

The Role of Community Museum in Ethnic Identity: A Case of Tharu Cultural Museum and Research Center in Chitwan Nepal

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Abstract : Tharus are indigenous inhabitants of the Tarai, the narrow strip of flat and fertile land that lies at the foothills of the Himalayas. They have unique rituals, festivals, and music, while their clothes and ornaments are similar to some ethnic groups of India. After the control of malaria in the Terai between 1955 to 1965, (with the help of the U.S. Government, the WHO and the government of Nepal) the rate of in-migration skyrocketed, particularly of Nepal's hill people, whose culture, along with the use of the Western education system, was gradually adopted by the Tharus. Among the many challenges, the Tharus face is their assimilation into the dominant Nepali culture. The Tharus are thus under threat of slowly losing their ethnic identity and cultural values. In order to preserve the indigenous Tharu Culture, Tharu Cultural Museum, and Research Center. It is a community based non-governmental and non-profitable museum established in 2005 by Tharu intellectuals, traditional leaders and youths. The main goal of the museum is to preserve Tharu culture through different activities with direct and indirect involvement of community people. It aims to preserve arts, culture, handicrafts, and artifacts related to Indigenous Tharu People. Similarly, the museum displays an exhibition about the Tharu histories, lives, culture, and their indigenous knowledge and skills. The paper aims to demonstrate that community museums can be one of the key hubs for the preservation of culture with the collection and promotion of cultural objects, artifacts, and intangible cultural heritages. The preservation of culture not only has contributed to establishing their ethnic identity but also has contributed to establishing their recognition of their political space in the mainstream politics - the constitution of Nepal has recognized Tharus to provide reservation for the political space.

Keywords : community museum, tharu,, identity, culture

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