

**Building network among the Gandharba communities of
Nepal for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Safeguarding**

Cultural Partnership Initiative

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Abstract

Gandharba, also written Gandharva or Gaine is one of the musician communities of Nepal. This community has their own unique culture, musical instruments, music, traditions, festivals, language, rituals and social practices perpetuated from their forefathers. Long before the postal networks and the use of electronic communications in Nepal, the musicians of this unique community would roam all over the nation to spray the news in the form of songs and music. The Gandharba were the sole entertainer and the information disseminator of the numerous isolated communities across the mountains of Nepal. Thus they are also wknown as the messenger of the nation. But due to the Modernization, Urbanization, Socio-economic challenges, limited Education and other changes seen in the society; the present status of the Gandharba community's identity and the intangible cultural heritage is at risk. The outcome of this research have identified the major challenges of the survival of the community's identity and possible solution and suggestion for building effective networking system among the Gandharba communities of Nepal to confront the challenges and to support, revitalize, reconstruct and safeguard their intangible cultural heritage and their identity in a long run.

Background

Nepal, a country of South Asia, located in between of India and southwest China, is a home of multiple languages, cultures, traditions, rituals, and the festivals. Based on the National Census Report of 2011, Nepal has more than 100 ethnic

caste/groups each with its own and unique culture with 123 spoken languages. Among them, the Gandharba or Ganie is one of a community which is known as the musician community of Nepal. The Gandharbas of Nepal are known as the hereditary musician and have been taking part in singing and playing *sarangi* and *arbajo* (The musical instruments) over centuries. Long before the broadcast media the musicians would travel from one place to another, playing their lively music and spreading news; making themselves the messengers of the nation. Gandharbas were and still are the conveyers of news and messages from times long past. They traveled the length and breadth of the country to convey messages from people and kings and their heroic deeds in the form of songs.

The Gandharbas are a treasure of oral history and literature, little recognized in Nepal or abroad. Although their songs are unique to Nepal, the appeal of their sound and spirit cross caste and nation boundaries. Although a few of them have to earned fame and success, generally the Gandharba struggle to sustain their families and maintain their traditional identity, which is found in most evidently in their music. (Spray A. Stephanie, 2003)

The repertory of songs sung by Gandharba with their musical instruments are various and broad. The songs sung to the audience include folk songs, devotional songs, love songs, historical songs and the songs of human struggles, life and death. And various other songs of love, humor, satire, ritual ceremony, gender equality, festivals and so on which were created by the Gandharbas. Moreover, the Gandharbas also sing in favor of social awareness, peace building, and social development and of unity.

It is said that Gandharba played a significance role in favor of King Prithivi Narayan Shah during the unification of Nepal in 1744 – 1815 AD. Though there is no concrete evidence to claim that it referred to the Gandharbas. But the name of Maniram Gaine has been listed as one of the members of the army of King Prithivi Narayan Shah during his attack on Nuwakot (Naraharinath, 1965:357). However the *Tarbar Naach* (the sword dance) of Gandharba community demonstrates an evidence of Gandharbas involvement in the unification process where the dance signifies the battle in the act.

Gandharva who are generally known as Gaine or singers are the living messengers of folk music and art. They are not only players of *sarangi* and *arbajo*,

(musical instruments) or signers of folk songs or *Karkha*, or performers of *Mangal Dhun* (music to bless somebody); they are also messengers, communicators, singers etc. Through their performance of *Karkha*, *Sawai*, a narration of events, they have, to a great extent, kept alive a lost history. Under the traditional Hindu caste system they belong to one of the lowest strata and consequently have been victims of social, cultural, economic and political discrimination. (Gandharba folklore and folklife (2009:9)

The Gandharvas are mentioned in both Hindu and Buddhist religious text. They are described as a winged musician of the gods and also a messenger of gods and humans.

In Hinduism, the Gandharvas are male nature spirits, husbands of the *Apsaras* (heavenly nymph). Some are part animal, usually a bird or horse. They have superb musical skills. They guarded the soma (medicine) and made beautiful music for the gods in their palaces. Gandharvas are frequently depicted as singers in the court of Gods. Gandharvas act as messengers between the gods and humans.



Gandharva (right) with an Apsara, 10th century, Cham, Vietnam (copied from Wikipedia)

In Buddhism, Gandharvas can fly through the air, and are known for their skill as musicians. They are connected with trees and flowers, and are described as

dwelling in the scents of bark, sap and blossom. They are among the beings of the wilderness that might disturb a monk meditating alone.

Despite this religious and historical fact of Gandharbas, the Gandharba community is a marginalized and vulnerable community in Nepal. They are not only dominated or exploited by the so-called upper caste but also given a so-called social tag and term “Dalit” (perceived lowest member of the society). The contributions of Gandharbas in the Nepalese folk culture are barely recognized in the past. They were never given any respect; rather they were treated as a second human being in the society.

Despite their sacred and historic contributions, Gandharbas, the mediators/messengers and preservers of the oral tradition of Nepal, are socially degraded as an untouchable group and marginalized in the mainstream culture. Gandharvas were kept at the lowest strata in the Nepali social hierarchy. After the execution of the *Muluki Ain*, the Civil Act, little attention was being paid to the Gandharvas. (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:26),

The Gandharbas are known with various surnames: *Gaine, Gayak, Ranjan, Gandhari, Baikar, Nepali* and many other surnames which are similar to other ethnic groups. According to the census data of 1991 the total population of the Gandharbas was 4,484 (0.04 percent of the total population) which increased to 5,887 in the census of 2001 to 0.03 percent of the total population with a literacy rate of 46.86 percent. Gandharbas dwell in 69 districts in Nepal, more dominantly in *Dang* (496) *Kaski* (376), *Chitwan* (295), *Pyuthan*(275), *Gulmi*(242), *Surkhet*(230) and *Tanahun*(209). (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:27)

Literature Review

The ICH always has been a great value for every nation, every individual, every group, and for every community as it has become a part of their life and their identity. Similarly, the ICH of the Gandharba community also has its own value and richness which has given a unique identity and the life to this community in Nepal. Scholars both Nepalese and foreigner have carried out the studies on the Gandharbas of Nepal in different time and context. Some of these studies, as they are relevant to the Gandharba cultural heritage are discussed below.

The popular magazine *Danphechari* has the Gandharba folk songs and folklores. A. Bake in 1956 wrote the Gandharba in Nepal and then MacDonald studied the Gandharba in 1961 in Kathmandu and in 1967 in *Salyan* districts. Focusing on their profession of singing and playing the *Sarangi*, he has analyzed Gandharba life, their community and its impact in Nepalese society. In 1969 Professor Tulasi Diwasa had collected various forms of Gandharba folksongs including *karkha*, *lok rag*, *teeje*, *chanchari*, *chutke*, *laske*, *jhaure*, and *lahure*. An article entitled “*Batulechaurka Gandharba Jatika Avastha*” (The Situation of the Gandharbas of Batulechaur) published in 1980 by Keshab Prasad sharma and articles by Dhurba K.C. and Surya Ratna Shakya have provided more information on the social and economic situation of the Gandharbas. In 1988 the book *Gandharba Samajma Paribartanko Prabaha* by Hari Prasad Shrestha was published. He published his research work on the social and cultural behavior of the Gandharba. Many papers were presented on the first Sarangi day celebration in which the paper presented by Raj Kumar Gandharba (2003) was the first paper written on Gandharba culture by a Gandharba person. Imai Fumiko (2002) from Japan and Spray A. Stephanie (2003) from USA wrote about the Gandharba for their doctoral thesis. The book *Gandharba Sanskriti Ra Sangeet*(The Gandharba culture and Music) by Purna Nepali (2003) is regarded a remarkable work published so far on about Gandharba. Bikram Sherchan (2007) Master’s degree thesis entitled, *Regenerating Musicians (Motivation for Identity Reconstruction among the Gandharbas)* also a remarkable research on about Gandharbas of Gotheri, Tanahun district.

In this way, the studies and research carried out about the Gandharba up to now have provided a lot of information and analysis of various aspects of the life, art, skills, culture, and society of Gandharbas of Nepal. The above stated studies have their own value in terms of their plan and objectives. The changing time and situation brought vast changes in the lifestyle of the Gandharbas in which we can see massive changes in the ICH and its continuity. Though there are lots of studies have been done on about Gandharba music, songs, culture and traditions in the past, but no studies yet have found and tried to consider about building network among the Gandharba communities of Nepal for ICH safeguarding. And no studies have found the reason behind of diminishing of Gandharba’s ICH, ICH safeguarding challenges, and the possible solution to preserve and safeguard it so far. So, this paper mainly emphasizes on building network among the Gandharba communities of Nepal, as a tool to confront the challenges and to safeguard their ICH.

Research Methodology

As a member of this community I am very much attached with the culture, traditions, language, songs, music and the lifestyles of Gandharba community. I have been simply experiencing, observing and analyzing the Gandharba community's ICH very closely and deeply since I was born. To be more accurate and precise on collecting information and data for this research paper, the qualitative techniques of research have been applied.

The semi-structured interview methods with questionnaires have been used in the research paper. The modern social media; Facebook Messenger, Skype, Email and Phone Call are used for the interview. While collecting data and information, more than twenty individual Gandharba people representing various Gandharba communities' settlements: *Tanahun, Lamjung, Kaski, Chitwan, Dang, Gorkha and Kathmandu* (name of districts) have been selected. I made a good connection with some Gandharba musical groups and other several musical bands to gather the information for my research paper.

I collected the information from relevant publications: magazines, books, research papers, surfing reliable websites as a secondary research methods. For my better understanding, I even made a good connection with Nepalese and foreign researchers who had had their research on about Gandharba previously.

Introduction: Network, Gandharba community and ICH Safeguarding

The term “network” generally means to interconnect the people or things together. It is a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having common interest. Networking is a matter of creating useful linkage both within and among communities, organizations and societies, in order to mobilize resources and achieve various goals. It is also a tool that can also be used to meet new people who can be of help to us and we may be able to help them.

The term “community” is itself a broad concept. The UNESCO 2003 convention has defined the communities as: “Cultural groups and individuals continue to value, practice, nurture, and transmit the vitality of forms of traditional knowledge, skills and expressive culture that embody their identities—as long as these practices do not impinge on essential human rights”.

In the paper the “Gandharba communities” refer to the group of people inhabitant in various places in Nepal, having traditional musical instruments *sarangi* and *arbajo* and have been taking part in playing it and singing while making themselves a messenger of the nation over centuries. The community member who are relying on to sustain their life playing these instruments and travelling throughout the nation to entertain, to exchange the joy and woe and to disseminate the news and the information through songs and music with every single Nepalese are known as the Gandharba or the Gandharba community of Nepal.

According to the UNESCO 2003 convention, “the intangible cultural heritage” (ICH) means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated there with – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”. As stated in the 2003 convention:

“Safeguarding means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.”

The Gandharba is one of a community of Nepal with having entire domains of ICH. Oral history, social practices, rituals, festivals, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, traditional craftsmanship and the performing arts are the domains of Gandharba community’s ICH. However, the traditional craftsmanship, traditional knowledge and practices and performing arts are the fundamental domains of Gandharba communities’ ICH. Crafting and Playing musical instruments: *sarangi*, *arbajo* and singing traditional folk ballads play a greater role in among the entire domains of Gandharbas’ ICH. Knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another in the Gandharba community. So the Gandharba musicians are the vital and active practitioner to preserve, promote and safeguard the ICH in this community.

Unfortunately, the Gandharbas' ICH are gradually diminishing or disappearing. It is difficult to stress out a sole reason of the gradual disappearance of Gandharba communities' ICH. However, due to the Modernization, lower Socio-economic status, limited education and other social factors can be the reasons behind of ongoing evaporation of Gandharbas' ICH. This paper mainly stresses on building network among the Gandharba communities' of Nepal to revitalize, reconstruct and mainly to safeguard their ICH.

The paper also focuses on the role and activities of Gandharba communities on ICH safeguarding, challenges and a possible solution to confront the challenges and build an affective networking system among Gandharba communities to unite, empower and to safeguard their ICH.

Principal domains of Gandharba Communities' ICH

In Nepal there are over one hundred ethnic groups and they speak nearly 123 different dialects. They have their own distinct cultural traditions. Among them the Gandharba community- the musician community has their own distinct cultural heritage which is recognized as their intangible cultural heritage. The principal domains of Gandharbas' ICH have been discussed below.

Traditional knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

The Gandharba community is known as the knowledgeable and expert community in regard to traditional knowledge and practices. Gandharbas are well-known for fishing and collecting herbal medicines. Besides singing and playing music, their next work is fishing. They have an incredible fishing skill. The Gandharbas are also known for finding and using the herbal medicines. Gandharba community still practice and believe in herbal medicine and the natural cure.

Along with their traditional profession of folk singing and playing the *sarangi*, the Gandharvas sustain their livelihood with the skill of fishing. The skill of fishing prevalent among the Gandharva folk community is as old as their tradition of singing. Like playing the *sarangi* and singing, their forefathers were very skillful for fishing as the alternative of singing and sustaining their life. Still this skill of fishing exists in this community (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:153).

Fishing was also a primary source of income for most of Gandharbas in the past. Apart from singing, they used to go to river to catch fish hoping that they

could sell in the market and buy foods and clothes for their family. They had their own distinct knowledge preparing the required tools for fishing. They used to make hand-made fishing rod out of long bamboo stick, which they called *tango* and fishing lines out of wild vines which they used to collect from the jungle and they even used to make fishing hook themselves. Still these days; Gandharbas go for fishing more often. They are very skilled on catching fishes.

Gandharbas are very well-known for finding and using herbal medicines too. As being a wandering minstrel, they have gathered lots of knowledge and information related to the herbal medicines and the natural cure. Apart from singing and fishing, they also go on search for the herbal medicines. The Gandharbas use to take herbal medicine with them and treat the patient while going for singing in the villages. The method of identifying symptoms, diagnosis and treating are all transferred traditionally from their ancestors.

Traditional craftsmanship

The musical instruments *sarangi* and *arbajo* are the traditional musical instruments of the Gandharbas and also the carrier of their identity. The Gandharbas are the inventor and player of these instruments from the very beginning of their origin.

“Sarangi” - the combination of two Nepalese words: Sara and *Angi*. Sara means entire and *Angi* refers to the body. Literally it symbolizes an entire form of a human body. The Gandharbas categorize the structure of the Sarangi just like a human body: lower body, waist, belly, neck, cheek and the head. *Sarangi* is made out of single piece of wood having a neck hollowed-out double-chambered body. The lower hole is covered with goat skin where the upper chamber is left open. The four strings are tightened with the help of wooden knob known as *murra*, which are put on the upper part of the *sarangi*. The *ghodi*, a lower bridge on the goat skin and *sundari* an upper bridge on the neck are used to uplift the strings. It is played with the help of bow called *dhanu* made out of bamboo and horse-tail hair. The animal intestine's strings were used in the past but nylon strings are very common these days. Normally, it takes 5 to 7 days to complete one Sarangi but the size of Sarangi determines the duration of its making. There are no precise measurements of the sizes of the Sarangi yet as it is completely depends on the makers. But basically, Sarangi comes in three sizes: small, medium and large. The

small Sarangi can be measured as 12 inches in length and large are more than 27 inches. The pitch or sound of the Sarangi varies with its sizes. Basically we can find the two types of Sarangis: plain and carving. In carving, the maker put his design and art on the back and the frontal part of the Sarangi whereas the plain remains natural.

“Arbajo” is regarded as the oldest and chief instrument of Gandharbas before *sarangi*. It is also known as the male instrument whereas the *sarangi* is regarded as a female. It is made out of single piece of wood having a very long neck hollowed-out in the lower part and covered with goat skin. *Arbajo* is much bigger in size than the *sarangi*. Just like the *sarangi*, the strings are tightened with four wooden knobs and uplift strings with the help of lower and upper bridges in *arbajo*. Unlike *sarangi*, the *arbajo* is played by plucking strings with handmade bamboo picks.



Sarangi (right) and the Arbajo (left)

Performing arts

Performing arts play a great variety of contexts in the Gandharba community as it is used for an entertainment, spreading news or as accompaniment to social activities, such as rituals, festive events and ceremonies. Gandharbas ICH mainly based on their songs and music. Playing musical instruments *sarangi* and *arbajo* and singing folk ballads and a traditional dance play a substantial role in among the entire domains of Gandharba communities' ICH

The repertory of songs sung by Gandharbas with their *sarangi* and *arbajo* are various and broad. The songs sung to the audience includes; *Karkha*, the heroic epics in Nepal; *Ghatana*, the ballads of incidents and accidents that actually happened in Nepal; and *Lahure*, songs about the soldiers killed in the wars and their messages to their family. Other repertory song by Gandharba for special rituals and events include; *Mangal Geet*, an auspicious song to praise Hindu deities, holy rivers and the temples. *Bibaha Geet*, wedding song, the song sung in the Gandharbas' wedding. And various other songs of love, humor, satire, ritual ceremony, gender equality, festivals and so on which were created by the Gandharbas. Moreover, the Gandharba also sings in favor of social awareness, peace building, and social development and of unity.

Sword dance is a traditional dance of Gandharba community. This dance is especially performed in functions like marriage and *bratabandha*. This dance is performed in the group. The dancers swing their sword in the rhythm of music while performing this dance. The origin of this dance is unknown but it might have originated during the unification of Nepal in 1744-1815 A.D. in which the dance depicts the war and courage. It is also believed that the King Prithivi Narayan Shah had used Gandharbas to play the tactical role on carrying and passing the messages from neighbor's state at that time.

In this dance the singer sings the song and musicians play the music while the dancers perform their act of war dancing swinging their swords. Audiences participate in the song by singing and clapping which excites the singer, dancers and musicians and turns the environment more musical with excitement. This dance is the private of Gandharvas. It depicts the act of dance of war and courage. Only males of Gandharva community participate in this performance. (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:144)

Ratyauli is a type of song and dance performed by the women of the Gandharba community grouping together in groom's house. In Gandharbas wedding, the groom goes to bride's home to bring her to his home along with his friends, family, and relatives called *janti*. *Janti* supposed to be only males in the past. Those women, who were not allowed to participate as a *Janti*, would stay at groom's home and involved in *ratyauli* song and dance. During this dance, the women enjoy themselves performing some erotic *ratyauli* song and dance where they do not allow any males to participate in their performance. Some women dress up

pretending to be men and they dance like man with other women. This dance is filled with jokes and humor. But these days, female also can participate as a *janti* and even males also can be seen in *ratyauli* song and dance playing some musical instruments. This sort of culture is still practice in the Gandharba community.

Plan and Objectives

The fundamental objective of this research is to find out the current networking system and the networking challenges in the Gandharba communities for ICH safeguarding. And to stress out an effective networking system among these communities to help, promote and safeguard their ICH and their identity of being Gandharba in Nepal.

Another main objective of this paper is to suggest and find a possible solution for building effective networking system among the communities to provide them with helpful information about ICH and its values and to create a platform for sharing information through networking to safeguard their ICH.

Targeted Expectations

This paper mainly focuses on networking among the Gandharba communities for ICH safeguarding. It is expected that this research would be able to contribute on providing a better understanding to researchers, scholar, and culture related organizations, and the communities on about the Gandharba community of Nepal; their lifestyle, their problems and challenges, and their ICH safeguarding activities. The paper also helps or encourages to students, scholars and researchers for the new discourse or studies on about Gandharba communities of Nepal. The paper also encourages and empowers the Gandharba communities' to revitalize their ICH and to safeguard it using the tool of networking and the information sharing so far.

Present status of networking system in Gandharba community

Gandharbas, the musician community, were and still are the conveyers or disseminator of messages and information to the numerous isolated villages through music and songs in Nepal. Their contribution on bridging Nepalese individuals and communities for sharing information and news till these days are

very remarkable. But the bitter truth is; the networking systems among their own communities are not effective or satisfactory. Gandharba communities are still lacking on to unite themselves or build an effective network among the people of their own communities. In another words, the current networking system in Gandharba communities is compromised in various manners. As a result the community is facing many difficulties on safeguarding their ICH.

The Gandharba institutions, communities and individual Gandharba musicians organized numerous musical events, craftsmanship training and workshops to preserve, promote and safeguard Gandharba music, culture and the tradition at different times and places are notable and appreciable. But due to the lack of proper networking and information sharing among their own communities and individual, those programs and events have barely achieved an intended goals and success. One of a musician from Gandharba Cultural Art Organization (GCAO) expresses his opinion “these sorts of events and programs are not been fully succeeded. Due to the poor management system and lack of proper networking with other Gandharba organizations, communities and musicians, the programs and events are still lacking on to achieve expected goals, he said. He stressed out the importance of networking among Gandharba communities to achieve the intended goals and objectives while working for the ICH safeguarding activities. It looks clear that the Gandharba communities are still having difficulties or lacking on to build an effective network among their communities. So, it is inevitably true that the present status of networking system in the Gandharba communities is not satisfactory.

ICH safeguarding activities of Gandharba organizations

Organizations- literally mean a social unit of people which is organized and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. The Gandharbas of Nepal also have formed some organizations to meet their need and to achieve some goals. Especially, the Gandharbas organizations goals seem to preserve, promote and safeguard their cultural heritage and to uplift their life standards. Some Gandharbas organizations and their activities are discussed below.

Gandharba Cultural Art Organization (GCAO) was established in 1995 as a non-profit organization representing various Gandharba communities from many districts and settlements. GCAO was formed with the help of an American

Peace Corps Volunteer. Since then it has endeavored to keep the Gandharba tradition alive and improve the economic and educational status of this unique Nepali social group. GCAO is focus on strengthening Gandharba women and youth education and skills through various development programs such as “Mobile Sarangi Program”, annual “Sarangi Day” and “Sarangi Master Class”, “Sarangi workshops” and so on. GCAO has been celebrating this sort of events annually to uplift the life standard of the Gandharba community and to provide them with equal opportunities and to explore and demonstrate their skills and capabilities. It is also working on preserving the way of life of Gandharbas’ and their heritage as well as preserving and documenting their history and bringing them into the limelight, so the future generations of this country will be aware of the importance and historical facts regarding the contribution of Gandharbas’ in the past and present context of the Nepali society. GCAO has been playing a role of bridge to transfer the Gandharbas’ culture and traditional music to a new generation from old generation. GCAO also teaches the value of Gandharba music and their cultural heritage to the youth and also encourage them to learn it. To improve the educational status of Gandharbas student, GCAO provides an educational scholarship for an intelligent student. GCAO also promotes peoples’ awareness of the Gandharba and their traditions through a cultural campaign. It also promotes and demonstrates different kind of *Sarangi* and music in national and international arenas.

Mobile Sarangi Program is an initiative Gandharbas’ cultural program organized by GCAO, held in several places in Kathmandu, Capital of Nepal in 1998 AD. A -week-long program was the most successful program which played a significance role to promote Gandharba culture and traditions. Many Gandharba musicians from various districts had gathered and performed in this program.

“Sarangi Day” is an annual event of Gandharba Cultural Art Organization (GCAO). The First Sarangi day was celebrated in 2003. Since then, the GCAO has been annually celebrating “Sarangi Day”, a musical event, to preserve, promote, and safeguard Gandharba music, tradition and the culture. *Sarangi* day has been providing a platform to those knowledgeable, skillful and talented Gandharba musicians who have not got opportunity to flourish their talent. *Sarangi* day has been functioning as a great event bringing the musicians from different places and ages to perform on the same stage. It also has given a great opportunity to musicians to share their musical skills, talent, and knowledge to each other.

Sarangi Master Class, a workshop of *Sarangi* and traditional Gandharba songs was first initiated in 2010 by the GCAO, collaborating with the Mountain Music Project, USA. Many old and skilled musicians from various Gandharba settlements were invited in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, to teach the traditional skills and knowledge of playing music and singing songs to the contemporary Gandharba artists. GCAO has been conducting these sorts of workshop annually to teach the value of culture and to transfer the knowledge and skill to the new generation.

Gandharba Society Nepal (GSN), established in 2013 as a NGO, led by a group of young Gandharba from the Gandharba Community. GSN has established with objectives to keep the Gandharba traditions alive and improve the economic and educational status of Gandharba community, particularly focusing on marginalized groups and women by organizing different forms of programs. The “Sarangi Hamro“ a musical event was organized by Gandharba Society Nepal(GSN) at Trade Tower, Thapathali, Kathmandu, on February 28, 2014. The event was organized with an objective to preserve the way of life of Gandharbas and their typical cultural heritage by means of documenting their traditional culture, particularly of their folk songs and music. Many Gandharba artists had performed their music and songs in that event.

Nepal Gandharba Community Development Center (NGCDC) the NGO was established in 2004. The president of the center said, the NGCDC was establish to promote, preserve and safeguard Gandharba culture, tradition, music and the songs. The center is vigorously working on to achieve its goals and objectives organizing various programs such as *Karkha* singing competition, social awareness program and Nepalese folk instruments sarangi and arbajo teaching program. *Karkha* is a folk epic sang by Gandharbas describing the life and works of valorous persons. *Karkha* is composed in the descriptive poetic form which helps in instilling the sense of valor and courage in the listener. The sole purpose of *karkha* is to praise the brave national heroes of the history. (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:95), Two organizations; Nepal folklore society and Nepal Gandharba Community Development Center jointly organized a *Karkha* singing competition in Batulechaur, Pokhara in 2005 AD. Many Gandharbas had participated in the competition and presented their Karkhas.

Project Sarangi, a NGO was found in 2012. It is committed to the preservation and promotion of the living art of *sarangi* through crafting professional-grade

sarangi and souvenirs to raise awareness and keeping the craftsmanship alive. The founder of this organization said, “*sarangi* project has been doing numerous programs and events to promote the instrument in the national and international markets”. The project has been doing a remarkable work on uniting young generations and teaching them to play the *sarangi*.

ICH safeguarding activities of Gandharba communities

Generally, community is known as a group of people living in a same place or having a particular characteristic in common. In Nepal, the Gandharbas can be found living with their own group in various places. It is said that Gandharbas dwell in 69 districts out of 75 in Nepal. However the exact number of settlements of Gandharbas is still unknown. Some of the Gandhaba communities and their ICH safeguarding activities are discussed below.

The Chhaya Club, the Gandharba youth club, initiated *Sarangi* Craftmanship Training in Gandharba community in Chitwan, the Southern part of Nepal, with the financial support of local government. The two-week long training was started on 2nd April, 2016. A trainee of this program said, two-week-long craftsmanship training was a wonderful initiative program to learn to craft the *Sarangi* for the beginner like us. According to him, the old and skilled *Sarangi* maker of the village was selected as a trainer and there were around 15 young trainee had participated in the program.

Bhansar Village in the Tanahun District, 140 kilometers west of Kathmandu Nepal, is home to the Gandharba Community. The community is made up of 26 Gandharba houses and 150 residents. The 1990 and 2006 People’s Movements in Nepal (Jana Andolan I and II) touched the lives of everyone. Entire groups of people retreated to their home villages. During these periods of unrest, the Gandharba community suffered an economic crisis. One day, the entire village gathered to find a solution to their problem. While discussing various plans and ideas, one old woman shared a new idea—that of a collective. To unite the villagers, she suggested that they collect 20 NPR per household to create a community trust. The entire village consented and immediately named the group the Gandharba Trust Society. Since then, the GTS is striving on community’s development activities such as health, education, and income-based activities such as crafting and selling traditional instrument *sarangi*. The GTS is also striving to preserve, promote and safeguard community’s cultural tradition.

Lamjung- a district located in 160 kilometers northwest of Kathmandu, Nepal is home to the Gandharba community. The community is made up of around 16 houses and nearly 70 residents. The Gandharbas of this settlement mainly rely on the traditional instrument *Sarangi* making and selling it in the major tourist hub. In 2011 the community formed a trust named Gandharba Trust Lamjung after getting inspired from the Gandharba Trust Society, Tanahun. Since then, the community is collecting some money every month and utilizing it for the community development such as communities' cultural preservation, health and the education.

ICH safeguarding activities of Gandharba street musicians

The person who performs music in the street as a means of employment, literally regarded as a street musician. And the street musician can be seen all over the world. In Nepal, mainly in the major tourist hub, the Gandharba street musicians can be seen. Like others, the Gandharba street musicians also have obtained this job as a means of their employment. However the Gandharba musicians play a quite different role as a street musician in Nepal. They wander around mainly, tourist area, playing their *sarangi* instead of performing in one particular place. Mainly their aim is to sell the instruments to locals and foreigners for living. But they act different in the reality. One of a street musician from Thamel, Kathmandu said, "Selling instruments to locals and foreigners just function as a tool to attract them. But we share our history, our culture and our experience to those who gives little time to listen us".

While diving deep into the origin of this street music in Thamel, this legacy goes back to the Gandharba community who are considered as the musical community in Nepal. These street musicians are seen walking through Thamel playing their *sarangi*. They also carry around the same musical instrument to sell to the interested tourists. Most of the tourists are allured by the deep melody of the *sarangi*. The street music has become a way to not only get customers to buy the instrument but also as a way to connect with music lovers from across the world, as Thamel is a pot where tourists from all over the world visit to make it one of the most happening and must go places in the world. (Feb 7, 2017 Anuska Joshi, Image Nepal)

The Gandharba Street musicians have not only focused on selling their instruments just for the making money, also they have preserved their culture

and contributed on promoting the cultural tourism so far. They have shared their feelings with every single individual who encounters in their way. Gandharba musicians have taken culture as a life-survival strategy in which they are sustaining their lives in one hand and promoting, preserving and safeguarding their ICH on the other hand.

Networking and ICH Safeguarding challenges and problems of the Gandharba communities

In Nepal, many ethnic groups are discarding their folk traditions knowingly or unknowingly. It is clear that, this has inevitably led to gradual disappearance of their ICH. Like other ethnic groups and communities, the Gandharba community of Nepal also have been facing same sort of challenges. We can see the gradual disappearance of Gandharbas' ICH in Nepal. There are many problems and challenges that the community is facing over centuries and which has become a hindrance for continuing and safeguarding their ICH and building an effective network among their communities. Here are some concerned networking and ICH safeguarding problems and challenges of the Gandharba communities of Nepal.

Higher illiteracy rate

Education is very important in relation to ICH and networking as it is the means by which ICH is transmitted and well networking system is maintained. In the context of Nepal, the Gandharba rarely had a schooling system in the past. As a wandering minstrel, they travelled throughout the nation to sustain their life in which they always deprived from the academic education. To accomplish school education for Gandharbas was something far beyond of their imagination at that time. One of an adult man from Gandharba village, Tanahun, recalled his past (40 years ago), he quit the school in grade three because of his parents could not afford to pay 35 NPR (less than one dollar) for his school admission to the next grade. This is such a pathetic story to hear.

However the changing time brought some changes in the lives of Gandharbas in which handful of them have received good education these days but unfortunately, still the Gandharba community has a higher illiteracy rate in the Nation. According

to the national census report of 2001 the literacy rate of Gandharba community was only 46.86 percent. It is clear that more than a half of the Gandharbas are still illiterate. The higher illiteracy rate is a major obstacle of building an effective network and transmitting ICH knowledge and skills in Gandharba communities, where the large numbers of Gandharba do not realize the values of their ICH as well as the importance of network.

Isolated Gandharbas' settlements

Nepal, a landlocked- south-Asian developing country geographically made up of numerous mountains and hills. There are still many settlements in Nepal, which are still out of the access of transportations, electricity and other modern equipment. People, still these days, have to walk entire day or more to reach some human habitants in Nepal. As like other communities the Gandharba communities of Nepal also have been scattered throughout Nepal; even in some isolated mountains and the high hills. To reach such villages, to exchange the information and build networks with those communities seems very challenging.

Insufficient demographic data and information

Government of Nepal carries out the national census data collection in every ten years. The latest national census was collected in 2011. But the minority social groups or community like Gandharba is not given priority for the proper demographic studies. One of a member from GCAO said, "We are still unknown about the population, literacy rate and the settlements of Gandharba communities in Nepal. We have not got enough demographic data information from the government institutions", he added. So, insufficient data and information also a challenge for building network in the Gandharba communities.

Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors are the foremost factors of networking problems or challenges in the Gandharba community and also a main reason of gradual disappearance of their cultural heritage. Gandharbas are known as the Dalit of Nepal (Perceived lower member of the society). The Gandharbas' life, being a Dalit was very hard and miserable in the past as they were treated like an inhuman being.

Although the caste system was legally banned in 1962, it continues. In cities, many Gandharba exist with a degree of anonymity, yet they continue to bear the burden of generations of missed opportunity and struggle. Although there are many examples of their experience as untouchables, one Gandharba of Tanahun gave one example of discrimination from his own family. Although his father had a brief opportunity to attend school, he was forced to sit at the back of the classroom on the floor, lest he defile the benches, which were reserved for upper class children. When a schoolmaster sought to mete out punishment to children, he would instruct other Gandharba to beat him, so that the teacher need not touch the child. Later, when he was a child in school, although the system of Gandharba's beating other Gandharba was no longer in place; he was often not allowed to drink from the water jugs set aside for children. Although everyone drank with the jug held above the mouth, to prevent the lips from touching the jug and defiling the water, Gandharba were prohibited from using the jugs. He explained that this created a lot of anger and frustration for him as a boy. - Spray A. Stephanie (2003)

Even though, the caste system was legally banned by the constitution of Nepal 1962 AD, but it did not remove in practice. The Dalits' are still oppressed and subjugated by so-called upper caste in Nepal. One of a member from GCAO said, "Many Gandharbas have quit their traditional profession; crafting and playing *Sarangi*. They hide their surname and even detached the link with other Gandharba communities to get rid from the caste discrimination and domination".

Gandharbas, the minstrels of Nepal, have been singing for their supper as long as anyone can remember. Music is not just their profession; it is their culture, their life, their reason for being. Unfortunately, while they have earned much fame from it, the money has been significantly slower to come. And in these rapidly changing times, the challenge facing the Gandharbas is not just how to keep their culture alive, but how to keep their community itself going. (Alok Tumbahangphey, From Issue # 79 (01 Feb 2002-07 Feb 2002, Nepaltimes.com)

Gandharba communities are not only oppressed by socially, also by economically as well. Large numbers of Gandharbas have very miserable and pathetic lives. Strolling from one village to another playing *sarangi* at places such as someone's house entrance, crowded squares or on the street is a traditional occupation for many of the Gandharba men. They get only a small portion of cereal, vegetables or money in return. This is too little to support their families. Thus, Gandharba

people are forced to make fairly poor living. Due to the extreme poverty and the social domination Gandharba communities could not establish the proper network among their communities as well. This is fair that the socio-economic factors are the foremost challenge to this community on building network and safeguarding their ICH.

Multiple surnames of Gandharbas

In Nepal, the family name or surname is the first identity to know in which tribes, ethnic groups or communities a person belongs to. The ethnic groups or communities are categorized by their surnames in Nepal. The Gandharbas of Nepal are also known with various surnames: *Gaine, Gayak, Ranjan, Gandhari, Baikar, Nepali* and many other surnames which are similar to other ethnic groups. To distinguish the Gandharba communities and people by their surname is sometime difficult as they have numerous surnames. One of an old man from Gandharba village Tanahun, said, there are so many Gandharbas' changing their surnames. Sometimes the entire community is known with different surname which seems very difficult to distinguish whether they belong to the Gandharba community or not. To build a network or link with those people or community is also a challenge for us, he added. So, the multiple surnames with dissimilar identities of Gandharbas of Nepal also have become a challenge on building cooperative network among this community.

Modernization

The social changes brought by the influence of modernization and its negative impression on the existence of intangible cultural heritage are inevitable. But when we say that modernization can be also a challenge for building network might be questionable. A Gandharba radio journalist from Dang district said, "The modernization is a challenge for Gandharba communities to build a network among Gandharba communities and safeguard the ICH in Nepal". In the quest of better lifestyle and the diverse identity, some Gandharba communities have been completely isolated with other Gandharba communities and it is a challenge for us to share information and to build network with those people, he said.

The Gandharbas still follow the tradition of singing and playing the sarangi and arbajo. However, they have transformed themselves and their society from

a conservative and traditional society to a new, open-minded and modern one. Though the older generation of the Gandharbas is still playing the sarangi and arbas, the younger generation is not interested; rather, they are interested in playing modern musical instruments. (Gandharba folklore and folklife(2009:173),

Unfortunately, the changing musical tastes of Nepalis are posing quite a challenge to the Gandharba's music. The minstrels who wandered have already given up travelling through the villages, and most of them prefer to come to cities such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. More than just the disappearance of an art form, the decline of the Gandharba's traditional livelihood also signals the loss of a vital source of Nepal's folk history. (Alok Tumbahangphey, From Issue # 79 (01 Feb 2002-07 Feb 2002, Nepaltimes.com)

Though it is acceptable to transform themselves and their society from a conservative society to a new, open-minded and modern one, whereas being indifference or neglecting own cultural heritages and values in the name of modernizing the society seems very ridiculous. So it is clear that the modernization also has left huge negative impact in Gandharba communities and which has become a hindrance for safeguarding ICH and building effective network among their communities. Especially, to attract the new generation to the traditional cultural practice is very challenging. The modernization in the people's lifestyle, in the attitude and in behavior leaves a negative impression on ICH. So, the modernization also can be taken as the ICH safeguarding challenge in this sense.

Political instability

Political instability is a disaster-prone to any countries. Frequently changing government, its policies and the chaotic political environments not only disturb the lifestyle of people and development speed of the Nation, also distress the intangible cultural heritages. The political instability not only drawn backs the countries development performance, also makes the socio-cultural environment harsh and flimsy. It leads to a friction environment in the Nation. Then slowly it leads to the feeble performance in economic, health, education, employment, and even in the basic needs of the people in the country.

In the context of Nepal, the political instability seems a big challenge for ICH safeguarding. Political instability has become an obstacle in the everyday lifestyle

of entire Nepalese people either directly or indirectly. Frequently changing government, their policies and strategies, revolution, and strike have made the Nepalese life so harsh and difficult. Migration, unemployment, hostile social environment, extreme poverty is the outcome of instable political situation in Nepal. As a result many ethnic groups, communities and individuals are discarding their folk traditions, culture, and the profession and seeking for a better place and profession to sustain their lives.

Suggestions and possible solutions on building network and safeguarding ICH in Gandharba community

While considering about an entire ICH safeguarding activities of Gandharba institutions, communities and individual musicians, it seems like they are slowly going forward to the safeguarding process of their intangible cultural heritage. This is a positive sign of their work and efforts. But it looks very limited and also constricted as it only covered a small area and missed the major part: networking among their communities for ICH safeguarding. The useful link and network between communities are the fundamental necessity of Gandharba communities to safeguard their intangible cultural heritage in a long run. It is assured that the effective network among their scattered communities can support to empower themselves to overcome with the problems and challenges. Here are some possible solutions on building an effective network among Gandharba communities for the ICH safeguarding.

Collecting Gandharba data

The Government of Nepal holds the national census data collection in every ten years. But the minority caste or communities like Gandharba are not given much priority for a proper demographic study. So due to the insufficient data and information about Gandharbas' settlements, population, educational status and other related information, the Gandharba communities are still having difficulties on finding their scattered communities, their lifestyle, and their culture so far. To confront this challenge, the Gandharba institutions should collaborate or lobbying with Government to do the demographic studies of Gandharba community in a proper way. This helps to provide sufficient data and information to Gandharba communities in which they can build a network among each other and encompass in the safeguarding of their intangible cultural heritage collectively.

Building Gandharba musicians' network

The Gandharba community's ICH is mainly surrounded with craftsmanship of instruments, music and songs. Playing *Sarangi* and singing traditional folk ballads play a greater role among the entire domains of community's ICH. So the Gandharba musicians are the main and active practitioner of Gandharba community's ICH. Effective network among musicians can play a greater role on preserving, promoting and safeguarding the ICH in Gandharba community.

Gandharba individual musicians have been playing an incredible role on promoting, preserving, and safeguarding Gandharba community's ICH for a long time. If they could unite each other or develop an effective network among musicians, it is assured that they could revitalize and safeguard their intangible cultural heritage very efficiently. Gandharba musicians from diverse places and culture have their own uniqueness and style in the performance. And each of them has their distinct skill, knowledge, own story and experience of the life. The networking among musicians can help them to know each other and share their skills, knowledge and information about their culture in which they will be well informed about their intangible cultural heritage. So the Gandharba musicians' network is very essential for safeguarding the Gandharba community's ICH.

Operating Cultural programs, events and seminars

Cultural programs, events and seminars function as a key place to meet people and to know each other. People usually meet each other in cultural programs, events and seminars. They use to introduce each other in such places. So these places function as a great place for networking with individuals, community and institutions. The people with various fields and areas use to get together in such places. If Gandharba community would be able to organize such programs, events and seminars, they would also be able to meet many people and build network with them. The programs and events like *sarangi* day, *sarangi* workshops and training programs, musical events certainly help them to connect each other and share their experience, skill, and knowledge. This would definitely help them to build a network with the people of common interest and fields to work on for cultural heritage preservation and its safeguarding collectively.

Fostering Central information center of Gandharba community

Collecting and sharing information in Gandharba communities have become quite challenging as because of poor networking system. As it is mentioned above, the isolated Gandharba settlements and insufficient demographic studies are the networking challenges of Gandharba community in Nepal. Due to the insufficient demographic studies of Gandharba, the sharing and building network among their own communities have become so difficult. To confront this challenge, the ongoing Gandharba organizations should play a vital role on forming a central information center of Gandharba community in which they could build a cooperative relation to Government agencies to conduct required studies on about Gandharba community of Nepal. This certainly helps them to get sufficient information about Gandharba and also helps them to build a network with among the people of their community for Safeguarding their ICH

Using mass media and technologies

Books, Internet, magazines, movies, newspapers, radio, recordings, and television are known as mass media. The purpose of the media is to inform people about current new affairs and to tell about the latest gossip and fashion. Media and technologies play a vital role in making world a global village and to reduce the communication gaps amongst the people living in far distances. It is the media which keeps the people updated and informed about what is happening around them and in the world. In the context of Nepal, especially to build the network among Gandharba communities, the media and technologies can play a significant role. It can help to connect the Gandharba communities to each other and also help them to share their information. The social networking sites, like Facebook, Twitter and other social media can be used to connect with people of Gandharba communities. It can help them to unite and build network within and among their communities for safeguarding their ICH so far.

Encouraging Women and girls in ICH Safeguarding

Males are very dominant on the ICH related activities in the Gandharba community. Singing songs, playing musical instruments and crafting musical instruments supposed to be the task of males in this community. Women were rarely involved in such activities in the past, as the males used to go out from their

homes to earn money; the women would stay at home for cooking, cleaning and rearing their children.

These days, we can see the women from some Gandharba settlements are participating in crafting the traditional instruments which they typically would not do in the past. Women participation or involvement in ICH safeguarding is very essential. The girls and women should be encouraged to take part in ICH related activities. Their participation, their knowledge and skill can make a crucial contribution on safeguarding the ICH. The participation of girls and women in ICH related activities not only support on preserving their traditional culture and profession, also help them to become economically independent where most of the Gandharba women are reliant on their husband's earnings. In this regard the girls and women involvement in ICH safeguarding is very crucial in the Gandharba communities.

Operating Sustainable development programs

The concept of sustainable development is not a new one. We all are familiar with the term development. So what can be the sustainable development then? In 1987 the United Nations released the Brundtland Report, which included the following definition: 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

On the basis of this definition, the sustainable development is the development of human kind which has to be continued to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Poverty eradication, sound health, quality education, achieve food security, gender equality, women empowerment, sustainable economic growth and the sustainable environment are the spirit of sustainable development.

In the context of Gandharba communities of Nepal, the sustainable development plans and programs are highly required as most of the Gandharba communities are living with extreme poverty, poor education and unsecure health condition. Particularly, youth unemployment, insufficient food and water supplement, poor health condition, lower educational status and poverty are the major problems of most of the Gandharbas in Nepal. To bring a change or to confront the problems and challenges of Gandharba communities, a well-planned sustainable development programs and policies are highly required. The sustainable development directly

impacts on their socio-cultural development and behavior in which the community will be able to maintain a comprehensive network among their communities. And this supports them to engross in the ICH safeguarding process steadily.

Conclusion

The Gandharba community, a musician community of Nepal, long been educationally deprived, economically disadvantaged, and socially subjugated community, is striving to preserve, promote and safeguard their endangered cultural heritage over centuries. But due to the many challenges and problems, which frequently encountered to their lives, became a hindrance on establishing a sound networking system among their communities. As the result, their ICH has been diminishing for a long time. However, the changing time and situation has brought some positive changes in the Gandharba communities in which the communities have started to realize the value of their ICH and started to practice it gradually.

While analyzing their ICH preserving, promoting and safeguarding activities, it seems like they have slowly moved ahead to the right path. We can see that several Gandharba organizations, communities, women and youth are taking part in ICH safeguarding activities. But the effective networking among their people and communities are still lacking. This seems a weak part of this community. It is obvious that cultural heritage safeguarding seems impossible without the cooperative networking and engrossment of the communities. Communities' involvement in ICH safeguarding is highly essential and required. So the effective network among communities and information sharing is the necessity of Gandharba community to safeguard their ICH in the present context. It is assured that the comprehensive network among Gandharba communities will certainly help to unite, empower and bring them in the socio-cultural mainstream to uplift their life standard and to safeguard their ICH in a long run.

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Glossary

Bratabandha: The Bratabandha is the head shaving ceremony. This ritual is only practice for a boy and the odd year is chosen for the ritual. The maternal uncle plays a dominant role to shave the boy's head and offers him new cloths with Nepali cap (Dhaka Topi). The relatives and neighbors wish longevity of the boy with offering gifts or cash. The bratabandha opens the door for marriage to the boy. It is believed that boy without performing bratabandha cannot get married. Gandharbas observe this ceremony by fisting together, singing and dancing.

Dalit: In caste hierarchy, the Dalit are categorized as a lower one and oppressed and dominated by so-called upper caste.

Karkha, lok rag, teeje, chanchari, chutke, laske, jhaure, lahure: Title of the songs

Hamro: A nepali word refers to 'Our'

Ratyauli: A form of dance which is performed in the wedding of Gandharba community.

Janti: A group of people participating in the wedding ceremony

Danphechari: A bird that find in the Mountain of Nepal (lophophorus) which is also the national bird of Nepal.

ICH: Ingangible Cultural Heritage

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

Name of informants:

S/N	Name	Address
1	Buddha Gandharba	Tanahun
2	Samsher Gandharba	Tanahun
3	Raju Gandharba	Lamjung
4	Arjun Gandharba	Lamjung
5	Ramkrishna Gandharba	Tanahun
6	Kedar Gandhari	Gorkha
7	Pujan Gandharba	Tanahun
8	Santosh Gandharba	Dang
9	Mangal Gandharba	Gorkha
10	Manoj Gandharba	Chitwan
11	Saradha Gandharba	Tanahun
12	Reshma Gandharba	Tanahun
13	Bhoj Bahadur Gayak	Kaski
14	Deepa Gayak	Kaski
15	Puskal Gayak	Kaski
16	Minu Waiba	Kathmandu
17	Laxmi Gandharba	Kathmandu
18	Kishan Gaine	Finland
19	Subash Gandhari	Chitwan
20	Imai Fumiko	Japan
21	Kiran Nepali	Kathmandu