

## INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CHANGES IN THE RITUALS OF KIRANT RAI COMMUNITY

**Parbat Kumar Rai**

Tribhuvan University  
khatiwasom@yahoo.co.in

### **Abstract**

*The cultural practices and traditional values of the Kirant Rai community are influenced by a series of political changes and external aggression. Though, Kirant Rai community has a distinct culture, rituals and philosophy based on Mundhum practiced from time immemorial. The political changes have a negative impact in the present context. One of the indigenous aborigines of Nepal are the Kirant Rai community but their perishing culture and external aggression have created an atmosphere where enrich traditional values and identities are all in the verge of extinction. This writing is dedicated in serving the endanger rituals and practices professed by the Kirant Rai community, especially the Bantawa Rai's . Otherwise, which might be dislocated and nullified in the year to come.*

**Keyword:** Mundhum, Paruhang, Sumnima, Baaktaangchhuk, Honkumaang, Ubhauri, Udhaul

### **1. Introduction**

Culture and mother tongue are the identity of each caste and community. Their different tongues and cultures show the different identities. Otherwise, it would be difficult to classify with each other among various castes. So, different castes, ethnicity and communities have different identities of culture and tongue. In this sense Kirant Rai community, have their own identity, mother tongue and traditional values. But their culture and mother tongue are influenced by every

political change in Nepal. It means we can understand that political system and ideology is also a factor for the development of culture and mother tongues. Political ideology and system are guided the government where as government forms it's programme and policy about the culture, religion, language etc. It should take rigid policy or flexibility. From the unification period of Greater Nepal to the establishment of Republican Democratic political changes the Kirant Rai's culture and rituals have been greatly transformed by its changing ideology and policy.

Kirant Rai community is the aborigine inhabitant of eastern Nepal, especially in the hilly region like, Bhojpur, Khotang, Okhaldhunga, Ilam etc. Bantawa and Chamling languages are the major mother tongues of the Kirant Rai communities. A larger section of the population (132583, out of 620004) of Kirant Rai community profess the Bantawa language (National Population Census, 2068, Table No: 20, 21, pp.144 and 164). Kirant religion is the main religion of this community, which is based on Kirant Mundhum (interview with B.B.Rai). Paruhang and Sumnima are the devoted deities. They worship Paruhang Sumnima, ancestor and nature also (Rai, 2067, p 2). They are also guided in religion and culture by Kirant Mundhum (Ibid:13). The ceremony from the birth to death is functioned or guided according to principle of Mundhum. Mundhum is a solemn guideline of Kirant Rai community, which is existed in unwritten form. Kirant Rai has some rituals and cultures, which are, celebrated every year namely "Chachhuwa", "Maang" and "Sakewa". "Chachhuwa" is celebrated in the month of Bhadra, "Maang" is celebrated in the month of Marga and "Sakewa" are celebrated twice in a year.

The objectives of this article are to explore briefly the rituals existing in the Kirant Rai community and to analysis

briefly the influence of political changes in the community. This research article explores the originality, development and changes occurred in the Kirant Rai community. It does not cover the rooted culture and traditions of all Kirant Rai community. It is limited especially to Bantawa Rai community. During the writing process of this article both primary and secondary sources have been used. The primary sources of information include interviews and site observation. Published books, articles and intellectuals specifications are taken as secondary sources of information.

## **2. Some rituals**

### **Chachhuwa**

It is the main ritual of Kirant Rai community. "Chachhuwa" is celebrated in the month of Bhadra every year. In this ceremony the deity is worshipped in the memory of the ancestors. The material of worships are a female chicken or hen, new ripen crops like, paddy, maize, millet, ginger etc. Not only the crops but also beef and meat of deer have been used in this worship (Rai, 2067:47). Beef was compulsory in this ceremony as a material of worship but nowadays it is prohibited from the state, so it is limited in to expression in series of worship because of fear of punishment from the stateside. Slaughtering of ox and cow is legally forbidden in the law of Nepal, so we can't use beef as material of worship in this rituals (an interview with Gauri Bdr Rai, priest of the ceremony). Bitten rice made from new paddy, rice cooked from new paddy, jaand (fermented alcohol made locally and the materials specially used are millet and yeast). Jaand must be clean and pioneer to use which means jaand from closed pot or virgin pot, which have not been used before should be used for the ceremony. The act of worshipping is done by sacrificing a hen and offering its blood and liver to the ancestors, who have died. The Kirant Rai's culture, the newly

harvested crops are not eaten before offering to the ancestors especially by the main guardian as a tradition. The priest, who is called "Maangpa" completes the performance of the ritual after worshipping the ancestor of family deity and share the dishes and items of worship as boon and Prasad with all the people attending in the ceremony.

### **Maang**

"Maang" is another ritual of Kirant Rai communities. It is called "Pitri" or senior generation in other words. "Maang" is celebrated in the month of Marga every year. When Kirant Rai farmers harvest all the crops and enter into their houses, they celebrate to express their gratefulness to nature, family deity, ancestors and self for the good harvest of the year. This occasion is called "Maang". In this ceremony, they offer big cock as the materials of worship. First, they worshipped their family deity and their particular ancestors and secondly, they worship the serpent named "Saatnaanchinko". Not only serpent but also they worship river and water and water god named "Honku Maang". Finally they worship to self in the name of "Baaktaangchhuk". 'Baak' means 'shoulder', 'taang' means 'head', and 'chhuk' means 'hand' in Bantawa language. The reason behind the worship of shoulder, head and hand is the vital role played in due course of cultivation and the faculties of workmanship to self. The Kirant Rai communities during such occasion invite their neighbors, friends and relatives and share their happiness by dining together, where varieties of meat items, rice, alcohol is served by the family members. Fixed priest named 'Maangpa' does all the series of these ceremonies.

### **Sakewa**

Sakewa is a festival associated to nature and agriculture of Kirant Rai Community. Kirant Rai Bantawa and Chamling celebrate this ceremony like, Sakewa and Sakela

respectively. In other words, Sakewa is also called Baali Puja and Chandi Puja. The worship of devoted god(Paruhang and Sumnima),nature(Sun,wind,water and land or Earth) and Serpent are major features of this ceremony. This festival is worshipped twice in a year in the name of Ubhauri and Udhauli. Ubhauri is celebrated on the Baishakh Purnima every year and Udhauli is celebrated on the Mangsir Purnima every year. The villagers confirm a place for gathering and after that they reach there to worship the god collectively. The priest is called "Duwang", and its place is called "Sakewa Thaan". In the same way, the priest is called Duwang in Bantawa language.

During the occasion, people use the materials like solewa, katuria, aarawaa, bechhup (it means jaand, wine, rice and ginger respectively),seedlings of paddy, seedling of maize, cock, piglet as the items of worship. Cock and piglets are sacrificed and the blood and liver is offered to the Earth and deity (Sampang, 2066:66). They pray for good farming and production in Ubhauri ceremony and they express gratefulness and happiness towards devoted deity for good harvest of the year at Udhauli ceremony. In this ceremony the Duwang selects from among the villagers within the Rai community, who have divine power. The indicator of divine power is not in exact form but it depends on faith to him, who is senior and honorable. On this ceremony, all the villagers gathered along with the priest at a particular spot, where series of worship is done. Worship is completed within the music and timing of Dhol, Jhyamta and Poong. Dhol and Jhyamta are drum sets made from local materials and Poong is a horn of wild buffalo. It is the musical instrument of this ceremony. There is the tradition of demonstrating big swords and other local weapons within the high sound of Dhol-Jhyamta at the first moment of beginning of worship in order to drive away to

evil spirits from the surrounding devoted god and particular spot.(source: site observation by the researcher).

Then, the priest begins series of worship on the one side and on the other side all people begin to dance on the timing of Dhol-jhyamta surrounding the worshipping spot. All items of dance are called "Sakewa Sily". "Sily" is the name of dance item. Generally Sily is divided into three groups, like one is concerned with farming system, which is called also "Chaasum Sily"; second is concerned with activity of wild life and third is concerned with civilization process of human beings. Sily concerned with farming means beginning of agriculture system, in which the dancer have demonstrated the action of ancient form of farming from the savage stage towards modern form of farming system. Ancient form of farming are started from forest, which is called *khoriya fandne* in Nepali terminology. Not only starting of ancient agriculture system but also from beginning to end of a crops cycle is demonstrated one by one in this Sily. It is the typical characteristics of this ceremony. Secondly, Sily is concerned with activities of wild life. Wildlife means different animals and fowls. They have demonstrated the various acting of different fowls and animals by dancing. Thirdly, Sily is concerned with the acting of daily life of human beings, which is related to civilization and modernization process. They not only perform the dance but also they sing in loud voice collectively. The lyrics of song should have an example:"Sakewa Sily se-le-le, Nachera jaau hai pe-le-le; Dolocumma, soi-soi-la" (Site observation of dance by researcher).

The ceremony lasts for almost ten days after the *Baishakh Purnima* as well as *Mangsir Purnima*. Within ten days they have to do all series of worship, sharing of happiness individually and collectively, enjoy and get-together of various dishes. The ritual is completed within three days

and the remaining days are the period to share happiness collectively among all villagers but not only within Kirant Rai community.

In short, to pray for good harvest, express gratefulness and sharing of happiness towards the devoted god and nature, Kirant Rai community have organized collective worship among the villagers and perform the dance with song named "Sakewa Sily", which is generally "Sakewa Ceremony".

### **3. Political Influence in Rituals**

When small regional states unified politically into Greater Nepal, the enrich rituals of Kirant Rai's communities also assimilated within another culture apart from the Kirant culture. The formation of Greater Nepal and expansion of boundary not only merged the territories but amalgated the cultural trend and identity with other communities. Before the unification or expansion of Greater Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Kirant Rai community had been using beef as a material of worship in their rituals, not only in rituals but also Kirant Rai community had been using as a part of food in their dish (Yakkha Rai, 2055:120). After unification of Nepal formal law (Muluki Ain, 2069/2070:191 /192) bans the use of beef. This ban badly affected the traditional ritual system of the Kirant Rai community. During the panchayat period the Kirant Rai community was compelled to accept the slogan of "**Ek Bhasa, Ek Bhes; Hamro Raja, Hamro Desh**". Anyone breaching the slogan was punishable. It means the order of ruler was absolute and binding as well as divines. Kirant Rai community were compelled to say that they were Hindus, but they have practiced different Kirant religion, Bantawa language and traditional culture although they did not express their own natural feelings and religion due to the suppression of tyrannical Panchayati political system and ideology.

Even after the political change of 2046 B.S., constitutionally promulgated that Nepal is a Hindu nation (constitution of kingdom of Nepal, 2047: Article: 4). It influenced to Kirant Rai's culture, religion and tradition directly or indirectly. Abolition of monarchical system and establishment of the Federal Democratic Republican State created an open society and freedom of all practices. It has influenced over traditional religion, culture and rituals. Some influential group in the Kirant Rai community welcomed the change in traditional norms and values. For example Omnand and his followers wanted to substitute materials of worship and cancelation of priest system. According to them, they preferred fruits as the material of worship instead of traditional things. The inclusion and conversion of Kirant Rai's into another religious groups has resulted an adverse impact in the socio-cultural practices and ritual system. The adoption and conversion of Kirant Rai's community into Christianity has resulted adverse impact in to ritual system. According to them ancestors and rituals are devilish act. Therefore, it is abandonable for human beings, which are against of Kirant Rai's traditional culture and religion. It means political change gave religious freedom, which affected the development or erosion of culture, religion and rituals among different indigenous community.

#### **4. Conclusion**

"Chachhuwa", "Maang" and "Sakewa" are the unique rituals and festival of Kirant Rai community, but its originality and continuity is fast disappearing day by day due to changing political environment, in the name of unification, national integrity, social change, awareness and reformation. Each culture, ritual and religion is the property of the Nation, whose identity should be preserved and protected by the nation. So, protection of religion, culture and rituals from the state is

essential by formulating policies, budgeting and implementing the programme, which otherwise would vanish altogether.

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