

**Food Culture and Eating habits among the Newars of  
Sikkim: A Sociological Study of Continuity, Change and  
Revivalism**

**A Dissertation Submitted**

**To**

**Sikkim University**



**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the**

**Degree of Master of Philosophy**

**By**

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Date: 7.02.2020

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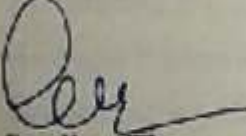
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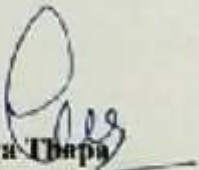
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All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation has been duly acknowledged by her.

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# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction

The present study is an attempt to explore the Food culture and Eating habits among the Newars of Sikkim with regard to its continuity and changes. Traditionally Newars are known for their rich food culture and are popular for their recipes and variety of food items. The ethnic cuisines of the community has a deep seated ritual and cultural significance too. Nevertheless, with the migration of the community from Nepal to Sikkim and settlement in a different socio- economic, political and cultural context for many years and not forgetting the impact of exogenous forces like globalization and modernization, the food habits and culture among the community has been affected and transformed. However, in view of recent ongoing trend of cultural revivalism of all communities in Sikkim, the present study has also examined the process of revivalism of traditional food among the Newar community of Sikkim that has been started recently. Therefore based on the study in both rural and urban areas of Sikkim, the present study looks upon continuity and changes in food culture of Newars community of Sikkim.

### 1.2.1 Statement of Problem

Food is indisputably one of the most important aspects of our everyday 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 phenomena, which also engulfs social and cultural issues. Food therefore is not only a biological necessity, but also has socio- cultural significance.

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). 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).

Counihan (1999) argues that eating together creates social relations and that enlarges our social groups. She further stated that ‘food is a prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena’. The production, distribution and consumption of food represent the power relations and is related to notion of sex and gender, as every social group has their own unique form of food-ways emphasizing diversity and variation of food habits across cultures and regions.

Sobreira et al., (2018) highlighted that although, food is the ultimate human necessity for the sustenance of human body and is universal, food habits of every region are not similar and has its uniqueness; What, when and with whom one eats are the features which add meaning to the act of eating and is culturally significant. Puerto et al., (2017) also argued in the similar view and opined that food and eating habits enables one to construct the identity of not just the individual but also the group as a whole, that in return facilitates the structuring of everyday life.

Emphasizing the cultural significance of food, Visser (1999) states that food and culture are entwined with each other and change in diet will bring about a 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 its heavy symbolic character inherited from the changing material conditions (Watts, 2008).

However, despite its universality and all pervasiveness, the study of food is relatively new empirically distinct area within sociology. Previously studies on food production

and consumption were typified under the research of health, development studies, agrarian studies, or social anthropology. Breda & Keil (1997) argued that the topic of food and eating was dissociated from the discipline for many centuries, as there was no vivid sociological text or materials that specifically addressed the issue. Brady (2011), also highlights that the study of food and food making have been marginalized in the field of social research for a very long time as food topics were regarded under the domestic domain and not as a subject matter for meaningful research and scholarship. Nevertheless times have changed and the study of food has been gaining popularity for critical inquiry exploring social, cultural and political aspects of life.

It was only during the 1980s, when the importance of studying food was acknowledged into the discipline and has been recognized as one major theme of contemporary sociology since then. Many renowned scholars like Malinowski (1935 as cited in Siewicz 2011), Levi Strauss (as cited in Counihan and Esterik 2008), Mary Douglas (1972) and many more have hugely contributed their work into the field of food studies.

However Ferguson (2005), highlights the complex nature of food which itself bears some responsibility for the lack of consensus over what should be academically done with food studies. The convertible nature of food from production to preparation to physiological and symbolic consumption turns food into something else in every stage of food cycle which further makes its stand quite unstable in the proper academic field. Boutaud et al., (2016) has similar perceptions on the study of food which is caught in the dialectics of retaining the indigenous recipes and at the same time exploring for something new in the world of flavors and sensations.

Therefore the complexity of studying food from a sociological dimension is quite arduous as it is comparatively a recent subject matter which results in some lack of theoretical understanding.

Ferguson (2005) describes that the topicality of food as a debatable matter for there isn't a particular consensus as how food should be studied. Although universities, journals, reviews have carved out a niche for food in the academic world but one cannot find accurate theories and methods that can be applicable to the study of food. Contextually on the ambiguity of food studies, Neuman (2019) also stated that although academically the study on food may have seen a growth in recent decades but it does not have autonomous theories to increase both the empirical knowledge of food issues as well as to understand social theoretical problem. However engaging in social theories, the study of food is not simply reduced as something else but will highlight the problems caused by food issues.

Food is similar to language as both the concepts manifests culture. Food is a majorly associated with an individual's identity as well as with places and important events like birth, marriage and death. Hence the study of food cannot be reducible to just what appears on a plate but food is central, it is omnipresent in every aspect of society. Therefore the study on food should not be neglected and treated with importance as other contemporary concepts.

### **1.2.2 Contextualizing the Problem in Sikkim**

Sikkim is a multiethnic and multicultural society which environs Tibet in the North, Bhutan in the East, Nepal in the West and Darjeeling of West Bengal in the South (Bhattacharyya, 1984). Comprising a small population with 610,577 (2006 census), it is the second smallest state in India.



The ethnic composition of the state can be broadly classified as Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali. The Nepali community is heterogeneous in nature and by far the largest which incorporates eighteen communities (State Socio-Economic Census, (SSEC), 2006). Sinha (1975) highlighted that Nepali community in Sikkim includes three sub cultural stocks: the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gurkhas. All these communities have distinctive cultural and social practices and food habits. Despite the differences, yet one cannot neglect the aroma of acculturation that has developed through inclusion and exclusion, which further determines the ethnic relations in Sikkim (Arora, 2007).

The Newars are considered as one sub group of broad Nepali communities in Sikkim. With 21,657 population, Newar community represents 3.5% of total population of Sikkim. The community is scattered in four districts of Sikkim i.e East, West North and South districts and is dominant in East district that comprises 4.4 % of total population followed by South district with 4.15 % and West district with 2.5 %. Occupationally, they are engaged in land-owning and trading activities (State Socio-Economic Census, (SSEC), 2006).

The Newars are known as the traditional inhabitants of Kathmandu valley in Nepal who share a rich cultural heritage and abundant food culture. The culinary delicacies comprises of many meat items, particularly buffalo meat, prepared using different ingredients. These are both ritually and culturally prescribed and consumed in everyday life and in the form of ritual-food in the Newar tradition. In Nepal, the members of the community prepare different types of sweet-breads for different occasions and also relish an extravagant feasts known as *Bhoj* where all the members of the family and community sit together in a hierarchical line and enjoy all the elaborate items Newars are also known for preparing various types of vegetarian and non-vegetarian pickles and also preserving it. However the rich and exotic food

culture of Newars has not been retained in its entirety in case of the Newars of Sikkim, who after the migration during the 18<sup>th</sup> century have witnessed many changes in their socio- cultural life, hence differs in certain socio-cultural features as compared to Newar in Nepal Valley. Also with the passage of time, social change and due to the impact of exogenous forces like modernization, westernization and globalization resulting in acculturation has been felt by the Sikkimese society in general and Newar community is also no exception. The urban areas of Sikkim especially Gangtok has been witnessing mushroom growth of fast-food and café culture. Amidst these rapid changes, the study focuses on understanding the food culture and eating habits of Newar Community and examines if the community have retained their traditional culinary culture. In case of changes, the study also highlights how these changes occurred and was adapted by the community .In the present trend of cultural revivalism among all communities of Sikkim, the study has also identified the role of *Guthi* in preserving and reviving rich cultural food habits of Newars.

### **1.3 Review of Literature**

The literature review has been thematically divided into two sections the first part deals with the studies on food and the second part is followed by studies on Newar.

#### **1.3.1 Studies on Food**

Masuoka (1945), in the article *Changing Food Habits of the Japanese in Hawaii* highlighted on the changing patterns of food habits among the Japanese who migrated to Hawaii for plantation purpose. Rice and fish is the staple food in Japan but the migrated Japanese consumed more American food like white flour, macaroni, bread, cereals, coffee etc. Many factors were responsible like availability of food, improved standard of living, convenience and ease of preparation, the relinquishing of

traditional institutional control over certain kinds of food that enlivened Americanization.

Dumont (1970), in the book *Homo Hierarchicus, The Caste System and its Implication* translated by Mark Sainsbury has focused on the structural study of caste system and also has also dealt on the religious functions of food. He argues that consumption of food is inter-linked with the rigid Hindu caste system. The study also explains commensality rules through various social institutions one being the marriage system where the rules of commensality between the affines is not established instantaneously and is never complete for instance the father of the bride cannot consume food at his son-in-law's house as a medium of showing respect. The study emphasizes the importance of Kacca and Pakka food how its acceptance and avoidance creates social barrier among different caste members.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984), in the book *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* argues that a taste in art, life-style, food habits is all a reflection of habitus and cultural capital. Habitus implies to physical embodiment of cultural capital that is deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that humans possess due to life experiences. The study further enlightens that in the realm of food income also plays a significant role in the preferences and choices

Counihan (1988), in the article *Female Identity, Food and Power in Contemporary Florence* explains about the vast changes of Modernization that has occurred in Italian society since World War II in the context of women and food as women everywhere is known to feed their husbands and child in return for love and good behavior. The study further highlights the changing economic and social position of women by entering the area of working class and gaining some status of independence. However

the altruistic and self sacrificing nature of women towards husbands and children is recorded changing in the Florentian society due to crippling effects of modernization.

Laudan (1995), in the article *Going Today, Gone Tomorrow: The Food or the People ? Hawaii and Loss by Migration* throws light on the lives of immigrants (Polynesians, Caucasians, Asians particularly Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos) of Hawaii Islands and the loss of their traditional food items due to the process of migration. The study shows how it was a difficult task for the immigrants to save their traditional diet due to many factors like geographic location, unavailability of resources. However the study highlights the negative tale of loss and disappearance of traditional cuisine into a positive tale of replacement, substitution and gain.

Meigs (1997), in the book *Food and Culture* has made a study among the Hua tribes of New Guinea, and describes a unique way of interpretation of food. For the Hua tribes food is vital in nature, here they aren't associating the importance of food with nutritional benefit rather they consider food as an emotional and mystical event. The study mostly focuses on how exchanges of food are linked as an indicator of harmony and discord among the Hua tribes of New Guinea.

Ritzer (1998), in the book *The McDonaldization Thesis* argues that McDonalds and fast-food restaurants are the new means of consumption which is tremendously affecting the consumption patterns of individuals not just in America but all around the globe. The study further highlights how the newly developed food culture symbolizes sophistication and affluence which again creates a huge drift between the upper and the middle class.

Counihan (1999), in the book *The Anthropology of Food and Body* emphasized on food being central to both biological and social life. It further examines how food

enables in shaping a community, personality, family and also explains how food continues to be the source of power while understanding the difference in gender dimensions due to differential control and access of the resources.

Visser (1999), in the article *Food and Culture interconnection* focuses how food is inter-woven with culture and change in diet would lead to change in culture and vice-versa. The study emphasizes the importance of food and states that it not only satiates the physical needs but also the social, taking into consideration the interaction that is caused by food. Food has a huge power and change in taste would either lead to be a boon or a curse to the society.

Amy Shiman (2000), in the article *Food Gifts: Ritual Exchange and the Production of excess meaning* explains the importance of exchanging food gifts on the Jewish festival of Purim which reflects the problem of gift giving both as a system of rules and obligations as the gift is a statement about the relationship between sender and recipient

Dietler and Hayden (2001), in the book *Feasts – Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics and Power* emphasizes on various aspects of feasting. The study focuses on the evolution of feasting, types of feasting, and how it creates social boundaries between male-female, aged-young etc.

Mintz & DuBois (2002), in the article *The Anthropology of Food and Eating* focused on the essentialism of food to human existence. The study further concentrated on food ethnographies like single commodities and substances, food and social change, food insecurity, eating and ritual, eating and identities and instructional materials. The richest, most extensive anthropological work among these subtopics has focused on food insecurity, eating and ritual, and eating and identities.



Counihan & Esterik (2008), in this article *The Culinary Triangle*, Claude Levi Strauss argues how Levi Strauss demonstrates the methodology of language and transfers it to other domains like cooking. The study of cooking can be understood by three points i.e, boiling, roasting and smoking which is based on nature and culture and how a society perceives it.

Watts (2008), in the article *Food is Culture* by Massimo Montanari emphasized on the idea that every aspect of food cultivation, preparation, and consumption represents a cultural act. The study further emphasizes on the consumption of glocal food (which is neither global nor local) and the function of these food serves various purposes based on different societies adapting and eating according to their needs and want.

Richards (2009), in the book *Hunger Work in a Savage Tribe. A Functional study of Nutrition among the Southern Bantu* focuses on the important elements of nutritional and distribution of food among the Bantu tribes. These tribes emphasize on a public distribution of food supply for the fulfillment of kinship obligation as well as educating the child in kinship sense. The study states how only vegetables are individually owned by these tribes while each hut supports one another meat food is distributed among the wider circle on the basis of kinship usages.

Rochow (2009), in the article *Food Taboo: Their origins and purposes* explains the importance of food taboo among the hunting and gathering tribe of Paraguay. The study elaborates how regular avoidance of some substances turns into a tradition and eventually ends up as a food taboo by giving special references of tribes like *Orang Asli* and Papua New Guinea who observe these taboos both on male and female consumption pattern.

Ward et.al, (2010), in the article *A sociology of food and eating* has collaborated many abstract on food and has focused not only within the realm of health sociology, but also in relation to evolving food markets along with its implication of “modern food risk” and “traditional food risk”, identity and food consumption, a renewed interest in food governance, shrinking trust in the food supply.

Chaudhuri & Chatterjee (2011), in the book *The Writers Feast, Food and Cultures of Representation* explains food as a part of everyday life which also provides an entry point to examine the negotiation of social relationship and gender roles. The study focuses on how food is a way of cultural behavior that determines the functions of a woman and man where the formers duty is to cook food while the latter job is to eat that food.

Siewicz (2011), in the article *Anthropology As An Inspiration to Food studies: Building Theory and Practice* has focused on the role of anthropological inquiry in the development and interdisciplinary approach to food in culture. Early anthropologist like Bronislaw Malinowski and Edward Evans-Pritchard stressed on the social meaning of food while analyzing their outcome of the field work. The study made by above anthropologists suggests that only when the functional approach was replaced by structuralism, the symbolic meaning of food was given a priority.

Inglis (2016), in the article *Globalization Studies* explains the process of food globalization and McDonaldization having a great impact globally. The study highlights how these globalized food culture is slowly cutting off the traditional local cuisine just as other American products like Hollywood films, television and also Nike sports gear is taking the global as well as local market.

Becut & Pureto (2017), in the article *Food History and Identity: Food and eating practices as elements of cultural heritage identity and social creativity* focuses on the energy of food, which enables in creating interconnection between people and preserving the cultural heritage for the continuity of the group. Food and eating foremost is not at all a constant observable fact, it's dynamic in nature and changes along with the society. Food though an everyday phenomena yet acts as a yardstick in building social equality due to the choices of selecting food items and also the act of eating is marked by regulative morals and code of behavior which binds the society together.

### **1.3.2 Studies on Newar**

Chattopadhyay (1924), in the article *An Essay on the history of Newar Culture* focuses on the Newars of Nepal and gives a brief overview of their origin, religion, caste-structure, social patterns, traditions and culture. The study briefly explains about the socio-economic and cultural lifestyle of the Newars traditionally and throws ample light on their rigid complex caste structure.

Haimendorf (1956), in the article *Elements of Newar Social Structure* explains the Newari social structure, which is said to have an urban characteristic as the community has always been engaged in trade. The study also highlights the unique caste system where the Newar society appears to be divided into two categories the Hindu and the Buddhist who ardently follow the hierarchical division and also strictly adhere to the rules of commensality within one's own caste. The Newar caste structure operates through the residential unit, second being the importance of

seniority and lastly the *phuki* where the members has to cooperate and organize various ritual events in order to maintain their caste structure.

Boker (1988), in the article *Spatial Organization of a Caste society : The example of the Newar in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal* has argued that the Newars of Kathmandu Valley practice their own culture and orthodox caste system. Caste system plays an important role in the life of a Newar. The caste system was traditionally very rigid that it also determined the settlement of the community which promoted the status, life-style and social interaction within the different types of castes causing further segregation in the community.

Lowdin (1998), in the book *Food, Ritual and Society, A study of social structure and Food symbolism among the Newars* has explored the symbolic significance of Newar traditional food in relation to the elements in social structure. The study highlights how food for the Newars play a significant role in caste division and hierarchical relation between different castes. The study also explores the importance of feasts(Bhoj) which creates an exclusive cultural identity and also contributes in binding the members of the community into a close-knit society.

Gellner (1991), in the article *Hinduism Tribalism and the Position of Women: The Problem of Newar Identity* has focused on the use of caste v/s tribe dichotomy to examine the Newars. The study argues how Newar girls undergoes a primary ritual mock marriage to a fruit in order to prevent themselves from experiencing widowhood and the Newar women are often stereotyped that they can easily divorce by just placing betel nuts under the pillow of their husband and remarry without being

looked down upon. However the study further highlights that due to the dominance of Parbatiya and the process of Sanskritization within the Newar community the Newar widows have to adapt the rigid norms and do not enjoy a healthy position as often cited creating some kind of identity crises.

Allen (2000), in the article *Ritual Power and Gender: Explorations of the Ethnography of Vanuatu, Nepal and Ireland* explains about the importance of Newar rituals and also explains about *samaibaji* a ritual food of Newars which is consumed in the form of Prasad.

Shrestha (2010), in the article *To Drink or Not to Drink Local Beverages of Nepal* highlights the importance of drinking which is culturally and ritualistically prescribed. The study identifies two important alcoholic beverages of the Newar community i.e. *Aila* and *Thon*, and also states the necessity of these drinks during feasts and festivals.

Shrestha (2015), in the book *the Newars of Sikkim* has made an ethnographic study on the Newars of Sikkim living in a diaspora. The study focuses on the transition of rituals (life-cycle, death), festivals, feasts, among the Newars of Sikkim and how the Newar population is re-constructing its identity in a diaspora context.

Sakhya (2019), in the article *A Scientific Feast* showcases the importance of feast or *Bhojin* in the life of a Newar. The study also discusses about the different items that are presented during the *bhoj*. These items have a symbolic and cultural significance in the life of a Newar.



Shrestha (2019), in the article *A Feast for Kings* explains about the traditional feast known as the *LapteBhoj*. This feast is considered to be one of the most important cultural event with various delicacies. The study further explains about the eating manners and patterns that a Newar invitee has to follow during this course of meal.

#### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The famous social anthropologist Malinowski (1935,cited in Siewicz 2011) emphasises on the magnitude of ‘cultural needs’ and functional unity in a society. He argues that every institution in a social setting is inter-linked which further enables in smooth functioning of the society. His famous work on Trobriand Islanders, a tribe in Papua, New Guinea speaks volumes about the socio-symbolic importance of ‘Yam’ which is considered as the main staple food. A storage house for yam was a requisite in the village and only the men who belonged to a high social class could build huge yam house while an average man owned an artless yam house. This showcases how food was significantly related to the class and status symbol in their community for retaining social order. However these fundamental needs are not only important for integration but also the formation of interaction and human relationships (Richards, 1932).

Another important approach applied to the study of food is through the Structuralist Approach where anthropologist like Levi Strauss has contributed in understanding the scope of study. Levi Strauss theory on the Culinary Triangle (as cited in Counihan and Esterik, 2008) considered food practices as language and therefore identifies the primary binary opposites i.e, nature and culture while explaining food. The concept of boiling and roasting are two different methods of food practices which Strauss had

beautifully linked while studying food culture. He argues that boiling is a form of culture because a material object is used during the process and this object is also passed down from one generation to other while roasting is a form of nature which does not require an external agent. He further argued that the boiled meat was mostly a family affair while roasted meat was served during banquets and was consumed outside the familial ties representing 'economy' and 'prodigality' and creating a status-quo. Therefore to understand a particular society one has to understand it in terms of the Raw, Cooked and Rotted which is unknowingly translated in its structure.

Mary Douglas, on her *Deciphering a Meal* (1972) emphasizes how food is a ritual activity and is consumed in every social setting. She argues that the food, particularly the meal is a miniature form of the larger social structure. She analyzed that the meals are structured and patterned in such a form that they structure our social events. Similarly Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is equally relevant while studying the food culture and eating habits of Newars by determining the differences in preferences of food habits due to difference in cultural capital. According to Bourdieu it is on the basis of an individual's physical cultural embodiment that he/she learns the norms, values, beliefs and behavior from one's habitus which is then reflected in the form of 'taste' towards art, food and clothing.

Taking George Ritzer's perspective of McDonaldization the study has also focused on the growing fast-food culture and its impact on traditional dishes in the Sikkimese society in general and the Newars community in particular.

In addition to these above perspectives, the present study while examining food culture and eating habits of the Newar community has also used various sociological concepts. Emile Durkheim's 'sacred and profane' has been used to examine about the

symbolic importance of religious and non-religious food in the life of a Newar. Herskovits perception of acculturation is also kept in mind while studying the migration process of the Newars from Nepal while living in a different socio-economic and geographic location in a homogeneous manner. Ferdinand Tonnies concept of *geminschaft* and *gesellschaft* is also used to understand the role of Sikkim Newar Guthi who unlike traditional caste-based guthis in Nepal, are more instrumental in reviving and preservation of the culture of Newar.

## **1.5 Rationale**

Food plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture of any community, so the Newar community with their traditional and elaborative food culture is tied in close knit-community. With 21,657 Newar population, the community represent 3.5% of total population of Sikkim, distributed in East, West, North and South districts of Sikkim. The Newars of Sikkim has a long history of migration from Nepal Valley. Unlike in the Nepal Valley where the community practices a rigid caste structure, the Newars of Sikkim live in more or less homogeneous group, where the orthodox caste system is virtually absent. However in Sikkim the community is considered as a culturally distinctive group having a rich culinary culture and exclusive food habits and recipes and variety of pickles like *alu*, *bhatamas*, *nutrela*, *sukti*, *matar* etc associated with the community, and is also widely adopted and marketed by other communities as well.

The Newars have been living in Sikkim since 18<sup>th</sup> century which is altogether a different socio- cultural, political setting and this has had a wide ramification in the socio-cultural life as well as in the food habits resulting in great deal of acculturation. In addition, the social change witnessed by the Sikkimese society has also contributed a lot in the changing food habits of all communities. The rapid change in lifestyles,

mushroom growth of fast food culture, the trend of eating outcafé- culture, catering, menu pluralism (Chinese, Korean, Italian, Continental, and Indian) have hugely affected the food habits of the Newars along with the other communities in Sikkim.

The literature review suggests that the literature on Newars of Sikkim is very scanty. Except Shrestha (2015) and few articles in community journal, the study on the culinary culture of the Newars of Sikkim is virtually non-existent. Therefore the study attempts to fill up the gap and make a comprehensive study on Food culture and Eating habits among the Newars of Sikkim and also its continuity and change.

## **1.6 Objectives**

- I. To study the food culture and eating habits of the Newars of Sikkim.
- II. To study the socio-cultural and symbolic significance of food in various rituals and feasts celebrated by Newars of Sikkim.
- III. To study the continuity and change of food culture and eating habits among the Newars of Sikkim
- IV. To study the role of Newar *Guthi* in cultural preservation with reference to ethnic Newar food, if any.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

- I. Has the Newar community of Sikkim still retained the traditional food culture and eating habits?
- II. What are the cultural and symbolic importance of various food items used in rituals and festivals?

- III. What are the delicacies of Newars which sets them apart and distinctive from other ethnic communities? Have these delicacies still part of daily eating habits of the community?
- IV. What are the continuity and changes in the food culture of Newars of Sikkim? Have there been any changes in the process of preparation and ingredients of ritually important food items?
- V. Is the community organization of Guthi taking any initiative with regard to revival and preservation of ethnic food? If, so, what are their initiatives and how are they doing it?

## **1.8 Methodology**

**1.8.1 Method of Study:** The study is exploratory in nature and has used both primary and secondary resources. The secondary information is derived from available literature like books and journals, census data etc. The primary data was collected from field through in-depth-interview method using semi structured interview schedule comprising both open-ended and close-ended questions, while questionnaire was also administered among *Guthi* members. In addition to that, observation, informal- conversation techniques was used to study the preparation of food items during feasts, rituals and everyday life of the Newars. For collection of qualitative information case study and narratives was used to further supplement the quantitative findings. Phone-call conversations, WhatsApp and Skype video calls were also done in Nepal through the support of Sikkim Newar Guthi for guidance.

The empirical study was analyzed using Levi Strauss Structuralist perspective. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Ritzer's McDonaldlization, concepts of



Malinowski, Durkheim and other sociological concepts for understanding food studies.

### **1.8.2 Field Setting**

The Universe of the study was the Newars of Dentam from rural setting and Gangtok from urban area. Dentam is a scenic village in West Sikkim District comprising of 331 Newar population (State Socio-Economic Census, 2006), which accounts to 9.8% of total population of the village. The community lives in close proximity to each other and are mostly engaged in farming while Gangtok being the capital of Sikkim has a metropolitan touch, here the Newars live in scattered manner and are mostly engaged in business and in-service sector.

The total sample selected was 100 taking 60:40 ratios from rural and urban fringe. Based on purposive sampling and considering the variables like age, gender, rural-urban, educational level, occupation, income, land and family structure, the respondents were selected in the age group of 18-60 years. To comprehend the role of Guthi in preservation of food culture, the sample population both in urban and rural area also includes the prominent *Guthi* members.

## **1.9 Chapterization**

**Chapter I Introduction:** This chapter provides a whole overview of the study incorporating the statement of the problem, literature review, rationale of study, objectives and methodology.

**Chapter II Food Culture of Newars and Its Socio- Cultural Significance:** This chapter aims at studying the Newars of Sikkim by exploring the historical and socio-cultural backdrop of the Newars of Nepal. In reference with available literature, the

chapter examines the food items that are prepared and consumed during festivals, birth, marriage and death rituals. This chapter also focuses on explaining food as a symbol of meaning which enables in creating the identity of an individual or a group which further relations and hierarchies.

**Chapter III The Newars of Sikkim:** This chapter also focuses on the migration history of the Newars of Nepal to Sikkim and locates the Newars in present context. It also aims at studying the socio-economic profile of the respondents like age, sex, education, occupation, income and family structure which further helps the researcher for analysis.

**Chapter IV Food Culture and Eating Habits of the Newars– An Empirical Analysis:** This Chapter makes a qualitative and quantitative analysis of field regarding the food culture and eating habits. Qualitative information like caste study, narratives has been used to further supplement the quantitative findings.

**Chapter V Continuity, Change and Revivalism:** This Chapter examines the continuity of traditional Newar food culture, in addition it also highlights the new changes and the courses of events in relation to food culture occurring in the process of Revivalism.

**Chapter VI Conclusion and Summary:** This chapter summarizes the entire thesis and highlights the findings of the study.

## Chapter 2

### Food Culture of Newars and Its Socio-Cultural Significance

#### 2.1 Introduction

The overview on food culture and its socio- cultural importance is preceded with an introduction of the Newar community against the historical backdrop. The section will be followed by an exhaustive discussion on food cultures of the community and its socio- cultural significance. The chapter will provide a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the continuity and changes of food culture in the present context of Sikkim.

#### 2.2 The Newars and their Origin : A Brief History

It is widely believed that Newars are the ‘ traditional’ inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley. Gellner and Quigley (1999) mentioned the word Newar as indistinguishable with the place called Nepal and many people even till date refer to the Kathmandu valley as Nepal. Although the place-name Nepal has its historical value since the fifth century but the term Newar, was only registered and confirmed from the mid-seventeenth century.

According to Lowdin (1998), the origin of the term Newar is not yet fully established and is often used to designate those who have Newari as their mother tongue and also those who observe *Mha puja* or the Newar New year.

Traditionally, the Newars are believed to be the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. There are different perspectives on the origin of Newars. While one version argues that Newars are the descendants of Kiratas, the other claims that they have migrated

to the valley from the Malabar in the Southern India, the claim is mainly due to the resemblance between the word Newar and Nayar (Lowdin, 1998). Louis Dumont (cited in Sharma, 2015) also argues about the similarities between the term Nayars and Newars and further describes them as a ‘conglomerate of groups’ following the Hindu caste order to which Sharma himself opposes and states that Newars are a mixture of diverse ethnic and racial groups and must not be viewed adjacent with the Nayars of South India. However, diverse perspectives on the origin of Newars have been associated with different historical periods according to the dynastic rule:

(a) The Kirata period- According to *Gopala Vamsavali*, the Kirata period, the oldest chronicle of Nepal ruled for 32 generations (Shrestha, 1999). The Kiratas are known to have existed in the Himalays since the rigvedic period which showcases the early influence of Mongoloid people. The Kiratas are often identified with Rais and Limbus who now live in the eastern part of Nepal. The origin of Newars is controversial and cannot be explained in an ascertainable manner. However, the Gorkhas believe that the Newars are the descendents of Kichak who are identified with the Kirats therefore, it is plausible to find some ethnic similarity of the Newars with the ancient Kiratas (Nepali, 1965).

(b) Licchavi period-The Kirats were then succeeded by the Licchavi, who ruled Nepal from fifth-ninth century A.D and have left many coins and inscriptions in Sanskrit. K.P Malla as cited in Shrestha (1999) argues that after closely examining those inscriptions he came to the conclusion that “the nominal found in the inscriptions are an archaic form of Nepal Bhasa”. The Nepal Bhasa belongs to the Tibeto-Burman stock which is now modified in the western philosophy and is commonly known as Newari and the Newari language is spoken by the inhabitants of the Kathmandu

valley (Gellner & Quigley, 1999). Therefore the Newar perceive themselves as the original dwellers of the valley (Anderson, 1971). However it was during the Licchavi period, that they brought Sanskrit into the valley and the process of Aryanisation was strengthened and caste system was also introduced (Pradhan, 2009). During the Licchavi period, both Hinduism and Buddhism flourished at the same time but the Licchavis associated themselves as Kshatriyas and as ‘patrons’ of Brahmans (Gellner and Quigley, 1999). The society was mainly Brahmanic in orientation where the tribal attained Sanskritization. It is also said that because of the grants given by the king, one of the grants particularly went to the group known as *pancali* and *gosthi*, both being the ancestor of the modern Newar *guthi*. Some of the festivals of Newars and their settlement pattern are similar to the Licchavi period, which suggests that Newars were the direct descendants of Licchavis (ibid:7). The origin of the Licchavi rulers is not fully established, although it is generally accepted that they have their roots in Bihar. It is also believed that the valley during the Licchavi period was under the influence of Tibetan king for a short time as he had married a Nepali princess, who along with her Chinese co-wife is given the credit of introducing Buddhism in Tibet (Lowdin, 1998). However, the Nepali scholars have contradictory views and often argues that such a thing has never been recorded in their Nepali chronicles and a “Kshatriya ruler could not have given his daughter in marriage to an uncouth Mongoloid” (Pradhan, 2009).

(c) The Malla Period : The period can be divided into two stages viz; early Malla(1200 to 1382 A.D) and late Malla (1382 to 1769) period. It was during the reign of King *Jaya Sthithi Malla* who codified the caste hierarchy system and a total of 725 different castes and sub-castes was created (Shrestha,2015) among Newars. However, despite these historical claims, the Newars have different views of

historical development and claims that the common identity of Newars was formed in the Kathmandu Valley. With the advent of the Gorkha rulers, the Newar language and culture gradually had to suffer a great deal and the introduction of Legal Code in 1854 collectively merged all the Newars castes as one *jat* and were made trivial to the *Parbatiyas* (Shrestha, 1999) which later caused migration of many Newars from the valley.

Although the origin of Newars is confusing and often shrouded in mystery, Lowdin (1998) came to the conclusion that the Newars can be considered due to the result of intersecting influences at the Indo-Tibetan boundary, both culturally and physically.

### **2.3 Social and Cultural Life of the Newars**

The Newars speak the Tibeto-Burmese Language, and possess a well-developed script of their own known as the *Ranja Lipi* (Pradhan, 2018). However an interesting feature among the Newars is that even within their community there is a considerable dialectical differences which exists from one Newar town to another (Quigley, 1987).The community represent an Indo-Mongolian facial type (Anderson,1971) to which Nepali (1988) contradicts and describes as long, oval, delicate and pulpy face with a high bridged nose. The Newars characterize a pleasant appearance and their women are often the symbolization of beauty (ibid:26).

Dress and ornaments are distinctive part of Newar culture.The Newars believe in presenting themselves in a neat and tidy manner. In regard to the male the upper garment is known as the *la(n)* in the Newar language and the lower garment is known as *Suruwa*, which is some sort of tight *pyjama* accompanied with a head- dress

known as the *tapali* (Nepali, 1988). The Newar women wear *Haku Patasi* which is a *saree* that is black in color with a red border. Traditionally the Newars used to weave the material for the saree in their homes, using a loom called *Tan*. This dress imparts important significance i.e, to look simple, traditional and exclusive. The *Haku Patasi* is completed with a *chawbandi* (blouse) known as *Bag-tug-kripa-la* in Newar, along with that a *patuki* (traditional belt) and a *sal* white in color with a red border is also draped (Shrestha, 2018). A Newar woman is often considered incomplete without her ornament, which carry both cultural as well as economic significance. They have a variety of head-ornaments among which *sir-bandi* and *gyapoo-sikha* are ritually important during *Ihi*<sup>1</sup>. Wrist ornaments namely *pancha-ratna-churi*, ear ornaments like *maka-phosi* and many more are also adorned by the female members of the community. The Newar women are also highly conscious about their status, therefore they load as many ornaments as possible especially during the feasts, which is also a platform for enhancing their status. One interesting feature is that nose-piercing is not encouraged among the community unlike the *Parbatya*<sup>2</sup> women (Nepali, 1988). However a Newar women is easily distinguished from others by the ornaments she wears.

The communities were basically agriculturist in nature as the soil of Kathmandu valley is remarkably fertile and is capable of yielding up to three crops per year (Quigley, 1987). Another important occupation engaged by the Newars was trade

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Bel Vivah, a customary mock marriage practiced by the Newars where the maiden girls are married off to a fruit name Bel, scientifically known as *Aegle marmelos*.

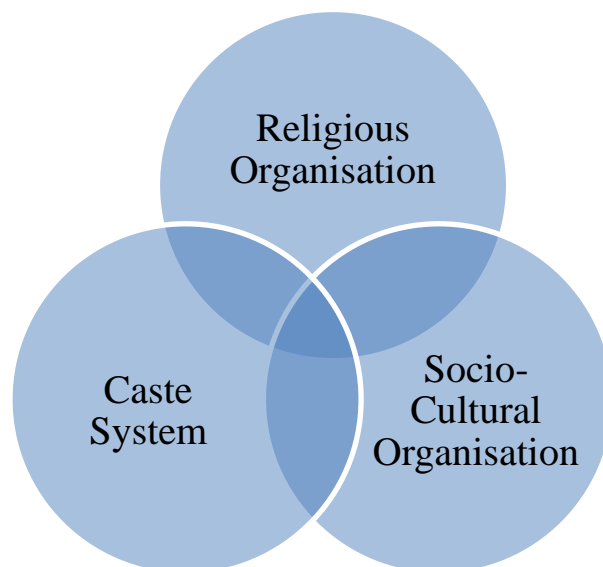
<sup>2</sup> Referred to the Nepalese communities residing in Nepal, particularly the Chettris and Bahuns.

where they had already attained monopoly (Boker,1998) .The Newars are also famous for handicraft which is implicitly related to religion as they make bronze effigies that illustrates their material cultural lifestyle (Charpentier, 1973).

For better understanding of the Newars community life, it is important to have knowledge about the various socio-cultural aspects viz, religious system, the caste system and socio- cultural organization and a brief discussion of these organizations is presented as follows:

**Figure 2.1**

Socio- Cultural Aspects of Newars



*Source:* Fieldwork May-October 2019



### **2.3.1 Religion among Newars**

Religiously, the Newars are divided into two different religious currents *Buddhamargi* and *Shivamargi*. Traditionally majority of the Newars were Buddhist and minority were the Hindus (Chattopadhyay, 1924 ) but during the reign of King *Jaya Sthiti Malla*, the nation was created into a Hindu monarch and it was on that basis various courtly privileges were sanctioned and were also hinduized (Quigley,1987). Although the community is bifurcated into two different religious currents, each practicing their own rigid caste system, there is very little to distinguish between the Buddhist Newar who worships both Buddha and Shiva simultaneously (ibid: 6) .However some of their life-cycle rituals and the use of priests may differ(ibid: 8). In case of the Hindu Newars, they use the *Deo Brahman* as priest and the Buddhist Newars use the *Gubhaju* (Lowdin, 1998). According to Shrestha (1999) there are also Christian and Muslim Newars in Kathmandu. The Muslim Newars also speak *Nepal Bhasa* and live in cordial relation with others, while the Christian Newars were forced to emigrate to India during the Gorkha conquest in 1769.

### **2.3.2 Caste System**

The Newar society is a complex one, while making an intensive study one has to keep in mind that the community in itself is divided into various castes and sub-castes which is further arranged into a hierarchical system based on its caste-based occupation. The Newars are fully aware about their sophisticated caste system which provides almost all the necessary services and that further makes the community exclusive from the other communities (Greenwold, 1977). Table No 2.1 illustrates a caste hierarchy of Newar.

**Table 2.1 Newar Caste Hierarchy**

Sl No.	Castes	Hindu Newars	Buddhist Newars
1.	<b>Priestlycaste</b>	Deo Brahman	Vajracharya(Gubhaju)
2.	<b>Highcaste</b>	Chatharia Shrestha Panchtharia Shrestha	Bare(Sakya) Uray(Udas)
3.	<b>Upper Lower caste</b>	Jyapu (Maharanjan,Dungol)	
4.	<b>Low Lower caste</b>	Citrakar, Kumal, Gathu, Nau, Ceepa, Saymi	
5.	<b>Unclean</b>	Duyyea, Balami, Sangha Bha Naye, Kasai Jugi	
6.	<b>Untouchables</b>	Pore, Kullu Chya Halahulu (harahuru)	

Source : Lowdin(1998) pg.52

The Newar caste hierarchy is completely based on their occupation and this division and hierarchical relation is reflected in the commensality rules.

The *Deo Brahmans* and the *Vajracharya* are considered as the priestly caste of the respective *Shivamargis* and *Buddhamargis*, who do not accept boiled rice from any other caste. Next in hierarchy are the *Sakyas* belonging to the Buddhist caste hierarchy who were traditionally the Smiths and the *Uray* belonged to the traders and craftsman.

Among the Hindu Newars, the *Chatharia Shresthas* belong to high caste Hindus and consists of several sub-groups namely *Malla*, *Pradhan*, *Raj Bhandari*, *Achar*, *Amatyaa* are often known as the aristocrats while the *Panchtharia Shresthas* attains the status which is lower than that of the *Chatharia*. The *Panchtharias* are ranked as equivalent to the *Jyapus*, who belong to the lower caste. It is believed that these *Panchtharias* have tried to elevate their status-quo through the process of Sanskritization.

This is followed by the *Jyapus* who are basically the farmers and form the major population of the Newars. Traditionally the *Jyapu* caste were also known as the palanquin bearers due to which marriage and commensality is restricted with this caste. The remaining low lower caste, unclean caste and the untouchables are

considered to be of demeaning status in the Newar caste hierarchy, as their occupation demands them to engage in things that the above castes would not do.

Therefore the community is regarded as highly complicated due to its division in caste hierarchies which in return creates discord and disarray within the community as a whole (Lowdin,1998 ) and is further reflected in the commensal patterns. The members of the community have settled in clustered manner and every Newar village can be easily distinguishable due to its three or more storied high red bricked house (Quigley,1987). The Newar settlements are to a large extent an “autonomous social and ritual unit” (ibid:4),where not only the non- Newars but also the Newars from other towns, who even after being the descendants from common stock are not regarded as their kin. However all these minute differences in the community also plays a major role in describing about their differences or similarity of food choices.

### **2.3.3 Socio- Cultural Organization**

Lachi (2069<sup>3</sup>/2013) argues that the Newar ancestors did quite a little to safeguard their culture, *jatras*<sup>4</sup>, folk dance, music, and food habits. He further highlighted that around thousand years ago, the Newar *guthi* had been established for protection and continuity of the Newar cultural heritage. To understand the caste and familial organization of the Newars, one has to understand the socio-religious organization, whom the Newars dearly refer to as the *Guthi*. In the context to Nepal, there are different types of Guthis organized for different socio-religious purposes and the network of such guthis is to bind the Newars at three different levels : caste, patrilineal groups and territorial boundaries (Nepali, 1988). In Nepal the *guthis* like

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<sup>3</sup> As per the Nepal Sambat, which is the lunar calendar used by the Nepalese-speaking people, when converted into English calendar is dated 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Religious processions of the Newars.

the *si guthi* is formed only for the dead rituals where the *guthiyars* (members of *guthi*) arrange the funerals for the deceased family by disposing the dead bodies to the cremation ground (Gellner and Quigley, 1999). Such *guthis* like *si guthi* demands compulsory membership of all the male heads of a household known as *Thakali* and the membership is hereditary. However one can observe extensive network of *guthis* in every tol/locality in Kathmandu (Pradhan, 2019). According to Bal Gopal Shrestha (2013), the town of Sankhu possesses a population of approximately 5,500 people and has 80 *guthis* catering the religious and cultural activities such as funeral rites, music, language etc. The *guthis* also have a major role in organizing large feasts especially during community- festivals like *Indrajatra*.

## **2.4 On the Importance of Food and Eating rituals**

Food plays a pivotal role in the structural and cultural construction of the Newar community. The importance of food among the Newars is transcendental for instance when two Newars meet they often greet each other with an expression i.e, *Ja naya dwuno la* which literally means did eat your rice? (Tamang, 2009)

Food is not just for mere sustenance but it also adds some meaning in the life of a Newar. One such interesting facts about the Newars as discussed by Nepali (1988) is about a caste known as the *Panch-tharia* Shresthas, who have various clan names being derived from the name of different food items. For instance *sya-baji* (a kind of flattened rice) *chhoyala* (meat item), *pai(n)* (another type of Baji), *bhuti* (meat item), *haku masya* (paddy), *dhau* (curd), *wa* (cake), *mhukha* (Mushroom) (ibid; 161). Here we can see the derivation of clan names based on food items denoting the frequency in which food plays a pivotal role in the community. Lowdin (1998) and Nepali

(1988) have further categorized and classified the Newar meals of Kathmandu valley into three types .

- i) *Jyona* that is the daily rice (*ja*) meal,
- ii) *Diku* the mid-day snack (*baji*)
- iii) *Bhoye* (*bhoj*) the feast.

These meals are relished on both daily basis and during the feasts. The Newars have two different styles of eating the first is mixing of *ja* (boiled rice) with *ke* (soup) which is formed into a chunk and pushed into the mouth using fingers, the second one is eating *baji* (flat rice) by scooping the rice into the mouth in a throwing motion (Lowdin, 1998). The members of the community do not use their left hand while eating and serving as it is considered to be polluting and anything that touches the lips of a person right from food to drinks to vessels is considered to be polluted (*jutho*) and disregarded. During the meals and especially during *Bhoj*, the male members often form a line (*jho*) and sometimes sit in a hierarchical order in terms of age group which is then accompanied by women and children at the last. Before the meals become polluted by eating, the Newars often separate small portions of each item from the plate and keep it away as the God's share known as *dyo chaye* in Newar language (ibid: 30) and when asked who was the God, majority of them often referred to as their *pitri* (ancestors).

#### **2.4.1 Meals and Morality**

According to the Brahmanical tradition the food is divided into three categories: 1) *Sattvic* 2) *Rajasic* 3) *Tamasic* (Lowdin,1988).

The *sattvic* diet is considered to be pure and vegetarian which abstains from items like onion, radish and garlic and is regarded as the food for saints.

The *rajasic* foods comprises of meat from goat and chicken along with eggs and is known as the food for kings.

The *tamasic* food includes items that are not permitted in the above categories like buffalo meat, fermented foods, spirits, garlic etc.

This categorization of food explains an individual's state of mind for instance the *sattvic* food makes a man holy while *rajasic* food makes him powerful, courageous and sexually active. The *tamasic* food is considered to turn the individual thoughts into demons like (ibid: 31). However the Newars follow *sattvic* diet during the *vrta* (fasting) days and on most of the occasions they follow the *tamasic* diet, where meat and alcohol is culturally prescribed. It is generally believed that the Newars consume the *tamasic* diet because the tantric Gods are thirsty of blood and if animals are not sacrificed, then the deities would satisfy themselves by causing a mishap like an accident. During the *bhog* (sacrificial rite), one has to offer buffalo, goat, duck, and chicken. Eggs and black pulses are often used as an alternative of proper animals especially for the ones who belong to low socio-economic status in the Newar society (ibid: 33).

#### **2.4.2 Commensal Rules in Newar Community**

According to Nepali (1988) the Newar society is a complex entity with a great division of caste hierarchy completely based on occupation. Each caste is divided on the basis of its territorial boundary known as *tol* (town/village) that further accentuates some sort of social distance and individual comparison within the different castes in the community. Shrestha (1999) also supports Nepali's statement by arguing that due to the traditional caste system, the members of the Newar

community living in different *tol's* do not reside in a unified manner. However their unique caste based differences has a deep inter-connection with food.

According to Gellner and Quigley (1999), the Newars rigidly maintain the rules of commensality within their caste system and has further divided the food into three categories

- 1) Boiled rice and lentil soup.
- 2) Other cooked food and water.
- 3) Raw foods.

This compartmentalization speaks volumes about food creating hierarchical division in the Newar society. The boiled rice is supposed to be avoided from any caste lower than one's own. Food in category (2) cannot be accepted by the clean caste from an unclean caste, here clean basically means caste from whom water can be accepted while unclean means caste from whom water cannot be accepted. Food in the third category i.e, raw foods can be accepted from all castes. Nevertheless the social structure of the Newar caste system is based on the concept of commensal dining through the acceptance or avoidance of *Katcha* and *Pucca* food.

Freed (1970) explains that food exchange plays an important role in constructing caste hierarchy in a community as any member can decipher which caste is higher and which is lower on the basis of who gives food to whom as the giver attains higher status than the receivers.

Contextually even among the Newar community caste based distinction is rigidly maintained through the acceptance of boiled rice (*ja*), water (*la*) and other socio-ritual food items (Lowdin, 1988). The acceptance and avoidance of boiled rice is so rigid

within the community in Nepal that if a high caste Newar man keeps physical proximity with an untouchable woman, then he had to pay a fine of Rs. 100, in order to regain back to his social status, but if he was guilty of accepting boiled rice from the hands of that untouchable woman, then he would be imprisoned for one and a half years, socially boycotted from his caste and was also pursued to join the same caste of that woman (ibid;65). It is to be noticed that boiled rice which is a common substance turns out to decide the caste position and the identity of an individual.

### **2.4.3 Food Culture and Social Power**

The Newar community is popular for celebrating their *char-parwa* (festivals), *jatramela* with quite a fanfare. No matter how extravagant these festivals and processions are, it becomes incomplete without their main attraction, which is their *Khan-Pin* (food and drinks). The different types of *Parikar* (delicacies) is heavily rejoiced by the members of the community while celebrating their age-old festivals as well as during the normal days.

The Newar festivals occur throughout the year and every Newar dish carries its own symbolic as well as scientific significance. The food items prepared and eaten during each festival or carnival is purely seasonal. With seasonal change, the human body also changes and our body requires its own form of nutrients that is supplied in the form of food. The Newars in the Nepal have since ancient period synchronized their dietary chart with religion and therefore some festivals are celebrated on the basis of season (Lachi, 2069). This indicates that the members of the community since time immemorial probably knew what is to be consumed during a particular season which



later became a major part of their food culture enabling in symbolizing their heritage and socio cultural aspect.

The Newars as discussed earlier considers boiled rice as a form of threat that creates pollution when consumed outside one's own caste, but at the same time the beaten rice which is at first partially boiled in the husk and then it is flattened by a pounding process is considered to be safer and non-polluting to the Newars (Allen, 2000). He further explains that the *baji* or the flattened rice is heavily consumed during their different festivals and *jatras*. However the *baji* is a common item in each and every Newar household and it also has a deep socio-religious meaning in formulating the Newar ethnic identity. The *baji* is eaten as a form of Prasad known as *samai-baji* which consists of *baji* (flattened rice), *syabaji* (roasted flat rice), garlic, ginger, black soyabeans, white beans, fish. Although the *samai-baji* is considered to be sacred and holy by the Newars, it also signifies commensal inter-caste inclusion as this ritual food, unlike the boiled rice is merrily consumed by all the caste members of the community during large-scale festivals and ceremonies without the fear of being polluted and out-casted.

Another delicacy which has to be present during most of the occasions is different types of sweet bread. Rajbangshi (2008) explains that dough or the batter for these sweet breads are prepared out of *kodo* (millet), *geraguri* (pulses), *makai* (maize), *phapar* (buck-wheat), which is designed in different structures and the pan fried in oil or ghee. *Lakhamari* is one example of this sweet bread that carries ample importance among the Newar community and the batter for this sweet bread is prepared by mixing flour, sugar and *ghyo* (butter), after the batter is prepared then different types

of figures like fish, frog, parrot is designed while frying batter in butter, once it is fried thin sugary syrup (*chasni*) is used for coating. The *lakhamari* is considered a must, as a ritual food especially during the marriage, where it is a sort of norm for every Newar groom to carry more than one *lakhamari* to his affinal house on the day of his wedding. The size of a *lakhamari* determines the closeness of the relationship with the bride's family, which further manifests the structure of a kinship bond (Lowdin, 1988). However small size *lakhamari* are also prepared for the guests and kids in everyday life. Other sweet breads like *gulmari*, *anarash* are also used during marriage ceremonies.

*Chatamari* is similar to a pan-cake and is a ritual food which is used during *digu puja* and *guthi* meetings (Lachi, 2069). Another famous sweet bread is *Yomari*, *yoh-* basically means something that is desirable and *mari* means roti. It is a steamed dumpling that looks like a fig or *torma*, a Buddhist ritual food. The dough for *yomari* is made of rice flour and on the inside *chaku* (jaggery), *kalo til* (black sesame seeds) is added and closed. Anderson (1971) argued that this delicacy is prepared prior to *yomari punhi*, a celebration for harvest thanks-giving and is stored in the granary for four days, no family member is allowed to enter and eat those *yomaris* until the full moon in the belief that these *yomaris* will cause the unseen rice grains in the granary to multiply. It is generally believed in the Kathmandu valley, once upon a time the God of wealth *Kuber* had visited a Newar household disguised as a beggar and was treated in a generous manner, later the God was so impressed with that Newar's waywards, then revealed his true identity and presented him with the gift of figs and it is due to this reason the *yomaris* are shaped as fig and is consumed as a traditional food by the Newars.

## 2.5 Feasts and Social Boundaries

Although the community is aware about its intra-caste separation based on acceptance or avoidance of boiled rice, water and other food items but the feeling of common 'Newariness' (Quigley, 1987) is seen in its entirety during numerous calendrical festivals and feasts, caste initiation rites and *guthi* meetings. The religious and ritual life in a Newar society is guided by calendrical festivals and the members of the community diligently organize their ritual activity in guidance of the *guthi* (Shrestha, 2006). Most of the Newar socio-religious and ritual activities are taken care by *guthi*. All feasts, fasts, festivals of the Nepal valley are characteristic of the Newar culture. Among the community, one prerequisite characteristic which deems them exclusive from all the other communities is their pattern of *Bhoj* (feast), which occurs in the most exquisite and elaborate manner. Every Newar looks for even the slightest chance to have a feast and even the smallest *bhoj* means around 50-60 invitees.

Shrestha (2010) states, how the process of feasting commences from *GaiJatra* (cow carnival) and cycles throughout the year. Every ritualistic event like birth, marriage, *Ketapuja/Bartaman*<sup>5</sup>, *Bel Biwah*, *Gufa*<sup>6</sup> calls for a feasts. He further explains about the elaborate traditional Newar *bhoj* known as the *Lapte-bhoye*. This feasts is considered to be vital traditionally and is till date practiced in Kathmandu valley. The main specialty of this *bhoj* is that the invitees have to sit on the floor in a hierarchical order on the basis of seniority, where the eldest male member will sit forming a line accompanied by the second eldest male member and son and so forth. Sometimes the women also sit after the men (Lowdin, 1988) and everyone wears comfortable clothes

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<sup>5</sup>A sort of baptism of the Newar boys into the Hindu belief system.

<sup>6</sup>A ritualistic activity practiced by the Newars where maiden girls are put into a cave like dark room after their menstruation for 12 days and are educated by their mothers and aunts about life after marriage.

as they have to sit in a cross-legged posture for a very long time up until the eldest male invitee has completed with his consumption (Shrestha, 2010). As the guests line up for the *bhoj*, they are presented a leaf plate which is known as *lapte* along with it a *salneecha*<sup>7</sup> (Shakya, 2019) Shrestha (2010) further highlights that the *bhoj* commences only after serving the eldest male guest with two hand full of *baji*, then *gaida-gudi* is served followed by *hariyo*(green leafy vegetables), and *alu-tamba* (potatoes and bamboo-shoot curry) without forgetting the famous Newars achar known as the *alu-kerau*(a dish made by mixing potatoes, green peas, small brown peas and radish). This is followed by the meat items which every guest has been eagerly waiting for.

As there was not vivid literary sources on the food culture therefore the researcher also spoke with some of the relatives of the respondents in Nepal and incurred data on the basis on telephonic conversation and video-calls. It was recorded that the Newars in Nepal are well known for consuming *Ranga ko masu* i.e the buffalo meat therefore there are more than six items that are prepared from buffalo meat. The meat items that is presented in that leafy plate is the *haku-choila*(grounded meat boiled and spiced up), *bhuttan* (deep fried intestine and other stomach parts), *senla mu*( steamed and sautéed liver), *swanpuka* (lungs filled with spices and fried), *mainh*( fried pieces of tongue) and other edible parts of the head of a buffalo is also provided to the invitees based on their seniority, for instance the right eye is served to the eldest and the left eye is served to the immediate eldest male invitee sitting in that line.

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<sup>7</sup> A small clay saucer used for pouring *aila* ( traditional alcohol).

Along with the food items *aila* is heavily rejoiced by the guest and is continuously poured in those *palas* or *saleencha*. The pouring of *aila* is in itself a form of art where the giver (a female) pours it from quite a height and the liquor is elegantly flowed into that *pala* without the fear of overflowing. After consuming the meat items, *chuse muse* (salad) is served which is a combination of carrot, radish, cucumber, onion, accompanied by *lapsi-ko-paw*<sup>8</sup> in small leafy bowls, which helps in digesting all the rich food. Curd is also placed during the feast as it marks purity. Lastly sweet meats like *jheri* and *rashbhari* are also served as a dessert. Dietler (2001), pointed out that the process of feasting is not merely a ritual activity but it also offers an understanding of social relations and processes. He further substantiated the practice of feasting in creating a subtle drift or a boundary between age and gender which further plays an important role in deciding the social ranking of an individual for instance among the Luo of Kenya, there is some sort of categorical distinction between men and women, elders and younger generation and between kinship groups, which is channelized during the feasting practices on the basis of who sits where, the order of serving, the types of vessels food and drinks distributed to different categories. This in return manifests solidarity and equality between groups forming structural and political links.

## **2.6 Food as a stimulus to social control**

Among the Newars, there are ten *karama-kanda* (life cycle rituals) which is of utmost importance and each member of the community religiously celebrates the 10 life cycle rituals. Lowdin (1998) argues that a caste membership for a Newar, not only depends

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<sup>8</sup>Scientific name of Lapsi is *Choerospondiasaxillaris* which is a winter fruit, also known as hog plum. The Newars make a cold sweet and soury syrup out of the fruit and consume it during the feast.

upon birth but it also upon ritual purity. For example in case of the Christian community, a new born is granted admission into the Church only by immersing it in the water as an act of purification and acceptance into the community. Similarly a person born as a Newar does not automatically become one, he has to acquire it thorough the purification process of the life cycle rituals.

Manandhar (2010) explains that the life cycle rituals starts for a Newar even before he/she is born with *nani pet ma hudda*<sup>9</sup>, *dahi-chewrakhane*. Another important life cycle rituals is the *nwaran* (birth ceremony), *annapraashan* (first rice feeding ceremony at five months for girls and six months for boys), *busakhakegu* (first haircut). As he/she approaches adulthood, the life cycle rituals continues with *ketapuja* purification of boys), *bara* (purification of girls), *vivah* (marriage), *buro-junko* (purification of the old aged), *mrityu-sanskar* (death rituals).

Each and every *karma-kanda* has to be followed by the Newar, only then he is called a Newar in its true sense. Along with the celebration of these life cycle rituals, the food items prepared for these events are very special and hold symbolic significance in the life of a Newar.

Pregnancy is an important phenomena as it adds value and happiness to any family. When a women is expecting a child, she has to observe many do's and dont's especially in regard to her food choices. Similarly among the Newars, the pregnant woman is required to have been fed *baji* (flat-rice) and *dhau* (curd) by her natal home just a few weeks before the delivery and this custom is known as *dhau-bajee-nake-*

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<sup>9</sup>It is one of the first initiation process which is practiced when the mother is still pregnant and has to consume curd and flat-rice for easy pregnancy process.

*wanegu* in Newar language (Nepali,1988). The main significance of feeding *dhau* and *baji* to the expecting mother is for smooth and uncomplicated delivery. Traditionally, even after the delivery, the Newar women has to follow temporary taboos in their diets, for instance not consuming pulses, salt and black soya bean until the birth purification rites of the child is completed.

Among the Newars, the areca nut, commonly referred as betel nut is of huge significance. In the Kathmandu valley the new born's *paju*(maternal uncle) has a major role to play after the delivery of a child. The message has to be conveyed first to the maternal uncle in the traditional Newar society and during this process, the areca nut was carried by the messenger to the maternal uncle. The areca nut symbolizes the sex of the child. In case of a male child, the messenger will take an unbroken areca nut, a chunk of jaggery, little quantity of salt, ginger and *ajwain*. If the child happensto be a female,only half portion of areca nut, half a piece of jaggery is sent to the uncle's house (ibid:90).

Another important life-cycle ritual in the Newar society is the rice-feeding ceremony. The Newars do not have a proper ceremony for naming the child. Instead in the Kathmandu valley, the Newars used to utilize the occasion of rice-feeding ceremony for naming the child. The rice-feeding ceremony is a very special occasion for the Newars and it is known as *macha* in Newar language and in Nepali it is known as *pasni* (ibid: 98) which simply means the initiation of a child after birth. The ceremony commences with traditional rituals. After the rituals of the rice- feeding ceremony, a *Thaye-Bhu* meaning a big dish, containing 84 types of ritual food items known as the *Chaurasi Byanjan* is presented and then the *thakali-naki*, who is the chief lady of the

lineage, takes a little rice and places it on a gold-coin or copper-coin and feeds the child five times. This is the feeding of *Pancha-grasa*. Later the parents and the other family members line up to feed the child. After the completion of the rice-feeding ceremony, The child is offered with some *saga(n)*, which basically comprises of curd, boiled egg and a fish is brought by the maternal uncle, which is then accompanied by a feast (ibid; 100).

*Ihi* is an important adult initiation ceremony for a Newar girl which is practiced at the age of 5,7 or 9 years. This ritual is performed solely by the Newars. In this ceremony a maiden Newar girl is customarily married to a fruit commonly known as the *bel* fruit due to which this mock marriage is also often known as the *bel vivah*. The main reason for this mock marriage is to protect the girl from the awful stigma of widowhood and also to protect her from malicious spirits (Pradhan, 2018). During this ceremony, the bride has to fast through out the day and can eat only after the rituals are over. The ceremony starts off early in the morning by sacrificing a duck or a goat to Lord Ganesh, while the Budhhamargi Newars refrain themselves from the sacrifice part. After the main rituals is over, it is followed by the *Thai-bhu* ritual, where eighty four kinds of ritual food is prepared for the girl. The girl has to perform the ritual-eating of *Pancha-grasa* (five mouthful) where she has to at first eat with each of her five fingers using her right hand and then with all the five fingers together. But before such eating, a little food is set aside on a leaf as the share of the evil spirits (Nepali, 1988).

After the *Ihi* ceremony, another important life cycle ritual is the *Barah* or *Gufa* which is also known as the confinement period. The Newar girls has to pass through this rite at some time after *Ihi*, but before their first menstruation. The girl child is confined in



a room for 12 days with the windows blocked, during these 12 days the Newar girls are not supposed to see the face of any male members (Gellner, 1991). During this ceremony the taboo on culinary items isn't as elaborative, yet the maiden has to refrain herself from items that has salt in it. During the ceremony, her maternal uncle has to send *chusya-musya* (salad) and Kon-cheeka(n) with which she rubs her face and then applies oil on her head ending the taboo on salt (Nepali, 1988).

The initiation ceremony of a boy into his adulthood is known as *Keta-Puja*, which occurs at the age of twelve years and symbolizes the full-fledged membership of the boy into his community. This ceremony is conducted in order to manage the adolescent period by teaching him how to control his mind from the tempts of life. During this life cycle ritual he is initiated by fixing a *Keta* (loin cloth) after attending of puberty and after fixing his keta, he is given *bhikcha* from family which consists of two handful mixture of rice, paddy grains, a coin and a fruit (Pradhan, 2019) and two important ritual food items served during this ceremony is the *dhau-sagan* and the *khesagan*. *Dhau* basically means curd, *Khe* means egg and *sagan* is Sanskrit word which literally means good omen. The curd is served with flattened rice, egg, meat, fish, *wa*, *ayela*. These *sagan* is served during the *keta puja* by the maternal uncle and the significance for presenting egg is that it symbolizes sexuality and fertility while curd symbolizes masculinity and purity (Lowdin, 1988). This ceremony also ends with a lavish feast.

Another very notable feature in the ritual life cycle of the Newars is the observance of the attainment of the old age, which is however not to be found among other ethnic groups of Nepal. They use the term *Buro-Junko* to designate this observance, which is

held thrice in life time of an individual. The first *buro-junko* takes place at the age of seventy-seven years, seven months, seven days, seven *ghadis* and seven *palas*. The second *Junko* takes place at the age of eighty-three years, four months, four days, four *ghadis*, and four *palas*. The last ceremony of *buro-junko* is celebrated on the completing the age of ninety-nine years, nine months, nine days, nine *ghadis* and nine *palas*. These ceremonies give an individual a stage of divinity and the other members of the community regard their blessings to be auspicious (Nepali, 1988).

When a family member passes away, every community performs some funeral rituals for the deceased so he/she gets the stairway to heaven and even after the funeral rites is completed. Even among the Newars, after the *burojyanko*, *mrityo-sanskar* is the last and the most important *karma-kanda*. One interesting observation among the Newar families is that after the pyre is set on fire, the *Fukee* (kin) members will sit together and eat flattened rice, jaggery, clarified butter, ginger and salt and this custom is known as *Sisa-Palu-khane-din* (Nepali, 1988). It is a common phenomena among the Newars that apart from the chief mourners, the kin members can consume salt, in fact salt eating is in itself a necessary ritual as mentioned above. Therefore the Gorkhas often jokingly say that “the Newars taboo the eating of salt at the time of birth, but eat it on the death of somebody” (ibid:132).

There are some restrictions on certain kinds of food during the period of seven days of the death, the members of the family cannot consume soyabeans, mass-pulse, areca-nut, curd and milk but at the same time meat and salt can be consumed culturally. It also depends upon the mourning family, if they want to give up meat eating as a form of paying homage to the deceased. And on the fourth or the sixth day of the mourning

period, the female relatives brings flattened rice, sweet-bread, curd and liquor as a part of offering condolence to the deceased household.

The members of the community believe that prior to the seventh day ritual, the spirit of the deceased keeps visiting the household due to which the family members store some *bajee* and curd in an earthen pot for it to consume. But on the seventh day, those who are not affected by death pollution cook some items in the morning and divide it into seven shares. These items include boiled-rice, bean-pulse, meat, soyabean, oil, and milk which is put inside an earthen pots. The items are then distributed to the *kusle* caste (low) in the name of the deceased. The chief mourners then goes towards the cremation ground with a replica of wooden ladder, an eyeless needle and a cooking furnace, these items are left on the spot for the deceased person. This ritual has an important significance, to hereby stops the spirit from visiting the household, as it is commonly believed among the Newars, that the soul does not know about his death until this ritual is completed. Later that same evening, all the relatives from the mourning family gather around and offer the last boiled rice and *baji* into a basket which is hanged at the attic and while offering the food to the deceased spirit, they cry out loudly saying: *Ja-Ka-wa* meaning ‘Oh soul of the deceased, come and take the rice’!(Nepali,1988).

After all the funeral rites is over, the deceased family has to organize a ceremonial feast in the house. In this feast, the main items are *bajee*, *chaku* (jaggery), and ginger, boiled vegetables, meat items are prepared. The last and the vital ceremony is the

*sradh* which generally occurs on the thirteenth day, on this day the family has to offer *pindas*<sup>10</sup>.

An overview of Newars community shows that food in a way is an expression of socio-ritual practices for the Newars. Although a distinct literature on the food culture of Newars was not available yet Lowdin (1988) and Nepali (1988) have briefly discussed about the delicacies, ritual-foods, and specific items which highlights the importance of certain food items during the passage of rites. The ritual-foods offered to deities or prepared for consumption during each and every rites of passage highlights the ritualistic significance and obligation that an individual as a member of the Newar community has to follow and abide by in order to prove his membership. For instance during the initiation rites for girls, bel fruit is the only exclusive fruit item with which the maiden has to be married, dhausagan or khesagan are two customary items during the initiation process for Newar boys and during the death rituals the mourning family has to cook for the deceased soul. These food items do bind the members of the community into an obligation of preparing specific items for particular events. The role of food therefore is viewed is not only for nutritional gains but it has a transcendental meaning in the social structure which has functional importance in many socio- cultural events.

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<sup>10</sup> A round shaped ball prepared by making a dough of barley flour. it is offered up to five generations of deceased ancestral souls.

## **2.7 Summary**

From the above discussion, we can understand that the Newars belong to an endogamous group who practice a rigid caste-hierarchy system within their own community, this caste differences is purely based on occupation. However the distinction created by caste-system is also many times reflected in their food habits particularly while accepting or avoiding certain food items. The Newars are known for a rich food cultural heritage and also for consuming tamasic diet where meat and alcohol is ritually and culturally prescribed.

The food items have a socio-cultural and symbolic significance in every social events and unions of the community which further manifests the role of food in creating social-boundary between the Newars and other communities. The rich and the exotic food culture itself reflects the cultural distinctiveness, which sets the Newar community apart.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Newars of Sikkim**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a brief profile of Sikkim, its demographic features and the ethnic composition of Sikkim. The chapter more significantly attempts to present general overview and locate Newars in the Sikkimese social structure with a brief historical backdrop of their settlement in Sikkim.

The second section begins with the general overview of field setting. The present study was conducted into two different districts of Sikkim i.e East and West. In the East District, Gangtok was the selected as the field area in order to capture the scenario of food culture of Newars in urban setting. For understanding the proposed study in rural backdrop, Dentam in West District was chosen. The total number of sample size was 100 which was bifurcated into the rural and urban setting on 60 :40 basis. 60 respondents were interviewed from rural area of Dentam, while 40 respondents represents the urban area of Gangtok. The Newars have a community association known as the Guthi, therefore the guthiyars or the members of Guthi were also taken into consideration while interviewing from both the rural and urban space.

#### **3.2 Sikkim: A Brief Profile**

Sikkim is the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of Indian union, which is a multiethnic and multicultural society (Subba, 2009) that environs Tibet in the North, Bhutan in the East, Nepal in the West and Darjeeling of West Bengal in the South (Bhattacharyya, 1984). Sikkim looks like a humungous snow clad mountain and is rightly known as the ‘abode of the

snows' (Gurung, 2011). The state comprises an area of 7096 sq.km and altitudes ranging from 300m to 8500m. Sikkim lies in the Eastern Himalayas between 27.5 degree to 28.9 North Latitude and 87.59 degree to 88.56 degree East Longitude. The state embraces four districts: North, East, South and West (Tamang et al., 2007).

### **3.3 Population and the Ethnic Groups of Sikkim**

The population of Sikkim comprises of 607,688 with 321,661(52.9%) as male population and 286,027 (47.5%) as female population providing a sex ratio of 889 females per 1000 males as per Census 2011. Sikkim is a multiethnic state which adorns diverse ethnic groups; these communities are broadly classified as Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali. Meanwhile the Nepali community is heterogeneous in nature and by far the largest which incorporates eighteen ethnic communities (State Socio Economic Census, 2006). The diverse Nepali communities of Sikkim is however classified into four social categories as argued by Gurung (2011) namely Schedule Tribes (Limboos and Tamangs), Most Backward Classes (MBC) that comprises (Gurung, Rai, Manger, Thami, Sunwar, Bhujel, Dewan etc), Other Backward Classes (OBC) comprising (Bahuns, Chettris, Newars) and Scheduled Castes (SC) that comprises (Kami, Damai, Sarki etc). Recently, M.B.C and OBC has been reclassified as O.B.C (Central) and O.B.C (State) respectively. These communities live in a harmonious manner. Sinha (1975) has also highlighted that Nepali community in Sikkim includes three sub cultural stocks: the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gurkhas. All these communities have distinctive cultural and social practices and food habits. Despite the differences, yet one cannot neglect the aroma of acculturation that has developed through inclusion and exclusion, which further determines the ethnic relations in Sikkim (Arora, 2007).

Since the present study is based on the Newars of Sikkim, in order to have an exhaustive understanding about the community, the following section attempts to locate Newars of Sikkim with a brief historical backdrop .

### **3.4 Newars of Sikkim : A Brief Historical Backdrop**

In order to trace back the history of Newars of Sikkim, a brief background of Nepal becomes pertinent. The Kingdom of Nepal which is located in the Northern frontier of India was ethnologically bifurcated into three regions: i) The Terai or lowlands ii) The proper Nepal Valley iii) The mountainous region on the Tibetan side, as argued by Chattopadhyay, in his *Essays on the History of Newar culture* (1924). He further argued that the Newars belonged to the second region of the Nepal kingdom which was known to be the proper Nepal Valley, this however is one major reason that the Newars are known to be the early inhabitants of the Nepal valley.

Traditionally the Newars had their maximum number of strength in the valley and were mainly engaged in agriculture, metal-work and sculpting but the situation was not constant forever. There was a huge change in the air with advent of the Gurkhas into Nepal valley and the victorious Gurkha conquest of 1769 proved to be the major turning point in the history of Nepal as the Newars lost its territories to the famous Gurkha king Prithivi Narayan Saha, who mercilessly tortured and punished the Newars in their own valley (Shrestha, 2015). This led to not only the loss of territories but also a vast decline in land holdings, economic conditions, food scarcity due to population explosion (Gurung, 2011). Therefore this discussion supports the fact that Newars had migrated from the Nepal valley.



Shrestha (2015) further argued that during the reign of Gurkha kings, many Newars had evicted out of Nepal to save their lives and had settled in different parts of India, one of it was Darjeeling, the former kingdom of Sikkim. Although the above mentioned factor is one of the main cause for the migration of Newars from Nepal valley, Gurung (2011) further added and explained about two important treaties i.e, The Anglo-Nepalese Friendship Treaty of 1850 and The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 in which “The Government of India and Nepal agreed to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other, the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of similar manner”. These treaties might have further encouraged rapid number of migration of the Nepalese community, among which the Newars have been the prominent one to travel to Sikkim and gradually settled.

The migrating history of the Newars to Sikkim does not have much prominent and vivid accounts. Among very scanty literature, Bal Gopal Shrestha (2015) is one such scholar who has traced the migration history of the community from Nepal valley in his work *The Newars of Sikkim: Reinventing Language, Culture and Identity in the Diaspora*. According to Shrestha (2015), the story unfolds as Laksmidas Kasaju, a Newar from Bhaktapur, who was the first Newar to migrate from the valley immediately after the Kot massacre in 1846. It is believed that he first came to Darjeeling in 1853 and at that point of time, no other Newar had ever visited Darjeeling from the valley. Laksmidas being a true Newar became a populous businessman in no time and later was invited by the then king Chogyal of Sikkim in the early nineteenth century to collect land revenues. Similarly another Newar namely Chandrabir Pradhan (Maske) who is also believed to be the earliest Newar to have

settled in Sikkim worked simultaneously with Laksmidas as *thekedars*(contractors) for mining copper and minting coins for the Sikkim Government and they were also awarded the title of *taksari* or the minter for their contributions to the Sikkim Government (ibid, 26).

The advent of Newars into Sikkim is controversial by nature but majority of the Newars strongly believe the fact that Laksmidas Kasaju was the one who had first arrived in Sikkim laying down the foundation for other Newars of the Kathmandu valley. However there is another perspective according to which some Newars of Sikkim do not comply by the story of Laksmidas Kasaju as the first Newar to have visited Sikkim and argues that the Newars were already in existence long before the advent of Laksmidas. However there are historical references of Laksmidas Kasaju provides insights into Laksmidas's migration (Shrestha, 2015)

The change in residence in case of Newars brought about a different sort of involvement with the other pre-existing communities of Sikkim, striking a good deal of social interaction and give-and-take relationships like lending, borrowing but also tithing and bits of each others culture and lifestyle, performing small services leading to inclusion and friendship in a different socio-economic and political location.

The first ever Census of Sikkim was recorded in 1891 out of which the strength of Newars were 727 of the total population 30,558 constituting 2.3 % of total population and in 1994 the number had increased to 20,000 (Shrestha, 2015). The estimated Newar population as per State Socio-Economic Census 2006 is 21,657 that accounts to 3.72% of the state's total population. The gender-wise distribution shows 10,989 of male population that constitutes 3.63% percent while female population with 10668 accounts to 3.82% percent of total Newar population of the state.

**Table 3.1 District wise Population Distribution of Newars in Sikkim**

Sl. No	District	Male	Female	Total %
1	East	6117	5895	12012 (55%)
2	West	1712	1654	3366 (16%)
3	North	195	191	386 (2%)
4	South	2965	2928	5893 (27%)
	Total	10989 (3.63%)	10668 (3.82%)	21657 (3.72%)

Source : State Socio-Economic Census, 2006, Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring & Evaluation(DESME), Government of Sikkim

Table 3.1 presents the district wise population distribution of the respondents. It highlights the total distribution of Newars in the four different districts of Sikkim. The table indicates that the East district of Sikkim has the highest Newar representation of 12,012 which accounts to 55% of total Newar population of the state, With a population of 5893, the South district shares the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest i.e 27% of Newars of state. The West district has a total of 3,366 population, which is 16% and the North district of Sikkim has the lowest Newar population of 382 which is 2% of the Newar population of the state, as this region is predominantly inhabited by the Lepcha and Bhutia.

### **3.5 Field Setting**

The present study was conducted in two different social spaces, one being a total urban set-up Gangtok, other being the Dentam in West Sikkim. The main reason for selecting the two different social set-ups was because Gangtok being the capital town of the state is a complete urban area with a cosmopolitan character and Dentam being rural characteristics has features of some degree of cultural continuity, therefore helps in understanding food culture among Newars in typical rural set up.

Gangtok lies in the East district of the magnificent Sikkim, it is also the capital which is often crowded with tourists from all around the globe. The city is completely urban in nature and has easily accessible transport facilities connected via road, rail and air route to major cities. The nearest airport is the newly opened one at Pakyong i.e, 29 kms drive from Gangtok and another famous airport is Bagdogra located at a distance of 122.3 kms. The nearest railway station is New Jalpaiguri in Siliguri, West Bengal which is 118.2 kms away.

The Newars in Gangtok live in a scattered manner and are mostly engaged in service sector both private and government services as well as business activities and has urbanic lifestyle. They live in a harmonious manner with the other ethnic communities by sharing and being a part of their social and cultural activities.

Dentam is a part of the West district of Sikkim and lies in an altitude of 4,659 ft., it is 185 kms away from the state capital Gangtok and 28 kms from district headquarter, Gyalshing, West Sikkim. The distance from Gangtok to Dentam is about 133 kms but there are other alternative routes too. One can travel from Singtam, Rabongla via Gyalshing or from Melli, Jorethang via Soreng. The word Dentam is said to be derived from a Limbo word namely '*Ten-Nem*' which literally means resting place (Source, Dentam GPU). The Lepcha and Limbus are known to be the early inhabitants but presently many other ethnic communities like Gurung, Pradhan, Sherpa and Rai live cordially with each other. Agriculture is the backbone of the community and cash crop and spices like cardamom are grown in abundance; vegetables like potatoes, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes are mainly cultivated here. Animal rearing is widely practiced and milk production is also a major source of income of the farmers of Dentam.

Dentam is distributed into 8 Gram Panchyat Unit (GPU) which are as follows:

1. 17- Sardung Ling
2. 18 –Boteng Sapung
3. 19 –Gitang Karmatar
4. 20 -Sopakha
5. 21 –Mane bung
6. 22 -Dentam GPU
7. 23 –Sankhu Radhu Kandu
8. 24 –Hee-gaon GPU

The field work was conducted in two G.P.U.s i.e, 22-Dentam and 23-Sankhu Radhu-Khandu GPUs. Table 3.2 presents the total Newar population of the village wards of two GPUs, where the field work was conducted.

**Table 3.2 Total Households/Population of field area and Newar community**

Sl. No.	GPUs	Ward	Total households	Total Population	Newar Household	Newar population
1	22-Dentam	Gorkhali Gairigaon	118 (100%)	430 (100%)	28 (24%)	120 (27%)
2	23-Sankhu RadhuKhandu	Upper Radhu Lower Khandu	235 (100%)	758 (100%)	28 (12%)	125 (16%)

*Source:* 23- SRK GPU, 22- Dentam GPU

The 22 -Dentam GPU is also bifurcated into seven wards viz, i) Upper Bega ii) Middle Bega iii) Gorkhali Garigaon iv) Singshore Takuthang v) Upper Mangmoo vi) Lower Mangmoo vii) Dentam. Among these 7 wards the study was conducted in the

3<sup>rd</sup> ward Gorkhali Gairigaon with a total population of 430 and 118 total households, in which the Newars comprises 27% of population and 24% of total households.

The 23-Sankhu Radhu Khandu GPU also has seven wards viz, i) Middle Sangkhu ii) Lower Sangkhu iii) Upper Sangkhu iv) Upper Radhu v) Lower Radhu vi) Upper Radhu vii) Lower Khandu. Among the above seven wards, Upper Radhu and Lower Khandu were the field areas. The total population of these wards accounts to 758 in a total households of 235 where the Newar comprises 16% of population and 12% of total households.

### 3.6 Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The socio-economic background of the respondent is significant as these factors influence the study in varied ways. The section therefore presents socio economic background of 100 respondents taken from two field areas, viz; the rural and urban area. Dentam with 60 respondents and Gangtok with 40 respondents. Table 3.3 represents these 100 respondents which also includes the Guthi members

**Table 3.3 Rural Urban Distribution of the Newar Respondents**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	Rural (Dentam)	60	60%
1	Urban (Gangtok)	40	40%
2	Total	100	100%

Source :Fieldwork, May to October 2019

**Table 3.4 Age wise distribution of Respondents**

Sl. No	Age Group (Years)	18-30 years	31-45 years	46-60 years	Total
1	Gangtok	8 (20%)	20 (50%)	12 (30%)	40
2	Dentam	12 (20%)	28 (47%)	20 (33%)	60
3	Grand Total	20	48	32	100%

Source : Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Table 3.4 presents the Age wise distribution of Respondents. It provides an insight into the age wise distribution of the respondents from both Gangtok and Dentam. It is often said with age comes maturity therefore the age structure is an important variable while making any sociological analysis. While this variable also affects the food choices, therefore it is relevant in the present study. The data collected from Gangtok (urban) shows that 20%, of the respondents are within the age group 18-30 , 50% respondents belong to the age group 31-45 and 30% respondents are in 46-60 years while the data collected from Dentam illustrates that 20% respondents belong to 18-30 years age group, 47% of respondents from Dentam belong to the category of 31-45 years and 33% falls within the age group 46-60 .The varied age group enables the researcher to collect comprehensive information from perspectives of different age groups and this in return strengthen the holistic understanding and varied insights regarding food choices and preferences in the present study.

**Table 3.5 Gender wise distribution of Respondents**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
1	Gangtok	16(40%)	24(60%)	40
2	Dentam	25(42%)	35(58%)	60
	Grand Total	41(41%)	59(59%)	100%

*Source:* Fieldwork, May-October 2019

Table 3.5 presents the gender wise distribution of the respondents from both the rural and urban fringe. Gender division is one important variable while studying the food culture and eating habits of the Newars of Sikkim as food preparation and kitchen has traditionally and culturally been identified with the role of women. In this case although the women were not the solely targeted population, yet it is quite clear that from a total of 40 respondents hailing from Gangtok, the male population was 40% while the female were 60% and in Dentam out of the total sample of 60, the male were 42% while 58% were the female respondents. Combining both the rural and urban fringe, out of 100 respondents, the total female percentage comes to 59% while the total male respondents was 41%. Gender division of respondents is important as it interlinks gender distributions with cooking activities and the role of women in deciding what the family consumes. Since Newar society being patriarchal in nature, the gender division of labour do exists and preparing food, taking care of various menus in varied occasions has always remain within the domain of women.



**Table 3.6 Educational Level of Respondents**

Sl. No.	Educational Level	Gangtok		Dentam	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Illiterate	-	-	09 (36%)	07 (20%)
2	Elementary	01 (6.25%)	02 (8.33%)	05 (20%)	14 (40%)
3	Secondary	03 (18.75%)	03 (12.54%)	07 (28%)	10 (28%)
4	Higher Secondary	03 (18.75%)	02 (8.33%)	02 (8%)	03 (9%)
5	Graduate and above	09 (56.25%)	17 (70.83%)	02 (8%)	01 (3%)
	<b>Total</b>	16 (40%)	24 (60%)	25(42%)	35 (58%)
	<b>Grand Total</b>	40 (100%)		60(100%)	

Source : Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Education is the process of enlightenment that creates consciousness in the society. According to Bourdieu (1984) education is source of ‘cultural goodwill’ which imparts knowledge to the agents making them empowered by creating awareness about cultural capital. Education enables one in broadening the horizon of knowledge. It is a crucial variable that enables access to wider information in the era of globalization and glocalization. The wider access to information is also one factor that contributes and exposes one to the process of McDonalization, where one can have the liberty to choose his menu from all around the globe.

Table 3.6 .presents the educational background of the Newar respondents of Gangtok and Dentam. It shows that there is a wide educational gap between the respondents of Gangtok when compared with Dentam. Out of the total sample population of 40 respondents in Gangtok, the study reveals that none of the respondents in Gangtok are illiterates, also the Newar families interviewed in Gangtok were not the first generation learners and had received at least the basic form of education, while in

case of Dentam out of the total sample population of 60 respondents 36% of male and 20% of female are illiterate. Being in rural set up, the families in Dentam traditionally did not give much importance to education, as working in the field was a necessity. From the field findings in Gangtok, 6.25% male and 8.3% female have attended the elementary level of education which encompasses grades one to eight. 18.75% male and 12.54% female had obtained secondary education which includes schooling up to class ten. Another 18.75% male and 8.33% female respondents had attended up to secondary education which accounts to schooling up till class twelve and majority of the respondents i.e, 56.25% of male and 70.83% female respondents were graduates and above in Gangtok. However the case was not similar in Dentam, where only 8% males and 3% females were graduates and above. A significant percentage of 20% males and 40% females had elementary education, 28% male and 28% females attended up to secondary education. Only 8% males and 9% females passed higher secondary level. From the above table, we can conclude that as elsewhere in rural setting, the Newars of Dentam also have relatively minimum credentials which may have led to less cultural capital than those of Gangtok, which is one determining factor that leads to variation in food choices.

**Table 3.7 Occupation of the Respondents**

Sl. No	Occupation	Gangtok	Dentam
1	Government Employee	30(75%)	5(8.4%)
2	Farmer	-	50(84%)
3	Business	10(25%)	5(8.4%)
	Total	40(100%)	60(100%)

Source: Fieldwork, May to October 2019

One's social status also depends on the occupation which generates income. Therefore the two variables, i.e, occupational status and income are closely linked while determining an individual's socio- economic status. Weber, also argued that in a social order an individual's power is seen through his status and in the economic order the power can be viewed through his class (Morrison, 2006)

These two variables together determines one's class and social status. The occupational status is relevant as it determines one's food choices. Table 3.7 presents the Occupation of the respondents. It shows that 75% respondents from Gangtok are engaged in Government services, and 25% are doing business, Gangtok being a urban area has a vast range of job opportunities, none of them are farmers. While in case of Dentam only 8.4% of the respondents were engaged in Government services, while 84% were still farmers and 8.4% were doing small-scale business like small grocery shops. The occupation as vital variable is relevant while studying consumption patterns and food choices of an individual, group, family and a community.

**Table 3.8 Monthly Income of the Respondents**

Sl. No	Monthly Income (Rupees)	Gangtok	Dentam
1	Below 5,000 Rs	-	12(20%)
2	5,001-15,000 Rs	04(10%)	19(32%)
3	15,001-25,000 Rs	01(2.5%)	10(17%)
4	25,001-35,000 Rs	04(10%)	6(10%)
5	35,001-45,000 Rs	11(27.5%)	7(11%)
6	Above 45,001 Rs	20(50%)	6(10%)
	Total	40(100%)	60(100%)

Source : Fieldwork, May to October 2019

As discussed, occupation generates income which further describes an individual's status in the society. Table 3.8 presents the Monthly Income of the respondents. It illustrates the monthly income of the respondents of both the rural and urban fringe.

As discussed above education enhances the cultural capital of an individual but it is not only the cultural capital, it also contributes in enhancing the economic capital leading to vertical mobility in the life of an individual. In the case of Gangtok where majority of the respondents are government employees, the income pattern was also orderly maintained and steady. There was no respondent with monthly income below Rs. 5,000 in Gangtok, while in Dentam, this lowest income category constituted of 20% in the rural belt who were farmers but possessed infertile or marginal small plot of land. Under the category of Rs. 5,001-15,000, it was 10% of respondents in Gangtok, while in Dentam 32% of respondents came under this category. 2.5% of Gangtok respondents and 17% from Dentam have monthly income of Rs.15,001-25,000. Within the income category of Rs. 25,001-35,000, the respondents in both Gangtok and Dentam is 10%. 27.5% of population from Gangtok and 11% of population from Dentam fall under the monthly income of Rs. 35,001-45,000. In the highest income category of above Rs. 45,001, 50% Newar respondents from Gangtok and 10% respondents from Dentam belonged to this category. Therefore income level variation between urban and rural setting was quite prominent. To conclude, the high percentage of respondents in highest income level in Gangtok is mainly due to the fact that majority of respondents are engaged in government services. 10% respondents in Dentam belonged to the highest earning category, who were basically landowners, businessmen and were government employees. However reliable land details could not be availed during the research which would further support the income of the respondents.

**Table 3.9 Family Structure of the Respondents**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Types of Family</b>	<b>Joint Family/ Nuclear extended</b>	<b>Nuclear Family</b>	<b>Total</b>
1	Gangtok	12 (30%)	28 (70%)	40 (100%)
2	Dentam	23 (38%)	37(62%)	60 (100%)

*Source:* Fieldwork, May-October 2019

Family is the cornerstone of society. It forms the basic unit of social organization and is difficult to imagine the functioning of human society without it. Family as defined by Irawati Karve is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold a common property. Table 3.9 represents the family structure of the respondents of Gangtok and Dentam. Family is known to be one of the significant institution in the society. It is through the medium of family socialization takes place and the culture is passed down from one generation to the other. The role of family is important in shaping the personality of an individual and making him/her more social and cultural. It is through family, one learns what is cultural food and non-traditional food. the family plays a vital role in passing down not only the material culture but also traditional recipes which helps the individual in continuing and retaining his/her food culture. Table 3.9 highlights that in both the urban and surprisingly rural areas too, the percentage of nuclear family is higher than that of the joint or extended family. In context of Gangtok joint family/ nuclear extended family comprises of 30% while nuclear family consists of 70%, while in context of Dentam the nuclear extended family consists of 38% and nuclear family comprises of 62%. One can observe the trend of nuclearization of families both in rural and urban field setting.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter provides the general profile of Sikkim and explains the historical overview of Newars settlement in Sikkim along with their migration history. The historical backdrop of the communities migration is very important as this allows one to understand Newars of Sikkim in different historical, socio- cultural and political setting in Sikkim, and this throws insights in understanding the variation and changes in the food culture as compared to the Newars of Nepal who till date rigidly maintain the usage of traditional delicacies. The second section includes the field setting and socio-economic background of the respondents. The socio-economic profile like rural-urban distribution, age, gender, education, monthly income and family structure are the important variables of the study that are closely interlinked with one another, which directly or indirectly impacts the food consumption pattern. These factors enables one to explore changes and continuity in eating habits and food culture in an extensive manner.

## Chapter 4

# Food Culture and Eating Habits of the Newars –An Empirical Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

Out of many magnificent aspects in life, food is such a component which is central to both biological and social life. Food is indispensable for survival and is a biological necessity. From a biological point of view humans are considered as omnivores, who rely on both plants and animals for nutrients. However being an omnivore has not been an easy task as the identification of edible and non-edible food and the diversity of eating patterns is the result of ‘trial and error’ which has evolved through experiences over innumerable generations (Breadsworth & Keil, 1997). And this consumption pattern later has been identified as an important cultural aspect of a community.

Highlighting socio cultural aspects of food, Counihan (1999) argued that, food nurtures us but it also enables in maintaining social relations by eating together. During meals an individual constructs family and friendship by sharing not only food but also tastes, values and himself. She further argues that eating delicious food when hungry arouses our happy hormones and makes one joyful. Meals and feasts are such occasions where people creates positive relations. But if there is a sense of hostility in any relationship, then eating together can often be unpleasant. When one eats he is not only consuming to be euphoric in nature, his consumption patterns speaks volumes about the meanings and symbols of a particular community and its culture. In every community the dietary culture is distinctive in nature and this distinctiveness further

symbolizes the heritage and the socio-cultural aspect of its ethnicity (Kwon & Tamang, 2015). Thus the nature of food and eating habits is closely related to socio-cultural life of a community.

The present chapter deals with empirical analysis on food habits and culture of the Newars of Sikkim who do not see themselves in coherence with the traditional Newars of Nepal. The chapter focuses on both everyday food habits as well as the ritualistic significance of delicacies of the Newars of Sikkim. Based on the analysis of 100 respondents taken from rural and urban location of Sikkim, the chapter attempts to highlight the eating habits and whether Newars of Sikkim has retained their traditional cuisine or not. If not what are the changes. The research is explorative in nature and it was conducted into two different geographical locations, one field area being solely urban area of Gangtok, where the community live in more scattered and mixed with the other population and the other was a rural village where the Newars households are in a clustered pattern and live quite proximity to each other.

## **4.2 Food Habits in Every Day Life**

Food in its simplest form is a substance necessary for living but the consumption pattern differs from each households. The daily eating habits plays a vital role in determining and shedding light about many factors like caste, class status and lifestyles etc. During the course of research, it was recorded that the lifestyle and the everyday food habits of the Newars of Gangtok and Dentam were similar in some respects while differences were also noticed at certain aspects. Following section includes daily eating habits and food culture among Newars of Sikkim.



### 4.2.1 Eating habits and its quotidian occurrence

The daily eating patterns followed by the Newars of Sikkim is similar to the food items consumed by any other ethnic communities in Sikkim. The Newars have been living in Sikkim for almost a century and this has highly impacted their culinary culture. From an exhaustive field analysis, it was observed that the preparation of traditional and typical Newar food items like *choila*<sup>11</sup>, *chatamari-aitamari*<sup>12</sup>, *kwati*<sup>13</sup>, *yomari* are not consumed on a daily basis and are eaten only during occasions. It was also recorded that apart from some families, who still have contact with their relatives in Nepal, many had less or no knowledge about these items and that these food items are gradually being known to the Newars of Sikkim especially after the celebration of Indraajatra since 2000, where the community association of Guthi members took an active role in demonstrating their traditional culture including their culinary culture by displaying various traditional food items for their community members to see and learn.

Traditionally the staple food of the Newars in Sikkim is the *dal* (lentils), *Bhat* (boiled rice), *tarkari* (seasonal vegetables and leafy greens) and *achar* (pickle) which is consumed by all other communities. Sikkim being a multi-ethnic state has diverse communities living together and borrowing and lending each other's culture and food habits spontaneously takes place, the similar eating patterns is also due to the ecosystem and the availability of the food items. The morning meal pattern in every household is the *dal. bhat, tarkari, achar* as many people consider it to be filling and

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<sup>11</sup> An important Newar delicacy prepared out of buffalo-meat by first boiling the meat and cutting into pieces and frying in oil and fenugreek seeds or else by roasting it in fire.

<sup>12</sup> A type of sweet bread

<sup>13</sup> A mixed soup of nine types of sprouted beans.

healthy. Other non-Newar items like *thukpa*<sup>14</sup>, *kawri*<sup>15</sup>, *momos*<sup>16</sup>, chowmine were also a regular part of the Newar diet daily as well as on occasions. From the empirical findings, it was observed that due to the growing modernization and globalization, food patterns and daily meal sequences have been changing and introduction of contemporary and healthy breakfast, eating out culture, multi-menu cuisine have been rapidly increasing in Gangtok which has implicitly affected the diet of the respondents in the urban area, while the Newars belonging to the rural area remain very less or not affected by the modern day delicacies. This is mainly due to various factors like lack of awareness and consciousness, lack of availability, as well as the lack of affordability. An elaborate discussion about the daily meal sequence is discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Cooking as a form of Daily Activity**

Cooking represents the usual act of domestic activity. Cooking among the Newar community was exclusively a women's job although there was no specific taboo on men cooking food, thereby indicating that gender roles are very prominent in the community. In all the households, meals are prepared in the kitchen, although the design of the kitchen was still traditional for few households in Dentam, where the families prepares their staple *dal-bhat-tarkari* in the indoor *lipeko-mato-ko-chulha* meaning a U-shaped mud hearth made from mixture of local clay and cow dung. It was observed from the field setting that brass crockery were arranged and aligned on the basis of their shapes and sizes in Dentam while in the context of Gangtok, most of

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<sup>14</sup>A local traditional dish which comprises of soupy noodles, vegetables and meat chunks.

<sup>15</sup> Sea-shell shaped souped which is hand-made noodles from flour which consists of vegetables and slices of meat.

<sup>16</sup> Dumplings.

the houses are adorned with the modular kitchen and display of modern techniques like LPG gas stove, induction stove microwave, electric kettle, electric chimney and glassware crockery's etc were common.

Lowdin (1998) argues that in a traditional Newar household in Nepal valley, the kitchen was considered as a sacred entity where a person had to open his shoes before entering. The Newar kitchen was situated on the top floor and its entry depend upon one's caste and closeness to the household. Empirically, during the course of research, such instance was recorded where 56 years Sarita Pradhan, a resident from Dentam said that her family till date rigidly maintains the exclusion of certain communities into their kitchen. She, reported that caste occupying the lowest position in the Nepali caste hierarchy are not permitted inside her kitchen. She narrated one incident where her husband's boss belonging to lower caste was invited for dinner and the food was not served in the kitchen but in living room. He was asked to wash his hands in the washroom because inviting the lower caste members to kitchen would rage her *kul* and *pitri*<sup>17</sup> as the food items offered to them are prepared in the kitchen. Although many other Newar respondents had contradictory views stating this type of orthodoxy is not possible now since it is an educated world today and stratification between upper and lower caste is not as rigidly followed and maintained. However from the empirical understanding shows that respondents had different views and opinions regarding inter-caste distinction. The younger generations and especially educated groups were more flexible in relation to following rigid commensality and caste distinction. The difference in following strict commensal norms was also noticed in rural and urban areas.

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<sup>17</sup>Ancestral spirits who are worshipped in the form of God.

The Newar households from both the rural and urban areas consumes traditional dishes like dal, bhat. Tarkari achar in every day life however incase of the respondents of Gangtok multi-menu cuisine are also part of the daily menu. Cooking as an activity throws light on identity, bodies and knowledge (Brady, 2011) and it explores the identity of an individual through everyday bodily practice of food making. Contextually the everyday meal prepared in both rural and urban households were not tremendously different, but the respondents from Gangtok due to availability and high social and cultural capital had vast knowledge about numerous culinary items, which were frequently cooked in their homes. 36, years Anusha Pradhan, a resident of Gangtok with an M.Com degree and currently working as a school teacher stated that she likes eating Korean food, therefore she often visits the famous Korean restaurant named Mu Kimchi in Gangtok. She has also learned to cook some of her favorite items from youtube like Gimbap (Korean dried seaweed rice rolls), Ramen (noodles cooked in fish broth flavored with soy sauce, pork slices, sausage, etc). Another respondent from Gangtok, 26 years, Shivani Pradhan who has recently completed her B.Ed degree loves eating Chinese food, therefore she frequently prepares items like chicken chilli, chowmine at her house. Although cooking is daily ritual in every household but the food items prepared differs and also describes a lot about the person and his creativity, and the difference in socio-economic status.

In terms of cooking, the Newars of Sikkim virtually maintain the hygiene by regularly sweeping the rooms with a broom which was considered as a primary requirement in the morning before starting the process of domestic cooking. Taking bath everyday was not compulsory before cooking neither was their any sort of restriction reported on cooking food during menstruation cycle.

The culture of food and eating is an everyday phenomena. It is through the act of everyday preparation and consumption in a given family, one can decipher their social relationships and gender roles. It is also through an individual or a group's daily eating habits that contributes in the formation of distinct events. Therefore the study of food and eating is an arena which embraces every aspect of an individual's life.

### **4.3 Rituals and Food items**

Food as discussed is not only biological but also cultural and is also theoretically proven by Levi Strauss in his famous work *The Culinary Triangle* (cited by Counihan & Esterik, 2008), where he identifies the two binary opposite methods of cooking i.e, roasting and boiling. He further argues that these methods of cooking illustrates the difference between nature and culture. He has associated roasting with nature and boiling with culture, as the process of roasting does not require any mediator, i.e, a vessel, it is cooked in the openness of nature by simply placing the food material object, and as a cultural element this object is passed down from one generation to another making this method of cooking as a part of huge part of culture. Therefore Strauss has beautifully explained the art of cooking through his theory of binary opposite and how food which is so basic and underrated is actually the major part in distinguishing what is culture and what is not.

Ritual is a part of culture and while studying festivals one cannot neglect the importance of food and eating habits in a particular community. It is during the festivals where food is the main attraction and people travel from far and near to eat with their family and relatives during the festivities. The Newars of Sikkim also celebrates some if not all festivals and these festivals form a major part of their

cultural heritage. The Newars celebrate festivals both at community and household level. Table 4.1 presents the types of festivals celebrated by the Newars of Sikkim.

**Table No 4.1 Types of festivals celebrated by the Newars of Sikkim**

Sl. No.	Level	Types of Festivals
1.	Community Level	i) Indra jatra ii) Gai jatra
2.	Household Level	i) Makar Sanskranti ii) KwatiPurne iii) Dewali iv) Dushera v) Mha Puja

Source: Fieldwork, May to October 2019

The Newar of Sikkim celebrates festivals at two levels viz; household and community level. From the field setting it was recorded that food items prepared during these festivities carry a symbolic meaning in the life of the Newars as each festival has some exclusive delicacy. However, it was observed that many members of the community have only recently been aware of these items. After migration and settlement in Sikkim for many years, many of them did not know about these food items of ritual significance. The acculturation with the Sikkimese culture as well as the impact of growing modern food items to some extent has made their own food culture in a vulnerable position. Nevertheless, Sikkim Newar Guthi has been playing a major role in revitalizing their food culture and implementing these ritual food during the festivals. A brief discussion on ritualistic food items among the Newars of Sikkim has been presented in the following section.

### **4.3.1 The sacredness of food**

In every society socialization starts right from the oral stage where the child is taught to distinguish between foods and non-foods. It is through this process, an individual internalizes not only what is edible and non-edible but also understands which food is culturally accepted and rejected, permanently and temporarily in a given society and culture.

The concept of ritual and non-ritual food can be understood through Emile Durkheim's perspective of sacred and profane. These are two important concepts given by Durkheim to understand the theory of religion, sacred is something that is set apart and forbidden, while profane is the normal, ordinary part of life (Morrison, 2006). He further highlighted that the concept of sacred provides protection to things which has to be approached and handled by the members of the group with supremacy and dignity while the perspective of profane depicts the regular, mundane, routine which separates the natural from the spiritual. Therefore in the context of food, the regular items that a person consumes is a part of normalcy which again is a part of profane as there isn't any rule as to how a member of a society has to conduct himself before eating that substance but in relation to the delicacies, that are consumed during festivals and feasts are considered as sacred, as these items are associated with ritualistic offering and supernatural process and are prepared in the purest manner by taking special care and attention for example by taking bath in the morning or fasting, not using the edible oil but using pure butter to prepare some items, not using non-vegetarian food items or utensils which has been used for cooking meat. Profane here does not mean impure but something common, and used as day to day activity and consumption where much focus on purity is not given while cooking. Contextually

among the Newars of Sikkim too, the concept of sacred-profane dichotomy was visible as special food items were prepared from their cultural cook books which are supposed to be eaten as a form of Prasad<sup>18</sup>. These foods are not consumed on a regular basis and are treated with utmost respect and awe as a great part of their culture. The food items that were categorized as sacred and a form of Prasad are as follows:

### **i) Samai Baji**

The importance of food and eating among the Newars of Sikkim is a notable matter and this ritual food cannot be studied in isolation while discussing festivals. The religion and ritual-food go hand in hand especially during the time of festivities. The Newars of Sikkim celebrate some festivals with a quite a fanfare and among these festivals *Indrajatra* is one. Anderson (1971) explains the importance and celebration of *Indrajatra*. Mythically, Lord Indra is known as the creator of the universe who was extremely fond of white *parijat* flowers, also known as the night-flowering jasmine and this flower was grown abundantly in the Nepal valley. The myth tells that one day while his mother was performing *Tij*<sup>19</sup> rites, she asked for these flowers but it was not found in heaven. Therefore in pursuit of his mother's happiness. Lord Indra disguised himself as an ordinary human being and stole some flowers from the residence of some people in Nepal valley. During the act of stealing, he was caught and was held as a prisoner, as the commoners were not aware about his identity. Later when Lord Indra's mother came for her son's rescue, people in the valley realized

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<sup>18</sup> A devotional offering made to god particularly in the form of food which is later shared among the devotees.

<sup>19</sup> A fasting rite performed by the married women for her husband



their mistake and fell before them with bountiful offerings of food and flowers and organized a procession for their departure to heaven. The *Indrajatra* festival is one such day which is celebrated in this occasion where ritual food *samaibaji* is consumed by the Newars in abundance. Nepali (1988) argued that the members of the community bring baskets full of *samaibaji* and share and rejoice it in the streets of Nepal valley. However even among the Newars of Sikkim *Indrajatra* is known as the *samai-baji-khane-din* (ritual-food eating day).

The *samaibaji* comprises of *baji* (flattened rice), *syabaji* (roasted flat rice), garlic, ginger, black soybeans, white beans, and fish generally. The Newars of Sikkim display a *Thaye-Bhu* meaning a big dish with a stand containing dishes like *syabaji*, *choila*, *musya-palu* (bhatamas and ginger), *wamari* and *bara* (a type of roti/ pancake prepared out of black lentils), fish, egg, *choila* (meat items), *chatamari* (sort of pancake made out of wheat flour), mustard leaves and *aila* (traditional alcohol) during the puja and later distribute among its members as a form of sacred Prasad..

Contextually locating, the Durkheimian perspective of “collective conscience” which represents the “totality” of people’s beliefs and sentiments remains integral through shared understandings (Ritzer and Goodman, 2002) finds reflection in consumption of *Samaibaji* which is one such ritual food which represents a sense of collective conscience among the community representing sacred food among the community. Nevertheless from the empirical findings it was recorded that the Newars of Sikkim not only consider *samaibaji* as ritual food but also something having social in nature. 44 years old Hira Pradhan, a resident of Gangtok who worked in the District Administrative Office shared that during his daughters *ih*i ceremony, *samaibaji* was kept in the form of starters, where every guest was being fed with *chewra* (flat rice),

*sukuti*(fermented fish), *bhatamas*<sup>20</sup> *ko achar*, roasted garlic, egg, one piece of fried fish and *aila*(alcohol). He further stated that “I was born and brought up in Sikkim and my family had very little knowledge about the Newar culture and whatever I have been learning now a days is from the *guthi*. Therefore, it has been observed that *samaibaji* acts as a cultural marker in case of the Newars of Sikkim as it was found from the field setting. Both in Dentam and Gangtok, in most of the social occasions invitees are presented with *samaibaji* as a form of honour. Although introduction of this ritual food has been started recently in Sikkim, now this practice of using Newar sacred food items during festivals and rituals is becoming universal among the Newars of Sikkim

## **2. *Ranga*<sup>21</sup> and its Ritual value**

The Newar community is quite populous for celebrating their *char-parwa* (festivities) and among such festivals one major festival of significance is *Dasai*. For the Newars *dasai* is one of the most important festival as they commence the festival by consuming socio-ritualistically significant *bhoj* or the feast. The Newars of Sikkim specifically co-relate *dasai* with *bhoj* as in most of the other occasions *bhoj* is not as extravagantly organized as during *dasai*. The mood for festivities starts off from *asthma* i.e, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Durga puja. On the day of *asthami* one *Ranga* is slaughtered in the village. Around two to three families couple up and contribute to buy one buffalo and the meat of which is usually divided between these families for *bhoj* preparation.

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<sup>20</sup> Soyabean, fried in oil and mixed with red-chilli powder and salt.

<sup>21</sup> The Buffalo's meat is an important ritual food which carries ritualistic as well as symbolic meaning in the life of a Newar.

The sacrificial rites are performed for pleasing the deity and binding the God in a certain obligation to his kinsmen (Richards, 1932). This ritual is an act of union between the deity and his worshipper which associates the divine to protect and nurture the mortal as a form of guardian. Therefore from a sociological understanding, it can be argued that food also acts as a means, a path which helps in building a relationship with the omnipresent and consuming the items that are offered to the God in the form of Prasad as it is considered to be righteous. When asked about the symbolic importance of consuming *Ranga* meat as a form of Prasad, 50 years old Captain Pradhan, a resident of Dentam, working as a school teacher illustrated that mythically Goddess Durga saved the world by killing the demon named *Mahishasur*, and this malicious evil had a buffalo as its pet who was also killed during the battle. The Newars consider the *Naw-Durga-Bhawani* as sacred entity, as she saved the human existence from the evil and therefore consume buffalo as a ritual food provided by the deity.

The Newars are popular for following the tantric tradition where meat and alcohol is ritually prescribed hence consuming buffalo meat during *dasai* is an important ritualistic event as it is believed that this sacrifice implicitly makes the God and deities of Newar happy and therefore showers blessing in abundance.

The field view revealed that the process of celebrating *dasai* was slightly different in Dentam than Gangtok. The Newars of Dentam slaughtered the buffalo in an outdoor space after the morning rituals in the house is over, where male members take an active role. After the slaughtering is done, the meat is distributed. While among the Newars of Gangtok, the collective slaughtering was not practiced and buffalo meat was either bought from the butcher house or in case of unavailability, goat/chicken was used as an alternative for consumption only.

### 3) Boiled Rice

As has been already discussed in chapter II, the concept of food and drinks in the Newar society reflects caste dimensions. The hierarchical caste system within the community regulates commensal differences within and outside the Newar community. Dumont (1970) mentioned seven kinds of taboos on the basis of food that regulates commensal relations in caste system :

i) With whom one eats, ii) Who prepares the food, iii) What sort of food to eat with whom, iv) What are the rituals observed while eating, v) From whom one accepts water, vi) With whom one shares pipes, vii) With whom one shares vessels.

The restriction on feeding is further explained by Ghurye (1932, 7) in one of the features of caste system where he argues that all food is divided into two categories viz; '*Kachcha*' and '*Pakka*'. The former is a type of food in which water is used for preparation, while the later is prepared using ghee and without adding water. According to the hierarchical rule, a Brahmin cannot eat Kaccha food unless it is prepared by his caste-man but can accept Pakka food only through some caste. But from the empirical findings reveals that the Newars of Sikkim do not follow the strict traditional caste hierarchy within them and so the commensality pattern.

Traditionally the Newars did not consume boiled rice with caste lower than one's own, as it was to be consumed within the hierarchical boundary and disobeying the rule would lead to severe penalties like social boycott (Lowdin, 1985). Therefore consumption of boiled rice during special occasions was restricted and is termed as temporary taboo as people from all caste, creed and colour visits during special occasions. Consuming boiled rice with castes lower than ones would invite a severe

penalty in the form of social boycott. Therefore, during such occasion of temporary taboo of eating boiled rice, flat rice or *baji* is a famous food item among the Newars, which they relish it with meat curry and soups and also offer it to the invited guests of other communities.

The field analysis highlighted that the Newars of Sikkim although avoid boiled rice specially during three days of Dasai, this temporary taboo is not viewed by the Newars of Sikkim as maintaining caste hierarchy. Majority of the respondents were not even aware about their caste name and identified themselves with the broader Newar community and under one umbrella term i.e, Pradhan. 40 years old, K.N Pradhan a resident of Dentam said he has been following this tradition of abstaining from taking boiled rice since childhood but he does not consider it in the form of maintaining the hierarchy system. Dasai for him means an occasion for relishing *baji* with buffalo meat curry. Another respondent named Sudesh Pradhan, 26years, a farmer by profession and a resident of Dentam highlighted that the he loves eating *baji* and Dasai is one such occasion which unites all his close and far relatives, when they sit together, reminisces about their childhood days. The best part is they consume *baji* with the variety of delicacies and such form of caste distinction was not known to him. Similarly 60 years old Dilu Kumar Pradhan, a resident of Gangtok and also the President of the Sikkim NewarGuthi opined that the Sikkimese Newars have been living together under the same blanket title of Pradhan after they settled in Sikkim. They cannot compare themselves with the Newars from Nepal, as Newars in Sikkim live in scattered pattern unlike in Nepal, where the members of the community live in close proximity and a caste-based village known as *tols*. He further explained that the Newars are a part of Sikkimese culture and have been living in harmony with each

other as well as with other ethnic communities. He also stated that individually a person may practice the Nepali caste hierarchy but in general the Newars believe in living in peace and harmony with other communities.

Many respondents from the field opined that the avoidance of this potential food may not have always started as a food taboo. The observance of regular avoidance could have turned into a tradition and eventually as a taboo. Even among the tribes of Papua New Guinea, the young un-married men receive the best and fresh foods but as soon as he gets married, he no longer enjoys to eat fresh but have to consume smoke meats like their wives (Rochow, 2009). Theoretically, food as a taboo acts as a factor in facilitating group cohesion and group identity, as some food items that are acknowledged as a taboo by a particular group enables the member of the group to stand out exclusively among other communities in maintaining its identity. This in turn creates a feeling of belonging together. Contextually for the Newars, boiled rice is the marker of their identity as ‘we’ and ‘they’ and can be viewed something as external and coercive that exercises a social control over the members of the community through commensal relations.

#### **4) *Sirh-Khane Din***

The *sirh-khane*<sup>22</sup> is a ritual cum festival which is celebrated specially by the Newars of Dentam on the day of *tika*. There may have been such occurrences in Gangtok but on the basis of the sample size, the study found none of the respondents reporting the prevalence of this ritualistic practices. The *sirh-khane* is also a sacrificial festival, where the head of the *Boka*, i.e. uncastrated male goat is sacrificed by the head male

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<sup>22</sup>*Sirh* means head and *khane* means to eat. Therefore etymologically *sirhkhane* is a ritualistic event for the Newars where preparation from the head of male goat is eaten as a form of Prasad.

of the family to *Bhimsen*. When asked as to why he goat is used 60 years old, Jaslal Pradhan a resident from Dentam highlighted that the female goat gives birth and produces milk, hence as a form of respect female goats are not sacrificed.

On the basis of empirical accounts, it was recorded that the Newars do not consume boiled rice starting from *asthami* and resumes eating boiled rice only after performing this ritual of *Sirh-Khane*. It is on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Dasai, the head male member of the family sacrifices a male goat, however some families also used a rooster or cock as an alternative for sacrificial purpose . On this auspicious day, the head male of the family cleanse himself by taking bath and observe fasting until the puja is over. During this puja, one of the important offerings is the head of the he goat or cock. The blood of these animal is offered to *Bhimsen* as a form of honor, once the sacrificial rite is over, the head of the male goat is kept separately. This head is cleaned properly and in the evening along with *kalash*<sup>23</sup> and an oil wick in a ritualistic manner. Once the process is over, all the family members get together in the *mulgarh* (House of clan head) where the female members prepare either soup or curry out of the head of that cock and serve it with *baji*. The significance of keeping only the head separately and later consuming it at the *mulgarh* highlights the importance and respect the Newars pay to their elders and relevance of clan .

## 5) Mha Puja

It is known as the new year for Newars and is celebrated one day after the Diwali. It is celebrated as the annual festival basically where one worships his/her own body in order to purify the body, mind and soul. This is a ritual of purification, strengthening and understanding oneself for physical and spiritual wellbeing and prosperity. The

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<sup>23</sup> A metal pot which represents creation and fertility.

ritual is celebrated within the family members by sitting in floor crossed legged in a hierarchical order and in front of each person a *mandala* is made, which basically is a circular drawing made on the ground representing the universe and its five elements of nature i.e, earth, water, air, fire and wind. This festival is celebrated by all the Newars of Sikkim and they do it by sitting on the floor and drawing seven circles that represents the seven lives.

These circles are made out of *bhatamas*, *khori*<sup>24</sup>, black lentil, wheat, oil and water. In one side of the *mandala*, a *sukunda* (Newar traditional lamp) and *kalash* is kept for the puja. It is important to note that during the celebration of *mha puja*, the role of the head-female *thakali-naki*, is the most important. She is the one who commences the puja with a *mana*<sup>25</sup> where fruits and vegetables are put. Then she holds this *mana* and pours the fruits and flowers into each of her family member's head thrice, which is termed as *ghawala-garnu*. The main significance for doing it thrice is to pay homage to the three deities i.e, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.

42 years old Alankar Vajracharya from Kurseong, West Bengal is a Newar priest by occupation and has learned all the traditional customs, rites-rituals from Nepal and whose service is used by all the Newars of Sikkim. He cited that during the *mha puja*, various food items are displayed before the *mandala*, each having its own symbolic connotation. For instance it is believed that *bimbira* which is a citrus fruit is kept during the puja as it symbolizes the protection of the body from harmful diseases and also to make life happy and healthy. In case of unavailability of *bimbira*, another citrus fruit namely *bhogateh* is also offered. Similarly walnut is also kept during the puja which has a hard outer covering and soft and breakable inside. This represents the

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<sup>24</sup> A form of popped rice or puffed rice, very light and good for health but is not muri.

<sup>25</sup> A traditional copper bowl used for measurement of grains.



humans who although might be rough from the out but should always be amicable and kind hearted towards religion and society. It was noted that once the ritual is over, these items are eaten along with the *sagan* that consists of egg, fish, *aila* (traditional alcohol), and *dhau* (curd) by the family members as a form of Prasad.

The field study revealed that although every Newar households in Sikkim do not have full knowledge and awareness about the symbolic connotations of the food items that were presented in the *mandala* during the *mha puja*, yet they ritualistically organize those food items as learnt through their priest and other members from *guthi*, who often visits Nepal to explore more of their food culture.

From an exhaustive understanding about the Newar food culture, it can be concluded that food represents a powerful symbolic resource not just as an eating activity but also as a connection to rituals, symbols and the belief system. The importance of food and ritual is co-related with each other and enables in knitting people to their faith by relating food with supernatural beings and process, which in return strengthens religious and ethnic boundaries of a certain community (Mintz & Dubois, 2002)

#### **4.4 Marriage : An occasion of food gifting and exchange**

Marriage is social union of two individuals and their families. During the process of marriage, exchange of food gifts is mandatory in the Newar society. The community considers some food items as “*chokho*” meaning pure and the presence of these food items are necessary during the wedding ceremonies. It is to be noted that some food items are presented and accepted by both the parties only, if it is an endogamous marriage within Newar community. The role of food and gifting is significant as it explains both as a system of rules, obligations and constraints (Shuman, 2000).

Unlike Nepal, where the community priest is called for performing all rites and duties, the Newars of Sikkim have been taking services of the Nepali *Bahun* Hindu priest due to which an inclination towards Nepali culture was observed during the marriage rite. This was one of the major reason for Newars of Sikkim not being able to continue with their customary rites of marriage and exchange and gifting of Newar food items. However lately after the gubhaju training held in Dentam, many Newar households have started taking services from their traditional priest. A Newar wedding is filled with food and frolic and each food items used during the process of marriage has a symbolic connotation that represents the authenticity of the community. 60 years old R.M Pradhan, from Dentam, a retired school teacher who was an enthusiastic guthi member explained the process and significance of food items in a Newar endogamous marriage. He said in a traditional endogamous Newar marriage ceremony, an event called *wok Dan* also locally known as *baghdatta* occurs a couple of days before the main wedding ceremony. From the empirical findings it was observed that during the occasion of *baghdatta*, a *saipatta* i.e a platter filled with food items like two uncooked or fried fish, *lakhamari*, 2 pieces of betel nut divided into 4 and half parts, *kush*, *dubo*(sacred plants) wheat-flower, sweets, fruits and dry fruits are presented. This platter is carried from the groom's family as a form of bride-price which indicates that after the gifting of this *saipatta* to the girls family, the bride is now completely their and she will be living in her natal house just as a guest until the main wedding occurs. This act of bringing *saipatta* in the form of an entrée and gifting it to the bride's family is an example of the positive rules of commensalism (Richards, 1932). He explains that the ritual of sharing food between two parties describes about their desire to commit into an act of union and therefore are expressing their feelings of belongingness during such a public occasion. Although the *saipattais* bought from the

groom's family but at the end of the ceremony the bride's family adds certain food items into the platter. The delicacies that are presented in that platter by the groom has symbolic connotation. The main item presented in that *saipatta* is a pair of fish which symbolizes the married couple, who are paying homage to Lord Vishnu and seeking his blessings for a happy married life. The fish is either in raw or fried form and is later cooked by the bride's family and consumed within the family.

Another important item is small sized *lakhamaris* - a type of sweet-bread prepared out of flour, milk and butter by the Newars. *Lakhamari* is one of the most important item in that platter as it has to be distributed to the bride's family by the bride herself, once the *saipatta* is handed to the bride by the groom's family. The size and the distribution of *lakhamari* within the bride's family denotes the closeness, she shares with her kins. When asked the respondents whether they had *lakhamari* in their wedding functions, 45 years old Dhiren Pradhan from Gangtok who works in the Science & Technology department stated that as he married a Vajracharya, therefore it was a customary for his family to take *lakhamaris* during the wedding rituals. He further stated that the conventional large sized *lakhamaris* were not prepared instead small ones were taken as a form of tradition. While 29 years old Malati Pradhan, from Gangtok who works in a Private company in Siliguri stated that although she had recently married a Newar boy from Kalimpong, yet *lakhamari* was not used and she was not even aware about this sweet bread. She explained that her marriage rituals were performed by a Nepali *Bahun* in a traditional Nepali style.

Another important item in an endogamous Newar wedding is the Betel nuts. The groom has to bring four and half pieces of betel nuts which is passed to the bride, who again presents it to her father. The ceremony marks an emotional moment indicating that from this day onwards the daughter can grieve only for four and half

days, when death occurs at her natal home. This rite is practiced, to set free a married woman who is over burdened with the mourning and death rites of both affinal and consanguine families. This act of passing down the four and half betel nuts symbolizes that her parents are now setting her free from the obligations of the rites of grieving.

#### **4.5 Bhoj: A Gustatory discourse among the Newars of Sikkim**

Feasts are extremely important social events that occurs in every community the worldover. Dietler & Hayden (2010) conceptualized feasting as a form of ritual activity which distinguishes feasting from the daily meals, that gives them the particular power in articulating social relations and actions . The study of feasting is not just confined to social or gustatory gratification but it has gradually emerged as a powerful cross-cultural concept which enables in the understanding of culture and its dynamics from one generation to another, the transformations in surplus, to the emergence of social and political inequalities to the creation of prestige technologies including specialized domesticated foods and to the understanding of elites in a complex society (ibid:17). Contextually locating, feasting among the Newars of Sikkim is of utmost importance for the community and is a compulsory gustatory event for the community inspite of class differences. The *bhoj* commences on the day of *asthami* but the process of preparation starts at least a day early, where all the male and female members of the house sit together and make elaborate preparation of delicacies.

The main items and the preparation of Process of Bhoj includes the following:

1. *Choila* : This is one item that many families prepare during the bhoj. It is prepared in two ways, one is by boiling the meat, adding spices, which is mixed withthe sautéed fenugreek seeds. The other way is by roasting in the

smoke of hay and after it is cooked, it is sliced into pieces and is mixed with the spices.

2. *Aila*: The traditional alcohol prepared by distillation of fermented ingredients such as rice, grain and millets
3. *Baji* or *Chewrai*.e, the flat rice made by pounding rice.
4. *Bhutan*: This item is also locally known as *karchi-marchi* which is prepared by including internal organs like the heart, intestine, meat, bones, liver, etc. of either chicken or buffalo.
5. *Eggs*: The egg is also an important item consumed by the Newars of Sikkim. it is usually fried in the oil and served along with *bhoj*.
6. *Nine types of vegetables*: The Newars of Sikkim prepare these mixed nine types of vegetables together as one item. These vegetables and leafy greens are sliced and cooked like the regular *tarkari*. Here the vegetables used for preparation is seasonal but *mula-ko sag* (raddish leaves) is a must while cooking this item for *bhoj*.
7. *Haddi ko soup*: The another famous item prepared during the *Bhoj* by the Sikkimese Newars are *haddi(bone) ko soup* which means soup made out of buffalo's bones. It is prepared by boiling the bones and adding ginger garlic paste, turmeric, salt.
8. *Sukuti-Bhutuwa* : *Sukuti* means dried fermented fish/ buffalo meat and the Newars are famous for consuming fermented foods so the dried fish/ meat are boiled first and cut into pieces that is fried with onions, tomatoes, garlic, ginger, salt and spices.

9. *Bhaisiko kofta*: This item is also known as meat balls which is prepared by mincing the meat and mixing it with onion paste, ginger garlic, pepper, salt, turmeric, red chili powder etc and frying it in oil.
10. *Pakora* : A dish consisting of pieces of vegetables or meat which is dipped in a spiced batter and deep fried.
11. *Achar* ( Pickle): The Newars are famous for making *achars* and the different types of *achars* prepared during *bhoj* are *Alu/matar*, *masuko achar*, *bhatamas ko achar*, *soyabeanko achar*, cucumber and radish *achar*.
12. *Dhau* i.e, the curd
13. *Lapsi* or *Methikojhol*: It depends upon the families whether they prefer *lapsi* (hog plum) or *methi*(fenugreek seeds)cold soup.
14. *Sisapusa*: A type of salad consisting of sliced banana, sugarcane, radish is served.

The Newars of Sikkim consider the *Bhoj* to be auspicious and on the day of *asthami* after performing the main rituals, all the members of the family sit in a hierarchical division from the head male member of the family known as the *thakali*, next the wife of the head known as *thakalini* and the second eldest male member and his wife and the pattern of sitting continues in this formation. While they sit to eat, the members have to sit in a cross-legged posture in the floor. The delicacies are served by the second eldest to the eldest and to the third eldest by the fourth and it continues so on and so forth. The members or the relatives who could not be present have their share of food kept aside, this custom of keeping aside the food items for the far relatives is known as *bhaglawnu*<sup>26</sup>. From the empirical analysis, it was noted that this tradition is

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<sup>26</sup> A gesture of keeping aside the share of delicacies prepared during *bhoj* for the relatives who weren't able to visit immediately.

customary and if by chance the family members forgets to keep the *bhag* or share, they have to pay some sort of penalty which is known as *sir uthawnu*. This is done by presenting a bottle of beer or fruit juice, some flower, *acheta*<sup>27</sup>, and some amount of money. The relatives may visit the following day. In case they visit later, then only the *baji* is placed aside while fresh food items are prepared when they visit.

However the feast which is considered as a joyful event can be viewed from following perspectives:

- i) The preparation of the items: Using Merton's functional perspectives, the main motive and manifest function of organizing a *bhoj* is the ritualistic orientation, an event of social gathering that marks social solidarity, however the preparation so many food items can be at a point of time becomes very strenuous for the family both physically and financially. The *bhoj* having a ritual importance and connection to God makes it unavoidable for the community, hence becomes a huge priority for the members of the Newar community sometimes proves to have dysfunctional consequences having financial burden also.
- ii) *Bhoj* and social boundaries: All the feasts in some ways define social boundaries while simultaneously creating a sense of community and we feeling. Similarly among the Newars too, gender and age categories play a vital role during the preparation and seating arrangement. There is a clear hierarchical demarcation on the basis of age and gender while serving the food to the eldest male member first.

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<sup>27</sup> Rice grains symbolizing auspicious occasion.

## **4.6 Food during the *Rites de Passage***

Van Gennep (1960) argues that the transitions from one group to another is made up of succession of stages, with similar ends and beginnings for example birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement of higher class and death. All of these events are marked with ceremonies aiming to enable the member to transit from one position to another, therefore a wide range of similarity is found in the ceremonies of birth, childhood, puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies and funerals. He further argues that in this respect, a man's life resembles nature as the universe is governed by the celestial changes and so are the rite to passage. Every society and community observes initiation ceremonies when they move from one stage to another in a life-time and in order to do that one has to pass through various rites in life.

Since the present study confines itself only to food culture and eating habits. Therefore instead of the detailed analysis of rites to passage among the Newars, the section will attempt to understand the symbolic importance of foods during the rites to passage, which I prefer to use the term as *food de passage*.

### **1. Food items during Pregnancy and Child birth ceremonies**

The study reveals that during the time of pregnancy many families in Dentam and Gangtok still practices the cultural feeding of *Dhausagan*,(curd) in both rural and urban space, where the natal family brings curd and flat rice and feeds their expecting daughter on her seventh month of pregnancy for smooth delivery. This rite can be identified as the first initiation rite among the Newars, performed for an unborn human. From the empirical analysis it was observed that the importance of *Dhau*, is



considered to be auspicious and feeding it to the expecting mothers means indirectly feeding it to the unborn child.

During the field analysis, an exclusive case of feeding the new mother with spices was also recorded. The spice was known as *sutkeri masala*. 56 years old, Geeta Pradhana resident from Gangtok, who owns a small-scale business has many relatives in Nepal. She stated that when her niece gave birth, *sutkeri masala* was given to her on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of post-baby. The spices is considered to be very healthy and energizing for the new mother, as her body goes through a lot of hardship during delivery and this item gives her strength. The masala comprises of thirty-two types of ingredients among which she could remember only few items like jwano<sup>28</sup>, jeera<sup>29</sup>, methi<sup>30</sup>, soaf<sup>31</sup>, which is often sent by her relatives from Nepal. She highlighted that one can use this *sutkeri masala* in any manner to prepare a delicacy, she used to feed her niece by making tiny sweet-balls similar to ladoo.

## **2. Food items during *Pasni* and *Buro Junko***

Another food item which has a cultural significance and is used during the rites of passage is the *Chawrasi Byanjun*, which means eighty-four types of traditional delicacies. This item is prepared during two types of life cycle rituals 1) *pasni* (rice feeding ceremony of the new born) and 2) *buro-junko* (celebrating the existence of age old members in the family).

Although *pasni* is generally practiced but the study revealed that the preparation of all eight four food items were not symbolically prepared by every Newar households.

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<sup>28</sup> Also known as ajwain, a spice used to flavor food items

<sup>29</sup> Cumin seeds

<sup>30</sup> Fenugreek seeds

<sup>31</sup> Fennel seeds.

Also it was observed that not everyone had a broad idea as to what were exactly these eight-four types of delicacies, yet the respondents unanimously stated their version of the *chawrasi byanjun* comprised of rice, meat, fish, egg, vegetables, *achar*, sweets, curd etc. Using the silver coin, the food items are touched and symbolically feed to the baby. It was observed that although all the members of the community may not prepare all the eighty four items, yet they present some delicacies during the occasion of *pasni* referring symbolically it as *chawrasi byanjun*.

Van Gennep (1960), states that birth ceremonies include “protection and divination rites”. He further argues that all these rites of passage have a singular goal i.e, change of stage from a magico-religious, secular group to another. The rites to passage is not just changing stages but also identifying that individual as a cultural and social being and a part of a particular group. The process of this identification happens during the birth ceremonies which is a form of social activity, where the members of the community now have knowledge about the existence of this child as their member.

Another ritual *buojunko* i.e, celebrating the existence of age old members in the family is observed three times in the life of every Newar at the age of seventy seven, eighty eight and ninety nine years, which has been discussed elaborately in Chapter 2.

During the *jujuko*, the aged are fed with *ChawrasiByanjun* and are worshipped as divine. The symbolic reason for feeding the eighty four items to the aged symbolises that they do not face any food crisis after life. However even among the Newars of Sikkim *jujuko* is celebrated with quite a fan-fare but from the field analysis it was also observed that all the families do not prepare the eight-four types of dishes in particular. In case of Gangtok, 46 years old, Mani Ratna Pradhan stated that during the time of

his father's *junko*, they had given the responsibility to catering company who prepared both traditional and Indo-Western cuisine for the celebration. Although the occasion is social and cultural event and is still celebrated by Newars of Sikkim, the preparation of traditional food items and other menus during the celebration have taken a modern twist. These changes have been elaborately discussed in the Next chapter. The conventional *chawrasi byanjun* its preparation, may not behold the same position as it is for the Newars of Nepal, yet the Sikkimese Newars have somehow retained this food culture by inculcating only certain delicacies of their reach and refer it as *chawrasibyanjun*, for maintaining their cultural distinctiveness.

### **3. *Bel vivah* and *Bartabandha***

Among the initiation rites, the *Bel Vivah* is one of famous rites to passage that is practiced largely by the Newars of Sikkim, where the maiden girl is married to a fruit *Bel* at the age of five to nine years. From the empirical findings, it was recorded the maiden girls fasted on the main day of marriage and after the rituals, the marriage to *Bel* is solemnized which is ended with a lavish *bhoj*. Similarly another initiation rites for the boys. *Bartabandha* is the occasion when *bhoj* is served. The field study revealed that food items for *bhoj* was not so elaborate as it was during Dasai. Certain items like choila, samai-baji were mainly presented and along with it local cuisine and Indo-Western buffet was also presented by the Newars during such occasions.

### **4. Death Rituals and Food**

The last and the most important rite of passage is the death rites among the Newars. Robert Hertz (cited by Davis, 2000) argues that funeral rites resemble the initiation

rites. In initiation rites, the youth changes its status by being drawn from the group of children and is integrated within the larger group similarly death also changes the position of an individual in the society. In simpler words, the death reminds us of birth that transfers an individual position from one domain to the other. Both these transitions embrace a sense of renewal and is surrounded by mystical qualities.

When a death occurs at any Newar family, the grieving period continues for thirteen days like most of the other Hindu Nepali communities in Sikkim but what is exclusive among the Newars is that on the seventh day of the grieving period, the married daughters or even unmarried but not a maiden (before puberty) offer cooked food items for the deceased soul. Wearing a unstitched robe, keeping their hair loose and sitting on the *balesi* i.e, the spot outside the house where the rain water drops from the roof, they cook for the deceased soul. The empirical findings from the field revealed that the symbolic meaning of cooking by wearing unstitched clothes is that stitched cloth by a tailor may have used his spit while sewing, so is considered impure. Therefore while cooking they use simple unstitched cloth signifying the purity. The daughters also keep their hair loose so that deceased soul do not get entangle in it and find difficulty to reach heaven.

Although the Newars of Sikkim do not themselves consume meat during the mourning period, but on the seventh day, the daughters prepare a scrumptious tamasic diet for the deceased soul, for instance boiled rice, meat, fish, egg, vegetables of the soul's preference, even cigarettes if he/she was a smoker. All these items are put in a basket and hanged at an attic, so that the soul does not remain hungry till his voyage to the heaven. On the 13<sup>th</sup> day, which is considered the day of "choki-nu" ( final purification day), the mourning family sits together and relishes *bhoj* which consists

of a combination of rajasic and tamasic diet. Richards (1932) also mentions about the concept of feeding the dead common among the zulu tribes of Southern Africa, who expose meat in a special hut for the spirits to eat, who by eating the meat might be pledged to help them. Similarly the Thonga tribes also calls their ancestral spirits before consuming a meal.

The above discussion highlights how food is a form of communication not only for the living but also for the dead and this is prevalent among Newars of Sikkim also. It is a pathway that makes an individual stay connected to the departed soul by his/her act of feeding the soul on earth. This understanding of feeding the unknown is in itself a mysterious phenomena where food has to be first served to unknown during the first week of his death. It is implicitly feeding the soul to abundance, so they do not make frequent visits to the living family making their life uneasy.

#### **4.7 Summary**

The empirical findings demonstrates that the Newars of Sikkim distinguish the everyday food with the ritual foods. As these ritual food are consumed only during sacred events and therefore instigates a feeling of Newariness when they consume it. Although most of the Newars of Sikkim are not fully aware about the symbolism of their food culture, yet some of them perform and consume it bluntly without questioning its cultural significance. The significance of food among the Newars plays a vital role in every walk of life and although they have not fully retained all the food culture ,yet there are some specific component of food habits, that makes their culinary culture distinctive from other communities.

## Chapter 5

### Food Culture: Continuity, Change and Revivalism in Sikkim

#### 5.1 Introduction

With the overview and understanding of socio-cultural and symbolic significance of food among the Newars of Sikkim in the previous chapter, the present chapter attempts to illustrate the continuity and changes in the eating patterns of the Newars of Sikkim. This chapter basically focus to what extent traditional food culture and its patterns have been retained by the Newars of Sikkim. Simultaneously, it will also explore what are the changes and alterations in their delicacies over the years that have impacted their food culture.

The field study revealed that the Sikkimese Newars 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 plays an important 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 started evaporating 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 the Sikkimese Newars and reviving their traditional food culture and traditions. Therefore, the chapter also contains a section on Guthi and its functioning with regard to its role in revivalism of food culture among the community.

## 5.2 Daily Food Patterns of Respondents

Food as discussed is not only biological but also social therefore the food patterns of an individual plays an enormous role in determining the economic class, lifestyle, geographic location of the respondents.

Although food in its mundane sense is just a piece of substance that we eat to satisfy our hunger but the choices of food items in our daily lives speaks volumes about our economic and cultural capital. Therefore Table No 5.1 enables us in understanding everyday food patterns among the Newars of Sikkim. It further highlights their lifestyle and consumption pattern which is determined by various other variables like class, rural urban breakup, age, availability of the food items which depends to a large extent on information and knowledge of availability.

**Table 5.1 How many times do you consume meal in a day?**

Sl. No.	No.of Meals	Gangtok	Dentam
1.	2	5(12%)	55(92%)
2	3	35(88%)	5(8%)
	Total(%)	40(100%)	60(100%)

Source : Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Table 5.1 presents Daily Meals consumption of total respondents in Gangtok and Dentam. It highlights that respondents accounting to 12% from Gangtok consumed two meals per day which comprised of breakfast and dinner only and 88% respondents consumed three meals with breakfast, lunch and dinner. While in Dentam 92% consume meals twice in a day while another 8% consumed three meals in a day. In case of Gangtok, the working class people leaves for office at 9 to 9.30am eating a

heavy meal in the morning which they referred to as *khana*<sup>32</sup>, the case was similar in Dentam too where both the working class and the farmers leave their house by 8 am after consuming a full fledged meal in the morning. While in Gangtok among those 88% of respondents consuming three meals in a day includes the housewives, office goers who prepare food at home, carry lunch, buy from canteen or order online, while in case of Dentam 8% of respondents consuming three meals were housewives, some-working class person who either carry prepared lunch or buy food from canteen.

**Table 5.2 Sequence of meal consumed by the Respondents**

Sl. No.	Types of Meal	Gangtok	Dentam
1	Bed / Morning Tea	40 (100%)	60 (100%)
2	Khana/ Breakfast	35 (88%)	60 (100%)
3	Lunch	35 (88%)	5 (8%)
4	Evening snacks/tea	40 (100%)	60 (100%)
5	Dinner	40 (100%)	60 (100%)

\*Percentage calculated out of 40 respondents in Gangtok and 60 respondents in Dentam. Figures in parent thesis indicates percentage

Source : Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Table 5.2 presents the sequence of meal consumed by respondents. It indicates that all the respondents from Gangtok and Dentam are in the habit of consuming bed/

<sup>32</sup> Complete meal comprising bhat(rice), dal(pulses), tarkari(seasonal vegetables curry) achar(pickle).



morning tea. However the types of tea they consume differ which is discussed elaborately in later section.

Traditionally there was no concept of breakfast therefore 88% of the Newars from Gangtok and all the respondents from Dentam indulged in a full course meal which they refer to as *khana*.

While 88% of Newars from Gangtok and 8% from Dentam consume lunch in the afternoon and all the respondents from both rural-urban fringe indulge in evening snacks and dinner. On the basis of empirical findings, it was observed that both lunch and evening snacks were referred to as *khaja*<sup>33</sup> that does not involve a full course meal consisting of rice, lentils, vegetables and pickle which is literally known as *khana* .

From the table 5.2 it can be concluded that there is not much difference in the sequence of meal patterns among the Newars comprising of both urban and rural area. They take traditional system of eating complete meal in the form of breakfast, light snacks in the form of lunch and a full course meal with addition of meat items for dinner. This meal pattern is followed by almost all the communities living in Sikkim and the Newars are no exception.

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<sup>33</sup> Local nomenclature for light meals or snacks

**Table 5.3 Food Items Types in Breakfast and Evening Snacks/Tea**

Sl. No.	Items	Gangtok		Dentam	
		Breakfast/Morning Meal	Evening Snacks/Tea	Breakfast/Morning Meal	Evening Snacks/Tea
1	Milk tea/Coffee(sugar)	10 (25%)	10 (25%)	55(92%)	55(92%)
2	Milk tea(salt)	30 (75%)	30 (75%)	5(8%)	5(8%)
3	Green tea	35 (87%)	35 (87%)	-	
4	Herbal tea	10 (25%)	10(25%)	-	
5	Dal/Bhat/Tarkari/Achar	20 (50%)		60(100%)	
6	Roti	5 (12.5%)		-	
7	Oats	20 (50%)		-	
8	Eggs	40 (100%)		60(100%)	
9	Muesli	25 (62.5%)		-	
10	Cornflakes	15 (37.5%)		2(3.3%)	
11	Bread/Biscuits	40 (100%)*	40(100%)	20(33%)	
12	Doughnuts		40(100%)	-	
13	Nimki/Bhujia/Dalmut		20(50%)		30(50%)
14	BhutekoMakai(roasted corns)		*Depends on availability		60(100%)
15	Gilo Roti(pancakes)		10(25%)		60(100%)
16	Bhuteko Bhat(fried rice)	10(25%)		60(100%)	60(100%)

Source: Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Table 5.3 on Food Items : Types in breakfast or morning meal and evening snacks/tea reveals that there is a huge difference in the consumption pattern and types of food followed during breakfast and evening snacks/tea amongst the Newars of Gangtok and Dentam.

In Gangtok milk tea (sugar) and coffee (sugar) is consumed by only 25% of the total population the remaining avoids it either due to health issues like diabetes or to stay fit and slim. It is recorded that the Newars from Gangtok have started switching to healthier beverages for instance 87% reported taking green tea and 25% takes herbal tea for morning and evening refreshments.

As per the breakfast is considered, 50% of respondents from Gangtok are in the habits of consuming the traditional/local meal in the morning known as *Khana* but the breakfast pattern is not the same throughout Gangtok. Many respondent were reported of eating bread although not every day, it was a common phenomenon in Gangtok. Among the types of bread, brown bread was highly favored for health benefits while other options for a healthy breakfast consisted of oats, which was consumed by 50% of the total respondents, 62.5% consume muesli, 37.5% eats cornflakes and all the respondents consumed eggs almost on a daily basis. From the field view, it was observed that some respondents of Gangtok were highly health conscious and therefore tried to consume a no-carbohydrate diet in order to remain fit. Also Gangtok being the capital town of state, the types of western food and other items are easily available in every nook and corner of town.

For evening tea and snacks, the respondents from Gangtok usually consumes light snacks like biscuits, doughnuts and Indian snacks like Nimki, Bhuja and Dalmut with tea of their preference. Local items like *Bhuteko Makai*<sup>34</sup>, *Gilo roti*<sup>35</sup> are consumed depending on availability and time to prepare.

In contrast to Gangtok, 92% of respondents in Dentam still consume traditional milk tea i.e, *dudhkochoya* instead of green, herbal tea. It was also observed empirically that many respondents from Dentam were not as conscious and aware about the variety of tea sold in the market. In Dentam all of the respondents relied on *khana* before they left for work. The concept of western or health conscious breakfast was not as popular and even though some respondents had a vague idea about it, they considered it to be a form of luxury consumption. 48 years old, Birkha Bahadur Pradhan from Dentam,

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<sup>34</sup> The Locally produced Maize roasted in the traditional stove.

<sup>35</sup> Sweet/Salty Pancakes, prepared by flour.

who is a farmer by profession was not aware about the ongoing no-carb diet which consisted of oats, muesli, brown bread and egg whites. He said jokingly if he start consuming these food items, he might collapse out of hunger, which indicates his limited knowledge about the health benefits of the above food items. According to him rice is the only staple diet and not consuming it would bring health disorders, so his family consumes the traditional meal or *Khana* twice, once for breakfast and once for dinner. Similar opinion was reflected in the statement of 50 years old Bal Kumari Pradhan, who also works in agriculture farm. She finds cornflakes overpriced and items like that cannot be consumed by their family on a regular basis, as it is a matter of affordability. She also highlighted that ‘cornflakes’ is not a cultural food item but due to growing modernization, the youngsters like her grand-daughter find it tasty and sometimes demands for it.

Among the 3.3% of the young respondents, who were students and liked consuming cornflakes with milk was 19 year old Subeksha Pradhan from Dentam who has recently appeared for Higher Secondary Examination. She likes eating cornflakes with milk and honey, although consuming cornflakes is not a regular practice and gets to eat it once in a while. So, cornflakes with milk is not a staple breakfast for her, she relishes it in any time of the day as per her wish. This indicates that a food item which is a form of breakfast for a certain group may not be the same for everyone. The variation has been due to many factors and in regard to Dentam, it is mainly due to lack of information, awareness, affordability etc.

The Newars from Dentam enjoy Indian snacks like dalmut, nimki, during tea time and also consumes the local and homemade *khaja* like *bhutekobhat*<sup>36</sup>, *bhuteko makai*, *gilo roti* after they come back from work. 30 years Kharka Bhadur Pradhan a resident of

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<sup>36</sup> Stale boiled rice fried using vegetables, egg, meat.

Dentam stated that items like green tea, oats, cornflakes and limited choices of biscuits are available only in few shops in Dentam, but items like herbal tea, muesli, doughnuts, muffins, and other bakery items are unavailable. He also emphasized that food items like these is not a compulsion in his grocery list. Similarly, 42 years Gargi Pradhan who is a housewife from Dentam supported and said that her family is unaware about the idea of western breakfast and neither are they health conscious. Therefore occupation is one of the main criteria in deciding a persons consumption pattern. It is not affordable for them as they live with a meager monthly income. 25, years old Nandita Pradhan a resident from Dentam who was working in Siliguri highlighted that unavailability of food items also restricts consumption pattern of an individual. According to her some of her favorite items like pizza, burger, cheese, sandwich, oreo biscuits, koka noodles were not immediately available in her place in Dentam, even if she wanted her parents to try out something fancy. However sometimes she brought food items from siliguri so that her family could taste new things but her parents were not in favor of the taste as they found it too salty or too sweet for their taste buds. From the empirical study, it was observed that variables like education, availability, occupation and income were closely interlinked with the selection of types of food item and consumption pattern.

**Table 5.4 Meal Types during Lunch and Dinner**

Sl.No	Items	Lunch		Dinner	
		Gangtok	Dentam	Gangtok	Dentam
1	Rice	2(5%)	2(3%)	10 (25%)	60 (100%)
2	Roti	-	5(8%)	20 (50%)	-
3	Sabji	2(5%)	2(3%)	10 (25%)	60 (100%)
4	Just Soup	-	-	15 (37%)	-
5	Chicken curry	-	-	30 (75%)	60 (100%)
6	Chicken chilly	-	-	30 (75%)	2 (3%)
7	Buffalo meat curry	-	-	-	60 (100%)
8	Buffalo dry	-	-	30 (75%)	40 (66%)
9	Pork/Beef	5(12%)	-	-	-
10	Fish	-	-	5 (12%)	5 (8%)
11	Momos	25(62%)	5(8%)	30 (75%)	50 (83%)
12	Thukpa (soupy noodle)	25(62%)	-	40 (100%)	60 (100%)
13	Gyathuk (soupy noodle)	25(62%)	-	-	-
14	Syafale(fried meat fillings)	25(62%)	-	5 (12%)	4 (23%)
15	Chowmine	20(50%)	-	-	-
16	Samosa	10(25%)	5(8%)	-	-
17	Puri/Sabji	3(7.5%)	5(8%)	-	-
18	Parantha	10(25%)	-	-	-
19	Curd	*only when available	-	*only when available	-
20	Salad	-	-	40(100%)	-

Source: Fieldwork, May to October 2019

Table 5.4 presents Meal Types during Lunch and Dinner. It describes about the choices of food consumed by the Newar households. A close examination of food

patterns among the Newar society highlights that there is fine resemblance in the daily eating habits of the other communities of Sikkim.

In the Sikkimese society the concept of a scrumptious lunch is not a common phenomena, breakfast or *Khana* is supposed to be in the form of complete meal while lunch is comprised of light snacks locally known as *Khaja*. Table 5.4 indicates that respondents from Gangtok usually consume lunch but outside their homes either from canteens, restaurant, fast food stalls, online delivery or visit M.G Marg, the famous shopping area in Gangtok, in case they have sufficient time in hand as 75% of them are government employees and are out of house through out the day.

The respondents reported of commonly eating local delicacies. In case of Gangtok 62% respondents reported eating local fast food items like momos<sup>37</sup>, thukpas<sup>38</sup>, syafale<sup>39</sup> Tai-po<sup>40</sup>, 50% consume chowmine as it is easily available in any small or fancy restaurant in Gangtok. Main land Indian items are also enjoyed by the Newars like 25% eat samosa, 7.5% consume puri/sabji and 25% relish paratha. It was observed that the working class respondents prefer eating out during lunch, as carrying a tiffin to work place was tedious and many offices does not have the facility of an oven, where they could warm their meal. Even the electric tiffin boxes does not work always, if there is a power cut, hence eating out these items was easy and also a way to get out for some chit-chat with their friends and colleagues for some time.

In case of Dentam, lunch was not given as much importance as breakfast and dinner. From the empirical analysis, it was observed that among the respondents of Dentam, the breakfast was consumed in the form of complete meal and was a given full

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<sup>37</sup> Local nomenclature for dumplings

<sup>38</sup> Soupy noodles consisting of vegetables, egg and meat (depending upon one's choice)

<sup>39</sup> Fried bread with meat stuffing's

<sup>40</sup> Big sized dumplings

priority, while lunch was not a compulsory phenomena as the respondents left early from their respective houses. Therefore they ate heavy breakfast in the morning and tea in the evening. There were not as many eat outs in Dentam as in Gangtok as eating out every day incurs huge cost, which is not affordable by many respondents in Dentam. However *momo* is one such local item that is loved by all the communities in Sikkim and Newars are no exception. 8% of those who are government employee replied that they eat momo occasionally if they do not carry lunch along with them to office or school, as this food item is available in nearby fast food corners.

For dinner the scenario in Dentam was different than lunch. According to the field findings, dinner was eaten without any disturbance and meat was one such item that was often prepared in most of the houses in Dentam. For dinner all the respondents consumed rice with sabji and lentils. Roti was not much favored as it took a lot of time to prepare and many do not want to compromise rice with roti. While preparing meat delicacies, chicken curry was an important cuisine that was eaten frequently as broiler chicken is now marketed even in rural areas. Items like chicken-chilli which was reported to be consumed by only 3% was considered to be too dry to compliment rice. The traditional smoked buffalo curry of Newar is also relished. The dried smoked buffalo is traditional Newars cuisine is reported to be eaten by only 66% out of the total population. As fresh buffalo meat was easily available in Dentam, it is prepared as curry like any other community using onions, tomatoes, garlic and ginger paste along with coriander, cumin powder. Preparing smoked and dry buffalo meat in traditional ways takes a lot of time and dedication, therefore it was prepared only during feasts. Out of the total respondents, only 8% reported eating fish although it is a ritual food item. When asked why, many stated the preference of meat over fish.



Amongst the meat items pork and beef are not consumed and are considered as a taboo for the Newars.

In case of Gangtok as well, dinner was heartily consumed and 75% of the respondents consumed chicken curry and chicken chilli for dinner. Fresh buffalo meat was not always prepared for dinner due to unavailability of fresh and good quality buffalo meat in town. 66% of the Newars from Gangtok reported that they consume dry buffalo meat which they purchase from Lal Bazar or Newar shops who exports it from Nepal and sold it here. This packed buffalo meat is also famous delicacy among other communities of Sikkim and is highly relished on a daily basis in the form of dry pickles.

A close examination of types of meal patterns in everyday consumption both in Gangtok and Dentam shows that the traditional Newar cuisine does not have any space in Newars' daily life and Dal/bhat/tarkari is a daily phenomenon like any other communities in Sikkim. However, although the consumption pattern between the rural urban space is similar at various aspects, some difference has been noted due to factors like exposure and knowledge about these food items which is also linked with educational level, awareness, media exposure and also the question of availability. For instance 50% of respondents out of the total population from Gangtok relies on the Nepalese traditional *dal bhat tarkari achar* combo as a staple breakfast, while in case of Dentam, 100% of the Newars comply to the above staple food in the morning. Responding to the query why she prefers heavy meal in the morning, 55 years old Dil Maya Pradhan from Dentam justifies that rice is *ari-lo* (local nomenclature for something enduring that gives strength). She stated that all through the day, her family works in the field, therefore in the morning they always prefer to eat rice with seasonal vegetables, dal and one side of the plate contains

pickle prepared simply by grinding tomato, green chili and garlic. She also said that a Newar can make achar out of anything edible, so one can find variety of pickles when he/she visits a Newar house.

The field observation shows that there are some differences in breakfast choices between the Newars of Dentam and Gangtok. The respondents from Dentam were habituated to their *bhat dal tarkari achar* while some respondents from Gangtok have started consuming healthier and low cholesterol products which are rich in fiber, nutrients and has zero level of trans fat.

From the empirical finding it is observed that although all the respondents in Gangtok and in Dentam consume bed/ morning tea but the variety in tea preference differs. In Dentam 92% of the respondents consume milk sugar tea and only 8% consume milk salt tea. Milk and other dairy products was easily available in Dentam as it is produced at the respective home from their domesticated cattle. While in case of the respondents of Gangtok, only 25% reported consuming milk sugar tea while the remaining 75% of the sample population switched over to green tea, herbal and salted milk tea. However, sugar milk tea is usually offered when guests visit their homes. Responding to the query on her preference for herbal and green tea, 35 years old Rachna Pradhan from Gangtok who is a graduate and works as government employee stated that sugar is very bad for health and since she works out in a gym, consuming sugar would restrict her metabolism rate, therefore she prefers only green tea and occasionally salted milk tea.

It is observed that although the respondents share same traditional values yet their social lifestyle and food preferences is not similar in two field areas. Conceptually, the notion of 'lifestyle' is a by product of what Bourdieu termed 'habitus'(Bourdieu,

1984) which means physical embodiment of cultural capital, deeply rooted habits, skills, dispositions that we possess learning through our life experiences and this further enables in molding our 'taste' for cultural objects like art, food and clothing. Therefore the consumption pattern of the respondents from both urban-rural space was completely dependent upon the habitus they belonged to, which also determines the knowledge of cultural capital through their choices in culinary items. While corroborating their food choices with the educational level, Dentam has 36% male and 20% female who are illiterates while in case of Gangtok, none of the sample population were illiterates. Therefore factor like education plays an important role in determining the consciousness and awareness level among the individuals, access to information which in return guides their choices and preferences of food item materials that they indulge.

In addition to education, there are other variables like income level, age group and rural urban divide that is also largely accountable for the difference in food choices as it determines the affordability, tastes, preferences and availability of food items.

### **5.3 Continuity and Changes in Food Culture: Discussion from Sociological Lens**

The Newars with their distinctive socio-cultural practices in Sikkim are often considered to have a rich cultural heritage with their unique food culture. The empirical analysis highlights that Newars food culture in Sikkim has also witnessed many changes often impacted by other communities food culture after their long settlement in Sikkim and also due to the impact of the exogenous factors like

globalization in food culture which has been discussed exhaustively during the course of study.

Startup (1971) argued that from a sociological perspective migration is a process of geographical movement of an individual or a group which in return has an impact on the group structure, which in turn has ripple effect on one's culture. Contextually locating, the Newars living in diaspora in Sikkim have not only changed their residential place but have also witnessed a gradual and dynamic change in their larger social structure and culture. Since, food is the manifestation of culture, the change has also been noticed also in the food culture. Similar argument has been given by Counihan, (1999) where she stated that Food in true sense is a mirror of the organization of a society and is related to different types of cultural behavior.

Levi Strauss in his famous work on 'The Culinary Triangle' has understood the structure of food on the basis of binary opposites like 'boiling' and 'roasting' as 'endocuisine' and 'exocuisine' (cited in Counihan and Esterik, 2008). Here he implies boiling as an endocuisine and roasting as exocuisine. Strauss justifies his argument by stating that endocuisine or the boiled food is an internal affair of dining restricted to a small closed group while exocuisine or the roasted food is an external affair and is offered to the guests. He cited instances of France, where boiled chicken was only for the family meals while roasted meal was for the banquet. Similar type of instance as reported by him, on Paraguay where the members of the family usually roast meat except on domestic events like naming the child, which is considered to be a familial affair and eating boiled meat on this occasion is a marker of inside. Nevertheless, it can be observed that Levi Strauss has applied structuralism to all forms of communication related to food and associates boiled with 'tightening' and roasted with 'loosening' of familial and social ties (ibid).

Contextualizing Structuralism of Levi Strauss in the present study, Strauss ideology of binary opposites ‘endocuisine’ and exocuisine’ is found to be relevant among the Newars of Sikkim, as they consider the boiled rice to be endocuisine and consumption of it is restricted only within own caste and not outside the caste. The Newars exempt themselves from eating boiled rice for three days during Dasai, as it is one such festival where all the clan members within and outside the community sit and eat together. Therefore to avoid pollution during *dasai*, the Newars abstain themselves from the intake of boiled rice to maintain the authority of intra/inter caste hierarchy. Also as Strauss justified boiled as a domestic affair, similarly for the Newars too boiled rice is an indicator that marks inclusion within the same caste. From the field setting, it was observed that the practice of abstaining from eating boiled rice is still in a continuous practice among the Newars of Sikkim, however the concept of maintaining caste hierarchy within Newar or what Strauss referred as ‘endocuisine’ was not accepted by the respondents, It was observed that some Newar respondents from Sikkim were not aware about their caste name and defined themselves under the umbrella term i.e, Pradhan. Shrestha (2015) also argued that all the Newars in Sikkim are grouped together and identified as a homogenous community. Therefore, ignorance and uncertainty about their sub-caste could also be the reason for missing of their traditional caste hierarchy which is still a phenomena among the Newars of Nepal. Although the practice of abstaining boiled rice as a temporary taboo during Dasai still continues but many were unaware of the fact as to why is it practiced. Nevertheless, the Sikkimese Newars perform it voluntarily as a cultural traits, but do not maintain caste hierarchy in observance as they live in a completely different socio-cultural and political location than Nepal.

The Newars after the migration to Sikkim having been living in close proximity with the other ethnic communities and this is however reflected in the food preferences and exchange of culture within the Newars as well as the other ethnic communities of Sikkim in a reciprocal manner. While understanding the Newars of Sikkim and their food ways, it is to be noted that Sikkim is a multi- ethnic state which includes all the Nepali communities as well as Bhutias, Lepchas and others. The diversity is reflected in borrowing each other's cultural traits and food culture is no exception.

In understanding the cultural borrowing and lending, the concept of assimilation and acculturation becomes relevant. Jamal (1996) argued that the theory of assimilation is often used to describe the consumption and behavioral patterns of the immigrants gaining new cultural values from the host society at the expense of its original cultural values. He contradicts the theory of assimilation and termed it to be unidirectional, he further highlighted that this change could also occur in both ways and affect both the parties. Hence the term acculturation is increasingly used by the researchers to describe the two way process of cultural exchange.

Acculturation as defined by Herskovits (1937) occurs when group of individual have different culture and they come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. Therefore it is not just the migrated community that faces challenges when they move out from their culture of origin to the culture of destination but the host society is influencing and also is being influenced by bringing minor changes or may be no change at all in some cases.

Empirically locating in the present study, it is observed that the changes that has occurred in the food habits among the Newars of Sikkim is also both way process and

not uni-directional. While their food habit has been impacted by the food culture of the Sikkimese society, it also has impacted the Sikkimese society in return. Taking the field scenario, the changes and continuity of food culture among the Newar community has been noticed in the following aspects:

1. Ritualistic Food
2. Non-Ritualistic Food

### **1. Ritualistic Food**

There is no exaggeration when it is said that the humans eat with mind as much as with mouth as food carries a symbolic significance which is associated with ritualistic events. Breadsworth & Keil (1997) argues that the symbolic aspect of foods are of extreme importance to us that we might even starve ourselves, than consume certain substance which is against our culture. As discussed in earlier chapter, certain food items have an inter-connection with rituals and the significance of these items have a deep rooted meaning in the life of a Newar community. However from the field analysis it was revealed that the Sikkimese Newars due to various factors like migration, unavailability of resources, discontinuity of oral history and influx of modernity has led to many changes and alterations in consuming the ritual foods.

- a) From the field study, it was recorded that during the three days of Dasai, starting from *asthami* to *dasami* boiled rice is considered to be a temporary taboo and traditionally these three days is supposedly only for consuming flat or the beaten rice known as *baji* or *chewra* in Nepali. It was revealed that the Newars from Sikkim although have retained the practice of abstaining boiled rice from their meal sequence during *dasai* but unlike Nepal, Newars of

Sikkim consume not only *baji* for three days but has also incorporated other cuisine like momos, syafale, eggfale, chowmine, biscuits, bun/bread, oats, chapatti, puri, paratha. When asked about the food alterations to the members of the community, 35 years old, Rekha Pradhan a resident of Dentam, who is a house-wife and has attained education up to higher-secondary level stated that continuously consuming beaten rice for three days makes her stomach upset and she does not particularly have a taste for it, therefore on the first day i.e, *asthami* she consumes *baji* during the *bhoj* as a part of ritual significance, but after the ritual feasting is over she prefers eating momos, which is the local and traditional cuisine of Sikkim . They often prepare buffalo momos and relish it.

Another respondent Gyan Bhadur Pradhan 60 years, a resident of Gangtok who was a retired government employee had different views. He said that *baji* is a Newar identity and he would eat it any time without having any problem and further stated that consuming flat rice with *bhaisi* (buffalo) soup give him a euphoric satisfaction. 56 years, Ranu Pradhan from Dentam highlighted that flat rice is an important component as the Newars offer it to *Nau Durga*, *Bhimsen*, Lord *Ganesh* and *Kul* (ancestors) during Dasai. From the field interaction, it was recorded that this particular family prepares the flat rice themselves at home. The preparation is done by soaking rice overnight in water, after that it is beaten in a big wooden log traditionally known as *dhiki* and then it is left for drying. They do it specifically only for offerings and later consume it as a form of Prasad. She further illustrated that their *kul puja* (ancestral worship) should be performed in the purest way, therefore buying *baji* from the local market was not considered to be as pure because according



to her no body knows which caste is involved in the preparation of beaten rice. Therefore, she justifies her act of preparing the *baji* herself and further said “what if a lower caste Nepali is making the beaten rice, hence I do not want to anger our *kul*, therefore we take trouble to prepare the flat or the beaten rice ourselves for the puja, while for domestic consumption process we buy *baji* from a specific shop only”. The field observation also reveals that although the Newars do not maintain caste differences within the community in Sikkim, but one can sense the social distance they maintain with the other Nepali lower castes, indicating a shift in focus from intra to inter-caste differences. And although the Newars do not practice the traditional commensality rules within the castes of their own community as in Nepal , however some of them do practice restrictions on commensality with lower castes of the Nepali community.

- b) Migration has its own socio-cultural impact and changes particularly the food culture. Many communities have witnessed such changes and have been affected by this change for example Polynesian, Caucasian and Asians who had migrated to the Hawaiian Islands had faced an enormous change in their food culture. Due to unapologetic climate, they had to give up their most important staple foods like yam, wheat, potato, spinach, apples and started replacing potatoes with taro, spinach with taro tops and apples by green mangoes (Laudan, 1995). Similarly in case of Newars too, after settling in Sikkim for many years, many things changed along with food culture. Traditionally *has ko anda* or the duck egg during the *kul* puja was used as an offering and later consumed in the form of Prasad. However duck egg is not

always available, therefore instead of duck, the Newars have started using chicken egg usually poultry but preferably *basti ko anda* (locally produced) if available. Here, variables like migration and availability of resources is intertwined with each other, which together allows disappearance of certain authentic food items and also suggests other alternatives as a form of compensation.

- c) Another change that has been recorded is in the *sirh* (head) *khane puja*, as practiced by Newar of Denatm. During this ritual the head of the he goat is sacrificed to their *kul* (ancestor) and this head is kept separately for two days starting from *nawami* till the end of *dasami*. On the last day, the preparation from head of the male goat is consumed in the house of head male clan members symbolizing that from the evening onwards the period of taboo for consuming boiled rice is over. One change that was observed in this ritual was that 60% families use chicken head for sacrificial offering than he-goat, as chicken was comparatively cheaper and readily available. It was also found that 10% of the families in Dentam have given up this ritual sacrificing, as they consider it to be violent and torturous towards animals. Instead these families have switched over to offerings of vegetables like bottle gourd, pumpkin, cucumber for the sacrificing rites.

- d) *Chawrasi Byanjun* or the eighty four types of food which is traditionally a strict practice during life cycle rituals has also encountered some changes. One interesting observation recorded during the course of study was that only few families from Gangtok prepared all the full eighty four items during occasion

while many respondents from Gangtok and Dentam did not have a full fledged information about the use of *chawrasi byanjun*. Therefore they prepared only ten to twenty items, as they revealed that cooking whole eighty four items was considered to be time consuming and for some it is simply unaffordable. 56 years old Geeta Pradhan a resident of Gangtok who owns a small scale business and sells Newari achars stated that her family is quite conventional in term of rites and rituals and have always prepared all eighty four items during important events. These items comprise all the seasonal fruits and vegetables, variety of meat items, variety of sweets, and numerous pickles. She added that it takes around one week to collect and prepare these items and is quite time consuming and expensive. Like every society, the Newar society is not homogenous in lifestyle and there is segregation in terms of economic class, therefore affording and collecting all eighty four food items is not easy for all the members of the community. From the empirical analysis, it was observed that some members of the community who belonged to the lower economic section use only five to six items during various life cycle rituals or occasions and symbolically referred to those items as *chawrasi byanjun*. Commenting on 84 food items, 56 years old, Kazi Pradhan a resident of Dentam and a farmer by occupation illustrated that it is not possible to keep all the food items during the life cycle rituals and they have never even tried to keep more than ten items as it is a cost effective and they perform this traditional food ritual just to maintain continuity of traditions.

- e) In Newar society, drinking comes quite naturally as it is socially as well as ritually acceptable. The two important traditional drinks of the Newar culture

is *aila* and *thon*. *Thon* basically means beer made from rice and *aila* is commonly known as *teen-pani-raksi*. However *thon* was not as populous as *aila* among the Newars of Sikkim. The respondents were not aware about the Newar nomenclature for beer and during the *bhoj* or any occasion *aila* was merrily served by the Newars. It is also offered to the Gods while performing puja during Dusshersa. From the field observation it was recorded that *aila* was easily available in Dentam as many Newar households prepare and also market it but it was not the case in Gangtok. Preparing *aila* was a tedious job and some families manage *aila* only for puja and ritualistic purpose. For their own consumption, western manufactured alcohol like rum, vodka, gin, scotch, whisky, brandy were popularly used on the basis on the family's preference and affordability.

## **2. Non ritualistic Food items:**

Apart from the ritualistic food, changes have been noticed also in non- ritualistic food items. Newars are famous for consuming fermented foods items typically pickles of all sorts. During the field setting, it was revealed respondents from both Gangtok and Dentam had a unanimous affinity towards Newari achars, a local terminology referred by Non-Newars in Sikkim. 60 years Kalpana Pradhan a resident from Gangtok, who used to work as an editor in Sikkim Assembly(Nepali Section) and was also an Ex-Vice President in Guthi, illustrated that the art of preparing achar from seasonal fruits and vegetables and stocking them up for later use is a traditional phenomena practiced by the Newars. She stated that as a child her mother used to prepare achars out of

soyabean, potato and dried peas, buffalo meat, lapsi, chillies, filunge<sup>41</sup> and therefore she also developed the interest of preparing these achar. Another respondent 30 years old Bikash Pradhan, a resident of Dentam who had recently attained the position of Newar priest as an occupation stated that members of the community are fond of eating and preparing achar traditionally in the Nepal valley. The Newars used to prepare seasonal achar and preserve for future use. He further said that he believes that this continuity gradually became a culture and now the Newars have become quite famous for achar comprising of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet. These achar are also manufactured in Sikkim and Darjeeling by both Newars and non-Newars and sold in the local markets or small departmental stalls. During the field, the brief interaction with individuals from other communities like Bhutia, Rai, Chettri, Tamangs and Gurungs of Sikkim revealed that these achar also have a symbolic meaning as they are often a part of *koseli*, a terminology in Nepali which means gifting of only food items while visiting family, friends or dignitaries. These items have become a part of the traditional gifts. Many people from Sikkim introduce these achar to outsiders as a part of the Sikkimese culture along with some Temi Tea leaves. Even the host goes irrespective of their caste and community usually demand their parents a bottle of *sukuti ko achar* (dry meat pickle).

Also in the wedding celebrations of Newars or non-Newars, these ‘Newari Achar’ are an instant hit. Sociologically, one can derive the understanding of mutual approach of acculturation occurring in the Sikkimese society in terms of food habits. Therefore these tiny gestures of keeping one Newar food item during marriage feasts of any other community in Sikkim or Newars consuming *momo* or *thukpa* during some of their religious events as discussed above showcases, how well they have

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<sup>41</sup> Known as Niger seeds is used as a herb by the Nepalese speaking people. Scientifically known as *Guizotia Abyssinica*.

acculturated with each others culture unconsciously, which in itself is the essence of a pluralistic society.

Nevertheless these Newari achars have also faced many modifications over the years, for instance the preparation of Nutrela<sup>42</sup> achar .The use of Nutrela for achar has been somewhat a recent phenomena. It was also observed that the Newars of Sikkim frequently add fried nutrelas in preparation of the ritual food like *samaibaji* by mixing it with dried fish and fried garlic. The Newars in Sikkim has popularly gained a status in preparing pickels out of everything and nutrela is one such item which has gradually become an identity of the Newar food culture especially in pickle. These nutrela pickles are also manufactured and marketed as a part of local business by some Newars and non- Newars. It is in its truest form to what Tweeten (1997. cited by Scanlan, 2003) has described about food security which is the state of having available, accessible and utilizable quantity of food. The notion of food security supports the argument about nutrela being a part and parcel of Newar food culture due to its high availability and accessibility in the market.

There are many changes that have been noticed in the daily food consumptions among Newar community of both Gangtok and Dentam. The impact of food items from other states of India and even multi cuisine from various parts of the world also have penetrated in the food consumption patterns of the Newars of Sikkim. A detailed discussion on the changing consumption pattern is presented in the later section.

A close examination reveals that the food habits of the Newars of Sikkim has witnessed tremendous changes and in everyday life of Newar community, the original Newar cuisine are rarely prepared. Many people have intermingled with the

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<sup>42</sup> A textured soy protein or soy chunks is defatted from soy flour by extracting soyabean oil. It is often used as a meat analogue.

Sikkimese culture to an extent that they have forgotten their own food culture. Although the other communities of Sikkim have a notion that Newars have a rich food culture but during the course of study and through empirical findings it was observed that many Newars living in Sikkim had very less information about their food culture and cultural heritage.

However in recent years, the *Guthi*, an association created to revive the Newar culture and traditions of Sikkim have been under taking various initiatives to enlighten their people about their own tradition that includes both material and non material culture including the food culture. Guthi is venturing this by re- visiting their roots in Nepal and exploring what were their main food items. Various efforts have been formulated by the members of *guthi* to spread and sensitize the community members regarding their food culture. A detailed discussion on role of Guthi for revival of food culture has been presented in later section.

#### **5.4 Globalization and McDonadlization and its Impact on Food Habits of Newars:**

A simple definition of food globalization would describe the world wide spread of the great American food brands like Coca-Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds, Burger-King which has allegedly been replacing the local cuisine and food ways as a symbol of American cultural imperialism (Turner and Holton, 2016).

Nevertheless Sikkim has been also been witnessing fast socio-economic changes in recent times and the impact of the post Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization since 1990s has been manifested in the socio-cultural change among the Sikkimese

society. The mass media and the rapid growth of information technology has also facilitated in rapid cultural changes which can be seen in every day life and food culture is no exception.

As elsewhere, Sikkim has also been witnessing an enormous growth of fast food junctions which has highly affected the eating habits of the residing communities especially in town areas. The field observation shows that the eating out culture has been developing in a rampant pace in Sikkimese society. However, there has been a considerable gap in terms of eating out culture in two different field areas i.e, Dentam and Gangtok.

The field observation reveals that incase of Dentam, eating out in fast food café, tea stall, and small canteens is restricted only to lunch time during office hours . They also eat out when they are travelling to town or in market areas. However it is to be noticed that more than the eating out trend, this becomes a virtual necessity as they travel or going out of home. Dentam with its rural background, the contemporary culture of eating outside home by the entire family in the restaurant has not been reported by the respondents.

Nevertheless in case of Gangtok, the situation is completely different. The mushroom growth of multi cuisine restaurants, hotels and bars namely Square, Apna-dhabha, Hotlix, House-of-bamboo, Thakali, Anum-pedro etc, food parlors like Dominos, Meat and Eat, Coffee shop, Baker's Café, Oven in the Mountain, Cacao, Triptis and many more evidently speaks of eating out trend. The recent trend of food deliveries like shuffle momos, mitho etc. has highly impacted the eating out cultures of Gangtokians, and Newars especially the younger generations. All the respondents reported they eat out weekly or at least once in a month either with friends, peers or family members.



Therefore a notable difference was observed in the eating out habits from Gangtok and Dentam. For the former, eating out culture was what Bourdieu defined ‘taste of luxury’ while for the respondents from Dentam it was ‘taste of necessity’. Bourdieu(1984) argued that taste of luxury was a product of material culture appearing through possession of both cultural and economic capital and providing freedom in preferences, while taste of necessity was de-limiting and adjusting in the choices one makes. Theoretically extending and implying Bourdieu’s concept to Newars, it can be illustrated from the empirical findings that although the Newar community do not practice any intra caste boundary but the intra class division is highly visible and that is also indicated through an individual’s selection of eating patterns. The study also shows relevance with Malinowski’s famous work on the socio-symbolic importance of yam house, a storage house for yam which was considered as a requisite among the tribes of Papua, New Guinea. Only the men who belonged to a high social class could build huge yam house while an average man owned an artless yam house. This showcases how food is significantly related to the class and status symbol in their community for retaining social order.

When asked about food preferences creating some form of stratification and reflection of social status, 43, years old Dilip Pradhan, a government employee and a resident of Gangtok opined that off course the choices in eating habits do create a vast difference of class and status. He further stated the cost price of many food items like green vegetables, onions, fruits, milk, bakery items are unimaginable these days, therefore he makes wise decision before buying any item as being the sole bread earner of the family. Similar kind of view was presented by 33 years old Manita Pradha, who works in a bank as an Assistant Manager, admitted that there is hike in each and every food item but she argued that “I cannot use alternate items or cut off some items from

my grocery list as I do not want to compromise, also the miscellaneous items like butter, cheese, ketchup, jam, oatmeal, preserved food like sausages, ham etc has become a part and parcel of my lifestyle”.

**Table 5.5 Food Items Preference while Eating Out**

Items	Dentam	Gangtok
<b>Local fast food/Chinese</b> Momos, Thukpa, Syafale, ChickenChilli, Chowmine,Fried rice	40 (66%)	40 (100%)
<b>Indian cuisine</b> Biryani, CholaBhatora, Alu-Parantha, Samosa- Chop, Naan, Butter Chicken, Chicken Bharta	8 (13%)	25 (63%)
<b>South Indian cuisine</b> Dosa, Idli, Vada	5(8.3%)	10 (25%)
<b>Italian cuisine</b> Pasta, Pizza, Lasagne,	3 (5%)	25 (63%)
<b>American fast foods</b> French fries, Burger, Coke	3 (5%)	40 (100%)
<b>Bakery Items</b> Bread, Rolls, Cake,Biscuits, Pastries	20 (3.3%)	40 (100%)
<b>Thakali Thali (Newar traditional thali)</b>	8 (13%)	20 (33%)

Source: Fieldwork, May to October, 2019

Table 5.5 presents food preference of respondents while eating outside home . It is observed that 66% of the respondents from Dentam and all the respondents from Gangtok consume the local or Chinese fast food items like *momo*, *thukpa*, *chowmine*, *syafale*, chicken chilli etc.

Apart from local/Chinese cuisine, main land Indian dishes like chola-bhatora, biryani, samosa are also relished by 63% of the respondents from Gangtok, while only 13% of the respondents from Dentam consume items like alu paratha, samosa and chop sometimes from small stalls.

All the respondents from Gangtok consume or have tried American fast foods and 62.5% of respondents love the taste of Italian cuisine, some have reported that they like how Italian cuisine has enormous amount of cheese in their recipes. Apparently in Gangtok, there are many food junctions, which offer a variety of Italian cuisines like Alferdo pasta, crepes, spaghetti and a variety of Pizzas. 25 years old Riya Pradhan from Gangtok and a student at Sikkim University stated that she loves eating Italian cuisine and makes sure that she eats it whenever she goes to M.G Marg with her friends. 36, years Jayanti Pradhan, from Gangtok a home-maker illustrated that her nine year old frequently tells her to take him out to Dominos for pizza and make sure they spend a quality time ,while they relish their chicken cheese pizza.

8.3% respondents from Dentam reported that they consume South Indian dishes only when they travel to South India for medical checkups and 25% respondents from Gangtok consume South Indian foods like dosa, idli on a regular basis as its available in Gangtok.

*Thakali*, the traditional Newar thali is recently introduced in Gangtok. Surprisingly only 13% from Dentam who have travelled to Nepal has tasted it while 33% of the respondents from Gangtok ate thakali as is easily available in restaurants like Thakali and Nimtho at M.G Marg.

The field observations supports that the difference in geographic location i.e, urban and rural area, is one such factor which provides or restricts availability of food items. When asked about Italian or the famous American (fries-burger) cuisine, 20 years old, Tikamaya Pradhan from Dentam said that she has tasted pizza and burger, when she was studying in Gangtok with her friend. But after she finished her schooling, she is staying in Dentam to take care of her father's business i.e, a grocery shop. Since then,

she has not consumed these items, as Dentam does not have any multi cuisine restaurants. She further told that “I don’t even have cravings for it, as mentally I know that these items will not be immediately available to me”. Similarly 50, years Bal Kumari Pradhan a resident of Dentam and a housewife said that she has never stepped out of Sikkim and is not fond of travelling. Therefore she has never even heard or tasted these items. She added that these ‘packed’ items are the cause of ill health, therefore it is better to avoid. Contradicting to this statement, 22 years old Niraj Pradhan, a University student argued that he loves eating Pizza from Dominos and could eat it everyday. His favorite pick is the Chicken golden delight and makes sure he eats it once every week with his friend or family.

Affordability is an important factor that comes to play when discussing about the food preferences. Consuming a golden delight pizza from Dominos every week is not cost efficient and every individual cannot afford it. However consumption of local/Chinese items was preferred both by the respondents of urban and rural areas, as these items have existed in the Sikkimese society for a very long time and is affordable too. It is also available in every nook and corner starting from small stalls to fancy restaurants. Even main land Indian delicacies are relished by the Sikkimese Newars as a form of *Khaja*, as some of these items are immediately available in locally termed as *chai dokan*<sup>43</sup>.

Therefore, the food patterns and choices among the Newars of Gangtok is notably different than the respondents from Dentam, who consider food as a necessity, a substance of nutrient while in Gangtok the process of McDonaldization has been erupting with the advent of multi-menu and global restaurants like Mu-Kimchi(a Korean restaurant), Gangtok Groove(a multi-culinary restaurant which provides

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<sup>43</sup> A tea stall where Indian snacks and sweets are easily available.

global food items), Keventers(a milk-shake junction), Baking magic(a bakery which provides a vast range of pastries) and many more. The restaurants in Gangtok do not only favor multi-pluralistic menu but have also blended the traditional and local cuisine with global. Therefore a restaurant which sells Italian Pizza is also selling *momos* and *thukpas* together.

Ritzer (1998) argued that McDonaldization is ‘the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world’. This is also found to be true even in case of Gangtok, which has been witnessing a mushroom growth and wide range of fast food and café culture. It is clear from the above discussion that the Newar society has adopted to some changes in relation to change from traditional to exotic cuisine But the introduction of new means of consumption has its own side effects to the society. It showcases signs of affluence and sophistication which acts as a prey upon the one’s belong to the lower class (ibid).

The process of McDonaldization has been playing a major role in the Sikkimese society with the increasing growth of restaurants and new means of consumption through easy and home deliveries which are becoming trendy and obviously Newar community has also been impacted by these developments.

The process of McDonaldization is widespread all over the world and Sikkimese society is no different. Due to the spreading of fast food culture many traditional and ethnic food like the Newar culinary traditions are in vulnerable position as the McDonalized foods brings about a change in consumption pattern from traditional to exotic.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984), argues that a habitus (social class) enables an agent to practice his products (taste) in the structure (high/ low /rich/ poor) and tends to establish them as the fundamental structuring of practices and the perception of practices. He further argues that it is the habitus which apprehends difference between conditions which it grasps in the form of differences between classified and classifying practices (products of other habitus) in accordance with principle of distinction. Contextually, even among the Newar community class differentiation was hugely found and the choices of consumption pattern and their tastes and preferences co-depended upon many factors including their socio-economic profile and lifestyle.

## **5.6 Newar Guthi and Revivalism of food culture**

The Sikkim Newar Guthi is a non-political association which was first established in 1994 with the aim of 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).

### **5.6.1 Organizational Structure**

According to the constitution of Newar Guthi in Sikkim, the membership of Guthi shall be 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 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-RangpoGuthi), West District (Gayzing- Dentam, Soreng- Sombaray District) and South District(Namchi-Namthang, Melli-SumbukGuthi).
3. The zonal guthihas been further divided into branches or Sakhas .There are total 53 Sakhas of Guthi which are formed area wise.

65, year old Dilu Pradhan Maskey, who is the current president of Central Executive Committee stated that traditionally. The women did not participate as members of the Governing body but in Sikkim, a special post of Vice President is reserved for any women candidate. During the field work, it was found that 30 years old, Mrs. Reshu Pradhan is the current women Vice President of Newar Guthi.

### **5.6.2 Guthi : A Brief History**

As per the discussion held with the members of Guthi, it was found that the it was in the early 90s, a team comprising Mohan Pratap Pradhan, Mr. Ganesh Pradhan along with other members played a major role in establishing the Sikkim Newar Guthi for reviving the Newar culture. After the guthi was formed, the Newars in Sikkim, initiated the discussion about their cultural existence and decided to travel to Nepal in order to explore more about their historical root and tradition. After returning to Sikkim, the guthi members started spreading cultural awareness among the people here and also introduced many traditions and festivals, that identifies with Newar community. It was Mr.Khagendra Pradhan in 1998, who initiated the Institute for Newar Language and Culture in Gangtok and implemented the Indrajatra celebrationin Sikkim at the community level. The first ever Indrajatra celebration in Sikkim was held in the year 2000 at Namthang, South district, which was organized by the guthi. The main reason for choosing Namthang as the place of celebration was because the guthi head office was situated in Namthang back then. This community festival was celebrated at Singtam in the year 2016 and at Namchi in 2017. In 2018, the venue was shifted to Gangtok.In 2019, this celebration at massive scale was held



at two different districts i.e Gangtok in East District and Dentam in West District on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Indrajatras has been recognized as the state holiday in Sikkim and this recognition was given to the Newars by the then SDF government led by the yester year Chief Minister Shree Pawan Kumar Chamling.

Indrajatra is exclusively the festival of Newars and by celebrating this festival, the important ritual food i.e, samaibaji was also introduced among the Newars of Sikkim. The members of the Guthi put in all their effort to organize the Indrajatras and to prepare and distribute samai-baji to all those who attended the function, be it Newar or non-Newar. It is through the celebration of Indrajatras, many people came to have knowledge about their ritual food. 43 years old Gayatri Pradhan from Gangtok, who is a graduate and works in the Power Department stated that the celebration of Indrajatras by the Guthi members have brought all the Newars together under one umbrella and it is during these festivals, they get to learn more about their food culture and even prepare it for their children.

The Sikkim Newar Guthi is very distinctive when compared to Nepal. Unlike Nepal where Guthi is caste based within the community itself, the Newar Guthi of Sikkim is a single body that represents the Newars of whole of Sikkim irrespective of their caste differences. 42 years old, Bikash Pradhan from Gangtok, working under Education Department is an integral member of Sikkim Newar Guthi, who has specialized in Newar language. He stated that although there are many Newar castes and sub castes living in Sikkim, yet the Guthi does not necessitate in forming different caste based Guthis in order to prevent clash between its own members and to maintain solidarity. He further argued that the Newars in Sikkim live in a scattered form and also the title 'Pradhan' unifies all the Newars into a single association. According to him caste based Guthi system would never be a reality for the Newars of Sikkim, as it would

bring disharmony and as a Guthi member, he would never want that to happen in future. So 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.

However the Sikkim Newar Guthi is not as compact and ubiquitous in nature and even the membership is not obligatory for every Newar population. Thus, the Sikkim Newar Guthi resembles somewhat to what Ferdinand Tonnies termed as, Gesellschaft(association) and Geminschaft (community). According to Tonnies, (1980)Geminschaft was traditional in nature and attached personal and emotional sentiments along with it, while Gesellschaft was instrumental and impersonal in nature and had a more rationalist outlook towards a certain motive and is mediated by money. Contextually, the Sikkim Newar Guthi although portrays like the traditional Guthis in Nepal, which are informal in nature and has deep-connection with its members but in Sikkim the Guthi functions in the form of an association is not personal as the traditional Guthis. It is mostly external and look after the cultural preservation and revivalism process only.

### **5.6.3. Newar Guthi's Initiatives and Revivalism of Food Culture**

The members of the Guthi worked effortlessly for their community and have initiated many food related programs to make the Newars aware about their rich food culture.

A brief overview of the initiatives has been presented below :

1. During the Red Panda Festival in 2017 at Gangtok, Newar food stall was opened and items like choila, yomari, Newar achar, sel roti, samaibaji, buffalo

momo were displayed. Many dignitaries , politicians and researchers from West Bengal visited their stall and food items turned out to be an instant hit. The stall was opened for eleven days and the total income generated was approximately rupees four lakh. On the last day of the festival, the Newars distributed some food items to all the other fifty-four stalls as a sign of courtesy and respect.

2. Another initiative taken by the Sikkim Newar Guthi to create awareness in case of food culture is during the Indrajatra celebration 2018, where an achar competition was held and a total of 163 vegetarian and non-vegetarian achars were prepared by members of Newar community. Amongst these achars, ten vegetarian achars were selected and a nutritional analysis was conducted by Dr.Sushen Pradhan, the President of Newar Youth Affairs. These ten types of achar were launched commercially on the Silver Jubilee of Sikkim Newar Guthi on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2019.This competition introduced by the guthi members aimed to encourage the Newars to familiarize their traditional items, on a public platform.

3.Simultaneously, a remarkable initiative with regard to food culture was taken by Guthi where they organised many Newar cooking classes in places like Melli, Dentam, Singtam, Rongli, wherein master chefs from Nepal was invited to teach the Sikkimese Newars about the Newar cuisine. Among these classes, the researcher also participated as an observer for one of the Cooking class, which was held in Singtam by Newa-Bhay-Bowney and was initiated by Mr. Binod Pradhan, the President of Singtam zone on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Mrs. Laxmi Vajracharya from Nepal was invited to teach the rich and scrumptious Newar cuisine. Items like chatamari, womari, peas pickle, methikojhol, choila, yomari, kachila and many more delicacies were taught in one week workshop. She further stated that she loves visiting Sikkim and teaching

about the Newar food culture, as she feels being a Newar, one has to have a full-fledged idea about the culinary roots. 22, years old Adarsh Pradhan a student from Nar Bahadur Bhadari Degree College, Gangtok believed that this workshop was very fruitful as it taught him many things about his own food culture from which he remained aloof for long. He wants to cook these items not only for his family but also for his friends in order to showcase them about his rich culinary culture. Another important cooking classes was organized by the Guthi members in Dentam in 2017, where again Ms.LaxmiVajracharya was invited to teach the preparation of *yomaris* to the members of the community.

Thus the Sikkim NewarGuthi has been playing an important role in reviving the food culture and are trying to bring about the consumption of traditional food items in the every day life of the Newar, so to retain their culture and tradition. However, field study revealed that these items are not produced and consumed in everyday life of respondents and are prepared mostly during the festivals.

### **5.7 Summary:**

Summing up, the Newars in Sikkim have faced a major socio-cultural transformation in their food culture due to migration, acculturation and also impacted by exogenous factors like modernization and globalization which has highly impacted their eating patterns. The Newars from Sikkim are facing a vulnerable position in terms of culture in general and food culture in particular, the members of the community are in a state of panic as their rich traditional cultural heritage is slowly evaporating in the midst of acculturation and exogenous forces. However the Newars have established the Sikkim NewarGuthi for the preservation of culture The members of the Guthi unitedly have been working for the betterment of their community.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **I**

Food is not only natural but also cultural. It is defined as a substance consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate and fat taken into the body to restore and repair bodily growth. But for humans eating is not simply an activity aimed at requiring nutrients but also identifying the items that are culturally acceptable for human consumption (Breadsworth & Keil, 1997).

Food is a part of everyday life which is frequently taken for granted but the study of culture and food in a given society provides an entry point to examine the negotiation of social relationships and gender roles (Chaudhri & Chatterjee, 2011). Food and eating practices together create an identity not just for individuals but also of the group as a whole (Pureto, 2017).

In view of socio- cultural importance of food, and its pivotal role in shaping the culture of any community, food closely binds Newars into close-knit community. Traditionally the members of the community are known for their rich food culture and exotic recipes which in return reflects their rich cultural heritage. However the Newars of Sikkim after their settlement for nearly 200 years in an entirely different socio-economic and political location has brought certain changes in the food habits and eating culture. The close interaction with other Nepali communities and Bhutia, Lepcha community in Sikkim also have impacted their food culture. In this backdrop, the present study entitled 'Food Culture and Eating habits among the Newars of

Sikkim : A Sociological Study of Continuity, Change and Revivalism' attempts to understand the food culture of the Newars of Sikkim.

## II

Sikkim is the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of India and presently comprises of 21,657 Newar population (SSEC,2006) that accounts to 3.72% of the total population of the state. The study has been conducted in two districts of Sikkim i.e, Dentam(West) and Gangtok (East). Gangtok is the capital of Sikkim and a bustling town notable for its urbanic character whereas Dentam is a rural setting and scenic village located in the West District of Sikkim. Since there is virtually non existent of literature on Newars of Sikkim except (Shrestha, 2015), the present study is explorative in nature and is based on a total sample of 100. Taking the rural- urban variable and using the purposive sampling method, the sample is divided between 60: 40 ratio, where 60 respondents was interviewed from Dentam (rural area ) and 40 from Gangtok that is from the urban setting,. The tools and techniques for data collection involved in-depth interview using an interview schedule comprising both close ended and open ended questions. Case studies and narratives were collected to supplement the objectives of the study. Phone conversations WhatsApp calls, Skype were also done in Nepal through the medium of Guthi in order to cross-check and support the study. Observation as a technique was opted to record the preparatory process by attending festivals like Dasai, Indra-jatras, going to food trainings and workshops organized by the Guthi, in which master-chef from Nepal was invited to give orientation on Newar food culture, visiting Newar food stalls during Jorethang mela and also attending social and ritual events like Bel Bivah.

To understand the Newars of Sikkim, a brief historical backdrop of the Newars of Nepal is essential. The Newars of Nepal are believed to be the traditional inhabitants of Kathmandu valley, who speak the Tibeto-Burmese Language and have physical features resembling the Indo-Mongolian facial type. The members of the community are basically agriculturist in nature and are also engaged in trade and business. The Newar society is a complex entity which practices a rigid caste hierarchy system based on caste-based occupation. Religiously, the community is divided into *Buddhamargi* and *Shivamargi* Newars. The differentiation in caste system and religious system is also reflected in their commensal relations. Members belonging to the higher caste in the caste hierarchy of the community do not eat boiled rice from caste lower which is still prevalent in many parts of Nepal. In context to this practice, the caste based rigidity is not visible in Sikkim and the Newars of Sikkim identify themselves as Pradhans and as a homogenous community, although class difference in terms of economic status is clearly visible. Over the years, there has been some degree of cultural lending and borrowing with the other communities of Sikkim in the form of acculturation and food culture has also been significantly impacted. The Newars are quite famous for their Newari achars in Sikkim. This aspect of the communities food culture is highly appreciated by all the other communities, who not only indulge in preparing the pickles during daily basis or occasions but have also started marketing it. Similarly the Newars of Sikkim equally relish the local Sikkimese delicacies like momo, thukpa, gyathuk, and have adopted it as a part of their daily eating activity.

### III

The study revealed that food is not just for mere sustenance but has a symbolic meaning in the life of a Newar. The community follows the tantric tradition where meat and alcohol consumption is both ritually and culturally prescribed. For the sacrificial offering, he-buffalo is ritually significant and the meat of he-buffalo is necessary in every socio- cultural occasion. Apart from meat, the traditional alcohol aila and thon is also culturally accepted by the members of the community.

The Newars consider food as a part of their cultural identity and therefore prepare different delicacies in festivals, rituals and rites of passage like birth, marriage and death. The food items are not only relished but are also offered to the deities and later consumed in the form of Prasad. An exhaustive discussion on food items in different socio- cultural occasions has been discussed in ChapterIV. The empirical findings revealed that members of the community do not see themselves in close coherence to the Newars of Nepal instead they have highly acculturated and live in close proximity with the other communities of Sikkim. The members of the community have been living in Sikkim for more than a century, and have mostly forgotten about their rich cultural heritage which therefore puts them in a vulnerable state. It was found that the process of migration from their place of origin to the place of destination has deeply affected in the continuity of their oral history which has led to less or no knowledge about one's own culture and traditions.

It was observed that unlike Nepal, the Newars of Sikkim celebrate only some, if not all the festivals as they opined that their ancestors were not successful in bringing the caste-based priest along with them during the time of migration. Due to scanty information about the culture and festivals, the knowledge about food is also highly



affected. Although there were some families who had a vast understanding about the food culture, due to their frequent contacts with the relatives in Nepal, but majority of the members of the community identify themselves as Pradhan and many of them do not possess knowledge about their caste and clan name, therefore facing cultural-identity issues. Despite the challenges, the Newars from Sikkim with little knowledge and, support from the guthi have led to continuation of preparing their traditional delicacies. For instance the complex Newar hierarchical caste system is dependent on the acceptance and avoidance of boiled rice but the field data revealed that although commensal restrictions on boiled rice was not observed in practice but the Newars from Sikkim abstained from eating boiled rice during Dasai and majority of the Newars from Sikkim eat only *baji* or the flat rice, which is a cultural food item of the Newars. The concept of Levis Strauss nature and culture comes into being while studying the food culture of Newars. Food in its raw form is a symbolic representation of nature but when it is cooked it adds more meaning and symbolizes the identity of a particular community. The culinary culture of the Newars throws ample light on the meanings and symbols each item carries and how it is used specifically for certain occasions only.

The study found that, majority of the respondents had limited idea about their food culture, yet even with little knowledge, they have been preparing the cultural delicacies during the time of festivities, like *samai-baji* an amalgamation of flat rice, fish, egg, ginger and garlic, buffalo meat was a vital ritual-food which is prepared during the extravagant festival of Indrajatra and consumed in the form of Prasad. Kwati, a soup is prepared out of nine types of lentils, buffalo-meat items during bhoj. Chawrasi Byanjun, an elaborate combination of eighty-four food items is consumed during the initiation rites of a child and while celebrating the aged

members in the form of divine. Although the full-fledged meaning of each item from the delicacy could not be identified due to unclarity among the respondents but it was observed that unlike Nepal, where all the eighty-four items are prepared for these occasions, in Sikkim most of the Newar families prepare minimum ten items and refer to it symbolically as Chawrasi Byanjun.

From the field setting it was found that all the specific ingredients are not immediately available while preparing various delicacies and ritual-food, therefore the Newars of Sikkim use alternate items to compensate, for instance preparation of Newar potato and peas pickle, requires dry peas known as *kheraw*, due to its unavailability dry white peas are used. Similarly the respondents use poultry egg during ritual offerings as duck egg is not always found. Buffalo is considered to a ritual food of the Newars but if fresh and quality meat is not found in Gangtok, the respondents use either chicken or goat for preparing meat items during Bhoj.

However, currently, the Newars of Sikkim are undergoing the process of cultural revivalism in which Sikkim Newar Guthi, a community association formed by the members of the community has been playing an active role and is very vibrant for preservation and strengthening their cultural elements,.

While studying the food culture and eating patterns of the Newars of Sikkim the daily food patterns was also taken into consideration and it was found that both the respondents from urban and rural belt consumed the traditional *Khana* comprising of rice, lentils, vegetables and pickle in the morning before leaving for work. Although the members of the community shared the same cultural background it was observed that the pattern of eating out in hotels and restaurant differed hugely in case of rural and urban areas, also the taste and food preferences had a huge gap. It was found that

various factors like education, awareness, occupation, income, media, and also the availability of food items have been playing determining role in differentiation in consumption of various new food items.. The study revealed that the respondents from Dentam(rural) did not prefer eating out while that was not the case in terms of the Newars of Gangtok who ate out frequently due to availability and affordability of various café, eating joints, multi-menu restaurants and home delivery options in Sikkim as a result of ongoing process of Globalization and McDonaldization.

The nature of choice in food also speaks volumes about Bourdieu's Cultural Capital and how it has been embodied as a part of an individual's personality which is reflected through his taste.

The study also corresponds to Malinowski's perspective on yams, an edible tuber. The tribes of Papua, New Guinea identified huge yam houses with status and class. Contextually , although the Newars of Sikkim share the same culture and traditions, the difference in class and status manifests itself in the difference in food habits as well as food items during bhoj in festivals, marriage etc.

Despite the flexibility and changes in terms of the food culture, the study found that the Sikkim Newar Guthi has been taking a pro active role to revive the cultural heritage and food culture, to make the younger generation aware about the importance of their food culture and eating habits. The present trend of cultural revivalism shows an optimistic trend indicating a keen interest among Newars of in reviving the food culture. Nonetheless, the challenges and impact of globalized food culture can not be ignored, however the trend is also showing marketing of Newars cuisines at least different types of vegetarian and non-vegetarian pickles which can contribute in retaining some element of culinary culture. More initiation on marketing Newar

pickles inside as well outside the State, catering thakali restaurants, adopting the traditional Newar delicacies not only for occasions but also as a part and parcel of every day life, encouraging men and women participation in cooking workshops, organizing Newar stalls in every state functions would give a ray of hope in maintaining and preserving the Newar culinary heritage.

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## Appendix-I

### Interview Schedule

Food Culture and Eating habits among the Newars of Sikkim: A

Sociological Study of the Continuity, Change and Revivalism

Name of the Researcher : Yankeela Bhutia

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### Section I

#### 1. Basic Information

1.1 Name:

1.2 Address:

1.3 Age: 18-30  31-45

46-60

1.4 Gender: Male  Female

1.5 Religion:

1.6 Caste:

#### 2. Information Regarding Respondent:

2.1 Family Structure: Joint Family/Nuclear extended  Nuclear Family

2.2 Occupation: Government Employee  Farmer  Business

2.4 Monthly Income:

Below Rs. 5,000  Rs. 5,000-15,000  Rs. 15,001-25,000

Rs. 25,001-35,000  Rs. 3,5001-45,000  Above Rs. 45,001

2.5 Education :

Illiterate  Elementary  Educated Up to High School

Educated up to High Secondary  Graduate and above

2.6 Marital Status :

Married  Unmarried  Divorce  Widow

**3. Food Details of the Respondents**

<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>Lunch(Khaja)</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
Rice (Alese, Bagra, Basmati, Brrown) others)	Bhuteko Bhat ( Fried rice)/Plain Rice and Sabji and Tea (Darjelling, Temi ,Red Lable, Taj, CTC)	Rice/Dal/Sabji
Dal (Kalo,Musuri,Moong,Masyum ,Rahar, Chana ko dal) others)	Dhero/ Phapar/Gilo roti, bhuteko Makai.	Meat or Fish
Vegetables (Sibi, Iskus, Mula, Farsi, Farsi ko munta, Lawka, Bhindi, Karela, Baigun, Kopi, etc)	Local Fast foods (Momo, Thukpa, Syaphale, Chowmine, ect)	Roti ( Ashirwad, Makhan Bhog, Pillsbhari, Local Piseko Atta)
Leafy Vegetables (Rai ko sagg, Methi, Palak, Lali, Siki, Gundruk, Simrayo, Ningro, Chausar ko sagg)	Indian Fast Foods (Samosa, Kachori, Puri Sabji, AluPharatha, ect)	Boiled Vegetables and Fruits Only.
Achar (Tomato and garlic, Selam, Til, Lapsi,Bhatamas, Sidra/Sukuti, Chimping, Timbur)	Continental Fast Foods (Pizza, Pasta, Burger, Chicken Wings, Rolls, Lasagna etc)	
Meat (Chicken Boiler/ Local, Pork, Beef, Buff, Goat) Eggs.		
Fish (Katla,Raw,Ilish,Silong,Pabda, Phamplet, Bata, Prawn		
Papad/Pakora		
English Break Fast(Bread, Butter, Jam, Ham, Sausages, Fruits and Juice)		

## Section-II Question Related to Newar Food and Culture

### 1. Adults

1. Did you migrate to Sikkim? If yes, how many generations ago?
2. Have you managed to retain regular contacts with the family and relatives from Kathmandu Valley. If Yes/No why?
3. What foods are indicative of your culture? What food items are needed to prepare a traditional meal for you?
4. How many meals do you eat everyday? Who prepares the meal? What are the items in regular meals.
5. How and where is food normally consumed?
6. Do you maintain the Newari tradition of commensal dining? If no why?
7. Does the traditional caste hierarchy still exist among the Newars of Sikkim?
8. Are you aware about the Newar bhoj? Have you ever experienced it?
9. What are the food items required to organize Newars bhol? What are the important ingredients that makes those items?
10. Have the items or the ingredients of the items changed over the years?
11. Are the items prepared during bhoj too expensive? Is this the reason why people do not indulge in organizing Bhoj?
12. What is the culture significance of Buffalo in a Newar cuisine?
13. Do you have knowledge about your traditional alcohol? If yes how often do you consume it?
14. What is your personal preference the traditional alcohol or the western alcohol?
15. Are you aware about the Si rite? Do you practice it at home during Mohani? If no/yes, Why? If yes, which animal is sacrificed and do you still practice the traditional pattern of eating the sacrificed animal in a hierarchical manner or are there some alterations to the rigid system?
16. How much do you consume Newar cuisine during the life cycle rituals?
17. Are the ingredients was it available in the market? If no how do you manage?
18. How important is sagan during the purificatory rites?
19. Can you tell me something about the socio-symbolic importance of sagan for the Newar community?
20. Why is fish an important part of the sagan? Is there any specific fish which has to be solely used, what type of fish is used in Sikkim?
21. Is the concept of exchanging lakamari still prevalent among the Newars of Sikkim? If yes, Do all class group follow it?
22. What type of Newar cuisine is prepared during the marriage or do you prefer the Indo- Continental buffet?
23. What the type of food items are consumed during the death rituals, are there any specific items that is distinctive in nature?

24. What are the traditional Newar delicacies prepared in daily basis? Is the preparation process still the same or are there any substitution/ alterations done to the recipe.
25. Traditionally the Newars of Nepal Valley often consumed and offered salted Tibetan tea to their guest, Is it the same among the Sikkimese Newars?
26. What importance does these achar have in the Newar cuisine?
27. What are the different types of achar that is prepared by the community.
28. Do you fast? If yes when? And what are the food consumed and avoided during fasting days?

## **2.Youth**

1. Describe the family and the place where you grew up?
2. Do you think food defines a culture? If yes, what is the value of traditional Newar cuisine to you?
3. Do you consume Newar food in your daily basis? If yes, what are the food items? If No, explain why?
4. What was your families cultural heritage?
5. Tell us about a favorite memory of traditional food item from your childhood.
6. What do you normally eat for breakfast , lunch and dinner?
7. How often does your family eat at a restaurant or fast food outlet?
8. How often do you visit M.G marg?
9. What is your favorite hang-out place in M.G marg?
10. How has the western culture influenced your cultural habits and traditions?
11. Do you like food other countries? If yes, which cuisine do you enjoy the most.
12. Do you prefer eating your traditional cuisine for birthday parties/ weddings etc. Or the Indo- western buffet? Why?
13. What kind of beverages do you drink usually?
14. Does your family have any special traditional Newar recipe that is passed down from generations? If yes, explain.
15. Do you cook western cuisine at home? If yes, how often? And what the items that is prepared.
16. What is your opinion about the traditional Newar cuisine? Do you think it should be preserved?



### **Section III- Questions related to Guthi**

#### **Guthi**

1. What is it being a Newar?
2. Who are the members of Guthi?
3. What is the process of selecting Guthi members?
4. What is the membership fees os the Guthi members?
5. What is the main objective of the Guthi?
6. What is the organization patterns of the Guthi?
7. Why is the process of reinventing the Newar identity coming into picture after many years of migrating to Sikkim?
8. There are different types of Guthis in Nepal Valley like digu diya guthi or the lineage guthi, the si guthi for funeral rites, guthi for masked dancers. How many types of Guthi are prevalent in Sikkim? If only one, why?
9. Land gifting to the Guthis is a traditional phenomena among the Newars, is process. Was it only the affluent class groups?
10. What is the role of Newar Guthi in creating awareness among the Newars of Sikkim?
11. What are the events that has been occurred or occurring for the process of revivalism?
12. How are the community and domestic festivals organized by the Guthi?
13. Who funds these festivals like Indra Jatra?
14. what is the process of preparing Indra Jatra?
15. Is Bhoj served during the festivals? How is it organized?
16. What are the items served during the Bhoj?
17. How is it different from the traditional Newar bhoj? Is it as elaborative? If no Why?
18. How well connected is the Guthi network at village, district, subdivision level?
19. How much do you encourage the community members to cook the traditional dishes at home?
20. Has there been any kind of traditional cooking classes or food festivals that has been organized?
21. What are the activities that the Newar Guthi organizes for the community?
22. Does the Guthi take part in the welfare of Newar community in total or does it exist just for preserving the culture identity of the community.
23. As a member of the Newar Guthi what suggestions do you want to pass down to the youth?

## Appendix-II

### Field work Photographs (May - October 2019)



**Respondents from Gangtok relishing Bhoj during Dasai.**



**Respondents from Dentam sitting in a hierarchical position from the male head member to youngest and consuming Bhoj during Dasai.**



**Chatamri, a type of pan-cake  
consumed during rituals**



**Methi Ko Jhol, a cold soup  
prepared out of fenugreek seeds**



**Yomari, sweet-dumplings  
consumed during festivities**



**Chicken Pickle**





**Vegetarian Choila prepared out of Nutrela**



**Non-Vegetarian Choila prepared out of Buffalo meat**



**Chawrasi Byanjan**



**A Newar family in Dentam celebrating Bhog, by sacrificing papaya and gourd**



**Collectively distributing *Raga* meat outside the house of a respondent in Dentam on the day of asthami**





**Pulling off Religious chariot by Guthi members during Indrajaltra in Dentam**



**Preparation of Newar delicacies by the Guthi members during Indrajaltra in Gangtok**





Researcher receiving *samai baji*, the ritual food



Khe-sagan, comprising of egg, fish, garlic, ginger, meat and alcohol