

Meshroom Varah of Ghandruk

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Introduction

Ghandruk is situated in southern slope of the Annapurna Himal in mid-western region of Nepal. It takes 8 to 9 hours to reach there from Nayapool on foot.

Among different ethnic groups of Nepal, Gurungs are known as very important ethnic group. The bulk of the Gurung population is to be witnessed in Kaski, Gorkha, Lamjung, Shyangja as well as whole of the Gandaki Zone. They are also found to have inhabited in Baglung and dispersly in rest of the kingdom. Gurungs are clearly Mongoloid and very sturdy and stout in appearance and famous for fighting as the brave Gorkha throughout the world.

The Gurungs of Ghandruk

Ghandruk is famous for Gurungs and their unique culture as well as eco-tourism. The Gurungs of Ghandruk inherit unique cultural feature, which separate them from other ethnic communities. The Gurungs of Ghandruk are divided into two main groups, which are known as 'Char jat' and 'Sorah jat'. The 'Char jat' is considered amongs them to be higher in social status than 'Sorah jat'. The cross-cousin marriage is very popular in Ghandruk but parallel-cousin marriage is not allowed. As far as the occupation of Gurungs of Ghandruk is concerned, traditionally they are pastro-agricultural group. Beside this, these days they are also found getting involved in trade,

government services and tourism industry for their living. Their recruitment in British and Indian Army is source of glory and economic up-liftment of their family. They are also found working in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and many other Asiatic and European countries. The Rodi is the important social organization of Gurungs of mid-western Nepal, but in Ghandruk Rodi is no longer in existence because of modernization and development of tourism in the region.

The Religion

As far as the religion of Gurung of Ghandruk is concerned they are animistic by nature and practitioner of Shamanism (belief in Dhami Jhakri). These days they also follow the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Beside this, they also worship certain Hindu god and goddesses. Moreover they worship local deities like, Bandevi, Bai Katraykhola Varah etc. The Meshroom Varah is very important local deity. This article tries to focus on the process of worshipping, and importance of 'than' (Shrine), material for worship, sacred day of worship, role of spiritual leader and importance of worship of Meshroom Varah respectively. The Meshroom Varah, is regarded as the guardian deity of entire village.

The Meshroom Varah

The Meshroom Varah is very famous local deity of Ghandruk. There is a popular story behind the origin of Meshroom Varah. It goes like this; Several years

back, there was a holy man in that village who was famous among people for his kind-hearted nature. After his death his soul could not get into rest because of some mistake, committed by him during his lifetime. It is probably the cause, his soul started wandering around the village and began troubling the people and cattle. One day when the spiritual leaders of the village chanting the mantras to find out the cause of tormenting people, they came to know that the soul of holy man was the cause. When the spiritual leader (jlakri) revealed the secret before the people they decided to erect a small 'Than' shrine to make his soul reside and offer goods according to his wish one day in the year on one auspicious day. So, it is said the worship of Meshroom Varah started from that day and the people of Ghandruk follow this tradition up to now.

The 'Than' of Meshroom Varah

There is a small shrine of Meshroom Varah situated little far from the proper Ghandruk village under big a tree. It is reported that the 'Than' is shifted by the inhabitants of Ghandruk because the original 'Than' of Meshroom Varah was far from the present one. When I myself got an opportunity to ask about the shifting of the 'Than' from its original place, the local people reported that they had shifted to their convenient location to pay homage to their professed deity. Similarly, it was not possible for them to reach the original place often and easily where the original 'Than' was located and it was surrounded by thick cane forest. In the name of that cane Varah is named as Meshroom Varah. It was the reason reported why they shifted their holy deity from its original place. But the retired ex-army Kajiman Gurung said that there is a peculiar story behind the task of shifting of the 'Than'. According to him many years ago, everybody in the village including women were allowed to visit the 'Than'. It is said that Meshroom Varah provided them with necessary utensil for cooking on condition of returning them again. One day, it so happened that one women chanced to steal the 'poniyo' from that heap of utensil and took it to her home. From that day on, Meshroom Varah got enraged with the inhabitant and refused to provide them with necessary utensil as before. When it so happened the people of the village decided to shift the 'Than' of Meshroom Varah because, it was not possible for them to carry the utensils from their houses to the 'Than'.

That was the reason reported by Kajiman Gurung to construct the 'Than' of Meshroom Varah near their village. Keeping this fact in mind, they decided to shift the 'Than' with in the reach of their village.

There is a small 'Than' of Meshroom Varah in proper Ghandruk village that is situated on the top of village. It takes an hour to reach there from proper Ghandruk village. The 'Than' is surrounded by a small wall that can be jumped. There is a small entrance to inter the 'Than' towards the east direction. The 'Than' looks like a shade which is covered with stone and there is a big round polished stone inside the 'Than' which is worshiped by the people as Meshroom Varah and they offer the blood of male goats while they perform the prayer. It is reported that sheep is preferable for sacrifice. There are more than hundred bells, hanging on the supporting wood of the 'Than'. The bells are reported to have been donated by different devotees to acquire special boon from Meshroom Varah. Moreover there are bundles of colorful flags made of clothes hanging on the branches of big tree and there are many 'Kalasa' also made of copper which were reported to have been donated by different people in the time of worship. It added extra attraction to the 'Than' premises. The 'Than' is surrounded by a forest and they have a water reservoir near the 'Than' to supply the water to the villagers during the period of worship.

Sacred day of worship

The Meshroom Varah is worshiped on sacred days which are all Tuesdays of the Nepali months of Chaitra and Baishak. It is a common practice to offer the deity at least one sheep or male goats accompanying with ten bread made of rice flour from each household. Every household paint their house with the mixture of red clay (lateritic soil) and cow dung and the person participating in the worship of deity has to take bath and wear new and dress on this occasion. On this day ploughing of land is not done and religious authority also prohibits ploughing land on this day and people do not start long journey as well. Then whole the villagers gather in the shrine of Meshroom Varah. On the presence of the people of the village the spiritual leader begin chanting mantra and offer homage which brings goodness and opulence to the whole village of Ghandruk.

Material for worship

The engrident material of worship comprises of pitcher full of water, rice flour, rice grain, copper lamp, flower especially pati (a local name for brownish non-blooming flower), cow-dung, cow ghee, cow milk, red vermillion, little denomination of money and colorful flags made of cloth. All these components are compulsory without which the process of worship is not observed.

Role of spiritual leader (Jhankri)

The spiritual leader of all the villagers conducts the task of worship in a systematic and careful way. If they do not follow the process properly, it is believed that the deity gets angry and brings misfortune to the whole villagers, followed by calamities like, landslide, snowfall, drought, starvation and the like. The spiritual leader, for this reason should be very careful, alert and industrious during the process of worship of the God.

When all the essential components are properly arranged then only the spiritual leader starts murmuring sacred mantras to propitiate the Varah. Taking considerably long time in his process of worship then after comes the process of sacrifice of sheep and male goats. The spiritual leader himself with long swords sacrifices them. After offering portion of the blood of the goats and sheep on the stone, remaining blood is collected into the big vessel. After slaughtering the animals the Jhakri takes out seven piece of meat from each of the sacrificed animals from inside the body. The pieces included blood, liver, heart, lungs and kidney. These pieces, in turn, are pierced into a bamboo stick. Then after those organs is cooked in a big vessel and eaten with great Charm like picnic. The breads are distributed to the whole mass of people. The little residue of which is carried home for their family members. The women are not allowed to enter into that particular spot because they are supposed to be filthy, unclean or 'maila' (filthy in Gurung language). Once the worship is completed the spiritual leader carries few bread and head of all sacrificed goat and sheep. After all the process of worship is observed and goats are sacrificed, the people return to their respective houses with the body of sacrificed goat and sheep as prasad of that deity. The prasad is distributed among

every neighbour and their relatives. After these all performance are done the households take their meals. This is the good example of good social relationship and understanding among them which is unique custom in Ghandruk.

The worship of Meshroom Varah is also conducted by the village in a community level with the help of village development committee. Whole the expense is bourned by the VDC. On this occasion only one sheep or male goats are sacrificed by the spiritual leader (Jhakri) which is known as the share of whole villager. It is also a good instance of harmony and good interrelationship among them.

Importance of Meshroom Barah

The people of Ghandruk have great faith on Meshroom Varah. It is believed that Meshroom Varah controls every activities of Gurung of Ghandruk, save the villagers from various type of catastrophes. It is even believed that Meshroom Barah brings suitable environment for agricultural activities as well as shifting the 'gotha' of the farmer from one place to another. Moreover, it is believed that Meshroom Varah saves the people abroad who went to earn money and other activities to gain social status as well as economic prosperity. People recruited in army abroad and in house have great faith on Meshroom Varah because they believe that Meshroom Varah saves their life during the time of war and conflicts. The ex-army personnel Kajiman Gurung claims that when he was in the battle fields his troops were captured by Pakistani armies. He suddenly prayed Meshroom Varah for his life and promised to offer a big bell, if he is rescued from the fence of Pakistani soldier. With wonder, he immediately was able to overcome the fence of enemy. When I asked about this incident he stressed that it was Meshroom Varah who freed him from the fence of Pakistani troops. Every year many people who remained away from this village are reported to go home either in Pokhara or Kathmandu to pay homage to Meshroom Varah with various type of offering. So there is no wonder to believe that the Meshroom Varah is the tutelary deity of Gurungs of Ghandruk.

There is also a common belief among the people that if Meshroom Varah annoyed it may bring misfortune in the peaceful living by creating many calamities like, landslide, drought, snowfall, floods, starvation etc. It

is perhaps the reason that they don't annoy Meshroom Varah and take strict regulations during the worship of Meshroom varan.

Present situation

Though Meshroom Varah is a famous deity of Gurungs of Ghandruk and they have great faith on this deity,

modern thought has brought great change among new generation and these people in turn even dare to question on the reality, existence and authority of Meshroom Varah in the recent day. The faith which their fathers and forefathers had on Meshroom Varah has, at present, been questioned and it has been subject of discussion among new generation.