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Tamba and Damphu in Tambakaiten as the Network of Tamang and Songs

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Abstract

Santabir Lama's *Tamba Kaiten* is a cultural documentation of Tamang community focusing especially in central region of Nepal, about cultural and religious rites and rituals through songs which are mentioned as *whai* and according to Macdonald (1983) *hvai*. *Tamba* is known as historian or cultural poet of Tamang who sings songs of genealogy, cultural rites and rituals along with different activities of daily lives and origin of the Earth and human beings. *Kaiten* is the document. Likewise, the *Damphu* is a musical instrument which has the most crucial role in singing and dancing. This research explores the network of Tamang culture and songs by *Tamba* from Bruno Latour's perspective of Actor-Network theory. The study of different issues around us is not possible only through social perspective which centralizes human beings; there is the need of scientific study to focus both on quasi-subjective and quasi-objective agents. The *Damphu* also completes *Tamba* to contribute the network of Tamang culture of *whai*. The study is significant to study hybridity of actors in Network theory which doesn't indicate only humans but also non-humans which play an avoidable role to complete a structure as being integral element.

Keywords: genealogy, historian, actor-network theory, quasi-subjective, hybridity

Introduction

Tamaba Kaiten Whai Rimthim: Tamang kaa Purkhouli Ritithiti ra Geet (Tamang Folk Culture), which is referred as only *Tambakaiten* throughout this paper, is an important documentation on Tamang community to keep the record of oral folk tradition. As Nepal's identity is related to diverse culture based on different ethnic, social, religious, geological backgrounds of Nepalese, it is necessary to investigate, research and record traditions and practices of all these communities. With the help of

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the book, this study explores the role of *Tamba* and *Damphu* as actors in the network of Tamang songs, *whai* by using Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. This book was first published in 1959 AD from Darjeeling, though it was completed two years earlier, as a remarkable effort of Santabir Lama (Pakhrin), a governor of Illam at the time and later on he became a member of the National Panchayat. In the Preliminary of this book, he has mentioned about the major focused region for his study which is Eastern illaka 1 and 3, Western illaka 1 and 2, central region Sindhupalchowk and Kathmandu periphery which would help to understand and analyze the role of *tamba* as the actor in the social and cultural system of Tamang from this area. Dor Bahadur Bista (1980) has mentioned, "The Tamangs live in the high hills east, north, south and west of Kathmandu Valley" (p. 52) which indicates that Tamang inhabitation surrounds the valley from four directions. Likewise, David Holmberg (2017) has presented on "Ethnography, History, Culture: Enduring Oppositions and Creative Dynamism in Nepal" about Tamang in *The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2017* as:

At that time, Tamang were largely considered outsiders, even aliens, from the perspective of the political and economic elite of Kathmandu and the district administrative centres. Many people feared Tamang and told me it was dangerous for me to think about working with Tamang. Nevertheless, I was hospitably welcomed into the western Tamang community of Mhanegang, a politically key village on the border between Nuwakot and Rasuwa districts to the west of the Trisuli River on a massif that rises up from the Salankhu river eventually to the Ganesh Himal, or as the Tamang call it, lhari (p. 3).

Which shows that the central hilly part of Nepal is important to study about Tamang culture and tradition.

RK Tamang (2016) has mentioned about the area of inhabitation as *Tamsaling*, "From his collection and study, Santabir found out that there is diversity in the practical aspect among the Tamang of these places but the *Rimthim* is similar. This indicates that *Tambakaiten* is important and it reflects the overall Tamang folk culture" which is the major geographical area of collection in *Tambakaiten*. There are different customs and traditions according to the places even within Tamang community but the central region is the prominent one for the study as it is the oldest area of Tamang civilization.

Tambakaiten is collected and written in Tamang language along with Nepali translation for further study. The first section of this book "Role" is written by Surya Bikram Gynawali, a renowned figure in Nepali literature from Darjeeling, India. He has compared the *whai* of Tamang folk culture to some of the Nepali songs. Buddhism is said to be spread in Nepal from China which is refuted in the edition of 2013 AD of this book in the section of Reformed Edition's Role by Santabir's successors. The

writing from this section claims that Buddhism was spread from Nepal to Tibet with the evidence of having 109 generations of Tamang Lamas in Nepal and Dalai Lama's only 13 generations. This indicates the *tamba* oral tradition of Tamang as ancient form of transferring knowledge and information.

There are many versions of *Tambakaiten* sung or written, the poet or historian's reflection is divided into many parts as it reflects the religious and cultural rites and rituals of Tamang community. At present, many separate books have been written and published regarding to different aspects of the culture. However, in this book, these different aspects of *whai* are headed with various topics, Macdonald (1983) in his article "The Tamang as Seen by One of Themselves" writes:

Rui means jat and chen "name". Cyopge means "eighteen". The genealogy (vamsavali) which describes the eighteen jat of Tamang is thus called Ruichen cyopge. Jikten means "compilation, essence of religion" and tamchyos means "book of sayings" (kurako pustak). The book in which the fundamentals of religion are consigned is, therefore, called Jikten tamchyos. Rama (gitko talsur: tal "hand-clap" + sur "musical note, melody, tune") is a book which contains rhythmic songs sung at marriage (p.130).

In this regard, *Tambakaiten* has variations of *whai* within it on different subject matter. It is a collection of songs by Tamba with the examples of the habits and customs of the Tamang, description of the family divinities, the story of creation and of nature and found songs in Tamang language. Besides, these subject matters, *whai* consists of important traditions and stories concerning the Tamang. RK Tamang (2016) clarifies the role of *Tamba* in various rites and rituals; he explains that *tamba* has irreplaceable in all the occasions and rites of Tamang from naming ceremony to cremation and *Ghewa* as death rites. He writes:

In Tamang society, marriage is an institution to unify two people from opposite gender and sex to continue the society. This institution must follow the procedure of *tamba's* rites and rituals rather the state's law. If people haven't followed the right and complete procedure according to *tamba*, *tamba* conducts the proper marriage procedure on the dead bodies even after the death which later on validates the marriage of the people. This shows a strong role of *tamba* in marriage (Tamang, p. 3).

Tamba's role is unavoidable in marriage ceremony in Tamang community. The rites and rituals of the ceremony are instructed by *tamba* for bride and bridegroom through *whai* in marriage. After following a complete instruction by *tamba*, the marriage becomes complete and valid.

Tambakaiten begins with the definition of essential terms paraphrased in Nepali language including various posts which are found in Tamang communities to run different activities in different occasions; greetings used by the community; *khada*, a shawl as a form of respect; pong, recipients and list of conduct followed by Tamang community. *Whai* is not meaningless thus *Tamba Kaiten*'s *whai* section gives examples of different *whai* sung by *Tamba* especially offering of incense and rice in various occasions. Santabir is worried about the use of *whai* in meaningless and without any relevant context when *tamba* or other singers try to imitate other version of songs. He argues that *whai* has the capacity of giving important message or information to its listeners. Without the help of *tamba*, the culture, traditions and customs of Tamang would be disappeared.

Tamba is translated as *purkhyouli mannya* in this section which is translated as cultural respected person or hero. After this section, the songs by *tamba* are presented under the section of 'Whai'. *Tamba* sings *whai* in different occasions about different subject matter depending on the type of occasions. These *whai* is sung accompanied with the beatings of *Damphu*. Therefore, the *Damphu* is irreplaceable element of *Tambakaiten* or *whai*. *Tamba* always begins *whai* offering the respect or homage to mother in different occasions such as marriage ceremonies and reunion of parents and friends. Likewise, *tamba* ends their *whai* with the formula, Macdonald (1983) explains:

mannalai hai dannala krasya nagri yunala; mannala means "golden ashes" and dannala means the triphala (that is to say, the three myrobolans: amalo, barro and harro); krasya means in Tamang "brains" and nagri "inside". The final formula, therefore, means: "May the golden ashes and the three myrobolans go into the brain" (p. 134).

This indicates prevalence of necessary pattern in *tamba*'s *whai* in the starting and ending both. The first and second *whai* are related to giving offerings of incense and rice to deities of different directions, underworld and ancestors.

The next section is about the description of the process of making the *Damphu* by an ancestor named Peng Dorje who wants to make any musical instrument to pass his time when he is alone. Macdonald (1983) elaborates:

However, Pendorje killed a wild goat (ghoral). With the skin of this animal, he apparently covered one head of his drum, the frame of which was made ambursing (koiralo) wood; bamboo pegs were used for stretching the skin. The sound of the drum was like the voice of Sarasvati. (p.135).

Peng Dorje was the first person to make the *Damphu* in any *tambakaiten*. After making

the *Damphu*, he plays it, sings song and performs dance according to its beatings. In this regard, he is considered as the first *tamba* in Tamang. However, there is no any particular evidence to prove him as the first *tamba*. *Tamba* has the songs about the origin of the earth and human kinds as well, Macdonald (1983) describes:

At the time when the sky and the earth were without form and invisible, the Dorje Gyaram (vajra) of the air was formed. This Dorge gyaram filled the whole universe; above it was created fire, and on the fire a lake of water. On the lake, white foam, as it became solid, was transformed into earth (mato). Next, the mountain Sumeru was created. (p.135)

which indicates *tamba* having knowledge about the origin of the Earth and *whaiis* about it along with the description of nations in the north and south of Nepal or land of Tamang. It describes the source of river Ganges and other rivers as well under the topic.

Tamba sings *whai* about the origin and settlement of different subgroups within Tamang community. For this purpose, they are also known as the historians. “Ruichen Chyopge laa whai” is the song about the origin of different surnames of the community which helps to trace back the history of the groups. Tamang community has the concept of *rui* to denote different clans within (Lama, 2012) which has different narratives of origin and migration. The genealogy is also presented through *whai* by *tamba* which helps to gain knowledge on history of the community. Macdonald (1983) translates:

I can explain the genealogy. I understand the language of signs, and I can make it understood. I am here among you, not to teach you the seasons and how to offer fruits at each of them, but to tell you, if you wish it the hvai of the genealogy as our ancestors relate it. After the Tamang text of the “Eighteen Names of the Rui” come recommendations in Tamang, and in Nepali translation, as how to worship the kuldevta. (p.137)

There is the list of places especially where the different *rui* of Tamangs had established their palaces and settled the rule and *rui phola*. Likewise, *tamba* has knowledge about the destruction of the world and recreation as well, Macdonald (1983) translates, “At the end of time, seven suns and seven moons shine in the sky. All the forest dries up. Stone and earth melt like wax. The earth becomes a lake. The god again makes the earth. The green *dubo* grows and the *uniu* flowers” (p.137). *Tamba* is not only aware about the ethnic history and culture rather the origin as well as destruction of the world too. This book *Tambakaiten* is divided into thirteen topics written about introduction of Tamang community and their customs and traditions through songs along with other information.

This research wants to inquire the role of *tamba* and the *Damphu* in different cultural activities to complete the system along with adequate information and relation to Actor-Network Theory by Bruno Latour. With the sufficient background knowledge about the different *whai* or songs of *tamba*, this study will be able to establish the role of *tamba* and the *Damphu* as actors to construct Tamang culture and folk literature.

Literature Review

Indigenous literature has been marginalized from the mainstream of dissertation and studies. Therefore, ample research has not been conducted in Tamang culture and literature. However, some of the studies have emerging and are emerging in this area of knowledge. Despite of this, the works in *Tamba Kaiten* is limited. In his research work *Essays on the Ethnology of Nepal and South Asia*, Alexander W. Macdonald (1983) has translated, interpreted and explained *Tamba Kaiten* by Santabir in detail as much as he could under the topic “The Tamang as Seen by one of themselves”. He has started this section with the translation of “Role” by Suryabikram Gynawali, “Fifteen years after the opening of Nepal to western research, we still have at our disposal only one professional anthropological monograph concerning a population of the hill areas” (Macdoanld, 1983, p. 127) with background set in the context to explore about the community residing in the central part of Nepal. It further describes as, “In view of the weakness of our sources, it seems useful to draw attention to a little book which may interest anthropologists and tibetologists and which is entitled *Tamba Kaiten*: its Nepalese subtitle “Genealogy, habits, customs and songs of the Tamang” indicates its content” (p.127) which illustrates that the necessary resources to study about Tamang community, one of the important ethnic and indigenous group, are inadequate. Thus, this document is regarded as very significant internal resource of Tamang written by Tamang. Likewise, in Tamang society, there are varieties of dances but one of the most important and ethnographically identified folk dances is *Damphu Naach* which is discussed in Santabir’s *Tambakaiten* with the portrayal of different phases of life through songs and dances with the beatings of *Damphu* (Lama, 2012). Usually, *Damphu Naach* is performed in marriage and hair cutting ceremony, *Chhewar* and other festivals. Similarly, RK Tamang (2016) has written a thesis entitled *The Study of Popular of Tradition of Multiple Heroes in Tamang Community (In the Context of Khotang, Mude*, in which he discusses the roles of different cultural heroes of Tamang tradition; he writes which is translated as:

The plural heroes can be studied by classifying into two major parts as main and subordinate. The nature of work and knowledge are two bases for such study. *Tamba*, *Bonbo*, *Lama* and *Choho* are the major Tamang heroes. Their presence is must in every rites and rituals. Likewise, sub-heroes are studied as enacted and voluntary. *Asyang*, *mha*, *maiti*, *dajubhai* are enacted sub-heroes

whereas *katholba*, *laiba*, *chhyangbasya* are voluntary functionary sub-heroes with their permanent social responsibility. (p.4)

Among several other cultural heroes in Tamang tradition, *Tamba* is one of the permanent and prominent one. *Tamba* plays very important role in every rites and rituals of a Tamang individual along with communal activities.

Methods and Procedures

Actor-Network Theory is the major theoretical approach which is used as qualitative research design in this study. The different elements of the society have studied as either totally as social entity or totally as technological entity which both of them have opposite perception for one another. In the study of social entity, social actors are determined as the object of political economy or the social construction of interest. Technology emerges and develops on the basis of its own internal need and beyond human control which contributes as one of the major elements in a network. Any complete network is an assemblage of both human and non-human actors. The network is a combination of hooked actors which works on itself and actors are the agencies contributing to make change in the network for its betterment. Therefore, Actor-Network Theory allows both of these models of entities, social and technological to develop them as actors. This theory is one of the streams of Social Construction of Technology which is recently introduced movement in the history and sociology as Social and Technology Studies. This type of theory is related to French sociologists of science Bruno Latour and Michel Callon with an aim to use the concept of actors, autonomous individuals who are corporate or collective are social units. This paper uses the concept of accepting both human, *Tamba* and non-human object, *Damphu* as the actors to complete a network the network of Tamang culture and songs. *Tambakaiten* is an important cultural identity and tradition of Tamang community and there are many elements which support this network. There are many actors which play their own role to continue and preserve this custom and *Tamba* is the most important one but other actors are also mandatory according to their position in the process. As a whole, a written text of oral tradition, *Tambakaiten* is evaluated and analyzed on the basis of Latour and Callon's concept of hybrid nature of actors in Network theory.

Results and Discussion

Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory is developed by French sociologists Bruno Latour and Michel Callon collaboratively as the hybridity of both cultural and natural entities for study. Latour's Network theory helps to show the social relationship between human and non-human beings as equal actors in network to complete a certain goal

thus maintaining an equal role by both biotic and abiotic beings (Stalder, 1997). Therefore, Actor-Network theory has an objective to show the need and importance of different types of actors to fulfill the work of a network. The Network theory is not about only one link or chain rather it is chaining itself to the different actants whose contributions are important and are transformed into actors after chaining themselves in a network (Latour, 2007). This illustrates Actor Network Theory is the combination of both social and natural elements which are network themselves to bring result on something. Another book by Latour himself *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005) provides the traditional study of society as sociology of society and new study as sociology of association with the name Actor-Network-Theory which has:

A name that is so awkward, so confusing, so meaningless that it deserves to be kept. If the author, for instance, of a travel guide is free to propose new comments on the land he has chosen to present, he is certainly not free to change its most common name since the easiest signpost is the best—after all, the origin of the word ‘America’ is even more awkward. I was ready to drop this label for more elaborate ones like ‘sociology of translation’, ‘actant-rhizome ontology’, ‘sociology of innovation’, and so on, until someone pointed out to me that the acronym A.N.T. was perfectly fit for a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveler (p. 9)

This shows the struggles of Latour to give appropriate name to his newly propounded theory. After having deep thinking about the name, he decided to use as Actor-Network-Theory and short form of A.N.T. Despite of almost all the scholars’ agreement about humanity reaching to modernity, Latour claims that humans use ‘purist’ concept on everything especially to distinguish between natural and cultural. However, nothing can be studied in a pure form, there is no purity. Thus, while studying about any subject, it must use hybrid mode of thinking such as culture-nature, then only we will be able to study a field or topic from different angles otherwise, we have never been able to modernize (Latour, 1993). Therefore, Actor Network Theory is theoretical approach of hybridity of nature and culture and at the same time, distinction between these natural and cultural entities on ontological stances.

There are different concepts this research would clarify in this topic. First of all actor is the most important concept in Actor-Network-Theory, “Actors are “entities that do things” (Latour, 1992, p. 24). In this regard, actor is anyone or anything that does any action. We can further define if as whatever acts or shifts action. Thus, an actant which has no social value but is a natural entity can achieve the status of actor once it acts in a particular network. Network which is defined as, “group of unspecified relationships among entities of which the nature itself is undetermined” (Callon, 1993, p.263), is

another prominent term used in this theory after actor. It ties together two systems of alliances which are classified as people and things; which further leads to “sociogram” and “technogram”. Both of the alliances play an important role in network. These two are cordially constitutive, there is no act of actor without any network and a network is made of actors. Intermediary is anything which passes among the actors in the course of stable transactions. In this sense, intermediary is the language of the network which is used by the actors for their communication. In this way, with different concepts and terms ANT studies biotic and abiotic entities for effective measure to solve various problems.

Role of Tamba as Actor

In *Tambakaiten*, the *tamba* plays the role of social or cultural actor. On the basis of Actor-Network-Theory, the network is the whole Tamang culture and tradition in which there is the practice of singing *whai*. Singing *whai* is very important element of social system in Tamang community because not only *tamba* but common people also sing it in different occasions, festivals, rites and even during every day activities.. Macdonald (1983) describes:

Among the songs of the ancient villages of Nepal, those of the Tamang are not only interesting and beautiful; they are also instructive. They are appreciated in Nepalese society. The Tamba who composed these songs conserved them for Tamang society. It is the duty of every Tamang to seek out the *hvai* composed by Tamba (p.130)

It indicates the importance of *whai* in the community and significance of *tambain* this network. *Whai* has generated a condition to communicate among the *tamba*. The other onlookers or audience when *tamba* sings *whai* are enclosed within the Black Box, an important concept in ANT. They take participation in the *whai* but not as the ones singing rather listening. *Tamba* is unreplaceable actor in *Tambakaiten* whose contribution creates its existence.

Role of Damphu as Actor

The Damphu is an important musical instrument used while singing *whai* by *tamba* in *Tambakaiten*. It is a technological actor which has crucial role to complete the network of *whai* in Tamang culture and at the same time, it is objective. Thus, it is included in “technogram”. However, the *Damphu* is used by *tamba* as an actor to sing *whai* but its role is unavoidable that it should not be missed while singing songs. Otherwise, the *whai* is never complete. It makes *tamba*, a social actor more powerful and vocal in the network. Peng Dorje, a supposed to be the first *tamba* in Tamang tradition, invented the *Damphu* to sing *whai* for himself. He was able to create it by

using different resources from various geographical regions of Nepal. After he made it, he started to sing the *whai* along its beats and dance due to his uncontrollable happiness. Santabir has written a full topic only about the procedure of making *Damphu* by Peng Dorje in his *Tambakaiten*. A *tamba* can't initiate any *whai* during any occasion without *Damphu*. *Tamba*, *Damphu* and *whai* are interconnected with inseparable way in the network of Tamang tradition and culture.

Conclusion

This research helps us to see the different aspects of our society from both cultural and natural perspectives even using technological or non-human entities as actors because they also shift the action. French sociologists and philosophers Bruno Latour and Michel Collin have propounded very useful and necessary theoretical concept to tackle different emerging social problems. It seems that the society is consisted of either strict social entities of human beings with the ability to think and act own her/his own. However, the existence of natural or abiotic elements of our surrounding also affect a great deal on the environment.

Tamba Kaiten, an indigenous folk literature has been able to be studied by using ANT of Bruno Latour and Michel Collin. The prominent entities of *tambakaiten*, *tamba* and the *Damphu* are the major and most important actors within the network of Tamang culture and practice. Nepal is rich in different indigenous tradition and culture, thus, creating innumerable opportunities for other researchers to conduct study by using different theoretical approaches.

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