

Use of Qualitative Research Approach in Postmodern Studies: Sharing of Some Anthropological Experiences of the Study on the *Pahari* People of Central Nepal

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1.0 Context

Postmodernism is an umbrella term that consists of a vast subject. More specifically, those postmodernists who came from the root of development explored the importance of local or native people's knowledge; those who came from the root of industrialization, they found out the importance of cottage and small industries against the big industrialists of the western world; those who came from the root of colonization went against the colonial oppression and found out the hegemonic suppression over the marginalized groups; those who came from the art/literature area, they broke the thought of certain or fixed form of art/literature and claimed that the formless literature is possible in the world. These examples indicate that postmodernism is itself a dialogical word with various negative and positive connotations and a current historical, social and cultural epoch (Allen, 2007: 181). In other words, postmodern study embraces fluid and multiple perspectives. It refuses to the definite 'truth claim' over another (Gilley, 2002).

Postmodern study witnessed various discussions. Some of them highlighted the positive strengths and others showed its criticisms (Simons and Billig, 1994: 16). Looking from the positive strengths, a group of persons like Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida found postmodernism as a rupture with modernism. These groups of persons advocated for the decentered subjectivity and emancipated imperatives of the work and usefulness. According to Simons and Billig (1994: 16-32), this advocacy and imperatives are taken as a triumph of heterogeneity over consensus. It is also our self-consciousness through civic discourse (ibid). Looking from the anthropological field as well, postmodernism is a logical part of the interpretive tendency and it has focused on subjective data in anthropological research (McGee and Warms, 2004: 576 & 577). This interpretive tendency always focuses on the understanding of persons and groups about any phenomena that requires an understanding of their meanings (Spiro, 2006: 523). Keesing (2006: 258) in this line has argued that anthropology is a search for meanings, for hidden connections, for deeper silence than those presented by the surface evidence of ethnography. Therefore, anthropology is an interpretative quest. It means interpretative tendency indicates the subjectivity area. This subjectivity in

postmodernists' sense is a dialogical part of the fieldwork. This is also similar in the field of anthropology where they explore the subjective data from interaction between the anthropologist and the natives (Spiro, 2006: 523). In other words, they describe and explain human affairs and teach a reader the subjective meaning of human experience.

The above-mentioned discussions imply that both postmodernism and the scientific field of anthropology regard the main focus of exploring the subjective meaning of human experiences. In this sense, the field of anthropology and postmodernism are complementary to each other. Their complementary work values the interpretative study. This interpretative study is a set of activities of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 6) that privileges not only single methodological practice over another but also involves an interpretative approach to the world that makes the world visible and help to transform this world. In a sense, it can be said that qualitative and interpretative research are interchangeably used. In this course, qualitative or interpretive research went through the traditions in understanding the social complexities, which overlap and simultaneously operate in the present (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 2-3). These traditions are: (a) traditional period (1900-1950); (b) the modernist or golden age (1950-1970); (c) the blurred genres (1970-1986); (d) the crisis of representation (1986-1990); (e) the postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990-1995); (f) post experimental inquiry (1995-2000); (g) the methodologically contested present (2000-2004), and (h) the fractured future, which is now (2005 -).

The focus of qualitative research is different from period to period (see appendix 1). If we analyze the historical phase of qualitative research (i.e until the 1990), it focused mainly on positivism and post-positivism despite its interpretative tradition. The positivist researchers as well went against the qualitative research traditions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 10). They saw the single cause to be studied, captured, and understood. But post-positivist researchers focus on multiple methods as a way of capturing realities. Besides this, it emphasizes the discovery and verification of theories (ibid). It means post-positivism brought multiple methods but did not shape the exact position of qualitative research. Only after 1990, a new generation of qualitative researchers attached to post structural and/or postmodern sensibilities rejected the positivist in term of one way of telling stories about societies or social worlds in one hand. They also rejected the post-positivist tradition of research as well in terms of creating a certain kind of science that silences too many voices. It means qualitative research is shaped by the new ethnographies, experimental and post-experimental inquiry that raised the crisis of (a) representation, (b) legitimization, and (c) praxis in the course of research. Besides this, it used multiple theories; included the concept of active participation of the researcher (activist-cum-

researcher or researcher-cum-activist); and replaced the grand narratives by local and small theories for specific problems and situations. Particularly, it focused to derive the lived experiences of the community (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 20).

After analyzing the above-mentioned scenarios, I came to the decision that the focus of qualitative, postmodern, and anthropological research lies in the same line. It can be said that they have close relationship in terms of research on social reality. In this scenario, I would like to bring the story of *Pahari* children who are the decenter part of the school structure but the center of their community. These "center of the community" are forced to obey the teachers and school's rule and regulations of the mainstream society.

I conducted a study in the *Pahari's* community at Bodikhel, Lalitpur district of Central Nepal. This showed that schooling works along the caste line and hierarchical order. Following the hierarchical structure, students are forced to live in an inferior position of the school structure. For example, *Pahari* schoolchildren have their own language and culture, which is not the school's language and culture. So the *Pahari* children should speak and write in Nepali language and follow the culture of school compulsorily. In school, *Pahari* language and culture are not valued. In this reality, this paper tries to explore the decentered group's subjectivity from a different perspective towards the school structure. In order to understand *Paharis'* worldview about school, I have used Derridian standpoint as theoretical stance. This stance has different terms such as identity, deconstruction, and interpretation. Besides this, I have also used other theories as the context of this research demands.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research site

In 2006-2007, I did the fieldwork in a public school. *Brahman, Chhetri, Dalit* and *Tamang* were the other groups of people at the school catchments. But majority of the students (grade 4-7) belonged to the *Pahari* community. Paradoxically, majority of the teachers were the *Brahmans/Chhetris*. This made me interested to find out the following realities: (a) lived experiences of the human agency of the school that has multilingual and multicultural settings; (b) emic perspectives of the *Paharis* by using multiple theories and (c) relationship between the grand narratives and local and small theories.

2.2 Method

As the principal method, I used interconnected interpretative/qualitative approach for the generation of the information/data. The approach involved a panoply of research techniques such as direct and participant observation,

semi-structured interview (with key informants), case study, and focus group discussion.

3.0 Analysis and Interpretation

I analyzed the qualitative data thematically by reading all the descriptive field notes and identifying the themes, putting the relevant information under the relevant themes and making the generalizations by looking at the relationships between and among the variables under study. In doing so, I tried to understand the self and others – worldviews of the *Pahari* school children and the interface between them. For the interpretation of the generated information, I used Derrida's deconstruction theory along with some others' perspectives.

3.1 Slice of the Field

Contrary to the traditional anthropologists, I brought the slice of the field and began to analyze and interpret it from the postmodern qualitative theory. Let me begin with students such as Anuja Pahari, Surya Kumari Pahari and Naresh Pahari's slice of their understanding about the language and the identity. These students said:

"We feel easy to speak Pahari language but in the classroom, we are supposed to speak Nepali language compulsorily. We think this is the rule of school. In our home and village, we often speak Pahari language because we have been speaking it from our childhood and we have been learning everything and understanding about our life from this language. Our parents also speak in Pahari language. But we are not given permission to speak our language at classroom. This makes us feel that our language is lost and lost. Except in the classroom, we have to speak in Nepali while we go to market for selling bamboo goods. Besides, we are different from the ethnic point of view but we are more cultural group than the caste group though we follow the same Hindu religion in school and in our community. But school's calendar is based on their culture and festivals, which is not suited to our culture and festivals because we are more involved in celebrating festivals, which hamper the regular school attendance".

Anuja Pahari of Grade 7 had her different expression. She said:

"Though whatever we feel uneasy, difficult and unmatched, schooling has made us able to speak and write in Nepali language and at the same time, it made us literate in English language as well. But we cannot write our Pahari language though this is our own

language because we have not been trained to write in Pahari language at our home and even in this school. In this sense, Nepali language is easy for us because school never taught to write in Pahari language. But we can write if we use same Devanagari script in our Pahari language, which supports to make Pahari language functional as well like the Nepali language. In this sense, formal schooling has been good for us".

From the first case, I understood that *Pahari* schoolchildren wanted their language and culture identity in four areas. They are: (a) their language is the different thing from the hidden rule of school to speak Nepali; (b) their concern is related with the preservation and development of *Pahari* language; (c) *Pahari* language and culture are unmatched to the school; and (d) *Pahari* festivals are different things to the Hindu festivals of school. From the second case, I found the utilitarian perspective of *Pahari* school children that has nurtured double identities, the first being the *Pahari* and the second being the person of the larger world who is learning the Nepali language. She also created the possibility of the development of *Pahari* language through the use of the Nepali *Devenagari* script. She found other perspectives from the *Pahari* parents and *Pahari* community leaders in the issue of *Pahari* language and cultural identity. As she found, parents also wanted double identities by speaking both *Pahari* and Nepali language at their home in a hope to improve Nepali language of their children. Referring to the *Pahari* community leader or president of *Pahari Sangh*, Kanchha Pahari, Anuja Pahari argued that *Paharis* in Bodikhel area have the consciousness of their marginalized language and culture and at the same time, they are trying to save them.

3.2 Self-Worldviews of *Pahari* School Children

My informants' emic views emphasized on *Pahari* language due to the following: (i) among the *Paharis*, they felt easy to speak in *Pahari* language; (ii) their family environment encouraged them to speak *Pahari* language; (iii) in every situation, they felt easy to think in their own language, and (iv) they are aware of their language situation and are concerned for it. I believe that they are conscious of their self. This self emphasizes more on individual and leads itself as per its own interest. According to Ritzer (1996: 374-377), individual is a part of overall social process. With this social process, this individual knows the knowledge of his/her identity, knowledge of utility of any language, interest of language protection and consciousness of oppressed and dominated group. In the case of *Pahari* group as well, they have knowledge about their language situation and they are conscious for their future self. In Ritzer's understanding, this consciousness is the psychological reflexivity. This reflexivity regards person's ability that unconsciously puts her/him into others' places and acts

as they act. In Shruti's sense, this self is an individual, a full of knowledge, and an internal light that proves the permanent existence (Cited in Sinha, 1999: 247). In this regard, socialists viewed that this all process is a different social system. This self-looking nature tells that *Pahari* school children have to look for their own language and culture identity at school. It means school should address multi- language and cultural issues.

3.3 Other Worldviews of *Pahari* School Children

In the case of Nepali language, *Pahari* students portrayed different worldviews. Because of school's compulsory provision, they could speak Nepali language in the classroom. This is seen as "colonized situation" because school's rules and regulations dominated their *Pahari* language. As a result, *Pahari* language became inferior in the school structure. Jacques Derrida called this position as *decenter*. According to him, structure is a binary opposition where both *center* and *decenter* parts exist. In the structure system, *center* part tries to exclude other. In doing so, this ignores, represses and marginalizes the *decenter*. As a result, *decenter* becomes other (Powell, 2003: 21-23). In the same way, in school structure, the position and status of Nepali language is in center or high or superior that excludes the *Pahari* language. In doing so, this language becomes specific form of imperialism. It means for *Pahari* language, Nepali worked as colonial authority (direct rule of the school) in the locality and replaced local language, that is, *Pahari* into Nepali speaking culture. It means the local language is incorporated into the colonial power structure (indirect rule) of modern school (Seymour-Smith, 1986: 182). In this colonial situation, *Pahari* school children could not get chance to speak what they want. Therefore, it can be said that the Nepali language colonized the *Pahari* language-speaking student community (Coulombe, 2000: 182).

In this colonized environment of school, *Pahari* schoolchildren understood that the language identity of their non-*Pahari* friends and teachers is in the first position or in center part for three reasons as follows: (i) they found that their non-*Pahari* friend's language is the school and national language, though it is the "other" for them; (ii) they found the culture of other is the culture of school which is related with government's culture; and (iii) they found the mentioned examples and language of textbooks are related to the "other" so the textbooks are alien to them regardless of their linguistic version. Due to these causes, they saw the value of Nepali language and culture so they accepted their non-*Pahari* friend's identity as center of school. The center ultimately turned out to be structural power of school which has oppressed *Pahari* language in school. It means school remains enabling force to put *Pahari* language in *decenter*. Besides this, the teacher and head teacher were "other" factors who followed the same structural power. Based on this power,

they were neglecting *Pahari* language. In this situation, their non-*Pahari* friends never felt their language and culture are neither center nor *decenter*. It means like the *Pahari* children have, the non-*Pahari* children did not have any concern about language and culture. Therefore, they felt that non-*Pahari* friends are indifferent to them.

I also explored the comments of some *Pahari* schoolchildren about the schooling of Shreepath Pradasak School. For example, a student of grade 7, Naresh *Pahari* believes that school does not do justice to the *Pahari*'s ethnic, culture and language issues. This means school does not manage the issues of cultural pluralism. In this regard, Koirala (2006) viewed that most of schools are lacking the culture of listening "others" and creating mosaic out of the pluralities. Looking from Koirala's point of view, the structure of school cannot ensure the educational justice. The reason is that there is no hearing environment. It means school does not listen to the *Pahari* school children and never tries to create mosaic environment for different languages and cultural groups.

In Freire's (1983: 8) sense, this school seems "oppressive institute" for *Pahari* school children. If we use Freire's (1983:60) concept to understand this issue, one can find that school is delivering the oppressive schooling to them. As an oppressor, non-*Pahari* teachers and head teacher want to change the consciousness of *Pahari* school children (oppressed group). These oppressed and oppressor groups in Durkheim's sense are made as "social facts". These facts are called social structure of school. This school represents the moral order for schooling (cited in Seymour - Smith, 1986: 85 - 86). For the same issue, Derrida feels that oppressors dominate the oppressed group and become central part of the school. And oppressed group turns into *decenter* (Powell, 2003: 23). These center and *decenter* create inequality in school. In Bourdieu's (1976: 113-114) sense, it is a currently created "cultural product". In this "cultural product" non - *Pahari* teachers and head teacher are the product of a system of the school that transmits an aristocratic culture in the name of schooling for *Pahari* school children. In this sense, *Pahari* school children understood that their school is promoting only Nepali language and culture and caste domination and symbolic violence. For this, non-*Pahari* teachers bank their knowledge to the *Pahari* students (Freire, 1983: 8). It means there is no exchange of knowledge between the teachers and students and between the *Pahari* and non-*Pahari* students. This implies that a school like this should deal with the question like how children look at the school structure critically.

3.4 Utilitarian Worldview of *Pahari* School Children

Except the critical perspective of students about the school structure, the above mentioned case number two has showed that there are some *Pahari* students like Anuja who see some benefits to the *Pahari* children from the school. Anuja

shared that the benefits are her ability of speaking and writing skills in Nepali and literacy skills in English. She further said that she finds the possibilities of developing *Pahari* language through Nepali language. She says that she can use the same script, which she never realized before she enrolled in the school. It means she could speak in *Pahari* language and now she wants to write in *Pahari* language with Devanagari script. This implies that all *Pahari* school children did not see the school from the same corner. *Pahari* school children did not see this school as only the oppressor type social structure but they understood it as liberator as well. It means they accepted inequality characteristic of school like that of the society, where many groups are there and they are regarded as unequal.

According to Ogbu (1978: 1), these "unequal groups of people" belong to different races or castes or different ethnic, language and religious groups. To be the different groups is natural process of society in the eyes of the dominant group. Based on Ogbu's theoretical perspective, it can be said that socio-cultural diversities are the symptoms of naturalness in the societies so they are not regarded as problems. It means that the situation of inequality in school is regarded not as a "cultural product" but as "natural" process, which is thought by the dominant group, non-*Pahari* teachers and head teacher. Such types of unequal realities make the myths and legends of the school and legalize them. This legalized knowledge provides moral sanctions for sustained inequalities. It means school structure gave a specific knowledge i.e. inequality to the *Pahari* school children, legalized it, and maintained functional relationship in the school (Durkheim cited in Seymour-Smith, 1986).

Like in the school, *Pahari* school children see the benefits and value of Nepali language at market for two reasons: (i) they have to sell their bamboo goods, and (ii) they need to go for shopping. These two reasons indicate that Nepali language has been the strategy of *Pahari* group to enter into the broader market. Therefore, the ability of speaking Nepali for the *Pahari* students is the situation of satisfaction for them. Or it is one of the measures for relative happiness to the *Paharis* (Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia, 2007). This happiness or satisfaction indicates the utilitarianism. This utilitarianism, in Bentham's (1748-1832) understanding, is the belief/behavior/conduct that is determined by the balance of pleasure over pain in a given act (cited in McGee and Warms, 2004: 652). In the same vein, Nepali language is a business activity for *Pahari* children to satisfy their needs as itinerant traders or craft-persons (Gaize, 1975: 118). Therefore, *Paharis* use Nepali language in a hope to get benefit in the market without feeling the language dominance. For this, they use Nepali language at maximum level. In other words, they use Nepali language with Nepali speaking customers to sell their goods. In a sense, to speak Nepali language is a double obligation for maximizing *Pahar*'s well-being (Velasquez

et. al. 2007). Looking from the utilitarian perspective, this obligatory situation is the utility level of language use. And to accept Nepali language is the cause of both self and other psycho perspective of *Pahari* schoolchildren. Because of this benefit, the selfness of *Pahari* group accepts Nepali language as a social process for human communication.

3.5 The Subjective Meaning of Schooling for *Pahari* School Children

After analyzing the different perspectives of language use of the *Pahari* school children, I hold the view that *Pahari* school children were maintaining two kinds of language identities directly and indirectly. Directly, through informal schooling, they understood that *Pahari* is their first language as identity and Nepali is their second language. Formal schooling did not provide the environment for the development of written *Pahari*, though it is hoped that school is main source of development opportunity (Goodland: 1979: 18- 19) where children learn, read and write in their own way to be civilized. Contrary to this, school taught them Nepali language as the first language. As a result, their *Pahari* language was automatically pushed as second language. It means *Pahari* school children are pushed to develop only Nepali language in for learning, reading and writing as single language culture. Similarly, market is another place, which required them to think from the utility point of language use. Consequently, *Pahari* language became "unwanted language" to the outer world. However, the *Pahari* school children used their language indirectly as their identity. The reason behind is selfness. For poststructuralist, this selfness is the main basis of belief (Devies, 1992). According to Radhakrishan (2003), selfness is attached deeply with identity as separate cultural domain rather than selling or commercial influencing to the other. In a sense, *Pahari* school children are maintaining dual language identity as per the sequence. In Derrida's sense, *Pahari* schoolchildren's identity is a two-place relation/function (Hobson, 1998:3) where Nepali language has functioned as first language in school and market. *Pahari* language, on the other hand, has functioned as second language at the same places. But at the same time, indirectly they are using *Pahari* language in those places where school's rule does not affect and cannot control even in school playground. This ability of managing dual language is the historical characteristic of *Pahari* school children because their mother tongue is the hybrid of *Newar* and *Tamang*. It means they hold double language identity genetically.

Pahari school children celebrate different kinds of festivals and rites. Since they are the crossbreed of *Newar* and *Tamang*, they have many festivals adopted from both groups. Besides this, they have their own culture that they do not share with other caste groups. In fact, they maintain "communal secrecy". Non-*Pahari* teachers and head teachers also supported the opinion of the

Pahari teacher and viewed that *Pahari* school children do not come to school during their festivals. As a result, they are being irregular in their classes (Khadka, 2007). Similarly, they have other identity that came out of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Animism. Literatures on *Paharis'* socio-culture (Silwal, 2058 BS; Simirik Nepal, 2058 BS; and *Pahari*, 2062, BS) background also mentioned about the double culture, that is, religious and ethnic identities. By and large, it can be said that *Paharis* have multiple self (social and individual) with their own knowledge. They believe that their knowledge is their own soul's recognition. This recognition proves their permanent existence (Sinha, 1999: 247). In this respect, school has affected them indirectly. When school did not value *Pahari's* socio-culture practices, they found a mis-match and a tension to understand their self. In this mis-match, *Pahari* students reported that they have more difficulty in understanding teachers than their Nepali speaking friends in one hand and on the other hand, their non-*Pahari* teachers and head teachers also reported that they were feeling difficulty in teaching *Pahari* school children. It means both learning and teaching groups were feeling tension in school. This situation indicates that the identities of *Pahari* school children do not match with other groups of children in school and but school does not realize it.

After interpreting the emic perspectives of *Pahari* schooling from all the theoretical standpoints, I came to the conclusion that *Pahari* school children are self-led to generate two realities: (a) reality of critical lens of Bourdieu and Freire, and (b) the reality of functional lens of Ogbu. Except these two realities, I could see the next reality that was indicated by one of the *Pahari* school children – Anuja who could extend her *Pahari* identity by using *Devnagari* script to write *Pahari*. Based on three realities, I argued in my M. Phil thesis (2007) that school is oppressive on the one hand, and functional on the other hand. At the same time, it leads to co-existence. This reminded me the Derridean concept of binary opposites. According to this concept, language, culture, caste/ethnicity not only creates center and *decenter* (Powell, 2003), but also new things through the fusion of these opposites. This fusion gave birth to the double identity among *Pahari* children through reciprocal learning (p. 69).

From the above understanding, I can claim that there are possibilities of fusion of the different lenses for the creation of new thing that can grow out of the existing school structure.

4.0 Conclusions

Postmodernist look on *Paharis'* schooling highlighted both the center and decenter by analyzing peoples' subjectivity that came up out of the school structure. Both parts constructed school in terms of language use and socio-

cultural practices. Against this backstop, I drew some conclusions. They are as follows: (i) it drew the emic perspectives of *Pahari* school from different lenses such as critical, functional and utilitarian perspectives; (ii) practically, it explored the lived experiences of alternative ways of schooling (Based on these lived experiences of *Pahari* schoolchildren, this study found the possibilities of centering into decentering and decentering into centering), and (iii) theoretically as well, it found the reality that the center position can be changed into decenter and decenter position can be changed into center of the structure. It means it showed that the possibility of fusion of center and decenter creates the new structure of school through reciprocal learning between the center and decenter groups of school. Such post-modernist studies can be successfully conducted only through the use of qualitative research methods because the emphasis has to be on finding the meanings of the activities/ behaviors/cultures and understanding the social contexts, experiential learnings, perceptions, consciousness, subjectivities and inter-subjectivities.

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Appendix 1

Interpretive researchers went through different traditions in understanding social complexities and these comprise the following:

- In the traditional period, they tried to find out "objective reality" by following Malinowski's approach of lone ethnography. This period gave a "slice of life" through narrative approach
- In the modernist period, the interpretive researchers continued "slice of life" approach; added participants' observation; used interpretive theories; and began methodological discourse.
- In blurred genre period, they used range of theories; used "thick descriptions"; and followed naturalistic, constructivist, and post modernist paradigm.
- In the crisis of representation period, the interpretive researchers raised the issue of representation; developed "feminist look in research"; and refuse the identity of the empirical science.
- In the triple crisis period, the interpretive researchers raised the crisis of (a) representation; (b) legitimization, and (c) praxis. They used multiple theories which included the concept of active participation of the

researcher (activist- cum- researcher or researcher- cum- activist); and replaced the grand narratives by local and small theories for specific problems and situations.

- In the post experimental period, the interpretive researcher derived lived experiences of the community.
- In the methodologically contested present, the interpretive researchers raised the issue of social conflict, contradictions, and tensions
- In the methodologically backlash period, the interpretive researcher associated with the “Bush Science” and demanded evidence based social movement.

Source: Koirala, Bidyanath (2005). Class note. MPhil Program.