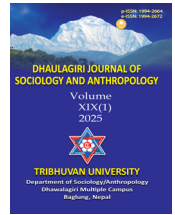


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Social Change in the Hidden Kingdom of Nepal's Himalayas : A Case Study of the *Baden*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/dsaj.v19i1.77252>**Abstract**

The rich cultural heritage of Nepal's mountain communities is undergoing rapid transformation, with a noticeable decline in traditional festivals, songs, dances, and cultural practices. These changes pose an ongoing threat to the collective socio-cultural life and history of the people and their homeland, yet this critical issue remains largely under-researched. Focusing on the *Baden* festivals that were celebrated in Manang village, located in the Nishyang Valley of the Central Himalayas, Nepal, this study aims to elucidate the detailed processes of decline in festival celebration and their relationship to broader social change. The study employs an ethnographic approach, utilizing fieldwork conducted in September-October 2018 and May 2024, which included informal conversations and interviews with local elders, performers, festival organizers, and youths in Manang village. Secondary data, including photos, documentaries, videos, and archives, further supported the analysis. The findings reveal that increasing mobility and out-migration have led to the gradual erosion of indigenous cultural practices, particularly the *Baden* festival, which once reinforced communal identity and sacred spatial ties. This loss reflects the erosion of the unique cultural heritage of the Nepal Himalayas, with sacred spaces and local traditions under threat as younger generations move away from their ancestral place and customs. By documenting these transformations, the paper calls for a critical rethinking to revitalize and sustain mountain cultural heritage in the face of global and local pressure.

Keywords: *Baden* festival, cultural identity, mountain, mobility, social change

Introduction

The Mountain community of *Nishyangba*¹ in the Nishyang Valley is, located in the central Himalayas of Nepal. There are many festivals that the people of Manang village celebrate throughout the year, and the *Baden* is one of them. The *Baden* festival reflects socio-cultural, temporal, political, historical, and communal elements of the people, which they celebrate. Festivals have a social and cultural context (Xiao et al., 2017). The festival discussed in this paper is not a leisure event, such as a film

festival or carnival; rather, it is a festival that reflects the history of both people and a place.

I have attempted to uncover the processes of decline of the *Baden*² festival over the past two decades in the Manang village. The loss of festivals and cultural heritage can pose challenges for maintaining socio-cultural and ethnic identities. Without such traditions, communities risk losing their tradition, culture, and history, potentially leading to an identity crisis in the context of contemporary identity politics related to 'preservation of identity' (Kumar, 2005), where ethnic groups strive to assert their unique identities. This is also found in the analysis of festivals that provide

1. Term *Nishyang*/*Neyshyang*/*Nishyangba*/*Nyeshyangte* denote people living in the Manang-Nishyang valley, Manang District in Gandaki Province, Western Himalaya of Nepal

2. Term *Baden*/*Paten*/*Patey* denote same festival discussed in this research paper, the pronunciation differs among local people



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unity, culture, and identity among the group of people who celebrate them (Esman, 1982). It is crucial to understand that people's cultural identity is also associated with place, which helps to understand societies and culture (Gabbert & Jordan-Smith, 2007).

Nonetheless, Nepal is a nation characterized by its rich socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, with 142 ethnic groups speaking 124 languages (NSO, 2021). Geographically, it is divided into three distinct ecological zones: the Mountain, Hill, and Plain (Tarai) regions. Nepal's Mountain region is not only a home of natural beauty, but also a sacred site that has been worshipped by a diverse community and connected with people's internal world. Nepal's Mountain communities, in particular, are celebrated for their unique socio-cultural identities and picturesque landscapes. Howell (2013) opines, "Landscapes have power" because the history of people and their culture is attached to the landscape in which they reside. Nishyang Valley in the central Himalayan region of Nepal, with its beautiful landscape, rich traditional cultures, unique ethnic histories, ancient architectural structures, vibrant festivals, and other cultural features, attracts numerous domestic and international tourists each year.

Despite the influx of tourism, this Mountain community in Nepal has been witnessing gradual changes in its traditional way of life in recent years. Local languages, festivals, traditional knowledge, historic structures, rituals, and other tangible and intangible cultural heritages are being transformed, leading to significant social changes. Therefore, the paper aims to highlight the importance of preserving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage for the collective socio-cultural identity and historical continuity of people and places.

Anthropology and the history of religions have adopted a comparative approach to studying religious festivals, considering them as distinct historical events (Testa, 2014). Furthermore, Howell (2013) argues that communities interwove their bonds through festivals, rituals and performance. Festivals, as reflections of social, cultural, political, religious, and historical contexts, are celebrated at specific times and serve as a means to reinforce community identity. Moreover, Esman (1982) opines that festivals carry significant symbolic and economic implications for the group. Cudney (2014) describes festivals as "organized socio-spatial phenomena occurring outside everyday routines, enhancing social capital and celebrating elements of tangible and intangible culture" (p. 643). Similarly, UNESCO (2003) defines festivals as part of "intangible cultural heritage," encompassing practices, knowledge, expressions, and artifacts recognized by communities as part of their heritage. Using these definitions, the Baden festival of Nishyangba is seen as a cultural heritage that symbolizes the ethnic identity, traditions, and history of the people and place. Therefore, considering the meaning and historical aspects of festivals and their relation to the people and place has academic value.

I have examined and analyzed this study across three thematic areas. Firstly, it explores the significance and

meaning of the Baden festival for the people of Manang village, emphasizing its role in understanding their ethnic, political, and territorial history. Secondly, it investigates the processes and impacts of the decline or discontinuation of traditional festivals on the collective and ethnic identity of the community, particularly in the context of contemporary identity politics. Lastly, it highlights efforts to revitalize the Baden festival through the need for safeguarding initiatives by the local community and institutions, aimed at preserving the rich cultural heritage and unique mountain culture of Nepal in the face of rapid global changes.

Methodological Strategy

This paper employs a qualitative methodology to investigate social change within the Mountain community, focusing on the decline of the Baden festival, once celebrated by the Nishyangba of Manang village. The research was conducted in wards four, six, and eight of the Manang Nishyang rural municipality, which together form a single village comprising approximately 100 households. Ethnographic fieldwork took place in September-October 2018 and May 2024. During total four months stay and fieldwork at Manang village, I was able to learn local language, build strong rapport and trust with local residents, which allowed me to gain an in-depth, emic understanding of the festival including its cultural significance, the way it was traditionally celebrated, and the factors contributing to its discontinuation over the past two decades.

Since the Baden festival has not been held in Manang village for the past two decades, I was unable to observe it directly. However, I gathered oral narratives and experiences from local residents, performers, elders, organizers, and *mitheba* regarding the festival. Informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with six village elders, five key figures involved in the festival, including performers, organizers, intellectuals, and locals, were the first-hand important sources of the information. These discussions and conversations provided rich descriptions and local insights into various dimensions of the Baden festival, including its social, cultural, historical, political, and economic aspects.

A combination of desk research and fieldwork was employed to gather information on the Baden festival. This included reviewing scholarly articles, administrative records, archival sources, videos, and documentaries. The Manang Museum, situated in Manang village, the study site, offered significant insights through its displays of costumes and weapons used in the festival's dramatic performances. Additional details about the Baden festival were obtained from the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) Office in Manang. Furthermore, the documentary *Manang Patey Festival: The Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas, Nepal* (available on YouTube in two parts) provided a deeper understanding of the festival and its key elements. These sources contributed valuable perspectives on the festival's songs, dances, and performances, essential for capturing its cultural significance. They also supported the triangulation of data from both fieldwork and secondary

materials to effectively address the research questions.

People, Place, and Culture

Manang village, located at an altitude of 3,540 meters above sea level, lies in the shadow of the Annapurna and Gangapurna mountains in the western part of Manang District, North-central Nepal. Locally known as *Niyshyang* and referred to as *Manangbhot* in Nepali (Bista, 1967; Koirala, 1981). The village is home to Gurung, Ghale, Lama, and Dalit communities, who consider themselves the region's indigenous inhabitants. Most Nishyangba adopted the Gurung surname as part of their ethnic identity, though the full ethnic history of the area remains untold (Van-Spengen, 1987). The locals, identifying as *Niyshyangba* embrace Tibetan cultural influences, reflected in their material culture and religious practices (Van-Spengen, 1987; Watkins, 1996). Manang village boasts a rich socio-cultural and historical heritage, with annual festivals and rituals that foster peace, prosperity, and harmony with nature, connecting the internal and external worlds.

Historically, the civilization of Nishyang dates back to the late Se-rib period (12th century), as noted by Van-Spengen (1987), who cites Jackson (1978). During this time, Nishyang was part of a political entity that included villages in the neighboring Kali Gandaki Valley south of Lo (Mustang). Local legends claim the valley was once ruled by the Ghale king, with Syamrang Ghale recognized as the first king of Ngawal village. Initially settled by Gurung clans, the region later came under Ghale dominance as they expanded from their Nar-Phu stronghold (Van-Spengen, 1987).

Buddhism is the predominant religion in Manang, evidenced by its numerous monasteries, village shrines, sacred sites, and religious parks. Every household displays prayer flags, where blue symbolizes space; white represents air, yellow stands for earth, green for water, and red for fire. The village also features a collective youth flag (*fingola*). The community operates under its own traditional indigenous governance system called *Mitheba/Mhi Thowa* (Bhattachan, 2023). Historically, the *Mitheba* was selected by villagers for a one- to three-year term, based on seniority and leadership qualities, to oversee social, cultural, political, ecological, and economic matters. In the current federal system of the country, elected representatives at the local level fulfill this role, though they continue to consult traditional *Mitheba* for local matters. The village economy relies on tourism, agriculture, and herding, with locals raising yaks, cows, goats, and sheep for milk, meat, and manure. The region is also rich in medicinal herbs, including Yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*) and wild garlic (*Allium wallichii*), which villagers collect and trade for supplementary income.

Traditional houses, constructed from stone, clay, and wood, often feature clay slab roofs that serve as drying areas for grains and storage spaces for firewood. The ground floor is reserved for livestock, while families reside on the upper floors. Modern RCC houses with iron sheet roofs have become increasingly common, reflecting the evolution of structural design over time. Rituals and

festivals are integral to village life, ensuring purification, peace, and prosperity. While individual rituals take place in households, collective ceremonies are held in the village's four monasteries: Pocho Gumba, Karki Gumba, Praken Gumba, and Manang Gumba. The village's watermills, located on the Ghattekhola near the entrance, play a role in managing communal responsibilities for rituals and festivals on a rotational basis. In December, many villagers migrate to urban areas to escape the harsh winter. Before leaving, an internal audit of the village's annual income and expenditure is publicly presented. A group of permanent Manang residents in Kathmandu, known as *Aama* (a local institution), guides welfare decisions on village and community matters. These unique social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics highlight the distinct socio-cultural identity of Manang village and its people, rooted in a deep respect for their heritage and territory.

The Baden/Paten/Pateyn Festival

In the Manang village, the Baden festival, celebrated every three years, serves as a vibrant socio-cultural event that reconnects the community with its history. Over four days, people of all ages, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds come together to enjoy performances of drama, songs, dances, and acts. Central to the festival is the Lama, who chants mantras, purifies pollution, and safeguards the community from harmful influences. The festival also features characters like the King, the king's ministers, his army, and his supporters, who enact scenes in the main street to inspire the warriors.

The festival begins at the monastery and moves to an open ground at the village center, where rituals are performed. Lamas lead the ceremonies by burning juniper to purify the five elements fire, water, soil, cloud, and air. Villagers, dressed in traditional costumes, gather with pride, displaying solidarity. The Lamas wear special ceremonial outfits, while other performers don masks and thematic costumes. Carrying bows, arrows, knives, swords, guns, and other symbolic items, participants march through the village to the beat of drums, with each rhythm corresponding to a unique dance style and act. These performances, requiring skill and stamina due to the heavy costumes and masks, are interspersed with singing and laughter, though some children are frightened by the masks.

Bells, flags, and various dance and song forms add layers of meaning to the festival. Performances take place at the village center and along its streets, with men, women, and children joining the procession. The "mother group" serves local alcohol in wooden jars wrapped in brass, adding to the celebratory spirit. Male villagers perform the *Syapru* (local dance form) on the main street, using instruments like drums, cymbals, and bells, while wearing traditional "*Chhyuwa*" for men and "*Angdung*" for women.

The festival showcases themes of warrior courage and victory. Yak's horn, skin, and tail are used during the drama and performers' reflection yak's important role in logistics and transportation in the past. Performers wield

swords, knives, and shields, enacting scenes of aggression, pride, and humor. Real guns are occasionally fired, and at the conclusion of a performance, a participant lifts another to symbolize triumph. Songs and dances, infused with historical and communal significance, emphasize belonging and harmony. Attendees from across the Manang Nishyang Valley join to witness the festivities, underscoring the village's cultural and political influence.

Throughout the event, communal participation fosters a strong sense of connection to the land and heritage. Local wine made from barley (*chhyang*) is shared to refresh performers, and performances conclude with collective expressions of gratitude and joy. Jokes and laughter fill the air, making the festival a celebration of unity and tradition. Details of the Paten festival have been beautifully documented by Joanne C. Watkins (1996) in her book titled 'Spirited women; gender, religion, and cultural identity in the Nepal Himalaya' among the Nyeshyang community. Details of the Paten festival are presented below from Watkins' (1996) account:

Paten is a composite of various rituals (Bon sacrificial rites, initiation of adolescent boys, clan celebrations, and Buddhist exorcisms) that include dramas and songs that portray historical events in the valley and adjacent regions. According to local informants Paten was observed in Nar Khola (called Yakchhya) and Thini village in Thak Khola (called Dumdzya). The link between these three communities (located in separate valleys) has a historical basis: apparently at one time the region was unified under a chieftain who, in the course of a battle, fled from Mustang into Nar Khola and from there into Nyeshang, where he was assisted by Nyeshangte warriors or "champions."

Paten with its tradition of human (or yak) sacrifices every three years. Nyeshangte informants did not know when the custom of sacrificing humans had ceased, but their accounts were "a long time ago, we believe that we come from Tibet like an army. We kill everything people, animals, everything before us, we kill and come here to Nyeshang. We used to kill twelve girls every three years, but then we realized no one would be left. So some say, we change and start killing yaks. No more killing girls, now just yak. But we run out of yak, so then we are just killing goats. But then we become Buddhists, so we don't kill anymore. Now we just cut the ears, and let out a little blood."

Lama performs a year-end exorcism (Tarkye) to rid the village of malignant forces. On the last evening of the Paten, girls in their traditional dress dance around the juniper pole under the full moon while the village looks on, and the Paten celebration comes to a close" (Watkins, 1996, p. 205-211).

Discussions and Analysis

The Baden festival celebrated by the Nishyangba of Manang village has been discontinued for two decades. There are various reasons behind the discontinuity of the Baden festival in Manang village. Demise of Baden poses

a threat to the rich cultural heritage of the people and place of the Nishyang valley. Festivals hold unique meanings shaped by the contexts and communities that celebrate them. Robb (2000) classifies festivals into categories such as community celebrations, historical commemorations, seasonal events, multicultural festivities, and religious observances, each rooted in distinct cultural or historical contexts. Testa (2014) describes festivals as spaces where various dimensions of social life economic, religious, political, and more converge. Festivals reflect the history, memory, and socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions of a community, imbued with meaningful connections to people, places, and traditions (Bakhtin, 2010). Each event carries individual and collective significance, bridging the past and present in relationships between culture, place, and people. The Baden Festival in Manang village emphasizes collective participation, underscoring their "public dimension" (Testa, 2014).

Durkheim (1912) referred to festivals as moments of "effervescence" that strengthen group solidarity and embody the relationship between humans and natural laws. This view underscores the role of festivals in sustaining and reproducing the social and cultural fabric of communities (Cudney, 2014). Falassi (1987) defines festivals as periodic social occasions where members of a community bound by ethnic, linguistic, religious, or historical ties come together to share a collective worldview, fostering social cohesion and unity. In smaller communities, shared morals and perspectives shape daily interactions. Festivals reflect a group's awareness of its identity and commitment to preserving it (Friedrich, 2000).

The essence of a festival is expressed "through acts" (Bell, 1978). Performances like drama, music, and dance enable participants to reconnect with their history and cultural values. Esman (1982) argues that festivals mirror and reinforce the social order and values of their host communities. The Baden festival in Manang village commemorates the community's history, including ancient battles and efforts to protect their territory and culture.

Decline of the Baden Festival

Over the past two decades, social changes in Manang village have been driven by migration to cities and abroad for better livelihoods. These changes have affected various aspects of daily life, including agriculture, herding, rituals, language, songs, music, dance, and festivals.

The Baden festivals in Manang village have been abandoned for over two decades, with several factors contributing to their decline. One key reason is the migration of residents to cities and abroad, coupled with an influx of outsiders moving to the village in search of livelihood opportunities. Additionally, the passing or relocation of elders who serve as custodians of the village's historical and cultural knowledge has negatively impacted the cultural heritage. Furthermore, younger generations are increasingly leaving their ancestral home for opportunities abroad, showing little interest in preserving the village's culture, language, and traditions. This has significantly affected the community's cultural identity, triggering

noticeable social and cultural changes in Manang village from the recent past to the present.

Out-migration and Its Impact on Village Culture and Festivals

Local elders of Manang village said migration trends, particularly after the 1990s, have led many residents to permanently relocate to urban areas or abroad, resulting in a demographic shift in Manang village. Today, people of Manang village are scattered geographically inside the country and abroad due to migration. Migration is defined as the movement of people from one location to another (Bailey, 2010). Push-pull factors work in migration, push factors include lack of economic opportunity, and good quality education, and pull factors include better economic and educational opportunities in the cities and abroad (Bhattachan, 2023). Furthermore, the main reasons behind migration are social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological (Helms & Lebang, 2019). Literatures show that one of the top reasons for social, cultural, economic, and geographic change is triggered by human migration (Borcion et al., 2019).

In the case of this research, mass migration from the ancestral land to the cities has impacted historical festivals in the place of origin. As a result, festivals, rituals, songs, and culture are changing and dying in the village. This change means a “threat of losing one’s cultural identity” (Cudney, 2014, p. 647). Many people from the Manang village started migrating to the cities and abroad for business, trade, education, and in search of employment and better opportunities (Watkins, 1996). In the year 2024, what I observed in the Manang village was that older settlements of the Manang village are almost empty, many old houses and structures are collapsed or in a state of collapse, the main home of the people of the Manang village are resided by migrated people from Dolpa, Dhading, Gorkha, Rukum, and Rolpa districts of Nepal.

The sharp decline of local populations has brought social change in the village, including declining traditional ways of life of the people of the sacred valley Manang of central Himalaya, losing rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and gradually losing history and identity of the people and place. In order to conduct this festival, various actors must be available, including a ritual specialist/Head Lama, singer and dancer, performer of the drama and act, budget to manage the festival for four days, time, and knowledge, skills, craftsmanship and community solidarity. Today, these human resources are scarce in the Manang village due to high mobility and migration of the people to the cities and abroad.

This migration has significantly impacted the transmission of local knowledge, skills, and cultural practices. Older generations are unable to pass these traditions to the younger generation, who often lack interest in preserving their heritage due to their focus on modern lifestyles. This has contributed not only to the decline of the Baden festival but also to broader transformations in the traditional Mountain way of life.

Changing Livelihood Strategies and Their Impact on People and Place

It is believed that the Ghale rule in Nishyang brought changes in the religious, political and agro-ecological setup of the valley. Ghale showed that it was possible to establish a sedentary agriculture, and a livelihood could be produced on the basis of local resources (Van-Spengen, 1987). Later trade played a crucial role in Nishyangba’s subsistence strategy. It is said that the first royal order granting trade privileges (*laalmohar* given to the Nishyangba by King Rajendra Bir Bikam Shah Dev in 1825, later in 1962/1964 by King Mahendra) to the Nishyangba dates back to 1784 (Gurung, 1976; Koirala, 1981; Van-Spengen, 1987). This privilege further helped Nishyangba to become a successful trader and hence migrated and settled in the cities (initially Kathmandu in particular, later settled in different cities of the country) and abroad for better livelihood options.

In the past, the village’s economy (production, consumption, and distribution) was self-sufficient, and people lived with minimal means to fulfill their needs. People followed a subsistence-oriented (farming and herding) way of life (Watkins, 1996). People used to conduct various rituals and celebrate festivals in the village with a sense of communal harmony. This has continued for a long time since the first generation of settlers arrived in Manang. After the 1980s, Manang gained exposure to foreign tourists, improved walking trails, and the state’s presence by establishing government offices in the district, enabling the people of Manang to come into contact with the outer world and its people. As a result, people’s livelihood strategy shifted from agriculture and herding to tourism businesses, trade, and foreign country employment. This has gradually brought changes in the total way of life of the people in Manang village.

There are few native inhabitants remaining in the village, and they are associated with tourism businesses or hotel owners. In my conversation 27 Years Karma Tashi Ghale (Former, elected representative of Manang Nishyang RM ward 4, chairperson) said “we are still living in the Manang village due to our hotel and business, if we do not own hotel and business we also want to move to the cities and abroad to find better opportunities.” This statement suggests that in the era of capitalism, people prioritize material possessions over their homes, culture, and local places. This is very disheartening for the local inhabitants of Manang village to see such a decline in local population, which leads to changes and the dying of many songs, dances, rituals, festivals, and other tangible and intangible heritage of the place, causing people’s identity crisis in the long term. With this decline of the local population, local indigenous technical knowledge, art, craft, and culture are slowly dying. If this population decreases gradually at this pace, people and places will lose their important history.

Cudney (2014) argues, “festivals have been a part of human life since antiquity (ancient times)” (p. 643). Each and every festival we celebrate and every ritual we follow have meanings and history attached to them, so our identity. Belonging to a particular community serves the identity of that individual in collective ways. Therefore, the songs

we sing, the dances we dance, the rituals and festivals we follow and celebrate have a long history attached to them that represents people and places in certain ways.

Esman (1982), who termed the festival complex, argues that Cajun festivals in Louisiana do not reflect a consensus about the group's identity; rather, they show internal conflicts regarding that identity. But in the case of this study *Baden* festival reflects the group's identity. The decline of festivals has an adverse impact on both the individual and collective life of the people and the place. People of Manang village living in Kathmandu city have formed committees in Kathmandu that look after various aspects of the village's issues. Still, their main concern is material and governance rather than social, cultural, and identity.

Festivals are expressions and reflections about people and places that people celebrate. It is not just an event, but an expression of the history of people and place at large through the enactment of the drama during the festivals. The perspective from the community that celebrates diving deep and engages in the festivals may generate both subjective and objective reality. The 'spirit of the festival' (Bell, 1978) that this paper tries to unfold to understand the meaning of dying festivals to the people and places who celebrate them in today's globalized world.

Eckersley (2017), put forth "the idea of attachment and belonging as a relationship between people and place, through their encounter with objects, memories and emotions" (p. 3). People of Manang village migrated to the cities, and claiming their belongingness to their back home shows the relationship between people and place, and their celebration of village festivals in Kathmandu and forming communities to organize rituals and community gatherings shows their memories of the village and emotions that bind people together.

There are diverse ways that people manifest their culture and history (Bhagvat, 1968). Festivals reflect history and meaning to the people and community those who celebrate in the form of culture. Villagers are part of the *Baden* festival in Manang village since it represents collective meaning to the inhabitants that represents social relations. Anthropologist David Holmberg (2000) shows Chhechu rituals and a festival of sportive plays (*tsema*) among the Tamang communities of the northwest of the Kathmandu valley "to produce a closed, power-infused collectivity that took form against the outside" (p. 940). Further, Holmberg analyzed "how power is created in ritual, how it becomes symbolized and then deployed in practice" (Holmberg, 2000, p. 929). Similarly, the *Baden* festival celebration marks the remembrance of historical events to protect their territory against external forces. This festival celebration also serves as a production of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992) for the communities. Douglas (1984) interpreted the Spanish bullfight as 'honor'. The bullfight is a metaphor that makes a statement about the social order. Through festival celebration, people find unity and a common heritage shared by all members (Esman, 1982).

Impacts of Youths Moving Away from Their Ancestral Place and Culture

Today, in the age of economic globalization, our traditional festivals are changing (Xiao et al., 2017). My study area shows that as elderly people pass away or migrate to cities, knowledge and cultural transfer to the next generation remains passive. As I have had conversations with older people about their attachment to place and identity, most of the older people I have had conversations with had self-awareness about their identity and history. Conversely, among the younger generations, this self-awareness and history of their people and place became less interesting subject matter. This indicates that, over time, social and cultural changes are gradually occurring in the village. Watkins (1996) captured the accounts of elder people's desire to return to their *Nishyang* homeland, who went on hunger strikes, refusing to talk or eat to their adult children for not making arrangements for their return trip home. Conversely, in the Manang village, younger adults and generations are willing to leave home to settle in the cities and abroad and if this arrangement is not met, they refuse to talk with their parents. Many parents of young adults from this study area expressed concerns about their children not embracing their ancestral traditions, culture, language, and knowledge.

Festivals do not die overnight; it is a gradual process that people who celebrate them slowly lose their cultural ground, which causes changes over a certain time period. Linguist David Crystal (2000) argues that there are three processes of language death: 'first, either speakers of a language all die, or they all stop transmitting their language to their children. Second, natural causes such as disasters and human action, e.g., colonialism and language contact. Third, language is lost when its speakers have had to relocate for economic or political reasons. In this study, the main reason behind the death of the *Baden* festival is the seniors' inability to transmit it to their children and subsequent generations. Also, people who celebrate them in the Manang village had to relocate to the cities and abroad for economic or political reasons. A sense of belonging and identity (individual and collective) can be reflected in language, culture, festivals, songs, and the shared history of people and place. In the present context, this sense of belonging and attachment to their place and culture detaches from natives due to materialistic concerns.

Discontinuity of Festival and Social Change: What Dies When Festival Dies?

Baden is not a festival that is organized especially for cultural tourism; rather, it is a festival of the community that represents their unique cultural, political and economic history of people and place. *Nishyangte* have their own group identity in the village and tend to have their own character and style (Watkins, 1996). This unique socio-cultural identity of *Nishyang* people is shaped by historical experience (Kumar, 2005). Again, these historical experiences are shared collectively through ritual, songs, myths, festivals, and culture. Therefore, anthropologist Marvin Harris (2001) argues to use 'emic perspective'

to understand any socio-cultural setting to comprehend their world. In a similar vein, Geertz (2005)'s 'Notes on Balinese cockfight' emphasizes the need to find meaning and interpretation of cockfight for the Balinese community that represents blood, money, domination, power, and manhood. For outsiders, it is just a cockfight, but for the Balinese people, it is more than a cockfight. Similarly, the *Baden* festival for the people of Manang village carries pride, identity, solidarity, politics, history, and morality of the people and place. These factors are associated with the collective lives and history of a place by paying tribute to rulers who settled the valley and the village in the past. Basso (1996) argues, "Place making is a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities" (p. 7). Through festivals and rituals, people of Manang village preserve their important history of people and place, contributing to the group's cultural and social identities.

David Crystal (2000), in an important writing titled "Why Should We Care If a Language Dies?" argues that we should care about language because it expresses identity, diversity, and repositories of history. Likewise, we should care about festivals because they carry identity and repositories of the history of people and place. If we do not care about our festivals, culture, and rituals, we might lose the ground to claim who we are and where we belong. It is important from both the individual and group side to maintain such festivals to live a dignified life as who we are as humans. Harrison (2007) argues that language death means the loss of cultural heritage (myths, jokes, wordplay, wise sayings). Festivals are a cultural heritage of the people who celebrate them. When festivals die, people's cultural heritage slowly begins to become extinct because festivals also carry myths and represent the history of people and place.

A 42-year-old male informant, a native of Manang, is worried about the gradual decline of the cultural life of the place. He said, "This place used to celebrate many rituals and festivals in the past that represented unity, peace, prosperity, solidarity, and harmony of people and place. People used to highly value these rituals and festivals, now with the political divide, out migration, and changing livelihood strategies of the people of this village, causing changes in the traditional ways of life of the people and losing the value and history of this place." This voice of change serves as a wake-up call to the people and community of Manang village to preserve their culture. In the past, people who used to live in the village have now become Diaspora. Losing one's cultural ground means losing one's history and identity in the future, and people and places have to face an identity crisis due to this social change. Ideas of "home" and 'belonging' have a greater relationship in forming attachment (Eckersley, 2017). Any individual or group belonging to a certain place or home is due to their social, cultural, ecological, historical, political, and other factors. Alterations and changes in these factors may bring social changes. For example, migration brings 'memories of home into new territory' (Eckersley, 2017, p. 1). Likewise, many people of Manang village living

in Kathmandu celebrate their festivals and rituals in their second home, remembering their ancient land by bringing back memories and sharing them with the new territory.

In this paper, I have connected the belonging of Nishyang people concerning geography and social (Lahdesmaki et al., 2016). "Belonging is tied up with understanding, constructions and articulations of identities, as well as with place, people, things and experiences" (Eckersley, 2017, p. 3). Dying *Baden* festival, language, customs, rituals, old sayings, songs, anecdotes, knowledge, and skills mean losing their rich ethnic cultural identity. Losing one's identity may impact the socio-political relations of the people and place (Kumar, 2005).

If we forget our traditional festivals and total way of life, "their historical and cultural roles will decline as new economic and social changes are undertaken" (Xiao et al., 2017, p. 193). Losing festivals and cultural heritage may adversely impact individual and collective identity. As Watkins (1996) states, "imagined past, reconstructed landscape and homeland and their significance as vehicles and represent collective identities" (p. 7). Losing the originality of their homeland and living in the nostalgic past is none other than searching for their root and collective identities that their original homeland has provided. Today, people of Manang village are successful in making their entrepreneurial and business identity, but they are losing their cultural identity provided by their ancestors and homeland.

Revival of the *Baden* Festival

Festivals play a crucial role in maintaining group solidarity (Esman, 1982). Reviving the *Baden* festival could strengthen the sense of unity among the people of Manang village, including those who now live in urban areas or abroad. "The revitalization of traditional festivals is a process of invention of tradition and reproduction of culture" (Xiao et al., 2017, p. 194). Political factors are also significant in festival revival, as Cudney (2000) demonstrates that politics has increasingly influenced festival development in recent decades. Local political figures and institutions could play a key role in rejuvenating this fading tradition, allocating a budget for social development and promoting local culture and tradition.

Hafstein (2018) asserts that interpreting a cultural practice as heritage establishes a foundation for its preservation. Safeguarding involves creating new structures to protect and revive traditions. In the case of the *Baden* festival, elders and Lamas in the village and Kathmandu possess the knowledge, skills, and craftsmanship necessary to educate younger generations about the festival's essence and significance. By passing this cultural heritage on to the youth, both in Manang and elsewhere, the festival can be revitalized before it is lost entirely.

Reviving the *Baden* festival represents more than preserving a tradition; it restores the spirit of indigenous life, fosters a sense of belonging, and reinforces community solidarity, identity, and historical continuity. In today's rapidly changing world, where cultural identity and traditional knowledge are increasingly at risk, sustaining

such practices is vital for a future rooted in harmony between people, place, and culture. For the revival of the Baden festival and to pass this rich heritage to the emerging generations, the community's collective effort and initiatives can play a significant role.

Conclusion

Mountains and mountain cultures are an integral part of people belonging to their place, which carries a unique ethnic history. Their histories are portrayed through songs, dance, festivals, old sayings, anecdotes, knowledge systems, and other tangible objects such as structures and arts. Today, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of mountain communities faces serious threats, leading to a profound impact on everyday life's social and cultural fabric. If relevant authorities, communities, and individuals do not address these issues urgently, the consequences for future generations could be irreversible.

Over the past two decades, the decline and eventual discontinuation of the Baden festival in Manang can be attributed to several interrelated factors. First, migration to cities and foreign countries for better economic opportunities has disrupted traditional ways of life and led to the abandonment of ancestral cultural practices. Second, the passing of elderly community members has resulted in the loss of valuable cultural knowledge and practices rarely documented or passed down. Third, younger generations have shown diminishing interest in such traditions, further contributing to the erosion of this rich cultural legacy.

The discontinuation of the Baden festival not only entails the loss of unique songs, dances, masks, and costumes but also represents the erasure of a cultural memory that connects people to place and history. Cultural identity is grounded in shared practices and values, and festivals play a central role in maintaining this connection. The loss of such festivals can thus lead to a broader loss of cultural identity and historical continuity. It is, therefore, crucial for mountain communities to find ways to revitalize and preserve their cultural traditions not merely as heritage artifacts, but as living expressions of identity and belonging that go beyond material concerns.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not Applicable

Consent for Publication

Not Applicable

Availability of Data and Materials

Data will not be shared. The main reason is to respect and prevent local community's privacy for research ethics.

Competing Interests

There is no competing interest on financial and non-

financial for this research.

Funding

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Use of AI

I declare I did not use AI to write this paper

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