

Using material Culture for Tourism: A Study of Sauraha (Chitwan), Central Nepal

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Abstract

Chitwan is important tourist area of Nepal. It is famous for wildlife and nature, however, folklore has been played vital role to promote tourism industry in this zone. Tharu and Chepang material culture are highly used in Sauraha for tourist purpose. The paper analyzes both (Tharu and Chepang) material culture that has used in this area since long time before. Among different genre of folklore; material culture is one of them that covers folk art, vernacular architecture, textiles, and modified mass-produced objects. Main concern of this paper will be; how use the material culture to promote tourism in Chitwan. Does it properly use or not? The study will base on Sauraha, one of the famous tourist areas of Nepal.

(Key words: Folk Material, The Chepang, The Tharu)

Introduction

The term folk refers to people living in certain area and material identifies the things that uses by folk in their day to day life. Allan Dundes asserts "Folk can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is-it could be a common occupation, language,.... have some traditions that it calls its own" (2). There are different genre folklore such as material culture such as folk art, vernacular architecture, textiles, modified mass-produced objects, music as traditional, folk, and world music, narrative like legends, urban legends, fairy tales, folk tales, personal experience narratives, verbal art as, jokes, proverbs, word games, belief and religion: folk religion, ritual, and mythology, food ways: traditional cooking and customs, relationships between food and culture. The paper is concentrated on folk materials that have use for tourist purpose in Sahara Chitwan

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Sahura is located in south central part of Nepal. Geographically it is located in inner terai in the bank of Rapti River and surrounded by community forest and Tharu settlements. On the basis of political division it lies in central region of Narayani Zone and Chitwan district. Recently the area is added part of Ratnanagar municipality before that the area is located in Bhchhuli VDC ward no 2.



Source: <http://www.Google.com> retrieved April 3, 2015

Since Rana period Sahura has been famous for Rhinos, elephants, tigers and birds watching. After establishment of Chitwan national park in 1974/75 A.D., the area was declared as tourist area and many hotels and restaurants have been running since the time. The number of hotels and restaurants are going to increase day by day in the area. Sahura it is well known for jungle safari and natural tourism, however, folk materials also play important role for the promotion of tourism in particular area. Large numbers of tourists annually visit the area and huge amount of folk materials purchase by them. Hotel Association estimates that around eight Lakhas(around one million) visitors annually visit the place including natives and foreigners. There can be seen many curio shops and open stalls and sell the folk material for tourists. It is clarified that folk material is one of the important components of attraction of Sahura. Large numbers of Tourists enjoy with folk material culture (like watching Tharu's house, dressing pattern of Tharus, Chepangs' house and their home use materials). Purchasing folk materials is one of the important missions of visitors rather than watching natural beauty. There found various material culture in Sahura, however, Tharu and Chepang material culture appear as identity marker of the area. The study concentrate on the situation of using Tharu and Chepang material culture in Sahura and its values for promotion tourism in the area. More over it provides the suggestion how we can properly use the material culture in the study area.

The study is based on the both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from the field visit. For the purpose of primary data collection I visited Saura and collected the data through observation of curio shops. More than that, I have taken interview with the shopkeepers who have been selling folk material for the visitors since long ago. Random sampling method was used for taking interview and only limited numbers of shopkeepers (only 5) were participated in interview and expressed their idea about using folk material(Chepang and Tharu folk material) for tourist purpose in Sahura

Traditionally, Chitwan is home land of Tharu and Chepang before eradication of malaria only these communities were in dominant. Chepang is one of the indigenous nationalities living in central mid hill of Nepal including Chitwan district. Their physical features is similar to other indigenous nationalities that Ganeshman Gurung (1995) mentions that , " have flat and short nose, round face, dark and brown complexion, then and medium ears, dark eyes and prominent eye brows" (6). In the same way Ross Caughley (2000) clarifies the etymological meaning of Chepang and says, a folk etymology of the name refers to an origin myth in which their first ancestors emerged from cracks in rocks(bang meaning rock plus Cyo? meaning 'tip'of or by an extension of basic meaning recent generation of a lineages"(1). In the same way there are various tales and opinions about the nomenclature of Tharu. In the introduction section of *A Biannual Newsletter of the Nepali Folklore Society* (2009), the origin of the word ‘Tharu’ has been described in the following way:

The term ‘Tharu’ is derived from ‘Sthera’ which denotes a sect of Buddhists.

According to the second view, the term ‘Tharu’ is derived from the word ‘Thara’ of Magar language, which means the area. The third view suggests that the people who have come from Thar in Rajasthan, India are called Tharu. (32)

Tharus have no authentic document recorded by themselves about their lineage and history. Due to the lack of their own texts, Tharus get defined by others in all records of history. In the context of Chitwan they are known as the first migrant people who have lived in the land since thousand years ago. After eradication of malaria people from the hill occupy the land and these communities become marginalized. National census of 2011 shows 63359 (29796 male and 33593 female) population in Chitwan. In the same way, CBS report (2011) indicates that 28989 (14651male and 14338 female) Chepang living in Chitwan.CBS reports further highlights the total caste wise population of Chitwan districts as

All Caste	579,984	male 279,087	female 300,897
Brahman - Hill	165,652	78,296	87,356
Chhetree	65,894	31,222	34,672
Tharu	63,359	29,796	33,563
Tamang	46,198	22,520	23,678
Gurung	39,155	18,205	20,950
Newar	30,256	14,574	15,682
Chepang/Praja	28,989	14,651	14,338

Kami	28,318	13,257	15,061
Magar	27,985	13,030	14,955
Damai/Dholi	12,101	5,712	6,389
Kumal	9,302	4,491	4,811
Darai	8,011	3,781	4,230
Sarki	7,218	3,450	3,768
Musalman	6,780	4,067	2,713
Gharti/Bhujel	4,430	2,103	2,327
Rai	3,962	1,953	2,009
Dashnami/Sanyasi	3,716	1,783	1,933
Thakuri	3,488	1,696	1,792
Bote	3,094	1,526	1,568
Teli	1,551	1,062	489
Kathbaniyan	1,420	817	603
Ghale	1,254	558	696
Kalwar	1,252	739	513
Danuwar	1,110	558	552
Yadav	1,099	818	281
Kanu	1,062	641	421
Koiri/Kushwaha	922	546	376
Badi	840	391	449
Sunuwar	748	393	355
Hajam/Thakur	613	416	197
Majhi	594	359	235
Haluwai	558	346	212
Mallaha	549	368	181
Dura	549	246	303
Gaine	469	234	235
Marwadi	467	255	212
Kurmi	466	361	105
Musahar	428	229	199
Limbu	372	195	177
Dusadh/Pasawan/Pasi	359	244	115
Brahman - Tarai	296	167	129
Chamar/Harijan/Ram	283	217	66

Thakali	283	133	150
Sonar	274	122	152
Kayastha	237	127	110
Bangali	217	153	64
Hyolmo	213	106	107
Rajput	183	115	68
Brahmu/Baramo	156	80	76
Sherpa	144	86	58
Dhanuk	141	100	41
Lohar	138	97	41
Sudhi	130	76	54
Mali	129	69	60
Nuniya	128	85	43
Bhote	125	67	58
Dhobi	113	86	27
Tatma/Tatwa	92	65	27
Baraee	84	68	16
Kumhar	79	46	33
Thami	72	43	29
Bin	72	54	18
Badhaee	51	41	10
Satar/Santhal	38	26	12
Chhantyal/Chhantel	38	12	26
Yakkha	37	23	14
Punjabi/Shikh	35	19	16
Halkhor	31	18	13
Rajbansi	29	19	10
Dhimal	25	15	10
Kewat	23	13	10
Pahari	22	15	7
Kahar	21	10	11
Lodh	20	9	11
Dom	20	15	5
Kamar	19	11	8
Bantar/Sardar	18	9	9

Khawas	17	7	10
Jirel	16	11	5
Nachhiring	16	9	7
Sampang	13	7	6
Dalit Others	365	194	171
Tarai Others	494	291	203
Undefined Others	332	180	152
Foreigner	125	82	43

Source: CBS Report, 2011

Especially Tharus have been living in plain area and Chepanags's settlement is extended in hill area of the district. Both the Rich folk material culture of the Tharu and the Chepang have play important role to promote tourism in Chitwan. Their arts and crafts are based on indigenous knowledge and it can be used for various purposes in house. It is made by wood, grass and bamboo.

Before began tourism in Chitwan, both the Chepang and the Tharu exchange their folk materials each other by using batter system. During the winter season Chepang came down to the plain area and exchange the material like basket(*Doko, Dalo*) and bamboo made mat (*Mando, Bhakari*), grass made mat(*Gundri*) and small grass made basket (*Dhaki*). Now days such tradition has been changed and folk materials are used for tourist purpose. In present time curio shops sell various folk materials to the visitors. Visitors prefer the things made by grass and bamboo. Such grass and bamboo made goods is based their indigenous knowledge and skills. In this regards, Brush and Stabinsky (1996) mentioned, "Folk material is reflected as form of indigenous knowledge"(12). Among different genre of folklore; material culture is one of them that covers folk art, vernacular architecture, textiles, and modified mass-produced objects. Like that the Tharu and the Chepangs folk material culture also reflect folk arts, architecture and modified mass produced objects.

Using material Culture for Tourism in Sahura

Material culture is the physical evidence of a culture that Ian Woodward (2007) justifies that "it is an objects and architecture they make, or have made. The term tends to be relevant only in archeological studies, but it specifically means all material evidence which can be attributed to culture, past or present" (1). Material culture covers an interdisciplinary field that highlights the relation between folk and their things. In tourism sector it is used as visual archive or commodity

that visitors purchase and use in their daily life. Such folk materials are important for the attraction of tourists in particular area. Kathmandu valley is an example where folk material culture creates centre of attention of tourists. Similarly in Sauraha visitors also enjoy with folk tradition and culture such as observing the structure of house and dressing pattern of the people.

Using material culture for tourism is not new phenomena in Nepal. Nepali paintings and hand made goods are famous all over the world. More than that in local level different folk materials can identify the place such as Bhaktpur is famous for pot (*soil made pot*) and Palpa is famous for metal pot (*Karuwa*). In the same way, Sahara is famous for grass and Bamboo made folk materials. Such materials are made by Chepangs and Tharus. I asked one of the curio shopkeepers of Sahura about the folk material who has been selling goods since five years ago. He says, "Most of the bamboo made goods are collected from Cheapng cooperative, and Chepang villages. Grass made goods are purchased by local sellers of Tharu community" (*Personal Interview*). It shows that folk materials are one of the attractions of Sahura. Tourists usually observe the houses of Tharus and Cheapngs during the time of village travel. The Chepangs' folk materials are one of the attractions of the route. The materials are made by wood and bamboo is different and unique from other goods found in common market. They use their indigenous knowledge while preparing the material that makes their material distinct from other handicraft. In the same way Tharu folk material is popular among the district, however, their folk material is similar to the other goods of market. Tharus have their own hotels and lodge and curio shops so they are conscious about values of folk material and use it tourist purpose.

While analyzing the situation of using folk materials for tourist purpose, it raises questions about of copy rights of the community on the folk materials that use for tourist purpose. Till the time people have no idea about copy rights issues. I asked one of the curio sellers about the matter. He says "We have no idea about copy rights of folk materials; we all buy and sell the material. I am also Tharu but I have no idea about special rights of the Tharu on our folk materials." (*Personal Interview*). It shows that curio shopkeepers have no idea about copy rights. Copy rights are one of the important issues of using folk material for business purpose. In the contexts of Sahura, the issues is still silent ,however , most of the curio shops highly use folk materials of Chepangs and Tharus. In some cases some of the business men use raw materials and

produce folk material in the name of the Chepang. In this regards, one of the participants states, " In the case of the Chepang folk materials, I see some of the business person produce themselves by using low quality materials and sell by using the name of the Chepang because visitors want to purchase Chepang folk material like Basket (*Dhaki,Dali*)"(personal Interview). He adds, "When visitors see the word 'Chepang', they show interest to buy the goods so that sometime Tharu's folk material also converts on Chepang's folk materials"(personal Interview). It shows that how folk material is misusing in tourist area of Nepal. Curio shopkeepers and middle men take benefit from the sympathy of visitors who purchased Chepang folk materials from Sahurha. Except some cases, Tharus' folk materials also misuse in the area. Till the time locals do not get extra benefit from the folk materials that use for touristic purpose in Sahraha.

Conclusion

Folk material is one of the identity markers of the indigenous people, however, middle men and curio shopkeepers use it only business purpose and undermine the value of folk materials in Nepal. Due to awareness of exclusive rights of the folk materials culture Tharu and the Chepang have not get benefit from their folk material that other middle men gain. The Chepang folk materials are highly misuse in Sahura while it utilizes for touristic purpose. Visitors' sympathy go on Chepangs' folk materials and pay more for their folk materials. In reality Chepangs do not get any benefit from the sympathy of buyers that goes on to the shopkeepers and middlemen. To reduce such bad practice it needs to increase awareness about folk materials and its original values as well as exclusive rights on the objects that produce by the people for tourist purpose. For that government and non government sectors should work to secure rights on folk materials and use it for tourist purpose.

Some Folk materials use in Sahura



A Colorful folk Material (Dhaki) made by Tharu



Bambo made sandal made by Tharu



Wood made saddle of Tharus



Grass made Dhaki of Tharus

Grass made sheet of Tharus



Tharus's House



Wooden Pot made by Chepangs



Bambo Made basket (Jhapri) of Chepangs



A bamboo made Basket Made by Chepangs



Bamboo Made Var made by Chepangs



Hat made by Bamboo(A chepangs' folk material)



Bambo made table of Chepangs

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