



The Role of Sikkim Newar Guthi in Revitalizing the Traditional Food Culture

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Abstract: *This paper explores the cultural revivalism of traditional food practices among the Newar community in Sikkim, India, with a focus on the pivotal role played by the Sikkim Newar Guthi—a non-political, inclusive cultural association established in 1994. Unlike the rigid, caste-based Guthi system in Nepal, the Sikkim Newar Guthi has emerged as a unifying body fostering cultural preservation and identity reconstruction among Newars in diaspora. The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork to examine how traditional food practices, nearly lost due to migration, acculturation, and the absence of caste-based religious specialists, are being revived through festivals (notably Indrajatra), cooking workshops, public food exhibitions, and community initiatives. While these efforts have reintroduced ritualistic food such as samaibaji into community life, findings reveal that these foods are largely reserved for ceremonial occasions and have yet to be integrated into daily consumption patterns. By situating food as a potent medium of cultural expression, this paper argues that the revival of Newar foodways in Sikkim is both a form of cultural reclamation and an adaptive response to modern diasporic realities. The Guthi's inclusive model reflects a shift from traditional communal structures to a more formal, association-based approach to cultural heritage, highlighting the evolving nature of identity and tradition in the face of globalization and cultural erosion.*



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Introduction

In view of socio-cultural importance of food and its pivotal role in shaping the culture of every community this paper highlights the recent ongoing trend of cultural revivalism in Sikkim. The study examines the process of revivalism of traditional food among the Newar community of Sikkim that has started recently. The field study reveals that the Newars of Sikkim do not consider themselves analogous with the Newars of Nepal as they perceive that after their ancestors migrated to Sikkim, they couldn't bring all of the material and non-material culture, especially their caste based priest, who played a significant role in the knowledge of ritualistic food culture and its significance. With the passage of time, the cultural awareness among the Newars of Sikkim slowly evaporated leading the community with very less or no information about their traditional food culture. However, in recent time with the trend of cultural revivalism the *guthi* was established in Sikkim in 1994 for creating cultural awareness among

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the Newars of Sikkim and reviving their traditional food culture. Therefore, this paper aims at understanding *guthi* and its functioning with regard to its role in revivalism of food culture among the community.

Food is indisputably one of the most important aspect of our daily lives, although its existence is taken for granted as a substance only for survival due to its act of everydayness but the concept of food is a concrete phenomenon, that engulfs socio-economic, cultural, symbolic issues therefore food just isn't a biological necessity. In a gastronomic sense food practices represents a cultural act which in return is related to our identity in its deepest manner (Boutaud et al., 2016). Eating together creates social relations and that enlarges our social groups, Counihan (1999) states 'food is a prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena.' She further substantiates that the production, distribution and consumption of food represents the power relations and is related to notion of sex and gender as every social group has their unique form of food-ways emphasizing diversity and variation of food habits across cultures and regions. Visser (1999) highlights the close connection between food and culture; hence change in diet will bring about change in culture and vice-versa. In view of socio-cultural importance, food has become fundamental source of inquiry for the cultural sociologists due to the heavy symbolic character inherited from the changing material conditions (Watts, 2008). Therefore, food cannot be studied in isolation as the exchange of food between individuals or groups symbolizes a bond of social alliance and solidarity (Meigs, 1997).

The Role of Sikkim Newar Guthi as a Social and Cultural Custodian

The Sikkim Newar Guthi is a non-political association which was first established in 1994 in Sikkim. The aim focuses on strengthening fraternity amongst the members of the community, their welfare, preservation and development of cultural heritage. It also aims for the promotion and development of their language and providing a common forum for discussion of general problems, protection of interest and mutual assistance as recorded in their constitution. The Sikkim Newar Guthi has been a registered organization by the Government of Sikkim under the Department of Land Revenue, Gangtok (Registration no.689/LR/94).

In Nepal the *guthi* is a rigid and traditional socio-religious institution among the Newars that is caste based and within the community as they possess an exclusive hierarchy system of their own. The Sikkim Newar *guthi* is non-identical when compared to Nepal. It is a single body that represents all Newars living in diaspora in Sikkim irrespective of their caste differences. Bal Gopal Shrestha (2015) in his work 'The Newars of Sikkim' writes Laxmi Prasad the earliest migrant from the Kathmandu valley to India, plays a foundational role in shaping a unified Newar identity in the Indian context. He is widely credited with using the title Pradhan among Newars settled outside Nepal particularly in Sikkim and West Bengal as a means of fostering social cohesion and collective identity. His legacy is still lived in places like Sikkim where the Newar Guthi operates at present as an inclusive body devoid of caste based

divisions. From the field view Mr Bikash Pradhan, present member of Sikkim Newar Guthi, currently working at the Education Department and a specialist in Newar language further substantiates the above argument and says 'caste based guthi system cannot be a reality for the Newars of Sikkim, as it would bring disharmony and friction among the members of the community. As a prominent guthi member, he fully supports the progressive departures from traditional rigid hierarchies. Thus the Guthi in Sikkim is a single unit and entity and it functions more like an association catering the cultural and social needs of the Newars of all castes and sub castes.'

Sikkim Newar Guthi serves as an important role in preserving and promoting Newar culture, although it lacks the rigidness, uniformity and features of traditional guthis in Nepal. The membership is not obligatory like the traditional guthi in Nepal, however its presence is not equally felt across the entire Newar population in Sikkim. The Sikkim Newar Guthi although retains certain performative elements of traditional Nepalese Guthis such as cultural rituals and festivals observance it operates primarily as an external realm of cultural preservation, heritage promotion and the revival of collective identity, rather than maintaining the intimate, emotionally sustained, bonds that typify traditional Guthi system. In this context, the Sikkim Newar guthi reflects elements of Ferdinand Tonnies (1980) *gesellschaft* (association) which is more modern, impersonal and instrumental form of association driven by rational objectives, which is often mediated through formal structures and external motivations.

Organizational Structure of Sikkim Newar Guthi

According to the constitution of Newar Guthi in Sikkim, the membership of Guthi is voluntary and open to all the members of the Newar community of Sikkim irrespective of caste or creed, who have attained the age of eighteen years. The admission fee for the membership is Rs. 200 only and subscription of the membership is Rs.50 only per month.

The Organizational Structure of the Sikkim Newar Guthi consists of three tier organizational structure consisting of

1. The Central Executive Committee
2. The Zonal Executive Committee
3. The Sakha (Branch) Guthi

All these three tier system together functions for the betterment and development of the Newars in Sikkim.

1. The Central Executive is the main governing body at central level and the Central Headquarter is situated at Gangtok. It also acts as administrative and decision making body which consists of:
 - a. President
 - b. Vice-President

- c. General Secretary
 - d. Assistant General Secretary
 - e. Treasurer
 - f. Assistant Treasurer
 - g. Cultural Secretary
 - h. Youth-Affairs Secretary
2. There are nine Zonal Executive Committee in four districts- North District (Mangan Zonal Guthi), East District (Gangtok, Pakyong, Rongli-Rhenock, Singtam-Rangpo Guthi), West District (Gayzing- Dentam, Soreng- Sombaray District) and South District (Namchi-Namthang, Melli-Sumbuk Guthi).
 3. The zonal guthi has been further divided into branches or Sakhas. There are a total 53 Sakhas of Guthi which are formed area wise.

From the field findings it was recorded that traditionally women were not allowed to participate as members in the governing body in Sikkim, however in the present day a special post of Vice President is reserved for a women candidate, sixty five year old Mrs. Dilu Pradhan Maskey and 30 years old Mrs. Reshu Pradhan had served the position.

Revival of Traditional Food Culture in Sikkim

The early 1990's was a significant year for the Newars in Sikkim as the main foundation of Sikkim Newar Guthi was established for the revival of Newar culture (food). After the guthi was established the members of guthi primarily focused on fixing the culture rupture and identity reconstruction by actively voyaging to Nepal to revise their historical root and tradition. The Sikkim Newar Guthi started culturally sensitising the members of the community and thus introduced many festivals, rituals, socio-ritualistic occasions and the food culture. Mr. Khagendra Pradhan in 1998 initiated the Institute for Newar language and Culture in Gangtok and implemented Indrajatra celebration in Sikkim at a community level. Indrajatra is a festival celebrated only by the Newars. In this festival samaibaji a significant ritual food is consumed, the Sikkim Newar Guthi played a major role in prescribing compulsory commensality during this festival to all the Newars as well as invited non- Newars to experience their ritual food. The samaibaji comprises of flat rice, roasted flat rice, fried garlic, ginger, toasted black and white soya beans, one fried fish, and one boiled egg. This display is represented as a blessing sagan from Lord Indra (creator of the universe). Indrajatra for the Newars in Sikkim simultaneously also mean samai baji khaney din, which translates to ritual food eating day.

The first ever Indrajatra celebration in Sikkim was organized in the year 2000 at Namthang, Namchi district which in the past was the head office of the Sikkim Newar Guthi. The next celebration at community level was held at Singtam in 2016 and Namchi in 2017, later the members shifted the venue to Gangtok in 2018 and was celebrated at a massive scale. The

members of guthi played a vital role in organizing Indraajatra as well as preparing samaibaji at such a colossal scale. It is through this celebration many Newars were re-introduced to their cultural food delicacy, from the narratives of Newars it was recorded that celebration of Indraajatra organized by the guthi collectively bought together all the Newars under one roof motivating them to learn further and deeply about their rich food culture and even prepare it at home. Indraajatra today has also been recognised as the state holiday in Sikkim and this recognition was presented to the Newars by the then government Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) led by Shree Pawan Kumar Chamling.

Revitalizing Cultural Identity Through Food: The Role of Sikkim Newar Guthi in Preserving Traditional Newar Cuisine

The Newar community of Sikkim has experienced significant cultural shifts due to migration, modernization, and globalization, leading to a gradual erosion of many traditional practices, especially in the realm of food. In response to this cultural dislocation, the Sikkim Newar Guthi has emerged as a central institution in the revival and preservation of Newar culinary heritage, serving as a vehicle for identity reclamation and cultural continuity.

Since its inception in 1994, the Guthi has initiated several community-driven food-related programs aimed at sensitizing the Newars of Sikkim to their rich and diverse gastronomic heritage. These initiatives have not only helped reconnect individuals with their ancestral roots but also fostered communal solidarity and pride.

One of the earliest and most impactful efforts by the Guthi was the establishment of a food stall during the Red Panda Festival in 2017, held in Gangtok. This eleven-day cultural festival provided a vibrant platform to introduce traditional Newar cuisine to a broader audience, including dignitaries, scholars, and tourists. The food stall featured iconic dishes such as choila, yomari, Newar achar, sel roti, samaibaji, and buffalo momo. These items, deeply embedded in Newar culture, received overwhelming appreciation and turned out to be an instant success—both culturally and economically. Generating an income of approximately four lakh rupees, this initiative demonstrated the potential of cultural gastronomy not only as a heritage tool but also as a viable economic venture. As a gesture of goodwill, the Newars distributed their food to all 54 participating stalls on the final day of the festival, symbolizing respect, alliance, and hospitality—values central to their food ethos.

Further advancing their cultural mission, the Guthi organized an innovative achar (pickle) competition during the Indraajatra celebration of 2018. A total of 163 vegetarian and non-vegetarian pickles were prepared by members of the Newar community, highlighting both culinary creativity and traditional knowledge. The competition was more than just a showcase of flavour—it aimed to rekindle familiarity with ancestral recipes and promote them in contemporary settings. Out of all entries, ten vegetarian achars were selected for a nutritional analysis, conducted by Dr. Sushen Pradhan, President of Newar Youth Affairs. These pickles were later commercially launched during the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Guthi on

November 9, 2019, symbolizing a significant step in transforming ritual foods into accessible everyday commodities and strengthening the community's economic and cultural self-reliance.

Another remarkable and sustained effort by the Guthi lies in culinary education. Recognizing that cultural revival must begin at the grassroots level, the Guthi facilitated cooking workshops across multiple regions such as Melli, Dentam, Singtam, and Rongli. Renowned chefs and culinary experts from Nepal were invited to conduct these workshops, providing hands-on training in the preparation of traditional dishes like chatamari, womari, peas pickle, methikojhol, choila, yomari, and kachila. These immersive workshops served as vital spaces for knowledge transmission between generations. For instance, a workshop held on July 16, 2019, in Singtam featured culinary expert Mrs. Laxmi Vajracharya from Nepal, who played an instrumental role in educating the Sikkimese Newars about their native cuisine.

Such initiatives did not go unnoticed. Young participants, like 22-year-old Adarsh Pradhan, expressed a renewed sense of pride and identity after learning about his culinary heritage. He articulated a strong desire to share these traditional recipes with his peers and family, marking a personal transformation and signalling a wider cultural ripple effect. This sentiment was echoed by other community members who began embracing their food identity not merely as a nostalgic remnant but as a living, evolving practice.

Despite these commendable efforts, the field study reveals that traditional Newar food continues to remain largely symbolic, prepared mainly during festivals and ritual events rather than as part of daily meals. This reveals a crucial limitation in the process of cultural revival—the gap between symbolic representation and lived practice. The reasons for this include changes in lifestyle, lack of time, availability of ingredients, and the pervasive influence of globalized food habits.

Nevertheless, the work of the Sikkim Newar Guthi marks a significant counter current to cultural dilution. Its activities underscore the importance of food not merely as sustenance but as a medium of storytelling, memory, and identity. By actively creating spaces for cultural exchange, culinary learning, and public participation, the Guthi has redefined how traditions can be preserved in a diasporic and modern context.

In essence the Guthi's food revival initiatives reflect more than a culinary renaissance—they symbolize a resilient assertion of cultural identity in the face of ongoing social and cultural transformations. While challenges remain in mainstreaming traditional food into everyday consumption, the initiatives undertaken so far have laid a robust foundation. They have catalyzed a shift from passive cultural loss to active cultural revival, demonstrating how food can serve as both a bridge to the past and a beacon for the future

Conclusion: Food Revival as Cultural Reclamation in Sikkim's Newar Community

The revitalization of traditional food culture among the Newars of Sikkim is a clear example of cultural reclamation amid the forces of migration, modernization, and globalization. This article reveals how food transcends mere sustenance and emerges as a powerful medium for identity, social cohesion, and cultural memory. The formation of the Sikkim Newar Guthi in 1994 marks a pivotal response to cultural erosion, functioning as a key cultural custodian in reconstructing lost traditions and redefining Newar identity within the Indian context. Through the celebration of rituals like Indrajatra, community-wide food festivals, cooking workshops, and entrepreneurial initiatives, the Guthi fosters renewed engagement with traditional foodways. However, while these efforts have sparked awareness, traditional Newar foods remain largely symbolic—prepared during rituals and festivals rather than in everyday life.

This revival journey is not without its challenges. The tension between cultural preservation and contemporary lifestyles persists, yet the sustained work of the Guthi points to a resilient cultural consciousness. The Sikkim Near Guthi's inclusive, caste-neutral model of operation marks a progressive adaptation of traditional structures to modern diasporic realities. Ultimately, the revival of Newar food traditions in Sikkim serves as a reminder that food is never just what we eat—it is who we are, how we connect, and what we choose to remember

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Tamang Wedding Folksongs: A Study of Themes, Functions, Music and Significance

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Abstract: *This paper will discuss the folksong tradition from the Eastern Himalayan region. Here, many heterogeneous ethnic linguistic groups come together to form the larger Nepali community. Most of these ethnic groups have their own indigenous, distinct history, culture, language but the political and linguistic dominance of Nepali in the Himalayan region have pushed many of these languages and cultures towards becoming endangered. But at the same time the tradition survives in some parts and is still key in defining indigenous culture and identity. One of the communities in the larger Nepali community is the Tamang community.*



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The Tamang Community:

Many legends, stories and anthropological research have claimed the Tamang community to be originally from the northern Himalayan regions of Tibet. Over time they have lived across the Himalayan region in Nepal, India, and Bhutan. The Tamang language is a Tibeto-Burman language and does not have a script of its own. In the past, Tamang language has been written using the Devnagari and the Tibetan-Sambhota script. As the Tamang language has existed and survived without a script, the Tamang community is heavily dependent on oral transmission of their culture and customs throughout their history. Due to this dependence on orality, there also exists various versions of the history of the tribe, stories of creation, origin of clans, origin of tools and the musical instruments and stories about their first movement into the southern regions of the Himalayas.

Tamang Culture -

In a traditional Tamang community, there are certain important individuals who are social leaders and form the foundation of the traditions carried in the community. The *tamba* is the historian and the poet of the community and also acts as the master of ceremony in important rituals of marriage and death. The *ganba* are the elders of the village or community who can

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guide the community with their wisdom and experience. The *bonpo* is the shaman who is the bridge between the natural and the supernatural world and also a medicinal man. The *bonpo* are the traditional healers who use local medicine and extracts of indigenous plants to heal. Along with such remedies a *bonpo* also uses his connection with the other world beyond our world to heal and they play a significant role during ancestral worshipping ceremony. It is also important to look at the changing role and position of these social leaders. Especially the role of the *bonpo* which has been marginalised since the shamanic faith and Buddhism have collided. The Tamang community has been mainly receptive to Buddhism, and also to other mainstream religions but to a lesser degree, leading to the *bon* faith being less in practice among them. Along with this, with the growing advances and availability of western medicines, the traditional healing practices are slowly disappearing. It is only in remote areas, where western medicine and treatment are not easily available the traditional healers are used. The social leaders (*tambas, ganbas*) are the primary users of oral tradition and the agents of knowledge and wisdom who leads the community with their understanding of the past and the various intrinsic customs and traditions of the community. Besides the *tamba* and the *ganba*, the *damphurey* is also an important individual in a Tamang society who actively takes part in the process of evolution of the folk song. He is the person who plays the *damphu*, the traditional Tamang drum which is part of almost all the important social functions. A *damphurey* sings the Tamang folk songs during the many important life events that take place in a person's lifetime.

Tamang Folksongs

The Tamang folk songs can be divided into two basic divisions based on the language that is used. The Tamang folk song which is sung in the Tamang language is called '*whai*'. *Whai* simply means a song. When the Tamang community adopted Nepali as their language, then the form of *selo* emerged. The widespread use of Nepali language, its dominance over other ethnic languages and with the assimilation of Tamang within the larger Nepali identity has resulted in the *whai* branching out into the Tamang *selo*. This also means that Tamang *selo* could be understood and enjoyed by all and would belong to a larger group. It did not remain exclusive to the Tamang community but now belongs as a popular folk form within the larger Nepali community. Similar in theme, beat and tune the Tamang *selo* once again marks the convergence of various ethnic groups to form the Nepali identity.

The songs that the *damphurey* sings are variously themed, from the creation of the universe, the creation of man, origin stories of the musical instrument, the historical songs about the tribe and the songs about the ancestors. He also sings songs which draws from various myths and legends. There are also simple love songs, and songs about Nature and the environment and about daily livelihood and those that ponder on the strangeness of life. One of the important folk songs is the song about the origin of the *damphu* which the key instrument used by the Tamang community.

Damphu ta ramro ghoralko

Chalale modeko

Koiralako katko gheroley wari pari ghereko
Malla baasko killa ley
Battis thauma khileko
Purkha ta hamro Peng Dorjey
Usailey Damphu Banako

The damphu made of Ghoral hide is the good one
The one framed around with the Koirala wood
The pegs made of *malla* bamboo
Nailed in thirty-two places
Peng Dorje is our ancestor
And it is he who created the Damphu

These songs are sometimes celebratory in nature while many are ceremonious, like the songs that are sung during the event of a marriage.

Whai and Tamang wedding

In a Tamang marriage the *tamba* conducts the marriage and the *damphurey* performs the *whai*. The work of the *tambas* or the *damphureys* begins a day prior to the journey of the *janti*, which comprises friends and family of the groom, to the bride's home. The *damphurey*, along with a Buddhist monk, or a *lama*, performs the *Sangba-Silwa*, which is the purification of the house, through prayer and devotion. Although previously there was the tradition of using *bonpo* or the shaman, with the adoption of Buddhism, the role of the *bonpo* has diminished to a point of extinction in the Tamang customs. The lama performs the *chyul thim* or the traditions guided from the Buddhist texts while the *hyul thim* or the traditions of the community are performed by the *damphurey*. These rituals and customs are first done by the monk after which, the *damphurey* takes over with his singing of *selo*. Firstly, he performs the '*sang shergim*' where he sings to the gods to cleanse the house of the evil spirits, while lighting the incense, or the '*sang*'. The smoke from the '*sang*' is believed to purify the house. Besides the *sang*, the *tamba* also uses, *chanamano*, which is commonly known as *titepati*, in the Nepali language and mugwort or common wormwood in English. This medicinal plant with healing properties is regularly used in various customs and rituals in a Tamang community as well as other Nepali communities as its fragrance is believed to have a cleansing effect.

Ahh...
Sango sango sang thano
Sango sango sang thano
Poimana tangahri mae yuji
Poimana tangahri mae yuji
Changmana poi mahase sangathana la

Changmana poi mahase sangathana la.

After the purification of the house using the 'sang' and the *chanamano*, the *tamba* then uses the items prepared by the family. During the performance of this ritual, the groom's family has to prepare a few important items for the *damphurey*. On the *chyangdi*, which is a table used by the *lamas* and the *tambas* in the *lasem*, or the prayer room, they have to present a bottle of *shagun*, which can be a bottle of alcohol or wine, or a glass of milk, and a few flowers known as *kokomhendo*, also known as *totola*, in Nepali. They also have to keep some *sel-roti*, which are breads prepared for the marriage. Amongst these items on the *chyangdi* are kept the *choi mim*, which are the Buddhist scriptures.

A *thui* is also made by mixing camphor, cardamom, clove, and saffron in warm water, which is later strained. The *tamba* then uses this *thui* to perform the *shergim*, where he sprinkles the *thui* around the house as an act of purification. Through all this the *damphurey* asks the *deu deuta*, and the *kul-deuta* for strength and safety. This is not a celebratory song, so there are no dances involved. This is an offering to the gods for the purification of the house. Here ends the 'sang' *shergim* and begins the prayer song for the next day's journey.

Ahh...

lahaima lahaima tilusumusai
lahaima lahaima tilusumusai
Sangema besamu titapanga sai
Sangema besamu titapanga sai
haramahara de lasingnam
harama hara de lasingnam
Mahadeu lame darshana lala
Damphu ma chungu si whaighoji
Damphu ma chungu si whaighoji
Lajlala gumbame thansinam
Lalane gumbame thansinam
Nargima shagun thansinam
Nargima shagun thansinam
nermamae nagahri silthanaji
nermamae nagahri silthanaji
poimama tanghari mae yuji

poimama tanghari mae yuji
poimama tanghari mae yuji
dermama nanghari nangsala thanaji
damphuma sangasi whaighoji
dhimlala luda phyaphulo ji

dhimla la luda phyaphulo ji
dhimlala dhami phyaphula ji

gangemi gyangami thangsinam
gangemi gyangami thangsinam
dhermame choi me mrasinam
dhermame choi me mrasinam
selai selo besinam
selai selose silathanala

amalaile jana khailala
amaile jana khailala
amalaile jana khailala
amaile jana khailala
tamanga chungu nila chudamaphu
tamanga chungu nila chudamaphu
damphuma chungasi whaighoji

damphuma chungasi whaighoji
damphuma chungasi whaighoji
dhimlama phola daladha
dhimlama phola daladha
shergi bumbase phulthanala

shergima bumbase selthanaji
shergima bumbase selthanaji
lulgima ladami phulthanaji
lulgima ladami phulthanaji
nubgi ladami phulthanaji
nubgi ladami phulthanaji
jobgima lathame phulthanaji

Amailele jana khailala
Amailele jana khailala
Damphuma rabasi whaighoji
Damphuma rabasi whaighoji
Whaighoji brabame nga mula

*Khaigoji tabame nga mula
Gyalpo la gyalamola karmari
Gyalpo la gyalamola karmari
Syugai syugo syu thanri*

*Banbome syubame lathanhri
Banbome syubame lathanhri
Lamame syubame thi thanhri
Damphuma chyaji sangsinam
Damphuma chyaji sangsinam
Ganbame gansomda phyaphuloji
Asenga aangi phyaphulaji
Asenga aangi phyaphulaji
Mhemhe ma mama dani phyaphulaji
damphula selo mi lasinam
damphula selo mi lasinam
churime shyubhame shyudanala
chorime shyubhame shyudanala
damphu la selo se phyaphula*

Here, the *damphurey* exclusively sings along with the sound of his *damphu* to the gods and goddesses, *deu-deuta* of the rivers and the mountains, *khola-dala*. He sings for the strength and safety of the *janti* and to appease the evil spirits. Besides the *dev deuta*, the *selo* also sings to the elders of the house, and asks for their blessings.

The *damphurey* also accompanies the *janti* to the bride's house where again plays an important role. Here, the *damphurey* from both the bride and the bridegroom's side are present and they participate in a *juwari* which goes on until one of the *damphureys* can no longer continue the conversation through his song or does not have an answer to the other's question.

Janti:

*ha...ha...ha...Jungle mangle hee fyago
ngengkor sansi dan chyago
simpuri nishi mhanae kulla
shyang remporche fyafulla
lhaptem fil fil papa ya
tor boi oisae khapa ya
shyarse fe:pa ngema dawa*

nhupari doma galpari
sangay korta jyalpari
donglam shenor thukapa
karchyol pongse shyukapa
lasso danna manna lala
shyarse fe:pa ngema dawa
nhupari doma galpari

In a *juwari*, the *damphurey* from the bridegroom's side begins the event. The *damphurey* asks the friends and family of the bride and the *damphurey* of the bride, who are present there to give him their attention as he has an important thing to say. He pays respect to the *kul*, the ancestral gods, and the Buddhist gods and the *remporche*, who is a Buddhist saint. He also shows his reverence to Nature, by calling out to the sun which rises in the east and sets in the west. Then he presents the *karchyol pong*, or the gifts that they have brought along for the bride's family. This presentation of the *karchyol pong* is customary in the Tamang community and it is considered to be an important part of the dual between the two *damphureys* and also to the marriage as a whole. It is through this gift that the bridegroom's *damphurey* begins to speak about the bride and eventually ask her hand in marriage.

As a reply to the *karchyol pong* and what is said by the bridegroom's *damphurey*, the *damphurey* from the bride's side replies, by asking them to feel comfortable and that they will take care of everyone in the *janti* who has made this auspicious journey to their village. Then he enquires as to why the *karchyol pong* has been presented, and what the *janti* are looking for in return. He also asks about the *nhorla* or the presence of a particular amount of money in the *pong*. He then goes on to invite the *janti* into the house.

Bride's side:

Ha...ha...ha...sepapatise la korge
ngengkor sansi danchyago
hyangla palo pang borge
gompo ngrajyang fulsari
nganna hrongla hyulsari
tilta wapa karchyol pong
tila mula ngengkor shela dong
tila mula ngengkor nhorla dong
ngengkor syukai mrap dungo
hya om ngenkor syal sungko
lasso danna manna lala

The *dampaturey* from the groom's side here, makes an attempt to provide an excuse for their visit. In this segment the *dampaturey* refers to the village of the bride as a garden full of jewels and says that their visit is filled with a hope to find a treasure for themselves. He says that they have come looking for a beautiful flower, and that is why they have brought the *karchyol pong*. The bridegroom's *dampaturey* then appeals to the *tamba* and the elders in the *janti* and the *lamas* who are seated there and requests them to listen to what he has to say. Since the Tamang community has integrated the Buddhist religion and customs, the *lamas* too have to say their prayers and carry out their rituals. The *dampaturey* refers to this and sings of how the *lama* and the *shaman* have appeased their gods, in their own ways and the gods from every direction are satisfied. Hence, he says that there is no reason as to why the *janti's* visit to this garden will not be successful.

Janti

*ngala thopori walbase
syangi dongpo rimporche
sanbar nangsi danchyago
marchala pete rulchami
syang ngengkorla hyulsami
manlapa shyudan gallaicha
mui mhendola bagaicha
bonpase gyalpo sanglawa
lamase konjyo sanglawa
mui mhendola bagaicha
ngangtai folegi yanglawa
ngengkor bajan syukapa
syang dongpola hyulsari
mhendola folegi thukapa
karchyol pongse syukapa
lasso danna manna lala*

*Thigila lama thigila ghle
sanbar gryansi danchyago
syangi nengkor remporche
lamase konchyo fangpase
bonbose dunchur fangpase
sangayse jinlap nangpase
shyarla sangay syar khaiba
mui mhendola bagaicha*

*tapa lhengmori thu athul
danna ngengkor danna hyul
sangayla dewa duwari
aalai chiten supari
muskil mula ngengkoro
mhendola fum gi thupari
lasso danna manna lala*

Janti:

*Mhida che gupa mhela ngre
sanbar ngansi danchyago
syangsi dongpo remporche
mula tala nganna vaggeri
mhendo gila lagiri
mhui mhendori sem kyamsi
bongnang kapa changpuri
tingnang khaji no syamsi
ngengkorta fyafula
nganim churi dokaba
kulting lapa aala om
mhendola fole gi thupada
tilda musikal tala om
tala talaje sunggo
hya om aasyang syal sunggo
lasso danna manna lala*

Then the *dampurey* from the *janti*, proceeds to exclaim their wish for finding a flower in the garden. He also sheds the metaphor of the flower and the garden, and states that they have come looking, with optimistic thoughts and hope, for a suitable match for their son. He also accepts the fact that for their search for a flower to be successful there may be some difficulties, and some traditions and customs are to be carried out. After this, he presents the *shagun* to the *aseng*, here, meaning the father of the bride.

Bride's side:

*bonpose fangpa nongpa de
lamase fangpa kalpade
sanbar ngyansi danchyago
syangi dongpo remporche
gangila ngengkor fyafulla*

*mhendola fumgi tasai non
mula ngengkor amulya
dim nanpada chai bamsi
bingnang khapa changpuri
tingnang khapa no syamsi
bagaachari ngengkor chepkachim
onchyan ngenkor fepkajim
gyewa ngowa lamadakor
lusi chumsi borpari
tanon aata ngepa ngenkor
hrilam chyanse ra guwa
mhula mhendo thupari
tila chij basi fepsyuba
mhendo kinkapa thasungo
ya om ngengkor shyal sungo
lasso danna manna lala*

After the *bonpo* and the *lama* perform their rituals the bride's *dampurey* goes on to speak about the proposal that has been put forward by the *janti*. He says although they have come looking for a flower where there is a garden, the flower is precious and valuable, and it is required to be earned, which if fulfilled, there should be no problem. He then further goes on to tell them a story about another visit, which was more discreet, where someone had tried to take a flower from them. He compares that individual to a bee who has come for the flower or the wild tiger on prowl to take away a goat for itself. He says that that person tried to steal the bride away, which is not accepted. Here, he has referred to the *chori biya*, where there is no engagement but the boy and the girl elope. He sings this to declare that a proper engagement along with the appropriate customs and traditions needs to be carried out for their visit to be successful. Then he says that for the purpose of fulfilling these criteria a proper proposal is required along with a *shyal* or the *shagun* that is necessary to be presented.

Janti:

*Siba namae resi tor afyang
sanbar ngyanbar danchyago
shyango dangpo asyang syang
pesam changchar ga kula
lupam lhengmo tila mula
tilta ngenkor ngai lula
lampar thansi fyafula*

panggo ngengkor thu thula
Hrangnila mhuala mhendota
mharla chyase tek thula
lasso danna manna lala

In reply to the bride's *damphurey*, the *damphurey* of the bridegroom says philosophically, a dead bird does not come back to life and fly away and the talk that had happened before is like that dead bird. He then moves forward to exclaim that the proposal shall take place now and that they shall take their daughter-in-law with them. He says that they will offer the price that has to be paid while taking a daughter from a village as a bride for their son. The payment of the price is customary in a Tamang wedding. The price, which is a small amount is fixed by the elders of the house, and it is an honorary payment. He says that there is nothing for anyone to hide, adding poetically that they will carry away the bride on a 'golden hand'.

Bride's Side:

Ha...ha...ha...warla dongri gwai nhepa
sangko ngyanko ngengkorse
lhengmo sungji tok nepa
muilam mhendo thupari
mharla chyami tok jepa
dangmola aakhe mhege chinnawa
mhar mhendola capwapa
pakka denba nginnawa
ngaiye ngengkorda fyafulla
chura basi fepkapa mulawa
tingla lhengmo tor orko
lhengmo ngyangge ngengkorla
hya om ngengkor sungborgo
lasso danna manna lala

Eventually, the bride's *damphurey* replies by saying that they have listened to their words, and that he feels that they are ready and satisfied to take the matter of the marriage forward. He then philosophically adds 'to pick a silver flower, the silver knife should be good'. The silver knife refers to the *shagun* presented and the way the *janti* has approached the bride's family and the way their *damphurey* has spoken and represented the groom's family. He also expresses his satisfaction that the ancestors, *akhey mhemhe*, who have brought forward this tradition, have been respected, which bodes well for the bride. He states that their trust and respect has been earned and that they have a strong belief that their daughter will be taken care of by the groom's family. He further adds that the words and thoughts that have been presented have been accepted and agreed upon, so the discussion needs to be taken forward.

In this manner, the *dampaturey* plays a vital role in a marriage in the Tamang community. He conducts the purifications of the groom's house and prays for the safety and the prosperity of the occasion through his *whai*. He also accompanies the groom and his family to the bride's house, presents the proposal to the bride's *dampaturey* through his song. The songs also reflect the relationship between the various institutions that are a part of the lives of the Tamang people. We can see the amalgamation of the Buddhist religion that they follow and its role in the marriage along with the traditional Tamang culture and its functioning.

Question: *Dhartiko ke cha gahana*

Gaonko ke cha gahana

Sunima rakhau, bhanana

Sunima rakhau.

Answer: *Swargama ramro suhauney*

Kalpa briksha gahana

Dharti ramro dekhiney

Pipal briksha gahana

Jawan ketini bhaye

Gaonko ta ramro nigahana

Question: What is the jewel of the earth?

What is the jewel of a village?

Please tell us the answer

We are all ears

Answer: The tree of life adorns the Heaven

The tree of life is the ornament of the Heaven

The pipal tree is the jewel of the Earth

And as for the village

Young beautiful girls are its jewel

(Translation, mine)

(Dasgupta et al 2015, 67)

The Tamang folk music like many other forms of folk tradition acts as a repository of culture, traditions and hence identities too. As discussed earlier, re-creation, change, multiple versions and the evolving nature is a fundamental part of folk culture. True to these fundamental criteria, many customs and traditions also are subject to change and it is through these folk songs that we can tap into the collective knowledge of the community that exists in the form of songs. The Tamang language is mostly a dying language especially in the region

of North Bengal, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal. It is only spoken by a few individuals or in selected villages which further highlights the importance of the role of the *damphurey* and his songs in keeping the tradition alive. These days these songs have also mostly shifted from being a part of the various rituals in the lives of the people in the community to being something which is performed on stage for the public during various conferences and meets. Yet it still serves as a medium through which identity can be defined and indigenous history found.

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