



Attitude of Laities Towards Sraddha Ritual Among the Buddhist Community of Jyapu

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Abstract

The research observes the practice of annual sraddha within the Jyapu Community, an ethnic group in Kathmandu known for its rich cultural heritage, arts, and rituals. The research examines the attitude of the general public towards sraddha ritual. The research findings show that annual sraddha rituals are still regularly practiced in Kathmandu. However, the core philosophy behind these rituals appears to have significantly deteriorated over time. The confusion has been clearly observed among the laities. For example, 91% of the respondent prefers Bajracharya priest for performing rituals including sraddha, however, 57% only accepted them as a Buddhist. Hence, if majority of the Buddhist respond themselves as a Buddhist by knowing themselves correctly in the census then data wise also Buddhist population will be increased in Nepal.

Keywords: *Bajracharya, Jyapu community, Laities, Sraddha.*

Introduction

The Jyapu caste is a prominent community in Nepal, with a name derived from two syllables, "Jya" and "fu." The term "Jya" refers to work, while "fu" evolved into "pu," meaning capacity.¹ Jyapu community holds a unique way of presenting themselves in the society from birth to death. This research is majorly based on after death ritual i.e. sraddha

1. Maharjan, P.N. (n.d.). *Newa Samaj*. Newa De Dabu. pp. 106-223

After death there is a ritual named sraddha which is performed among the Jyapu community. Sraddha, a kriya performed in reverence of the departed, is closely associated with the concept of faith². Sraddha also can be taken as respect, generosity, condolence towards the ancestor and popularly also known as *sraddhadana* ritual and later the word sraddha generates from it³. The Objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To know the attitude of the laities towards sraddha rituals among Jyapu community
2. To know general concept of sraddha

However, the practice of Buddhism inside Kathmandu named as Newar Buddhism, seems to be very unique in comparison to the other practices of Buddhism happening in the world. Major ritualistic practices performed on the regular basis are kept secret. For instance, the sraddha practices are done regularly in Kathmandu but the philosophical and scientific explanation are not opened up and forgotten.

In past the tools like sraddha may have been used by our ancestors to guide the consciousness towards liberation and the priest who performs it and the general laities who were involved in it may knew the philosophical and scientific explanation of the work used. However, in this modern era the priest who handles the process of sraddha may know the real understanding of the ritual, common people may be doing it just for the sake of continuing the tradition without knowing the real cause of practicing it. Therefore, the major focus of this research was the study over certain groups of laities to observe their attitudes towards the sraddha ritual which has not done before.

There are various types of sraddha rituals according to the day and situation so the considerable delimitation of this research is focusing only on the annual sraddha ritual. The research was targeted just among the Jyapu communities of Kathmandu and within them also seven live sraddha rituals were only observed. There are thirty-two wards inside Kathmandu but only the sraddha observed in seven wards (i.e. wards 13,16,17,21,23,24,26 were the target area for research). During fieldwork, the respondents for filling up the questionnaire were limited up to eighty-two.

Exploratory and field study research design has been implemented to conduct the research. Overall seven sraddha were observed between seven wards (i.e. Ward 13,16,17,21,23,24,26) of Kathmandu and interpreted after taking help of the four Bajracharya priests. To observe the attitude of a laities towards sraddha ritual, eighty-two respondents from Jyapu community were selected to respond the questionnaire.

2. Bajracharya, R. (2022). *Sraddha: Newa sanskare pitri uddhar yayeta shraddha purbak yaigu karma*. Swetkali Press p. 9

3. Bajracharya, S.T. (2011). *Newa Baudha Samajye Mrityu Sanskar ya Byawastha*. Link Prints, Kathmandu, pp. 17-18

General Concept of Death

According to Newar Buddhism death can be defined as the phenomena when the Mind gets apart from body. The mind or consciousness-less figure or body is called *Shi-Mha* (or dead body) and body with consciousness is called *Mwa-Mha* (or Living body). Mind, Citta, Consciousness, *Vigyana*, *Mana* and *Nama* are synonymous to each-other. Buddhist writings often refer to the mind in terms of its various characteristics, such as *citta* (the mind or thought), *manas* or *mano* (the mental strength or faculty), and *vina* (the consciousness faculty). Buddhist teachings state that these ideas serve to clarify the mind's complex nature⁴. Buddhists consider the separating consciousness from the human body as a “*chyuti chitta*”, or the last loss of consciousness, to be the same as dying away⁵

General Concept of Sraddha

Sraddha, which signifies reverence, is a Sanskrit term. This ritual serves as a way to pay respect to the deceased⁶. The Sanskrit or Pali word *saddha*, which is frequently translated into English as "faith," can also mean trust, confidence, or fidelity⁷. The term "Pinda" derives its etymology from the Sanskrit word "Pind," which translates to "mass" or "bundle." In Newar Buddhism, particularly during the performance of Sraddha rituals, Pindas are offered to the departed consciousness. These offerings typically comprise egg-shaped doughs, whose size varies depending on the specific ritual and context.

In essence, the offering of Pindas represents a symbolic act of feeding the departed consciousness and is considered an essential element in the Sraddha ritual's spiritual efficacy. The intricate details of Pinda offerings in Newar Buddhism reflect the rich cultural heritage and beliefs of this community⁸. The act of offering Pindas is a symbol of the community's respect and reverence for their ancestors, as well as an expression of their belief in the continuity of life beyond death.

Reasons Behind Performing Sraddha

Providing Gati or Realm: According to Buddhist view the rebirth can take place on one of the realms among the six realms (six *gatis*) called *Bhavachakra* that can be taken as the

4. H. J. Suwanda. and Sugunasiri (2014). *Triune mind in Buddhism*. Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies. No. 10, Nalanda College Buddhist Studies.

5. Ghimire, C.K. (2021). *The Mind and its Procedure in Buddhism*. Nepal University Teachers' Association (NUTA), Volume 8, p. 42

6. Chanchal, G. (2021). *Facing Missiological Challenges by Understanding Hinduism's Approach to Ancestors*. Journal of Adventist Mission Studies, Vol. 16, No. 1, Art. 11.

7. Barbara O'Brien. *Shraddha: The Faith of Buddhism*. <https://www.learnreligions.com>

8. Field observation, 2023.

symbol of samsara⁹. Among the six realms¹⁰ if good karma or kushala karma is made the good realms are possible. On the otherhand bad karma or Akushala Karma favours towards the bad realms.

Elimination of Negative Deeds: In the process of offering pinda during the Sraddha ritual, there is a specific sentence that is recited: "*Sarva Papa Chayam Kari Swadha*," which translates to "May this offering alleviate all negative deeds." This sentence highlights the action to eliminate and purify any bad karma that the departed being may have generated during their lifetime.¹¹

Elimination of Sixteen Types of Sufferings or Hell or Narkas: In the Devadutta Sutra, the Buddha gave a detailed account of the many hells. According to conventional view, the Narakas are a collection of cavernous levels that go far beneath Jambudvpa (the realm of humans). The most common, described in the Abhidharma-kosha consisting eight cold narakas and eight hot narakas¹²

Fulfillment of Perfect Dwadasa anga: Twelve pindas are offered to the awareness of the dead as part of the Sraddha practice. This rite is thought to help the Dwadasa anga, or twelve organs, of the person's mental body become complete in their next life.

Bodhisattvacharya: Sraddha ritual is an opportunity to cultivate a mindset of generosity, compassion, and altruism towards all sentient beings. It offers us a chance to transcend our self-centered attitudes and embrace a broader perspective that encompasses the well-being of all sentient beings. Through the practice of Sraddha, we can actively contribute to the welfare of all beings, both living and deceased.

Attitude of Laities Towards Sraddha Ritual

In the context of Newar Buddhism, the successful execution of rituals relies upon the active participation of a dedicated team. While the Bajracharya priest plays a vital role during facilitation for the completion of sraddha, it is imperative to acknowledge the significant contributions made by the supporting members or sponsors involved in effectively managing the overall process. The family members who sponsors to conduct any ritual like sraddha are the laities.

9. Buswell, R. and Lopez, D. (2014). *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton University press.

10. Six Realms are Deva or heavenly gods, Ashura or demigod, Manushya or Human, Tiryak or Animals, Preta or hungry ghosts and Naraka or Hell

11. Field Study, 2023.

12. Buswell, R. E. (2014). *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 86

Total Number of Respondents

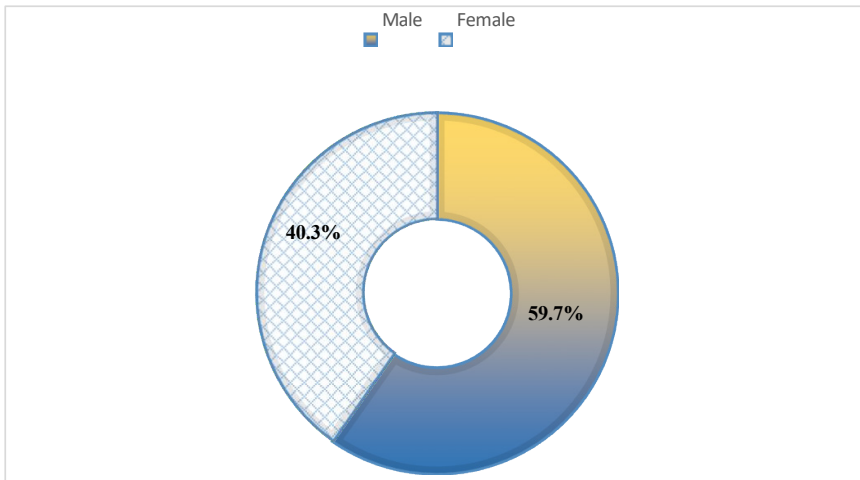


Figure 1: *Total number of respondents*

Altogether, eighty-two respondents (100%) were surveyed where, forty-nine (59.7%) were male, and thirty-three (40.3%) were female respectively.

Religious Affiliations of Respondents

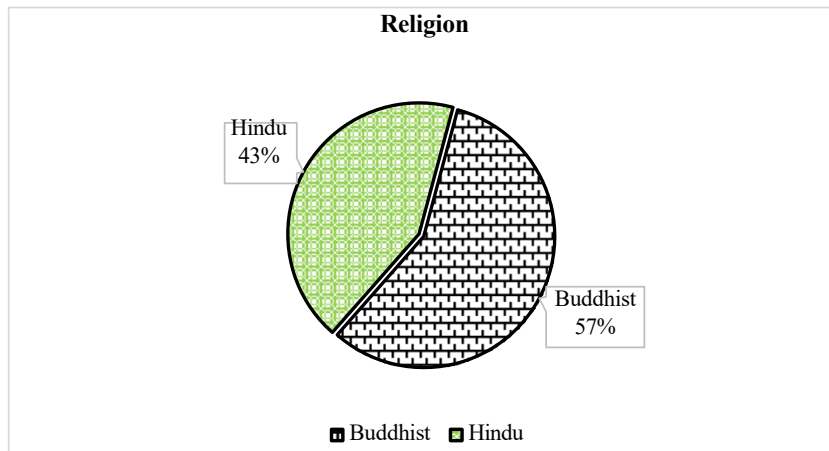


Figure 2: *Religion of a respondents*

The presented data shows the number of respondents differentiated according to the religion, along with their respective percentages. Among the total of 82 respondents, 47 individuals self-identified as Buddhist, constituting 57.3% of the sample. Conversely, 35 respondents identified themselves as Hindu, comprising 42.7% of the sample population.

Preference of Priest During Sraddha

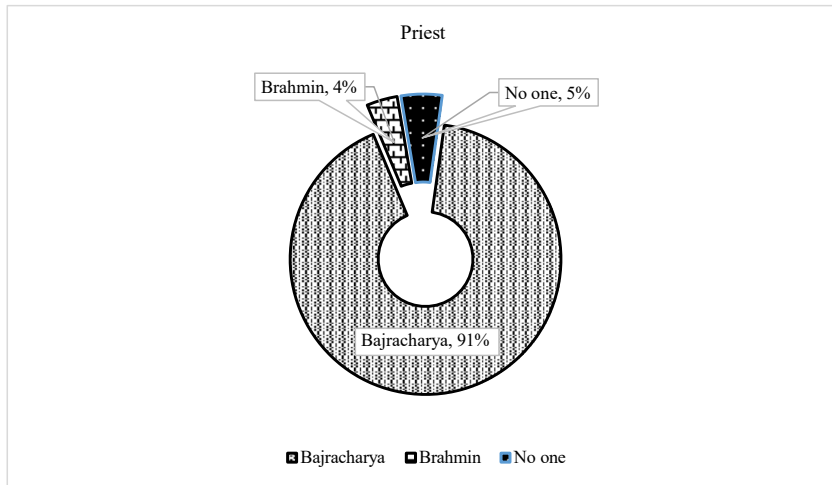


Figure 3: *Help of a priest during sraddha*

Among the total of 82 respondents, a substantial majority of 75 individuals (91.5%) expressed their preference for Bajracharya priests to conduct Sraddha. Conversely, a smaller yet notable group of respondents, specifically 3 individuals (3.7%), indicated their inclination towards Brahmin priests for performing Sraddha. Whereas 4 respondents (4.9%) disclosed that their households do not engage any priests as they do not believe in the ritual.

Sraddha as a Superstition

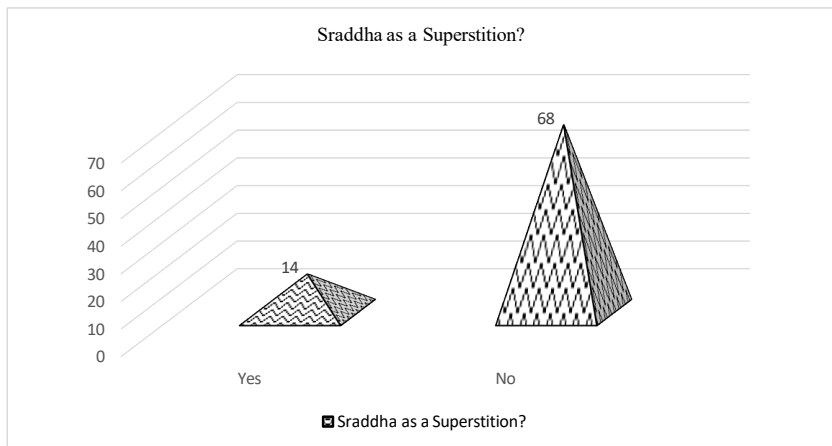


Figure 4: *Respondents taking sraddha as a superstition*

The figure shows the count and percentage of respondents based on their views regarding Sraddha as a superstition. Among total 82 respondents, 14 individuals (17.1%) expressed the belief that Sraddha is just a superstition. On the other hand, a majority of 68 respondents (82.9%) disagreed and stated that Sraddha is not regarded as a superstition.

Sraddha Just as an activity

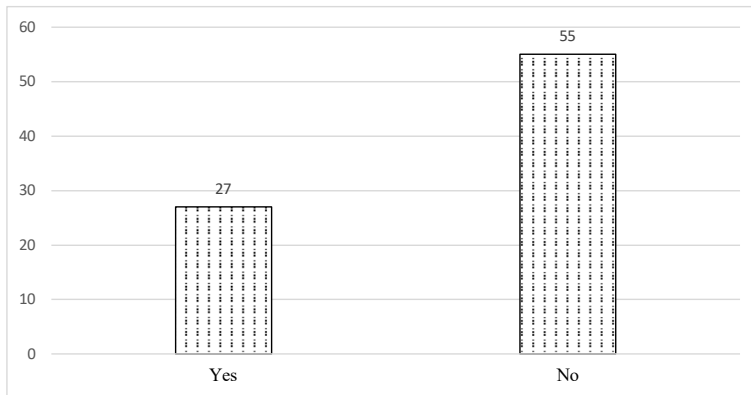


Figure 5: Respondent believing Sraddha just as an activity.

The bar diagram presents an overview of the respondent’s perspectives on Sraddha, specifically in terms of viewing it just as an activity. Among the total of 82 participants, 27 individuals (32.9%) shared the belief that Sraddha just as an activity not more than that. In contrast, a significant majority of 55 respondents (67.1%) held a contrasting viewpoint, asserting that Sraddha carries a profound significance and more than the activity.

Respondent Believing Sraddha as a waste of Money

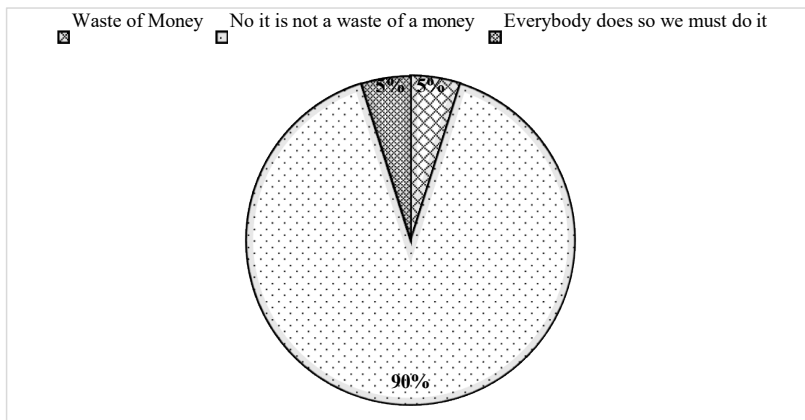


Figure 6: Respondents believing sraddha as a waste of money

The figure shows the count and percentage of respondents based on their beliefs concerning Sraddha as a waste of money. Out of the total 82 respondents, 4 individuals (4.9%) expressed the opinion that Sraddha is indeed a waste of money. Conversely, a significant majority of 74 respondents (90.2%) disagreed and stated that Sraddha is not considered a waste of money. Additionally, 4 respondents (4.9%) mentioned that they engage in Sraddha due to social expectations and traditions.

Necessity of Sraddha

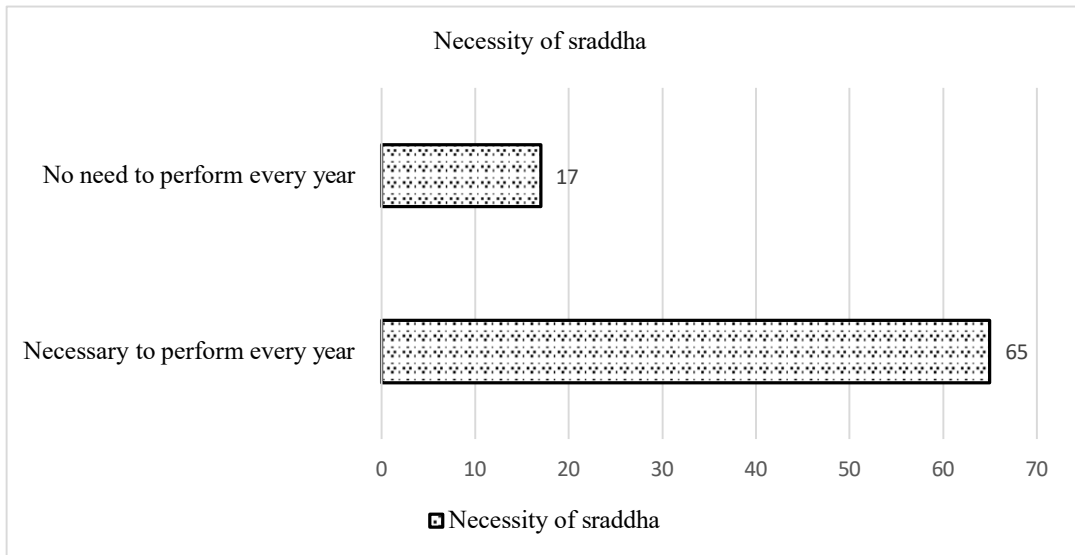


Figure 7: *Necessity of Sraddha*

The bar chart presents the respondents views over the necessity of performing Sraddha. Among the surveyed participants, 65 individuals (79.3%) believed that it is necessary to perform Sraddha every year. While 17 respondents (20.7%) expressed the opinion that there is no need to perform Sraddha every year. The chart visually demonstrates the distribution of respondents' opinions, showcasing a significant majority supporting the notion of performing Sraddha annually, while a smaller portion holds the view that it is not necessary.

What will take Rebirth?

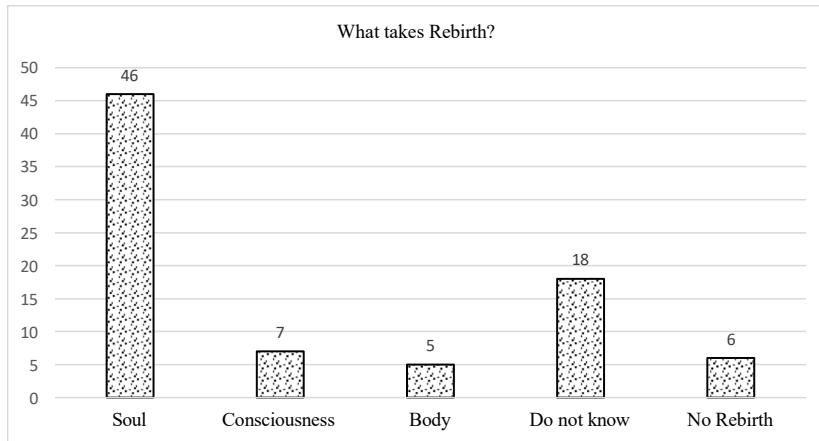


Figure 8: Respondent responding what will take rebirth

Among the respondents, 46 individuals (56.1%) believed that soul, 7 respondents (8.5%) believed that consciousness, 5 individuals (6.1%) believed that the body will take the rebirth after the death. 18 respondents (22%) indicated that they do not know. Lastly, 6 participants (7.3%) stated that there must be no rebirth or continuation of life after death.

Respondent Preferring Short Sraddha

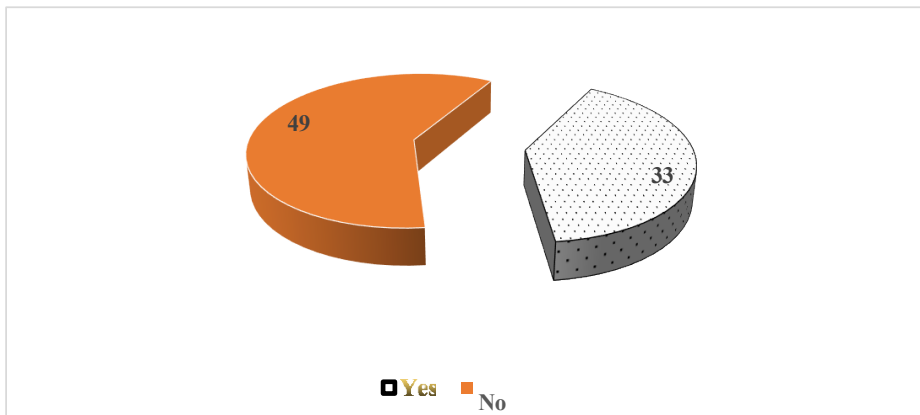


Figure 9: Respondent responding sraddha must finish faster

Among the total 82 respondents, 33 individuals (40.2%) expressed the view priest should complete sraddha faster. On the other hand, a majority of 49 respondents (59.8%) disagreed and stated that Sraddha does not need to be rushed.

Boring Part of a Sraddha

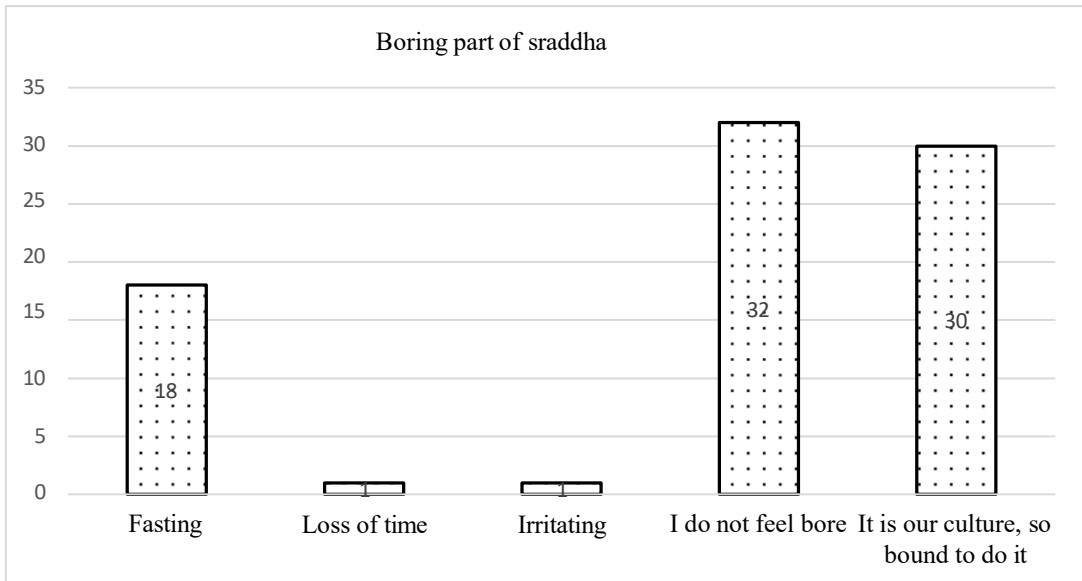


Figure 10: Boring part of Sraddha

A number of respondents, specifically 32 individuals (39.0%), reported not feeling bored during Sraddha rituals. They find meanings, significance, or engagement in the observance. Similarly, 30 respondents (36.6%) mentioned that performing Sraddha is an inherent part of their culture so they like it or do not like it they are bound to perform the ritual. On the other hand, 18 individuals (21.9%) mentioned that fasting during Sraddha was a boring part of sraddha. Concluding, 1 respondent (1.2%) expressed a perception of loss of time, while another 1 respondent (1.2%) found Sraddha rituals irritating.

Do You Think Your Offspring Will Perform Sraddha In Future?

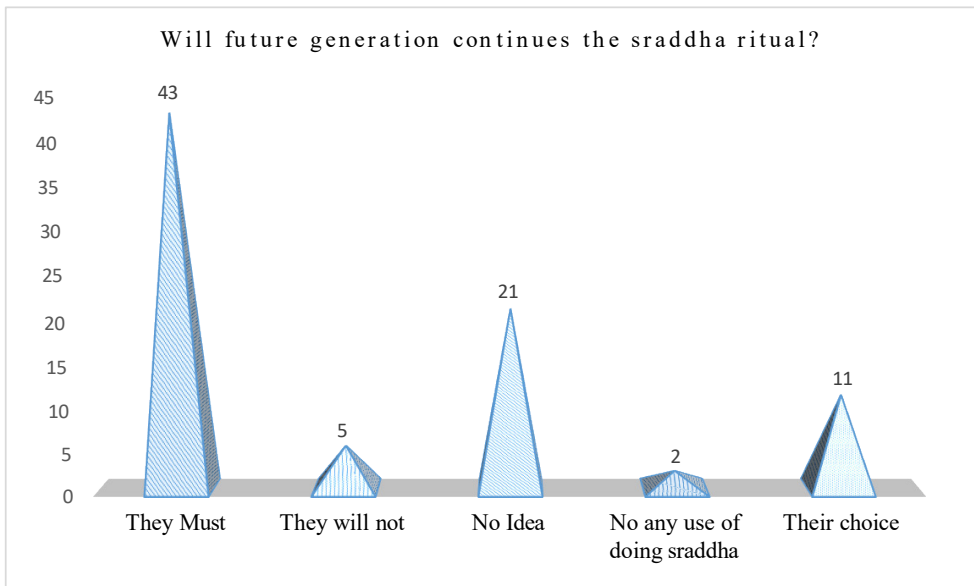


Figure 11: Respondent responding about the future generation

Among eighty-two respondents, a majority numbering 52.4% (43 individuals) expressed a strong belief in the continuity of the Sraddha ritual by future generations. They firmly stated that it is necessary for the tradition to be held and passed on.

While, 25.6% (21 respondents) thinks to having no definite idea about the future of the Sraddha ritual. Lastly, 13.4% (11 respondents) acknowledged that the decision to continue or discontinue the Sraddha ritual lies within the hands of the future generation.

Whereas, 6.1% (5 respondents) held the view that the future generation will not continue the Sraddha ritual. These individuals believed that the practice may gradually fade away over time. A small fraction of 2.4% (2 respondents) expressed skepticism regarding the usefulness of performing Sraddha, suggesting that they perceive the ritual as lacking practical value.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Jyapu community resides into three areas: Thane (upper area), Dathu (middle area), and Kone (lower area inside Kathmandu). They have a distinct administrative institution called Guthi, responsible for managing their religious practices. The sraddha ritual practice among them and their attitudes and understanding towards the practice was the interest area of research.

In the context of Newar Buddhism, death can be understood as the phenomenon where consciousness separates from the body. The body without consciousness is referred to as Shi-Mha or a deceased body, while a body with consciousness is called Mwa-Mha or a living body. The gradual dissipation of the four primary elements, known as Chaturmahabhut, exerts a significant influence on the body during this transition.

Sraddha is a ritualistic practice within the context of ancestral worship or rites for the deceased. It encompasses the recitation of texts, prayers, and the offering of food, as well as the oblation of pindas (rice balls) to honor the departed and their ancestors. The term "sraddha," originating from Sanskrit, conveys the essence of respect, underscoring the profound reverence accorded to the deceased.

The primary objective behind the ritualistic practices performed following the mentioning of the deceased's name is to facilitate their entry into Sukhavati Bhuvana, the realm of ultimate bliss, on their behalf. Sraddha ritual serves as an endeavor to create a favorable space in Sukhavati Bhuvana for the departed consciousness, symbolizing a desire for their spiritual well-being and liberation.

Among the total of 82 respondents, 47 individuals self-identified as Buddhist, constituting 57.3% of the sample. Conversely, 35 respondents identified themselves as Hindu, comprising 42.7% of the sample population. However, in the question of the preference of a priest during sraddha ritual, a majority of 75 individuals (91.5%) expressed their preference for Bajracharya priests. The collected data points us towards a significant discovery, the Jyapu community in Kathmandu predominantly engages Bajracharya priests for the sraddha ritual and seeks their guidance in various life events. By both birth and practice, it logically suggests that they align with Buddhism. However, a considerable number of individuals from this community identify themselves as Hindu. This inclination can be attributed to a combination of ignorance and the pervasive influence of Hinduism throughout the country.

The teachings of Buddhism are gradually losing their prominence, and the fundamental knowledge about Buddhism is at risk. In a particular question about rebirth, most people responded by mentioning the concept of a soul. Even those who identify as Buddhists are stating that the soul undergoes rebirth, which indicates a decline in understanding regarding Buddhism. This is concerning because the concept of No-Soul is a significant in Buddhism.

A growing disinterest in sraddha rituals can be observed among respondents. Approximately 40.2% of the participants expressed a desire for the sraddha to be completed quickly so that they can resume their official duties. When asked about the perceived boredom associated with sraddha, 39% of the respondents disagreed, stating that they do not find it

boring. However, a substantial number of 30% indicated that they feel obligated to perform sraddha due to cultural reasons, suggesting a decline in genuine interest in sponsoring such events. If this trend continues, it is likely that the number of individuals performing annual sraddha rituals will decrease in the future.

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