

## Cultural Capital and Educational Performance of Brahman/Chhetri Students

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### Abstract

*Why Brahman/Chhetri students are high achievers in secondary education in Nepal is rarely analyzed. For their educational success, people attribute to their cultural capital. A qualitative method was employed to assess whether the assumption is valid or not. In the course of assessment, researcher generated information from secondary and primary sources and analyzed them. The findings show that the Brahman/Chhetris are rich in cultural capital, which is instrumental for their better performance in formal education. However, empirical evidence has led the researcher that the argument is valid partly. Due to globalization combined with other factors such as class, education, and growing cultural exchange, the influence of cultural capital to their educational achievement has been found weak. Therefore, the stereotypical generalization is not necessarily true at present, among the research participants.*

**Keywords:** cultural capital, educational performance, Brahman, Chhetri

### Context

Brahmans/Chhetris<sup>†</sup> are regarded mainstream groups in Nepal (Lawoti, 2010). He has claimed that after state consolidation led by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, they are at the helm of mainstream state affairs. The documents of Ministry of Education (2009) and (2016) regard them as other groups and have considered few ethnic groups as marginalized. Foreigners and native scholars have high propensity to study ethnic groups. However, Brahman/Chhetris are among the least understood groups of people in Nepal generally (Chhetri and Gurung, 1999). They consist of over 30 percent of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2014). In Nepal, caste hierarchy is predominant. The Brahman/Chhetri fall in the highest stratum of the caste hierarchy (Hofer, 2012). They are better educated than the members of other caste/ethnic groups (Shah, 1975; Bista, 1991; Caplan, 2000; DFID/World Bank, 2006; Acharya, 2007;

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<sup>†</sup> I have included Thakuris as well among them.

Stash & Hannum, 2009). They lacked adequate empirical data base to substantiate their claim. Analysing the data of Tribhuvan University and its few colleges, Bhatta (2011) has compared their total population (30.89 percent) with their enrollment in higher education that is 68.4 percent. This implies that their involvement in higher education is more than satisfactory level. They were among high achieving groups in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination as well (Mathema and Bista, 2006). Simkhada (2012) carried out a field research of Sunachari School in Dhading and the people residing in its surrounding. On the one side, he developed the data of regular SLC graduates. On the other side, he carried out census of the people of the catchment areas of the school. They had better scholastic achievement. However, none of the study explained why they were more successful in school and higher education though social sciences aimed at explaining the reality in detail. Why they were ahead in educational mainstream was an intriguing question to the researcher. To quench the curiosity and fulfill an academic void, he carried out a qualitative research among them in order to bring out the grassroots reality during August –November 2016. This paper has tried to go deeper and examined whether the stereotypical generalization is correct or not.

### Objective

The primary objective of the research was to assess the generalization that the Brahman/Chhetris have rich cultural capital and therefore, they have better educational performance. Their culture is open to all but nobody has analyzed it vis-à-vis their academic performance. In this context, this study assessed their cultural capital and its contribution to their formal education.

### Method

The study was primarily qualitative. Review of literature, case study, participant observation, autobiography, two key informants interview (lawyers from *Dalit* and ethnic group) were some of the methods employed. The researcher used a concept of cultural capital elaborated by French scholar Pierre Bourdieu in 1977. He defined it in the Nepali context as participation in educational rituals, particularly *bratabandha* (the sacred thread wearing ceremony). Then, he defined students of 5-19 years from Brahman, Chhetri, and Thakuri community as Brahman/Chhetri students. Finally, he measured educational performance in terms of success or failure of the students in prescribed examination particularly the SLC or any board examination. In the beginning, he reviewed some books and documents to be familiar with the Brahman/Chhetri and their rituals related to education. He selected seven *vatuks*\* on the

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\*The boys being initiated.

basis of their participation in *bratabandha*. To know historical development of the *bratabandha* ritual and their reflection, he developed a cohortsuch as a) initiated recently, b) initiated two-nine years ago, and c) initiated more than ten years ago. Similarly, he selected three parents of the *vatukas* for in-depth interviews. Finally, he interviewed three priests who had performed the role of *upaneta* (initiating role) for knowing an ideological root of cultural capital among research participants. The priests hinted that they were using some manuals. He bought the guidelines and reviewed thoroughly to know the cultural ideals and procedures. He observed practices using unobtrusive participant observation method. He was observing the ritual as an invitee. He noted down special issues that emerged during the study. He dug deep on the issues by using the case study method. The researcher is also a *dwija* (twice-born) as described by M.N. Srinivas (1956). However, he played a role of a stranger learner during the study. He classified and analyzed critical themes emerged during the research vis-à-vis his auto-biographical experiences during initiation or *bratabandha*. He reflected and analyzed the information to come to some conclusions. The researcher also carried out a field research in a school and its surrounding settlements. He analyzed the findings and has also presented them in this article.

### **Perspective to view the educational success or failure**

The researcher reviewed multiple perspectives in the course of being familiar with Brahman/Chhetri students and their educational attainment. For the last several decades, few scholars like Spearman (1927) and Herrnstein & Murray (1994), including conservative people, have emphasized that it is one's intelligence that makes a difference in schools, meaning that people are born with unequal intelligence and those who have more intelligence, achieve more in education. For them, it is pre-determined. Jensen (1972) - a bio-genetic theorist - argued that lower class children, especially blacks in the United States, suffered from a specific cognitive deficiency, an inability to engage in conceptual learning. This inability was a result of genetic inheritance. He was not optimistic about the likelihood that the academic performance of black children in the USA could be substantially improved despite social and economic policies as he believed that the root of the problem was biological. This explanation was later challenged by Ginsberg (1972), who demonstrated that children, black or white, possessed fundamental competencies in mathematical thinking and that there was no evidence of pervasive cognitive deficit.

Racial, ethnic, and class differences in intelligence quotient (IQ) test scores, were assumed to determine school performance. The differences in school performances were believed to have occurred due to differences in genetic endowment, differences in home environment and child-rearing practices, and cultural differences. Later studies

have indicated that these differences in intelligence are partly due to the cultural bias of IQ test questions, the conditions under which they are conducted, and cultural and family differences (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Coming nearer home, the Brahmins/Chhetri are regarded smarter from birth by some people. From anthropological perspective, this opinion is ethnocentric. Therefore, more relative and value-neutral lens that highlight cultural differences have been developed. According to Bourdieu, schools reward students based on their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). He concluded that those who were likely to perform well in schools were from 'superior social standing.' They possessed a specific 'cultural capital' such as the elite tastes, consumption patterns, skills, manners, and actions as 'intelligence.' The structures and processes that constituted the schools such as curriculum, methods of instruction, examinations, and disciplinary procedures favor them. He further argued that possession of such cultural capital leads to economic and social advancement because of its convertibility to economic and other capitals. For him, schools not only reproduced the dominant values and contents but also imposed symbolic violence on non-elite students. This implies that the Brahmin/Chhetri students also possess a cultural capital that is conducive for their free, fair, and better performance in education. Different people may view their educational performance differently. Some people interviewed regarded Brahmin/Chhetri genetically superior (by *prarabdha*). Even their claim that *purasartha* (human effort or nurture in the anthropological sense) was the underlying cause of their success in education. They had a good taste of study and therefore encouraged their posterity to education. As a conceptual tool, their cultural capital has been employed for critiquing the reality.

### Findings and analysis

Culture is the human-made part of the environment. It is binary opposite of nature. It is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by human as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). The ways of nurturing or educating is also a component of the culture. Bourdieu (1977) envisions that cultural capital exists in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), and in the institutionalized state. It, transferred over generations, possessed by group, families and individuals, is thus an important resource that contributes to an individual's educational success. Sullivan (2001) regards cultural capital as vocabulary and cultural knowledge while Bourdieu (1986) has operationalized it as linguistic competencies, mannerism, travel for education etc. DiMaggio (1982) operationalized cultural capital as children or parents' participation in cultural activities like going to museums, concerts, or taking an art class. Graaf, Graaf

& Kraaykamp (2000) has regarded cultural capital as reading habits of parents or literary climates of the family. Then, this concept has been a popular and frequent topic for academic discourse. The majority of them employed quantitative techniques for analysis. The quantitative analyses are criticized these days. In such an academic context, the researcher has regarded *bratabandha* and other rituals related to education an embodied and institutionalized cultural capital.

Two lawyers, one from *Dalit* and other from an ethnic group, claimed that Brahman/Chhetri were high achieving in education as below:

Do you know why Brahmans are high achieving? They teach three 'rs' and other manners to their wards from early age. We do not have book in our house but they often have plenty of books in their house. Their day begins with holy recitation and ends with academic discourse. Such an environment is conducive for their success in formal education. They can sacrifice their desires (*mojmasti*) and lead a simple and disciplined life. Therefore, they are forward in education.

*Manusmriti* (Chapter 1 Stanza, 88) says that to study (*padhnu*), teach (*padhaunu*), perform sacrifice (*yagnya garnu*), to encourage sacrifice (*yagnya garaunu*), donate (*dan dinu*), and receive the donation (*dan linu*) are six prescribed professions for the Brahman (Chaturbedi, 2002). Thus, Hindu scriptures and practices have accorded high priority on rigorous education from time immemorial. They were not allowed to do other economically rewarding jobs. In Sunachari, the majority of the Brahman/Chhetri were farmers for instance. This reality was not in harmony with their conventional provisions of the professions. A few people had been the priests. Due to education, diversification in their occupations, and globalization, significant changes occurred in their commensal rules. The patron-client relationships they have been maintained customarily had also been weaker.

Before analysing their cultural capital, a brief introduction of the Brahman/Chhetris is required. Hagen (1998) termed Indo Nepali groups to denote the Brahman, Chhetri, and Thakuri, including others. Etymologically, the term Brahman is derived from the *Brahma*. One who knows *Brahma*\* is a Brahman (Environment and Sanitation Section, 2002). Though there exist variations, the Brahmans are superior in Hindu caste hierarchy, which is followed by Chhetri (Chhetriya) and Thakuri meaning warrior who protect people or place. All of them are Caucasoid in physical features. However, most of the Brahmans are in-born<sup>†</sup> Brahman who are not Brahman by

\*There are three kinds of Brahma viz. *shabda* (word), *para* (knowing inter-subjectivity) and *purna* (perfect know all). Those who know meaning of the words are more in number while those who know *para brahma* are a few like Narad (a famous sage) and it is hard to be *purna brahma* (like Krishna).

<sup>†</sup>But in a Sanskrit stanza goes like this:

जन्मना जायते शुद्र कर्मणा द्विज उच्यते  
वेदपाठी भवेत् विप्र ब्रह्म जानाति ब्राह्मण ॥

definition at the moment. They are called *Bruwa*, Brahman beyond *Brahma*, or deed and culture (meaning nominal Brahman). There are varied Brahmans viz. *purbiya* (eastern), *kumai* (those who are from Kumaon, which is now situated in Uttar Pradesh of India), and *jaisi* (this term is derived from *Jyotishi* meaning astrologer). Tarai and Hill Brahmans are also their broad categories. Different septs (*thara*, like Khanal, Bhandari, Timsina, Nepal, Dahal, etc.) come within each subgroup, who have distinct cultures. Thus, Brahman is a constellation of heterogeneous cultural groups\*.

Brahmans, *Jaisis* and Chhetris, are designated as *tagadhari jat*, which implies that they are high Hindu castes. In common parlance, Brahman and *Jaisis* are denoted by *Bahun*s while the three groups together are termed as *Khas Bahun*. They wear sacred thread (*janai* or *taga*), a symbol of their high ritual status (Caplan, 2000).

All Brahman Chhetri reside throughout the country since different times after they came from Sindhu Valley. Therefore, they were labeled Hindu by the Muslim people in Arab because they could not pronounce “s”, and “h” sound is heard instead. Some of them are indigenous groups and influenced by Hindu civilization later on. The civilization initiated by different sages has been perpetuated since 3,000 B.C. According to Subedi (2013), one of the hallmarks of these groups is their elaborate cultural practices viz. *sora sanskaras* (16 life cycle rituals<sup>†</sup>). Among them, tenth, eleventh, twelfth and fourteenth rituals are directly related to education which are dealt in brief in the following paragraphs:

### **Vidyarambha**

*Literally, Vidyarambha or Akshararambhasamskarais* abeginning of reading and writing alphabets and numbers. It is performed at the age of five and is necessary before commencing Vedic study - *Vedarambha*. On the day of the ritual, the child is bathed and asked to sit facing the west, while the *Acharya* (teacher) sits facing the east. With pen, the child is encouraged to write phrases such as Salutation to Ganesh (the god who

By birth, everyone is a *Shudra*. If s/he follows prescribed deeds by Hindu Scripture, he is called *dwija* (twice-born). If one can recite Vedas, s/he is called *bipra*. One who knows *brahma* is a Brahman.

\*Brahman do not view themselves as a group, according to Gil Daryn in his article “Bahuns: Ethnicity without ethnic group” published in Lecompte Tilouine and Dollfus (Eds.) *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and Representations in the Himalayas*, 2003. Pp 161-173. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

†(1) *Garbhadhan* (Conception), (2) *Pumsavana* (engendering a male child) (3) *Simantonayana* (Hair-parting), (4) *Jatakarma* (Birth rituals), (5) *Namkaran* (Name-giving), (6) *Nishkraman* (First outing), (7) *Annaprashan* (First feeding), (8) *Chudakarma* (Shaving of head), and (9) *Karnavedha* (Piercing the earlobes). (10) *Vidyarambha* (Learning the alphabet), (11) *Upanayana (Yagnopavit)* (*Sacred thread wearing ceremony*), (12) *Vedarambha (Beginning Vedic study)*, (13) *Keshanta* (Shaving the beard), (14) *Samavartana* (End of Studentship), (15) *Vivaha* (marriage) and (16) *Antyesthi* (Death rites).

bless one to overcome hurdles), salutation to Saraswoti (goddess of knowledge), salutation to family deities and salutation to Narayan (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who protects all creatures) and Lakshmi (goddess of wealth). The child then writes, *Om Namah Shivaya* (salutation to Lord Shiva). He then presents gifts to the *Guru* or *Acharya*. The *Acharya* then blesses the child. The practice was/is related to *Gurukul*. Now, the children are enrolled in schools to begin reading and writing.

### ***Upanayana***

After eight years, the son of Brahman/Chhetri is initiated by the *Acharya* with a sacred thread, known as *janai* or *yagnopavit*. Amongst all the foregoing *samskaras*, this is the most important for education. It is the dawn of a new life. Hence, the child becomes *dwija* (the first biological birth while after the ritual he is regarded born as a member of their culture. Therefore, *Upanayana* or popularly known as *bratabandha* is the second birth). The child enters studentship with a life of perfect discipline which involves *brahmacharya* (state of celibacy) at or around the premises of the *Acharya*.

### ***Vedarambha***

This *samskara* is marked when a boy starts studying Vedas - the apex Hindu scriptures. The provision of *Vedarambha* is missing in the earliest list of the Dharma Sutras. It seemed that though *upanayana* marked the beginning of education, it did not coincide with Vedic study. Therefore, a separate *samskara* was felt necessary to initiate Vedic study – a specialization course. In this *samskara*, each student, according to his lineage, masters in one or four Vedas. During this course as well, he continues *brahmacharya* and lives in strict continence and austere discipline.

### ***Samavartana (End of Studentship)***

Generally, the boy is graduated at 25 years. After graduation *Samavartana Samskara* is marked. 'Sama- vartana' means 'returning home from the house of the *Acharya*.' This involves a ritual sacrificial bath known as *Snan*. It symbolises the crossing of the ocean of learning by the student - hence *Vidyasnaatak*. In Hindu scriptures, learning is compared with the prowess of swimming in an ocean. One who is skillful to swim is called a *snataaka*, a graduate.

The boys undergo through four stages of life viz. *brahmachari* 8-25 (*chaste student*), *grihastha* 26-50 (married householder), *vanaprastha* 51- 72 (a forest life with or without wife) and *sannyasa* 72 + (the ascetic life when all worldly materials are renounced). Broadly, after completion of the studentship, one can lead one of two ways of life: *prabriti marga* (life of a married householder) or *nibritti marga* (ascetic life). However, student life is mandatory for both ways of life (Subedi, 2013).

*Bratabandha* (a disciplined life) is a specific and elaborate cultural practice long cherished by the Brahmans/Chhetris which is distinct in comparison to other caste/ethnic groups. The prescribed activities like wearing sacred thread (*janai lagaune*), hearing the *Gayatri Mantra* - a three-line verse from the *Rigveda* – and other stanzas of *Veda* from the *Acharya*, leaving the parental home and going to other places (*deshatana*) for study and returning from the other places after completing the study (*samavartana*) are the major steps of *bratabandha*.

Similarly, on the sixth day after the birth of a baby, *chhaiti* is celebrated among them. According to a myth, on the day, *bhabi* (the goddess of fate) writes the child's fortune on his/her forehead. A pen, book and copy are kept nearby pillow of the child. A lamp is kept burning all night so the goddess can see to write out a long future for the child. In the *chhaiti* as well, their emphasis on education is manifested (Bennet, 2002). *Saraswoti puja* is another similar festival which has something to do with education of the group. It falls between the end of January to the first week of February each year. It is a fifth bright moon day (*basanta or shree panchami*) according to Nepali calendar. On the day, the *Saraswoti*\* (goddess of knowledge, music, art etc.) is worshipped by the Brahman/Chhetri. It is believed that if she is happy, she will bless the person and consequently, one can get success in education.

Above-discussed culture diffused in Asia up to the Himalayan region or its culture circles originally from Sindhu Valley. The people migrated were the culture bearers. They are still following the rituals generation after generation. Therefore, we can observe some variations among people residing in different places. Though they have retained the culture so far, the influence of such culture has been weaker these days. A priest from Sunachari informed that introduction of modern education, influence of western world views, growing communist philosophy, government policy on inter-caste marriage and increased cultural exchanges from other caste/ethnic groups were a few major reasons for such a cultural decline. None-the-less, their culture has a distinct focus on education, even if it may not be compatible with modern education. These rituals/festivals are close to a concept of cultural capital put forward by Bourdieu (1977, 1986, and 1996). Such capitals can be converted to economic and social capitals. They can be acquired and transmitted to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite consciously or unconsciously. It is cherished by the whole family or cultural group. Being familiar with the culture, scholars like Shah (1975), Caplan (2000), Stash and Hanuum (2009) and Bista (1991) might have argued that because of possession of such

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\*Hindus worship three powers personified by the *Saraswoti* (knowledge or education), *Laxmi* (wealth) and *Kali* (power) which is similar to the concept developed by Max Weber.



cultural capital, the Brahman/Chhetri are forward in education. The concept of cultural capital was initially developed to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children from different social classes. It was developed to challenge a common sense view that sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes.

The culture capital is associated with certain practices and values like *sandhya* – crepuscular ceremony, bathing, offering fire ceremony and Vedic recitation daily. This family life minimized the importance of wealth, without inculcating asceticism. The important thing among the groups was not to grow rich but to lead a decent and harmonious life (Ingalls, 1958). The root of such values and practices is the Vedas (originated before 5,000 years ago\*) though the cultural traits are subject to change. Traditionally, initiation or *upanayana* is primarily related to a boy (*vatuka*). It is a ritual or symbolic purification of the boy. After *upanayana*, he grows up observing how rituals are performed (private, public and state rituals). He starts learning how to read and recite text with proper intonations and studying astrology. The forms of rituals are flexible. They can be modified or ornamented, made long or short, to suit the occasion and the need of the commissioners (which is equivalent to the Sanskrit sacrificer, *yajamana* or inviter). The true aim of the rituals is *dharma* (proper moral order) and *mokshya* (salvation). Four reasons for the rituals are a desire of security and refuge, wishing success in life, a desire of wealth and faith. These rituals are process of cleaning or sweeping away the old and initiation of the new (Kuanpoonpol, 1990). *Bratabandha* can be analogized with liminal stage<sup>i</sup> as described by the anthropologists like Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, as a kind of transition of the neophyte to a new status, with proper insignia and new role<sup>†</sup> as a new member of the respective cultural group. Such changes are critical to the shaping of both temporal and social experiences (Turner, 1969). As stated above, the neophyte is betwixt and between, neither here nor there, no longer a child and not yet an adult. After some time, he learns new things and becomes a responsible cultural member. Then, he is expected to become vegetarian and abstemious. Ablution and following commensal rules are other salient features of his everyday activities. Such a disciplined life is believed to contribute to modern education to an extent. The researcher compared the practices prescribed in scriptures with their current ritual practices. The table below shows the present reality about *bratabandha*:

Table 1: Perception of People on Contribution of *Bratabandha* to Modern Education

\*The civilization of Hindus developed in Sindhu Valley. The “s” is pronounced as “h” in Arab language. For the first time, the Arabian called the people of “Sindhu valley and their civilization” as “Hindu”. Different sages in different time perpetuated the civilization.

†Turner focus on the concept of limen, “threshold” and the term liminality. Arnold van Gennep presents a threefold schema, preliminarily, liminality and post-liminality. They embrace all transitions, and all rituals everywhere Stephen, B. (2009).

Key Indicators	Perception and practices of parents, <i>gurus</i> and <i>vatukas</i>
Importance of <i>bratabandha</i> or <i>upanayana</i> sanskar	It grants the initiated dignity and decorum. It nourishes and purifies him and his deeds. It orients him to the perfection of humanity if implemented well. As a part of society, it helps to strengthen social ties and cultural identity.
Age of the <i>vatukas</i> while being initiated	Eight years onwards
Venue	House, Temple or Party Palace
The total cost of <i>Bratabandha</i>	NRs. 10,000 – 1 million
Changes brought in <i>vatuka</i> 's life	<i>Vatukas</i> have started feeling more responsible. They found themselves more mature. As a member of the cultural group, they have begun their role.
Contribution to the education of <i>vatukas</i>	It helped them feel a part of society and culture they belong to. If the ritual is practiced well, it contributes to success in modern education as well.
Effectiveness of <i>bratabandha</i> sanskar	For <i>Gurukul</i> education, it was effective. It has been ritual for ritual sake at the moment. Due to the influence of ethnic and western culture (individualism, secularism and consumerism), it has been weaker. It has not been updated. The majority of them had not understood even the <i>rai-son d'etre</i> of the ritual. <i>Vatukas</i> were not convinced that it was really for their transformation. In terms of cost also, it has not been cheap and effective for the majority of Brahman/Chhertis. The educational significance of such indigenous ritual needs to be maximized.

Source: Synthesis of in-depth interviews, August – November 2016.

It is noteworthy that the people have been perplexed due to the changes in the broader cultural domain propagated by capitalism. They remember the cultural practices cherished by their forefathers on the one hand. On the other, the new culture that evolved around the globe also attracts them. Nobody is found there to guide them to

update or revive their original culture in the modern context. According to the concept of Robert Park (1928), they are neither in the traditional culture nor in contemporary culture but at margin. The sons were initiated, but it did not contribute to success in modern education (See Case 1 below).

### Case 1: Despite Bratabandha, the Boy Failed

During fieldwork, a sacred thread wearing ceremony of a boy was being marked. The parents were forward and wealthy. The father was also a promoter of a local public school. He played a crucial role in the development of the school. He sent his daughter to the public school. Though she was not culturally purified and prioritized, she was regular at school. Due to her hard work and perseverance, she passed a bachelor's degree in education. Now, she is teaching in a neighboring school. Contrary to her success, her brother was sent to a private school and admitted to a hostel outside the village in the hope that he would attain better educational achievement. He did not have much interest in the study. Therefore, he was brought back to their village and sent to the public school again. It was hoped that the sacred thread wearing ceremony (*bratabandha* or *upanayana*) would improve his education. It was just a ritual.

According to the western concept of schooling, the Brahman/Chhetri, including others, are sending their wards to the schools after they are three years of age. Rituals are not understood well by the parents and the children. They have not followed the traditional rituals in the real sense of the term. In such a context, the traditional cultural capital nominally contributed to their success in modern education (See case 2 below).

### Case 2: How Can We Explain Success Without the Ritual?

Ankit was an 18 years old boy from the Thakuri community. He passed A-Level last year. After his success in the A-level, an initiation (*bratabandha*) ceremony was organized in a party palace. He said, "I have not understood the rationale of the *bratabandha*. I just heard that I could observe the funeral of my parents after I am initiated." He did not rule out the role of *bratabandha* for his future education, but it is doubtless that his success so far was not due to the ritual. His parents had spent a lot (1 million) on the cultural ceremony. Consequently, they hoped their son would be more responsible and sensitive culturally after the ritual.

Both cases show that modern education is a kind of secular system. It has its manifest and hidden aim. It has its ways of socializing pupils and has no link with *upanayana* or *bratabandha*. One of the research participants even opined to delink

*upanayana* and modern education. The implication is that their traditional cultural capital has not contributed to success in modern education. However, compared to other caste/ethnic groups, the Brahman/Chhetri students are found forward in enrollment and achievement. Existing data indicated their high enrollment in comparison to their population. Such an overrepresentation is voluntary. The reason behind their “success” can have some association with the position they hold in social structure. Similarly, it is also true that they are rich in cultural capital, which has some link with education as stated above. Undoubtedly, they accord a high priority to education.

As per in-depth interviews with the people of different ages and cultural backgrounds, the researcher found that parents and forefathers of the Brahman/Chhetri were literate if not well educated. They were familiar with the unfolding educational processes around the globe which are largely influenced by the market values under broader capitalism outside their communities. Therefore, they played a significant role in establishing the school in their community for the first time (Parajuli, 2006). Due to their positivity and optimism towards education, majority of them have been ready to send their wards to school. Their children have been familiar about three “r” (reading, writing and numeracy) before going to the school. In such a context, the children feel easy to adapt in school.

Secondly, the majority of the Brahman/Chhetris were skillful cultivators. Their forefathers brought paddy and plow culture for the first time in Nepal\*. The women were very skillful in storing, processing and using the grains. Therefore, they are economically stable and do not worry for survival. Such a condition also encouraged them to continue education for some time.

Thirdly, a key informant narrated that the home environment of the Brahman/Chhetri is relatively peaceful. The family members do not make fuss over trivial issues. A research participant observed, “Candidly speaking, absence of alcohol and quarrel results in peace.” Traditionally, the Brahman/Chhetri do not accord a high priority on excessive materialist life. Instead, they believe in sacrifice and lead a decent life. Such a family background also encourages children to pursue education. Fourthly, it is found that the Brahman/Chhetris possessed a sense of superiority. They took part in every activity of the community. They constituted the mainstream culture. Their children were socialized in that way. Such enculturation made their wards optimistic. Therefore, they are better adapted in school.

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\*It is found that Gorakhnath brought paddy and plow culture in the hills of Gorkha for the first time. The Brahman/Chhetri spread the culture across the country. In Gorkha, the people still donate flour of paddy to Gorakhnath temple in return in July-August even today. See Simkhada (2001: 56-58) Gorkha from Past to Present, in Gorkha Parichaya, Kathmandu: Gorkha Social Service Center.

Fifthly, the research did not bring sufficient evidence to claim that their success or failure was due to their caste/ethnicity. Every case under consideration was unique. Therefore, it is not relevant to attribute one's caste/ethnicity for success or failure. Instead, educational attainment can be viewed as individual success or failure.

### Case 3: Beyond the Stereotypes

There were numerous high caste Hindu Brahman/Chhetri boys. Their birthplace was known in the district for their familial power and prominence. The headteacher and the founders were from their lineage. School was nearby their house. The parents sent them to the school regularly. They even visited the headteacher regularly. However, they could not complete full cycle of school education. After failure, they wandered here and there for employment. It was in vain. Finally, they got menial jobs. Their plight was sad though they were initiated and possessed the same so-called superior cultural capital.

Finally, the review and observation of rituals of the Brahman/Chhetri lead the researcher to the inference that they are rich in the cultural capital which accord high priority on education. However, they are followed for ritual sake only. The in-depth analysis of role of cultural capital in shaping education of the Brahman/Chhetri does not provide the researcher adequate basis to claim that they are performing better due to their traditional cultural capital. In other words, their cultural capital has confined role at present and does not necessarily contribute to their educational success (See case 3).

### Concluding notes

As indicated in the analysis, market values propagated by capitalism in general and modern education in particular has penetrated the community where the researcher conducted research. Caste ideology or cultural capital specifically has been found less influential at present due to internal and external factors. During the 1950s, when the bureaucracy was being modernized, the Brahman/ Chhetris would have benefited because of their better literacy skills and social standing. At present, the researcher found diversity among them regarding their class, caste, and gender. Their traditional cultures have undergone different transformations due to the expansion in capitalism and globalization. In such a context, the traditional cultural capital used to accord high priority to the education has also been weaker. On the other hand, modern education has been developed so that it has nominal association with their indigenous culture. They have not updated their rituals as per the ongoing changes in their socio-cultural milieu. Their cultural rituals related to education are followed for rituals' sake only. Sometimes, the rituals seem like a mockery (*deshatana* for instance). Therefore, it is not safer for

social scientists to conclude that they are forward in modern education due to their traditional cultural capital in a stereotypical vein. It could be right in the past. At present, the meaning, intent and impact of the rituals are faded away. If not revived, the rituals like *bratabandha* may not play significant role to encourage the new generation to realize success in any walks of life in the future.

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