

## TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION AND CHANGES IN SOCIO-CULTURAL BELIEFS OF LOCAL COSMOLOGIES

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### **P**URPOSE

*THIS paper aims to show the understanding of people about the world and universe according to their beliefs. The main purpose of this paper is to find changes in the beliefs of people about their universe in the course of evolution of science and technology through transformative education.*

**Methodology:** *The methodology used in this study is informal talks with people, interview, and document analysis. The views of both educated and uneducated people have been taken about traditional beliefs and findings of science and technology. As sampling, five educated people and five uneducated people were selected to collect data for this study.*

**Findings:** *People's beliefs are shaped by religions and myths of the ancient world. Ancient religions and myths have explained our universe either by their innate capacity or imagination but they are deeply rooted in the heart of people and find it difficult to change. Different religious groups have explained this universe differently which has kept their identity. Different kinds of religious and mythical documents have explained the origin, the history, and the evolution of the cosmos or universe based on the religious mythology of a specific tradition. Religious cosmologies usually include an act or process of creation by a creator deity. But due to the evolution of people's social and cultural behavior, there are changes in the beliefs about the universe. Discoveries and inventions of science and technology have also brought changes in the ideology of the present human beings. This has been the root cause of transformative education.*

**Research Limitations:** *This is a qualitative study and is limited to informal talks to people, interview, and document analysis. Accuracy about people's beliefs has been maintained.*

**Practical Implications:** *This research paper analyses that transformative education has promoted people's wisdom and knowledge by bringing together both the eastern and western traditions for the purpose of personal transformation and well – being of people around the world. The readers will be aware of the truth of traditional beliefs as well as of science and technology.*

**Originality and Value:** *Cosmology is very important aspect of education which has made human beings in the ideological field of today. Due to the theories related to cosmos, human beings have shaped their ideology that we find at present. Human beings are indispensable parts of local cosmologies. This paper explains different ideologies related to people's beliefs about the universe and changes experienced in personal transformation and well – being of people in society and transformation in culture. It is an original research study and has got great value in shaping people's beliefs for future ideology.*

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**Key Words:** *Socio-cultural Beliefs, Local Cosmologies, Value of beliefs, Globalized Higher Education, Transformative Education.*

## **Introduction to Local Cosmologies**

Our world has shaped in the way as people have thought about it. There are differences in the thought process of people according to their ancestor's socio-cultural beliefs. Cosmology is divided and determined in terms of tribes, ethnicity, and religious group of people. According to Central Bureau of Statistics (2011), "there are 125 tribes in Nepal and there are 123 mother tongues. There are ten major tribes and ten different religious group in Nepal. Among them, Hindus constitute 81.3 %, Buddhists 9 %, Islam 4.4 %, Kirat 3.0%, Christian 1.4 %, and 0.4% Prakriti have made local cosmology of Nepal."

In Nepal, Kshatriyas, Brahmins of hilly region, Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Kami, Musalman, Yadav, and Rai are in the decreasing order of population. Among all tribes of Nepal, the smallest population is of Kusunda tribe, having only 273 in number. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2011) mentioned that the literate population is 65.9 %. Among the literate population, 75.1% males and 57.4% females are literate as a whole. In terms of educational attainment, the SLC level passed population is 10.2 % and the passed percentage of population above SLC level is also 10.2%. The population attended informal education comprises of 4.2 %. In this way, educational attainment of Nepalese people is less, not so high.

There are different beliefs among different group of people. Some of them can be accepted, but some others cannot be accepted. Many of the beliefs are taken as granted by people which have been deep-rooted in them according to their socio – cultural origin.

Regarding construing the nature of indigenous cosmologies Abramson and Holbraad (2012, p. 38) have mentioned that, "the study of indigenous cosmology was necessarily conceived as an exercise in holism in two related senses. On the one hand, at the level of methodology, cosmology is conceived as a particular part of the total cultural perspective that any given society might generate which is to be understood alongside all those elements that go together to make the society in question an 'organic' whole—kinship, social, and political organization, economic arrangements, ritual practices, and so on. On the other hand, with respect to its contents, indigenous cosmology was also whole unto itself, in as much as its role is taken to be that of presenting an account of the indigenous cultural perspective conceived as a whole."

In every family, they have got their own culture among family members which has moral value in society. In Nepal, there are matters of touchable and untouchable. There are systems of high caste and low caste of people in societies and if the people of low caste touch the water taps or food of the high caste people, they will be beaten in many parts of Terai region and western parts of Nepal. But, this same system in eastern parts of Nepal is reformed to some extent where more people are literate than the other parts of the country due to the power of transformative education. The places where more people are educated, the feeling of discrimination is less. But, except some rare cases, inter-caste marriage system is not accepted in Nepal among many tribes of people. Bétéille 1965, p. 46) has defined caste system as, "a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system."

Berreman (1967, p. 70) has defined the caste system as "a system of birth-ascribed stratification, of socio-cultural pluralism, and of hierarchical interaction."

"The word 'caste' is derived from the language of Portuguese and was applied to India by the Portuguese in the middle of fifteenth century which has taken identity of people in India and Nepal" (Subedi, 2010).

In Hinduism, the caste system dates back to “Manu” which was opposed in India by great learned person B. R. Ambedkar.

In the words of Sinha (1967), “caste is a hierarchy of endogamous groups, organized in a characteristic hereditary division of labour.”

In this way, Nepalese cosmology is composed of caste system which has got identity of people. While introducing people, first of all, caste of a person is asked for identity.

In the words of Subedi (2010), “caste-based hierarchy in Nepal affects the people by constraining them to accept lower positions and conditions of work embedded with oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, caste based discrimination, be it state or private level, provide a ground for various movements to emancipate the oppressed. Caste is not today what it was before 1950; and it has not become completely class or replica of it. It is also true that, a dominant caste has not been necessarily a part of the dominant class.”

The caste system has got its own effect on human beings. It was expected earlier that, people from low caste should be ready to accept the domination posed on them by the so-called high caste people in the society. But due to transformative education system, in some cases, the domination system is decreasing with time. It is the need of present era that, education should motivate people to change their attitudes which leads to social restrictions. Transformative education has brought about some social reforms to ensure personal well- being of people thereby, avoiding discriminations among them.

## **Objectives**

The paper aims to study the different beliefs of people with respect of cosmologies. The paper also attempts to highlight the role of transformative education in understanding the true knowledge of cosmologies.

## **Literature Review**

There are different beliefs existing among Nepalese local cosmologies. In some districts of western Nepal, there is Chhaupadi system in which ladies in their menstruation period are thought to be impure and kept in a separate shed away of their house. These ladies suffer much during this period, and also die of snake bite and other torture.

“During those days, although women are forbidden from going inside the house they are still expected to do more laborious work outside like carrying heavy loads, digging, collecting firewood, and grass despite the lack of a nutritious diet and comfort” (Kadariya & Aro, 2015, p. 54).

There are systems of Jhuma and Deuki in some communities in which daughters are offered to God who don't get chance of getting education and married life. In many families, daughter- in- laws are thought of inferior human beings and they are tortured too much and beaten to death and murdered.

There are different beliefs in the system of eating food among communities. There are matters of untouchables among low caste and high caste people. The high caste people have got belief that, if milk is given to a low caste person such as Kami, Damai or Sarki, their cow or buffalo would climb a tree and die. Due to this belief, low caste people would not get milk in the house of high caste people and also they have to stay out of the house of high caste people because their entry makes their house impure. Damai caste of people, who stitch clothes for high caste people, are not allowed to touch them in temple.

The people, who make idols of God, do not get chance to go into the temple for touching the idol made by them and worship.

Regarding caste and ethnic stratification in Nepal, Bennett, Dahal, & Govindasamy (2008) have stated

that, “after the promulgation of the National Code or Muluki Ain in 1854 – the caste system has been a major determinant of their identity, social status, and life chances. In this system, everyone was organized in terms of their relative ritual purity into the four broad varnas of the classical Hindu caste system: the Brahman priests, the Kshatriya kings and warriors, the Vaisya traders and businessmen, and the Sudra peasants and laborers – with an additional group technically “outside” the caste system because of their ritually defiling occupations which rendered them “untouchable” by others.” (p. 1)

Under one religion also, there are many kinds of discriminations on people of different castes and on women, too. People believe on witchcraft in many places. But the matter of ghosts and spirits are still unsolved. Almost all people believe on spirits and are afraid of them. Although the low caste people are also Hindu, they are not allowed to enter the temple to worship. There are caste- based, ethnicity-based, gender- based and religion – based discriminations in Nepal. All of these elements together have formed local cosmologies in Nepalese communities. All kinds of beliefs and discriminations are related to socio-cultural perspectives of people.

### **Understanding of Cosmos Then and Now**

According to Wikipedia, “the cosmos is the universe. Religious and philosophical approaches may include in their concept of the cosmos, various spiritual entities or other matters which deem to exist outside our physical universe” (Cosmos, 2018). In the past, there were no any scientific instruments to examine the physical structures of stars and planets but now there are plenty of instruments to judge them so that we have got exact data and information about our cosmos; the number of stars and planets, number of suns, sizes of stars and planets, number of galaxies including their sizes and stars under them. This is due to science and technology we have today, which has functioned as the sole means of transformative education by providing real information in the real world situation. We have knowledge of concrete universe today with different functioning factors for it.

About belief on universe, Gregersen (2009) has stated that, “ancient people around the globe once believed the Moon, Sun, planets, and Stars were Gods and Goddesses, demons, and angels revolving around Earth, the centre of their universe. Little did they know that, Earth is a mere speck in a vast universe. It took many centuries for people to realize that Earth isn’t even the centre of our solar system. It is, however, one of the components of what’s known as the inner solar system - comprised of the Sun, four terrestrial planets, and the moons that orbit them.

There are changes in the beliefs related to universe due to development of science and technology as a boon of modern education which has promoted transformative education. People’s beliefs about the stars and planets have already changed from abstract ideas of Gods, Goddesses, and spirits to the mass of concrete matters just like earth. In the past, the universe was believed to be made by the Almighty God and all planets and stars including Sun were worshipped believing that they are all Gods. It was believed that in every star and planet there would be God, as they were kingdoms of Gods. But today, they are directly seen as concrete mass of dust, snow, rock, etc. and they are all uninhabited heavenly bodies. There is no life on other planets because they have got no water and air. Each star and planet has got existence due to their unique gravitational force of pulling each other.

In the past it was believed that, the Sun revolves around the Earth, before the invention of telescope by Galileo. But now, it is concrete knowledge as mentioned in Encyclopedia Britannica (n.d.) that, “all the planets move around the Sun in elliptical orbits in the same direction that the Sun rotates. This motion is termed prograde, or direct, motion. Looking down on the system from a vantage point above Earth’s North Pole, an observer would find that, all these orbital motions are in a counterclockwise direction.”

This is the true knowledge that we have got through scientific discoveries and inventions which have brought drastic changes in the beliefs of local cosmologies around the world. It is good to worship

heavenly bodies for mental satisfaction. It is known that, Jupiter has large enough gravitational force to divert meteors and asteroids, which are supposed to hit the Earth and attract towards it in the vast space in eternity.

### **Some of the Beliefs and Facts Related to Universe**

There are many beliefs existing in literature and tradition around the world from ancient time to the present scenario. They are existing in such a way that they cannot be proved by human beings. Regarding existence and supremacy of soul, Lord Krishna has told Arjun in Gita, “as a person puts on new garments, giving up older ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. Although the existence of the soul cannot be explained, scientists also accept the energy that our body absorbs from childhood to old age. The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by wind.” (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2:22).

In Holy Bible, the Lord has said to Moses, “make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” (Bible, Verse 21:8)

According to Chanakya, “the person who recites the name of the God, he will be free from all kinds of sins. Excess of anything should be avoided because it does not give proper credit” (Sanghi, 2010).

Regarding ancient belief of cosmology in Maya civilization, Diaz (2013) has mentioned that, “death for the ancient Maya was apparently seen not so much as the end of life, but more as a transformation or displacement into a different realm of existence that does not mean the extinction of the social persona. In many ways, although invisible, they coexisted with the living. All beings, visible and invisible, inhabited their own place within the different parts of a layered, four-sided, and concentric universe. The sky, the earth, and the underworld composed this universe” (p. 30).

Different people have different kinds of belief according to socio-cultural factors in which they have grown up and trained. About life and death Lord Krishna’s saying to Arjun is same as Maya people have believed as ‘death is not the end of life. It will be changed from one form to another form of living beings.’ According to this belief, a man today will be born in the communities of other creatures and performs the same activities. The power which manages such things is known as powerful God by human beings. The composition of the universe was explained in ancient vedic age as composed of five elements, namely, sky, earth, water, air, and fire. Moreover, people in all cosmologies have maintained their life as their myths say about existence of Gods and spirits along with monsters.

### **Transformative Education**

Transformative Education is a good aspect and strong step in the ladder of educational knowledge and skill. Today, education has been internationalized with promotion of English as global language. Transformative Education should be based on scientific factors and cosmologies should be conscious to transform them into scientific skills from abstract ideas to realities.

Regarding clear exposition of the relationship between cosmology and religious faith, Kuhn (1998) has mentioned that, “if we use God as an explanation for the big bang, there would be no reason to look further for a natural explanation. Use of supernatural explanations would shut down science. If science relied on a creator to explain the inexplicable, there would be nowhere to go, no way to prove that explanation wrong. The question would have already been settled. Science does not deny the existence of God. God is simply outside its realm.”

People should use their knowledge and thinking in such things in which there is proof for research. Thinking about abstract nature makes people sick, but if they think about things with proof, it makes personal well-being in them (Kuhn, 1998). To avoid unnecessary domination and conflict on other

people is also an idea of Transformative Education. In many families, daughter-in-law is beaten to death and such type of domination should be eliminated from socio-cultural perspectives of people. It should be thought as all human beings as one and similar beings to establish peace and prosperity among human beings.

## Conclusions

Transformative Education that provides individual transformation of people's unwanted traditional beliefs should be applied to solve the existing problems about people's beliefs. Personal transformation and well-being is the motto of Transformative Education.

Pradhan & Shrestha (2005) have suggested that, "a new development paradigm that is focused in managing the country's immense sociocultural diversity will lead to more equitable development outcomes. Historical deprivation has to be negotiated through the provision of measures that improve the conditions of disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes. As a first step, new economic and social policies are needed that promote the redistribution of physical (e.g. land ownership and income generating schemes) and human assets, redress biases in public spending, and target provision of basic services such as education, health, and water supply, to populations facing poverty, and social exclusion."

Today there is competition among developed countries about producing of weapons which is one of the traces of developed countries by means of Transformative Education. But the sense of exclusion and discrimination among countries is still existing and growing. This situation also indicates that there is no any real definition of goodness because for the same thing, a group says good but another group says bad. To drop bombs on different countries by developed nations is good for them but for normal people it is not good. People are in favour of Transformative Education but what to transfer is still confusing. There are so many ritual ceremonies at the death of a person according to their culture, which they do not want to leave but the idea of education is to transform these from traditional to modern systems. In Hindu culture, at the time of death of a person, to do religious and ritual ceremonies for thirteen days is really difficult period in terms of health, expenditure, waste of time by keeping people without any result. So, mostly such kinds of superstitious beliefs and people's understandings should be transformed through transformative education for personal well-being and happiness. Anyway, people should invest their time for productive purpose in this era of globalization.

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