

Assessing the Impact of Modernization on Folk Traditions in Sikkim

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Abstract

This research article explores the impact of modernization on folk traditions in Sikkim, highlighting both the positive and negative effects, in a region known for its rich culture and diverse ethnic communities. As globalization and technological progress influence our daily lives, traditional customs face both challenges and transformations. Since folk traditions encompass a broad range of elements, it is beyond the scope of this research to examine every aspect of the folk heritage of Sikkim. Therefore, the research primarily focuses on musical traditions while also minorly covering other aspects like folk healing traditions and festivals in Sikkim. Utilising descriptive and explanatory approach, this study combines online surveys, musical content analysis, a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and observations of the researcher to evaluate the implications of these changes on cultural identity and traditional practices in the hills.

The findings reveals both positive and negative aspects of modernisation on the folk traditions of Sikkim. On the upside, there is enhanced cultural exchange and new economic opportunities, while on the downside, there is the risk of dilution of the authentic practices and diminishing community ties. Community- Based Efforts for Cultural Preservation are also highlighted. By analysis of these factors, the study highlights the necessity of balancing advancement with the safeguarding of cultural identity, calling for a deeper understanding of modernization's impact on Sikkim's folk traditions.

Keywords: Modernization, Folk Traditions, Sikkim, Globalization, Folk Music.

Introduction:

Sikkim, the second smallest state, is located in the northeast region of India, nested in the eastern Himalayas. Apart from its rich biodiversity, the state also reflects the legacy of diverse ethnic traditions. Sikkim is home to three major communities viz. Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali- each with its own rich and distinctive culture and traditions, including diverse aspects like music, dance, festivals, cultivation practices and crafts, showcasing the rich cultural diversity of the region. The Lepchas, believed to be the first inhabitants of Sikkim, practised animism. After 15th century, immigrants from Tibet known as Bhutias (Buddhist by faith)

settled in Sikkim which led to the amalgamation of two cultures (Choedon 2012). The Nepalese inhabited in huge numbers especially following the late 19th century, constituting about seventy five percent of the population by 1940s (Duff 2015).

Modernization is a global phenomenon that has affected societies worldwide, and Sikkim is no exception. Evolving from an agrarian to a modern society, Sikkim has witnessed a series of notable changes across multiple aspects, including its folk traditions. As folk traditions refer to the cultural practices, beliefs, and expressions that are passed from generation to generation within a community or a group. These traditions include music, dance, festivals, language, rituals and crafts that reflects the values and identity of a specific community. Conserving the global cultural heritage and supporting the cultural sectors has become more urgent in the face of modern challenges. UNESCO asserts that sustainable development is not achievable without a strong cultural element (UNESCO 2023). Research on socioeconomic development on a global level has produced two school of thoughts. One predicts the decline of traditional values, while the other school of thought believes in the persistence of traditional values despite modernisation, suggesting they are independent of economic conditions (Inglehart and Baker 2000). This contrasting thought are mirrored in the online survey conducted for this research, which will be discussed later. A case study on Modernization and Inheritance of Folk Beliefs in China argues that the folk beliefs are facing a major crisis of inheritance. While in the southeastern coastal areas, the trend of modernisation has helped some folk beliefs to gain widespread attention, especially among the youths (Liu, Huang and Li 2024). The findings from the online survey and numerous studies suggest that Modernisation has notably influenced the folk traditions of all communities in Sikkim.

Lepchas, the first inhabitants of Sikkim have received worldwide scholarly attention. They were first described as the ‘dying race’ by Arthur Foning in his book titled “Lepcha, my vanishing tribe”. Statements like “*Earlier the Lepcha used to have magical powers, now they are weak and Vanishing*” are commonly heard and read in Sikkim today (Bentley 2007). Bentley identifies three reasons for this perception- religion, demographic shifts and educational system. The article also highlights the roles of of active Lepcha associations like RMRT¹, RMROS² and MLAS³, in efforts to revitalise their traditions.

In a study on the folk music of Sikkim, Manger (2015) found that that 90.5 percent of the respondents from all the three major communities have witnessed significant changes in folk music resulting modern influences such as mass media, communication development and industrialization (Hydro Power projects). The study emphasises the initiatives taken by various communities to keep the deeply rooted traditions alive, suggesting greater involvement of Local T.V and Radio channels in telecasting folk programs and also the inclusion of folk music in the school curriculum. As modernization is an inevitable worldwide phenomenon, some communities utilising the modern elements have been able to preserve their folk traditions, although the originality of these traditions remains a concern. Similarly, a study on The Newars

¹ Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum

² Renjong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shezum

³ Mutanchi Lom Aal Shezum

of Sikkim also highlights the critical loss of language, culture, rituals and traditions. Nevertheless, with the governmental support and organisations like Sikkim Newah Guthi efforts have been made to help the Newar community to revive its cultural heritage (Shrestha 2015). Research on Sherpa's folk music also has provided some insightful information for this research, while many old songs have declined in the modern era, Sherpa Band Rewa played a crucial role in blending tradition with modernity (Sherpa 2021). The Limboo community's efforts to revive their ancient traditions through modern songs, and the adoption of contemporary instruments like the bugle and bagpiper in Naumati Baja or guitar and cajón in Nepali and Lepcha folk songs, further demonstrate this trend. The influence of improved sound technology is particularly evident in the evolution of modern folk music.

Modernization has also significantly impacted traditional healing practices in Sikkim. A shift in popular attitudes towards alternative healing methods has occurred, especially with the growing preference for allopathic medicine. Studies by Panda (2010) on health traditions in the Sikkim Himalayas and Hyam (2020), who explored traditional healers in Darjeeling and Sikkim, examine this change.

Additionally, this research utilises an analysis of various folk performances available on DD National Gangtok's YouTube channel to assess the impact of modernisation on performance as well as musicals aspect in folk music. Results show significant impact as various aspects of modern music elements and western instruments increasingly being included in these performances, as discussed in the findings section of the study. The research also identifies significant shifts in the way festivals are celebrated due to modernization.

In exploring the effects of modernization on folk traditions, key factors such as modern education, migration, urbanization, and industrialization are identified as significant forces of change. However, it is also crucial to acknowledge other dimensions of these phenomena that have led to increased awareness of folk traditions across Sikkim's communities. Consequently, the research highlights several community-driven initiatives, such as the MLA and Kanchendzonga Naumati Sangh, which have been actively engaged in revitalizing and preserving the traditions of their respective communities.

The research methodology incorporates Descriptive and Explanatory research design, utilising both primary and secondary data. Data was collected using Online Survey of 40 local respondents, Musical Content analysis, Census reports and review of relevant literature alongside the researcher's personal observation. The data collected was processed manually and categorised to support the research objectives.

Objectives:

1. To assess the impact of modernization on the folk traditions of Sikkim, with a primary focus on music, as well as traditional healing practices and festivals.
2. To explore the community-led initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing Sikkim's cultural heritage.

Historical Development of Sikkim:

Sikkim is a home for three communities: Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali. Lepchas were the earliest known inhabitants of the region, an indigenous group who practiced shifting cultivation and were animists by faith. They lived in relative isolation until the 15th century (Choedon 2012). From the 13th century onward, the Bhutias or Denjongpas, Tibetan immigrants began settling in Sikkim, a process that intensified over time (Gyaltzen 2022). These immigrants brought with them Tibetan Buddhism and cultural practices that profoundly influenced the Lepchas. Over generations, Lepchas started adopting the language, dress and religious practices of the Bhutias, fostering first cultural assimilation in Sikkim. The Bhutia influence was further reinforced with the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in 1642. The Chogyals, rulers of the Namgyal Dynasty, were of Tibetan origin and ruled Sikkim over three centuries, maintaining a centralised bureaucracy and administration. During their reign, Sikkim's ties with Tibet remained strong, with cross border communication, trade and religious exchanges shaped the Kingdom's political and cultural identity. This relationship lasted until the 1950s, when Tibet was annexed by the People's Republic of China, leading to a shift in geopolitical context of the state (Choedon 2012; Duff 2015; Shrestha 2015).

In 1817, Sikkim entered into a treaty with the British authorities, the Titalia Treaty, which marked the initiation of British political influence in the Kingdom and secured permanent presence by 1835, influencing the administration and trade. Motivated to expand the trade and infrastructure of the Kingdom, the Britishers encouraged massive immigration from Nepal, constituting about seventy five percent of the population by 1940s (Duff 2015). The influx of massive Nepali immigrants included Mangar, Gurung, Newar, Sherpa, Kami, Damai, Brahmins and Chettri etc. which resulted in significant cultural and religious differences. While the Bhutias and Lepchas adhered to Buddhism and Animism, the Nepali population brought Hinduism, also the Nepali language became the *lingua franca* of Sikkim. Through this process, Sikkim underwent a cultural shift, blending Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis.

Despite the dissimilarities in the cultural diaspora, Sikkim has historically been a model of peaceful coexistence. Today, Sikkim stands as a perfect example of "Unity in Diversity".

Modernization of Folk Traditions in Sikkim:

Daniel Lerner's book, *The Passing of Traditional Society* looks at modernisation as a global process and concludes that the traditional society is gradually disappearing as modernisation advances (Lerner 1958). As modernisation can be viewed through the lenses of structural transformation of the society and cultural changes. The process of modernisation began because of Colonisation in India, which was the first encounter of India's traditional Society with the modernising west (Mitra and Abhinaya n.d.). The Rulers of Namgyal Dynasty, the Chogyals, were also influenced by the British political officers. As Duff (2015) highlights, the royal lifestyle reflected western modern practices, like having morning tea in bed and enjoying family meals in the dining room for with breakfast, lunch and dinner. The last Chogyal, Thondup Namgyal, is noted for having adopted modern hobbies such as riding and listening to Beethoven and Mozart on his gramophone. Despite coming from a traditional Buddhist background, he even married an American Woman, Hope Cooke. From these instances it is safe to assume that

modernisation in Sikkim was also strongly influenced by the colonisers. Choedon (2012) notes that while effort towards modernisation and development were initiated under the guidance of Indian government in 1954, it was the merger of Sikkim in 1975 that significantly accelerated this process leading to rapid expansion of services, businesses, and the industrial sector, creating numerous job opportunities. This expansion also attracted both the businessmen and investors from various parts of India, referred as ‘plainmen’ further diversified the culture in Sikkim.

“Modernity gives energy to tradition”. As the term modernisation refers to the transformation of the traditional into a progressively current one and tradition comprises of beliefs and customs which are passed on from one generation to another. Tradition and modernity work dialogically, they are interconnected. In other words, modernisation is the new version of tradition (Kaur 2018).

Sikkim’s folk traditions, which encompass a wide range of Music, Dance, Festivals, Rituals, Language and Crafts, have been integral to the identity of the Sikkimese people for generations. However, like many regions around the world, the folk traditions of Sikkim are undergoing a process modernisation. This transition is fuelled by Globalisation, technological advancements, Urbanisation, and Changing Social Dynamics. There is no doubt that modernisation has brought numerous benefits in terms of economic development, education, and connectivity, it also poses significant challenges to the preservation of traditional cultural practices. Findings reveal both negative and positive implications of modernisation with respect to the folk traditions of Sikkim.

Most studies on the communities and folk traditions of Sikkim have emphasised the impact of modernisation, often citing it as the primarily challenge to the sustainability of folk traditions. With ongoing infrastructural developments, Sikkim is no longer an isolated kingdom. Even the most remote villages have experienced significant transformation due to improved connectivity and communication.

Modernization of Traditional Folk Music:

Manger (2015) on highlighting the influence of modernisation in folk music of Sikkim concludes the current musical landscape is in a contradictory stage. The growing influence of western music is evident in local music shops, where guitars, keyboards and drums dominate, with folk instruments being rarely found. This trend reflects the commercial focus of these businesses which aim to meet the demands of customers, while musicians adapt to the taste of their audiences, ultimately mirroring the broader musical atmosphere in Sikkim. The study reveals that 90.5 percent of respondents across various ethnic groups have noticed significant changes in the folk music. The rise of modern mass media, education and communication, as by-products of Modernisation, are seen as major threats to the survival of folk traditions.

As Inglehart and Baker (2000) highlight, in highly developed societies, people opt for foreign restaurants to taste new delicacies, spending significant amounts of money and travel long hours to experience exotic cultures. Tourism, closely linked to modernity, has become a significant source of Sikkim’s revenue and has played a key role in preserving and promoting

the folk culture of the local communities (Manger 2015). Research conducted on Music in Tourism Industry in Sikkim (2022) notes that tourism has played a pivotal role in preservation of folk culture in Sikkim. In particular, homestays have seen a higher demand for folk music and dance performances over live music shows featuring Hindi and Nepali pop songs. The study suggests that live music does not align well with the peaceful atmosphere of homestays. While live performances can attract tourists, it's crucial to also recognize the positive impact on local artists and folk traditions. Tourists have shown appreciation for the authenticity, purity, and sincerity of folk songs.

Ethnomusicological Study on Folk Music and Folk tradition among the Limboos in Sikkim (Panday 2021) highlights that the Limboo community views modern music positively, as long as it helps preserve their culture and traditions, whether through music or other forms. The Limboos are open to the evolution of their folk traditions, from music and dance to marriage and death rituals. The study also highlights how contemporary Limboo artists, like Sunita Thegim and Asha Hang Angbo, have adopted traditional music by incorporating modern effects on their vocals as well as the accompanying instruments like Machunga and Sarangi. Asha Hng Angbo, in particular, believes fusion as the key to preserving folk music. Additionally, scholar argues that it is through fusion of folk music with modern influences and the commercialisation of these traditional forms that has fostered folk consciousness among younger generations.

The online survey reveals that 69.2% of participants are familiar with their community's folk traditions, while 30.8% have a moderate level of awareness. In terms of participation, 76.9% of respondents engage in folk events occasionally, with 15.4% attending frequently and 7.7% participating very often.

Subba's (2021) article on Modern Limboo Songs emphasises the immense contribution of Padmashree B B Muringla in popularising modern Limboo music. His first modern song, "*Yakthungsa ga keywaye aatikemoye* (meaning "You were born as Limboo but where have you Vanished?"), released in the 1980s had a profound impact on young singers. This sparked the creation of numerous Modern limbo songs that have gained massive recognition among the younger audiences. As per the scholar, the movement to modernise Limboo music began in Sikkim and later spread to Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Assam and the eastern parts of Nepal. It also highlights that the standards of modern limbo songs have been elevated in recent times, bringing them on par with Nepali pop music.

Manger's (2020) study on the Damai community highlights that most Damai respondents, known for their hereditary role as musicians in the Nepali community, are now engaged in agriculture and tailoring. As younger generations have pursued education, very few are inclined to follow the traditional musical profession due to both socio-economic factors and changing social perceptions. Agricultural practices have shifted, with an increased focus on cash crops like cardamom and ginger, rather than staple crops such as rice. This, along with the introduction of modern agricultural technologies in Sikkim, has contributed to the decline of the Naumati Baja, an instrument traditionally played during the rice cultivation season in paddy fields. Furthermore, advancements in sound technology have led to the replacement of the

Naumati Baja by electronic sound systems, which are seen as a more affordable option in modern times.

The study also notes that traditional Damai aerophones, such as the Narsingha and Shnai, which require rigorous training to master, have become rare. In their place, Western instruments like the Bagpiper and Bugle have been adopted, primarily to attract audience attention and to make the music more compatible with modern ensembles. Damai musicians, who once performed during rice cultivation and marriage ceremonies, are now invited to play at political events and tourist festivals to honour guests.

Additionally, the study highlights the significant decline in the number of ragas used by the Damai community. Of the original thirty-six ragas, each with its unique cultural importance, only a few remain, and many are on the brink of extinction. This reduction in the variety of ragas may contribute to the perceived monotony and unappealing nature of the music in contemporary times.

Folk traditions, particularly in music, have evolved significantly in the modern era. As mentioned earlier, an analysis of folk music performances shows that traditional elements are being blended with modern influences. Folk artists now incorporate Western instruments into their performances, and folk fusion bands like Sofiyum are gaining widespread recognition through social media, which has also provided them with economic opportunities. This shift is evident in Sikkim, where artists like Bipul Chettri, Sujan Chapagain and Arko Mukherjee, who blend Nepali folk elements with contemporary music, have received a large and dedicated fanbase. Some respondents noted that modern technology has made it easier to learn folk music and play traditional instruments, with platforms like YouTube offering valuable resources for self-learning. These points highlight positive impact of modernisation on the folk culture of the state.

A study on Sherpa Folk Music (2021) highlights concerns over the erosion of Sherpa culture, primarily due to urbanization and technological advances. Rewa, a member of the Sherpa folk band, reflects on the shift from traditional cultural events to more contemporary performance settings, which has led the band to gain national recognition. The scholar views Rewa Band as a bridge between traditional and modern Sherpa society. However, a senior Sherpa musician argues that modern songs lack the authenticity and essence of traditional music, which was historically passed down by elders and mirrored the values of a society based on centralized authority. In earlier times, Sherpa music was predominantly accompanied by the *danyen*, a traditional stringed instrument. Today, however, modern instruments like the guitar have become more common in contemporary compositions. The study also notes that the transformation of Sherpa traditions is linked to changes in lifestyle, as folk practice are linked to the natural environment, it has been reshaped by urbanization and modernization. Despite these changes, technology has played a role in preserving and promoting Sherpa folk music. Platforms like social media have helped bands like Rewa Band gain recognition and reach wider audiences. Yet, a significant barrier to the continuity of folk music is the shift in language. As Nepali has become the lingua franca in Sikkim, many urban Sherpas have lost contact with

their native language, which is integral to their cultural identity. This linguistic shift has contributed to the decline of other traditions, including folk music.

The lack of appreciation for traditional folk music among modern youth can likely be attributed to the significant changes in life contexts. In an increasingly fast-paced and competitive world, the themes and lyrics of older folk songs no longer resonate with younger generations. Considering the Limboo community's ongoing modernization efforts, it would be a valuable initiative to adapt the context of folk songs to reflect a more contemporary perspective, while still preserving their original essence. Although modern instruments have been incorporated into folk music in recent times, the lyrics have not been given the same attention when it comes to revitalization. However, this task is achievable, provided there is a strong command of the traditional languages of the community. Such an approach could help revive the traditional folk music of various communities across Sikkim, ensuring its relevance to current and future generations.

Music Content Analysis

This study also includes an analysis of several folk music performances available on DD Gangtok's YouTube channel. One notable performance is a Nepali folk song by Bimla Pradhan and Dipika Diyali (Fig.1), which blends both traditional and modern elements. The performance features traditional folk instruments such as the Madal, Basuri, and Sarangi, alongside Western instruments like the Clapper, Mandolin, and Harmonium, thereby adding a contemporary dimension to the traditional folk music. Additionally, the musical arrangement incorporates Western techniques, including harmonization and solo interludes, further enhancing the fusion of styles. Similar elements are present in other performances of Nepali folk songs, such as those by Anjali Pradhan and Sangita Ghatani, as well as Uttam Pradhan and Narayan Rai.

The Lepcha folk music performance (Fig.2) by Padmashree Hildamit Lepcha) exclusively showcased traditional elements, featuring only the authentic instruments of the Lepcha community, such as Tung-Buk, Po-Patake, Sut-Saang and Pathongpalit, among others.

Sofiyum, a Lepcha fusion band based in Gangtok, exemplifies the integration of folk traditions with modern and Western musical elements (Fig.3). The band's performances blend traditional Lepcha music with contemporary influences, gaining significant global recognition, particularly among youth, as evidenced by their dedicated YouTube channel with millions of views on several tracks. While modernization has often been cited as a threat to the preservation of folk music in various studies, the efforts of Sofiyum demonstrate a successful fusion that should not be overlooked. The band's performances, including at notable events such as TEDxChennai, highlight its role in revitalizing Lepcha folk music. Sofiyum has emerged as a beacon of hope for the preservation of endangered Lepcha musical traditions and serves as an inspiration for other communities to explore similar innovative approaches to cultural preservation.



Fig. 1 Nepali folk song. Source: DDK Gangtok.



Fig. 2 Lepcha Folk Music. Source: DDK Gangtok.



Fig. 3 Sofiyum. Source: DDK Gangtok.

Impact of Modernisation on Traditional Healing Practices:

For centuries, Sikkim remained an isolated region, and before the onset of modernisation, Shamanism played a central role in the healing process, particularly in addressing physical ailments and psychological disorders. Each community had their own shamans: The Lechas had the Bongthing and Mun, Pawo and Nejum of the Bhutias and Jhakri and Mata of the Nepalis (Denjongpa, 2022). The traditions of Folk healing in Sikkim, which encompass recitation of mantras, herbal remedies, songs and dance, collectively known as Shamanism, have undergone significant transformations in the process of modernisation. According to the ethnographic research by Doctor Hyam (2020) on Traditional healers in Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim, Nepali traditional healers, referred to as *Jhakris* are often referred to as “tantrikas” and are commonly looked down upon as greedy scam artists, using questionable methods that make them untrustworthy. This is considered as a part of larger cultural discussion which is in vogue in South Asia, where Tantra is frequently associated with scandal, eroticism, moral corruption and danger. In the modern context, however, Jhakris

believe that allopathic medicines and western biomedical treatments are most effective when combined with traditional folk healing practices.

The Rai and Limbu communities in Sikkim have successfully maintained their shamanistic traditions, especially in rural regions. Although they primarily identify as Hindus, they continue to include shamanistic rituals in death and matrimonial ceremonies.

A study by Panda (2010) on the health traditions of the Sikkim Himalayas found that folk healing practices are declining, despite the availability of 490 medicinal plants in the region. Study concludes that only 8.32% of them being between the ages of 20 and 40, while most are over 60 years old. As modern society is increasingly switching to allopathic medicine, only 8% of folk healers earn more than 9,000 rupees per month. Economic pressures have led many to abandon their traditional practices in search of better financial opportunities, and 58.33% of folk healers have not passed on their knowledge. However, the rise of NGOs and AYUSH in Sikkim has brought about a noticeable shift in the socioeconomic status of folk healers. The Rai and Limbu communities in Sikkim have managed to preserve their shamanistic traditions, particularly in rural areas. While they identify as Hindus, they continue to integrate shamanistic rituals into death ceremonies, even if they do not incorporate them into other religious practices.

Impact of Modernization on Festivals:

Traditional festivals are integral to Sikkim's cultural heritage, each holding significant value for its respective communities. Some of the major traditional festivals of Sikkim include Maghe Sankranti, Sonam Lochar, Losar, Sakewa, Saga Dawa, Tendong Lho Rum Fat, Indra Jatra, Dasain and Tihar. However, with the influence of modernization, these festivals have evolved over time. The increasing migration of workers from places like Bihar, Bengal and other areas, festivals such as Holi and Chat Puja have gained popularity in Sikkim. Additionally, the rise of Western cultural influences, fuelled by of social media and influencers, have led to the increasing celebration of Halloween among the youth in the past couple of years.

For the Nepali community, Dasain used to be a time for new clothes and special foods, but with the emergence of numerous restaurants and online shopping platforms, the excitement around food and clothing has diminished, as people now regularly shop online and dine out. Moreover, traditional activities like flying kites and playing on the lingey ping (a traditional bamboo and rope swing) have become rare sights in Sikkim, reflecting the shifting cultural landscape. Although the tradition of playing Deusi and Bhailo during Tihar has been practiced in Sikkim for generations, the true essence of these customs seems to be fading. Today, modern songs are often performed, and instruments like the guitar and tambourine have replaced traditional ones like the Sarangi and Madal. It is also noteworthy that people from non-Nepali communities are increasingly participating in these traditions, reflecting a cross-cultural bond.

A study on Newars of Sikkim (2015) highlights the transformation of festivals among the Newari Communities. Although major festivals like Dasain, Tihar and Indrajatra are celebrated, several traditional festivals like Mha Puja, Panjaram and Gathammugah have fallen out of practice. Additionally, animal sacrifices in festivals and rituals have been replaced by

vegan offerings like fruits or coconuts, in the modern era. The Wearing of white for an entire year as a sign of mourning for a departed family member has also become a rare practice in Sikkim. Along with rituals and traditions, Shrestha also highlights the decline of the Newar language among the community.

Some festivals in Sikkim have been reduced to a one-day event, while others have become more about recreation due to the demands of busy lifestyles. While festivals once centred around community participation, they have now become more of a private affair, with celebrations confined to intimate family gatherings rather than broader community involvement.

Impact of Religious Conversion:

Religious conversion can be seen because of modernisation, though it is influenced by various factors. Economic challenges, such as the inability to provide education for children, have often been attributed to religious conversions in Sikkim. Additionally, as modernisation includes advancements in education, higher levels of learning may lead people to question their inherited religious beliefs or embrace new ideologies that promise a personal or collective development. The spread of Christianity has been closely associated with the acceptance of western or foreign ideas and practices. Furthermore, as societies evolve, certain religious practices may seem irrelevant to the modern individual. Thus, religious conversions can be considered as closely linked to the process of modernisation. Most studies on the communities and folk traditions of Sikkim have emphasised the impact of modernisation, often citing it as the primary challenge to the sustainability of folk traditions. With ongoing infrastructural developments, Sikkim is no longer an isolated kingdom. Even the most remote villages have experienced significant transformation due to improved connectivity and communication.

Bentley's (2007) research on Lepchas of Sikkim highlights three major factors contributing to the erosion of their cultural identity: Religion conversion, Labour and immigration and education. The modern scenario of Lepchas in Sikkim is such that they identify themselves as Buddhists, despite their original animist faith. With the influence of Buddhism, some traditional beliefs like animal sacrifices are no longer included in their rituals. Additionally, funeral rites have shifted from burials to cremation, reflecting Buddhist influence. A significant concern among the Lepchas has been the rise of Christianity, as Christian Lepchas do not attend religious ceremonies and refrain from the traditional beliefs. A similar issue of religious conversion is highlighted in a study by Mangar (2020) on the Damai Community in Sikkim, where conversions have significantly impacted the demand for Naumati Baja. Shrestha (2015) also notes Christian Newar refrain from traditional practices.

The census reports of 2001 and 2011 highlight significant increase in the Christian population, rising by 67.5 % from 36,115 in 2001 to 60,522 in 2011, outnumbering both Buddhism and Hinduism in growth. This shift has raised concerns among the indigenous tribes (Table 1). The rise in conversions has been attributed to economic conditions. Bentley (2007) suggest that Buddhist Funeral rites can be monetarily draining as it involves long processions.

Additionally, Manger (2020) also states Poverty and Alcoholism as major factors contributing to the conversions within the Damai families in Sikkim leading to massive conversion.

Table 1: Population by Religious Community in Sikkim

Religion population	2001	2011	PC increase
Hindu	3,29,548	3,52,662	7.01
Muslim	7,693	9,867	28.2
Christian	36,115	60,522	67.5
Sikh	1,176	1,868	58.8
Buddhist	1,52,042	1,67,216	9.9
Jain	183	314	71.5
Other religion and persuasions	12,926	16,300	26.1
Religion not stated	1,168	1,828	56.5

Source: Computed from Census of India (2001 & 2011)

Impact of Modern Education:

As industrial society is the key element of a modern society, the level of education and skill determines the occupational choices and employment opportunities. As per the reports from 2011 census Sikkim has shown a significant rise in literacy rate of 88.2% as compared to 68.81% in 2001. Even the rural literacy rate is 79.82%, it stands higher than national rural literacy rate being 68.91% (Census,2011).

The advancement of modern education across Sikkim has been attributed to the decline of folk traditions. While some believe that educated children can benefit the community by obtaining secure jobs, others voice concerns about the impact of migration to urban areas for education. Moving from Rural life contact with the language, oral traditions and agricultural practices are lost. Bentley (2007) observes that young members of the Lepcha community more interested in engaging with media than in listening to the traditional stories of elders, once shared around the kitchen fire while sipping local beer. This shift in interest is seen as a key factor contributing to the decline of Lepcha culture.

In a broader context, these observations are not limited to the Lepcha community but are relevant to other concerned communities as well. Online surveys conducted for this research reflect similar trends, with 76.9% of respondents believe that younger generations are losing interest in folk traditions. While Bentley's 2007 study provides valuable insights, it is important to recognize that Sikkim has experienced significant advancements in both education and mass media since then. In the current era of 5G technology, where access to information is nearly instantaneous, the landscape has shifted further. Additionally, the rise of social media and streaming platforms has had an impact, with 61.5% of respondents believing that technology fosters greater engagement with folk traditions, 23.1% observing a decline, and 15.4% noting no discernible effect.

Community- Based Efforts for Cultural Preservation:

In examining the impact of modernization on various folk traditions, we identified key factors such as modern education, migration, urbanization, and industrialization as major drivers of change. However, it is equally important to recognize other aspects of these phenomena that have contributed to an increased awareness of folk traditions across communities in Sikkim. In recent years, several community-based initiatives have emerged as powerful forces in revitalizing and preserving the folk traditions of their respective communities in the modern era. Based on the results of Online survey, 92.3% emphasize the importance of community involvement in preserving traditions.

Some of the prominent active organizations involved in this effort include: RMRT (Main Lepcha Association), RMROS, Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association (Rey, Mindu & Timpyang Branch) and MLAS of the Lepcha community. These organisations are engaged in organising various ritual ceremonies like Tendong Lho Rum Fat and also engaged in promoting Lepcha language and Literature. These associations have become the keepers of traditions as well as promoters of Change in Modernity (Bentley 2007, Thapa 2015).

The Kanchandzonga Numati Sanstha, run by Damai Community has been organising various workshops since 2007 to impart training and knowledge among the younger generations across sikkim. Furthermore, Kedhar Bardewa of Nampok is also worth mentioning as he has been successfully organising free workshops at local level (Manger 2020).

Sikkim Newar Guthi established in 1995 has also been working tirelessly towards reviving Newari culture in Sikkim by Organising Festivals like Indrajatra and Kwati Purnima on a massive scale. They have successfully been working in promoting their language across state by establishment of Institute of Newar language and Culture (Shrestha 2015).

Results of Online Survey:

An online survey conducted with 40 local respondents in Sikkim (ages 18–44) reflects the state of folk traditions and their relationship with modernization (shown in Fig 5). The survey findings shows that majority of the total respondents are highly aware of their community's folk traditions, while some have moderate awareness. In terms of engaging in traditional events, a larger percentage of the total respondents occasionally participate while a smaller percentage attends frequently, and a small number are very often involved. Considering the impacts of modernization in folk traditions, over half the surveyed respondents agree that the negative impacts were more obvious while some acknowledges the beneficial effects. A very minor percentage of the respondents were not able to determine the impacts on folk traditions. The survey reflected the highly affected elements of folk traditions, ranking festivals as the most influenced element, followed by music and dance as shown in Fig 4. The respondents believed that public participation is the key to preserving folk traditions. Almost 70 percent of the total respondents favour community engagement initiatives for preserving folk traditions, while some advocate education and awareness program, and others showed the importance of documentation and archiving and the need for government support. Given the rapidly advancing state of technology, a greater proportion of the surveyed respondents believe

that technology plays a significant role in conservation of folk traditions while others believe that technology reduces the interest of people to folk traditions. A tiny proportion believe that the impact of technology is neutral. Additionally, most of the respondents stress the value of community involvement in maintaining folk traditions as younger generations are becoming less interested in folk practices which is reflected in the survey.

Respondents expressed mixed views on modernization's impact, with some traditions successfully adapting, while others are at risk of fading. Many highlighted the need for a balance between modernization and tradition, and the urgency of preserving community-based practices, such as dance and music, which are in danger of disappearing without active efforts.

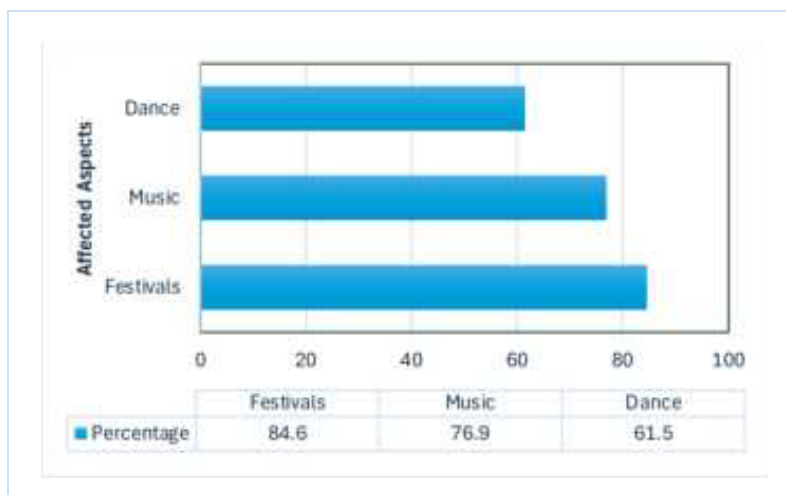
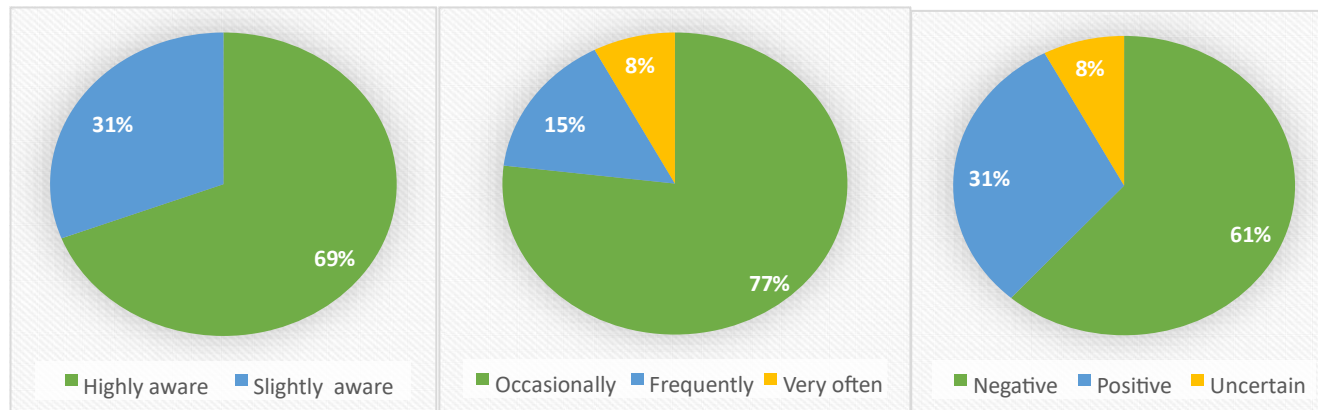


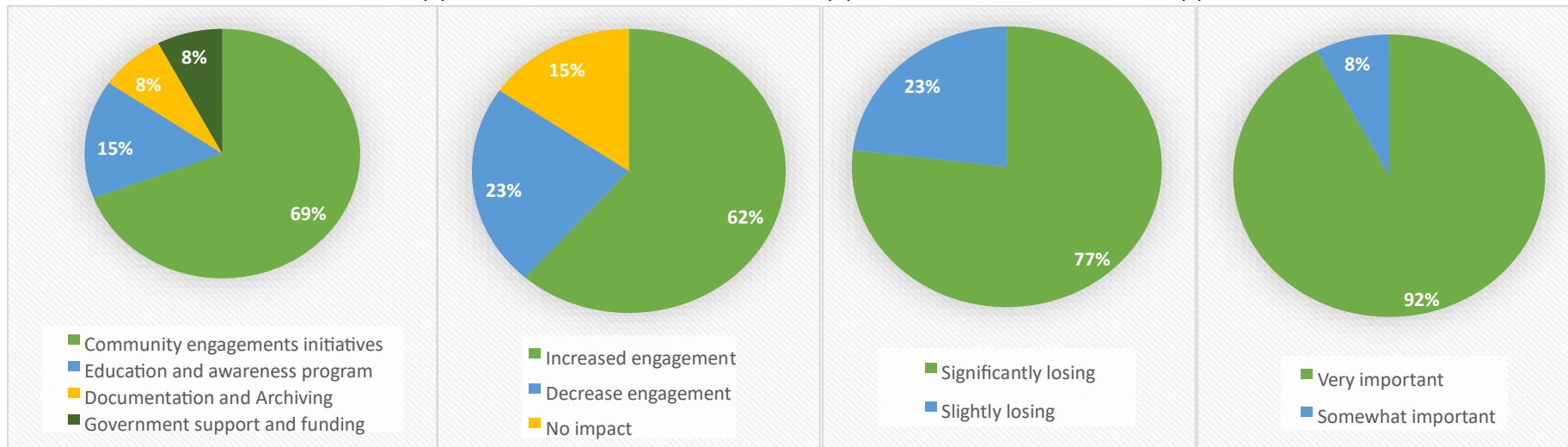
Fig 4. Most affected aspects by modernisation. Source: Online Survey



(a)

(b)

(c)



(d)

(e)

(f)

(g)

Fig. 5 (a) Awareness, (b) Participation, (c) Impact of Modernization, (d) Preservation methods, (e) Role of Technology, (f) Generational Shifts, and (g) Community Participation

Conclusion:

As modernisation in rise, this research accesses the impact of modernization on Sikkim's folk traditions, focusing on music, festivals, and folk healing practices. It examines how urbanization, industrialization, and technological advancements challenge traditional practices while also offering opportunities for cultural adaptation. While some communities, like the Limboos, have embraced modern influences through bands such as Sofiyum and Rewa, others face a decline in their traditions.

The study finds that modernization has significantly transformed folk music and festivals, with mass media, industrialization, and technology playing key roles. Some communities have adapted by integrating modern instruments, blending tradition with contemporary styles, and using digital platforms for cultural preservation. Survey results highlight a strong awareness and occasional participation in folk traditions among respondents, with a majority expressing concern over the negative impact of modernization, particularly on festivals, music, and dance.

Community engagement is widely viewed as the most effective method for preserving these traditions. Initiatives, such as those by the MLA and Kanchendzonga Naumati Sangh are vital in revitalizing and safeguarding local traditions. Ultimately, the study calls for a balanced approach, where modernization and tradition coexist, ensuring the survival of Sikkim's rich cultural heritage.

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