Local Values in Governance: Legacy of *Choho* in Forest and School Management in a Tamang Community in Nepal

Mahesh Nath Parajuli
Kathmandu University

Indra Mani Rai
Kathmandu University

Prakash C Bhattarai
Kathmandu University

Suresh Gautam
Kathmandu University

Abstract

The political modernization in Nepal accelerated since 1951 when the country changed its course owing to a popular movement that was acclaimed as the beginning of democracy in the country. However, the governments continued cultural and political homogenization. This has been so in the case of local governance practices as well. Modern governing structures/institutions are guided by the state formed policies and elite-based power structures despite the fact that different ethnic groups in Nepal have their own traditional self-governance systems. In this context, this article unfolds the inheritance of traditional practices of the Tamang community (one of the major ethnic groups of Nepal), in a village, in the district adjoining Kathmandu valley, within the modern structures of governance of forest and school management systems. The paper argues that there is a legacy of the traditional institution, the Choho, though the system of Choho itself has now largely disappeared. This paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork, presents the accounts of Choho and examples of how the particular norms, values, beliefs, and practices are still in practice challenging and denying the modern/state formed mechanisms of governing the forests and schools in the village. The paper further argues that given the modern governance system, the traditional souvenir exchange practice that was rooted in the notion of honour and respect has now shifted towards the practice of giving and receiving gifts based upon the principle of reciprocal benefits that could be described as a bribe.

INTRODUCTION

Tamang is one of the major ethnic groups of Nepal among 125 castes/ethnic groups speaking 123 different languages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Most Tamangs reside in the hill districts surrounding Kathmandu, capital of the country. They have been residing in these territories for centuries with their own language and culture with frequent migration. Kukuczka (2011) also writes that they are distinct ethnic group who came to Nepal from the northern Tibet during different times particularly when the Nepali state formation process was going on. Traditionally, they had their own traditional institutions with particular customary laws such as *Tamba* (language initiator), *Ganba* (social evaluator), *Bonbo* (priest/priestess), *Labonbo* (genealogist), *Lama* (religious leader), and *Choho* (community manager) which existed to regulate, promote, and develop the society (Tamang, 2003). These institutions had specific roles in governing communal practices. They maintained social order, ethics, rituals, and cultural practices which shaped ways of living and lifestyles of local people. One of the specific roles of *Choho* was to govern and manage the village forest and forest resources. However, the traditional institutions and customary laws of the Tamang communities have been gradually dissipating due to the process of modernity based and standardized state legal systems (Zemach-Bersin, 2005) Despite the efforts of the modern government to legitimate Nepal's separate political identity, to unify the country internally through the legal system, the customary law of Nepal's diverse populations like Tamang created inconsistencies (Levine, 1987).

In many cases, these traditional institutions provided a strong basis for establishing the modern governing structures. For example, there used to be a system of forming a village system of governance and management in the Tamang communities in Nepal. However, the centrally formulated state policies and development approaches sidelined the role of the traditional institutions that functioned with customary laws and practices. Moreover, the centralization of power at the hands of state elites often marginalized the community-based initiatives and traditional democratic practices at the grassroots level. Modern Nepali state basically ignored the fact that good governance can be materialized only through the articulation of local political values and practices and their harmonization with modern democratic practices (Dapilah, Bonye, & Dawda, 2013). The local governance system through traditional institutions was holding democratic practices and

good governance. But the state could not recognize and respect such practices of community governance through the traditional institutions. Moreover, as the Modern democratic practices are less aligned with the traditional values and systems, they have not captured the interests of the local communities and individuals. Although some of these institutions are still in practice in some core areas of the Tamang community, many others have already disappeared (Tamang, 2003). The question that could be put forward here is, why the modern state did not value the traditional institutions like *Choho* which tied community people to the values of democracy and good governance.

In this context, this paper, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in a Tamang community (*Ghyang* – pseudonym) in a neighbouring district of Kathmandu, argues that the traditional beliefs and practices guided by the traditional institutions, *Choho,* were rejected in the state created modern governance system. However, traces of those practices are still prevailing specifically in forest resource use and school management. The paper further illustrates how this traditional institution of local governance challenged the state authority resulting in the weaker performance of the state-created local governance institution. It further argues that the mismatch between modern and traditional local governance practices has created a space for bribery in a modern sense. This could be seen in the reality that the traditional souvenir exchange culture rooted in honour and respect of the *Choho* institution has largely shifted towards bribery practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY

This paper is based on the ethnographic account and memories generated through an extensive field engagement in one homogenously settled Tamang community, *Ghyang*. Ethnography that we conducted in such a culturally bounded context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) allowed us to understand a Tamang traditional institution, *Choho,* in a historical context and to make sense of its roles in forest and school management in the present context. This specific form of research enabled us to learn the life patterns, distinctive socio-cultural and traditional systems, beliefs, culture, and values of Tamangs. At the same time, this also allowed us to learn the modern institutions and governance practices focusing on forest and school management. For this purpose, we visited *Ghyang*

three times in the years 2016 and 2017 altogether spending 45 days in the field. We engaged in the field interacting with the participants in their natural contexts being careful listeners to explore how they expressed their memories and experiences (Collins & Gallinat, 2010) of the *Choho* institution and its practices.

The community of *Ghyang* consists of about five hundred households with approximately two thousand inhabitants. Almost all people are from the Tamang (Dong, a subgroup) ethnic group with a few Brahmins, Chhetris, and Dalits (so-called untouchables, but the practice of untouchability is now a punishable crime). They have been residing in the community with a strong bond of social cohesion and harmony for several generations and most of them are engaged in subsistence farming (maize and vegetables such as onion, pumpkin, and beans). The land of the community looked less fertile for rice and other vegetable farming. The community people fulfill their needs of daily goods importing from out of the village, particularly from Kathmandu. Many of them are also in trekking business, some work as professional drivers, and some other youths are working in Kathmandu and abroad.

Buddhachitta (Ziziphus budhensis, the scientific name for the plant), a sacred plant, traditionally grown in this area, has been a major source of cash income for most of the community people. They sell the seeds of *Buddhachitta* (used for making garlands) that are sold at a high price not only in the Nepali market but also in China and other Buddhist countries. The sale of *Buddhachitta* has been bringing lots of money to many village people. This has increased their affordability of services like education and health as well as modern consumption items such as electronic gadgets, alcohol, and beverages. The youths are most affected by these changes. Such changes are particularly distinct in their behaviour.

In the field, we observed deeply their beliefs, values, socially constructed behaviours and the meaning they attached (Forsey, 2010) to the phenomena of managing forest and school. We focused on understanding and reflecting on the meaning of *Choho* and its values, practices and contribution to maintaining and fostering social cohesion for promoting democratic values. We also aimed at uncovering the continuation of the values

of *Choho* in the modern governance of forest and school management. The process enabled us to generate a detailed description of *Choho*.

We conversed with many people in *Ghyang* – women and men, adults and youths, parents, students, and teachers. We focused on having extensive conversations with two elderly Tamang people, a spiritual leader, three local political leaders, the Chairperson of one of the Community Forest Users' Groups (CFUGs), and six members of this group. We also engaged in two community schools and interacted with two head teachers, the chairs of the School Management Committee (SMC), other four members of the SMC, and two members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Further, we observed one SMC meeting in a school. The interaction took place in groups in the case of SMC members, teachers, and head teacher. We interacted with rest of the others on an individual basis.

We maintained field notes and developed memos of the field interviews and observations which were descriptive, reflective, and analytic (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In addition, we maintained recordings and photographs of the field engagement activities which supported us to recall our memories whilst writing the paper. We read and re-read the memos and listened to the recordings time and again for making a deeper understanding of the traditional and modern practices in forest and school management. In addition, we unpacked our field experiences and reflection whilst analyzing the phenomena.

The field information supported us to make meaning and the meaning helped us to explore further newer ideas on *Choho* and its practices. Thus, our ethnographic inquiry was emergent in nature (Brewer, 2000; Hamersley & Atkinson, 2007; Whitehead, 2005). We engaged in discussing among ourselves regarding the values of *Choho* and its contribution to maintaining democratic values and the continuation of these values in the present governance system.   Following the ethnographic approach in understanding *Choho*, its gradual disappearance, and continuation of its legacy, we focused on knowing and understanding change as "in many cases, change itself becomes the research subject" (Murchison, 2010, p. 11). Given the status of *Choho* and oral histories it created, we engaged in exploring its historical importance. At the end of each field day, we sat and shared our insights, bringing our earlier professional and research experiences. The

rigorous discussion in the field among ourselves helped us raise questions, which we tried to unpack in the following days by interacting with the research participants.

Such interactions with the participants helped us accumulate, contextualize, and interpret data to make sense of our observations (Musharbash, 2008). Bringing the newer understanding of *Choho* and its practices was possible through the interactions with the participants. The process of raising questions and seeking further explanation from the participants was carried out more than once. After accomplishing the fieldwork, we followed a similar approach of rigorous discussion among ourselves while developing the manuscript of the article. Our varied experiences greatly contributed to developing the arguments and their substantiation.

AN ACCOUNT OF *CHOHO*: A TRADITIONAL LOCAL INSTITUTION

We first reached at *Ghyang* on a day in April 2016. As soon as we reached there, we set out on foot, up and down along the sloppy trail to map the village and to know the people as well as to sense the research context. Along the trail we met people, informally talked to them diminutively, exchanged greetings, and inquired the pattern of their everyday life. They also asked about us as we were new to that village. We also shared about us and the purpose of our visit to them. While making these informal conversations and observations, we tried to sense their ways of living and lifestyles.

We spent a couple of days to be familiar with the context of *Ghyang*, its people and their norms, values and practices. In this initial phase, we tried to understand traditional and modern institutions in the village in relation to the available services particularly focusing on forestry and education. With this initial purpose, we started talking to the local people about their living and occupation, rituals and rites, changing patterns of life and livelihood, and education and employment in a broader socio-cultural, economic and political context.

We tried to find the research participants who knew more about traditional governance practices in their community. We met a spiritual leader-*Lama,* who took care of a *Gumba* near his home. From him, we learnt a little about *Choho*. On the next day, we found a middle-aged Gyalbo who could provide a little bit more detailed information about

the practices of the traditional institution, *Choho*. We collected bits of information from many Tamang participants and tried to understand them. We followed and talked to Gyalbo comprehensively and frequently. We understood that *Choho* as such was no more in place there. But, Gyalbo and few other elders had experienced and heard about the *Choho* practices.

According to Gyalbo, *Choho* used to be the head or chief of the community enjoying the highest authority in the community. *Choho* was also socially accepted but he had to prove practically his competency of leadership in the community. Gyalbo further expressed, "There is no more *Choho* nowadays in the village, but I have heard and also experienced little bit that *Choho* was supposed to be an experienced, acceptable, and knowledgeable person who could make fair decisions. Generally, the position was transmitted down to the sons but a new person could also be selected." *Choho* worked closely together with other institutions such as *Lama* to safeguard the interest of the community and to regulate, promote, and develop the community.

Traditionally, *Choho* was responsible for the overall administration of the village. According to Gyalbo, it was the village governing body, which would make important decisions pertaining to security, development, justice, moral, spiritual standards of the community. *Choho* would chair village meetings and hearings. *Choho* preferred participatory, inclusive and consensual decision-making process so that the decisions were applicable and appropriate. All adult community members had to attend the meeting and make decisions by consensus. The system ensured that everybody understood the rules, regulations, and laws, which they set up by themselves. Though, at times, *Choho* would make decisions alone on small and minor issues, it was not a normal practice. The norm was participatory decision making. Another middle-aged Mingma said, "Opportunities for social gatherings either in community houses or meeting places as well as in the course of daily work allowed community members to discuss issues." *Choho* also had a role in educating younger generations. This role was practised by assigning certain roles to younger people where they would learn the social values and practices by working with adults.

The *Choho* played a major role in enforcing customary laws in using the forest and other resources. We were also told that it had a role of constructing and repairing foot trails, cleaning and clearing watersheds and sources of drinking water, making small suspension bridges including culverts in and around the village. Further, it was responsible for making water canals for farming, inns, and rest spots *(Chautara)* for travellers and porters in the name of deceased ancestors. It took responsibility for safeguarding the community from natural calamities and disasters and for which the villagers were mobilized for taking necessary measures. Similar points were also noted by one publication made by Non-Governmental Organization Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities (NGO FONIN, 2011).

Mingma informed us about some particular examples of the traditional ways of managing community resources such as forest and land. For example, "if someone needed timber for constructing a house, s/he had to request the *Choho*. The *Choho* would then grant permission for cutting the timber from a certain part of the community forest as per the need that would be determined by the size and design of the house to be built." Further, for collecting fodder and firewood, someone had to seek the permission of the *Choho*. In order to get the forest resources, one had to present a certain amount of alcohol to *Choho* as a souvenir as per the amount of demanded timber, firewood, and fodder needed by the person. In this sense, traditionally the forest was managed through communal ways under the leadership of the traditional institution *Choho*.

Choho also used to decide to distribute land to the landless community members. This indicated the community support for those who were in need, further illustrating the economic well-being and social harmony of the community people. However, the person getting the land would be expected to provide a souvenir of local wine and head of a sacrificed animal to *Choho* (Bhattachan, 2007). It was also noted that the community people were required to maintain the relationships with *Choho* by providing labour to him whenever he would need any work done. The community people would support him collectively by working for him such as in agricultural works, constructing house and cowsheds, collecting firewood, and timber. The *Choho* also used to get souvenir (meat and local wine) from the community people particularly on special occasions such as festivals

and rituals. Likewise, the person blamed for disturbing social cohesion and creating conflict would also provide souvenir to him.

Giving and receiving a souvenir, however, was in practice not only with *Choho* but with among community members. As one participant Ngima noted, "Souvenir is given to elders and old relatives for receiving blessings from them and married daughters would also provide souvenir to their parents when they visit their maternal homes." This shows that the souvenir was given not only for achieving lands and forest products from *Choho,* rather it was a culture of the Tamangs for promoting honour and respect among the kinship.

SIDELINING OF *CHOHO* IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Before the political unification of the country that went on in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the country was divided into several small principalities. At that time, different ethnic groups had their own homeland, self-rule and self-governance system which ensured political autonomy (Tamang, 2009). After the political unification and gradual development of the state systems, the local ethnic communities were forced to adopt new institutions and organizational forms which was the major cause of the loss of traditional local governance and cultural heritage (Bhattachan, 2002; Tamang, 2009). With the beginning of district administration, court, and revenue system, the responsibility of local governance, judiciary, and tax collection shifted to the new institutions (Thapa, 2009; NGO FONIN, 2011). This process was further strengthened with the change in political course in 1951. However, customary laws and institutions still remained powerful tools of social order in most of the ethnic communities and rural areas of Nepal (Tamang, 2003).

Towards the second half of the 20th century, the Nepali state claimed the adoption of decentralization for local governance. Accordingly, it established some legal and institutional provisions for operationalizing the decentralization in development and service delivery (Acharya, 2018). However, the system of decentralization and development in Nepal was actually a centralized process designed and implemented more for appropriation of resources and less for democratizing the society (Shrestha, 1997). Holmberg (2016) traced out the history of Tamang people articulating that they mainly worked as a forced and bonded labourer under the rule of the Rana regime and they served as porters on the transport routes showing their marginalized position in the state system.

However, such marginal position of Tamang has been changing as the important ethnic communities in the modern state (Holmberg, 2016). Bhatta, Adhikari, Thada, and Rai (2008) argued that mainstream nationalism based on 'one nation, one language, one culture' homogenized the practices of the governance thereby less recognized the traditional governance. With this new system of governance, the local self-rule practices were further superseded. These were the modern political processes through which the community cohesion was under gradual slackening. Under such circumstances, the Tamang people experienced political discrimination and social marginalization and demonstrated their resistance to the homogeneous state ruling mechanism (Zemach-Bersin, 2005).

The country adopted new political course in 1990. A popular movement in 1990 brought more openness in social and political processes by ending the totalitarian rule of the King and his court. Nevertheless, the village gradually lost its grasp from the seniors and elders (NGO-FONIN, 2011). As a consequence, new power players such as cadres of political parties and elected representatives gradually became powerful. The birth of the political parties collapsed the unity in the community and communitarian practices of managing resources. Political ideologies, rather than caste and ethnicity, became more powerful for grouping of local people (Tamang, 2003). These political parties would protect their cadres even if they do work for personal interest rather than for the community. Next popular movement resulted in the abolition of Kingship and establishment of the federal system in 2006. As per the new system, the new constitution was promulgated in 2015 followed by elections for the federal, provincial, and local governments in 2017. All these political changes were claimed to have been moving towards local self-governance, autonomy, identity, and promotion of local socio-cultural values (Acharya, 2018). Despite all these claims, the traditional institutions like *Choho* was devalued, marginalized, and hence disappeared in many heterogeneous communities of the Tamangs. Therefore, *Choho* was sidelined in local governance including in forest and other socio-cultural processes. Despite such unfavourable environment due to the intentional work of the state for abolishing local institutions, as argued above, in this paper, we intend to show the continuation of the legacy of traditional governance system. This is what we will discuss in the next section.

LEGACY OF *CHOHO* IN FOREST MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGING THE STATE AUTHORITY

As a modern governance system, the Nepali state formed different new institutions for regulating resource management and service delivery in the country. Particularly, in forest, different policies such as Forest Act 1993, Forest Rules 1995, Leasehold Forest Policy 2002, and Forest Nationalization Act 2013 were endorsed (Government of Nepal, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2013). These policies claim to focus on proper management of forest and forest resources mobilizing local people. As per these policies, the Community Forest User Groups (CFUG) were formed from among the households residing near the forests. However, these new policies ignored the importance of traditional system of forest management. As we found in *Ghyang*, the Chairpersons of CFUGs were no more the traditional *Choho*, but were selected from the political parties. Moreover, the selection of the other members of CFUG also showed the political alignment. This showed how the state enforced modern governance system tried to ignore the traditional knowledge base.

We focused on making sense of governing practices in one particular CFUG of one of the wards (local administrative unit) in *Ghyang*. We observed the thin forest expanded in about sixty *ropani* (8 acres) of land with some old trees and newly planted ones seemed rapidly growing. On the other hand, we noticed that the forest area was being encroached from one of the edges for expanding cultivable land and for developing residential areas. The decline of forest area and forest resources seemed to have less affected the livelihoods of local people. The community people were using few forest resources such as firewood, timber, fodder, and other agricultural tools. This was because many of the community members were changing their livelihood strategies. There were fewer people engaged fully in agriculture and cattle raising and many were shifting to non-farm activities such as business, tourism, service and even migrating to Kathmandu, and abroad. Besides, many were using gas ovens for cooking. Given all these reasons, household dependency on forest resources for fulfilling the household needs was in a decreasing trend.

Another change that came forward to us was that the community people who have been using forest resources less cared the CFUG. The CFUG was not functioning well; no decisions were made and thus no implementation. It was formed just for the sake of

fulfilling a policy requirement. It had almost no action against those who had been using forest resources illegally. They had been using the forest resources without consultation with and permission of the CFUG. It knew all those activities but did nothing against those people. The Chairperson of CFUG expressed,

> We do not have written document or written decisions. The community people are encroaching the particular areas of our forest, we are aware of these all, but we don't punish them and we don't go for legal action [reporting or procedure]. We are less influenced by government policies. We collectively decide by all villagers and get timber, firewood, and fodder from the forest. We are not following the legal arrangements of the state. For example, Forest Act envisages getting consent of Community Forest Users' Group (CFUG) to cut down the trees of one's own fields. But we don't do so. We cut down trees without any legal procedures. So far, we have not made any written decisions in CFUG; no minutes, no files, and no any other official documents. We had no formal meeting except at the time of its formation (Field Note, 2017).

We further asked him why it was so. He said, "We are all relatives, if we take action or if we tell them not to do so, they would be disappointed. We do not want to break our relationships as we need each other in each pace of life". He shared with low tone, *"Tai chup mai chup"* (staying silent). The Chairperson noted, "Our fathers and forefathers did the same, we do not create dispute and conflict in small matters, if somebody commits very big crimes, then we solve in the community". It was, thus, an example of the strong kinship tie of the community people that is what Putnam (2000) says 'bonding social capital' (as cited in Khan, 2007, p. 51) which had a strong network for facilitating the life of Tamangs. This was the sense of togetherness they did not want to dispute with each other. Explicitly, they didn't resist the state mechanisms but implicitly they were valuing and promoting the traditional value of togetherness, sentiments, and belongingness. The members of CFUG were also following the similar traditions. The traditional collective practice of forest management was thus challenging the state authority. They did not want to harm each other through negative responses and that they did not want to weaken the community relations. This could further be explained as the community people did not see those acts as crime that the state would see. They were, thus, less concerned on legal procedure, rather, would attempt to settle the cases regarding the use of forest resources within the community through collective decision-making processes.

It was the legacy of *Choho* that there were stronger traditional community practices on using forest resources. These traditional beliefs and practices of forest management were handed down through the generations to which people have a strong bond. Obviously then the CFUG was not functioning for regulating forest resources. The Chairperson of the CFUG further said, "We accept the community decisions". The community people are spontaneously unified for the decision-making process in regard to social issues of utilizing forest resources. He felt that the community decided in such a way that they provided justice to all the people. Despite the emergence of political party cadres who present themselves as *Janne Sunne* (knowledgeable), the legacy of *Choho* is still there as those *Janne Sunne* were also not in the position of denying its role.

Tamang still had a sense of solidarity and feeling obligated towards each other which was derived from the traditional values of "cultural threads and networks of clan relations" (Tamang, 2009, p. 276). The collectiveness and group-ness created by rural boundary helped them to find ways of living by getting support from each other. The nature of Tamang with communitarian feeling rather than rational individualism seem to serving the common cause. It was a construct what Ferdinand Tonnies called *Gemeinschaft* involving "a lasting and genuine form of living together' through 'coordinated action for a common good" (Day, 2006, p. 5). It was thus the natural and spontaneous willingness of support to each other. The strong sense of belonging in the Tamang community made them using forest resources in consensus and going against the state rule of forest management. It is also true that such situation has been creating tensions and conflict not only between traditional and modern governance values but also in other social, cultural, and political practices in the community.

LEGACY OF *CHOHO* IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Coming to the education sector, traditional ways of educating community members through *Lama*, *Choho*, *Shamans* and other village heads or institutions (Holmberg, 1989) was in practice in *Ghyang*. Such system would educate the learner in an experiential manner and was very much aligned with the everyday need of the people. Emergence of state promoted the modern school system which was completely in contrast with the traditional system, resulted in the disappearance of the traditional system. During the

decades of 1950 and afterwards Nepal saw rapid expansion of modern schooling (Stiller & Yadav, 1979). At that time, establishing, and managing the schools were the local responsibility in Nepal. However, in 1971 the government nationalized the whole education system in the country, centralizing all aspects like governance of schools, teacher management, and curriculum development. Education Act 2071 and National Education System Plan 1971 formalized these practices (Government of Nepal, 1971a, 1971b). All these provisions denied the role of the local institution and its values such as *Choho*. However, we found the legacy of *Choho* in the management practices of schools in *Ghyang*.

There were four schools (two primary, one lower secondary, and one high school) in *Ghyang.* The teachers told us that the number of students was decreasing in the schools due to migration of community people to Kathmandu for their professional business such as trekking and driving. We observed that both schools were in poor condition both in terms of physical and educational environment. School buildings were not in good shape and were awaiting repair. The effect of 2015 earthquake was clearly visible in both schools. Both inside and outside the school buildings, things were here and there in a very untidy manner. It was clear that such environment will not promote better learning. With their untidy dress and half-torn books and notebooks they were carrying, students were also not in a very good shape. A discussion with the teachers made it clear that their learning was very poor. It was clear that both these schools were in a very poor state.

The head teacher of one of the primary schools we focused on claimed, "Despite insufficient teachers' quotas, we are committed for providing quality education to the children." However, some parents were expressing their dissatisfaction with the irregularity and uncommitted involvement of teachers in the pedagogical practices. Further, the chairperson of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) expressed dissatisfaction for their tokenic or signatory participation of parents in the decision-making processes in schools. As almost all the teachers and SMC members in the schools were from the same Tamang community, they were in close kinship relationships allowing them to function as per their practice and not as per the state rule on how schools are to be maintained. They retained the intimate co-existence with each other due to their dominant and homogenous

settlement (Oppong, 2013) which affected the regularity of the teachers in their school, parent's presence in the school meeting, and the overall school environment.

One of the community members said, "We gather together when something happens in the community." Though SMC members blamed that local teachers were not serious about education in school, they are aware of what was going on in schools but were doing little to improve the school condition. School teachers had a kind of unwritten bond to leave the school at any time within school hour. One teacher even claimed that being local inhabitant, it was his duty to serve the community, be socialized and attend some social and cultural ceremonies in the village. Teachers would leave their school and go to the village to serve their relatives and neighbors. Likewise, during harvesting and cultivating crops, they would become irregular to school. The head teacher said, "We support each other in *Marda Parda* (while in need)". From their perspective, they were being united for their shared interest and aspirations and they were less individualistic and selfish. As they claimed, they had a sense of helpfulness or cooperation among the community members. All this could be understood as a collective sense of "we-ness", "organic" relationships, and emotional and social ties with the feeling of "togetherness" and "intimacy" (Macionis & Parrillo, 2011, p. 122). Aspects like kinship and neighborhood ties were behind such togetherness which made them ignore the rules and regulations of the school. Though teachers expressed their dilemma between serving the community and following the rules of the school, it was also clear that they were ignoring their duty towards the school and the children. This sort of situation was a clear illustration of how, on the one hand, the traditional system of educating was destroyed and on the other hand, the externally induced system was also not working.

PRACTICE OF SOUVENIR: SHIFT TOWARDS BRIBERY

One day in the month of July, 2017, we entered into a primary school in *Ghyang.* It was already school time. We observed five teachers outside of the school building and very few students were scattered on the school ground and inside the classroom. We noticed that most of the students and teachers were from the Tamang community. The main school building was under-construction which was destroyed by the devastating earthquake

of April, 2015. We observed temporary tinned huts with four small classrooms where few desks and benches were waiting for the students to sit on.

When teachers saw us, we exchanged greetings and the teachers took us inside their office. The floor of the office room was dusty. There were a few scattered text books and attendance registers on the table. The head teacher who was from the same community requested us to take the chair. We took our seat and we introduced ourselves to them and explained the purpose of our visit to school. We started conversing with the head teacher and other teachers focusing on how the service delivery was going on in the school. The head teacher shared that the number of students has been gradually decreasing for few years. There were only 27 students from grade one to grade five in this year (2017). The teachers and head teacher were attempting to enroll students from nearby communities with several strategies such as visiting to community and interacting with children, parents, and local leaders. They were also organizing extra-curricular activities in the school as an attraction to the students.

The discussion with the teachers went to 'quiz contest' the school had organized two months ago. The head teacher shared that the school requested a Resource Person (RP), a representative of District Education Office (DEO), to make questions for quiz contest. The school provided the RP a small amount of money as gift for his contribution to the programme of quiz contest. We further asked, "Why did you do so?" The head teacher said, "It is our culture. It is to build relationships. With such relationships, when we have to go to the DEO, it would be easier to accomplish school's works there." The teachers further explained that they offer gifts and souvenirs to guests, and to respected people and that this was their culture. Obviously, the cultural practice was continuing but with the passage of time, the traditional culture has taken a different form, a form of bribe. Talking with the teachers made it clear that without such bribe money they would face difficulties to get works done in the government offices and get support from the government representatives.

The same situation was echoed by the chairperson of the CFUG that a few people were encroaching forest lands and using forest resources without the consent of the community people. He further elaborated, "Government officers sometimes come to

monitor the community forest, they meet us, and do nothing for the offenders." He added, "While in the village, the government people are well honored and offered a dinner with dishes prepared with the local chicken and other delicacies". This was another example of how the traditional culture of exchanging souvenir for promoting social bond, intimacy, and helping each other as a culture rooted to the traditional institution *Choho* was shifting towards bribery.

It is not that the meaning of practice of souvenir exchange has completely changed. The practice is still there with all its traditional meanings and which have been facilitating building relationships among the people in *Ghyang* and lubricating continual relational ties among the members. These practices often existed in "structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities" (Winkler Prins & Souza, 2005, p. 10). The souvenir exchange system has emotional meaning and for memories and honour rather than for calculated economic benefits to be paid later. These are helpful to develop sensibility of belonging or togetherness. However, because of the influence of modernity, the underlying meaning of exchange of souvenir among people for respect and honour has shifted by the calculated give and take relationship. The gifts are always reciprocal and hence the receiver pays back in any form (Mauss, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The state promoted governance practices hardly considered the historical existence of traditional institutions like *Choho*. The state is central to gradual disappearance of traditional institutions and the values they carry. At the same time, the state has been instrumental in expanding the external culture of governance. There exists non-alignment of the state mechanism and traditional collective practices that was particularly illustrated in the case of forest management where the state mechanism is found almost non-functioning. Going against the norms of the state, local communities have been resisting silently the state imposed local governance in managing community forests and schools. The continuing legacy of the traditional system gave the people in the local community the strength to resist the state. The resistance against the state is expressed not as an individual act but as a collective and autonomous act. The practice of souvenir exchange was there as one of the mechanisms for cohesive functioning of the society and the relationships among

community members. This practice was also instrumental to develop the culture of participatory governance. However, this practice of souvenir exchange relying on the value of respect and honour has gradually been converting into bribery based upon calculated gain as was illustrated in the local forest and school management. This shows the tension between modernity and traditional values in local communities.

REFERENCES

Acharya, K. K. (2018). Local governance restructuring in Nepal: From government to governmentality. *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 12*, 37-49.

Bhatta, P., Adhikari, L., Thada, M., & Rai, R. (2008). Structures of denial: Student representation in Nepal's higher education. *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, *13*(2), 235-263.

Bhattachan, K. (2002). *Traditional local governance in Nepal.* Paper presented at a national seminar on Strengthening Decentralization and Good Governance in Nepal organized by the Political Science Association of Nepal (POLSAN) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Kathmandu, Nepal.

Bhattachan, Y. K. (2007). Democracies in the indigenous organizations of Nepal. In B. N. Koirala, A. Khadka, & R. Khadka (Eds.), *Democratic indigenous practices of Nepal* (pp. 7-13). Kathmandu, Nepal: Nepal Center for Creative Research.

Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Central Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *National population and housing census 2011: National report.* Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Collins P., & Gallinat, A. (2010). The ethnographic self as resource: An introduction. In P. Collins & A. Gallinat (Eds.), *The ethnographic self as resource: Writing memory and experience into ethnography* (pp. 1-24). Oxford, England: Berghahn Books.

Dapilah, F., Bonye, S. Z., & Dawda, T. D. (2013). From conquerors to development partners: The changing roles of traditional authorities in local level development

and governance in Ghana. *Scottish Journal of Arts, Social Sciences and Scientific Studies, 11*(2), 3-16.

Day, G. (2006). *Community and everyday life.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Forsey, M. G. (2010). Ethnography as participant listening. *Ethnography, 11*(4), 558 - 572.

Government of Nepal. (2013). *Forest nationalization act 2013*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Government of Nepal. (2002). *Leasehold forest policy 2002*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Government of Nepal. (1995). *Forest rules 1995*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Government of Nepal. (1993). *Forest act 1993*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Government of Nepal. (1971a). *Education act 1971*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Government of Nepal. (1971b). *National education system plan 1971*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Holmberg, D. (2016). Tamang Lhochhar and new Nepal. In N. D. Gellner, L. S. Hausner, & C. Letizia (Eds.), *Religion, secularism, and ethnicity in contemporary Nepal* (pp. 302-325). New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

Holmberg, D. H. (1989). *Order in paradox: Myth, ritual, and exchange among Nepal's Tamang.* New Delhi, India: Totilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Khan, O. (2007). Policy, identity, and community cohesion: How race equality fits. In M. Wetherell, M. Lafleche, & R. Berkeley (Eds.), *Identity, ethnic diversity, and community cohesion* (pp. 40-58). London, England: Sage.

Kukuczka, A. (2011). Negotiating ethnic identity in the Himalaya. The Tamang in Nepal. *South Asia Chronicle, 1*, 393-437.

Levine, N. E. (1987). Caste, state, and ethnic boundaries in Nepal. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46(1), 71-88.

Macionis, J., & Parrillo, V. N. (2011). *Cities and urban life* (5th ed.). New Delhi, India:
    PHI Learning.

Mauss, M. (2002). *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies.*
    London, England: Routledge.

Murchison, J. (2010). *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting, and presenting
    your research*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Musharbash, Y. (2008). *Yuendumu everyday: Contemporary life in remote aboriginal
    Australia*. Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Non-Governmental Organization Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities.
    (2011). *Situation analysis of traditional local governance system (Choho Ghanba)
    of Tamang ethnic group.* Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.

Oppong, S. H. (2013). Migration and reconstruction of identity. *Asian Journal of
    Management Sciences and Education, 2*(2), 163-169.

Shrestha, N.R. (1997). *In the name of development: A reflection on Nepal.* Kathmandu:
    Educational Enterprise.

Stiller, F. L., S.J. and Yadav, R. P. (1979). *Planning for people*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi
    Prakashan

Tamang, M. S. (2009). Tamang activism, history, and territorial consciousness. In D. N.
    Gellner (Ed.), *Ethnic activism and civil society in South Asia* (pp. 269–290). New
    Delhi, India: Sage.

Tamang, P. (2003). *Customary law and conservation in the Himalaya: The case of Nepal.*
    Paper presented at the 5th World Parks Congress, Durban, South Africa.

Thapa, N. (2009). *Country profile of excluded groups of Nepal.* (Unpublished
    manuscript).

Whitehead, T. L. (2005). *Basic classical ethnographic research methods: Secondary data
    analysis, fieldwork, observation/participant observation, and informal and
    semi ̄structured interviewing.* Retrieved from
    http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/workingpapers/classicalethnomethods.pdf

Winkler Prins, A. M. G. A., & Souza, P. S. (2005). Surviving the city: Urban home
  gardens and the economy of affection in the Brazilian Amazon. *Journal of Latin
  American Geography, 4*(1), 107-126.

Zemach-Bersin, T. (2005). *Change in motion: Tradition, modernity, and a shifting
  Tamang identity*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Dharma Dhatu Foundation.