

CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF BAJI (CHIURA) IN NEWAR COMMUNITY OF BHAKTAPUR

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Abstract

This paper outlines Baji's (Chiura/beaten rice) role in the Newar tradition. The study, applying cultural ecological theory with a constructivism paradigm, examines what and how Baji plays a cultural value-based role among the Newar community of Bhaktapur. The study focuses on the uses of Baji in traditional festivals, rites and rituals in particular and in daily life of the Newar community in general. Baji is a food item in different Nepali communities; however, it is more than a food item in the Newar community. Representing a deep rooted cultural tradition in the Newar community, it brings the members of the Newar community together. Baji is one of the key social connecting factors and items of cultural identity among Newar as a symbol of unity. The study reviews relevant literature availed published and unpublished. Culture experts and stakeholders were interviewed as key informants for primary data. This study explores that Baji is an absolutely necessary item in rituals from births to death, festivals or similar occasions. This study sheds light on how the Baji maintains its identity in modern times while still holding deep meaning for the Newar community.

Keywords : Baji (Chiura/Beaten Rice), Newar, Cultural significance, Feast

1. Introduction

Edible parts of plants, animals and their derivatives consumed for nourishment, enjoyment, or ceremonial purposes are understood as food items in general. They are material substances that carry and reflect deep customary cultural values through symbolism, preparation techniques, and social functions. For example, rice symbolizes prosperity and communal unity in Nepal and [1.1] paddy rice planting and crop collecting activities are performed with some customary rituals. Turmeric holds auspicious meaning in Hindu rituals, used in weddings and purification ceremonies to invoke blessings (Fuller, 1992:112). Maize in Mesoamerican indigenous worldviews is tied to creation myths, representing the substance from which humanity was formed (León-Portilla, 1963:78). Dietary taboos, such as pork prohibition in Islamic and Jewish traditions, reinforce ethical boundaries and group identity (Kraemer, 2007:23). In Hindu practices consumption of meat from cows, bulls or oxen is prohibited. It is believed that communal meals and seasonal dishes further strengthen kinship ties and preserve ancestral heritage in the society (Counihan, 2004:15).

Food items related to the cultural background of any community are significant and meaningful as Worthing (2008) highlighted the meaning of cultural significance as the combination of cultural practices, symbols, and artifacts in shaping identities, social structures, and community values. Thus, food items function as concrete manifestations of cultural identity, moral frameworks, and historical continuity.

The Newar community is regarded as one of South Asia's most oldest indigenous ethnic groups and its rich culture and customary practices are one of the key identities of Nepal. The Newar community of Nepal consumes many food items that have their deep roots in customary lineage of cultural evolution. Baji (Chiura/beaten rice) is one of the key food items that Nepali people consume generally, but particularly in Newari culture. [2.1]

As some of the food items have strong [3.1] ties with festivals, rituals and traditions in any community culture, Baji is rooted and renowned for its lively role in Newar culture. Simple in appearance yet rich in health benefits and cultural significance, Baji is more than just a food item. Among the many dishes that identify Newar cuisine, Baji stands as one of the most important food-

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items consumed in everyday life and different ceremonial activities. This article overviews and elaborates the role of Baji in cultural practices of Newars through the study of Baji's role in cultural practices of Bhaktapur Newar Community.

This study aims to seek answers to the two basic questions as follows:

- A. "What role does Baji play in traditional Newar festivals and rituals?"
- B. "How does the preparation and sharing of Baji contribute to social bonding among Newar families?"

Bhaktapur, locally known as Khowpa is one of the oldest and historical cities of the Kathmandu valley that has been home to the Khowpa Newar Community for more than six hundred years. This study aims at investigating how the preparation, consumption and sharing of Baji contribute to social coherence and build bonding among Newar communities during cultural celebrations and everyday life.

2 Conceptual Reviews

Background

In Sanskrit, "the paddy grains", moist with husks are roasted, burst open, pounded and flattened are called 'Chipita' (Bhavprakashnighantu, cited from Dhungana, 2078 BS: 513). The word 'Chiura' in Nepali is derived from Sanskrit word Chipita. Baji in Newari carries the equivalent meaning of Chipita or Chiura. Ali and Bhattacharya (1976) state that Baji (Beaten rice) is a rice product popular in South Asia, traditionally made by parboiling paddy rice, followed by flattening it into flat, light, dry flakes. Defining Newar a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal, comprising more than 30 main hierarchical groupings, is one of the most sophisticated in south Asia, Toffin (2007) discusses the food items used by Newar while performing different rituals, festivals and occasions. They try to explore the traditional process of making Baji and its cultural importance in the Newar community.

Historical and ethnographic research traces Baji's origins to local rice cultivation, with traditional preparation dependent on indigenous varieties such as Tauliwa, Marsi, and Taichin (Shrestha, 2012:45–47). The process involves communal labor: soaking, draining, roasting, pounding in wooden mortars (Okhal-Musal), and drying. This method produces variants including Choka Baji (half-cut flakes), Haku Baji (from brown rice), and Sabun Baji (fried flakes) while reinforcing social ties, as families and neighbors collaborate months ahead for major ceremonies (Gellner, 1992:178).

Baji features prominently in ritual platters like Samay Baji, which symbolizes the five elements (earth, fire, water, sky, and air) through components such as beaten

rice, grilled meat, soybeans, and ginger; this platter is offered during puja to deities such as Navadurga and in festivals including Biska Jatra, Gai Jatra, Dashain (Kuchi Vyoe), and Tihar (Mhapuja) (Gellner, 1992:210–212).

In the Newar community, Baji is an unavoidably necessary item from ceremonial activities to major feasts, festivals, and auspicious occasions. In the events and ceremonies as mentioned all family members, friends, and relatives come together to participate in the Bhoj (ceremonial feast). [4.1]Bhoj without Baji is almost impossible to imagine [5.1]for Newars. Hence, Baji is not just a food item—it represents social togetherness and cultural significance. Baji also holds local importance, as its production is traditionally tied to the cultivation of local rice varieties and the use of traditional methods. Therefore, this study examines the importance of Baji within the Newar community, focusing on how it is made traditionally and how Baji represents its cultural values and traditional practices as well. This is an article prepared having studied the cultural importance of Baji in the Newar community, particularly of the Newars of Bhaktapur.

Review of Literature

There have been numerous inquiries in the field of Newar tradition and cultural dynamics and many scholars have shed light on different aspects of Newar cultural practice. This section presents a review of existing scholarship in the areas of the issues closer to the topic of present study. As a part of the present study, literature is reviewed below and put forth chronologically.

Joshi (2080 B.S.) claims that a Newari feast is a huge, special celebration that celebrates a variety of traditional cuisine and drinks jointly celebrated by Newar people in Nepal. The significance of Baji is much more than just eating. It is a way of bringing together family, friends and relatives for special occasions or rituals. This study shows how the community gets together through the Newari feast and how the preparation of Baji helps gather the community.

Gyanwali (2023) in his article, stated that Newari dishes are mostly popular nationally and internationally because of their more than 200 varieties of dishes. The Newars, native to the Kathmandu Valley, are known for serving some of the best dishes in the country. Their cuisine [6.1] prominently features buffalo meat, though their vegetable soup made with potatoes and bamboo shoots (Aalu-tama) is highly praised. The Newari people prepare different meat items from a single buffalo utilizing all body parts such as head, liver, intestines, and lungs. These prepared items are consumed during various occasions. Not only in big celebrations but even in small events the Newari people have their own traditional food items. Among them, some of the most popular dishes are Wo (Bara), Chatamari, Yomari, Kwati, Chhoila, Kachila (p.18).

While this article provides different traditionally served dishes during feast and festivals it does not mention Bajji.

The study carried out by Magar et al. (2023) on “Traditional cereal-based dishes of the Newari community of Nepal and their preparation process” explores the importance of cereal grains in human diets focusing on their role in Newari cuisine. The study also highlights the significance of rice, maize, wheat, and barley which are used to make traditional dishes. These dishes represent the identity of Newari culture such as Aila, Dhindo, Yomari, Selroti, Chatamari, Khurma, Chiura, and Lakhamari. The use of cereals also carried the nutritional benefits to humans beyond its cultural significance. The necessary nutrition for better health and well-being like vitamins, fibers, minerals, and carbohydrates can be achieved from these cereals. The study also mentioned the global recommendations of increasing whole grain consumption for better health advantages except it provides energy.

Frisone (2021) studied the Newari food and its consumption in traditional feasts with social practices among the Newari community both in Nepal and London. The researcher has well studied the religious and symbolic meanings of food in Nepal highlighting the broader cultural presence in a diasporic setting—through festivals, gatherings, and social media by creation of the Newari food ways. The research specifically focuses on two iconic dishes of the Newari community: Chhoyela (roasted meat) and Yomari (sweet dumplings). It also explained the historical journey from the preparation and consumption of these Newari dishes to their representation in songs, webinars, and even mainstream media, such as MasterChef: The Professionals UK. Adopting the concept of Nancy Munn “fame of Gawa,” the researcher explained the popularity of Newari food in occasions and events. The media contributes to expand the identity and recognition of Newars through these foods into transitional space beyond the immediate diaspora as well. It also highlights how food plays the role in connection of cultural heritages with modern global platforms.

Bajji is the most common and popular in Nepali society because it is a food item with a crispy texture that is ready to eat straight without cooking. It is often consumed with achar, meat, eggs, vegetables, and beans as both a snack and a full meal. Besides the Newari community, it is also popular among all Nepalese communities, including Brahmin, Chettri, Rajbanshi, and Choudhari etc. It is significantly consumed in Nepalese celebrations like weddings, festivals, picnics, and parties. In the preparation of Bajji, the paddy locally produced is used (Dangal, 2021).

Patle and Rana (2020) explained the production process of flaked rice. The soaking paddy for 18–24 hours at 40–50°C and roasting it at 150–160°C gives the optimal results in terms of moisture content, fat, protein, and ash

content. The proper procedure can enhance the quality of flaked rice, making it a more nutritious and appealing food product. The nutritional content and sensory quality of flaked rice are determined by soaking time period and roasting temperature. The study also noted that the JR-81 and KRANTI rice varieties performed best in flaking characteristics and sensory acceptability.

Shakya (2006) explored the traditional food practices and their connection to cultural values among the Newari community in Kathmandu. Beyond foods to consume, it is highly connected to the cultural values, rites and rituals, and health beliefs. In Nepalese society, food also carries a symbolic role in festivals, seasonal changes, and birth to death rituals such as birthdays, marriages, and Janko (Bhimratharohan). During the festivals like Maghe Sankranti (Chaku, Ghee), Janai Purnima (Kwati), and Yomari Punhi (Yomari), special foods are prepared and consumed. These foods often carry spiritual or social meanings. The researcher also explored the concepts of food purity based on Ayurveda as Sattvik (pure), Rajasik (stimulating), and Tamasik (impure). It is believed that foods can be classified as hot, cold, and neutral foods. These foods are consumed to maintain health. The fasting practices (Vrata), the rituals like Sagun, and boundaries founded on caste or life stage shows the complex cultural logic behind what, when, and how people eat. Preserving and understanding the traditional belief is now very much important in present days as modern food is influencing the traditional food habits because this habit carries both cultural identity and indigenous information/knowledge about health and well-being, are the major arguments of this research paper.

Ali and Bhattacharya (1976) distinguished the behavior of three types of processed rice i.e. parboiled, roasted-parboiled, and beaten rice. Even though the structure seems the same, these are distinct on the basis of how they absorb water, cook, and break down. Among them, the roasted –parboiled absorbed more water than the parboiled rice, whereas the beaten rice absorbed the most while soaked in them. Both roasted and beaten rice are converted into softened quickly when soaked and don't need extra time to cook it, whereas the parboiled rice consumes more time to soften. They also break down more easily in a weak alkaline solution. Particularly, beaten rice converts thick and sticky when soaked in water before cooking, whereas parboiled rice does not. Such differences are caused due to the more stable starch structure of parboiled rice, while roasting and flaking change the rice's texture and behavior.

It can be said that traditional Newari Bhoj is a combination of Bajji (Chiura) including various items of vegetables, pickles, meat dishes, some sweets and drinks, etc. (Pradhan, 2043 BS). It seems that the consumption of Bajji during festivals and occasions is considered as a popular

practice among the Newar community. Unlike eating rice, there is no rule that one should not touch anything while eating Baji. Because of this, almost everyone has no issue eating the main food item of the Bhoj together. Baji is also considered as a pure form of food to offer in rituals.

Research Gap

While previous studies have explored the variety of Newari food items (Gyanwali, 2013), the nutritional value of Newari cereal-based items (Magar et al., 2023), and how food can act as a cultural bridge, connecting heritage with modern global platforms (Frisone, 2021), even the comparison of processing technique between parboiled rice and beaten rice has been conducted, there remains a notable gap in academic field of Baji. The existing literature focused on overall food items used in different festivals and occasions, however, they do not connect Baji with cultural practices.

Above scholars or studies have not been able to articulate what exact role of Baji exists in traditional Newar festivals and rituals and how it contributes to social bonding among Newar families or community. This study aims at addressing the research gap by examining the cultural importance of Baji in Bhaktapur within the Newar community by assessing its linking role in ritual practices and social cohesion.

3. Method and Limitation

This study is based on a qualitative ethnographic design applying constructivism as a research paradigm. The study is guided by cultural ecology theory envisioned by Julian Steward, which emphasizes that cultural practices and traditions evolve in direct response to the environment and local ecological conditions (Chhetri & Rayamajhi, 2062 B.S., p. 215). The researcher tries to argue that despite the adaptation of modern food, Baji holds cultural and social cohesion nationally and internationally.

Cultural practices are a result of societies adaptations to their environments particularly in the context of food production. The study employs both primary and secondary data to fulfill the stated objectives. Scholarly journals, articles, published and unpublished books, publications are the secondary sources of data. For primary data sources interviews with culture experts, tourism entrepreneur and stakeholders have been used.

This research is geographically limited to the core Newar community of Bhaktapur. The area was chosen specifically with a focus on the core areas of the city and based on a qualitative research approach. The primary data is collected only from nominated experts and stakeholders within this locality applying a convenient sampling method. Secondary data are used for the articulation and discussion of the subject matter having been collected from published and unpublished materials.

4 Deliberation: Making Process, Types and Performance of Baji

4.1 Process of Baji Making:

Flattened rice is known as Poha in India and Aval in South India. It is a popular breakfast item in India and Bangladesh (Wadikar, 2016). In Nepal, Baji is traditionally prepared with the help of neighbors and family members coming together to divide tasks. The process begins before one and a half months of the feast (Joshi, 2080 BS). As per B. Jati (personal communication, Chaitra 15, 2081 B.S.), the procedure begins with steaming freshly harvested rice grains, followed by roasting and flattening them using large wooden tools. Such traditional process is uncommon these days. Modern mechanization has largely replaced it for convenience. The process is outlined below:

Selecting Paddy Rice: The process begins with selecting good quality paddy rice from nearby neighboring countryside (B. Jati, personal communication, Chaitra 15, 2081 B.S.).

Soaking and Cleaning: The paddy then gets ready for soaking as per:

a) In Summer:

12 hours in hot water followed by 60 hours in normal water for dried paddy.

10 hours in normal water for undried paddy.

b) In Winter:

84 hours in normal water for dried paddy.

Ensure that all floating particles are thoroughly removed from the soaked rice during cleaning.

Draining: After soaking, the rice is poured into a bamboo basket with holes named "Daalu" to facilitate complete water drainage.

Drying/Frying: The fully drained rice is quickly cooked in a large clay pot called a 'Bhaajan' for 3-4 minutes. During this process, it is continuously stirred with a bamboo stick broom known as 'Chwafi' to prevent the rice from burning.

Pounding or Beating: The cooked rice is transferred to a deep wooden vessel known as an "Ugha" in the Newari language. Using wooden pounders called "Luci", two people frequently beat and stir the rice with a long bamboo stick known as "Usakathi". This process flattens and spreads the rice, making Baji's thin and flat.

Drying: After beating, the Baji is spread out and left to dry. This drying process ensures that the Baji becomes crisp and stable for storage.

Cleaning and Storing: After drying, the Baji undergoes a process where rice particles and husks are separated using

traditional tools such as 'Salincha' and 'Hasa'. The cleaned Baji is then stored in an airtight container for future use.

4.2 Types of Baji

Special kinds of rice grains are used to prepare Baji such as Wala Wa: (Ghaiya), Hakuwa (Black rice grain), or Taichin. (Joshi, 2080 BS). Apart from this traditionally locally harvested grains like: Tauliwa, Marsi, Thapchinya, Swanwa are used to prepare Baji (B.R. Sharma, personal communication, Chaitra 26, 2081 B.S.). The various kinds of Baji are :Choka Baji: the half-cut Baji separated from the intact Baji is known as Choka Baji. PaanBaji: Baji that has clumped together is known as PaanBaji. HakuBaji - the Baji made up of Brown rice is known as Haku Baji. SabunBaji - the fried Baji is known as Sabun Baji. Kho Baji - Baji prepared on the same day using the finest characteristics is known as KhoBaji. ShyaBaji - the roasted Baji is known as ShyaBaji. This type of Baji is specially used to feed children and adults as snacks. MamuchaBaji - when cleaning or separating husk particles from beaten Baji using traditional tools like Salincha (a circular bamboo tray with big holes) and Hasa (a circular bamboo tray with no holes), the small leftover husk particles are separated, which is known as MamuchaBaji. This type of Baji is used to perform some special types of puja and also to feed animals.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the Newar community is known for its diverse culture and history. One important part of their culture is Baji. It's not just a simple food for them—it's a symbol of Newari people's traditions, connections with others, and spirituality. The Newars they symbolize Baji as a Kali, SyaBaji as a symbol of Barahi, Meat as a buffalo, Hinghasa as a Kumar, Intestine as a Bramhayani, Green leafs as a Bishnudevi (Joshi, 2080 BS).

4.3 Classical Sacraments of Newar Community

Along with human development, progress in agriculture has created an inseparable link between the environment, culture, and economy of Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. Historically, the valley's fertile soil and favorable climate, once made habitable by a lake, transformed it into a center for agriculture. Over time, locally developed rice, cultivated through a combination of traditional knowledge and innovation, have not only boosted production but also helped maintain soil quality and efficient water use. This balance has contributed to the ecological conservation of the valley while promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Beyond its agricultural importance, rice holds deep cultural value. It is not only a staple food but also an integral part of the valley's social and cultural traditions. From planting to harvesting, festivals such as Dahi Chiura, Gatha Maga Chahre, Dashain, and Tihar are deeply intertwined with local customs. The increased production

of improved rice varieties has led to a diversification of local cuisines. Dishes like rice, chiura (beaten rice), yomari and traditional liquors such as aila (local wine) and thwo (rice beer) have become an essential part of Nepali culture. These foods serve not only as nourishment but also as symbols of community feasts, religious rituals, and family unity.

According to Hindu classical traditions, although there are 16 sacraments (Munankarmi, 2079 B.S.), some castes have modified or adapted them over time based on their class, community, and geographical region. The 16 classical sacraments are of the following types:

Before birth: Garbhadan, Punsawa, Simantonayan (DhauBaji Nakegu)

After birth: Jatakarma (Machabu Byankegu), Namakaran, Niskrama, Annaprasan (Macha-Janko), Chudakarma (Bunsa Khayegu/Ihee), Karnaveda, Bratabanda / Barah

Young-age rituals : Keshanta, Samavartan, Bibaha, Wanprasthan, Sanyas

Death rituals: Antyasti

The Newar community celebrates different cultural rituals from before birth to after death such as Dhau Baji-Nakegu, Ihee, Barah, Ketapuja, Janko, Marriage, Death Rituals, Birthday, etc. Celebrating such traditions unites people and maintains social coherence. The items used by the Newar community are unique and traditionally prepared with Baji holding special significance. In the ceremonial traditions of all the aforementioned classical rites, 'Baji' (beaten rice) is used in various forms, such as Naibadya (Baji topped with jaggery), in Pujathali which is offered to God/Goddess in Tantric puja, as a form of Goja - is a pyramid shape item used in decorating the Puja Thali offered to God/Goddess made up of soaked Baji. This item is especially used for Tantric puja performed by Newar Community. (Joshi, 2080 BS), SamayBaji – the combination of Baji, Chhoila, Black-soyabean, Fish, Sabun, Ginger, Garlic, etc. is one of the important elements in Puja Thali which is offered to God/Goddess, Dhau-Baji, Vyoe-vaag and others each carrying both cultural and religious importance. This study focuses on the rituals where large amounts of Baji are used.

4.4 The uses of Baji in classical sacraments of Newar people

Garbhadhan, Punsawan and Simantonayan are the sacraments before birth. On Simantonayan, Dhau Baji Nakegu (Shagun from maternal) rituals has been performed by the maternal house as well as one's house. It is believed that the consumption of (Ghee), Chaku (Molasses), Baji (Chiura) and Dhau (Yoghurt) gives pregnant women energy (Shrestha, 2066 BS), because these are a high source of protein and energy. During

this ritual Panchayan Puja has been performed that is (i.e.) Narayan, Mahadev, Ganesh, Durga and Surya. The pregnant woman are offered Baji, Dhau (Yoghurt), Eggs, Fish, Roti, Fruits, Meat, Yomari, etc., as a Shagun (gesture of blessing) which is called Dhau Baji Nakegu (Munankarmi, 2079 B.S.).

Jatakarma, Naamakaran, Niskraman, Annaprasan, Chudakarma, Karnavedh, and Bratabandaha are the sacraments of childhood. During this period Newar people perform different rituals. Some of them are Jaybili Byankegu, Naamkaran, Machajanko, Ihee, Bara: Tayegu, Ketapuja. On the 4th day of new born, "Pi-Dhyenkegu (Navel cutting)" rituals are performed. The necessary items for this ritual are: Salt, Ginger, Baji (2 Mana), Rice, Dakshina (money), etc. Similarly, on the 6th day "Chaithi" rituals are performed by the child's aunt and grandmother. The deity worshipped at that time was Shastikadevi – one of the 16th mother goddesses. Necessary items for the Chaithi are Ghee, Molasses, Imu (Carom seeds), Baji, Ginger and Salt. Machabu Byankegu (purification rituals after birth): This ritual comes under Jatakarma. As per ritual Machabu Byankegu is performed on the 10th day after baby birth but it may be varying as per the situation. Some perform it on the 4th day or 6th day. The varieties of Sagun are offered to the daughter, new born baby as well as the family member which includes Dhau, Baji (4 Mana), buffalo's head, Molasses, Ghee, Isicha, Mustard oil, Anja Batta, Machakathi, Machalasa, clothes for the new-born baby and family, different varieties of foods and fruits, etc. (Regmi, 2035 BS).

BwachaBaji- On the 12th day of Gufa some rituals are performed by Achaju (Acharya). On a banana leaf various kinds of dishes like choila, soyabeans, garlic, ginger, woncha (green leaf), soya, etc along with Baji offer to Panchayan and God Surya. After that the remaining BwachaBaji are distributed among the relatives. It is believed that the consumption of Bwacha Baji helps to cure stomach pain. And it is also customary for the distribution of Bwacha Baji on the day of Machabu Byankegu also.

After Machabu Byankegu, the maternal mother came to visit her daughter and the newborn baby, bringing Baji (fried in ghee) and minced meat along with Ghee (1 Mana), Milk, Dakshina (money) known as Ghya-Baji Nakegu. A few days later, the daughter and baby visited the maternal home for some time. Then, the mother-in-law came to take the baby and daughter-in-law back (Regmi, 2035 BS).

Following this, between the 5th- 6th months, another ritual is performed named Machajanko/Annaprasan. This activity is technically called Infant & Young Child Feeding (Tripathay, T., et al, 2024). In this ritual Sagun are also offered to the baby from the maternal house with variety of food items like: Baji, Dhau, Kheer (rice

pudding), fruits, jewelry, meat, etc.

Another important ritual is Upanayan. In this ritual, in the context for boys – Bratabanda ritual is performed and in the context for girls – Bara: has been performed. The maternal uncle's house offers Baji, Dhau, eggs, fish, bara, meat, sweets, clothes, a variety of pea, etc. as s Sagun (Shrestha, 2066 BS) for the boy who performs Ketapuja (Bratabandha) and named it as Ketapuja Ku: (Sagun). In the context for a girl Bara (Gufa) is performed. On the sixth day of the Barah (Gufa), the mother along with other relatives should perform "Chusyamusya Nakagu" (feeding of roasted wheat and soybeans). For this, the girl is fed with roasted wheat, soybeans, almonds, buckwheat, banana, gram, Dhau, Baji, etc. (Munankarmi P. , 2079)

Keshanta, Samavartan, Bibaha, Wanprastha and Sanyas are the sacraments of adulthood until death. There are many rituals performed in Bibaha like: Kha: kochehu, Goya Yenkegu, Janti, Khwa Sowanegu, Dirichiyakegu, Lasakusa, etc. During the day of the wedding one ritual performed is Thya-Bhu Nakegu which means various types of dishes are placed on a large traditional brass plate called "Thaybhu". The food is served to the bride and groom. They enjoy it from the same plate, symbolically declaring them officially husband and wife. This act is called "Thaybhu feeding" which includes Baji, meat, sweets, vegetables, dhau, fish, etc. (Joshi, 2080 BS). Not only in wedding ceremonies, it is customary to offer Thya-Bhu in Annaprasan, Ihee and Barah: ceremony also for the child who is performing the ritual.

Antyasti is the death sacrament in which various rituals are performed from the day of death to the 13th day in the name of the deceased. The first ritual is Mha Gekegu: in which - the dead body is laid on the ground floor and some rituals are performed, during which a pinch of rice is placed in the right hand and Choka-Baji (a half cut-baji) in the left hand of the deceased. After finishing all rituals, a relative spreads Maa Baji across the street during the cremation rite then, the cremation, it is customary to serve food to the relatives participating in mourning, which includes Choka Baji, palu (ginger), aila (alcohol), and salt and it is called Chipan Thikeyu.

On the 4th day, the daughters and other relatives of the deceased are required to bring offerings such as Baji (2 to 4 pathis), potato, green vegetables, fruits or cereals (1 to 2 mana), sugar, sakhar, Bara (approximately 15 pieces), Pickle, Dhau, and more, as a gesture of respect and responsibility – this ritual is known as Lakcha Baji (S. Shrestha, personal communication, Chaitra 20, 2081 B.S.).

Following this, on the 5th or 7th day another ritual done by relatives is Swonacha Ta:wanehu. In the evening, relatives go to the river, with some pinch of rice, Maa-Baji wrapped in a small cloth, Khalu (Ghortapre - bitter herbs), Kancha (reed pot) along with a reed ladder and put

a needle with a broken hole on it. After going across the river, the relatives lit an oil lamp and left the ladder.[7.1] Rice and Baji there.[8.1] (Regmi, 2035 BS). This ritual is performed to help the deceased realize that they are no longer part of this life.

Likewise, on the 11th day Homa is performed by Acahaju (Karmacharya) for the purification of the house as well as the family members. All the relatives are asked to take some ghee in the fire of Homa and warm their hands. This is called "Lha Panegu". Then SamayaBaji (with black beans, chhoila and ginger) is allowed to be eaten by all. And the holy water is sprinkled for purifying the home (Regmi, 2035 BS) known asGha:su Karya/Egharasa (11th day death ritual).

Subsequently, according to S. Shrestha (personal communication, Chaitra 20, 2081) stated that, the souls of the dead are offered food every morning by the elder son or younger son. This ritual is performed before having lunch/rice. Despite Rice, Baji is offered to the Pitris along with salt/ginger or sugar and it is named as Bau: Biyegu.

Besides the 16 sacraments in each and every occasion like Birthday, Shraddha, Jaldan and others the use of Baji is extensive. Nisla Baji :A tapari (leaf bowl) full of Baji topped with Sakha (Jaggery), is offered to Bajju (Newar Priest) on the Shradda, Mother's day and Father's day in remembrance of the pitri is called Nisla Baji (B.R. Sharma, personal communication, Chaitra 26, 2081 B.S.). And a small pouch of Salt, Ginger, Turmeric, Kasu (pea lentil), Maa:(black lentil), Spinach, and full plate of Baji, Si:kale (small log of wood), Potato, Rice(chamal) offered to Pitris at the Shradda rituals is known as Sidha Daan.

Kala Wayegu: A ritual performed to ward off the influence of the evil spirits (Nepali, 2071 BS) is Kala Wayegu. This ritual is performed during all ceremonies whether that is organized on happy or sad. The main elder male and female of the family perform this ritual. Adding more food on leftover food from a Bhoj(party) by the Thakali (elder one who is performing the ritual) then, thrown at the corner of the locality.

Dhau Baji Yegu(Distribution of Yoghurt/beaten rice on Birthday): During the celebration of someone's birthday it is believed that the distribution of Dhau-Baji can avoid/skip the misfortune.

Digu Puja (Kul-Deity Puja): Normally, people eat Bhoj during Digu Puja according to their tradition. However, if the family has an Ihee or Bratabanda ceremony in that year, a goat or duck is traditionally sacrificed to the Kula deity. The meat is then distributed to all participants of the Kula deity puja, and they are also served 'Samaya Baji' on behalf of the Ihee girl or Bratabanda boy (Regmi, 2035 BS).

Marriage, Guthi, Tirtha Bhoj, Ketapuja, Chipangthikegu (Annaprasan), Janko Bhoj: Newari Bhoj mean to Newari

feast or elaborate communal meals that are an integral part of Newari culture. A Newari Bhoj is a culinary extravaganza that showcases the rich and diverse flavors of Newari cuisine (Baral, 2023).

Baji is sometimes used for medicinal purposes as well. In the Newar community's cultural practice, a sacred tantric puja is performed under the guidance of an elderly woman (Aji) to help heal a sick person. During this puja, a full plate of MaaBaji is placed on a leaf bowl (tapari) along with vermilion, goja, local wine (aila), black soybeans (haku muskya), fish, a piece of black cloth and then left in the center of Doka (Chaubato). This puja is known as Bau Tayegu (Sacred puja- treatment for evil spirit).

Similarly, it is an old traditional practice that when someone experiences swelling in any part of the body, a pinch of Baji is chewed and then applied to the swollen area. The heat generated from chewing the Baji is believed to help reduce the swelling. This practice is called Baji:paa.

4.5 Newari Feasts and Festivals necessitate Baji

Biska Jatra, Chandesori Jatra, Gai Jatra: During these Jatras, Newar people organize different Bhoj as per the festivals. The Bhoj includes Baji, different beans, green spinach, potato curry, etc. and ends with the delicious dessert, JuJu Dhau.

Ngalakegu (Navadurga): The Jatra, performed by Nawadurga gan on the basis of Tantric and Divine Shakti, is performed by devotees on different days and different places of Bhaktapur. In this Puja the local people offer God different varieties of foods and other things along with Puja thali which includes Samay Baji (Shrestha, 2060 B.S.).

Samay-Baji: Samay Baji, a cornerstone of Newari cuisine, embodies the essence of homemade delight. This dish ingeniously combines various elements offering both exquisite flavor and wholesome nutrition. Featuring lentil pancake, grilled meat, soybeans, peanuts, ginger slices, beaten rice, spiced potato, boiled eggs, and potato curry as a side dish. Samay Baji encapsulates the diversity of Newari culinary traditions in one harmonious ensemble. It is a reflection of the rich tapestry of flavors and ingredients that define Newari culture. According to ancient medical science human body is considered as the combination form of five elements i.e. Earth, Fire, Water, Sky and Air. The Newar community consumes the items included on Samay Baji as symbolizing the five elements (Piya, 2059 BS).

Deo: Bwakegu: It is a feast where a large variety of delicacies are offered to Navadurga in a huge Lapte with Baji (beaten rice), whole chicken meat, buffalo head, eggs, dhau (yogurt), and many other delicious items.

Ramnavami: On the day of Ramnavami, Dhau-Baji is

distributed to all devotees on Hanumanghat, Bhaktapur in remembrance of the victory over Ravan by Lord Ram, Sita and Hanuman (B.R. Sharma, personal communication, Chaitra 26, 2081 B.S.).

Deo:Swogan Biyegu: On the eighth day of Biska Jatra — the second last day, a ritual known as Deo:Swogan Biyegu (the day of offering alms to the gods) is performed. On this day, 43 gods and goddesses within the core city of Bhaktapur are worshipped, and various delicacies are offered as sagun. The sagun is offered to Asta Matrikas, Nava Durga, the twelve main Ganesh, Bhairav, Tole Ganesh, and Kumar (R.S. Bhele, personal communication, Chaitra 24, 2081 B.S.).

Deo: Bwo Chhayegu: On special occasions such as festivals, commemorative days, births, installations, or the death anniversaries of deities, the practice of offering various dishes to the deity is known as Deo:Bwo Chhayegu. For example, on Ramnavami, every temple dedicated to Lord Ram is visited, and offerings of food are made. Similar offerings are made during Krishna Janmastami, Chhyama Puja and others.

Deo:Bwekegu: On special occasions such as Bratabandha, wedding and Pujas, a large quantity of Bhoj is offered to Nawadurga.

Ashadh 15: The festival known as Ropain Diwas, Dhan Diwas, and Ashadh 15. Dhau and Baji are traditionally consumed on that day.

Janti (wedding procession) : [9.1] Before the arrival of the Janti, the relatives, friends, brothers and neighbors are all invited and served a Bhoj at the bride's house.

La-lasakusa: On the Astami (8th of Dashain), every Newar household practices the ritual of bringing meat into the house for Kuchi Vyo. During this ceremony, the meat is brought by the Thakali Naya. As it is carried through the main door, the Thakali Nakin welcomes the meat into the home by spreading Chokabaji three times on the right side and three times on the left. Then, a small piece of blood, flesh and lung is taken and offered to Pikhalki (Kumar).

Kuchi Vyo (Dashain): Kuchi literally means 2 ManaChiura. On the Mahaastami day of Dashain, Newar people consume Kuchi Vyo. Everyone from the same family sits and eats dishes such as: Baji (2 manaBaji on a kera-lapte) on a banana leaf consists of a variety of foods like potato, meats, saag, Dhau, cereals, etc. (B.R. Sharma, personal communication, Chaitra 26, 2081 B.S.).

Mhapuja: The 3rd day of Swonti (Tihar) is Mhapuja. On this day the whole family cleans the house as well as themselves and in the evening they perform Mhapuja and end up having Bhoj. A Lapte is placed on the mandala and Bhoj includes Baji (beaten rice from newly harvested rice), mustard green, Bhutan, Dhau, potatoes, pickles, etc.

Panchabali (Sacrify of 5 animals): A type of Tantric puja

in which five animals are traditionally sacrificed—goat, buffalo, duck, sheep, and hen. However, in non-sacrificial forms of the ritual, instead of taking the lives of animals, offerings consist of five Goja and five pinches of Baji (flattened rice).

4.6 Other Occasions Baji is used Culturally

Apart from rituals and feasts, Baji is commonly consumed in daily lives, especially by children, who are often fed Baji along with other elements such as: DuruBaji (Dudh-chiura) which means, Baji[10.1] served with boiled milk so that the child can consume it easily. Dhau Baji (Yoghurt-Chiura) - the combination of Dhau (Yogurt) and Baji (Baji) is one of the best meals for children. Ku-kuBaji (Alcohol and Chiura) - a mixture of Baji and local wine Aila. It helps children who aren't sleeping enough to sleep better. ChakuBaji (Molasses and Chiura) - the mixture of Molasses and Baji is the best source of high energy. This type of Baji is consumed mostly in the winter season.

5 Result and Discussion

5.1 Results

The study, conducted through qualitative ethnographic methods in the core Newar community of Bhaktapur (Khowpa), reveals that Baji (beaten rice/Chiura) transcends its role not of a mere food item but it functions as a multidimensional cultural pillar embodying ritual sanctity, social cohesion, symbolic identity, and ecological adaptation. The study finds that:

- a. Baji indispensable in all 16 classical sacraments (Saṃskāra) from pre-birth (Garbhādhāna) to post-death (Antyeṣṭi), appearing in forms such as Naibadya (Baji + jaggery offering to deities), Goja (pyramid-shaped soaked Baji in Tantric pūjā) and used in birth rites (e.g., Machabu Byankegu, Annaprasan), initiation (Ihee, Barah), marriage (Thaybhu feeding), and death rituals (Mhā Gekegu, Chipan Thikegu, Swonacha Ta:wanege) explains that No Newar rite or feast is complete without Baji as well as Bhoj without Baji is culturally inconceivable. Therefore, Baji is a holy food item that deserves universal ritual presence across the life cycle of Newars.
- b. Unlike cooked rice (considered impure in ritual contexts), Baji is classified as Shuddha (pure) and offered to deities (Navadurga, Panchayan, Kuladevata), ancestors (Pitri), and in Tantric pujas (e.g., Bau Tayegu for healing). The representation of cosmic balance (five elements: earth, water, fire, air, sky) in Samay Baji shows the relationship of nature-culture. Therefore, Baji is valued as a symbol of purity and divine offering in the cultural normative landscape.
- c. Preparing Baji is a communal act rather than a personal one, as families and neighbors collaborate

1 -- 1.5 months in advance using traditional tools (Ugha, Luci, Daalu, Chwafi), reinforcing kinship and labor-sharing (collaboration). As it is eaten from shared platters (Lapte, Thaybhu) during Bhoj, Janti, Guthi, and Tirtha Bhoj, breaking touch barriers (no restriction as with cooked rice) Baji is a means of consumption unity. Its distribution rituals (Dhau-Baji Yegu, Lakcha Baji, Deo: Swogan Biyegu) strengthen intergenerational and affinal ties. Thus, Baji exists as an agent of social cohesion and communal bonding of Newars.

- d. Baji is linguistically embedded in Newar speech as “Baji ney dhunala?” (Have you eaten?) “Bela na kubela Baji ney la” (Eat Baji anytime) and in folk songs: “La chako wyaka Samaybaji...” demonstrate the cultural identity of symbolic lexicon of Newar Community.
- e. Rooted in local rice ecologies (Tauliwa, Marsi, Taichin, Ghaiya, Hakuwa) and traditional agronomy of Kathmandu Valley that has durability for storage and portability made it ideal for pre-modern agrarian life. Baji evolved as an adaptive response to fertile valley soils, monsoon cycles, and labor systems that validates cultural ecology theory with Ecological and Adaptive Resilience.
- f. Yet, Baji retains non-negotiable status in rituals and identity and Global Newar diaspora continues Baji-centric practices, extending cultural continuity, due to mechanization and urban migration Traditional preparation declining and Local paddy scarcity threatens authentic texture and taste. These factors pose challenges to the continuity of Baji tradition. [11.1]

5.2 Discussion

In the Newar culture, foods are classified as sacred or impure depending upon its type, source and handling. Cooked rice is considered an impure item. It is therefore avoided on ceremonial occasions including Bhoj, feasts, fasting, mourning ceremonies and Shraddha (memorial rites performed to satisfy deceased ancestors). As it does not require cooking, Baji is considered a pure and holy item offered to deities and departed souls. As Baji is an essential item for occasions of worship, feast and festivals including Parva, Puja, Sanskar ceremonies, it is a significant food item to preserve and continue cultural practices in the Newari community in general as it is inevitably offered and consumed in community and family gathering events. The customary procedures for preparation of Baji are established as rules of rituals and cultural performances. This brings the community and family members to a special form of community bond and sustains mutual cooperation as the preparation of Baji begins a month before a major ceremonial event.

Therefore, it is a cultural symbol of community unity and is not only a food item to fulfill hunger (S. Shrestha, personal communication, Chaitra 20, 2081 B.S.).

Beyond its culinary and ritual significance, [12.1] the word Baji has also been used in various conversations depending on the occasion. For example, when formally asking someone if they’ve had their meal as in “Baji ney dhunala”, if someone demanding food at any time as in “Bela na kubela Baji ney bela”, during Indra Jatra sing folksong as “La chako wyaka samaybaji, walawala pulukisi”, and other expressions include “Aji mehcha danka baji”, “Dahi-chiure”, etc. Baji shows how resourceful the Newar community is. Baji is easy to store and carry, from a child to old generation anyone can easily consume it, which was important in the past when they depended on farming and faced changing seasons. However, the traditional methods of preparing Baji are now being overshadowed by the adoption of modern technologies. These changes may affect the original texture and quality of Baji. Similarly, the scarcity of good quality paddy suitable for making Baji has now become the most challenging issue.

As a result, the cultural practices centered on Baji in the Newari community can be affected by the increasing use of modern food items. It is happening because of the easy availability of modern foods and the influence of other cultures. Such practices can alter or even lead to the disappearance of traditional culture and rituals associated with the use of Baji.

6 Conclusion

Baji is a cultural property and identity of the Newar community of Bhaktapur. Far beyond a [13.1]mere derivative, it is a living artifact that encodes ritual grammar, social architecture, ecological wisdom, and socio-cultural memory. Its presence from cradle to cremation ground makes it a unifying thread across time, space, and generation.

The study confirms that Baji is not consumed, instead it is performed. Its preparation binds labor, its sharing binds hearts, and its offering binds the individual to collective faith. In an era of culinary globalization, Baji’s persistence as a non-substitutable element in Newar life ways demonstrates the resilience of embodied tradition.

While modernization poses risks to its artisanal production, the symbolic and social capital of Baji remains unmatched. As long as a Newar person says “Baji neydhunala”, the community endures. Therefore, it is recommended to establish Baji heritage cooperatives in Bhaktapur to preserve indigenous rice varieties, traditional processing, and intergenerational knowledge transmission- ensuring that this beaten grain continues to beat at the heart of Newar civilization.

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