

**Social Reality in Oral Literature:
A Study of the Rai Folk Narratives from
Sikkim**

A Dissertation Submitted To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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I, **Bonita Rai**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

The content of this thesis has also been subjected to plagiarism check.

This is being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of English, School of Language and Literature.

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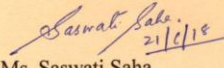
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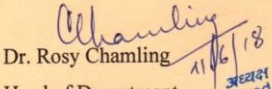
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled "Social Reality in Oral Literature: A Study of the Rai Folk Narratives from Sikkim" submitted to Sikkim University for fulfillment of the requirement of the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of English, embodies the result of bonafide research and work carried out by Bonita Rai under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship. All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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“Social Reality in Oral Literature: A Study of the Rai Folk Narratives from Sikkim”

Submitted by Bonita Rai under the supervision of Ms. Saswati Saha, Assistant Professor of the Department of English, School of Languages and Literature, Sikkim University.

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- Bonita Rai

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Rais or the Kirat Khambhu Rais (Kirat Desh) along with tribes like Limbus and Yakhas are said to be the third ancient kingdom that ruled the Hindu Kush Mountains. It was "...established by the first Kirata Emperor Yalamba Hang son of Senchheingba in c. 2,153 BC." (Subba, 2) At that time the Rais were just known as Khambus and there are various controversies as how the title 'Rai' came into being.

"The word Rai is seen on a copper-plate inscription of the Jumal Raja Punya Malla and dated 1259 Shak sambat or equivalent to 1338 A.D. However, the word Rai is used in the inscription in the King's own way and doesn't indicate the Rai in question. If properly studied, one can clearly see that this Rai word came into full use only after Prithvi Narayan Shah annexed Kirant areas to make a greater Nepal around 1831 B.C." (Gautam.R, K.Ashok, 155-156).

Prithivi Narayan Shah (1723-1775 A.D), ruler of Gorkha kingdom gave the title 'Rai' to honor people who were given responsibilities of land and revenue but in time all Khambus came to be known as the Rais. In today's context 'Rai' is an umbrella term encompassing diverse population; diverse because different sub-castes within the Rais have different languages, distinct rituals and beliefs. For this reason *dubo sari* (Bermudagrass, found in abundance and used for rituals by Nepali folks) is a common phrase used commonly and heard by many while addressing the Rai community. Rai is the common title/ *Jaat* used synonymously by all the people belonging to this

community. They are further divided into *Thars*, which literally means the place of origin: for example people tracing their ancestral origin to a place named Yaku will be/ are known as *Yakuley* or *Yaku* itself. People from Kulung be known as *Kulungey* or *Kulung* itself. The second subdivision is *Pacha*, 'Pa' meaning father and 'Cha' meaning son. So the son will be given a sub caste that belongs to his father and their forefathers before them. The third sub-division is *Samet*, where 'Sa' meaning 'sarir or body' and 'Met' meaning 'creator'. So the child gets the title from both father and mother side of the lineage. *Thar*, *Pacha* and *Samet* all are important for a person belonging to Rai community for all religious and social practices like marriage, funeral, etc. as these are the important markers of their identity situating them in the society.

Kulung, Khaling, Chamling, Chaurasaya, Thilung, Thulung, Dungmali, Dumi, Puma, Bantawa, Yaku, Baying, Sotang, Sampang, Mewahang, Ambola, Dilpali are some of the *thars* or subgroups. There are more than fifty such *thars* with their own language. Some of the *thars* have more than hundreds of *Pacha* under them. To get the exact and correct list of Rai tribes and clans would be next to impossible as new clans keep on adding continuously. The new clan or sub-groups are formed because of their distinct habit(s), new place of origin, speech and other such unique characteristics which gives them a new name and that new name becomes their identity or *thar*. Even if two Rai's are world apart and have the same *thar* they are considered as brothers and sisters and marriage between them is not permitted.

With time people from the Rai community have settled in different parts of India; for instance in Assam, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim. In Sikkim the total

Rai population as per 1999 census was 50,033 and the latest census of 2006 shows that out of 5, 81,546 total populations of the state 78,615 people belong to the Rai community. The Rai community is very diverse in itself, almost all the *thars* have their own individual languages but they have no written script which is perhaps the reason why so the community is rich in oral tradition. One element, among others, that binds the community together, in spite of all the divisions, is their folktales. It is through these tales they know how all the *thars*, in the beginning, were brothers originating from the same parents. Their folklores being one teach them how they eventually went their separate ways mainly for sustenance and in need for finding suitable places for settling down provides a rock solid infrastructure to the edifice of the community even today when the community is undergoing a rapid change from within.

Folklore:

Folklore is a way of life so it is an integral part of every society and individual's life. They are the cultural vent to the cultural soul of the community. The term 'Folklore' was put forward in 1846 by a British antiquarian William Thoms who felt that scholarly works related to folkloristic nature should be labelled under one heading. Folklores are as old as people and civilization, the need to connect and communicate is the primordial instinct that humans have and that is what gives life to a tale. Folklores are evergreen, larger than life itself as it is passed on from one generation to another with care. Whenever one talk about folklores, the mention of Grimm brothers are inevitable for they were the ones who came forward with the famous collection of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* in 1812; paving the way towards folklore studies eventually.

Fairy tales, like other folk tales and folk myths circulated among folk in oral forms before Grimm brothers anthologize it for readers across the globe. The establishment of ‘The Folklore Society’ in London in 1877 and ‘The American Folklore Society’ in 1888 opened up avenues for research and discussion on the subject. From that time on Folklorists have come up with their own ideas of what folklore is. Although there had been considerable research in the field of folklore, be it anthropological or literary, scholars have hardly agreed with each other, as Dundes has observed, “In the past, and even in the present, there has been considerable disagreement among folklorists as to the nature of folklore.”(Dundes, 226)

Mac. Edward Leech defines folklore as, “...the generic term to designate the customs, traditions, beliefs, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc.; in short the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people,...”¹. Alan Dundes in his *Folklore as a Mirror of Culture* defines folklore as, “... *autobiographical ethnography*- that is, it is a people’s own description of themselves.”(Dundes, 471) When we read both the definitions, we see that both the scholars disagree with what the other has to say. Leech’s definition which clearly suggests that folklore belongs only to people who are ‘unsophisticated’ meaning primitive, who lack refinement and class, also points out that civilized, modern and ‘sophisticated’ people do not have folklores of their own. Whereas, the title of Dundes’s article itself suggests that folklore is a part of every society as culture of various kinds are found not only, as Leech suggests, in primitive, ‘unsophisticated’ society but even the modern and civilized societies have their own distinct culture. Apart from the above disagreement some folklorist consider only orally transmitted or

un-written literature as folklore while others are of the opinion that even those communities who have scripted tales, myths and other forms of 'lores' too have folklores.

For Martha C. Sims, who provides a holistic view, "Folklore is informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures and our traditions, that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviors and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge with other people." (10)

Manx National Heritage has given a domestic touch to the concept of folklore by saying that; "Folklore is about hidden fears and old wives' tales, about rituals and customs which helped people make sense of an often frightening world."²

Taking note of all the controversies and disagreements that exist in the world of scholarship regarding the concept of folklore, when we focus on the *Definitions of Folklore* given by twenty-one eminent folklorists we can see that the following are common characteristics of folklore:

- i. Folklore is traditional and primitive.
- ii. It is an artistic expression which is highly imaginative.
- iii. It is oral or spoken words.
- iv. It is collective or related to group experience.
- v. It is acquired and transferred from old to new generation.

vi. It is a part of culture with unknown or no specific author.

vii. It is living and changing.³

M. Dorson has outlined four broad sectors of folklore and folklife studies.

These are:

- 1) Oral Literature
- 2) Material Culture
- 3) Social folk customs, and
- 4) Performing folk arts. (Dorson, 2-4)

Oral literature or 'Verbal Art' as William Bascom has said, denotes folktales, myths, legends, riddles and other form of arts which is transferred through the word of mouth. The major portion of such literature is un-written but over the period of time those tales have been documented, written and translated in other languages as well. (Bascom, 375) A.K Ramanujan's *Folktales from India* contains 'a selection of Oral Tales from twenty-two languages' from across the country. Here he has included tales from two North-Eastern states of India too; Assam and Nagaland. *Stories and Legends of the Liangmai Nagas* compiled by Sujata Miri contains tales from Liangmais, a sub-tribe of the Zeliangrong Nagas. *Folktales of Northeast India* by Bhaskar Roy Barman is another such example where he has anthologized tales from all the seven northeastern states of India. He has curated this book keeping in mind the people of all ages; "... there is still a widespread concept relating to the folk-tale that it is only meant for children, not for old people... I have selected those folk-tales which will appeal to both older people and children, or rather young people," (Barman, vii)

Material cultures are physical or visible heritage, the techniques and skills specific to a community; so are costumes, traditional cookery items, traditional homes, etc. There is no fixed time or age for learning or transferring these skills. In the Rai community, it is especially during festivals and rituals that young people lend a helping hand and they watch and learn as they assist the elders. For instance; when a young person watch and learn how to cook *wachipa* (a tradition dish prepared during rituals, with the sacrificial chicken where 'wa' means 'chicken' and 'chipa' means different parts of the chicken) by helping elders clean or skin the chicken during its preparation on any ongoing ritual of the Rai community or learning the art of decorating the alter, the art of making bamboo items and others are instances of transferring the knowledge of material culture.

The festivals, celebrations, leisure games etc. are Social folk customs which binds a community together. It gives a chance of looking inside the circle of the community as customs require group performance rather than just an individual at work. The rituals during a marriage ceremony, birth or death requires both the elders and the young people of the community to come together to observe and participate in the rituals. Other exclusive rituals like; the ones among the Rais, worshipping the *Mannng* (the almighty) or *Chulah-Dhunga* (the worshipping place of the Rais with three elongated stones) requires the exclusive presence of relatives and elders who recite the *Mundum* (sacred knowledge or holy words). It solidifies the feeling of brotherhood and fellow feeling, they come forward to help the members of their community in good and bad times alike and one can see them performing as one unit.

The custom of performing folk arts includes all folksongs, folk dance and dramas that need to be organized and performed. The Rai community sings and dances in their festivals exalting and thanking the Mother Nature. *Sakela* and *Sakewa* also known as *Udhawli* and *Ubhawli* are crop sowing and harvesting festivals which is celebrated within the family and together with whole community as well. The *Sili* dance and songs are exclusive to these festivals. These four elements broadly cover the life in a traditional community.

Oral Tradition/ Orality:

Oral Literature as mentioned earlier is spoken, narrated, sung or transferred with the help of speech, it is not documented or written down which makes it vulnerable to corruption but this also helps in its enrichment and diversity. Oral tradition or oral narratives are the markers of identity and cultural heritage and more so in communities that lack the written script. Hence, the Rai folktales or any folktales for that matter will fall under the category of Oral Literary Tradition. Oral tradition has been defined as, “verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation. The definition specifies that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on a musical instrument.” (Vansina, 27) The word ‘oral tradition’ or ‘orality’ was in use from the early Eighteenth Century and it was then used in religious sentiments, ‘the word of the God’. It was Walter J Ong who gave this word a new dimension, “Ong’s use (and popularization) of the term “orality” exemplifies a historical process of secularization of debates about oral tradition and orality...” (McDowell, 170) “... Ong understood orality as a mode a

consciousness” (McDowell, 171). He has divided orality into two parts; Primary Orality and Secondary Orality;

...the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, ‘primary orality’. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. (Ong, 10-11)

Oral tradition in the Rai community is just starting to leave the stage of Primary Orality to enter into Secondary Orality. The elders of the community have jointly introduced the Rai script known as the ‘*Rai Lipi*’ recently. Learned individuals and research scholars are putting their effort to collect, compile, preserve and transfer the dying Rai languages, their folktales and folk myths with the help of present day technology and thus, pushing the Oral Tradition of the Rai community to its Secondary Orality stage. But the fear is that the language itself may die before the endeavor spreads its root, for various reasons such as dwindling population who speak the Rai languages. The youth are more inclined to use the Nepali language as it is a medium of instructions in many schools and the commonest language of parlance in the hills spoken by almost all the communities residing in the Eastern Himalayan region, albeit most of the communities have their own language. Moreover, the Rai language has no relevance outside their own community and even within their own community their sub-castes have different languages. In such situation it is in Nepali language that the oral tales, myths and stories are shared. The Rai language is slowly being reduced to the language of rituals. These oral tradition and tales serves as a

bridge to connect the folk culture, rituals and customs to their present life. Even then the problems that come up with orality cannot be neglected;

...oral cultures have little sense of a relative past and either do not assign dates to events in their tradition, or forget large parts of the past. The transmitters of such traditions thereby 'telescope' their own history and provide a chronology which, though it is comprehensible to the members of their group, will mislead outside observers conditioned to dealing in firm dates. (Woolf, 31)

The situation is similar when it comes to the oral narratives and tales of the Rai community. The story does not start in any specific date or a century it starts with; "Once upon a time" or "In the beginning". These oral narratives thrive on the collective memory of a group; collective memory is nothing but an individual's memory based on similar experience, shared to form a narrative. Shared experience becomes a memory, these memories constructed by certain important events, at prime places stay with people in form of oral narratives. Collective memory strengthens the feeling of belonging and oneness and continues to bind the community under the banner of Oral Tradition. But with time situation changes and so does memory, it either gets modified or slowly forgotten as people with same memory are no more there to relate it with the present physical space. Halbwachs' theory of collective memory based on space elucidates that,

... we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings... it might be conceded

that every group and every kind of collective activity is linked to a specific place, or segment of space... (Halbwachs, 7)

The people who know the tales are old and they themselves admit to the fact that they have forgotten most of the tales. Forgetting becomes natural as people of the community, either they do not share the tales as often as they used to before or because the physical space described in the tales are no more in front of them. They only remember the parts which still finds place in their culture and rituals. The tale of *Haechakua*⁴ who was the very first man and the ancestors of the Rais, his tales of struggles which used to take seven days and seven nights (resource person's word) to be told is now finished within an hour or two. Three people from three different places narrated the same tale, tale of *Haechakua*, only one of them remembers his father and mother. Another tales which supposedly took place before *Haechakua* existed, there was a 'human'⁵ and his brothers⁶, here narrators differ in numbers while recounting the brothers of 'human', some recounted three while others recounted seven. When one listens to the story there are considerable gaps which cannot be refilled now, for those parts have been lost with the time. Few things are left to the understanding of the listener and if one actually sit and think about certain tales in depth it will make no real sense; for example; in one of the origin myths there is no land but only water but then *Paruhang*, the lord is said to be living on a mountain. Mountain as we know geographically is a part of land. It then becomes like the 'Chinese Whisper' game where the message or words are lost in the process of transferring, whispering from one to another man's ear; sometimes it loses its meaning and at other times the message delivered at the end of the chain is entirely different.

The relevance of Oral Tradition is always questioned as most of the time they do not have any physical evidence to support their credibility. But when it comes to historical facts, they have documents and records of history frozen in time. Oral Traditions are constantly evolving, since they emerge from collective memory and consciousness of a group, they may be ancient but not irrelevant.

...oral traditions are documents of the present, because they are told in present. Yet they also embody a message from the past, so they are expressions of the past at the same time. They are the representations of the past in the present. One cannot deny either the past or the present in them.
(Vansina, xii)

Moreover, oral tradition is imbibed by the society and it is woven into their traditions, customs and rituals which helps one to gain insight into their social realities. Their living beliefs, religion and day to day activities in many ways are shaped by such tales that are exclusive to that particular community and mustn't be measured or understood in comparison to other communities.

Literature Review

The study of folklore and folktale is not a new area of study. Scholars and researchers have carried out work at different places across the globe studying diverse communities. Many such researches has been conducted on the folklore of the ethnic tribes of Nepal and India with emphasis on the oral literature, traditional customs, and social institutions. These works continuously shed light on the culture and traditions of ethnic communities and guide the work of new researchers in their venture.

A book of short stories *Himalayan Folklore: Tales of Eastern Nepal* compiled by Shiv Kumar Shrestha from Kirat tribe consist of few Rai tales which basically talks about how the Rai communities were living in close proximity with nature. The story gives us the reason behind the community worshiping stone and trees during a fix time of every year.

“On Folk Narratives” an article by Komal Kothari, talks about his experience on study of folk narratives with Rajasthan Folk narrators known as Bhat. Bhat are professional story tellers who belong to two groups ‘Mukhavancha’ Bhat and ‘Pothibanacha’ Bhat, one memorizes all the genealogy of one’s family other keeps a written record of it. They are paid by the respective families to keep their record.

Oral Tradition as History; this book by Jan Vansina is about the presence of oral tradition even when it is not verbally told. It talks about the process of a story being converted into an oral tradition and how oral tradition becomes a history. Everything in and around us is so dynamic that it is not possible to depend entirely on past alone so in that case oral tradition though they are from the past incorporates what is in the present. It shapes itself along with the time and hence, equally historical and important as historical documents.

In “Cosmogonic Myth and ‘Sacred History’” an article by Mircea Eliade, he has taken myths from two communities; Ngadju Dayak of Borneo (community studied by Hans Schärer) and the Aranda tribes of Central Australia (materials collected by T. G. H. Strehlow). Before going into the myths of these two tribes the author points out how ‘myth’ is considered as something untrue and fictional owing its popularity to the Greek myths. But in real sense myths when studied through

religious and social life are more than true which reveals the higher truth about the beginnings. Taking myths from above mentioned two tribes he explains how myths become a sacred history for a community. That sacred history becomes a site for longing and reintegration of what was just after the creation and it lives on in the tradition of such communities.

Scope of the Study

As the title of the study suggests “Social Reality in Oral Literature”, the present study will focus on the impact of tales in the contemporary Rai society. Communities, though dynamic, always has its root imbedded deep within its history and culture and tales tells us about the history and culture of a society that it belongs to. The literary analysis of the folktales will bring us closer to the social life of the community. It will also help reveal their rich oral heritage and their creative expressions. In studying and analyzing the tales from different sub-groups, the elements that separate them and unify them will also come to the forefront. Most of the published collections of the Rai folktales are from Nepal. But since tales are in oral forms they tend to differ when they travel from one country to another. Moreover, it is a difficult task to cover whole of the Sikkim state within the time frame of the project. Keeping these two points and time into consideration the tales used and studied in this dissertation are specifically collected from three Rai villages in East-Sikkim; Rolep, Assamlinzey, Ranka-Lingdum Busty.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims at understanding in depth the oral tradition that is prevalent in the Rai community by collecting and documenting the folktales. Since the community has no written script, they preserve their heritage through oral tradition, emphasis will be given to primary sources. The study also aims at understanding how the Rai community stands as one unit in spite of having diverse sub-groups at multiple levels.

In order to attain the aim, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. Collect similar tales from different sub-groups with variations which will help in bringing out the unifying element within the community.
- ii. To study and analyze the social and cultural settings and context upon which the tales are based.
- iii. To evaluate the significance of oral tradition as a tool to preserve and enliven the collective consciousness of the community.

Methods and Methodology

The proposed research is empirical, descriptive and interdisciplinary in nature as it uses anthropological tools for data collection. Anthropology is basically the study of humans and their behavior in the society; in other word, it studies human being in totality. Anthropological research or its tools of research differ from other social science survey as other social sciences use structured interviews and administered questionnaires. Whereas Anthropological tool consists of observation and unstructured interview as the researcher learns from the informant. The use of

Anthropological tool was important for this research as it needed observing the members of the Rai community in their natural surrounding and the questions had to be framed then and there according to their response and narration of the tales. In spite of using the Anthropological tool this research is primarily literary in nature as the end was to collect oral literature form primary resource persons. The field work was conducted in a span off six months at different places of East Sikkim. The resource persons are mostly elders of the community, or person with the knowledge of the *Mundum* (sacred oral text of the Rai community). For literary analysis of the collected tales, theories of orality, memory and history and eco-criticism are used.

Research Problem:

“The only thing that is constant is change”

-Heraclitus

Spoken words cannot be taken back they say but they are modified, altered and forgotten many a times. Such is the character of spoken words and oral literature. Orality as defined by ‘National Endowment for the Humanities’ is “A quality of anything that is spoken, chanted, recited, sung, or read aloud rather than written down or read quietly” So, anything that is not written down faces the danger of being erased; for memory is a very fragile thing. Even then primitive societies are rich with oral tradition and narratives for it helps them in binding the people and communities together. Traditions and culture are passed down orally from generation to generation in form of Folktales, Folklores, songs, rituals and so on. These narratives or tales

carry with them social and moral messages; the stories of the origin of the tribe, their conquest, survival and many more small and big events of the tribal life make up their rich tradition and heritage. Folklores and Folktales are as old as people and their tribe as 'Folk' means people and 'Tales' or 'Lore' means stories. So in simple terms Folk tales or Folklores are the stories of people who live(d) and carry them.

India has always had a rich and diverse repository of oral traditions, be it stories of *Panchantratra*, *Kathasarita* or *Jatakas*. They existed even before scholars started looking into these subjects. Oral literature/traditions are dateless and they do not follow a strict chronology like that of historical documents. And moreover, with the passage of time, large part of the tradition and culture tends to get diluted and lost. The Inca tribe used knots, strings, colored threads known as 'Quipu' supported by their stories and poems to keep track of their events which are systematic to some extent. But the Rai community had or has no such way to keep track of their past events. They rely on growing of trees, flowing rivers, stones and mountains as a pointer to remember and recollect the events which can be often forgotten and confused with other similar events. Oral tradition being the greater part of human history, it exists in the heart of the community's environment. But with the passing time and due to lack of written records it is bound to undergo change and even move towards slow death eventually. The rites and rituals of the Rai community essentially depends on verbal memory of the folk but many rituals are dying out due to lack of new generation of people who would memorize and carry on the torch of their ancestors. Old non-literate repositories of knowledge and wisdom are bound to die out

with time and along with them the window to the past tradition and identity may be closed forever.

The very first chapter of this dissertation being the 'Introduction' gives a brief ethnographic outline of the Rais, importance of Oral Literature for the community and the problems of Oral Literature. The second chapter focuses on 'Myths of Origin', this chapter is divided into two parts; 'Origin Myths' and 'Form Nature to Culture'. Both the parts have tales from two sub groups of the Rai community which gives a glimpse of how the culture of the community is rooted in the nature. The third chapter titled, 'Social Realities and Other Tales' analyses all the tales from literary and social perspective. The tales are woven into everyday life and becomes alive with people living and breathing it. There are other tales which talks in general about the world and the community itself. This chapter also has a section on 'Naturalized Migration'; contrary to the diasporic migration of many known communities which are dispersed throughout the globe, feeling homeless and lost, the Rai community feels no such tension and pressure. They are guided by their tales and being rooted in nature they find home in every wild place they go. The last chapter is 'Conclusion' which sums up the findings and also discusses the limitation of this dissertation.

A.K. Ramanujan while compiling the Oral Tales from across India knew that there cannot be one original tale and he cannot keep them in the same state. "Every tale here is only one telling, held down in writing for the nonce till you or someone else reads it, brings to life, and changes it by retelling it. These stories were handed down to me, and in selecting, arranging, and adapting, I've inevitably reworked them

somewhat. So consider me the latest teller and yourself the latest listener, who in turn will retell the tale.”

While translating the Rai tales from the Rai language(s) to Nepali (in some cases) at first and then to English was a test for me. There may be many sentences in the tales which may not be grammatically correct at times, or the sentence may sound incorrect, that is all because I have tried to translate them from the perspective of the narrator. I have tried to stay true the tales that were handed down to me. Even then I may have failed at times, or some essence might have been lost in translation but I hope that the readers will read it with consideration.

Chapter 2

Myths of Origin

The question of origin plays a huge role in everyone's life as it is something which lends identity to a being. "Where do you come from?" - it is one of the questions that we are asked frequently by people we meet and it is natural, for everyone and everything has a origin. As for the origin of the world, humans, tribes and civilizations there are proves of scientific origin on the one hand and stories of mythical origin on the other. Myths give answers to 'What' 'Where' and 'How' of one's origin in their own distinct way.

Oxford English Dictionary defines myth as, "A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events."

Myth, as it dates back to times unknown, is legendary and traditional that usually concerns an event or a hero, the certainty of the event is often remote. They may concern demigods or deities, and describes some rites, practices, and natural phenomenon. Typically, a myth involves historical events and supernatural beings. There are many types of myths, such as classic myths, religious myths, and modern myths.⁷

William G. Doty defines myth as something which, "belong to the primary strata of cultural reflection, although their presence may be more or less obvious, more or less influential at various times." (Doty, 532)

When people generally uses the term ‘myth’, for them it means ‘fiction’, meaning made up and untrue. On the contrary myths hold a special place in communities and tribes which are deeply rooted in the culture of their ancestors and forefathers who followed and believed these myths. Their belief and understandings were eventually carried on from generation to generation, taking the shapes of tales, stories and myths which are in turn true and reliable even to trace back their history. So when we study myth along with the culture,

...one can say that any myth tells how something came into being, the world, or man, or an animal species, or a social institution, and so on. But by the very fact that the creation of the world precedes everything else, the cosmogony enjoys a special prestige. (Eliade, 173)

The features that the myth carries forward are; it is a traditional story which features Gods, Demi-Gods, natural and supernatural beings and event. It reflects and influences the community that it concerned. To an outsider it may just be another story but for the community it is their base on which they are living.

The Rai’s Myths of Origin

Humans are inquisitive by nature and this human nature leads them to ask questions and seek answers for them. These series of questions and answers, factual or imaginative helps to satisfy the human minds and this is how some of the most interesting and creative stories take shape. Every primitive society in a similar way came up with their ideas about the world and its creation. The Rais being no different

came up with their ideas. However, as the Rais are diverse they came up with more than one story about the beginning of their beginning.

I. Genesis

Date: 19/11/2017

Time: 09:42 A.M.

Place: Zero Point, Ranka (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Prabhat Shivahang Rai (Bantawa)

Age: 45 years

It is said that amidst the darkness there travelled a sound, '*ahhhhhhhhhhh*' and while it was traveling it is said that one day it met an obstacle and the sound hits it and from then the sound of '*mmmmm*' comes into being. '*ahhhhhh hhhh mmmmmmm ko ko mo koro toma*' it is said like this. 'Om' in the Rai language is light, the sudden spark of brightness, white pure light. When the sound hits the obstacle there comes a sudden white light and the sound bends and turns back and starts rotating. While rotating for a really long time it turns into fire and from there came light, so 'om' is that light. It keeps on rotating and increases in size, one day it blasts and from there comes stars, sun, moon and our earth. When earth is formed, it slowly cools down and while cooling down it gives way to valleys and hills, the vapor that rises up while cooling forms the cloud called *Rumuhang*, it is said that a shadow was seen on the earth, that

first shadow that was seen is known as *Rumuhang* and then comes *Sulungpuk* (flooding rainfall). After rain all the pits were covered by water, when it is filled the wind starts blowing and starts creating ripples on water. Slowly the wind starts to grow stronger and a wave is created which goes and hits a hill; *Chomulung*. It keeps on hitting the hill and forms foam, from that foam the first thing that was created was algae and then from that algae *walumangpa* (small earthworm like creatures) was created inside water; ‘*waluuuu mangpaaa, fuluuuu loisuuu*’. It is said that those earthworms took out mud inside the water and that mud was taken out of water by termites. Their water level also started going down and the level of mud started increasing. That same algae started spreading outside the water and formed grass and trees. From earthworm came sea snakes and serpents and later on it is said that *Sunnima-Paruhang* (they are the father and mother of all creation, supreme deities of the Rai community) came from there.

Date: 06/06/2017

Time: 01:34 P.M.

Place: Assamlinzey, Pastenga (Interviewee’s home)

Name of the Interviewee: Pancha Bahadur Rai (Kulung)

Age: 83 years (approximately)

Going back to ancient times, they say that whole of the world was inside water. There was no land or mud. They talk about *Hutulippa* who used to live inside water. The

lord Shiva is called *Paru (Paruhang)*. He gave *Hutulippa* the authority to live inside the water- Sea and to rule over it. There was no land, mountains as it seems, so *Hutulippa* was asked to stay inside sea, live-eat and rule over it. After giving the kingdom *Paru* left for *Kailash*. One day there came a day; it must be for change and evolution there. *Hitibey* and *Hiribey* were the great demons of the sea; they materialized and started creating troubles for *Hutulippa*. They didn't allow him to eat, sleep, and sit or even to look after his subjects. They started creating trouble for everyone in the kingdom and they were about to snatch away his kingdom. *Hutulippa* went to *Paruhang* who was in *Kailash*, he went singing hymns and finally reached *Kailash* and met *Paru*. But he could not call him at once as *Paru* was sleeping peacefully so he went near his feet and said in his thoughts without speaking out loud, "Oh! Lord I am in trouble", he just sat at feet. (It is said in folktales that you should never call a sleeping person). Then after some time *Paru* woke up from his sleep and saw *Hutulippa* at his feet with folded hands. He asks, "Aye *Hutulippa*, why have you come here? I told you to rule the sea, I asked you to stay in the sea and look after its inhabitants." *Hutulippa* replies, "*Paru*, *Hitibay* and *Hiribay* have materialized, they are troubling me a lot and they are not allowing my subjects to carry on with their daily activities. They are not allowing me eat, sleep or walk. Lets us two go together, catch them by surprise and let's kill them. Then only there will be peace. If you are not coming along with me, I too will not go back." He pleaded in such manner. *Paru* asked him to go alone for once and asked him to talk to them to solve the problem. But *Hutulippa* did not wanted to go alone he said, "You have given me the sea to rule over but if I go alone there, the demons will kill me for sure as I am powerless in front of them." Listening to him *Paru* agrees and he goes along with *Hutulippa* to the sea.

There must have been some place for the lord to sit and rest in the sea. So when he reached and was sitting *Hitibay* and *Hiribay* started their nefarious activities, they started shouting, whistling, running here and there and they started troubling them a lot. *Hutulippa* took out his arrow, *Paru* told him that he cannot shoot the arrow but he will be giving him the mantra to shoot the arrow. With the help of mantra given by *Paru*, *Hutulippa* was successful in pinning down and killing *Hitibay* and *Hiribay*. Now what to do with their bodies, all the subjects also came and surrounded the body and they all peeled the skin of those two demons. Now what to do with their peeled skin, they said that they should make earth out of it as only water is not enough they need earth too. With the hair of demons they made all types of vegetations, forests and trees. Their bones were used in making hills and mountains. In the end, the meat was used to make land, their fats became white soil and red soil came out of their red meat. *Paru* had already gone back to *Kailash* teaching *Hutulippa* the *Mundum* needed to create the earth. As taught, they all started singing *Mundum* and few saplings of crops came into being. The saplings started to grow and someone had to take care of them, they recited *Rishiwa* (mantras) calling buffaloes. Buffaloes came and muddied the entire place and destroyed all the saplings with their hoofs. They pushed him and kept him away thinking that this will also serve some purpose and we can eat it. Next they called on a cow, cow also did the same thing and he too was pushed towards the jungle. Next they called on a boar, they thought maybe he will take care of the saplings, but the boar was also of no use and he too was pushed to the jungle. Next they called on to cock and hen, but they also did no better work. So they were also put inside a cage to be eaten later. When none of them worked, they called upon humans who finally took care of the crops.

Date: 12/11/2017

Time: 05:11 P.M.

Place: Assamlinzey, Pastenga (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Tul Kumar Lohati Rai (Kulung)

Age: 62 years (approximately)

In the beginning, before anything else there is said to have been a sea. While the sea was flowing, a creeper or string named as *Babio* germinated. Three of its branches drowned in the sea and these branches constantly swayed and dashed against the sea waves because of which three bubbles were formed inside the sea. When these three bubbles burst one turned into air, another into sand and the third one burst and *Horem* came into being. We humans evolved as humans only after eight generation, *Horem* was the first one in the lineage. *Horem* came into being just like that; he did not have branches or anything else, just a trunk that swayed with the wind. When *Horem* germinated and grew and reached his old age like humans, his death gave birth to *Ninamridum* next *Ninamridum* with her death gave birth to *Chukrim*. After reaching his age *Chukrim* disappeared and *Bidurip* came in her place. *Bidurip* also vanished slowly and his place was taken by *Teterem* and after her came *Holendo*. When *Holendo* disappeared *Khar* took birth who had two daughters and one son. *Khar* was

an ironsmith by his profession. After the death of *Khar*; *Khokchilip*, *Las* and *Khew*, brother and two sisters came into being.

The first origin myth as narrated by Prabhat Shivahang Rai follows the narratives of *The Big Bang Theory* to a certain extent. The Big Bang Theory is the scientific and widely accepted theory about the creation of the universe. According to this theory the universe came into being with a blast. “In the first second after the universe began, the surrounding temperature was about 10 billion degrees Fahrenheit (5.5 billion Celsius), according to NASA. The cosmos contained a vast array of fundamental particles such as neutrons, electrons and protons. These decayed or combined as the universe got cooler.”⁸ Though the myth does not specify the exact temperature or the scientific names for the suspended particles in the atmosphere, it does mention the process of water cycle in their own native term. The blast, spark of light and the cooling down of the earth in the first myth is coincidental to the Big Bang Theory of the Universe which gives this particular myth a universal appeal.

The other two Myths of origin are different from the first one as it does not coincide and cannot be explained by any scientific theories. These myths start at a point when the universe was already present; as pointed out by the presence of water. From that water life of all kinds came into being. The myth of *Hutulippa* and creation of earth can be called a cosmogonic myth, as cosmogonic myth is a myth that takes place prior to the origin myths of the humans, origin myths are often based and carried forward from the cosmogonic myths. Time when there were no humans and other beings of the present world. The myth of *Hutulippa* is similar to that of the myth of Ngadju Dayak of Borneo in its essence as explained by Mircea Eliade:

The cosmogonic myth enables us to understand the religious life of the Dayaks as well as their culture and their social organization. The world is the result of a combat between two polar principles, during which the tree of life- i.e. their own embodiment- is annihilated. But from destruction and death spring the cosmos and a new life. (Eliade, 176)

Here the tree is destroyed when two hornbills fight with each other and they too die ultimately giving way to a new life. In a similar way in the myth of *Hutulippa*; the good i.e., *Hutulippa*; fights with *Hitibey* and *Hiribey*; the evil and when the evil is slain its destruction makes way for a new creation.

In the third myth of origin there is no presence of divine being or there is no external force making the moves. It follows a pattern of evolution and through the process of evolution humans come into being.

II. From Nature to Culture

Humans evolved and so did his understandings and desires; he tasted ‘the fruit of wisdom’ and wanted to do more for himself: a better life, social relationships and stability. There are myths which tell us about the ancestors of the Rais who took a step towards civilization and socialization. There are two different myths with two variations owing to the diversity of the Rai community.

Date: 12/11/2017

Time: 05:11 P.M.

Place: Assamlinzey, Pastenga (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Tul Kumar Lohati Rai (Kulung)

Age: 62 years (approximately)

After the death of 'Khar' (the seventh generation from the myth of origin) *Khokchilip*, *Las* and *Khew*; brother and two sisters came into being. They were on their own and they started weaving, the place where they weaved was known as *Dooh* or *Dokham*. The threads were extracted from the root of a plant named *Sisnu*. Sisters extracted the threads as they were elder and more able than their brother, while sisters were working *Khokchilip* falls asleep. Sisters were talking to each other about their plan to move to different places as they were adults now. While working and talking at the same time they didn't realize that their brother was sleeping nearby and he got covered by the peels and roots of *sisnu*. When they finished their work they called their brother but he did not reply as he was asleep beneath the piles of waste. They discussed among themselves that they should just kill him as they are moving to different place. They stepped over the roots and peels and it made a crackling sound and they thought that the skull, ribs and bones of their brother were broken and he is dead for sure now. They discussed as to which way they would depart. Before taking their own way they decided to plant a flower, *Katarchampa*. If someday I come flying to this place and find the flower towards the plains side dead I will understand that sister you too are dead and if you come flying and see the flower towards the hill side dead, think that I too have died', said the elder sister who was wiser than the younger

one. After sisters were gone their brother woke up from his sleep and called out for his sisters, '*Las nana*' '*Khew nana*' but no one was there. Soon it was dark and the brother was left alone. He went alone to the place where they were staying before and he sat there alone, that night he slept without eating. Early in the morning the brother got up and was sitting wondering about how hungry he was and he was thinking of how to get things to eat. When he was thinking about food, a bird, *kurley dhukkur* came and started strolling near him. *Khokchilip* remembered how his father used to use catapult and he looked for it and found it, along with it he found *matengra* (dry hard seed/fruit from a tree) in a small bamboo basket *furlung*. He aimed for the bird and killed it, he thought of eating that bird to save his life. He brought the bird and thought of roasting it, it is said that in earliest time the fire never died. When he started cleaning the bird for roasting, inside that bird he found seeds of all kind; maize, barley, pulses, rice and so on. As if by divine intervention he realized that these things are edible and the bird should not be eaten. He buried the bird and separated all the seeds and planted them all around him. He became the master of all the harvested products. Towards the inside of that forest there lived an old grandmother named *Teteremmuma* who had survived. Now *Khokchilip* had all that he wanted so one day he decided to go for fishing. While fishing he caught a stone on his fishing net instead of a fish, he threw the stone and went on the other side to catch fish again, second time also he caught the same stone and he thought that this may be of some use for him in the future, he sewed a *furlung* and kept the stone inside it. Every day he used to leave his home for his work and when he returned everyday he found that all the house chores were done and his food was ready for him. One day a dog came and he shared his food with him but he realized that it couldn't have been the dog who did all

his household work. He went to *Teteremmuma* and told her what was happening at his place. She told him that next day like every other day you should get up and prepare to leave for work but instead of going to work hide beside the door beneath a *nanglo* (a flat round woven tray made up of bamboo. It is made traditionally out of thin bamboo pieces intermingled into flat surface- like ancient method of weaving cloth manually by tangling threads). Whoever comes to your place catch it and say *O tho ma*. He thought it was a great idea, so next day he did that exact same thing and saw that the stone that was there in his *furlung* came down as a beautiful maiden and did all his household work. He remembered his grandmother telling him to catch her from behind saying 'you are mine'; '*O tho ma*' when she is about to leave after finishing the day's work. He waited for her to finish the works and when she was about to leave he caught her from behind and shouted '*O tho ma, O tho ma*'. She denied and said no and reminded him how he threw her back into the water and broke her jewelry. She was about to break free and leave so he called his grandmother who rushed in and made her understand that she was the goodness and light of his home. *Khokchilip* did not really have a home till then so *Yelim*, who was now his wife called him (from earlier times man and woman could call out each other's name, it was spontaneous and natural) and told him that they should make a house as they have a child now. During that time the child was carried in front, tied with a cloth. *Khokchilip* in order to build their house brought all kinds of log and branches of trees but they were all straight and could not provide support. *Yelim* told him to get the branches of *bhakimlo* which was like the tail of a *Chaskup- Chevay* bird, which is in the shape of 'V' from one end. He understood and got them and started erecting the main center pillar (Rai community people still have that center pillar which is erected at first). He tried a lot

to make it stable many a times but he failed and asked *Yelim* to come and help him, when she was helping him their child who was tied to her, fell inside the pit and the pillar also became stable. It was an infant and *Khokchilip* wanted to dig out the pillar to retrieve the baby but *Yelim* told him that this also has a reason, *Yelim* had all kind of knowledge and divine wisdom and *Khokchilip* was just the person who implemented and carried out the work. She told him that they have to now set a ritual and according to it even now no child under one year of age is taken to any construction site. Now we people while erecting the main pillar we put a coin along with four pieces of ginger and complete the ritual with sprinkling holy rice; *acheta* (we humans, the eight generations follow all those rituals created by them). After completion of the house *Yelim* asked him if he has some relatives or not to which he said he did have two sisters *Las* and *Khew* but now he has no idea about their whereabouts. He told her what had happened when he was a child and how they had left him on his own. *Yelim* told him that whatever had been is now in the past, but at present they should call his sisters to meet them. At first they sent a frog to call his sisters, the frog could not bring his sisters back. Sisters picked up the frog with a tong and threw him away. Next they sent a cock, the cock flew and sat on the bamboo pillar and crowed and told them ‘*Khokchilip hong po ka*’ (*Khokchilip* is the king). Sisters were surprised to hear about their brother as they thought that he was dead so they followed the cock to know the truth behind it.

Meanwhile, when the sisters were away from *Khokchilip*, the elder sister had told her younger sister not to tease anyone but *Khew* could not stop herself, she met an old owl and started teasing him. The owl told her not to tease him as he was used

to eating birds. But *Khew* did not pay much heed and went on teasing him, the owl and *Khew* were related to each other as *solti-soltini* (co-brother-in law and co-sister-in law) he was sitting in his nest, inside the tree trunk weaving a bamboo casket. When she didn't stop teasing her he killed her and ate her. When the *Las* returned she saw that the flower that represented her sister was dead, she went in her search and met that same owl and asked him about *Khew*. The owl told her how in spite of warning her she kept on teasing him and how he killed her and ate her. He took her to the tree hollow where her bones were left behind. *Las* carefully collected those bones without dropping them and started reciting the *rishiwa* taking all her jewelry off one after another and she was able to revive her sister finally. She then told her not to tease anyone anymore and not to get into trouble.

Continuing from the cock as messenger: after following the cock, the cock took them to their brother's place. When they met *Khokchilip* he told them that since you have left home and I could not do anything then but now we have to carry out the ritual and give you proper farewell. The eldest sister was able to keep 'aath than' or eight items rituals (offering eight items in eight different leaf/plates) where as the younger sister was able to keep only 'saat than' (seven items for offerings) ritual. *Khokchilip* himself carried out all the rituals, he took them out of his hearth and bid them farewell and so came the rituals for marriage. Now they had to fix rituals for death as *Teteremmuma* died all of a sudden. So to carry out the rituals he made the coffin out of bamboo and *bhakimlo* (tree), he gathered all the old and elders of the village and took her body for burial. *Yeli* taught him all the rituals as to how eight elders are required to go through all the rituals of burial and performing purifying

rituals after death. Similarly, till date we follow all such rituals created by *Yelim* and *Khokchilip*.

Date: 19/11/2017

Time: 09:42 A.M.

Place: Zero Point, Ranka (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Prabhat Shivahang Rai (Bantawa)

Age: 45 years

In our ancient times there said to have been *Pateysung* and *Dilidungma*, they used to stay there and they had three kids. *Pateysung* also had a second wife she was known as *Dankoklima*. From his first wife he had three children and from his second wife he had no children. Since *Dankoklima* was of negative thoughts, a witch so she was thrown out of their home by her husband. When everything was going well in their life, one day *Pateysung* suddenly dies. After his death responsibility of three children solely falls on *Dilidungma*. *Haechakua*'s original name is *Longmaley*, he got his other name later when he becomes an orphan for *Haechakua* means an orphan. Eldest sister's name was *Tangwama* (means a person with big head) *Khiwama* (means small and little) was the younger sister. *Dilidungma* was trying her best to bring up their children but *Dankoklima* always blamed *Dilidungma* for her misfortune and for being thrown out of the house. For this reason she used to create trouble for the family.

Even then they were living on with all they had, but then there came a time when drought strikes that place as it did not rain for years. In such situation they had to go to really faraway places to search for food. One day *Dilidungma* leaves her children at home, she had tied a bundle and while giving it to them she had asked them to watch over the bundle and not to go anywhere out of their home. She also asked them not to open the bundle and told them that once she returns they would all open the bundle together and eat whatever is inside it. She leaves them and crosses over to the other side of the river with the help of a wooden plank stretched over the river. *Dankoklima* comes to know that *Diligungma* has crossed the river and had gone to the forest in search of things to eat. When she comes to know this, she cuts the wooden plank from below making it weak. In the evening *Dilidungma* after getting whatever she could, thinking about her children she rushes towards home but when she crosses the river the wooden plank breaks with her weight, she falls into the river and dies. At home children wait and cry for their mother but she does not return. At night when she does not return they finally open the bundle but find nothing to eat inside it as her mother had just tied ashes inside it. They fall into a dire situation, but it is said that *Maang* (the almighty) always had his blessings over them. From next day they started going to the village and there they ate leftovers and whatever was thrown out by the people of the village. From this time on the village people started calling them *Haechakua* which means an orphan, they were considered bad omen so people from village did not allow them to roam freely in their village. Since they were stopped from entering the village, his sisters started searching for other things to eat. Sisters got '*angma-angkaleksi*' (some kind of fruit from a tree which has creamy sap) and they start eating that to survive. So their problem gets solved, they don't even have to go to the

village to get it. They go to pluck it during the day, come back by evening and eat it at night. Their step mother starts getting curious as to how they are surviving without eating the leftovers from the village; she tries to find out what they are eating in such a grave situation of drought. *Haechakua* was warned by his sisters that if anyone comes and inquires about the things that they were eating then he should not tell the truth. One day when sisters were off in search for '*angkaleksi*' their stepmother comes to their place and seeing '*Longmaley-Haechakua*' alone, asks him about the thing that they are eating and surviving. *Haechakua* being just a kid falls for her sweet words and tells her the truth. *Dankoklima* being evil she hardens the fruit and puts *angkaleksi* inside a crust and now even a monkey cannot open that crust to eat the seed that is inside and she also turned its creamy sap to bitter taste. Once again they were in trouble and don't know what to do but somehow they again find other wild things like *gittha-vyagur* (purple yam, ube) and *taruls* (Casavaa, Tapioca, sweet potato). Again their stepmother come to know about it and it is said that she is the one who put threads inside *gittha-vyagur* and made it uneatable and bitter, she put all the *taruls* inside the earth crust. From then on it is said that we have to dig out the *taruls* or else it was all above the ground like other fruits. Now that their only source of livelihood was also gone and they had no other way, they again start going to the village during late evenings. During that time it is said that people used to use a wild rice kind of food known as *Chebo*, they used to gather it from the forest and used to grind it using stones, after that it was husked, cleaned, boiled and eaten. So when they used to grind and husk it some of it used to fall down and scatter around. So these sisters and brother used to search and gather these scattered rice from the village and used to eat little bit of it by mixing it in the water. Again when their step mother

comes to know about this, she gathers all the villagers and tell them that, 'our village is going through drought for so many years and there haven't been any rainfall it is all because of bad luck brought to us by *Haechakua*. So what we have to do is we have to be very careful with our rice. We have to make sure that not even one seed of rice is left on the ground, they come and take these scattered rice for themselves and brings us more bad luck'. Everyone does as they were asked but it may be *Maang's* wish that one old lady who did not hear so clearly thinks that they have to leave two-three scoops of rice outside. Since *Haechakua* and his sisters were not allowed to roam during the day, that night they went as usual to the village and started searching the ground by filling it with their palms for scattered grains. But they find nothing on the ground as everyone had been careful as not to leave a single grain on the ground. Only in one house where that old lady lived, they find two-four fistfuls of grains. They take it and go home; they had been hungry for so many days so early in the morning the sisters keep the rice for boiling in their earthen ware. One sister goes out to fetch water and other starts cleaning their house. Brother for the first time in his life sees so much rice being cooked at once in their house, he becomes so happy and excited that he starts running around the hearth saying; '*Nana Tangwama* give me food, *Nana Khiwama* give me food'. Sisters they don't pay much attention to their brother as they both were busy in doing their own works. Elders sister tell him to ask his younger sister and younger sister tells him to ask his elder sister, they just keep him waiting and his hunger increases more and more. So he starts jumping around even more and he steps on one of the firewood and the rice bowl falls down and all the rice falls down too. When the rice falls down sisters get angry and they slap him hard in hunger, they leave him there and go back to their work. Their brother, he

crouches near the hearth and goes on crying, because of hunger and crying for long time he becomes unconscious. After a while when sisters anger subside they return to see their brother. They see him unconscious and they shake him, turn him and do other such things to wake him up, but the brother does not wake up so they think that he has died. They take him to one place; keeping him in a pit they cover him with leaves and twigs. Towards his feet they keep a sickle, they had brought a banana for their brother but it was unripe so they leave that too near him and they also keep water in a bamboo casket. They don't even have their parents and their only brother had died and the villagers also despised them, they feel overpowered with grief and they decide to leave that place. They leave that place together and reach a place named *Tayachung-Jayajung*. Upon reaching there they are so saddened about how their human forms have just seen only sorrow, they decide to leave behind their human form and ⁹transform into some other beings. They both discuss as to which form to take and they look around, when they look around they see vast-dense jungle and wild fruits and berries hanging from trees, so looking at them they both decide to turn into birds. They call out and worship the *Maang* who blesses them with a gift to transform themselves into bird forms. *Tangwama* becomes a *Hangrayo* as she had a big head and her sister turns into *Dhanesh*¹⁰ with smaller head much like herself. After transforming themselves elder sister wants to go to uphill whereas younger sister wants to fly downhill. When they both cannot agree to go towards one direction they both decide to go towards their own said direction. They plant a flower each in their name as a mark so that later on if they want to know each other's wellbeing they can come back to this same place to know each other's whereabouts. Elder sister plants *Lenchungbung* and the younger one plants *Thompabung*. While flying away younger

one asks elder to fly away first and the elder asks her sister to fly away first, so in this way no one could fly away. They decide to fly away together at the count of three; one-two-three, and they both fly away together. So, even today the count of three is considered to hold truth. They fly away towards their own destination; the green forest with its fruits in plentitude makes them merry and healthy. Many years go by in such manner without them realizing it but one day the younger sister misses her other sister so she goes back in search of her. She reaches the place where they had planted flowers, she looks at the flower planted by her elder sister and sees it in full bloom, and looking at it she knows that her sister is well and good. In that same place *Samfokdiwa* who was an owl used to stay who was an artisan of that time, he used to weave baskets and ropes. He was very dangerous, if he got angry then he could eat anyone no matter their size, such were his powers. Before leaving that place *Tangwama* her warned her sister not to tease and make *Samfokdiwa* angry but when sister is going around that place she meets him who was engrossed in his own work. Seeing him she starts teasing him as dumb person he grows angrier by the moment and at one point he grows so angry that he catches her by surprise and eats her. Later on the elder sister also remembers her sister and goes out towards the plain in search of her but she does not find her there so she also comes back to that same hill where she finds her sister's flower dead. Looking at the flower she comes to know that her sister is no more so she starts looking for her near that place. She too meets *Samfokdiwa* and asks him about her sister, at first he denies seeing her but his nature and body language tells her otherwise so she keeps asking him and at last he tells her that how her sister teased him, how he got angered and how he finally ate her. He points towards the leftover bones left in the hollow of a tree. She goes to that tree and

sees the leftover bones and feathers of her sister, she collects them and wrapping up in a leaf takes them and keeps them where her flower was dead. She performs *Rishiwa* (ritual or elaborate prayer/ ceremony) using water and after some days the flower slowly starts growing and with it the bones in the leaves too starts joining slowly. As the flower grows her sister too wakes up in her bird form as if waking up from a long sleep. But her sister tells her that how she was eaten by *Samfokdiwa* how she died and how she performed *rishiwa* to revive her. At that time the younger sister realizes her mistake, they hug and cry and decide that they won't be going away from each other again, from that day on they both start living together at that same place.

On the other side after the sisters leaves *Haechakua* and go away from that place, he wakes up from his unconscious state. When he wakes up he calls his sisters times and again, he cries but no one comes as his sisters had already left and had gone towards the jungle. Then he has no means or way, he looks around and sees the sickle and he also sees the banana. *Haechakua* is said to have divine blessing or powers of *Maang*, he picks up that sickle and orders that banana; 'Will you be ripe this instance or should I cut you into two with this?'. When he says so the banana becomes ripe, he eats them and drinks the water. Wild bananas have seed within them, so when he eats the banana he realizes that he can eat bananas and survive, *Maang* blesses him with such knowledge as he does not know how to eat other things and what to eat. So he collects those seeds and scatters them on the soil and once again tells them; 'Will you grow up or should I kill you with my piss?'. Then the seeds grow as saplings, same way he orders them to grow quickly and give him more bananas. So in this way there comes a garden of ripe bananas, he climbs up and starts to live there itself by eating

the bananas as all his tensions were gone. Nearby there used to stay a demon named *Chakrawdhipma*, while she was roaming the jungle one day she reaches the bamboo grove of *Haechakua*. She gets the smell of a human being and when she looks up she spots *Haechakua*. She asks him for bananas, *Haechakua* refuses to give her but she keeps on asking him again and again but he denies her all the time but she pretends as if she was going to die without eating it, so *Haechakua* feels sorry for her and he throws one banana at her from the top. She tells him that she is not going to eat the banana that is thrown to her. *Haechakua* tells her that he is sitting on top and she is below there, how can he possibly give her without throwing it. She asks him to press the banana between her toe and other finger and then to lower his leg towards her. When he lowers his leg to pass her the banana she catches his leg and pulls him down on the ground and starts taking him towards her place. By now *Haechakua* had aged a bit from before and he knows that she will eat him after reaching her place. He starts thinking of ways to free himself. He calls her and tells her, '*Dima, Dima* I want to pee' but *Chakrawdhipma* refuses to set him down, he asks her again but she denies again, she was carrying him on her shoulders so he tells her that if she is not going to set him down to pee than he would pee all over her. Hearing this she sets him down and as soon as he is free he runs towards his banana grove and climbs up. She too follows him there and tries to climb up the banana plant, it is said that *Haechakua* was the one who ordered the banana plant to be like the way it is today, difficult to climb up, before this people could climb up. *Chakrawdhipa* who was left below again starts nagging him to give her a banana, she shows as if she is losing her consciousness and she shows as if she was about to die. *Haechakua* seeing her like that once again feels sorry for her but he tells her that he is not going to give her banana neither with his

hand nor with his feet. *Haechakua* had a really long hair so she tells him to give her a banana by tying it to his hair. He lowers his hair to give her a banana and again this time she pulls him down by pulling his hair, she ties him up and takes him to her place. Upon reaching home, she had a daughter named *Chandokchawma* who was of same age as *Haechakua*. Mother and daughter talk among themselves and mother tells her; 'I have brought a human today and its been long that we have not had any human, I am having a huge craving. I am going to call my brothers, you first kill him by hitting him by a stout log. Keep his blood in a wooden bowl and make his meat properly'. *Haechakua* also hears all that was said, but he had no idea what to do. *Chakrawdhipma* leaves to call her brothers, *Chandokchawma* goes to where *Haechakua* was kept in order to kill. When she comes to him *Haechakua* tells him; '*Chandokchawma* you are so beautiful and you even have a mother who takes care of you and takes out lice from your hair. I am all alone, I don't have father or mother or any sisters, please take out lice from my hair for some time.' *Chandokchawma* also feels pity for him and she agrees to take out his lice from hair for some time. They both come out of the dark cave to the light and free him from his bondage. *Haechakua* had a really long and silky hair and she sees it and she likes it. She asks him as to how his hair is so beautiful, he tells her how his mother when she was alive used to dip his hair in a wooden water bowl and massage it. *Haechakua* asks her; 'Did you like my hair?' *Chandakchawma* replies 'yes' and asks him if he too can make her hair like his. *Haechakua* readily says 'yes' he knows and *Chandakchauma* asks him to make her hair like his. They both agree and *Haechakua* asks her to show him their water bowl, they both go there and he asks her to dip her hair in it. When she dips her hair *Haechakua* presses her head down inside the water and kills her by drowning.

Haechakua wears her clothes and keeps her blood in a wooden bowl and prepares the meat according to the instruction given by *Chakrawdhipma*. *Chakrawdhipma* also returns home with her brother, thinking *Haechakua* to be her daughter asks her to serve meat to her uncles. When she asks to serve meat to her elder uncle she gives it to the younger one and when asked to serve the younger one, she serves the middle one as *Haechakua* had no idea about them. She shouts at her for not recognizing her relatives, *Haechakua* is then somewhat afraid of his secrecy being revealed but then uncle interfere and tells *Chakrawdhipma* that its been a long time since she has not met them so it is not really her fault, she has prepared all the meat properly and they should start eating it. After eating everyone returns and *Chakrawdhipma* drinks all the blood, she was tired and while eating the meat and blood together she becomes tipsy and she goes to sleep and falls sleep instantly. When she is asleep *Haechakua* plasters her eyes with *angkaleksi* (fruit with sticky sap) and surrounds her with *sisnus* (stinging nettle) and thorns. That day he could not run away as it soon becomes dark, he collects few things so that he can run away tomorrow. He takes some kind of pulses, ash, broken piece of a bowl, bamboo comb and an egg. He hides on the ceiling of the cave and waits for the morning, when it was about to be morning *Chakrawdhipa* wakes up but everything seems dark to her so she calls her daughter, ‘*Chandakchawma, Chandakchawma, what has happened?*’ She turns one way and is bitten by *sisnu*, she turns the other way, thorns pierce her. *Haechakua* from the ceiling keeps shouting; ‘*Chakrawdhipma cha k chama rona bhey bhey*’ (*Chakrawdhipma*, demon and a daughter eater), he teases her in this way. She thinks him to be her own daughter and tells her not to say like that for something bad will happen for real. Somehow she removes the plaster from her eyes and looks around to find out that it

was *Haechakua* for real, she gets angry at him and tells him that since he had killed her own daughter and served her so now she would eat him alive, saying so she starts running after him to catch him. *Haechakua* runs ahead and she behind him, they keep running and at one point when she is about to catch him, he throws back those pulses that he was carrying and there comes thick bushes and creepers which makes it difficult for *Chakrawdhipma* to catch up to him. Leaving her behind he runs ahead and again when she is about to catch him he throws back the bamboo comb and there comes a thick grooves of bamboo and again it becomes difficult for her to catch him. This time when he is about to be caught he throws ash and when he throws that, a thick fog comes up and she finds it difficult to find her way. Next time he throws that broken piece of bowl and when it breaks while being thrown, it turns into big boulders, rocks and valley comes up, he is on the lower ground and she on the higher ground. She still continues to chase him and while chasing him she tumbles down the hill but again continues to chase him after getting up. They both are running and they reach a small stream which *Haechakua* crosses first as he was ahead of her and when *Chakrawdhipma* is crossing the stream, he just had an egg left so he throws it in the stream, when he throws the egg the stream turns to a big river and sweeps away *Chakrawdhipa*, finally drowning and killing her. *Haechakua* didn't know what to do next so he walks down along the river bank for many days and reaches a village. When he reaches that village, he meets people and starts to live there with them. While talking around with people he comes to know that it was his maternal uncle's village and the person he was staying with was his own uncle. Maternal Uncle is happy to receive his nephew after so long, they both are happy and he stay with him while growing up. When he becomes mature he meets and likes a girl from that same

village named *Nuwapnuma*. When his uncle comes to know about this he gets them married. According to the old customs he could no longer stay with his uncle, they had to make their own household so his uncle bids them farewell. He instructs them to find a leveled land with water source nearby to settle down; he gives them farewell gifts in a bundle and sends them with his good wishes. They keep walking throughout the day and when it is about to be night they reach a place near the river side, where land was also leveled and a cave was also there. *Nuwapnuma* was also tired so they decide to stay in that place that night, they open a bundle given by mama and it had some food in it. That day they eat it and go to sleep. Next day early in the morning *Haechakua* gets up and walks around that place. He finds that the place was good and tells his wife that they should stay in this same place. *Nuwapnuma* had a dream in which she comes to know with *Maang's* divine blessing that this was a good place to stay. So they both agree and start living there. While they were staying there they used to hunt wild animals and used to eat them for their survival, they even started bringing wild animals for domestication. One day he kills a *dhukkur* (dove) and brings it home, he cleans the bird and gives its stomach and intestine to his wife to throw it away. She throws it down and when she throws it the seeds of different grains spread across. She looks at them but stays quiet at that time, she comes back and they both eat the meat of the bird. Later on those grains sprout and grow, they had been dumping the waste of all the dead animals at that same spot so it acts as manure and helps the grains to grow properly. When *Nuwapnuma* looks at those plants she comes to know that these were the ones that came from the stomach of that bird. So she thinks that when that bird did not die after eating them and when they did not die after eating that same bird then if they eat those grains they too will not die. She tells her husband what she saw

and thought about it and then they both decide to eat it. When they eat it for the first time they both have stomach ache and they suffer from diarrhea. They think that it must be because they did not offer it to their *Pitris* (ancestors), so next time before eating they offer the grains first to the fire and then they eat it and this time they do not suffer any negative consequences and grow stronger and healthy. They realize that they should be growing these grains instead of hunting in the forest. From then on, they clear the jungle and clean the land and make it ready to plant grains. From then onwards it is said that this marks the end of wild life the age of agriculture started. Now they had no scarcity of food and they lived on happily, after some time they have a baby and *Nuwapnuma* thinks of having a house where they can raise their child. She tells her husband about her wish, they had this much knowledge that in order to build a house, they need to erect a pillar but they don't know what kind of pillar. While they were just sitting around, one day a bird with forked tail 'chivey' (bronzed drongo) comes and sit near their cave, *Nuwapnuma* sees it and tells her husband that they need to bring such tree branches for pillar. Slowly they learn how to go about constructing the house, *Maang* had blessed them with that knowledge. *Haechakua* goes to the forest and gets the tree trunks and branches to erect the pillar and he digs the pit for it. While erecting the main pillar, he could not erect it alone so he calls his wife for help. When she comes to help him she was carrying their baby in front, so while helping the baby slips from the knot and falls inside that main pit. Immediately the pillar also slides into the pit, crushing and killing the baby. (In the Rai community women are not allowed to carry their baby in front, they are asked to carry them at their back with double knot. It prevailed till our grandmother was alive. From then on while erecting the main pillar they do a puja which is known as 'chapdaam'; 'chap' means crushed

and ‘*daam*’ means the price or punishment.) They cry over the loss of their child but in the end they think that it was what *Maang* wished for them, so they carry on. They build the house and had to do *khimran*; worshiping the new house, it is also known as ‘*rawa puja*’. While doing this *puja*, people need to call their father, mother, brothers, sisters, relatives and all they have. *Haechakua* is troubled as he wants to perform the rituals but he doesn’t know whom to call. His wife comes to know that he is troubled, she asks him about the cause and he tells her how he has no one to call for the ritual. *Nuwapnuma* tells him that since neither his *Pitris* are here nor his are siblings here they should establish a certain thing in their name. Hence, they establish *Chulah-Dhunga*, three in number one in their father’s name; *Pakhaklung*, another in their mother’s name; *Makhaklung* and the last one in the name of his siblings; *Chekhulung*. But *Haechakua* has a premonition that his sisters are still alive, so he wants to send someone to search for them but whom to send, so there are many stories which tells that he sent moth, beetles, lice and other creatures to call his sisters. These creatures find his sisters but they were not able to deliver his message to them, they come back and tell him about their wellbeing. Same way they send a goat, the goat while going sees so much greenery on the way that he forgets his work and he starts grazing and he does not even return to his home. When he does not return he curses the goat saying that, ‘from now on our relatives and lineage will not even touch you and you will not be allowed in our *kul*’ (It is said that from then on the Rais, they do not eat goat meat and even if they eat it, they do not bring it near their *Chulah-Dhungah*). In the end he sends a cock, when cock reaches and finds his sisters he crows saying, ‘*Haechakua Hok*’. *Tangwama Khiyama* they think that this is a bad sign as their brother has been long dead. They chase away the cock, the cock runs to the other hill

and says the same thing, they chase him even from there, in this manner the cock leads them to their brother's house. That day many people had gathered in his house for the ritual, seeing people they stop as they were no longer in human form and they had even forgotten human language, they also don't know if their brother is there or not. The cock tells *Haehakua* that he has brought his sisters, he also comes to know about his sisters presence there, his sisters also somehow comes to know that he is their brother. In spite of calling them, the sisters, they feel shy to go and meet their brother. When sisters do not come in even after much plea, *Nuwapnuma* tells him that they have to do *rishiwa* by hanging the *bhakimlo* (fruit of Nutgall tree) to call his sisters in, it is known as *Balam* (it is a ritual where the sisters or daughters are called to walk inside from a gate made out of fruits and flowers), it is still practiced and they do that ritual. The sisters salivate a lot and because of that *rishiwa* their cravings for *bhakimlo* rises so much that they could no longer resist going in. The sisters come in and as soon as they step inside his premises the *rawa* puja becomes successful and on that day official marriage of *Haechakua* and *Nuwapnuma* had also taken place. Everyone meets one another, *Haechakua* welcomes his sister with respect and treats them with food. While going back *Haechakua* and *Nuwapnuma* wants to give message to his sister, since sisters are in bird form and they no longer understand their language so husband and wife together they give message through action. The message was 'sisters you can no longer go on living as wild birds, you have to be humans again and you have to prepare field, prepare seeds, sow them, care for them, harvest them, thrash them, clean them, cook them and eat them' they show all these through action or *silli*, this is considered to be the first *silli* and is known as *Chasumsilli*. This *silli* cannot be danced anywhere and everywhere, this *silli* is

actually about the way he explained things to his sisters by taking things in his hand, the villagers gathered at his place also helped him with it and they together made his sisters dance. Sisters understood his message and while going back *Haechakua* gives them gifts, sisters had nothing to give him back so they think that since their brother wants them to live as humans again, they shed all their feathers and takes human form once again, they gather the feathers and gives it to their brother and he deeming it as a pure gift wears it on him head. So even now *mangpas* wear it and it started from then. Sisters go back and starts living as humans and from then they start weaving clothes, an art that was passed on to them from their ancestor. First they start with taking out roots of *sisnu* and then *bhangra* and then they later on find cotton and weave with it.

Date: 10/12/2017

Time: 09:28 A.M.

Place: Zero Point, Ranka (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Prabhat Shivahang Rai (Bantawa)

Age: 45 years

In our *Bantawa* side, humans are addressed as *Henkumbung*. In ancient times *Paruhang* and *Sunnima* was there and it is said that they had three children. Eldest was tiger named Chapcha, Second was bear named *Tumun* and third and the youngest was human named *Henkumbung*. When they have three children they start taking care of them, specially mother, Paruhang has his own worldly work and he does not pay

much attention to his children and he did not know much about them. Fathers are like that most of the time and it is mother who is in touch with the children most of the time. They were fine when they were kids but when they started growing up their nature also started changing, Tiger started becoming more aggressive, he would get angry and irritated for small things. *Tumun* was of different nature, he was mostly silent who didn't talk much to anyone and he didn't even listen to others too. Youngest was the wisest among those three who used to listen to his mother and used to take care of his brothers whereabouts. Because of this *Paruhang* and *Sunnima* thought that since he is made in our image, he will be the one to take care of this world after us. They used to love him for he used to listen to them (it is from this that parents are still seen loving their youngest more.) Mother loved the youngest brother more and this made the elder brother jealous and he got angrier, he thought that it was because of his younger brother that his mother loved him less. The second son *Tumun* was least bothered by all these, he used to go to the jungle searching for things to eat, came back to rest and he went back again. But Tiger and man used to stay together with their mother, they used to accompany her and listen to her. But, jealousy that makes a home in Tiger's heart keeps on growing with time. To the question as to why mother loved the youngest more, *Chapcha* comes to know that the youngest is intelligent so he starts competing with his brother to show that he too was no less. They started growing up competing with each other and amidst their competition their second brother was caught in-between so tired of this he escaped to the jungle forever. Now only two brothers remained, they both had to go to the jungle on everyday basis to hunt to feed themselves. Once when they were going to the jungle the elder brother thought that no matter what their mother is going to love his younger brother more so,

he always tried to show him weak so he would have to somehow kill *Henkumbung* somehow. He started acting in the same manner, he would want to fight with his brother for nothing, he would take him to difficult terrains in the forest. *Henkumbung* also realizes that his brother is somehow trying to get rid of him so he too thought that if his brother attacks him he too won't go easy on him, he too would kill his brother. Their mother also realizes that these two brothers are competing against each other and they are having evil thoughts. She calls them both and explains to them that how brothers should not fight with each other, how they should work together and should move ahead together. They should not spill blood and think of spilling blood of each other, it will bring evil into the family. If you two want to be the greatest on this planet you two should work together. They both understood their mother's advice but they were driven more by their initial thought.

One day, in similar manner they go for hunting towards the forest but before leaving house they both had discussion over something. Their mother packs them their food and they get going but they both walk without talking to each other. *Chapcha* in front and *Henkumbung* behind him, they both reach their usual hunting spot. *Henkumbung* keeps their food aside and takes his place for hunting. *Chapcha* had the work of driving the prey from the jungle towards his brother who would aim and kill it. *Chapcha* starts walking towards the jungle and while walking he starts playing with thoughts, he thinks how he has to search whole of the jungle, crossings hills and river to drive the prey but his brother who simply takes the aim and kills it and takes all the accolades from mother for killing it. He reaches a clearing and finds a spot where the sun was filtering down. He lies down and sleeps at the same spot all

afternoon. His younger brother who was waiting for him, when his elder brother does not arrive even after waiting for a long time, he suddenly realizes that his elder brother must be thinking of harming him, if that is the case then he thinks that he too would teach him a lesson today. *Henkumbung* opens all his clothes and finds a dead tree trunk and hangs his cloth on it to disguise the tree trunk as him. He then climbs a *Simal* tree and sits on the topmost branch of it (*Simal* tree has branches all around it like stairs). It is said that he sits on the seventh floor with his bow and arrow. When the sun is about to set the Tiger wakes up and he growls scratching the earth and then he runs towards his brother. His brother too hears his growling and gets ready with his bow and arrow. *Chapcha* reaches the spot where his brother was supposed to be waiting for him, he spots the disguised tree trunk and in rage he jumps at it taking it to be his own brother, he bites and scratches him and in the end he thinks that his brother is dead. He too gets tired and lies back on the floor under the same tree from where his brother was watching him. He lies down and when he looks up he sees his brother up on the tree, looking down at him and smiling. He is startled to see his brother alive, he is now afraid that his brother might kill him now. So he gathers all his strength and climbs up that tree and reaches the fifth floor. While both the brothers are fighting with each other their mother senses it (she has a feeling of heart attack) she keeps a bouquet of flower for both of them in a vase. Since she loves her younger son *Henkumbung* more she prays for him more, “may he win, he is human, it was his brother who insinuated him”. But when the Tiger climbs the tree the flower kept for *Henkumbung* starts withering and his mother flops down to the floor in deep prayer. When the Tiger reaches the fifth floor *Henkumbung* asks his brother, “What happened to you today brother, you growled so loudly from the hill that I got afraid wondering

as what might that be, so I climbed the tree to save myself.” *Henkumbung* weaves the net of sweet words for his brother and his brother listening to him thinks that his younger brother is not angry with him. Tiger tells him that he did not find any prey and he is famished, he asks for the lunch that his mother had packed for him. *Henkumbung* tells him, “Brother, today your eyes are so fiery, I cannot even look at you directly. I don’t know what has gotten into you. You just stay there and close your eyes.” That day their mother had packed them three chapatis and it is considered as a bad omen so even now it is forbidden to make only three chapatis. Elder brother closes his eyes and opens his mouth, that time his younger brother shoots his arrow from above. “That time arrows were made out of a particular type of bamboo known as *gopey* it is so sharp that even now it can cut through skin with a slight touch.” After being struck by the arrow the Tiger falls down breaking all the branches of one side. Even now the *simal* tree does not have any branches on one side. When the Tiger falls down after being killed by his brother, their mother, who is in deep prayer, opens her eyes suddenly, as she knows by now that something is not right. After opening her eyes she finds out that the flowers representing *Henkumbung* were all green and fresh whereas the flowers representing *Chapcha* had all died and withered away. Mother now knows for sure that *Henkumbung* has killed his brother. She is sitting outside waiting for her sons and when it is almost twilight *Henkumbung* arrives walking slowly with his bow and arrows. Mother then asks him about his brother and *Henkumbung* tells her that he must be somewhere behind him. Mother who knows everything asks him again saying how everyday they arrive home together but what happened today. To this *Henkumbung* tells her that since they did not find any prey today he must be searching for something on his way back home. Mother again pokes

him and asks him as to what has happened as his face seems so dark and his spirit so gloomy. *Henkumbung* does regret killing his brother and he is dark and gloomy as he fears that his mother may scold him once she comes to know the truth. He again tells her how they did not find any prey and he is tired and hungry which makes him look like dark and gloomy. Mother who cannot bring out the truth from him finally tells him that she knows what has happened and asks him not to lie to her. *Henkumbung* finally tells her how his brother thought and tried to kill him. In order to save himself, he shot his brother with the arrow, but he does not know if he is dead or not and that his brother is still lying in the jungle at the same place. Mother then asks him to take her to the place where her brother is lying. She looks at him and knows that he is already dead. She takes out the arrow and wipes all the blood from his body, after cleaning him she lays him down and that time *Sunnima* had used *bechchuk*, she keeps ginger, a white round stone from the river, flowers and also the younger brother. She links him with a promise to the ritual and starts *rishiwa*. (It is said that it was then that the ginger and water was used) while doing the *rishiwa* she places that white stone on the chest of the Tiger (Tigers still have a small white patch on their chest and it is said that when they run or jump it still makes a thumping sound.) and after the completion of *rishiwa* the Tiger gains consciousness and says that he really fell asleep for long time since the time he was basking in the sun. But his mother tells her the truth about how they both fought with each other and how he was killed by his brother. She asks both of them to sit together and makes both of them promise to her to certain conditions. She tells the Tiger, “since *Henkumbung* killed you today, and even though he is younger to you, he was successful in killing you with his intelligence and patience so from this day onwards he is your elder brother and since you died and was

reborn you are now younger to him. Whenever you see *Henkumbung* you have to respect him. From today *Henkumbung* is the king of this world and you will be the king of jungle. You are not to fight with each other from now onwards. If your brother is going uphill you go down the stream, if your brother is going downstream you go up hill. If your brother is walking a straight road you go down the road. If you two suddenly meet then you hide then you hide behind *sungnikonthok* (fern)". It is said that if the Tiger hides behind it almost becomes invisible. The Bear had already gone towards the jungle; there was no news from his side so the Tiger was given the responsibility of the jungle. *Sunnima* brings *Henkumbung* home and gives him the responsibility of the world and after that she too vanishes from this world.

Date: 12/12/2017

Time: 08:29 P.M.

Place: Rolep (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Parshuram Rai (Bottang Bokhim)

Age: 49 years

During the ancient time *Sunnima* and *Paruhang* had seven sons. Among seven sons eldest was *Bhenara* (Lion) second was *Maksa* (Bear) Third was *Samba* (Kind of bamboo) Fourth *Gopey* (Species of Bamboo) Fifth *Sachanambi* (kind of creeper) Sixth *Becchuk* (Ginger) and Seventh *Hangcha* (Everyone had human forms but they were named according to their nature and later they turn into beings suitable to their

nature). The eldest was too proud of his strength, second son was also too proud about his strength, third son also felt that he was next to none and this world would not be same without him. All six brothers were too proud of their so their father and mother turned them to what they deserved. All six brothers were warned by their parents that they should not tease and harass their youngest brother, he may seem small and weak but his skills and brain was next to none. But the elder brothers thought that he was a weakling and he could never harm them as they were all more powerful and bigger than him.

One day they all decided to go to the forest for hunting, on the way the eldest brother makes an excuse and goes ahead from the group and hides himself, same with the second brother he separates from the group and hides himself. *Hangcha* was accompanied by his other brothers, though he knew that his two elder brothers were hiding and waiting for him he does not return back. He makes a plan to tackle his brothers and other three brothers agree to help him. Samba becomes the bow, *Gopey* become the arrow and *Sachanambi* becomes the string of the bow. Hence, bow and arrow was formed. He opens his clothes and disguises a dead tree trunk as him and he climbs a tree and waits for his two elder brothers with bow and arrow. When Tiger comes and sees his brothers' clothes he jumps at him to eat him but he grabs the dead tree trunk. The youngest brother, who is sitting on a tree top and is watching all this tell him, "Oh! You really do want to eat me, if you want to eat me, open your mouth, I will jump in your mouth and you can eat me." All this time the Bear was still in the hiding. Tiger agrees to him and looking up he opens his mouth. When he opens his mouth, his younger brother shoots the arrow, piercing his throat and killing him. They

return home after that and in the evening when their elder brother did not return their mother enquires about him. Youngest tell her how the eldest brother tried to kill and eat him and how he killed him and as for now he was lying down in the forest. She asks them to take her to him. She is accompanied by all the six brothers to the place where her eldest son is lying dead. She sees her dead son and asks other to turn him over, she vents over his dead body as to how she had warned him. She then materializes *becchuk*, *accheta* and *salaiwa* to perform *rishiwa*. After that her son comes back to life. She asks all the brothers to gather around and tells them that from that day they were to live in forms shaped by their nature. She realized that they were not going to live together in harmony, she asks eldest to go towards the wild hills and asks him to live there, she tells him that they were not suppose to meet humans in his life and if they meet each other the outcome was not going to be favorable. Then she tells the Bear to take the form according to his pride and she asks him go roam the valleys searching and eating termites. *Samba*, *Gopey*, *Sachanambi* and *Becchuk*, since they were not against *Hangcha* and since they had helped him she asks them to take the form of grass and tree, to germinate near their youngest brother so that they could help him at other times too.

The first and the second myth by Tul Kumar Lohati and Prabhat Shivahang Rai respectively talks about the first human ancestors of the Rais. The first myth is collected from *Kulung* community and the second one is collected from *Bantawa* community. The theme of the myths bring them close to each other, both of the myths are about a boy and his two sisters, their struggles in life, their learnings which slowly paves way for the civilization. The variation that is found within them are many;

owing to the language difference in both the sub-caste, the name of the boy and his sisters are different but even then the sisters are associated with the same bird in both sub-castes. In the first version, *Khokchilip* and his sisters come into being through the process of evolution, their parents are not known. The second variation is more elaborate which talks about the parents of *Haechakua* and his sisters who also happen to have a step-mother. In both myths the brother is assumed to be dead and he is left by his sisters but the events that lead to the assumption are different. Another most important variation is; in the first myth the boy is taken care by an old lady and when he grows up he marry a girl who is not from the land. In the second myth the boy is taken care by his maternal uncle whom he finds accidentally and here he likes a girl from that same place and marries her.

The next two myths are from the same community i.e., *Bantawa* so there are not much variation. They run along the same theme, it's about humans and his brothers in the beginning; pride, overconfidence and rage leads to the downfall of the elder brothers. The only difference that we find in these two myths are the number of siblings and their names. The first myth has three brothers where as the second has seven brothers.

Ecocritical Analysis of the Myth

The Rai community is one of the nature worshipping communities. Their ancestors being hunters and gatherers initially; nature played a huge role in their life. Even now at the core, the community still worships nature and the myths and tales from the community strengthens their bond with the nature. In general, nature is an integral part of every living being, its importance and presence cannot be just dismissed. Thus,

the importance and role of Ecocritics and Ecocriticism cannot be denied. Ecocriticism has come to mean “not only the application of ecology and ecological principles to the study of literature, but also the theoretical approach to the interrelational web of natural cultural and supernatural phenomena.”¹¹. The word ‘ecocriticism’ was first introduced by William Rueckert, in 1978 in his essay titled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” but it was Cheryl Glotfelty who popularized the word. He defined ecocriticism as, “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.” (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii) Eco-criticism is also “a study of culture and cultural products (art works, writings, scientific theories, etc.) that is in some way connected with human relationship to the natural world.” (Dean, 5).

Art work of today belongs to various genres which may or may not have nature at its crux but when we look into the oral literature, culture of tribes and communities that existed even before we became aware of preserving our planet, we will find that these primitive communities were already at it. Their culture, myths and tradition all revolve around keeping the planet as it was; green and blooming. “...the widest definition of the subject of eco criticism is the study of the relationship of the humankind the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing analysis of term ‘human’ itself. (Garrard, 5). We understand and analyze ‘being humans’ as not being animals or the one with understanding and feelings. But this understanding of

us as being a human is too narrow as many a time animals prove to be gentler towards the nature while humans exploit the nature and that is the root cause of all the major problems. To address the problems of how ‘non-human’ we act at times and to bring awareness through various form of arts and literature, ecocritical approach is adopted by various scholars. “The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear... Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.” (Kerridge Richard- sodhganga)

In this respect, the first three origin myths of the Rai community emphasize on one or the other elements of life out of the five; the fire, the water, the air, the earth and the sky. The first myth, though the initial component may have been that of sound but it was the ball of fire that finally burst and give way to life. In Aryan myths the fire or *Agni* is personified as a ‘priest’ and even God, who is violent when it comes to destroying the evil. But in the Rais myth, the fire is simply an element which was crucial in giving life. Even though the mention of fire is not elaborate one cannot deny its significance. Fire symbolizes different things in different cultures, ‘... the Greeks imagined that the God Prometheus brought the highly classified divine secret of fire to human humankind.’ The initial phase of human civilization began when humans started to eat roasted or cooked food in fire which gives the element of fire a special status in human life.

The other two Rais myths of origin; life comes into existence because of water and water is essential for existence of all creatures. The natural environment is extremely important for the sustenance of life on Earth and these myths subtly sends

that message. The identity of *Horem*, the first ancestor of mankind, and his image is that of a leafless tree trunk swaying in the wind, “*Horem* came into being just like that, he did not have branches or anything else, just a trunk that swayed with the wind.” Man as seen in this particular myth is a child of nature, who is dependent rather than being superior to the nature. Against this notion, stands the Anthropocentric Christian view which claims that man is superior, made to rule this world:

Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetative and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all powerful God had created light and darkness, heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being alone. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purpose. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image. (White Jr., 9).

The myths of the Rai community not only depicts them as the child of nature but the human form that they get is from the process of evolution so the notion of them being shaped in the form of creator is absent. This places them at equal level to all the creations of the earth. Even the idea of God in the Rai community apart from the identity of *Sunnima* and *Paruhang* is crude. They call their God as *Maang* who is formless, they worship their *Pitris* in form of *Chulah-Dhunga*; stones, which is

basically an embodiment of nature. Unlike in Christianity, where man named the birds and animals which established his supremacy, here birds and animals were his siblings and kins. In the myth of *Khokchiplip* and *Haechakua*; their sisters are identified as birds known as *Dhanesh* and *Hangrayo*, their uncle named *Samfokdiwa* is an owl and the wife of *Khokchilp* is a stone who turns into a lady who happens to be the daughter of King of water and serpents. It is not *Khokchilp* who is more intelligent and knowledgeable but it is his wife, “*Yelim* told him to get the branches of *bhakimlo* which was like the tail of a *Chaskup- Chevay* bird, that is ‘V’ from one one end.” “...*Yelim* had all kind of knowledge and divine wisdom and *Khokchilp* was just the person who implemented and carried out the work.” *Khokchilp* evolved from nature as a man but he is distanced by seven generation hence he lacks the knowledge, on the other hand *Yelim* is still a part of nature, hence she has greater understanding and knowledge of the nature, she is the daughter of nature, born from the nature.

The concept of being one with nature and nature as provider resonates throughout the myths. Taking only what is needed and giving back when we can is the way of maintaining the ecological balance. Though in modern world we do talk about sustainable development, we even celebrate days like Earth Day, World Environment Day and others but humans often take more to fulfill their growing wants. Ancient cultures and myth differ to the contemporary views; less talk and more work. Taking the example of ancient Hindu culture where the water bodies were considered sacred and activities that polluted the waters were forbidden. Stones, mountains, trees, animals and birds were considered sacred and these were a way of maintaining the

balance and preserving the ecology. The myths of the Rais echoes similar concern and they believe in returning to nature what came from her. The myth of Huttulippa preaches that; this world is created out of the dead bodies of two demons named *Hitibey* and *Hiribey*. "... *Hutulippa* was successful in pinning down and killing *Hitibay* and *Hiribay*. Now what to do with their bodies, all the subjects also came and surrounded the body and they all peeled the skin of those two demons. Now what to do with their peeled skin, they said that they should make earth out of it as only water is not enough they need earth too. With the hair of demons they made all types of vegetations, forests and trees. Their bones were used in making hills and mountains. In the end, the meat was used to make land, their fats became white soil, red soil came out of their red meat." *Hitibey* and *Hiribey*, they materialize in the water world so after they are killed they are returned to the nature, though in different forms.

Many a myths talk about the heavenly father who is the creator, like that of Greek where Zeus created the world and the mankind and in the Christianity it is the almighty God "... the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed... all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." (GENESIS 1:30, 4) The God as a father created all that he could but it was the garden that took the role of a mother to nurture and take of human that was placed in her lap. She provided him with all that was essential for sustaining his life. It is true in every sense for all the communities, without nature man would not have survived a day. When *Haechakua* is abandoned by his mother and later by his sisters he relies on nature for his survival. But life and living is not all that easy, he has to face all the difficulties that is to come but he is not

alone as mother nature takes great care of humans in every turn. The evil like the 'serpent' is always present in people's life. Presence of 'Dangkoklima' works almost like the serpent in 'Garden of Eden' making life difficult. The serpent tempts the woman and the man in Eden to taste the fruit of knowledge; "the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (GENESIS 1:30, 4) and this brings upon them the wrath of God making their life full of hardships. Here "*Dankoklima* being evil she hardens and puts *angkaleksi* inside a crust and now even a monkey cannot open that crust to eat the seed that is inside and she also turned its creamy sap to bitter taste. Once again they were in trouble and don't know what to do but somehow they again find other wild things like *gittha-vyagur* and *tarul*. Again their stepmother come to know about it and it is said that she is the one who put threads inside *gittha-vyagur* and made it uneatable and bitter, she put all the *taruls* inside the earth crust" but mother nature is ever forgiving and giving, she presents them with new ways and opens up her vast reserve of resources to help them sustain their life.

Haechakua learns the secret of nature, he plants and takes care of the bamboo grove and in turn he is saved by them from hunger and later on from the clutches of the demon *Chakrawdhipma* and her daughter. Throughout their life, he and later his wife, they constantly learn from the nature and depend on her for their survival. To show their gratitude towards their mother, they offer back whatever they can through rituals, now known as *Sakela* and *Sakewa*.

"The word 'wilderness' derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'wilddeoren', where 'deoren' or beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation."(Garrard, 60) The Rai

myth is the amalgamation of the wild, its beast together with humans in the same natural world, within the same boundaries. Their existence in the same world is never on a linear plane; bonding, relationship and their conflict throws light on human nature at a universal level. The chapter “Social Realities and Other Tales” will make an attempt to elaborate on it.

Chapter 3

Social Realities and Other Tales

It was an early morning on 04th of June 2017, the members of the Rai community dressed in their ethnic wear had gathered at a reserved forest in a place named Bulbuley in East Sikkim. They had gathered there to perform *Prakritik Puja* (worshipping the nature). Towards one end of a small clearing in that forest was the *Chulah-Dhungah*, they started their ritual after burning woods with incense in it and by using its ash to put *tilak* on the forehead of members present for the rituals. The Rai community has come a long way from the time that their tales talk about, but even then the age old tales with no specific time of origin is seen to be thriving at present in everyday life of the community. The present social reality of the Rai community is an offspring of tales which are still found living and breathing in their social life.

Without documented record and written script it is hard to tell if it is the culture that gave birth to a tale or was it from tales and myths that their culture was shaped. Either way we cannot deny the fact that folk tales and folk myths do shape the culture of a society and with changing time folk tales also change their themes and messages according to the time, situation and need. The identity of the Rai community as a nature worshipper has its root deep in the tales of their first ancestors known by many names; *Haechakua*, *Hokcilip*, *Khokchilip*, *Rachelkua*, *Longmaley*. The list can be bigger and there may be other names too owing to the diversity of the community. According to the tale, he as a human, from his childhood had always been dependent on nature but he fails to give thanks to the nature since he was just a child. When he grows up and finds a wife, who discovers the secret of grains and crops they

start worshipping the nature; “When they eat it (grains) for the first time they both have stomach ache and they suffer from diarrhea. They think that it must be because they did not offer it to their *Pitris* (ancestors), so next time before eating they offer the grains first to the fire and then they eat it and this time they do not suffer any negative consequences and grow stronger and healthy.” Even though they started thanking and worshipping nature out of fear, in today’s time people are more aware and they give thanks knowingly. Agriculture as a means of livelihood is slowly vanishing from the community because of various reasons like scarcity of land for farming, better opportunities at other field of work, etc. but even today the Rai community is seen to be worshipping nature jointly as one unit. People who still practice agriculture as their main source of income also offer their harvested product to their *maang* before eating or selling them. Resource persons for this research like Pancha Bahadur Rai, Parshuram Rai and Mrs. Itima Rai who still have lands had corns, rice and other harvested products hanging above their *Chulah-Dhungah*.

Worshipping of nature, among various reasons is also because of the importance of food in real life. There is no denying to it and one can find the mention of food in abundance in almost all the indigenous tales. The Rai community uses bamboo leaf in the altar as it was a banana that saved little *Haechakua* from starving. It was also the bamboo grooves which protects him from a demon; “...he runs towards his banana groove and climbs up. She too follows him there and tries to climb up the banana plant, it is said that *Haechakua* was the one who ordered the banana plant to be the way it is today, difficult to climb up,”. Other than food it is also wine or local beer that holds an important place in social life as well as in rituals of the community. Local beer known as *jaar* or *khabat* served usually in a small bamboo

jug is known as *tongba*. There is a folk myth which explains how and why the beer was created.

Date: 12/12/2017

Time: 08:29 P.M.

Place: Rolep (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Parshuram (Bottang Bokhim) Rai

Age: 49 years

Mahadev/Paruhnag used to be in his meditation in *Kailash*, to see to the well being of this world all the time. *Sunnima/Parvati* used to stay at home and she used to carry on all her duties alone. It became difficult for her to look into all the matters all on her own. *Sunnima* created *Rogoma* from her shadows and taught her the household work. *Rogoma* learnt all that was taught to her and as she grew up she was taught to work outside of home too. During that time *Sunnima* used to prepare breakfast out of peas and grams grown by her, she used to wrap them up in a piece of cloth and used to send it with *Rogoma* when she went to work outside on the field. She used to give *Rogoma* all the required agricultural equipments before sending her off to the work. One day she cooked rice for *Rogoma*, packed it for her and told her to have it if she felt hungry while working. She took it along with her equipments and upon reaching the field she kept her breakfast on the edge of the field and covered it with some grass. That day she dug out the field and soon grew tired, but she forgot all about her breakfast as she was too much engrossed in her work. When it was evening she

picked up her things and went towards her home. Next day again she followed her usual schedule, on the third day when she reached the place where she had forgotten her rice covered by grasses, she could smell a sweet, delicious smell in the air. That was a new and intoxicating smell so she started searching for it. Upon searching she found her left over food which had fermented, she smelled it and knew that the smell was coming from that pouch. She soon realized that she cannot taste it without showing it to her mother, so she immediately took it to show it to her. *Sunnima* examined the pouch and asked her to take her to the place where she had left her food. When *Rogoma* took *Sunnima* to that place she was asked to search that place for some herb. *Rogoma* found (*Marcha*) a root and fern of plant that fermented the rice. *Sunnima* knew that, that was the thing that fermented the rice so she took it along with her and started cultivating it, to be used when the need arises. She fermented the rice to test it and tasted it, she also offered it to her husband. (This was given to *Paruhang* as an offering so it is still use it as an offering during rituals.) *Paruhang* told her that this would come to use in future and *Sunnima* kept it away as per instruction. All three of them resumed their work and soon became busy with their daily activities. The work of creating, destroying and maintaining the balance was done by *Paruhang*. During that time he used to send *Kaal* (God of death) and *New* (reason/messenger for/of death) in human form, *New* used to go first closely followed by *Kaal*. At that time, it was believed that humans were taken in their original form as opposed to only soul believed to be taken at the later stage. Even now, among the Rais it is said that without *New* (Reason for death like; sickness, accident) *Kaal* will not come. As *Kaal* and *New* were carrying out their work, one day they went as usual but they did not return as expected. When they did not return even on the seventh day *Shivaji* got

worried as the world could not handle the growing weight of humans. He decided to go in search of *Kaal* and *New* on his own. At first he went to *Sunnima* and discussed the matter with her, *Sunnima* and *Paruhang* both sat to meditate with concentration. They saw that *Kaal* and *New* were in hands of a blacksmith who was a tantrik. He had imprisoned both of them in a tunnel behind seven doors. *Paruhang* and *Sunnima* analyzed the situation and they decided to convert the fermented rice into wine. They decided to take the wine and feed it to that blacksmith to make him vulnerable so that he would reveal his secret. As decided they reached the house of the blacksmith with the wine and *Parvati* starts pouring him the drink. When he starts getting intoxicated they start praising him and when they know that he is fully intoxicated *Parvati* starts asking him question about *Kaal* and *New* with caution. He blurts out his secret and tells them that he has imprisoned them. She humbly asks him to return *Kaal* and *New* and also tells him that no harm would come to him. He agrees and enters the tunnel, opening one door after another. After opening the seventh door he brings *Kaal* and *New* and gives them back to *Paruhang*. *Paruhang* then realizes that sending *Kaal* and *New* in human form was not appropriate and from then onward he started sending them without any form. Before this incident, the Rais believe that humans, Gods and demons used to live in the same plane as one, marriage ties and general contacts were normal. But from then onwards *Paruhang* realizes that it was not suitable, so he prohibits any kind of relationship between these three kinds. Along with *Kaal* and *New* all other Gods too leave their human forms and become formless and they remain so till this day.

The above myth explains the importance and the reason behind local wine being offered in rituals. It is not only the Rai community where local wine or beer holds an important place in rituals as well as in social life. The Karbis from Karbi Anglong in Assam also have their local beer known as *Hor* which is an important part of their traditional marriage, rituals and ceremonies. "...the presence of the 'bottle gourd' and the '*hor*' (rice beer) in Karbi folk lore link one generation to another and connect speaker and listener in communal experience, thereby uniting the past and the present in memory." (Dattaray, 22) Wine or beer, though it has positive social and cultural significance within the community it also may have negative impact on people at times. People were aware that it causes intoxication and its excessive use is harmful so they also have a tale which talks about how it can lead a meek and hardworking man astray. Humans are full of flaws and weaknesses and even the strongest man succumbs and becomes the prey of malice that is all around. The threat is even greater when there is no one to guide a person towards the right path. Such is the myth of a very hardworking *Torempa* who, due to lack of guidance becomes an alcoholic and is fated to become an evil spirit after he dies.

Date: 10/12/2017

Time: 09:28 A.M.

Place: Zero Point, Ranka (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Prabhat Shivahang Rai

Age: 45 years

Torempa was an orphan. He had no one so he grew up hopping from one home to another in his village. He was good natured and humble as a kid who used to help every other people in their work. In this manner his life went on and he grew up as a young and very hard working man. He was loved by everyone as he never said no to anyone. But he grew up alone without a father and a mother to show him the difference between right and wrong. According to our tradition people in village who work for others and help others are offered fermented rice or millet wine, even now people offer it. So everyone used to offer him local wine for his help and as he grew up he got addicted to it. When he comes of age he marries a girl whom he liked and her father gives them their old home to stay. Their married life starts happily but his addiction towards local wine keeps on increasing. When this happens he forgets his home, he keeps on going to places where he can get that local wine. In the ends his wife leaves him and he ends up being alone again, he becomes a worse drunkard who loses everything. People in the village also start ignoring him as he was of no use anymore. He remains thirsty and hungry for days and in such condition one day he reaches to his in-laws place. When he reaches there he is welcomed happily as he was their son-in-law once. He is given local wine as a welcome drink, after serving him the drink both of his in-laws go to the field for some work. Since *Torempa* by now had become an addict and a drunkard, after drinking the given share he could not stop himself there so he goes to the barrel where the content was kept and he starts eating it hurriedly as he fears that his in-laws would return quickly. While he is trying to eat everything in hurry he chokes himself and dies instantly. After he dies there is no one to bury him with proper rituals, his in-laws do what they could but even then he rises up as an evil spirit. He is now known as *Torempa*, the evil spirit. Even now people

sprinkle drops of wine in the air with their finger for *Torempa* before drinking. It is believed that if the spirit of *Torempa* gets someone then they tend to fall down, tumble down from hills, ravines and other such steep places.

Folk tales and myth though narrated in simple language often has multiple layers to it. It serves as a moral lesson not only to children but also to grown up who may lose their right ways at times. Times when there were no formal education and schools, these tales served as a medium to educate the younger minds and also to transfer the great reserve of knowledge through word of mouth. All the ancient, traditional societies have tales which talks about vices and virtues, good and evil. For instance; The Meitei community from Manipur has a folktale named “Sandrembi Chaisra” which delivers the message of victory of truth in every situation, urging the listeners to be truthful at all times. Another folktale named “Apanggilaibak” (The Fool’s Fate) gives the moral lesson of how a man should not become greedy. The tale of *Torempa* also leaves a message of how being greedy will eventually kill a man since it was his greed that choked him to death. Along with greed the tale of *Tormepa* also talks about the role and importance of parents in an individual’s life. Parents are the great store house of knowledge and shaping the mind of a child from a young age is their duty and listening to their parents is what a child must do. There are various other tales in the Rai community which talks about how greed is an evil that will not leave human mind at any age and times. These tales are still symbolic and relevant at present times.

Time: 03:42 P.M

Place: Rolep (Her residency)

Name of the interviewee: Mrs. Itima Rai (Kulungey married to Bokhim)

Age: 85 (approx.)

Once a couple (*naw raja* and *naw rani*) were very miserly who never even served a drop of water to a person who came to their doorstep. But their son was very kind who used to give away things to needy people without his parents knowledge. Once God came to their house posing as a beggar to see how the couple would treat him, he came to test them as he knew they were penny-pincher. But the son took out few gold pieces carefully so that his parents won't know and he gave those away to the beggar. When his father died his mother did not even come out of her room fearing that she would have to make offerings during funeral and such other related service. Her son carried out the service in secret without his mother's knowledge. He called people, treated them with food and made the required offerings. When all the service was over she came out of her room and started complaining about the fortune that he had just spent doing the good work; "Oh my good lord! This boy just flooded the river of wealth for nothing". Uttering these words, the mother died then and there. The son again carried out all the rituals for his dead mother dutifully. After sometime he married and the new bride wanted jewelry to get ready so he took all the ornaments but he could not find any gold bangle to give her. He went to the God and told him that; "my father and mother both are dead and now I have married so that I can have a family. I have all the required jewelry for my new bride but one gold bangle is missing." The offering made by the boy was kept separately on a shelf by God,

pointing towards that direction he asked the boy to take the needed item. And God also showed him his father and mother who were in '*Narak*' (hell) inside a pit filled with human excreta.

This is an ancient community's way of teaching its members to invest in philanthropic way of life. This story is a means through which the community urges its members to help each other in times of need that keeps the spirit of the community alive and binds its members in an unbreakable bond of brotherhood. This is how the folktales form an important component of entertainment and education in any given society. The concept of hell and heaven introduced in the above tale are the rewards that one receives at the end of their life for the kind of work they indulge in. Therefore, there exists an underlying appeal in the tale which talks of moral values that promotes an individual's personal development. The tale thus has a number of lessons to be conveyed like good always triumphs and evil gets punished, kindness gets rewarded by the Almighty whereas bad deeds lead to no good result. These kinds of tales also serve as a warning to the members of the community urging them to preserve the tradition of kindness, generosity and fellow-feelings which will keep the community together.

The Rai folk tales also talk of how human beings should take care of cats and dogs too. Now we may be human but after we die we will be born as cats and dogs. The tales often warn that in this life one may be human but after they die they can be born as cats and dog. Therefore they teach the members of the community to give food to cats and dogs in a clean place, never give them food on a fallen leaf. According to the tales when one will die and crossover s/he will meet those cats and

dogs and they will recognize them and there they will give them food when they are hungry. So if they have given them food in leaf, they will also give food in a leaf.

Folklores are anonymous. Dan Ben-Amos in his essay titled “The Idea of Folklore: An Essay” writes, “The cloak of tradition concealed the identity of those who authored folktales, ballads and proverbs, and transmission from generation to generation obscured the origins.” He further writes about indigenous stories and poems saying that they become a folktale only when the identity of its creator gets completely erased and how it is this anonymity that defines the genuine of the folktales. Thus folktales become a part of collective tradition and they survive through circulation. Thus another tale of the Rai community talk about how the stories should be shared. The tale says:

We should share stories because if we don't share, the 'stories' get angry. Once there was a man who did not share the stories that was told to him so the eldest story, *Jethi Katha* got angry and swore to kill him when he was on his way to visit his in-laws house. She planned that on a sunny day she will stand tall in form of a big and shady *Peepal* tree and when he will come to take rest under her shade, she planned to fall down on him and kill him. His loyal servant and friend was *Pashuvagye* (one who could understand the language of nature and its beings). When his master or friend said that he wants to take rest under that tree he urged him and pulled his hand to move forward without stopping. When they reached a little further that tree fell down with a loud noise and he said then, “I was trying to save your life then because I saw the roots of that tree, it had decayed and I knew that the tree was about to fall down.”

He lied to his master in that manner to save his life as he could not tell him the truth about eldest story who had vowed to kill him. When the eldest story was unsuccessful in killing the man, the second story or '*Maili katha*' too vowed to kill him as the man did not share the story that he had heard. She vowed that when the man will be traveling to his in-laws house on a sunny day she would stretch herself long over the river on a high ground as a strong bridge and when the man will try to cross the river with her help she would then break and fall, drowning him into the river and finally killing him so. When the man and *Pashuvagye* reached the bridge, the man wanted to cross the river using the bridge, he wanted to go through it watching the pleasant view and enjoying the breeze but the servant who had already heard the second story taking vow to kill the man and knew of her plan, urged his master not to step on that bridge and asked him to cross the river using another short-cut way which he knew. When they crossed the river through the other way immediately the bridge fell down with a loud noise. Again the servant lied to him and told him that the bridge was already weak and it was about to fall down so he asked him not to step over it. Now that both the sisters were unsuccessful in killing the man, the youngest sister, '*Kanchi Katha*' who was also angry with the man for not sharing her with other people vowed to kill him. She planned that when he will reach his in-laws place they will treat him with a dinner for sure and then she will be hiding in his food as the thorn of snake and when he will eat the food he will certainly die of the poison. When they reached the in-laws place finally, the servant who knew of the youngest story's plan, he sat next to his master during dinner. When he was about to take the first bite he shook his hand so that the food falls from his hand. The servant kept doing that throughout the dinner to prevent his master from eating the food. When they came back to their home the next

day, the man called his servant and scolded him over his rude behavior, as he felt really very ashamed because of this unpolished behavior. Finally, the servant had no other way or excuse so he had to tell his master the truth. He told him about the vow made by all the three sisters to kill him in detail. He told him how the eldest story wanted to kill him by falling down on him as a tree, how the second story wanted to kill him by posing as a bridge and by drowning him in the river and how the youngest story wanted to kill him by sitting in his food as a snake thorn. As soon as the servant had revealed the truth, the servant died as a *Pashuvagey* cannot reveal his knowledge and truth to other people. According to the Rai mythical belief, when human beings pluck flowers and fruits they see white sap but that is actually said to be the blood of the plants and *Pashuvagey* sees its original red color. *Pashuvagey* never plucked any flower or fruit because whenever he tried to pluck them he could hear their cries and he always returned empty handed even though he used to be scolded every time by his master. But finally he had to reveal his truth about his knowledge about the vow of three sister stories and he thus died.

In these tales, recollected and narrated by one of the eldest lady respondents from the village and also the narration of Parshuram Rai, where he has used *Shiv/Paruhang* and *Parvati/ Sunnima* interchangeably, one can see the acculturation and amalgamation of Hindu beliefs within the folktales and folk myth. The concept of hell and heaven is not present in the core of the Rai customs and belief. After their death they believe that they turn into spirits; evil or the good ones or they reincarnate as humans; for instance the story of *Torempa* where he turns into an evil spirit. The good spirits are given a resting place in their sacred place i.e., *Chulah-Dhungah*, they are

worshipped and called on for guidance. Not only in tales but acculturation is seen even in the customs of the Rai community, they are very liberal with their belief system and can be seen using Hindu priests, Buddhist monks on various occasions. Only during their rituals of death, marriage and other age old rituals which involve the *Chulah-Dhungah* they specifically call their priests known as *jhakris* or *mangpas*. This shows how certain features of folktales from various communities often overlap. Although there exists peculiarities and local flavors in the folktales of a particular community, there seem to be a common pattern which alludes to a certain kind of parallelism of cultures that influence each other. The tale of *Pashuvagey* also coincides with similar tales from India and Europe, where a man or a king will have the power or knowledge of understanding the language of animals and other beings and the people who are given this gift is always forbidden to share the truth with other people. If they go against this one principle they would die instantly. Other stories have different endings and different chapters but the theme is same. For instance, a similar story from *Jataka* titled *The Language of Animals* the king is given a charm by a Naga King which helps in understanding the language of other beings, but in the end he does not die as he tactfully avoids telling the truth to his wife. Other stories with similar themes from India are; *The King and His Inquisitive Queen*, *The Billy Goat and the King*, *Ramai and the Bonga*. *The King Who Learnt the Speech of Animals* is a Sri Lankan tale. *The Language of Animals* and *The Language of Beasts* is from Bulgaria. *Woman's Curiosity* and *The Wicked Wife* is from Hungary and Germany respectively. Other European countries too have tales with similar themes, one reason behind the similarity is the oral nature of tales which help them move freely.

“...the 18th and 19th century linguists had realized that languages were related in language families... The diffusion of different branches of a given language family was explained by the nomadic habits, warfare or migration of people or tribes... It was therefore natural to suppose that not only languages and material culture were transmitted from one place to another, but the spiritual culture, religion, law and oral literature were also disseminated by the same process.” (Bregenhøj, 24)

Moreover, the Rai community traces their origin back to Nepal and before they settled down they were hunters and gathers.

Using the term ‘migration’ or ‘migrated’ may and will hurt the sentiments of many Rais for they believe (like many other communities inhabiting Sikkim and foothills of the Himalayas) that they are native to these regions. Their tales go beyond time when there was no notion of state and nation. These people, like a river originated and moved along with all their energy, taking along with them whatever came in front of them. But when we talk about origin and roots, the roots of the Rai community does go back to Nepal, the folktales and people themselves will agree to that. So the question is what is it that makes them native to two different countries? What is migration and who are migrates?

Migration is process by which people move from one place to another for various reasons, on temporary or permanent basis. The Webster dictionary has defined migration as, “the act or an instance of moving from one country, region to settle in another.” Smith, T. L. also defines the term simply as “change in physical space.” Definition given by Baker covers a broader area; “migration is the act of moving from one spatial unit to another”. “...it touches a large number of branches of naturalists,

social scientists, and others.”¹² Be it for social, political or economic reasons when an individual or a group moves from one location or area to another it is considered as migration. Migration can affect an individual or a group in various ways and Diaspora arises out of migration. Gijsbert Oonk has outlined three main characteristics of Diaspora citing examples of Jews and African slaves who were displaced from their homeland into two or more countries. These populations go through a traumatic experience and the reason for such experience may vary. Even when these people have lived in foreign land for generations they have a ‘collective- often idealized memory/myth’ of their nation or homeland like Israel for Jews and Kalisthan for Sikhs. And lastly they often dream or have a ‘myth about returning to their motherland’ and it is due to this they often fail to assimilate with local people and their culture. But all the communities who migrate or are forced to migrate do not go through traumatic experience. They may have a homeland in their tales and myth but they do not dream about returning back to where they came from. These people accommodate, assimilate with the locals and build their home around them, hence the term ‘Naturalised migration’: migration with no sense of loss and depravity. The Rais unlike Jews, African slaves and Sikhs do not fall under Diaspora as they do not carry any characteristic of Diasporic population.

Gijsbert Oonk has also categorized migration into four categories; (i) Trade Diaspora; they were the ones who traveled to establish profitable trade relationships in other continents. They set out for a long time but eventually returned to their own homeland. It was only in nineteenth century that they started settling in other continents. (ii) Indenture Labourers; similar to trade Diaspora is indenture laborers, they too set out to work in different continents but their migration was forced on them most of the

times. (iii) Post Second World War migrants; people started moving from one place to another after Second World War. Educated Indians left their lands in search of better jobs, Muslims left for Pakistan and Hindus came to India and so on. (iv) Twice migrants/ Thrice Migrants; "...Indian indentured laborers in Suriname who eventually settled in the Netherlands or those who were expelled from East Africa and ended up settling in the UK and Canada." (Oonk, 11-12). Looking at the documented history of people moving towards India from Nepal they can be categorized under Indenture Laborers, forced by the colonial rule to serve their greater purpose or people who simply migrated willingly in search of work to support their livelihood. British rule in India needed cheap laborers to work for them in tea plantation and famously the Gurkha regiment, the brave soldiers to fight for them during the Second World War. After World War, these soldiers were given land to settle in the regions of North Bengal and other places near foothills of Himalayas. The Indo-Nepal treaty (1950) which made the border porous led the people from Nepal to move into Indian Territory freely and settle in different parts of India. People who migrated to India belonged to different tribes and clans and among them were the Kirats; the Rais, the Limbus and the Subbas. One reason that the Rai population do not suffer from sense loss may be because this documented history is not even a century old, whereas according to Pancha Bahadur Rai (Kulung), a respondent from Assamlinzey, he is the seventh generation of his family living in that same place i.e., their family history goes beyond hundred years. They do not consider themselves as migrants, they think of themselves as native to that region. But then the folk tale that he carries with him does associate the Rais coming out of Nepal, from a place named Diktel-Okhaldhunga. It was in that place where the first of the Rais were born and came into

being but with time their population increased and the brothers decided to move out in search of different lands for them and for their family.

Date: 06/06/2017

Time: 01:34 P.M.

Place: Assamlinzey, Pastenga (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Pancha Bahadur Rai (Kulung)

Age: 83 years (approximately)

“We are from Cheskham, one side there is Mahakulungbung belonging to *Kulungey*. There are *Kulungey* and *Pilbungey*, we call ourselves *Kulungey* but in reality we are not, we are *Pilbungey* and my *thar* is *Lohatey*. We *Kulungey* and *Pilbungey* are like aunt-nephew and uncle-niece (closely related). Our rituals are same, dialect is same.”

The story of the origin of the Rais starts from the place known as Diktel, Okhaldhunga (We *Kulungey* and *Pilbungey* call that place as Diktel). Eldest (*Jetha*) was known as *Chamling*, second son (*Maila*) was known as *Khaling*, third (*Saila*) *Bantawa* and so on. With time the population of the Rais increased a lot. *Chamling*, the eldest was the cleverest one he suggested that they should now do one *Mundum* (a ritual). All brothers should dig an individual big pit where they were to gather sand; in that sand they were to erect the branches of Chestnut tree (*Katus ko sewli*) and they were to circumbulate around that *sewli* while saying *mundum*. Near that *sewli* they were to keep one small barrel of green bamboo (*Dhungro*). While going around

saying *Mundum* they were to shake the *sewli* and if water falls from the *sewli* of any brother then the village will belong to that brother. Following the same process, they were to tap the uncovered *dhungro* from the top and if the *dhungro* of any brother will make the sound of chirping village bird then the village will belong to that brother. This was promised and agreed upon by all the brothers. As said, all the brothers started their circumbulation while saying *mundum* and they started shaking their individual *sewli* but water did not drip down from the *sewli* of any brother and they also tried the same with *dhungro* but it just made the usual natural *fung-fung* noise, it did not make the sound of the chirping village bird. *Chamling* on the other hand when he came reciting the *mundum* and shook his *sewli*, his *sewli* rained water wetting the sand. Then others asked him to tap the *dhungro*, he said the *sashi* (mantra) and took a round of his *dhungro*, others *dhungro* just created *fung-fung* noise but the *dhungro* of *Chamling* created *chyar-chyar* (chi-chi) noise, (*char chawka*) that was the sound of the bird of the world, country and their land. In this way every other brother lost to *Chamling*. So they all agreed that since *Chamling* is eldest and as he has also won the bet so from now *Diktel* will belong to *Chamling*. So leaving the place of their origin other brothers spread out to other places; *Kulungey* came to Mahakulungbung, *Sotang* came to inhabit *Sotoma*, *Thulungey* took refuge in a place named *Buri dara*, and so on. This way they all scattered and took small places (*Kipat*) of their own leaving *Diktel* for the eldest.

During the *Rishiwa* (ceremony) *Chamling's* *sewli* rained water and his *dhungro* made the chirping noise of *Char chawka* but in reality he was clever than other brothers. Other brothers were simple minded and naive. They didn't even check

if the eldest has kept something inside the *dhungro*, actually *Chamling* had kept the baby of *Latkoshera*, an owl inside his *dhungro*, and the *sweli* was fresh and green so he had kept a green bamboo casket (*chunggi*) filled with water. After he had already won the bet and everything was decided other brothers happened to notice this but then it was too late by then and they could do nothing so they left Diktel to the elder brother as decided and spread out to other places. In this way, they say that their own language and rituals were created.

With time the population of the Rais started spreading out all over, they were there in Mhakulungbung, they came to Cheskham too, *Sotangs* came the Sotoma, there were *Kipats* everywhere, towards *Buridara*, towards *Zubu* where the *Thulungs* settled. Due to excess population people started moving out, some moved out cutting down the woods for furniture (*arakatney*), some lifted the weights of others (*bhariya*), some practicing shifting agriculture; they slowly and gradually shifted further and further. When they entered Sikkim, they say that Sikkim had a King, King had kept *Kajis*, *Kajis* had kept *Mandal* and under *Mandal* were *Karbari* (middlemen). So Rais said that they should also get land since it has been a long time that they have been practicing Shifting agriculture. The king gave them land saying half of the produce from the land will go to the king and others can be kept by the people. The Rais got legal authority over the land by order from the King. So in this way the Rais started settling and spreading out in Sikkim. They say that at first they came towards Darjeeling and then towards Kalimpong and to other parts of India. The respondent notes that:

Our family had been here in Sikkim for seven generation, when I will go away mine will be the seventh generation. Among our family everyone has died, I am the only one alive. We were seven brothers; I am the fifth (*antarey*) brother. Others elder to me and younger to me, everyone has died. I am the only one in our area, Daragaon. There are other *Kulngey* who are elder to me but our *Thars* do not match, I am *Lohatey* they are *Mopocho* but out language, rituals and other things are similar.

The above tale and the personal life history of Mr. Pancha Bahadur Rai states how the Rais population in general moved from one place to another practicing shifting agriculture and reached Sikkim where they currently inhabit. Looking into this through the medium of their folktales, it can be seen as simply their way of life, a matter of choice. Unlike other migrants like the Cherokees from Australia, the Jews, or even the South Asian migrants from India scattered all over Europe, the Rais do not have any nostalgic craving for a homeland which is distant and out of their reach, for them the place they inhabit is their homeland. The process of migration or moving was natural for them and it was necessary and needed when the resources were limited.

Their folktales from earliest time, all point towards them as wanderer, hunters and gatherers who settled down in favorable places with time. One of their earliest tales about their first known ancestors known as *Haechakua* or *Khokchilip*, known by different names in different sects, is that he was born in a jungle and he moves from one place to another as he grows up under different circumstances. Finally, when he marries the girl he liked, his maternal uncle instructs him to move on and find a

leveled plane, near a river where he can settle down with his new bride. One noticeable fact about their search or moving on to a new place is that they always moved towards the hilly terrains, towards forested area with different types of vegetation. When we see the settlement patterns of the Rai community, they all inhabit the mountainous or hilly area. The border of Nepal is not only attached to West Bengal and Sikkim but it is also attached to other Indian states like Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, but the Rai population choose to move toward regions that were already familiar to them. This is also another reason why they never felt foreign to any place or never really felt that they were away from their homeland as wherever they moved it was their homeland.

“The phrase “Trail of Tears” evoked images of Cherokees marching overland through sleet and snow, and over windswept prairies and endless plains” (Smithers, 248): in forced migration like this, migrating or moving in search of another place is an act of great pain and sorrow. On the other hand the Rais have ‘Trails of Tales’ instead of “Trail of Tears”. Wherever they go, they are connected to their past and their lineage through tales and new tales follow up. They have a restorative way of balancing their past with their present, for instance; in a tale narrated by Prabhat Shivahang Rai; when Haechakua and his wife settles down and builds their house completely for the first time they have to call on to the *Maang*; the almighty. While performing this ritual elders, parents and siblings are suppose to be present with him. But since he had no living family that he knew of, his wife suggests him to establish *Chulah-Dhunga* with three stones, each representing his father, mother and siblings respectively. This *Chulah-Dhunga* keeps them connected to their roots and also with nature. It represents everything that is missing from real life, the dead ancestors are

given safe haven in the *Chulah-Dhunga* , they call upon their almighty God, *Maang* by lighting fire in it, it is also considered as the caretaker of their home and family. This *Chulah-Dhungah* established by the first ancestors of the Rais, has become their social reality which serves as their identity marker. Diversity of the Rais merges and becomes one as every sub-caste no matter how different the language and rituals has to have *Chulah-Dhungah* in their home. With *Chulah-Dhunga* close by the Rais are never too far away from their origin, it represents everything good and auspicious in their life.

Need for identity is relatively a new concept, long before all these mundane division existed, the Rai folk myth talks about only two divisions Humans known as *Hangman* and Spirits known as *Sheatmang*. They lived together in harmony but then the animalistic nature of humans came to the forefront.

Date: 19/11/2017

Time: 09:42 A.M.

Place: Zero Point, Ranka (Interviewee's home)

Name of the Interviewee: Prabhat Shivahang Rai

Age: 45 years

This is a myth, in the beginning of the ages (*satya yug*) it is said that the souls of the dead and living could see, talk and could even marry each other. They were known as *Hangman* and *Sheatmang*, *Hungmans* were the living and the *Sheatman* were the dead. During that time, in a village a *Hangman* was married to a beautiful *Sheatmang*.

They were living happily with one another, one day the man had to go to his in-laws house. After reaching there he tells them that he wants to go back as his wife is alone in the house, but his in-laws asks him to spend that night with them. Next day they plan to go to the forest for hunting and they want to take their son-in-law along with them. He is given a bow and some arrows, they tell him that their people have spotted a very big boar in the jungle so they have to kill it and bring it back. All the dead souls along with their hunting dogs go to the jungle and reach the hunting spot. Few souls hide in their hiding spot and the man is also given a spot to hide and wait for the wild boar, while others with their dogs go in search of the boar to chase him towards the hiding spot. From a distance they start chasing the boar, shouting; 'it's coming, it's coming, boar is coming, it's coming towards our son'. Man gets ready with his bow and arrow to shoot that big wild boar but then a bird '*mustey*' comes towards him flapping, waddling, tired and out of breath. He sees the bird, and since it distracts him he picks it up and thrashes it on the ground to kill it, after killing it he puts it in his pocket and again gets ready with his bow and arrow to shoot at the boar. The boar, however, do not come, only his relatives with their dogs find him. When they find him they ask him about the boar; 'Such a big boar was coming towards you, where is it? Where did it go' He says that nothing came towards him. They tell him that the wild boar definitely came towards him and even the dogs running to and fro hinted at it. His father-in-law also tells him that the dogs are pointing towards him which means the boar is with him. They tell him that he must have killed the boar and hid it somewhere. He gets angry because of such acquisitions and in anger takes out that bird from his pocket and throws it in the ground saying; 'take it, this must be your boar.' When they see the bird they shout and jump with joy; 'Yes! Yes! This is it, this

is the boar'. The man is astonished. What they do is they cut down a tree and tie that bird around the tree, his relatives carry it together from both the ends with great difficulty and they finally reach their village. In the village they separate portions of that bird for all the villagers; head of the bird to the village priest, right thigh to the village headman, left thigh for their daughter (even now daughters are given left thigh while the family bids her farewell after marriage). Other remaining parts are distributed among the villagers. The man is surprised and astonished to see such a small bird being tied and carried with the help of a tree support and that small bird being distributed in portions to everyone. Again they tie that left thigh in that same tree trunk for their daughter and with the help of three-four people the thigh is lifted up to be delivered to the daughter. People carrying that thigh were having great difficulty and they were breathing heavily, it seemed that they were carrying a heavy load and were about to die under the weight. The man gets angry and asks them to keep the load down; he takes out the thigh and plucking three leaves of chestnut tree, wraps the thigh in it and puts it in his pocket. He asks them to leave and he walks back home alone, angry and somewhat surprised too. When he reaches home his wife asks him in excitement as to what her parents have sent for her. He takes that bird thigh from his pocket and throws it towards her, 'take it, this is what they have sent for you'. It hits her thigh and her leg breaks and she falls to bed in sickness. After that he does not go back to his in-laws place, his wife day by day gets more serious and she reaches the stage where she was almost about to die. One day the family of his wife comes to visit them as no one came to meet them, nor did they get any news about their well being. When brothers of *Sheatmang* reach, they find their sister in such a serious condition and were amazed that they were not even informed about her

state by her husband. They asked her how did this happen and she told them how her husband threw the meat piece at her and broke her leg. At this point *Sheatmang* and *Hungman* had controversies and fight and they did not come to peaceful terms. When this happened, they planned to hold a big meeting and as such people, elders and villagers were called from both the sides. Both of them blamed each other, *Sheatmang* blamed humans to be demons; ‘you demons, we can survive just by feeding on air but you need so much of meat to fill your belly’. Humans told them; ‘you want to work and live with us together, but you weaklings your leg is broken just by a small thigh of a small bird’. After trying to resolve the issue for a long time both the parties could not come to any solution and they did not find peace. As such they decided to part their ways, and the elders of the village told them that from that day on everything between both of the kinds should stop as they cannot carry on living in peace like before. While parting ways they brought *katus ko sewli, kawlo*, (branches from two different trees) humans sat towards the east and on the west sat the *Sheatmangs*. In between them they first made a fence out of *sewli* (branches), then from one side they asked the other; ‘Can you see us?’ They replied that yes, they can see partially. So they made a thicker fence by adding *kawlo* (branches from another tree). Then they again asked, ‘can you see us?’ They replied that no, they cannot see us. Having said that the dead souls vanished and their daughter who was married to the man also vanished. From that day on it is said that all the conversation with dead souls were broken and humans cannot see them. Even now while showing way to the dead soul *mangpas* use *kawlo* and *katus ko sewli* to do *rishiwa*.”

The myth is very simple yet reflects human's complex nature. The above myth talks in metaphor about humans ever growing wants. We humans try to unravel all the mysteries of the universe and often fail in such cosmic attempts. We fear and try to eliminate what we cannot understand. Living in harmony becomes a dream when mind remains clouded by fear and judgement. Failing to understand the dead souls little need as compared to humans un-satiated need led them to part ways. Such myths extend beyond time, place and any particular society. William Tucker asserts that:

myth has to do with human experience, which is also a painful experience, like Prometheus's punishment, and it has no place in which to embody itself, except art. It cannot be explained, like the mass of rock, but it remains there.
(Megged, 213)

The myth of *Hangman* and *Sheatmang* is similar, we may not be able to understand their relationship or life but we can certainly imagine their pain and we can definitely learn a lesson from their mistake. Living with the nature in its raw state can be challenging many a times and in order to live in harmony with it, it is important that we respect the course of nature.

“The stories connect the people to their land, history and cultural identity.” (Dreese, 23) It is indeed the truth; it not only connects but reveals the reason and gives meaning even to the tiniest of things that people hold on to. Like a stone or a specific flower or a piece of bone; for an outsider it may just be what it appears to be but for that particular community, it is their heritage, culture and social reality at present with which they identify themselves.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The past is dead and soon forgotten and the present of actual living eludes us before we can grasp it.

--Brooks Otis

Past may be dead but they are reborn in new form, yet again in form of tales and myths. These are the foundation of brotherhood and solidarity among the communities which are diverse and that disperse with time. Oral Literature and Oral Tradition transcend the physical boundaries of state and country and connects with folks who came from the same place in the beginning. Time changes and people move on and what seems to be the root and provide meaning to existence suffers a natural death. Such is the fate of the Oral Tradition of the Rai community; it is dying and vanishing. Feeble efforts of the elders to continue its survival is not making much difference. It is often said that there is unity, beauty in diversity but the diversity of the Rai community is becoming one of the reason why the efforts to preserve the overall richness of the community is failing. On one hand the folktales and myths are the root of solidarity among the diverse sub-communities but on the other these same variations in those same tales are creating a gap between various sub-castes. Since these tales are woven into social customs and rituals, questions like should *Chulah-Dhungah* be placed out in open or not is creating a rift among sub-groups. Some people believe it should be separated and kept in a pure and unpolluted area. While

there are others who believe that keeping in open would highlight the solidarity along with reinforcing their identity as nature worshipper. After all, their ancestors erected the first *Chulah-Dhungah* out in the open. Other than such small disagreements, the oral tradition of the Rai community is a reflection of its creative and rich cultural heritage. The community's constant contact with the nature and the natural world seems to be the source for the folktales with abundant elements of nature in it. Growing out of harmonious existence in the lap of nature, these folktales are a natural expression of man before the technological progress of the modern world contaminated life.

Apart from elders of the community it is *mangpas* and *magmas* (priest and priestess) who are the sole carrier of the ancient knowledge of *mundum* also known as *thuthuri ved* (*Thuthuri* meaning mouth; *ved* meaning knowledge). They are the chosen ones and divinely blessed individuals, their knowledge is sacred and learning their secret is difficult as other person wanting to learn should also be the chosen one, visited by the Rai deity. Unlike other tribal community, the Rai community does not have the ritual of narrating the tales related to the rituals. And even if they narrate it, it is narrated in the Rai language which is understood by only a handful of people. This makes the rituals even more obscure to the present generation who can hardly speak Rai language and are more fluent in Nepali, the language that is mostly spoken in the sub-Himalayan region of India. In some communities like the *Paddnas* of coastal Karnataka who narrate night long stories of birth and death of local heroes, "the bearers of the epics are no more interested to transfer their wisdom to the next generation..." (Bilimale, 57) but in the Rai community the question of transferring never even comes up. Like every other community, the Rai community is also

touched by Globalization, western education which provides lucrative opportunities for youth so in such cases the age old Oral Tradition is swept off to the background.

The only way to reverse the fate of the dying Oral Tradition is by plucking it out from the inner circles of the Rai language speaking community and making it more accessible to all, both the educated young generation who cannot relate to the tales mostly because of the distance created by the language barrier and modern way of life and also the larger world who would get a glimpse of the custom, rituals and beliefs of a very important community of the Eastern Himalayas. This will also ensure and increase the life span of the folktales which would otherwise drown into the abyss of forgetfulness. Therefore collecting and documenting of tales becomes an important responsibility that will ensure preservation of the tales. Preservation of Oral narratives is important because:

There is no history without oral history. It is, after all, the oldest form or even “pre-form” of history’s existence, and today with our contemporary possibilities of recording and transmitting the spoken word, oral history takes on greater meaning. Yet it never really ever disappeared. (Kurkowska-Budzan and Zamorski, xi)

Diversity is one of the most important characteristic features of the community, instead of resolving the diversity and homogenizing the culture, the diversity should be promoted to retain the richness of the cultural heritage. To promote the diversity, youths should be kept at the center, they should be given responsibilities for organizing events, feasts and fairs so that they can carry forward the lineage of oral narrative. To preserve and continue the growth of creative expressions storytelling,

recitation and creative writing in the Rai languages should be encouraged and organized.

This dissertation is one such small step towards preservation of the folktales that speaks volumes about the rich cultural heritage of the Rai community, but it lacks totality in many ways. At first, only one particular area has been taken for the study which had members from only three sub-castes; Bantawa, Kulung and Yaku when there are more than fifty sub-castes in the community. It was mentioned by the resource person Mr. Mohan Dungmali Rai that there exist seven variations of the tale of *Haechakua*. Only two variations of the tales were found in East-Sikkim. Further attempts should be made by future scholars to salvage and restore such diversity. The tales collected for this dissertation mostly belong to the origin myth, other genres of the Oral Literature from the community is yet to be explored.

Since the Rai community traces its roots of origin to Eastern Nepal, there is scope for further study and new revelations. The comparison of the tales from both the country could shed newer perspective to their social realities. The incorporation of newer elements and the missing gaps can be filled in by the researchers. The whole of Sikkim along with neighboring places like Darjeeling and Kalimpong should be incorporated in the study for better and full picture. This dissertation is just a first step towards exploring the rich Oral Literature of the community. This can be regarded as an initial step towards learning and knowing more about the community, their diversity and their rich reservoir of Oral Tradition and Oral Literature which acts like a thread to bind a community in a beautiful necklace of narration.

¹ See “Definitions of Folklore”. *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep. - Dec., 1996), pp. 255-264 Published by: Indiana University Press, 261.

² <http://manxnationalheritage.im>>2016/11.

³ See “Definitions of Folklore”. *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep. - Dec., 1996), pp. 255-264 Published by: Indiana University Press.

⁴ Narrated in full, in the second chapter, along with different variation.

⁵ Henkumbung or Hangcha; meaning a man or human. Tales narrated in full in second chapter.

⁶ ‘brothers’ consist of different flora and fauna which indicates the harmony that existed between Man and Nature, in fact man is also regarded as a part of Nature and not superior in any way from the other natural elements.

⁷ <https://literarydevices.net/myth/> 18/03/2018

⁸ <https://www.space.com> › Science & Astronomy. Accessed on 16th March 2018

¹⁰ *Dhanesh* (Hornbill) and *Hangroyo* (Great Pied Hornbill) both belong to the family of Hornbills.

¹¹ See shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/33847/2. Accessed on 19/02/2018.

¹² (http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/37372/9/09_chapter%203.pdf)

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