

**Ethnographic Cinematography: A Quest for Identity in Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Village***

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**Abstract**

This study explores and analyzes the representation of native identity in Nabin Subba's film *A Road to a Village*, which focuses on the depiction of cultural archetypes, the projection of the hero, and the application of ethnographic cinematography. Cinematography, though, is a technical aspect of the visual arts; it is intrinsically linked to the overall subject matter, agenda, and specific theme of a perfect work of cinema. The narrative portrays the experience of hardships faced by a man from the indigenous community whose traditional ethnic skill is facing threats by the arrival of a road to the village and rendering him unable to adjust with modernity. This tragic hero juxtaposes the popular image of a problem-solving protagonist, which could be analyzed through the belief of the Rai community in collective identity rather than individualistic one. On the other hand, Subba has employed the symbols and images from the myths and culture of the Kirat community through deliberate framing, angles, and movement of the camera as aesthetic coherence between the issues and craft of the cinema as the techniques of ethnographic cinematography are a quest for ethnic identity as well as the identity of Nepali cinema. This study calls for future study on Nepali cinemas with the lens of ethnographic cinematography and examine the role that cinema to incorporate intercultural dialogue, social justice, and identity of indigenous community amidst rapid socio-economic transformation they have been facing.

**Keywords:** Ethnographic cinematography, Nepali cinema, Indigenous Identity, Rai community, Kirat Culture

**Introduction**

The study examines and analyzes the negotiation of native identity in Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Village* (*Gaun Aayeko Bato*) by employing an ethnographic cinematography perspective. Nabin Subba's 2023, film *A Road to a Village* reveals the story of Maila, a basket weaver, his wife Mailee, and their seven-year-old son Bindray, who live a simple life in a rural mountainous area in eastern Nepal. When a newly made road connects their village to the city, modern conveniences arrive, bringing progress but also challenging their traditional lifestyle and values and highlights indigenous struggles at international festivals (Merican). Subba's film presents a contemporary portrayal of Nepalese rural community through the perspective of indigenous people and garnered an invitation to the Busan Film Festival due to its application of ethnographic filming techniques that illuminate the challenges these communities undergo.

Ethnic or cultural identity in the form of visual arts has long been a fascinating subject in cinema studies and become a prime issue for academic discussion. In this nexus, Cheung and

Fleming note, "Within the field of Film Studies, debates surrounding the construction and projection of identity formulate some of the hottest and most contested discourses" (1). Additionally, they reveal that the "production and projection of identity" is one of the aspects of cinema (1). As a cultural product, social and cultural paradigms inevitably shape cinema, and films from ethnic or indigenous communities foreground issues of cultural or ethnic identity. Cultural identity in cinema can be expressed in various ways, such as through the use of myths and cultural archetypes, as well as through visual techniques that project their protagonist with socio-cultural values. Thus, this negotiation of local identity occurs in the context of an evolving social structure, which touches upon themes of purity and discourse, as suggested by the use of Foucauldian and de Beauvoirian concepts.

Set in Balankha, a village in Bhojpur inhabited by the tribal Rai community, Subba's *A Road to a Village* foregrounds mythical elements and cultural archetypes, which projects its protagonist as an emblem of social and cultural belief system. Moreover, the film articulates this consciousness or identity in terms of camera angles, movement and composition of the frame to depict the multi-layer aspects associated with entire community's cultural identity. What might be the politics behind the selection of symbols from cultural archetypes, the projection of a low-profile protagonist and the use of certain cinematic styles in the cinema? Does the cinematic technique adequately represent the themes and subject matter? Indeed, Subba has not only selected the symbols and images from the myths and culture of the Kirat community through the story of his common man protagonist but also has built a cohesive aesthetic that aligns the film's thematic concerns with its cinematic craft. He achieves this by employing techniques characteristic of ethnographic filmmaking, positioning the work as a quest for the identity of Nepali cinema.

The protagonist (hero) in the cinema is a poor and common man who is unable to rescue himself. Moreover, most of the time he is in "low mimetic mode" due to his suffering, unlike the hero defined by Aristotle and Bharat Muni. As Aristotle notes, "tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (23). Similarly, for Bharat Muni, "The hero is one who is high-born, attractive, eager for renown, steadfast, clever, dignified" (283). However, Maila Rai from *A Road to a Village* is neither a reflection of mythical legends nor a man from the noble class as claimed by Aristotle and Bharat Muni, but rather a subaltern character rooted in social reality. By depicting a common man as a protagonist, Subba foregrounds the Rai community's collective notion of identity since these indigenous people rarely emphasize individualism, nor do their mythologies center on male-dominated legends.

### Literature Review

Although the film's screening at Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) Bussan, and Beijing, followed by Nepali theatrical release on June 7, 2024, Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Village* lacks critical reviews in literary journals. However, primary responses from film critics have praised the film as a significant artistic achievement. Raju Syantang writes in *Naya Patrika*, "*Gaun Aaeko Bato* has become an ideological cinema. . . Nepali cinema should walk in the path drawn by this cinema" (5). According to Syantang, this cinema is a "creative document of the tussle between capitalist ideology and tribal belief systems" (5). Like Syantang, most of the critics have focused on the issues of exclusion of Indigenous people from the goal of development which is depicted in the cinema in surface level.

Likewise, Gurung Susanta focuses on the issues of 'development and exclusion,' raised by the cinema, "The road has not only destroyed the farms of the common people, but it has sized away the skills and knowledge of ethnic community" (7). He further explains how globalization has threatened the belief system of indigenous people, "The life philosophy of the tribals, who are accelerating their lives by filling nature with labor and skills . . . the

market, which has destroyed the life philosophy and lifestyle of the nature-oriented community" (7). Susanta views that *A Road to a Village* has proved the fact that a movie that represents us is not possible only by dialogues, screenplay and visuals, it also requires deep research on the cultural aspects" (7). From this review, it is clear that Nabin Subba has had proper research of particular communities, people, society, culture, and politics before making the cinema. Nabin Subba is probably the first filmmaker to depict that Nepali society is not monoethnic but multi-ethnic through the screen of multi-ethnic cinema. *Numafung* is an example. Due to this quality, most of the film critics regard Subba as a game-changer in Nepali cinema.

His latest cinema *A Road to a Village* highlights the exclusion of indigenous communities due to globalization focusing on their displacement from tribal lands due to modernization and capitalism. It portrays the experience of indigenous Rai community through the stories and sorrows, dreams and visions, hopes and disappointments, and struggles that a tribal family has to go through after coming to the tribal land. The road comes, and with the road comes cars, tractors, outsiders, goods, money, values, culture, service facilities, habits, etc. The modern means of development, in the tribal community, exploits nature and makes tribals individualistic and consumerist of unnecessary needs. The community and the collective ways of life of the tribal community are fragmented on the basis of class, gender, and strata. The film critic Jason Knight reviews that the plot revolves around a family and its core values, presenting the theme of parenting. Moreover, financial constraints is an integral part of this story where disruptive effects of technological advancement replaced manual labor by the machine and erode livelihoods. Knight further remarks that the film can be analyzed from multiple perspectives providing an insight into rural life in Nepal. In sum, it is a family drama that represents familial struggles and the challenges due to economic survival in a context of obsolescence (qtd. in *UK Film Review*, 6 Aug. 2025)

Moreover, writer J B Bishwakarma appreciates *A Road to a Village* because of its focus on native culture and social reality as well as for the depiction of the impact of consumer culture. He observes, "The sight of consumerist capitalism destroying tribal skills, art and heritage is very serious. This is not only a story of a village in Bhojpur, but a real story of tribals all over the country" (Bishwakarma 7). According to Bishwakarma, such cinemas are "giving a strong challenge to the market-controlled commercial entertainment cinema" (7). Thus, Bishwakarma praises the director Subba's efforts in advancing Nepali cinema. He further asserts that "there is a kind of economy. When the market is piled up from above in that economy, idolatry spreads. It affects people's relationships. This film is like a study of that" (ibid). Most of the critics have focused on the consumerist culture's entry with the roads to villages and its impact on rural communities. In the name of development, the capitalist market destroys the labor, skills and profession of a low-class tribal family, and a forced situation occurs where the family members lose themselves.

Various critics observe the film centers on the impact of modernization and consumer culture on native people. However, if we observe on a deeper level combining the myths, projection of the hero and ethnographic cinematography, Subba has tried to quest the cultural identity. There is very little discussion regarding ethnic identity and cinema in Nepali context since there are very few critically acclaimed cinemas that bring the story from the tribal community. In an article titled "Chyamrung Sangai Rashtra Banaudai Baradhwaj" (a review of the cinema *Jari*), Yuwaraj Bharttarai contends, "*Jari* is a step ahead of the previous films that capture geography and culture . . . through the *Jari* "Nepali cinema market has happily accepted Yakthung Limbu's identity, originality and nationalism" (5). The review marks that it is the time of Nepali ethnic cinemas and the quest for multiple ethnic identities through visual arts. Considering these issues, the research observes the critically acclaimed cinema *A*

*Road to a Village* as a quest for cultural identity through the perspective of 'ethnographic cinematography'.

Ethnographic cinematography serves as an appropriate perspective to trace out cultural archetypes, rituals, and daily lives of people from the particular community where the cinema is set. Ethnographic cinema features centers on ethnic subject matter and identity by capturing the holistic essence of community. In this connection, Karl Heider says that "ethnographic films" primarily record the "cultural practices" focusing on and capturing "whole bodies," "whole people," "whole interactions," and "whole acts" (5). Such cinemas are equally important for anthropologists as these cinemas are seen as "valuable data" for "further anthropological research" (Asch et al., 183). Apart from the specific perspective 'ethnographic cinematography', this work brings references from other sectors including myth, culture and overall cinema. That is why this theoretical methodology could be also called 'new textualities'. It is a position of 'intersectional approach' where theories from diverse disciplines are used. According to Richard J. Lane such a theoretical model is sometimes referred to as the 'hybrid approach' (724). This modality will be even helpful for the study "Ethnographic Cinematography: A Quest for Identity in Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Villages*" since it demands theoretical ideas from various genres and disciplines including ethnographic cinema and visual arts, myths and culture, identity and ethnicities etc.

In his book *Ethnographic Film*, first published in 1976, Heider has treated the "ethnographicness" of a film as a series of sixteen attributes, each of which contributed to making a film more ethnographic" (Fredman 1). Thus, it is obvious that at the beginning, the critics of 'ethnographic cinema' particularly focused on the community's culture, rituals, and daily life reflected in cinema.

Perceptions and criticisms of 'ethnographic cinema' have also been evolving. Jay Ruby assumes that such cinemas as texts are "capable of conveying complex anthropological arguments" and "requiring rigorous scientific examination akin to written ethnographies" (Ruby 104). That is why Ruby emphasized the need of filmmakers to be "reflexive and transparent" about "their methodological choices and the epistemological assumptions" (Ruby 157). Nowadays, not only the plot or subject matters, ethnographic cinema also require distinct visual arts, techniques, and framing. Hence, scholarly debate indicates that "the sensory ethnographic frame" further expands the scope by valuing the "unique qualities of visual media" and that film could capture the "lyricism of lived experience" (Castaing-Taylor 88; MacDougall, 270). At this juncture, ethnographic cinematography might be an appropriate lens to investigate the cohesive interplay between ethnographic subject matter and the visual arts of cinema. Proper visual techniques ensure the accountability of cinema to the particular community they portray. Critically analyzing the previous studies, they lack the integrated method by decoupling ethnographic analysis from cinematic form. There is a void in comprehending the visual approach influence on cultural accountability in ethnographic cinema. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining Subba's *A Road to a Village* through ethnographic visual discourse to advance scholarship on indigenous identity portrayal in Nepali film studies.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research, interpretive method that combines film analysis with ethnographic criticism to explore and analyze Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Village* exploring and elaborating focusing in terms of its narrative structure, visual style, and representation of cultural identity. This approach builds upon key scholarly works by Heider and Ruby in ethnographic film studies, which highlight the role of visual storytelling in conveying Indigenous experiences and worldviews. The study involves close readings of selected scenes to reveal cultural archetypes and mythic symbols, as well as the

characterization of the protagonist. By examining dialogue, narrative progression, and visual motifs, the research explores how the film negotiates the tension between tradition and modernity. The film situates itself within larger conversations about identity in cinematic storytelling through its use of theoretical frameworks from film studies and cultural theory by Cheung and Fleming, and its comparison of the main character to classical heroes described by Aristotle and Bharat Muni.

The research applies ethnographic cinematography as the theoretical framework by foregrounding "cultural meaning and social context" (Heider 6). According to Heider, ethnographic films rely on sustained observation and attention is given to everyday practice and cultural representation. According to Ruby, "an ethnographic film" is "exposing yourself" (160). These insights help to interpret Subba's *A Road to a Village* as an ethnographic cinema. Likewise, to analyze the narrative structure and portray of the protagonist it also includes classical narratological framework. For example, the ideas from Aristotle's *Poetics* that protagonist's journey must reflect "moral development and internal conflict" (13) as well as insights from Bharat Muni's *Natyasastra* are discussed in order to depict distinct identity of indigenous protagonist according to their world views. Finally, the film's effects and its emerging discourse on Indigenous identity in Nepali cinema were examined via available published reviews and festival reports. As a recent debut film, it receives primary analysis from its original content and existing critical commentary, given the limited scholarly reviews. This research uses interpretive analysis instead of empirical methods in order to enhance current discussions about ethnographic representation and identity within South Asian cinema.

### **Reflection of Myths and Cultural Archetypes**

Nabin Subba's *A Road to a Village*, projects the Suptulung as a central mythical and cultural archetypes, which is the symbol of the holiest and highest place in the Khambu/Rai community, where "a myth is no more than the structure imposed on it by the unconscious mind" (Clarke 743). The film features a traditional cooking stove made with three stones as one of the major components to drive the entire story that brings an immense of mythical and cultural archetypes from the particular Khambu (Rai) community. As the lead character of this story is Rai, it is natural to bring his culture, his way of life, speech, language, rituals, ethnic beliefs and myths and archetypes like Mundum and Suptulung. The story revolves around three family members: Maila (Dayahang Rai), Miley (Pashupati Rai) and Bindre (Prasan Rai). These characters look like symbols of the three stones from their Suptulung. The presence of these three characters maintains balance to the story through structural independence.

At the beginning of the film, Rai Maila angrily hurls (throws) his Khukuri on the top of a Suptulung. One of the stones falls down. When the stove is broken due to Maila's action, Maili quickly apologizes with both hands. The fall the Suptulung or to present anger against it is a very bad omen for the family. Thus, the attack on the Suptulung is a devastating incident according to Kirat's myth or cultural archetype, "Myths make use of signs to establish, to mediate and to transform oppositions" (Clarke 755), as the hearth's disruption signals tradition's vulnerability against modernity. Here, Suptulung as a relational archetype embodying core values of Rai against encroaching change, "The element of myth exists only in the context of the oppositions into which it enters" (Clarke 758). The Chula has its special values in the Rai community.

Regarding the cultural value of the Suptulung, Pushpa Raj Rai mentions, "The Chula is simply three stones but its cultural importance is very high. It is sacred thing of all Rai houses" (235). Chula (Hutlung) has a high significance and all rituals (Ubaili, Udhauli, marriage ritual, death rituals) begin with the worshiping of Chula (Hullung in Chamling Rai language). According to Rai, the stove or Chula is called 'Hutlung' in Chamling Rai

community and it is believed to have "supernatural power and sacred thing" (235). Thus, Suptulung is regarded as a basic foundation of all rituals performed in the family and community.

The scene of the falling Suptulung in the cinema presupposes that something unexpected is happening in the family. In the middle part of the cinema, Maila and Maili replace the new stone at Chula with proper rituals. However, the tragedy occurs with the death of the only child Bindre which further leads to the migration of the family from the traditional locality. The director has presented three characters from a family as the symbol of Suptulung (a combination of three stones). At the beginning, a stone falls and at the end of the cinema, one of the family members dies. Thus, here, director Nabin Subba has properly associated the mythical or archetypal symbol of Suptulung with his major storyline of the cinema as if he is far conscious regarding myths and cultural archetypes of Rai community as well as their proper implication in the popular media of visual arts (the cinema).



*Three Central Characters around Suptulung (Thin Chula)*

In the cinema, the Suptulung, a symbol of myths and cultural archetypes, is properly associated with the ethnic identity of the Rai community as well as it is aesthetically connected with the plot of the cinema to depict the fate of the protagonist's family. Here, both cinema and myths have justified the fate, plights, or suffering of the protagonist's family. For Bronislaw Malinowski, "myths justify and validate economic, political, social, and religious realities" (Powell 698). Barry B. Powell further clarifies the role of myths in understanding particular problems. According to him, myth should be understood "from its social function, from how myth helps to deal with the practical problems of living" (698–99). Here, both cinema and myths have justified the fate, plights, suffering of the protagonist's family.

Bronislaw Malinowski, "myths justify and validate economic, political, social, and religious realities" (Powell 698) is further clarified by Barry B. Powell, who highlights the role of myths in understanding particular problems. According to him, myth should be understood "from its social function, from how myth helps to deal with the practical problems of living" (698–99). As claimed by Malinowski, Nabin Subba has employed the 'power of myth' to justify the fate of his protagonist in one hand. On the other hand, he has strengthened the cinema as one of the powerful ethnographic films by using proper archetypal images from the ethnic community.

Being an ethnographic cinema, Subba's film also brings other images of rituals including the death ceremony process. One of the significant aspects of Rai community's death ritual is that the deceased will be buried in a particular place according to the nature of his/her death. The

bodies of those who unnaturally die are not buried in the traditional or usual area. Focusing on this cultural aspect, Bindre's body is placed in the grave on that small spit. During the ending of the death ceremony, it is said that since the world of the departed soul is different, there will be nothing to remember him and no meeting from now on. This understanding of life and death is directly brought from the assumptions of Mundhum. In this sense, the reflection of myths, rituals, and cultural archetypes has made the cinema one of the ethnographic works of art that captures the identity of the Khambu/Rai community.

Likewise, Nabin Subba through his central character Rai Maila, has evoked the traditional hand-work craftsmanship like a work of bamboo and traditional pattern of making home-made liquor. At the very beginning of the cinema, Maila is dragging a pile of bamboo towards the downhill and in another long pan shot reflects the landscape of eastern Nepal with the background of Mahabharat hills and Himalayans and the protagonist is carrying a pile of Chitra (made from bamboo works). He is delivering the Chitra to a person who had ordered to make it. Director Subba frequently projects the bamboo bush in the background of his camera frame. Similarly, time and again, his protagonist is busy with bamboo works. Bamboo culture is an integral part of the Khambu/Rai communities. The skills of cutting bamboo, weaving Choya, making Chitra/Mandro, and other traditional household materials are indigenous skills of the Rai community.

However, the villager who had ordered the Chitra with Rai Maila does not need it since he has already brought 'Tri-pal' from a newly opened store in the village due to the arrival of the road. The road brings modern household materials that replace traditional types of equipment like Chitra, Mandro, and Phipi. In this way, the cinema presents the tussle between tribal/native culture and globalization/capitalism artistically. On one hand, globalization brings a consumer culture to the village that demands much income to sustain or run the family. Contrastingly, it displaces the traditional ethnic skills, the source of little income for the local people like Rai Maila. The tragedy in this cinema is caused by this conflict between ethnicity and modernity.

Here, Subba has well-crafted the cinema like the Chitra weaving skill of Rai Maila. While, Maila weaving skills are outdated due to the arrival of the road, the same road brings an opportunity for another local knowledge and skill. The vendors of district headquarters demand local liquor. Tinpane liquor is called Wasing/Chi/Arak/Arakha etc. in the different Rai communities. In Mundum, it is said 'Arava Kharava'. Now, Rai Maila and his wife make local liquor in a traditional pattern and Maila takes it to the district headquarters. In the beginning, they get good earnings. However, disturbance from government authority hampers their work and Maila being a dignified personality leaves this task. Rather he again returns towards his bamboo craftsmanship. Now, he builds colorful Phipis to sell in Daran City. The colorful Phipi itself is a cultural identity of the traditional craftsmanship of the local community. The projection of almost vanished Phipi's craftsmanship is powerful ethnological documentation in the cinema as a feature of ethnographic film.

### **Low Profile Protagonist and Indigenous Belief System**

The representation of Rai Maila in *A Road to a Village* demonstrates Northrop Frye's notion low mimetic hero than average village people, whose ordinary status highlights the tension between tradition and modernity in countryside of Nepal. In this context, Frye categorizes the heroic figure into five separate modes, or rather five types of heroes according to the criteria of power or perceived power. The hero is considered to be "lesser, greater, or equal to an average person" (Frye 33-34). Dayahang Rai, most of the time in the cinema, is projected in ironic and low mimetic modes. Similarly, his craftsmanship of bamboo work marks him distinct or extraordinary from other villagers. However, his craftsmanship becomes a curse for him since the arrival of new goods and commodities from the city replaces his products. Due to the same skills, he does not go abroad as foreign labor and lacks earnings. On the



other hand, he has to fulfill his son's desire for new foods and goods appearing in the market. His son desires for noodles, coke, glasses, and even television. He has to pay the bills for electricity and even the repair cost of hydropower. From the beginning, he is trapped in the circumstances brought by modernity and the arrival of the road to the village.



*Low Profile Protagonist Making Phipi*

Selling the Chitra or other bamboo works is the only way to his income. The director has presented his frustrated face while a villager denies buying his Chitra. The look of despair is noticeable on Rai Maila's face when he cuts the bamboo, makes Choya, weaves Chitra, and delivers them to the house of the person who said, "I bought Tripal, I don't need your chim." While the Chitra is not sold, he is not happy though the villager's wife presents him with a heavy boulder of local liquor to drink. His frustration is depicted in the shot while he carries back the Chitra to home it is already darkened. At this juncture, the director is able to express the suffering of the weavers and sellers without words, with the expression of the face and body blended with a powerful ethnographic shot.

In another scene, the protagonist is presented in a villagers' meeting. It is about collecting the remaining electricity bills from the villagers and repairing hydropower. Here too, Rai Maila is portrayed as a loser because he has no money to pay the electricity bill and does not borrow from others. After the financial crisis hit hard, Maila hopes to get Fipi money from neighboring Pema. However, without giving the amount of Fipi, she tries to send a bucket full of grain to Pema. The grain cannot pay the electricity bills and if there is no electricity, his son cannot read. He wants paper cash anyway, he wants rupees. Maila returns without Pema's grain given at the price of Fipi. He needs money now and then. Even at this scene, he is presented as a person defeated by fate and circumstances.

The protagonist is in the ironic mimetic mode in most of the scenes. He cannot come out from circumstances. For example, he cannot fulfill the dream of television for his son. While the protagonist begins to supply homemade liquor to headquarters he makes little money. Now he is excited that he will buy a television as soon as possible. At this moment, he is in low mimetic mode average with other common villagers. According to Frye, "the low mimetic hero is an everyday ordinary character who are perceived to be of lesser, or equal, power to other people in their surroundings" (33). A hero might go through various mimetic modes according to his journey and most of the conventional heroes go through high mimetic modes since they are on the level beyond ordinary people.

So, what might be the significance of low mimetic hero in *A Road to a Village*? By presenting the protagonist in a low and ironic mimetic mode, Nabin Subba wants to depict the fate and suffering of common people displaced by modernity and modern means of development as a universal suffering of Nepalese rural people from the local community. On



the other hand, he through the ironic and low mimetic mode of his hero, has been projecting the collective consciousness of the indigenous Khambu/Rai community that their myths hardly recognize the individual superhero as their ideal. Mundhum too does not focus on the male hero as their icon or legend rather it has given significance to the feminine figure Yuma as their collective cultural identity. In this sense, the projection of the ordinary hero as a common man in low and ironic mimetic mode itself is connected with the collective identity of the Bantawa community. The collective way of life of the tribals is collectivist rather than individualistic. In this sense, the projection of the common man hero itself is an ethnographic visualization of cinema.

### **Ethnographic Cinematography and Tribal Identity**

The projection of ethnographic cinematography in *A Road to a Village* constructs tribal identity through the visual arts that connects the hero with his cultural roots and traditions. The camera works and framing are probably vital aspects of the cinema applying this technique have addressed well both 'the representation of cultural archetypes' and 'projection of the common man hero.' At the beginning of the cinema, Maila is carrying a pile of Chitra. This frame captures the panoramic scene of Mahabharat ranges in the background, and far behind the Mahabharat there is the Makalu range. It visualizes the landscape of 'Majha Kirat,' a land of the Rai community. In the same frame, some sheep are grazing on pasture and Maila wears 'pakhi' traditional folk dress made with sheep's wool.



*Maila carrying chitra and Mahabhataa and Makalu Range on Background*

Most of the frames of the cinema somehow try to presents the ethnographic images from the community. At the surroundings of the protagonist's home, there are images of local craftsmanships made of bamboo materials including Chitra, Perungo, Doko, etc. Likewise, the most critical circumstances faced by the protagonist's family are depicted around the Suptulung where all three family members are gathered. Similarly, when Maila goes to Pema's home, she is feeding her pigs, which is depicted through the sound of feeding pigs. As Pema takes Maila inside the home he is served local liquor (Jaad) which she filters with traditional Chapani made with bamboo. To depict the ethnic and cultural identity through rich visual techniques, the director has equally worked on this framing of the camera. While cutting bamboo, making Choya, weaving Chitra and carrying it, Maila (Dayahang Rai) is presented as a typical villager from the ethnic community. Since Maila's traditional bamboo craftsmanship is marred by modernization both Maila and his wife engage in making local liquor using their ethnic technology. Sara Merican highlights the clash of tradition and modernity. For instance, the plot foregrounds Maila, a basket weaver, whose traditional livelihood is changed due to the arrival of a new road linking his village to the modern world (Merican). The way of making local liquor is presented as a practical way of what the locals do in the community. Thus, the director presents rural and ethnic lives as well as their natural livelihoods by projecting the ethnic identity of local people and community. The realistic

representation of the characters and ethnic culture can be achieved through the technique of ethnographic filmmaking.

One of the notable factors of the ethnographic characteristic of this cinema is its symbolic presentation of 'weaving Chitra' parallel with the story of its protagonist. The story structure of this cinema is exactly like the shape of Chitra. The full shape of the cinema comes only at the end, like a perfect Chitra after weaving. The beginning of the cinema is made of bamboo. The issues appear layer by layer like the pattern of weaving bamboo (Chitra). Like the Choya from Chitra all the issues raised in the cinema are interconnected or stuck with each other. At the beginning, there is a long scene in the movie where Myla is carrying a pile of Chitra. And, the end is done also with a wide frame like a Chitra. Just as the Chitra becomes complete only after the bits are cut, in order to understand this cinema, it is not enough to see it in the framework of conventional storytelling. Likewise, the movie starts with the scene of coming home dragging the heavy load of bamboo to make Choya, after all efforts failed, the cinema ends with the scene of leaving his native land and choosing the same road to get into the same bus which has killed his son.



*Portray of Road in Cinema*

The analysis redefines traditional perceptions of heroism and national identity through the comparison of cinematic representations with *A Road to a Village*. Critical reviews from film critics and festival audiences help establish the proper context for the film's domestic and international reception. In this backdrop, Amar Bahadur Sherma "Films are one of the most effective mediums to spread content or messaging" (107). The representation of road indicates that film is a story about ethnic craftsmanship, rural livelihoods, survival struggles, and the preservation of native culture through the life of Rai Maila from a Rai village (TIFF 23). Consequently, the film excludes urban elements, modern color and colorful dreamlike patterns. However, the rural and rustic reality is articulated through the dim and muted color, which echoes the ethnic community's identity and their adjustment issues in their native land amid globalization and modernization. [Angel Sun](#) remarks, "The impacts of modernisation on indigenous communities, such as increasing income levels and disruptions to traditional social order, have been widely discussed in many news reports and documentaries. Apart from this, Sherma asserts, "Nepali films have been incorporating ethnic cultural contents into their productions to both promote it and serve their audiences a new flavor" (94). Thus, Sherma revisits traditional perceptions of heroism and national identity connects to hegemonic masculinity in Nepali films redefining identity.

Additionally, Subba's application of visual documentation is evident in his framing and capturing of the Rai community's rituals, crafts, and landscapes. The film's visual storytelling, from the representation of the Suptulung to traditional bamboo craftsmanship,

enriches the narrative and provides a commentary on the socio-cultural displacement of indigenous communities. In doing so, the narrative structure, paralleling the weaving of Chitra, reflects the interplay of cultural preservation and modern encroachment.

Importantly, the film's reception highlights its ideological significance and its challenge to the capitalist and consumerist narratives imposed on rural communities. Scholars have praised Subba's research and representation of the Rai community, positioning him as a transformative figure in Nepali cinema. The film's success in international film festivals indicates its global relevance and potential to carve a niche for Nepali cinema worldwide.

### Conclusion

Therefore, *A Road to a Village* serves as a cultural archive and cinematic text since it provides valuable insights into indigenous Rai identity, struggle and its negotiation with modernity. The film exemplifies cinema as a medium for cultural expression and preservation and sets a precedent for future ethnographic films in Nepal through its application of framing, camera movements and mise-en-scène elements to depict cultural identity of the Rai people. Furthermore, this study accentuates the substance of such works in understanding Nepal's multi-ethnic and multicultural tapestry, paving the way for more inclusive cinematic tradition.

Finally, this study calls for Nepali filmmakers to adopt participatory and ethnographic approaches when encompassing indigenous communities, anchored critically on collaboration and experience-near principles. The potential researchers may carry out further study by examining the role that cinema play in intercultural dialogue, social justice, and policy advocacy amid socio-economic changes. Additionally, institutions may fund ethnographic film projects, build capacity, and facilitate international partnerships to ensure diverse cultures of Nepal are represented and understood by the world community with depth and vibrancy.

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