



SACRAMENTS OF DHIMAL PEOPLE OF EASTERN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Sacraments are the means of purifying a person in this life and for the life after death. The word Samskara is used to mean 'religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind, and intellect of an individual, so that he may become a full fledged member of the community' (Pandey, 1982: 16) and also sanctifying, impressing, refining and perfecting the entire individualities of the recipient, (Pandey, 1982: 17). Samskara also represents the ability of a person and it is a way of getting this ability. For example, the newborn baby is known from his name from the naming sacrament. In the same way marriage ceremony indicates the perfectness of a person. Therefore, different kinds of sacraments are performed in different ages to show their ability. It is a means of purification and it proves the capacity of doing something in the society. Therefore, different cultural groups perform different kind of rites and sacraments. This is a step of taking profession also. The sacraments show the childhood, maturity, adulthood, and seniority of a person.

KEYWORDS : Dhimal, sacraments, name giving, marriage, Bhenra

INTRODUCTION

Dhimal are a Sino-Tibetan -speaking ethnic group of the Nepal Terai. They mainly reside in Morang and Jhapa districts of Nepal and Darjeeling district of West Bengal, India. In Nepal they reside to the east of river Lohandra up to Mechi River in the east. Most of them live between Lohandra and Ratuwa rivers of Morang and Jhapa district. According to the census report of 2011 their total population is 26298. Out of this figure male are 12114 where as female are 14184 in number. If we study the population history it is clearly seen that the ratio of population of Dhimal is not increased in high speed for the long time. Dhimal women are good at weaving and have unique dress among the ethnic peoples of Nepal. Education is almost completely absent among them. A landless people, the traditional occupation of the Dhimal was hunting and gathering. Nowadays, agriculture is their main occupation. They perform limited number of sacraments, worship different gods and goddesses and celebrate own kind of festivals. They live in their traditional houses.

Dhimal people perform only four kinds of sacraments in their lifetime: Birth rite, first hair-cutting, marriage and death sacraments.

Birth rite: Birth rite is the first one, which is performed very simply in the occasion of a child's birth. They do not have any sacraments that are done before the birth. A pregnant woman is not given chilly, cold drink and tea in her food. They guess about the gender of the baby male or female from the symptom of sickness of the mother at delivery time. In the case of paining her liver in irregular way, they guess that the pregnant woman gives the birth of a girl. In the same way, regular paining of the liver is the symbol of the male birth in her delivery.

A woman of other group is given the charge of looking after a newborn baby and its mother in Dhimal society. She is called *Dagarain*. She helps the pregnant woman for delivery also. Dhimal women do not sleep at the time of delivery in traditional villages. *Dagarain* helps the pregnant woman to give birth a baby in the posture of sitting. She makes a *Bhakal* to *Champagardin* for easy delivery of the pregnant women. *Ojha* of the village recites Mantras for her easy way of delivering a child. The women give birth of the first baby in her husband's house, where as other babies can take birth in their uncles house also. At the time of delivery, a weapon to cut the placenta of the baby is prepared. It is made of pottery plates or bamboo plates (Dahal, 2036: 123). Some restrictions in eating is also there for the pregnant women. Some group of local

fishes and green vegetables like guards are known as cold foods and they are not given her in the menu. Ghee, onion and mutton also are not given. Instead, pork is known as the best meat for a pregnant woman, where as cold and raw foods are not allowed eating.

In Dhimal society it is believed that the bottom part of placenta of the falls down after third to seventh day of its birth. Placenta is called *Sutisika* in Dhimal language. Falling down placenta is the occasion of naming a newborn baby. They perform this rite very simply. In the morning, they clean the house and paint floor with water and cow's dung. Then they sprinkle the purified water in the houses. They believe that if the silver is kept in the water, it becomes pure and it remains good to sprinkle in the house to make it clean. After that, the newborn baby is cleaned. Its mother also takes a bath to make the house clean.

Dhimals do not discriminate to the newborn child whether it is a boy or a girl. However, they become happy after getting a new baby in the family. At the day of *Sutisika*, they perform the naming process. They give the name of a newborn baby based on the event that was happened at the time of taking birth. If a minister was present at the time of a child's birth, its' name is given *Mantri*. In the same way, other kind of events is also considered to give its name. Days and the months of a year is also the base of naming a child in this society. This system is followed in each traditional Dhimal villages. Now a day Dhimal youths prefer to give different names for a newborn baby instead of traditional system. They want to follow the naming system of other societies than their traditional custom. Therefore, names of Hero and Heroine and the gods and goddesses are given to their newborn babies. Old people prefer to name their babies based on scheduled cast aiming to protect them from evil power and spirits. Elder women of the house are responsible to name the newborn baby in this society.

In case of lacking milk from the mother, *Ojha* is consulted for her treatment. He chants mantras and wills to recover the milk for the baby from its mother. In the same way he gives some herbs as the medicines to the women for increasing milk in her breast. Some nutritious foods also are given her. The herb that *Ojha* gives to the mother covers the milk. He recites the Mantras and gives the medicines. He does not say the name of the herb that he gives to her. *Ojha* teaches the method of eating that herb also.

Pasni or the ceremony of first food for the child is also not done

in Dhimal society. The mother can feed her newborn baby whenever she feels need. The baby is in general fed with rice and other hard food after one or two months of its birth. When her milk cannot cover the need of food to the child, she feeds hard food to the child herself. She does not take help of other people to feed the baby. Other sacraments are not done in its childhood in this society.

Bhenra Samskara; Another Samskara observed in the Dhimal society is called *Bhenra Samskara*. *Bhenra Samskara* means the first hair-cutting occasion in Dhimal language. It is not compulsory for all Dhimal babies and it is performed only for those babies who have taken birth from Bhakal. In the case of getting birth of a died baby from the womb and not getting babies for the long time of the marriage, Dhimal youths promise something to their gods of the house and villages. They promise to offer animals and foods to get the child born. In the case of getting babies after these promises, they perform *Bhenra* rite for such a baby. In reality, *Bhenra* is a rite of cutting hair at the first time. Such babies are considered a gift of the god and its *Bhenra* rite is done in the name of that god. It is compulsory for such a baby, according to the Dhimal traditional customs. In other words, *Bhenra* is done only for that baby who is born from the effect of god's will. *Ojha* offers the promise in the name of such baby. The presence of its uncle (mother's brother) is compulsory in *Bhenra* occasion. He cuts the hair of his nephew or niece (Bhanja or Bjanji) and takes some money from them. It is believed that the sin of the new born baby is lacked by their uncle from this money. A small party is given to the relatives in occasion of *Bhenra* rite in Dhimal society. They make a small hole in the ear of newborn baby and let them wear earrings. This rite is done for both male and female baby.

Bhenra is not compulsory of the baby that is born in normal way. In such a case, the father cuts the hair of the baby whenever he feels its need. In the beginning, they ask the barber to cut their hair. They cut the hair of both male and female. In the same way, they make a small hole in their ears also. It is done for wearing ornaments in the ear also. They do not feel necessary to make a hole in the ear and the different function is not done for this. Therefore, this function is done only for decorating their body.

Marriage: Marriage is the third *samskara* of the Dhimal society. Marriage is a compulsory sacrament in each society. Only the process or patterns are different in different cultural groups. The age of marriage is also the same with some rules and regulations. Hence, another sacrament that is done in Dhimal society is marriage. At the time of marriage, they have a system of providing *Dasa Rita* to the father of the bride. Marriage does not complete without sending *Dasa Rita* in this society. Without giving the *Rita*, marriage is not completed; even the pair become old and got children. The death sacraments of the women shall be done from father's side in the case of not given this *Rita* after marriage. If the baby is born without giving *Rita* of marriage, it is not taken good in the society. In other words, death of the women in such a case is considered as the death of a person of her father's site. Without paying *Das Rita*, her husband and his family do not get the right to perform her death sacrament. In this way, *Das Rita* is compulsory in this society. *Rita* is a kind of property given to the father or mother of the girl by the side of the groom. It remains in the form of gold, cash and goods. Meat, sweet and other food items also are given in *Dasa Rita* to the bride's parents.

In traditional Dhimal family, the age of marriage is 15 to 20 years. However, at present the youths are practicing to do marriage after 20 years of the age. They look a girl near their villages for the marriage. They do not marry a girl from close relatives. They are exogamous family and they do not marry

the girl inside the family in fathers and mothers group. Outside three generations, they are free to marry in both sides. The girls prefer to marry with a younger boy than she is. They do not have the system of doing love marriage by a Dhimal girl. In the same way, the parents of the groom hope to marry the bride older than the bride for agriculture purpose. According to their tradition, a boy needs to go to the girl's home to beg her at least four times for the marriage. It is one of the hard works for the youths. They need to take some food as souvenir in the girl's house while they go for asking her for marrying. They repeat their visit regularly for 14 to 15 times also in some occasions. In traditional custom, the system of sending the boys at girls home for seven to 30 days to assist their house was in practice. Now a day this system is not in practice compulsorily.

After the finalization of the marriage, other process of marriage is done from both sides. After that preparation of the marriage starts. According to their custom, the boy goes to the girl's house with his relatives and villagers to get married. In this process, the boy worships the house gods and goddesses and walks for the girl's house with his relatives and villagers. The participants of marriage procession are given food before visiting to the bride's home. They are given mustard oil to rub it in their hands, feet and faces. Then they participate in the process. They reach to the house of the bride before setting the sun. Some young women also participate in marriage procession with the bridegroom. Three groups of people at the bride's house disturb for the procession three times in this occasion. At first the boys, than the old people and the girls at last disturb the procession near the bride's house. Bridegroom, his relatives and father pay some charges in each spot of disturbance. The bridegroom pays some nuts and money to clear the way. After that, they are allowed to reach up to the girls house. Then, the rites of marriage begin in the girl's house.

Dhimal boy needs to pay ten *Rita* at the time of marriage to the girl's father. There are ten names for ten *Ritas* in this society. They are *Chorkasur*, *Panchauli*, *Dhansakauri*, *Dudhawali*, *Kantaka*, *Dhaami*, *Mukhiya*, *Duwarchhekauli*, *Senkauli* and *Gharmaini*. Most of these traditions (*Ritas*) are completed at the house of bride. However, *Dwar Chhekauli* and *Senkerauti* are practiced at bridegroom's house. In the same way, *Chor Kasur Rita* is practiced only in Chori and Supari Marriage system. All the goods of *Ritas* are kept in banana leaves and all the relatives of bride and bridegrooms sit there with important personalities of the societies. The first process of *Rita* is give and take of *Rita*, which is called *Kantaka*. Two bottles of wine and some money are given to the relatives of the bride for such *Rita*. Bridegroom provides *Dhanasakauri Rita* to the youths of bride's village. In the same way *Dudhawali*, *Panchauli*, *Dhami* and *Mukhiya Rita* are paid to the mother, *Pancha*, *Dhami* and *Mukhiya* of the girl's side. All the *Ritas* include the cash and wine. After accepting these *Ritas* other functions of the marriage are taken ahead.

The bridegroom gives only a piece of *Petani*, a comb and a bottle of hair oil to the bride at the time of marriage. The parents of bride also give some money to the bridegroom. The bride gets a *Petani* from her parents also. Dhimal girls are given some property from their parents in occasion of marriage. The bride and the bridegroom worship at Maharaja than before the departure to the bridegrooms house. The parents and relatives of the groom organize a small farewell party for the boy and his relatives. After that, the bridegroom returns to his house with a new bride. Other rites necessary to be completed at the bridegroom's house begin from this event. While returning bridegroom with her newly married wife at home, his villagers disturb him to reach at his home. Therefore, he needs to satisfy them with cash and wine. Then they let him go home. In the beginning, the bridegroom goes to

Maharajathan with the bride and moves round it. After that, both of them are kept on the chair and take *Tika* and cash from their relatives and villagers (Dahal, 2036:137). At the same time, the marriage party begins. New groom also participates to distribute food in the party. Next day of marriage party, the members of the family go to the river for fishing purpose. Some of their relatives also join in this function. They catch fish and cook to distribute to their relatives and guests. Small stones collected with the fish from the river are also brought in the house and they are mixed in fish while cooking. The same fish is given to the guests as a joke. Now this system of joking is totally stopped. Another party to the relatives and villagers is given at the next day and the process of marriage remains completed.

Dhimal bridegroom goes to the bride's house after a month of his marriage. He takes his wife with him in this occasion. Souvenirs like sweets and wine is compulsory to carry with him. There is a tradition of taking a kind of bread called *Bagiya* as souvenir with him in this occasion. The system of taking such souvenir is called *Banchhagali* in Dhimal language. The bridegroom stays at the girl's house for some days and returns his home. He takes back his wife with him while returning. Then, all the process of marriage is supposed to be completed.

Supari Bibaha (giving a piece of nut to a girl), *Jabarjasti Bibaha* (forced marriage) and *Chori Bibahs* (theft marriage) are other categories of Dhimal marriage system. According to a system of *Supari Bibaha*, a boy gives a piece of nut to a girl. If he likes a girl, he gives it to her and her acceptance of the nut is considered as the acceptance of his proposal. It is an easy way of marrying a girl without paying ten Rita. In such a cases, the boy is given the facility of paying Rita whenever he becomes capable to pay it. However, such kind of marriage is done without the willing or the permission of parents also. Again, without paying Dasa Rita this kind of marriage also remains incomplete. Now days such types of marriage is not practiced in the society.

Forced marriage system was also popular in Dhimal society long ago in Nepal. According to this system, the boy could kidnap the girl from the farm and the market and can take her at his home without her willingness. Then he used to try to convince her to accept him as her husband. In the case of her acceptance, she could stay there at his house. However, in the case of refusing him, she could return to her father's house respectfully. In the case of refusing his proposal, the kidnapper should pay some fine for the parents of the girl and the society. This system of marriage is not in practice now.

Chori Bibaha or theft marriage was also popular in traditional Dhimal society. According to the system, a boy takes a girl at his house and makes her wife without paying Dasa Rita. If the boy is poor and cannot manage the cost of Rita, this kind of marriage is done. If the girl agrees to marry with him, this kind of marriage is possible. Dasa Rita is paid after a long time when the boy becomes able to pay it. Hence, Dasa Rita is compulsory in the case of doing such marriage also. Priority is not given to the willingness of their parents in such a marriage system. In the same way, widow marriage is also accepted in this society. However, Dasa Rita should be returned in the case of doing widow marriage.

Death sacrament: The last sacrament that is performed in Dhimal society is death sacrament. The dead body is both buried and burnt. If the death case happens in a house, the relatives and villagers reach at that house to assist to the family member. If somebody does not go at that house of death case, he gets punishment from the society. Each one of them feels their responsibility to assist the relative of the dead person for the completion of death sacrament. They reach at

the house of the dead person and manage for funeral procession. They make a *Arthi* from bamboo and keep the dead body to take it up to the burials. A lamp is kept at the chest of dead body and some soil is thrown there. The people who cannot participate in procession perform this duty. Then they take the dead body to the cremation area. They take alcohol, rice, a cock, a bottle of mustard oil and other necessary materials in the cremation. The villagers and the relatives also participate in funeral procession.

Dhimals do not have their permanent crematory centers. Some of such centers are already cultivated and sold for agriculture and residential purposes. Therefore, they bury the dead body at the bank of rivers. All belongings of the dead person and the goods of his daily uses like clothes and beds are also kept inside the burial with the dead body. A hand fan, a cock, a bottle of oil, rice, and alcohol made from rice and other essentials are kept on the top of the burial. Then the participants of funeral procession return back home. In the case of burning the dead body, they make a crematory of firewood in seven steps and burn the dead body. If the dead person is unmarried, a banana plant is planted at the side of burial and a piece of iron is kept with a dead body of pregnant woman. Banana is known as a pair of unmarried dead and the iron is supposed a means of protecting the family members from evil spirits. After the completion of burial activity, the process of taking a bath in the river and house and touching fire, iron and Tulsi plant are the same with other cultural groups.

A plan to complete the death sacrament is made after the funeral procession. The second day of the death event is much more important in Dhimal society to perform this rite. Eggs, rice and meat is mixed in an earthen pot and it is offered to the dead person. It is offered on the top of the crematory. Elder son of the dead person is responsible to conduct death rites in this society. This sacrament is called *Kampapi* in Dhimal language. The Karta or the elder son is the main person to perform this duty. He does not eat meat, oil and salt and does not drink wine for this period. *Kampapi* is done after 3rd days of the death case. Pigs and cocks are massacrred in this occasion (Dahal, 2036: 146). Latter on they have started to do the *Kampapai* rite on the 13th day of the death. Three couples of hens and cocks are offered in the name of dead person in this occasion.

Special variety of food is offered to the dead person in the occasion of *Kampapi*. Such kind of food is prepared mixing with fresh and dried meat, alcohol, cottonseed, rice, jute plant and flour. This mixture is divided into seven parts and kept in banana leaves. It is offered in the name of dead person. Later on, the Karta of *Kampapi* collects them and keeps in an earthen pot. At last, it is thrown in the water. *Barang* is a post in Dhimal social organization, which helps to perform death sacrament to the Karta like a priest. The family members of the dead person cannot act as *Barang*. He is responsible to purify the house and the relatives of the dead person. At the last day of death rite, the relatives and the members of the dead family shave their hair and take a bath. Only the male members and relatives shave their hair to become pure. The relatives are given beaten rice and some alcohol for purification. Silver water (water used to clean silver) is sprinkled to the relatives and the house to purify it. Then the relatives are suggested to rub the mustard oil in their bodies. After that, they do not do any functions in the name of dead person.

Children are the gift of the god in their view. Therefore, they do not discriminate between their boys and girls. However, they become happier in the birth of a son rather than the girl. Dhimals are endogamous marriage group of people. They do not have the system of marrying multiple wives. In the beginning, love marriage also was very rare. Such kind of

marriage is rare even today in the society. The girls also are respected at the house. They are the worker of the agriculture. Therefore, the girls are also equal in the society.

Dhimals have their own kind of belief on gods, society and the people. They think that the earth is the creation of god and a person takes birth according to the gods wish. They believe that a person who does sin in his life should be suffered from such deed in this Loka. They do not have the word *Swarga* or heaven in their language. They have the same kind of gods and goddesses in their different residents. Altogether, they have four kinds of gods and goddesses. They are divided in to the the villages, houses, ancestors and Hindu related gods and goddesses. Kali, Masan and Devi are their gods and goddesses of the houses. They are called Sako-dir, which means the gods of the house in Dhimal language. In the case of separating, a family Sakodir is kept in the house of elders. *Chamsari, Andha Kali and Sojhakali* are three categories of Kali. Kalis are worshipped in *Ashadhe Puja* and Aunsi (Tihar). However, in the case of being ill from her effect, she is worshipped in other occasions also. Paining of body, infection in eyes and blindness are some symptoms or the effect of Kali. They believe that when she is not happy, she harms with such infections. Therefore, she is worshipped with flower, rice, pigeon, geese and hens to make her happy. If she becomes happy, she makes them healthy in their view.

Masan is other kind of god, which is worshipped inside the house. According to their belief, there are two kinds of *Masanas*. Among them *Masan* of the house is different from the *Masan* of the forest and the ghost places. It always suffers the people. Instead, the house *Masanas* save the house and the family. Chief of the household and *Ojha* both are capable to worship and make happy to the household god. It is believed that these household gods make the people sick, but they are not so fierce like other gods and ghosts (Dahal, 2036: 157).

Other types of *Devata* that are worshipped by Dhimals are Gram-devata. They worship them in *Gramthan*. They are worshipped with high priority in the occasion of *Akhadepuja*. They do not keep any images of the gods and goddesses in their *Thanas*. Simple tridents, *Ghantas* and *Dhwajas* are kept in *Gramthanas*. Some images also are kept there at the time of *Akhade Puja*. However, they are thrown away after the completion of this function. *Gramdevatas* are divided into two groups. They are the gods and goddesses that are worshipped at the time of *Tihar* and *Akhadepuja*. *Maharaj, Budha Thakur, Radharam, Berang, Dera Gelai, Samsari, Chaumajhi, Dharni Berang, Kali, Devi, Masan, Sikari, Bahadur Chaudhari* and *Arjun Dhama* are worshipped at the time of *Ashadhe Puja*. In the same way other *Gramdevata*, which are worshipped at the time of *Aunsi* or *Tihar*, are the same including some other local gods and goddesses. Hence, most of *Gram Devata*, which are worshipped at the time of *Tihar*, is considered as greater than the gods of *Akhadepuja* (Dahal, 2036: 160). *Gram Devatas* are worshipped at once in a year. *Akhadepuja* is the main occasion of worshipping them. They are so fierce against the villagers.

Among others, *Gaura Gelais* are their *Pitri Devatas* (ancestors), who are worshipped at the time of *Aunsi* (*Tihar*). In the same way, *Dhama Berang* is the god of kitchen. House, jungle, tree, tube well, rivers and taps are also worshipped as the gods and goddesses in this society. *Ghatghatuwar* for road gods, *Dware* for door gods, *Kupkupaini* for water tap gods, well gods and *Mistibarang* for agriculture equipments gods are other types of their *Gram Devata*. The brave persons of their community are called *Gaiya* and they are seven in number. *Bar, Peepal, Simal* and *bamboo* are the main objects where the gods and goddesses reside according to their view. They worship to *Budhasubba* and *Pashupati* also. They travel up to *Satashidham, Arjun dhara, Varahakshetra, Surunga*

and *Kathmandu*. These people also worship *Dantakali, Ranakali* and *Guhyeswari*. Now a day some of *Dhimals* have started the custom of using *Brahmin* priest to perform some sacraments. They have accepted many more gods and goddesses of *Hindu* origin. The influence of *Hindu Brahmin* culture is deep rooted in this community.

CONCLUSIONS

Dhimals reside mainly in the eastern part of *Nepal*. Their traditional residents are found in the different villages of *Morang* and *Jhapa* district. They are known as the *Kirati* people of the low land. Some legends related with their origin are the same with the *Limbus* of the hills. Therefore, it is said that *Limbus* and *Dhimals* are the same brothers. They have their own kind of cultural products. Both tangible and intangible cultural products are found quite different from other cultural groups in this society. Making traditional clothes and use by *Dhimal* women is their different cultural activity. In the same way, different languages, gods and goddesses, feast and festivals, traditions, customs and values are their cultural properties. As they have different cultural properties, the ministry of tourism has declared that the tourism of *Morang* is related on the cultural product of *Dhimal*.

As we have discussed above about the rich cultural traits of *Dhimal* society, they are related with fulfilling different necessities. For example to fulfill the spiritual satisfaction, their culture has given the tradition and religion. In the same way, food and drinks with their traditions are their identities. The agriculture is their cultural occupation and the art of making their equipments is the means of their livelihood. All of them are their cultural products and now we can sell them in tourism market. They can sell not only tangible products, but also intangible products in tourism market. It will assist to increase their income level. Marketing of cultural products in tourism market can assist them to provide employment and it can assist to raise their income. Therefore, cultural products of *Dhimal* can become the means of their livelihood. However, proper management and promotion of *Dhimal* culture and tourism should be done.

The *Dhimals* of *Nepal* has their unique culture. They are *Kirati* of the low land. They speak the language of *Tibeto-Burman* group. They are residing at the side of river and the forest from the long time. They are expert in making traditional clothes. Their tattooing, hair styles and housing systems also are some attractions for cultural tourists. Their musical instruments, folk songs and dances, way of gathering food and traditional treatment system can attract the cultural tourists.

The government of *Nepal* should promote the cultural tourism of *Dhimal* people. They should be given home stay training by the government. Home stay programs should be started in their settlements. The government is responsible to send the tourists to stay in their homes as the guest. A museum of their culture is in need in *Morang* district. Their handmade clothes and musical instruments shall be promoted. It will assist to promote their culture and helps to raise their income level. It supports to the local development process also. Then, it can become the means of livelihood.

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