

**A Study of the History and Culture of the Rai Community of  
Darjeeling Hills (1830-1947)**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

**Degree of Masters of Philosophy**

By

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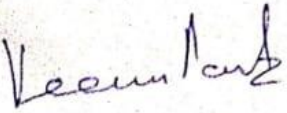
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All the assistance and help received during the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

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**(1830-1947)”**

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






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**Shristi Rai**

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling is a small hilly area surrounded by the international boundaries of Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the east. It is one of the districts of the West Bengal. West Bengal is comprised of number of districts such as Darjeeling, Kurseong, Mirik and Siliguri plains. Kalimpong, which was earlier a subdivision of Darjeeling district, has now become a separate district of West Bengal. Darjeeling Hills is a multiracial, multilingual, multicultural and multireligious place. In Darjeeling, a wide variety of people belonging to different ethnic groups, religions, languages, cultures, etc. live together.<sup>1</sup> One of the ethnic groups among them is the Kirat Khambu Rai. The term 'Rai' is actually a title given by the Gorkha ruler, king Prithivi Narayan Shah which means 'headmen'.<sup>2</sup> Later, it is used to denote the entire community. In ancient times, the Rai were known as Kiratis. While the term was used in ancient texts to refer to mountain and forest people in general, it has now become an ethnic designation. As early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Nepalese chronicle Gopalaraja Vamsavali mentions an ancient "Kirata" dynasty having ruled over Nepal. It is said that the Kirat people who claimed to be the descendant of the Kirata dynasty of Nepal, moved and started settling outside their original territory, especially in Terai plain, Sikkim and around Darjeeling, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> It's possible that the term Kirat came from Cirata, Cireta or Cirayita, also known as 'Kirata- Tikta' or Anarya – the country of modern Kiratis or Kiratas. This was the name of a drug which was bitter in taste and was received by the Aryans from the Kiratas. Aryans used this drug for the medical purposes. Another possibility is that the Kirata

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<sup>1</sup>Worrel Kumar Bain, "An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India", *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology*, 6, (2018):1041

<sup>2</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambus Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, Shivika Khim, Gangtok, 2005, 4, 5, 14

<sup>3</sup> Gregoire Schlemmer, "Following the Ancestors and Managing the Otherness," *HAL*, Marine Carrin. Encyclopedia of the Religious of Indigenous People of South Asia, Brill, halshs-02303985( 2019) : 1-2

themselves might have come up with the term for this drug.<sup>4</sup> According to Mundum (the religious scripture of Rai Community) the word 'Kirati' or 'Kirat' describes the race or aborigines of the Hindukush Himalayan Range.<sup>5</sup> Given these, it appears that the word Kirati is closer a term that used to denote the Kirati people as an ethnic group and the Kirati or the Rai community are said to have settled in Darjeeling by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, the Rais have their own cultures and traditions that are unique and distinctive from the other ethnic groups of the Darjeeling Hills. It is noted that the Rais are divided into several clans and sub-clans that shares similar culture but different languages. As far as the cultures of the Rais in Darjeeling are concerned, it is reflected in their beliefs and practices. One important cultural practices of the Rai's is marriage. There are various types of marriage system namely arranged marriage, marriage by payment of fine called Jari, marriage by force (elopement), etc. According to the traditions of the Rai, it is said that marriages between cousins are allowed after a lapse of three generation but there is no record of such marriage. It is interesting to note here that clans mark an important aspect through which the system of marriage was carried out among the Rai community. It is through the clans that the Rai's identify their genetic line; one is Pacha and another is Sameit. There will be no marriage if both the Pacha and Sameit become identical because if both become identical, that would be akin to inbreeding.<sup>6</sup> Worth figuring out within the system of marriage is the position of the Rai women. Women in the Rai community can be said to have a respectful position as they enjoy considerable rights and privileges not only in their parents' home but also in their in-laws house. To cite an example, the birth of female child in the Rai community is accepted as a gift of happiness, luck and prosperity and the female child receives special care and attention from her parents.<sup>7</sup> Apart from marriage, life cycle ceremony occupies another

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<sup>4</sup> G.P. Singh, *Kiratas In Ancient India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1990) 96

<sup>5</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts Revised Edition*, Dumaram Busty Kurseong, 2021, 15

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 33-34

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 104-106

cultural significance among the Rai's. This includes the performance of the various rites ranging from the birth of a child to naming, weaning and hair cutting ceremonies. While talking about the birth rites, the birth of a child takes place generally in the husband's house. The umbilical cord of the Rai child is cut by his or her mother or by an elderly woman. In most of the birth ceremonies, there is a difference in the performance between a girl and a boy child. For instance, purification ceremony is performed on the third day for a girl child and fifth day for a boy child and it is considered important especially for the health, wellness as well as to ward off the evil spirits from both the mother and child.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, naming ceremony is performed in between five to nine days for a girl child and six to ten days for a boy child.<sup>9</sup>

Funeral or the Dead ceremony is an essential part of the life of the Rai community of Darjeeling Hills. They perform two types of funeral rites: the first one is Mishia which is performed soon after death and the second one is Shilum Kattu which is normally performed on the third or fifth day after the death of a person with the belief that the spirit of the deceased person remains within the vicinity of the surrounding area of the house before going into the spiritual realm.<sup>10</sup>

Festival is another form of cultural expression of the Rai's of the Darjeeling Hills. In regard to festivals, Ubhauri and Udauli together known as Sakewa are two most popular festivals of the Rai's. These two festivals are celebrated on the full moon days of two different seasons. For instance, Ubhauri is celebrated during the monsoon season between May and June to commemorate the onset sowing season. However, Udauli is a festival of harvesting celebrated by the Rai's, expressing their gratitude and joy for the good and bountiful

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 90-91

<sup>9</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai, *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha) 60-61

<sup>10</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambus Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, ShivikaKhim, Gangtok, 2005, 64-65

harvest.<sup>11</sup> What is striking given these whole trends in the cultural practices of the Rai's is the significance of Mundum- the religious scripture of the Rai's. Not denying the fact the Mundum is in oral form rather as a recorded text, it gives valuable insight regarding the beliefs, practices and traditions about the Rai community. It is considered an indispensable part that binds the lives and traditions of the Rai community of the Darjeeling.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Kirat Rai, who settled in the Darjeeling Hills by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has their own history and has followed their own distinctive cultures, traditions and religion which are totally different from the other ethnic groups. The Rais have quite a large population in Darjeeling District as compared to other communities. It is of great concern that the study on the history and culture of the Rais' in Darjeeling Hills had hardly addressed thoroughly. The history of Darjeeling was mainly focused on the political history as a whole which created a huge gap in understanding about the history and culture of some particular ethnic group. In addition to this, most of the works on the Rai community undoubtedly have the value of historicity through which one can relate cultures of the Rai community of Nepal to that of Darjeeling. Therefore, it is important to note that the history of the Rais in Darjeeling cannot be studied in isolation without studying the histories of Nepal and Sikkim. In order to trace the history of the Rais of the Darjeeling Hills, a brief reference to the history of Nepal in connection to the Rais is essential.

There is no dearth of works on the Rai community and its cultures in Nepal. Though some of the works throw light on the Rai Community of Sikkim, their works lack the information on the culture of the Rais of Darjeeling and so are left untouched. As such, it is significant to look into the culture of the Rai community of Darjeeling with reference to change and continuity which are reflected in their beliefs and practices such as marriage, life cycle

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 45-47

ceremony, funerals and festivals. Since marriage is a lifelong ceremony requiring the consent of two partners, addressing the question of freedom to choose the partner especially to women of the Rai community would open up another area of study. Also, the other significant insight the study will attempt to draw and highlight in terms of marriage is not only the different forms of marriage but also the process/norms followed. This will set the line to mark out the differences and similarities more clearly between the types of marriages. For instance, in the Jari and elopement form of marriages the process of engagement before marriage between the parties of the bride and groom are found to be absent. Also, penalty paid to the former husband by the groom who is marrying the wife of that man in Jari form of marriage is silent in the case of a widow. Clans and sub-clans delineate an important part in understanding marriage within the Rai community. The absence of the notion of heaven and hell in terms of performing the dead ceremony among the Rai's is another point that one can connect about the spiritual realm as a form of belief regarding life after death among the Rai's. The celebration of Ubhauri and Udauli, marking the sowing and harvesting festivals by the Rai community of Darjeeling in fact points to the practice of traditional mode of celebrating festivals relating to their beliefs. These cultural practices of the Rai's are left undone without the references to Mundum. Thus, the study will also highlight the concept of Mundum and its significant role in the life of the Rai people.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Warrel Kumar Bain in his article *An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India* discusses about the location, area and population of the Darjeeling Hills. This article provides brief information about the history of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling. The author also throws a light on the contribution of Nepali people in tea plantation. He discusses about almost all the ethnic group of Darjeeling in brief. This article also highlights the history of Kirat Khambu Rai of Nepal, their house types, food habits,



dance, music, instrument, traditional medicines, etc. This article provides information about almost all the important themes which are needed to be studied in order to have knowledge about the Rai Community but the information provided by him are not sufficient for the better understanding of the Rai Community. It also lacks information about the history of Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills and importance of Mundum in the day to day life of the Kirati people.

Balram Rai in his book *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts* have briefly introduces the Khambus (Rai) and throws a light on the history of the Khambus. He also tries to explain why Rais are called Khambus and Kiratis. In the third chapter he talks about various clans of the Rai community one by one. In the fourth chapter he discusses how the Khambus became Rais and Limbus became Subbas. In the fifth chapter he provides brief knowledge about ancient Khambu tribes of Darjeeling and Sikkim. In the sixth chapter he highlights the contribution made by the Rai people in coming of the Tea in the Darjeeling Hill. In the seventh chapter he throws a light on the distinctive cultures of the Rai people. In the seventh chapter he talks about why the Rai people like to live in a scattered way in isolated areas. In the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters he discusses about the religion, shamanism, language and scripts of the Kirati people. Lastly in the eleventh chapter he talks about his visit at Mansebung, Nepal. In this book the author has touched many topics which are very important for the Kiratis, however, the information provided by him is very limited and are not sufficient for broader knowledge and better understanding.

Mahashweta Das in his article *History of Darjeeling District Migration Between 1872-2011* discusses about the history of migration that took place in between 1872- 2011 and sheds a light on the growth of the population in Darjeeling District. It also highlights the historical events that led to the migration and also focuses on the changes in socio-cultural structure in Darjeeling District.

Shiva Kumar Rai (Sampang) in his book *Kirat Khambu Rai of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* briefly discusses about the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai as a whole. He also discusses about the brief history of the Nepal and Sikkim. He throws a light on the origin of the word Kirata/Kirat/Kirati, “Khambu” and “Rai”. He mainly deals with the culture, religion, festival, Mundhum of the Kirati Community in general. However, his work lacks information about the Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills.

Gregoire Schelemmer in his article *Following the Ancestors and Managing the Otherness* has talked about the history of the Rai Community. In this article, he throws a light on the different groups of the Rai and their difference in languages. This article summarily discusses about Mundum. In this article the author has taken the Kulung Khambu group as a case study. He mentioned Mundum as the ancestors’ legacy. It is intrinsically local: each group has its own ancestors and thus its own Mundum, rooted in its community and territory. This article provides information about the rituals and powers of the Rai Community. The author mentions that the main spiritual providers of vitality are the ancestors. In this article, he provides information about how the funeral procedure of the Rai’s complex is conducted. He throws a light on the element of wedding focusing mainly on women. He brings out the importance of ancestral worship known as lucirim among the Kulung Rais’ and also give details on the offerings made by Rai people during the time of worship. Apart from this an attempt was made to convey a picture of the main religious elements which are connected to Hinduism, for instance; performance of dasai, summoning a Brahman to perform rituals, etc. Beyond this, the author throws a light on how the general impact of intellectuals and activists, reformist movement and scripturalization influenced the religion and religious practices of the Rai Community. As a result, new religious practices are spreading among the Rai. Though this article provides large information about the Rai Community, it only focuses on the Kulung Rai and it gives finite knowledge on Mundum which played a very significant

role in the life of the Rai people. This article also lacks information about the history of the Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills.

Salahuddin Akhtar Siddiqui in his article *Socio System of Kirat of Nepal- An Empirical Mini-Study with special reference to Kirat- Limbu* highlights the brief history of Kirat of Nepal. This article deals with the social system of the Kirat people of Nepal focusing only on the Kirat-Limbu. The author of the article gives information about the family system, birth, marriage, divorce, death rites, partition of property, language, attire, food habits, etc of the Limbus of Nepal. Moreover, he throws a light on the provisions regarding social system in Mundum. This article also talks about the Mundum of the Kirati Community (Rai) but it contain more information about the Mundhum of the Kirat-Limbu.

D. C Roy in his article *Ancient Kirata and Kirata Today: A Case Study of the Lepchas of West Bengal* provides brief information about the *Kirata*. This article throws a light on the different meaning of the term *Kirata*. In this article, the author tries to analyse the *Kirata* tribes in both narrow and broad senses and tries to examine if the Lepchas of Eastern Himalayan region could be included under the *Kirata*. He also attempts to identify the *kirata* through two distinct methods, one is by studying about their geographical area and another one is through their ethnic group. Though this article provides various meaning of *Kirata*, yet there is a lack of information about the history and culture of the Rai community.

Shanti Devi Rai in her article *Suptulung as indigenous knowledge of Kirat Rai people* deals with the conceptual and philosophical knowledge of Suptulung. In this article, she provides a detailed account on Sutptulung (main shrine of Kirat Rai household) and its importance in the daily life of the Kirati people. She discusses about its meaning, its different parts and also throws a light on its belief and practices. Furthermore, this article gives brief information about Mundum and its relationship with the Suptulung. However, the information provided in

the article about Mundum is very limited and are not sufficient for profound knowledge and greater understanding. This article also lacks information about the history of the Rai Community.

Shanti Devi Rai in her another article *Indigenous Knowledge in Mundum and Suptulung* tries to bring out the indigenous knowledge of Mundum and Suptulung through Binayo movie. Further, she sheds a light on the importance of Kirati culture, food security and festival with an aim to bring consciousness about these things among the people

So far as available we can get a whole lot of information about the Rai Community in a number of articles and works done by scholars and anthropologists. A thorough study of the above literatures provides valuable information about the Rai Community, their culture and Mundum but those work mainly focused on Nepal. Some works have provided information about the Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills but that information are also very limited and article did not go in details. The information provided by such article about Mundum is also very limited.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study are:-

- To trace the history of the Rai Community from the time of their settlement in Darjeeling Hills.
- To examine the cultural practices of the Rai Community of the Darjeeling with regard to change and continuity.
- To study about the concept of Mundum and its significant role in the life of the Rai people.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included documents, government records, census reports, district gazetter, etc. which are available in the Deshbandu (Govt) District library, Gorkha library, Bloomfield library, etc. As the study throws a light on the change and continuity, therefore the primary data is also collected from the field through interview. Interviews were held with elderly and knowledgeable people of the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills. However, the primary sources were not sufficient to complete this study, therefore, many secondary sources such as books, articles, journals, etc. has been used in order to complete this study.

## **CHAPTERISATION**

### **CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION**

Chapter I consists of the introduction which provides information of the Rai (Kirati) Community in general. Moreover, it gives the overall view of the study consisting of Statement of the problem, Review of Literatures, Objectives, Methodology and Chapterisation.

### **CHAPTER II - HISTORY OF THE RAI COMMUNITY OF THE DARJEELING HILLS**

This chapter deals with the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills. This chapter throws a light on the migratory history of the Rai Community and their settlement in the Darjeeling Hills. This chapter even deals with the various clans and sub clans of the Community in details. Moreover, it highlights the tremendous contribution of the Kirat Khambu Rai people in the politics, economics and various other aspects.

### **CHAPTER III - CULTURE OF THE RAI COMMUNITY WITH REGARD TO THEIR CHANGE AND CONTINUITY**



This chapter emphasizes the cultural practices of the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills with main focus on marriage, various rites and rituals of life and dead, festivals. Furthermore, it highlights the change and continuity with reference to their cultural practices within Darjeeling Hills.

#### **CHAPTER IV - MUNDHUM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN THE RAI COMMUNITY**

This chapter provides information about the concept of Mundum. It highlights the importance and relevance of Mundum within the community. It also throws a light on the important role of Mundum in the day to day life of the Rai people of the Darjeeling Hills.

#### **CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION**

This chapter deals with the concluding part of all chapters. It will sum up all the work discussed above.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY OF THE RAI (Khambu) COMMUNITY OF THE DARJEELING HILLS

The study of the history of the Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills cannot be completed without studying the history of Darjeeling in relation to Nepal and Sikkim. It is said that the Rais are the aborigines of Nepal, Sikkim and the Darjeeling Hills and in ancient times they claimed themselves as Kiratas.

The 'Kirata' is considered to be one of the most popular races and has been mentioned in lots of literary sources such as Vedic literature, epics, puranas, Buddhist texts, Jaina Canonical texts, secular literature like the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, *Mahabhyasa* of Patanjali, Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, etc. Archaeological sources are also helpful for learning about the *Kiratas* but these sources are very limited.<sup>1</sup> Though the mention of Kirata has been found in various sources, a satisfactory explanation on the term Kirata has not yet been provided. G.P. Singh has pointed out that the term 'Kirata' has been used to identify the tribes of north-western India, north-eastern India including Assam, Bengal, Tripura, Orissa, Nepal and Sikkim of Tibet, and Burma who had settled in the plains, valleys and hills between the epic age and the fifth century A.D.<sup>2</sup> According to him, the term Kirata has been originated from the Cirata or Cireta or Cirayita. He further explains that this was the name of a drug with an extremely bitter taste and was used as a medicine by the Aryans. It is said that these plant grown in the lower region of the Himalayas came to be known as Modern Kirantis or Kiratas.<sup>3</sup> However there is no unanimity among the scholar about the geographical location, origin, culture, language of Kiratas. A large number of Kiratas have been found in the eastern Himalayas.

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<sup>1</sup> G.P. Singh, *Kiratas In Ancient India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1990) 16-29

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 113

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 96

The 'eastern Himalayas' is a huge area consisting of North Bengal, Sikkim, East Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Kirati people consisted of mainly three groups i.e., Rai, Limbu and Yakha.<sup>5</sup> However, this chapter deals with only Kirat Khambu Rais of some part of the eastern Himalayas such as East Nepal, Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim. Focusing on the Kirat Khambu Rais of these areas it attempts to trace their original homeland. It also highlights the sub-clans within the Kirat Khambu Rai and lastly, it throws some light on the contribution of the Kirat Khambu Rai to the development of the Darjeeling Hills.

While discussing the original homeland of the Rai (Khambus), the issue of migration of the Rais to the Darjeeling Hills remains an important point. On account of the lack of literary as well as archaeological sources, our information on the migratory history of the Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills is limited and it has led to a number of speculations. However, an analysis of the combined available data reveals mainly three different views regarding the original homeland of the Rais. Firstly, some of the writers believe that Nepal was the original home of the Rais and later in the second half of eighteenth century, they migrated to Darjeeling. Secondly, it is said that they migrated to Darjeeling in the first half of nineteenth century when Darjeeling was in its phase of steady progress. The third view holds that some of the Kirat Khambu Rais are the aborigines of the Darjeeling Hills.

#### **MIGRATION OF THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI TO THE DARJEELING HILLS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

According to the first view, it is stated that in ancient times, Nepal is ruled by many dynasties. One of the important dynasties among them is the Kirata dynasty. Bhanasur was considered the first Kirata king of Central Nepal who was defeated by King Bhuktaman

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<sup>4</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai, Orient Longmen Limited, 1999)30

<sup>5</sup> A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazeteer: Darjeeling* (Siliguri: N.I. Publisher,2011),71

(Yadavas, Gopala dynasty). After that, when Bhuvan Singh, the last king of Avir dynasty, was ruling the Nepal, he got defeated by the Kirata king Yalambar of east Nepal, which again led to the foundation of the Kirata dynasty.<sup>6</sup> The local chronicle of Nepal, Vamshavali, suggests that altogether there were 29 Kirata Kings who ruled over Nepal.<sup>7</sup> They made Gorkana their capital and they used to live in the palaces. When King Patuka, the 28<sup>th</sup> Kirata king, was ruling the Nepal, he had to face several raids from Somabamsi Rajputs from the west. This repeated attack of the Soma dynasty forced him to leave the capital Gorkana. After that, he moved to Shankhamul, where he made his new capital. His successor, Gasti, the last Kirata king or 29<sup>th</sup> Kirata king proved to be a weak ruler; he could not stop the continuous invasion of Somabamsi, as a result, he got defeated at the hand of Somabamsi Raja, Nimikha or Nimicha. Their conquest brought an end to the Kirata rule.<sup>8</sup> After the end of Kirat rule over Central Nepal/Kathmandu Valley, they moved towards eastern Nepal and settled there.<sup>9</sup> Their settlements were divided into three principalities such as Wallo Kirat, Majh Kirat and Pallo Kirat. In the western part of Nepal, Gorkha used to be one of the important states of which Prithvi Narayan Shah became king in the year 1742. He wanted to bring a feeling of nationalism in the minds and hearts of the Nepalese.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in order to bring eastern Nepal under his over lordship, he defeated Wallo Kirat which was located in the east of Kathmandu. After that, he waged a war against the Rais (Rai is a title given by Prithvi Narayan Shah) of Majh Kirat and Pallo Kirat, and when the Rais were about to win the war, Prithvi Narayan Shah brought more armed forces from Kathmandu and used weapons against their opposition, which eventually led to the annexation of Majh Kirat and Pallo Kirat.<sup>11</sup> After

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<sup>6</sup> Subba, op. cit. 29

<sup>7</sup> G.P. Singh, *Kiratas In Ancient India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1990), 396

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 401-402

<sup>9</sup> D.C. Roy, "Ancient Kirata and Kirata Today: A Case of the Lepchas of West Bengal," *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University* 2, ISSN: 2348-6538, 2015, 90

<sup>10</sup> Worrel Kumar Bain, "An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6, 2018, 1040

<sup>11</sup> D.C. Roy, "Ancient Kirata and Kirata Today: A Case of the Lepchas of West Bengal," *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University* 2, ISSN: 2348-6538, 2015, 90

the victory of Prithvi Narayan Shah over Majh Kirat in 1773, some of the Rais came and settled in the Darjeeling Hills.<sup>12</sup>

## **MIGRATION OF THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI TO THE DARJEELING HILLS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The second view contends that the Kirat Khambu Rai migrated to the Darjeeling Hills only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While talking about their migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is worth mentioning the history of the Darjeeling Hills in relation to Sikkim, Nepal and colonial rule.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, when Phuntsong Namgyal II, Raja of Sikkim, was ruling Sikkim, he got engaged in a continuous unsuccessful struggle against the increasing power of the Gurkhas of Nepal which resulted in the invasion of Sikkim in the year 1780.<sup>13</sup> During that time, Darjeeling Hills used to be part of Sikkim.<sup>14</sup> After the invasion of Sikkim, the Gurkhas marched to the east towards Teesta and annexed Terai.<sup>15</sup> In the year 1814, a war broke out between the chief of the Gurkha and the English East India Company known as the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16). As a result of this war, a treaty was signed between Nepal and English at Segouli in 1816, according to which Nepalese had to give those lands to the East India Company, which they had forcibly taken from the Raja of Sikkim.<sup>16</sup> Again, in the year 1817, the English East India Company signed a treaty of Titalia with the Chogyal (Tsugphud Namgyal) of Sikkim. Under the treaty, the whole of the country between Mechi and Tista was restored by the company to the Raja and also guaranteed sovereignty to him by the Company. This is how English successfully prevented the Gurkhas from taking over whole of Sikkim into their dominion.<sup>17</sup> After ten years, disputes arose on the

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<sup>12</sup> Indra Bahadur Rai, *Pahar ra Khola*, (Darjeeling: Granthakar Sahakari Samiti, 1993),2

<sup>13</sup> L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazeteer: Darjeeling* (New Delhi: logos press 1999)19

<sup>14</sup> A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazeteer: Darjeeling* (Siliguri: N.I. Publisher,2011)37

<sup>15</sup> Malley, op. cit. 19

<sup>16</sup> E.C. Dozey, *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District Since 1835* (Calcutta: N Mukherjee at Art Press, 1922)2

<sup>17</sup> Malley. op. cit. 19-20



Sikkim-Nepal frontier, which were referred to the Governor General. In order to settle the dispute, two officers, General Lloyd and Mr. J. W. Grant, were deputed in the year 1828.<sup>18</sup> They visited “the old Goorkha Station called Darjeeling” in 1829 and got fascinated by its great strategic position. Subsequently, General Lloyd negotiated with the Raja of Sikkim for the possession of Darjeeling and the deed of grant was implemented by Raja of Sikkim on February 1, 1835. According to the deed of grant, the land was given to the East India Company which includes the area South of Great Rangit River, East of Balasun, Kahail and the Little Rangit River and West of Rungpo. The Raja of Sikkim handed over this area to the Company as a mark of friendship.<sup>19</sup> This alliance remained for a very short period. Again, the Raja of Sikkim and the English East India Company started having continuous disputes, especially because of the increasing development of the Darjeeling Hills. As a result of this dispute, in the mid -19<sup>th</sup> century, Sikkim Tarai (received by Raja as a free gift from the company) and some parts of the Sikkim was captured by the English. This newly annexed territory by the British was brought under the charge of Dr. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling.<sup>20</sup> With this annexation, the British boundary was linked up with Nepal on the west and Bhutan on the east, Darjeeling on the South and the British districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri. Previously, the district had been an enclave in Sikkim territory and to reach it, the British had to pass through a country acknowledging the rule of a foreign, though dependent, potentate.<sup>21</sup> After this annexation, for few years, there were no quarrels between Sikkim and the British. Unfortunately, incursion on British territory started again, their properties were plundered and their men were sold as slaves. At this time, the Sikkim Raja became too old, roughly 80 years old. Thus, soon he retired to Chumbi in Tibet and left the government in the hand of his son Diwan Namguay. During his reign, again a serious dispute arose between

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid,20

<sup>19</sup> A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, (Siliguri: N.L. Publishers,2011) 38

<sup>20</sup> L.L.S O’ Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (New Delhi: logos Press, 1999) 24-26

<sup>21</sup> Ibid,25

English and Sikkim and ultimately a treaty was signed that proved to be advantageous for Darjeeling because it put an end to the suffering of the people of Darjeeling and also secured complete freedom for trade and commerce.<sup>22</sup> However, this peace could not last forever, and it was again interrupted by the raids of Bhutanese into the district. In the winter of 1864, a large military force was sent to Bhutan. The opposition offered by Bhutanese proved to be detestable and ultimately the whole of Bhutan Doars was captured in 1865 and in 1866, an area which now called Kalimpong was added to Darjeeling district. After this, no other areas were added to the Darjeeling district or this was the final addition.<sup>23</sup> With this addition, their area increased from 640 to 1164 square miles.<sup>24</sup> Later in the year 1891, Kurseong subdivision was formed from the district and in 1907 another subdivision was formed from Kurseong viz. Siliguri subdivision. After some time Kalimpong was also made subdivision in 1916<sup>25</sup> and now Kalimpong is one of the districts under West Bengal.

When the Raja of Sikkim transferred the hilly area of Darjeeling to the British in 1835, there took place a drastic change in the field of politics, economy and society. It is significant to mention here such developments in the Darjeeling Hills under the colonial rule, as it was during this period that most of the people belonging to different ethnic groups including Kirat Khambu Rai migrated to the Darjeeling Hills and played a vital role in its developments.

At first, the British Government made this area a centre for tea plantations, health resorts and leisure, military cantonments, etc. and they also constructed houses so that they could enjoy the cool climate of the Darjeeling Hills.<sup>26</sup> Prior to 1835, Darjeeling was just a hill mostly covered by a forest and there were only 100 inhabitants. It was only after the coming of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid,25-26

<sup>23</sup> Ibid,27

<sup>24</sup> E.C. Dozey, *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District Since 1835* (Calcutta: N Mukherjee at Art Press, 1922) 7

<sup>25</sup> B. Ray, *Census 1961, West Bengal District Census Handbook Darjeeling* (Bengal Government Press, 1967) 6-7

<sup>26</sup> Aditi Chaterji, *Contested Landscape: The Story of Darjeeling* (Kolkata: Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, 2007) 81

British in Darjeeling Hills, 'station' was added to it. They converted Darjeeling Hill into a hill station which they used to escape from the heat of the plains. Though they made a hill station for their own benefit, this also proved to be a golden opportunity for the neighboring people and they started migrating to Darjeeling and also taking part in the development of the area.<sup>27</sup>

Initially, it was believed that one of the most important facets for the establishment of the hill station was the health function but the recent analysis has shown other functions to be equally important for the establishment of the hill station. The political functions of this hill station were defence and administration. They used hill station to protect the British Indian territory as a result, they captured nearly all the hill territory in the foothills and that they used to defend the northern frontier. The hill station also played an important role in the economy of the British government. As the hill stations were situated in the Himalayas, they were all made important trading centers. Plantation of tea and cinchona formed an important economic function responsible for the setting up of hill stations in Darjeeling. Education also became an important function of several hill stations.<sup>28</sup> Another important development that took place in Darjeeling was in the field of agriculture. The large forested area of Darjeeling was brought under cultivation.<sup>29</sup> If tea plantations were the important development of Darjeeling and Kurseong, then cultivation formed an important development of the Kalimpong. All these functions led to the development and progress of the Darjeeling Hills.

All the aforementioned developments led to immigration. The credit for this rapid growth and development of the Darjeeling Hills was given to Dr. Champbell. When he was appointed superintendent of this area in 1839, he put his effort into establishing hill station in Darjeeling. He attracted a lot of immigrants from the neighboring areas in order to work in

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<sup>27</sup> A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, (Siliguri: N.L. Publishers,2011) 49

<sup>28</sup> Chaterji, op. cit. 82-90

<sup>29</sup> A. J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, (Siliguri: N.L. Publishers,2011) 41

the hills of Darjeeling and to stimulate trade and commerce. He was successful in his efforts and he was able to report that the population increased from 100 souls in 1839 to about 10,000 in 1850. This was possible because a large number of people migrated from neighbouring states like Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, as well as from areas where slavery was prevalent.<sup>30</sup> During that time, Darjeeling was developing in different arena which opened up job opportunities in every field like the clearing of forest, tea and cinchona plantation, agriculture, construction of roads, schools, private houses, etc. All these led to the growth of population in Darjeeling Hills. After immigration, some of the people settled permanently in the Darjeeling Hills and some remained here for few years and they returned to their original homeland. It was during this times the Rais along with other people belonging to different ethnic groups came and settled permanently in the Darjeeling hills as there were many job opportunities provided by British officials. The Nepalese chronicle Gopalaraja Vamsavali also mentions that, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Rai people of Eastern Nepal moved towards the Terai Plain, Sikkim and Darjeeling and settled there.<sup>31</sup>

#### **DARJEELING HILLS AS THE ORIGINAL HOMELAND OF THE RAIS**

All the above-mentioned views somehow state that Nepal was the original homeland of the Rais and later in between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century they migrated from Nepal and settled permanently in the Darjeeling Hills. However, Dr. Shiva Kumar Rai, states that some of the Kirat Khambu Rai have been residing in Darjeeling hills since its inception and not from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He proved this with the help of the first census report which was conducted in February 1891 in Sikkim.<sup>32</sup> He writes that in ancient times some parts of Nepal used to be part of Sikkim and similarly some parts of Sikkim was under Nepal. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the

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<sup>30</sup> L.L.S O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (New Delhi: logos Press, 1999) 22

<sup>31</sup> Gregoire Schlemmer, "Following the Ancestors and Managing the Otherness," *HAL*. Marine Carrin. Encyclopedia of the Religions of Indigenous People of South Asia, Brill, halshs-02303985(2019) :1-2

<sup>32</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rai Of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangto: Shivika Enterprise, 2005) 12

British Government took the southern part of Sikkim which was again taken by the Indian Government. Therefore, a large number of people belonging to different communities living in Nepal, Sikkim and British India started settling in different parts of Sikkim, Nepal and British India. Interestingly, in the 1891 census of Sikkim, the Kirat Khambu Rai was found to be numerous.<sup>33</sup> He said that if the Rais had been migrating from Nepal only since the 1830s, its population in 1891 would not have been as numerous. Another important thing that can be assumed from his statement is that if there were the Rais in Sikkim before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it might be possible that there were the Rais even in the Darjeeling Hills, as Darjeeling used to be part of Sikkim before treaty of Segouli.

In addition to this, few interpretations regarding the name of Darjeeling among Khambus have been found which also provides the possibility of the existence of the Khambus in the Drajeeling Hills from the very beginning. To begin with, many Khambus of the eastern Nepal believes that the name Darjeeling has been derived from the Khambu dialect. On the basis of their received knowledge they used to say that somewhere near the present Chowrashta or in Chowk Bazar there used to be a big flat stone. For any kind of gathering or if they needed any kind of conversation and discussion among the Khambus, they used to gather there. They gave a name to this place i.e, 'Tajeelung'. The reason behind giving this name to a big flat stone is that, in Khambu dialect, 'Tajee' means conversation and 'lung' means stone. Furthermore, there is another interpretation concerning the name of Darjeeling. This interpretation also states that there was a big stone in Darjeeling where Khambus used to take rest and exchange their Dowah (life experiences). They used to call this place as 'Dowalung'. With the passage of time this term became 'Durjeeling' and after the coming of the Britishers, it became Darjeeling. Still another interpretation based on the folklores of the Kirat Khambu Rai states that there was an immensely big stone somewhere in the heart of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 12



Darjeeling town and the Kirat Khambu Rai preferred to call it ‘Dewalung’ which means grandfather of all rocks.<sup>34</sup> According to the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai used to believe that these aforementioned names of the Darjeeling are derived from Khambu dialect which later evolved and became Darjeeling. Therefore from all this interpretations, it can be assumed that if the name of the Darjeeling has been derived from the Khambu dialect, then it would not be wrong to consider them as the aborigines of the Darjeeling Hills.

It is true that the all the Rais of present-day Darjeeling were not the aboriginal of the Darjeeling Hills. Some of the Rais are there in Darjeeling Hills whose ancestors came from Nepal after their defeat by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Even it cannot be denied that after the Gorkha Sikkim war, a large number of people belonging to different ethnic groups from neighboring countries migrated to the Darjeeling Hills including the Kirat Khambu Rai. But at the same time, it will also be wrong to say that the Rais are outsiders and that they came only after 1835 as some of the Rais were there in Darjeeling Hills since its inception. Therefore, all the three theories regarding the original homeland of the Kirat Khambu Rai cannot be discarded.

#### **BRIEF ACCOUNT ON THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI OF THE DARJEELING HILLS**

Kirat Khambu Rai is one among the variety of people of the Darjeeling Hills. They have their own religion, language, cultures, etc. They are considered one of the ethnic groups that fall under Nepali Community. Besides, there were many other tribes and ethnic groups under Nepalese such as Tamang, Pradhan, Chhetri, Gurung, etc. but the Kirat Khambu Rai is considered to be the most important ethnic group on the basis of its numerical strength.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 75

<sup>35</sup> A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazeteer: Darjeeling* (Siliguri:N.L. Publisher 2011)71

Among the Nepalese, it is said that about 34 percent of the population has migrated from the Nepal.<sup>36</sup>

Kirati people consisted of mainly three groups i.e., Rai, Limbu and Yakha.<sup>37</sup> Among all other ethnic groups, Kirati term is still used by the Kirat Khambu Rai as their identity.<sup>38</sup> They were also known as Khambus and Jimdars. The origin of the words Khambu and Jimdar is not yet clear.<sup>39</sup> Etymologically, the word 'Khambu' meant the indigenous people who used to live in Himalayan Ranges. In Bantawa (Sub-tribe of Rai) language also, there is a meaning of 'Khambu,' where Kham stands for land and bu for holy, therefore it can be said that Khambus were the people of holy land.<sup>40</sup> It is also believed by some that the term Khambu was derived from Kham, one of the provinces in Tibet while on the other hand Sanskritists held the opinion that it was derived from the ancient name Kamboja.<sup>41</sup> Another name, Jimdar is of later origin. According to Kumar Pradhan, "Jimdar was derived either from Jamidar, 'holder of land' or from jimmdar, 'functionary with official responsibility (jimma)'." He also says that "Rai is a derivative of raja."<sup>42</sup> When Gurkhas conquered the Kirati, the Gurkha king became anxious and wanted to placate the defeated enemies, thus he granted them power to rule over some districts. It was during that time, the Gurkha king; Prithvinarayan Shah gave the title Rai to Jimdars or Khambu chiefs.<sup>43</sup> But before that also Khambus or Jimdars had been referred similarly by one of the Sena potentates of Eastern Nepal. They used to spell this title as Raya which was changed by the Gorkhalis (Nepali speaking people

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<sup>36</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical account of Bengal, Darjiling* (Siliguri: N.L. Publisher, 2012) 37

<sup>37</sup> Dash, op.cit. 71

<sup>38</sup> Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal, with particular reference to Eastern Nepal*, (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1991) 52

<sup>39</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999),33

<sup>40</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rai): Their Retold Account, Revised Edition*, (Kurseong, Dr. Dipanker rai, 2021)15

<sup>41</sup> Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal, with particular reference to Eastern Nepal*, (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1991) 52

<sup>42</sup> Ibid,52

<sup>43</sup> A.J. Dash *Bengal District Gazeteer: Darjeeling*, (Siliguri:N.L. Publisher,2011)71-72

of Darjeeling Hills) as Rai.<sup>44</sup> Now Rai has been used by all the Khambus of Nepal, Darjeeling, Sikkim, etc. as a title.

The Rais are divided into a number of tribes and sub clans, but it is not possible to find out the exact list of all the tribes because a number of new clans are continuously emerging. According to Shiva Kumar Rai “the fact of living in a particular district or marriage into any particular clan, often causes the creation of fresh clan.”<sup>45</sup> The Rais, who are divided into a number of sub-tribes, are again divided into smaller tribes and it was again divided into branches and later into clans. From this structure, anyone can trace the exact family lineage.<sup>46</sup> It is said that there are more than 50 tribes that speaks different languages. While talking about the language, there is one famous dialogue in Nepali i.e., “Jati Rai Uti Kura”. Although there are a number of sub- tribes, there is no caste-system within the Rais.<sup>47</sup>

#### **THAR OR SUBTRIBES OF THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI**

Ambola is one of the sub-tribes of the Rais and it is named after a place which is in Khotang in Majh Kirat (Middle Kirat). The Amchoke is another sub-tribe whose name is taken from a place in Limbuan. Thus, the Rai from that place came to be known as Amchoke tribe. The Rais who speaks Bantawa dialect are known as Bantawa tribe. Chamling is another sub-tribe and its name is also taken from the place in Majh Kirat. Besides, there are other sub tribes such as Dumi, Dilpali, Kaling, Kulung, Lingkhim, Lingmuk, Lohoron, Thulung, Sotang, Walig, Sangpang, etc. There is always a myth about the origin of all the sub tribes within the Rai and one of such interesting myth is that of the Sangpang tribe. They believe that there was a time when one Khambu lived near the Rawa stream and he used to serve the king

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<sup>44</sup> Pradhan, op. cit. 52

<sup>45</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok; Shivika Enterprise, 2005) 30

<sup>46</sup> Charles Mc Dougal “Structure and Division in Kulung Rai Society,” 206

<sup>47</sup> Mr. Bijoy Kumar (M), Retired Asstt. Head Master of the Darjeeling Government High School, Present Chairman of Darjeeling District Primary Educatio GTA, 61years, Address- Bodhi-Khim 6 Convent Road Haridashatta Darjeeling – 734101, 7/4/2022 – interviewed by Shristi Rai

palace but king had not provided him with a salary for 12 years. Therefore, he requested the king to fulfill his one wish in place of his due salary. He wanted to give his name to his homeland. As a result, the name of the area near Rawa stream became Sangpang. In this way, his wish was granted and the Rais who lived there came to be known as Sangpang.<sup>48</sup> Within each tribe there were number of clans and like the origin of their sub tribes, even each clans have the myths/ folk tales which talks about its origin.<sup>49</sup> Some of the names of clans within sub-tribes are Baralung(Bantawa), Nimabung(Chamling), Changcha(Dungmali), Bolam (Dumi), Siwahang(Walung), Hengma(Yakka),etc.<sup>50</sup> These clan are known as Pacha and it is a kind of mark of the Rais which is used to identify the genetic lines.<sup>51</sup> Again under Pacha there are Sameit. The Sameit is used to trace the original clan of a particular Rai family. Sameit is different for the son and daughter from the same parents. For example, in Bantawa Rai, there are two Sameit for son such as Changcha and Natcha and for daughter there are four Sameit such as Chenkhama, Bungkhama, Chimitma and Changkhama.<sup>52</sup> It is said that, if the Pacha and Sameit of the partners matches, they are not allowed to marry as they are considered as the brother and system from the same ancestors.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, at the time of marriage, it is important to pronounce the Sameit of the groom and the bride. While performing the death rites also it is mandatory to pronounce Sameit of the deceased during Chinta/Dowa Domma when shamans possessed their body with the spirits of deceased.<sup>54</sup> Another interesting thing is that if any individuals belonging to any caste wanted to become the Khambu Rai, they are allowed to adopt the title of the Khambu Rai but he or she has to have one of the Rai

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<sup>48</sup> Balram Rai *Khambus (Rai) Their Retold Accounts* (Kurseong: Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2021), 24-36

<sup>49</sup> Smriti Rai “ Significance of thar in the social structure of the Khambu Rais: Some Observations” *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University*, Volume 3,Number 1,(2016)152-153

<sup>49</sup> L.S.S. O’ Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*(New Delhi: Logos Press, 1999)22

<sup>50</sup> Rai, op. cit. 38-53

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 33-34

<sup>52</sup> Smriti Rai “ Significance of thar in the social structure of the Khambu Rais: Some Observations” *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University*, Volume 3,Number 1,(2016)150

<sup>53</sup> Rai, op.cit. 33-34

<sup>54</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok; Shivika Enterprise,2005)36

members who will give his thar and pacha to him or her. In order to give permission for such kind of things, the elderly people or the leaders of the Rai community will sit together for a meeting and they will discuss this matter and they will ask the Rai member of that person whether he will give his thar and Pacha to him/her. If he agrees, then again he is asked to give his Sameit but it is important to note here that, they will never give their Sameit under any condition as Sameit identifies the original clan. In such circumstances he will speak any of the word that becomes the Sameit of that person. Such is the importance of Sameit within the community. No one will ever give their Sameit to anyone, not even to the adopted child.<sup>55</sup> It is unfortunate that some of the Rais of the Darjeeling Hills are not aware about the above mentioned things; however no one can deny the importance of Thar, Pacha, and Sameit of the Rai ethnic group of the Darjeeling Hills.

#### **CONTRIBUTION OF THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DARJEELING HILLS SINCE 1835**

The history of the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills can be traced since 1835 with the contribution of the Rai people to the development of Darjeeling Hills visible in terms of economy, politics and education.

The year 1835 marks a new era not only in the history of Darjeeling but also in the history of the Kirat Khambu Rais. Change had been taken place in every field. The actual growth and development of Darjeeling took place when Dr Campbell was appointed as the first Superintendent of Darjeeling in 1839. He devoted his energy for the development of the Station in Darjeeling. Besides, he attracted a large number of immigrants in order to cultivate the mountain slopes and revitalize trade and commerce. It was said that at the time when he was appointed as Superintendent, the population of Darjeeling was not more than 100 people

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<sup>55</sup> Mr. Bijoy Kumar (M), Retired Asstt. Head Master of the Darjeeling Government High School, Present Chairman of Darjeeling District Primary Educatio GTA, 61years, Address- Bodhi-Khim 6 Convent Road Haridashatta Darjeeling – 734101, 7/4/2022 – interviewed by Shristi Rai

but by 1849 it had risen to 10,000.<sup>56</sup> Thus, it proves that he became successful in attracting a large number of immigrants from the neighbouring states. The credit for the growth of tea-plantations was also given to Dr Campbell. He was the one who brought the Chinese tea seeds from Kumaon and in 1841; he made an experiment by planting few seeds in the Darjeeling Hills. As a result of this experiment, it was found that the soil and climate of the Darjeeling are suitable for the plantation of tea.<sup>57</sup> When development started taking place in Darjeeling, a large number of Nepali people have been found to have worked for its progress. Among them, the people belonging to the Kirat Khambu Rai community have also been found participating in the various development and progress of the Darjeeling Hills. In the field of economy, there were essentially four important individuals whose contribution are worth mentioning here, such as Bhagat Bir Rai, Buddhiman Rai, Narbhup Rai, Dakman Rai, Ram Singh Rai. Likewise, in the field of education, there were three important personalities such as Hangjeet Rai, Indramaan Rai and Shiva Kumar Rai and again in the field of politics, Hangjeet Rai and Shiva Kumar Rai worked for the rights as well as for the welfare of the Nepali people.

Hence, for a better understanding of their role in the development of the Darjeeling Hills, their contributions will be discussed here:

Bhagat Bir Rai is said to be the first among the locals who had contributed a lot for the development of the Darjeeling Hills. He used to visit Darjeeling in and around 1800 and at that time it was wholly forested and only a few people used to live in Darjeeling. Initially, he used to visit Darjeeling out of his own interest and returned to Nepal, his homeland. Finally, in the year 1835 he decided to settle down in the Darjeeling Hills and came from the Dhankuta Nepal along with his family including his wife, his brother's son Ransingh and his

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<sup>56</sup> L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*(New Delhi: Logos Press, 1999)22

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 28

another brother and settled in Kalimpong, one of the area under Darjeeling Hills.<sup>58</sup> He worked as a labour contractor under General Lloyd. He got his first contract for building an old military road from Pankhabari to Gundri Bazar (Darjeeling). As he was a very hardworking and loyal man, he was able to become economically strong even under the colonial rule. In the year 1845 he spent his own money to purchase Samrikpani in order to start a tea plantation. He became successful in planting tea at Samrikpani which inspired him to plant more tea seeds. As a result, he started planting tea at Soureni and Phuguri in 1850. Therefore, he is considered as the first local pioneers of tea plantations. Since, Bhagat Bir Rai was the first to start tea plantation at Samrikpani, it is believed that Samrikpani is named after one of his wives. Also, they held one programme in order to set free the slaves and it was during this time that they planted twenty saur trees along the ridge of the Bungalow. It was because of the presence of number of saur trees at Saureni, it got its name Saureni. Later in the year 1910, he sold his three tea gardens to the European planters.<sup>59</sup>

Dakman Rai rather than Bhagat Bir Rai is considered to be the first native pioneer of the tea plantations of the Darjeeling Hills by some authors. To prove this, it is important to mention the writing of Balram Rai, one of the writers of the Kurseong. Balram Rai, in his book mentions Dakman Rai as the first among the local tea planters in Darjeeling. He writes, when Dr Campbell was on his mission of attracting immigrants to work for the tea garden, he heard about Dakman Rai. At that time, Dakman Rai had come to Darjeeling from Nepal. Actually, this was his religious journey to 'Mahakal Baba' (one of the most powerful gods of the Hindus). He came with caravan of twenty pack ponies which was loaded with necessary stuffs including rations and there were number of servants with him. When Dr Campbell heard about Dakman Rai, he immediately sent his subedars to meet him with an invitation for a meeting. Dakman Rai also accepted his invitation and they had a meeting. After the

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<sup>58</sup> Sujata Rani Rai, *Wihangam Wiwechna* (Darjeeling: Sajha Pustak Prakashan, 2016) 85

<sup>59</sup> J.P. Gurung, *Darjeeling Tea Muscatel Memories* (Darjeeling: Salesian College, 2021)17-18

completion of the meeting, Dr Campbell asked for a help to Dakman Rai. He requested him to bring labourers from the Eastern Himalayas in order to work for the progress of the Darjeeling Hills. He accepted his request and returned to Eastern Hills. After some time, he returned to Darjeeling and became the contractor. A lot of development became possible with the help of labourers brought by Sri Dakman Rai. It is said that he also received land from East India Company through Dr Campbell as a gift. However, the labourers brought by Sri Dakman Rai at first were not sufficient. They needed more labourers for further development. Again, Sri Dakman Rai was invited by one of the Directors of D.C.T. Company whose name was Mr Christison. He was from England and he came to Darjeeling to see the tea garden. Sri Dakman Rai was at Saurenee at that time and Mr Christison requested him to supply more labourers from Eastern Hills. He also promised that in return he will provide tea seeds to Dakman to establish his own tea plantation on the land he received as a gift from the Company. In this way, he got the opportunity to establish his own tea plantation. Thus, the account of Balram Rai says that Sri Dakman Rai was the first among the Nepali and among the Rais who started his own tea plantation at Saurenee in the year 1876. In 1880 he started another tea plantation at Phuguri and in 1883 at Samrikpani from the tea seeds provided by Mr Christison. Thus, Balram Rai considered Dakman Rai the first Native Tea Planters of Darjeeling.<sup>60</sup>

Despite of the prevalence of two contesting views, based on the time period, it can be assumed that Bhagat Bir Rai was the first one, as it is mentioned that he came to Darjeeling in the year 1835 and established his tea plantation in between 1845 to 1855, whereas Dakman Rai established his tea plantation in between 1876 to 1883. However, their areas of tea plantation were same, such as Samrikpani, Saureni and Phuguri. Therefore, it might have been possible that after Bhagat Bir Rai, the responsibility of his three tea plantation was

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<sup>60</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong: Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2008).83-86



transferred to Dakman Rai. Another possibility is that they might have planted tea in different places that comes under these three areas. Nevertheless, their contribution towards the Darjeeling Hills cannot be neglected. Though there are differences in the opinion among the writers about the first native pioneer for the tea plantations in Darjeeling, it is true that they both made significant contributions in the field of tea plantations in the Darjeeling Hills.

Besides, Dakman Rai's great-grandson Sri Ram Singh Rai also became the first superintendent of the five tea gardens of the Darjeeling Hills.<sup>61</sup> Even another descendant of Dakman Rai, Shri Narbhup Rai made a great contribution to the Darjeeling Hills. It is said that he was the first one from Darjeeling Hills to go to London (King's College) and United States of America to study engineering. His important contribution to the Darjeeling Hills was the establishment of THE KURSEONG HYDRO ELECTRIC SUPPLY Co. Ltd. at the end of 1928.<sup>62</sup>

Not only has the family of Dakman Rai been found participating in the development of the Darjeeling Hills, but the family of Bhagat Bir Rai has also been found to have equally contributed for the development of the Darjeeling Hills. The son of Bhagat Bir Rai, Buddhiman Rai, was another important figure who worked for the growth and progress of the Darjeeling Hills. He was educated in English, Hindi and Nepali. With his work, he earned the title 'Sardar' before his name and he was known as Sardar Buddhiman Rai. From a very young age, he worked as a contractor and he chose Doars as his working site where he started a tea garden and also constructed a number of roads, metre gauge train track and bridges. He was the first one to start Hope Tea Garden in Thaljora which is in present Jalpaiguri. Later, this tea garden was brought under Sardar Dharma who recruited many tribal people to work in this tea garden. Sardar Buddhiman Rai constructed metre gauge railway track above the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 86

<sup>62</sup> Prem Kumar Thapa, Captain Narbhup Rai, In *Kharsang Hija ra Aja*. Edited by Shantiraj Sharma, Kharsang, (Darjeeling: Gorkha Jan Pustakalay Prakashan), 1976, 55-56

Sukhani drain near Jaldhaka and after that he constructed the Red pool or Rato pool where his name is mentioned as Contractor Buddhiman Sardar. Unfortunately, this metre gauge railway track has been destroyed and replaced by a Broad Gauge Rail line. Among his constructions, one is still there as a witness i.e., KUJI DIANA BRIDGE constructed in the year 1913. Another railway bridge above Diana River had been constructed by him and its name was Ghatia Bridge which is in ruin but his name; Contractor Buddhiman Sardar has been found in one of the marbles of the bridge. Besides constructions, he also established a trade relation with Dhaka (Bangladesh) and he was also the shareholder of Kurseong Hydro Electric Supply Co. Ltd. Later in the year 1938, he transferred all of his property to his son Dr Indramaan Rai whose contribution towards Nepali literature cannot be forgotten.<sup>63</sup>

The three important dramas of Dr Indramaan Rai are *Jiwan Lila*, *Farce Jiwan Lila*, and *Jaba Purva chahi Paschim ou Paschim chahi Purva huncha*. Besides, he wrote many novels and stories that reflect his desire to eradicate social evil practises like superstitious beliefs, untouchabilities, etc. He also spent his wealth on social work. It is said that Dr. Indramaan Rai built rest houses for the people in memory of his wife at Pedong, 20<sup>th</sup> Mile, and Rishi Road. At Pedong only, near Suryamaya Dharmasala, he had made arrangements for drinking water not only for the travelling people but also for the animals. In addition to this, he also contributed a lot for the people of Kurseong. Here he made arrangements for drinking water for the people by constructing two tanks in memory of his mother-in-law. This construction was known as the *Deshmaya Hitti* and the *Deshmaya Tank*. Even at Nagarkatta, he generated electricity through *Budo Kuwa* (the well) and provided electricity to the household and the roads. This is how he provided facilities to the surrounding residents as well. Besides, he constructed many wells for drinking water for the people. Therefore, apart from his

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<sup>63</sup> Sujata Rani Rai, *Wihangam Wiwechna* (Darjeeling: Sajha Pustak Prakashan, 2016) 85-89

contribution to literature, his contribution to the welfare of the people is also worth mentioning in the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai.<sup>64</sup>

Hangjeet Rai was another important figure in the Darjeeling Hills whose contribution can be seen in the field of education as well as in politics. On 8<sup>th</sup> June 1913, the first library of the Gorkha in India, known as Gorkha Library was started with the efforts of eight great figures at Kurseong in a rented house. Hangjeet Rai was one among them.<sup>65</sup> He became a Sub Inspector in 1907 and after some time in the year 1913 he became an Inspector. Though he was a service man under the British government, he always worked for the well-being of the Darjeeling Hills and its people. He upheld his culture and religion with utmost devotion throughout his life. He worked hard for the establishment of the Gorkha library. It is said that when there was a need of money for the establishment of this library, he and his friend even collected donations. Politically also he supported Darjeeling as he became a member of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkhal league or All India Gorkha League (political party).<sup>66</sup>

Shiva Kumar Rai was also an important figure who worked for the progress of the Darjeeling Hills. He became a member of Gorkha association. The main aim of this association was to remove the evils from the society and resolve the fights among the Nepali people. He makes a demand to the Chairman Hangjeet Rai to form Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League for the protection of Gorkhas because at that time lives of Nepalese were not in a good condition and they were not safe. On that day itself, Sardar Bahadur Hangjeet Rai declared the formation of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League. He also became the M.L.A and Minister of this party.<sup>67</sup> In 1945, he was elected as General Secretary of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League. In 1948, he became the Vice President of the same League. In this way, he worked politically for the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 92-95

<sup>65</sup> Proceeding of meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1913

<sup>66</sup> Shri Dawa Sherpa, "Swargiya Hangjeet Rai." In *Kharsang Hija ra Aja*. Edited by Shantiraj Sharma, Kharsang, (Darjeeling: Gorkha Jan Pustakalay Prakashan), 1976, 11-12

<sup>67</sup> Jiwan Labar, *Kehi Rajnaitik Vyaktitvaharu*, (Darjeeling, Gamma Prakashan), 108-110

welfare of the Nepali people of the Darjeeling Hills. Since he was in a good position, he demanded every possible thing from the government for the wellbeing of the Nepali people. He was the first among the Nepalese to demand occupancy rights for the tea garden workers of the Darjeeling Hills as they were the ones who worked day and night in the tea garden. He demanded the government to provide something for the protection of the labourers.<sup>68</sup> After independence also he demanded many facilities that are needed by the Nepali people; hence, his contribution towards the welfare of Nepali people cannot be forgotten. He had also contributed a lot to the Nepali literature. In the later days, Punya Prakash Rai, Devprakash Rai, H.B Rai also helped to bring political consciousness among the Nepali youths.

Thus, without mentioning the names of these great heroes, the history of the Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills cannot become complete. Not only the history of the Rai community but even the history of Darjeeling cannot become complete without their names and works. It not only glorifies their names but also shows their real efforts in making the today's beautiful Darjeeling which is now famous for its tea, tourism, toy train, etc.

While summing up the above account, it is important to mention about the census conducted in Sikkim which reveals the population of the Kirat Khambu Rai as the largest that ultimately proves their existence in Sikkim before the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim then; therefore, they can be regarded as the original inhabitants of the Darjeeling Hills. We cannot deny the fact that half the population were the original inhabitants, whereas the other half migrated from Nepal to Darjeeling during the early colonial rule after facing the defeat from Prithvi Narayan Shah and during the colonial rule when Darjeeling was in its phase of development. As an ethnic group, the Kirat Khambu Rai consists of a number of sub-tribes or Thar; however, it is impossible to trace their exact number as the sub-tribes are still originating depending upon the places and types of marriages. These sub-tribes are

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 108-111

divided further into Pacha and then Sameit. The division of the caste into various sub-tribes serves as the only way for the people of this community to trace their family lineage, which ultimately saves them from breaking the blood relation, especially in case of marriages. While dealing with the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills, it can be traced only after 1830s as there are limited sources available. It was only after the 1830s that the contribution of important personalities of the Rais in terms of economy, politics and education to the development of Darjeeling Hills began to be appreciated. The economic development can be seen in the areas of tea plantations, construction of building and roads and electricity. The wide development in all the fields opened a new portal of job opportunities for the people of the Nepali community which resulted in their economic stability. Work in the tea garden and construction site was open for all the villagers, both the educated and uneducated. The newly established Gorkha Library became a source of knowledge for the people. It paved a way for the people to read and educate themselves; it was in one way the job hub for literate people. The immortal works of many Nepali writers such as Indra Bahadur Rai, Indramaan Rai, Shiva Kumar Rai, found their place on the shelves of the library. Their works illustrates the then social, economic, and culture of the Nepali community. The works of those writers mirrors the people and condition of Darjeeling during their time that makes it possible to trace the history of Darjeeling and its people belonging to various ethnic groups, including the Kirat Khambu Rai. We cannot disregard their tremendous contribution in the field of politics as they were successful in bringing political consciousness in the minds and hearts of the Nepalese. Therefore, it is very significant to mention the works of great personalities, as their tremendous contribution in almost all the fields not only uplifted the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai but it also improved the lives of the entire Nepalese of the Darjeeling Hills.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **CULTURE OF THE RAI COMMUNITY WITH REGARD TO CHANGE AND CONTINUITY**

Culture originates from society and every community of the society have their own distinctive cultures. It gives identity to the community. Culture includes everything that human being does - worshipping god, birth and death rituals, marriage practices, food-habit, festivals, etc. One can identify the caste and community of the people from their different religious practices, marriage norms, languages they speak, etc. Therefore, different communities, tribes and ethnic groups have their own culture that gives them a distinct identity. Likewise, the Kirat Khambu Rai Community have their own distinctive cultures based on Mundum (religious scripture) which makes them different from the other communities of the Darjeeling Hills. This chapter deals with the culture of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community with main focus on birth, marriage, death rites and festivals and it also highlights some of the changes that have taken place within cultures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **BIRTH RITES**

Birth ceremonies used to be one of the important ceremonies followed by all the communities. Like in any other community, even in the Kirat Khambu Rai Community, birth ceremony was considered as one of the essential rites since its inception. Therefore, when any woman belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai conceived a baby, she had to remain under certain restrictions. Her near and dear ones were advised not to give her bad news, she were advised to stay away from tensions, she was not allowed to go to a place of accidents and not allowed to join unfortunate programmes, she was not allowed to see dead

bodies, etc. The family used to put such restrictions to a pregnant woman because they had a strong belief that such things would have bad effects on the baby in her womb. They believed that for the proper mental and physical growth of a child, it is necessary to provide a healthy environment around the mother of an unborn child. Before the birth of a child, in the Kirat Khambu Rai community, the family used to perform a ceremony known as Chanki/Bhuri Puja. It was a worship of the womb with the help of shamans for the protection and maintenance of good health for both the mother and the unborn child.<sup>1</sup>

Initially husband's house was considered as the right place for the birth of a child, but at times it also took place in the wife's house if the circumstances so demanded. If the birth of a child took place in the maternal house, it used to be known as Choowakhim.<sup>2</sup> And in such cases, only the mother of a child had the right to cut the umbilical cord. No other member from maternal house could touch it.<sup>3</sup> Originally, chopping board made up of Phaduri (wood) was used by the people to cut it. However it was very difficult for them to find this variety of wood in the changing society; therefore, in such cases, they used bamboo for the purpose. After some time, they started using chopping board made up of silver or silver coin to cut the umbilical cord.<sup>4</sup> An experienced elderly woman used to tie the umbilical cord of a child with a piece of a thread.

Different sub-tribes within the Kirat Khambu Rai community had their own distinct way to keep the umbilical cord of their new born child. Some used to store it in a tree near the house; Bantawa Rai used to keep it in a bamboo basket; and Athpaharia Rai used to bury it in the nearby field.<sup>5</sup> It was important to note down the date, time, and month of the new birth. At the same time to write about the features like face, head and shape of the new born baby was

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<sup>1</sup> Smriti Rai, "Significance of *thar* in the social structure of the Khambu Rai: Some Observations", *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University*, Volume-3, Number-1(2016)156

<sup>2</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 90

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 90-91

<sup>4</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha, 1918) 59

<sup>5</sup> Rai, op.cit. 90-91

also equally important. They had to provide clean clothes to the new born child because they used to believe that the old and dirty clothes might bring sickness to the child.<sup>6</sup> In case of a boy child, cock was needed and in case of a girl child, hen was needed along with some rice beer. The gullet of the fowl after killing was kept aside for some times. After that, the gullet was placed on top of the mixture and then they used to cook the whole thing together. When the meat was ready after cooking, they had to place the gullet on the top of a rice mound on the plate, which had been kept aside for the child. After this, they had to place three banana leaves on the ground, one was made to offer to the family deity known as Pitri (ancestors), second was made to offer to the entire deities in general and third was made as proprietary offering to the evil spirits.<sup>7</sup>

In the beginning, the house where the birth of a child takes place was considered as ritually polluted. The mother was not allowed to cook and she was not allowed to leave her room and the new born baby. No one was allowed to touch her except the new born baby. She was provided with food by her relatives. No male family member could visit her.<sup>8</sup> Not only that, even family, relatives and villagers had to follow some restrictions like the fact that a family member of new born child could not pluck the fruit, flower, not even they could work in their field of cultivation till the naming ceremony was done. The male members of the village would maintain distance from that house. The hearth or chulas of that family was considered unclean; hence the entire male member used to make the arrangement of their food in the separate area. The family member was not allowed to take the food prepared for new mother. After preparing food for a mother, they had a tradition to put food on two banana leaves, one on the front side and another on the back side because there was a belief among the Rais that

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<sup>6</sup> Rai, op. cit, 59

<sup>7</sup> Rai, op.cit. 90-91

<sup>8</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005)58



some woman who might have died in such situation expected food and if one ate without doing this ritual, they may have to suffer from problems.<sup>9</sup>

After the birth of a child in the family of the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills, they were required to perform mainly four birth ceremonies such as Purification Ceremony, Naming ceremony, Weaning Ceremony and Hair cutting ceremony for boy and Tith Tama for girl child.

- **PURIFICATION CEREMONY:**

Purification ceremony was performed, preferably three days after the birth of a girl child and five days after the birth of a boy child. The relatives of both parents were expected to join this occasion. There was a tradition of giving chicken and millet beer as gifts; thus, in this ceremony each household used to bring these two items as a gift to mother.<sup>10</sup> On this day, mother had to wash all the clothes and had to clean the room that they had occupied since the birth of a child.<sup>11</sup> Mud- water was used to clean the house. Both the mother and a child were given purification bath on this day.<sup>12</sup>

In many of the Khambu families, the old or elderly woman used to performs the rituals of this ceremony. If needed, a shaman was also invited to perform the rites of this ceremony. After this rite was performed, the mother and the child would be respected in a ceremony called Soyachangma or the lifting of the head by offering new clothes to both the mother and a child. Besides, the performing ladies or the Shamans would be respected by offering wine and some amount of money by the member of the family.<sup>13</sup> They used to believe that the evil spirit may have been present at the time of birth and that this rite would drive away its

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<sup>9</sup> Smriti Rai, "Significance of *thar* in the social structure of the Khambu Rai: Some Observations", *Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University*, Volume-3, Number-1(2016)156-157

<sup>10</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 91

<sup>11</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005)58

<sup>12</sup> J.R. Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008)326-327

<sup>13</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 91

presence. Therefore, they would perform this rite, and at the end, the entire invited guest would enjoy feast provided by the family.<sup>14</sup>

- **NAMING CEREMONY**

In the naming ceremony, the eldest member of the family used to declare the name of a new born child. Generally, in case of a boy child, it was performed between six to ten days and in case of a girl child, it was performed between five to nine days. Before performing this ceremony both mother and a child had to take bath. The important items required to perform this ceremony were spring water from seven place, artemisia vulgaris (titeypati), cynodon dactylon (Dubo), gold, silver, copper, etc.<sup>15</sup> The family member would invite a Rai priest to perform this rite and with all this items he would start the ceremony and chant Mundum asking blessing of the household and clan deities for both mother and child.<sup>16</sup> He would chant Mundum, asking long life for both mother and child. In this ceremony the waist, wrist and ankle of the baby had to be tied with a piece of thread and in case of a girl child they also had to pierce hole in the ear of the baby. The invited priest, relatives and neighbours were offered with foods and drinks.<sup>17</sup> The main reason for performing this ritual is to keep the name of a child; therefore, it was mandatory to name a child on this day. It was the responsibility of the elderly member of the family or village to announce the name of a child.<sup>18</sup> During the naming ceremony the role of the female members of the house was very important as all the household duties were done by them. Despite the fact, originally, people used to perform naming and purification day on different dates; however, after a while, they started practicing both the name giving and purification ceremony on a same date.

- **WEANING CEREMONY**

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<sup>14</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005)58

<sup>15</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha, 1918) 60-61

<sup>16</sup> Rai,op. cit. 58

<sup>17</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha ,1918) 61

<sup>18</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 91

The Kirat Khambu Rai used to perform weaning ceremony or rice-feeding ceremony on the sixth months in case of a boy child and five months in case of a girl child.<sup>19</sup> On this day, the elders of the family had to provide a new cloth to a child. This day was essentially made to feed the baby some rice for the first time after the birth. The parents of the child had to invite all the relatives, neighbours and family member of both the parents. While performing this ceremony, they had to place curd, rice and a lighted wick (not a diya) on the plate and along with this on the floor they had to place the vessel containing water with some flower on top. The parents had to dress their child in a new dress and had to keep the plates and vessels on either side of the child. At first, the parents of the child would put some tika on the forehead of a child. Then, using silver coin or gold coin, they would feed the child some rice and meat.<sup>20</sup> Originally, when they were not much advanced, they used beak of a bird to feed a first meal of rice to a child as they used to believe that if they feed their baby with beak of a bird then their child would speak fast like the bird and become clever. However, such kind of tradition got replaced by coins/silver coin/gold coin depending upon the financial condition and will of the parents.<sup>21</sup> At first the mother of the child had to feed him/her five times.<sup>22</sup> After that as per the tradition all the guests would feed the child and offer some gifts to a child. At the end there was a tradition to provide food to all the invited guests where pig used to be an important item of food.<sup>23</sup>

- **HAIR CUTTING CEREMONY**

The hair cutting ceremony used to be considered the final birth ceremony of a boy child but not of a girl child. The reason behind not maintaining this tradition for a girl is not very clear.

However, during tith tama ceremony, the Kirat Khambu Rai used to provide a scarf to a girl

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<sup>19</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999)86

<sup>20</sup> Rai, op.cit. 91-92

<sup>21</sup> MC Rai (M), Retired Head Master of Sepi Primary School, Writer in Nepali and Khambu language, Age- 80, Address Champdarha Sepi, Rimbick, 10/04/2022, interviewed by Shristi Rai

<sup>22</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha) 65

<sup>23</sup> Balram Rai, Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 91-92

child, especially in order to protect her hair. From this tradition, it can be observed that they used to consider women's hair as a valuable and beautiful possession. This is probably the cause for not performing this ritual for girls within the Rai community. Despite of the fact, they used to perform the hair cutting ceremony lavishly for a boy child. During this ceremony, boy's hair was cut for the first time. He should be at least three years old to perform this ceremony.<sup>24</sup> The first haircut had to be done by the hand of the maternal uncle but mother could also cut the hair in case of absence of maternal uncle. If there was an absence of both an uncle and a mother, anyone could cut the hair of a child.<sup>25</sup> Even on this occasion they used mud water (daubing) to clean the house. On this occasion also, it was mandatory to call a Rai priest and along with a Rai priest; relatives, friends and neighbours were invited to celebrate this occasion. As in other ceremony, in this ceremony too, food and drinks were made available to the entire guest list.<sup>26</sup> However, some people did not consider this ceremony as birth rites because it used to be performed at the age of three and sometimes at the age of 5 or 7.

- **TITH TAMA**

Like hair cutting ceremony, tith tama was considered as the final birth ceremony of a girl child. If hair cutting ceremony was particularly meant for a boy child, the tith tama ceremony was specially meant for a girl child. This was considered as an important ceremony for the daughter and it used to take place at the age of three, nine and thirteen.<sup>27</sup> It had to be performed on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. While performing this rite, mother had to face towards the east and had to give Tanfey Yamlung, Tankhi and Tangdungma to her

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<sup>24</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999)86

<sup>25</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha) 67

<sup>26</sup> Subba, op. cit. 86

<sup>27</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021),92

daughter.<sup>28</sup> In other words, this was the ceremony where girls used to receive Tanfey yamlung which means traditional saree and blouse of their community.<sup>29</sup> Along with Tanfey yamlung, a mother also had to provide scarf to the girl child to protect her hair. However, with the passage of time this tradition lost its importance and it is rarely seen practicing within the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Like hair cutting ceremony, this ceremony was also not accepted as birth rituals by some of the Khambus as it was done at the age of three, nine or thirteen.

## **MARRIAGE**

Marriage is one of the important aspects of the culture. It is mentioned above that all the ceremonies of the Khambu Rai used to be based on Mundum, however, Rai marriages could be performed with or without chanting Mundum by shamans.<sup>30</sup> Though they could marry without chanting of Mundum, it was still mandatory for them to follow all the rules of marriage from Mundum.

There were certain rules for the marriage ceremonies of Kirati people that were made by the first Kirati religious leader of mankind, named Yehang. Firstly, there should be no marriage between father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister. Secondly, the marriage between step brother and step sister should be prohibited. Thirdly, breaking of the blood relation from the father's side was not allowed. Fourthly, breaking of blood relation from the mother's side was allowed only after the fourth generation.<sup>31</sup> These rules were not only meant for the Kirat Khambu Rai but for the entire Kirati people. In case of the Bantawa Rai, (one of the sub clan of the Rai), it is said that breaking of blood relation from mother's side was allowed only after five generations and from father's side it was allowed only after seven

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<sup>28</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha) 67

<sup>29</sup> Rai, op. cit. 92

<sup>30</sup> T.B. Subba *Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999),90

<sup>31</sup> Iman Singh Chemjong *History and Culture of Kirat People* (Lalitpur: Kirat Yakthung Chumlung,2003) 27

generations. If marriages took place between maternal lines within five generations, such marriages were known as dudhphora, meaning “breaking of milk” and the marriages between paternal lines within seven generations were known as hardphora, meaning “breaking the bones”.<sup>32</sup> Both endogamy and exogamy forms of marriage used to be practised. Exogamy marriage was allowed only with the people of higher castes. In Nepali language, there was a saying that marriage was permitted with Pani Chalne Jat (caste above polluted one). In exogamy marriage, in case of a daughter, her family had to give Washihunma-Khukshihunma, which means that their daughter will no longer remain a member of their family.<sup>33</sup> In case of daughter-in-law, the family of the son (groom) along with his new wife (bride) had to follow some rituals then only his family could accept her in their clan.

The Kirat Khambu Rai people used to believe in the metal container made up of brass or silver considering it as the true witness of marriage. The term used by them for this container was bulukhum. As per tradition, this bulukhum was to be brought from the groom side and kongpi or mediator from both groom and bride side had to beat the container with the help of silver coin thrice, alternatively. At the time of beating the container, they had to make some promises for the wellbeing of the bride. This practice was performed because they had a belief that human being can change their mind anytime but the sound of the container created by silver does not change. Therefore, if they violate any promise at the time of beating the container, this will bring misfortune to the groom. Such a strong belief was there among the people belonging to the Kirat Khambu Rai. This was considered one of the rare customs within the Rai Community known as bulukhum.<sup>34</sup> The Kirat Khambu Rais were free to

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<sup>32</sup> Raj Kumar Rai *Sociology of Nepal, Social Structure and Social Change* (Kathmandu: Nepal Sociological Association, 2018), 138

<sup>33</sup> Smriti Rai “Significance of *Thar* in the social structure of the Khambu Rai: Some Observation” *Journal of the department of sociology of North Bengal University* Volume 3, Issue No.1(2016), 151

<sup>34</sup> Worrel Kumar Bain, “An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6 (2018) 1049

choose their partner. Sometimes man ceremoniously fought with the woman's family in order to marry her.<sup>35</sup> Pre-puberty marriage was not practiced within the Rai Community.<sup>36</sup>

The marriage rituals of the Kirat Khambu Rai depend on the types of marriage. There were four types of marriage such as: -

- Arranged marriage,
  - Consented and agreed marriage followed by elopement,
  - Marriage through persuasion and
  - Marriage by force or capture.<sup>37</sup>
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- **ARRANGED MARRIAGE**

Arranged marriage ceremony included two stages, such as initial marriage ceremony and final rite of marriage.<sup>38</sup> There were four stages in the initial marriage of the Kirat Khambu Rai, which was also known as charkalam. In the initial marriage ceremony, at first, the relatives of boys with a leader would go to the girl's house.<sup>39</sup> The leader was known by various names depending upon the different languages of the Kirat Khambu Rai sub clans such as Kongpi, Kongpee, Bongpa, Kahliya, etc. The leader had to be an elderly person with the quality to speak in good Kirati Khambu as well as Nepali language. He should be from the Kirat Khambu Rai community, but he should not be from the boy's clan.<sup>40</sup> The leader used to play a very important role in making the marriage successful. He must be a dependable person because it was his responsibility to give reliable information about the

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<sup>35</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2021)94

<sup>36</sup> T.B. Subba *Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999) 88

<sup>37</sup> Rai, op. cit. 93

<sup>38</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005),60

<sup>39</sup> T.B. Subba *Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999) 87

<sup>40</sup> Ibid,88

boy's family and also had to take the responsibility if the partner faces marital discord. It was also important to remember that the leader had to have all the knowledge about the customary laws, traditional norms, cultures and ritualistic practices of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community. Most importantly, he had to have knowledge about the marriage norms of the community.<sup>41</sup> He was also given all the credit for arranging the marriage but prior to them it was sisters, aunts and other female relatives of men who usually starts the negotiation for marriage at home. However, they were never given credit for such kind of things.<sup>42</sup>

The leader or Kongpi had to carry some items with him when he met the girl's family; such item includes Rakshi/arrak/hengma (liquor/cultural drink) and Bebook (small wicker basket) where they had to put bookok (flesh of a pig) and some coins.<sup>43</sup> The first meet of groom's relatives and leader with the bride's family was known as Sodhani (request).<sup>44</sup> On their first visit, they had to place Raksi and bebook on the floor and they had to give one rupee to the bride's representative.<sup>45</sup> In this stage, groom's parents had to make request to bride's parents with the help of a leader.<sup>46</sup> They had to make requests to the bride's family and had to ask the decision of a girl.<sup>47</sup> The second stage of the initial marriage ceremony was known as multheki. In this stage, the groom family had to offer liquor, which was considered as the main payment to the bride's parents. The third stage, known as bhakha, was considered as the promised date of fulfilment. The couple who got engaged ceremoniously during the time of multheki would get official acceptance on this day.<sup>48</sup> Then the groom's family had to go to the bride's house in order to give personal gifts known as makamundari / saya Mundari,

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<sup>41</sup> Raj Kumar Rai *Sociology of Nepal, Social Structure and Social Change* (Kathmandu: Nepal Sociological Association, 2018), 139

<sup>42</sup> Subba, op.cit. 88

<sup>43</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2021) 95

<sup>44</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005),60

<sup>45</sup> Rai, op. cit. 96

<sup>46</sup> J.R. Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008),327

<sup>47</sup> Rai, op. cit. 96

<sup>48</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005),60



which included dresses and ornaments to the bride. The important ornaments which were expected from the groom's side were coin necklace, gold nose ring, gold earrings (cheptey Sun) gold necklace (tilhari.)<sup>49</sup>

After finishing all these practices, within the initial marriage ceremony only, the residents of groom's family were invited and they all had to visit the bride's house along with sayahangmi consisted of Kongpee/bongpa, groom, saye sangpa, saye sangma, friends, and some relatives. The bride and her relatives had to sit on one side and the groom and his relatives had to sit on the other side and they would have some speeches that included blessings for the new couple. Then they would perform another ritual, which was known as savet dotma or the rites of changing relationship.<sup>50</sup> In savet dotma, liquor had to be placed between the bride's family and groom family and an elderly person had to introduce both bride and groom to each other's family, where they would touch the liquor and feet of their relatives.<sup>51</sup> After the completion of this ritual, the bride was escorted to her in-laws' home.<sup>52</sup> Another ritual, Daplo Kuin, was performed after the first entry at her in-laws' home. In this ritual, the groom family had to pour the beer brought from the bride's house on their three sacred hearths stones (religious place) and they had to walk in clockwise direction and at the end on the than (worshiping area).<sup>53</sup> The liquor and foods had to be served to the guests. Some knowledgeable people of the Rai community would sing the song of Sakumbo Kura; blessing songs for newly married couple.<sup>54</sup>

After that, final rite of arranged marriage was performed. But they could perform final rites only if the member of bride's family gives consent since their involvement was needed. This

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>51</sup> T.B. Subba *Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas*, (Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1999) 88

<sup>52</sup> J.R. Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008),327

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 327

<sup>54</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005),60-61

ritual was normally performed after having their children.<sup>55</sup> At first, groom had to go to the bride's house to seek permission from his wife's parents for the final rite. They used to take long gap of 10 years or more between the initial stage and the final stage of marriage. In the final rite of arranged marriage, the groom's relatives had to take with them ceremonial gourd, one large earthen pot full of millet beer, two large wooden vessels filled with liquor (Arakha/Hengma), part of pig leg or head (pork) twelve seers of grain with the lastur which contains set of eight copper vessels. With these items, they had to visit the bride's house, where they had to meet bongpa from the bride's side. There, the two parties had to greet each other ceremoniously and offer liquor to each other. Again, Daplo Kium ritual was performed where food and liquor were served to the entire guests.<sup>56</sup> In the evening, the groom had to give lastur to bride's family and had to ask for Washihunma-Khukshihunma. After that, the bride's father would make final declaration that he is giving his daughter to the groom in presence of witnesses.<sup>57</sup> With this, the formal jurisdiction and responsibility of the bride were transferred to her husband.<sup>58</sup>

At the end, the father of the bride had to give Washihunma-Khukshihunma to her daughter. Washihunma-Khukshihunma used to play a very important role in marriage, especially for girls. If any father failed to give Washihunma-Khukshihunma to his daughter, the marriage of his daughter was considered invalid and she would be counted as unmarried women. In some cases, if a woman eloped with her man, lived together as his wife and even begot children, she could not be counted as a married women, until and unless she received Washihunma-Khukshihunma from her father. In other words, if father failed to give Washihunma-Khukshihunma to his daughter, she would always remain Kumari in his eyes and in the eyes of the Rai community. However, it is also important to note here that Washihunma-

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Mc Dougal "Structure and Division In Kulung Rai Society" 216

<sup>56</sup> Rai, op. cit. 62

<sup>57</sup> J.R. Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008),328

<sup>58</sup> Rai ,op. cit. 62

Khukshihunma could be given to only those girls who married into the acceptable communities or tribes (Pani Chalne Jaat). The ritual of giving Washihunma-Khukshihunma was not permitted to the one who married into a non-nepali community or the castes that come under the category of scheduled caste.<sup>59</sup>

- **CONSENTED OR AGREED MARRIAGE FOLLOWED BY ELOPEMENT**

If both girls and boys like each other and elope in order to marry, such a marriage is known as consented or agreed marriage followed by elopement. This type of marriage was also prevalent among the Kirat Khambu Rai. In this type of marriage, the couple did not ask permission from their parents for their marriage.<sup>60</sup> They used to marry on their own decision and such kind of freedom was given to the children of the Kirat Khambu Rai family. In some cases, the couple used to give information about their relationship to their families and with their permission they would marry by following elopement process. And sometimes they would marry by informing and taking permission from the boy's family only. Again, this marriage was of two types, such as Dikulama and Chekulama. In Dikulama type of marriage, boy used to marry a girl and in Chekulama type of marriage, girl used to marry a boy. In the Kirat Khambu Rai custom, even girl could marry a boy and was allowed to take him to her home.<sup>61</sup> However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such type of marriage has not been witnessed within the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills.

In some cases, they used to marry on their own will through the process of elopement without informing their families, in such cases, the girl or bride had to leave some items as a sign at home in order to inform her family indirectly. She would leave small broken wooden poles or silver coins under the pillow of her mother. From this, any of the Kirat Khambu Rai mother

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<sup>59</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2021) 98

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 93

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 93

could assume that her daughter had eloped with her husband.<sup>62</sup> A man who married a woman willingly or not, they had to pay fine to her family and they had to inform girl's family within three days.<sup>63</sup> After informing the girl's family, they had to perform one custom i.e., Sapten Sengma in order to appease the village deity. This ceremony was required to be performed near the girl's house but only the member of the boy's family could participate. All the necessary things required to complete this ceremony had to be brought from the boy's side. In this ceremony, they had to offer prayer to Saptenhang (village deity) asking forgiveness from the village deity. They had to sacrifice a cock and cook cock meat using utensils from the boy's family, which could be consumed by boy's family only. This custom was considered very important for those couples who got married through the elopement process because there was a belief that if this ceremony was not performed, the village deity would curse the village and villagers may have to suffer from various sicknesses.<sup>64</sup> After performing this ceremony, they could perform other rituals of marriage.

- **MARRIAGE THROUGH PERSUASION**

In this type of marriage, some people used to persuade a girl secretly to agree to a marriage. After coming under the influence of these people, they used to run away to secretly get married. In such type of marriage, sometimes even married women were included.<sup>65</sup> In Darjeeling, this kind of marriage became very rare in later days as most of the people became educated. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that education is one of the important factors that lead to decrease in the number of marriages that used to take place through persuasion.

- **MARRIAGE BY FORCE OR CAPTURE**

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 99

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>64</sup> Worrel Kumar Bain, "An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India" *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6 (2018) 1049

<sup>65</sup> Rai, op.cit. 93

In this type of marriage, man used to marry a woman without asking permission. The consent of girl was not given importance. A man used to wait for the chance to take away a woman forcefully in order to marry. A man would capture woman usually from gatherings, markets, festival, fairs, etc. and sometimes quietly from the villages when she was found alone and outside her home engaging in some work. However, such kind of marriage also became rare in the Darjeeling Hills in later days.<sup>66</sup>

Besides these four types of marriages, other forms of marriage were also there within the Kirat Khambu Rai, such as Jari form of marriage, levirate marriage, junior sororate marriage and widow remarriage.

- **JARI FORM OF MARRIAGE**

Within the Kirat Khambu Rai community, there used to take place another type of marriage known as Jari/Jarikal. In this type of marriage, a married woman would elope away with another man. Though such type of marriage was allowed within the Kirat Khambu Rai Community but they had to face Pancha (Comprising of five elderly Kirat folks) who would charge fine or Jarikal to them. The meaning of Jarikal is that the second husband had to pay compensation depending upon his economic condition to the former husband of the woman and woman also had to return all the possession received from the former husband during their marriage. In such cases, the former husband was given the permission from the Salumsong (Pancha: comprising of five to ten khambus of different clan) to behead the second husband. Later this practise was restricted and replaced by fine/penalty.<sup>67</sup> Though it is said that Jarikal was replaced by fine payment but it was not acknowledged by all. As there was a great respect for women within the Kirat Khambu Rai Community, they did not want

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 94

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 98-99

to equalize women with money. Therefore, some preferred punishment as the right judgement in such cases.

Another reason for not accepting fine payment is that for them respect was more important than money. In other words, if their wife eloped away with another man then he would feel humiliated and they would desire to give same kind of humiliation even to the second husband. They wanted to humiliate the second husband in front of the villagers. And the second husband had no other choice but to accept the Jarikal if he wants to live with his wife.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, practically Jarikal means the humiliation of the second husband instead of fine payment. It was possible that some individuals used to accept money but for most of the people, fine payment was just a theoretical. Another important thing is, if the second husband refused to pay the Jarikal in any form (money/humiliation), he could not perform her death rites. In such condition, the children of former husband or the former husband had to perform her death rites and if former husband refused to do so, the second husband had to give responsibilities of dead wife to the knowledgeable elderly people and the Kirat priest. They would perform death rites for his wife on behalf of her family however; he had to pay for all the things that were needed for the death rites.<sup>69</sup>

- **LEVIRATE AND JUNIOR SORORATE MARRIAGE**

Levirate marriage was also practiced by the Kirat Khambu Rai people where man was obliged to marry his brother's widow. Even junior sororate marriage was allowed within their community where man could marry the sister of his wife, usually after the death of his wife or if his wife had proven infertile /sick.<sup>70</sup>

- **WIDOW REMARRIAGE**

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<sup>68</sup> Mr Bijoy Kumar (M), Retired Asstt. Head Master of the Darjeeling Government High School, Present Chairman of Darjeeling District Primary Educatio GTA, 61years, Address- Bodhi-Khim 6 Convent Road Haridashatta Darjeeling – 734101, 7/4/2022 – interviewed by Shristi Rai

<sup>69</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha, 1918) 112

<sup>70</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dr. Dipankar Rai, 2021) 99

Widow Remarriage was also practiced but she would be provided only half of the usual bride price and if she had passed her first youth, she would get only one quarter of the actual bride price.<sup>71</sup> If the widow had a son, she could not be removed from the Kul (place of the departed soul) of her former husband. If she had no son from the former husband, she could be removed from the Kul and again her new family would put her in their Kul. If she had son from both sides, in such condition both her sons had to perform her death rites together. No one was allowed to snatch the rights of her first son for performing her death rites.<sup>72</sup>

### **SIGN OF A RAI MARRIED WOMEN**

Traditionally, there were some unique signs by which a Rai married women could be identified. Such as her Tangdungma (piece of cloth used as waistband), Potlung (necklace made of red beads), and sayemtam (necklace made of green beads). Married Rai women used to make lots of fold in their tangdungma and there they used to keep many things like tobacco, matches, nuts, cigarettes, coins, medicines, etc. Apart from this, they also used to sling a bag where they used keep big hair brush, comb, tooth pick and musical instrument known as Machunga or Binayo. Comb had a very significant role in the life of the Rai married women because Paruhang (deity of Rai) gifted golden comb to Sumnima in order to convince her for marriage.<sup>73</sup> However, these things could not survive for a longer time. Gradually, the Rai women of the Darjeeling Hills started putting vermilion on their forehead as a sign of their marriage instead of tangdungma, sayemtam, etc. But vermilion was not the traditional sign of the Rai married women. Instead of wearing tangdungma, sayemtam, potlung, etc and carrying tobacco, cigarettes, etc., in their tangdungma, they slowly started wearing fancy clothes as they got influenced by Hindu culture.

### **POSITION OF WOMEN REFLECTED IN THE MARRIAGE PRACTICES**

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid ,99

<sup>72</sup> Shri Santa Kumar Ishara Rai *Dowangdum Samkhaling* (Kathmandu: Kirat Rai Yayokha) 109

<sup>73</sup> Rai, op. cit. 99-100

From the marriage practices, one can assume the position of women within the Kirat Khambu Rai Community. The Kirat Khambu Rai women had the freedom to choose their partner, it was not necessary for them to get permission from their parents. She even had the right to take her husband at her home after marriage. She was given respect in her paternal family even after her marriage and she was always welcomed. A married Rai woman was never abandoned by her family. This is evident from the fact that whenever a husband failed to look after his wife and failed to take her responsibilities properly; her family had the right to get involved into their matter. At first, they would try to solve their tensions and problems by suggesting and giving counselling to the married couple but if the couple still wanted separation, the husband had to pay money and some items such as alcohol, food, and other necessary things to his wife. This would purify their separation, which was known as Chokhauni. After that, another tradition Ukhundi has to be performed in the house of a girl in order to purify her. This system was known as Ukhundi. With the help of shamans or Rai priests, a married girl had to be brought back to her paternal house and shamans had to make a request before Suptulung (sacred hearth) to accept her in the Kul. This tradition would purify the girl and give her an unmarried status in the family. After performing this ritual, she could regain her previous position at home.<sup>74</sup> Thus, if the married women were found ill-treated and ignored by her husband, her family could bring her back with dignity.

This tradition used to play a very important role in the lives of the Kirat Khambu Rai married women as it assured them that they would never be neglected by their paternal family under any circumstances. Even divorce was permitted within the Kirat Khambu Rai community. It was a custom to bring back their daughter with dignity after divorce. Interestingly, being a mother before marriage was not considered a disqualification within the Rai Community. If an unmarried girl conceived a baby, her lover had to take all the responsibility. He had to

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 98



marry her, if not, he had to take all the responsibility for his girl until the birth of a child and then she could marry another man.<sup>75</sup>

From all these practices, it can be assumed that women held good position in the community. Moreover, unlike other religious scriptures, the Mundum of the Kirati Khambu Rai holds that female was the first human being on earth and she was considered a Deity by them. She was regarded as the mother of the universe in the Kirati Mundum. Thus, the Rai people believe that she was the mother of all creation and would look after her creation. Likewise, each mother in the Khambu family used to receive immense respect and she was the one who used to take all the responsibilities of home. Without her consent nothing could be done in the Rai family. Thus, her consent was considered very important to start anything within the family. The birth of a girl child was never considered inauspicious; instead, the presence of girl was considered very auspicious. Therefore, the Kirat Khambu Rai family always used to welcome the birth of a girl child as gift of prosperity and contentment. From birth until death, they would receive special attention and care from their family. She even had the privilege to inherit her father's property as equal to male child.<sup>76</sup> Since its inception women were given sufficient facilities and were considered the important pillars of the family within the Kirat Rai Community. It is important to remember that though the women belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai had very good position within the community and their decision were given much importance within the house yet, if the questions come for the decision-making of the whole Kirat Khambu Rai community, then it went into the male member of the community. Despite this, women of the Kirat Khambu Rai community had a valuable position within the community.

## **DEATH RITES**

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid ,99

<sup>76</sup> Ibid ,104-106

A death rite is the final rites of life cycle of any community. Similarly, the community of the Kirat Khambu also used to solemnly perform this rite, not because of the fear of the ghost but in the hope that the soul of the deceased could find its right path after the death. The Khambu Rai used to practice both cremation and burial. Their death rituals would vary according to the nature of the death - natural and unnatural deaths. Unnatural deaths included suicidal and accidental deaths.<sup>77</sup> Their death rituals also used to vary according to their sub-clans. In general, as the funeral practices proceeds, initially a clean white cloth was used to cover the body of a person after their death. Before taking the body to the crematorium or graveyard, it was covered with a new white cloth up to the neck, making the face visible.<sup>78</sup> The dead body was placed flat on a ground, however the Kulung Rai, used to keep the dead body with the arms crossed on the chest and their legs drawn up and tucked into the body. The body was to be laid on the west direction with head facing north. The popular traditional tools like tali vey and dabey were placed on the left side of a man's dead body to prevent it from the evil spirit. Another traditional tool, kombi is placed beside a woman's dead body. A brass plate each was to be placed on the head and on the feet followed by a copper lamp above the head of the dead person.<sup>79</sup> A dead body was guarded either by family members or the wise/knowledgeable people of the same community to protect it from the animal. A person outside the Kirat Khambu Rai community was strictly prohibited from touching the dead body. Following the rituals, the dead body was carried on a stretcher made of green bamboo for the last rites.<sup>80</sup> However, after some time, the Khambus of the Darjeeling Hills started using wood to make coffins and it inevitably became the practice within the Rai Community.

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<sup>77</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai; Orient longman Limited,1999)90-91

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>79</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005) 64

<sup>80</sup> Subba, op.cit. 91

Eventually, they stopped using stretchers made of bamboo to carry dead body. All the relatives of the deceased used to mourn and at that time they could not eat salt, oil and meat.<sup>81</sup>

Death rituals were performed on two parts, such as Mishia and Shilum Kattu. At first Mishia was performed, it was the time when the dead body was buried or cremated. It was performed immediately after the death or after two days, if they had to wait for some relatives. Then the Shilum Kattu was performed. It was practiced mainly on the third day for women and fifth day for men and in case of the Kulung Rai (sub-clan of Khambu Rai), it was performed within a month.<sup>82</sup> After these two practices, the family had to conduct *dowa thomma* where the role of shaman was very important. While performing *dowa thomma*, they would call the soul of the deceased for the last time in order to ask the unfulfilled desires of the deceased.

- **MISHIA**

Mishia was performed immediately after the death of the deceased and it continued even after the burial or cremation. This was considered as the first death rites and a Rai priest known as Mangpa/Nokchhol/Nakchung was summoned on this day. The visitors to the house of the dead were required to bring one unit of grain and liquor, but this was not mandatory; it would depend upon the will of the people. The kinsmen had to bring buckwheat, liquor and beer as an offering in the name of the deceased. Siblings were not allowed to take/eat anything brought into the house by the outside members. While performing this ceremony, on the one side, the priest would address the dead and make him understand that he is no longer alive. While consoling a soul, he would offer some buckwheat and beer in his name. Two more priests would assist him to complete this ceremony. On the other side, some people would prepare commemoration flag that was needed during the time of cremation and some would prepare themselves to attend the funeral ceremony. Before bringing dead body to the

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<sup>81</sup> J.R Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008)329

<sup>82</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005) 64

graveyard, some people had to go to the venue which was fixed for the cremation. After reaching the venue, one of them had to shoot an arrow and there only they had to dig the grave for the dead.

It was a ritual among the Kirat Khambu Rai that they had to buy the land for the cremation and even if the deceased was the owner of the land, it was necessary to pay at least one rupee in order to complete their ritual. A grave had to be six feet deep and a large stone was placed at the head of the grave where they would kill cock or hen by throwing it on the slab. In case of male, cock was killed and in case of female, they had to kill a hen. They would put one leg of the chicken inside the grave and had to ritually throw away the remaining part of the chicken. Some of the Rais used to keep even the wings of the chicken under the armpits of the deceased. Four men would bring the dead body to the place by carrying it on a stretcher made of bamboo known as Chelemse which was tied on three sides.<sup>83</sup> After that, corpse was placed in the grave to rest and the entire member present there had to put three handfuls of earth (soil) on it. The priest would offer all the rice and coins on top of the grave and the flag was then kept in a right position. After completing this, the entire party would proceed to the nearest spring water where they would clean themselves thoroughly. Then, they would proceed to the deceased's house. With this, the cremation would be complete.<sup>84</sup> After the cremation was done, the main family members of the deceased were asked not to eat oil, salt, etc. till the completion of the Shillum Kattu . This is how the Mishia was practiced by the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills.

- **SHILUM KATTU**

Shilum Kattu was the purification ceremony for the family of the dead. In case of women, it was required to perform on the third day and in case of men it was perform on the fifth day.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 64-65

<sup>84</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong: Dr Dipankar Rai, 2021)101-102

On this day, the soul of the deceased was placed in the vicinity.<sup>85</sup> During this ceremony, all the relatives and closed ones were summoned and the presence of the Kirat Khambu Rai priest was mandatory.<sup>86</sup> This ceremony was performed in order to purify the entire family and relatives of the deceased. On the day of Shillum Kattu, early in the morning, they had to put food in one of the baklakhung made of banana leaves and they had to keep that baklakhung in the grave. If the grave was in a distant area, they could also keep a baklakhung in a way between home and the grave. They had a strong belief that the soul of the deceased would come and eat the food that was kept on the way or beside the grave. This is the reason why they used to follow the ritual of placing the food either on the grave or somewhere in between. Side by side, they would also try to console the soul of the deceased so that the soul could rest in peace.<sup>87</sup>

Next, a small cup known as baklakhung made of banana leaves was given to the entire family and relatives. After that, they were required to stand in a circle until the Rai priest would ritually chant in Mundum language and talk to the soul of the deceased. It is said that, the Rai priest by chanting Mundum would show the way to the souls of the deceased.<sup>88</sup> Then, in one of the baklakhung, the chief mourner would make a mixture by mixing oil and salt. All the mourners had to dip their fingers in that mixture and put that mixture into their mouths. In this way they could purify themselves and it was only after performing this ritual mourners were allowed to take/eat oil and salt.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Rai, op. cit. 64-65

<sup>86</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai; Orient longman Limited,1999)91

<sup>87</sup> C.B. Rai (Purva Sikkim, Suraj Rai and C.B Rai (Dakchin Sikkim), *Kirawa Ridum Kopsam* (Aakhil Kirat Rai Sangha Sikkim) 85-87

<sup>88</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambu (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong: Dr Dipankar Rai, 2021),102

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 102

At the end, the family member of the deceased had to offer some money ((Dakshina) and had to anoint the five virgin girls in order to purify themselves.<sup>90</sup> The people present there were served with food and drinks in memory of the departed souls. With this, the purification ceremony was held to be completed.

- **DOWA THOMMA**

During the night of purification day, Dowa Thomma used to take place. A shaman known as Mangpa/Jhakri/ Bijuwa was needed to perform dowa thomma. In fact, only shamans could perform this ritual by chanting Mundum and by doing so, they would persuade the soul of the deceased to reside in the Samkhalung/Suptulung (sacred place of the Rai people made up of three stone).<sup>91</sup>

Originally, shamans used to start this ceremony from the evening of the purification day and it used to continue for three nights. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries such kind of dowa thomma for three nights was not possible as there were no such knowledgeable shamans as in those of the ancient times. Therefore, they started practicing dowa thomma for only one night.<sup>92</sup> It is said that shamans had the power to communicate with the world of spirits and with this power they would call the soul of the deceased. Shamans after being possessed by the spirit of deceased during dowa thomma, would ask him (deceased soul) about his unfulfilled desires, the cause of his death and some aaprimusa (prophecy) about his family.<sup>93</sup> When the priest was in trance, the village elders who could understand the priest's language had to ask the soul of the deceased about the causes of death and many other things related to death and aaprimusa (prophecies) about family and the whole village.<sup>94</sup> At the same

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 102

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 103

<sup>92</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai; Orient longman Limited,1999)92

<sup>93</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok: Shivika Enterprise, 2005) 66

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 66

time, shaman, along with the village elders would try to console the souls of the dead to go to Samkhalung (sacred hearth). But it was very difficult for shamans to persuade the soul to reside in the Samkhalung and it used to take a lot of efforts and time to make the deceased soul understand the situation. However, by making number of promises at the end, he would make the deceased soul understand about the situation and persuade him or her to reside in the Shamkhalung.<sup>95</sup> While performing this rite, the family had to offer fowls/ a whole pig, foods and drinks (everything liked by the deceased soul) to the soul of the deceased.<sup>96</sup> This is how the entire death ceremony used to be practiced within the Kirat Khambu Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hills.

## **FESTIVALS**

According to Mundum (oral form), the religious scripture of the Kirat Khambu Rai, Sakewa/Sakela used to be their main festival. People used to celebrate this festival twice in a year: one is in the month of Baisakh (May to June) which was known as Ubhauri and another one was in the month of Mangsheer (Nov to Dec) which was known as Udhauli. Both this Ubhauri and Udhauli were celebrated on the full moon. As there were many languages within the Rai Community, this festival were provided with various names on the basis of varieties of language and they were: - Sakanwa, Tosi, Chasok, Chasuwa, etc. However, in general it was denoted as Sakewa/Sakela.<sup>97</sup> Dongwangna was another name for Ubhauri; likewise, for Udhauli it is Dongdawa.<sup>98</sup> In some of the literature, it is mentioned that Sakewa denotes Ubhauri and Sakela denotes Udhauli but in point of fact, these two used to be two different words with the same meaning. Originally, the term Sakenwa had been used by the people to denote this festival where sa means tali vey (weapon), ken means siliken,

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<sup>95</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai; Orient longman Limited,1999)92

<sup>96</sup> Rai, op. cit. 66

<sup>97</sup>Prakash Rai, "Socio- Cultural Values and Ecological awareness in Sakela Sili in Kirant rai in Nepal"<https://doi.org/10.3126/listud.v34i01.39537> (January 2021)164

<sup>98</sup>Nirdosh WalaKhamchha, *Sakewa Ek Parichai*. (Naya Baneshwar, Kathmandu: Mani Prasad Kulung, 2049)10

manakhom (instrument) and wa means water and soloya. However, after sometime, gradually, people started using the term Sakewa or Sakela for this festival.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it would be wrong to say that Sakewa stands for Ubhauri and Sakela stands for Udhauli.

Since the Kirat Khambu Rai was a nature worshiper, this festival was related to nature where they used to worship land, sky, river, forests, crops, etc.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, during this festival, Paruhang and Sumnima, along with ancestors were also worshipped. For the Kirat Khambu Rai people, Paruhang and Sumnima were their creators. Therefore, the important features of this festival were the worship of Paruhang and Sumnima (devoted god), nature and ancestors. The Khambu Rai used to celebrate these festivals with great ardour. Ubhauri was celebrated before the cultivation of fields, where prayers were made at Sakewa thetlum for good rain, good harvest and good sunshine along with the good health, peace and prosperity for all the villagers. This festival was started on the day of full moon of Baisakh and it would continue for 15 days. On the other hand, Udhauli was celebrated after the harvest where prayers were made to thank God for a good harvest and a suitable climate and it would start from the day of the full moon of Mangsheer and continues for up to 5 days.<sup>101</sup> People of other communities preferred to call this festival as Bhumi Puja.<sup>102</sup> To celebrate this festival, the Rai people of all ages belonging to different villages used to gather in one particular area and they had to follow the command of Nakcho who would start the festival.<sup>103</sup> Nakcho was a Rai priest of Sakewa shrine; they were specially meant for Sakewa.

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<sup>99</sup> MC Rai (M), Retired Head Master of Sepi Primary School, Writer in Nepali and Khambu language, Age- 80, Address Champdarha Sepi, Rimbick, 10/04/2022, interviewed by Shristi Rai

<sup>100</sup> Siva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rai of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok :Shivika enterprise, 2005), 45

<sup>101</sup> Nirdosh WalaKhamchha, *Sakewa Ek Parichai*. (Naya Baneshwar, Kathmandu: Mani Prasad Kulung, 2049), 10

<sup>102</sup> Worrel Kumar Bain, "An Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal, India," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6, 2018, 1052-1053

<sup>103</sup> Dik Bahadur Rai "The impact of Modernisation on the traditional Sakawa Sili festival in the Rai Kirat community of Nepal: A case study of the Rai community" M. Phil Thesis, University of Tromso, 2012, 31-32



It was not easy to become Nakcho, there were some specific rules that needed to be fulfilled in order to become a Nakcho.<sup>104</sup>

Folk dance popularly known as Sili used to be the instrument to celebrate this festival.<sup>105</sup> In order to perform Sili, music was needed; hence music was another instrument to celebrate this festival. Music was made from local traditional instruments such as siliken, manakhom and poong and they had to use these instruments at the very beginning of the festival. The main purpose of using these instruments in the very beginning of Sakewa was to remove the evil spirit from the spot. Especially siliken and manakhom were considered important instrument and at their high sound; the big swords and other small weapons were demonstrated. This was performed at the very beginning of ceremony. After this, priest would start his worship and at the same time, people would also start dancing to the high beats of the siliken and manakhom.<sup>106</sup> While performing folk dance or Sili, people had to make circle and they had to follow the hand and footsteps of their leaders Sili Mangpa (Male) and Sili Mangma (Female). It was mandatory for all to follow the movements of the Sili Mangma or Sili Mangpa.<sup>107</sup>

There were various types of Sili with several movements. Each movement of Sili had its own meaning and had been interpreted differently by different people. Since this festival was related to nature, its Sili or dance steps used to exhibit the association between the living person and the creature.<sup>108</sup> Among all the Silis, Chasum Sili was considered the most popular as it depicted the method of paddy plantation. It also used to demonstrate paddy harvesting,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 45

<sup>105</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rai of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok Shivika enterprise, 2005), 45

<sup>106</sup> Parbat Kumar Rai, "Influence of Political Changes in The Rituals of Kirant rai Community," [khatiwadasom@yahoo.co.in](mailto:khatiwadasom@yahoo.co.in) (July to December,2013), 76-77

<sup>107</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rai of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok Shivika enterprise, 2005), 45

<sup>108</sup> Dik Bahadur Rai "The impact of Modernisation on the traditional Sakawa Sili festival in the Rai Kirat community of Nepal: A case study of the Rai community" M. Phil Thesis, University of Tromso, 2012, 33-35

husking, cooking and eating of cooked rice. There was one Sili that requires no particular movements of hand and leg and this form of Sili was known as Paklewa Sili. This form of Sili was very simple. Narowa Sili was another form of Sili that used to exhibit the activities of creatures like animals and birds. For instance, the function of the Sili was to show how the crane used to raise their chicks and teach them to fly freely in the open sky, how they would huddle together into two circles. Sili further used to showcase the technique of the birds that confuses the hawk and save them from it by flying in a clockwise and anti-clock wise direction. <sup>109</sup> This is how the Sili steps used to showcase the activities of living beings and their relation with nature.

This was not only the moment of enjoyment for the people of the community; rather it had many more significance in the field of culture. During this festival, people used to wear cultural dress of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community which helped them to preserve the importance of the Rai's traditional dress. The people belonging to the community of the Rai used to have great respect for nature, which is also one of the fruitful results of this festival. They used to consider nature equal to God. Further, it demonstrated the harmonious relationship among the Rais belonging to different places. Though there were various sub tribes with different languages within the Rai Community, their unity could be seen during this festival as all the Rai people of different sub- clan used to gather at a particular place and celebrate this festival with great joy. This was the festival through which different sub tribes of the Khambu Rai people could show that they belonged to the same community. This was celebrated every year which helped the Rai people to transfer their culture from one generation to the next.

Wachipa was cooked for the people during this time which was considered the traditional food of the Rai Community. Wachipa was a mixture of rice and chicken and in addition to

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<sup>109</sup> Rai, op.cit. 45

this, the ash of feathers of hen was an important ingredient without which one could not make Wachipa. Therefore, Khambus had chance once or twice in a year to eat their traditional food. In this way, they could never forget about their tradition. Later, people started giving more importance to their hygiene, so some of the Khambus started using bitter-tasting flower instead of ash from feathers to make Wachipa. And vegetarians also used flowers to make this traditional food. Despite the fact, this festival was very important not only as a festival of joy but as a festival that held the importance of all aspects of the culture of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community.

### **CHANGES AND CONTINUITY IN THE CULTURES OF THE KIRAT KHAMBUS RAI OF THE DARJEELING HILLS**

All the above mentioned were the important cultures and festivals of the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling hills which used to be practiced since its inception. However, with the coming of the Britishers, these practices seem to have undergone a gradual change as people came under the influence of new colonial system. In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century with the effort of colonial officials, number of educational institutions, hospitals, libraries, railways, etc. was constructed in the Darjeeling Hills. These developments had both positive and negative impact on the lives of its people including the Kirat Khambu Rai. Within the Kirat Khambu Rai, the changes have been found mainly in its cultural practices such as birth rites, marriage rites, death rites and festivals. For instance, in birth ceremony some of the changes appeared. With the facilities provided by hospitals, gradually, the birth of a child started taking place in the hospitals especially in case of rich and urban people and doctors would cut the umbilical cord of a child instead of mother. In case of rural areas the birth of a child used to take place at home only. It was only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most of the childbirth of both the rich and poor started taking place in the hospitals. With the education provided by the new educational institutions, they became more rational which was reflected in their

practices. For instance, they stopped considering the husband's or wife's house as the right place for the birth of a child. All the near and dear ones were allowed to meet new mother and new born child in the house as well as in the hospitals. Not only that, the elderly women of the family or relatives was allowed to touch and take care of the new born child and mother. The birth rites used to be performed only after the discharge of both newly born baby and mother from the hospitals. Though birth of a child used to take place in the hospital yet their house were considered as ritually polluted. But all the relatives could meet both child and mother and even they were allowed to take care of both child and mother in their house and later they had to purify themselves on the purification day. After the birth of a child, they used to practice purification day and naming ceremony on two different days but later they started practicing both the ceremony on the same day. It was probably either due to lack of knowledge or lack of money. Originally while performing weaning ceremony, bird's beak was used by the people to feed the first rice to the newly born baby by performing weaning ceremony, but slowly Khambus learnt to use silver coin and silver spoon for the same. Another practice, Tith tama also became very rare among the Rai of the Darjeeling Hills in the later days. From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they also started celebrating birthday which was completely a western culture. Despite of all these changes, they continued to practice all their birth rites.<sup>110</sup>

The establishment of tea plantation, construction of roadways, railways, etc. due to effort colonial officials opened many job opportunities in the Darjeeling Hills as a result, large number of people have been migrated to Darjeeling Hills. Such huge- migration from different areas led to inter-cultural interaction therefore, it would not be wrong to consider

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<sup>110</sup> MC Rai (M), Retired Head Master of Sepi Primary School, Writer in Nepali and Khambu language, Age- 80, Address Champdarha Sepi, Rimbick, 10/04/2022, interviewed by Shristi Rai

this as the contributing factor for the change in the Rai culture.<sup>111</sup> Some of the Kirat Khambu Rai had very little knowledge about their own culture due to which they sometimes used to mix up their culture with the culture of those outsiders. And they started practicing the mixed-up cultures in the name of the Rai culture. This is how migration played a very important role in bringing changes within the cultures of the Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills.

Even in the marriage system of the Rai Community, few changes have been taken place but their fundamental idea remained the same. Though the inter-caste marriage was allowed within the Rai Community, initially, most of the marriages used to take place within the same caste but due to the new ideologies of raj some of the Khambus stopped giving importance to endogamy which gave rise to the inter-caste marriages. If the bride was from another caste, the marriage would take place outside the house not in front of Samkhalung/Suptulung (Sacred hearth). However, after the completion of marriage, bride was allowed to enter sacred hearth in order to introduce her to the ancestors. Though she was introduced before sacred hearth, unfortunately, she could not perform any rituals related to it. In case of inter caste marriage, it would be very difficult for the girls of different communities to adopt and follow all the rituals of the Rai Community. Therefore, they would end up mixing the cultures of two communities. That is why inter-caste marriage can be regarded as another factor for the change in the culture of the Rai Community.<sup>112</sup>

In the colonial era, most of the people of the Darjeeling Hills including the Kirat Khambu Rai became educated as the result, some of the form of marriages of the community such as marriage through persuasion and marriage by force gradually became invisible. Moreover,

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<sup>111</sup> Yozana Rai, "Social Structure, Culture Values and Transformation, A Study of Rai Community In Sikkim" M. Phil Dissertation, Sikkim University 2012, 28

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 47-48

Chekulama form of marriage lost its importance that may be because of the influence of marriage system of the Nepali community.<sup>113</sup>

There was also a change in the death ceremony of the Kirat Khambu Rai. For instance, bamboo stretchers were the original tool to carry the dead body which was replaced by the wooden coffin.<sup>114</sup> Likewise, there was a change in the performance of *dowa thomma* which originally used to perform for three consecutive nights. However, the shamans of the later days could not perform *dowa thomma* for three nights; therefore it had been reduced to one night.<sup>115</sup> These changes were probably because of the lack of knowledge among the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills about their own culture.

Most of the Khambus of the Darjeeling Hills were not aware of their festival and they used to celebrate the festival of Hindu i.e., Dussera and Diwali as their main festival. Essentially, these two were not the original festival of the Rai people. Later, during the colonial rule when the Khambus became educated, the interested educated khambus started finding out the original festival of the Khambu Rai. It was during these times, they came to know about their traditional festival. As a result, most of the Khambu family gave up the practices of Dussera and Diwali and they started celebrating *Sakela* or *Ubhauli* and *Udhauli* as their main festival.<sup>116</sup> Still some of them used to celebrate both the festivals of Hindu i.e., Dussera, Diwali and the *Kiratis* i.e., *Sakela*. Though they became aware about their festival due to the efforts of the elders and educated Khambus, yet, most of the younger generation came under the influence of westernization therefore, they did not focus on the real meaning of *Sili* steps of *Sakela* instead they used to enjoy *Sili* by wearing their ethnic dress and ornaments. In other

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<sup>113</sup> MC Rai (M), Retired Head Master of Sepi Primary School, Writer in Nepali and Khambu language, Age- 80, Address Champdarha Sepi, Rimbick, 10/04/2022, interviewed by Shristi Rai

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> T.B. Subba, *Politics of Culture; A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* (Chennai; Orient longman Limited,1999)92

<sup>116</sup> Yozana Rai “Social Structure, Culture Values and Transformation, A Study of Rai Community In Sikkim”M. Phil Dissertation, Sikkim University 2012, 49-50

word, they failed to realise the importance of Sili, festivals, traditional dress, ornaments, etc. There was also a change in the instruments which were used during Sakewa festival.<sup>117</sup> This was not because the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills at that time had knowledge only of modern instruments but due to the non-availability of traditional instruments of earlier times. Therefore, along with the colonial ideologies, the non-availability of the traditional items and negligence of the Khambus towards their own culture had played a vital role for the change in the Khambus culture.

Lastly, the important factor that brought changes in the cultural practices of the community was the adoption of new religious beliefs and practices. It is said that, in the educational institution established by the evangelists, the entire students of the missionary school were forced to read Bible which eventually led to the conversion of their religion into Christianity. Not only this, the Kirat Khambu Rai also came under the influence of Hinduism and they started claiming themselves as Hindus instead of Kiratis. Some of the people were not even aware about the religion of the community known as Kirati religion. The Kirat Khambu Rai who adopted another religion, completely forbids their traditional cultural practices; instead they started following the cultural practices of the religion they later adopted.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, it can be said that the Kirat Khambu Rais, one of the inhabitant of the Darjeeling Hills used to have unique cultures based on Mundum which had made them visible as distinct ethnic group in the Darjeeling Hills. The cultural practices including birth rites, marriage rites, death rites and festivals followed by the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed few changes in their practices that had been occurred over a period of time due to new colonial policies and lack of knowledge among the Khambus about

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<sup>117</sup> Mr Bijoy Kumar (M), Retired Asstt. Head Master of the Darjeeling Government High School, Present Chairman of Darjeeling District Primary Educatio GTA, 61years, Address- Bodhi-Khim 6 Convent Road Haridashatta Darjeeling – 734101, 7/4/2022 – interviewed by Shristi Rai

<sup>118</sup> MC Rai (M), Retired Head Master of Sepi Primary School, Writer in Nepali and Khambu language, Age- 80, Address Champdarha Sepi, Rimbick, 10/04/2022, interviewed by Shristi Rai

their own culture. However, such changes did not entirely alter the cultural practices of the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills. Hence, with some modification and changes, the people of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community of the Darjeeling Hill are still practicing all the above-mentioned rituals. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the originality and continuity of their culture exists through which they can be identified as the Kirat Khambu Rai.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **MUNDUM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN THE RAI COMMUNITY**

Mundum is the oral literature of all the Kirati people such as Limbu, Rai, Yakha and Sunuwar. From the very beginning, all the Kirati people used to follow Mundum to practice the entire ritual and ceremonies of their daily life and still the performance of all the rites are based on Mundum. However, Mundum of all the Kirati people is not the same; some variations have been found in the content of the Mundum of each community. For instance, variations can be seen in the pronunciation of the term Mundum by Kirati people such as Limbu pronounced it as Mundhum, Yakkha pronounced it as Munthum, Sunuwar pronounced it as Mukdum, Bantawa (sub clan of the Rai Community) pronounced it as Mundum, Chamling ((sub clan of the Rai Community) pronounced it as Mundum and so on.<sup>1</sup> Apart from this, there were much more dissimilarity and accordingly, the cultures of all the Kirati people are found different. However, this study deals only with the Mundum of the Kirat Khambu Rai community highlighting its significance as a moral code of life, scientific knowledge and its relation with Suptulung (sacred hearth/shrine) of the Kirat Khambu Rai.

#### **MUNDUM**

Like any other Kirati people, the Kirat Khambu Rai also has their distinct scripture known as Mundum which is in oral form. It is regarded as the philosophy of the Kirati Khambu Rai. Many writers have provided its meaning and they prefer to say it as a religious scripture of the Kirat Khambu Rai. However, it deals not only with the Kirati religion (Rai religion), it also deals with the moral code of life, activities, behaviour, values, cultures, traditions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Salahuddin Akhtar Siddiqui “Socio System of Kirat of Nepal – An Empirical Mini- Study with special reference to Kirat Limbu” *Canaos*, Volume 4, n.2, nov 2016

Kirati Khambu Rai people.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is a sort of adviser or mentor to its people. Through Mundum, all the rituals were conducted which they need to practice in their daily life in order to maintain their identity as the Kirati Khambu Rai in their respective society. They also take Mundum as their social law. They practice all the rituals from birth until death under the guidance of Mundum.<sup>3</sup>

According to Chemjong, “the word Mundhum means the power of great strength and Kirat people of east Nepal take it to be a true, holy and a powerful scripture.”<sup>4</sup> In his opinion Mundhum is of two types such as Thungsap Mundhum and Peysap Mundhum. Thungsap Mundhum is considered the original one and it emerged directly from the mouth before the writing has been introduced. This is termed oral Mundhum. Another one i.e., Pesyap Mundhum is in written form and it deals with religion.<sup>5</sup> The Kirat Khambu Rai accepts the same definition of Mundhum provided by Chemjong (Limbu) but they do not believe in the division of Mundhum given by him. For the Kirat Khambu Rai there is no division of Mundum as they believe that its original form is oral practice, therefore they consider wrong to divide Mundum into two sections.<sup>6</sup>

The language of Mundum is totally different from the languages spoken by the Kirati Rai people. Its language is considered a divine language, the language which is used to address superhuman beings.<sup>7</sup> Only the shamans and few knowledgeable elders can understand this language. Generally, there are two types of Mundum language - Ritual language and Shamanic language. Ritual language is used in various kinds of rituals and only ritual experts

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<sup>2</sup> Jaya Shiwahang, *Kirat Mundum Bhitra Bigyan*, ( Pradip Khambu Rai, Kurseong, 2016) 1

<sup>3</sup> Shanti Devi Rai, “ Suptulung as Indigenous knowledge of Kirati Rai people” *Siddhajyoti Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 1, 139

<sup>4</sup> Iman Singh Chemjong, *History and Culture of Kirat People*( Kathmandu, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, 2003) 18-19

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 18-19

<sup>6</sup> Ichchha Purna Rai, Balthasar Bickel, Elena Lieven, Goma Banjade, Martin Gaenzle, Manoj Rai, Netra Prasad Paudyal, Novel Kishor Rai, Sabine Stoll and Toya Nath Bhatta, “Mundhum: A Case Study of Chingtang ritual Language,” (January 2009), 21

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 22

chant this language. Ritual experts include shamans, knowledgeable people, elderly people, etc. and they use this language while performing rituals in order to address the deities and the ancestors. One should not get confused between ritual language and Mundum language because ritual language is just one part of Mundum language whereas whole Mundum are not in a ritual language.<sup>8</sup>

Shamanic languages are those languages which are used by shamans. The knowledgeable person or priest cannot be considered as shamans. No ordinary man or woman can become shaman; it is believed that shamans are the chosen people by God. Shamans are totally different from the common people; they are believed to have acknowledged spiritual power to communicate with the world of spirits.<sup>9</sup> They engage themselves into the acts of supernatural beings in order to fulfil certain objectives related to society. For instance, healing the illness of the people, predicting future, they can even possess their body with the spirit of dead to ask them about the cause of the death and their unfulfilled desire and delivering the message to the family of the dead, etc. A person having such kind of spiritual power and knowledge and most importantly, the one whose body is possessed by divine beings can only become shaman. When a person is possessed by the deific being, he/she starts to chant in a special form of language and that language is known as shamanic language. This language is different from the Kirat Khambu Rai language and ritual language.<sup>10</sup> Through Mundum only, shaman can talk with the soul of the dead.<sup>11</sup> According to Mundum, souls are of two types such as good soul and bad soul. The good soul is the most influential and powerful spirit of knowledge and wisdom. It is believed that good spirit itself is the creator of bad spirit. However, bad soul or the evil spirit is less powerful as

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 22 -23

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 22 -23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 22 -23

<sup>11</sup> Santi Devi Rai, "Indigenous Knowledge in Mundum and Suptulung" *AMC Journal, Volume 2 Number 1(2021)* 85

compared to the good spirit.<sup>12</sup> The role of good soul is very important in the life of the Kirati Khambu Rai people as it protects their house like a guardian angel by surrounding it. It protects them from the evil spirits and misfortunes. However, to receive such guidance from the good spirit, the Kirat Khambu Rai has to follow all the rules and regulation of Mundum. According to Mundum, if any of the Rai people fails to follow its rules and regulations, they will have to face various disasters in their journey of life. Therefore, Mundum plays a vital role in the life of the Kirat Khambu Rai.<sup>13</sup>

### **CREATION AS PER MUNDUM**

Like any other religious scripture, at first, even Mundum talks about the creation. According to Mundum, Tagera Nengwa Bhu Mang was the first one to appear on earth spontaneously. Before that, there was a large empty space. Tagera Nengwa Bhu Mang, the Almighty God, first created water. He then disguised himself as Maakmaak Naga or serpent and entered into the water.<sup>14</sup> After taking the shape of a serpent, he started breathing and then he formed a cloud and then he entered the cloud. From the cloud, he created other creatures. In the very beginning, he created those creatures that could crawl. These creatures then entered the water and started spewing mud. Hence, the soil was created but it was in muddy state, as a result, the whole earth was in muddy state. To change the muddy state of the earth, he created the sun (ball of fire) and gave heat to the earth from above. Similarly, the creation of vegetation was also followed. According to Mundum, first grass in the earth was Pitcha sam or Dubo grass. After that, langwai was grown which was followed by many other plant species. In the same way, small creatures and then big creatures were created. And then he realised the need of someone to look after all these created things. Therefore, he created Poruk Mee

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<sup>12</sup> Iman Singh Chemjong, *History and Culture of Kirat People*( Kathmandu, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, 2003) 19-21

<sup>13</sup> Santi Devi Rai, "Indigenous Knowledge in Mundum and Suptulung" *AMC Journal, Volume 2 Number 1(2021)* 85

<sup>14</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus (Rais) Their Retold Accounts*, (Kurseong:Dipanker Rai,2021), 127

Yongbhamee Mang and ordered him to create human beings. He was the first one to make the human being from metals like gold, silver, etc. But unfortunately, when the new creature was asked to speak, he did not respond. He approached his creator about the situation and his creator helped him to make a human being. Therefore, under his direction Poruk Mee Yongbhamee Mang again created another human being form the mixture of five elements such as water, wind, earth, fire/ light and sky. The second created human being was in a form of female. Fortuitously, the newly created female began to speak as soon as she was offered five types of flower by Poruk Mee Yongbhamee Mang. This is how the human being was created as stated by Mundum. According to Mundum, the female was the first human being on earth; therefore, women are always treated well in the Kirat Khambu Rai Community.<sup>15</sup> Mangdema or Buri Khok mang or Buriboju Hangma etc are considered as old goddesses or mother by the people belonging to the Rai community. Along with this it also talks about several topics such as:

- “Histories of the origin of the ancestors.
- Beginning with the primal creation of the universe.
- The emergence of natural and cultural orders.
- Continuing to the settlement of the ancestral territory.
- It also concerns the proper means of communicating with ancestors and ritually maintaining the order they have established.
- It evokes a way of life predefined by the ancestors, a self-enclosed world, rooted in the past.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 127-128

<sup>16</sup> Shiva Kumar Rai, *The Kirat Khambu Rai of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas*, (Gangtok Shivika enterprise, 2005), 73

## MUNDUM AS A MORAL CODE OF LIFE

The significance of Mundum of the Kirat Khambu Rai community lies in the fact that it provides a way to its people to lead a pure and simple life. For instance,

- Firstly, it teaches the people how and why anger should be controlled. According to Mundum, if anyone knowingly does violence out of anger, his family has to suffer from many unfortunate things. However, at the same time Mundum also shows the way its people to come out of such misfortunes. Accordingly, to avoid that kind of suffering, the Kirati Khambu Rai has to call Mangpa/ shamans. These Mangpa then resite some mantra /Mundum and accordingly they will practice some of the rituals. This is how they will end all the rituals in the river believing that their anger and bad deeds have flowed into the river with the help of Mangpa.<sup>17</sup>
- Secondly, as stated by Mundum, no person is allowed to open the lock, knot or anything that is locked by another person. If anyone unlocks anything without their permission, it is said that they will not have children in the future. It has to be unlocked by the person himself who locked the things. Even in their absence, they have to permit someone else or if they failed to permit any one, then the responsibility goes into the hand of the elderly people. In such cases, the elderly people of the village have to give permission to any person to unlock the locked things.<sup>18</sup>
- Thirdly, Mundum does not allow the Kirat Khambu Rai people to take over other's property and if they do so, the mental health of their children will be affected or they will not have children in the future. They are not allowed to work even on the

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<sup>17</sup> Jaya Shiwahang, *Kirat Mundum Bhitra Bigyan*, ( Pradip Khambu Rai, Kurseong, 2016) 1

<sup>18</sup> Ibid,3

boundaries of their own areas, for that, they have to ask for help from the people belonging to another caste.<sup>19</sup>

- Fourthly, according to Kirat Mundum it is not good to hurt the sentiments of the parents. If someone makes their parents cry, their soul will have to face problems reaching their spiritual realm after death. In other words, those children will not get salvation. Therefore, Mundum always guides the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai in these things so that they could make their parents happy.<sup>20</sup>
- Fifthly, the Kirat Khambu Rai people are not allowed to take prey made by another person. If they do so they have to suffer from various punishments. According to Mundum, if any one takes prey of another person, his wife has to go through miscarriages and sometimes they even die. If anyone found prey in their area hunted by another person, then also they will not have full rights over that prey. They have to give prey to its master/hunter or both of them have to share it or in case of the absence of a hunter, he can share it with the other people. Mundum does not allow them to take whole prey alone.<sup>21</sup>
- Sixthly, Mundum says that if any woman after the death of her husband becomes pregnant with another man, she has to go with that person leaving her children of former husband. Under such a situation if any child lost their life in absence of their mother, then it is called that child met with Aswikriti. This implies that if a parent has an extramarital affair, the child may occasionally have to face death.<sup>22</sup> However, the women can take their children to the second husband if there is no one in the former husband's family to look after them. Likewise, if both the wife and husband are still

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid,3

<sup>20</sup> Ibid,3-4

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 6-7

alive and have extramarital affairs, one of the partners would have numerous setbacks. According to Mundum, women of the Rai community had to remain pure as they were given the position of Goddess. Hence it is very wrong, according to Mundum, if the women of the family are found having extramarital affair. In such cases, it is mandatory to purify their Kul and home because failing to do so will force them to endure a variety of illnesses, some of which may even be fatal.<sup>23</sup>

All these are the rules and regulation conducted through Mundum. Besides, many more values are there within the Mundum of the Kirat Khambu Rai people. It may be inferred from all these rules and restrictions that Mundum is trying to keep its people under control in order for them to live moral lives. Mundum undoubtedly strives to reduce the occurrence of crime in the life of the Kirat Khambu Rai people by imposing severe punishments or by threatening severe punishments. From the aforesaid account, one can see how they respect women. Although Mundum give a position of Goddess to women, it is probable that Mundum is trying to control the women by giving them such valuable status within the community. When discussing chastity, it refers primarily to the purity of women rather than men. It is therefore, possible that they want the women of the community to adhere to certain boundaries and constraints. Nevertheless, it is proved that Mundum not only talks about the ancestors, origins, culture, religion but at the same time, it also teaches values to its people. It serves as guidance for every Khambu individual to have a decent life on earth.

#### **MUNDUM AND ITS SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE**

It is confirmed by Mundum that there is an immense store of art, religion, behaviour and custom. In addition to this, the Kirat Khambu Rai people moreover claim the existence of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 6-7



science within the Khambu Mundum. Many instances can be found within Mundum which can prove the existence of science within the Khambu Mundum. For instance,

- Firstly, it is true that Mundum is as old as the Kirati Khambu Rai people. Since its inception Mundum had given a definition of life that is similar to the definition provided by science. According to the Khambu Mundum, the main characteristics of life are that it must have respiratory system and it must move and cry. Therefore, if something possesses all these things, it can be said that it has life. A similar definition for life is given by science too. Hence, it can be said that there is a science within Mundum.<sup>24</sup>
- Secondly, as stated by Mundum, Paruhang and Sumnima are the creators of the Kirat Khambu Rai. Mundum says that ginger is a sign of Paruhang and Sumnima's hand. Therefore, ginger plays a vital role within the Kirat Khambu Rai Community. It is not possible for any Shamans/Mangpas to perform any rituals without ginger. Without ginger, no rituals can be conducted within the community. With the help of ginger shamans can predict the future, can heal illness and even they can deal with misfortunes and evil spirits. Therefore, shamans, also known as Mangpas are revered as the healer of the soul, illnesses, injuries, and misfortunes. It is evident that during illness people prefer to consult shamans before they visit doctors. With the help of ginger, they can identify positive and negative things. During any rituals, while chanting Mundum, they have to cut down a ginger with the traditional small sickle. When it is cut by shamans, its on- piece facing downward is considered as the sign of Paruhang which means the positive sign and the symbol used for this is (+). It's another piece facing upwards is the sign of Sumnima and it is considered as the negative sign. A symbol used for the negative sign is (-). Shamans can prophesy the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 60

future of the people by using these two signs. It is said that in order to prophecies things, shamans need to cut the ginger at least two times, if two pieces falls under the same sign i.e., positive-positive or negative – negative, then they consider this as bad sign. According to Mundum one positive and one negative sign indicates a good sign. These signs are used by the shamans while conducting ceremonies and rituals and they are using this signs since their inception. These same signs are again used by scientists in mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc. and interestingly both positive and negative signs are equally significant in science too.<sup>25</sup>

- Thirdly, the enzymes which are used to make yeast have already been known to the Kirat Khambu people with the help of knowledge of Mundum. Intoxicating juice is very important within the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai. It is used in all the rituals of the community. In order to make intoxicating juice, yeast is needed. Earlier they used to make this yeast with the help of herbs and all this knowledge they got from Mundum. On the other hand, scientists used two important products i.e. zymase and invertase to make yeast. This again proves that the Kirat Khambu Rai people already had the knowledge about yeast like that of science. From this also it can be assumed that Mundum know science or science existed within Mundum of the Kirat Khambu Rai.<sup>26</sup>
- Fourthly, the Kirat Mundum also talks about distillation process as a science. According to science, distillation is the process in which liquids convert into vapour and again that vapour converts into a liquid while heating. Similarly within the Khambu Rai community, to make intoxicating juice, fermented rice (rice beer/local alcohol) is needed. They can ferment any crop like rice, millets, wheat, etc. In order to ferment, at first, they have to cook rice, millets, wheat, etc. and spread into a clean

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 61-62

<sup>26</sup> Ibid,64

surface. When it becomes cold, they have to stir yeast around the cooked rice and mixed it properly. After that, they have to cover the vessels with clothes and leave it in a warm place for 4-5days. It would be ready when the strong smell of fermentation starts to come out. Then again they have to pour the fermented rice into a round bottom flask. Within that round bottom flask, they have to put a small vessel and then they have to place a big vessel or delivery pot above the round bottom flask. In between the process, they need to change water of the delivery pot. Cloth is also required to cover an area between delivery pot and round bottom flask so that vapour could not go outside. This flask is then kept above a hearth and it is necessary to give continuous heat to the flask. With the help of heat, the vapour comes out from the fermented rice which touches the bottom of a delivery pot and again this vapour falls in the form of water into the vessel within the round bottom flask. It is necessary to change the water of the delivery pot at least two times during its process. Therefore, in this process, one can see the conversion of liquid into vapour and again vapour into liquid with the help of heat. This exactly happens in the process of distillation. Therefore, it can be proved that Kirat Mundum already had knowledge about distillation through the method of making rice wine. It would not be wrong to say here that Mundum knew about distillation process even before science.<sup>27</sup>

These are the few instances in Mundum that illustrates the existence of science within Mundum.

### **RELATION OF THE MUNDUM WITH THE SUPTULUNG**

Although Mundum talks about religion, moral code of conduct, cultures, science, etc. yet its importance cannot be completed without the Suptulung (sacred hearth) or Mundum is incomplete without Suptulung. According to the principle of Mundum, Suptulung is very

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid,67,69

important for all the Kirat Khambu Rai people. There is an interrelation between Mundum and Suptulung. Suptulung is a hearth made up of three stones that all the Kirat Khambu Rai people keep in their houses except Christians. In the Nepali language, Suptulung is called 'Tin Chulo' (three stone).<sup>28</sup> These three stones are provided with various names based on the languages within the Rai Community. Among all the names, Papalung, Mamalung and Rimlung are the most commonly used term for these stones by the people. Papalung is kept in the left side and it represents all the male ancestors of a family along with Paruhang (diety). The departed souls of the male member of the family who died of natural causes are kept in this stones. This is the place for the male ancestors and they all are remembered in all the auspicious and inauspicious rituals of the family. They are considered signs of energy, intelligence, wealth, prosperity, etc. Next is the Mamalung, a place meant for the female ancestors. It is kept in the north-west direction. Like in case of Papalung, here the departed souls of the female member of the family who died of natural death are given a place to reside. Even this stone is equally respected as papalung and all the female ancestors that reside in this stone are remembered in all the fortunate and unfortunate happenings of the family. Rimlung is another stone that is a sign of neighbors, relatives, etc. It is kept at 60 degrees in between Papalung and Mamalung, this is how it connects the two stones. People believe that this stone protects them from the unfortunate happenings like accidents, attacks from the evil spirits, etc. Like Papalung and Mamalung, Rimlung is also respected and remembered in all the rituals of the Kirat Khambu Rai. These three stones together form the Suptulung.<sup>29</sup> It has a very important role in Mundum, its importance was so much that without Suptulung, rituals of Mundum cannot be performed. Initially, Nepali people belonging to all the communities used to keep a hearth in their household but a hearth known as Suptulung of the Rai Community is completely different and has a great significance.

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<sup>28</sup> Shanti Devi, "Suptulung as indigenous knowledge of Kirat people", *Siddhaiyoti Interdisciplinary Journal Volume 1*, 139- 140

<sup>29</sup> Shiwahang, op. cit. 71- 73

When people became more advanced with the technologies most of them stopped keeping it however, hearth/Suptulung is still exists in all the Rai houses as it is important for the religious purposes. Since the presence of Suptunlung in the Rai house is very crucial, in the urban areas the Khambus found it difficult to maintain it, so in consultation with the Shamans they began keeping oil lamp in place of lung.<sup>30</sup> Even though there is fundamental shift in the way Suptulung is maintained in a Khambu house in metropolitan regions, no changes can be seen in its importance and functions. All the rituals of the Khambu Rai have to be conducted in front of Suptulung. All the prayers, confessions are done in front of the Suptulung by reciting Mundum. Mundum is considered the religion-cultural philosophy of the Khambu Rai and Suptulung is considered a holy place. Therefore, no one is allowed to speak any dirty words before this holy place. If they do so, they have to ask forgiveness in front of Suptulung and they also have to take vow in its name. At the same time Mangpa or shaman is also very crucial because only Mangpa have the power to chant Mundum. That is why all the rituals of the Khambu Rai are performed by Mangpa by chanting Mundum. These Mangpas are chosen by the God. Therefore, it is only Mangpas who get supernatural power spontaneously with the help of which they can practice all the rituals. With that power they can even heal the people. It is significant to note here, before starting any rituals; they have to pray with pure hearts before Suptulung. After that only they can start any ritual/ceremonies of the Mundum.

Thus, Mundum plays a vital role in the lives of the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai. It is noted that Mundum contains the entire life cycle, from conception to death. The birth ceremony, marriage ceremony, death ceremony, and other ceremonies cannot be performed without Mundum. Even the Kirat Khambu Rai's celebration of festival cannot be observed without the knowledge of Mundum. The aforementioned account makes it clear that only the shamans have the power to recite Mundum; as a result, along with

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<sup>30</sup> Balram Rai, *Khambus(Rais) Their Retold Account*, (Kurseong: Dipanker Rai, 2021),120

Mundum, the role of shamans is also seen as being significant in the lives of the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai. Additionally, the significance of the Suptulung is demonstrated by the fact that all the ceremonies have to be performed in front of it. It is stated that if Mundum can be considered the guide of the Kirat Khambu Rai people in all the religious and non-religious matters, the Suptulung is their holy place where all the rituals are carried out.<sup>31</sup> Here, the mutual reliance on one another to complete any rituals of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community is evident. Therefore, to perform any of the rituals within the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai the presence of three is mandatory and thus the importance of the three can be realized in the life of the Kirat Khambu Rai. Even though all three play a crucial role within the community, Mundum is the most important because it is the source of all the knowledge.

Although Mundum is very essential for the community, they are shifting to other religion or they are influenced by the philosophies of other religions such as Hinduism and Christianity. Those who initially practiced Mundum have been increasingly transitioning to other religions. One of the contributing factors for this is the lack of knowledge among the Rai people about their own culture based on Mundum. Moreover, due to the absence of language homogeneity among the Kirat Khambu Rai, the Mundum of those people have not yet been documented which prevents people from learning about them through writings.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is crucial to write Mundum so that people can have knowledge and its importance can remain at least within the community. Through Mundum, the culture of the Kirat Khambu Rai can be transmitted from one generation to other. It is through Mundum only, the identity, culture and language of the Kirat Khambu Rai can be maintained. Without Mundum, the Kirat Khambu Rai cannot execute any of the rituals that serve to distinguish them as

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<sup>31</sup> Santi Devi Rai, "Indigenous Knowledge in *Mundum* and *Suptulung*" *AMC Journal*, Volume 2 Number 1(2021) 85

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 139-140

Khambus. Therefore, it is very important to recognize the significance of Mundum early on because if not, they risk losing their individuality.

Hence, Mundum being a religious literature, provides ethical code of conduct, scientific knowledge, etc. to its people. It would not be incorrect to say that Mundum attempts to prevent its people from committing crimes in some way by warning them about the severe punishment while educating them the moral code of behavior. The study of Mundum reveals its deeper knowledge of science, demonstrating that its understanding extends beyond the creation, cultures, religion, etc. of its people. When dealing with the culture and religious practices of the Kirat Khambu Rai, Mundum alone is insufficient. Suptulung (sacred hearth) and shamans are required to complete all the rituals and ceremonies conducted through Mundum as most of the ceremonies are performed by shamans in front of Suptulung. However, it is unavoidable that the knowledge of Mundum comes first as this is the one that governs all of the Kirat Khambu Rai's rites and norms from birth until death. Thus, all the knowledge of religious practices, ceremonies, science, moral values, etc. from Mundum accentuates the importance of Mundum within the community.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The history of the different ethnic groups of the Darjeeling Hills has rarely been addressed by the writers of the Darjeeling Hills due to a lack of literary as well as archaeological sources. However, on the basis of the available sources, the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai, an ethnic group of the Darjeeling Hills, reveals essentially three views regarding their original homeland and among them two views traces their origin from Nepal. The sole difference that can be traced between the two theories is the time period and the reason for migration. The third view does not discard the two views but rather believes in the migration of the Kirat Khambu Rai from Nepal, however, it does not stick to the point that claims all the Kirat Khambu Rais are from Nepal. It believes in the existence of some of the Rais in the Darjeeling Hills from the very beginning. This has been proved by the census conducted in Sikkim in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this census, the existences of the Kirat Khambu Rais were found to be numerous in Sikkim before 19<sup>th</sup> century which ultimately proves their existence in the place. If the Kirat Khambu Rai migrated from Nepal to Sikkim only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it is not possible to trace the huge population growth of the people belonging to the community during the same time period. Interestingly, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so there is no harm in saying that the Rais have been part of Darjeeling since then. Not only this, there are few interpretations among the Khambus regarding the name of the Darjeeling. They believe that the term ‘Darjeeling’ has been derived from the Khambu dialect. From one of the interpretations, it is known that the Kirat Khambu Rai people gave a name ‘Tajeelung’ to a place where there existed a large flat stone, somewhere close to present Chowrasta. The term ‘Tajee’ means conversation and ‘lung’ means stone and this ‘Tajeelung’ later became Darjeeling. Another interpretation that



discusses about the derivation of the term Darjeeling from the Khambu dialect states that they used to rest and exchange life experiences on a large stone in Darjeeling. They used to refer to this location as 'Dowalung.' This term evolved over time to become 'Durjeeling' and it became Darjeeling during the colonial rule. Another interpretation based on folklores states that there was a very large stone somewhere in the centre of the Darjeeling town, and the Kirat Khambu Rai preferred to call it 'Dewalung' which means grandfather of all rocks. Therefore, the Khambus believe that these above mentioned term evolved to become Darjeeling in the later days. If the term Darjeeling has been derived from the Khambu dialect, then there is a high possibility that they might be the indigenous people of the Darjeeling Hills. Despite the fact, it is not possible to note down the exact number of sub-castes under the Kirat Khambu Rais as there are many and more are emerging due to marriages into a particular clan or living in a particular place. These sub-castes are again divided into Pacha and then into Sameit. The Pacha and Sameit plays a very important role in the marriages, death rituals, etc. Especially in the case of marriage, if both the Pacha and Sameit of the partners match, then the marriage is not possible between them.

Apart from the subject of the migration and sub-castes, the account of the history of the Kirat Khambu Rai also throws a light on the great personalities belonging to the Rai community whose contribution towards the development of the Darjeeling hills is worthy of appreciation. They have immensely contributed to the development of the Darjeeling Hills in the fields of economy, education and politics. Great personalities such as Bhagat Bir Rai, Buddhiman Rai, Narbhup Rai, Dakman Rai, Ram Singh Rai, etc. enormously contributed in the field of Economy. The fruitful result of their hard work is the establishment of the tea plantations, constructions of roads, buildings, bridges, etc. which opened work opportunities for the local people of the Darjeeling Hills. Education prospered in full swing in the hands of great intellectual figures such as Hangjeet Rai, Indramaan Rai, and Shiva Kumar Rai. Hangjeet Rai

was one of the founding members of the Gorkha Library. In the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a rise of great Nepali writers like Indramaan Rai, Indra Bahadur Rai, Shiva Kumar Rai, etc. whose work of literature was the mirror of the then - Nepali society, economy, culture and politics. Further, the books were kept in the Gorkha Library for the local people to have easy access to it, which served to enhance their knowledge about the history of their people. In the arena of politics, they served for the welfare of the people. Their decisive aim was to resolve the fights among the people of the Nepali community. In this way, through politics, they fought for the rights of the Nepali people and became successful in raising the political consciousness among them including the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai. The contribution of the Kirat Khambu Rai, therefore, can be hugely felt in almost every aspect of the society for the development of the Darjeeling Hills. Thus, it will not be wrong to say that their contribution towards the development of the Darjeeling Hills shaped the future of the place.

While dealing with the Kirat Khambu Rai people, it is important to note down that they used to have distinct cultural practices through which they can be identified as the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills. The few significant cultures through which they can be identified include the birth ceremony, marriage ceremony, death ceremony and the important festivals. It is true that, the people belonging to the other communities of the Darjeeling Hills also practiced life cycle ceremonies of an individual but the norms and the processes of the Kirat Khambu Rai people are found to be different from others as it is based on the Mundum. Moreover, the celebration of Sakewa, important festival of the Kirat Khambu Rai, is found to be absent in the cultures of any other communities of the Darjeeling Hills. Therefore, from all the norms and practices followed during the performance of the life cycle ceremonies of the Kirat Khambu Rai and their festivals, Sakewa, they can simply be identified the Kirat Khambu Rai of the Darjeeling Hills.

The practices such as birth rites, marriage rites, death rites and important festivals followed by the people of the Rai community displayed their antiquity; however, few changes have occurred in the culture due to various factors like colonial policies, demographic change, modernization, etc. In spite of the fact, the change does not depict the complete depletion of their original culture as they had Mundum with them all the time, which provided them the required knowledge about their cultural rites. The changes that were found within their cultural practices are as follows: the four rituals that were being followed during the birth ceremony were reduced to three, considering the financial status of the people of the Kirat Khambu Rai. Earlier, the naming ceremony and purification ceremony were performed on two different days which was reduced to one. The main reason for bringing forth the change in their culture is the non-availability of traditional materials used by the people of earlier times. For instance, a weaning ceremony was performed using the peak of a bird in order to feed rice to a baby for the first time, with the gradual change of the society with modernity, it became difficult to find the peak of a bird, and as the financial condition of the people started improving, it resulted in the use of gold and silver coin as replacement for the bird's peak. Likewise, when dealing with marriage ceremony also, we can see the originality in their marriage practices yet with some changes. As it is known to all, in the colonial era, most of the Kirat Khambu Rai people became educated which resulted in the gradual decline of some of the crucial form of marriages, such as marriage through persuasion and marriage by force. Even in the Jari form of marriage, some differences can be seen. Initially, this form of marriage was made to humiliate the second husband of the wife by the former husband; however, the punishment was reduced to the payment of fine. Half the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai were unsatisfied with the payment of fine as the worth of a woman was defined by money. For the same marriage, there was no harsh punishment for the women, apart from being asked to return the possession gained from the

former husband. At the same time, the reason behind not giving same punishment to the women of the community is not clear. According to Mundum woman was the first creation on the Earth, probably, they didn't find it appropriate to severely punish women. Another possibility for not giving same punishment to women is that of men dominating society. Men dominating society in the sense that, though women occupied respectable positions within the house, when things come for the community, the decision was taken by the men of the community. Perhaps, while taking decision for the jari form of marriage they gave no importance to make such kind of punishment for the women as men were considered responsible for eloping women to secretly get married. Despite this, it would be wrong to say here that the men of the community used to treat women as a weaker section of the community. There were other practices like Ukhundi, where women would receive the previous position at home after the divorce, which vividly mirrors the good status of the Khambu women within the house. At the same time, while taking any decision in the house, the consent of the mother was given the first priority. Therefore, it can be said that the women of the Kirat Khambu Rai community somehow enjoyed a good position within the community. Similarly, some changes can be found in case of death ceremonies as well. For instance, earlier, the dowa thomma (one rite under death ceremonies) used to be performed by the Mangpa (shamans) for three nights but the shamans of the later times could not perform it for three nights. It is noted that these Mangpas were less knowledgeable as compared to the previous one; therefore they started practicing for only one night. In spite of being devoid of the complete knowledge, the shamans of the later times didn't stop themselves from performing the ritual that they have been following since earlier days; they performed well, hence providing satisfaction to the family of the deceased. Apart from the ceremonies related to the lifecycle of an individual, festival was also one of the crucial parts of their culture. Most of the Kirat Khambu Rai people were unknown to their own festival-

Sakela, as a result, they ended up giving more importance to the Hindu festivals of Dussera and Diwali rather than their own traditional festival. They spent more time, energy and money to celebrate the Hindu festivals of Dussera and Diwali. Favorably, the elderly people and the interested people became successful in finding the importance of their original festival and in spreading acquaintance about it among the people; as a result Khambus started giving importance to Sakela. Even after being aware of their traditional festival, the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai could not stop themselves from celebrating the aforementioned Hindu festivals. Though there were few changes within their birth rites, marriage rites, death rites and festival, yet these rites which were based on Mundum still reflects the originality of their cultures and is still following by the people of the community of the Darjeeling Hills.

The fact that the word Mundum is used so frequently in this study indicates how important the role of Mundum in the life of the Kirat Khambu Rai people. Mundum is the religious literature of the Kirat Khambu Rai and other tribes including Limbu, Yakha and Sunuwar. However, the Mundum belonging to different tribes has different features in it, which serves to differentiate them from one another. Therefore, it can be said that the Kirat Khambu Rai has a distinct identity based on their own scripture i.e., Mundum. All the religious rituals were performed by the Kirat Khambu Rai referring to Mundum. Without the knowledge of Mundum, it is not possible for them to perform any of the rituals. Apart from being a religious literature, Mundum discusses about the ethical code of conduct by which people are instructed to survive on the earth without committing a crime. Therefore, the knowledge of Mundum plays a vital role to teach its people about the values of life that not only helps to decrease the crimes rather it also helps to live a simple life and to maintain discipline within the community. Further, it talks about the creation, ancestors, importance of women, etc. Since Mundum sheds a light on the value of women, the people belonging to the community

of the Kirat Khambu Rai consider the birth of a girl child to be very lucky for the house. Moreover, the Kirat Khambu Rai believes that there is a science within their Mundum which can be justified through the explanation of the process of distillation, definition of the life, the logic behind the positive and negative signs and so on. Therefore, from this, it can be observed that the knowledge of Mundum is not limited to the Kirati religion and cultures rather it have broader concept especially of science from the very beginning. Through the scientific knowledge of Mundum, the Kirat Khambu Rai people can make some items required during the ceremonies and they even can make some of the medicines to cure the minor illness of the people. Thus, the role of Mundum is very significant in the lives of the people belonging to the community of the Kirat Khambu Rai as it guides them in their day to day accomplishments, religious or non-religious.

Though Mundum contains everything that is essential for the Kirat Khambu Rai, it is crucial to understand how it is connected to Suptulung (sacred hearth). Mundum and Suptulung are deeply inter-reliant that the importance of the two can be understood only if both the things are present at the same time. All the rituals of the Kirat Khambu Rai from birth until death are conducted through Mundum in the presence of Suptulung. The Suptulung is thought to be home to all the departed souls of the Kirat Khambu Rai. There is a strong belief among the Kirat Khambu Rai that their ancestors used to protect them through Suptulung and the entire ancestors (male/female/relatives) that reside in the stones are remembered while conducting all the ceremonies, auspicious and inauspicious. The language of Mundum has been found completely different from the ordinary languages hence, it is considered as the language of the God. Therefore, in order to chant Mundum, a shaman is needed who is known as Mangpa in the Khambu dialect. As a result, it may be claimed that Mundum, Mangpa and Suptulung play a vital role for the completion of any of the ceremonies within the community.

Though Mundum plays a significant role in the life of the Kirat Khambu Rai, half the people are not aware of it. Thus, instead of focusing on their original rituals they are found adopting the rituals of other religions like Hinduism and Christianity. This is probably one of the causes for the decreasing significance of Mundum in the daily life of the Khambus. It is said that if the Kirat Khambu Rai fails to realize the importance of Mundum before time, it will be difficult for them to perform any of their rituals and they will even end up losing their identity in the upcoming days. The dominant reason behind the decreasing importance of Mundum is that it is undocumented. It is reportedly learnt that the people of the eastern Nepal are making continuous efforts to write down the Mundum, but their work is still incomplete. Despite all the draw backs, it is very important for the Kirat Khambu Rai to realize the significance of Mundum, since it serves as the foundation for all of their as rituals, rules, ceremonies, festivals, etc. giving them a unique identity as the Kirat Khambu Rai in the Darjeeling Hills.

Although, the migratory history of the Kirat Khambu Rai, their contribution towards the development of the Darjeeling Hills, their cultural practices in general, were the main topics of this study, additional research can still be done in some areas of the community, such as the cultural practices of a specific sub-caste, the position of women as reflected in the Mundum, Kirati religion, etc. In short, it can be said that by adhering to cultural practices, rules and regulation conducted through their oral scripture Mundum, the Kirat Khambu Rai community of the Darjeeling Hills is able to preserve its identity from its inception till the twenty-first century.

## GLOSSARY

Aaprimusa - Prediction of the past, present and future.

Bhakha - Third stage of initial marriage under arranged marriage.

Baklakhung - Pot made up of banana leaves which are known as duna in Nepali.

Bhumi – Earth

Bebook - Small wicker basket.

Bongpa - A leader who represents the groom's side while performing the marriage ceremonies.

Bookok - Flesh of a pig.

Bulukhum - Term used by them for the container made of brass or silver.

Chankhi /Bhuri Puja - A ritual for the protection of pregnant women and baby in her womb

Chelemse - Stretcher made of bamboo to carry a dead body.

Chokhauni - A purification ceremony to purify the separation that takes place between married couples.

Choowakhim - If the birth of a child takes place in the maternal house, it is known as Choowakhim.

Dabey - Traditional weapon like knife, Khukuri in Nepali language.

Dowa Domma - A funeral ceremony where the shamans possessed his body with the spirit of a dead and convince him/her to reside in the spiritual realm of the community.

Dowah - Life experience



Jarikal - Compensation that needs to be paid by the second husband to the former husband of his wife in any form.

Jati Rai Uhti Kura – Different sub-tribes within the Rai community have different languages so Nepali people used to say Jati Rai Uhti Kura (The more sub-castes of the Rais, the more languages)

Kombi - Traditional tool /Khurpi

Kongpi - A leader who represents the groom's side while performing the marriage ceremonies.

Kul - A place made for the departed soul of the Community to reside. Place where the departed soul of the ancestors of the Kirat Khambu Rai resides.

Kumari - Virgin or unmarried women.

Langwai – A type of broom grass.

Lastur - Set of eight copper vessels which are given to the bride's family from the groom side while performing the final rite of arranged marriage.

Makamundari / saya Mundari – Personal gifts from the groom side to the bride which includes traditional ornaments and dresses.

Mamalung – One of the stone of the sacred hearth of the community which is meant for the female ancestors of the community to reside after their death.

Mangpa - Shamans

Manakhom – Traditional Cymbals

Mishia - Death ceremony that is performed immediately after the death of a person for his/her cremation or burial.

Multhekei - Second stage of the initial marriage within arranged marriage.

Nakcho- Shaman meant for festival Sakewa

Pacha – Sub-tribe

Pancha/Salumsong - Comprising of five elderly Kirat folks who sits to solve the problem within the community.

Pani chalney jaat - Term used by the people for the caste whom they think are not the untouchables.

Papalung - One of the stone of the sacred hearth of the community which is made for the male ancestors to reside after their death.

Paruhang and Sumnima - Deity of the Kirat Khambu Rai Community.

Potlung - Traditional necklace made of red beads used by married women of the community.

Pitri - Ancestors

Poong – An instrument made of horn of buffalo which is used during Sakewa

Rakshi/arrak/hengma - Liquor/cultural drink

Rimlung – One of the stone of the sacred hearth of the community which is made for the departed soul of relatives, neighbours.

Sakewa Thetlung- Place made to perform Sakewa.

Sakumbo Kura - Blessing song for the newly married couple at the end of initial rite under arranged marriage.

Sameit - Last division of the Rai caste that helps to know about the family lineage.

Samkhalung – Sacred hearth made of three stone.

Saptenhang - Village deity

Sapten Sengma - Name of the rituals that is needed to perform in order to appease the village deity in case of agreed or consented form of marriage through elopement process.

Savet Dotma - The rites of changing relationship in Nepali it is called saino phernu.

Sayahangmi - Groom's wedding procession which goes from his house to the bride's to bring the bride in his house.

Sayemtam - Traditional necklace made of green beads.

Saye Sangma - A girl who sits next to bride during wedding.

Saye Sangpa - A boy who sits next to groom during wedding.

Shillum Kattu – A name given for one of the death ceremony

Sili - Traditional dance of Sakewa

Siliken – An instrument used for the Sakewa.

Sodhani - First visit of the representatives of the groom to the bride's home where they will make request for the marriage.

Soloya – Gourd used by the Kirat Khambu Rai people to hold water.

Soyachangma - The lifting of head by offering new clothes to both the mother and a child during purification ceremony after a birth of a child.

Suptulung - Sacred hearth made of three stone (Samkhalung and Suptulung are the two different Rai terms for the same sacred hearth of the community)

Tali Vey – Bow and arrow.

Tanfey - Traditional saree of the Kirat Khambu Rai community.

Tangdungma - A piece of cloth used by the married women of the community as waistband.

Tankhi – Traditional ribbon braids of the Kirat Khambu Rai community.

Thar - Sub-tribe

Tith Tama – A ceremony specially meant for a girl child where she will receive some of the important traditional item like saree, scarf, braids, etc.

Ubhauri - Name of the festival which is performed before the cultivation for good result.

Udauli - Name of the festival which is performed after the harvest to thank God.

Ukhundi - A ritual to purify the women after her separation from her husband and this custom will give them the previous position at their house.

Wachipa - Traditional food of the community

Washihunma-Khukshihunma - A ritual where the father of a bride will give the jurisdiction of his daughter to her husband.

Yamlung - Traditional blouse of the Kirat Khambu Rai community.

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