

Guthi as a Performative Practice in Newari Culture with Reference to Jyapu

Community Living in Kirtipur

This research makes an attempt to study the Newari culture of Kirtipur. It tries to highlight the characteristics of a typical Newar society including their history of origin, settlement pattern, rituals, social hierarchy and caste system and their tradition and culture. Mainly it focuses on their religiously inspired traditional social organization Guthi which is regarded as one of the core elements of their society. It discusses how it performs to make Jyapu castes strongest on their culture and tradition in comparison to other Newar castes. Likewise, it discusses the impact of Newari culture in Kirtipur to enhance mutual understanding, harmony, preventing anarchy and in maintaining the customs and social order of the Newars. Every religious act, festival and traditional system is being practiced by Newar people since ancient times without any obstruct.

Nowadays, all these performative acts are under the high current of transition and transformation. This research focuses on how to preserve the originality of the performative quality of these performing acts, despite the fact that they are being practiced without any obstruction.

Additionally, this research points out the changing mode of traditional religious rituals followed by Guthi system due to the impact of modernity. It focuses on transforming the discriminatory and outdated rituals which were strictly followed by Guthiyars in Guthi system. These changes could help for the further existence of all traditional acts. The main aim of this research is to preserve Newari culture along with the changing mode of the human mind. Guthi social organizations are also influenced by such changes. On the other hand, the process of modernization is something that a society cannot avoid. It is undeniable and unavoidable elements for

the society. So, this research finds out the main way to balance between these 'tradition' and 'modern' to harmonize them in proper manner for the well being of the Newar society. Traditions are necessary in order to keep the society's cultural identity alive. So, by keeping the basic points related to the notion of different philosophers, writers and senior members of Guthi as reference has made it realize the importance of traditional religious rituals and find the ways of revitalizing their cultural elements.

Guthi system plays a crucial role in performing every ritual, occasion related to birth, death, ceremony, festival and so on. Guthi system of Newars is an important feature of this society. In the sense of performance Victor Turner defines, "A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures" (qtd. in Richard Schechner 20). Guthi are formed for the preservation and maintenance of temple, or continuation of any festival, or helping the needy persons as social work also. It performs with a view to accomplishing a work not by an individual but by a group of persons collectively who shared a common goal. Guthi is a proof of selfless service. It stand for the welfare of the Guthiyars. Guthi system has significant role in combining every members within the society. It shows how performance could be a key paradigm in many cultures. The caste and familial organization of the Newars cannot be fully understood without understanding their Guthi institutions, which are of socio- religious characters. This study helps to achieve different rules that hold to combine Newar people within certain area in Guthi system. It has its own significance and helps to clarify declarative statement, which provides direction to investigate the variables because through this system we can know other norms and values of Newar's culture.

Likewise, Guthi existed for the three particular themes – the god, the living and the dead. These three themes were carried out by the members of the Guthi. In

Kirtipur most Guthis do still exist although the activities that they conduct may have diminished considerably. This research also focuses on the major impact of modernization within this religious system. In the sense of Guthi, Prayag R. Sharma opines that, “It was the living style of the Newar people which created the feeling and importance of living and doing things together, and this was the prime reason for the creation of Guthi system” (51). The Guthi system is therefore integrated into the social structure of the communities and hence was not only successful but also highly sustainable. It is a system like no other in the world. Similarly, Catherine Bell talks about ritual and think that ritual is a form of social activity. She defines, “Ritualization is fundamentally a way of doing things to trigger the perception that these practices are distinct and the associations that they engender are special” (220). Guthi system has presented its own distinct features and power of ritualization for its existence. It follows every traditional and cultural activities to preserve own typical identity.

The general objectives of this study have focuses on the cultural, historical and social aspects of the Newars. Main issues are related to Newar Guthi culture which has been praised not only by the entire Nepalese people but also by the foreign people and scholars. In order to preserve this Guthi culture, which is a pride for the nation itself, Newar people must come forward. Victor Turner focuses on the study of culture and society in his book. The concept of liminality and *communitas* arise from his analysis of their codependence with the concept of structure. He conceived of *communitas* as an intense community spirit, the feeling of great social equality, solidarity and togetherness. As he states, “any concrete tribal society is made up of multiple *personae*, groups and categories, each of which has its own developmental cycle” (129). In Kirtipur, Newari society is made up of multiple ethnic groups and

categories and Guthi is the formation of a group as a performative act which has its own developmental cycle. Communities are divided into different toles in Kirtipur. Each tole has their own Guthi organization where tole members are presented as representatives for management and to maintain every rituals act within the specific place.

The research also studies the effect of this Guthi system and its kinds. Newari Guthis are of very different types. Some, for instance are compulsory, others purely optional. Even among one category there is wide latitude for variation according to caste or locality. It is possible to distinguish into three main types: first Guthi sets up for the worship of a particular deity or the celebration of a festival; second funeral association and third territorial segments or ward groups, mainly linked with music. Guthyars are responsible to run every process related to different Guthi. Commenting on the Richard Schechner book “Performance Studies” as [T]his book discover new ways of looking at performance, and through performance at the world at large. He is one of the founders of Performance Studies. In the sense of performance he defines, “Performance was both ritual and entertainment” (221). To perform every ritual and to celebrate every religious ritual related to different occasion is to act as a performer. So, Guthi members’ gives continuity to every religious task and Newari people perform with joy and enthusiasm.

Catherine Bell was an American religious studies scholar who offers a close theoretical analysis of recent developments in ritual studies. In the sense of ritualization, Catherine defines, “Ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations” (197). Through the ritual process conducted by Guthi it helps to the members of Guthi are called Guthyars. These members are, in many ways, servants of

the goddess and are paid in cash or in food by the Guthi sansthan. Guthyars have to make an annual or bi- annual contribution to meet the running expenses. Every member is responsible for the management of the association and this resolves each year. The rotation for organizing feasts and rituals ties of solidarity and dependence within the group. These regulations express the intra-caste solidarity and unity among the Newar in Kirtipur. Guthi came into being due to the realization of the need to live together, earn one's livelihood, and ensure one's life and the need to work together for a common purpose.

According to the notion of Anne Vergati, "The Guthi constitutes a network undergirding the whole of Newar social and religious life" (124). Guthi is a proof of selfless service. If its value diminished then there will be no existence of cultural values in Newar's community because Guthi as an institution helps to identify Newar's culture as a civilized and communal culture in Nepal. The main objectives of this study are to focus on the cultural, historical and social aspect of the Guthi system among the Newars and to explain performative act of guthi among the Non Newars.

Guthi – An Integral Part of Newar Society

Guthi is a social organization used to maintain the socio-economic order of Newar society, prevailing among the several cast of Newars. The Guthi system has been in existence since 5th century B.C; presently, in Kathmandu most of the Guthis are defunct and are vestigial representation of what once was the most powerful social organization of the Newars. However, in Kirtipur city Guthi system still exist with its own purpose and its functions governed by the internal rules. Specifically, in Kirtipur the Newar society is one of the traditional society having typical traditional characteristics. Traditional culture of this place is control and maintain by the social organization Guthi. There are many rituals that we follow in our life stages from birth,

marriage, death, rice feeding, and seniority and so on. To conduct and to follow up such rituals, maintain tradition, preserve culture and religious festivals, Guthi is believed to be formed. Not only Nepali writers but the foreign scholars who have studied Newar culture praise this system. Likewise, Gerard Toffin defines, “It might be contended that Guthi until very recently were the ideal form of cooperation and social grouping among this people. They are vital for the status of an individuals and reinforce in many ways social relations within the community” (292).

The history of Guthi in Kirtipur is as old as the history of Newar civilization. It is believed that Guthi system were flourished well in Licchavi periods and gained maturity in Malla periods. Gerard Toffin claims, “Unbroken tradition continuing from the Licchavi Period [5th-9th century CE] down to the present” (291). Guthi system is varied as their purposes for which they established. Nevertheless, their main target is to maintain peace and order, uniting people within the community and in keeping ‘we feeling’ alive along with the religious faiths and beliefs. Thus, due to its importance in the lives of the Newar people, it is regarded as one of the most important and significant element of the Newar culture. Schechner claims, “Performative thinking must be seen as a means of culture analysis” (8). In Newari culture Guthi organization plays a vital role in performing rituals related to the culture. Performance of Guthi system has seen as a means of Newari culture analysis. Through this system we can analyzed every performing rituals related to the Newars’ society. They provide a definitive corporative character to the activities of the locality.

In Gerard Toffin’s *Newar Society* Mahesh Chandra Regmi stressed his idea. As he defines, “Guthi was originally used to denote an association of persons responsible for the management of religious and philanthropic endowments, not the endowments themselves” (291). Toffin furthermore says, “Guthi set up for the

worship of a particular deity or the celebration of a festival; second, funeral associations; and third, territorial segments or ward groups, mainly linked with music, but also in some cases (among craftsmen) with workshops” (291). There are many things that have to be learnt from the system of Guthi that are prevalent in Kirtipur. The main objective of the Guthi is to do welfare of the people by undertaking a religious activity such as installation of an idol of god or construction of a temple. It is an object of study. It conduct or work to organize various festivals, maintain the worship of a given lineage or regional god, to take charge of funerals, to protect at a regional or caste level as a corporate group. According to Schechner, “The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance” (2). Similarly, Bala Ram Acharya said that, “Guthi is a traditional organization which is established to do works related to society, religion, Jatra and devalaya” (219). Guthi conducted every works related to Jatra, worship, death, rituals etc which is presented and highlighted or displayed as more significance.

Performative act of this system helps in maintaining social unity, relation and group work. It works as a medium to perform socio-cultural works in an active way.

Schechner argues, “A performer in ordinary life, in a ritual, at play or in the performing arts does show something performs an action” (30). Guthiyars duty is to assist in the work of Guthis. They are performer and their performance shows to preserve the fixed or floating assests of Guthi. Every Guthi has its own specific objectives. These objectives must be accomplished by the collective efforts of all the Guthiyars.

Likewise, Schechner argues, “More than a few people attend religious service as much for aesthetic pleasure and social interactivity as for reasons of belief. In many cultures, participatory performing is the core of ritual practice” (32). Every Newari

people especially Guthiyars attend religious service as much for aesthetic pleasure and social activities as for reason of belief. Their belief is inspired by the religious spirit and realization of the need to live together earn one's livelihood, ensure one's life and the need to work together for a common purpose. On the other hand, Bala Ram Acharya said that, "Religion consists of beliefs like hell, heaven, sacred, profane etc. Likewise, while applying religious in their economic, social, political and cultural life, people use to act as per the belief in that religion" (161). In Newari culture every behavioral characteristics, songs, musical instruments, plays, festivals, important occasions, processions that reflect the life and spirit of people are elements that explore the significance of collective feelings. The Guthi was created with a view to accomplishing a work, not by an individual, but by a group of persons collectively who shared a common goal. Schechner claims, "Rituals games and the performances of everyday life are authored by the collective" (35). This research aims at exploring valuable rituals followed within the Guthi system. This tradition systems still exist and perform every ritual's related to Newars' community. It has its own significant and helps to clarify declarative statements, which provides direction to investigate the variable because through this system we can know other norms and value of Newar's culture. In the sense of ritual, Schechner states, "Rituals are frequently divided into two main types, the sacred and the secular. Sacred rituals are those associated with expressing or enacting religious beliefs" (53). In Newari culture, rituals related to death are performed with in a sacred atmosphere. On the other hand, Toffin states, "This is particularly the case with the *Sikah bhway*, a special feast that takes place at the end of the festivities, usually in the late evening. It is restricted to the eight oldest male members of the association, collectively called the thakali. Women are totally excluded from these rituals" (299). Cathrine Bell has defines, "This understanding of

ritual accompanied a primary focus on religion, as having to do with the sacred, which is still seen in the work of phenomenologists of religion today” (14). So, Kirtipur is a sacred community where it has sacramental values which help to define as a unique. During the ceremonial meals at first food is offered to the *Sidyah* god of the group. The dishes are thus sacred in many ways.

In Kirtipur every Newar caste has its own Guthi institution which controls most of their social interaction and works. Toffin, illustrates the most significant role of Guthi system. He elaborates, “Moreover, every Newar is bound with various Guthi institutions, some inherited by birth and some gained membership voluntarily. Some of the Guthi are compulsory whereas some are purely optional” (291). In Kirtipur, whatever the type of Guthi is, the composition of this system is the same. Eldest male of the family can be the member of the Guthi. Eldest member represents his family in a Guthi. Women are not allowed to be the member because of the patriarchal nature of the Newar society. So, this is the strict rule which is in practice till today. The term used for a member in any Guthi is Guthiyar. The eldest among those Guthiyars is termed as Thakali. Each and every decision of the particular Guthi is made by the Thakali, as he is believed to be the most experienced one.

Similarly, in Anne Vergati perspectives, “The local Guthi (deslaguthi) is of lesser importance, but it is also a means for social control, since it is a corporate group” (105). The author underscores the fact that the Guthi system is a feature peculiar to the Newars, a feature which differentiate them from the Indo-Nepalese ethnic group. In the lineage and caste based Guthi, kinship rules predominate. The head of the association is the oldest lineage or caste member. He is called the *Nayo* (Newari) or *Thakali* (nepali) which means “leader” or termed as *Chyamha* Thakali; eldest one being Thakali. He is assisted in his functions by three, five or seven

subordinate who are respectively designated, according to their age, by the titles of *noku* (second), *soku* (third), *pyeuku* (fourth), *nyaku* (fifth), *khuku* (sixth) and *nheku* (seventh). The seniority principal comes into play at such times as members of a given lineage come to inherit various functions.

The hierarchy of a lineage or caste-based Guthi plays an important role at the time of annual feasts in which all the association members come together and in which ritual distribution of the sacrificial animal occurs. Either the *nayo* or the *thakali* receives the right eye of the sacrificed animals. This signifies that they or he alone have the power of decision. In the lineage-based Guthi, if the *Nayo* dies, it is the *Nokuli*, second in the association hierarchy, who succeeds him. One of the Guthiyars is also appointed and is called *Pala*, whose responsibility is to manage the Guthi and acts as a caretaker of the main God of the Guthi for the period of one year. After that, another Guthiyar is chosen as *Pala* and the God is handed over, organizing a feast for all the Guthiyars. The other members are not considered. Schechner argues, “values are a function of culture, group and individual’s value can be used to protect and liberate or to control and oppress” (1). In Guthi system every voice of the senior members, every themes related to rituals, opinions, methods for maintaining order and subjects related to the activities can be studied as performance. Every act related to Guthi system in Newar community has its own value.

Regarding the economic aspects of the Guthi, it is run by the incomes of land and collective contribution of the members. If the Guthi has land property, then it is rented to certain individuals and the revenue collected is reserved in budget and used for Guthi activities and rituals. Anne Vergati had rightly expressed. She defines, “The Guthi are also financial corporation’s which possess wealth and to which members pay annual dues in order to cover the association’s costs, their priest’s salary, temple

upkeep, and the annual banquet which falls at the time of the divinity's festival” (100).

Newar's Guthi in financing by collecting money from their members to give to their priest and for other expenditures of the divinity's festival is remarkable. Moreover, most lands owned by the Guthi were either privatized by the tenants or seized by the Government itself for the development purpose. So, most of the land are not in used as before. “UttamSagar Shrestha Chapter on “Land Use Changes In Kirtipur” is the most detailed of the three and directly addresses many of the effects of the mandatory 1957 sale of much of Kirtipur's agricultural land to His Majesty's Government for the purpose of building the campus of Tribhuvan University and the Horticultural Research station. The agricultural bases for the financial resources of many Guthis charged with maintaining the structured described in this volume were lost a third of its cultivated land” (65-68). The money which is required for functioning of the Guthi is collected from the Guthiyars. Working committee collect money from all the members. Additionally, fines are charges to those who are absence in Guthi rituals and meeting. That all goes on to the budget. Working committee has the responsibility to manage and fix the budget for each activity of the Guthi within a year. Finally, we can say that Guthiyars' tries to find out the other ways to run their traditional system. Their attempt shows their strong unity.

As Newar society is one of the strongest patriarchal societies, where women have very passive role to play in Guthi organization. Though family belongs to Guthi but female are not included as member in Guthi system. Women are strictly prohibited in performing rituals related to Guthi. In certain rituals women are allowed to participate. But, in case of rituals related to Guthi and for the conduction of Guthi functions, the women are also participation is not allowed at all. Mostly women task

is to prepare food in Newar society but in Guthi feast women are not allowed to cook and not even allowed to be present during the feast and during Guthi discussions. In Guthi only male member of the family can be Guthiyar and represent the entire family in Guthi. Anne Vergati explains it as:

A girl who marries leaves her family to go and live with the family of the husband. Henceforth, she will no longer belong to her original lineage and will have to submit to the obligations imposed on her husband's lineage and will have to submit to the obligations imposed on her husband's lineage, in this respect a woman marries not only an individual but also a lineage. (38-39)

Unmarried Newar women belong to the Guthi in which her father is member, but after marriage, automatically integrated to the Guthi in which her husband has membership. In some families, there may be such cases that there are no male representatives and if male member are under the age of 18 then also all the services are provided to that family as other families of Guthi. Basic point is that in Guthi system we can observe gender biasness in nature and in performance. In the sense of gender biasness Bala Ram defines, "Every society has different roles for men and women in its different socio-cultural aspects. Gender is the role that men and women fulfill differently and these roles are formed on the basis of social norms and values, religion and culture" (104). Likewise, Gerard Toffin explain it as :

Nonetheless, it must be said that Newar women are clearly under the domination of men, in daily life as well as in communal events.

Hierarchically, men come first, according to seniority, women and children second. Among all castes, men eat first then women start eating only after the men of the household have finished their meal. More importantly, wives eat the polluted leftovers (New. Cipa) of their husband. (393)

If we observe on the whole then Newar women from all castes, high or low, feel themselves to be in a better situation than Chettri and Bahun women. They have their own legal rights and are prompt to defend their own interests against their husband. Specially, Maharjan women in Kirtipur are economically and socially more independent from their husband's family than Shrestha caste women except in Guthi system.

In the sense of gender, Bala Ram Acharya writes, "Different gender roles arise out of relation and social structure of patriarchal society seen from the point of view of process of male, identities are actives, rational and independent. These social assumptions are supported and strengthened by patriarchal social relation" (103). So, Guthi members should admit the concept of gender biasness as worthless for its own sustainable existence.

Gopal Singh illustrates, "Each Guthi provides numerous occasions for collective worship of a particular deity to which it is consecrated; and for feasts in which its members have the right to ritual participation" (191). In Kirtipur there are numerous types of Guthis depending upon their functionality and purpose of establishment. Toffin furthermore says, "Guthi set up for the worship of a particular deity or the celebration of a festival; second, funeral associations; and third, territorial segments or ward groups, mainly linked with music, but also in some cases (among craftsmen) with workshops" (291). There are different Guthis in Newar culture and they perform according to their categorization. In overall it performs social activities for the welfare of the Newari people. Bala Ram Acharya in *Society & Culture In Nepal* illustrate the idea of sociologist Janak Lal Sharma. He defines, "Among these there are three main types of Guthis. They are Sana Guthi, Si Guthi, Dewali or Dhau Guthi" (220). These Guthis are main in Newar culture. Sana Guthi and Si Guthi are

related to death rituals. Sana Guthi helps in picking up the dead body and in taking it to the place of cremation whereas Si Guthi picks up the dead body and conducts the last rites. Dewali or Dhau Guthi established to worship that communal clan deity. Among all, these are main types of Guthis which are still in practiced.



Fig.1: Funeral Guthi (Si Guthi) members lend assistance to each for the cremation of Guthi members.

In the sense of death Guthi, Toffin had rightly expressed. He writes, “Funeral Guthi are a distinctive feature of the Newar (see Chapter 1,2,3 and 6). These mutual associations, in which the members lend assistance to each other for the cremation of Guthi member” (296). In Kirtipur, Si Guthi (for death rituals) is the main and it is in practice which comes under the category of service- oriented Guthi. Death Guthi ‘Sana Guthi’ runs a permanent office and has its governing body consisting of eight members among the member house- holds. The chief of ‘Sana Guthi’ is called ‘Naika’ or ‘Thakali’. At the time of a funeral procession the corpse has to be covered with a red cloth called ‘deva’ which has to be covered which has to be supplied by the ‘Sana Guthi’ office. Every members of the ‘Sana Guthi’ are divided into different groups

with different duties connected with the disposal of the dead. 'Sana Guthi' has a system of attendance to ensure the participation of all the Guthiyars. The Guthiyars who are absent on the particular funeral are fined with some financial amount which goes to the fund of the Guthi. Gopal Singh defines, "Each caste is spatially divided into local groups owing allegiance to their respective 'Sana Guthis'. The name of this Guthi is derived from its primary function of disposing of the dead" (192). At the same time there are numerous feasts to be held by it in a year in which all the members have to participate or in default have to pay a fine such as would be fixed by the Guthi council. Each Si Guthi has its senior members and an organizing committee, who police social regulations within the community and act as a vehicle for moral values. Death ceremonies involve the participation of many rituals specialist barbers, musician, various priest and the like.



Fig. 2: Guthi: tradition of Newari family. One day before Jatra Guthi member arrange this feast for Si-Guthi.

In addition, the Guthiyar are present to help and demonstrate their solidarity. Each Si Guthi celebrates its own annual feast. In the past, some of them met twice a year, but this is no longer the case today. These feasts are held over two or three days,

and include numerous meals. Buffaloes are sacrificed and their meat eaten by the Guthiyar. All the members must participate in the gathering. Fines are levied on Guthiyar who are absent. Among Maharjan farmers, these feasts are held in special buildings, 'Guthi Che' belonging to the association. It helps Guthiyars to share each other's ideas and allow them to discuss about the matters regarding Guthi work. Their mutual understanding and helpful thoughts bound every Newars with a positive attitude. These types of behavior help other to learn the importance of unity and traditional culture.

Similarly, Degu (Dewali) Guthi is basically formed with the motive of worshipping and to conducts the religious activities. The Newar communities are in engage with patriarchal groups having common ancestors. Such lineage group is organized under the culture of ancestral deity called "Dewali" and the institution is "Dewali Guthi". Gopal Singh Nepali has described main features of Newars in his book. He writes, "Each caste is divided into patrilineal lineage-groups whose members preserve the memory of having a common ancestor. Such a lineage-group is organized under the cult of the ancestral deity called 'Dewali' and the institution is called Dewali Guthi" (194).



Fig. 3: Degu (Dewali) Guthi: lineage group is organized under the culture of ancestral deity.

The members of a ‘Dewali Guthi’ are to refer to by one another as “Fukee”(relative) a term, which implies splitting from the common generation. The “Dewali” group is therefore a cluster of a large number of joint families and nuclear families that trace their descent to common male ancestor. Gopal Singh Nepali gives a clear definition of the term ‘Fukee’ as:

When a Newar says that such and such person is ‘my fukee’, it implies many things. Firstly, it means that he and the person in in question cannot intermarry; secondly it denotes that their ‘Dewali’ deity is one; and finally it means that mutual rights and obligations in matters of domestic ceremonies existing among them, are the same as among the members of a family. (194)

The “Fukee” members are placed in definite hierarchy in matters of social precedence. The seniority is based on generation and age. The “Thakali” is the head of the “Dewali Guth” or organization. There are other sever seniors under Thakali.

They are Naku, Soku, Peku, Nyaku, Khuku, Nhye-Ku and Chya-ku. The 'Dewali' group is, therefore, a large number of joint and nuclear families. In all ceremonies they act as a group. At every stage related to ceremonies or in a death rituals "Thakali", chief of the 'Dewali' group and his wife ('Naki') who have to head these ceremonies. Robert Levy defines this *Fukee* group as, "The largest patrilineal unit called as clan consists of people who are thought to descend from a common male ancestor whose men and unmarried women share the same surname and who are forbidden to marry each other" (138). Every performance related to rituals shows love and affection within relatives in Newars' community. It helps to teach moral lesson and shows the values of their own culture. So, Guthi system works as a means in uniting through the power of rituals.

This study aims to focus on the Newar indigenous community. Similar to other indigenous communities of Southern Asia, this community has not gained much of international focus like those of Europe, America and Australia; but still has its own distinct identity and way of life. Gopal Singh state as :

The term Newar is applied to designate a number of former ethnic groups who have, through centuries of inter- breeding, been welded into a homogeneous community with common traditions of language and other social heritage. It is therefore, a gross over- simplification to regard them as belonging to one single racial origin. (18)

Tika Ram Gautam's *Sociology and Anthropology* explores his further ideas on this subject. He states, "System generally work to maintain stability, cultures are often fairly stable and remain so unless the conditions to which they are adapted, or the human perceptions of those conditions, change" (200). Guthi as a system works to maintain stability in Newar society. It helps to solve the problem of existence and for an integrated cultural system. In Richard Johnson et.al *The Practice of Cultural*

Studies, dialogue is key to a kind of objectivity for Gadamer, too:

In human relation the important thing is... To experience the Thou as truly a Thou – i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us... Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so (57).

Openness to the other is the main motto of Guthi system. It helps us to know other's value and lead us in a cooperative manner. Through sharing and caring, every member in this system can understand each other.

A Glimpse of Newar Ritual and Festivities

Ray B. Browne in his work *Profiles of Popular Culture* defines popular culture, “as the system of attitudes, behavior, patterns, beliefs, customs, and tastes that define people of any society” (3). It makes clear that popular culture is the way in which and by which most people in any society live. It is the way of life we inherit, practice, modify as we please, and then pass on to newer generation. Guthi act as means to elaborate and to construct religious rituals, traditional customs and on performing holistic behavior. Every socio-cultural works are actively are done through the medium of Guthi. According to Schechner, “There are many ways to understand performance. Any event, action, or behavior may be examined “as” performance” (48).

Moreover, In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall defines, “culture as a shared values transmitted by the medium of language, visual or non- visual, through which individuals make sense of objects and experience, and meanings produced and exchanged”(1). Guthi system shares cultural values and every members experience every ethical and rituals performance

and that helps to produced meaning. Every rituals and festivities related to Newar has its own significance in Kirtipur city. The Newar are well known across the country for their numerous religious festival, feasts and rituals round the year. It is said these days Newars (Jyapu) have number of festivals and ceremonies than the days in a year. Not only in Kathmandu but wherever these Newars have migrated and settled across the country, they have managed to observe those festivals and feasts regularly. In the sense of ritual Cathrine Bell defines, “The framework of ritualization casts a new light on the purpose of ritual activity, its social efficacy, and its embodiment in complex traditions and systems” (67). In Kirtipur every Newar preserves his/her own culture and socialized their children by acknowledging with the values of their own culture. This might be the most significant process, which helps to preserve their identity as Newar in all over the world.

In Kirtipur specially community festival such as in Indrayani Jatra, Bagh Bhairav Jatra and other festival related to jyapu community usually the participation is inter-caste and various Guthi organization have to participate actively on those ones. The Newars of Kathmandu are very rich in culture. In Kirtipur, Kirtipurians’ observe a number of rituals and festivals throughout the year and participate in many fairs and festivals with joy and enthusiasm. Bernhard Giesent state that, “performance art” is a collective term covering a range of artistic activities and movements, that from the 1960s onwards, appeared in different domain such as the visual arts, dance, theatre, circus, music and pop culture.

In Bala Ram Acharya’s *Society and Culture in Nepal*, E B Tylor’s definition of culture is very inclusion. He claims, “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, moral, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of society” (7). Likewise, in Collins’ dictionary of

sociology, culture has been define as, “Culture is the human creation and use of symbols and artifacts” (7).

In Guthi, Newari men and women wearing their typical dress Tapalan (long shirt) and Haku Patasi (Black Sari) involve themselves in their ritual’s ceremony. So Guthi helps to flourish knowledge, belief, art, moral, law and customs in Newari culture. As an institution it helps to made Newari culture popular and the secrets of Newari people’s life such as affection, intimacy, kinship, “emotional \ fulfillment” and “intellectual enjoyment” are depicted making all spheres of strength and hope for giving continuity to their long standing culture in a sense dignifying the whole Newari people. In Newari culture every performance related to dance, music, rituals is more significance and has its own value.



Fig. 4: Dhimay drum players from Kirtipur. Young musicians and most of their gurus wear the traditional Maharjan ceremonial dress.

Moreover, all Guthi members participate in a musical group based on an apprenticeship in the playing of a special cylindrical drum, exclusive to the Newars the ‘Dhimay’ and the playing of this ‘membranophone’ during religious ceremonies. It must be admitted that the Guthi system is still very active in many Newar rural settlements, especially among Maharjan farmers in Kirtipur.



Fig. 5: During the celebration of Indrayani Jatra, Kirtipurians following ritual on carrying chariot. On this auspicious occasion chariot is decorated with ornaments and colorful flowers.

In the month of December, the Non Newars observe Bala Caturdashi ritual in the PashupatiNath temple area, while the Newars on the same day celebrate Indrayani festival in Kathmandu city (Tina Manandhar;2008:Vol 2). Vivacious festival is celebrated in Kirtipur called Kirtipur Indrayani Jatra. This festival is celebrated amid much fanfare, while hundred of people from around the valley come to witness the festival every year. It is celebrated with more devotee and faith. Likewise, Schechner claims, “Performance studies expresses the only things I can say about what it is, through what it does” (2).

It is held in the month of Marga (November/ December) and specifically celebrated by Kirtipurains. Community of Kirtipur is divided into different Toles. Every after twelve years, Kirtipurians from each tole have to follow ritual on carrying chariot. Tole member are responsible on performing every rituals and on preparing feast for those tole members who take responsibility during Indrayani Jatra festival. Every tole men and women have to be more active to complete every rituals and to be

success on performing every responsibility. The day before Jatra, chariot is carried out at night time from Indrayani's shrine, which is established around the periphery of Bagh Bhairav temple. Then after, chariot is carried to the Deodhoka Indrayani tole. In Deodhoka other shrine of Indrayani goddess is located. On the day of Jatra, at morning around 10 o'clock, the image of the Indrayani goddess is carried in a chariot through the streets of the upper half of the town, starting from Deodhoka Indrayani tole with traditional musical band. Before moving to the main wide square Lyaku tole, every members of the tole have to prepare Samai (a kind of ritual- breakfast which generally precedes a ceremonial feast. It includes a cup of liquor, flattened rice and a few pieces of buffalo meat) and have to share within themselves, in the name of goddess before Jatra started. On the day of main Indrayani Jatra, every feast is prepare in a Guthi house of that tole. Guthi member, women, youth member and senior member become active on performing various rituals on that day. It has the truth that chariot is not made but it is decorated with colorful flowers and by using others ornaments during Jatra. Chariot is made by our forefathers and still it is safely has in used. It is kept by hiding inside the temple of goddess Indrayani and takes it outside during Jatra festival only. Day before Jatra, tole members used to clean all the side of chariot and decorated before Jatra begins.

During jatra, feast is arranged for the whole day. To manage all items, money is collected from each house of the tole. Collected money is used to prepare feast for each member. At least 300 members are estimated for the feast. From morning till at evening time, bhoj is prepared by the member of the tole during jatra. Daphah Khala is associated with traditional group called Guthi. It becomes active during this Jatra. Every role of this Daphah Guthi seems to be more significance and perform every rituals related to jatra. Daphah music is played by bands known as Daphah Khala.

Basically, the song of Daphah music are devotional songs based on classical ragas.

During Jatra, probably, for two hours chariot is kept in wide square Lyaku for celebrating and for worshipping.



Fig. 6: Newari women wearing ethnic wear from the tole, carrying fruits and flowers in a bronze tray moves in a parade towards chariot to worship Indrayani, mother goddess.

Every worshipper wearing ethnic wear from that tole, carrying fruits and flowers in a bronze tray moves in a parade towards Chariot to worship Indrayani, mother goddess. Some devotee even sacrificed animals as a part of rituals. To show their dedication and faith, they select one of the senior member from tole to represent as dwari. Dwari has to sacrifice animals in the name of mother goddess. All those fruits are uses for distributing as Prasad among all who are presented and people accepted in the name of God. After worshipping in Lyaku, chariot is carried to other tole. At least forty people are needed to carry chariot. Chariot is stopped in many hubs to perform puja. Finally at the end of this Jatra, chariot is carried to the main Bagh Bharav temple through the main door and settle down to the main sacred place (Mandala) to

complete this Jatra. Their excitement and enthusiastic feelings shows their value towards their own culture. To value festivals with traditional rituals make the sense of moral values.

One such in Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* introduces the ideas of the nature of religion and of religion in nature. Thus, it is about the nature of humanity. He states, “Inasmuch as performance is one of its general features. As a form or structure it possesses the properties of practice as well. In ritual, logic becomes enacted and embodied - is realized – in unique ways” (3). Newari culture is a performative act which possesses the properties of practice and Newars perform every ritual in a unique way.



Fig. 7: Celebrating Bagh Bhairav Jatra with traditional bands, drummers and dancers, followed by devotees chanting bhajan and kirtans.

Similarly, Bagh Bhairav Jatra is performed on the first of the month of Bhadra (August/ September). An image of Bagh Bhairav, especially made for the festival; is carried through the streets with traditional bands, drummers and dancers, followed by

devotees chanting bhajan and kirtans. This typical religious Jatra is conducted by the tole member of the Bagh Bhairav. The procession winds through the streets along the borders of the ancient principality of Kirtipur. Schechner writes, “To understand performance from the broad perspective of those human activities where behavior is consciously structured, whether in art, religion, folk and popular culture, sports or other public activities (17). These festivals go to provide the basis of the kinship bonds among the Newars. Kirtipur, with its temples, stupas and colorful festivals is in many ways the model of a traditional Newari town.



Fig. 8: Celebrating *Ghya Chaku Sanlhu* festival by receiving bless from eldest member to junior by rubbing mustard oil on their head.

Similarly, other typical festival ‘Ghya, Chaku Sanlhu’ is celebrated by Kirtipurians’ in which mother gives blessings to her children by rubbing mustard oil on their head and offering traditional Newar sweets (Ghya, Chaku etc) wishing for their happy and prosperous life. In Kirtipur, Newars give much importance to this ritual. Though their children staying far from their house visit their mother’s place to get blessing. On this occasion Niece and Nephew are invited for feast and to give bless to their maternal uncle house (Mama Ghar). Schechner notion states as:

Rituals are performative; they are acts done; and performances are ritualized; they are codified, repeatable action. The functions of theatre identified by Aristotle and Horace- entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education (including political education), and healing –are also functions of ritual (203). Through rituals, we can learn social values and educate us on knowing the importance of culture and families. Every year Newari people move on celebrating different festivals by performing rituals and every repeatable action codified norms and values.



Fig. 9: Mask wearers represents Gai Jatra. Having assembled at the place, the procession is arranged in a definite order of precedence.

The festival “Gai Jatra” is generally celebrates on the month of Bhadra (July / August). It is observed for three days. In Kirtipur it is celebrated in a unique way. Families who have lost their own be – loving ones participated in a procession for whole day. Participants wearing masks and colorful clothes were on the procession. Similarly, some people especially children disguised themselves as a cow and ‘Jogis’.



Fig. 10: During Gai Jatra children disguised themselves as a cow.

Edward Shils defines, “beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals however, could not exist without beliefs” (qtd. in Cathrine Bell 19). It is believed that the cow, revered as a holy animal by Hindus, will help the deceased relative’s journey to heaven. In the sense of this festival Gopal Singh writes, “The festival of cow, thus it is seen, is not designed for material gains as in the case of Bhairava and Bhairavi (god) festivals. Rather, it is aimed at fulfilling one’s obligation towards the dead relatives” (357).

The festival honors the death of people during the year. It is celebrated to diminish the sadness from the death of family members. During the festival, cows are marched in the streets. People also distribute food to others. All these rituals are performed for the welfare of the Newari people and all these social activities show the impact of Guthi system that teaches the lesson on how to perform every social ceremony and to be moral.

Impact of Modernization on Traditional Social Organization – Guthi

In case of Guthi, the bad impact of modernization is leading towards the changing and extinct mode of such traditional practices. Various modernization factors are promoting modern thought that leads to the extinction of traditional

values and degrade the value of traditional institution. Specially, the Guthi organization which is related with certain festivals and dance performance are under the high current of transformation. Bal Gopal Shrestha, cultural anthropologist defines, “It is stated that in the small town of ‘Sankhu’, forty one such Guthi organizations have closed down within few years” (161). However, among all types, ‘Si Guthi’ seems to be enduring till now because of its importance in death rituals. In the context of Kirtipur most of the Guthi are still in exist. According to Toffin, “It must be admitted that the Guthi system is still very active in many Newar rural settlements, especially among Maharjan farmers and other associated agriculturist castes” (312). But almost in all cases, Guthi membership is no longer binding as before. The modern thoughts of gender equality also have changed the rituals of Guthi system. Every new young members in the working committee of ‘Si Guthi’, changes the traditional working principle. Modern working principal are replaced. For example, in death rituals, females were not allowed to be chief mourners, traditionally but now it has with the modern thoughts of gender equality.

Additionally, the crucial issue of this research is how to preserve the originality of such traditional social organization which is being practiced by them without any obstruct. Regarding the rituals performed during those festivals, nothing has changed comparing the past. Various interview to the elder people of the community revealed the fact that they are experiencing the same traditions followed since their childhood till present date. Active members of Guthi also feel proud on observing huge youth participation in such occasion.

On the basis of interview many information have been recorded. It was held on 12th of Falgun; at evening time around 4: 15 at ‘Gachhe Tole’ of Kirtipur. One of the most senior Guthiyar, Tuyu Maharjan says, “Youth are excited about such

festivals which provide them entertainment. Guthi members believed that youth focused on entertainment but we focuses on religious and tradition” (Personal Interview 1). They hopefully believed that youth will do the same when they grow older. To conduct such festival and to complete religious rituals, strong individuals are in need and that is provided by the young generation. For instance, on carrying such heavy chariot along the narrow pathways of the locality needs immense power, which is found on youth rather than the aged people. So, youth participation is compulsory and it is completed or fulfilled by the Newars youth. However, we can say that youth active participation or their involvement in such occasion is to get entertainment. They do not want to miss and eagerly wait for such entertainment sources. Even parents seemed eager to allow their children to take leave from their colleges to observe such festivals.

Moreover, it is clear that motivation of participation is contrasting between the old generation and the young ones created to enhance the standard of living of people due to realization of the need to live together and work together for a common purpose. Bell argues, “In most societies the “sense of ritual” would be a vital addition to this list. It is through a socially acquired sense of ritual that members of a society know how to improvise a birthday celebration, stage an elaborate wedding, or rush through a minimally adequate funeral” (80). Guthi is organized to give importance to the religion and educate Newari people giving basic knowledge of rituals. In Newar community different rituals have to be performed from beginning to the end of their lives. So, Guthi system acknowledges these people to be within the boundary of ritual circle and shows how to be in connection with religious rituals and tradition. Youth always seek entertainment from those festivals and rituals. So, there is a doubt that it may not be necessary for them to participate in the future for the same purpose. In

modern days, we can find numerous modern entertainment sources for such purposes. So, there is huge possibility of youth losing attraction for such traditional entertainment sources. Internet, television, theatre, sports, games etc are easily accessible in the current context.

Additionally, the elders pointed out some negative aspects of youth participation and suspect about their kids creating negative trends. Guthi member Bir Maharjan claims:

What we don't like is the trend of drinking alcohol in such participation. We all drink alcohol, we are allowed by religion and caste as well. But we don't lose our control like these youngsters. We have recently faced various complications in such festivals. As the young people get drunk during festivals due to which it becomes very tough to control them. They have young blood which builds a tendency to fight with each other. Most of the time, they start fighting for carrying the chariots. Everybody wants to carry the chariots, which is not possible and on that reason they start fighting. It will be best if we can make them understand about the importance of such festivals in our society and the motive of creating social harmony through these festivals.

(Personal Interview 2)



Fig.11: Jyapu women playing the transverse flute *bamsuri* made out of turned wood.

While talking about youth participation it is not only done by the male youth. Rather, female participation is also higher these days, but in different manner. Females are seemed actively participating in such festivals as the musicians. In early ages only males were allowed to play such traditional musical instruments, but the situation is different at present. Toffin writes, “The traditional hierarchy prevailing in the Guthi is rejected by the younger generations” (313). Even, various Guthi organizations are initiating to train and involve females in such musical groups who have to actively participate in such festivals. So, it is an evidence of change of tradition which can be observed.

Finally, the most important factor is that whatever the reason of youth participation is at least they will know the tradition and will know how to do, what to do, when they have to bear such responsibilities. In this way tradition is passed from one generation to another generation. Thus, it can be concluded that by observing active participation of youth cannot be confirmed that it will remain the same in future as well. It might force to change such festivals and ritual and even to be vanished. So, modernization is leading the whole Newar society towards a new dimension changing rituals in compare to tradition one. Though Modernization has made our life easier, it can act negatively in case of traditional cultures resulting into cultural loss. Due to the impact of modernization lots of traditional societies had to suffer with the loss of their traditional culture and eventually losing their ethnic identity.

Modernization can be regarded as one of the factors for such kind of changes. Whether the changes are negative or positive, it cannot be distinguished. Death rituals are also changing its shape along with the duties and responsibilities of the ‘Si Guthi’ in Kirtipur. Due to the Modern medical facilities and treatments, people are taken to hospitals during the critical situation. If the person is dead then the corpse is not

brought home. Rather it is directly taken to the cremation site of pashupatinath. So, the rituals that have to be conducted at home by Guthiyars are not done at all. So, Guthiyars would rather prefer to stay home than attending funerals in such places. They do not want to spend their time and money. So, due to lack of participation, proper condition of the ritualistic activities becomes difficult. Moreover, rituals related to dead ceremony such as shaving head, eyebrows and mustache-beard is fading away.

Additionally, Guthi system is also under the influence of modern thoughts of youngsters. Due to flexibility, Guthiyars start showing concern to their own individual daily lives which increased the tendency among them to remain absent during such funeral rituals and pay few amount of money instead. This all activities show the negative impact of Modernization, due to which the human resources required for the rituals become inadequate. So, to preserve traditional religious ritual from being extinct, simplicity should be adopted in the rules rather than to lead towards discontinuation.

With the change in time, people have found lot of difficulties to continue with this century old tradition, but we are responsible to minimize such difficulties and give continuation to this ritual. As positive and negative aspects of Newari culture and its important features have been already discussed, we should look at the negative aspects and try to minimize it while stress should be given to positive aspects.

Through this research I have explore my basic concept related to Newar society of Kirtipur. I have tried to highlight the characteristics of a typical Newar society mainly focusing on the Guthi, a socio – religious organization which has been in practiced by Newar people since their ancient times. Guthi is religiously inspired traditional social organization which is regarded as one of the case elements of Newar society. Main aim of this research is to explore most significant and dominant role of Guthi system in Newar community. It has focused every aspects and functions related to Guthi and its variation.

Additionally, there is some serious issue which shows the negative aspects of

Guthi system and on performing religious rituals and traditions by youth in present situation. Moreover, superstitious belief regarding to the ritual performance is in existence. Concept of pure, impure and prediction for luck and unluck while following ritual shows or create negative impression towards religious Newari culture. It has become quite necessary to adopt such changes for the contribution of these rituals. This research deals on different modernization factors and its impacts on the Guthi. I have tried to discuss on whether these modernization factors are beneficial for the society or not in terms of traditional culture and preservation. People of different generation have different opinions about continuing this ritual. Mainly, the old generation does not want any change in the ritual while the new generation does not have any interest in continuing with the conventional regulation. In such situation, it is worthy to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of such rituals.

Likewise, drinking habit created such a violent environment even in a pure religious ritual of festivals. Especially youth are involved for entertainment. So, limit on consumption of Alcohol helps to create peaceful and religious environment. Through this research we can evaluate the importance of Guthi system and other rituals related to Newari culture. So, it is the prime duty of the present generation to preserve this unique culture of Newar. With the change in time, people have found lot of difficulties to continue with this century, old tradition, but we are responsible to minimize such difficulties and give continuation to this ritual. As positive and negative aspects of this ritual have been already discussed, we should look at the negative aspects and try to minimize it while stress should be given to positive aspects. There should be simplicity in the rules and regulation for continuation of such rituals.

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