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Heritage Institutions and Digital Transformation: The Case of the Nepali Guthi

Shobhit Shakya

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Declaration:
Hereby I declare that this doctoral thesis, my original investigation and achievement, submitted for the doctoral degree at Tallinn University of Technology has not been submitted for doctoral or equivalent academic degree.

Shobhit Shakya

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signature

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Pärandinstitutsioonid ja digitaalne transformatsioon: Nepali Guthi juhtum

SHOBHIT SHAKYA

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List of Publications

The list of author's publications, on the basis of which the thesis has been prepared:

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Appendix:

V **Shakya, S.,** & Drechsler, W. (2019). The Guthis: Buddhist Societal Organization for the 21st Century. In T. N. Tu (Ed.), *Buddhism around the World. United Nations Day of Vesak 2019* (pp. 501–527). Religion Publisher. **ETIS 3.2**

VI **Shakya, S.** (2021). Heritage Restoration and Traditional Community Governance in the Kathmandu Valley. In S. Gupta, K. Shreesh, S. Paudel, & N. Dorjee (Eds), *Conference Proceedings 2018: The Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal & the Himalaya.* Kathmandu: Himal Books, 146−162. **ETIS 3.4**

VII **Shakya, S.** (2022). Guthis Abroad: Newars and Continuation of the Tradition of Community Cooperation. Conference *Proceedings 2019: The Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya.* Himal Books [forthcoming]. **ETIS 3.4**

Author's Contribution to the Publications

Contribution to the co-authored papers in this thesis are:

I Paper conception, empirical research and writing of the case study report and some theoretical sections, altogether 65%.

IV Partly conceptualizing the paper, empirical research and case studies, altogether 55%.

V Paper conception and writing most of the paper with detailed guidance and several rounds of review from the co-author, altogether 75%.

Introduction

Diverse experiences, which are significantly different with the slightest of changes in context, structure our lived realities. However, globalized perspectives attempt to impose one dominant set of values and principles upon everyone, while dualistic, binary constructs of East-West or North-South divide us simultaneously, sorting us into categories. There is no one blueprint for the Globe nor even for the Global South. Our imaginations and lived experiences are all shaped by the "contextual truths", to borrow the Buddhist term "*saṁvṛti satya*", in contrast to the absolute truth or "*paramārtha satya*" (Dorji, 2020; Murti, 2008).

This thesis is a mulling over the hopefully nuanced view of one such contextual truth. It deals with an idiosyncratic case from Kathmandu and the Newars.[1] I present here an explorative study of the Guthi[2], an institution of cooperative self-governance in the Kathmandu Valley and (arguably) a typical form of a Buddhist cooperative, via the framework of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (NWPA) (Drechsler, 2013, 2015).

The inspiration for this thesis came from witnessing the failure of "developmentalism" in Nepal. The globalist pushes towards implementing systems and practices considered "developed" or to be from countries that are "developed" through concepts of aid-driven processes are something I saw up close in my country. In a country that, for the good part of the second half of the 20th century, was a playground for numerous aid agencies, the results were generally far from being successes. This is especially so when considering the generation of a higher capacity to govern for the longer term. The globalist agendas bypassing the contextual "lived realities" of the people in question have had horrendous results, on occasion even turning the local communities into "victims" (N. R. Shrestha, 1997, p. 75). Yet, the dependence on aid has continued in Nepal, a key event of which being the 2015 massive earthquake struck, affecting most parts of the country (K. D. Regmi, 2016). As many lives were lost, and the economy took a hit, there was also an unsurmountable loss to the heritages as well (**I**; **III**; Coningham et al., 2016).

Beyond the World Bank's agenda of "Good Governance", arguably a very much non-neutral policy that enforces the adoption of Western agendas on the part of developing countries, Public Administration, in practice, does not have a truly global standard (Drechsler, 2015). In contrast to the hegemonic tendencies of international agencies pushing Global-Western "off-the-shelf" policies and practices, cultural elements and contextual paradigms of PA practices have emerged as an essential topic within the PA discipline (Bice & Sullivan, 2014; Drechsler, 2013; Peters, 2021). Within social sciences in general, there have been suggestions that studies outside the Western context can provide a "corrective for theories" within academic disciplines (Spradley, 1980). Still, as ICT emerged as the dominating technological paradigm, with digital technologies becoming pervasive in all aspects of everyday life globally (Perez, 2002, 2015), having a significant impact on PA and Governance discourses, academia seemed to retain and perhaps even increase the tendency towards being fixated on the Global-Western paradigm. Scholars have brought forth concepts such as "diffusion discourse", assuming that the Global South is supposed to catch up with the Global North (Avgerou, 2008;

[1] Newars are considered to be the original inhabitants of the urban areas of Kathmandu Valley and surrounding areas with several cities, towns and villages (Gellner, 1986).

[2] I have used "Guthi" with capitalization to denote the overarching institution as such and "guthi(s)" to refer to individual organizations.

Rose, 2005). It has often been taken as an *a priori* that the adoption of digital technology will transform societies towards being more transparent, participatory and democratic. But there is no convergence of propositions towards how that will happen, with attempts only being made lately to come to a unified understanding of digital transformation (Kraus et al., 2021; Vial, 2019).

As of today, in this "digital era", Nepal is still a "Least Developed Country" (LDC) with some typical attributes of "developing" countries in regard to the governance challenges faced. The country was, from the late 1900s to the early 2000s, transitioning into "modernity" through policy reforms, political turmoil and regime changes while also adapting to economic transformations and technological advances (Gellner, 2016). The case of Nepal, especially in the context of the events that followed the 2015 earthquake, is *prima facie* worth studying from the perspective of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (NWPA). The existence of a distinctive institutional pattern inclined towards a cooperative style of local governance makes it even more relevant for studying. The Guthi, with a history of at least 1600 years (**II;** Vajracharya, 1973), exemplifies this cooperative pattern in governance practice, which is part of the heritage of Kathmandu Valley, which created the backdrop for an exciting exploratory study. Building on the Nepalese case, I studied how non-standard localized practices may generally affect governance in the Global South vis-à-vis the effects of ICT. Furthermore, the questions that my thesis contributes to providing answers to are:

- How can traditional institutions be re-interpreted in the modern context as a viable approach toward inclusive and sustainable forms of collaboration?
- How may contextually grounded approaches in public governance provide better alternatives to aid-based and "off-the-shelf" strategies in governance?
- How does ICT interplay with traditional institutions like the Guthi and possibly contribute to furthering such institutions' resilience and sustainability?

As is typical for ethnographic research, which NWPA almost invariably is, at least to some extent, the questions get clearer with more gathering and understanding of the data (Spradley, 1980). Accordingly, I have taken some advantage of retrospect in formulating the questions listed above. Though the listed research questions are not explicitly stated in the papers included in this thesis, those papers do provide answers to them.

This thesis is built on four original papers, three of which, according to the regulations of the current PhD curriculum, qualify as the core forming a thesis, and an additional three papers are included in the appendix. The scholarly investigation starts with the study of the role of the Guthi institution in the reconstruction process of heritage structures in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. Further on, it incorporates ethnographic approaches to study the Newar community, acknowledging the Guthi institution as part of their cultural heritage. The included articles show two sides of the narratives they convey. The first side tells the historical and cultural side of the Guthi, highlighting the embeddedness of the culture and identity of the people in the institution. The second side explores the institution's transformation in interchange with the effects of digitality, providing evidence of the institution's potential for contemporary governance, especially in matters of public utility. The narratives are built on the central theme of contemporary relevance, considering the historicity and the embedded Buddhist values that relate to that context.

This introduction is structured as follows: first, in Chapter 1, I dwell on the framework of NWPA and the theoretical background concerning Governance from a non-Western

perspective. Additionally, I also discuss the theoretical frames that deal with the transformative effects of ICT on institutions, i.e. genuine digital transformation. The chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings that gave the background for the research rather than being used for attempting validation of the theories, a position akin to approaches in ethnographic research (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009). Chapter 2 discusses the methodological approach undertaken in the research conducted. Chapter 3 provides a detailed background on the Guthi, building on the historical trajectory connecting to the institution's status contemporarily. Chapter 4 discusses the narratives presented in the research articles based on the research conducted. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the study outcome presented in a conceptual framework and implications for further research and practice. The thesis is capped with a short concluding chapter.

1 Non-Western Governance, ICT and Transformations

The will to progress towards a state that is supposed to be more desirable is a trait of virtually all societies. The view that change is persistent and that all states (of being) are impermanent, complementarily, is pertinent to the core beliefs of Buddhism. This is somewhat parallel to the current tendency to see progress as a necessity. Except that with the notion of progress and development, there comes the prerequisite for unidirectionality towards the better. Despite the desire to progress, whether this brings progress *markers* and the *means* to progress to convergence universally is an entirely different question (Drechsler, 2015; Inge, 1920). The global reach of digital technologies and their effects on societies in different regions across the world complicates the matter even more. Based on this thought, I will now discuss some theoretical concepts that have guided my research.

1.1 Governance from a non-Western Perspective

Even though the term governance has come to be taken as more or less a neutral term, it has to be noted that "Good governance" is a non-neutral concept which "embodies a strong value judgment in favour of the retrenchment of the State, which is supposed to yield to Business standards, principles, and – not least – interests" (Drechsler, 2004, p. 388). The concept of "Good Governance", as has been prescribed to the countries in the Global South by development agencies, reflects some of the aspects that are similar to New Public Management (Erkkilä & Piironen, 2014). But by now, NPM has theoretically fallen out of favour; it is, conceptually at least, effectively dead (Drechsler, 2005; Dunleavy et al., 2006).

With the demise of New Public Management and the West losing its ability to assert "standards" in PA and Governance, in practice, new approaches have emerged challenging the Global-Western best practices (Bice & Sullivan, 2014; Drechsler, 2015). There surely are cultural elements in PA, and the relevance of traditions in PA is by now again well accepted (Peters, 2021). However, rather than just nuances in administrative traditions, there are also "paradigms" in PA and Governance (Drechsler, 2015) which are, to a great degree, independent of the Global-Western paradigm and may not ever converge, given the following characteristics (2015, p. 106):

- *A large body of theoretical literature*
- *Centuries of practice*
- *Strong relevance today*
- *A convincing carrier country*
- *A largely non-derivative system.*

Drechsler (2015) puts forward examples of two such paradigms, namely Islamic and Confucian PA alongside Global-Western PA. He provides a conceptual model of interrelations between the Paradigms in PA and Governance (see Figure 1). According to the model, there can be the following conceptual categorizations:

> (a) is what is generally assumed to be good PA, and the contextualized second nucleus, (b) is what the more sophisticated PA research supports today (although it is not the common view), but our focus is on (c), the postulated spheres of good PA with(in) a certain paradigm each that does not work well, nor does it have to, in any other (Drechsler, 2015, p. 110).

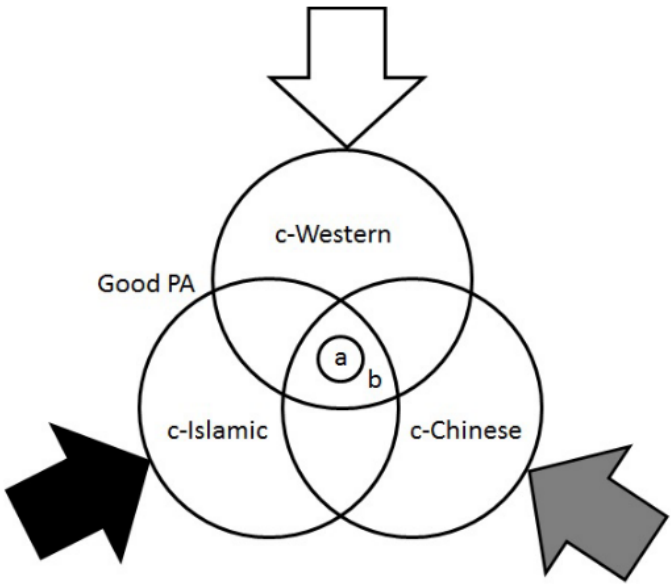

Figure 1: Three paradigms of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (Drechsler, 2015)

For non-Western contexts, there can be a possibility that there are elements in region (c) which, despite being more esoteric-seeming in nature, may work well for the particular context or may have the potential to work well.

But the study of "paradigms", or even institutions and elements that are non-standard, are not without challenges. Academic disciplines, too, tend to be culture-bound, and there are normative assumptions that take hold of theories and methods, which makes practices in non-Western PA and Governance stand at odds with those that are Global-Western. While differentiations are necessary, the constructs that turn to categorizations of world regions can be non-neutral approaches that discriminate against the "others" by looking at these countries through normative value judgements (Said, 2003). This tendency has introduced farfetched ideas, such as claiming that large regions in the non-West are "not governed" (Brass, 2012). But a thriving self-reliant community implies the existence of an effective form of governance. And to claim that societies in the Global South did not thrive at all, would be illogical.

Societies in the non-West have been noted to have "strong societies" with communities that are able to self-govern (Migdal, 1988). This contrasts the monocentric understanding of state and governance, favouring "polycentricity" (Aligica & Tarko, 2012; Nagendra & Ostrom, 2012). Joel S. Migdal (2001) argues that seeing the "ideal state" as a single coherent entity or a "compulsory association" inhibits seeing the role of society as part of either reinforcing or contradictory elements in governance. Citing examples from India and Africa, Migdal (2001, p. 20) writes that "parts or fragments of state have allied with one another and groups outside, to further their goals." These practices and alliances, he argues, "have acted to promote a variety of set of rules, often quite distinct

from those set out in the state's official laws and regulations." Describing this phenomenon Migdal states that the state should be thought of combinedly:

> (1) as the powerful image of a clearly bounded, unified organization that can be spoken of in singular terms (e. g., a headline stating, "Israel accepts Palestinian demands"), as if it were a single, centrally motivated actor performing in an integrated manner to rule a clearly defined territory; and (2) as the practices of a heap of loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings inside and outside the official state borders and often promoting conflicting sets of rules with one another and with "official" Law (Migdal, 2001, p. 22).

Given the history of colonization, most states in the Global South can be considered "new and renewed states" (Migdal, 1988, p. 11). However, no states are clean slates; legacy institutions and traditions, too, make some imprints on all states, new or renewed. Practices which are central to Migdal's assertion of what constitutes a state can exist in informal and grassroots forms and be impactful.

1.2 ICT and Institutional Transformation

The role of networks and the importance of electronic transfer of information in the organization of social life was already well discussed by the early 1970s (Craven & Wellman, 1973; Gerlach, 1973). Since then, authors in different fields of study have discussed the transformative potential of ICT (Castells, 2011; Fulk & DeSanctis, 1995; Mansell, 1994; Orlikowski, 1992).

Technologies that have shaped Techno-Economic Paradigms in the past (see Perez, 2015) can be argued not to have been as pervasive in all aspects of our lives as ICT has been. The "big bang" that it created is significantly bigger than those created by any prior technological innovations (*ibid.*). Due to the pervasiveness of ICT globally, there has been a convergence of thoughts from across regions and disciplines that ICT is a potential enabler of progressive transformation, leading to democratic participation, collaboration, and good governance (Avgerou, 2010; Falch, 2006). ICT was expected to reduce hierarchy and promote new forms of democratic practice due to its intrinsic characteristics of being distributed in architecture. However, it has, on the contrary, also produced new issues and problems (Kostakis, 2011; Mansell, 1994). Transformative effects of ICT and how it may affect institutions and societies within diverse contexts is still a learning process.

There are broadly two theoretical concepts that have been widely used by Information Systems researchers to theorize the transformative effects of ICT, namely *affordance* and *structuration* (Vyas et al., 2017). *Affordance*, which is a concept introduced by Gibson (2015), explains human perception of things and the transactional relationship human beings have with their environment. According to Gibson (2015, p. 119), "*affordances* of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill." (Gibson, 2015, p. 119). Technological artefacts become part of the environment for human beings. Gibson saw no need to differentiate the artificial artefacts from the natural ones, as he argued that the artificial is also created through natural substances (Gibson, 2015, p. 122).

The concept of *structuration*, which was introduced by Giddens (1984), concerns social structures. *Structure* per Giddens refers to "the properties allowing the 'binding' of time-space in social systems … which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them 'systemic' form" (Giddens, 1984, p. 17). He introduces the concept of "duality of structure"; he expounds that "the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practice they recursively organize" (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Based on Giddens' concept of *structuration*, Orlikowski (1992) has provided her proposition that use of technology is enacted or negotiated rather than following the "normal operational conditions". Per her view, there is an "interpretative flexibility with respect to technology" (1992, p. 421). Human agency *enacts* technology, and it gets "institutionalized in structure", which enables or constrains human action in return, thus exhibiting *duality*.

It is the framework generated by these conceptualizations that the current thesis will follow – the methodology for which being explained in the next chapter.

2 Methodological Approach

In the aftermath of the major earthquake of 2015 in Nepal, there was a chain of events which, *prima facie*, seemed relevant to the research stream of NWPA. Nepal, whose PA system is a typical example of a failed "transplantation" of the Westminster system (Patapan et al., 2005; Russell & Serban, 2021), was understandably predicted to be ill-equipped to overcome the effects of the earthquake. The worst was feared from the expected administrative failure. At the same time, this was a promising laboratory for researchers that was expected to provide many valuable learnings.[3] From the perspective of community mobilization and grassroots initiatives, there was clearly a case to be studied, especially when concerning heritage reconstruction, in which guthis – the main subject of this thesis, which will be introduced and discussed in detail shortly – were going to have a role to play. The phenomenon is surely fascinating from the perspective of NWPA.

Initially, the methodological approach was planned as a multi-case study, studying a few heritages reconstruction projects. Nevertheless, I took into consideration that flexibility would be required. For Article **I**, the case of post-earthquake heritage was approached as an intrinsic and exploratory case study with multiple sub-cases (Dumez, 2015; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Interviews and short field visits were conducted, complemented by desk research. However, after my early research, I realized that a more ethnographic approach with a more culturally grounded study involving the broader aspects of the contemporary struggles of the Newar community was needed.

The majority of studies related to Nepal have been confined to area studies concerning the Himalayan or the South Asian region. Works from anthropologists, sociologists, and historians dominate the literature. Much of my literature-based study relied on ethnohistorical accounts of the Newars and Nepal. There was a path dependency thus created for my research. I was inclined more towards approaching the study from an ethnographic mode. However, rather than studying Newar culture generally, I felt the need to set boundaries on the phenomenon being studied. The resulting methodology is most similar to that of "ethnographic case studies", which is also a well-established mode of inquiry (Harper, 1992; Walters, 2007).

I started with desk research relying on news articles, secondary literature and online materials. I also conducted field visits in March 2017, July 2018, July 2019 and March 2022 in Kathmandu and in January 2019 and February 2020 in London, where I had general conversations with several activists, guthi members and scholars as well. Some of these visits also doubled as conference participation. I further conducted 19 interviews that involved experts, activists, guthi members and government representatives and gathered a few informants from whom I could get important information. I continually followed the developments through social media and news articles and verified the reports through my informants. The later part of my research focused on digital ethnography, taking the social media spaces as the "field" (Pink et al., 2016). I relied on participation in online fora and discussion groups and employed the shadowing of key relevant individuals. Getting involved in relevant debates and issues also brought me to have exchanges with several community members, which gave me valuable insights. As usual, communication and discussion with other scholars and participation in

[3] This thought had brought in numerous research projects. There were projects involving several Western and Nepali institutions; SOAS, Heidelberg University, Arhus University and Social Science Baha, to name but a few.

conferences also helped. Moreover, my experiences as a member of a guthi, the one associated with Rudravarna Mahavihara in Patan, and being a member of the World Newah Organization provided me with direct insights into the relevant topics, adding elements of participant observation and even action research. With Rudravarna Mahavihara, I have been directly involved in a funeral guthi. With the World Newah Organization, I was involved in various of their projects, like online quizzes for youth, Google Translate of Nepalbhasa, and an online dictionary, which enabled me to talk to members from other organizations as well.

Given the idiosyncratic interest in the case, generalizability is not at the forefront of my research agenda, a not-so-unusual aspect of ethnographic studies. Positivism has largely fallen out of favour within ethnographies. However, some space is still provided for "detached objectivism and deductive reasoning" (Harrison, 2014). Cultural and contextual elements become critical to understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of those whose lives are affected by the phenomenon. We are all, in a sense, "culture-bound" or living within a specific reality, a condition that is also relevant to researchers and even whole academic disciplines (Spradley, 1980).

Though I do use the term case, the "case" in the context of my study is different to case-study approaches like that of, say, Yin (2009). Unlike case study research that aims to provide a more stringent methodological structure to studies with the primary intention of generalizability, my use of the case is limited to defining the phenomenon I study and staying within the context. This approach can also be termed "topic-oriented ethnography" (Spradley, 1980, p. 31). Yet, with ethnographies, "plausible conjectures" can be reached (Rhodes, 2014), and I have not entirely avoided such attempts. My assertion based on the findings would convey a part of the truth – more about which *infra* – which may hold when applied within a certain scope and may help guide similar research approaches or provide approximate answers.

As most ethnographies, my analysis of the phenomenon that is studied is done from an interpretivist stance. These interpretations are presented in narratives through the perspective of the people being studied, who are in this case the Newars. These narratives are a version of the truth or a "means of experience for the reader" (Denzin, 1997, p. xiv). There is an obligation to bring "morality into the discourse" (Denzin, 1997, p. 40). As such, the presentation of the research findings aligns towards "beneficence and non-maleficence" with a focus on the protection of the autonomy and dignity of all the research participants (Iphofen, 2011).

3 The Guthi

The Guthi is a type of traditional cooperative institution in Nepal mainly prominent amongst the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley. Guthis are established for specific purposes, which can range from religious activities to public utility and usually involve members from the same kinship group (Toffin, 2005). They are usually autonomous in their operation and are provided with endowments in form of agricultural land which provide the organization with the funds required for its operation (M. C. Regmi, 1968, 1977). Historical records have shown that guthis were prevalent since at least the start of the Licchavi rule in the Kathmandu Valley in the early 400s CE and were an important part of the governance structure (Hasrat, 1970; M. C. Regmi, 1977; Vajracharya, 1973). The institution was of key importance throughout the Licchavi rule, which lasted around three centuries, with the last dated inscription being from 733 CE, and there is a sort of "dark period", of which less can be ascertained (Sharma, 2015). This period, also known as the "transitional period" (Thapa, 2001), still has some scanty records showing that guthis continue to exist throughout the period, which lasts till the late 1100s. After that, more extensive historical records start in the Malla period from the early 1200s (Sharma, 2015; Petech, 1984). With the end of the Malla rule, as the Gorkhali Shahs overtook Kathmandu Valley in the late 1760s, there is a noticeable shift as more emphasis is given to guthis as a land deed instead of an association of people within historical records (M. C. Regmi, 1968). New guthis have been formed after the Malla period as well, but whether they retain their traditional form or not can be debated (M. C. Regmi, 1977). Being an institution with more than 1600 years of existence, the Guthi is part of the heritage of the people of Kathmandu Valley or the Newars. The institution has diverse functions and forms of operation.

For my study of the Guthi institution, I stand on two key assumptions: 1. It is a Newar institution, and 2. It is a Buddhist institution. This position is open to debate, given that neither are guthis limited to the Newars nor are Newars all Buddhists. But in a Weberian sense, I focus here on ideal-typicality rather than delineation, as is appropriate in the social sciences (Weber, 1978). The attempt is to look for a calibration point so as to facilitate the measurement of the similarities or deviations across comparable paradigms.[4] That guthis were primarily prevalent amongst the Newars and an important part of their way of living was already well documented as early as 1965, when Gopal Singh Nepali published his ethno-sociological study of Newars (Nepali, 2015). Being embedded into their culture, virtually all authors who have conducted anthropological or historical studies of the Newar community also have written about their guthis (see, for example, Gellner, 1992; Nepali, 2015; Sharma, 2015; Toffin, 2008). But the Buddhist emphasis is something that probably needs more clarifying, even though the importance of the Guthi amongst the Buddhist Newars has been well documented (Gellner, 1992; Lewis, 1993), as is the influence of Buddhism on the formation of the Newar identity (Gellner, 1986; Tuladhar-Douglas, 2006).

In this section, first, I provide some account of the historical background of the Guthi from the perspective of it being a Buddhist institution based on literature and scriptural references with a focus on the Licchavi period institution (400s to 700s CE). Then I provide some contextual background of the historical institution and the Newar community,

[4] In 1905, Sylvain Lévi had considered Nepal to be a microcosm that would allow for the study of South Asian history as a whole, a view not exactly prominent today, but one which influenced several studies of Newar Buddhism (Gellner, 2016).

focusing on the Malla period (the 1200s to 1760s) while also discussing the key features of the institution. Further, I provide details on its decline mainly after the start of the Shah (and Rana) period (from the late 1760s onwards).

3.1 As a Buddhist Institution

The historicity of Buddhism, especially within the Indian Sub-continent, was largely lost until rediscovered during the British Raj. The rediscovery of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (304 to 232 BCE) established the globally accepted historicity of Buddhism (Allen, 2012; Lahiri, 2015). The archaeological discoveries of several Ashokan edicts in 1895 in Nepal, followed by others both in Nepal and India in the early 1900s, helped legitimize the historical aspect of Buddhist scriptures as well as provide a special position for Ashoka in Buddhist history (*ibid.*).

Powerful monarchical systems and the role of Kings have been crucial in the Buddhist understanding of statecraft (Drechsler, 2019a). However, some powerful states in ancient India, contemporary to the Buddha Gautama (623 BCE to 543 BCE), known as *gaṇarājya*, were ruled by large clans; they have sometimes been called proto-republics (Brenner, 2007). Scriptural accounts, from which the aspects of the governance system prevalent within these states can be gleaned, provide insights into Buddhist ideas in statecraft (for an example of such an attempt, see Brenner, 2007). It has been suggested that the home state of the historical Buddha Gautama was also such a republic (Bapat, 1956). Another important and strong republic contemporary to the historical Buddha Gautama was the Vajji state ruled by the Licchavi clan (**V**; Bapat, 1956; Brenner, 2007). Scriptures state that the Vajjian republic was eventually conquered by Magadha and dissolved into the empire towards the later part of the Buddha's life. However, the Licchavi appear to continue to claim some power in ancient India until they were, according to the dominant theory, pushed out by Kushanas in the 2nd century CE (Gautam, 2019; Hasrat, 1970). Several historians have suggested that some of these Licchavi eventually migrated to the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, overthrowing the Kirat ruler.[5]

It is generally accepted that the Licchavi were important patrons of Buddhism. Chinese records from the Tang dynasty (618 to 907 CE) even claim them to have been "pure Buddhists" (Rongxi, 1996). But the influences of Vedic religion on the Licchavi are equally apparent (Gautam, 2019). Signifying how both Hinduism and Buddhism were equally prevalent in the Licchavi state, Xuanzang notes in his records of the "Western Regions" written in around the mid-600s CE that in the kingdom of "Nepāla, monasteries and deva temples are so close together that they touch each other" (Banerjee, 1972; T. Sen, 2006). The earliest accurately dated Licchavi inscription[6] from 464 CE that mentions a guthi endowment is from a Vishnu temple, Changunarayan (Maharjan & Barata, 2020). Yet, Buddhists worship the same temple as Harihariharivāhana Lokeśvara, one of the several forms of Avalokiteśvara (T. Lewis & Bajracarya, 2016). Such a blurring

[5] It has to be noted that there are conflicting claims about the lineage of the Licchavi (Hasrat, 1970; Nepal, 2019). But some historians do claim direct lineage of the Licchavi of Nepal to the Vajjian clan as plausible (Thapa, 2001; Gautam, 2019). My leaning is towards the latter, as being a rather large clan (Brenner, 2007), Licchavi lineage would not have been too rare.

[6] The one from Charumati stupa (also called *Chabahil Chaitya* or *Dhando Chaitya*) that is considered to be older cannot be accurately dated due to the inscription being partly damaged (D. Vajracharya, 1973). However, the first mention of the Sanskrit form of the word guthi itself is from 533 CE in Pashupati (M. C. Regmi, 1977).

of the boundary between Hinduism and Buddhism is not uncommon in Nepal (Gellner, 2005), but lived religions are never "pure" (see only Kaiser, 1993), and "the Holy" is universal (Otto, 1968).

Several Licchavi inscriptions mention guthi or *gausthika*[7] (**II**; **V**; D. Vajracharya, 1973). Charumati stupa, a Buddhist stupa and monastery believed to predate the Licchavi rule in Nepal (Thapa, 2001), has been recorded to utilize guthis and is argued to be the earliest remaining record of a guthi in function (D. Vajracharya, 1973). But based on most evidence provided by various inscriptions; it can be claimed that the Guthi was a Licchavi-era institution. Evidence shows that Licchavi rulers established guthis to maintain temples and monasteries and public utility activities like maintenance and cleaning of roads or maintenance of water resources (D. Vajracharya, 1973). According to Dhanavajra Vajracharya (1973, p. 287), the Guthi was historically a system meant for doing "most cooperative tasks".[8] Guthis could have been established by philanthropists or the ruling monarchs (**II; IV**).

Gellner (1992, p. 248), in his anthropological account of the Buddhist Newars in the late 20th century, has pointed out that the key principles that underline the operation of the Guthi as part of the overall Newar social structure are: seniority, rotation, and territory. Of the three, he has noted that the first two can be reduced to a single principle – equality.[9] The seniority rule, the system of rotation and compulsory participation are the foundational core of the Guthi, and the institution had highly egalitarian values that emphasized equal participation from all members within an organization. In addition, features such as having yearly assemblies (that included feasts), having external "witnesses" as part of the organizational setup (Gellner, 1992, pp. 233–234), as well as an emphasis on unanimity in making decisions, place the Guthi in a rather good light when looking at it from the perspective of having democratic ideas (**IV**).

These principles of the Guthi are coherent with the Buddhist concepts of governance depicted in the scriptures giving the respective historical contexts as well. In Buddhist scriptures, the mention of administrative styles contemporary to the time is not extensive. However, a notable mention is the *Satta Aparihāniyā Dhamma* (seven conditions of welfare) mentioned in *Digha Nikāya* of the *Sutta Pitaka*, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (Pandita, 2011). The *sutta* mentions an event in which Ajātasattu, the King of Magadha, wanted to conquer the Vajjian republic ruled by the Licchavi clan. He sends an envoy to ask advice from the Buddha on the matter, to which the Buddha dictates the seven attributes of the Vajjians, which makes them undefeatable (Brenner, 2007; Harris, 2007; Pandita, 2011; Shobhana, 2017; Walshe, 1995). The ideologies depicted in the "seven conditions of welfare" clearly bears a resemblance to the principles of the Guthi (**V**). For instance, holding frequent meetings, focusing on unity, continuity of existing practices and honouring elders are relatable to the principles of the Guthi. With a significant degree of plausibility, one can say that this is not simply a coincidence.

[7] Often also written *gosthika*. The word guthi, which is a Nepalbhasa (Newari) word, is considered to have been derived from the Sanskrit *gosthika,* while the institution is considered to be a continuation of the same (Shaha, 1990).

[8] Translated from Nepali "मिलेर गर्नुपर्ने धेरै जसो काम" (D. Vajracharya, 1973, p. 287).

[9] Equality may not apply here if one takes into consideration various contemporary Global-Western normative criteria of course.

3.2 Nepal Mandala and the Newars

Newars, in the general sense, are the indigenous inhabitants of the cities, towns and villages in and around Kathmandu Valley. Nepal Mandala has come to be a popular term used to refer to the cities and towns in and around the Kathmandu Valley.[10] Newars are not an entirely homogenous group, as the sub-groups within them claim varied ethnic origins. Among the Newars, there are several groups who entered into the valley from the Southern regions at later points, especially with the arrival of the Mallas after the 1200s, and assimilated into the Newar culture (Hasrat, 1970; Shaha, 1990; Thapa, 2001; Sharma, 2015). At the same time, groups such as the Jyapu community consider themselves to be indigenous to the valley, and other sub-groups like the Byanjankar claim to be descendants of the Kirat clan, who were ruling the Valley before the Licchavi (Gellner & Pradhan, 1995; Toffin, 2016). However, Newars have largely homogenized by now, mainly tied by their common mother tongue Nepalbhasa (also called Newari).

Going through a gradual metamorphosis through the centuries, Newar culture climaxed during the Malla period (mainly with the reign of Yakshya Malla that started in 1428 (Hasrat, 1970; Korn, 1976)) with the creation of a unique identity in art, architecture, language, trade and governance system (Nepali, 2015; Sharma, 1983). As such, the Malla period has been called the "Golden age of Newar Civilization" (Johnsen, 2020). Even though the currently most visible elements of the Newar cultural heritage are from the Malla period, on the grassroots level, Licchavi influences that continued through the Malla period and still persist cannot be underestimated. My study of the post-earthquake heritage restoration dealt with two structures that pre-dated the Mallas[11] and are considered Licchavi architecture (**I**; **II**; **V**). Furthermore, several of the key landmarks within the valley, such as monasteries, temples, water sources and other traditional structures, are from the Licchavi period (Gutschow, 1997; Korn, 1976; D. Vajracharya, 1973). With regard to the governance practices, there is a clear continuation of the Licchavi institutions in the Malla period, with the Guthi institution being the most prominent.

Under the Malla rule, the urban structures of Nepal Mandala did develop further. The three palace complexes, which are also part of the sites noted in inscribing Kathmandu Valley as a UNESCO world heritage site, are Malla-built. However, some of them were rebuilt on sites of Licchavi period structures, providing a relative continuation of the Licchavi cityscape, especially in Patan (Gutschow, 1997; Tiwari, 2007; Toffin, 1990). Mallas did introduce new elements of governance practices. Jayasthiti Malla (1382–1395 AD) introduced reforms defining the 64 occupational caste groups within Nepal Mandala (Sharma, 2015). Most historical guthis that currently survive were established during the

[10] Kathmandu Valley was the nucleus of the political and cultural sphere of Nepal. Kathmandu Valley had, for the larger part of the rule under the Malla kings, been divided into a system of three city states that had satellites in the surrounding areas. Though short of being a confederacy, the three city states could still be considered one single socio-cultural sphere for which the term *Nepal Mandala* has been used, especially since Mary Slusser (1982) used the term for the title of her book. The broader significance of the term Mandala concerns Buddhism iconography and how the layout of the cities and even the entire valley was imagined through such analogies (**II**; Gutschow, 2011; MacFadyen & Vogt, 1977; K. M. Shrestha, 2010).

[11] It is clear through the archeological study of Kasthamandap that it was a pre-Malla structure with its foundations already established by 897 CE (Coningham et al., 2016). Though the establishment date of Ashok stupa in Thamel cannot be ascertained, the architecture is believed to be Licchavi, and its establishment is claimed to be pre-Malla.

Malla period, except some like Ta Chatan Guthi from Kasthamandap, which is claimed to have been established in the late 800s CE (**V**; KC, 2016).

Though the Guthi is a Licchavi-period institution, the current remnant of the historical institution is largely the Malla-period form of it, or a transformed version of the Malla-period form.[12] But in principle, through history till contemporary times the Guthi has remained about cooperative self-governance, serving the socio-cultural and public utility needs of the Newars. I have categorized the functions of Guthi based on the works of authors who have previously provided their own typology of the institution as (**II**; **V**):

(i) Those related to governing of cities (public utility Guthis) – those concerning festivities (*jatra*), industries, music, maintaining public infrastructures like roads, *hiti*, *pati* and other activities.

(ii) Those related to the community welfare – those concerning carrying out funerals, lending money, caste councils, etc.

(iii) Purely religious rituals – those that carry out rituals and worshipping of deities (excluding jatras, which is included in the first type).

One key feature of the Guthi is the principle of self-funding and ownership of shared resources. Shared resources, such as physical structures or water sources, were kept under the care of guthis, and landholdings were also allocated to the guthis to provide a permanent source of income for the activities of the guthi (M. C. Regmi, 1968, 1977; Sharma, 2015; Tiwari, 2007; Toffin, 2005). These landholdings allocated for funding the guthis were given to tenant farmers to till, requiring them to provide a share of the yield to the guthi (M. C. Regmi, 1968, 1977; Sharma, 2015).

Another feature was the principle of continuity. A guthi was considered a permanent entity; the role of the members was passed down from generation to generation. The property of the guthi was considered to be for the benefit of the community for perpetuity and was not taxable or transferable (M. C. Regmi, 1977). Members could leave a guthi, but that was associated with social stigma, thus preventing most people from quitting their guthi. The same has been criticized and labelled as an "honour economy" (Rankin, 2003). Guthis were also male-only organizations, and women usually only had supporting roles, which were tied to the membership of their male family members. Most guthis were based on kinship and thus were based on the occupational caste groups too. Such elements have been strongly criticised for enforcing gender and caste discrimination (Rankin, 2003). However, one must consider whether this is an outdated societal norm that has left its imprint on the institution and not necessarily an institutional feature (**IV**).

The concept of territory is also key, as it is most common that caste groups from a locality form guthis associated with the neighbourhood. There are specific types of guthis that concern neighbourhoods or *tvāḥ* (also written *twa*) which govern the various matters concerning such neighbourhoods (**II**; Vergati, 1995, p. 121). The historical cities of Kathmandu Valley were divided into residential units or *tvāḥ*. These usually had community buildings known as *chapāḥ chhen* (guthi house) (see, for example, mentioned in R. Shrestha, 2021). There were usually responsibilities related to playing musical

[12] Descriptive details of the Guthi institution are either an anthropological account of the Newars, covering guthis that have continued from the Malla period (see, for example, Gellner, 1992; Toffin, 2005) or historical accounts from the Malla period (see, for example, Sharma, 2015) even though there are mentions of later guthis started by the Shah kings too (M. C. Regmi, 1968). Other studies of the guthi land tenure are not concerned with Newar Guthi institution, but tend to provide such a disclaimer (see, for example, M. C. Regmi, 1977; Upreti, 2004).

instruments, worship and rituals, which were part of the duties of such guthis (Toffin, 2021).

Many of the above-described features have been retained to this date within traditional guthis. And Newars continue to uphold their duties, even though to a lesser degree of compulsion.

3.3 Nepal's Transition towards "Modernity" and Decline of the Guthi

The initial decline of the Guthi started as early as the overtaking of the Nepal Mandala by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha in the 1760s, followed by a push toward a homogenized Hindu Nation-building (**V**, fn. 5). Prithvi Narayan Shah is widely believed to have delivered a political testament with his visions for the territories he annexed (Whelpton, 2005), but his death shortly after makes it dubious that he made a mark on the administrative system at all. His son Pratap Singh Shah passed away soon after, leaving his 2-year-old grandson on the throne, who also died at the early age of 19. Resultantly, several years of the early Shah period, heading to the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814, were headlined with military expansion, wars, and internal tussle for power (*ibid.*). As a result, the state administration was in a deteriorating condition. This can be seen from the paintings made by Henry Ambrose Oldfield when he was a doctor in the British residency between 1850 and 1863, which show most Malla-built structures being in dilapidated conditions (**V**; Dixit, 2008). As Dixit (2008) quotes Sudarshan Raj Tiwari reflecting on the paintings, "Drains had lain unattended for years; temples and *bahals* (courtyards) were falling apart; poverty, particularly at the community level, was debilitating and many *guthi* (trust) had gone as *birta* (award) to the new Gorkhali gentry." Early Shah rule of Nepal would have been a slow decay of the country's administrative institutions caused by the political transition and unstable leadership.

The situation did not improve as the *Hausmeier* Rana dynasty took power starting in the 1840s and exploited the special status of the guthi-owned lands, which per the existing laws and norms, made them tax-free and unlikely to be confiscated by the state (**IV**; M. C. Regmi, 1977). The division of the guthis into *raj* guthi and *niji* guthi was also done during the Rana regime, which is claimed to be the attempt of the Ranas to take control of the landholdings under guthi land tenure for personal benefits (Gellner, 1992; M. C. Regmi, 1977). Ranas also established new guthis, which brought malpractices and resulted in the exploitation of the tenant farmers (M. C. Regmi, 1977).

The most impactful policy changes that led to the sidelining of guthis came with the reforms introduced during the *Panchayat* regime (1960–1990), when new acts like the Guthi Sansthan Act of 1964 and the Land Reform Act of the same year were enacted (**I**; **II)**. These reforms were directed toward the "modernization" of Nepal. However, they affected the guthis negatively (**I**; **II**; **IV; VII**). Gorkhali leadership, during the Rana regime and the *Panchayat* period, acted with the intention of systemically dismantling Newar influences in Nepal. They removed Nepalbhasa and the Nepal Sambat calendar (the Newar year count and calendar based on lunar cycles) from official use (Gellner, 1986; B. G. Shrestha, 2015). The Ranas tried to establish a new trading class of citizens to challenge the Buddhist Newar influence on the trade and commerce in the country as part of the process of forging a Hindu nationalism (M. Shakya, 2014). The systemic discrimination towards the Newars and their language and culture (as is categorized in Nepal with other "indigenous" communities as *Janajati*) is something that has been well highlighted (Onta, 2006; Pradhan, 2007). My investigation has shown that this is still the general sentiment of the Newars, seeing that the government is still dominated currently

by the *Parbatiya*[13] classes. The proposed bill from 2019 concerning the Guthi institution, which was widely protested against by the Newars, can be seen as a continuation of such a partiality against them (**IV**; Toffin, 2019).

But the Guthi has endured and recently resurged, as we will see now – and it is this resurgence, scaffolded as it is by ICT, that is the focus of attention of this thesis.

[13] *Parbatiya* is the word commonly used to denote the Hindu population of the hills of Nepal, including those who came to the valley along with or after the Gorkha conquest of Nepal Mandala.

4 The Guthi today and the New Narratives

This chapter summarizes the original articles included in this thesis, along with those listed in the appendix. There are three main themes to the narratives, and I have presented them accordingly.

4.1 Disasters and Dignity

Disasters are man-made; they result from the failure to respond to the challenges that arise due to natural and man-made events, they are not the events themselves (Kelman, 2020). The earthquake of 2015 in Nepal was a disaster in many ways, or a "critical juncture". Hutt (2020) has interpreted the earthquake's aftermath as an "accelerated status quo" in describing political developments that followed. May it be as a "critical juncture" or an "accelerant", the earthquake was a major node in the history of Nepal that had several repercussions, one of which concerned heritage. Being a UNESCO World Heritage site, Kathmandu's impending failure to properly reconstruct was thought of as a disaster waiting to happen (**I**).

By 2016 already, the void left behind by the decline of the Guthi and concerns of authenticity in form and processes of heritage reconstruction started to emerge (**I**; **VII**). The government and the local community activists had disagreements regarding the reconstruction of heritage structures, such as the Rani Pokhari and Kasthamandap (**I**; **II**). Community members demanded the use of vernacular methods, including community participation following the blueprint of the guthis in the past. Activists focused on the need to involve community stakeholders in the reconstruction process. But the government unwittingly went forward with regular procurement processes for their reconstruction, drawing criticism as the use of cheap materials and lack of authenticity plagued several projects (**I**; **II**; **III; V; VI**).

Showing strong agency, Newars, in Kathmandu Valley, started to demand some form of autonomy to govern their heritage. They emphasized stakeholder and community participation, use of vernacular methods, and focusing on authenticity. The Global-Western dominant heritage discourses had given some direction to the perspective of the Newar activists (**I**). There were apparent intrinsic political interests of the Newars in this discourse, which was to a degree about taking the control back in matters of local interest, such as heritage and urban development (**II; V**). Bhaktapur, which is one of the three major cities of Kathmandu Valley, had overwhelming support from the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (*Nepal Majdoor Kishan Party,* NMKP) (**III**). The party has been a highly localized political party, with the majority of the cadres being Newars from Bhaktapur (Hachhethu, 1997). The focus of NMKP and the Bhaktapur Municipality was broadly on community participation and the use of local skills and expertise. The ideological inclination was present even before the local election in 2017, which was even more emboldened after the elections in 2017 (**III**).

Due to previous history (Kawan, 2013), the German government offered to fund the reconstruction of a few important heritage structures in Bhaktapur, and an agreement was reached (**III**). But after the local election in 2017, having won the election with a clear majority, NMKP's stance on using user committees and local skill and expertise in reconstruction, even for larger project, created a friction with the German side. The Germans wanted to use a tendering process for a few "high-ticket items", citing the scale of the projects and the need for better accountability to align with the German Financial Cooperation regulations (**III**, p. 215). Moreover, there was also disagreement

regarding the use of international consultants. Bhaktapur Municipality was insistent that they had the capacity or could develop the capacity, whereas the German side felt that this did not comply with German financial regulations. The disagreement eventually led to the Germans withdrawing from funding the projects in Bhaktapur and redirecting the funds elsewhere in Nepal.

The case of Bhaktapur coincided with an overall scepticism over the aid-driven approach being used in post-earthquake response and rehabilitation programmes. While the aid was generally welcome, many people felt that the conditions applied came along at the cost of a loss of dignity (**III**). Aid that comes with too many strings attached sets barriers for a given country or community to exercise their own culture in administrative practices, having to concur to the laws and regulations of a foreign country, thrust upon them in the name of "best practices" and "Good Governance".

For aid agencies, it is easier to justify the use of "off-the-shelf" strategies and accepted "best practices" for the disbursement of aid. The priority is more often the immediate results and accountability rather than the long-term outcome of capacity building, creating a principle-agent problem in the dynamics involving donor agencies, government and the people (**III**; Easterly, 2002; S. Shakya, 2018). The structural features of the "aid bureaucracy" often create barriers for governments, local or central, to attempt to build native capacity and empower native institutions, even with the presence of institutional practices that show potential, as in the case of Kathmandu Valley (**III**, p. 222).

But for a dignified solution, especially in situations of major natural events and the disasters that follow, governments have reasons to try to use the blueprints of native institutions like the Guthi, with principles of self-funding their activities. Native practices are close to the local culture; there are relatively fewer barriers to building capacities and utilizing local social capital through the empowerment of native practices and institutions (**III**). Even though it took time, the heritage reconstruction of Bhaktapur has been a success and arguably a benchmark for all cities in Nepal (Aryal, 2019; Suji et al., 2020), providing a direction toward how contextually grounded approaches in public governance provide better alternatives to aid-based and "off-the-shelf" strategies.

4.2 Identity, Parallels and Reinterpretations

Nepal's U-turn in the approach of heritage reconstruction, leading towards an emphasis on using vernacular methods in contrast to the aid-driven approaches employing so-called "best practices", was a phenomenon that coincided with the increased awareness of the concept of heritage amongst, mainly, the Newars. Despite the heritage of Kathmandu Valley being an integral part of the Newar identity, during the *Panchayat* regime, it was discouraged to identify them as Newar. Wolfgang Korn has stated that for his book titled *Traditional Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley*, he was not allowed to use the term "Newar architecture" (Korn, 2012). This is an additional example to the ones provided *supra* in section 3.3 of the tendency of the *Parbatiya* hegemonic government of Nepal to curtail the influence of Newar culture in the country.

With the revival of democracy in 1990 and the identity politics that eventually came into prominence, there was an increasing awareness amongst the Newars about needing to preserve their identity as well as a political impetus behind it (**II**; Brosius & Michaels, 2020; Ismail & Shah, 2015; Johnsen, 2020). The Maoists had pushed forward the idea of identity-based federalization of the state to bring the ethnic minorities, including the

Newars, to their side. With the 10-year civil war ending, the Maoist and identity politics entered mainstream democratic politics in Nepal (**V**; Ismail & Shah, 2015). As a result, the concept of heritage converged with Newar identity politics, thus starting the "heritage movement" in Kathmandu Valley (**II**; **IV**; **V**).

The Guthi protests of 2019 climaxed with one of the biggest but yet peaceful public demonstrations, taking place in Kathmandu on 19 June (**IV**; Khadgi & Pokhrel, 2019; Satyal, 2019; Sunuwar, 2019). The event can be taken as the defining moment of the ongoing "heritage movement" (**IV**). The movement enabled the resurgence reaffirmation of the importance of the Guthi within the heritage discourse and became an integral part of the continued struggle of the Newars to preserve their cultural identity. Coming from the *Nepalbhasa Andolan* (Nepalbhasa Language Movement) of the past (Gellner, 1986; B. G. Shrestha, 2007; S. Vajracharya, 2014), which saw the Newar language as a key element of the Newar identity, the concept of heritage expanded the scope of the Newar struggle for their identity.

There is, again, clearly the influence of the Global-Western discourses, and the "social turn" as part of it, that has affected the "heritage movement" in Nepal (**I**). Beyond that, there are internal political dynamics in Nepal that have shaped the "heritage movement" (**II**). Furthermore, the pre-existing traditional institutions and practices, primarily the Guthi and cultural imprints of the same, are important factors too. Even though the phenomenon is highly localized with very contextual elements to it, parallels can be drawn, and reinterpretations can be made, bringing in possible hybrid models (**I**). It is convenient to see heritage from the lens of the "commons", which is already an emergent view within the field of heritage management (Alonso Gonzalez, 2014; Lekakis, 2018; Zhang, 2010). Drawing parallels from the concepts of "commoning" and reinterpreting the Newar traditional approach to community participation, there can be better practicability. The literature on the commons and its governance (Berge & Laerhoven, 2011; Ostrom, 1990) and production based on the concept of the commons (Bauwens et al., 2019; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006; Kostakis et al., 2015; Pazaitis & Drechsler, 2021) is already well formed, and my research has shown that these can clearly be applied within the Nepali context (**I**). At the same time my study of the heritage movement in Nepal gives some fresh perspectives, as the existence of autonomously governed community cooperatives that oversee the maintenance of heritage artefacts is something not very common.

Reinterpretations are not necessarily confined to institutions and conceptual constructs but may also apply to material artefacts. On the reverse side, it is also true that the material aspects form parts of the overall institution. Architecture, infrastructure planning, and physical setups have cultural elements embedded in them, and they facilitate certain collective or individual behaviours in opposition to others (Humphrey, 2005). The Guthi, having been associated with urban spatial planning of the historical cities of the Kathmandu Valley, is part of the Heritage of Kathmandu Valley as are the numerous historical monuments and sites. Similarly, the interpretation of the structures themselves also demonstrate the values and principles embedded into the Newar community's societal fabric (**II**). An interesting fact to know is that the planning and administrative divisions of the towns of Kathmandu Valley were done using religious symbols, thus showing the native ideological imprint on the urban planning and physical structures within the historical towns (**II**; Gutschow, 2011; MacFadyen & Vogt, 1977; K. M. Shrestha, 2010).

Open public structures and spaces such as courtyards, *phalcha* (resting platforms also called *pati*), *sattal* (almshouse or rest house), and *hiti* (traditional water sources with sunken courtyards with taps with flowing groundwater) (**II**; Tiwari, 2007), which are open public spaces, shed additional light on the institutional imprint on the physical structures. These structures historically and contemporarily facilitate communal life involving meetings, events and general conversations, activities that would be complimentary to a democratic way of life. There is a parallel here with the concept of "third places" (Oldenburg, 1997; Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), which is claimed to be significant for the "empowerment of community ties, the establishment of a sense of place, civic engagement and, therefore, democracy." (Niaros et al., 2017, p. 1145).

The new aspirations of "development" in Nepal that favour mega-constructions, however, have created frictions, as they go against the traditional lives of the Newars. The unruly urban development plans have threatened not just loss of guthi-owned lands (for example in Khokana, see **II;** Timsina et al., 2022) but even the traditional way of life. Resultantly, in an "awakening", Newars have realized where their best interests lie (**II**). It is this "awakening" that has fuelled the resurgence of the "Guthi spirit" (the spirit of community) and an emphasis on participation in governance, as well as the urgency felt to preserve the Guthi itself too (Maharjan & Barata, 2020). Amongst the Newar "heritage activists", "development" and "modernization" has been reinterpreted to have a negative connotation, and traditionality and heritage has become trendy. And it cannot be overemphasized that especially this favouring of traditionality is primarily coming from the youth.

4.3 ICT Synergies

The Guthi and the grassroots activities amongst the Newars are suitable to be looked at from the perspective of being participatory and "democratic". After all, features of the Guthi adhere to democratic principles (Gellner, 1992). ICT had a major role to play in the "heritage movement" (**IV**). There was seemingly a synergy formed between ICT and institutional features of the Guthi.

ICT, and especially the communications aspect, was clearly showing itself to be an important element in the phenomenon that was unfolding (**IV**; **V; VII**). Social media, mass communication and online deliberations on heritage issues were shaping a new generation of activists (**II**; **IV; V**). The Guthi Protests of 2019 (Khadgi & Pokhrel, 2019; Sunuwar, 2019) were largely coordinated through the use of ICT (**IV**). Social media and the internet became the catalyst for the events, which led to the massive demonstration that took place on 19 June.

The role of ICT was not limited to activism. Newars, who are culturally inclined towards having expansive social networks owing to involvements in guthis, are seemingly adaptive to technologies that enable communal activities. My study shows that not just activists, but guthi members in general are utilizing ICT and social media for their own benefit in their own different ways (**IV**). Traditional guthis, such as Bishnudevi Guthi and Upakarma Guthi from Patan, are using SMS, Facebook and Viber as a means of information dissemination to their members (**IV**). Guthi members are promoting cultural extravaganzas, such as the chariot pulling festival of the deity Bunga Dyo in Patan, through social media (**IV**). Guthis or user committees involved in the reconstruction of heritages were using social media for better transparency, documenting their work and even displaying the financial data publicly (**II**; **IV**; **V**).

A rejuvenation of the Guthi through ICT can be claimed based on clear signs that the historical guthis have incorporated the use of ICT in their operations. But clearer signs of rejuvenation are evident when taking into consideration the organizations that have formed out of the evolution of the Guthi institution leveraging on ICT, producing newer iteration of the institution which are not exactly like, but not too different from, the traditional guthis. These new iterations have been propelled by the contextual dynamics and the synergies created with ICT. As presented in article **IV**, it can be seen that three types of Guthi have emerged in parallel to the historical guthis: **quasi-guthis, neo-guthis, and sub-guthis**.

Quasi-guthis have emerged as the results of the discriminatory legal framework that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish new guthis. Thus, several new organizations have been established with a Guthi purpose but registered as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with some keeping the "guthi" name. Though quasi-guthis do not have features of the Guthi, based on their functions they resemble the guthis. They extensively use ICT, and their ICT-based activities range from virtual meetings and seminars as well as conducting language classes to posting notifications or announcements and even developing ICT-based solutions.

Neo-guthis are new socio-economic organizations that are present mostly amongst the migrant Newar communities living abroad or in different places within Nepal. Newars, having a highly communal way of living, tend to appreciate community engagement, and they tend to establish new community organizations, which usually also bear the "guthi" name (**IV**; **VII**). This tendency is similar amongst Newars who have migrated to new places within Nepal too. As neo-guthis have the tendency to have members who are largely geographically dispersed, they are dependent on extensive use of ICT means for their operation.

Sub-guthis are committees formed by members of traditional guthi that are registered with the local authorities so as to establish a legal basis for working with the local government. For example, Upakarma Guthi from Patan has a committee registered at the city office, which has members coming from amongst the guthi members (**V**). Having the committee allows the guthis to be funded by the city office for some of their activities when needed.

These newer iterations of the Guthi are largely ICT-based. Table 1 summarizes how the different iterations of the Guthi are utilizing ICT for their tasks.

*Table 1: Typology of organizations that form the contemporary Guthi (Source: article **V**)*

	Description	Social character	Role of ICT	Key ICT Tools used
Ancient Guthi		Traditional, mirroring Newar culture rather than challenging it	Internal communication; advertising	• SMS • messaging apps • social media
Quasi-Guthi	New Nepali orgs, which are contemporary iterations of the Guthi principle	Less but still traditional	More ICT-based	• SMS, messaging apps, and social media • online conferencing • video and multimedia • creation of font faces
Neo-Guthi	New guthis, also in name, were founded abroad (or outside the Kathmandu Valley) for the diaspora	Places of reflected, "progressive" transformation	Often primarily ICT-based	• Online conferencing • Contributing to Google Translate • cloud storage, social media • animation tools • video and multimedia software • capable of self-developing ICT solutions
Sub-Guthi	Orgs related to ancient Guthi in order to operate better in today's Nepal	More pragmatic and technical	Using ICT also for communication with the government and especially for transparency	• SMS • social media • word processing and spreadsheets

What one sees if one just looks at the ancient guthis is arguably less than half the picture in this respect. As discussed prior (section 3.2), some features of the traditional guthis are not aligned with Global-Western normative priorities, like gender equality and being anti-caste, making ancient guthis open to criticism. But with the newer iterations, such matters seem not to affect the membership of guthis (**IV**).

There is a variety of ways in which the Guthi has been conceptualized. For those who look at the Guthi from a land-tenure perspective, the emphasis might be on the endowments. From other perspectives, there can be an emphasis on the religious and ritualistic aspects of guthis (Toffin, 2021). For my thesis, which treats Guthi as an institution of Newar cooperative self-governance, it is the cooperative action that remains at the core of what the Guthi signifies; this adheres to the definition given by Dhanavajra Vajracharya (1973), who claimed that the Guthi is a system intended for doing "most cooperative tasks" or "मिलेर गर्नुपर्ने धेरै जसो काम". As such, even though they are different from historical guthis, the new iterations are still part of the overarching Guthi institution. The Newars have used ICT as a means to their needs, fitting it into their context, and ICT has, in turn, become "institutionalized in structure" in a process that concurs with the notion of Orlikowski's concept of "enactment" (Orlikowski, 1992). The new iterations are transformations of the Guthi institution, aided by ICT – a true digital transformation. With these new iterations, the Guthi shows prospects of better sustainability and resilience in the changed context.

5 Reflections and Implications

5.1 Three Spheres of "non-Westernization"

The case of the Guthi has unveiled a somewhat paradoxical process in how native institutions transform under Global-Western influences, either as technological means or parallels in concepts and reinterpretations. While the institution has moved closer to Global-Western normative priorities with the new iterations that emerged, with ICT acting as a catalyst, at the same time ICT has also enabled a move towards more traditionality.

By the mid-18th century, there was a rapid "Westernization" of the world. This only increased in the 20th century as non-Western countries were swept away by the progress that the West was making technologically, economically and in various other spheres. Countries like Nepal were swayed by the wave of developmentalism that followed the dismantling of traditional practices and institutions. However, by the early 2000s, in the context of increased resentment towards the colonial pasts and a decreased impact of the West influencing other cultures, there is undoubtedly an ongoing process of moving away from seeing the West as the hallmark of success in virtually all sectors. One can argue that the West is still "ahead" overall, but the influence level of the West is undoubtedly diminishing (Mahbubani, 2016). Beyond this trajectory, which is simplified with an aggregate view, it can be argued that no process is linear and that there are regressions and progressions in all processes, at micro and *meso* levels. As such, if there was a process of "Westernization", in a nuanced view, there always was and currently, even more, is a process of "non-Westernization" that, reflecting back on the framework of NWPA, results in the non-convergence of non-Western Paradigms with the Global-Western paradigm.

This process of "non-Westernization" may or may not be a conscious process in policy trajectories. In Nepal, there was the element of spontaneity. There were deliberate steps as a result of strong agency as well, such as the case of heritage reconstruction in Bhaktapur has shown. Yet, the Bhaktapur model, which has become the hallmark of local governments in Nepal, was only possible due to contextual elements such as the strong support of the Nepal Labourers' and Peasants' Party and the demography of the city (**III**). The historical trajectory is undoubtedly relevant, as the study has shown so far. But that there is a role for choice and strategic planning is clear as well. There are several layers to the narratives of the Guthi and Newar struggle for self-governance that I hope to have presented *supra.* However, for conceptualization and for heuristic purposes only, not claiming finality but only an on-the-go working-hypothetical functionality, the process of "non-Westernization", as synthesized through my study, can be divided into three spheres: **1. Ornamental, 2. Instrumental, and 3. Persistent.**

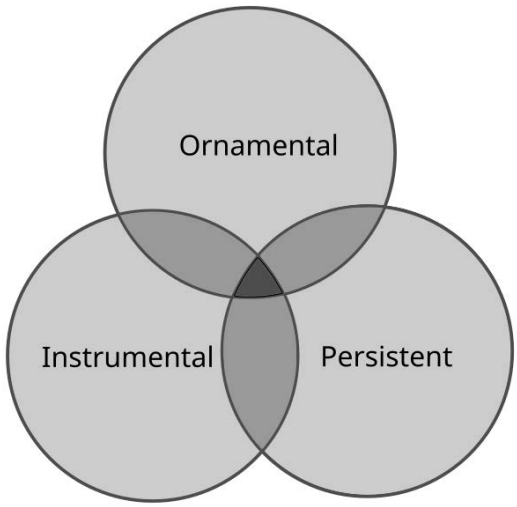

Figure 2: Three spheres of "non-Westernization" (author's own conceptualization)

The **Ornamental** sphere of "non-Westernization" concerns the cultural aspects that are peripheral to PA, but still affect PA and the outlook on it to some extent. These include things like the dress code for civil servants. Despite being unimportant for the actual working of the Civil Service, these do become relevant for the overall image of the Civil Service. Heritage reconstruction projects included such ornamental considerations towards using traditional elements. An emphasis was put on the ritual elements of reconstructing religious structures. A specific ritual known as *chyama puja* (forgiveness ritual) is often part of the reconstruction of religious monuments (see Welton-Mitchell et al., 2016). Even when reconstruction takes place through the lowest bidding processes under the call of the city offices, it is usually so that such rituals are conducted at the expense of the city office itself. This even goes beyond religious structures, and organizing some rituals by means of funds coming from the local administrative units like ward offices or city offices is very common.

The **Instrumental** sphere concerns the deliberate inclusion of specific traditional elements into the contemporary PA apparatus, which is intended for a specific outcome. Such elements can be processes, organizational structures or even elements that otherwise seem ornamental but would result in being critically important to the success of achieving a goal. Community participation through user committees was instrumental in the success of most heritage reconstruction in Nepal. May it be for the reason that state mechanisms had flaws or that the community was demanding participation as a stakeholder, without community participation, several projects were unlikely to have succeeded. Though user committees are not exactly guthis, they are Guthi-like in the principle of community participation. Moreover, taking into consideration the new iterations of the Guthi that have emerged, some of these are organizations that are part of the overarching institution. Many of the user committees are indeed sub-guthis per the typology provided in article **IV**. This is the employment of a means that exploits the principles deeply embedded into the culture and would result in approval from the community stakeholders, overcoming barriers that would have otherwise been raised due to non-cooperation. This is consistent with what Migdal has suggested in his

conceptualization of the state-society relationship (Migdal, 1988, 2001). Such choices in "non-Westernization" ensure a better possibility of achieving the set goals.

The **Persistent** sphere concerns resilient institutions and elements deeply embedded into the social fabric, which cannot be easily detached from within a cultural context. From a broader perspective, the case of the Guthi shows that the traditional institution is extremely resilient; this was well proved by the Guthi Protests of 2019, when the institution that outsiders considered to be dead produced a challenge to the government, which resulted in the government having to back down from its intentions. Moreover, with the transformed format of the institution that has leveraged on ICT while also creating footprints amongst communities in foreign countries, there is a fluidity to the nature of the institution, which cannot be decoupled from the Newar way of life. While there is a lack of rigidity and not all features get retained, the institutional blueprint of community actions tends to stick to the Newar way of life. These elements can be an inertial force for some actions, while for others, it can be a hurdle, especially if the actions do not adhere to the cultural elements that are persistent. As a result, such elements retain an informal or semi-formal form but continue to be relevant for the overall governing of matters that are relevant to the community.

As can be seen in the case of Nepal, the three spheres discussed above exist concurrently. The interplay between these three spheres never adheres to a predictable trajectory, given that there are far too many variables that come into play. May it be internal socio-political dynamics, historical trajectories of institutions or externalities, the interplay between these three spheres happens in a complex entanglement of causations through a two-sided inertial impetus. Choice and individual or collective agency interplay within a "structuration" process of the society (Giddens, 1984), and the target remains a constantly moving one. The equation grows more complex, given that in addition to the process of "non-Westernization", there is also a constant reverse process of "Westernization", which happens in all three spheres too. Given the past of the West's absolute global dominance, the inertial remains of that thrust still exist, and whether it be ornamentally, instrumentally, or continually, there is the counter-process of "Westernization" that does not cease to exist. As discussed in article **IV**, there is the tendency of the Guthi to move towards Global-Western normative priorities, and there is a reasonable basis to believe that such transformative processes, through the influences of externalities such as digital technologies or changes in normative values, will continue to influence the Guthi.

5.2 Different Songs, Differently Strung: the "Middle path" Doctrine and NWPA

As I have formulated in the previous subsection, the processes of "non-Westernization" are important with implications in PA as an academic discipline and also in practice. The complexities that come with path dependencies, externalities and critical events that set the dynamic between the three spheres discussed above result in challenges for any sort of generalization. How the three spheres, as conceptualized above, interplay cannot be ascertained. Thus, in practice, a need for a pragmatic approach is clearly apparent.

And while Pragmatism as a philosophical school is very distinct from its everyday usage, as well as the one in PA, the combination of the former and the latter has been classically posited by Shields (Shields, 1996; Shields et al., 2018) in a way constructively applicable to what I want to argue in this thesis. Classical pragmatists arguably focus on

the need for considering, while conceptualizing any object, the "practical bearings" or consequences of the conceptualization of the object (Bernstein, 1992; Putnam, 1995). Practical implications or "bearings" of actions are integral to the conceptualization of any object. As Putnam writes, explaining the works of Peirce, "there can be no difference in conceptions where there is no difference in the sensible effects that we suppose would obtain if one or the other of those conceptions were to be correct" (Putnam, 1995, p. 292). The practical implications depend on the "approximation of truth" rather than absolute truth. Per pragmatism, knowledge is held by a "community of inquiry" (Putnam, 1995; Shields, 2003). As Shields (2003, p. 511) mentions, "the community of inquiry is an ideal position to which public administrators should strive." According to her, "community of inquiry" is an "organizing principle"; she gives the example of the Buddhist story of the three blind men describing an elephant, adding that if the three blind men were to cooperate and deliberate to decide what the truth was, they would be able to come to a "truer sense of the elephant" (2003, pp. 512–513). The "community of inquiry" thus enables reaching a better "approximation of the truth". Shields posits that "public administration decisions that use a scientific attitude are not perfect (or truth). They are just the best available (at the time) and are subject to revision." The approximation of truth that pragmatism adheres to has a clear resemblance to concepts in Buddhism, where truth can be either *paramārtha satya* (ultimate truth) or *saṁvṛti satya* (contextual truth), as I put forth at the very beginning of this thesis (see Murti, 2008). As such, for pragmatists as well as practising Buddhists, the truth is experiential and based on our beliefs (Adorjan & Kelly, 2008; Peirce, 1905).

Pragmatism and the concepts of "approximation of truth" are relevant in formulating the implications of my thesis. My study takes an interpretive stance and adopts the perspective of the Newars, of which I am one, too, detailing their priorities and their best interest concerning their own affairs. But I do have to acknowledge that Newars are a minority even now in the Kathmandu Valley and an even smaller minority within the whole of Nepal. When I was at a conference in SOAS in January 2019, in a round table discussion after my panel, a fellow researcher mentioned that underrepresented voices from other communities in Nepal, whose heritage has not been adequately studied, should be "amplified". If I did not misunderstand him, he implied that Newar heritage had been overstudied, at least by now. There is some truth to it, and when discussing cases that favour one cultural group, there will always be another group that will contest that; however, on the political-governmental level that is the context for power and coaction, Newars remain suppressed in contemporary Nepal. Still, my assertion that this study of the Guthi institution is relevant for the whole of Nepal or the Global South in general needs some elucidation.

One argument can easily be that within the framework of NWPA, the case of the Guthi is a typical one for Buddhist Governance and Economics, and similar institutions within the Buddhist sphere of influence can be studied and compared – something that is of particular interest in the NWPA context, given the imbalance of global interest in Buddhism and the lack of concrete cases (Drechsler, 2016; Drechsler, 2019b). This can be expounded further. My positioning can be explained through a popular Buddhist analogy used to explain the "middle path" doctrine.

The doctrine of *majjhimāpaṭipadā* or the "middle path" (mentioned in the Buddha's first sermon *Dhammacakkappavattana Sūtta*, which is included in the Pali canon's *Sūtta Pitaka*, *Samyutta Nikāya*, 56:11) has been explained within Buddhist scriptures and commentaries. One is that the "middle path" is "the avoidance of both the dogmatism of

realism (the reality of objects) and the scepticism of Nihilism (the rejection of objects and consciousness both as unreal)" (Murti, 2008). However, there is also the aspect of the "middle path" being a pragmatic methodological principle (Lysenko, 2007). Easier yet is the analogy of the "lute string", which comes directly from the earliest scriptures. A lute or any string instrument cannot be played if the strings are too tight or too slack (Lysenko, 2007). If too tight, the string will break, and if too slack, there will not be a sound.

As a string, structures within a society are at any given time and space stretched from two ends, the externalities on one end and the inertial tendencies of pre-existing trajectories on the other. In this case, contemporary necessities, pressures from foreign agencies and Global-Western normative priorities (like gender equality, anti-caste discrimination policies, transparency etc.) and resilient traditional institutions continue to have an imprint on the society. If too much tension is created, there is dysfunctionality, while not having any tension at all means that society cannot adapt, grow and change where necessary, as change is supposed to create some tension, and not having change means an absence of improvement and even, perhaps, development.

There can be multiple strings in a string instrument, and how each of the strings is tuned depends on the song being played. Each context is a different piece, and there is the need for variations, but there is also an approximation of truth – standard ways of tuning a string instrument and common knowledge of the ideal tension of the string. Paradigms in NWPA can be taken to be approximations of the truth, where various theories coming from different disciplines apply contextually.[14] What the best practices are and what works shift as contextual variables change as well. But as my research has shown, some broader theories provide elements of predictability of the trajectory within a given scope which distinct paradigms provide. As I approached my study through the use of the NWPA framework, I conceptualized the Guthi as a Buddhist institution relevant to a Buddhist paradigm in PA, where some of the learning from my study can be compared and utilized. There are similarities in other cases from the Buddhist part of the world, which likely provide spaces for some comparative studies (see, for example, Boonjubun et al., 2021). While such comparative studies are well outside the scope of the current study, I would submit that such studies can be approached by taking my study as a calibration point or an ideal-typical example. My study, staying within the Buddhist paradigm, hopefully remains relevant for the relative generalization and implementation of the generated ideas in practice.

[14] According to Shields (1996), "using pragmatic logic, one would not expect a unifying PA theory" but rather practice of PA should be organized around the principle that "theories are useful and theories are useful and should be judged by their usefulness in solving problem" (p. 399).

6 Conclusions

> "If it isn't good, let it die. If it doesn't die, make it good."
> — Ajahn Chah (as quoted by Ñāṇiko, 2015)

In presenting the idiosyncratic case of the Guthi of Nepal, this thesis has sought to present how non-standard localized practices may positively affect governance in the Global South, especially vis-à-vis the effects of ICT. The study, as presented, framed via the concept of the paradigms in Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (NWPA), clearly has some typical Buddhist elements, similar to other cases that come from other Buddhist countries (see, for example, Boonjubun et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the study does not come from a Buddhist country but rather from a country where there has historically been systemic discrimination against Buddhism, which speaks for the institution's resilience.

As I have presented it, resilience comes forth as a prominent theme of my research, although originally, this was not the main reason for undertaking it. Having been able to survive intact as a distinct institution of cooperative self-governance through the centuries, tested by time and unfavourable governmental policies, and having been able to adapt to new changes, it is a fair claim to say that the institution exhibits resilience. Though the institution itself has significantly evolved, probably never more so than through the use of ICT, as I have shown – a genuine digital transformation – the Guthi has remained relevant and seemingly resuscitated through ICT and propelled by events of natural calamities and other circumstances.

To use Migdal's (1988) *Alice* analogy of "Humpty Dumpty", despite the continual side-lining of the Guthi, it can be said that "Humpty Dumpty" never truly fell off the wall to begin with. Remnants of the Malla state, in the form of institutional blueprints, have survived, embedded in the social fabric of the Newars. The Guthi and the Newar way of cooperative self-governing were never fully dismantled. Many traditional institutions, having been intertwined with the local culture and way of life, are never entirely removed, and they possess the capacity to bounce back, either benefiting the goals of the state if they align with the culture, or creating hurdles if not.

As the famous quote from Ajahn Chah that serves as the motto for this section suggests, if something does not die, one has to learn to live with it, try to make it better, reaching a harmonious balance. The concept of good in the quote connotates acceptance. The quote, which is instructive for meditation and mindful living, is about thoughts and habits (Ñāṇiko, 2015). In a process of meditation, one is supposed to let thoughts and habits that are not good die and not feed them. But if such thoughts or habits do not die, one has to come to terms with them – make them good. But if already good, there is no problem anyway.

The idea of feeding thoughts and habits, if one thinks about it, applies to institutions and practices too – within the study of NWPA and the various non-standard traditional governance practices that this or similar study deals with. Institutions and practices that stay resilient and do not die are worth the attempt to improve and let evolve. At the same time new externalities, such as those that technologies bring, like ICT in this case, also create new dynamics. These elements play a part in producing structures too, thus constraining some actions while enabling others, as Giddens' (1984) propositions suggest.

Thus, societies have tendencies to function well in specific ways and fail in some other ways, given a distinct outlook on how best they are governed. All things being impermanent, as the Buddhist doctrine of *anicca* suggests (Walshe, 1995), change is inevitable, and values, practices and institutions all go through the course of change, may it be more toward Global-Western normative assumptions or away from them, or both at the same time. But the importance is to internalize these aspects of change and continuity. I have stated *supra* (section 1.1) that states are never a clean slate; elements of continuity are always present, which are relevant for the study and practice of PA and Governance. Be it with the existence of distinct institutions, as in the case of Nepal, or without such a background but only other persistent traditional elements, there is a likeliness that the implications for PA and Governance will be similar if not the same. Thus, in the end my thesis asserts that PA and Governance, within the context of the non-Western regions, should be approached addressing native institutions, values and elements.

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Abstract

Heritage Institutions and Digital Transformation: The case of the Nepali Guthi

The failure of globalist pushes towards "modernization" through the transfer of Western practices in PA and governance using aid-driven means has led to accepting that there is no one single best practice in PA for the world. Yet, the pressures from globalization and the all-pervasiveness of digital technologies continued to influence policies in the Global South. Nepal was from the late 1900s to the early 2000s transitioning to "modernity" through policy reforms, political turmoil and regime changes, while also adapting to economic transformations and technological advances. Between all this, a major earthquake that devastated the country in 2015 also sparked some interesting questions as challenges to heritage governance and community ownership of heritage surfaced alongside the question of the native cooperative governance institution associated with heritage in the Kathmandu Valley. Against the backdrop of this case, using the framework of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (NWPA), this thesis tries to contribute to answering the question of how non-standard localized practices may generally affect governance in the Global South vis-à-vis the effects of ICT. The thesis is guided by some additional theoretical concepts such as Migdal's "State in Society" concept, affordance, structuration and enactment of technology.

The thesis dwells on the explorative study of the Guthi, an institution of cooperative self-governance among the Newars in Kathmandu Valley and an (arguably) typical form of a Buddhist cooperative. The study showed that traditional practices in organizing and governing that have continued for centuries have some intrinsic value despite the forces of globalization. Three themes emerged from the study. The first theme, questioned the dignity of the local communities in having to restrict themselves in adopting aid and the conditions that come with them. While donors emphasize the use of the so-called "best practices", there are restrictions to the use of native practices, which have the potential for generative native capacities. The second theme focuses on the parallels and reinterpretations. In the Nepali case studied here, parallel concepts coming from Global-Western discourses, such as heritage, commons and community participation, have been internalized by the local communities and reinterpreted as suited for their context. More yet, "modernization" and "development" has come to be reinterpreted to have a negative connotation while traditionality has become trendy. Thirdly, ICT has formed a synergy with the Guthi institution, with the Newar guthi members adopting the use of ICT for the purposes, which has not only rejuvenated the institution but also transformed it producing new iterations of the institution – a truly digital transformation.

A paradoxical process exists with the transformation of the Guthi. At the same time, the traditional institution transformed toward Global-Western normative priorities, and there is traditionality that has been ushered in by ICT. This non-linear process of "non-Westernization" has a complex interplay within three overlapping spheres – 1. Ornamental, 2. Instrumental, and 3. Persistent. This complex interplay calls for a pragmatic approach to undertaking governance in the non-West in practice.

Lühikokkuvõte

Pärandinstitutsioonid ja digitaalne transformatsioon: Nepali Guthi juhtum

Kuna globalistlikud “moderniseerimispüüdlused” läänelike avaliku halduse ja valitsemise tavade juurutamisel abipõhiste vahendite kaudu ei ole olnud edukad, on jõutud tõdemuseni, et ei ole olemas ühte ja ainust avaliku halduse parimat tava, mida saaks rakendada kogu maailmas. Sellegipoolest mõjutavad globaliseerumise surve ja digitaalsete tehnoloogiate laiaulatuslikkus jätkuvalt poliitikat maailma lõunapoolsetes riikides. 20. sajandi lõpuaastate ja 21. sajandi alguse Nepal oli üleminekuühiskond, kus läbi poliitiliste reformide, poliitiliste rahutuste ja režiimimuutuste püüeldi “modernsuse” poole, kohanedes samal ajal ka majanduslike muutuste ja tehnoloogiliste arengutega. Lisaks sellele laastas riiki 2015. aastal ulatuslik maavärin, mille järelmõjuna kerkisid esile mõningad huvitavad küsimused seoses pärandvalitsemise ja pärandi kogukondliku omandiõigusega kõrvuti Katmandu oru pärandilise kogukondliku haldusinstitutsiooni küsimusega. Selle juhtumi valguses ning toetudes läänevälise avaliku halduse ja valitsemise raamistikule (*Non-Western Public Administration and Governance*, NWPA) püütakse doktoritööga vastata küsimusele, kuidas mittestandardsed kohalikud tavad võivad valitsemist maailma lõunapoolkeral mõjutada IKT-ga kaasnevate mõjude kontekstis. Doktoritöös juhindutakse ka mõningatest täiendavatest teoreetilistest kontseptsioonidest, sh Migdali idee riigist ühiskonnas (*state-in-society*), tehnoloogia sobimus (*affordance*), struktureerimine ja rakendamine (*enactment*).

Käesolev doktoritöö on eksploratiivne uuring, käsitledes *guthi* süsteemi, mis on Katmandu oruga seotud newari rahva kogukondlik omavalitsuslik institutsioon ja budistliku kooperatiivi (väidetavalt) tüüpiline vorm. Uuring näitas, et traditsioonilistel organiseerimis- ja valitsemistavadel, mis on kestnud sajandeid, on vaatamata globaliseerumisele teatud olemuslik väärtus. Uuringus kerkisid esile kolm teemat. Esiteks keskenduti kohalike kogukondade väärikuse säilimisele, kui nad peavad abi vastuvõtmisel end piirama ja arvestama sellega kaasnevaid tingimusi. Kui toetajad rõhutavad nn parimate tavade kasutamist, siis kohalike tavade kasutamisele on kehtestatud piirangud, millega kaasneb potentsiaal generatiivsete tavade tekkeks. Teine teema keskendub paralleelidele ja ümbertõlgendustele. Käesoleva Nepali juhtumi puhul on kohalikud kogukonnad omaks võtnud globaalsest-läänelikust diskursusest pärinevad paralleelsed mõisted, nagu pärand, ühisvara ja kogukonna osalus, ning tõlgendanud neid ümber vastavalt kohalikule kontekstile. Lisaks on mõisted “moderniseerimine” ja “areng” omandanud negatiivse varjundi, samas kui traditsioonilisus on muutunud trendikaks. Kolmandaks on IKT ja *guthi* institutsiooni vahel tekkinud sünergia. Newari rahvas *guthi* liikmetena on võtnud IKT-lahendused oma eesmärkidel kasutusele, mis ei ole institutsiooni mitte ainult noorendanud, vaid seda ka muutnud, luues institutsiooni uue versiooni – see on olnud tõeline digitaalne transformatsioon.

Guthi transformatsiooniga kaasnes aga paradoksaalne protsess. Ühelt poolt arenes traditsiooniline institutsioon globaalsete-läänelike normatiivsete prioriteetide suunas, kuid samal ajal tõi IKT kasutuselevõtt kaasa uue traditsioonilisuse. Seda mittelineaarset “mitteläänestumise” protsessi iseloomustab kolme kattuva sfääri keerukas koosmõju: 1) ornamentaalne, 2) instrumentaalne ja 3) püsiv. See keerukas koosmõju nõuab pragmaatilist lähenemist valitsemise teostamiseks läänemaailmast väljaspool.

Publications

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Bringing the Community Back: A Case Study of the Post-Earthquake Heritage Restoration in Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract: Heritage preservation is a resource-intensive activity nested among other processes in the public administration, related to identity building and touristic product enhancement. Strategies and schemata associated with heritage preservation sprang in the western world after WWII and they have been adapted, in the form of 'heritage management', in various contexts with questionable effectiveness regarding sustainability. Our paper discusses the case of the post-earthquake cultural, social and political landscape of the World Heritage Site of Kathmandu valley in Nepal. By reviewing the bibliography and drawing upon various case studies of post-earthquake heritage restoration, we focus on the traditional ways of managing human and cultural resources in the area as related to the modern national heritage management mechanism. We also examine how traditional practices, re-interpreted into a modern context, can point towards inclusive and sustainable forms of collaboration based on the commons. We shed light on the elements of an emerging management system that could protect the vulnerable monuments through community participation, adapted to the challenging realities of the Nepalese heritage and its stakeholders.

Keywords: heritage management; commons; restoration; Gorkha earthquake; living heritage; traditional knowledge

1. Introduction

The disastrous Gorkha earthquake of 2015 disrupted development in Nepal, and brought about challenging issues concerning the restoration of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)-acknowledged heritage of Kathmandu Valley. This raised questions surrounding whether it is sustainable to employ a mainstream western-based approach, which treats heritage as any other resource that should be protected, and invests through a top-down scheme. Or should there be a community-based alternative, premised on the socio-religious past of Kathmandu Valley? Based on a discussion of heritage as a project developed and nested in the public life of modern nation-states, especially after WWII, this paper discusses both scenarios unfolding in different case studies in Kathmandu Valley. We then opt for a third option, particles of which are already present in contemporary Nepal. The third option should be based on an extended community participation scheme, built upon concepts from the 'social turn' of the western approach in heritage management towards a commons-based governance for heritage.

2. Governance, Community Participation and the Commons

In the social sciences, governance is a neutral concept that covers three sectors: Public, private, and the non-governmental sector [1]. According to Stoker [2], governance is about an autonomous self-governing network of actors, while the government's role is to steer and guide rather than to command and exercise full authority. Therefore, governance, i.e., the act of creating conditions for ordered rule and action, comes from multiple actors that also involve non-state actors [2–4]. Citizen participation and empowerment is thought to be nourishing democratic values [5]. In the case of local governance and management of local resources, the involvement of local communities is crucial and has found its place in various political agendas [6,7]. Community involvement has been a critical focus in mainstream discourses of several disciplines, bringing about terms such as 'co-production' that has lately become a buzzword [8–11].

Concerning community-driven governance of resources, the concept of the commons has been popular ever since Ostrom [12] reinvigorated the interest in it, answering to the proponents of the 'tragedy of the commons' discourse, promoted by Hardin [13]. Ostrom's ethnographic work has documented the feasibility and the potential of systematic and sustainable management of natural resources, outside the state and/or the market, towards a sustainable and just future for the communities involved [12]. Since then, there have been several scholars who have contributed to the vast amount of literature concerning the 'commons' [14,15].

When concerning developing countries and especially the South Asian region, the communities are strong while the governments are weak. However, in several cases, they lack capacity but not the ability of impactful action [16]. In these settings, communities have an even more pivotal role. Nevertheless, governance does not have a global standard, especially when communities are concerned; where the background is set by the local cultures, ideas, and practices. Drechsler [17] argues that there are at least three paradigms in public administration and governance based on theories and potentiality, namely: Global-western; Islamic; and Confucian. Buddhist governance has been pointed out as a fourth paradigm. In parts of Asia, public administration models based on non-western influences have been, in cases, as effective as models based on global-western best practices. While some of these models have been authoritarian some have been more inclusive in terms of community participation. There are several cases where non-western traditions have influenced participatory models in local governance [18–20]. However, regions that do not share a common historical background may not always have the same trajectory in the development of governance practices. Thus, it becomes essential to look into each context with a different perspective; acknowledgment of the different paradigms in public administration and governance enables us to do so. For the case of Kathmandu Valley, discussed in this paper, we look at the local traditions based on non-western, public administration and governance paradigms. Kathmandu Valley has been highly influenced by Buddhist traditions historically that still continue to influence most aspects of contemporary life [21,22].

3. The Concept of Heritage and Its Management: A Western Perspective

Cultural heritage is a by-product of modernity [23]. Its development coincided with the emergence of the nation-states in 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, as these new collective political subjects configured socially significant sites, buildings, landscapes and personalities into national identity landmarks [24].

This cultural heritage mechanism was built on a pattern introduced in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment; that of distancing the past from the present day in an observable place that could be studied to reveal itself. The official narratives that would bridge the distance with the reclaimed present constituted national histories; the overarching truth for the birth and the survival of the nation-state's soul and values through the centuries [25,26]. These narratives were anchored on and illustrated by the tangible remains of the past, monuments that were recast as national treasures. In this way, nation-states, amongst the other rational management processes and monopolies, they also took up the role of selecting ancestors and enclosing significant features and figures in an elective national narrative

for the benefit of their people, connoting unique and exceptional links with a glorious ancestor, in an unbreakable continuum.

Heritage management, as a cohesive way of dealing with the remains of the past and a scientific branch, came up after the end of the WWII, along with the attempt to work together and ameliorate the trauma left open in Europe and the rest of the world. Championing the need for a new, shared and somehow neutral field for collaboration and diplomacy, international organisations were established (for example, UNESCO 1945; ICOM (The International Council of Museums) 1946; ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) 1956; ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites) 1965), focusing on culture and heritage, introducing at the same time an arena of cultural policies that would progressively evolve in what we identify today, as the 'cultural industry' [27,28].

The new discipline borrowed processes from management and business administration shaping the basic tools of heritage management in action (for example, management plans, assessment and monitoring protocols) but also theoretical concepts (for example, values, stakeholders), customised to apply in a heritage context. Elaborated tools also came from natural resources management, as the concept of heritage as a 'resource' or the goal of sustainability in its management [29,30].

In this framework, normative documents (charters, directives, documents), organised by intergovernmental organisations, aspired to foster collaborations and promote good practices in cultural management. In the 1960s and 1970s, they focused on the protection of "authenticity and integrity" of cultural heritage for the benefit of the "humanity" [31,32]. It seems that priority was given mostly to the physical carrier of the monuments, their original material. Following the 19th century dialectics, they emphasised on the internal values of heritage that are always tactile, static and eternal, can be estimated (age, rarity) or appraised aesthetically (monumentality, artistic merit) [33]. In this way, the significance of a monument was reflected in its historical value and its levels of preservation, as it was curated and stewarded by professionals (archaeologists, architects, conservators) working for the state services; their main intention was to protect the 'cultural property' for the perpetuation of the national values and the development of the cultural product as a touristic output [34].

3.1. The Social Turn and Heritage Governance

However, the 1970s marked a turn in these heritage management narratives, focusing on more social objectives. The network of heritage stakeholders is broadening towards a more decentralised pattern, involving apart from the experts and the national authorities, various communities with vested interest in heritage, examining variable values to assess the significance that lies outside the materiality of the monuments. It is no wonder that at that time the concept of 'governance' is also introduced in heritage literature, implying a broader and not a priori top-down management process of cultural resources [30,35,36].

We can trace the beginning of this social turn to the Burra Charter, the first version of which was adopted in 1979 by Australia ICOMOS [37]. This document focused on the understanding of heritage significance as a process, reflecting the ways it is being formed inside a living society, thus opening up the platform of heritage management to a number of interest groups, the visions, and ideas of which should be taken into consideration at all stages of the heritage management process (research, planning, implementation, evaluation) [38].

Later normative documents developed this pattern and its economic overtones [39,40], as for example the Faro Convention that highlighted the importance of participation for the communities and the need to acknowledge the values they attach to objects and places, towards management processes that apart from historic material preservation, do good to the people as well [41]. This offered a higher level of inclusion and reflective control over heritage governance but also introduced new hybrid heritage categories, as the landscape or the intangible heritage, that reside in more locally based and nuanced understandings than the national dialectics for heritage [42,43].

The political and economic scenery in Europe had been the perfect background for these developments, especially with the emergence of neo-liberalism and the establishment of the new public management; in this context, heritage was treated as another 'resource', understood in terms of stock and flow, an input in the economic circle of the state, as the physical capital a few decades earlier that needed to be governed as any other national asset, respecting the funds provided by the average taxpayer [27,44].

3.2. The Concept of Sustainability and Its Implications on the Heritage Governance Discourse

These two relatively new aspects in heritage management, the drive for broader participation and the economic connotations, are combined in a novel concept that is being introduced in the late 1980s [45]. The framework of sustainability derived from the worrying observations of the impact of growth with short-term planning to the physical environment but also to the social cohesion and the economic viability [46,47]. It emphasised on the need to cover human development goals, without undermining the availability of resources and the integrity of society for the future generations.

Culture was recognised as an essential attribute in this process. Translated into another form of a homogenised capital, aside to the human, physical or indeed economic, culture was deemed as a strategic element and a dynamic input in this form of equitable and considerate development. Acknowledging its contextual and coordinating aspects, culture was even suggested by UNESCO and the United Nations as a new circle in the centre of the sustainability Venn diagram [48].

In the sustainability scheme, public participation was also considered vital in order to amplify capacity building inside communities [49] but also to ensure the viability of future policies [50,51]; both aspects widely reiterated in a number of international documents that followed.

In any case, sustainability discourses transformed and keep shaping the dialectics and practices of heritage management around the world, appearing in various forms: As the viability of actions and pathways of action, as the purpose of heritage conservation, as urban regeneration or as the goal of cultural tourism [44]. Furthermore, they also redirected the focus to the local level, the main grounds for participation, where resilient knowledge and practices could provide new understandings and modus operandi for the viable management of the available resources.

4. The 'Indigenous Mind-Set'

This refocusing to the local level was paradigmatic in the-recently then-decolonised countries but also in "crypto-colonies", as Thailand, Afghanistan, Greece and Nepal [52] or relevant places romantically considered spared by modernity. Postcolonial criticism together with attempts to emancipate local/indigenous people focused western attention on the 'indigenous mind-set', a supposedly untapped resource that could provide alternative pathways to the sustainable management of local resources, 'as it was done for hundreds of years'.

In a nutshell, the indigenous mind-set can be considered as systems of knowledge, constituted of collectively learned experiences on traditional technologies, social, economic and philosophical learning that explain the world and are grounded in spirituality, practices, and ways of being in nature [53]. These processes conveyed by experiential learning and oral traditions, storytelling, and other means of intangible record keeping, can be juxtaposed to the western, positivistic modes of structuring knowledge, and communicating it through formalistic education practices.

Particles of these traditional systems have been severed from context and appear in literature lately, bundled as 'Traditional (Ecological) Knowledge' or 'Indigenous Knowledge'—which can potentially provide insights on archaeological sites, medicinal properties of plants, sustainable harvesting practices, wildlife monitoring, environmental change, behavioural ecology, etc. [53]. The indigenous mind-set is also being introduced in traditional curricula at a university level [54] or even taught through Massive Open Online Courses, offering concise explorations on indigenous worldviews, pre-contact social systems and traditions, resistance patterns and self-governance (See, for example: https://

www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada; https://www.edx.org/course/reconciliation-through-indigenous-education; https://www.coursera.org/learn/aboriginal-education).

The same trend became visible in heritage management at an early point. The Nara document of authenticity, in the spirit of the Burra Charter, challenged the western obsession of material authenticity. It discusses conservation methods that could substitute the physical carrier of monuments but preserve their essence, through the survival of the traditional building/conservation techniques and the communities that sustain them [55]. The Nara document in 1994 (as the Burra charter earlier) can be considered as spill over of "indigenous archaeology" practices. This is developed for the agenda of incorporating the indigenous population in the economic, social and political life of the state with a cultural agenda, and inbuilt criticism of the western management perspective [56–58].

Appreciation and adaptation of indigenous systems in heritage management are nowadays a steadily upcoming field. In 1998 East Rennell in the Pacific Ocean was inscribed on the World Heritage List "under customary land ownership and management" [59], affirming the significance of non-western management systems, transcribed though in the western concept of a UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription [60]. A pattern observed again in the management plans of Kakadu & Uluru Parks in Australia through the involvement of the indigenous communities [30,61].

In the same climate, ICCROM has been promoting in the last years the 'living heritage' model, developed for sacred sites of South-Eastern Asia. This model prioritises the living dimension of heritage that reflects the original function, still served by communities dwelling near or inside the ancient structures, forming an integral constituent of the site [62,63]. Apart from the edifices, it also aims at the preservation of oral traditions, skills, and knowledge, performances and rituals related to the site cf. [30,42].

The latter reflects another pattern acknowledged in the indigenous mind-set agenda for the sustainable management of heritage. Heritage crafts and skills, such as traditional methodologies for preserving heritage but also producing new artisanal goods based on traditional forms, are a new niche market in the creative economies, with considerable impact and profits.

5. The Case of Nepal

5.1. Research Methods

After critically reviewing relevant literature on heritage, governance, and sustainability, we now turn to the discussion of the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site. The case of Kathmandu Valley provides an interesting insight into a non-western perspective of heritage governance. Kathmandu Valley is a historically significant settlement, arguably a paradigmatic case-study for studying the South Asian region in the past [64]. The traditional governance mechanisms in the Valley have been highly influenced by Buddhist traditions, extending in the field of heritage governance, as we will explore below.

The recent earthquake in 2015 caused great losses to heritage structures [65,66]. The scale of the damage and the reconstruction required provides an interesting context to discuss governance and the emerging stakeholders in heritage management. To do this, this study draws upon multiple courses of information, including bibliographic and archival sources, local press publications, and ethnographic data—semi-structured interviews with engaged stakeholders (community members, government representatives, and local experts). We also use participant observation from several case studies, which are part of ongoing research by one of us that will culminate in a doctoral thesis.

5.2. Historical Context

Nepal has been known for its art, architecture, and culture ever since Brian Houghton Hodgson introduced the country to the West during mid-1800s. Historical monuments mostly concentrated around Kathmandu Valley have been well studied for their architectural uniqueness [67–69]. Cultures of Kathmandu valley and the *Newars*. *Newars*, or *Newa*, are a socio-linguistic group, who during the

pre-Shah era where the citizens of *Nepalmandala* or the system of cities in and around Kathmandu Valley before the unification of modern Nepal. They are often falsely identified as a caste group [70,71], and are especially distinctive in their amalgamation of Buddhist and Hindu influences within a very urban socio-cultural setup [72,73]. Kathmandu Valley was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List (four years after the list's establishment) as an exceptional testimony to the architecturally explicit, local civilization of coexistence of Hinduism and Buddhism. The inscription résumé highlights seven important sites in the Valley: Durbar Squares of *Hanuman Dhoka* (Kathmandu), Patan and Bhaktapur, the Buddhist stupas of *Swayambhu* and *Bauddha*, and the Hindu temples of *Pashupati* and *Changu Narayan* [74].

Characteristic of the *Newar* architecture is the pagoda style, believed to originate in Kathmandu Valley and exported to China during the Yuan dynasty by the Nepali artisan *Araniko* [75,76]. These monuments (of which there are more than a thousand in number) exist within the three major and other minor historical towns in and around Kathmandu, where since more than a millennium an urban society was formed and continues to exist even nowadays [69]. Within the scheme of the traditional urban socio-cultural setup, a framework for community governance that is characterised by community organizations called *Guthi* existed, a core feature of the *Newar* society.

Guthi is a unique institution among Newars that historians believe to have existed since the *Lichhavi* era (400 to 750 CE), appearing as *Gosthi* in older historical accounts [72,77]. The oldest palm-leaf manuscript written in *Newari* (Language spoken by the *Newars* now officially called *Nepal Bhasa*.), dated in 1114 CE, explained the rules and regulations for collective use of the property of a Buddhist Monastery among the *Guthi* members [78]. *Guthis* have had several functions within the *Newar* society, and they are still an integral part of *Newar* lifestyle. *Guthis* have been categorised in many ways by writers who have studied them [79–81]. In general, based on the goals or objectives, *Guthis* could be discerned in three types, concerning: (a) The organisation of festivities, workshops, teaching craftsmanship, playing music, maintaining water conduits and other social tasks; (b) funeral preparations and (c) purely religious activities (as most *Guthis* consist of a specific caste or group within the *Newar* society.). *Guthis*, while being part of the intangible heritage of *Newars*, were also set for the conservation of other heritage resources, such as monasteries, *sattal* (which are traditional structures common in Kathmandu Valley that serve as public rest houses often used for social gatherings and public occasions), temples (virtually all temples in Kathmandu were looked after by *Guthis. Guthis* still actively participate in maintenance of major temples such as *Baudhha* and *Swyambhu*), and art forms like folk music, devotional dances and plays (most *Guthis* still play devotional music called *bhajan* during festivals. Masked dances such as the *Kartik Nritya* are also performed with involvement of *Guthis*) [82–84].

Despite the cultural and historical significance of *Guthis*, in recent past, their role has been dramatically reduced in the state's administrative framework. With the "*Guthi Sansthan* Act" of 1964 and further amendments in 1976, several *Guthis* and their functions were incorporated into the state owned *Guthi Sansthan* corporation while the land that *Guthis* owned was either nationalised or allowed to be privatised and distributed amongst the *Guthis'* members [83–85]. With traditional practices considered outdated while following the trend to copy global mainstream governance and public administration models, the *Guthi* institution went into decline and solely associated with religio-cultural aspects of the society. In addition, the emerging trend towards a more individualistic lifestyle in the country has dealt another blow at the *Guthi* institution [86]. With several heritage structures missing their traditional custodians, the effects of the 2015 earthquake were even more disastrous.

5.3. The 2015 Earthquake and the State Response

The 2015 earthquake in Nepal reached a magnitude of 7.8 MMS. Its hypocenter was in the *Barpak* village of *Gorkha*, and it had a devastating effect on the country, resulting 8674 deaths [65,87].

For Kathmandu Valley the losses to architectural heritage were of enormous scale with 753 temples, monasteries and monuments damaged, either partially but significantly or entirely [66].

Nepal, being in a seismic zone, has faced large earthquakes almost every century of its long history [88–90]. During the 2015 earthquake the country was in an already vulnerable condition, as it was in the middle of political transition, and was not prepared for disaster of this size [91]. Furthermore, until 2006, the country had also been in a decade-long civil war [89,90]. Following the peace processes and the subsequent transition into a Republic from a Constitutional Monarchy, the country was still politically unstable and economically volatile. Local elections had not been held for almost two decades [92], and the competency level of the government in most aspects was low. The earthquake left the country with a daunting task of reconstruction. Early steps were to turn to international aid, through which different donors pledged more than $4 billion [93]. The government also established a public body, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) to oversee the reconstruction and distribution of aid to the affected. The heritage reconstruction processes were planned and monitored by a committee that involved the NRA, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) and the local municipalities.

The usual mechanism for infrastructure development in the country was based on closed tender bidding from contractors for which the bids were selected based on the lowest cost method [94]. The DoA and NRA together with the municipalities, which at the time did not have any elected representatives, proceeded with several restoration projects with the available lowest bid tender process mechanism. However, this led to questionable results since the quality of the restoration became a secondary criterion while most contractors lacked sufficient knowledge of the traditional architecture and building techniques, which were essential for keeping the integrity of the heritage structures. As a consequence, several of the major restoration projects were suspended due to pressure from the local community or intervention from DoA for reasons, such as the use of inappropriate building material or techniques [95,96]. Furthermore, almost all of the restoration projects became battlegrounds between the key stakeholders, seeking to resume control. In most cases the communities did not trust the government-appointed contractors, and demanded more direct involvement in the restoration process [97].

5.4. Other Stakeholders

Since the inscription of Kathmandu Valley in 1979 [74], UNESCO has been a significant stakeholder in the restoration projects, as in the *Kasthamandap sattal* case in Kathmandu durbar square and the *Rani Pokhari* with the *Bal Gopaleswor* temple in its premises [98]. UNESCO has a significant influence on cultural heritage maintenance and restoration through the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). KVPT was founded in 1991 by Eduard F. Sekler, who was the team leader of the UNESCO Campaign to Safeguard the Cultural Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley [99]. Therefore, KVPT can be understood as an expert organization with close ties to UNESCO. All restoration projects are directed chiefly by Dr. Rohit Ranjitkar, who is a noted expert in heritage conservation in the context of Nepal. KVPT had a partnership with the local government and the DoA for maintenance and restoration of important structures in *Patan Durbar* Complex. The KVPT has restored structures such as the *Sundari Chowk* wing and *North Taleju* temple of the *Durbar* complex. The organization has a good reputation among donors and is currently being funded by several international agencies such as the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, the Japanese Embassy in Nepal and the British Embassy among others [100].

Contrary to the influence of KVPT and UNESCO in the *Patan Durbar* area, the case is entirely different in the Kathmandu Durbar Complex. Having been the traditional seat of the Nepali Monarchy, the Durbar Complex had been more closely monitored and controlled by the government. This might explain the fact that the restoration projects of two of the significant structures in the area have been directly handed to China and the US through diplomatic level agreements. The nine-storey tower of *Basantapur* durbar square was restored by Chinese experts while *Gaddi Baithak* by funds from the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, which has partnered with Miyamoto Global Disaster

Relief (both American non-profit Organisations) and ICOMOS. ICOMOS is a non-governmental international and professional organisation, dedicated to the conservation of architectural heritage. Founded in 1965, ICOMOS is one of the three formal advisory bodies to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, along with IUCN (the International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and ICCROM [101,102].

The *Kasthamandap sattal* in the same area, however, received a different treatment given the function of the structure; a public rest house, commonly used by the community and its ownership claimed by the local community and *Guthis* [103–105]. The maintenance of the monument was based on the Buddhist tradition, where communities volunteer to take care structures as an act of charity [106–108]. Major renovations, however, took place in 1966, organised by the government [109]. Since then the local authorities had maintained the ownership of the building but the local *Guthis* and community groups continued to use the structure for traditional and other social events. After the earthquake the delay in the reconstruction process and also the mistrust towards the local authorities led the community to self-organise and create a locally based entity, focusing on the reconstruction of the *sattal*. Consequently, on 25 April 2017, the 'Campaign to Rebuild *Kasthamandap*' was launched by the local community in the area and on 12 May a four-way agreement was signed between the NRA, DoA, the Municipality and the Campaign, handing over the responsibility of rebuilding *Kasthamandap* to the Campaign [97]. UNESCO and other international bodies have supported the move. Thus, an excavation was organised and carried out by DoA, Durham University and UNESCO that dated the structure as early as 700 CE [104]. However, after the local elections in 2017, the newly elected local government withdrew from the agreement and insisted on taking over the reconstruction through contractors selected by the Municipality [97]. After a lengthy dispute between the community and the Municipality, a new committee was formed in May 2018, chaired by a Provincial Assembly member from the area, Mr. Rajesh Shakya, and the reconstruction process resumed with the involvement of the community participants, even though not everyone from the initial Campaign was included [110] (Figure 1).

The model applied to *Kasthamandap* was not very different from the models for community participation in heritage restoration used in Kathmandu Valley for other monuments. The first project that highlighted community initiative is the restoration of Ashok Chaitya in Thamel, which is a popular tourist area in Kathmandu [111,112]. The restoration was attempted before the earthquake, but due to the disastrous event, the project needed to restart. The project was headed by a local resident, Mr. Sanjeeb Shrestha, who took the initial steps to start the project when a Chinese monk showed interest in the restoration of the Buddhist monument. The damage caused by the earthquake provided more stimulus. Since the old *Guthi* which took care of the *stupa* was defunct, a new committee was formed and registered at the municipality office with some members from the old *Guthi* involved and commenced the restoration with a permit from the municipality. By June 2017, the monument was already completed and a stone inscription with the name of all the donors was added on 4 July 2017. Through partial funding from the municipality and other donations the committee collected Rs 3,629,345 of which Rs. 2,998,375 were spent and the rest saved for future maintenance. Except for the donations, there was voluntary participation from the local community while also artisans worked for a discounted rate. As claimed by the committee, the project budget was half of the initially estimated (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Volunteers working to move salvage crafted wooden pillars from the wreckage of *Kasthamandap* for proper storage (Source: Sandesh Munikar and *Kasthamandap* Reconstruction Committee).

Figure 2. *Thamel Ashok Stupa* before and after renovation (Source: *Ashok Vihara* Restoration and Conservation Committee).

Reviewing the cases of Kasthamandap and the *Thamel Ashok* Stupa, a trend can be acknowledged pointing to a working model for stakeholders' involvement and community participation in heritage management, as a result of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. There are several more projects that have progressed using similar models for community participation after the earthquake; such as, the *Jaya Bageshwori*, the *Bauddha Stupa*, and *Maitripur Mahavihara*. Three main reasons tend to be considered as catalytic for the development of this trend: Firstly, the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the government mechanism concerning the restoration projects from the communities' viewpoint.

Secondly, an apparent influence from UNESCO and international agencies exists, and this has multiple implications. In *Patan Durbar* complex an "expert approach" has been initiated by KVPT, whereas in the case of Kasthamandap, the Campaign agenda was based on the *Guthi* spirit [97,105]. Indeed, the third main reason is that the community involvement is strongly influenced by the *Guthi* institution and Buddhist modi operandi that is deeply rooted within the traditions of the Newar society and continue to affect people lives in the public sphere.

6. Reviewing the Context

Heritage is often considered as a western construct, based on the significance of material authenticity and bearing underpinnings related to national identities and the touristic prospect through a top-down management process. This paradigm and its widespread adaptations in non-western contexts have been shifting the last three decades, towards a more socially inclusive and sustainable pattern, using a series of re-appropriated indigenous management tools.

However, in Nepal, there seems to have been a slightly different trajectory in managing the material remains of the past. Traditionally, pre-modern community involvement models have adequately cared for historic structures. With attempts to modernise public administration in the country, these traditional models were increasingly ignored. Implementation of models mirroring western heritage practices has not been entirely successful. The devastating Gorkha earthquake has highlighted and intensified problems in the process. It has added a new chapter in Nepal's cultural history but also revealed the new realities of governance capacity and concerns about the future of heritage conservation in the country. In these precarious circumstances, two obvious options emerge: To further cultivate the western approach to heritage management towards a more systemic adaptation in Nepal or to tap into the available social capital and revive traditional patterns of heritage conservation through community participation. At the same time, the question of sustainability, regarding resources, processes (derived from the western heritage or the 'indigenous' context) and goals remains.

As we have examined, the western approach to the post-earthquake conditions brought about a series of problems. Restoring and reconstructing historic buildings is getting increasingly expensive in Nepal, causing commercial contractors to use cheaper, non-traditional materials and lobby for design alterations that would grant them further profits. Parallel to that, NGOs-as KPVT-rely on foreign aid and focus on projects that would attract donors. Their focus revolves around the seven highlighted sites, main attractions for tourists, even though the whole of Kathmandu Valley has been inscribed in the World Heritage List. As a result, priority of foreign aided projects appear always to be the same sites while all the other monuments come second. Moreover, relying exclusively on foreign aid does not seem as a sustainable choice. Thus, an effective management system based solely on the western mandates, i.e., through commercial contractors or NGOs specializing in heritage conservation, is not plausible.

Considering the second option, traditional models are still active in Nepal, as several *Guthi* organizations; the case of *Maitripur Mahavihar* demonstrates that. However, as Nepal moves into modernisation, only a fraction of these survive and are still useful, while their capacity to handle large-scale projects is questionable. The possibility of enhancing these *Guthis* is not high as the state does not have a mechanism for it and would not allocate further resources on the revival of pre-modern institutions. But even in this case, with *Guthi* owned lands either privatised or nationalised and primarily deprived of their support community, the *Guthi* institution cannot anymore be self-reliant or able to face the contemporary socio-political challenges in Nepal.

7. Ways Forward

The circumstances examined above suggest for a third option: To bring together the various ideas and practices in play in the post-earthquake Kathmandu Valley, and create a hybrid model. Such a

model would embody the spirit of traditional community-oriented practices and also the paradigm shift towards the 'social' mode in the western heritage management patterns.

As the case studies show, there is encouraging participation from key stakeholders including the state, non-state and international agents and a trend towards a more inclusive attitude in conservation attempts. Guidelines for a broader participation scheme are abundant in the bibliography and normative documents [38,41] along with case studies of community involvement in natural and cultural conservation plans [113–115].

However, directives should be based on and adapted to the context of Nepal. In our case, a focus on the transparency of the agendas from all sides is necessary. Discussions and decision-making processes should be organised and facilitated to minimise corruption. In this process, there will be also need for the national/local authorities to shed some control in the heritage management mechanism and thus aid community empowerment. In the cases discussed, this potential was met when supported by the NGOs in the field; a fact reinforcing the argument in favour of plural participation in the heritage governance scheme.

The influence of the western patterns and traditional tools in heritage management (e.g., management plan, value assessments) should also be scrutinised. These tools carry normative heritage understandings, meaningful from a western perspective but not compliant with other socio-political contexts with different priorities and needs [30]. The same applies to tools coming from western discourses of the 'indigenous mindset' that are often de-contextualised and entangled in systemic power imbalances. They come with the social evolutionist tinge of the 19th and 20th centuries from shady 'noble savages', representatives of our 'primitive' human past, possessing knowledge to remedy the adverse effects of modern living. They might offer input to the established processes of research or monitoring. However, they should also be critically examined. Indigenous knowledge systems and western science are couched in very different languages. In contrast to western knowledge, which tends to be text-based, reductionist, hierarchical and dependent on categorisation, indigenous thought does not strive for a universal set of explanations. On the other hand, it is particularistic in orientation and often contextual [53,116].

Following on the lessons learnt after the Burra charter and Nara document, mix and match practices with western approaches and traditional systems in heritage governance can be problematic. These commonly breed inequality and promote the dominance of the most relative to the frame each project is being developed. For example, the 'living heritage' model, a supposedly middle ground, evangelises the capitalisation of local/indigenous know-hows towards a sustainable management pattern. However, the participation methods involved do not address the hidden power imbalances, as the role of the core community and the western management concepts, conveniently serving as the framework of the whole project [30].

Moreover, combined tools focus tactically on the immediate issue in question without working towards broader emancipation goals. For example, in jointly managed national parks in Australia, indigenous majorities on management boards are now a well-established approach [61,117]. However, the idea of having indigenous people as majority decision-makers over urban development options or metropolitan-scale strategic planning in Australia is largely unthinkable [118].

8. Towards a Commons-Based Governance for Cultural Heritage

Lekakis [119] argues that to define cultural heritage, one must consider five interrelated components: (1) The physical material, e.g., a temple, its stones; (2) the communities and their values that are local and distant related stakeholders, e.g., archaeologists, tourists; (3) the knowledge and information produced, e.g., scientific studies related to our temple; (4) the past and present social knowledge, e.g., local beliefs, practices and visions; and (5) the relevant services, e.g., tourism.

Therefore, the sustainable future of the cultural heritage a hybrid pattern of governance is necessary that would employ context-specific tools and methods, already at play in the case of the Kathmandu Valley. Nowadays, the national enclosures of the past-in the form of heritage-are

acknowledged and challenged in various local, national or international levels. We argue that the heritage, the collective values inspired by it, the knowledge produced or surviving, and the services involved in its communication, should be acknowledged as commons, in the way Ostrom [12,120] and others [121,122] discuss natural and information resources.

Given this volatile paradigm that emerges, heritage is perceived as a resource-intensive affair that cannot be solely managed by national authorities. Firstly, because of the administrative competencies. Secondly, because heritage embodies a variety of transient values and aspirations of the communities it represents, calling for self-governing institutional arrangements and bottom-up decision making. In this schema, strategies developed should be much more than the collation of western tools in context, as everything should be customised through plural participation and not driven by national or personal agendas.

In the case of Kathmandu Valley, the (western-oriented) public administration model of Nepal along with UNESCO set a few boundaries. The government agencies, the local municipalities, UNESCO and the community that include *Guthis* and NGOs manage the specific heritage components variably. We argue that they should collaborate and organically develop commons-based governance schemata and strategies. Such a commons-based governance model should consider all the components described above.

There is a very rich substratum of knowledge produced in the past and considerable scientific knowledge being produced nowadays by various communities that are mobilised around the World Heritage Site (e.g., *Guthis* and experts from Durham University). State authorities and NGOs and the other stakeholders need to help in the conservation/restoration, after acknowledging the historic context (*Guthi* patterns) for the preservation of the buildings but also the western context (new technologies and adequate material). Moreover, knowledge produced must be open, available commons-based licenses (e.g., Creative Commons), and thus accessible to the communities related to the project.

Besides the tactical approaches to foster a participatory heritage governance system in Kathmandu Valley, it is apparent that a new theoretical framework for the management of cultural heritage should be systematically established. A shift towards commons-based governance schemata might be the only sustainable solution for the preservation of resources, but also for the complex social and historical values they represent in the various communities. Inscribed under the criterion III and VI in the World Heritage List, therefore having the social implications and the traditional aspects of management acknowledged, this could be the only viable way to preserve the fabric and the (ever-changing) essence of the cultural heritage.

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Chapter 6

GOVERNING THROUGH GUTHI: TOWARDS A NEO-TRADITIONAL MODEL FOR GOVERNING URBAN PUBLIC SPACES IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

Urban spaces of the Kathmandu Valley, which were historically part of the cultural space of Nepal Mandala, are unique in having an abundance of community spaces. Although built centuries ago, traditional public spaces still survive and community organizations known as Guthi have played a key role in the management of these spaces, creating a unique institution of citizen participation in urban governance. However, over the course of time, the role of the Guthi in urban governance has diminished as a push for modernization was made in the contemporary

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society. While the old institutions were side-lined and new arrangements were not sufficiently capable of better urban management, a decline in urban liveability was observed along with the rapid and unplanned growth of the Kathmandu Valley towns in the later part of the past century. Despite the lack of interest from the government, the Guthi institution has remained resilient and a model of participatory urban governance envisaged based on the traditional institution has shown viable prospects. New and old organizations, following the blueprint of the Guthi, have leveraged upon Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and have tried to address the urgent needs of the cities in the aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake. This has created a potential for realizing a neo-traditional model for governing urban public spaces in the Kathmandu Valley.

Keywords: Guthi, participatory governance, urban spaces, community mobilization, Newars, Kathmandu Valley

INTRODUCTION

Urban spaces of Nepal Mandala, located in and around the Kathmandu Valley, have been a unique area of human habitat that has existed since the Lichchhavi period (Shaha, 1990; Thapa, 2001; Whelpton, 2005). Historically, not only was the valley an important urban centre for the rich Indo-Tibet trade (Shaha, 1990), it was also the only large urban centre within the political borders of contemporary Nepal. The uniqueness of the urban centre lies is in the abundance of traditional public spaces within them, which continued to exist and serve their purpose upto the modern time.

Guthi – a unique institution of citizen participation played the key role in the governance of the public spaces in the Kathmandu Valley (Quigley, 1985; Regmi, 1977; Toffin, 2005). As documented by Dhana Vajra Vajracharya (Vajracharya, 1973), there is historical evidence of how Guthis, also known as gosthi during the Lichchhavi period, were responsible for maintenance of roads, temples, town squares, water sources and other forms of traditional public spaces.

Since the 1960s, with legal reforms that were considered detrimental for the Guthis, a large vacuum was left within the state's governance framework. Despite the disinterest from the government, the Guthis have continued to remain relevant even if relegated to the fringes of the governance framework. Yet, Guthis have been successful in playing a significant role in the maintenance of the tangible or intangible urban heritage of the Kathmandu Valley with many local festive events still being organized through them (Kawan, 2013; Maharjan and Barata, 2017; Shrestha, 2012; Toffin, 2005).

The Kathmandu Valley saw an exponential growth of population and urbanization during the late 20th century owing to the political situation of the country. This led to unplanned urban growth with the seemingly vacant space left in the governance framework. The valley has increasingly become less liveable with the quality of basic services like water supply, sewerage, quality and availability of public spaces rapidly deteriorating. However, developments that occurred around and mostly after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake has brought back discussions on Guthi into attention. With several grassroots movements starting to focus on conservation of the public spaces within the historical urban spaces, the viability of following the blueprint of the traditional institution of citizen participation is becoming evident.

This chapter attemtps to shed light on the traditional Guthis of the Newars and their role in governance of urban public spaces. The issue of urban governance is looked at from the institutional perspective. The emphasis given to public spaces within urban planning and management discipline is evident but, often the discourse fails to cover the institutional dimension. The argument put forward is that urban spaces are as much institutional as it is physical. There is an institutional dimension to how the policies are formulated for planning and governance of a city (DiGaetano & Strom, 2003; Pierre, 1999). For the case of Nepal and especially the Kathmandu Valley, there is evidence that the embeddedness of the Guthis into the social fabric of the local population greatly shaped the governance and spatial planning of the historical cities.

NOTES ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the research being conducted as part of the author's PhD study that concerns the study of Newar Guthi institution from the perspective of understanding its contemporary relevance in governance. The research is qualitative in nature and is an idiographic case study of the Newar Guthi institution in the light of developments in the aftermath of the April 2015 Gorkha earthquake. While community-oriented organizations in local governance are not new to Nepal, the extent to which Guthis are pervasive in the Newar lifestyle and culture is unique. Thus, the study focuses on the ethnographic study of the Newar community. Literature-based study of the historical aspects of the Guthis, the Newar community and political development within the country concerning Newars and the urban spaces has been conducted.

The earthquake of 2015 and the reconstruction of heritage structures in the long-term aftermath has also provided a great opportunity for studying the relevance of the Guthis. The cases from several reconstruction projects have been examined as sub-cases through ethnographic (also digital-ethnographic) studies. The author has relied on interviews (telephonic or in-person) to gather insights into the cases. The official information available online from official webpages, social media pages and news reports have been used to triangulate the data collected through the interviews. In addition, shadowing has also been applied to get a more detailed reflection of the concerned people. Social media platforms have been extensively used to participate in discussions and track the development of discourses. The author has actively participated in such discussions too thus adding an element of participatory action research methods.

A bulk of the study is also based on secondary sources. When concerning a historical study, the study is solely relied upon secondary sources. There already exists a rich repository of the study conducted on Newar community and the Guthis. However, most of the works are either historical studies based on archaeology or conducted from the cultural

perspective using an anthropological lens. Revisiting such studies using a more institutional and organizational lens with an emphasis on the urban governance aspects enables us to provide a new insight. For this paper, desktop-based studies were also done using secondary resources for collecting data and insights on urban growth of the Kathmandu Valley.

TRADITIONAL URBAN GOVERNANCE OF THE NEWARS

This section discusses traditional urban governance system in Nepal as practiced historically by the Newars. Newars are believed to be the "climax society" that developed in and around the Kathmandu Valley before its eventual conquest by the Gorkhas (Levy, 1992, p. 35). They are the most urban of the different groups belonging to the population of Nepal, with the valley arguably being the only continued historical urban space in the country. Scholars who studied the Newar community have emphasized how Newar settlements always have urban characteristics; they never live isolated but dwell in densely housed areas even in smaller farming villages (Vergati, 1995; Weiler, 2009). This is true even for the later towns that were established by the Newars during the Shah or Rana rule - the best examples for this being Tansen in Palpa and Bandipur in Tanahun. But the full extent of the complexity of Newar town planning and governing are exhibited more clearly by the three Kathmandu Valley towns namely, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur.

City Planning

Newar cities were planned as an autonomous living space and were known as desha. The word desha, can be translated as "country". However, the concept is much different in how the word was used within the context of the Newar settlements. Each of the towns was considered a desha and anything outside the town was termed as paradesha or foreign (Gellner &

Pradhan, 1995). This has led some scholars to translate the word as simply a "settlement" or an area within a certain spatial boundary (Mateo, 2014; Pant & Funo, 2007; Vergati, 1995). However, one needs to consider that the Newar concept of a settlement was not as simple as a physical boundary and a population living within it.

Scholars mention of the concept of a mandala when disucussing the historical Newar settlements (Levy, 1992; Shrestha, 2012; Vergati, 1995). A mandala can be defined as a cosmic circle or a symbolic depiction of the universe (Shrestha, 2012; Weiler, 2009) and is mostly present in Buddhist and Hindu symbolism (Bangdel, 1999; Beer, 2003). The conglomerate of cities, towns, and villages in and around the Kathmandu Valley (historically the valley of Nepal) was also termed as Nepal Mandala[15] (Gellner, 2016; Shrestha, 2012; Slusser, 1982). The entire Kathmandu Valley and the satellite towns within it or separate monuments have been represented as a mandala and this has been well described by several authors (Bangdel, 1999; Levy, 1992; Shrestha, 2012; Slusser, 1982; Tiwari, 2007; Toffin, 2008). A mandala is thus a sphere or boundary of not just physical space but with a spiritual meaning as well.

The mandala representation of the Newar towns is significant to the urban governance of these cities from what can be synthesized from the works of the authors who have studied various historical towns of the valley. Anne Vergati's work concerning the city of Bhaktapur is largely helpful to reflect on how a complex churning of the religious beliefs, social structures, institutions and territories brings out a functional Newar city (Vergati, 1995). Spatially, the towns were designed to resemble religiously significant shapes. Of the three major towns Patan (or Lalitpur) was designed in a shape of a Dharma-chakra[16] based on Buddhist symbolism (Levy, 1992; Tiwari, 2007). Kathmandu was designed to represent the shape of a khadga or a sword, which is a symbol significant for both Hindu and Buddhist protective deities (Hasrat, 1970; Pant & Funo, 2007). The

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[15] Other alternative transliterations of the term can be Nepalamandala (Gellner, 2016; Toffin, 2005) or Nepālamaṇḍala (Weiler, 2009).

[16] A Dharma-chakra (or Dhammachakka in Pali) is a Buddhist symbol which is a wheel usually with eight spokes. The spokes represent the noble eight-fold path of Buddhism (Beer, 2003).

city of Bhaktapur is in shape of a conch shell (Levy, 1992), a holy object in both Hinduism and Buddhism.

The physical planning of the Newar cities had close interlinkage with the social structure with various quarters within the cities being occupied by different occupation based sub-groups (Levy, 1992). The Malla King Jayasthiti Malla is attributed for codifying the system of kinship-based occupational groups in the 14th century, but whether similar hierarchy or division existed before him has been debated (Levy, 1992; Nepali, 2015; Sharma, 2015; Vergati, 1995). There also exist conflicts on the view on the hierarchical structure, especially concerning the Buddhist and Hindu priestly groups across the three towns (Gellner, 2005; Nepali, 2015; Vergati, 1995). Nevertheless, the Newars having a hierarchical social structure and their residence being spatially organized as per the hierarchy is widely accepted and can be witnessed even till date in the inner-city areas.

Much of the original forms may not be preserved as the cities have been transformed and expanded over the centuries, but there are descriptions of religious topography of the old towns. In the case of the old town of Kathmandu, a 19th century painting displayed in the National Art Gallery in Bhaktapur shows 33 named gates of which 24 names still can be located (Gutschow, 2011, pp. 125). There also are the eight shrines of protective deities which are claimed to give a rough sword like shape (Kapali, n.d.). In Bhaktapur, eight shrines also represent the eight segments (imagined as the petals of a lotus) of the mandala with the shrine of Goddess Taleju and also the location for the royal court being placed in the centre of the eight (Gutschow, 1993; Levy, 1992; Vergati, 1995). In the case of Patan, the four stupas which roughly gave the structure to the city still exist today (Tiwari, 2007).

Public Spaces

Along with the symbolism used in the shape of the city boundaries, it is believed that the quarters within the cities were spatially planned too;

indeed different quarters (locally tole or twa) do still exist – in their original forms or otherwise. Vergati (1995) has noted that the city of Bhaktapur was divided into 24 quarters. These quarters usually have a larger central public square. These squares were commonly used for threshing and winnowing grain not too long ago when the valley had abundance of arable land (Vergati, 1995). As any open spaces, they also were and are commonly used as meeting places and for organizing festivities. Each of these localities also has shrines to specific deities and festivities related to the specific deities also take place in each of the localities.

More than in Bhaktapur, in Kathmandu and Patan, the spatial planning also involves the layout of Buddhist monasteries in the city. These monasteries, locally called as baha or bahi[17], are prominent landmarks of the Buddhist cities. Both Kathmandu and Patan have 18 major monasteries each as per the traditional listing (Gellner, 1985; Locke, 1985). The monasteries generally have an open courtyard in the middle with the main shrine on the one side and other shrines or buildings used for various other purposes on the other sides. Usually, the structures are two storey. The monasteries can also form an extended built complex with large open spaces. These spaces are usually surrounded by residential buildings and can often be maintained as parks. The best examples of such a park-like complex are Bu Baha and Nag Baha[18] in Patan, as mentioned by Locke (1985). Since being such prominent structures that form much of the urban fabric of the old cities, mainly in Patan, a significant part of all open spaces within the inner cities are part of the monastry complexes.

Beyond religious spaces, there are structures in the traditional Newar towns that serve a functional purpose. Among these structures, the traditional water supply system – that uses sunken water spouts known as

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[17] Both baha and bahi are traditional Bajrayana Buddhist monasteries known in Sanskrit as Mahavihara. While they are essentially the same with no distinctions from the point of view of religion and rituals, there are differences when looking at the size, composition of their members, architecture and history (Gellner, 1985; Locke, 1985).

[18] Nag Baha rather than being a baha in true sense of the word, is a residential complex or nani and is a later term used by outsiders. The alternative name Itilhone or Ilhone is also commonly used. The area is associated with Kwa Baha (Gellner, 1992, p. 24)

hiti or dhunge dhara – is one that has been the subject of many studies (Khaniya, 2005; Pradhan, 1990; Shrestha, 2014). These structures usually have multiple spouts (always in an odd number) made of stone and are located in a courtyard below ground level with flights of stairs leading down. The area is often also called hitiga – the crude translation of the word is "tap hole". The hitiga are sufficiently large to be used for bathing and washing within the sunken courtyards, making it comparable to some extent to the public baths found elsewhere in the world. Hitis are fed with water through a complex system of underground water channels, dug wells and reservoirs in the form of ponds (Shrestha, 2014).

Another form of public spaces with a practical function are sitting or resting places known as phalcha or pati. The larger structure with a similar function is known as sattal (Slusser & Vajracarya, 1974). These structures are prevalent throughout the towns and even in the outskirts. Within the city, these spaces are also used for performing religious hymns known as dapha (Kawan, 2013).

Beyond the inner town, there are open spaces in the form of grassy fields known as khya to the Newars and referred to as khel in Nepali language (RECPHEC, 2016). These fields probably served the function of grazing animals as it is noticed that some of the quarters, where Khadgi community who traditionally were butchers sub-group live, are near to a khya. Localities named with a khel suffix like Jawalakhel, Lagankhel or Tundikhel still have large open spaces to date. Even though these khya spaces are not within the immediate vicinity of the old town, they are very much part of the urban space system. These spaces are also used for organizing religious festivals such as the festival of Bhoto Jatra that takes place in Jawalakhel in Laitpur (Locke, 1980).

Guthi Institution

The early history of Nepal, specifically the Lichchhavi period, is still only available in fragments. Especially when it comes to the nuanced details of matters such as the administration of the cities, there are only a

few pieces of evidence to clearly predict what they would have been like. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that as early as the Lichchhavi period, there had been organizations that were set up for undertaking different tasks related to the governance of the cities. While the Lichchhavi inscriptions called these organizations gostika, scholars agree that the later organizations called Guthi were the continuation of the same institution which probably was the defining institution of the Newars and their cities (Shaha, 1990; Shrestha & Singh, 1972). In Sanskrit, the word gosthi means "assembly" or "association" (Dangol, 2010; Pradhananga et al., 2010; Toffin, 2005). Toffin (2016, p. 34) describes Guthi organizations as "communal groups which are theoretically motivated by the notion of service rather than by profits." The fundamental principles based on which Guthis function have been explained by Gellner (1992, pp. 232–48) based on von Furer-Haimendorf's work (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1956) as "seniority, rotation, and territory". There are organizations which are not called Guthi specifically but still form a part of the overall Guthi institution. Sangha (community associate to baha and bahi), khala, pucha etc. are similar organizations which can be considered as being part of the overall Guthi institution considering they follow the same principles. Gellner (1992) has explained how Newar Buddhist sanghas are in effect a Guthi whose purpose is to run a monastic complex. In its essence, Newar Guthi institution is a form of participative governance - democratic and egalitarian in some respects - within which citizens were seen as an integral part of the state itself. These organizations have had several functions within the Newar lifestyle and state governance, and they have been categorized in many ways. Gellner has presented six types of Guthis based on their functions (Gellner, 1992), Quigley (1985) has listed three functions of Guthis and Toffin (2005, 2007) distinguishes Guthis with four different functional characteristics. Based on the typologies provided by the various authors, a simplified categorization into three types can be as follows:

1. Those related to governing of cities (public utility Guthis) – those concerning festivities (jatra), industries, music, maintaining public infrastructures like roads, hiti, pati and other activities,
2. Those related to the community welfare – those concerning carrying out of funerals, lending money, caste councils, etc.
3. Purely religious rituals – those carrying out rituals and worshipping of deities (excluding jatras which partly also are religious).

Despite the existence of different types of Guthis, they are all literally connected to religious beliefs and rituals. In fact, there is a reason to believe that the institution has close ties with Buddhism with the institution itself having Buddhist roots (Gellner, 1992; Shakya & Drechsler, 2019). The organizations are often formed by caste or kin groups, but the case is not always so; a Guthi can be formed based simply on geographical propinquity as well involving people from multiple caste groups (Regmi, 1977; Toffin, 2005). Research works on the Newars and their culture always discuss Guthi to varying degrees, thus exhibiting how Guthis are an integral part of the Newar community (Gellner, 1992; Gellner & Pradhan, 1995; Nepali, 2015; Sharma, 2015; Shrestha, 1999, 2007; Toffin, 2005, 2008).

As per Vergati (1995), a Newar is always a member of one or many Guthis; by the virtue of being a part of the Guthi, a Newar is incorporated into the "social fabric". Toffin (2005, p. 22) also expresses the same idea of the "social fabric", mentioning Guthi as one of the main cultural characteristics of the Kathmandu Valley and its people. But, the Newar "social fabric" is intertwined with the governance of the cities as well. Guthis being goal/task-oriented organizations that – even per the earliest records – were formed for provision of governance functions (Vajracharya, 1973). Becoming a member of the Guthi was a legal and formalized matter than social acceptance in an informal sense. Guthis in the past have been established by the monarchs with specific objectives in mind thus making them also legal entities. Even if they are not established by the ruling monarch but through grassroots initiatives, it had been common for most

Guthis to have been provided with immovables in the form of endowments. This made them legal entities with possibilities of having ownership of landholdings. In fact, it is due to this feature of Guthi organizations that the Guthi has been interpreted as a form of land tenure (Regmi, 1977).

A Guthi is primarily about the objective(s) which the organization and its members (known as Guthiyars) are tasked with fulfilling. Having ownership of landholdings is not a compulsory element of all Guthis and many private Guthis do not have any land endowments (Shrestha, 2012). Nevertheless, the aspect of Guthi owning a land is particularly important when considering the governance of public spaces. Ownership of land by Guthi used to be permanent with the legal arrangements historically maintaining the allocation of Guthi land as irrevocable (Regmi, 1977, 1988; Toffin, 2005). Immovables belonging to a Guthi can be the public space within the cities themselves which a given Guthi is tasked to look after; these being in any form like temples, roads, hiti, pati and others as discussed above. A Guthi can also own land that are cultivated by tenant farmers in an arrangement that some part of the yield is given to the Guthi members as a rent payment. The agricultural yield from the land belonging to a Guthi funded its activities (Shrestha, 2012). The legal arrangement for making Guthi properties permanent and irrevocable ensured preservation of public spaces in two ways – firstly, it ensured that public spaces would have an organized group of people to look after them and secondly, it ensured that the people responsible for looking after them would receive sufficient funds for the purpose. This way it becomes clear that the arrangement of Guthi was largely about public spaces and their continued upkeep.

Although the Guthis have largely sidelined within the current governance framework of the state of Nepal, it is still a semi-formal institution. There were two major legal reforms in the 1960s that largely affected the Guthi institution which, to some extent, had been appropriated by the Gorkha rulers too (Quigley, 1985; Shakya & Drechsler, 2019). Two acts, the "Guthi Sansthan Act" of 1964 and the "Land Reform Act" of the same year, were the outcome of the reforms what were intended by the

partyless Panchayat system that was forcefully brought in by the Shah monarch Mahendra in 1961 (Dhakal, 2007). Using the reforms, most Guthi land was nationalized or arranged for being converted into private land and to be divided amongst the tenant farmers and the Guthiyars (Acharya, 2008). With rising land prices in the Kathmandu Valley and the soaring demand for housing, the ammended law made it irresistible for the Guthiyars to privatize Guthi lands and register them under their own names, only to later sell them in most cases. This meant that the Guthis lost their income and with their source of income gone, several Guthis ceased to function. Most of the public spaces whose upkeep was overseen by the Guthi organizations were transferred to the local municipalities or the Guthi Sansthan – a government corporation that was created under the Guthi Sansthan Act. Moreover, the misinterpretation of the Guthi institution by the government meant that the Guthi became officially defined a "religious trust", a definition still used by the state-owned Guthi Sansthan, thus causing the Guthis to eventually become seemingly obscure and irrelevant.

CONTEMPORARY KATHMANDU VALLEY

Urbanization in Nepal is a unique case in South Asia. Although it is one of the least urbanized countries in the region, it is also the fastest urbanizing South Asian country (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013). Currently, Kathmandu Valley is the largest of the urban regions in Nepal as it was in the past and still accounts for the largest share of urban population (24% of Nepal's urban population belongs to the valley) (MoPE, 2017). This section will present some insights into the current status of the Kathmandu Valley towns in light of the growing urban population and competitiveness of the governance of the cities.

Rapid but Unplanned Urbanization

The growth of urban population in the Kathmandu Valley has been a major concern due to the rapid rate. The size of urban settlements within the valley has grown exponentially since the last half a century and the urban population has increased 60 times between the years 1952 and 2011 (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013, pp. 30). This is not, however, the entire story of the population growth as much of this growth is a result of temporary migration. The floating population within the valley can only be estimated, and an accurate figure can perhaps not be ascertained. However, it is believed that at the moment over 30% of the total population is floating (Ishtiaque et al., 2017; Thanju, 2012). The permanent population is recorded to be 2.51 million as per the census of 2011 with more than one million people living in Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) alone (MoPE, 2017; Thanju, 2012).

Spatially, there has been a 412% increase in the urban area in the valley from 1989 to 2016 (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). The decrease in cultivable land or open spaces has been drastic, owing to the housing demand fuelled by the rapidly growing population. The core areas have expanded and there is a significant increase in the population in the satellite towns too. The major changes were seen during the 1990s when the Maoist led civil war was waging in the remote areas (Chitrakar et al., 2014; Gellner, 2007; Williams & Pradhan, 2009). But, the rate of population growth and the built-up area has continued to increase even after the peace process with the current estimate of population growth rate for 2030 being 5.6% (MoPE, 2017).

The rapid population growth in the valley was perhaps foreseeable but not predicted accurately and thus the adequate plans for managing the growth was not in place. The valley's projected population was 2.6 million by 2021 but the actual population was already 2.5 by 2011 (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013). This was not even accounting for the temporary population. The political volatility could be blamed for government's failure to act. The country did not have local elections for almost two decades since 1997 and the municipalities did not have elected

representatives for almost a decade since 2002 (Gellner, 2014). The national politics was volatile too with governments changing in an average of less than a year during the most parts of the 1990s (Hachhethu, 2000), which continued upto the 2000s too. The 2000s saw major political changes with the royal massacre happening in 2001, the monarchy taking absolute power in 2005 and then it being abolished in 2008 (Malagodi, 2008; Whelpton, 2005).

Current Woes and Future Concerns

The result of the failure to devise and implement suitable planning for the rapid influx of immigrants to the city and the resultant urbanization meant that it was haphazard and poorly planned or not planned at all. The early signs of the lack of planning were the scarcity of tap water that was first witnessed during the 1990s (Shrestha, 2014). As of 2010 less than 20% of the population in Kathmandu were receiving a reliable supply of piped water (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013). Due to the government's failure to make provisions for water supply, people were resorting to digging private wells and also relying on traditional water supply system through hiti of which many were not working due to the lack of maintenance (Joshi, 2015; Khaniya, 2005; Shrestha, 2014; UN-HABITAT, 2008).

Sewage management has become another major concern as the population rise continued. The holy Bagmati and other rivers that flow through the valley were almost turned into open sewers by the early 2000s. Most sewage pipes end up directly into the rivers untreated as the treatment plants available are not functioning (Thapa et al., 2008). The situation of sewage management has caused the river banks to become an ugly sight. There are parks that have been created on the river banks like the UN Park on the Bagmati banks between the Kathmandu and Lalitpur municipalities, however, due to the pollution level of the rivers, the prospect of using these parks and riverbanks as recreational open areas is bleak (RECPHEC, 2016). Most of the riverbank areas have also been occupied by squatters and are more of an eyesore than anything else.

Of the public infrastructures within the valley in form of baha, bahi, temples, pati that had survived since the time of the Malla kings or even before, many had been in a dilapidated state towards the end of the second half of the 20th century; works of the authors published during the time clearly show the evidence (Locke, 1985; Slusser and Vajracarya, 1974). Many authors have blamed the legal reforms introduced after 1961, which were aimed to modernize the state, for such a state of public infrastructures (Joshi, 2015; Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013; Tiwari, 2007). After Kathmandu was declared a World Heritage Site, some of these structures – now considered as heritage structures – were renovated or provided with better maintenance, mostly by means of the foreign aid. Yet many sturctures were not in the best physical state when the earthquake struck in 2015 (Bell, 2016; Lekakis et al., 2018; Maharjan, 2014). In addition, the lack of enforcement of building codes and inspections have also greatly affected the heritage sites as many public spaces were found encroached (Maharjan, 2013; Rai, 2008). Encroachment of not only the structures but also of the open spaces has become a major problem (RECPHEC, 2016; Chitrakar, Baker & Guaralda, 2016). Guthi owned open spaces have been illegally privatized and used for constructing private buildings evident from the controversy of Chhaya Center in Thamel of Kathmandu and Saptapatal pond in Lagankhel of Patan (KC, 2019; UN-HABITAT, 2008, p. 61).

With the population growth rate not expected to slow down and without the right policy in place by the local or central government, the situation will not improve. Even with relatively better political stability, new reforms in the administrative units of the country and elected mayors (World Politics Review, 2017), there still are ambiguities pertaining to municipal authorities and the state agencies such as Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA), Department of Road, Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, Guthi Sansthan, etc. It is the fragmented and overlapping responsibilities that have created a logjam in acheiving better governance of the city (Maharjan, 2013; Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013; Shrestha, 2018). There still are uncertainties about whether the issues prevalent at the current times will be resolved soon or not.

NEW PROSPECTS

The Gorkha Earthquake of 2015 was a turning point for Nepal in many ways. The political impasse was overcome, and the new constitution was promulgated in 2015 after 8 years since promulgating of the interim constitution in 2007 – it was an achievement following the two Constituent Assembly elections (Gellner, 2014; Ostermann, 2018). The local elections took place and then after the legislative and provincial elections, the first under the new constitution (Ostermann, 2018). Whether the earthquake can be attributed as a catalyst or not for these turns of events would be debatable. But in the historical timeline of the country, the earthquake may still be considered as a critical juncture. The earthquake also prompted concerns towards the cultural heritage located mainly in the Kathmandu Valley (Coningham et al., 2016; Lekakis et al., 2018). Many grassroots movements followed the incident, bringing about a paradigm shift in how heritage and its governance were viewed among the general public. These movements mainly started leveraging on the issue of threats to cultural heritage but have extended beyond encompassing other aspects of urban governance too.

An Awakened City

The notion of "waking up" is prominent within the political sphere in Nepal prompting the need for a movement. Fittingly, a page on Facebook with the title "Sleeping Kathmandu" was started in 2018 with the description that reads "contents that will hopefully help wake the #SleepingKathmandu"[19]. The page is just one of the tens of such pages, groups or handles on social media that emphasizes the lack of urban management in the Kathmandu Valley and a need for grassroots activism to bring about a change. Several youth-led groups have been formed in the

[19] The page can be found on this link https://www.facebook.com/pg/Sleeping-Kathmandu-1098242733684375/about/.

last few years that have been actively promoting their agenda, organizing public protests, and spreading awareness amongst the residents of the valley.

Right after the 2015 earthquake, there occurred the gross mismanagement of the heritage restoration projects in the valley. Media articles started to raise concerns about the state of such projects (APF, 2017; Bell, 2016; Theophile & Newman, 2016). Being listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site, historical built structures in the valley are one of the main contributing factors for tourism in the country. Writers also started to point out at side-lining of the Guthi as being the cause of the vacuum created within the state's governance framework responsible for the upkeep of the heritage structures (Bhattarai, 2018; KC, 2016; Taylor, 2016). There exists an uneven level of attachment towards these heritage structures between the Newars and other migrant residents of the Kathmandu Valley who have migrated after the Shah conquest, for these historical monuments being dated prior to the Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of Nepal. Guthis that neglected the monuments belonged to the Newars too and perhaps that makes the Newar's claim as a stakeholder stronger too. The emphasis on the later built structures is more prevalent among the rest of the residents of the valley dominated by the Khas[20] population (Hutt, 2019).

Of the heritage-related movements, the most notable case is the rebuilding of Kasthamandap, a sattal located in the old town of Kathmandu (Pradhananga, 2017; Risal, 2015; Sharma, 2015; Tuladhar, 2018). Considered the oldest standing structure in Kathmandu before the earthquake brought it down (Coningham et al., 2016; Slusser & Vajracarya, 1974), locals were devastated with its destruction. Immediately there were voices emphasizing the importance to rebuild the structure keeping the authenticity intact with the media outlet Nepali Times doing a feature on it (Sharma, 2015). Through experience from other projects, there already were major concerns towards the quality of the restoration

[20] The Khas is the term used to often denote the Hindu Brahmin, Chhetri and other population living in the hilly areas of present-day Nepal. They are also known as Parbatiyas (Pradhan, 2007).

work done by the contractors selected based on the "lowest bid" (Ojha, 2017a, 2017b). Resultantly a grassroots initiative "Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign" was started and an agreement between the campaign, National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), Department of Archaeology (DoA) and KMC was signed (Bhattarai, 2018). There were discussions on the possibility of involving the Guthi associated with the monument too (Bhattarai, 2018; KC, 2016). Through a long tussle between the community representatives and the KMC on the modality of the reconstruction, the work was finally started in May 2018 by a committee formed through local participation and headed by Mr Rajesh Shakya, a member of Provincial Assembly (RSS, 2019b; The Himalayan Times, 2018). The progress is being steadily achieved (Panthi, 2019; RSS, 2019c).

There have also been direct involvement of the Guthi in the events of heritage reconstruction through grassroots movements like in the case of Maitripur Mahavihar. The Bajracharya community associated with the Mahavihar commenced the reconstruction efforts on their own with partial funding provided by the local government (Shakya & Drechsler, 2019). It is common for the maintenance of the most baha and bahi (mahaviharas) to be carried out by the Guthi associated with the monasteries. This has been continued even though in some cases the process has not been smooth and often involved complex negotiations amongst the stakeholders and included other partners as well, as the case of Itumbahal has been (Singh & Keitsch, 2016).

There have been small scale and less documented efforts made by the community such as the cleaning and restoration of several hitis and the conservation of open spaces. Activist groups such as Save Nepa Valley, Save Heritage, Nepal Sanskritik Punarjagran Aviyan, Newah Gwali Pucha, and others have been advocating and actively participating in the preservation of the hitis. Also, there has been collaborative efforts involving the community to utilize water from a working hiti even before the earthquake (Alkohiti is an example) (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013, p. 73; Shrestha, 2014). Moreover, several demonstrations have been organized deminding for the conservation of open spaces, of which the notable one is concerning Tundikhel – the largest civic open space in Kathmandu

(Chitrakar, 2019). The 2015 earthquake resulted in people seeking shelther in this open space to avoid buildings being collapsed due to aftershocks. But, as the open space in Tundikhel was started to be used as a temporary bus station and to store construction material for a structure the KMC is building, the suspicion towards the government has started to build.

The need felt for grassroots movements is largely due to the lack of public trust on the government. The government's vision towards "modernizing" the cities in the Kathmandu Valley resembles the Asian trends towards private sector driven mega infrastructural projects. Shatkin (2008) describes such a trend through a case of Metro Manila. The government has devised plans for developing new "satellite" cities and building large concrete towers within the valley (Himalayan News Service, 2017; Thapa, 2016). The emphasis on the new constructions without analyzing the likely impact on the already existing historical towns has left the Newar population, which still occupy most of the old town quarters, with worries as to whether the identity of their city would be wiped out. The scenario is best revealed by the newly proposed Dharahara tower that is being built next to the site of the old view tower built by Bhimsen Thapa in 1832, which was completely collapsed during the 2015 earthquake (Hutt, 2019). The government has started to build the new tower adjacent to the ruins of the old one, however, the route for a traditional religious procession called upaku has been blocked by the ongoing construction and hence, the conflicting situation has emerged (RSS, 2019a). Even though the issue was eventually resolved, such a situation raises a question as to whether the government, which is dominated by non-Newars, will value Newar identity and lifestyle while sanctioning the new infrastructure projects. There are cases like Khokana where infrastructure projects threatened the existence of the historical towns (Manandhar, 2018; Poudel, 2019). Then there are questions of capacity and integrity of the government when concerning cases like Chhaya Center, which is claimed to have been built on a land that used to be a pond looked after by a Guthi (KC, 2019), and Tundikhel, which is at risk due to mismanagement (Chitrakar, 2019). There have also been cases of land grab like the Lalita Niwas case (Online

Khabar, 2019) which have made the integrity of the authorities questionable and the people weary of the alleged "land mafia".

The mistrust has deepened more when in April 2019, the government made a proposal for the "Guthi Act Amendment bill", which has several clauses that threatened the existence of the already weakened Guthi institution (Shakya, 2019; Toffin, 2019). The suspicion of the locals was that the government was bringing the bill to facilitate the "land mafia" in land grab of the Guthi owned lands. Even with the effects of the 1964 acts, there still are significant numbers of Guthis that still own land. Rankin (2004) mentions that the average size of the land of the Guthi still owning it was 2.2 ropani[21]. Eventually, the protests grew more outspread and a mass protest was organized in June 2019 (Khadgi & Pokhrel, 2019). Both the newly formed grassroots activist groups and the traditional Guthis participated in the protests, helping to create a massive turnout of protesters.

The people have awakened to the idea that situations where they can blindly trust the government, local or federal, is not imaginable in the near future. Without constantly remaining vigilant, a continuation of the identity of their cities can be at risk. Moreover, the citizens actively participating in the key decision making processes of urban governance was already a norm defined by the Guthi institution. While most activism seen in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake was with political undertone, the activist groups were not entirely political outfits and they loosely followed the Guthi blueprint with the people identifying a cause or a task, forming a group specifically aimed for the cause, and organizing events through the committee.

Evolution of the Guthi Institution

There cannot be any doubt that the Guthi was a formal institution on which the urban governance of Nepal Mandala was based on. But over the

[21] Ropani is the measurement unit used for landholdings in Nepal. One ropani equals 508.72m2.

course of time, the interpretation of the institution has changed, both in terms of legality and practice. A legacy of the Newar state of Nepal Mandala annexed by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, the Newar institution continued as the Shah King took the role of the king of "Nepal" and became the custodian of the Newar culture and institutions[22]. The Newar state continued as is under the new dynasty with only very superficial changes. Historians agree that it was only during the reign of Rana Bahadur Shah that the steps were taken against the Guthi (Pradhan, 2012).

As per the institutional theory, institutions and organizations are clearly distinguished. Pierre (1999) mentions that "institution refers to overarching systems of values, traditions, norms, and practices that shape or constrain political behavior". The Newar institution of participatory governance of urban spaces has been headlined by the traditional Guthi practice. But, institutions evolve over time. Lewis and Steinmo (2012) have looked at evolutions of institutions through a generalized concept of the Darwinian theory of evolution. Thelen (2004) has laid out the mechanisms through which institutions evolve. Within the two and a half centuries of the political process that leads to the formation of current Nepal, the Guthi institution has greatly evolved too.

Even without considering a traditional Guthi, it is evident that the population of the Kathmandu Valley is very community-oriented and there are organizations such the micro-financing and other community cooperative organizations which take an important part in the overall governance structure in the municipalities. Toffin (2016) has likened these cooperatives to Guthis arguing that they "parallels and compliments" the Guthi organizations. There are larger cooperatives that have been formed with a more diverse portfolio like Bungamati Cooperative Society in Lalitpur Metropolitan City which runs schools, telecentres, homestays and carries out maintenance of public spaces among other tasks (Shakya, 2018). There are User Committees that have been formed for upkeep and

[22] It is believed that Prithvi Narayan Shah took the seat of Kathmandu during the festival of Indra Jatra by accepting tika from the living goddess Kumari and allowed the festival to go on as is, declaring that he was now the King of the Newars (Mocko, 2015).

restoration of public spaces and heritage monuments (Bhattarai, 2018; Mateo, 2014; Shrestha, 2014).

There exist User Committees related to the governing of natural resources (Acharya, 2002), but these organizations are equally prevalent in urban settings. User Committees have already become an integral part of the governance model of the cities in the valley with Bhaktapur Municipality leading the way in utilization of this model. The emphasis of restoring heritage monuments in the Bhaktapur Durbar Square area through this model led to a disagreement between the municipality and the German Development Bank (KfW). The German side had pledged ten million euro for the cause (Bhattarai, 2018; RSS, 2018). Even though it was initially portrayed by the media as a loss for Bhaktapur Municipality to lose the funds, eventually with slow but steady progress in restoration efforts, the media started to report with good light on the Bhaktapur model (Aryal, 2019). It isn't so that Kathmandu and Lalitpur Metropolitan Cities were not using User Committees before either. Thamel Ashok Stupa in Kathmandu Metropolitan City was an early reconstruction success story utilizing a User Committee (Lekakis et al., 2018). The Mayor of Lalitpur has also spoken about the decision to rely on User Committees more as in the case of the reconstruction of Bhimsen temple in Patan Durbar Square, also using the city government's internal funds and crowdfunding (Republica, 2019; The Himalayan Times, 2019).

There is a significant element of current institutional transformation observed in the governance of public spaces in the Kathmandu Valley, which is Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based. Social media has helped start discussions amongst the urban population which otherwise had started to become more individualistic with the widespread tendency to focus more on individual gains rather than community goals. Pointing to such a phenomenon as early as the 1980s, Locke (1985) mentioned how the tendency amongst the younger generation to not have time for Guthi activities was observable. But the ICT and social media have reversed the situation; people can communicate easily and even with less time available, they can contribute to the discussions and share ideas among the members of their community. Advertisement of activities like

the Walkathon organized for collecting funds for the reconstruction of Bhimsen Temple (Republica, 2019) would not have been as easy or effective if not for the widespread access of the internet and social media. Much of the activities of new activist groups, user committees, and traditional Guthis have become transparent and visible due to the social media. Community organizations have used social media effectively for information dissemination. Many activist groups and their activities are largely social media based. Activist groups have overseas members also contributing and this is only possible because of the ICT. Several traditional Guthis have used groups on the social media as their platform for discussions and information dissemination.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has put forward, the history of Nepal, and more specifically, of Nepal Mandala, shows the clear importance of the Guthis. The Newar state of the past was built upon the institution of participatory governance and the conglomeration of the towns of Nepal Mandala functioned through the Guthis. Much of the historical cities and the public spaces planned within them still exist, so as the intangible aspects of the Newar culture associated with these public spaces. It is for these reasons that the Kathmandu Valley was inscribed under criterion III and VI in the World Heritage List (UNESCO, n.d.); for this reason continuation of the physical artefacts, intangibles and institutions must be understood as being essential for conservation. There is, however, the lack of enlisting of any specific items of intangible cultural heritage with the UNESCO. The Guthi institution would be a suitable candidate and there has been suggestions on doing so (South Asia Time, 2019).

The exponential urban growth of the Kathmandu Valley witnessed since the 1990s has been grossly unplanned and this has rendered the city disfigured and virtually unliveable with the major issues emerging relate to water supply, sewage management and retention of open spaces. The rapid

urban growth mainly owes to the political situation in the country during the 1990s and 2000s and then after on the lure of economic prospects. The mismanagement of urban growth has become a problem not only regarding sustainability of the urban space, but also concerning the conservation of the heritage and identity of the past. Progression towards modernization in case of the Kathmandu Valley is perceived to have gone wrong, and the new developments do not seem to have solid foundations. In that sense, building upon existing institutions and conserving what was already existing seems essential; this notion also applies to physical spaces.

Regardless of its history, the Kathmandu Valley is now a home to a significant number of non-Newar population with people from amongst Parbatiya, Madhesi, Tamang and other geo-ethnic groups of Nepal. As Hutt (2019) argues, what is imagined as being dear will exhibit divergence amongst the different groups of the population having different roots. The Newar Guthi institution will not be seen through the same lens by the people from other roots as the Newars. The appropriation of Guthi practice during the Shah and Rana period has taken the Guthis beyond the Newars but not necessarily in its originality. This was one of the reasons that legal acts aiming at land reforms have been seemingly anti-guthi and the lawmakers have claimed the Guthi to be exploitative (Shakya, 2019).

Despite the challenges, initiatives towards awareness of the potentiality in following the blueprint of the Guthi is needed in the current scenario. The way forward needs to encompass both the traditions and innovations. A conservative approach in keeping the Guthis in their historical form as a relic of the past may not serve the purpose for which they were initially formed. The Guthi institution needs to evolve, and using a goal orientation approach, these need to be subjected to reforms that would facilitate the institution being timely and relevant.

The new developments in the Kathmandu Valley which are the results of the spirit of community instated by the Guthis tend to have parallels with the emerging appraoches in urban governance in the West based on the concepts such as participation, commons-orientation, and co-production (Bauwens et al., 2019; Fischer, 2006; Kearney et al., 2007; Pestoff, 2006). When the democratic world is striving for enabling

participatory governance through the medium of ICT, the phenomena noticeable in the Kathmandu Valley has shown that the Newar Guthi institution and the culture of collaboration have led to the potentiality for realizing an ICT enabled community governance model for governing of the urban public spaces. While this may still be essentially just a potentiality, it can be argued that some level of activities related to governing such as developing of discourse in the society, to criticize or legitimize policies and plans, have already been performed. These activities of "metagovernance" or "second order governing" form the basis for creating further procedures, reforming legislation and structures (Haus & Klausen, 2011). It is to be noted that this is happening regardless of the government policies not necessarily supporting the idea of involvement of the Guthis in local governance. The protests against the Guthi Bill in 2019 has indeed spread awareness among the people of the valley, both the Newars and the non-Newars. In addition, it has brought the government to a realization that the Guthi institution is resilient. With its principles such as irrevocability and permanence of public spaces, citizen participation, and stakeholder inclusion, the Guthi institution can be argued to be the way through which the valley and the conglomerate of cities could still be turned back into a liveable urban space or at least prevented from degrading further.

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9

Changing Perspectives on International Aid in Nepal since the 2015 Earthquakes*

Shobhit Shakya

Introduction

The 2015 earthquakes tested the resilience of Nepali society and the Nepali state to its limits. A fragile regime that was going through a transition from a democratic monarchy to a federal republic and trying to put 10 years of civil war behind it was handed down the mammoth tasks of immediate response and long-term rehabilitation (Hachhethu 2009; Lawoti 2003; Upreti 2006). As expected, Nepal had very little choice other than to turn to its neighbours, friends, and the international community in general for assistance. Help, mostly in the form of relief materials, did arrive, and in large quantities too. But Nepali officials were overwhelmed, and chaos ensued in Nepal's only international airport (PTI 2015). While the government desperately needed aid and assistance from the international community, it also needed to assert control over the situation. Many reports accused the government of creating bureaucratic obstacles which slowed down the flow of aid, and some also alleged corruption (Burke and Rauniyar 2015; Francis 2015), but the other side of the story was that the government also needed to keep checks on potential illegal or inappropriate activities and could not be too lenient with its protocols. As an article published in the *Huffington Post* (Alfred 2015) pointed out, it was necessary for the government to stay in control and this the government

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was trying to do. A similar situation continued in the longer term as well, with the government struggling to collaborate efficiently with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) which were the recipients of a large percentage of the international aid that was coming into the country. As a step towards controlling the situation, the government eventually introduced a single channel policy for the incoming aid by establishing the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (Mahatara 2017).

In the longer run, it looked as if the government's and the people's general perception of NGOs and aid agencies was gradually changing after the earthquakes. Discontentment on the part of the government, and changing public views of the activities of I/NGOs and aid agencies, eventually led to the drafting of the National Integrity Policy (NIP) in 2018 (*The Himalayan Times* 2018b). This policy was widely criticized and, as of late 2019, it looked as if a revised version would be tabled sooner or later, with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) being authorized to draft a new law in November of that year (P. M. Shrestha 2019). The decision from the government was claimed by some to be evidence of the government 'flexing its muscles' towards the establishment of an authoritarian regime, or a populist step taken with consideration of the growing sentiment amongst the people (S. Manandhar 2018). The authoritarian tendencies of the K. P. Oli–led government that was elected with a huge majority in 2017 have been well discussed (D. Adhikari 2018; S. Manandhar 2018; Paudyal and Koirala 2018). Yet this cannot be the only reason for the government's steps, because local governments led by other parties have also been seen to move away from international aid, as the case of the heritage reconstruction process in Bhaktapur Municipality has shown (*The Himalayan Times* 2018a).

This chapter presents some key aspects of the increasing disapproval of I/NGOs and aid agencies in Nepal. In the first section, I identify some of the key discourses, based on media reports and secondary literature. I mostly base this section on desktop research but also on my own experience of the earthquakes in the field, and on contemporaneous media reports. Further on, building on my ongoing research on post-earthquake heritage restoration in relation to traditional governance mechanisms, I discuss the case of heritage reconstruction in Bhaktapur and how user committees have been instrumental in the post-earthquake heritage reconstruction process. I investigate the characteristics of these user committees and compare them to the traditional *guthi*s. I also consider some issues that

have arisen in respect of aid-based development in general and discuss the relevance of the self-funding principles of the traditional institution of the *guthi*.

Discourses in the aftermath

The 2015 earthquakes received a high level of coverage in national and international media. The open call for assistance made by the Nepal government resulted in multiple governments sending their teams to conduct rescue operations; this was followed by NGOs/INGOs and independent groups of all sorts initiating their own operations and relief campaigns. The situation was overwhelming for the government whose bureaucratic competencies were tested to the fullest. It was already a challenge to coordinate with the several rescue teams with equipment and military vehicles that were coming in. In addition, an unprecedented amount of relief material was arriving at the airport (*BBC News* 2015). While NGOs and aid agencies were criticizing the government for imposing unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, the government was denying allegations that it was slowing down the distribution of aid material. There were two sides to the initial discourse: first from the perspective of the NGOs, which pointed out the strictness of the bureaucratic process and made accusations of corruption against the government; the second being from the perspective of the government, which saw a need for control and better accountability. In addition to the initial discourse, other discourses relating to foreign aid followed as the rebuilding process went forward. While there was insecurity on the part of the government due to the increasing activities of Christian evangelists, from the people's perspective there was a question of dignity when the government was relying excessively on foreign aid, specifically for the restoration of heritage monuments. The key aspects of the earthquake aftermath which might have shaped the discourse concerning foreign aid will be summarized in the subsections that follow.

Immediate relief efforts

Nepal has witnessed extensive NGO activity, with 50,358 NGOs registered with the Social Welfare Council as of July 2019 (Social Welfare Council

Nepal n.d.). As such, it is predictable that in a situation of disaster, the level of activity from the non-government sector will be immensely high, and this was exactly the case in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes. With all NGOs and INGOs, regardless of their primary sector of operation, getting involved on the ground as first responders, it was evidently an overwhelming task for the government to coordinate these activities, and this was made even worse by the lack of anticipation and preparedness on the part of the government. As a *New York Times* article (G. Harris 2015) pointed out, quoting the United Nations resident coordinator, the United States (US) ambassador, and several Nepali officials, the immediate response was slow due to bureaucratic processes not being efficient. As aid workers became increasingly frustrated, accusations of corruption and the intentional blocking of aid flows were levelled at the government (Burke and Rauniyar 2015; Francis 2015). The government's failure to send relief materials to remote areas even several days after the earthquake made this claim stronger, as there were protests and widespread criticism of the government's relief efforts (P. Adhikari 2015; Poudel 2015).

The government's policy of discouraging 'unofficial' channels was blamed for its failure to ease the inflow and distribution of aid (Burke and Rauniyar 2015). It set up the Prime Minister's Relief Fund in an attempt to keep track of the inflow of funds (Mahatara 2017). But the government's perception was that smaller NGOs, most of which did not have any expertise in disaster response, did not have the capacity to distribute aid on their own, and that coordinating with these smaller NGOs was creating an administrative burden. There was also the question of the reliability and transparency of the different funding campaigns that were being initiated by independent groups and smaller NGOs. As an article in *The Diplomat* pointed out, it was certainly not the case that Nepal was unwilling to accept international aid or was not trying to coordinate with aid agencies and I/NGOs (Claire 2015). It was also necessary for the government to check on the inflow of goods for substandard or superfluous materials; completely avoiding any kind of paperwork or checks would not have been the best step. This certainly was a probable scenario, as was evident from an incident of distribution of rotten rice by the World Food Programme (WFP) in Gorkha, which was taken back after the government intervened (*The Kathmandu Post* 2015b). This was certainly not an isolated case and more incidents followed, prompting the Prime Minister's Office to direct

the authorities to distribute edible relief material to the earthquake victims only after laboratory tests (*The Kathmandu Post* 2015a).

It was not just the distribution of material goods that was perceived as a problem by the government. Funds collected individually or through smaller NGOs could not be accounted for in many instances. There was no means by which to ensure that funds collected by all NGOs, independent groups, and individuals reached the earthquake victims. The government's mistrust of NGOs grew further, and in 2017, when the country was being affected by floods, the government made the use of 'official' channels mandatory and tried to curtail the independent activities of NGOs by barring collection of funds by NGOs and individuals (*The Himalayan Times* 2017a).

A perceived threat of proselytization through aid

In the immediate aftermath, and in the overall recovery process after the earthquake, the topic of religious conversion came to the media's attention, and even scholarly discussions included the topic in some instances (Bennike 2017; Suhag 2015). A number of media outlets published articles with headings such as 'Bread Not Bibles for Nepal' and 'Nepal Earthquake: How Religious Groups Prey on the Victims of Natural Disasters'. A discourse which held that NGOs in Nepal were luring underprivileged communities towards conversion through financial promises was reaching the mainstream (Hamad 2015; Suhag 2015).

Historically, Nepal has tended to show insecurity towards foreign influences in matters of religious belief. The majority of the population, and especially the Hindu Brahmin and Chhetri ruling classes in the country, have been excessively protective of the religious status of the country, as was also seen recently during the drafting process of the 2015 constitution (*The Himalayan Times* 2015).[1] During the earlier period of the Shah monarchy, it is clear that the regime was not only unsupportive of Christians coming into Nepal but was suspicious of any kind of foreign activity in the country (Liechty 1997). As the country transitioned into democracy over the years that followed, there has been a gradual increase in the acceptance of religious

[1] See also Sen (2015).

heterogeneity from the perspective of the state and law (K. B. Thapa 2010). Still, a large portion of the country's population was wary of the rapidly growing Christian community and foreign involvement in Christian evangelism; this has led many to support Nepal being reinstated as a Hindu nation (*The Week* 2019; *The Himalayan Times* 2015). With an ongoing debate on secularism and laws on religious freedom, the earthquake might have helped to garner support for laws that would be more restrictive of proselytization. Thus, the constitution subsequently promulgated in September 2015 and the Criminal Code Bill that was enacted in 2017 placed restrictions on religious conversion (*Spotlight* 2017). As per the new law, while conversion was not illegal in itself, proselytizing was illegal and so was speaking against another person's religion. Nonetheless, the reaction to the new law from the Christian community was predictably negative (World Watch Monitor 2018).[2] The *International Religious Freedom Report* for 2016 from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor had acknowledged the growing anti-Christian sentiment in the country with incidents of arrests for proselytizing. But the same report also mentioned that Christian missionary hospitals and welfare organizations continued to operate without government interference.[3]

Heritage and public sentiment

The important and complex task of restoring heritage monuments, which included the restoration of 753 monuments that were affected by the earthquake (Satyal 2018), lay before the government in the aftermath. The significance of these historical monuments meant that aid and assistance for their restoration were readily promised from various sides. Specifically, two key projects immediately started with direct assistance from the international community. In Kathmandu's historic Hanuman Dhoka heritage site, a project to restore the Gaddi Baithak, a building built in 1908 by the Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher, started with US assistance, and the

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2 See also Janssen (2016) and Khadka (2017).

3 See United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2016).

older Malla-era Newar-style nine-storeyed Basantpur Durbar began to be rebuilt by the Chinese (*My Republica* 2017).[4]

Given that the Kathmandu Durbar Square was a listed World Heritage Site, it is understandable that the government felt immense pressure to make arrangements that would ensure the swift renovation of these structures. The pressure understandably would have come from both within and outside the country, because the situation with the heritage monuments was already starting to receive international attention soon after the earthquake (Bell 2016; Sengupta 2015; Theophile and Newman 2016). Furthermore, the incapacity of the local government was evident in several cases and this was turning into a national embarrassment (AFP 2017; Mathema 2017; Ojha 2017). At this point in time, it was easier for the government to go ahead by accepting foreign assistance in heritage restoration projects. However, this certainly was not the only possible approach: a variety of models were utilized in parallel across different projects (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018).

For the government it was a case of pressure to get these World Heritage monuments rebuilt, but for the local Newar population this came with the sense of a loss of dignity. Most heritage monuments in the Kathmandu Valley were built during the Malla period (c. 1201–1779 CE) and the local Newar population has the strongest cultural and emotional connections with them. The Newars are considered the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and the trading towns that surround it. Most of the heritage monuments were built by the Newars during the Malla or Licchavi (c. 400–750 CE) dynasties at a time when 'Nepal' meant mainly the Kathmandu Valley and the people living there were called the Newar (or Newa in the local dialect) (Nepali 2015; P. R. Sharma 2015; B. G. Shrestha 1999). For this reason, handing over the nine-storeyed Durbar within the Hanuman Dhoka complex, which was the traditional seat of the Newar Malla Kings of Kathmandu, to the Chinese government (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Department of Archaeology 2018) was seen as hurtful to the sentiments of the local population.

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[4] Gaddi Baithak Restoration Project, http://miyamotointernational.com/gaddi-baithak-restoration-project-us-embassy/ (accessed 22 January 2018).

During my research on heritage restoration in Nepal (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018), it came to light that activists who were promoting the restoration of heritage monuments through community initiatives were highly disapproving of the restoration process being handed out through direct agreements with foreign governments. These 'heritage activists' have been critical of the use of foreign aid in heritage restoration because they feel that rebuilding these monuments through local initiatives would make a powerful statement of capacity and resilience. Their narrative was that these monuments were built and maintained by their ancestors without any foreign technical help, using native technology and traditional mechanisms which involved the community organizations that were native to the local Newar population—the *guthi*s (Khaniya 2005; Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Maharjan and Barata 2017; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; Quigley 1985; Toffin 2005). Several incidents occurred which clearly showed the discontentment of the local activists: for example, it was reported that protests by local activists were a key reason for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) withdrawing from projects to reconstruct two other temples in the Kathmandu Durbar Square complex (Satyal 2019a; see also Lotter, this volume).

There were also the questions of building techniques and materials. The activists' emphasis was on promoting local skills and providing employment for local artisans. When rebuilding through foreign assistance, there was uncertainty whether the architectural integrity would be maintained, or local skilled resources used. The concept of intangible heritage was also an angle through which several questions were raised. The mechanism through which construction was managed by traditional organizations such as the *guthi*s, which used to oversee most of these historical monuments, was also considered intangible heritage (Diwasa, Bandu, and Nepal 2007; C. KC 2016; Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010). With restoration projects being handed out to INGOs and foreign experts, questions were raised about the impact of these actions on the intangibles.

The National Integrity Policy

The NIP was proposed by the MOHA during the Sher Bahadur Deuba–led government (June 2017–February 2018) and the draft was prepared by former

secretaries Mohan Banjade and Sharada Prasad Trital (*The Kathmandu Post* 2018b). The policy was first formulated in 2017 and eventually the draft was presented by the Prime Minister's Office in 2018 (*The Himalayan Times* 2018b).

The draft policy contained several clauses relating to NGOs and INGOs. Some of the regulatory requirements for INGOs and NGOs were clearly aimed at enabling the government to control their activities. As per the draft, INGOs would not be allowed to send reports to their parent organizations outside the country without the consent of the government, their annual budget was to be approved by the Finance Ministry, and they would not be allowed to implement projects without the government's consent (*The Himalayan Times* 2018b; *The Kathmandu Post* 2018b). For local NGOs, the regulations were even stricter, requiring them to get permission from the government to receive any donation from donor agencies, and to inform the authorities within seven days of receiving these donations (*The Kathmandu Post* 2018b).

Due to these extremely restrictive rules, it was certain that the draft would be met with sharp criticisms from I/NGOs and the civil society in the country, and there was active criticism from the NGO Federation of Nepal and also several diplomatic missions (*Northeast Now* 2018). According to the non-government sector, the draft was even more worrying when considering other evidence for the changing scenario as well. In 2018, the government came up with the Foreign Nationals Monitoring Directive which was supposedly aimed at making the activities of foreign nationals in Nepal more 'transparent and ethical'. Later on, there were also reports that the government was mulling over regulations to make it mandatory for Nepalis to get clearance from local bodies before leaving for foreign destinations on a tourist visa (*The Himalayan Times* 2018d). This series of steps from the government that showed tendencies towards an authoritarian approach caused anxiety among international agencies. But the government seems to have tried to downplay these policy changes by calling them 'internal matters'. According to a news report published by *My Republica*, the Prime Minister was agitated by the 'unwarranted interest' from several international agencies (*My Republica* 2018b). Eventually the government relented under the pressure (*The Kathmandu Post* 2018a).[5] Despite this initial

[5] See also A. Giri (2018).

backtracking, as of late 2019 there were still indications that the government would pursue the policy direction, with the MOHA being authorized to draft a new law concerning the non-government sector in November 2019 (P. M. Shrestha 2019).

It can be understood that the NIP was the continuation of a chain of events that subscribed to the discourse of INGOs and NGOs being responsible for proselytizing and trying to interfere in the internal matters of Nepal. Nepal has always been considered friendly towards its foreign partners in general, both Western and regional. The recent development does not necessarily reflect an increase in anti-West sentiment in general but is probably related to an increasingly nationalistic politics, which needs further study and inferencing. The earthquakes in 2015 might have acted as a catalyst for such politics.[6] This does seem highly paradoxical because after the earthquakes the government had to depend on international aid and secured pledges of USD 4.4 billion for earthquake rehabilitation. However, these and other events that followed the earthquakes also gave rise to a strong national discourse against foreign aid and foreign-aid-driven I/NGOs.

The case of heritage restoration in Bhaktapur

The discourses discussed above provide grounds for us to hypothesize that the Nepal government was becoming less inclined to accept international aid as a result of a particular chain of events that followed the 2015 earthquakes, these events having varied backdrops and maybe direct or indirect effects on the changing perspective. As part of my ongoing research on the relevance of *guthi*s in post-earthquake heritage reconstruction (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018), I closely studied the heritage reconstruction process in Bhaktapur, where disagreements between the German side (the German Embassy and the German development bank KfW) and Bhaktapur Municipality regarding the modality of the restoration process eventually caused the German side to withdraw from the project. This case

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[6] The continuation of this perspective seems to be reflected in the controversy surrounding the United States' Millennium Challenge Corporation's Nepal Compact (B. Ghimire 2020).

can provide some insights into the perspective on aid in Nepal concerning heritage restoration in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes.

Immediately after the 2015 earthquakes, the Germans stepped up for the reconstruction efforts, and were probably drawn to Bhaktapur by earlier German involvement in heritage restoration there (Kawan 2015). The Durbar Square in Bhaktapur Municipality is one of the seven sites within the Kathmandu Valley listed in UNESCO's World Heritage List (UNESCO n.d.), and needed to be restored with urgency. By April 2016, the reconstruction had commenced, through a three-party agreement between KfW, the Government of Nepal, and Bhaktapur Municipality (*The Himalayan Times* 2016). In total, 10 structures were planned to be reconstructed through this arrangement, including the Pujari Math at Dattatreya Square, the National Arts Museum, Fasidega temple at Bhaktapur Durbar Square, the old building of Bhaktapur Municipality, Bhairav Dyo Chhe, Chyasimandap at Bhailukhel, Nyatapola temple, Hada Chhe at Nasamana and the buildings of the Bidyarthi Niketan Higher Secondary School and Shreepadya Higher Secondary School (*The Kathmandu Post* 2016a). All of these structures were historical buildings in the Durbar Square and were prioritized not only for swift reconstruction but also for archaeological investigation, in order to get clearer information on their historical significance. However, due to some opposing voices from within the Municipality, the project largely stalled.

The political transformation expedited by the earthquakes of 2015 also had effects on local politics. Nepal successfully conducted local elections in 2017 for the first time in almost two decades (*World Politics Review* 2017). This brought new local representatives to the municipalities who had a different vision from that of the central government for their respective municipalities. The Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (NMKP) had always been strong in Bhaktapur Municipality and this party won the election there with a convincing majority. The newly elected local leadership had a clear vision regarding the reconstruction of the heritage structures and wanted to employ local skilled resources and technology through a model based on local 'user committees'. The Municipality issued calls for community representatives to come forward to take part in reconstruction projects: groups that would have been formed through grassroots initiatives would come forward and take responsibility on the basis of agreements with the residents of the relevant area. A noticeable influence of the NMKP in the case of most user committees in Bhaktapur was claimed by some respondents. This was understandable, given the overwhelming influence

of the party within the city. According to the Deputy Mayor, Rajani Joshi, the Municipality did not give any preference based on party affiliation when handing over projects to user committees. Still, political influence in community activities in any field cannot be ruled out.

The participation of the local community in the maintenance of religious and social structures within the Kathmandu Valley was not an entirely new concept. Historically, *guthi* organizations had been providing the function in a very similar fashion. *Guthi*s were community organizations that were either instated by the ruling monarch (*raj guthi*) or formed through the grassroots initiatives of local communities (*niji guthi*) and looked after physical infrastructure, social welfare, or religious/cultural activities (Khaniya 2005; Quigley 1985; B. G. Shrestha 2012; Toffin 2005). The 'user committee' in the current context of Bhaktapur replaces the traditional *guthi* organizations that used to be responsible for the upkeep of these historical public structures, but the modality is similar, if not the same. These organizations display the same spirit of community initiative, as discussed elsewhere (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018). According to the information provided by the Deputy Mayor, smaller projects were already having success in restoration through this model and the Municipality wanted to use the same model for larger projects as well.

In April 2018, KfW formally withdrew from the project. This was reported by the national news agency in Nepal as KfW pulling out from its commitment (*The Himalayan Times* 2018a). The Mayor of Bhaktapur Municipality, Sunil Prajapati, in an interview published by *Nepali Times* in June 2018, used strong words such as 'sovereignty' and 'self-respect' while clarifying the reason for KfW eventually stepping back (Bhattarai 2018a). He mentioned that Bhaktapur already had two engineering colleges and a large pool of skilled resources and was thus able to rebuild these structures using the resources that were locally available. However, the conditions laid down by KfW meant that the Municipality did not have an absolute say in the techniques and materials used in the reconstruction process or in the process of selecting contractors.

From the perspective of the German side, a complete handover of control to the Municipality without conditions, as per the usual process, would not have been acceptable because of their own standards and rules. In an interview included in the same report, the German Ambassador Roland Schäfer focused on the relationship Bhaktapur Municipality had had with KfW, explaining that 'KfW had to defend modalities for a reconstruction

grant because of its general mandate, and that this could not be adapted to where Bhaktapur's leadership saw the city moving between 2015 and 2017'. In my communications with the German Embassy, Claudia Hiepe, Head of Development Cooperation, pointed out the three key points from the perspective of the German side which led to the failure of the cooperation attempt, as follows:

1. Use of local materials: Bhaktapur Municipality was of the opinion that the project should exclusively use local (traditional) materials. The German side suggested that while the use of local materials needed to be encouraged, the emphasis needed to be on having earthquake resilient structures which could also make prudent (internationally accepted) use of modern materials if required.
2. Exclusive utilization of user committees: Bhaktapur Municipality wanted to ensure that all activities were done through user committees. While the German side accepted this for most of the work, it was not able to accept a blanket use. The German side suggested going through a tendering process for the high-ticket items like the Old Municipality Building and schools, in line with the German Financial Cooperation regulations.
3. Use of international consultants: Bhaktapur Municipality felt that it had the internal capacity to implement the project and duly monitor construction work, even without the assistance of an international consultant, in this case a construction engineer. However, this did not comply with German financial cooperation regulations.

To my question as to whether the German side had doubts about the accountability and transparency of the Municipality's preferred model of working through user committees, Hiepe answered with a firm 'no'. In fact, for smaller projects the German side was already willing to utilize user committees, which would have not been the case if there were any concerns about accountability and transparency. Taking this into account, it can be understood that the conditions placed on the use of German financial support were not considered appropriate by Bhaktapur Municipality and, due to their requirements, the German side could not become more flexible. Thus, the two sides mutually agreed to part ways, with the allocated funds being redirected for other purposes within Nepal.

Even with the Municipality leadership's commitment to use local skilled resources and funds for the reconstruction, it is doubtful that the Municipality had the financial capacity to fund the projects. Bhaktapur is the smallest of the three major old cities in the Kathmandu Valley and has a much smaller annual budget in comparison with Kathmandu and Lalitpur (Patan)—just NPR 1.73 billion (c. USD 15.7 million) for the fiscal year 2017–18 (*Setopati* 2018). Given this scenario, it is certain that the Municipality does not have the capacity to fund some of the major reconstruction projects. For this reason, in October the Mayor had a meeting with the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) regarding the funding of the heritage restoration projects. According to the official social media page of the Municipality, there was a positive response from the NRA.

In my interview with her, the Deputy Mayor seemed to reiterate the stance of the Municipality that the reconstruction work on the heritage monuments needed to be done using local skills and techniques. The failure of the Rani Pokhari project (Ojha 2017) and other restoration projects in Kathmandu seemed to be one of the main influences on the decisions of the leadership in Bhaktapur. Coincidentally, as per the developments that followed, Rani Pokhari started to be cleaned and readied for reconstruction with the help of a team of women sent by Bhaktapur Municipality under the supervision of a user committee (Ojha 2019b). This happened as reconstruction of Bhajya Pokhari, another pond like Rani Pokhari, with a temple at its centre, was taken forward by Bhaktapur Municipality with notable success, using the same model (Phuyal 2018). Similar prior success with a model using local user committees was a strong reason for the added confidence of the Municipality leadership in the continued use of this model. In addition, as explained by the Deputy Mayor, having an engineering college (Khwopa Engineering College, run by the Municipality itself) added to the list of reasons why it was justifiable for the Municipality to reject the conditions put forward by the German side as far as the need to have an international consultant was concerned. Moreover, the condition that the projects were to use a bidding process did not go well with the Municipality, with the bidding process already detested by most stakeholders (AFP. 2017; S. K. Shrestha 2014). For heritage structures to be constructed through native technology was a priority for the Municipality. Thus, it believed that it would be more appropriate for locally trained engineers rather than international consultants to oversee the reconstruction of the structures. The Department of Architecture in

Khwopa College of Engineering had run courses in traditional architecture and was believed by the Municipality to have suitable expertise in heritage architecture and building techniques.

Despite the firm stance of the Municipality that the reconstruction should be done through the involvement of the local community and local skills, it seems that the larger project cannot be self-funded by the Municipality and that eventually the funding will come from the NRA. The NRA and the pre-existing strategy of the government for post-disaster management were heavily dependent upon international aid, despite criticisms of how international funds were being funnelled into the country (Claire 2015; Jones et al. 2014) and concerns about transparency and accountability in the use of these funds (Deen 2015). Given the predisposition of the international community towards the possibility of misuse of the aid funds, modalities that differ from internationally accepted standards are sure to be questioned. This posed a challenge to the Municipality to stick with its stance. Yet the partial success the Municipality achieved in the restoration process had been portrayed in a positive light (Prajapati 2018) and this provided grounds for the Municipality to push on with its agenda. There were other municipalities that were also showing a willingness to follow this model, with the Lalitpur Municipality deciding that the Bhimsen temple in Patan would be rebuilt with a user committee in charge (*The Himalayan Times* 2019b). However, with the project only partially funded by the Municipality, the committee responsible for the reconstruction of the temple also went ahead with crowdsourcing activities (*My Republica* 2019). Some projects, like the Kasthamandap, which faced initial hurdles too, made progress through local participation (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; *The Himalayan Times* 2019a). Other projects which already utilized user committees and even involved traditional *guthi*s have also achieved appreciable progress (Shakya and Drechsler 2019). For technical assistance, the efforts of the Department of Archaeology, UNESCO, and the NGO Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) have been effective (*Spotlight* 2020), in addition to the expertise accumulated by the municipalities themselves. Although the model of reconstruction through community participation in the heritage field was showing good prospects, it was evident that financing would be the biggest challenge if foreign aid were to be completely rejected. This was especially true for fringe projects where interest from central government agencies may be minimal. There is also the question of the longer run, when organizations like the NRA may

be dissolved and funding through them would not be a possibility for the municipalities.

Discussion

User committees and guthis

The concept of user committees and community participation has been used extensively in Nepal in the implementation of policies to govern natural resources such as water and forests (K. P. Acharya 2002; Chakraborty 2001; H. K. Shrestha 2018). The reasoning and influencing factors behind the policy implementation are something that would require a separate study, but the available literature shows that the Panchayat system, which used territorially based politico-administrative units (K. P. Acharya 2002), and the National Forestry Plan (NFP) of 1976, plus other rules that subsequently followed, provided for the formal recognition of villagers' management of forest resources through user committees (K. P. Acharya 2002). Since then, the concept of community participation, grassroots initiatives, and the employment of user committees for providing various functions of local governance has become a favoured model in the country (Harris et al. 2003; Mateo 2014; H. K. Shrestha 2018). There has been significant interest in studying this aspect of governance in Nepal from international scholars, notably Elinor Ostrom (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001; Varughese and Ostrom 2001). User committees have a more *ad hoc* manner of formation and in the case of Bhaktapur they are likely influenced by the NMKP, which raises questions about how party politics and the popularity of one party or another will affect the stability of these user committees.

The *guthi*, in contrast to user committees, is an institution with a history of at least 1,600 years, as it was a part of a system of state administration that was prevalent from the Licchavi period (c. 400 CE) onwards (D. Vajracharya 1973). According to the available inscriptions, *guthi* organizations were formed by the monarchs of the time with the goal of maintaining water resources, roads, *pati* (wayside shelters for travellers, the homeless, or other purposes), and so on. Despite the historical importance of the institution, *guthi*s have diminished and have been largely sidelined from governance, beyond matters of cultural significance among the Newar community (Shakya and Drechsler 2019; Toffin 2005). Yet the assumption

that *guthi*s are nearly obsolete and merely relics of the past is something which can be argued against. Especially since the 2015 earthquakes, *guthi*s have re-emerged to some extent, either in discussion or in practice (C. KC 2016; Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Gellner 2019). Given that user committees are formal institutions that are supported better by the legal mechanisms in Nepal, and that *guthi*s are defined primarily as religious trusts (as per the definition provided by the Guthi Sansthan Act, 1964), it is clear why user committees are preferred. There are even legal complexities in registering a new *guthi* at the current time (P. Sangroula 2020). However, the definition of *guthi*s as merely religious trusts is flawed. Especially within the Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley, it is unarguably the case that *guthi*s have a wide range of social functions (Gellner 1992: 236; Nepali 2015; B. G. Shrestha 2012; Toffin 2005, 2008). The traditional Newar lifestyle is greatly intertwined with this socioeconomic institution (Toffin 2005, 2019) and it is for precisely this reason that, when the Government in 2019 attempted to introduce a Guthi Act Amendment Bill, it was primarily Newars who took to the streets in a protest that was said to be the largest since the revolution of 2006 (referred to as the Jan Andolan II) that ended the direct rule of monarchy (Ojha 2019a; Satyal 2019b; Toffin 2019). But, despite the legal roadblocks which prevent *guthi*s from actively taking control of reconstruction efforts, as shown by my ongoing study of Maitripur Mahavihara (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; Shakya and Drechsler 2019), *guthi* members have still been resourceful in finding ways to get involved in the reconstruction of their monuments. At Maitripur Mahavihara, a committee was registered with members of the *mahavihara* and its *guthi* for running the reconstruction project. Thus, the *guthi*s can legally be interpreted as community-based organizations (CBOs). Of late, several *guthi*s have registered as NGOs as well (Social Welfare Council Nepal n.d.). This largely blurs the line between *guthi*s and user committees in practice, regardless of what the legal arrangements in the country may assert.

As an informal institution, a *guthi* is much more mature and established than a user committee because *guthi*s are an integral part of the Newar lifestyle (Gellner 2019; Nepali 2015; B. G. Shrestha 2012; Toffin 2005). While user committees have a more or less *ad hoc* nature as to how they are formed and there seems to be little ground for arguing that these groups would continue to function in the longer run, *guthi*s are, by design, intended to last for generations and the responsibility of a *guthi* member is passed down from

father to son. Having been formed based on kinship (Toffin 2005) there is a social stigma in not fulfilling one's duties in a *guthi*, which keeps members from discontinuing their affiliation to a *guthi*. *Guthi*s, considering those that are still existing, have the capacity to deliver their functions, although most of the functions of existing *guthi*s are confined within the religious and cultural spheres. For instance, there are numerous religio-cultural festivals known as *jatra* that take place in the Valley, which are significant as tourist attractions as well as for their cultural value, and these are all organized by the *guthi*s (T. T. Lewis 1993; Maharjan and Barata 2017; B. G. Shrestha 2012; Toffin 2007). Some of these *jatra*s are elaborate celebrations which extend over days or weeks and involve thousands of participants and spectators and are thus testament to the organizational capacity still retained by the *guthi*s. But the functions of *guthi*s have always extended beyond the religio-cultural sphere, with several social functions such as maintenance of water supplies and schools, and provision of funeral services, among others, being ensured through their involvement (*My Republica* 2018a).[7] An added advantage that *guthi*s have over user committees is their ability, albeit only in principle in many cases as of now, to self-fund most of their activities. Historically, most *guthi*s were usually provided with landholdings and other immovables in the form of endowments by either the ruling monarch or wealthy patrons (M. C. Regmi 1977, 1965). The rent produced by these holdings funded the activities of the *guthi*. Some percentage of the land in the Valley is still owned by *guthi*s (J. Adhikari 2008). However, the level of revenue generated by the use of these plots of land will probably not be as high as previously, because farmers in the Valley have largely moved away from their profession, and examples of diversifying the means of generating income through the optimal use of these properties are scarce.

While *guthis* have a strong historical connection with the lifestyle of the Kathmandu Valley, which suggests that they have clear advantages over user committees, the reason for their dwindling popularity is largely unfavourable state policy (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Maharjan 2013; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; Shakya and Drechsler 2019) and the failure to reform this institution to fit the present context. Having been sidelined and not subjected to reforms that would adapt them to new contexts, many of the *guthi*s and their routines may seem outdated and

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[7] See also Khaniya (2005), Quigley (1985), and Toffin (2005).

impractical at times. As organizations with centuries of history, with many of them functioning in a more or less unchanged manner, most *guthis* are patriarchal, and are criticized for being so (Dangol 2010). Many lack the capacity for proper accounts keeping and administrative capability, as not all members have higher education. Some of these issues that may be identified as problems surrounding the *guthi* institution are general societal problems, whose imprint falls onto the *guthi* institution as well (Shrestha and Mamta 2010).

Issues with aid-based development

The level of trust of I/NGOs amongst much of the population and within the government certainly appears to be decreasing, as the case of Bhaktapur and the media discourses discussed above suggest, and there are signs that government policy will pose difficulties for their activities. The changing government policies do not come just from the incumbent party but also reflect the general sentiment amongst the population; this claim is reinforced by the case of heritage restoration in Bhaktapur. This is not something that has not been witnessed by members of the international community before. Former US Ambassador Alaina B. Teplitz observed that the community had the right to 'ask tough questions' about foreign assistance (Teplitz 2018) and went on to suggest that the government, the media, and the people should ask questions like—'Is that project really in Nepal's national interest? Does it provide jobs or convey skills to Nepalis? Does it put us in debt, and how much? Is this project sustainable? Is the community or government engaged? Does that project align with Nepal's national priorities?' She further mentioned that Nepal should 'insist on community involvement'. It can be understood that the article was written by Teplitz based on her reflections on the sentiments of the people in the country. The case of Bhaktapur does bear similarity to the suggestion from Teplitz in insisting on community involvement as well as in many other aspects.

The case of heritage restoration projects in Bhaktapur and the drafting of the NIP might both be looked at from a similar angle as far as their implications are concerned. However, the two have rather different underlying causes. The NIP stems from the increasingly negative attitude towards I/NGOs and aid agencies amongst a section of the population and the government in the country. This negative attitude towards I/NGOs and

aid agencies has been further fuelled by the fear of proselytizing. It seems that the NIP itself was highly contentious within the government, and what the government will come up with regarding the new law concerning I/NGOs is still largely uncertain. The Bhaktapur case, on the other hand, is not in itself a display of a local government being opposed to all forms of foreign aid. Rather, the emphasis of Bhaktapur Municipality was on local capacity-building and using local resources and skills, an emphasis which created an incompatibility with the requirements of the German side.

The Bhaktapur case shows that the processes and institutions in place are often a major cause of the ineffectiveness of aid in development. Bureaucratic arrangements are designed more for the disbursement of aid and maintaining transparency about where the aid goes, rather than the ultimate goal that the aid is supposed to achieve. Easterly (2002) explains that 'aid bureaucracy' is more focused on the aid disbursed than the delivery of a service. The relationship between donors and aid recipients usually develops in such a way that the recipient government becomes primarily accountable to the donor agencies and less citizen-oriented, thus making it difficult for a social contract to be developed between the government and citizens (Moss, Pettersson, and van de Walle 2006). Using the principal–agent theory to describe this phenomenon, Castel-Branco (2008) argues that if strong institutions are not in place within the recipient country, the recipient country or the agent will be more accountable to the donor than to its own constituency. Owing to this, the donor agencies are often more influential in policy building within the recipient country; meanwhile, the aid recipient does not have active ownership of the projects that are in place.

There are concerns about the dignity of a recipient nation when it comes to development assistance. Often aid comes as development assistance that is tied with advice and conditions provided by richer nations and international institutions (Easterly 2007). Advice in the form of what is 'good for you' comes as a subjective idea that is highly influenced by values and traditions external to the society for whom it is supposed to be good. The question 'good for whom?' can be asked when terms such as 'good governance' are discussed (Drechsler 2004). Often, the conditions put forward may even hurt the dignity of the recipient. Policies from the donor countries come from a macro-level policy perspective that may not always take cultural sensitivities into consideration. In Bhaktapur, the standardized policy of the German side did not suit the particular case. Moreover, the case of Bhaktapur is not an isolated one: there is an increasingly clear body of

public opinion that is opposed to using foreign aid when strict conditions that are felt to be unfavourable to the country are included. There is also an increasing tendency towards aid agreements being more widely scrutinized. The controversy surrounding the Nepal Compact of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of the US exhibits this tendency. The MCC's Nepal Compact (which was signed in 2017) was to provide Nepal with USD 500 million in grants. However, as confusion grew over linkages between the MCC and the US Indo-Pacific Strategy and a clause that the Compact would prevail over Nepal's existing laws in case of conflict, there were widespread criticisms of the Compact (B. Ghimire 2020). There is a question of geopolitical influence surrounding the controversy; however, the level of public interest in the matter does show that Nepal can be wary of the conditions sought to be imposed. The Kasthamandap reconstruction is also a good example of a project which largely sought non-involvement of international donors or foreign contractors (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Tuladhar 2018; *The Kathmandu Post* 2017). The people involved in the restoration processes believed that the non-involvement of foreign donors and consultants would help to keep intact the dignity of the local community and also the state, by exhibiting indigenous capacity.

Questions of dignity, and alternatives to aid

A keyword that one comes across when considering the case of post-earthquake reconstruction in Nepal is 'dignity'. Whether considering the national discourses that have developed in the aftermath of the earthquake, or in a local context such as that of Bhaktapur, there is a realization that what the country was searching for was self-sufficiency and within that a sense of dignity. Dignity is a key aspect of development, as acknowledged by the United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015). Dignity means much more than adequate healthcare, proper nutrition, clean drinking water, and other such necessities. In a Buddhist economy, dignity directly associates with happiness and happiness in turn is the goal of Buddhist Economics (Bodhi 2010; Drechsler 2019). Dignity also concerns the equal treatment of all cultures, and equality has been considered a crucial element of happiness (UNESCO 1982). Autonomy is largely associated with dignity. Self-control or self-mastery, according to Buddhist values, is a crucial part of the notion of dignity and happiness

(Bodhi 2010). International aid often comes with too many strings attached; it has been argued that this reduces the liberty of developing countries to plan their own course of development and creates a dependency on aid (Tandon 2008). Some writers have even likened development aid to 'neocolonialism' (Buba 2018; Palacios 2010).

Several nuanced aspects of the aid mobilization in Nepal after the 2015 earthquakes raised the question of whether the government in Nepal, at the national and local levels, views development with dignity as possible through aid, or whether an alternative is required. Whether it be due to nationalistic policies or the desire of the general population to be self-sufficient, as the case of Bhaktapur showed, Nepal may not have the same level of activities involving international aid in the future. The country certainly cannot avoid accepting international aid as a whole, and will need to tread carefully. In the longer run, the alternative will certainly involve indigenous capacity-building in fiscal governance. The short-term interests of governments often give way to aid-funded short-term projects and these tend to help legitimize the government's performance. However, they fail to provide long-term strategic approaches for development. For developing countries the approaches needed are balanced across various essential aspects, including fiscal capacity-building (Drechsler 2009; Lin 2012). Taking Nurkse's view on fiscal administration for low-income countries, the goal should be always to push for improvement in domestic capacity, just as in techniques of physical production (Nurkse 1958: 264–65). In heritage governance in Nepal, traditional *guthi* institutions not only provided the human capital for the restoration of heritage structures but also served the function of sourcing the funds for the maintenance of these structures (Khaniya 2005; Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; B. G. Shrestha 2012).

It would be overly ambitious to say that a potential rejuvenation of the *guthi* institution is the answer to the funding dilemma faced by heritage restoration or other infrastructure projects, but smaller projects can certainly be executed through funding received from rent sources still available to the municipality or local *guthi*s. In the longer run, tackling larger projects by developing similar models further can certainly be a possibility. Funding infrastructure projects (religious or not) through land endowments and community-based fund sourcing is not a concept unique to *guthi*s. *Waqf* practice in the Islamic world endorses similar concepts (Latif et al. 2018). In Europe, elaborate cathedrals have been built using community-based

funding (Brichta 2014; Wolff 1999). Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, which burned down in 2019, is largely being rebuilt through donations coming in from the community (Sansom 2019). If the economy overall is healthy, heritage structures of high sentimental value can easily be locally funded, which is more dignified than looking towards foreign aid that may come with stringent conditions. The *guthi* principle of self-funding resource-intensive activities through community involvement can be argued to have significant potential. It is necessary to acknowledge that even though the user committees that have effectively taken over the restoration projects in Bhaktapur are not very different from *guthi*s in essence, a vital aspect—the capability to self-fund their operations—is missing. Furthermore, user committees have a far more temporary nature, compared to *guthi*s. It is worth considering whether the Bhaktapur and other local governments can learn from the *guthi* institution as they seek to develop self-funding capacity.

Publication IV

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ICT and Institutional Transformations in the Global South: A Study of the Rejuvenation of the Guthi Institution in Nepal

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ICT and Institutional Transformations in the Global South: A Study of the Rejuvenation of the Guthi Institution in Nepal

Abstract: At a juncture where various streams questioning the role of ICT in democratic governance have joined, this paper explores how a traditional South Asian institution – the Guthi – is rejuvenated, if not resuscitated, by ICT, especially – but not only – by the Communication aspect, prompted by a cataclysmic event, and also propelled towards global normative priorities. The case came to attention after the major earthquake of 2015 in Nepal. The Guthi, the traditional institution of cooperative self-governance prevalent primarily amongst the Newars of Kathmandu Valley, was in serious decline and the earthquake laid bare the void it had left behind. Leveraging on ICT and following their traditions, the communities put forward the case for their participation in rebuilding efforts. Especially this, but also those possibilities in general, "spun off" new iterations of the Guthi: neo-Guthis, sub-Guthis, and quasi-Guthis. We argue that much of the criticism that is levelled against the Guthi today ignores these and solely focuses on the ancient, guthis. As we put forth, it was the reaction to the demand of the time as well as utilizing the tools available, and even adapting the organization(s) to do so, that enabled the rejuvenation of an indigenous institution.

Keywords: Guthi, Nepal, ICT, Cooperatives, E-participation, Deliberation, Social Media.

1 Introduction

With the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially since the 2000s but also even before (Olphert & Damodaran, 2007), barriers to decentralization and citizen involvement were supposed to be resultantly ameliorated. But increasing evidence suggest that e-participation projects do not easily achieve success in transforming governance as anticipated (Bright & Margetts, 2016; Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). Despite the large volume of literature in favor of the implementation of participatory democratic governance, how it actually can be achieved through ICT is still a learning process; *a fortiori* when it comes to diversified contexts (Kostakis, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017; Walsham, 2001).

Our paper starts with the theoretical assumption that resilient, context-suited institutions enable socio-economic development in the broadest sense of improving the human condition, both materially and regarding equity, in time and space (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1985, 2000). Our

interest in the research concerning this paper is to explore whether Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a role to play in furthering the resilience and sustainability of indigenous "democratic" institutions, and if so, how?

Thus, we are offering a study in which a traditional South Asian institution is rejuvenated, if not resuscitated, by ICT, especially – but not only – by the Communication aspect, prompted by a cataclysmic event, and also propelled towards global normative priorities. The case in question is that of the Nepalese Guthi[1], an institution characterized by community-based cooperatives with a centuries-old tradition and with often heavy endowments, part of Buddhist Economics (Drechsler, 2019, 2020) and a typical institution of the Newars[2], the inhabitants of the urban core of Nepal around Kathmandu. The victim of government discrimination and "modernization", the Guthi resurfaced in the wake of a devastating earthquake and re-established itself, in various permutations, through facilitation by ICT, which in some forms then even took over and actively utilizes the latter.

2 Methodology

For our methodological approach, we consider the common occurrence of traditional institutions often getting side-lined from mainstream practices, with such institutions even more often being under-researched. Yet, many studies have shown that in a situation of a void within the government's institutional framework as regards the fulfilment of a specific necessity, traditional practices and institutions can come back and re-establish themselves (e. g. Boonjubun et al., 2021; Pur & Moore, 2010; Urinboyev, 2011).

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[1] We do not italicize Guthi, and use the capitalized singular, with definite article, to refer to the institution as such, whereas individual guthis are not capitalized and can be singular (guthi) or plural (guthis).

[2] Newars are the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, historically also referred to as Nepalmandala (also written Nepal Mandala; see Slusser, 1982). The Newar culture is argued to have climaxed during the reign of the Malla Kings in 18th century until the region governed as a system of three cities was conquered by the Gorkhali Shah dynasty (Levy, 1992, p. 35; P. R. Sharma, 2015; Toffin, 2008, p. 8; Whelpton, 2005).

From a historical institutional perspective, pre-existing institutions and the path dependency that they create are essential in considering policy implementation (Steinmo, 2008). The framework of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance (NWPA) asserts that in contrast to the global-Western paradigm in Public Administration (PA), alternative paradigms do exist (Drechsler, 2013). These institutions and elements, if relevant to the specific context, are worth studying even without the need for an elaborate theoretical scaffolding. But from the perspective of resilient institutions, traditional institutions are embedded into the societal fabric or the way of living of any given group and thus they either create challenges to change or provide advantages in some respects (Peters, 1999). Resilient institutions also often characteristically tend to utilize collective action and are contextually grounded with ability to absorb disturbances and keep the ability to perform (E. Ostrom, 2005, 2008; Ratner et al., 2017). Through the right institutional arrangements, the social capital within a population can be utilized to achieve set goals collectively (E. Ostrom and Ahn, 2009).

Through a historical institutionalist perspective, we follow the trajectory of the transformative process of the Guthi, and move on to its contemporary relevance in light of its transformative interaction with ICT against the backdrop of the devastating earthquake of 2015. Research for the paper started in 2017, when early signs showed that community-led collective action following the blueprint of the Guthi could have an important role to play in the process of reconstruction, especially concerning built heritage (Lekakis et al., 2018). Given the reach of ICT within the urban population of the Kathmandu Valley, it was likely from the outset that this would be a factor too, but its key role became eventually visible. It therefore became relevant to pursue our topic from the angle of ICT-enabled institutional transformation.

As suggested by the subject matter itself, the research here takes an interpretivist qualitative approach. A mix of qualitative research approaches were used: Several informants were continually followed; the key individuals on social media were shadowed; more than a dozen interviews were conducted; several other scholars with knowledge in the field were consulted; participation in relevant academic conferences took place; active participation in online fora and discussion groups was established. All these were done in addition to classical field work, viz. in March 2017, July 2018 and July 2019 in Kathmandu and in January 2019 and February 2020 in London. For this research, because of the phenomenon being activities influenced by and reflected in digital media, it was necessary to go in parts towards digital methods

employing digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016). As the first author is a member of a guthi associated with Rudravarna Mahavihara (a Vajrayana Buddhist temple and monastery) in Patan, and a member of the World Newah Organization, there are also significant elements of participatory action research.

The availability of a rich repository of literature from historical and anthropological perspectives concerning the guthis (and Newars generally) meant that a significant study could be achieved through their study. Works from Gellner (1986, 1992), Regmi (1977), P. R. Sharma (2015), B. G. Shrestha (2012; 2015), Toffin (2008; 2016), Vergati (1995) and several others provided key material, while direct correspondence with some of these authors also helped provide direction to the research.

3 The case of the Guthi in Nepal

The Guthi, or गोष्ठी (goṣṭhī) as per the Sanskrit terms historically used, is an institution of community governance prevalent amongst the Newars since the rule of the Licchavi clan more than 1600 years ago (Vajracharya, 1973). Guthis, in essence, are community organizations tasked with private matters associated with members of the organizations themselves, or with public utility. Their functions are diverse; they can range from social and cultural functions like arranging funerals and organizing rituals in temples to alternative public-service provisions like the maintenance of water sources (see Toffin, 2005). Although cooperatives abound in human time and space, the Guthi is so distinct, resilient, and important that there are calls to even declare it a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (Gellner, 2019; M. Maharjan & Barata, 2020).

But well beyond this aspect of cultural importance, the Guthi was and can be an effective (alternative) public-sector institution (S. Shakya, 2020; see Gellner, 1992; Toffin, 2005). In fact, this was so already during the Licchavi times, gleaning from inscriptions that mention guthis established for public utility tasks, such as cleaning and maintaining the roads (Vajracharya, 1973).

An example of the public utility function of guthis is the maintenance of water sources. In the Kathmandu Valley, these generally took the form of ponds or *hiti* (*hitis* for plural), which is a specific structure that taps into underground water channels with sunken courtyards, providing

running water for public usage – and in parallel with modern water supply, they are still in crucial and everyday use (see Molden, 2019; UN-HABITAT, 2008; on guthis being in charge of their maintenance, B. G. Shrestha, 2012, p. 76–80). *Hitis* along with other water resources such as ponds and dug wells were maintained by guthis and were available for general public use (Molden, 2019; UN-HABITAT, 2008).

Even though most of these structures were constructed by ruling monarchs (Whelpton, 2005), *hitis* came from philanthropists as well, with the kin of the donor often establishing a guthi for continued maintenance of the common resource in future. For example, Alkwo Hiti in Patan, which was established in 1415 AD by Tumha Dev Bajracharya (UN-HABITAT, 2008). Tumha Dev not only constructed the *hiti* but also allocated a significant area of arable land for the maintenance costs, established a guthi for its maintenance and also conducting the ritual requirements. Additionally, instructions were too left behind in the form of inscriptions (UN-HABITAT 2008).

It has been argued by Tiwari (2007) that channelling "individual wealth" to the public through committees recognized as permanent entities was the main point of the Guthi. The wealth of an individual was thus utilized for the benefit of many and its sustainability ensured, adhering to the Buddhist principle of "*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*" or the welfare and happiness of many.[3]

Buddhism is an integral part of the Newar identity (Gellner, 1986, 1992), and the Guthi is a distinct and in many ways typical form of Buddhist Economics (S. Shakya & Drechsler, 2019).[4] This makes it particularly interesting, at least as a model from which to learn, in a context where Buddhist Economics has become prominent in its happiness and sustainability orientation, and its conduciveness for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (Drechsler,

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[3] This expression often appears in the Buddhist Pāli Canon (see, e. g., Pali Canon, Itivuttaka 84) and is generally regarded as the main reason for teaching the Buddhist *Dhamma*.

[4] That said, they were also fairly common amongst Hindu residents of the Kathmandu Valley and its periphery, and some of them, especially among Hindu Newars, still remain despite the Buddhist origins (Gellner, 1992; Levy, 1992; S. Shakya & Drechsler, 2019).

2019, 2020). However, its Buddhist nature was especially objectionable to Nepali-Hindu homogenizing nationalism, already since the late 18th century[5], as well as to economic and development ideologies that were less community- and permanence-driven and more market-, exploitation-, and material-gains-focused (M. Shakya, 2008).

The membership within a particular guthi would usually be based on kinship or territory (Gellner, 1992), and memberships would pass down through lineage (Toffin, 2005). Though a sense of hierarchy exists within the organizations, with seniority being honored, the institution has been acknowledged to be democratic and egalitarian with the duties passing amongst the members in a rotational manner and decisions being made through mutual agreements (Gellner, 1992, pp. 232–248). There is a principle of sharing too, with properties of a guthi being shared assets of all the members. The surplus of the income from funding the activities of the guthi would be shared amongst the members (P R. Sharma, 2015, p. 62).

In its essence, the Newar Guthi existed as an institution of participatory governance which oversaw several aspects of the administration of urban spaces in the Kathmandu Valley.

3.1 The decline

After the Prithvi Narayan Shah takeover in 1768 (Whelpton, 2005), eventually, a hegemonic, Hindu rule of the *Parbatiya Bahun* and *Chhetri* communities (Hindu "higher class" groups mostly from the hills of Western Nepal) was established, which structurally discriminated against several, or all, previously-existing, now minority groups, including Newars (Bhattachan, 2003, 2005). Nepal then went through a phase of autocratic rule by the *Hausmeier*

[5] Tiwari (2007, pp. 81) mentions that the property of many of the guthis associated with the Buddhist institutions of Patan was expropriated and transferred to others as a result of the political changes after 1786 (the year of the completed Gorkha takeover of Kathmandu). Prithvi Narayan Shah's vision of "Asali Hindustan" ("true Hindus' land") (see Bhattachan, 2003, 2005) and Jung Bahadur's "Muluki Ain" (National Code) of 1854, based entirely on a Hindu framework (see Khatiwoda et al., 2021), would seem to indicate that Gorkhali policy, since the takeover of Nepal Mandala, was geared towards Hindu homogenization, which continued with the later Panchayat period (Whelpton, 2005).

Rana dynasty from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 46–49). After a short stint of democracy, the returning Shah monarchy took absolute power from 1960 to 1990, in the so-called *Panchayat* regime, after which multi-party democracy was (re-)established, if often in a highly deficient version (Bhattachan, 2005; Gellner, 2016; Whelpton, 2005).

The Panchayat regime's ideology of the time was based on developmentalism, suppression of political parties, pro-Hindu religiosity and nationalism (Gellner, 2016, p. 17). Legal reforms were introduced to side-line the pre-existing institutions of governance, including the Guthi, thus reducing either of them to semi-formal status or abolishing them altogether (for example the Kipat system was completely abolished). The Land Reform Act of 1964, the Guthi Samsthan (Corporation) Act of the same year and the subsequent act of 1976 sidelined the Guthi, with most of their property nationalized and brought under the control of said Guthi Samsthan[6], a non-Newar state agency, and their scope restricted to primarily religious and cultural activities (M. Maharjan & Barata, 2020; S. Shakya & Drechsler, 2019).[7] Additionally the Land Acquisition Act of 1977 (which allowed for the expropriation of private or Guthi land for development purposes), also part of the reforms aimed at modernizing and developing the country, in effect worked against the Newars, with their guthis being left without resources to self-finance and their lands being acquired for infrastructure projects (K. Maharjan, 2017; N. Pradhananga et al., 2010; Sunar, 2017).

But while the anti-Guthi reforms did largely sideline the institution, they did not cause a complete demise. Having been embedded into the fabric of the Newar lifestyle, the Guthi continued to be the means of self-governing, but more privately as the friction between the

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[6] Guthis were categorized as *Raj* Guthi and *Niji* Guthi. Properties of the former were expropriated, nationalized and brought under the ownership of the Guthi Samsthan while *Niji* Guthi were deemed private and allowed to keep their property (Regmi, 1977).

[7] Historian Tri Ratna Manandhar has argued that the legal reforms introduced during the Panchayat regime ended up being the root cause of the decline of the Guthi, although the reforms were ostensibly intended to improve the economic status of tenant farmers (Manandhar, 2019; Manandhar, personal discussion, July 2018).

state and the interests of the Newars continued despite the democratic transition in 1990 and further political shifts.

3.2 The Earthquake, the Heritage Movement and ICT

In 2015, a massive earthquake struck Nepal, taking over 9,000 lives (DPNet-Nepal, 2015). In the Kathmandu Valley, historical monuments, several of which were part of the sites inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List (see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n. d.), were destroyed. The urgency for the heritage structures to be reconstructed was strongly felt locally, nationally and internationally (Sengupta, 2015; Wolfson, 2015).

The government's flawed initial efforts at reconstruction drew criticism with the lack of focus on the authenticity and use of vernacular materials and methods in reconstruction being pointed out (for example the Rani Pokhari and Balgopaleshwor temple project, see S. B. Pradhananga 2016). Resultantly, a "heritage movement" emerged, led by the local community of the valley, demanding stakeholder participation and focus on authenticity and integrity with use of indigenous building techniques, methods and materials (Bhattarai, 2018; A. Tuladhar, 2018). The Guthi was at the center of this discussion given the role of the orgnizations in the past (KC, 2016; Sekhsaria, 2016). Few cases of successful community involvement, even if only indirectly or partly involving guthis, emerged (Lekakis et at. 2018; Shakya & Drechsler, 2019; S. Shakya, 2020; S. Shakya 2021).

As Newar youth activists started to take their agenda to social media through groups and pages on Facebook (which was and is still by far the most popular social media platform in the country; see StatsCounter, 2021), ICT became a driving factor. Pressure groups such as Save Heritage (Save Heritage, n. d.), Save Nepa Valley Movement (Save Nepa Valley Movement, n. d.) and Nepal Sanskritik Punarjagran Aviyan (Nepal Sanskritik Punarjagaran Abhiyan, n. d.) started to increase their activities largely utilizing the "affordances"[8] provided by the internet to disseminate information and collaborate in protest activities.

[8] "Affordance" concerns the "transactional" relationship between human beings and their environment (see Gibson 2015). The concept has been extensively used in Information Systems literature.

There was evidently a strong critical agency amongst the Newars. This was the key factor behind the success of the massive "Guthi protest" of 2019 as series of demonstrations that were directed against the "Guthi bill", which attempted to bring all guthis under an authoritative government body lacking local representation, in effect being designed to finish them off once and for all as serious players (Gellner, 2019; S. Shakya, 2019; Toffin, 2019). The bill was eventually withdrawn (Sunuwar, 2019). The demonstration held, considered exemplary in terms of size and coordination, was not led by political parties, but by an ad-hoc committee involving Newar community leaders and directly involved guthis, thus hinting at the potential of the Guthi in generating social capital and effective collective action (Sunuwar, 2019; Satyal, 2019). ICT played a vital role in all this, with several coordinating and dissemination activities organized via ICT means.

The events from 2019 clearly showed that the Guthi institution was evidently in a transformative process exhibiting institutional resilience with ICT in the mix of things. The question of how needs a better elaboration.

4 The Guthi goes digital and different: A New Taxonomy

The communication aspect of ICT is relevant for guthis which organize festivities and see value in advertisement of such events. A prime example is the festival of Bunga Dyo, the pre-Buddhist "God of Rain", who is worshipped by Buddhists as an aspect of the Avalokiteshvara (Vergati, 1995; Slusser, 1982). The festival involves pulling a massive wooden chariot around the city of Lalitpur, uniting more than a dozen guthis which work together. There have been several social media pages dedicated to promoting and organizing the festival which effectively emboldens the cultural practice.[9] The point here is not a generic "they're-on-FB-also", but that potentially fading-away community practices were rejuvenated cross-generationally, as we shall establish.

Many guthis that are more private, such as those that organize worship of tutelary deities and maintain their temples, also find use of ICT in their organizational activities. These guthis

[9] See, for example, Rato Machhindranath (n.d)

mostly have used private Facebook groups, examples being Bishnudevi Guthi (Etee Tole Bishnudevi Guthi Pariwar, n. d.) and Upakarma Guthi (Upakarma Guthi Lalitpur, n. d). Correspondence with the guthi members showed that the social media, specifically Facebook groups, was primarily used to communicate and make general announcements within the membership. In addition to Facebook groups, these guthis were using traditional SMS for this purpose, which was much more convenient than the even more traditional way of going door to door, making announcements. Yet, to uphold the traditions, they still use door-to-door visits on formal occasions, but for general discussions and announcements, the guthis have increasingly relied on ICT tools, and that has arguably made them more up-to-date, inclusive, and relevant.

This all might sound quite generic and not especially impressive for the study of the effects of ICT. However, close observation of the Guthi in present context reveals that there are organizations in their penumbra that are closely related to the ancient institution, sometimes even part thereof, but neither quite the same nor completely different with some but not all principles behind the Guthi being followed by the newer iterations. For instance, kinship might be a principle central to traditional guthis which have been discontinued with newer iterations, yet other principles like consensus decisions, honoring seniority within the organizational dynamics, and some level of rotation of duties are often continued. This likeness of characteristics in new organizations in comparison to the traditional institution has also been noted in the secondary literature (for example Pathak, 2020; Toffin, 2016), without there being a taxonomy built on this. Classifying and typologizing guthis, however, is a time-honoured practice among experts. Gellner (1992, pp. 235–247) has presented a typology based on functions and Toffin has presented his own typology (2005, pp. 289–306). Broadly, there can be three types based on their functions – 1. public utilities and organizing of festivities, 2. community welfare, and 3. religious rituals. But we look at functional organization, as this will help us to recognize what the Guthi now *is*, and what part ICT plays here.

We argue that to understand the 21st-century Guthi, it is pivotal to recognize how the ancient guthis, in various ways, have "spun off" other forms of related organizations that are best understood as forms of Guthi, as iterations, as they basically fulfil the same functions for and with similar people, but with important differences. This is crucial because if one focused on the ancient Guthi only (which is limited by the socio-political context), one would not be able

to recognize how they are rejuvenated. The ancient guthis remained in many ways how they always were, but both technologically and sociologically, "progress" was, consciously or almost coincidentally, "outsourced" to those other variants. In our ICT context, it is those other forms that have been created, to some extent, and certainly function, for or even by ICT.

We see three types of Guthi having emerged in parallel to the ancient one: quasi-guthis, neo-guthis, and sub-guthis. The first are guthis that are "created" by Nepali anti-Guthi discrimination, i. e. organizations with the Guthi purpose which are not allowed to emerge due to the existing laws, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish a new guthi. Therefore, at the end of the 20th century, new organizations started being registered in the form of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with some keeping the Guthi name (see some listed as NGOs in Social Welfare Council, 2019), and some not. Being in essence a group of new guthis, but not in legal form, we call the form **quasi-Guthi**. Studying them close-up (also partly discussed in S. Shakya, 2020, 2022) shows that they are extensively using ICT, and their ICT-based activities range from virtual meetings and seminars as well as conducting language classes to posting notifications or announcements and so on. Generally, all these activities take place in addition to offline activities, but one notices a much greater propensity towards ICT. A prime example of such a guthi in function and name, but not in a legal sense, is Nepal Lipi Guthi (Nepal Lipi Guthi, n. d).

Nepal Lipi Guthi (NLG) was established as NGO in 1980 with the aim of promoting Nepal's native scripts (lipi).[10] The mode of establishment is similar to how the guthis of the past would have been established, with a charitable purpose in mind. Though the earliest activities of NLG were not always ICT-based, with ICT getting pervasive, it became important for the organization to adapt to ICT-based activities. For a guthi that specifically dealt with preserving and promoting endangered native writing scripts, not just digitally documenting but also enabling the use of such writing scripts in digital mediums was an obvious goal. NLG has also been collaborating with activists and youth volunteering teams for various activities like developing smartphone apps and fonts and organizing online classes (see, for example, P.

[10] Nepal Lipi Guthi, personal communication, 12 March, 2021. See also Hall et al. (2014).

Tuladhar, 2018). One such team that has been collaborating with NLG is the Callijatra team, a group formed by youth activists (Callijatra, n. d.). Though NLG was already working on creating fonts for word processing and digitally encoding the native scripts as unicode (Hall et al., 2014; P. Tuladhar, 2018), activities have been more leveraged by the use of ICT through collaborating with Callijatra (Deupala, 2018).

Then, there are several Newar organizations even in Nepal (outside the Nepalmandala), but most prominently abroad, which have been largely established as community groups in the diaspora, focusing on social interaction and welfare among their members. Taking up, in all cases, the important concept of the Guthi (in itself a sign for its resilience), these are what we call **neo-Guthi**. The most prominent and active, even activist, neo-guthis are the ones in the United States and the United Kingdom, such as Pasa Puchah Guthi UK (Pasa Puchah Guthi UK, n. d.), founded in 2000, and Newa Guthi New York (Newa Guthi NY, n. d.), founded in 2007. Canadian Newa Guthi (Canadian Newa Guthi, n. d.), founded in 2005, has been similarly active. There is a better visibility of neo-guthis outside of Nepal, but there have been active neo-guthis within Nepal too, an example being Tansen Guthi (Tansen Guthi, n. d. a, b), established in 1993. It almost goes without saying that the organization of the former two neo-guthis happens primarily via ICT, and it is even questionable whether they could have emerged, and could be maintained, without such a platform (S. Shakya, 2022).

The fact that the geographically very dispersed neo-Guthis have closely cooperated has led to an almost automatically ICT-based federation. The World Newah Organization (WNO), an organization registered as a non-profit in the US, functions as a federation of non-Nepali neo-Guthis, with several neo-Guthis such as Canadian Newa Guthi and Newa Guthi New York being affiliated with the organization. WNO was established through a series of virtual meetings between 26 scholars and activists from various parts of the world (see S. Shakya, 2022; WNO, 2010). Their activities, too, go beyond just being ICT-based, with key activities including the development of an online dictionary (WNO, 2020), organizing online conferences (WNO, 2021a), and organizing online quiz games with self-developed software (WNO, 2021b).

The neo-Guthis, via the WNO, have even gone a significant step further – not being ICT-enabled, but enabling or at least influencing and creating key contents for the ICT world. Their

latest project has been to make Nepalbhasa[11] available for Google Translate. The project was initiated by WNO and taken forward through community contributions with joint sessions held on a daily basis over Zoom to feed translation data to Google's translation algorithm. A beta release of the translation service has already been launched on Google Translate (WNO, 2021c).

The level of importance of ICT in the establishment and organization of neo-guthis within Nepal may not be exactly the same as compared to those outside, but taking the example of Tansen Guthi, the relationship of ICT with neo-guthis remains similar. Tansen Guthi was established in 1993 in Kathmandu by Newars who returned from Tansen in the Palpa district back to their ancestral cities. Owing to the fact that many families still remained in Tansen and some even migrated to other cities in Nepal, two additional branches of the guthi, one in Butwal and one in Tansen itself, were established (Sh. Shakya, 2018). This created a scenario not different from that of neo-guthis outside Nepal, where organizational efforts needed to utilize electronic communication channels. Looking at the Twitter handle of the guthi (Tansen Guthi, n. d. b), it is clear that already by 2015, the organization was internally promoting use of ICT amongst their member (even if seems to be a discontinuity in use of the platform). Today, the organization's organizing is completely based on the messaging app Viber, and the members of the guthi see the further use of ICT as the only possible way forward.[12]

And finally, since the ancient Guthi is under such duress in Nepal, guthis themselves have adapted to the laws and regulations in the country, too. Guthi members started registering "Committees" with the municipalities, thus making it easier to receive grants from the municipality offices. In general, for many temples and quarters, Committees handling them consisted of a subset of the members of the guthi in question. As these are not independent organizations but depend on specific ancient guthis, but are legally autonomous, we call them **sub-Guthi**. The need to become transparent regarding their activities and spending, as well as

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[11] Nepalbhasa is the native language of Newars and the historical lingua franca of Nepalmandala. Though the term "Newari" is often used, the correct term is Nepalbhasa.

[12] Shrestha, Prami, personal discussion, 30 July, 2021.

showing appreciation to donors, became important for these organizations, and social media became a useful outlet for that. Several Committees established to conduct reconstruction/renovation of the monasteries and monuments or to handle other activities of importance amongst the communities have used social media in attempts to make their activities more transparent. Guthis associated with Maitripur Mahavihara (Maitripur Mahavihar, n. d.) in Kathmandu as well as Rudra Varna Mahavihara (Rudravarna Mahavihar, n. d.) and Upakarma Guthi in Patan (Upakarma Guthi Lalitpur, n. d.) are among the many which have registered such committees to officially work with the municipal offices.

In short, the typology we suggest can be summed up as follows:

Table 1: Typology of organizations that form the contemporary Guthi (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

	Description	Social character	Role of ICT	Key ICT Tools used
Ancient Guthi		Traditional, mirroring Newar culture rather than challenging it	Internal communication; advertising	• SMS • messaging apps • social media
Quasi-Guthi	New Nepali orgs which are contemporary iterations of the Guthi principle	Less but still traditional	More ICT-based	• SMS, messaging apps, and social media • online conferencing • video and multimedia • creation of font faces
Neo-Guthi	New guthis, also in name, founded abroad (or outside the Kathmandu Valley) for the diaspora	Places of reflected, "progressive" transformation	Often primarily ICT-based	• Online conferencing • Contributing to Google Translate • cloud storage, social media • animation tools

				• video and multimedia software • capable of self-developing ICT solutions
Sub-Guthi	Orgs related to ancient Guthi in order to operate better in today's Nepal	More pragmatic and technical	Using ICT also for communication with the government and especially for transparency	• SMS • social media • word processing and spreadsheets

How important it is to differentiate between these, but also to look at all of them when we discuss the Guthi today, is reflexively shown if we emphasize ICT, because what one sees if one just looks at the ancient guthis is arguably less than half the picture in this respect. But this is even more strikingly visible if we look at the challenges the latter face in local and especially global academic and social-media discourse, so we will examine this issue next.

5 Guthi identity: A Discussion

Although generally praised, Global-Northern (but not only) criticism of the Guthi is not missing either. Rankin (2003, 2004) is a good example of this, outlining the standard critique from a traditional global-academic perspective. Rankin sees the Guthi as a kind of "honor economy" of the Newars, which works "agentively to maintain and defend caste and gender hierarchies." According to her, guthis, being strictly segregated by caste, mark the differences within the Newar society. Regarding gender discrimination, she claims that the Guthi "marginalizes women from the male-dominated centers of ritual life – and attendant circles of political power – while at the same time depending concretely on women's labor for their routine functioning" (Rankin, 2003, p. 118). She also sees the Guthi as a practice that puts Newars at odds with accepting modernity – "the surest mechanism for protecting 'traditional Newar culture' against 'outside' influences of modernization" (Rankin, 2004, p. 123).

Beyond the surprising attitude to judge Newar culture from the outside regarding whether some of it may be acceptable from a specific perspective of modernization and some not, seeing the

Guthi as something that blocks modernity in a more technical sense has been a common view. Among the Newars, too, this narrative is not uncommon.

However, misunderstanding the Guthi as ancient, even atavistic, and immobile is frequently premised on outdated modernization theories – which often go hand in hand with authoritarianism, not least in Asia – and implicit global-Western standards of normal progress (Attir, 1981; Fakih, 2020). Possibly more prominent, however, is a lack of *au courant*, empirical, stakeholder-driven research among Newars and guthis, and a misconception of what the Guthi really is today. As we have just outlined, there are four discernible forms of the Guthi today. Functionally speaking, all four are Guthi; all four are part of what Newar cooperative self-determination means. The standard criticism as mentioned above, however, almost universally goes against the ancient Guthi (1), whereas the other three types are the ones in which progress as envisioned, technological (ICT-driven) as well as and together with societal (according to the Newars' own best standards), is actually and demonstrably taking place.

When it comes to caste discrimination, this is a serious issue, as Newars, being a hierarchal community, do have upper and lower castes and traditional occupational roles assigned to community sub-groups, even though not as rigid as it often may appear to be.[13] But today, there are on-going efforts for unification and cooperation among different caste-based associations (Ashanbare, 2020), and quasi-Guthi and neo-Guthi tend to be much more open and non-discriminatory in this respect, with the ICT-driven neo-guthis, PPGUK (PPGUK, n. d) and Newa Guthi New York (NGNY, n. d) having members from all Newar castes (S. Shakya, 2021c). Guthi Australia has also been noted by Pariyar (2019, p. 97) for including all Newar castes. It could even be argued that the Guthi is developing into being instrumental for creating a platform for cooperation among the several sub-groups (castes) among the Newars. In spite of different developments in history, space and subgroups, the essence of Buddhism is anti-caste, both originally and with high political relevance in the last century and even today (Omvedt, 2003; Wright, 2020).

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[13] The fluid nature of Newar caste hierarchy historically and today is, e. g., discussed in Gellner & Quigley (1995); Levy (1992); P. R. Sharma (2015).

The criticism of the Guthi around gender-related issues is similar, meaning that it is a rightly serious charge and with obvious *prima-facie* validity, given that guthis are traditionally male-member-only organizations, with women involved, but in exactly such supporting roles as in male social and service clubs in Western contexts. However, the ancient Guthi of category (1) is part of a historically male-dominated society, and therefore, first of all, one might ask, even while risking a copout, whether they are not reflecting, rather than promoting, traditional gender roles. Once the latter are changing, it is correct to say that such organizations might reinforce what is now the past – but once again, this is only the case if we fixate on the ancient guthis, which is problematic at best inasmuch as their inflexible makeup is arguably caused by state discrimination against them, so that we cannot know how they would develop otherwise.

Within the sub-Guthi already (2), but especially among quasi-Guthi and certainly neo-Guthi (3 and 4), even short-term change is not only possible, but even happening as we speak, or there was no such discrimination to begin with. For example, PPGUK and NGNY have had inclusive executive committees for around a decade now, with the former already having a female vice president in 2012 and as of December 2021, having a female president (PPGUK, n. d.). The latter had a female vice president until September 2021, who had previously been appointed treasurer in 2013 (NGNY, n. d.). Here, both Buddhist traditions which diverged from a more gender-inclusive concept since the times of the Buddha merge with recent advances in Buddhist Feminist approaches and, as we see, implementations as well (Farrer-Halls, 2002; Tsomo, 1999; Yeng, 2020).

6 Discussion Coda and Conclusion

There is a spontaneity to how the Guthi has taken up utilizing ICT for their benefit; it has not been planned, but it was a reaction to the demand of the times, as well as utilizing the tools available, and even adapting the organization(s) in order to do so. Such process of "enactment" or "appropriation" of digital technologies have been looked at through the lenses of structuration theory (Vyas et al., 2017).

The use of ICT across the newer iterations of guthis has led not only to better information dissemination, discussions and engagement among and beyond the community, but also made their activities more transparent, inclusive and capable towards providing efficient public utility functions – at a juncture when the ancient Guthi seemed poised to fade away.

In the case of Nepal, the centralized and top-down planning and reforms brought about under the Panchayat regime in a bid to "modernize" the country (in an authoritarian way), despite having been in line with the global standards of the time, failed to take into consideration how pervasive pre-existing practices were within the population. Despite the conscious efforts and plans to slowly cull the Guthi and community participation, the institutional design stuck on, and the communities retained the ability towards grassroots initiatives and critical agency following the same blueprint as in the past, which then ICT would resuscitate, meanwhile also creating new permutations of the institution. And this building-back is building-back better, more inclusive and more equitable, *nota bene* by the Newar's own Buddhist standards.

The Guthi certainly was (and is) not perfect from today's standards and values in many aspects, but the core characteristics of the institution were clearly effective in what they were intended for – governing through participation. ICT, not least together with a hostile political environment, and other factors as well, prompted the creation of various iterations of the Guthi that had and have an at least indirectly equity-propelling effect, as well.

The rejuvenation of the Guthi in its current form is hardly imaginable without ICT; this becomes obvious when analyzing the institution through the typology provided in this essay. Not only the ancient guthis are using ICT for communication, the newer iterations in the form of quasi-, neo- and sub-Guthi are largely ICT-enabled. So we can say, even without any global-Western pretence or linear theories of development and technology, that the case of the Guthi and its rejuvenation is an example of ICT actually helping to recreate an indigenous institution that is exactly the kind we desire for autonomous yet solidary human living-together in the 21st century, yet to transform and adjust its normative orientation as well – a triple win, if one so will. As Timothy J. Colton has said, a country – and we can widen that here to an organization like the Guthi – "can and must become a better edition of itself" (2016, p. 248). ICT has enabled the Guthi to do just that in virtually all realms that matter. Seeing the institution's significance both nationally for Nepal and internationally as an example of how cooperativism can work successfully across the centuries, we submit that this is an important example not only for the Global South.

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Appendix

Publication V

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THE *GUTHIS*: BUDDHIST SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Shobhit Shakya* & Wolfgang Drechsler**

ABSTRACT

The defining aspect of the Newar society of Kathmandu Valley (also referred to as Nepalmandala) is their traditional form of community governance – the Guthi. The Guthi is a specifically Buddhist institution of community governance based on the notions of societal resilience and philanthropism. At the core of the administrative structure of Nepal Mandala since the 4th century CE, after the Hindu Gorkhali conquest of the Nepalmandala and reforms towards a more global-Western style of governance in the last few decades, the Guthi Institution was reduced to only being used for religio-cultural activities. But when the Earthquake of 2015 damaged several World Heritage monuments, the Nepali government could not 'deliver', and so the Guthis, to all intents and purposes, re-emerged. In effect, some traditional Guthis, and new community initiatives following the blueprint of the Guthis, came forward, if mostly facilitating the restoration of several important monuments. It is of special interest that this re-emergence appears to be clearly ICT-enabled, i.e. based on community organization via social-media and other new communication technologies.

INTRODUCTION: NEWARS AND *GUTHI*

The Newars of Nepal are generally considered the original inhabitants of Kathmandu valley. They have a distinct culture

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amongst the population of Nepal and their own language, which is officially called Nepal Bhasa, while also being termed as Newari (Shrestha, 1999). Often seen as a homogenous community, the Newars are a very diverse community with most practicing either Buddhism, Hinduism or both (Gellner, 1986). Before the annexation of Kathmandu valley by the Gorkha to what became modern Nepal, historical Nepal or *Nepalmandala* existed as a system of cities and villages in and around Kathmandu valley. Historians usually credit the times under the Lichhavi and Malla dynasties with having been prosperous, and it gave rise to rich art, architecture and a distinct culture (Shrestha and Singh, 1972; Shaha, 1990). *Nepalmandala* under the Lichhavi and Malla dynasties had a governance system in which citizens actively participated in the activities of the state. It was defined by an institution of community self-governance via organizations called *Guthis*.

Guthi is a distinctive institution among Newars that has existed since the Lichhavi era (400 to 750 CE), called *Gosthi* in older historical accounts (Shrestha and Singh, 1972; Shaha, 1990). In Sanskrit, the word *Gosthi* means 'assembly' or 'association' (Toffin, 2005; Dangol, 2010; Pradhananga, Shrestha and Dee, 2010). Toffin (2016, p. 349) has describes them as "communal groups which are theoretically motivated by the notion of service rather than by profits." *Guthis* have had several functions within the Newar society and they have been categorised in many ways (Quigley, 1985; Toffin, 2005; Shrestha, 2012, p. 512). In general, based on the goals or objectives of *Guthis*, they seem to be of three types:

1. concerned with festivities (*jatra*s), workshops, craftsmanship, music, maintaining water conduits and other activities,

2. activities of the dead, such as carrying out of funerals, and

3. purely religious activities.

Often *Guthis* do relate specific groups based on caste or kin within the Newar community, but this is not always so. They can be based simply on geographical propinquity as well (Regmi, 1977, p. 48). Research about the Newars and their culture always discusses *Guthi* to varied degrees, thus exhibiting how *Guthis* are an integral part of the Newar community (Shrestha, 1999, 2007; Toffin, 2008;

Nepali, 2015; Sharma, 2015).

GUTHI AS A BUDDHIST INSTITUTION OF GOVERNANCE

Newars being partly Hindu and partly Buddhist, to see *Guthi* as a Buddhist institution of governance may be met with some criticism. *Guthis* do exist among the non-Buddhist side of the Newar population, and rarely outside the Newar community, too. However, there can be a clear indication that the existence of *Guthis* is most widely prevalent amongst the Buddhist Newar population. Most *Guthis* are associated with Buddhist deities like *Bajrayogini* and *Karunamaya* (Shrestha, 2012; Maharjan and Barata, 2017), and Buddhist monasteries, known locally as *Baha* and *Bahi*, or *Mahavihara* in Sanskrit (Locke, 1985; Vajracharya, 1998). When concerning *Baha* and *Bahi*, it has been noted that *Guthis* are the organizations that commonly oversee their upkeeping activities conducted around them.

Even though in Sanskrit both *Baha* and *Bahi* structures are termed as *Mahaviharas,* and both are essentially *Bajrayana* monasteries, they are locally distinguished as *Baha* or *Bahi*. Locke (1985) has given detail of how these structures differ in location within the cities and to some extent in architecture, but as he further explains, the major difference historically was based on whether or not celibate monks lived there (Locke, 1985, pp. 185–186). *Bahas* used to have a non-celibate monastic tradition, and were usually located towards the inner-city areas, while the *Bahis*, having celibate monastic tradition, were located towards the outskirts of the cities (Locke, 1985; Beckh, 2006). This eventually changed and both *Bahis* and *Bahas* now have non-celibate practitioners, and their lives revolve around the monastery they are associated with through ancestry (Locke, 1985, p. 185). Activities of the monasteries and the community associated with them are organized through *Guthis* (Locke, 1985).

All *Guthis* have ritualistic importance given to assembly and discussions, with most of these organization having annual assemblies where all members meet; this usually being over a feast. This practice of annual assemblies is common in *Guthis* that have activities being conducted year-round. For example, *Guthis* related

to functions of *Mahaviharas,* and *Guthis* concerning funerals or *Sana Guthis,* all have annual assemblies of sorts (Locke, 1985; Shrestha, 2012, p. 193). Duties are overtaken by *Guthi* members in turn, using a rotation system, usually in groups of a few *Guthi* members. According to the type of *Guthi* and the type of task required, members from the appropriate age group are selected. For example, in *Guthis* of Vajracharyas, elders will be responsible for priestly functions while younger members will be responsible for acting as the guardians of the deity (*dya-palas*) in the monastery complex (Locke, 1985, p. 474). *Sana Guthis* will also have different duties during the passing of a *Guthi* member, which other members will take over in a rotation system (Quigley, 1985; Dangol, 2010). Feasts that are prepared during annual assemblies are also organized by *Guthi* members in turns.

Guthis were maintained mostly through endowments provided by community members or monarchs in form of land. There are multiple types of *Guthis,* but they can be categorized into two types on the basis of ownership and on how they were established. The monarch delegating a responsibility to a community group would establish a *Raj Guthi* with the state owning the properties of the *Guthi* too, while *Guthis* that were established by community groups would be *Niji Guthi* (Diwasa, Bandu and Nepal, 2007; Dangol, 2010). *Guthi* land being farmed by tenant farmers in return of part of their harvest has been a common practice in Kathmandu valley, providing source of income to the *Guthis* and maintaining self-sustainability of these organizations (Regmi, 1977; Adhikari, 2008).

Not all *Guthis* receive land endowments. *Niji Guthi* may be without any endowments and they do not also receive any funds from the state either (Shrestha, 2012, p. 212). In cases where *Guthis* do not have sources of funds in form of land endowments or state sponsorship, the activities of such *Guthis* are funded through donations collected from their members or through external donations. Even *Guthis* having sources of funds may not necessarily have enough funds for all of their activities, so in such cases, too, *Guthi* members themselves provide the funds (Locke, 1985, p. 37). Members in any Guthi are also working for the activities of the *Guthis* as volunteers, thus keeping the operational cost at a

minimum (Shrestha, 2012, pp. 185, 282).

In general, *Guthis* are organizations within the sphere of Buddhist traditions that are based on notions of philanthropism, service and volunteerism that adheres to Buddhist practices as seen elsewhere too (Choden, 2003). *Guthis* are part of Buddhism in practice, of institutions that historically emerged in the specifically Buddhist context, which is often more important than institutions mentioned in theory or constructed backwards referring to the latter (Drechsler, 2016). There are evidences to support that *Guthis* come from traditions in governance practiced in ancient India (covering most parts of present-day South Asia) when Buddhism had much more influence in the region. References from Buddhist scriptures do support this argument. The *Satta Aparihaniya Dhamma* as mentioned in *Digha Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka emphasizes frequent assembly, unity and harmony, resilience of traditions and maintenance of hierarchal order (Harris, 2007; Shobhana, 2017). The scripture mentioned the seven duties the Vrijji (one of the Mahajanapadas of ancient India) needed to follow if they were not to go into decline and risk being overtaken by Magadh. The principles to a great degree match with the principles under which the Guthis of Newars function. The Lichhavis, a faction of which later ruled Nepal, were part of the Vrijji confederacy during the time of Shakyamuni Buddha (Sharma, 1983; Vajracharya, 1998). Based both on historical links and traditions, there is a significant basis to claim that Guthis are a specific form of Buddhist Governance that has roots to the governance system that were prevalent in history.*

OTHER INTERPRETATIONS AND COMPARISON WITH SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS

There is large a volume of literature that defines *Guthis* to be part of a land tenure system or a religious trust (Regmi, 1965, 1977; Acharya, 2008). Being a well-established practice within the most developed culture in the country (Regmi, 1977; Nepali, 2015), *Guthi* practice, understandably, continued even after the *Gorkha* conquest of Kathmandu Valley. It is important to note that Prithvi Narayan Shah was given education in Bhaktapur (Shaha, 1990), thus his knowledge of statecraft would have been largely influenced

by the *Newars*. However, the blurring of the boundary between Hindu and Buddhist traditions has always been evident with both religions sharing the same cultural landscapes. As a result, *Guthis* continued even under the Shah Kings, but with increasingly changed interpretation of the institution.

The changed interpretation of *Guthis* took towards redefining them as a part of system of a land tenure system, disassociated with the original interpretation and origin of the institution. Quigley (1985) argues that *Guthis* being seen as part of a land tenure system is a "*Gorkhali* invention" that started only after the *Gorkhali* conquest of *Nepalmandala*. Regmi (Regmi, 1965, 1977, 1988) has written of *Guthis* from the perspective of land tenure system. But he acknowledges *Guthis* as a distinct social organization amongst the Newars and writes:

> *Among the Newars, the term Guthi is used to denote an organization based on caste or kinship, or, occasionally, on geographical propinquity, which ensures the continued observances of social and religious customs and ceremonies of the community. The term, Guthi, in this sense is primarily used to denote a social institution that determines the rights and obligations of a Newar vis-à-vis his community. This is obviously that such an institution has no relationship with the land-tenure system.* (Regmi, 1977, p. 48)

Regmi (*ibid.*) further states that a *Guthi* organization may acquire and hold estates, and in such case, they come under the *Guthi* land-tenure system. This clearly indicates that the *Guthi* being primarily a part of a land tenure system is misinterpretation of the Newar *Guthi* that was adopted by the Shah regime and continued through the Rana regime (Regmi, 1977).

Guthi land has been common during the Rana regime, by which time it had become a way of making land holdings tax free, as no tax was levied on these lands (Regmi, 1977; Nepali, 2015). Another benefit of converting one's land to *Guthi* land was that it could not be attached by creditors in settlement of debt (*ibid.*). While the land was supposedly donated for a charitable purpose, familial interests were still served by these lands, as the law stipulated that persons who endowed land as *Guthi* land were entitled to receive

food and clothing from the *Guthi* endowment if such need arised (Regmi, 1977), comparable e.g. to Western trust funds even today. It is evident that the original meaning of *Guthis* has been lost as the practice was reinterpreted by the Shaha and Rana regimes. The notion of charity was still advertised, even though in effect *Guthi* lands were becoming less about charity.

Institutions of governance based on religious foundations are not uncommon around the world in varied contexts. *Mahallas*, as an Islamic institution of governance, have served as a means of providing social welfare and in fact local governance, and they strongly reemerged in post-Soviet Uzbekistan when the state could not provide sufficient infrastructure and services (Sievers, 2002; Urinboyev, 2011). *Waqf* is the classic example of an Islamic institution of governance that is prevalent in Islamic countries as an endowed charity (Latif *et al.*, 2018). When focusing on the land endowment aspect of the *Guthis*, they seem to exhibit the exact same characteristics as that of *Waqf*. In Christianity, too, there have been civic associations that oversee construction and maintenance of churches and Cathedrals which resemble some aspects of *Guthis*, from monastery endowments with land to the Zentral-Dombau-Verein zu Köln von 1842 that built and maintains Cologne Cathedral (*Kölner Dom: A brief history of Cologne Cathedral*, no date; Brichta, 2014).

However, *Guthis* arguably exhibit a deeper integration within the Newar community, with the organizations being involved not just in religious activities but in almost all aspects of the Newars' life. Crucially from a NWPA perspective, this includes several functions too that are usually seen as state functions, rendering them what is called "alternative public service delivery." This includes, i.a., maintaining water resources and the resting shelters known as *Pati* (Khaniya, 2005; Toffin, 2008; Pradhananga, Shrestha and Dee, 2010; Shrestha, 2014; Nepali, 2015; Maharjan and Barata, 2017).

Water supply in Kathmandu is done by Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited (KUKL) and Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC). However, before modern water pipes were installed, the sources of water supply in the cities were public wells, dug wells and water spouts called *Hiti*, and these were kept up by *Guthis* (Khaniya, 2005; Shrestha, 2014). Patis too were exclusively

maintained by *Guthis* (Shrestha and G.C, 2010, p. 97; Astha Joshi, 2017). These are small structures with open platform and tiled roof where people can take shelter temporarily. Often older people, ascetics or homeless persons spend time in these structures. In addition, some authors mention other public infrastructure such as bridges, roads and schools being maintained by *Guthis* as well (Toffin, 2005; Shrestha, 2012, p. 35). There are some literature on schools being run by *Guthis* albeit in a greatly dilapidated state due to lack of prioritisation to support them (Thapa and Mukhia, 2013, p. 242; *Guthi-run schools told to furnish property details*, 2015). But regarding bridges not much has been written in detail, so further research is needed at this point.

Considering how *Guthis* were responsible for a diverse set of functions, it is important to understand that the scope of *Guthis* go beyond the religious sphere, even though in most cases there is a religious background to most activities in the daily life of the Newars. Moreover, *Guthis* can also be taken to be a functional unit of the society that creates advantages in governing the population. For instance, when the local government calls for community participation in any socio-cultural functions, instead of making a public call or reaching out to individuals, approaching *Guthis* has clear benefits. This has been exhibited on several occasions with one being the case of the Kasthamandap, which is discussed in a later section below.

GORKHA CONQUEST, THE RISE OF HINDU HEGEMONY AND CURRENT POLITICS

After the conquest of *Nepalmandala* by the Gorkhas in 1769, the Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah became the ruler of the country with a larger territory, one that is comparable to the current territory of Nepal (Whelpton, 2005). Even though this was the decisive turning point leading towards the dominance of Hinduism in Nepal, the region including Kathmandu valley was already in a steady transition towards Hinduism since a few centuries (Gellner, 2005). However, the influence of Hinduism after and before the Shah conquest can be said to be largely different in nature. The Mallas, while being Hindu themselves, were tolerant towards Buddhism, if not influenced by Buddhism to some

extent themselves (Shrestha and Singh, 1972; Gellner, 2005). The Lichhavis who ruled before the Mallas had been influenced by both Hinduism and Buddhism (Shrestha and Singh, 1972, p. 15; Thapa, 2001, pp. 33–34). However, cities like Patan and Kathmandu (even though the whole valley later became known as Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu is only one of the three main cities there) were largely Buddhist. Especially Patan was known to be full of Buddhist monasteries (Slusser, 1982; Locke, 1985).

The conquest of *Nepalmandala* by the *Gorkhalis* led to increased Hinduism. This was part and parcel of the political process that took place after the Gorkha conquest of Nepal. The changed dynamics in the religious balance amongst the population was an entirely political process that helped the Shah kings develop a strong sense of Nationalism based on Hinduism amongst majority of the population; it has been stated that Prithvi Narayan Shah wanted to make Nepal the true 'Hindustan' (Bhattachan, 2005, p. 4). The intents of Prithvi Narayan Shah can be understood by the step he took in banishing Christian Missionaries as soon as he took over Kathmandu Valley (Gellner, 2005, p. 761). The Hindu caste system was instrument for legitimizing the rule of the elites, while the indigenous population, most of whom were Buddhists, were reduced to lower-class status (Bhattachan, 2005; Pradhan, 2007). The "Muluki Ain" of 1854, which was the first written law that was introduced by Jung Bahadur Rana after becoming the Prime Minister and seizing absolute power, emphasized this class discrimination (Höfer, 1981). The Ranas were particularly against Buddhism, and during their regime, Buddhist monks were exiled from the country (Sujano, no date; Gellner and LeVine, 2007, p. 147).

The fortunes of the Ranas, who were close with the British ruler in India, changed as India gained independence. Through the crucial role played by the Nepali Congress party, who were supported by the Indian Congress Party, the regime was overthrown in 1951 (Malagodi, 2008). This brought in a short democratic interlude which eventually ended as the next king, Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah, took absolute power, banning all political parties in 1960 (*ibid.*). The vision of King Mahendra was to establish a nation based on Hindu Nationalism with the single identity and

single language policy based Panchayat System (Pradhan, 2005; Gellner, 2007). The Panchayat regime also pushed administrative reforms and established laws focusing on equality, cultural homogeneity, modernisation and development. However, the policy favoured only Hindu religion and the *Parbatiya* culture and language (the language which then became the Nepali language), thus marginalizing other groups (Pradhan, 2005). It must be noted that even before the Panchayat era, during the Rana regime, most ethnic minorities and geo-cultural groups like Newars and the Madhesis were in a highly disadvantageous position. Added to that, the Panchayat time policies became the means for the elites to impose linguistic and cultural dominance (Giri, 2010)the official language of administration of Nepal, has been privileged through systematic political manoeuvres throughout its history. English also enjoys special status and privileges, and despite the fact that it is officially only a \"foreign\" language, in practice it is one of the most dominant languages in educational and economic domains. Both Nepali and English have become status symbols and tools in the hands of the ruling elites who use them to create linguistic hegemony. Speakers of other languages, on the other hand, are confused about their languages, their ethnic identity and their place in the community. To become a part of the mainstream life, they learn and use Nepali and English at the expense of their own languages. While Nepali and English contribute significantly to the development and modernisation processes, the people have paid a heavy price for them. In this article, I describe strategies adopted by the ruling elites to impose linguistic, as well as cultural dominance. I also demonstrate how the dominance of Nepali and English has led to a situation in which the people abandon their language and culture to adopt those of someone else. (Contains 7 notes., the elites here being the Hindu *Parbatiya* Brahmin and Chhetris.

By the time the Panchayat regime ended and democracy with more inclusive policies was reintroduced, there was already a clear hegemony of Hindu *Parbatiya* Brahmins that had been established in Nepali politics and bureaucracy (Bhattachan, 2005; Giri, 2010). This was the background for the *Nepal Bhasa* movement that focused on providing equality to all national languages and the *Adibasi Janajati* movement that followed with the resurgence of

democracy in 1990 (Onta, 2006; Gellner, 2007). The agenda was also taken up by the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal who during the "People's War" were largely supported by the *Janajatis* (Lawoti, 2003; Shakya, 2008; Ismail and Shah, 2015). Coming through a long political transition since then with a peace process, transition into a Republic and drafting of the new constitution through the Constituent Assembly, the Hindu Brahmin hegemony continued, as it was dominant within all major political parties (Bhattachan, 2005; Malagodi, 2008). In the whirlwind of political transitions, the *Newars* lost their influence in the state's affairs, and their legacies in statecraft, defined by the *Guthis*, were gradually even more sidelined as well.

A couple of key steps taken by the government can be pointed out which contributed most to the decline of the *Guthis*. The first of the two is "*Guthi Sansthan* Act" of 1964 and the second being the "Land Reform Act" of the same year. With the former, with further amendment in 1976, significant changes were introduced to the framework concerning the traditional *Guthi* institution and their role in local governance (Pradhananga, Shrestha and Dee, 2010). The *Guthi Sansthan* Act allowed for the creation of a state agency, the *Guthi Sansthan*, which now oversees the functions of traditional *Guthis* for religious and cultural activities such as *jatras* (festivities to roughly translate) and running rituals in temples and shrines. It has been argued that the competence of the *Guthi Sansthan* is questionable, as is the state's interest in improving it (Khaniya, 2005, p. 27).

Most importantly, the reduction of the scope of responsibilities of the *Guthis* to religio-cultural activities meant that they were not as relevant as before. Many of the structures and spaces that were managed by *Guthis* were eventually handed over to local municipalities. Through the "Land Reform Act" of 1964, *Guthi* lands were converted to "*Guthi Raitan Nambari*" land - a privately owned land which could be divided among the *Guthi* members and the tenant farmers (Acharya, 2008, p. 7). The intention of the new legislation ostensibly was to empower the tenant-farmers, but this meant that the *Guthis* subsequently lost their income. As described by Shrestha (2012, p. 228), in the case of *Guthis* in Sankhu, several

stopped functioning primarily due to the lack of income as a consequence of the "Land Reform Act". This certainly is the case with not just Sankhu but most *Guthis.*

However, despite the state's negligence towards the *Guthis* as a governance institution, it was not absolutely the case that *Guthis* were completely obsolete. Amongst the Newars, the emaciated Guthis continued to exist even though at a largely lessened capacity and interest among the people.

GORKHA EARTHQUAKE 2015

The 2015 Gorkha earthquake, which was of magnitude 7.8 and had the hypocentre located in the Barpak village of Gorkha, was devastating for the country, causing 8674 deaths (Chiaro *et al.*, 2015; Goda *et al.*, 2015). For Kathmandu valley and nearby districts, the losses to heritage structures were on huge scale, with 753 temples, monasteries and monuments significantly or completely damaged (Satyal, 2018). Nepal, being situated in a seismic zone, has faced large earthquakes almost every century (Weiler, 2009). Yet, as the 2015 earthquake showed, the government lacked a proper preparedness plan. The earthquake and its aftermath have therefore underlined the inadequacies of the state's governance capacity. This is understandable given the political transition the country had been going through (*How political instability affected Nepal's disaster preparedness*, 2015). This lack of existing governance capacity is also evident when looking at the post-earthquake restoration process. Many historical structures within the world heritage site of Kathmandu Valley, like Kasthamandap, Rani Pokhari and Trailokya Mohan Narayan temple, just to name a few, were still awaiting restoration months into the aftermath, and distribution of relief funds to earthquake victims took a very long time (Adhikari, 2015; Risal, 2015; APF, 2017; Ojha, 2017b).

As important as it was to provide relief to private citizens, the management of heritage monuments was almost as pressing as issue. Tourism being a significant part of Nepal's economy, Nepal needed to ensure that the monuments and areas enlisted in UNESCO World heritage sites were restored immediately (Kim Sengupta, 2015). However, the municipalities were without elected representatives

since a couple of decades (until the election finally was conducted in 2017) and thus seriously lacking legitimacy and capacity. As a result, the initial attempts to restore some structures backfired, as restoration projects came under scrutiny for mismanagement (*UNESCO concerned about inappropriate rebuilding of Ranipokhari*, 2016; *'An attack on our heritage': lowest bidders threaten Nepal's earthquake-hit historical site*, 2017; Ojha, 2017b). In some cases, the government accepted offers of foreign assistance for the restoration of some key monuments (Bista, 2017; Zhang Yu, 2017), but this was not well received amongst the Newars. Their concern was about the use of local resources and skills; most structures having been built through indigenous technology and knowledge centuries ago, many in the local community believed that accepting foreign assistance and expertise was disrespectful to their cultural legacies (S. Bhattarai, 2018), but it would also result in mere copy versions of the previous buildings and would not help local craftsmen and artisans.

GUTHIS IN THE EARTHQUAKE'S AFTERMATH

The situation of the aftermath of the earthquake had brought the *Guthis* back into discussion again. Few early articles that were published concerning the post-earthquake reconstruction of heritage dealt with the topic of whether *Guthis* should have been a more integral part of the governance structure in the country (Wolfson, 2015; KC, 2016). In a scenario like a large-scale natural disaster, for any developing country, the key concern is the availability of human resources. Most *Guthis* that were functioning had already become defunct, and the temples looked after by them were hardly cared for by anyone anymore. Most importantly, the state had undermined the importance of these organizations thinking of them as outdated legacies or even as hostile for its Hindu-nationalist mainstreaming efforts, and had not come up with an alternative means to serve the function that they once served. This was one of the reasons for the large degree of failure to 'deliver' on the part of the government. But, with *Guthis* already having been part of the cultural blueprint of the *Newar* community and perhaps beyond the *Newars* too, the earthquake saw a resurgence of community activities in the post-earthquake rehabilitation processes.

The case which gained most attention was probably that of Kasthamandap. The monument is one of the most important structures in Kathmandu (Slusser and Vajrācārya, 1974; Risal, 2015), which through archaeological surveys was discovered to have been built according to Buddhist traditions, using the mandala structure in its foundation. It was the oldest standing structure in Kathmandu valley until the earthquake brought it down (Slusser and Vajrācārya, 1974; Coningham *et al.*, 2016). With concerns towards quality of the restoration work done by contractors that were being selected based on 'lowest bid', as the failure of the Rani Pokhari restoration showed (Ojha, 2017a, 2017b), the community formed the "Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign" and restoration through community initiative was attempted, based on an agreement between the campaign, National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), Department of Archaeology (DoA), Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and the Campaign (*Kasthamandap's Journey Through History, Kathmandu Sights*, no date; A. Bhattarai, 2018). A direct involvement from the *Guthis* associated with the structure for the restoration was not witnessed initially, but there were discussions on the possibility of the same (KC, 2016; A. Bhattarai, 2018). The campaign members felt that it was necessary to involve the *Guthis* that were responsible for rituals that were held in the monument, and there were discussions with the members of the *Sa Guthi* and *Ta Chatan Guthi* (KC, 2016).

After the local elections of 2017, there was a tussle between community activists from the campaign and KMC, with the mayor wanting to go for reconstruction through contractors (Tuladhar, 2018). The new committee was eventually formed in May 2018, headed by member of Provincial Assembly, Rajesh Shakya. The new committee also included some members of the previous committee but was also politically backed by a Provincial Assembly member. This seemed to have resolved the tension, and there was space for optimism as the reconstruction process steadily moved forward with the target to finish the first level of the structure within end of fiscal year 2019 (*Reconstruction of Kasthamandap temple begins*, 2018; RSS, 2019).

On 10 February 2019, the main pillars of the structure were

erected in an elaborate ceremony in which the Mayor of Kathmandu Municipality participated (Xinhua, 2019). The event was conducted traditionally in a ceremonious way with participation from community members and *Guthis*. In an interview conducted 7 February 2019, Rajesh Shakya mentioned that on the day members from all *Guthis* in the vicinity and those directly associated with structure were invited. Before the event, there were participation from the members from local *Guthis* in multiple volunteer calls that the committee made when non-expert help was needed in the rebuilding process. The committee made community involvement and traditional processes a priority, which meant that the *Guthis* associated with the structure were going to be actively participating in the rebuilding process whenever added help was necessary.

In case of *Mahaviharas* in Kathmandu valley, the scenario has been comparatively different as the *Guthis* associated with *Mahaviharas* have managed to stay functional. As discussed in the first sub-chapter, since most Buddhist Newars are associated with one of the many *Mahaviharas* in Kathmandu Valley, the sense of ownership towards the *Mahavihar* they are linked to is very strong. It is perhaps this that helped most *Guthis* associated with Mahavihara to stay functional even with minimal support from the government.

Maitripur Mahavihara, which is one of the several *Mahaviharas* in Kathmandu, is undergoing reconstruction through the initiatives from the *Guthi* members associated with the *Mahavihara*. Several of the *Mahaviharas* did suffer significant damage through the earthquake, but none were completely razed to the ground. However, in the case of *Maitripur Mahavihara*, the members of the *Mahavihara* decided to completely rebuild the structure, and the process was started in July 2016. Perhaps due to the current religious setup of Nepal as a country, where Hinduism is the majority religion and given more attention, except when concerning tourism advertising, Buddhist *Mahavihara* structures in Kathmandu valley like Buddhist sites elsewhere in Nepal have not been given the same attention as Hindu religious sites and structures (*Demand to promote Ramgram monastery*, 2018; *Ashoka pillar finally gets protective shed*, 2018). The lack of media reports on the renovation process of these structures certainly tends to support this argument.

But this has not affected the restoration processes negatively as the case of *Maitripur Mahavihara* shows. As per information provided by Milan Ratna Bajracharya in an interview conducted 7 January 2018, a member of the *Guthi* associated with the *Mahavihara*, the earthquake had caused significant damage to the structure and since the structure had not gone through a major renovation since centuries, a full reconstruction was started through the initiatives of their *Guthi*. For the source of funding, 85% of the initially estimated cost was provided by Kathmandu Metropolitan City and 15% by the *Guthi* members. The restoration process in the *Mahavihara* has been going at a very slow pace but with steady progress.

The cases from the post-earthquake restoration of heritage structures have re-emphasized *Guthis* and their relevance, if for now primarily as far as temple restauration is concerned. For an institution that has continued for more than a millennium, Guthis have a deep-rooted connection with the culture of the people in Nepal and especially the Newars. As Toffin (2016, p. 236) has pointed out, the community in Nepal is strong, and may it be through Guthis or through cooperatives, communities in Nepal have had a tendency to rely more on the community institutions. The large volume of literature on community forestry and the health sector (Chakraborty, 2001; Acharya, 2002; Shrestha, 2003) support Toffin's claim. Heritage structures being rebuilt through direct or indirect involvement of Guthis, or at least the acknowledgement of the advantage of having them, shows how these organizations are still relevant despite their relegated positioning within the governance framework in the country.

GUTHIS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) proved to be a key factor in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake. Initiatives in mapping affected areas were started immediately after the earthquake through Commons-Based Peer Production (CBPP), a model based on collaboration among large groups of individuals often over a digitally networked environment (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006). Through the use of crowdsourcing and open data, a few activists helped to develop a system that would allow identifying the areas of most urgent need during the immediate post-

earthquake scenario (Poiani *et al.*, 2016; McMurren *et al.*, 2017). In addition, there have been feasibility studies for photogrammetric modelling of heritage sites (Dhonju *et al.*, 2017). Photogrammetric modelling can enable keeping better records of heritage structures in digital form and help visualize these historical structures, so that reconstruction match the original structure in events of a natural disaster.

But more importantly, the use of ICT cannot only enable new models of collaborative efforts and provide for other technological benefits (Thapa and Sein, 2010; Kostakis, Niaros and Giotitsas, 2015), but also revitalize and use old ones that seemed obsolete from a classic-modern perspective. From the perspective of community empowerment too, ICT, has had an important role; this can be observed via the cultural movement amongst the Newars which has become visible in cyberspace too.

The *Newar* community apparently had the most emotional connection with cultural heritage in Kathmandu valley and was most concerned by the mismanagement witnessed in the restoration of heritage structure. The phenomenon does have roots to a broader background concerning political movements amongst the Newars. After the end the *Panchayat* regime, the *Adivasi Janajati* movement (Indigenous Peoples Movement) gained strength in the 1990s, and the ongoing *Nepal Bhasa* movement amongst the *Newar* population was strengthened, as being to a degree connected with the movement (Onta, 2006; Pradhan, 2018). As ICT became more accessible to the middle-class population of the country, the movement expanded into cyberspace. But, with the earthquake and the mismanagement of the heritage restoration process by the government, the movement that was previously focused on *Nepal Bhasa* has refocussed now on cultural heritage. As a result, 'heritage activists' have found a platform within cyberspace, through smartphones and social media. The "Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign" concerning reconstruction of Kasthamandap, as discussed above, is a prime example of that.

But again, the activities in cyberspace, which stemmed from 'heritage activism', is only one side of the story. What is more significant in our context is that the use of ICT has also been

adopted by the traditional organizations already. Traditional *Guthis* from *Baha* and *Bahis* had started creating social media accounts and pages since the recent past. Rudravarma Mahavihara and Kwa Baha (also known as 'Golden Temple' or Hiranyavarna Mahavihara) in Patan, Itum Baha and Maitripur Mahavihara in Kathmandu are just some of the Buddhist *Mahaviharas* that have online presence (see table 1 for list of *Mahaviharas* and *Guthis* with social media pages). In all this, the central theme has been the use of ICT for communication, dissemination of information, and transparency for heritage restoration projects, but also helping old activities of *Guthis* and other community activities. The *Thamel Ashok Chaitya* restoration team started to use social media for providing updates on the restoration process since June 2016, soon after the restoration project started. They have used social media platforms very well for providing updates on the progress, and for maintaining transparency. The 'Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign' has also used social media platforms and had an official website since their inception. The committee for restoration for *Kasthamandap* that was later formed has also used social media effectively. These social media accounts – all on Facebook, as is common in Nepal – have been used for providing updates and other information in general about the respective restoration projects.

There have been concerns over the transparency of *Guthis* and traditional community-based organization (A. Bhattarai, 2018). Not all traditional organization follow proper record keeping procedures as per current standards; they usually do not have internal capacity and lack resources to acquire professional help, and it might also not be in line with the specific cultural-historical context. Thus, there is often lack of trust towards these organizations form donor agencies or government. But with the use of social media for transparency, the credibility of community-based organizations has increased, as the case of Maitripur Mahavihara has shown. In most cases, not all *Guthi* members can participate equally actively on tasks requiring a hands-on approach. To overcome this issue, *Guthi* members of Maitripur Mahavihara have created a working committee for the restoration project from within their members. The updates on the project have been posted on social media pages by the committee, and this has assured better trust of other *Guthi* members on the

restoration process being carried out. In the case of Thamel Ashok Chaitya restoration project, ICT has largely helped in the collection of funds for the project too. The continued updates had instilled better trust of people in the execution of the project. This has also made an alternate source of funding in form of 'crowdfunding' possible. In case of Maitripur Mahavihara individual donations from the community and *Guthi* members have been important for funding the projects, which was facilitated by ICT.

The use of social media has proved to be very effective for better networking as well, and the outreach has increased to great extents. Groups on social media have also facilitated discussions among the communities for heritage conservation related agendas. As explained by Rajesh Shakya, without the availability of the social media platforms, collaborations and discussions in larger scale, that has been achieved so far, would not have been possible. ICT has also allowed for collective actions that had largely begun to diminish with changes in lifestyle. Day jobs and increasingly isolated and individualistic lifestyle had caused collective actions to become more difficult to achieve (Toffin, 2016). The prioritisation of jobs and personal life over community-oriented activities was already a phenomenon witnessed by Locke in the 1980s (Locke, 1985, pp. 35, 256). However, social media has brought about alternative possibilities in achieving collective actions.

With an increasing number of people emigrating in search of better jobs and income, there is also another angle from which necessity of ICT can be looked at from. People living abroad, who otherwise would have been left out from these collective actions, have been able to provide inputs by means of ICT. Observing these developments, the culture of collective actions that adheres to the principles of *Guthis* has been facilitated by ICT.

A phenomenon that is entirely based on the new possibilities brought about by ICT are the new organizations that have been started by the Newar diaspora community in various parts of the World, with most of them being named *Guthis*, whether or not these organization adhere to the functional principles of *Guthis* – but the explicit takeup of the tradition is significant. Being a trading community, having groups in places that have been part of the

trading destinations for the Newars have been a norm since long back. There have been organizations and association established by the Newars in Tibet, Kolkata (Calcutta), Sikkim and other neighbouring places (Sen, 1971). With increasing globalization, the Newars too have expanded their horizon and many have settled in parts of Europe and the Americas. Bal Gopal Shrestha has written about the Newars in Sikkim and their Guthis (Shrestha, 1998). Beyond the neighbouring region, Guthis have been formed in places like New York, London, Copenhagen and many others with most of them being affiliated to World Newah Organization in recent years (*Chapters | World Newah Organization*, no date). While, these organizations may not be 'true' *Guthis* in a historical sense, they still do share some attributes of traditional *Guthis*, and arguably they form contemporary iterations. They provide for the social welfare needs of the people and provide cohesiveness for functioning as a community despite the dispersed nature of the demographics of the diaspora. This would have been impossible without the possibilities that ICT has brought about. Some of these newly formed diaspora *Guthis* are involving the younger generation too, as explained by Sanyukta Shrestha, President of Pasa Pucha Guthi London; this involves online presence and utilization of digital medium to a great extent.

CONCLUSION

Guthis have served as a relevant institution for providing social and cultural activities among the Newars. Despite the increasingly unsupportive environment, *Guthis* have proven to be resilient and continued to exist, especially when supporting *Mahaviharas*. The cases of heritage restorations in the aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake has re-emphasized the usability and importance of *Guthis* with either *Guthis* being brought into discussions or into action. As shown by the case of post-earthquake restoration of Heritage structures, *Guthis* can be a viable way towards effective governance through community initiatives. This is even more so given the availability of ICT that helps with communication, outreach and establishing transparency and trust towards the *Guthis*. Buddhist traditions and practices have the potential for impacting the models of governance in modern times. The

likability of Buddhist teachings not only in Asia but in most parts of the Western world certainly creates acceptance towards practices and models based on Buddhism. Buddhist traditions often adhere to the changed values in the modern world. There can be several examples of Buddhist institutions that potentially can have a larger positive impact towards a sustainable society in general. The *Guthi* institution of Kathmandu Valley, certainly is a suitable example of such institutions which are Buddhist traditions in practice. With a growing emphasis on participation, collaborative governance and sustainability globally, the Buddhist paradigm is a key alternative to the global-Western paradigm in economics or Public Administration (Drechsler, 2015). Being a working example of Buddhist practices that still hold relevance, the *Guthis* are Buddhist societal organizations that suit the 21st century.

Note on research methodology

This paper is based on the ongoing research for the PhD thesis of the first author that started in September 2017. The research takes the form of on semi-structured interviews and field work in Nepal in addition to literature-based desk research. Six interviews conducted in person or remotely have been included in this paper. Email and social media correspondence with several community members and experts have also helped immensely. Fellow researchers and academicians from Nepal and elsewhere have also been consulted. Official social media pages and websites have been used and news articles from key media houses in Nepal have been followed. The first author is a member of the Guthi associated with Okubahal (Rudra Varna Mahavihara) in Lalitpur, Nepal.

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Heritage Restoration and Traditional Community Governance in the Kathmandu Valley

Shobhit Shakya

Introduction

Looking back at the devastating 2015 Gorkha earthquake, it can be observed that the earthquake and the socio-economic effects that followed have been of interest for study in multiple disciplines among researchers from within and outside Nepal (Chiaro et al. 2015; Goda et al. 2015; Poiani et al. 2016; Sharma et al. 2018). One of the key topics that have found space in most discussions related to Nepal after the earthquake is 'heritage' (Coningham et al. 2016; Dhonju et al. 2017; Theophile and Newman 2016). However, the issue of damage to the heritage monuments and their restoration can be looked at from several other perspectives than just heritage studies; an important one among them being public administration (PA) and governance. As most reports will point out, the restoration process has been a display of incompetence in governance in the country.[1] This raises several concerns about governance capacity and policy implementation within the state in the current situation.

Looking at the context of Nepal historically, the governance framework within the state has changed considerably with multiple political transitions being aimed at pushing the country towards 'development'. Democratisation, modernisation, and globalisation have been among the themes in the transitions that have been witnessed in the past half-century. In midst of this transformation, traditional governance practices have been sidelined by imitations of global-Western best practices. The pattern is not different from most other developing countries. However, it has also been claimed that

1 Anup Ojha, 'KMC Threatens to Scrap Contractor's Deal over Rani Pokhari Project Delay', *The Kathmandu Post*, 12 Novermber 2017, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-11-12/kmc-threatens-to-scrap-contractors-deal-over-rani-pokhari-project-delay.html; APF, 'Lowest Bidders Threaten Nepal's Quake-Hit Heritage', *Dailymail*, 24 March 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-4344866/Lowest-bidders-threaten-Nepals-quake-hit-heritage.html; 'UNESCO Concerned about Inappropriate Rebuilding of Ranipokhari', *The Kathmandu Post*, 1 September 2016, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-09-01/unesco-concerned-about-inappropriate-rebuilding-of-ranipokhari.html.

global-Western practices might not be the only way forward for different countries with varied cultural backgrounds. There is a significant volume of literature in non-Western PA and governance challenging the idea that there is a global best practice which should be followed everywhere (Dao 1996; Drechsler 2013; Elkaleh and Samier 2013).

Studies in heritage governance around the world are influenced by global-Western ideas, and this applies in the case of Nepal, too. But, since the earthquake, as a result of the evident problems in the heritage restoration process, one can observe a debate starting as to whether transitioning towards global-Western best practices in governance has been effective in all the areas. As part of a broader research project, this paper tries to argue that the issues being seen in the restoration of heritage monuments are a failure in part of the state's local governance framework, which in the bid to modernisation, has been moving towards imitating global-Western best practices over traditional ones, and with negative results. The question now could be as to whether traditional practices can be looked upon as alternatives for heritage governance in the Kathmandu Valley, and if there are instances of such alternatives already being experimented with.

U-turns in Governance

Culture influences virtually all aspects of a society. Influenced by culture and traditions, regions in the world have had very distinct governance systems, and most of them are independent from each other to varying degrees (Painter and Peters 2010). PA and governance practices are still argued to not have a set of common best practices followed by everyone. This has led to paradigms in PA and governance that can be categorised based on traditions and cultural influences in different regions of the world. As categorised by Drechsler (2013, 2015), there are three easily distinguishable paradigms in PA and governance: global-Western, Islamic, and Confucian. The fourth has been pointed out to be Buddhist governance, given the degree of influence Buddhism has had in the past in the majority of regions in Asia, and the already existing concepts in political economics that have come from the Buddhist influences like Gross National Happiness and Sufficiency economy (Drechsler 2016a, 2016b; Proto et al. 2012).

Cultural elements and traditions, among other things, are greatly influencing the governance in any given geographical region. As societies evolve, the state transitions and the governance culture within a state evolves. But, often political transitions and disruptions that follow disallow continuation of an evolutionary path of governance culture. Disruptions can affect the trajectory of a culture in different ways. In some cases,

disruptions bring about U-turns in norms and practices. For instance, in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, *Mahallas* have re-emerged as an alternative means for distribution of social welfare (Urinboyev 2011). *Mahallas* which date back to the pre-Mongol period used to be 'communities of several hundred people organised around Islamic rituals and social events' (Urinboyev 2011, 117). Sievers (2002) has presented shifting characteristics of *Mahallas* through the three periods in history: Medieval *Mahallas*, *Mahallas* under the Soviet regime, and *Mahallas* under the Uzbek nation-state. Under the Soviet Union, *Mahallas* were subjected to possible elimination, but fearing possible social unrest, the Soviet government tried to integrate them into the state and party structure (Urinboyev 2011). However, the role of *Mahallas* became more prominent after Uzbekistan separated from the Soviet Union and the government was perceived as being unable to fulfil its promise of the welfare programmes (Urinboyev 2011, 2017). As Urinboyev (2011, 121) mentions, *Mahallas* eventually 'replaced the state as the primary provider of social guarantees and they provide extensive social services for community residents'.

A more discussed example would be the re-introduction of Confucianism in China since Deng Xiaoping's reforms and a similar tendency also witnessed in Vietnam (Drechsler 2018). In China, under Communism, Confucianism was thought as the enemy till the 1970s. With the death of Mao, a reversal in attitude towards Confucianism was underway amidst the economic, political, and socio-cultural changes that followed. Confucianism was brought back into the education system in China after the 'back to tradition' movement grew out of the political events that occurred in the 1980s (Yu 2008). As of now, the Chinese government has embraced Confucianism, but its influence at the PA level is negligible (Drechsler 2018).

In some cases, transitions are multi-faceted and changes only occur in some levels. In South Asia and the Himalayan regions, traditional practices still hold value such as the *Grama Panchayats* in rural parts of India (Pur and Moore 2010; Xaxa 2006). *Grama Panchayats*, also known as 'customary village councils' are self-governing bodies that are part of the *Panchayat Raj* that institutionalised during the British occupation when Lord Ripon passed the resolution of 1882 (Kumar et al. 2017; Gul and Khurshid 2017). The *Panchayat Raj* system tried to administer the local affairs through local rural and urban people. As the research from Pur and Moore (2010) shows, even though *Grama Panchayats* were generally believed to be 'disappearing vestiges of a pre-democratic, hierarchical socio-political order', they continued to thrive in Karnataka, and not being too different elsewhere in India. With timely changes to their institutional composition, *Grama Panchayats* have

shown a tendency to become more active and exhibiting a potential U-turn by becoming more mainstream. With attempts to digitalise governance in India by the state, *Grama Panchayats* have been digitally transformed into 'e-Panchayats', thus instilling continuation of the *Panchayat Raj* institutions.

Traditional institutions often still exhibit elements that can be of contemporary relevance if provided with possibilities to adapt and evolve. Since traditional institutions and practices are deep-rooted within the societies, they may prove to be more effective in the grassroots level of governance. As the different cases show, long continuing traditions and cultural influences often have some level of contemporary relevance and may even see complete U-turns and come back as mainstream practices. In Nepal, the *Guthi* institution might show a similar tendency.

Guthis and Their Role in Governance

Nepal, even though being at most times on the fringes of the political transition happening in the sub-region, has had a long history of over two thousand years, mostly within the valleys tucked away within the Himalayan foothills. Before the annexation by Gorkha, the historical Nepal or *Nepal Mandala*[2] existed as a system of cities and villages in and around the Kathmandu Valley. Historians believe that the Lichhavi and the Malla eras have been prosperous times for the state, and these periods gave rise to rich art, architecture and a distinct culture (Shaha 1990; D. B. Shrestha and Singh 1972). Art, architecture, and culture in the Kathmandu Valley, which are mostly from the Lichhavi and the Malla periods, have been studied by several scholars for their uniqueness (Bue 2011; Gray 2011; Slusser 1975; Slusser and Vajrācārya 1974; Weiler 2009). Cultural influence in governance have roots in the Lichhavi era and they still exist among the Newars with the traditional governance practices such as the continuing Guthi system.

Guthi is a distinctive institution among Newars that historians believe to have existed since the Lichhavi era (400 to 750 CE), even though termed as *Gosthi* in older historical accounts (D. B. Shrestha and Singh 1972; Shaha 1990). In Sanskrit, the word *Gosthi* means 'assembly' or 'association' (Dangol 2010; N. Pradhananga, Shrestha and Dee 2010; Toffin 2005). Guthis have had several functions within the Newar society and are still an integral part of the Newar lifestyle. Guthis have been categorised in many ways by writers who have studied them (Toffin 2005; Quigley 1985; B. G. Shrestha 2012). In general, based on the goals or objectives of Guthis, they seem to be of three types: (1) Guthis concerning with festivities (*jatra*s), workshops, craftsmanship, music,

2 *Nepal Mandala* (also written Nepālmandālā) is the historical space of Kathmandu Valley, a system of three city states and smaller towns within them (see Slusser 1982).

maintaining water conduits and other activities which signify the activities of the living; (2) Guthis which are engaged in the activities of the dead, such as carrying out of funerals; and (3) Guthis engaged in purely religious activities. Guthis are usually formed within specific castes or group within the Newar society, and are the very fabric that build the Newar society. The Newar societal structure being composed of different sub-groups, works vis-à-vis interaction between such sub-groups and the Guthis established amongst them. Toffin (2016, 349) has described the importance of Guthis in defining the society and economy of the Newars. He describes them as 'communal groups which are theoretically motivated by the notion of service rather than by profits'.

There is a large volume of literature that defines Guthis to be a land tenure system or a religious trust (Acharya 2008; Regmi 1965, 1977). This may present conflicting accounts as to what Guthis are. But, it is necessary to understand that around 3.1 per cent of land in the Kathmandu Valley is owned by Guthis (Dhakal 2011). But, in its origin, the Guthi institution is the institution of community organisations that have been a common practice within *Nepal Mandala*. The latter perspective towards describing Guthis lacks context and adheres to the state endorsed definition. Quigley (1985) argues that Guthis being seen as land tenure system is '*Gorkhali* invention' that started only after the *Gorkhali* conquest of *Nepal Mandala*. Ownership of land provides for the resources for running the Guthis. As acts of charity, land endowments were made to Guthis either by the monarch or citizens. The crop and cash gained from the appropriation of the properties of Guthis was shared among the members of respective Guthis or used for funding activities of the Guthi. This seems to have been the generally practised system especially for running Buddhist monasteries known locally as *Baha* and *Bahi* or *Mahavihar* (Vajracharya 1998). Buddhist monasteries being governed through community Guthis goes back to history as far as a millennium; the oldest manuscript found in Newari mentions the rules on sharing the property of a monastery among the Guthi members in Patan (Malla 1990). Patan and also Kathmandu being historically Buddhist urban spaces have numerous *Baha* and *Bahi*, and their operation seems to be based entirely on the Guthi system (Locke 1985). This tends to suggest that the Guthis most probably have origins in Buddhist traditions.

Despite the significance of Guthis as a system of governance and a part of cultural identity, in the recent past, their role in the state's administrative framework has been greatly reduced. With the Guthi Sansthan Act of 1964 and its further amendment in 1976, significant changes followed with the framework concerning the traditional Guthi institution and their role in local governance (N. Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010). The Guthi

Sansthan Act allowed for creation of a state agency, Guthi Sansthan. The agency now oversees the functions of traditional Guthis for religious and cultural activities such as *jatras* and running rituals in temples and shrines. The competency of Guthi Sansthan, however, is questionable as is the state's interest in improving the state agency (Khaniya 2005). Most importantly, the reduction of the scope of responsibilities of Guthis to religio-cultural activities meant that Guthis were not as relevant as before. Several of the structures and spaces that were managed by Guthis are now controlled by the municipalities. Through the Land Reform Act of 1964, Guthi lands were converted to *Guthi Raitan Nambari* land—a form of privately owned land (Acharya 2008). The intention of the new legislation was to empower the tenant-farmer but, this subsequently meant that Guthis lost their income. As described by Shrestha (2012), in the case of Guthis in Sankhu, several of the Guthis have stopped functioning primarily due to the lack of income as a consequence of the Land Reform Act.

Gorkha Earthquake 2015

The 2015 Gorkha earthquake, which was of moment magnitude 7.8 and had the hypocentre located in the Barpak village of Gorkha, was devastating for the country with 8674 deaths (Chiaro et al. 2015; Goda et al. 2015). For Kathmandu Valley and nearby districts, the losses to heritage structures were of huge scale with 753 temples, monasteries and heritage monuments being damaged, either partially but significantly, or completely.[3] Nepal, being situated in a seismic zone, has faced large earthquakes almost every century (Weiler 2009). Yet, as the 2015 earthquake showed, the government lacked a preparedness plan. The earthquake and its aftermath have underlined the inadequacies within the state's governance capacity. The lack of preparedness was a clear indication of the state being extremely weak. This is understandable given the political transition the country had been going through.[4] The lack of existing governance capacity is also evident in the post-earthquake restoration process. Many historical structures within the world heritage site of Kathmandu Valley are still awaiting restoration and distribution of funds to earthquake victims has not yet concluded. All this has been despite a large amount of aid received by the government from international donors after the earthquake.[5]

3 Ujjwal Satyal, '85pc Heritage Monuments yet to Be Rebuilt', *The Himalayan Times*, 25 April 2018, https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/85-per-cent-heritage-monuments-yet-to-be-rebuilt/.

4 'How Political Instability Affected Nepal's Disaster Preparedness', *DW*, 27 April 2015, http://www.dw.com/en/how-political-instability-affected-nepals-disaster-preparedness/a-18411259.

5 Hemant Ojha, Eileen Baldry and Krishna K. Shrestha, 'Two Years after the Earthquake, Why Has Nepal Failed to Recover?', *The Conversation*, 12 May 2017.

Community Initiatives in Restoration and Rebuilding

Despite the gross incompetency witnessed in part of the government, there has been some respite in the form of community initiatives, especially towards the restoration of heritage structures. Perhaps the earliest case of a successful community initiative in heritage restoration came from the restoration of a Lichhavi-era stupa in Thamel, locally known as *Ashok Chaitya* (Dave 2018).[6] Even though the paperwork for the project was already started by a local resident Sanjeeb Shrestha before the earthquake, the process had to be restarted after the earthquake. This restoration project, even though a small one, became an exemplary project that started with community initiatives and had a smooth progression. Members of the old Guthi that looked after the structure played a positive role even though the Guthi had become defunct. This was one of the first post-earthquake restoration projects that were completed. In less than two years the stupa architecture was restored with original Lichhavi-era style, and further structures in the area were also constructed. This becomes only one of the several restoration projects that would be later started through community initiatives.

One case which has gained much attention, and for understandable reasons, is the case of Kasthamandap, which through archaeological surveys, was discovered to have been built according to Buddhist traditions using mandala structure in its foundation. It was also believed to be the oldest standing structure in the Kathmandu Valley until the earthquake brought it down—this was verified by archaeological surveys that were conducted later (Coningham et al. 2016; Slusser and Vajrācārya 1974). As the failure of Rani Pokhari restoration showed,[7] concerns were raise regarding the quality of the restoration works done by contractors who were being selected through the 'lowest bid',[8] and the community formed the group 'Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign'. Restoration works were then attempted through community initiatives, with agreement between the campaign, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), the Department of Archaeology (DoA), and

6 Sanjit Pradhananga, 'Heritage Reconstruction 2.0', *The Kathmandu Post*, 18 March 2017, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-03-18/heritage-reconstruction-20.html.

7 Anup Ojha, 'Concrete Wall around Rani Pokhari Draws Flak', *The Kathmandu Post*, 20 December 2017, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-12-20/concrete-wall-around-rani-pokhari -draws-flak.html; Anup Ojha, 'KMC Threatens to Scrap Contractor's Deal over Rani Pokhari Project Delay', *The Kathmandu Post*, 12 November 2017, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-11-12/kmc-threatens-to-scrap-contractors-deal-over-rani-pokhari-project-delay.html.

8 APF, 'Lowest Bidders Threaten Nepal's Quake-Hit Heritage', *Dailymail*, 24 March 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-4344866/Lowest-bidders-threaten-Nepals-quake-hit-heritage.html.

the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC).[9] A direct involvement of Guthis regarding the structure of the restoration has not been witnessed, but there have been discussions on the possibility of the same (Bhattarai 2018; KC 2016). After the local elections of 2017, there was a tussle between community activists and KMC, as the mayor wanted to go for reconstruction through contractors (Tuladhar 2018). The new committee that was eventually formed in May 2018 resolved the tension, and opened space for optimism.[10]

However, in the case of *Baha* and *Bahi* monasteries in the Kathmandu Valley, the scenario has been comparatively different as Guthis still actively maintain these structures. *Maitripur Mahavihara,* which is one of the several *Mahaviharas* in Kathmandu, is undergoing reconstruction through the initiatives from the Guthi members associated with the *Mahavihara*. Several of the *Mahaviharas* suffered significant damage in the earthquake. However, in the case of *Maitripur Mahavihara*, the members of the *Mahavihara* decided to completely rebuild the structure, and the process was started in July 2016. Perhaps, due to the current religious making of Nepal, where Hinduism is the majority religion and given more attention, the Buddhist *Mahavihara* structures in the Kathmandu Valley, like Buddhist sites elsewhere in Nepal, have not had the same attention as Hindu religious sites and structures.[11] The lack of media reports on the renovation process of these structures certainly tends to support the argument. But, this tendency to not prioritise Buddhist heritage by the government has not in all instances affected the restoration processes negatively as the case of *Maitripur Mahavihara* shows. As per the information provided by Mr Milan Ratna Bajracharya, a member of the Guthi associated with the *Mahavihara*, the earthquake had caused significant damage to the structure, and since the structure had not gone through a major renovation since centuries, a full reconstruction was started through the initiatives of their Guthi. 85 per cent of the estimated cost was provided by the KMC and 15 per cent by the Guthi members. The restoration process in the *Mahavihara* has been going smoothly.

Not just in the case of *Baha* and *Bahis*, but several other cases have also re-emphasised the relevance of Guthis. The renovation of *Ashok Chaitya* in Thamel had positive support from members of the old Guthi that used

9 'Kasthamandap's Journey Through History, Kathmandu Sights', 2017, accessed 25 September, https://www.himalayan-dreams.com/kasthamandap-s-journey-through-history.

10 'Reconstruction of Kasthamandap Temple Begins', *The Himalayan Times*, 14 May 2018, https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/reconstruction-of-kasthamandap-temple-begins.

11 'Ashoka Pillar Finally Gets Protective Shed', *The Kathmandu Post*, 20 March 2018, http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-03-20/ashoka-pillar-finally-gets-protective-shed.html; 'Demand to Promote Ramgram Monastery', *The Himalayan Times*, 30 April 2018, https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/demand-to-promote-ramgram-monastery.

to maintain the stupa, even though the Guthi had ceased to function. There have been discussions surrounding the old Guthis in relation to the reconstruction of *Kasthamandap* (Bhattarai 2018; KC 2016; Risal 2015). These and several other restoration projects have shown that Guthis have found their way into discussions in the context of the Kathmandu Valley again. For an institution that has continued for more than a millennium, it is certain that Guthis would have a deep-rooted connection with the culture of the people in Nepal, and especially the Newars. As Toffin (2016) has pointed out, the community in Nepal is strong and people have had a tendency to rely more on the community institutions, be it through Guthis or through cooperatives. But, there seems to be a divergence in some parts of the local population due to lifestyle changes that being introduced as more people are opting for jobs instead of family and community-based businesses.

ICT as a Factor

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) proved to be a key factor in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake. Initiatives in mapping affected areas were started through Commons-Based Peer Production (CBPP)[12] approach immediately after the earthquake. Through the use of crowdsourcing and open data, a few open data activists helped develop a system that would allow identifying the areas with most urgent needs during the immediate post-earthquake scenario (McMurren et al. 2017; Poiani et al. 2016). In addition to this, there have been feasibility studies for photogrammetric modelling of heritage sites (Dhonju et al. 2017). Photogrammetric modelling can enable one to keep better records of heritage structures in digital form, and help visualise these historical structures so that reconstruction will be possible by matching with the original structure in events of a natural disaster. As these examples show, ICT has found a considerable amount of significance in the post-earthquake scenario.

Use of ICT can enable new models in collaborative efforts and provide other technological benefits. ICT has had an important role since the recent past from the perspective of community empowerment also. This can be observed through the cultural movement amongst the Newars which has also become visible on the cyberspace. The Newar community probably had the most sentimental connection with the cultural heritages in the Kathmandu Valley, and was most concerned by the mismanagement that was witnessed in the restoration of heritage structures. The *Nepal Bhasa* movement, which was a part of the broader Adivasi Janajati movement, had gained strength since the

12 CBPP is a socio-economic model of production that is based on collaboration among large groups of individuals often over a digitally networked environment (Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006).

1990s. The movement was the result of the discontentment of the Newars and other ethnic nationalities towards the increasing Khas Brahmin and Chhetri domination of the public sector, and the marginalisation of minorities (Gellner 2007; Onta 2006). As ICT became more accessible to the middle-class population of the country, it was certain that part of the movement would get voiced into cyberspace. But, with the earthquake and the mismanagement of heritage restoration process by the government, the movement that was generally focused on *Nepal Bhasa*, has now refocussed towards cultural heritage. As a result, 'heritage activists' have found a platform through smartphones and social media within the cyberspace.

The activities in the cyberspace that have stemmed from 'heritage activism' are only one side of the full story. The use of ICT had also been adopted by the traditional organisations. Traditional Guthis from *Baha* and *Bahis* had started creating social media accounts and pages since the recent past. *Rudravarma Mahavihara* in Patan, *Itumbaha* in Kathmandu, and *Kwabahal* of Patan (also known as 'golden temple') are just some of the Buddhist *Bahas* that have online presence. The central theme has been the use of ICT for communication, dissemination of information, and transparency in heritage restoration projects, activities of Guthis and other community activities. The *Thamel Ashok Chaitya* restoration team started to use social media for providing updates on the restoration process since June 2016, soon after the restoration project started. They have used social media platforms very well for providing updates on the progress, and for maintaining transparency. The 'Rebuild Kasthamandap Campaign' created an official website since their inception and has also used social media platform. The committee for restoration of *Kasthamandap* that was formed later has also used social media effectively. These social media accounts have been used for providing updates and other information in general about the respective restoration projects.

There have been concerns over the transparency of Guthis and traditional community-based organisations (Bhattarai 2018). Not all traditional organisations follow proper record-keeping procedures, and thus lack of trust in these organisations becomes a problem. But, with the use of social media for transparency, the credibility of community-based organisations is seen to have increased, as seen in the case of *Maitripur Mahavihara*. In most cases, all Guthi members cannot participate equally actively in tasks requiring a hands-on approach, as they can be living not too close to the monastery or might not have sufficient time to devote. To overcome this issue, Guthi members of *Maitripur Mahavihara* have created a working committee for the restoration project from within their Guthi members. The updates on the project have been posted on social media pages by the committee, and this has assured

better trust of other Guthi members in the restoration process that is being carried out. In the case of *Thamel Ashok Chaitya* restoration project, ICT has largely helped in the collection of funds for the project. The continued updates about the execution of the project had instilled better trust among the people. This has also made 'crowdfunding' possible as an alternate source of funding. In case of *Maitripur Mahavihara* and *Thamel Ashok Chaitya*, individual donations from the community and Guthi members have been important for funding the projects, and this was made possible through ICT.

The use of social media has proved to be very effective for better networking, and the outreach has increased to a great extent. Groups on social media have also facilitated discussions among the communities for heritage conservation related agendas. Without the availability of the social media platforms, collaborations and discussions at such a large scale would not be possible. ICT has allowed for collective actions that had largely begun to diminish with changes in lifestyle. Day jobs and increasingly isolated and individualistic lifestyle had caused collective actions to become more difficult to achieve (Toffin 2016). However, social media has brought about alternative possibilities in achieving collective actions. With an increasing number of people emigrating in search of better jobs and income, there is also another angle to view the necessity of ICT. People living abroad, who otherwise would have been left out from these collective actions, have been able to provide inputs by means of ICT. Observing these developments, it is clear that the rejuvenation of the culture of collective actions among the communities and traditional governance institutions is possible when facilitated by ICT.

Crisis as an Opportunity for a New Paradigm Shift

Even though the mismanagement of heritage restoration process after the earthquake is a major crisis for Nepal, there is an emerging paradigm shift that can be sensed in local community's self-governance. Whether this is an opportunity for a revival of communal actions in local governance is something that needs to be studied in detail, but early indications do point towards that direction.

The expression of crisis as an opportunity is very common in literature in several fields of studies (Brockner and Erika 2008; Short 1983). Referring to the ambivalent nature of crises, Short (1983) mentions that the Chinese word for crisis is composed of two figures that signify danger and opportunity. Another popular view that focuses on the idea of crisis providing opportunities comes from scholars in economics such as Carlota Perez. Mentioning about 'green' as a direction, Perez (2015, 15) mentions that it 'turns the environmental

crisis from an economic problem into an economic opportunity'. It can be said about most crisis scenarios that overcoming such situations lead to major shifts in the directions within institutions and societies. This concept can hold true for the case of Nepal and its crisis in heritage conservation. There already seems to be a possible model for collaborative governance that is based on the spirit of already existing traditional practices being developed. This phenomenon has been driven so far by the recognition of a situation of crisis and the need for change. If guided correctly, the movement that has started may provide for an opportunity for achieving transformations that will create a base for efficient grassroots level governance in the country.

The developments so far sprout from the deep-rooted practice of cooperative governance that was the hallmark of the specific Newari governance tradition. Guthi institution might have declined, but the cultural influence is still there. People still form groups from within the community for solving any given problem. The outer features might be different, but in essence, it is the effect of the people being accustomed towards communal actions for solving societal problems. Moreover, strong communities is not just a cultural trait of Kathmandu and Nepal, but of the majority of the South Asian region (Migdal 1988). This intrinsic cultural characteristic provides for the possibility to use the strengths of the society in achieving the goal of having efficient governance. Whether Guthis themselves can be revived or a model based partly on the spirit of Guthis, but transformed to fit the contemporary context, will be needed, is a topic that can only be discussed at a later stage. The current movement amongst the community in the Kathmandu Valley is still at a very early stage, and it cannot be speculated how it will grow and to what extent. There is also the question of political atmosphere in the country, and how it will impact smaller grassroots level movements that are much localised. There may also be the need to study the Guthi institution from a perspective of contemporary relevance in governance. There have so far been ethnographic studies which target the cultural aspect of Guthis more than the functional aspect, such as Shrestha's study of Guthis in *Sankhu* (B. G. Shrestha 2012) and Toffin's study in *Pyangaon* (Toffin 2005). As Shrestha's study showed, even in a small town like *Sankhu*, there were more than 80 Guthis, their functions and characteristics greatly varying from one to another (B. G. Shrestha 2012). This makes it greatly challenging to build a clear framework based on the Guthi institution, without further studies that develop a solid understanding of Guthi as an institution of governance. There needs to be studies conducted taking into consideration the potential of the Guthi institution playing an important part in the mechanism of local governance in the Kathmandu Valley. This will help in building up empirical

evidence towards potentiality of effective governance models coming from an entirely non-Western context that challenges the global-Western model.

Conclusion

The Gorkha earthquake of 2015 and the heritage reconstruction efforts in the aftermath have highlighted the weakness in governance capacity in Nepal. However, a new paradigm shift is certainly starting in the Kathmandu Valley with the Newar community, and the intrinsic aspect of their culture being placed in the centre of the movement. Practices like Guthi have been central to the culture of the Kathmandu Valley and especially the Newars. The cultural influence has brought about a movement towards communal action for achieving effective grassroots level governance, which now can be witnessed through the case of heritage restoration process. ICT is serving as a catalyst in this phenomenon where a grassroots movement for a transformation appears to be starting. It is certain that further studies on this matter will help towards realising an efficient alternative model of collaborative governance that has its roots coming from non-Western traditions.

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Publication VII

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Guthis abroad: Newars and continuation of the tradition of community cooperation.

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Community cooperation is the defining aspect of the Newar culture and is seen in their way of living and organization of their important life-events. *Guthis*, the main socio-economic institution of the Newars has a deep-rooted connection with the Newar culture. The tradition has passed on for generations. Rather than being just cultural legacies, *guthis* are effective means for the provision of social welfare in the Newar community. The importance of *guthi* as a social institution among Newars is also reflected by the establishment of various *guthi* organisations among Newars who have settled beyond the borders of Nepal, in places like Sikkim, where Newars had immigrated much earlier, and places of recent movement like Europe and the US. Despite these new *guthis* not sharing exactly the same features of the older *guthis*, they, nevertheless, share similar purpose –providing social welfare and catering to the cultural needs. Similar to how *guthis* were responsible for organising *jatras* and other social events in the past, newer *guthi* organizations established abroad have taken up the role of organizing events, regardless of their locations. A case study is presented in this paper through data collected via desk research and semi-structured interviews with members of Newa Guthi New York and Pasa Pucha Guthi, UK that explores these new *guthis*. Based on the initial findings, this article argues that *Guthi* institution and culture is a unique characteristic among the *Newars* that has made this diverse group a cohesive and functioning society that transcends national borders.

Introduction

Newar culture is argued to be one of the most complex and developed culture in the Himalayan region (Nepali 2015; Regmi 1977). Yet, within the modern state of Nepal, people often mistake Newars as being merely an ethnic group. While there is no doubt that Newars are not ethnically homogenous, there are cultural aspects amongst them that are fairly common across all sub-groups. One aspect that holds true amongst all Newars is that there are several life-events religio-cultural events among Newars that are unique to Newars alone. From *macha janku,* or the rice feeding ceremony of infants, to the funeral rites of the deceased, members of Newar community will have several important life-events which combine to make a unique Newar identity (U. Shakya 2011; Levy 1990, 661–62). *Guthis* – the defining socio-economic institution of Newars, play an important part of organising these life-events and other functions. (Dangol 2010; Gérard Toffin 2005; S. Shakya and Drechsler 2019). For instance, *sana guthi* is responsible for funeral processions (Dangol 2010; Quigley 1985). In similar ways many *jatras,* that are part of the Newar identity are conducted by *guthis* (B. G. Shrestha 2012; Gérard Toffin 2008; Gérard Toffin 2007; Gérard Toffin 2005). All Newars are usually members of one or more *guthis*; this being more common amongst the Buddhist sub-groups such as the Shakyas, Maharjans, Tuladhars and so on (Gérard Toffin 2019).

Newars have a strong association with their homeland and are usually rooted to their ancestral land. But as traditionally skilled tradesmen, Newars travelled to many new areas and setup many satellite settlements for the purposes of trade. Historical towns like Bandipur and Tansen have been habited primarily by Newars who helped established these towns as they immigrated to expand their businesses (Marianne 2014; Marchian 2017). Many Newar tradesmen travelled to even farther places like Sikkim and Tibet. B.G. Shrestha has detailed about the lifestyle of Newars in Sikkim where community cooperation still seem to play a major role in conducting their way of living of Newars there (B. G. Shrestha 1998; 2015) With globalisation, the emigration of Newars from their original homelands to far-reaching places has resulted to significant populations in Europe, US and Australia. Despite being important to their lifestyle *guthis* have not been as popular among the later generations of Newars, with many opting out from their ancestral *guthis* (Gérard Toffin 2005; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; S. Shakya and Drechsler 2019). However, paradoxically, it can be noticed that new namesake organizations have been setup among the Newars who have started settling in the West.

This paper tries to document some of key aspects of the *guthis* amongst the Newars living abroad through the study of two of such organizations and to explore the role of such institutions in providing for the cultural and welfare needs of these diaspora communities. In addition, the attempt of this paper is also to explore and assess to what extent do these new *guthis* adhere to the features of the older and traditional *guthis*, which is conceptualized in this paper as the legacy of the Newar state before Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquests in the 18th century (D. B. Shrestha and Singh 1972; Sharma 2015). The cases of two *guthis* in the US and the UK, namely Newa Guthi New York and Pasa Pucha Guthi UK, have been used for this study. Information has been gathered through desktop research and remote or personal interviews in semi-structured format.

Conceptualising the Guthi Institution

Early records on *guthis* were often works of historians who have provided accounts of *guthis* through stone inscriptions and other forms of records. Scholars like Dhanavajra Vajracharya and Mahesh Chandra Regmi have provided extensive studies on the function and role of *guthis* (Regmi 1965; 1977; 1988; D. Vajracharya 1973). Regmi's work, despite being important for overall understanding of *guthis,* maybe misleading to some extent as he looks at *guthis* from the rather misaligned perspective of land taxation and ownership system as defined by the government's legal framework, something that has been critiqued (Quigley 1985; Gérard Toffin 2005). It must be noted that Regmi made clear distinction between the concept of *guthis* as a land tenure system as interpreted by the state legislation of the time compared to the Newar *Guthi* Institution which bore key distinctive features (Regmi 1977, 48).

As Nepal became more open to foreign scholars, study of Newar culture and the *guthis* became more prevalent, especially amongst anthropologists. There was an increased focus on the cultural aspects of the Newars from an anthropological lens, that also increased the focus on the intangible cultural heritages (UNESCO 2003; Diwasa, Bandu, and Nepal 2007). As of late, conceptualizing *guthis* as intangible heritage has become the most common way of studying it with both scholarly authors as well as the mainstream media adhering to this perspective (Maharjan and Barata 2017; Pradhananga, Shrestha, and Dee 2010; Taylor 2016). The media coverage during June 2019 protests against the 'Guthi Act Amendment Bill' makes it clear that the view towards *guthis* as an intangible heritage is popular in general (A. Shrestha 2019; South Asia Time 2019). It was during the aftermath of 2015 Gorkha Earthquake, when major cultural heritages were damaged with slow or unsatisfactory rebuilding process, that 'heritage

activism' amongst Newars sprang up, that included the discussions on *guthis* being an intrinsic part of Newar identity (Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018). The rhetoric of the protests against the proposed act also largely revolved around Newar identity and the politics surrounding it.

Guthi institution can be looked at from the lens of public administration and governance. There is no doubt that *guthis* historically provided public utility functions in *Nepal Mandala* under the Lichhavi kings (Pokharel 2019). This understanding has been largely determined through the historical evidences from the Lichhavi era (D. B. Shrestha and Singh 1972; Shaha 1990). As understood from works of Dhanavajra Vajracharya (1973), since the time of the Lichhavis, the job of cleaning roads or providing water supply were largely done through *guthis*. It is also important to note that the religious duties were very much part of state functions contrasting the concept of state and the government back then to the fairly new concept of the secular state which largely excludes religious activities from the state functions (Dobbelaere 2011). *Guthis* are indeed religious in nature and seeing them as religious trusts would not be entirely wrong. Moreover, religion cannot be completely avoided when discussing forms of traditional mechanisms of public administration in Nepal. *Guthis* have been greatly influenced by Buddhist beliefs and are practiced primarily by Buddhist Newars, followed by Hindu Newars and non-Newars too. The institution itself could have roots linking to the historical Buddha himself based on available evidences (S. Shakya and Drechsler 2019; Gellner 1992, 248–50).

The rhetoric that emerged during the protests organized against the Guthi bill supported the idea of two conflicting understanding of *guthis*;as a land tenure system, and as a socio-economic institution that the state was failing to recognise (S. Shakya 2019; Gérard Toffin 2019). The misinterpretation of the *Guthi* Institution in part of the government can be seen as being aberrations that were introduced during the Rana regime (S. Shakya 2019). It was during the Rana regime that emphasis was put on the land, with increasing number of people from the elite class registering land as Guthi land (Regmi 1977). The first National Code that was written down in history of Nepal—Muluki Ain of 1854 (Malagodi 2008)—had legal provisions for *guthis*. But the lack of understanding of the concept of the institution itself made the legal code look at Guthis from a more religious land-endowments perspective (Regmi 1977, 67). Only later acts like the Guthi Sansthan Act 1976 (2033 BS) and Land Reform Act 1964 (2021 BS), the focus was shifted towards modernising the state structure, and providing additional legal rights to tenant farmers who tilled the Guthi lands.

The *Guthi* institution is a legacy of the Newar state or *Nepal Mandala* which was won over by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha. Upon his conquest, he became the king of 'Nepal'. Instead of continuing to rule from his ancestral seat in Gorkha, he chose *Nepal Mandala* as his new capital, bringing arguably little change to the already well-established public administration mechanisms like the *Guthi* institution. Historians agree that only during the reign of Rana Bahadur Shah were there steps taken against *guthis* (Pradhan 2012, 27). Following how history unfolded, one can realise that after the conquest by Prithvi Narayan Shah, *Nepal Mandala* had a new monarch and was annexed into the expanding Gorkha state, but this transition was not immediately felt, or perhaps not even intended, in the grassroots level. Newars were the only significant urban-based population in the Nepali hills, and the statecraft and institutions that Newars practiced would have been far more developed compared to the institutions of the Gorkha state, which would have rendered their complete replacement very difficult. Prithvi Narayan Shah having been educated in Bhaktapur for some years as a guest in the palace of Ranajit Malla would mean that his own skills in statecraft would have been largely learnt from the Newars (S. Shrestha 2019; D. B. Shrestha and Singh 1972). Thus, one can come to understand that even though the Mallas were overthrown by Shahs, the mechanisms of the state that was subsequently used by the Shahs was largely the continuation of the traditional Newar state, which remained unchanged in matters of economy, governance, culture and so on.

The definition of state in the social sciences context is argued to have been influenced by Max Weber's definition of the state. Weber defines state as being 'a compulsory association which organizes domination. It has been successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory' (Weber 1946, 5). Joel Migdal explains that this definition often is not sufficient to explain all the dynamics of a state, questions such as why some states perform better than others, and why a given state takes certain form such as a democracy while others become autocratic are some of the key arguments he places (2004). Migdal's definition of state under his concept of state-in-society is built on the works of Talcott Parsons and Shils among others (Parsons and S.Turner 1991) (Parsons et al. 1961). Migdal defines a state as the following:

> *The state is a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts.* (Migdal 2004, 16)

Underscoring Migdal's state-in-society concept, it is necessary to understand that a state, in addition to being a 'powerful image of a clearly bounded, unified organization that can be spoken of in singular terms', is also a 'heap of loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings inside and outside the official state borders and often promoting conflicting sets of rules with one another and with 'official' Law' (Migdal 2004, 22).

Using Migdal's framework, it is possible to envision the state of *Nepal Mandala* or the Newar state as being not only the 'image' of the state being headed by the Malla monarchs, but various institutions and dynamics within which would have continued from perhaps even before the Mallas. The Newar state constituted largely different features as compared to modern nation-states. Newar towns in districts of Nuwakot, Dolakha and Kavre clearly exhibit the feature of very lose boundaries. Similarly, the trade towns that used to be at the centre of the settlements carried distinctive Newar features whereas the periphery areas of the towns, often inhabited by Tamang and other indigenous groups, lacked the distinctive urban flair. The change of monarchs from Malla to Shah certainly transformed the state in several ways. However, as outlined earlier, many elements of the older Newar state continued unabated. Hence, the transition and shift of power after the political change was a rather gradual process instead of a sudden and sharp one. The concept of the *Guthi* institution as the legacy of the Newar state continued to exist within the new state of post-conquest 'unified' Nepal. Since *guthis* are formed on the basis of kinship and other forms of social ties, and that is supported by a strong cultural foundations, *guthis* are resilient and are able to exist beyond the territories of domination from the state authority (Gérard Toffin 2005; S. Shakya and Drechsler 2019; S. Shakya 2019; Gérard Toffin 2019). The shared feeling of responsibility towards one's own community keep *guthis* from disintegrating despite of changing socio-political contexts.

Guthis have been formed by Newar communities in settlements beyond the sphere of political influence of Nepal, wherever they have travelled. Bal Gopal Shrestha gives clear accounts of *guthis* that were established by Newars who migrated to Sikkim during the mid-1800s (B. G. Shrestha 1998; 2015)The most significant function of the *guthis* that were established in Sikkim appear to be for social welfare provision amongst the community (ibid.) Through *guthis*, the community in Sikkim also organised a few festivals that were observed in Kathmandu. This can be looked as an extension of the legacy of the Newar state within the political borders of Sikkim. It is necessary to acknowledge that the Newar community in Sikkim have taken a considerably long time to evolve as a community and establish such institutions. Hence, this

paper now proceeds to look at whether other Newar communities elsewhere across the world will follow similar trajectories of establishing *guthis*.

Guthis among the Newars living abroad

The trend of migration of Nepali citizens to foreign countries, and Nepal's economy becoming more and more dependent on remittance from the migrant workers is a well-documented phenomenon (Dahal 2014; Seddon, Gurung, and Adhikari 1998). Different than the emigration to primarily the Middle East for labour work, the migration of Nepali citizens to USA, Canada, Australia and Europe shows a largely varied pattern. While semi-skilled labour migration to Middle Eastern countries seem to be out of labour demand, with most people coming back to Nepal after some period of labour abroad, migration to USA and Europe tends to be more permanent (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2014). Several people apply to go to western countries through schemes that attract highly skilled labour (Bohra-Mishra 2011). Commercialisation of education has helped students to first pursue higher education in western countries and then permanently immigrate there (Bhattarai 2009; Valentin 2013). This has created a large community of Nepali citizens in the western countries. Foreign education has been most popular specifically amongst the people falling in the middle income bracket (Thieme 2017). Since most Newars fall into the middle income bracket, they would fall into the category of people who would be highly attracted to foreign education (Patel 2013; Müller-Böker 1988). Foreign education is also easier to approach for Newars with having been living in the capital where almost all the diplomatic missions are located and many events for providing consultation for abroad studies are organized. The trend to go abroad for studies started almost three decades ago, with the numbers increasing every year, and the count reaching 67,226 in 2017 (RSS 2018; Ministry of Education 2017). With this increasing trend of migration to western countries, the population of Newars in the West has also started to grow significantly. This is especially true in destination like the US, Australia and Europe (Dhungel 1999; Pariyar 2019). Newars who settled in these countries in recent years have started to establish namesake *guthi* organizations. The Newa Guthi in New York and Pasa Pucha Guthi UK in London and its chapters elsewhere are some of the examples of this.

Pasa Pucha Guthi UK (PPGUK) was formed in the UK in November 2000 with Amrit Ratna Sthapit, Arjun Pradhan, Balmukund Prashad Joshi, Dharma Shakya, Ishwar Prasad Manandhar, Jit Bahadur Tandon, Mahanta Shrestha, Shashidhar Manandhar, Rameshwor Lal Singh Dangol and Uttom Govind Amatya as the founding members ("PPG UK - Pasa Puchah Guthi, UK"

n.d.). As per article in the annual magazine published by the PPGUK and information provided by Sanyukta Shrestha, the current president of the organization, the initial objective for the establishment of the organization was to bring together the Newar diaspora in the UK and provide a feeling of belongingness through social activities within the community (Manandhar 2011). Eventually, they started organising cultural festivities and language classes, as well as invite prominent Newar personalities to the UK for events. The organisation chose the to include the name *guthi*, because the organisation had similar motives as with traditional *guthis* which, according to them, were "family lineage associations that have stood for the welfare and communal prosperity of people." As per the information provided by Sanyukta Shrestha, a Board of Trustees was formed in 2010 with the motive to bring the entire Newar community in the UK under one organisation to ensure better unity. Since then, similar regional chapters of the organisation in London, Southeast London, Aldershot, Reading and Wales began autonomous operations. They also met together in UK-wide meetings every couple of months to discuss their issues and ways to help each other. For this, board members were elected from representatives of each chapter. PPGUK and the various chapters have a more western way of how they are administered internally. They usually choose their board and executive members through elections amongst the general members. The last election of the board of PPGUK was conducted in 2018 as per information provided by the President Sanyukta Shrestha.

The clear goal of the PPGUK has been to enable continuation of Newar culture within their community in UK. In doing so, they have managed to keep a tightly-bond community to continue carrying out their traditions and culture. The organization was started by young members, and as per Shrestha, that has been a key motive to keep the younger generation interested and involved while also acquainting non-Newars with Newar traditions. This becomes increasingly necessary as more and more young Newars abroadmarry with non-Newars, which is would understandably be more common abroad compared to Newars in Nepal. In addition to organizing usual festivals and rituals which are important life events such as *ihi* ceremony, *kaeta puja* and *macha janku* among others, PPGUK also helps in events of death, as *Si Guthis* do. Similarly the organisation has been catering to the social needs of younger generation to acquaint them with their native culture, and also to help them create good network within the community (Levy 1990, 661–80).

There is the aspect of conservative ideals developing amongst many immigrated groups who live in different parts of Europe, which is not always seen from the positive light (Sejdiu 2017). The concept of 'immigrant integration' may not entirely be a result of conservative ideals, but

it is also a topic that needs to addressed (Korteweg 2017). However, PPGUK's position is not leaning towards conservative ideals. The organization certainly wants their members to keep in touch with Newar tradition and culture, but they are also willing to accommodate change to adapt to the British culture. The view of PPGUK is that avoidance of British culture is not the way forward, and they acknowledge that the influence from the new culture of where people live now is something inevitable. Thus, the stance of PPGUK is to adapt to the changed reality of Newar community in the UK. For example, Sanyukta Shrestha mentioned that they are open to organising Christmas events through the *Guthi*; his view was that *Yomari puhni* – a Newar festival celebrated around the same time of the year during Christmas– could be merged. The organisation is also following the current trend amongst the younger generation to increase their social media presence, as this tends to attract the younger generation the most. In fact, with the multiple chapters across the UK, it is understandable that without the use of ICT and social media, coordination and information dissemination activities would have been impossible

Newa Guthi New York (NGNY) ("नेवा गूठी [Newa Guthi]" n.d.) is one of the many organisations in the US established amongst the Newar diaspora along with 'Newah Organization of America' and 'United Newah USA', among others. The organisation was established in 2007 by nine founding members which included Aditya Maharjan as the founding president, Nuchhe Dangol as the founding vice-president, and Samir Maharjan as the founding treasurer. New York at the time had a small but significant community of Newars. As some members were already high-skilled professionals, they were available and showed their interest and support to start an organisation that brought people together for the benefit of their community. The initial aim was to bring the community together through semi-traditional cultural events. It can be said that the format of the organisation was more like a social club for the Newar community there. But it gradually they took a form of a traditional *guthi* with the focus shifting towards celebrations of traditional festivals and provision of social welfare and community support. The organisation has also put thoughts into starting a *si guthi* that specifically provides support to the family of deceased to conduct traditional funerals that can be difficult to arrange. One of their main objectives that the organisation has set is to preserve the culture amongst the community so that the Newar identity can transfer to the younger generation, who unfortunately may not have too much contact with their land of origin.

NGNY has been doing very well in providing meaningful social services to the Newar community in New York. Like PPGUK, the organisation has been helping with conducting life

events, organising annual celebration of festivities, and providing social welfare and support to the community. In the US context, the US healthcare and welfare system is lacking in many aspects. Here, the *guthis* have filled a void for people in the community(Khazan 2018). One mentionable incident is that of Ms. Prasha Tuladhar who was able to receive a double lung transplant in 2016 ("Breath of Life Elusive for Queens Woman — and Many New Yorkers" 2015). As per Samir Maharjan, the founding treasurer of the organization, NGNY was able to support the family during the ordeal by organising events that collected fund and was also proactive in providing emotional support to the family in the time of their need.

With the formation of the World Newah Organization (WNO) ("World Newah Organization" n.d.) that was established with the intension of creating a single organisation to represent all Newar communities spread around the world, both NGNY and PPGUK joined WNO as chapter associations. WNO was joined by several other Newar diaspora communities ("Chapters | World Newah Organization" n.d.). WNO was formed through initiatives of key thinkers of the Newar community living abroad, and with the leadership of Mr. Bal Gopal Shrestha (D. Shakya n.d.). The organization has since organized yearly conventions, the second instalment of which was organised in Baltimore (RSS 2016). The current paper lacks the adequate study to clearly put forward an argument on how WNO might progress as an organisation, but it is evident that the intended trajectory is to establish a larger body which coordinates all the diaspora *guthis* and associations of the Newars around the world.

Discussion

Pasa Pucha Guthi UK and Newa Guthi New York, despite not being like traditional *guthis* in how these organizations have been setup, do tend to have similar features which associate them with the Newar identity. The author of this paper has put forward few distinctive features of *guthis* in an earlier publication these features are largely non-existent when it comes to the diaspora organizations (S. Shakya and Drechsler 2019). As per D. N. Gellner(1992, 232) there are three key essential principles of *Guthi* institution looking at which these neo-*Guthis* established tend to divert from some key aspects of the *Guthi* institution:

1. Structure is based on seniority
2. Members take responsibility mandatorily through a rotation
3. Organizations are founded on basis of territory (also kinship)

In that sense, there can be a debate whether these organizations could be called *guthis,* if one is to be strict with the features of *guthis*. Yet these neo-*guthis* do tend to be a result of the

inclination of the Newar community towards associating through cooperative organisations, something that is a culture that has been influenced by the *Guthi* institution. Toffin has pointed this out that the establishment of newer organizations among Newars that are more egalitarian in their power management, are still the influences of the *guthi* culture (Gérard Toffin 2016; Gérard Toffin 2019, 238,349).

It is has been well discussed by several scholars that *guthis* are in decline (Locke 1985; P. R. Vajracharya 1998; Lekakis, Shakya, and Kostakis 2018). More specifically amongst the younger generation, there has been a steady decline in the awareness or tendency to associate with *guthis*. This holds true even more so amongst non-Buddhist Newars (Gérard Toffin 2019). But from what is understood from studying the case of neo-*guthis* in the communities living abroad, the younger generations do have stronger appeal towards the term *guthi*, even though the orgizations that they form may not be able to emulate the exact features of the traditional *guthis*. In defence of the neo-*guthis*, it is understandable that institutions evolve based on how the culture evolve too. Along with this, the realities of living within the legal framework in a foreign land, organisations may not be able to adhere to all the traditional features the *guthis* in Nepal encompass. *Guthi* is a centuries-old institution and *guthis* it needs to adapt to the reality of the contemporary context too, hence a degree of deviation from the traditional practices can be for the betterment of the institution itself. However, there is the need to make checks and make efforts that these organisations are in in effect examples of misuse the *guthi* name. The aberrations and sharp deviation from their true forms may lead to situation like what was demonstrated by the 'Guthi bill' episode in June 2019. While some of the lawmakers and the government voiced their support for the bill, Newar masses protested against it. It was clear that the later aberrations introduced to the *Guthi* institution deviated the true definition of *guthis*, thus creating an unclear legal translation of the institution (S. Shakya 2019; Gérard Toffin 2019; Radio Nepal 2019). To ensure such deviations do not occur, there needs to be an influential body that would to guide these organisations. With WNO taking the role of an umbrella organization of all the neo-*guthis* and other organisations formed by Newar diaspora communities around the world, there can be a better direction. However, the extent to which WNO can exercise its authority is questionable something to be seen.

What form these organisations may take in the future as the new generation of Newars, who have hardly lived in Nepal, would take charge of these organisations is yet to be seen. Yet, it is not likely that these organisations would cease to exist in near future. *Guthis* in places like Sikkim exist under a different political system and different trajectory compared to Nepal, and

have managed to continue with the traditions (B. G. Shrestha 2015; 1998). The culture of cooperation amongst the Newar community is extremely strong. The culture is strengthened over the centuries due to the continuation of the *Guthi* institution Factors such as non-supportive state leadership, change in lifestyle, and rising western individualistic ideals may have set *guthis* into decline (Locke 1985, 37). However, there is space for optimism in the current era of information technology as *guthis* will have better access to information and historical records, and better communication with well-informed members of the Newar community who can provide guidance to these organisations. With technology, social media, and internet, information on Newar culture and identity is more accessible than what it used to be few decades ago. Communication and information sharing are much easier, and umbrella organisations like WNO can now keep in touch with its chapters located around the world. It is congruous that WNO was envisioned through remote Skype conferences amongst the key Newar activists and thinkers (D. Shakya n.d.). Due to these reasons, with the changed context of technological advancements in ICT, distributed organisations have better means of working cohesively. While *guthis* kept majority of Newars rooted to Kathmandu valley, the changed reality will allow movement yet without alienation.

There is a threat to the *guthis* from steps taken from the government which may have negative implications towards the institution; the recent controversial bill proposed in the National Assembly by the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation has shown that there is this possibility. The Khas Brahmin hegemony that has developed in the country certainly is not very appreciative of Newar Institutions, either out of lack of awareness or perhaps with clear motives to displace Newars as some Newar activists have claimed (A. Shrestha 2019). In that sense, there is a threat that the *Guthi* institution within Nepal may become even more depleted. But there is also clear indication that the Newars are highly supportive of the *guthis* and steps from government that are against the interests of the *guthis* will be faced with strong protests. The level of discussions that happened in the traditional media and social media regarding the controversial bill proposed has greatly improved the awareness of the *Guthi* institution amongst Newars and non-Newars alike. Many have come to highly appreciate these organisations and their cultural impact, clearly proved by the amount of people who came to protest the controversial bill on 19th June 2019 (Satyal 2019).

There are many authors who have investigated how there is an interplay between culture and state institutions (Alesina and Giuliano 2015; Alasuutari 2015; Senge 2013). Alesina and Giuliano (2015) have put forward the idea that the culture (which also includes informal

institutions) and formal institutions that are legally recognised within a state mutually shape each other. Culture is also one of the various aspects which constitutes a state. Culture is more resilient compared to other aspects and change in culture happens gradually overtime but directing or forcing cultural changes is difficult (Fukuyama 2004, 39). Newars had a stronger and more developed culture compared to most other communities which now live within the political borders of Nepal (Nepali 2015; Regmi 1977; Sharma 2015). For this reason even after more than two and half centuries of Shah conquest and being gradually side-lined from political powers, the community has continued to exist as a relevant group whose cultural identity still constitutes large part of the overall image of Nepal as a country; the art, architecture, traditional urban lifestyles and various other identities of Nepal definitely comes from the Newar identity and Newar state of the past or *Nepal Mandala* (Gellner 2016; Slusser 1982). Staying within the framework of Migdal's state-in-society concept, we can look at the neo-*guthis* amongst the Newar diaspora as extensions of the Newar state of the past, the legacy of which continues to exist within the modern state of Nepal. The strong culture of the Newars enables them to function as a cohesive community group even though they are not ethnically homogeneous. The culture of collaboration and cooperation amongst the Newars that have been established through centuries of continuation of the *Guthi* institution, makes the community naturally inclined towards collaborative efforts in achieving common goals

Conclusion

The neo-*guthis* amongst the Newar communities living abroad have been effective in providing for the socio-cultural needs of the communities. The presented case study of the neo-*guthis* amongst Newars in UK and New York have shown that more than just being social clubs for the community to gather around, they also provide social welfare to the community, while also enabling the continuation of their traditional festivals and important life event rituals. These neo-*guthis* may not exhibit all the key features of Newar *guthis*, but they still provide some key functions of traditional *guthis*. The culture of Newars to create these cooperative organisations to tackle specific tasks is a legacy of the Newar *Guthi* institution which continues to exist and evolve, and at the same also influence the modern state of Nepal. Amongst the diaspora community which exist within different legal and political contexts, *guthi* organizations may not exist in their true form but may tend to adapt as per the needs of the community. Whether an authoritative body can keep checks on these organisations so that they do not stray too far away from the true features the *Guthi* institution is something that needs to be seen. With formation of WNO, this role may be played by the organisation. Despite questions of whether

the state will continue to support the *Guthi* institution as a legal institution in Nepal, it is likely that the neo-*guthis* in the Newar diaspora may continue in largely evolved forms.

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