremonies.

In the Himalaya, most of the people live in villages and use plants as medicine, edible/food, fuel, timber, agricultural tools and various other purposes. Age old traditional values attached with the various forest and varieties of forest products have gained tremendous importance in the present, particularly medicinal plants (Rana Man & Samant, 2011 Uaha & Gyal, 2011). The elders are the information and processing unit of a society. They are valued because they maintain the old tradition, customs, religion and kinship systems that are imperative to the group's survival in a difficult region. They play an important role in traditional medicine in that most often they act as healers, diviners and herbalist.

Like other ethnic/caste groups of the world, Lohorung Rai use *waiphu* (*Castinopsis tribuloides*), moss species and lichen, leaf of banana *titepati* (*Artemisia Vulgaris*). If *waiphu* is not available they use *waiphoo* (*Castonopsis indica*) (Hardman, 2000). Similarly, Brahmin and Chhetri use *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*), *kush*

(*Desmostachya bipinnata*), *jau* (*Hordium vulgare*), *til* (*Sesamum indicum*) *titepati* (*Artemisia vulgaris*), *bhringraja* (*Wedelia calendulacea*) for their death ritual for the worship their ancestors to join the soul of death body. In the study area Magar use *titepati*, *jhakro*, *til*, *katus*, *jau*, *aadua* (*Zinger officinalis*), *bhorla* (*Bauhinia vahlii*), *basar* (*turmeric sp. tulsi*). The above mentioned plant species are more useful for medicinal value. It indicates that people are afraid with illness and illness is mainly occurred due to the evil eyes of the ancestors if they become anger. If important medicinal plants are linked with ancestor's activities, the plant species can easily preserve on one hand and transfer knowledge for coming generation in the socialization process. Similar understanding is found in the study area.

4. Behavior of Magars in Kulpuja

They purify the house and clothes by cleaning and washing. The members of the house purify themselves by bathing. They take purified rice at a time in a day with ginger, milk and curd only with emotionally. Emotions are the primary source of human motivation. If emotions are simultaneously viewed as cultural concepts, they become important as statements about and motivations for the enactment of cultural values. If motivation is seen as culturally constituted, study of the emotions and their development becomes crucial for understanding the psychosocial origins of behavior (Hallowell, 1955; cited in Hardman, 2000). This behavior is most important and restricted within the Magar community within the period of time. It reflects the taboo but it is important for the health and sanitation because houses, clothes, using materials and body should remain purified by eating, cleaning and bathing behavior using herbal medicinal plants i.e. *jhakro*. The oldest and knowledgeable member completes the bathing activity early in the morning at 3 AM, but there is no restriction to use local liquor. He remains near the hut (temporarily prepared temple of ancestor) and all other members remain somewhat far emotionally watching the spreading of feathers of the vertically downward hung chickens on the strong branch of *katus*. The priest worships with the mixture of *aacheta*, *til*, barley and flowers continuously on hanging chicken which spread their feathers strongly. At that time, all the members said *kul aaya*, *kul*

aaya... emotionally and feel their ancestral god present there in the temple. The priest prays the ancestor:

The chickens are in your bandhan (confinement). We bring them for sacrifice. We are starting to sacrifice for our names. It is yours, you accept or not: it is up to you.

Then they start to sacrifice the chicken. They take out the heart and lever, fry it and offer for their *kuldauta*. Then, from the ventral surface of the black pig, a live heart is taken by the strong male people, symbol of active and brave within their member. The priest as well as the member of the Magar shows the innocent behavior with their ancestral god and the priest prays their god and says-

“O god! We sacrifice a black pig and chicken for you, transfer by our ancestors is in your name. We hope all the materials are purified. You are well known which activity and material are purified and which ones are funeral. If there is any funeral activity, please bless us.

The members of Magar as well as priest pray and say:

We offer black pig’s heart, heart and lever of chicken and all other materials in pure form and we ourselves remain pure as far as possible. Please, ancestral god what do you feel and say or show us in any symbol.

Some time later after the prayer, the priest expresses his statements on the basis of scent and his just emerged thinking in his mind. The members of the Magar feel god enters within the priest so he expresses what is happening in their future will be good or bad. All the members of Magar remain eager to hear with fear as well as expectation for their future life activities.

From the above behavioral activities it is clear that the members of Magar totally believe in supreme power. On one hand they are able to take the living heart from the pig and feel brave, on the other hand they show fear and emotion to describe attitudes towards ancestor, elders, and parents as a response to illness or troubles. They remain innocent, weak and helpless with their ancestral god and believe that the unfortunate activities which are coming in their future are blocked by their ancestral happiness.

5. Role of women

In kulpuja ritual, the women actively participate in the purifying activities. Bathing of cloths, cleaning of house, preparation of *Jaman*, local liquor; managing of foods for their family members as well as their guests who are invited to celebrate *kulpuja* are mainly performed by women. Though, the women are the eldest member of the community, there is not any role in the worshiping ancestral temple and sacrificing activities. In the next day of *kulpuja* they arrange a party. The invited people of the community gather in the house. In the house the role of daughters, son in law and daughter in law is higher to prepare yellow rice, meat, pickles, *dal* and wine. When asked to a respondent about the use of *besar* (*Turmeric sp*) in rice and make yellow color, she replied that it checks the evil eye. The *besar* is one of the most important herbal medicines called as *sarva aausadi* in Hindu mythology. All the members of house do their work according to their responsibilities. Elder father and mother respect their invited people and prefer wine. The daughter, son, daughter in law and son in law prepare food continuously. At first, they provide wine, meat and pickle for elder respective people. When the elder guests finish the given food and then supply the yellow rice, *dal* curry and pickle. The satisfied guests give thanks for their management. On the basis of age and respected level, the shifting of eating people and food items are managed carefully. I participated and observed this ritual activity from 10.50 am to 5.00 pm of that day. The women managed and completed the ceremony actively and wonderfully!

6. Kulpuja : Ritual and Cohesive Force

Kulpuja ritual is the most important ritual among the different caste and ethnic group of Nepal. Similar with other ethnic group, the Magar of Languan it plays vital role to bind strongly the relationship between the members. In the *kulpuja* ritual all the members gather in the sacrifice place. Almost all the members use local wine. On one hand they gather and renew their relation, share the activities of their past life, present situation and also coming way of life. On the other hand, they share their feeling to each other though they are negative or positive and become one.

The members also participate in the discussion of their activities about the ritual which is being celebrated from their ancestors, its process and positive as well as negative impact, its improvement and change also. They actively discuss about the role of the Magar members in the developmental activities within their society, their identities and relation with other caste. Present context and its impact on their own rule and regulation and changing patterns etc. An eldest member Dil Bahadur Thapa Magar worriedly says:

The children don't take good thinking (kura) and leave their own culture and accept others fusion easily. Though, they studied IA and BA they have no knowledge about the good way to spend daily life. He adds children are not allowed to use salt a day in a death ritual. They need to bathe daily and also start to marry with their own blood related sisters. They leave duties and responsibility but focus on personal facilities. How can they struggle with their coming life and environment in this behavior? I have given suggestions for change in that society but unless the people make efforts themselves it is not possible. All the members should give their efforts for the development of a society with own cultural identity.

Most of the elder members of the Magar, feel the binding force between the members is deteriorating continuously in the coming generation in the name of modernization.

7. Conclusion

In the traditional cultural and religious practices of the Magar kulpuja is one of the most important rituals. The Magars have kept their cultural and religious practices in some changed forms which can be viewed as their adaptive strategies for survival. In kulpuja rituals, they use some plant species which have medicinal value and transfer knowledge for their coming generation. They are also influenced with Hindu practice for their ritual and ceremonial activities. Within the Magar community in the study area, kulpuja ritual functions as conservative and cohesive force which helps to demonstrate social, political and cultural harmony. The elder members fear more with their ancestral god and his activities than the younger ones. Elder members are worried about the increase of

dependency in their children and deterioration of their cultural rites and ritual practices developed by the accumulated knowledge from their ancestors to adopt with the environment.

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