

Research Article

The Story of Two Cheese in Kalimpong

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Abstract

This article elaborates on the story of *churpi* and Kalimpong Cheese. In the mainstream media Kalimpong Cheese becomes the cheese of the Himalayas, whereas *churpi* gets forgotten. Kalimpong Cheese is kept in the stores, whereas *churpi* is found in the *haat*. Things found in the stores cater the product to a particular audience, and items found in the *haat* are considered ordinary. The *haat*, even if mundane, is a central part of everyday life in Kalimpong. It is how the public of Kalimpong town receives its fresh produce. The *haat*, in a way, has become a tradition of the town and my family. Taking a personal narrative of kitchen spaces and food cooked in my home, I engage with the two types of cheese. One has a historical record of how it was started, and the other is primarily considered the staple diet of the people in the Himalayas. Though both are cheese, when one uses the term ‘Kalimpong Cheese,’ there is a specific image that the product invokes. This image is often associated with the missionaries in the region and presents an exotic image that is essential to differentiate and market the product. *Churpi* doesn’t have such a detailed documented history, as it is mainly made by women locally. By exploring the circulation of both products, I engage with how different customers impact the image of these cheese. Finally, I also elaborate on how taste has an essential role in the image-making process of these two kinds of cheese.

Keywords

Home kitchen; memory; Kalimpong Cheese; *haat*; *churpi*

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Introduction

One of the important ways that food gets distributed in rural villages and towns in India is through the weekly open-air market called *haat*. The *haat* is a central part of the everyday life in Kalimpong. It is how the public of Kalimpong town receives its fresh produce. More than just an economic marketplace, it becomes a place where the faces of the sellers become familiar and relationships are formed. It is through these friendships and interactions that people buy a certain product and share recipes and ask how to cook certain produce.

In Kalimpong, the *haat* is located in an offshoot road of the 10th Mile Area on the R.C. Mintri Road. There is a cluster of open-air shops groups in the *haat*—one that sells clothes, another that sells spices, vegetable shops, and the *momo* (Nep. dumplings) and *phambi* (Nep. product made by mung bean) stalls that have kept on increasing every time I have visited. The fresh produce and other products from the village are what bring people to the *haat*. It is a lively place characterized by noise, speed, crowds, and the voices of women bargaining. It takes place two days a week—Wednesday and Saturday. The *haat* in a way has become a tradition of the town, and also my family.

During my school days in the 2000s, going to the *haat* was an everyday event for my mother and me. We would buy the different *saags* (Nep. green leaves like *rayo*, *duku*), *kinema* (Nep. fermented beans), *taba* (Nep. bamboshoot), and mushroom, among many other foods. One such food that we cherished and usually bought from the *haat* was *churpi*. It was one of the staple foods cooked at our home. There would be *churpi ko achar*, *churpi* salad, even *churpi momo*. *Momo*, rice, and vegetables always accompanied it. I am not sure about the etymology—if it is Tibetan or Nepali—but I do know that people in this region mostly eat it. Another type of cheese is also found in Kalimpong called Kalimpong Cheese.

Having grown up in Kalimpong, what confused me about Kalimpong Cheese, named after my hometown, was the fact that it was not widely consumed in Kalimpong. This does not mean that cheese is not cooked at home. It is just not ‘Kalimpong Cheese,’ but *churpi*. During my fieldwork in 2018–2019, I started enquiring about this particular Kalimpong Cheese. It led me to the shops, *haats*, and even a trip to Dr. Grahams Homes’ place.

This article is a tale of two kinds of cheese—*churpi* and Kalimpong Cheese. Though both are cheese, when one uses the term ‘Kalimpong Cheese,’ there is a certain image that the product invokes. By exploring the circulation of both products, we engage with how different customers impact the image of these cheese. The study begins with the making of a place through *churpi* and Kalimpong Cheese. This is followed by where these two cheeses are found. It helps us locate the relation of the food with the place. This is followed by the making of *churpi* and an exploration of the historical beginnings of Kalimpong Cheese.

The geographical indication of where the cheese comes from helps tell us the story of the colonization of the town. In the third section, the differences and similarities between the two cheeses are discussed. In the fourth section, I explore the relation between how food products are named and the questions that this raises. How Kalimpong Cheese becomes something that ends up getting the geographical name attached to it helps us understand its market position. In the article, I look at how *churpi* hardly gets such recognition whereas Kalimpong Cheese becomes a fetishized commodity. Finally, through food that is the same but has different trajectories, we ultimately see how it affects the imagination of the place.

Making and Unmaking of Place through Churpi and Kalimpong Cheese

In the 21st century, the media plays an important role in creating an image of a product. For Kalimpong Cheese, the re-invention of the tradition is through the many newspapers and the presence on television. Similarly, in the current age of online media, the presence of Kalimpong Cheese on YouTube exposes it to a much larger audience. In the videos, the focus is on reviving the culture of the mountain cheese that was once popular in the hills. For me, the cheese never left, as it was *churpi* for my household. The creation of this lost identity of these cheeses also goes to show how local producers are engaging with the creation of this identity for their product, as this product from this place - if marketed in a certain way - will bring value to the product. Besky (2014: 94) shows how the tea plantations workers themselves reproduce the ‘power of taste’ due to their ‘material conditions’ of wanting to stay in their villages on the plantations.

When it comes to products, the terroir of the product also comes to life with its naming.

Names and naming practices may reveal compelling information on how societies think (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006). Products come to life when given a name. “Names not only denote identity, they can elicit prestige” Paxson (2012: 14). The title Kalimpong Cheese produces the quaint image of a cheese produced in the Himalayas. It is similar to the Pink Himalayan Salt that I have never seen. Petridou (2012) mentions that the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) legislations have also accepted the relationship and the symbolic value of place in cheese making from the rationale that a particular place has an effect on the making of the cheese. But, even then, she argues that the consumer cannot get a similar taste from the cheese bought from the same region. Also, what the naming does is it connects “products to places” (Cleary 2012: 39).

This manifestation of place, when used for selling Kalimpong Cheese, is as much of the brand value as the nostalgia of the past of Kalimpong. The food’s relation with its production and consumption has as much to do with the place, memory, and nostalgia as with taste (Solier and Druz 2013), and this taste and memory - when utilized and marketed properly - add ‘value’ to the particular product (West 2020). In terms of Kalimpong Cheese, the representation of the cheese with its colonial past is also a strategic move in terms of marketing and creating an image of the product. When the tourists come to buy cheese, they ask for Kalimpong Cheese. It is so that the story of buying Kalimpong Cheese travels with them to their families and it is shared as an experience.

Moving away from the dominant narrative of Kalimpong Cheese, the Kalimpong Local Project, along with Café Kalimpong, is bringing the local organic produce of the region to its customer. When tourists come and buy packaged *dalle*, *gundruk*, and coffee from this project and shops, there is a claiming of the place. There is a reinvention of the image of the town, emphasizing on going local.

West (2012) argues that much can be said about cheese based on its name alone, than its aroma, texture, and flavor: “Even the most straightforward names, associating cheeses with their places of production, are the product of complex and often contentious histories” (ibid: 9). Paxton (2012) argues that names not only denote identity but can also elicit prestige. Some names might evoke connotations that work for some markets but not others. When a cheese is named Kalimpong Cheese, it adds to the mystic and the

exotic nature of the cheese from the Himalayas. Unlike *churpi*, when Kalimpong Cheese is available in the market globally with its entangled history of the place, it further gets value in the global commodity market.

The conversations surrounding the making of cheese are mostly about reinventing the tradition and culture of cheese making. It is a particular type of cheese that can cater to the global audience and not the local *churpi*. The tradition of making cheese started by a Swiss priest in Kalimpong is being used to create an image to the product. Using an already established past image of Kalimpong Cheese would help the products “to establish continuity with a suitable historical past (Hobswam 1983)” (cited in Besky 2013: 87). Taking the example of “Bitto cheese from Valtellina, an alpine region north of Milan,” Grasseni (2012: 26) explores the idea of authentic cheese makers, whereby she argues that the “geographical rooting” and the “genealogy of skills of cheesemakers” are drifting apart because cheese making artisans are also moving in search of better opportunities. In the case of Kalimpong Cheese, the artisans are returning to claim the colonial history of making the cheese as their tradition.

Churpi is traditionally made in the region and Kalimpong Cheese has been accepted as a part of the tradition. As West (2020) mentions, cheesemakers, after all, have to make a living through negotiating the innovation and traditional aspects of the product. In the case of Kalimpong, it could be branding the product in a certain way that would appeal to the global consumers and food connoisseurs. Further, Grasseni (2012) argues that media is of paramount importance in shaping the public perception of food via strategic communication. This can be seen in the case of Kalimpong Cheese, whereby the mention of Kalimpong Cheese on websites and NDTV travel shows creates a certain connection with the territory of Kalimpong and the particular cheese, while marginalizing the *churpi* that is the most eaten cheese of the masses. Kalimpong Cheese can be understood using Grasseni’s (2012) work, where she explores food as heritage and its influences in regional economies. Through an ethnographic work on the Alpine region of Northern Italy, she argues that communities that can advance with technological changes are ultimately the ones that can benefit in the market with a commodity like cheese. These technological advancements have happened after the advent of globalization. Kalimpong

Cheese became known globally with the role of the media and the growth of the demand for the unique food culture of the Himalayas. Along with the history of Kalimpong Cheese, the product at present is easier to market and sell (even at a higher price). Kalimpong Cheese is even found in the hotels of the metro city of Delhi. But, where do they get sold locally in Kalimpong?

***Churpi* in Haat and Kalimpong Cheese in the Stores**

Kalimpong is located in the India–Bhutan borderland. Historically, it has been ruled by different regimes, finally becoming a part of the British Empire in the year 1866. Through the years, infrastructures in the form of roads, ropeways, and bridges were built to reach Kalimpong. In the year 1905, the area of the *haat* was increased to thirty-six acres (Bell (1905: 6)). The increase of the area was to cater towards the increasing Tibetan trade in the region. Many of my respondents kept referring to the stories of how the Tibetan traders would bring lots of silver and gold from Tibet to sell in the *haat*. Once the trade stopped due to border closure, the *haat* increasingly became a place where you buy your everyday products for household cooking.

After strolling around the *haat* looking for dry fish and different *saags*, we always stopped by the corner of the *haat* where you find women selling *churpi*. The number of women selling *churpi* at present (in 2019) has decreased. Now, there are roughly around six women who sell only *churpi* in the *haat*. Apart from them, sometimes women in other parts of the *haat* also bring *churpi*. They make it at home and bring it along with other vegetables grown on their land.

Unlike *churpi*, Kalimpong Cheese is found only in some general stores of the town, the most famous being Lark's provisions (the importance of Lark's will be elaborated on in a later section). The location where these two cheeses are found gives us some sense of the trajectories of the food. *Churpi* becomes a local product whereas Kalimpong Cheese becomes something local, but yet global in its image. In the *haat*, *churpi* is found in the open, visible to the public, whereas Kalimpong Cheese is found in only particular places throughout the week. In my social circle, I know of no one who eats it. One has a historical record of how it was started, and *churpi* is largely considered as the staple diet of the people in the Himalayas whose beginning date can't be determined. It seems like people who know about

Kalimpong Cheese and those who can afford to buy it are among its local consumers.

Churpi becomes place-bound, but Kalimpong Cheese becomes something that is named through the place. Place-based foods are often linked to the specific identities of localities, territories, and communities of practice. The cultural diversity of tastes may well bear witness to the sustainable livelihoods of their original producers—usually mountain peasants making use of local resources according to their specifications (Grassenni 2012). Accordingly, using the resources and knowledge, women make *churpi* at their homes. When I was small, I saw my mother making *churpi* at home.

In the everyday lives of the people, it is *churpi* that makes itself found in the kitchens of the masses and not Kalimpong Cheese. Further, as Kalimpong Cheese cannot be found in the *haat*, it just adds to its strangeness and difference. It is found mainly in the stores. It has its customers, an already established image, and a niche market that promotes the product. Unlike *churpi* then, Kalimpong Cheese becomes a luxury food product that few people savor. The story of these two cheeses of Kalimpong makes us rethink the different links sustained between a product and its place. While both support local economies and are made with local ingredients, one is consumed widely in its place of production.

Making of *Churpi*

Churpi is something that can be found in the *haat* or also made in one's kitchen. The knowledge of making *churpi* is indigenous and is passed on within the family. While growing up I have seen my mother boil milk, curd, and vinegar to get a certain consistency. The remainder of this mix was strained in a white cotton cloth. This is done to separate the water from the product. My mom would always make a tight knot and then keep the cloth near the tap in the sink so that the remaining drops of water would fall into the basin. Now, my mother has grown old and she doesn't make it at home. She says, "It's easily available in the *haat*. If I want to buy, I can choose and buy accordingly." But, the image of the white cloth that we used to open to eat it simply with sugar is one of my fondest memories of childhood.

It is important to note here that *churpi* is not unique to Kalimpong but is found in the Eastern Himalayan region, ranging from Ilam in Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, and also Darjeeling. There

are two types of *churpi*: one soft and the other hard. For cooking purposes, one uses soft *churpi*. *Churpi* can be made with yak or cow milk. In Kalimpong, it is made with cow milk. Only the soft *churpi* has found a place in the *haat*, whereas hard *churpis* are found in the shops spread all across the town. The hard *churpi* costs around ₹80 (\$1.05) for a packet. The hard *churpi* is made by keeping the crumbs of *churpi* kept in a tightly sealed container. After a day or two, the tightened crumbs is taken out and left in the sun to be dried. This step is done to remove the oils and then they are cut into small square blocks. The longer the *churpi* is kept out in the sun, the harder its texture becomes. On digital media platforms, this *churpi* is also referred to as the hardest cheese in the world. My mother uses the soft *churpi* in her cooking.

According to Rai, Shyanpliang, and Tamang (2016), soft *churpi* can also be made by boiling buttermilk and following the same step as discussed above and then fermenting it for a day or two. Tamang (2016) discusses various ethnic foods of the Himalayas that use the different processes of fermenting legumes. The fermentation of the legumes leads to products like *kinema* for the Nepali community and *akhone* for one tribe of the Naga community. Fermentation as a process is used extensively by the indigenous population of the Himalayas. This process of making food creates solidarity and shared identities among the mountain people, almost creating “a kind of sensory imagined community” (Kikon 2015: 322).

Churpi is a key component in some of the favorite dishes cooked at my home - *churpi* and radish, *churpi* and tomato, onion and chili/*dale*. Sometimes in the European style of eating cheese, there is a separate course at the end of the meal with a cheeseboard. But *churpi* is rarely enjoyed on its own. It is always cooked with other products and eaten together with rice, meat, or other vegetables. When on its own, it is used to make *churpi ko jhol*, (soft cheese soup). This kind of *churpi* is not available in the permanent shops but mostly during the *haat* days, sold by the local women vendors, who make it themselves in their houses.

Churpi is not new to Kalimpong and its people. The different ethnic groups of the regions use it in their everyday food habits. The *churpi* cannot be identified with Kalimpong alone. *Churpi* has different stories in different parts of the Himalayas. *Churpi* in Nepal creates a class difference because of its pungent smell. One of

my respondents mentioned, “The people from Kathmandu would consider us *churpi* eating people in a demeaning manner, referring to us as people from the village.” In contrast, in the Eastern Himalayas, this is staple food included in the diet. When the Nepali community migrated from Nepal to the hills of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, these spaces provided them with work opportunities and also the possible co-existence with different communities of the region (Tibetan, Lepcha¹, Bihari, Marwari, etc.).

Churpi is the foodways across the Himalayas. The taste and the texture of this are not new for the migrated communities of Kalimpong. For the women in Kalimpong, *churpi* is known and familiar. It easily gets mixed and works as a quick condiment for the *momo*, or a quick accompaniment or *churpi* soup for rice. *Churpi* is quick to make and has a familiar smell. Women through cooking certain foods can include and exclude certain products. *Churpi* is a familiar food that when they stopped making for it for themselves, they started buying from the *haat*. Unlike Kalimpong Cheese, *churpi* was always present in the kitchen of the houses.

Colonial Beginnings of Kalimpong Cheese

“Do you have Kalimpong Cheese?” asked a tourist. On an affirmative nod from the shopkeeper, she was excited. She had read of the Kalimpong Cheese on the Lonely Planet website and was looking forward to trying it. She evaluated the cheese, bought it, and went on her way. This encounter was during my fieldwork in the year 2019 at Lark’s Provision store in Kalimpong. Lark’s is one of the few stores that sells Kalimpong Cheese. The Lonely Planet Website guide recommends that visitors go straight to Lark’s Provision Store. It mentions: “This is the best place to pick up Edam-like local cheese (per kilogram ₹600 (\$7.90)), produced in Kalimpong since the Jesuits established a dairy here in the 19th century.”²

It was roughly around 1945 when clergyman Father Andre Butty established the Swiss Welfare Dairy in Kalimpong. This can be associated with the many colonial capitalist enterprises that grew in the 19th century. Pradhan (2004) writes that the welfare dairy was started with the mission to employ the people of Kalimpong. In his initial days, Father Butty was focused on Tibet, the place where the French missionaries were denied entry, but were always longing to

set foot on. After all, Tibet was a forbidden land to the missionaries.³

It was the Swiss missionaries who introduced the particular European style of cheese in this part of the Himalayas. Kalimpong Cheese was one and even Homes had a version of this Cheese locally called the Homes Cheese. Dr. Reverend John Anderson Grahams was the founder of Dr. Grahams Homes School (DGH), which was built in 1900. DGH is spread over an area of 500 acres, with the school as its hub. It has various departments—the workshop, the farm, the estate, the bakery, the central kitchen, and the hospital. It also has small cottages as a residential area for its boarders.⁴

Each cottage had a lady who looked after the cottage and made sure the boarders followed strict rules of helping with the cottage chores. The Homes school was originally started for the orphaned kids of Anglo-Indians. The system created within the homes was to generate good colonial citizens who could ultimately be a part of the colonial networks spanning across different geographies in the world. Each department of the school catered to its students. The Homes Dairy also makes the cheese.

Rohan, a middle-aged man nearing fifty, is the one who looks after the dairy. He is the one who makes the Homes Cheese. It was during my visit to Homes that I met Rohan. He was busy when I asked him about who makes Kalimpong Cheese, but he was quick to mention Gitabbling. In a very non-challant way, he told me: “You know I am the one who taught Vijay how to make the European style of cheese. He is the one running the factory in Gitabbling. He is my brother-in-law.” The Lark’s Provision store gets its Kalimpong Cheese from the same person in Gitabbling. Unlike *churpi* which can be made by people in their own homes, making Kalimpong Cheese requires space and more time. Rohan is aware of the churning of milk at the right temperature and the various devices used to make Kalimpong Cheese. This knowledge of making this particular cheese is getting circulated within one family that ultimately makes Kalimpong Cheese.

Taste, Adaptation, and Affordability

Mr. Prem, owner of the Lark’s Store mentioned, “I saw the potential of this cheese and started marketing it to Kolkata especially in the New Market Area,” an enclosed shopping market where it was largely consumed by the Anglo-Indian community. Today, Kalimpong cheese can

be found in the New Market in Kolkata. It is the same cheese that makes its way from Gitabbling to Lark’s and then finally to Kolkata. Before this marketing by Mr. Prem, Father Butty used to take this cheese as a gift in many important events. He handed this cheese to various embassies as a gift. This cheese traveled far and wide, including to the top politician of India namely Rajiv Gandhi, who bought a block of this cheese during his first visit to Kalimpong in 1975. This product has found its consumers in the affluent few who know about its existence. The ‘social life’ of both the cheese that consists of production, consumption, and the exchanges that take place in between them, is completely different (Appadurai 1986). One revolves around its niche consumers and the other revolves around the public. Appadurai (1986) argues that meanings and value are inscribed in their forms, uses, and trajectories.

Keeping the different trajectories in mind, Kalimpong Cheese had few customers in the town, but had a larger global appeal whereas *churpi* had a local appeal. When I bring this point up to Mr. Prem, he mentions that you need to develop a palate for such kind of cheese: “It has not happened here yet.” In other words, the taste of Kalimpong Cheese could not reach the general public. Kalimpong Cheese is an acquired taste, mentioned Mr. Prem, and people haven’t been able to manage to acquire the taste here in Kalimpong. Further, there is already an established product, *churpi*, that is used in the local cuisines of Kalimpong. Kalimpong Cheese could not create a market among the local public due to the presence of *churpi*. Further, Kalimpong Cheese became a luxury even for the people who would buy and eat it. I can’t recall eating Kalimpong Cheese while growing up.

Along with the taste and affordability, the distribution of the product also has an important role to play for its lack of consumption by the masses in the region. According to the shop vendor, Kalimpong Cheese is expensive and not everyone can afford it. He went on to elaborate on how one slice of cheese would easily cost you ₹60 or more. He compared it with the broiler chickens available in the market saying: “Rather than buying a slice of cheese, one can pay some extra rupees and buy the chicken and feed the whole family.” The choice of his comparison was of meat and nutrition in terms of a slice of Kalimpong Cheese.

In the case of *churpi*, one can buy 100g for ₹20 from the women in the *haat*. This 100g can be

used three to four times in different ways. When accompanied with tomato, chili, and onion, a slight sprinkle in the end when the dish is cooled gives it a unique taste. You can enjoy a small portion of the *churpi* with sugar. It can also be used to make a *churpi achar* to be devoured with *momo*. As a quick soup one can also use *churpi*. In comparison, 100g of Kalimpong Cheese costs you ₹60. It can be used for two times maximum, and unlike *churpi*, it cannot feed the whole family. It is bought more for the taste than as a food item for the whole family. Some use it to make pasta, to eat it with bread, and some also make a coarse paste of red chili and Kalimpong Cheese.

For women, Kalimpong Cheese becomes a luxury item, an aspirational choice, and some simply hate the taste. Some of my respondents didn't buy it due to the price being exorbitantly high. Kalimpong Cheese seemed like an outsider whereas *churpi* became something of the region. Some women were not even aware of Kalimpong Cheese. This shows that the history of a place is always fragmented and many times keeps the people at a distance. It does not mean that all women in Kalimpong do not know about Kalimpong Cheese, but only women belonging to a particular social status and having the knowledge of the cheese buy it from the different stores.

During my time in Lark's stores, among the many tourists who came in search of Kalimpong Cheese, I saw one lady who came and bought a whole block of cheese for ₹600. When I asked the women in the *haat* why they don't buy Kalimpong Cheese, they questioned me: "How much does it cost?" Upon my answer, many women responded saying, "In ₹600, I would try to accommodate vegetables, fish, and meat for the family. This way they can also get a variety of dishes and nutrients for the family member. And also, I don't know how it would taste and if everyone would like it or not." This instance shows that trying new things also requires affordability and money and taste. Most of the women with whom I interacted were housewives, and they told me that if they were paying money and buying something, they hoped that the whole family could enjoy the food.

Home Kitchen and Restaurants: Visibility of the Two Cheese

While interacting with their respondents, two matriarchs of the family, Choudhary and Choudhary (2019: 10) write, "The sense of power

and authority in commanding the kitchen space was a palpable presence in our interactions." After all, it is in the kitchen where women (typically) cook different produce bought from the *haat*, and it is in their subtle cooking styles and family recipes that lie the possibilities of certain products being excluded or included in the local food culture. Cooking is also an important part of enjoying the food because it captures so much of "everyday life, thought and activity across time, place and generation" (Supski 2013: 28). It has stories of migration, movement, relationships, and sharing the knowledge of food making of different houses comes together in the kitchen. Choudhary and Choudhary (2019) explore how new dishes are invented in houses due to marriages in different communities in Guwahati. Some women make *churpi* at their house and some buy it from the *haat*. The dishes made with *churpi* - when they travel with the women - are the women's nostalgia, remembrance, and memory, all bundled in one when moving from one house to another. For my mother and my respondents, *churpi* is familiar and Kalimpong Cheese is not.

Like the tourist whom we met in the earlier chapter, a few locals and transit customers also buy Kalimpong Cheese. Upon inquiring with the shopkeeper about the demand for cheese, he mentioned that the demand is present, but the supply is limited. After Father Butty left India in 1986, the dairy was taken over by Peter Rai, which ultimately got closed. Few of the members of the welfare dairy have taken the art of making cottage cheese and are earning a livelihood (Pradhan 2009). The production of Kalimpong Cheese has started gaining importance in recent years with the youth taking active interest. The cheesemakers at Gitabling, almost ten km from Kalimpong town, meet this demand. Recently, there have been many young people who are returning to the hometown from cities to explore new entrepreneurial avenues in their hometown. This new entrepreneurial avenue is also directly related to the markets that Kalimpong Cheese provides. During the interviews and narratives, claiming Kalimpong Cheese as a part of our culture, comments like "Reviving the old culture of making cheese" are frequently seen in advertisements (Rare 2019).

The visibility of Kalimpong Cheese has increased largely due to the presence of the products on various online websites. Apart from the Lonely Planet Website, Kalimpong and Kalimpong Cheese have also featured in an NDTV Travel

Show, called Highway on a Plate (a point mentioned to me proudly by the owner and shopkeeper at Lark's). This has led to an increase in the demand for the product. The tourists and tour guides mostly bring customers to Lark's to buy Kalimpong Cheese. During my many visits to the Lark's store, I have seen tourists buying Cheese for ₹100 or ₹60. Kalimpong Cheese was made visible during the British Empire through massive scale conversions, missionization, and British occupation. Through the presence of European style cheese in Kalimpong, the colonial forces of the British Empire were also trying to civilize the food habits of the indigenous population. In contrast, the use of *churpi* in home kitchen spaces and its mere presence is also a subversion of the so-called refined Kalimpong Cheese.

The *churpi* is your everyday food that doesn't get noticed but is consumed widely at home and restaurants in Kalimpong. *Churpi ko achar* (churpi pickle) usually accompanies *momo*. Some even use *churpi* as a filling of the *momo*. Finding these recipes in the restaurant further adds to the locality of the product. Unlike *churpi* that is not just limited to Kalimpong, Kalimpong Cheese fits the image of the touristic town that Kalimpong is aspiring to be. Kalimpong Cheese has a story that is filled with tradition, history, and place.

Conclusion

When my mother cooks *churpi*, it's her sentimental ode to my grandmother from whom she learned cooking. It is her memory, nostalgia, and remembrance. She doesn't consider Kalimpong Cheese's history as her own, as it did not feature in her cooking either in the past or at present. For her, cooking food is as much about her lived experiences shared with her mother, than just recipes. It is through cooking that my mother remembers the knowledge shared, observed, and learned. Similarly, Supski (2013: 29) argues, "cooking is one of the strengths of the women in my family representing solidarity, the continuity of family across time and place." Through exploring a cookbook written by her grandmother for her family, she engages with the art of making a cake that was usually perfected by her aunt that was filled with memories and nostalgia.

The act of passing intergenerational memory in my family happened not through cookbooks but by sharing the everyday lived lives of the women in my family. Choudhary and Choudhary (2019) in their essay capture the nostalgia of the

way of preparing foods in the yesteryears and the changes that the kitchen goes through show the journey of the people. As most women learn to cook new food and habituate themselves in their arena of the kitchen, they bring their sense of what food means to them and their way of cooking.

Women making *churpi* and selling it in the *haat* often get overlooked by the consumers when comparing it with the historical story of Kalimpong Cheese. This research article began with the question of why Kalimpong Cheese is not consumed by the masses. Throughout writing this article, I realized that it is so because its story is different and doesn't find resonance with the women that I have lived, heard, and shared my life with. Kalimpong Cheese through its producers is trying to (re)make a name for itself in the fine luxury food products of cheese. Let's hope that while gaining a name for itself, it doesn't put at risk the gendered legacies of *churpi*.

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Endnotes

1. For the influence of missionaries in the Lepcha community refer to Lepcha (2017).
2. See <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/west-bengal/kalimpong/shopping/lark-s-provisions/a/poi-sho/479060/356542>
3. Refer to the Swiss Mission section of St. Augustine's School's website: <https://www.saskalimpong.com>
4. Refer to Dr. Grahams Homes School's website: <https://www.drgrahamshomes.net/>

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