



Newari Guthis in Sikkim

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Abstract

Newari Guthi of Sikkim, which is an organisation established with the consent of all the members of Newar community to preserve their age old culture and to revive their cultural values into their new generation and to bind them in one ethnic group. This study sets out to determine the significance of Guthis for Newari community in Sikkim and their role for the preservation of Newari culture and tradition. After reviewing the available articles and conducting a field survey several information have been gathered about the significance and the role of Newari Guthi of Sikkim; the new generations of Newari community are aloof from their cultural values and language for which Guthi is striving hard to bring out the solution for this by introducing Newari language in government schools and opening several schools to learn Newar language. They have started celebrating Mha Puja, Indra Jatra, etc as their important rituals in order to revive their cultural value system. However due to globalisation and influx of modernity, somewhere they are lacking behind to make their culture flourish. The members of Guthi basically consist of elder people only so there is a less participation of younger generations to run the organisation. Guthi should focus on the involvement of young people to fulfil their objectives. Thus, Participation of youngsters is crucial for the successiveness of Guthi.

Keywords: newar, guthis, Sikkim guthi

Introduction

The Newars are the original inhabitant of Katmandu valley and the word Newar is derive from the name of the country Nepal itself (Shrestha. 2005). The Newars are also considered to be a skilled and successful trading community and occupy much important administrative post in both Nepal and Sikkim. (ibid.25). The Newars migrated to Sikkim due to the fact Sikkim remained highly culturally assimilating and some of their ancestors began migrating to the region soon after some Gorkha conquest of Nepal in 1769.

Guthi is supposed to be a trust. It has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'Gosthi'. In the hoary past the gathering of gopals cow herders (Sapu) was called Gosthi (meeting of cow herders). Later, the term Gosthi was used to mean a gathering of people with a particular objective. It is also extended to mean a group conference and meeting. In Newar vocabulary Gosthi meant, Sigu, Sanagu, Achaju Guthi etc. This term was first mentioned in an inscription found at Pashupati dated Nepal Samvat 523 (1403 A.D). The term was also inscribed in an inscription found at Lembati, Lalitpur, dated Nepal Samvat 526 (1406 A.D). This inscription belonged to the time of Shivadeva and Amsuvarna. This term has been interpreted in various ways in various times. The term Gosthi was used in Lhasa in Tibet where Newars had their own cultures. The Guthi was created with a view of accomplishing a work not by an individual but by a group of persons collectively who shared a common goal. Therefore the history of Guthi is as old as the history of civilization. The Newar caste and sub-caste sets the limit to the general status-position of a person in the total society, his/her ritual and social life is regulated and controlled through these Guthi institutions. A

network of such Guthi institutions binds Newar together at the different level of caste, patrilineal grouping and territory. Each Guthi provides numerous occasions for collective worship of particular deity to which it is consecrated and for feasts in which its member have the rights to ritual participation. Further, while the manifest function of such Guthi is the fulfilment of some secular or religious interest, they have the latent function of preserving the norms and value of the community.

Newari Guthi is divided into four types, the religious Guthi, service oriented Guthi, communal Guthi and entertainment Guthi and the Guthi which are established by the king and royalties is Raj Guthi. Newari Guthi are established collectively by the Newari people and are run by the community people which are not registered in government office. The religious Guthi are related to do the compilation of the worshiped rituals. Sigu Guthi which is a service oriented Guthi are constructed for funeral service. Entertainment oriented Guthi under Nasa Guthi are responsible for feast, singing, dancing and playing musical instrument. Sometimes Guthi are created depending upon the reason and the requirement.

Guthi was created for a common purpose and the fruit of the common endeavour is evenly shared by all the members of the group. It is selfless service where religious feeling is the very life of the group and all the activities are inspired by the religion. The members who are financially strong they construct temples, sheds, wells, play grounds, etc. One of the interesting rules of Guthi is that any task must be done in an appointed auspicious day and can be done in advance but cannot be postponed. According to the concept of Guthi

seniors must be respected and the instruction of the senior must be carried on and there is no discrimination between the rich and the poor, worthy or unworthy, in the Guthi.

Rationale of the study

Newars are one of the ethnic Nepali communities of Sikkim and they occupy a significant place in the Sikkimese society. It has been found that very little research has been carried out on the Newari Diaspora of Nepal. In the recent year the Newars of Sikkim have set out on a quest endeavouring to promote their language, culture, rituals, traditions and religions across Sikkim and the Guthis seem to be playing a very important role. This study is a small effort towards the institution of Guthis in general, its significance for the Newari community and also a comprehensive understanding of the role of the Guthi in the revival and preservation of the Newari culture and traditions in Sikkimese scenario.

Objectives

1. To understand the significance of Guthis for the Newari community of Sikkim.
2. To determine the role of Guthis for the preservation of Newari culture and tradition.

Literature review

According to Gopal S. Nepal, in his book “the Newars an ethno sociological study of Himalayan community”, he has given a fairly detailed account of Newars and he has also recapitulate some of the salient features that distinguish their society. He conceptualised Newar as a typical ethnic group, an original inhabitant of Nepal. They are also considered as an original inhabitant of south-west India because of the fact that many of the cultural trait of Newar are diffused in the entire territory where the western mesocephals predominate. He has systematically explained all the Newari cultural value system of Nepal but this study basically focuses on Guthi organisation of Sikkim which is not mentioned in his study.

Subash Deepak, 2004 has written about the Newars in a very short form about their history of migration from Nepal to Sikkim and their settlement in all the four districts of Sikkim, particularly, in Namthang, Pkyong and Duga areas. He also talks about Newars being called as Pradhan in Sikkim and subsequent recognition of their language by the state government as one of the state language in 1995. Then he talks about Newari Guthis being established on 3rd Oct 1993 [regd.no.689, 1994] and the three main objectives of Guthis i.e. to bring solidarity among their society, to preserve their cultural value system and to revive their culture.

Bal Gopal in the journal bulletin of Tibetology vol.41 has given a short historical background as well as some ideas about the identity of the Newars. His work mostly focuses on their origin, their migration, etc. The author talks about how due to globalisation the tradition of Guthi is declining owing to migrations, neglect on one part of the younger generation who find it rusty, antiquated and other various similar reasons.

Methodology

Open ended questionnaires were used to explore the experiences, perception and views of the participants about Guthis. The sources of data have both been from primary and

secondary sources. The study is primarily based on both the primary and secondary source of data collection.

Profile of respondent

The study is also dependent on the primary data collection collected through interviews with people of Newar community of Sikkim.

Primary data were collected by taking interviews of the member of the Guthis and younger generations of Newar of Sikkim and other Newari people while secondary data through books, reviews, journals, internet, etc.

There were 34 respondents, out of which 21 respondents were male and 13 respondents were female.

Age profile

Table 1

Sl. No	Age group	Male	Female	Total
1	50-60	7	5	12
2	40-50	3	3	6
3	20-30	11	5	16
4	Total	21	13	34

Source: field data

This table shows the total number of Newari respondent on the basis of their age.

Limitations

This work is small effort towards understanding the Guthis of Sikkim and its understanding for the Sikkimese Newars. Due to limited time and resources the work is a limited and there is a lot of scope to take it further. However with the help of field studies involving respondents the more information have been obtained than the secondary source could provide. Moreover the respondents of the study were unable to give much information and those people from whom better information could be drawn were unavailable owing to their personal reasons.

Newari Guthi in Sikkim

The Newar population in Sikkim is concentrated in the Namthang, Pakyong and Duga areas and most of the population is in east district in Sikkim. It was in order to commemorate their long association with the rules of Nepal, that they had assured the surname ‘pradhan’. As per the 1951 census, the population of Newar was 4553 in Sikkim (ibid79). In Sikkim Newari Guthis which was established on 3rd Oct 1993, with objectives of bringing together all the Newars living in Sikkim, preserving their age-old customs and traditions, promoting and spread of Newari language and literature, has appointed two Newari language teacher for Rhenok and Mellidara primary school in the year (1997-98) (vol.3,79).

Since 1996, Mrs. Durga Kasaju, wife of Dharma Pratap Kasaju of Namthang Kothi had rendered her selfless service for the development of Newari language. They have been imparting teaching of Newari language to the students of the surrounding area (ibid 79). Sikkim Newar Sangathan, headed by Khagendra Pradhan of Turung South Sikkim, with the help of Dharma Prasas Kassaju, Puran Kumar Maskaju and other

Enthusiastic Newar Fraternity of Namthang area established an institute of Newari language and culture of Namthang Kothi on February 2000. It has been noticed that the Sikkim Newear Sangathan has now merged with the Sikkim Newar Guthi and the institute is running with the contribution and donation made by the Newars of Sikkim. (ibid79)

In Sikkim there is only one Guthi which look after the welfare of the whole Sikkim Newari community and they have zonal body in each district. Any issues against the community welfare are solved by the particular zonal body and if they fail to solve it, they hand it over to the central body to bring out the solution in a peaceful manner. Further it has been observed that the young generations are not fully acquainted with Guthi and have a very less knowledge about their cultural customs and language.

On the basis of religion, Newars of Sikkim are categorized into Hindu, Buddhist and Christian. Hindus and Buddhists under Guthi take part in every rituals and festivals but not Christians, but they are also the members of Guthi and feel proud of being Newar. The majority of Sikkimese Newar identifies themselves as Hindu.

Revival of Guthis

In 1994, the local government of Sikkim designated Newar language to be a state language along with all other languages spoken in Sikkim. They introduced the regulation permitting Newars to be spoken at the meetings of Sikkim legislative assembly. In this regard, since 1994, the slab has employed a Newar language translator editor and has been publishing proceeding of parliamentary meetings in the Newar language using Newar scripts. (ibid. 48)

The Newars of Sikkim are numerically very few but they have played an important role in ethnic politics and are active in trying to promote their language, culture, rituals, tradition and religion across Sikkim. In 2003, the state government of Sikkim also recognized the Newar as Other Backward Class (OBC). It is notable that in their homeland, Nepal, Newars have so far achieved very little recognition.

In 2009, under the supervision of Sikkim government five Newari students passed out from Tribuhan University on their language so that they can come and flourish their language in Sikkim. However in Sikkim there are eight schools where Newari language has been added as a discipline. Since 1995, with view of promoting Newari religion, the Newari Guthi organisations have been celebrating Mha Puja and they have also revived their festivals such as Indra Jatra and other important Newari events.

Conclusion

Newars of Sikkim are the original inhabitant of Nepal and sue to the Gorkha conquest of their place; they were displaced from their original place and migrated to various regions like Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling and so on. The Newars in Sikkim has adopted the Sikkimese cultural values and sue to the influence of other cultural value system their cultural pattern has been changed. So by the process of assimilation, they are not being able to uphold their own cultural value system and being less in number they are unable to flourish in Sikkim. The main cause in the present scenario is the influence of globalisation and influx of modernity. Due

to this the people of their community have become very rational and they do not give priority to their traditional belief system and less solidarity can be seen among the young generation. However Guthi organisation is playing a vital role in reviving Newari identity in Sikkim like opening new schools, introducing their language in government schools and reviving the age old cultural value system like Mha Puja, Indra Jatra, etc. Apart from that, all the communities in Sikkim have their own ethnic organisations. Although they believed that the nepali communities of Sikkim were for a long time seen as one cultural group but now each community is seeking for separate identity. Thus Newars are concerned that their heritage should be accorded with due respect wherever they live and they are also concerned that they should work towards preserving their culture while keeping a peaceful and harmonious relation with other community group. Since 1990s Newari organisations have been actively researching their root and are presently striving for Newari identity in India.

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