

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IN CREMATION PRACTICES IN PASHUPATI
AREA

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A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

This abstract of the dissertation of *Dal Bahadur Singtan* for the degree of *Master of Education in Environment Education and Sustainable Development* was presented on 12 January, 2014.

Title: Resistance to change in cremation practices in Pashupati area

Abstract Approved:

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This study has explored one of the main rituals of Hindus, which is death ritual. Since death ritual plays a vital role and bestows deep meaning on the Hindu system, I was interested in inquiring the views of my research participants about the death rites in today's dynamic society. Cremation of the dead bodies is a custom followed since ancient time by Hindus. Furthermore, this study has dealt with two major issues of cremation; one is people's perception about ongoing open-air cremation and another is their opinions on why electric crematorium which was supposed to be functional few years back is still not being completely installed.

Kurt Lewin's theory of change has guided this research as I found good grounds to compare the three stages of unfreeze-change-refreeze with the current scenario of possible cultural change in cremation practices; from conventional open-air to indoor electric cremation. I chose narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method, in order to explore the religious and cultural subjectivity. Observation and detailed interviews were done to collect data. During the interviews entire ethical

aspects such as informed consent and anonymity of participants were considered.

Data were transcribed, and presented with necessary discussion and interpretation.

The key findings are the changing perceptions of people; some of them tend to favor electric crematorium as it kept environment cleaner than current cremation way which kept pressure in forests, whereas those who are working for ongoing cremation felt insecure of their jobs and wanted alternative provision to be provided by Pasupati Area Development Trust in case of unemployment that may be caused by the installation of electric crematorium. Finally there were mixed responses regarding the possibility of shift in cremation from the ongoing open air to upcoming electric cremation. Resistive behavior of people due to cultural and religious attachment was found as the major problem for change. Whereas the need of time and consciousness of people regarding environmental pollution and degradation of aesthetic value of Pasupati area were found to be the driving forces for unfreezing of the system of ongoing cremation, stepping into the change stage and adopting the electric cremation as the refreezing step as suggested by the change theory of Lewin.

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12 January, 2014

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation has not been submitted for candidacy of any other degrees.

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of permanent collection of Kathmandu University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation for any academic purposes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On August 8, 2009, as any other weekend I was surfing some news websites to update myself about the current happenings. A headline in the BBC News caught my attention: ‘cremations go electric in Nepal’. While reading the news I was surprised to know that Pasupati Area Development Trust had tried to introduce the electric crematorium thirty years ago and was rejected by worshippers. After that day of reading the news, I have been following the updates of the electric crematorium. Also, I started tracing the history of cremation.

Most archaeologists believe that cremation was invented during the Stone Age, about 3000 BC (Cremation Association of North America [CANA], 2013). It was most likely first used in Europe or the Near East. It became the most common method of disposing dead bodies by 800 BC in Greece, and by 600 BC in Rome. However, other societies had other crematory methods like the use of tombs, vaults, shunning and open air exposure and burial. The varied practices and traditions of the last rituals imply that death rituals are directly influenced by the religion followed. Nepal, a landlocked South Asian country with a population of 26.49 million living in an area of 147,181 square km, has the majority of its people following Hinduism. 21,551,492 Nepalese, i.e., 81.3 percent of the total population are Hindus. In Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, there are 1,744,240 people recorded to be living with 1,395,538 of them following Hinduism, i.e., about 80 percent of the residents are Hindus (NPHC, 2011). So, majority of the people have faith in open air cremation of corpses.

In Hinduism, starting from birth of a child various ceremonies begin: name giving, rice feeding, sacred thread wearing, to *grihasthi* (i.e., settlement) to *antim sanskar* (i.e., final ritual). Hindu philosophy regards life and death a mere cycle. Hindus have faith in life after death. So, Hindus do not regard death as the end of life, instead regard it as a phase. Hindus believe in reincarnation, and the existence of soul and body. Once a person dies, cremation is regarded as the ideal way of freeing spirit from the dead body. Hindus regard body as five basic natural elements, namely *Agni* (fire), *Jal* (water), *Vayu* (air), *Prithvi* (earth) and *Akash* (space). So when one dies the combination is released into its original form. By purifying in fire the deceased body mixes in air and goes to space freeing the spirit. It is also believed that when people die, they will rest in heaven if their dead bodies were purified by fire. The ash and bone fragments are then released in the holy water bodies, usually river, which finally being mixed with water sediment as earthy materials.

The cremation is done by burning the corpse on a pyre at holy riversides. A pyre is a pile of wood upon which the deceased body is kept. The mound is lit on fire and it consumes the wood. Usually the eldest son lights on the male deceased body whereas the youngest son does so for the female. The fat bodied corpse need lesser wood to burn than for a lean and thin body because the soft tissues and fats contained in the body itself act as fuel. Additional accessories such as ghee, sandal wood, smaller wood, logs, and sugar are also use to burn the dead bodies effectively.

Statement of the Problem

Being very specific in Nepal, different methods of funeral processes can be observed. People of Muslim, Christian and Kirati religions, surname Giri and Kapali community follow burial process whereas peoples of Himalayan range such as Mustang and Manang feed the deceased bodies to vulture, a predator bird. However, I

became concerned about the ongoing cremation as a valued death ritual that contributes to the environmental pollutions, mainly air and water pollutions. If any visitor treads around Pasupati *Aryaghat*, sights of corpses being cremated on flat circular plateau on the bank of Bagmati River will usually be noticed. Also, despite the installation of modern electric crematorium in Pasupati *Aryaghat*, it has not been functional. Are people more attached to their religious faith than an eco-friendly procedure of cremation?

I came across a news item 'UNESCO concerned about giant crematorium at Pashupatinath' published in The Kathmandu Post, a national daily, on August 1, 2013. The article mentioned about the concern of UNESCO authorities over the construction of two storied complex having three furnaces and a tall chimney for a electric cremation in the premises of Pasupatinath, a holy site of Hindus and one of the UNESCO's world heritage sites. UNESCO, a cultural body of United Nations that had declared Pasupatinath temple complex as one of the world heritage sites in 1979, claimed the construction to be an eyesore.

However, another news item published on August 22 in The Himalayan Times, another national daily, reported that Pasupati Area Development Trust submitted a 'heritage impact assessment' to UNESCO and planned to complete the electric crematorium in next five months. Moreover, on October 8, 2013, Dipendra Bista published an article on the Kantipur daily criticizing Pasupati Area Development Trust for delaying in the completion of electrical crematorium. Dr. Govinda Tandon, member secretary of the Trust blamed the contractor for negligence in completing the work (Bista, 2013). Three electric machines for cremation will be installed by Endowment Engineering, an Indian company based on the international bidding announcement. The announcement was made according to Public

Procurement Act 2007 of Government of Nepal. Bista (2013) focused on the completion and operation of the crematorium so that cremation would be economical as well as less time consuming, and environmental pollution would also decline.

Then a series of questions flooded in my mind. It took three decades for Pasupati Area Development Trust to lay the foundation stone for the giant electric crematorium, how long would it take now to settle down ethical and religious controversies of the crematorium and bring it into effect? Will the crematorium be completely installed by the new deadline set up by Pasupati Area Development Trust? Or the installation would be a myth? Will UNESCO approve the heritage impact assessment that was produced as a part of formality later after UNESCO's serious concerns were made public?

The population of Kathmandu is highly dominated by Hindus and Buddhists i.e., where the traditional pyre system is the common process of disposing the dead bodies. This traditional process of cremation can emit the deleterious pollutants in the environment and thus this issue needs to be addressed properly. Meanwhile, the greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matters emitted into the environment are the triggering factors of climate change. Also, the consumption of wood that is essential for this process may lead to deforestation. To overcome many of these problems as well as to save time, electric crematorium may prove to be helpful.

However, environment is not the only aspect people are attached with. Faith on the supreme power, customs and rituals that one has been following since birth are not easy attachments to be replaced by modernization. Cremation is attached with cultural sensitiveness (Pandey, 2013). If people did not have any opposition to adopt the change of electric cremation over conventional cremation, Nepal would have gone

for electric cremations two or three decades back. So, despite promising environment friendly facets of electric crematorium, why is it taking a lot of time to be materialized?

Research Questions

With so many queries related to the conventional cremations and installment of electric crematorium, I tried to narrow down the queries. Thus, I designed two research questions for my dissertation.

1. How do the people perceive the ongoing cremation practices in Pasupati?
2. Why could the electric crematorium not be materialized?
3. How can people be encouraged to shift from ongoing cremation practice to electric cremation?

Significance of the Study

Electric crematorium in Pasupati area is the first crematorium of its kind in Nepal. A project that had been rejected by Hindus 30 years ago is being launched. The crematorium has been installed with a lot of pulls and pushes. Not only Hindus who have faith in the conventional cremation seem to be disappointed but, UNESCO also expressed its concern for building a giant crematorium in one of the world heritage sites. In between the dilemma of either to follow the conventional cremation procedure or adopt the new electric cremation procedure, I saw a space where I could communicate with the followers of Hinduism, local people, relatives of the deceased ones, authority of Pasupati Area Development Trust, Bhramin and supporters who have been helping members of the deceased people in cremation through traditional Hindu rites. Furthermore, I also interpreted the challenges and opportunities of electric cremation in the capital city of Nepal.

Although debates and discussions have been going on regarding the electric cremation for a long time, my intervention in this sensitive issue is to bring the diaspora of various ideologies and opinions about cremation to a common ground.

Delimitations of the Study

The aim of my study was to find out the people's perceptions on the ongoing cremation practices of Hindus in the *ghats* of Pasupati area and challenges of using electric crematorium in near future in Tilganga, i.e. in Pasupati area. The study was done in Pashupati area as Pasupati Area Development Trust is installing a modern electric crematorium for the first time in Nepal. The questions were asked mostly to those who were living nearby Mausoleum, an authority associated with the Pashupati Area Development Trust. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalized.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I started my discussion with the motivation to choose an issue of conventional way of open air cremation and possibility of the adoption of electric cremation for my dissertation, moved to problem issues, designed three research questions that inquire the perceptions of people about the ongoing cremation process, reasons for the delay in materialization of the electric crematorium whose building is being constructed, possibilities of shift in cremation culture from open air to electric, dealt with the significance of the study and finally presented the delimitations of the study. Thus, this chapter provided an overview of the overall research conducted for this dissertation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is the major part of the study through which I want to support my study. I have tried to link this learning with previous learning. This chapter deals with the review of relevant literature related to peoples' perceptions of electric crematorium. It discusses the various studies carried out by various scholars including ongoing developments concerning the use of electric crematorium. The chapter also includes a conceptual framework of the study.

I have developed my ideas with the help of literature review. The main objective of literature review is to gain familiarity with subject matter, to get enough knowledge to develop conceptual framework, to validate the concepts, and to adopt appropriate research methods (Bryman, 2008).

Review of related literature creates a solid ground for the proposed research. Here in this section I reviewed four types of literatures related to my research area. First, I reviewed the concepts or themes related to the research area. Then I reviewed the theories related to the research, third, I reviewed the previous researches related to my study area, and finally I did policy review. I have therefore presented the literature review under four headings: 'thematic review', 'theoretical review', 'research review' and "policy review".

Thematic Review

In the thematic review, I have tried to explore the meaning of various themes related to my research area. Among them, some major aspects are discussed here.

The word cremation comes from the Latin word *cremo* which means "to burn"; it particularly refers to the burning of the dead bodies. Cremation is the fundamental funeral process of reducing dead human bodies to basic chemical compounds in the form of gases and bone fragments. An Italian, Professor Brunetti, first developed the modern cremation chamber in the 1870's (Crematorium.eu, 2013). The first crematoria in Europe were built in 1878 in Working, England and Gotha, Germany, the first in North America in 1876 by Dr. Francis Julius Le Moyne in Washington, Pennsylvania. This triggered a movement towards cremation in Europe and North America, which has continued to the present day.

In Hinduism the body is seen as a medium to carry the soul. The Bhagavad Gita quotes "Just as old clothes are cast off and new ones taken, the soul leaves the body after the death to take a new one". Thus, a corpse is not considered sacred as the soul has departed the body. Hence, the open-air cremation is regarded as a way of detaching the spirit to easily pass on to 'the other world' (i.e., a place where Hindus believe that everyone after dying goes). In Hinduism, cremation is referred to as *antim-samskara*, which literally means 'the last rites'. At the time of the cremation a Brahmin or priest enchants Hindu prayers in order to transcend the spirit into 'life after death' (Frost, 2013).

In the modern cremation process, the deceased body is cremated in a standard sized crematorium with the supply of efficient fuels (i.e., natural gas, propane, coal or electricity). A cremator furnace is capable of generating heat from 1,400 to 2,000°F (Goetting, 2012), where the deceased body is burnt. It has adjustable computerized control system that monitors the furnace during cremation for safe and legal use. Before cremation, all the possessions like jewelries and implanted pacemaker are removed to avoid explosion and damage to the cremator. The corpse is charged into

the refractory material lined retort as quickly as possible. Additionally, the corpse is fed through a motorized trolley. During the cremation process, a large part of the body organs and soft tissues are vaporized and oxidized due to heat and gases are discharged through the exhaust system. Depending upon the size and mass of the corpse, the cremation usually takes one and half hour to four hours (Goetting, 2012).

The final disposition depends on the personal wishes of the deceased as well as their cultural and religious beliefs. So, the obtained cremated remains can be kept in an urn, stored in a special memorial building, buried in the ground at any location or sprinkled on a special field, mountain, or in the water bodies. Some religions, such as Roman Catholicism, insist on either burying or entombing the remains. In the Orthodox Church tradition a dead is always buried (Rotar, 2013). Hinduism obliges the closest male relative (son, grandson, etc.) of the deceased to immerse the cremated remains in the holy river. In Japan and Taiwan, the remaining bone fragments are given to the family and are used in a burial ritual before final interment.

The deceased open pyre burning process certainly emits particulates, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury, hydrofluoric acid, organics, and volatile organic compounds into the ambient air. Air pollutants emitted from the cremation processes by combustion, incomplete combustion and the volatilization of the metals in the human body. Volatilization of metals or the deposition of metals onto soot, which is then emitted into the atmosphere, is responsible for the pollutants, mercury, cadmium, and lead. Thus, open pyre burning causes atmospheric heating by the emission of carbonaceous aerosols (Chakrabarty et al., 2013). The other environmental detrimental impacts are landscape and visual impacts, traffic noise and problems with solid waste management, bad odor. Besides, the solid waste and ash

can degrade the water quality of receiving water bodies if disposed directly into them.

Theoretical Review

Theory provides a backbone for any research. Since my research deals with the premature phase of change from conventional cremation towards electric cremation, theories of change initiated by Kurt Lewin (1951), and extended by other scholars like Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958), Edgar Schein, Prochaska and DiClemente (as cited in Wirth, 2004) seemed to be relevant to me. Although scholars like Lippitt, Watson, and Westley developed a seven-step theory that focuses on the role and responsibility of the change agent than on the evolution of the change itself, and Prochaska and DiClemente found a series of stages such as precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance through which people pass during a change. However, Lewin's theory of change, despite being the earliest, sounded to be rational and goal oriented (Kritsonis, 2004-2005) to me.

Lewin's Theory of Change

Lewin's three staged theory of change, i.e., unfreeze-change-refreeze (Wirth, 2004) helps me to draw a roadmap for meeting my purpose to intervene in the changing scenario of the concept of cremation with the introduction of electric crematorium at the heart of the capital city, and inside the premise of Pasupati area; a sacred place for Hindus. The electric crematorium was proposed to be installed three decades back but Pasupati Area Development Trust failed to do so due to extensive criticism from public. Does this indicate the 'unfreezing' process or the motivational portion of change was weaker? So the circumstances compelled the Trust to take a long period for unfreezing. However, the idea of electric crematorium is eventually engulfing the resistance over 'unfreeze' procedure, and eventually moving towards

‘change’. So, if we walk around Pasupati area we could see a giant building erected next to the *aryaghat* where families of deceased ones conduct cremations and other death rites conventionally. Is the building, despite being criticized by UNESCO for causing disturbance to aestheticism of the world heritage site, a symbol of ‘change’? or a huge attempt of change?

At times, many changes demand sacrifice, may be this conceptual change of cremation paradigm from conventional to electric also demands sacrifice from people. Sacrifice of giving up the conventional way of cremating, i.e., use of open-air cremation. For Hindus, open-air cremation has been an auspicious ritual to release soul from the dead body. So, this culture of outdoor cremation that has been followed for more than 4,000 years (Taylor, 2009) may not be shifted towards indoor electric cremation overnight.

Pasupati Area Development Trust submitted ‘heritage impact assessment’ to UNESCO in response to the UN’s cultural body’s serious concerns, however, has the Trust done any assessment to target user groups of electric crematorium? Or, what exercises has the trust done to ease the process of change, and eventually for the process of ‘refreezing’ that is essential for any change to occur successfully? Thus, Lewin’s theory of change is very much convincing to guide my entire research with its rationality.

Research Review

The key findings of a dissertation published by Cecelia Danna Collier for her doctorate degree at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia in 2007 were that fifty percent of the Americans choose cremation in states and national surveys. Although the study is carried out in the world where increasing individualism, decreasing social ties between living and dead, personalization of memorialization, increasing

secularization and postmodernism (Collier, 2007) are the major causes leading to electric cremation, the case might be different in Eastern part of the world where life and death are regarded as part of a cycle, social ties are intimate between living and dead; evidences of these ties are the family strictly mourning for the deceased one for a year while the sons (nowadays even daughters) mourn as *kriya putris* for upto thirteen days.

The burning of fossil fuels and residential biofuels is regarded as the dominant emitter of light absorbing black carbon aerosols over South Asia by earlier studies. A study done by Chakrabarty et al. (2013) measured the emissions from open-air burning of funeral pyres, a deep-rooted and widely prevalent custom in South Asian region. They found that large amounts (i.e., approximately 98% by mass) of light-absorbing organic carbon aerosols, optically defined as brown carbon, are emitted per kilogram of feedstock burned. The emitted Organic Carbon contributes an average 40% to the smoke particulate matter absorption of the visible solar radiation. They calculated that burning funeral pyres in South Asia contributed in emission of light absorbing Organic Carbon. Their findings highlighted the importance of considering cultural burning practices as aerosol sources in emission records and Brown Carbon aerosols in climate models, as well as the development of mitigation strategies (Chakrabarty et al., 2013). Thus this study clarifies that burning funeral pyres in our region near Hindu temples not only creates air pollution but also emits gases like organic carbon and brown carbon which absorb light and contribute to global warming. Also, in order to mitigate the pollution, they recommended replacing wooden pyres by viable alternative and eco-friendly pyres.

Around the world electric cremation is being popular. According to Cremation MSU Extension Montguide 2002 of the Montana State University, in Montana, USA,

cremation acceptance increased by 54.89% of the population. Out of total 8,426 deaths 4,625 were cremated. United Kingdom death and statistics shows that the number of cremation has increased considerably. In 1885 cremation was only 0.000502 percentages of total deaths. But in the year 2000 A.D., 71.51% of the total dead bodies were cremated and the data increased to 71.87 % in the year 2002 (Goetting, 2012).

Policy Review

Regarding the legal measures, unlike most other countries, Nepal does not have a separate Act designated to manage crematory emitted air quality. However, the Environmental Protection Act and Regulations (1997) has some provisions related to pollution control. Environment Protection Act (1996) and Regulations (1997) were formulated to reduce the impacts on the environment and to ensure the proper use of natural resources for environmental conservation. The act is the first attempt by the government to deal especially with environmental issues. The act and regulations specify projects for which EIA and IEE are necessary and also specify the procedures to be followed for these activities. The EPA/ EPR also provided a framework for environmental assessment such IEE or EIA. Can the acts make pollution a punishable offence and empower the government to provide additional to encourage any enterprise, activity, technology, or process that will have positive environmental impacts? Sub article 7.1 of EPA prohibits haphazard waste disposal in the environment which will have an adverse impact on both civic health and environment.

Waste Water Management Policy draft 2006 is probably the first national-level response to the environmental and public health impacts of wastewater. It recognizes the need to improve compliance with standards, to improve coordination among various stakeholder agencies, and to foster public-private partnership;

proposes separate sewerage for storm and sanitary sewage; and aims to improve quality of water bodies. Water Resources' Strategy, National Water Plan (2005) advocates additional water supply and sanitation coverage and improving the level of services.

National Water Supply Sector Policy (1998) aims to integrate water supply and sanitation as well as to reduce the incidence of water-related diseases. Similarly, Clause 9 of Town Development Act (1988) empowers the town development committee to regulate, control, or prohibit any act which has an adverse effect on public health or the aesthetic of the town, or in any way pollutes the environment. It contains penalty provision in the form of fines for the violation of the act.

The Tenth Five-year Plan (2002-2007) identifies solid-waste management as a crucial environmental issue in the urban areas of Nepal. The final disposal site for the solid waste is given importance. The tenth plan also proposes the monitoring of air, solid waste, and water quality to reduce hazards to human health.

Solid Waste Management and Resource Mobilization Act/ Rules (1987) and National Solid Waste Management Policy (1996) are formulated to make the solid-waste management system simple and effective, minimize its adverse impacts on the environment and public health, mobilize it as a resource and privatize its management.

Industrial Enterprises Act/Rules (1992) categorizes industries in relation to their impact on public health and the environment. It empowers the government to issue directives to industries to prevent and mitigate environmental pollution. The act also provides tax relief on investments in pollution control.

The Environmental Division of Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MOEST) is responsible for drafting the environmental standards,

approving EIA reports, conducting environmental awareness programs and initiating industrial pollution prevention demonstration projects. The division has formulated a set of Generic Effluent Standards and nine sectors specific standards to control water pollution and recently it has also formulated draft emission standards for brick kilns.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have shared the literature I reviewed to understand the grounds of my research. I did literature review under four foundations; thematic, theoretical, past research, and policy. I chose three major themes; one is open-air cremation as an important death ritual of Hindus, second was environmental pollution caused by the death ritual in Pasupati area, and the final theme was the introduction of eco-friendly electric crematorium in Pasupati area. To provide a theoretical backbone I chose Lewin's theory of change that deals with unfreeze of a culture for and change, the change that takes place after the people are convinced and refreeze of new cultural values. I reviewed past research papers in order to get more idea of my research subject. Also policy review helped me understand that the government of Nepal is committed in preventing the pollution of air and water, and deforestation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with the research paradigm. Then it presents the philosophical considerations highlighting its ontology, epistemology, and axiology. It also includes the research methodology, definition ethnography, research participants, data collection tools, data collection process and data analysis, and quality standard. Furthermore, to make my research trustworthy (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) I have considered various indicators like deep immersion, prolonged engagement in the research field and member checking. The last section touches the ethical considerations and elaborates the conceptual framework designed for this study.

Research Paradigm

Paradigm is a conceptual framework which reflects the researcher's belief and the object of the research within a particular discipline. There are mainly four types of paradigms. They are: positivism, post-positivism, interpretive and critical. According to the nature of my research it is more exploratory and interpretive in nature. It believes in subjective reality rather than objective one.

Philosophical Considerations

Here, I have discussed the ontological, epistemological and axiological meanings in my research. These philosophies helped me understand the existence of knowledge, ways in which the knowledge exists and the values embedded in the cultural as well as religious knowledge of cremation.

Ontological Assumptions

The word “ontology” is derived from the Greek word “ontos” which means “exists”. So, as the meaning in philosophy it is the ‘theory of existence’. It is the body of knowledge describing some domain, typically general sense knowledge domain. It is the study of being or existence and forms of the basic subject matter of the metaphysics. So far as my study is concerned, I believe in getting multiple realities (various perceptions) on electric crematorium. Since humans are different by nature, they perceive and internalize the knowledge differently and they interpret it based upon their custom and beliefs.

As far as my study is concerned, I believe that there exists no single truth since truth is contextually determined. As my participants were from different walks of life and understood the world from their own footage, there would be chances for different perspectives and understanding about the same phenomenon. Moreover, the notion of cremation practices and people’s resistance about the use of electric cremation are such constructs that are natural to be understood differently by different participants. Therefore, the ontology of this study was based on multiple realities.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is the study and theory of knowledge in philosophy; it is therefore related with the study of knowing. In the case of my study, I believe that the knowledge about electric crematorium is well scattered among my research participants within their experiences and the purpose of this study is to organize the knowledge. As my study was to understand the resisting elements that prevent the use of electric cremation, I focused on understanding the inherent factors in it. Moreover, I needed to believe in what people said. And different people meant it differently.

Thus, every voice was valid for me. Therefore, the epistemology of this study was subjective and constructivist.

Axiological assumptions

Axiology is the theory of values, and refers to the value of people. People are different from one another from every aspect. Axiology deals with how people think and determine the value of different things. Peoples' behaviors are guided by their personal values. This study tried to put value on the research participants so that I can generate a real picture of peoples' perception about electric crematorium. As a study applying multiple realities and constructivist epistemology, there is the presence of me myself in this study. So, this study is influenced by my own and my participants' values. Thus this is a value laden study where the voices of my participants are valued and given high priority.

Narrative Research

My research is based on narrative inquiry of qualitative research design. In a narrative research, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences. As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person or a particular community gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. The phenomenology is an appropriate method to generate the information through the perception of the people.

Study Area

'Pasu' meaning animal and 'nath' meaning Lord, together the word 'Pasupatinath' signifies Lord of the Animals, the other name for Lord Mahadev or Neelkanth or Bholenath or Shiva or Mahesor or destroyer of evil. My study area is the

premises of the holy Pasupati temple area that is located in Gausala, Kathmandu. I particularly focused on the Tilganga, i.e., in Pasupati premises where the electric crematorium is being constructed and the Pasupatinath's southern as well as eastern areas where *ghats* are located along the holy river Bagmati.

Research Participants

My research study is guided by qualitative research. So, in this research purposeful sampling method was used for selecting the participants. Sample size in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Therefore, in my study I have conducted interviews with nine participants for gathering information regarding their perception towards using electric crematorium. The nine participants were chosen based on their profession, availability, and information richness.

Sources of Information

In this research both primary and secondary sources were used to generate the information. In order to collect the data to find out the answers to my research questions and meet the purpose of my research study, I used in-depth interview as my data collection technique. Interviews helped me to find out the existing practices, customs, beliefs, and rituals including their perceptions about the ongoing cremation and that about electric crematorium.

Data Collection Process

There are mainly two different sources of data. They are primary sources and secondary sources. According to the nature and demand of my research purpose and research questions, I used interview schedule and observation sheet as my data collection tools.

Observation

I made several exploratory visits around Pasupati area for observation. My key site of observation was the *ghat* where deceased ones were cremated. A couple of times, I closely observed the entire cremation process. Each process took about three and half hours. I also observed the expression of worshippers and devotees when they came to *ghat* to worship the river Bagmati, and simultaneously cremations were taking place in the plateaus next to the *ghats*. I have kept some of the relevant pictures that I took during the observation in Annex II. The pictures do speak a lot about the ongoing process of cremation.

Interview

I interviewed nine major research participants. For the first time, I met them at the Pasupati area while doing the observation. Moreover, I made telephone conversations whenever I felt confusion while transcribing the earlier data obtained from them. The first interview with each participant lasted for about one hour, later the interviews were precise. In later communication, I was able to obtain additional information and their experiences that they missed to share in earlier interviews.

I designed probing questions in order to obtain the experiences and opinions of my research participants. The interview schedules were semi-structured. There were different interview schedules for each participant depending upon their profession. The probing questions are included in Annex I.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a systematic process of segmenting the data into meaningful units. The qualitative study has less number of participants than quantitative one but qualitative data give detailed and deep information than the quantitative data. So, data analysis is a process of dividing the data into different meaningful parts.

Data analysis is done only after collecting the data. So, first, I transcribed the interview data. Then, I coded my participants. After that, I read the interview transcripts so that I could get the real themes. Then, I engaged myself for several times in analyzing, discussing and interpreting the information according to the themes to derive the findings and the conclusions under the continuous guidance of my dissertation supervisor.

Quality Standards

I followed the following techniques in order to prove the quality standards in my research so that it could be trustworthy.

Trustworthiness

In order to make my study trustworthy, I devoted myself in consideration of deep immersion, prolonged engagement, and member checking. In order to maintain trustworthiness of my research while considering the three aspects I have cleared my position as a researcher and engaged myself in the field for long period with dedication. Also, the reason behind prolonged engagement was to member check. I repeatedly met with my participants. Also, apart from having a clear picture of myself as a researcher, I had a clear picture of my participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007); I wanted opinions of locals, authorities of Pasupati Area Development Trust, Brahmins who are engaged professionally in the ongoing cremation, relatives who attended funerals and social activists who were dedicatedly engaged in conservation of Pasupati area, and I kept myself updated regarding the situations around my research area.

Deep Immersion

I would like to say that the study is like a son of mine. I already had a keen interest and wanted to be involved in it with complete care. So, I have immersed into

this research with my heart and dedication. I kept being updated with the news related to the cremation processes in Pasupati and especially news related to the completion of electric crematorium. To have a wider view and firsthand experience, I joined the Clean Bagmati Campaign that is organized every Saturday for three times. I spoke with other participants of the campaign, too.

Prolonged Engagement

As my study was about a very sensitive ritual of Hindu system, getting the information from the participants was a tough task. For the purpose of getting the information, I needed to engage in the field with the participants rigorously. It was not possible in a single go. I did engage and interact with the participants taking a long time. It took me more than a couple of months only to visit and revisit the study site and find their time and mood to interact on the issue. This engagement enabled me to come up with the live stories of my participants.

Member Checks

I met and talked with the participants for more than single time in order to gather additional information, thick descriptions of their experiences or in case they wanted to change or add anything related to earlier interview questions. My intension was to bring out the experiences of my participants regarding the ongoing cremation and opinions about the electric crematorium.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics refers to moral guidelines or principles that have to be followed by the researchers when they go in the field to collect data. So, ethical guidelines play a very important role while conducting any research because they help to guide the researcher by establishing boundaries about what to do, how to do and what not to do

when the researchers go in the field to collect data. Thus, as a researcher I took permission before interviewing, and recording the interview.

In order to make my study authentic, I concentrated on the ethics of care, ethics of empowerment and respect of self as well as others. Care is a precondition to have any kind of success. In the case of investigation, a proper care is a must otherwise it may lose its' trustworthiness. I conducted my interview with great care so that it would not make disturbance to my research participants and in my observation without care I might drop out the real information. So, I became careful in every step of my study.

I believe in the ethics of empowerment. I became respectful to my participants. I provided a open floor so that they became very much willing to open their argument which could give me a better feedback for my research.

I was well conscious about self-respect as well as the respect of others. As I had a keen interest in my topic, I studied many articles, and related books. So I was well known about my task. Therefore, I tried not to influence the participants with my predominant idea.

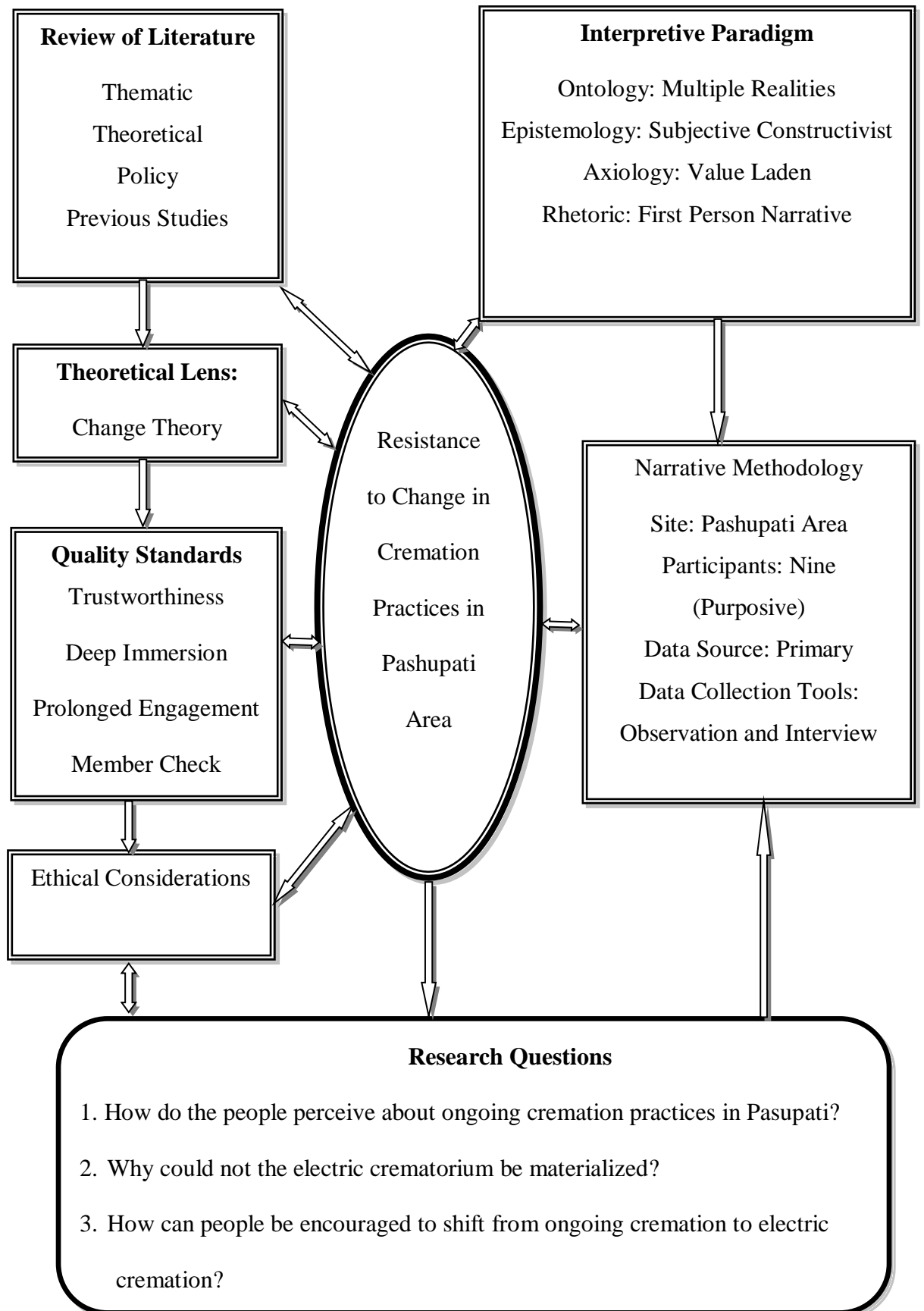
Regarding my own research, I followed the established ethical codes. I informed each research participant about my research objectives. I followed informed consent by taking permission before recording their interviews on my recording device. I did not force them to answer any question if they felt difficult or uneasy. I did not write either their real names or their imaginary names in my research paper.

Conceptual Framework

In order to make my research method clear and understandable I designed a conceptual framework. The framework is a blueprint of my research study. I kept my research title at the centre. On the top left I kept my literature review which was done

under four themes. On the top right I placed my research paradigm i.e., interpretive together with ontological, epistemological, axiological and rhetorical assumptions. Then I placed my theoretical lens i.e., theory of change by Lewin. Below it I have mentioned my quality standards. On the right I presented the details of the research method which are: narrative methodology, research site, number of participants, etc... Finally at the bottom of the framework I have mentioned the three research questions based on which I have conducted the entire research. My chart on the conceptual framework is in next page.

Conceptual Framework



Chapter Summary

This chapter dealt with the methodological aspects of my research. I began with the philosophical considerations guided by ontology, epistemology, and axiology and research paradigm. It also included the research methodology, definition of qualitative research, research participants, data collection tools, quality standard, and data collection process and data analysis. The next section touched on ethical considerations. Finally I have presented the conceptual framework for my research. The framework worked like a map for me to explore every area of my study. The conceptual framework included my research topic, theoretical lens through which I tried to seek insights over my three research questions based on interpretive paradigm and used narrative methodology to collect and interpret the data.

CHAPTER IV

PERCEPTIONS ON CONVENTIONAL PRACTICES

In the earlier chapters I discussed the issues linked with cremations, review of literature that would provide multidimensional guidance including Lewin's theory of change which has helped me from the first step to the last step of my research journey, and finally methodological aspects of systematically and ethically leading this research to its destination. I also presented my conceptual framework which provided a guideline to me in my entire research work. In this chapter, I share, and discuss the perceptions of my research participants regarding the ongoing process of cremation in the Pasupati *ghats*. While doing so, this chapter ultimately answers my first research question that attempts to find out the perceptions of people regarding the ongoing cremation.

A Sensitive Issue

A sensitive issue! These words were buzzing on my ears, so instead of approaching somebody for a conversation, I stood across the Bagmati river gazing at the magnificent dwelling of the savior of Hindus, the destructor of evils; Lord Mahadev! I did not want to return with some short notes about what I observed unlike other days. I wanted interviews not mere observation details that day, which was December 5th, 2013.

Across the holy Bagmati, in between the *ghats* are flat plateaus where open-air cremations are done every day. On one side of the bridge, just beneath the major temple complex of Pasupatinath, there is a V.I.P. plateau, mostly unused; it is designated for cremation of high profile people such as the then royals and key

leaders, the other plateaus that are on the other side of the bridge are in series and are used by the commons.

One of the foreigners standing next to me took several shots of cremation that was taking place in one of the plateaus for common people, i.e., *Bhasmeshor Ghat*. Slowly holding down black Cannon camera mounted by a long cylindrical lens, he turned to me, gave a quick gesture of ‘Namaste’ and said, “Very interesting!” I returned him a made-up smile. I did not want to comment.

Maybe he had the right to say so, he paid the entrance fee. But, I could not convince myself that way, would these foreigners who stretched their body so keenly while taking pictures of open-air cremations from across the river, and some even don’t mind going too close to the cremation plateau unless somebody signaled him/her not to come too close, allow others to take pictures with enthusiasm during the funeral of a deceased person in their country? Again, this argument did not convince me either. “Hindus in Nepal chose open-air cremation by the banks of rivers. Since the cremations take place in public area, they do not have any offense at strangers on looking or taking pictures, unless they feel their personal territory is being encroached. So, what problem is there when tourists take pictures?” I took a long breath, I thought it was time I spoke with some locals.

A Rendezvous With Social Activist

Rishi, a local in his late 40s, is the twelfth generation living near Pasupati area. Since last three decades he has been a social activist. Ideologically he believes in B.P. Koirala’s visions and philosophies.

When I inquired him about his opinions regarding the ongoing cremations in Pasupatinath, his response was, “Mecca for Muslims, Jerusalem for Christians, Lumbini for Buddhist and Pasupatinath for Hindus. Just like the followers of every

religion have their own holy place, Pasupatinath is one of the most sacred places for the Hindus. Pasupatinath is not only a temple where Lord Shiva dwells upon, it has been providing warm pilgrimage for Hindu devotees since ancient time. Together with the Hindu civilization, the culture of cremating dead ones on river banks developed and is being followed as a significant ritual till date. So, approximately fifty cremations that take place every day in the Pasupati *ghats* is a tribute given to the beloved dead ones by their respective families and relatives. Also Pasupati area provides homage for people who believe in burial of their deceased ones.”

He seemed to be pretty aware of how Hindus of different sects and belonging to different castes; Brahmins, Kshetriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras, have their own death rituals. Not every Hindu cremates the dead body of a relative in the same way. So, materials required for cremations would also differ according to the tradition and caste of the people. Regarding the time period taken to complete a cremation, according to him it depended upon situations. Generally if a professional Brahmin does the cremation he would not take more than two to two and half hours. However, if *Guthiyars* or relatives of the deceased ones perform the cremation on their own following the entire traditional procedures, then it would take three to three and half hours to complete a cremation.

A Relative's Response

Chandra (32), a businessman by profession and resident of Chabahil, an adjoining place to Gausala where Pasupati area is located, has seven members in his family. He had come to the Pasupati *ghat* in a funeral procession of his aunt who expired the previous night due to old age. He seemed to be pretty aware about the traditional cremation procedure. According to him, in his culture, the corpse is brought to *ghat*, water of river Bagmati is touched on the feet of the corpse, wood

pyre is prepared, then, the corpse is revolved three rounds around the wood pyre before placing it on the pyre. The corpse is worshiped by the paste of sandalwood. The eldest son offers water from the holy river in the mouth of the corpse. In absence of the eldest son, other sons do it. If the deceased person does not have any son then a nearby relative need to perform the entire procedure. However, only those relatives are allowed whose parents have already expired. Relatives having living parents should not be offering the final ritual to the corpse. According to him, it cost around seven thousand rupees to complete his aunt's cremation. Materials used in his aunt's cremation were *pitambar*, white cloth called *katro*, *jau*, *til*, *kush*, sandal, red color, etc...other materials were suggested by the Brahmin and they were available in the shop nearby.

His perceptions about the ongoing cremation were bit critical. His first disappointment was about mismanagement of *ghat* officials due to which people face inconvenience during the cremation. Due to the inefficiency the firewood is not properly burnt. From environmental point of view, the ongoing cremation is not healthy. This way, improper ways of cremation has led to pollution. He suggested the management of *ghats* to make cremation systematic and bring provisions to reduce spreading of foul smell. People living nearby feel disturbed. So, in his view, the process of cremation has to be changed. He regarded electric crematorium to be a better alternative as it would not spread foul smell, dust and smoke during the cremation of a corpse.

He wished the electric crematorium in Pasupati area be functional as soon as possible. He gave an example that had there been electric cremation, other relatives and he would not have to suffer the suffocation of both smoke and foul smell while waiting for three hours long cremation process of his dead aunt. Also he added that

for at least four to five hours he had to shut down his shop. If there had been electric crematorium, within an hour entire cremation would have been over and he could go back to his shop to run his business.

Unexpressed Disappointment

Rishi told me about the disappointments of devotees and pilgrims who come to pay hermitage and worship in the Pasupatinath temple due to the pollution in Bagmati river and cremations taking place by the river's bank. He regarded open-air cremation to be the main cause of Bagmati's pollution and foul smell in the surrounding of Pasupatinath. The wood pyres burning during cremation contribute to air pollution. After the corpse is cremated, the remnant ash and wood are dropped into the Bagmati river, this heavily pollutes the water. He claimed that the cremations that take place along the temple area have affected the devotees to come to worship.

During my observations, I noticed devotees climbing down the stairs to worship the holy river. However, they shirk their nose trying to narrow their nostrils due to the foul smell and try to ignore the cremations taking place on the plateaus on Bagmati's bank. Once an old Hindu woman with her worshipping plate came to the *ghat* of Bagmati river. She worshipped the river, closed her eyes and made her prayers. As she was about to lift a handful of water with her cup shaped hand, a Brahmin who seemed to complete a cremation dropped *austu* into the river which splashed the river water over the old lady, and the dust over her body. Disgusting! Though she did not say anything to the Brahmin, who seemed less bothered about what he had just done, she gave him a brief stare. She sprinkled Bagmati water over her head, filled her *lota* with the water and climbed up the stairs towards the temple in her semi-wet clothes. (Fieldnote, 2013)

Similarly, Rishi, a participant, also shared his views this way,

“Although, local initiatives are taken to keep Bagmati clean, however we are unable to have a clean Bagmati. Regarding the polluted Bagmati, devotees deeply express their disappointment and some even complain about the pollution. Time and again, we hear people expressing their concerns about the environmental pollution caused by open-air cremations. It is time we modified the conventional way of cremating corpse in wood pyres.” (Interview, 2013)

Memories of Bagmati

“Namaste”

“Namaste”

“Can you please give me your brief introduction?”

“Sure. I was born here and I am 70 years old.”

“And your name, please?” “My name is Bam Bahadur.”

“Do you live nearby?” “Yes.”

“What is this place called?”

“It’s Sinamangal.”

“As a 70 years old man, how is your participation in Bagmati Cleanness’s Campaign?”

“Well, in the past days, Bagmati was clean and there were few houses around. At our time we even used to bath and wash our clothes in Bagmati. It used to be fun!”

“Here, in Bagmati?”

“Yes. Also till 2044/45 B.S., We used to drink the water of Bagmati.”

“Really? If it was 2044/45 B.S, It must be no more than 25/26 years ago!”

Bam Bahadur laughed and said,

“It is. Only after then, the city became denser and populated. And because of that the latrine was mixed. However it is the responsibility of the government to manage it as we common people do not have the resources or expertise to do so.”

“It has been around 35 weeks since the campaign started. How many of its cleanness programs have you participated in? May be half or more?”

“Well, we participate in the programs whenever we can and will continue as long as it is organized.”

“So you participated from the beginning?”

“Yes, we did. Due to the dense settlements there is production of more and more waste materials which is not being properly managed.”

“In your opinion, how clean is the river now than before?”

“It has improved tremendously for a year or two. And if the improvement continues on with the management of the sewage side by side of the river, I believe there is high probability of the river returning to its original condition.”

“Pashupati Aryaghat near this place, is it not?”

“Yes, it is.”

“What I would like to ask is whether the death ceremony performed pollutes the river, too?”

“Yes, it does. It is because there are 30 to 40 such ceremonies held daily and the woods used are not of same type i.e. some burn completely some don't. So, all don't burn to ashes. This pollutes the river. Also the river is small and doesn't have the capability to take them away. There are not many sources and any plans to increase the flow of the river. However, Sundarijal is one very suitable source for human beings after undergoing purification process.”

“You have a long experience about the ceremonies held. In comparison to the burning of corpses before and now, what is the difference you notice?”

“I have heard there’s availability of an electronic machine. After it is built, there will be significant improvement.”

“So, you know this machine is used to burn corpse?”

“Yes, I do.”

“However there must be some good side of burning the corpses traditionally?”

“There must be where the flow of water is immense as the unburnt woods are taken away. But the flow of the water here is small and the waste materials are not being disposed elsewhere. The water is used despite the small flow and after use is thrown back in buckets. The pieces of wood used in burning of corpses are thrown too.”

(Interview, 2014)

The above conversation was done with a local from Sinamangal, area near Pasupati. He remembered his childhood days when people used to drink water from Bagmati and expressed bitterness as the river was gravely polluted. According to him, Bagmati lacked the current to flow the unburnt wood thrown into the river after burning the corpse in the wood pyre.

Deforestation for Wood Pyres

Stressing on the need of gradual change in the way cremations are done, Rishi gave a simple example of open-air cremations leading towards deforestation apart from pollution. According to him, to prepare a wood pyre for an average sized corpse, approximately 250 kilogram of wood is required, for a huge corpse, it might take 500 kilogram of wood. So simply when 250 kilogram wood in average per corpse is multiplied with average 50 corpses per day, then 12,500 kilogram of wood is consumed every day. “How much wood is consumed in a year?” he asked me.

His answer to my question of who supplies the woods for pyres was, “The wood is supplied by Timber Cooperation Nepal in a subsidized rate. Only small bunch of woods are supplied by individuals. But the 250 to 300 kg wood required for preparing the pyre for cremation is majorly supplied by Timber Cooperation Nepal. Since the rate of wood for cremation is subsidized by the Cooperation, it might have encouraged more corpses to come. Hence, deforestation has accelerated more and more. Nevertheless, at times, some corpses are returned due to shortage of woods.” I remembered an interview of the treasurer of Pasupati Area Development Trust published on February 2011 in The Himalayan Times sharing the challenges brought by wood shortage in performing cremations in Pasupati *ghat* and other religious activities including firewood for sages during *Shiva Ratri*, the greatest religious festival of Hindus following Shaivism, i.e., Lord Shiva.

“With the increasing population of Kathmandu valley, and easy access of road and air transport, people can afford to bring their deceased relatives for cremation in Pasupati area. This race of cremating one's expired relative by the holiest river in Nepal has increased the demand of woods for pyres. The increasing demand of woods keeps high pressure on our forests. This has caused massive deforestation. Due to the excessive demand of woods for cremation, now the supply has become insufficient. Thus, in order to prevent deforestation and environmental pollution, a strong alternative has to be chosen. Electric crematorium can be the most effective alternative for conventional cremation that consumes tons of wood every year.” Rishi expressed his high concern towards the rapid deforestation done to supply woods for cremation in Pasupatinath.

Building a System

“Generally when a person dies, either in a hospital or at home or in an accident, a formal documentation such as death certificate is required to carry on any legal tasks. However, corpses that are brought for cremations in Pasupati *aryaghat* are cremated even in the absence of any legal evidence of death.” Rishi said replying my question on the requirement of any legal procedure during registration or application for cremation in Pasupati *ghat*.

“Two three times I have encountered people shutting down the cremation and taking away corpses that were already blazed on wood pyres.” Rishi with a funny smile in his face shared how awful and tensed the situation had been when few cremations were stopped due to disputes among relatives, and police case.

“All we need is to build a better system, where the relatives need to fill an application form for cremation of the deceased one and they need to produce a legal paper showing the cause of death or death verification by a medical doctor. This may sound to be bothersome, but it does help to maintain law and order, and track down information regarding cremations.” Rishi focused on building a systematic and legal procedure for cremation. According to him, if a person dies in a hospital during treatment or any other reason, but dies in the hospital, then a doctor’s declaration of death on written would work. Similar applies to a person dying after fatal accident. Also, if a person dies in a house, due to old age or disease, death certificate could be issued from the nearby local government authorities.

His idea of building a system sounded to be very rational to me. Currently the authorities who administer cremations do keep record of the number of cremations taking place. However, it would be more systematic and scientific to maintain legal

records. This could also avoid controversial issues like debates for corpse's claim, any illegal cremations, and simply help to maintain the demographic records.

Meeting a Brahmin

Ramesh (aged 50) known as *Ghatey*; a Brahmin who cremates corpse, is a permanent resident of Kavre. Since last 12 years he has been working in *Ghat Service Center*. He does not differentiate any job as superior or inferior. He believes in *karma*. Answering to my question of how he landed in choosing cremation as profession, he said that some of his friends worked in *Ghat Service Center* as Brahmins to cremate dead bodies. Since he had to find some work to feed his family, with his friends' suggestion he started working in the Pasupati *ghat*.

When I asked him about the nature of his job, he took a loud breath and replied, "This is a *ghat*, how many corpses would come today it is not confirmed. Someday I cremate two three corpses. Sometimes, one in three four days. We have to wait for our turn. So there is no certainty."

Steps of Cremation

According to Ramesh, first when a corpse is brought to the *ghat*, relatives need to register for cremation of the dead body in the *Ghat Service Center's* office. Full name of the deceased one, name of relatives, address, etc... are registered in the office. Then, they get a cheat. The cheat should be given to the wood store house. Based on the cheat, wood store provides the required quantity of wood. To transport the woods, we have workers here who take the woods from the store to the plateau. Relatives need to wait for their turn, once their turn comes, they need to bring the corpse to *Brahmanal*. Each caste has its own procedure of conducting ritual. Even *Newars* from the valley and *Newars* outside of the valley have different rituals.

Generally, if the corpse is in clothes, the clothes are taken off. The naked corpse is wrapped in white cloth. Then the corpse is covered with a yellow cloth. It is worshipped with *abir*, flowers and garlands. *Jal*, holy water that comes from Pasupatinath is fed to the corpse. Then, the corpse is placed on wood pyre. The head should face towards north. Since other materials are also required, we ask the relatives to buy from the nearby *Ghat Sewa* shop. The materials required are vegetable ghee, pieces of dried wood, and camphor. We light the flame and give it to the sons of the deceased one. Once they lit the fire on the pyre, we support to burn the pyre. After about three hours the corpse gets burnt fully. Once the fire work is completed, we clean the plateau and provide *chita pinda*, a cinerary urn and *austu* of the deceased one, to the family members of the cremated one.

Cultural Variations

“Among Kshetriyas and Bhramins, only sons serve the holy water on the corpse. But, among Newars, whoever relatives have come in funeral; daughters, uncles, aunt, nephews, cousins, brothers, sisters or any relative, everyone except sons has to feed the holy water from Pasupatinath. After feeding the holy water, the corpse is worshipped. A unique culture about them is they wrap a cloth worn by the deceased one, a small *sukul*; mattress made from hay, and a broomstick. The wrapped materials called *chwasal fali* in Newari language is first touched to the deceased one and then dropped to a nearby temple. Then sons feed holy water to the corpse and carry the corpse to the place on pyre. Unlike others, the corpse is not placed with head facing towards north by Newars. Newars put the head of the corpse facing towards South.”

Ramesh, the Brahmin informed me about the ritual differences of various caste groups.

The wood pyre flaming process is the same as others. But, they do not keep *austu*, and flow it in *Ganga*. Once the corpse is completely burnt, they take out some coal, give it a structure of a human statue, and the sons worship it. After worshipping it, the son goes to take bath. Meanwhile, *palekhi*, beaten rice, leafy vegetable, etc...are hurled in fire to create a small blast. Similarly, ginger is kept in fire for a while and everyone in the funeral including the Brahmin needs to smell it. Then, the 'key touching' ceremony begins; a key is kept on the palm, water from Bagmati is poured on it and everyone touches the key; first to others, then to sons. After standing near the cremating fire until the pyres fully burnt, the relatives go to take a bath.

Ramesh emphasizes cultural variations of each caste and creed during cremation. According to him, Marwadis, mostly known as successful business people in the valley migrated from the Terai region and parts of India, have almost everything similar to the culture of Brahmins and Kshetriyas except one rite. During cremation, once the skull of the corpse breaks, they hang a small vase of brass filled with ghee on a bamboo stick and pour the ghee inside the skull. After pouring the ghee, the skull is broken more with the help of the bamboo stick.

According to him other castes like Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, Newars outside valley, Damais, Kamis, etc... have similar culture of cremation. Depending upon the caste system there are designated Brahmins. For example, Madhesis have their own Brahmin working in *Ghat Service Center*. They follow their own rituals.

Cremation Cost

I was curious about the working mechanism in the *ghat*. According to Ramesh, *Ghat Service Center* would charge Rs. 200 for registration of a corpse, Rs. 400 per kg wood, and Rs. 1200 per Brahmin for cremation. Other expenditure would be in purchasing ghee, sugar, dried wood pieces, flowers, garlands etc...Generally,

the minimum overall cost of cremation would be around Rs. 6,000 per corpse. Above Rs. 6,000 people could spend as much as they can. Ramesh reminded me of Rishi, the local whom I had interviewed earlier. According to Rishi, the minimum cost was about Rs. 4,400. *Guthi Sansthan*, a communal organization of Newars has taken the responsibility of cremating stray corpses. Rishi, being a social activist said that he was also involved in cremating abandoned corpses in Pasupati area. And, tentatively, it would cost around, Rs. 4000 to 5000.

“How much do you think it cost for the royal cremation or the cremation of Girija Prasad Koirala, the former prime minister of Nepal and leader of Nepali Congress?” Rishi asked me sarcastically. I did not have the answer, “They used only fine sandalwoods for preparing the pyre. A kilogram of fine sandalwood costs around 8 to 10 thousand rupees.” He gave me hints. Before I could calculate, he said loudly, “About three lakhs! Three lakhs or more just to prepare a wood pyre.”

Working Mechanism

Twenty seven Brahmins who work in the Pasupati *aryaghat* need to wait for their turn to cremate a dead body. Per cremation per Brahmin, the relatives of corpse pay Rs. 1,200, out of which 10 percent is deducted by *Ghat Service Center* and Rs. 1,080 is given to the respective Brahmin who performs the cremation. “If I missed my turn, I need to wait until the cycle revolves and my next turn comes,” said Ramesh with a brief laugh. The *Samiti* pays the Brahmins every week depending upon the number of cremations assisted by them.

When I inquired him about the time period to cremate a corpse, he said that it depended upon the nature of corpse and quality of wood in pyres. Some corpses that are huge or cold and frozen might take five or more hours whereas normal corpses

would take about three hours. If the corpse is light and fully dry woods are in pyre, then the cremation could be over by two and half hours.

Job (Dis) satisfaction

Till this date, Ramesh seems to be happy with his job. “Since I chose this profession, I do not hesitate cremating any corpse whether it be of Newar or Brahmin or Kshetriya or Matwali or Damai or Kami. I respect this profession,” said Ramesh. However, one thing was haunting him; that was job insecurity. He mentioned that there were Brahmins and other helpers who had been working more than three decades in the *ghat* even before he had joined, but neither the *Ghat Service Center* nor Pasupati Area Development Trust has any provision for them to support in their old age.

“The electric machines have come, it might be good for environment, but has anybody thought about us? We are about 75 workers here including Brahmins, helpers, and *Kriya putris*. If people started using the machines, we won’t have much work to do. Our work would decrease or maybe we would be jobless. We have been doing this tough profession without any complaints. During winter the weather is calm, wind is calm, but during *Chaitras* and *Baisakhs*, summer time, due to the blowing wind, it is very tough to cremate. Once I had my eyebrows badly burnt.” Ramesh said touching his eyebrows that were once burnt during cremation.

An Encounter with a Public Servant

Vishnu, in his late 50s, is an employee of Pasupati Area Development Trust. Since his co-workers suggested him to be a resourceful person for my study, I chose him as my research participant representing Pasupati Area Development Trust because the project of the electric crematorium is initiated by the Trust. Several of my attempts of interviewing him had been postponed due to his piling bureaucratic works

and certain unavoidable circumstances. Nevertheless, from the resource center of the Trust I had retrieved some key documents such as the trust's master plan for development of Pasupati area, and detailed construction plan of the electric crematorium building in Tilganga in my earlier visit that gave me additional idea of the Trust's vision to compensate for 90 ropanis of evacuated land, development of physical infrastructures such as road, drinking water, sanitation, electricity, communication, residential buildings, boundary walls, administrative building, library, conference hall, pilgrimage's lounge, parking lot, etc...including construction of electric crematorium.

One fine December morning, at around 7:30 am, we managed to meet each other for an interview. When I asked him how he was associated to his profession, he remembered his student life back in 1980s, when he, just like me became interested in Hindu death rituals for his thesis writing and did a study in Pasupati area.

Washing Away the Sins

According to Vishnu, in Hindu religion there are 16 major ceremonies beginning from birth to death. Death rite is the sixteenth and one of the most important rites. In Hinduism, death rite is basically divided into two types; burial and cremation. Burial is done if a child dies before any of his/her teeth appears whereas once the teeth appear, the deceased one is cremated. But, different sects of Hinduism have their own death rites. For example, *dashnavi sanyasi*, a sect of sages, bury the corpse no matter if it is of an infant or of an adult or an aged person. Nevertheless, generally Hindus follow cremation. Hindus believe that cremation done on *ghats*, mostly near the premises of holy temples by the river side, will wash away sins done by the deceased one in his/her entire life. The belief is also that holier the place, it would be easier to wash off the sins. So, due to this reason as well, Pasupati *aryghat*

receives a lot of corpses. Moreover, the population density of Kathmandu has also risen, causing more pressure on the *ghats* for cremation.

On the south of Pasupati temple, there is a famous *Bhasmesor ghat*, towards the East of the temple, there are Pasupati *aryaghats* by Bagmati where the number one *ghat* is used for cremation of national figures. Earlier, only royal cremations used to be administered there. The number two *ghat* was only used for cremations of Rana dynasty, after establishment of democracy in 2007 B.S., i.e., in 1950, it was made available for public cremations. Similarly in *Bhasmeswar ghat*, there were only two *ghats* earlier, now ten *ghats* are functional due to the increasing number of corpses brought to Pasupatinath every day.

Cremating a ‘Sidra’ to a Pile of Corpses

When asked about his opinion about the ongoing cremation process in the Pasupatinath premises, Vishnu put forward a serious concern, “There used to be days when no corpse was brought to Pasupati *ghats* for cremation for a week to ten days. Due to a belief that at least one cremation should be done every day in Pasupati *aryaghat*, dead fish called *sidra* was cremated on those days when no corpse was available for cremation. Now, at least 10-15 in minimum to 50-75 in maximum corpses are brought per day for cremation in the *ghats* here. Imagine, with the current cremation rate of corpse, Pasupatinath would turn into a huge *Samsanghat*; region where only dead bodies are brought, the holy river Bagmati will turn into a dead river where ashes and unburnt woods after cremation are dumped. Who would come to Pasupatinath for worshipping and visiting? It would no more be a temple where devotees would come for pilgrimage.” (Interview, 2013)

Saying this Vishnu sighed and expressed his deep concern on ruining of this holy temple; a heritage not only of Nepal but of the entire world, being ruined by

human race. In the name of washing away the sins after death, the corpses are committing additional sins by polluting the river, air and deforesting the woods, and turning the entire aesthetic, cultural, religious, archeological, historical and traditional values of Pasupatinath into mere ashes. Vishnu's comments made me think if we were cremating the value of Pasupatinath as a sacred place simultaneously with the corpses!

His words made more sense to me as I went through the statistical data provided to me by *Ghat Service Center*. The data were about how many corpses were cremated every month for the last four years. According to the data, three years ago 8,197 corpses, two years ago 8,529 corpses, last year 8,724 corpses and this year 4,329 corpses in six months were cremated in the *ghats*. These numbers also indicated the gradual increase in number of cremations in *ghats* of Pasupati area. In a session with Ramesh, the Brahmin working in the *ghat*, he had mentioned that they were being busier cremating corpses these recent years compared to a decade back when he had just joined the work.

Cultural Exploration

To my query if tourists visiting this world heritage site complain or express their concern regarding open-air cremation causing foul smell, air and water pollution, Vishnu's answer was quite astonishing. He said that it could be a general Nepali's interpretation about what foreigners might think. But, he has found foreigners enjoying the cremation. They get to witness a significant culture of the way Hindus perform the death rituals. To many of them, witnessing open air cremation is completely a new experience as they have never seen such cremation in their part of the world.

Mostly foreigners follow burial of corpse. It might take life time's earning to find a decent location for burial. Whereas, they seem to find open-air cremation completely different as after cremation of a corpse it would not require space for burial. So, unlike their culture where family members of deceased ones might become upset for not being able to afford a suitable land for burial, they find Hindu culture simple and effective. Also, they find our way of cremation cheap as well as fascinating. In their countries, they might have witnessed funeral procession of their close relatives and friends only. Here, the entire funeral process is done in public and any outsider can be onlooker without any offence.

Thus, in his views tourists regard witnessing open-air cremation as an opportunity rather a matter of disgust. I could not deny his way of interpretation. Once, in March 2011's issue of the Guardian, an international magazine, I had read an article entitled 'My father's Hindu funeral' by Carey (2013), an English writer. Her father Kim, born Hindu never practiced Hinduism, but the family decided to give him a proper cremation. The writer expressed her deep cultural interest during her father's cremation; i.e., including the minor details like praying the corpse, circling it five times, rubbing sandalwood's paste on the corpse's face, etc... Also, the images of tourists across the *ghat* trying to take their best shots by waiting with patience, taking multiple shots, time and again checking their cameras' screens for the quality of pictures they took, came vigorously in my mind. Maybe these foreigners who either bury the corpses or cremate in electric furnace find the open-air cremation fascinating. Thus, maybe Nepali takes open air cremation as pollution whereas foreigners regard it as an opportunity for cultural exploration.

Chapter Summary

Although all of the participants had a deep respect for the culture of open-air cremation, as this ritual is regarded as one of the symbolic rite being followed since ancient period together with Hindu civilization, majority of the participants expressed their concern towards environmental pollution, deforestation, high expenditure, and time consumption while continuing the tradition. So, most of them wanted some modification in the cremation procedure making it advanced, eco-friendly, economic and less time consuming. Hence, this sect of participants regarded electric crematorium as the best option to be introduced as soon as possible as an alternative to conventional open-air cremation. But, some participants, and people engaged in the ongoing cremation in the *ghats* did not have positive response towards the introduction of an electric crematorium. The reason of their attachment towards the ongoing cremation was because they were people who earned their bread by cremating dead bodies, building wood pyres, and collecting dead woods thrown in the Bagmati after cremation.

CHAPTER V

ELECTRIC CREMATORIUM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In the earlier chapter, I discussed people's perceptions about the ongoing cremation practices. Here, I present the discussion being based on my second research question; why is the electric crematorium not being materialized? Also based on the opinions, experiences and arguments of my participants, here I tried to put forward the opportunities and challenges of electric crematorium in my study area. Since the electric crematorium is the first one of its kind in Nepal, the gist can be inductively almost implied for the whole Nepal's case. This chapter answers my research question that tries to find out the causes of delay in materialization of the electric crematorium. I found cultural demarcation as one of the resisting forces for the shift in culture of cremation; i.e., from open-air cremation to electric cremation. However, the demand of time, pressure of corpses in the *ghats* and people's awareness regarding pollution caused by the ongoing cremation are the driving forces to overcome the resistance for change in the cremation culture.

Cultural Demarcation

On December 10th, 2013, I met Hari who had come to Pasupati to attend a funeral procession of his cousin brother. For him electric cremation did not hold much significance. The reason for him about electric crematorium not being materialized was lack of enthusiasm among people. Absence of enthusiasm among majority of the people who are Hindus was due to limitations of electric crematorium.

“With electric cremation *antim sanskar* meaning last ritual or *daha sanskar* meaning cremation by giving fire to wood pyre would be incomplete. According to

our Holy Scriptures, human has three stages, after the last stage that is death, *Krimi*, *Bit*, *Vasma*; either the corpse's fate would be eaten by insects or rotten or '*vasma*' meaning turned into ashes. The ash, also called *astu* obtained after traditional cremation has religious significance. It has to be flown into a holy river. Otherwise, the cycle of the human would be incomplete after death. Although in electric cremation the corpse is turned into ashes but will the *astu* be obtained? I doubt," said Hari.

When I further asked him about the significance of *astu*, he told me a story; *Long ago, a king named Sagar did 'aswamedh yagya' which is a sacred ritual done to please Gods and Goddess by sacrificing horse. Aswamedh yagya was performed by releasing a horse, whoever stopped and caught or rode the horse had to fight with the person, so until the horse returned back to the place of origin, the yagya had to be continued. After completing 99 yagyas successfully, one yagya remained for the king. The belief was that whoever did 100 aswamedh yagyas would be the King of heaven. So, as only one yagya was left for Sagar to be the King of Heaven. Indra, the rightful King of heaven was very worried and he was trying to stop Sagar from his mission. While performing the 100th yagya, Indra bothers the King..*

So, whenever king Sagar released a horse, Indra abducted the horse by disguising sometimes in the form of Brahmin, the sons of king Sagar defeated Indra and brought the horse back. In the 100th yagya, Indra abducted the horse and took the horse to Ganga Sagar and tied it to a tree next to sage Kapil, who is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Bishnu. Sixty thousand sons of king Sagar, who were born by his determination from heart, started looking for the horse. They found the horse tied in the hut of Kapil. They were

determined to kill the thief who stole their father's horse. They mistook Kapil for thief. As the sixty thousand princes were about to kill Kapil, they were burnt and turned into ash by Kapil's divine vision.

As neither the horse returned to yagya nor any of the sixty thousand sons of the king returned, so king Sagar's brother goes in search of the horse. He found the horse outside of Kapil's hut. When he briefed him about Indra's mischief of tying the horse in a tree next to Kapil's hut, and the princes attempting to kill Kapil and turned into ashes, Kapil replied, "you may take the horse, but as your relatives died an unwanted death, their life cycle would be incomplete, and they would go to hell."

In this way, Hari goes on telling me the entire story of the essence of flowing the *austu* in the river Ganga. Towards the end of the myth, Bhagirath, the descendant of king Sagar, worshipped Lord Shiva to hold the force of Ganga flowing down from the sky to the earth. In order to break the greed of Ganga and help Bhagirath to release his ancestors from the curse of going to hell, Lord Pasupatinath slowed down the speed of Ganga. It is believed that whoever's *austu* is flown in Ganga, the dead one would not have to go to hell. Bagirath had rescued his ancestors. So, Hindu people believe to prevent their ancestors from going to hell.

Thus Hari considered that electric crematorium would not be a better option for Hindus. He accepted that the ongoing cremation has created pressure in the environment but, his version of solution was to plant twenty trees if ten were cut down for wood. Time and again, his major stress was in the name of modernization, westernization and globalization, we should not be murdering our own culture, values, religion, norms and traditions.

A Demand of Time

On December 15, 2013, I planned to meet Rishi again. He was a local of Pasupati area and social activist. In the afternoon, we met at a tea shop at Tilganga. From there the red tin roof of the crematorium building was clearly visible. After sharing formal Namastes we resumed our discussion, this time exclusively on electric crematorium. “Electric crematorium is a demand of time,” said Rishi. “In the twenty first century, we cannot behave exactly like our ancestors in hunting and gathering society. However, I do not mean that we should disrespect the religion and tradition. The concept of using electric crematorium is not only mere revolutionizing cremation process. We can give continuity to our tradition in respect to our ancestors, and culture that has been followed for thousands of years. Before cremating a corpse in an electric furnace, the entire traditional rites could be followed. For instance, wrapping the corpse in plain white cloth opening the facial region,” he added stressing on the essence of operation of the electric crematorium.

“The electric crematorium should be made operational as soon as possible. Currently, the electric crematorium built in Pasupati area has two furnaces that could cremate two corpses at a time. Although, this crematorium, once become functional might become efficient but, with the population rise in Kathmandu, more electric crematoria might be required for installation in major *ghats* such as in *Pachali*, *Sava Vagwati*, *Sankhamul*, *Kal Mochan*, *Hanumanghat* in Bhaktapur and other major *ghats*. Pasupati Area Development Trust could initiate installation of other crematoria in major *ghats* by being an umbrella organization.” These statements of Rishi made me clear that locals in Pasupati area are happy about the installation of electric crematorium since it has promising eco-friendliness. However, they were anxious about the project due to the delay in completion of the crematorium.

No Opposition

When I asked him if the operation of electric crematorium was being delayed due to opposition of Hindus as it challenged their conventional way of traditional cremation and if electric crematorium could raise any threat against Hindu beliefs and traditional system of cremation, he completely denied both of my concerns. He replied that every single step of Hindu death rites could be followed. For example, blazing fire, feeding water, worshipping the corpse, etc. could be done in a room before transferring the corpse on a trolley into the electric furnace for cremation. Since all of the procedure of cremation would be same except for replacement of the wood pyres by electric furnace, and conversion of open-air into crematorium cremation, Hindu rites would still be continued. So, why would Hindus oppose?

According to him, it might be difficult to adopt the change for some time. But, with the passage of time, and flow of more and more people to cremate their deceased ones electrically, the change would gradually become a part of culture itself. He claimed that there are people who have desired to be cremated electrically in a crematorium in their death wish list. He even mentioned a few renowned names who wanted the crematorium to be completed soon so that later in their demise, their corpses would be cremated in the electric crematorium. So, his assumption is slowly socio-cultural change would come and people would prefer electric cremation to conventional cremation. Thus, he emphasized that the delay in completion of electric crematorium is not due to any opposition from the Hindu devotees or anyone, but it is due to the negligence of Pasupati Area Development Trust.

Regarding the wishlist of being cremated in the electric crematorium, Vishnu, a local authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust also shared similar experience. He also shared that he met many people asking about the duration of

completion of the crematorium so that when they expired, they wished to be cremated in it. Nowadays, due to the rising pollution in Bagmati and surrounding area of *ghat* due to continuous open-air cremations, people are already allergic to it. So, Vishnu told me that he had heard people asking their sons and daughters not to follow the conventional way of cremation and pollute the environment rather adopt the contemporary technology of cremation.

Policy Reformation

During the interview series in December 2013, I had asked Rishi if current policies were creating some hurdles for completion and operation of the electric crematorium. His response was that rather than hurdles from current policies, there is lack of appropriate policies. “I am not sure how Pasupati Area Development Trust is planning to launch the crematorium, but like I said last time, we need to build a system. Till now we have been taking cremations lightly. For traditional cremation, relatives would come with corpse, pay the bills and cremation is carried out without asking or producing any death certificates. But, in case of electric crematorium, it has to be systematic and law bound. What if a live person is cremated? A clear policy on electric cremation has to be introduced, for example, taking a written consent from the applicant and two or three witnesses before cremating a corpse. Making the death certificate either provided by hospital or local authority compulsory to be produced while applying for cremation of dead relative or friend, would make the cremation legal,” said Rishi.

“Also the operators of crematorium need to be highly trained and careful. The corpses need to be thoroughly scanned before transferring into the electric furnace. I read that if metals like gold, silver or iron, even by mistake got in the furnace with the corpse, then explosion might occur.” I was surprised that this local knew so much of

information about the electric crematorium. He added, “We locals have stressed the authorities to prepare strict guidelines for the entire operation of the crematorium. We can no more administer cremations flowing with the sympathetic feelings towards the deceased ones and bereaved family members.”

As Rishi and I were conversing, another local who had been patiently listening to us commented, “The corpse could be of someone who committed crime and died or that of someone who has been murdered. So, the corpse without death certificate or people debating on corpse should not be cremated. The corpse needs to be sent for post mortem or further investigation. At least it would help to minimize crime rates.”

I had also asked Vishnu, the local authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust regarding current policies or lack of appropriate policies contributing in delay on materializing the electric crematorium. His response was that more than absence of appropriate policies, the culture of doing each and every task of small to large scale through bidding contracts based on Public Procurement Act 2064 lengthens launching any developmental or infrastructure construction works by prolonged formalities and paper works. Also, the project budget is of huge sum so each purchase and running cost has to be closely monitored and evaluated. Preparation of documents such as plans, technical designs, assessment reports, etc... of several pages also cause delay in beginning and completion of the works. These factors slow down the pace of work. According to him, although use of computers has made the documentation work easier, he stressed on revision of various provisions and formalities in order to be efficient.

Need of Operational Guidelines

Rather than introducing new policies, Vishnu focused on the need of a clear and effective operational guide. According to him electric crematorium is entirely

different and sensitive place for cremation. Electric cremation does not mean, a corpse is brought, inserted in the furnace, switch on the bottom and complete the cremation. It requires proper operational guidelines for operators and general public. First of all the operators require sufficient training on operating the crematorium.

Similarly, general public also need awareness and knowledge about the crematorium's functioning. For instance, before taking the corpse to the furnace, there are certain procedures to be followed. Once the corpse is brought to the crematorium, it needs to be registered by the relatives.

Meanwhile, I informed him about a concern of Rishi, a local of Pasupati area, that there was a necessity of cold store for corpse in the crematorium so that the corpse could be preserved until the arrival of near relatives like sons and daughters who are abroad. According to Vishnu, the cold store for corpse is already available in various hospitals, and installing a cold store for corpse in Pasupati crematorium might pull unnecessary debates on corpse. His opinion was that when a corpse is brought to the crematorium either from hospital or home; the relatives need to produce an official death certificate issued by hospital or genuine consent of relatives about the natural death.

His view was that the operational guidelines was more of a necessity in order to efficiently run every aspect of the crematorium; from administration to sanitation to performing rituals by the family of the deceased ones to wait for turn for cremation, etc...

Job Encroachment

There are many Brahmins who earn their breads by cremating corpses. I could see laborers carrying woods to build pyres for cremation. Similarly, there are a group of people who collect the firewood that are dropped after the completion of cremation

into the river Bagmati. Speaking to locals, I came to know that these people supply those used firewood usually to brick kilns. Also, there might be other people directly or indirectly being benefited. Is electric crematorium creating anxiety among these people who are dependent upon open-air cremation for winning their breads? Is that job insecurity forcing them to oppose electric crematorium directly or indirectly, slowing down the pace of completion of the crematorium? Many questions were running in my mind.

I asked Rishi if a feeling of job encroachment by the electric crematorium was a cause in delay of its completion, his answer was that there are rumors about Brahmins who are involved in the cremation since long that they do not like the change, although they have not directly opposed. He added, “However, for the betterment of environment, we have to accept the change. Even though when the electric crematorium becomes functional, it does not mean banning open-air cremation. It only provides an option for people to choose, either the traditional method of cremation or modern, cheap, less time consuming and eco-friendly method of cremation. Thus, no one means to kick on their belly. No one is stealing their job. We, locals, have stressed that the capable ones from those Brahmins should be chosen and trained as operators for electric crematorium. Some of them might completely lose their jobs but such matters should not be taken as an excuse for not operating electric crematorium, which is today’s crucial need.” (Interview, 2013)

I had asked similar question whether the workers of *Ghat Service Center* are dissatisfied with the installment of electric cremation to Ramesh, one of the Brahmins who worked in the *Samiti* and helped families of deceased one during cremation on December 2013 during his interview. “For environment, time and expenses, we hear that electric crematorium is better option. It might be true. We are minors in making

any decisions. Our agreement or disagreement regarding any policies would hardly matter. Maybe authorities of Pasupati Area Development Trust have better answer for why the crematorium is not being completed. We are concerned about our jobs but what role could lower rank people like us make in delaying the completion of crematorium?” Ramesh spoke sympathetically. He seemed to be worried about the crematorium affecting his job and job of other co-workers. However, his demand was the Pasupatnath Area Development Trust providing other substitute opportunities or provision in case of current job loss due to the crematorium which is said to be completely installed and operated soon.

Belief System

In the earlier chapter, I have discussed the cultural variation in terms of the cremation practices among people following different castes and creeds, and of different origins as well as belief systems. While Ramesh was explaining cultural variations in the cremation process, I thought how will those unique cultural or religious aspects of cremation be assimilated in the electric cremation? For example, in the electric crematorium, it is not practical to break the skull of cremating corpse with a bamboo stick by a Marwadi relative. So, adopting electric cremation and following traditional rituals at the same time might not be as practical and easy as Rishi had suggested.

“Several times during cremation, I request the relatives not to throw the clothes into Bagmati river as the clothes pollute the river. Some of them listen to me, and realizing the problems of pollution they keep the clothes aside whereas many ignore and throw clothes into the river as a traditional custom. But, I ask them always, does the action of throwing clothes of dead one really open door for him or her to heaven? The funny part of this belief system is those people who come here

advocating for not polluting Bagmati by throwing clothes of deceased ones in the river, throw the clothes if they attended funeral of their deceased family members. So, awareness simply is not enough, people need to internalize and implement these matters in behavior,” said Ramesh sarcastically. (Interview, 2013)

“To change people’s belief system is not easy. So, even if the electric crematorium comes to an effect; maybe very few people would choose it and instead follow open-air cremation! Maybe we won’t be jobless even after completion of the crematorium.” Ramesh said being a little bit hopeful of not losing his job instantly as many people might stick to the conventional method of cremating dead bodies.

“Wasn’t there a time when cremation by a female was regarded unholy? But, now we can witness daughters cremating their deceased parents. Society has pretty accepted it. Also, these days many Nepalese go abroad for various purposes such as further education, employment, settlement, etc...Majority of them have already seen how corpses are cremated in electric crematoria. So, even they wish a clean and advanced technology like this be introduced in Nepal. Thus, it won’t be taking long for people to acknowledge a modern electric crematorium with all facilities at affordable price. This crematorium is not a failure project like that of Teku. Once, Kathmandu Municipality tried to introduce the electric crematorium in Teku *ghat*. But, the project was not visionary and the technology was not advanced so there is just a hall and it has worn out even without being used. However, electric crematorium in Pasupatinath has the latest technology and we believe to overcome the challenges of administering the crematorium once it becomes functional. Its efficiency would be convincing people to adopt the cultural change and use greener technology for cremation.” Vishnu said mentioning Hindu religion to be very flexible

and the belief system of people would gradually change as open air cremations at current rate of increase would be creating chaos and environmental hazards.

UNESCO's Concern

“Why would UNESCO have a problem with electric crematorium? The concern shown by UNESCO is not over the installation of electric crematorium in Pasupati area, but its giant structure. May be to some extent UNESCO's concern towards the giant crematorium slowed down the pace of installation but whose fault is it? UNESCO's or Pasupati Area Development Trust's? Was the Trust unaware about UNESCO's standards of construction in a world heritage site? In 2003, UNESCO had enlisted Pasupati area in its red list. After renovations and certain positive changes, Pasupati area was removed from the red list in 2006. That should have given the Trust slightest of the idea of UNESCO's presence as Pasupatinath is not only national treasure but world's treasure. But, look at their negligence, if they had worked together with UNESCO in the project of electric crematorium, no objections would have come in between the construction work. Good news is, despite periodic delay, the Trust submitted a heritage assessment to UNESCO. Else, maybe Pasusipatinath area would be in red list of the world heritage site.” Rishi expressed his frustration towards the Trust for not coordinating with UNESCO before launching the crematorium project.

I also asked Vishnu, the authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust, about UNESCO's concern to the giant electric crematorium. His response was that, there was no problem with UNESCO's concern. UNESCO has no problem with the construction of electric crematorium. It had shown concern to the 100 feet chimney of the crematorium only, as it seems to be a towering infrastructure near the world heritage site. UNESCO has neither commented to stop the installation nor agreed on

the installation of the chimney. It has simply expressed an ordinary concern regarding the chimney considering the presence of world heritage site.

According to Vishnu, the Trust has already responded to UNESCO regarding its concern to the chimney. The response included a promise to modify or replace the chimney if an alternative technology is introduced in near future. I was confused; if electric crematorium is eco-friendly and is smokeless unlike open-air cremation, why would a chimney of that tall height be required? I referred to Vishnu's own statements regarding the crematorium, "The electric crematorium is smokeless, dustless and clean," he gave a slight smile and said that theoretically yes, the electric crematorium is perfectly clean and smokeless, however, practically, at the end of completion of cremation when the furnace is turned off, a small amount of white fume would be released from the furnace. Else, the smoke that is produced during cremation is turned into dust by condensers and collected in a pit. The pit has to be cleaned every year. Thus, to prevent the white fume to be released in atmosphere at lower height, the 100 feet tall chimney has been installed.

He claimed that in the surrounding area of Gausala, there is human settlement, if a chimney of lower height was installed then they may criticize the white smoke polluting the air. So a taller chimney would release the smoke at greater height not harming the locality. Also, he accepted the UNESCO's concern to be genuine. However, he did not regard the concern as a big problem as the Trust was ready to bend the chimney or replace it by advanced technology in case of availability of better technology in near future. Also, he added that the chimney will be given an appropriate appearance and painted by green color giving the natural feeling of its surrounding trees so that people would not have a feeling that a factory or industry has been established in Pasupati premises.

Cause of the Delay

Chandra, who had attended his aunt's funeral, had heard about installation of an electric crematorium by 2011. But, since the crematorium was still incomplete, he assumed the negligence of Pasupati Area Development Trust as the cause of delay in completion of the project. Rishi, the local resident believed that it might be a game of commission between the authorities and contractors which could have led to the delay in installation. According to them, earlier there were rumors of Pasupati Area Development Trust being politicized, and the authorities running after political shade for their personal benefits rather than the development of Pasupati area. Maybe politicization of the institution became a key hurdle in completion of the construction work of the crematorium.

Bureaucratic Hurdles

Finally, I met with the right person whom I could inquire about the exact cause of the delay in completion of building the electric crematorium and materializing it. Locals, media, Brahmins and relatives pointed their fingers towards Pasupati Area Development Trust for their inefficiency that had caused the postponement of materialization of the electric crematorium. I met a resourceful person, Vishnu.

My first question was: when would the construction work of crematorium be completed? His answer was five more months from now provided the entire work goes efficiently. I was not surprised to hear such response from him as every time an authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust is approached the answer would be the same. Again, I asked him the main reason of Pasupati Area Development Trust's authorities, time and again, informing the media and general public that the

crematorium building would be completed in the next six or five or four months. And, this had been happening since 2011.

He said whether I believed him or not, the actual reasons of delay were technical aspects of the project of building electric crematorium. I asked for further clarification of the technical difficulties. According to him, to include the installation of an electric crematorium in the master plan of Pasupati Area Development Trust, a lot of exercise was required. Secondly, the bureaucratic procedures of announcement for contract biddings, selection of contractors for each and every machinery, equipment to construction works are lengthy and time consuming.

Similarly, the disagreements among the joint venture contractors caused a lot of dilemma and delay in the work progress. For this project, initially three contractors bid jointly to meet the criteria. They had started the construction work. But, one of them left with unclear reasons, then after few months the second contractor dropped, finally only one of the contractors was only left in the project. A single contractor in the field caused a lot of delay in the work processing despite his continuous efforts. Thus, inefficient and irresponsible contractor causes much delay in the work progress.

“As the Trust was criticized for excessive politicization and budget irregularities, we joined with high hopes of executing the master plan including this project of building the electric crematorium. We had assumed to complete the work by four to five months but, it has already been four months despite continuous construction work.

The construction of crematorium is not a single issue. Together with the crematorium, suitable garden, parking area, walls, and facilities of drinking water, sanitation, and favorable environment, etc. are also required to be constructed. For that Pasupati Area Development Trust has announced tender for bidding. We have

already received biddings from potential contractors. It should not take much time to review bidding documents and announce the contractor soon. Then, the construction of supportive infrastructures will also proceed. We are trying to complete it in this fiscal year.

Since there are many projects going on in Pasupati area, the total budget is huge. In the past, we did not receive the budget on time. Untimely budget sanctions led to further irregularity in purchasing materials required for construction. These financial hurdles also contributed in delay of the work completion. However, this year's budget has been sanctioned timely, so we are very hopeful about completing the construction of the crematorium by the next five months," said Vishnu.

(Interview, 2013)

Vishnu seemed to be very hopeful about the completion of the crematorium and surrounding infrastructures by next five years. According to him, eighty percent of the construction work has been completed, whereas remaining twenty percent is going on in a smooth pace.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the opportunities and challenges faced by the electric crematorium. Based on the opinions of my research participants, environment friendliness, time efficiency and cost effectiveness are the major attractions of electric crematorium. These factors might drive people to adopt the culture of electric cremation. However, bringing a change in people's belief system is the major hurdle of substantiating electric crematorium. As open-air cremation is regarded as one of the significant rituals in life cycle of a person, people might not easily want to cremate their deceased member in an electric chamber. Another factor to resist the change was job insecurity among the members of *Ghat* Service Center. However, authorities

believed that for betterment of environment and society, small sacrifices need to be made. Meanwhile, a social activist and local indicated that the current employees of *Ghat* Service Center could be trained to operate the crematorium or provided with job replacements as an alternative. Also, locals and devotees claim that they want the crematorium to be completely installed and brought into function as soon as possible.

CHAPTER VI

POSSIBILITIES OF CHANGE IN PRACTICE

In the earlier chapters, I dealt with the perceptions of people regarding the ongoing cremation and difficulties in materialization of the electric crematorium. I discussed varying opinions of people regarding the ongoing cremation and causes of delay in completion of construction of the electric crematorium. Opinions and commentaries of my research participants were motivated by their profession and their life experiences. In this chapter I have dealt with possibilities of change in cremation practice. This chapter is a discussion of my third research question; how can people be encouraged to shift from the ongoing cremation to electric cremation? More particularly, here, I have discussed the possibilities of cultural shift in the way of cremating dead bodies.

Changing Scenario

Listening to the stories of Ramesh, a Brahmin working in *Ghat* Service Center, Pasupati, about the challenges they have to face during cremation and how some people try to humiliate them referring as *Ghateys* and calling by other names, touched me inside. So, I asked him about his opinion regarding any changes that had to be brought in the traditional ways of cremation. His reply was on over all funeral ceremony.

“In old days, *kriya putris* used to take bath and drink water from the same tap, nowadays they drink mineral water. In the past, *kriya putris* had to stay bare foot, now slipper made of hay is used. There is also change on the way of feeding to *kriya putris*. In the past, sons felt honoured to be *kriya putri* to mourn for their dead parents.

Now, rich sons pay the professional *kriya putris* to perform their responsibilities.

Rules are not as strict as in the past. Aren't these changes?" asked Ramesh to me.

"Well, I meant in the cremation process," I clarified him.

"What change to bring? Cremating is the same. Do Brahmins like us have any choice? In the plateau after cremation all we can do is gather the ashes and remnants at a place, but by tradition we need to clean the place. So, the only option is to drop them in the river while washing the plateau. If any new direction comes from upper level like any other provision for the remnants except washing them into Bagmati, we will follow. Similarly, if the authorities keep some staffs to stop relatives to throw clothes of dead ones into the Bagmati river, instead collect the clothes in a box then Bagmati would not be polluted by clothes. Also, if there would be provision of collectors who could pick out the remnants of cremated wood from the river as soon as they are dropped, then Bagmati could be cleaner."

According to Ramesh, due to the strong attachment of people towards the cultural belief system, it might be difficult for people to shift from ongoing cremation to the new culture of electric cremation. This reminded me about the resistance theory in any cultural change (Wirth, 2004).

Revisiting the Brahmin

Since none of the Brahmins employed in *Ghat Service Center* agreed to converse with me despite my humble request and promising words regarding maintaining anonymity and disclosing their opinions and discussion for academic purpose only, I went to meet Ramesh, the kind Brahmin whom I had interviewed a couple of times last December.

"Namaste, dai."

"Namaste."

“Are you fine?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Again I am taking some of your time.”

“It’s alright.”

“Dai, in our previous meetings you gave me much relevant information and today I request for some more.”

“Sure.”

“In our previous meeting, you said our Hindu tradition is hard to break though some may go towards that direction. What do you see in the way the corpse is being burned nowadays? What are its good and bad sides?”

“It has good sides as ‘Sabdhagriha’ is being built. There is scarcity of wood due to the alarming rate of demand which we are unable to be meet. As I have said before due to the tradition some people still come here but some who think they must move according to the change in situation go there.”

“In your opinion, what are the good and bad sides of the traditional way of burning?”

“According to the religious point of view, the water from bath must fall in ‘*Bramhanal*’ and that water of Pashupatinath (Bramhanal) is to be drunk by a dying person, so that s/he is purified and finds peace after his/her death. ‘*Bramhanal*’ is here whereas ‘*Sabdhagiri*’ is a little far away. And it might be difficult for mourners to bring the dying person here to drink the jal (pure water) and take him/her to ‘Sabdhagriha’.

People who believe the pure water to be there may also face difficulty in the subject of drinking ‘pure water’. Also according to the Hindu tradition “Astu”/ shesh i.e. *the small remaining part of the dead person* is to be buried (dah) in the Ganga river.

However if the ceremony is done in ‘*sabdhagriha*’, astu can’t be obtained as everything is converted to ashes. In this regard, some ‘*malami*’ i.e. *people taking the*

dead body to burial site who strictly respect and follow the Hindu tradition prefer not to go there whereas some who think that they should accommodate according to the ongoing time are instead found eager to go to *sabdagriha* to perform the burial ceremony.”

“So the advantages of performing burial ceremony here are obtainment of *Astu* and easy offering of *jal*, the holy water to the dead one, aren't they?”

“Yes, you're right. It is convenient here than there. Also there are only few '*malami*' in cities who are willing to carry the corpse and touch it. They should bath in or drink '*sunpani*' after they touch the corpse to purify themselves which is very inconvenient. So '*malami*' hesitate to touch the corpse even in villages and usually '*malami*' who touch the corpses are separated from other '*malami*'. Among 60 to 100 '*malamis*', only 8 to 10 '*malamis*' really touch the corpse, carry it and perform the ceremony. Other only help them to carry woods and do other outside chores. The main cause of hesitation is that some believe something will happen if they touch the corpse while others don't. It is mostly guesswork.”

“Like you have said before, except the 16 traditions other tradition may or mayn't be followed. Likewise, death tradition is a must in our deep rooted Hindu tradition. So what do you think... will people go after it is newly built?”

“I guess about 60 percent people will go towards it.”

“Why will they?”

“It is because it will be more efficient and less time consuming. But 40% people might not go for it. Though I don't have experience or knowledge regarding its operation, I think if Nepal government properly manages it, most people might follow this new method. I have heard that most people arrive from the rural areas and

they want to finish the ceremony quickly so that they can return back soon. Thus, many of the people feel that burying ‘*astu*’ is not necessary.”

“What about those with the inner belief in the Hindu tradition?”

“Such people don’t go there at all. Those with faith in our religious belief come here.”

“What can be done to build up confidence in people to accept and utilize this new, more convenient way leaving behind old method?” I asked.

“All people don’t have the same concept. A person who thinks from one perspective might think differently tomorrow. The tradition of ‘*das kriya*’ has been followed till today, even if the corpse is taken to ‘*sabdagriha*’. I have seen even atheists carrying out ‘*das kriya*’. Many people think that there’s nothing to it after we die so ceremonies are not necessary at all but when they themselves face the real situation, they get nervous and perform ‘*das kriya*’.

Different caste such as Newar, Rai, Limbu etc. have their own tradition Newar castes don’t usually go there like most Brahmin and Cheetri do. Generally, Newars move the corpse in *Brahmalal* and the ‘*malami*’ and relatives make it drink the *jal*. According to what I have heard, another important thing is in ‘*Sabdhagirha*’ the corpse burned only after it is covered with a white cloth, usually a cloth with ‘Ramnami’ written all over it. But it is said that the cloth with ‘Ramnami’ shouldn’t be burnt so it is taken out before burning the corpse whose inner clothes are obviously to be removed which brings slight hesitation among people.”

“Lastly, do you think this project of electrical ‘Sabhagriha’ will be a success or a failure?”

“That depends on how well its popularity and usage increases here in Kathmandu and gets on track in other places of Nepal as well. Since there’s a shortage

of wood right now, there's the need of using a new method. Before good Sal woods used to be imported from Bardiya, Bara, Sarlahi and other places of Terai but nowadays, such wood can't be found."

(Interview, 2014)

Conversation with a Local

"According to the statements made by Pasupati Area Development Trust's authorities in newspapers the electronic machine should have been built already and as you also said that you are not sure when it will be built. What do you think is the reason for its delay?" I asked Bam Bahadur a local living near Pasupati area.

"I think the reason is corruption among higher authorities because there is not a given deadline for completion to those who are given the tender. Due to the lack of necessary rules and regulations, they may take 20 years to complete due to such carelessness. So there should be strict rules and regulations." Bam Bahadur replied.

"What do you think other reasons might be?"

"The reasons may be due to the involvement of different political parties and lack of security too. Nowadays when it is dark we fear to get outside our homes."

When I asked Bam Bahadur about his opinion regarding electric cremation and possibility of cultural change in the ways of cremation, he answered;

"I think electric cremation is advantageous for long term use. Also it is affordable by economically disadvantaged people for death ceremonies. In the traditional ceremonies it cost 20 to 22 thousand rupees for the wood and every other thing necessary. To those who don't have the necessary funds, donation

is the only way to cover the costs. Also there are many brokers for the wood offered by the government and due to too many middlemen the cost of the wood to be used becomes expensive”

“Do you think it is easy to accept the use of electronic cremator for the death ceremonies as our Hindu religion is very strict?”

“It may be difficult to be accepted by those who are not publicly aware. Their acceptance is dependent upon the government regulation and actions.”

“So the government regulation is necessary for the acceptance?”

“Yes, of course.”

(Interview, 2014)

Changing From Wood Pyre to Electric Cremation

As I was gradually driving the conversation between Bam Bahadur and me towards the cultural change in practicing death rituals. I asked him what changes he saw in our tradition and culture over the years.

“There are many noticeable changes. The way we perform traditional ceremonies is different from that performed by our ancestors. In short, the way we do things will not be done by our sons and grandsons. Chettri and Brahmin tradition of worship has changed too.”

“But I notice that you are still using rato tika?”

“Yes, I am.”

“You are going to Pashupatinath too?”

“Yes, I visit daily to worship god Pashupatinath.”

“So there is no change in you?”

“I disagree. There are changes in our eating and clothing habits. We should keep our lifestyle healthy and stay neat and clean. We should eat good foods. Thus we due to awareness are more civilized. We did not even cut our nails.”

“Why not?”

“We did not have nail cutter that we have now. My father used to tell me to take buffalos to graze. So, I used to take the buffaloes to river to graze. I used to bathe them and they used to give a lot of milk. Nowadays there are no more buffaloes as there used to be”

“Again I would like to ask you the advantages of Cremator?”

“The forest has started to decline and so is the availability of wood. The reasons are involvement of different political parties through land mafias who are highly active and the greedy bureaucrats. An example is: For 4 trees of 10 lakhs worth, 1 lakh is being bribed to such bureaucrats. They show the reason is due to the lack of enough salary from the government for their family to live properly. Though the government is unable to regulate market prices it has at least raised the salary with the increasing market price. At my time I worked for 37 rupees.”

“You were a government employee before? Where did you work?”

“To tell you the truth, I worked in Army for 7 years before I left.”

“So people will easily go for the use of electronic cremator?”

“Yes, I see a high probability in its use in future. It is because it is quick and saves time. With the wood in our traditional practice, the minimum time taken is at least 3 hours to burn but electronic cremation will take no more than an hour”

“If this machine is successful should it be used elsewhere too?”

“In my opinion, this should be used throughout the country mostly in the urban areas of the 75 districts. Also it can be used in those places where there is scarcity of woods. Even the fund from such electronic machine can be invested in the electricity generation projects.”

“Do you think this machine will be successful here and will be used elsewhere too or will it just be built and without use will be shut down?”

“That will be explained by the future events as there is no guarantee of its success or failure. However in my opinion it will be highly utilized in future like we have seen its uses in other countries too”

“In our country, based on your experiences what changes have you noticed in the context of the death ceremonies?”

“The ways of performing death ceremonies have definitely changed. Before only the people of same caste were allowed to touch the corpse. But now every person of other caste is allowed with their help and cooperation. People are more educated and so there are more differences.”

“In your opinion, what are the differences in the traditional burning and use of electronic cremator?”

“In electronic cremator there are no such things like methods and rules like in the traditional burnings. There is just commonality in death like common homeland of different people.”

“Like you said before there is pollution from the place of burning corpses, what are other reasons for the pollution in the Bagmati river?”

“Every waste material that is taken out is thrown in the river. For its management there should have been nets so that only water would enter the river and solid waste materials remain above the nets. Even if ponds are

made, there is no water during dry seasons so that if there is greater flow of water the sand could have buried the waste. So the ponds are of no use due to scarcity of water. Logs could have been separated but they are not so.

However people who are engaged in businesses have started to take such logs. For example; some take them to blacksmith. After reaching market it becomes pure and useful.”

“If people are still throwing wastages, despite your cleanliness efforts, will Bagmati be clean?”

“No. There should also be management of drainage and separation of wastage from the above too. The main thing is drainage must not be mixed with the river. Bagmati, the main river and its other branch rivers should be protected from such mixture and sewage should not leak to any of them. This will keep Bagmati pure. Also there should be the feeling among people like us that wastage should not be thrown in Bagmati. Whether it's you or me there should be a firm belief that the wastage can be removed. If I see any waste materials I can remove it and if I didn't see you may see it which you can tell me to remove or you yourself can remove.”

“Then, to make the burning of corpses with electronic machine successful, what should be done?”

“As this machine can only be built by the government, the main efforts should be of government to build and make it operational. As the corpses continue to arrive, the government should be able to convince the relatives to use electronic cremator not traditional woods. Though mass media it should make the public aware as many people do not even know the existence of electronic cremator.”

“Thank you very much.”

“You are welcome.”

(Interview, 2014)

Public Awareness Required

Chandra, a relative who had come for his aunt's funeral and Rishi, a local resident stressed on the requirement of public awareness about the necessity of electric crematorium in Pasupati area. They agreed that, initially it might be difficult for people to be convinced on using electric crematorium for the cremation of their deceased family members. But, according to Chandra, in one way or the other, public have suffered due to inefficient and mismanaged cremation services at the present context. Public have been suffering from long queue for one's turn to come for cremation, difficulty in managing wood for pyre as the wood would be limited in the store of *Ghat Service Center*, prolonged cremation process and other inconvenience. They need change in performing death rites, but many might not have realized that the change is coming soon in the form of electric crematorium.

There are rumors and constant statements from religious figures that a proper death rite cannot be carried out without open air cremation. This could be a reason people fall in dilemma of either following the conventional trend or accept the change and make use of electric crematorium. Chandra believed that culture can change with the passage of time. If public awareness about electric crematorium is increased than gradually people would shift in adopting new clean technology rather than following the suffocating, environment polluting and time consuming conventional cremation.

Rishi had also mentioned about making more people aware about the benefits of electric crematorium and its essence for environmental conservation. Here, I remembered, a tool manual of theory of change (INSP, 2005), according to which, it

is suggested that if theory of change is developed for any change to commence, for instance in our case theory of change for introducing electric crematorium, the developmental work could be promoted without much fear of change among the population.

The manual suggests that theory of change has two major components. The first one helps to set up a frame. The framework includes population; who would be served by the change, i.e., in our case families who would bring their corpses to electric crematorium, since Pasupatinath is the holiest temple among Hindus, we assume the majority of the population would be Hindus, however, the population could also include Buddhists, Sikhs and followers of other religions in whose culture cremation is considered.

Secondly, certain strategies need to be framed by the Pasupati aread Development Trust or other stakeholders who would like to contribute in this process of cultural shift from open air cremation to electric cremation. In this case, the stakeholders would be utilizing the information to develop system plans and strategies in order to deliver the service effectively (INSP, 2005). Thirdly, the theory of change focuses on the outcomes, that indicates what do the stakeholders intend to accomplish? This would help in a thorough evaluation of the changing scenario, and the phase of change; unfreeze, change or refreeze. The other component of theory of change helps to build an interrelationship among the above mentioned three components - population, strategies and outcomes - thus, leading to better understanding of relationships among the core elements of change.

Chapter Summary

Based on the opinions of my participants, there are both possibilities: one sect of people still disbelieve that people would easily give up the cultural attachments

they bear since long time, i.e., people would resist to the change. However, other sect of people believes in cultural change in the way of cremation. They believe that the change might occur with public awareness and realization of the consequences on environment caused due to open-air cremation by burning corpses in wood pyre. Well, it was difficult for my research participants and me to see the clear picture. However, the exact response would be seen clearly only after the electric crematorium is completed and opened for public. Till then, it would be a mixed prediction of success or failure of cultural change in the way of cremating corpses.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

In the earlier chapters, I have presented my data and discussed them thematically. The data and discussion were based on my three research questions. The first one dealt with the perception of my research participants regarding the ongoing cremation process in Pasupati *ghats*. The second one dealt with the complexities of materialization of electric crematorium despite frequent commitment from Pasupati Area Development Trust regarding the completion of the construction and launching of the electric crematorium's operation. The third one dealt with the possibilities of shifting from the ongoing cremation in Pasupati *Ghats* to the electric cremation in the newly constructed electric crematorium. Here, in this chapter, I have extended the discussion followed by interpretation of those data.

Varying Perceptions

When I inquired about the perceptions of my research participants regarding the ongoing process of cremation, each of them had their own opinions and experiences to share. I figured out that a sect of people had already understood the difficulties created by the ongoing cremation in Pasupati. They were unfreezing from the cultural attachment (Wirth, 2004) and preparing for the change.

Rishi, a local resident and Vishnu, a local authority of Pasupati Area Development Trust majorly focused on the need of change in the ongoing cremation process as this culture significantly created ecological misbalance, time and cost inconvenience. Their major concern was that cremating a corpse on wood pyre kept a

lot of pressure on the forests, leading high rate of deforestation, turbidity of Bagmati as the ashes and dead woods were dumped into the river after cremation, water pollution due to throwing of clothes of dead ones into the river, air pollution due to the burning corpse and wood, foul smell from the burning corpse, etc... Similarly, the time taken for cremation is about three hours, and cost is at least five thousand rupees. These factors would affect the people with low income and consume a lot of time of the family or relatives. Thus, their opinion was about completion of the electric crematorium at the earliest and its materialization soon after.

However, some of the relatives of deceased ones and the Brahmins working in *Ghat Service Center* had different opinions. According to them, the culture and religious faith regarding cremation is so intact to Hindus that the change on cremation process might take more time. Listening to one of the relatives, Rishi and Vishnu, I felt that we are already having ‘change’ in our death rites. However, the commentaries of the relatives and Brahmins pushed me back to ‘unfreeze’ situation. This denial of change is probably the first stage of Lewin’s theory of change (Wirth, 2004), as a group of people are struggling to disconfirm the present conditions, they prefer sticking to the conventional way of cremation as of fear of accepting the change or their personal interests; as the Brahmin was skeptic about losing his job. Similarly, it would affect the job of the remnant wood collectors who collected the remnant wood dropped into Bagmati after cremation, and sell it to the brick kilns.

Going Electric Will Be a Milestone

To my query on any possible threat that could be created by the introduction of the electric crematorium in a country where majority of the population are Hindu, the relatives and Bhramin expressed that electric cremation denounces the Puran instruction of performing cremation. It is disrespecting our ancient culture and

religious values. However, Rishi and Vishnu commented that no such threat would exist. “As time changes, culture also modifies. Earlier only, sons used to cremate the corpse, nowadays even daughters do so. Being a Hindu does not mean stressing on burning corpse in wood pyres only. Hinduism is one of the world’s most tolerant and flexible religion. On top of that, in the crematorium we have two rooms where prayers and other traditional death rites could be performed,” said Vishnu. (Interview, 2013)

According to them, very few local people and devotees have opposed the functioning of electric crematorium; as the option for open-air cremation would not be eliminated even after the installation of the electric crematorium. They regard Pasupati Area Development Trust to be inefficient to materialize the crematorium. However, the authorities transfer the blame to irresponsible contractor for delay in completion of electric crematorium.

The acceptance or rejection of the electric crematorium by public would be visible only when the installation of the crematorium completes and the crematorium is opened for public. In my view, there are hardcore Hindu followers who would be advocating the continuation of open-air cremation as this is how a dead body is shown respect. However, with the world running after globalization and modernization, people who have observed the use of electric crematoria abroad and in neighboring country India, might accept the change. Nevertheless, tension between people of these two ideologies might occur. However, at the end of the day Pasupati Area Development Trust is not phasing out open-air cremation with the introduction of the electric crematorium. Thus, families and friends of the deceased one will have two options available for cremation; either to follow the ongoing process or accept the change!

Job Insecurity

Based on the interview with Ramesh, the Brahmin who cremated corpses, current employees at *Ghat Service Center* are a bit concerned about losing their current job with the materialization of the electric crematorium. However, personally Ramesh was not much anxious as he believed the traditional open air cremation could not be easily replaced by the electric crematorium as it would not have the entire flexibility of cremating a corpse with complete traditional procedure. Yet, in case of job loss, he wished the Trust would provide them some place in the new crematorium.

Regarding the job insecurity, Vishnu had a different view. According to him, rather than debating on whose job will be affected, everyone needed to contribute towards a clean and green Pasupati by supporting in materialization of the crematorium. He said that the crematorium also require operators, helpers, office personnel, guards, cleaners, etc... for instance, at least six operators will be required. So, instead of debating on job insecurity of current people working in *ghats*, he supposed that everyone should be promoting the materialization of crematorium. The electric crematorium would be providing new jobs to people interested to work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have interpreted the discussions that I presented in earlier chapters. Here, I have shared the varying perceptions of my research participants regarding the ongoing open-air cremation in the *Ghats*. Some regarded it as following of any other Hindu rituals. However, some regarded it as a cause of pollution of air around Pasupati, including foul smell, pollution of Bagmati river water, deforestation and time consuming old culture which requires change according to the time. They expressed that using electric crematorium could be a better alternative to cremating corpses in the wood pyres. Bureaucratic hurdles to release budget, irresponsible

contractors who left the work midway, lack of public awareness were regarded as causes of the delay. To encourage people to use electric crematorium once it's built, public awareness about the benefits of electric cremation and demerits of ongoing cremation is a must, said the participants who believed that it's time for the change.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the previous chapter, I discussed and interpreted the data. I expressed my understanding regarding the perceptions of my participants about the ongoing cremation, their understanding of reasons for the delay in materialization of electric cremation, and their opinions regarding shift in cremation process from current culture to electric cremation in near future. In this chapter, I have briefly shared my concluding remarks and drawn some implications of my entire study.

How Do People Perceive the Ongoing Cremation Practices in Pasupati?

People regarded the ongoing cremation practices to be conventional and traditional. The present practice of cremation is open-air cremation where a corpse is cremated on a wood pyre following specific death rites of Hindu religion and culture. Hindus regard cremation as the sixteenth phase of a person's life where the body and the soul get separated. Also, through cremation by the banks of the holy river Bagmati at the shade of sacred Lord Pasupatinath, Hindus believe that the worst sins committed by a person in his/her life time would be washed away.

Faith

Faith of common people towards Lord Shiva and the Holy River Bagmati about cleaning the sins and creating a clear passage for the soul of the deceased person to rest in peace in heaven, day after day, more corpses are being brought. According to the Brahmin working in the *ghat*, sometimes, they need to return the corpse due to lack of space in plateaus for cremations. Commentary of Vishnu, the

authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust, regarding burning fishes, one in each day, in *ghats* due to absence of human corpse for cremation in the past and contrastingly flooding number of corpses for cremations at present, clearly indicates that the increasing number of cremations would create more pressure on environment. At this rate, the ongoing cremation practice is not sustainable.

Remarks made by Rishi, the local resident about wood no more being supplied from the Terai and currently Timber Cooperation Nepal is solely dependent upon the forests of hilly region to supply wood, deforestation has alarmingly accelerated. The news about the shortage of wood for pyre and affecting Hindus to perform the death rites do come on and off in media.

Cultural Differences: an Attraction for Tourists

Open air cremation has become a center of attraction for tourists as they witness traditional way of cremating a deceased family member. Numerous tourists take pictures not only of *babas* in Pasupati area but also that of cremation going on at the *ghats*. Literatures show that foreigners are mostly inspired to observe a Hindu cremation that is ordinary for any Nepali but peculiar to the outsiders. In countries like the Great Britain, Australia, where open air cremation is discouraged by law, people file their petition at courts for permission to be cremated in the traditional Hindu way claiming that open-air cremation is their choice of death rites and it is fundamental human right to choose how one's future dead body be treated. In earlier chapter, I have also shared an article published in the Guardian about a British family cremating their deceased member who was born Hindu.

According to Collier (2007), accelerating notion of individualism, decreasing social intimacies between living and dead, rising secularization and postmodernism are contributing in high rate of increase in culture of electric cremation in America.

Since, the study was done in the American context, the findings might not be implied in the Eastern culture. In my study I found the socio-cultural ties and religious faith stronger among my research participants.

Opposite Momentum

At the moment when the cultural gap is attracting foreigners towards conventional practices of cremation, Nepal is moving towards what the foreigners are practicing - electric cremations. To my query if this introduction of new technology create a cultural crisis, I received three types of opinions; one type objected and assumed that majority of the people would still opt for traditional practice of cremation, another type was very positive about majority of the people opting for environment friendly, economic and efficient technology however, the third type was in dilemma, may be people would chose the new technology or maybe not.

Nevertheless, all of my research participants were aware about the environmental pollution including air pollution by smoke and foul smell, and water pollution of Bagmati by disposal of clothes of the corpse and dead wood and ashes into the river after cremation. Also, the local residents and authorities from Pasupati Area Development Trust were more concerned about the deforestation accelerated by a high demand of wood for building the pyre for cremation, and ecological degradation of Bagmati and Pasupati area. In one of the interviews with the authority, he had mentioned that earlier, relatives who attended the funeral used to cross the remnants of cremation and go to Bagmati and take bath in the river for purification before departing to their respective houses. But, now who would dare to take bath in the polluted Bagmati?

Thus, local residents, some relatives, and the authorities regarded electric crematorium to be the best alternative to the ongoing cremation practices. But there

are still hardcore followers of Hindu, as they suppose themselves who regard shifting from traditional to electric cremation is near impossible as the crematorium would fail to meet the commandments of death rites directed by the Holy Scriptures of Hindu. Yet, they did not deny regarding degradation of environment due to the ongoing practices of cremation. They simply focused on the use of aromatic wood such as sandalwood for building pyre, wisely using the wood and not disposing clothes into river to reduce environmental pollution.

Why Is Electric Crematorium Not Being Materialized?

Proposal of electric crematorium was made by Pasupati Area Development Trust three decades ago but it was bypassed. Every time we follow any news about the electric crematorium in Pasupati, it is said that the installation work would be completed by next four to five months. When I met an authority of the Trust personally and asked him about the complete installation of the crematorium, his answer was “next five months, if the work went on smoothly”.

Public in many ways felt deceived by the delay. They assumed the delay is either due to ‘game of commission’ or ‘political dilemma on whom to offer the tender’. They were also aware about the politicization of Trust in the past which caused defaming of authorities for running after political parties for fulfilling their interests rather than that of the Pasupati area. Also, some authorities from the Trust blamed their leadership in the past with similar comments. However, at present, the authorities claim that every work is going on smooth as they have got a wise leadership who has been contributing to the developmental works of Pasupati area whole-heartedly and without any interest for personal gain.

According to the authority the major cause of the delay in materializing the crematorium was due to untrustworthy and irresponsible contractors in the past who

dropped their work before completion of their assigned task. Also, the procedure for announcing bidding to purchase individual material or commence individual task linked with the project under Public Procurement Act 2064 is tiresome. The procedure demands clear and lengthy paper works and documentation. In addition, the untimely budget sanction causes hindrance in timely purchase of the required materials for construction. As the nature of the project is huge, each and every aspect needs to be closely monitored and evaluated in order to avoid financial irregularities and criticism from public regarding budget misuse like in the past days. Thus, Vishnu, the authority's claim was eighty percent work has been completed and remaining twenty percent is going on.

Local residents and relatives who favored immediate completion of installation of the crematorium and its opening for public use, emphasized generating public awareness regarding the benefits of using electric crematorium for environment and for future generation in the long run. They believed that cultural change is possible with devotion of stakeholders towards bringing the change. Regarding the delay in materialization of the crematorium, they believed that general public should first be aware and then they can lobby the local authorities for early completion of the work. Meanwhile, the local authorities seek consensus and supports from general public to make the project of electric crematorium a success.

Implications of this Study

This study was conducted with an intention to broadly understand the perceptions of local people, experiences of relatives and Brahmin, and vision and arguments of authority from Pasupati Area Development Trust regarding the ongoing cremation practice in Pasupati *ghats* and Bhasmeshor *ghats*. Also, I intended to identify they key causes of repeated delay in materializing the electric crematorium

being constructed in Pasupati area. Thus, here I discuss some plausible implications in three parts; policy, practice and further study implications.

Policy Implications

Since cremation is a cultural and ritual entity of Nepali society, it is important that this issue be addressed from institutional and governmental level (Collier, 2007). The ongoing cremation practices, the pressure these practices have bestowed upon environment in Pasupati area and forests which are denuded to meet the wood demand, and introduction of electric crematorium as an effective alternative to the ongoing practice in the contemporary context are serious issues of socio-cultural and religious system. These elements should not be overshadowed before receiving appropriate response from the government, both at the local and the national levels.

The varying perceptions of people that I received regarding the ongoing cremation practices and possibility of materialization of electric crematorium soon are evident about existence of contrasting ideologies, some being neutral. Failure to address the issues of general public who are the real benefactors of the new system of electric cremation may lead to disharmony and conflicts in the society.

The ongoing practices of cremation are traditional. These practices are deeply rooted in the 'laws of Hindu society', thus the benefactors of change need to 'unfreeze' (Wirth, 2004) from their current cultural demarcations. Public need to realize that the present conditions are actually leading to unsustainable future. It is only when the public eternalize that the previous belief, i.e., freeing the departed soul from corpse through open-air cremation, is gradually getting invalid due to resource constraints, financial burden and adverse environmental impacts.

Thus, rather than making a 'chair assumption', i.e., creating a cloud of hypothesis that people would spontaneously accept electric cremation once the

crematorium is fully installed, it would be wiser to address the mass that might be dissatisfied with the change that they feel might be a forced one. Hence, visionary policies, laws and guidelines need to be regulated as a response of responsible government. The policies and laws could institutionalize the changing cultural belief and values of cremation (Collier, 2007).

Implications for Practice

This study could have practical significance for people who are enthusiast about the ongoing cremation in Pasupati and the causes of delay in materialization of the electric crematorium. Moreover, the study tried to explore the perceptions of people who strictly want to become intact with the tradition claiming it to be religious and moral value whereas it also brings the arguments of people with different ideology who believe in flexibility of Hindu religion and go for environment friendly process of cremation.

Implications for Further Study

One of the most important implications of this study could be a doorway to further research for deeper understanding of cultural change in the cremation process and its degree of resistance. Maybe this study could be a foundation for those researchers who are interested in either qualitative or quantitative study of cremation in Nepali society. This study is limited to Hindu norms and values. However, further research could be done with wider consideration of other religions as well such as Sikh.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have started my discussion summarizing my research findings followed by my own understandings. In this research I have tried to capture two major themes; one is ongoing practice of cremation and the other is environment.

As a student of environment education and sustainable development, somewhere in my mind, I was not happy with the environmental pollution caused by open air cremation. However, as a Hindu, the ongoing practice of cremation has been established as an empirical culture. So, trying to keep myself as an observer and listener, I interacted with people from various backgrounds. Some were locals, some Brahmins, some had just lost their relative and were attending funeral, some were social activists who were engaged in Clean Bagmati Campaign and other activities related to the conservation of Pasupati area, some were the authorities from Pasupati Area Development Trust, and some were tourists visiting one of the world heritage sites of Nepal. After presenting the conclusion of the research, I included three major implications of this study, namely the implications for policy, practice and further study.

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ANNEX I: PROBING QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: How do the people perceive the ongoing cremation practices in Pasupati Aryaghat?

1. How long have you been engaged in this profession?
2. Why did you choose this profession? How is it different from other profession?
3. Usually how many cremations are done per day?
4. Would you please elaborate the procedure of ongoing cremation and materials required for it?
5. How long does it take to complete a cremation?
6. What is the tentative expenditure of a cremation?
7. Have you ever faced any complaints or criticisms during cremations?
8. Does current practice of traditional cremation need any changes?
9. Are you satisfied with your profession?

Research Question 2: Why is the electric crematorium not being materialized?

1. Are you aware about electric cremations?
2. Please share your opinion on the introduction of electric crematorium in Pasupati *Aryaghat*?
3. Does electric cremation create any threat to Hindu death rituals and traditional values?
4. According to Pasupati Area Development Trust, usage of electric crematorium helps in conservation of environment but why are people hesitating to use it?

5. If the electric crematorium came in operation, it is likely to replace job opportunities of many people who are associated with traditional cremations. Is it the reason behind unpopularity of the electric crematorium in *Pasupati aryaghat*?
6. By any means, do you consider current policy about cremation affects installment and operation of the electric crematorium?
7. Is there any policy that creates difficulty in functioning of the electric crematorium?
8. Do you feel any necessity of using electric crematorium at present?
9. How could the electric crematorium be materialized as soon as possible? Give your suggestions.
10. In your opinion what roles could the stakeholders play to bring the electric crematorium in operation without any controversies?

Research Question 3: How can people be encouraged to shift from ongoing cremation practice to electric cremation?

1. Hindu culture is deeply rooted in the Hindu civilization, do you think people would easily give up the traditional form of cremation and adopt electric cremation?
2. Would you please give your opinion regarding the benefits or harm you see in following the ongoing cremation?
3. Would you please give your opinion regarding the benefits or harm you see in following electric cremation?

4. Do you agree that ongoing cremation has done a lot of harm to the atmosphere, forest, Bagmati and people's health, so now gradually a cultural change is required; i.e., start using electric crematorium?
5. How do you think people would gain faith towards electric cremation?
6. Lastly, in your opinion, will electric crematorium become successful and there would be demand of new electric crematoria in the valley as well as other towns of Nepal, or will it be a failure project?

ANNEX II
PHOTOGRAPHS



Ghats by Bagmati at Pasupati area



Wood Pyre for Cremation



Son



Corpse on wood pyre



Corpse burning with the wood pyre



A Brahmin helping the pyre to burn properly



Dead wood dropped in Bagmati after cremation



A person collecting the dead wood



Floating Dead wood being collected in river Bagmati



People loading the dead wood in a truck



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Founder Art of leaving in clean Bagmati campaign



High Authority of Nepal in clean Bagmati campaign

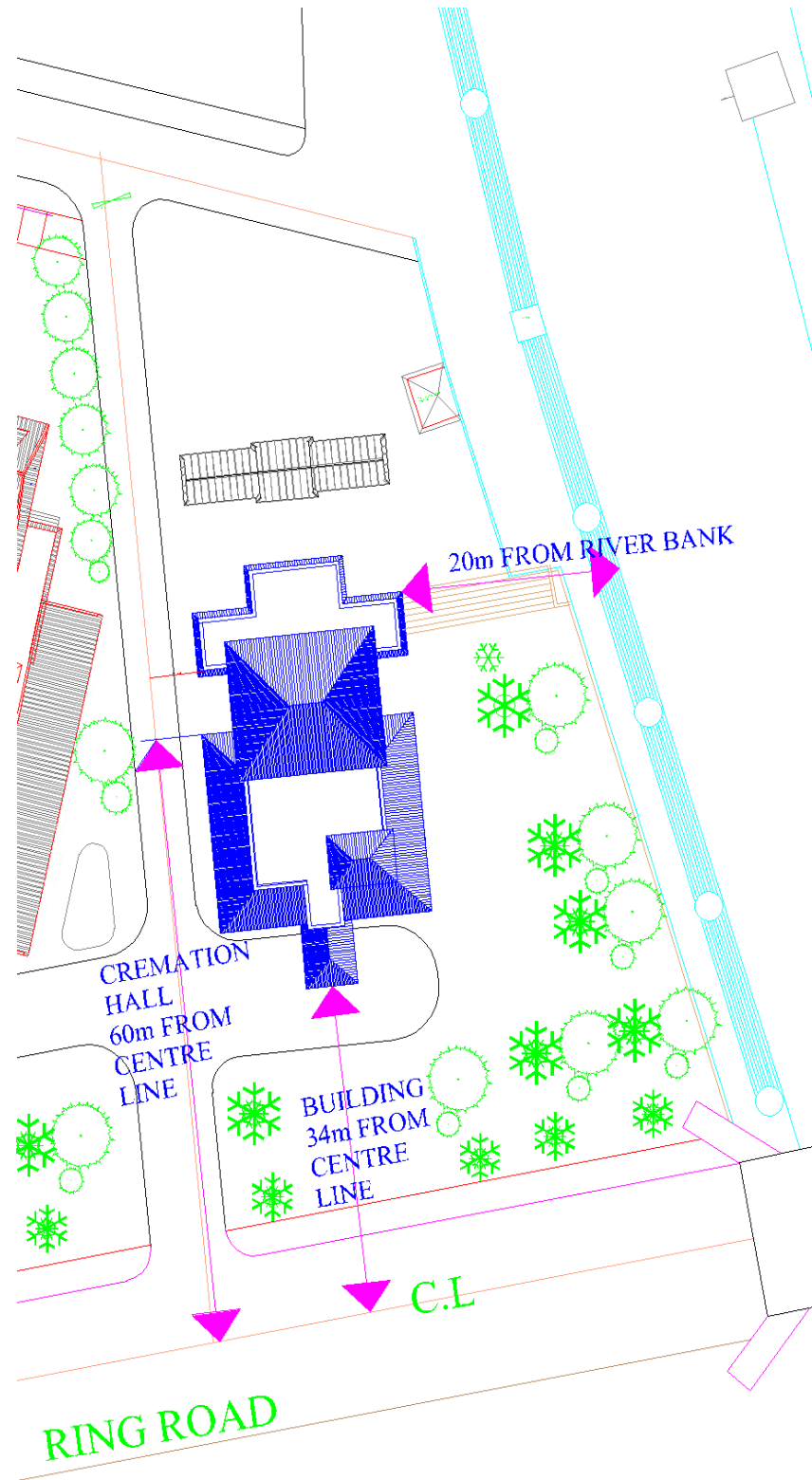


Public involving in clean Bagmati campaign

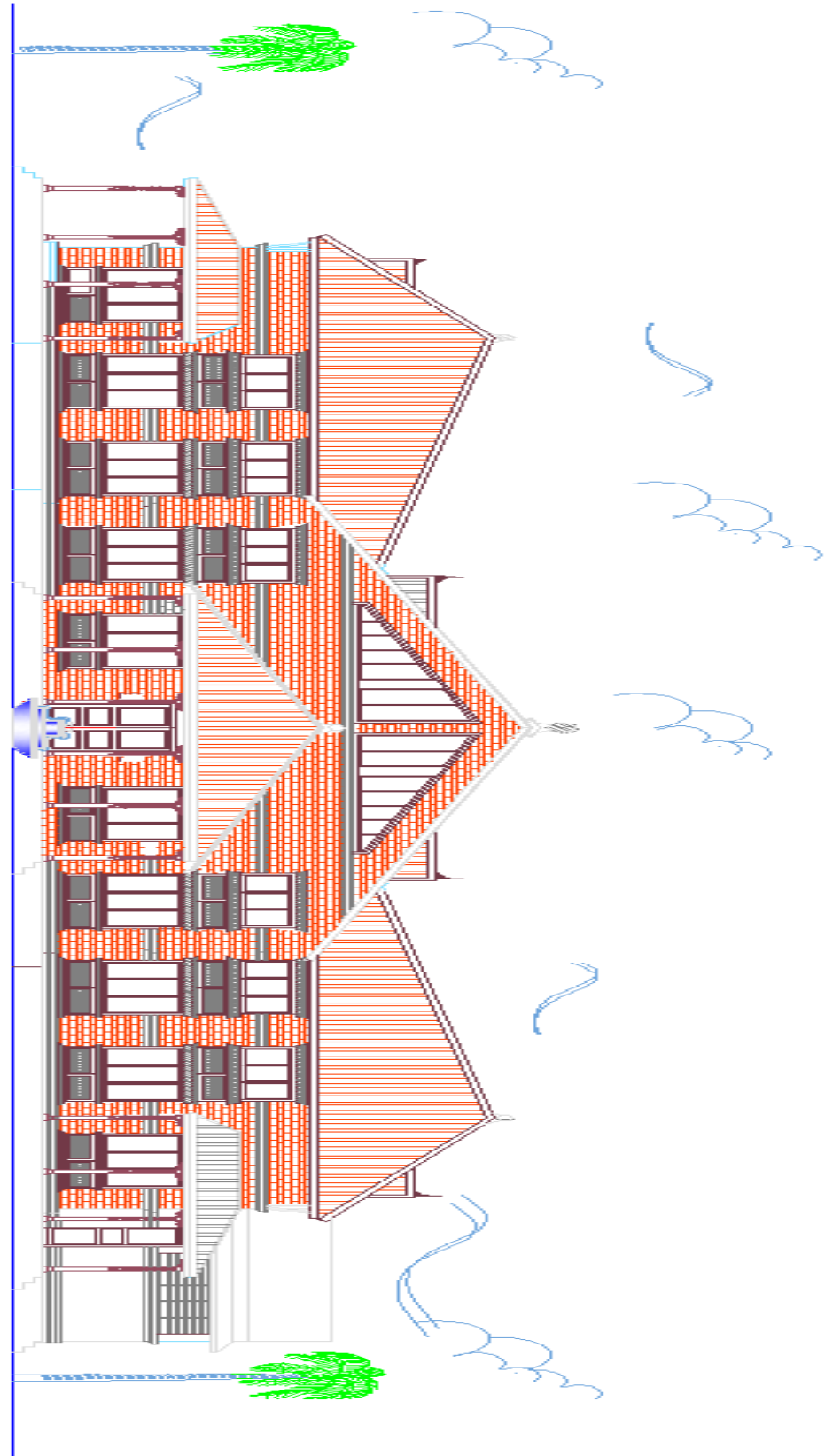


Public involving in clean Bagmati campaign

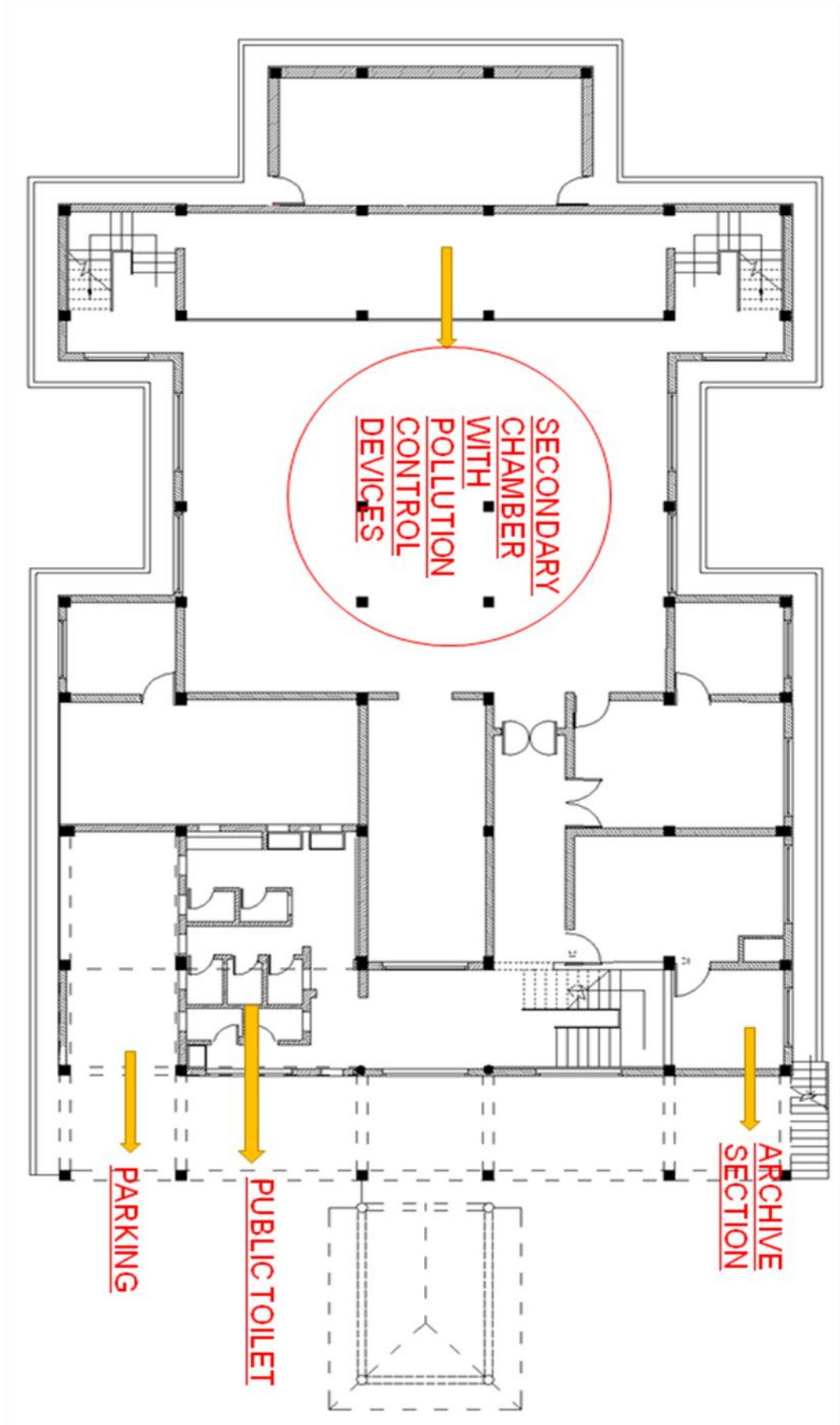
ANNEX III



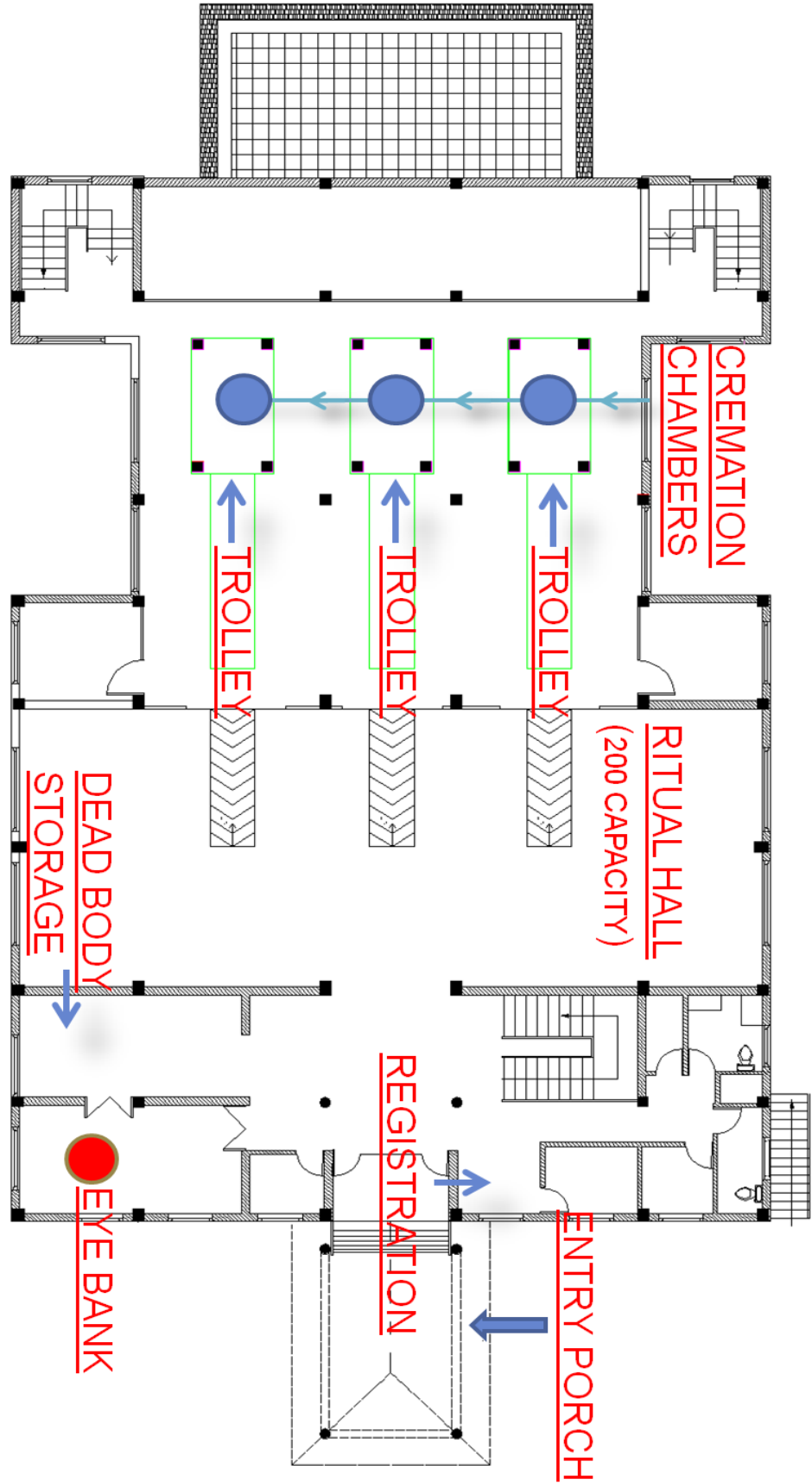
Site Plan of Electric Crematorium (Source: PADT, 2013)



Elevation of the Crematorium (Source: PADT, 2013)



Ground Floor Plan (Source: PADT, 2013)



First Floor Plan (Source: PADT, 2013)