



THE INDIGENOUS COSTUME & ORNAMENTS OF KIRAT RAI: AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract: The Kirat Rai community is a major tribal ethnic community like other communities in the Himalayas. (Post by Prabha Rai, 24 December 2021, Sikkim Project www.sikkimproject.org) Sumanima, Paruhang are Shiva and Parvati. They are pantheists and nature worshippers. Folk music connects people to their past in society and culture and keeps it alive. It gives cultural identity to each community. The Kirat Rai people have their own traditional culture and rituals. They are also rich in folk music, dance, songs and musical instruments. (Anita Rai 2023). Kirat songs (Chams) such as 'Rungpua Cham', 'Hakpare Cham', 'Yari/Hiari Cham', 'Saima Cham', 'Dolokupama Cham', 'Risiwa Cham', 'Hopma Cham' etc. are present in their folk music. A number of Chams (songs) are performed for different specific purposes on different occasions. (Rai Songs and Rituals www.tirakita.com)



the king yalamber at ranka, sikkim

INTRODUCTION

Among the indigenous peoples of the world, the Rai community belongs to the Kirat community. In terms of philosophy, 'Mundhum' is one of the religious-cultural aspects. (Rai S. D., 2020) They are the ancient inhabitants of eastern Nepal. Sumanima and Paruhang are their gods and goddesses, as are Shiva and Parvati. They are animists and nature worshippers. The Kirat Rai community has its own traditional culture and rituals. They are also rich in folk songs; some are well preserved from ancient times, some are dying and some are already dead. The Kirat people have preserved numerous songs such as, 'Rungpua Cham', 'Hakpare Cham', 'Yari/Hiari Cham', 'Saima Cham', 'Dolokupama Cham', 'Risiwa Cham', 'Hopma Cham' etc. which are sung for various purposes. Eastern Nepali folk music is mostly influenced by the Kirat Rai community. Some people have used and mixed Rai folk songs with Rai tunes and rhythms. We find many songs whose lyrics are not exactly in Rai language. Due to such confusion, it is essential to explore these areas for research. There are some Rai research and practice institutes in Sikkim.

Literature review

Subba, Jasraj (2015), 'History of Kirata Empire' (The third most Ancient Empire - Rediscovering and Reconstruction) -The study focuses the historical aspects, their background, the myths of all kirat people (Subba, 2015).

Chamling P.M (2009), 'Ridhum Thapsung' (Kirat rai jatika Sanskar haru)-This study focuses Mainly on the rituals and customs of kirat Rai community from born to death (Chamling, 2009).

Rai Prabhat Siwahan (2022), Paruhang Saptan (mangkhim uthghatan biseshagya) -In this book, there is one content/chapter about a few folk songs of Kirat Rai people of some categories of songs (Rai, 2022).

Chamling B. B (2010), 'Rodung Roongchaam'-In this book, the author has mainly focused on the Language, religion and culture of Chamling Rai. The author has put down almost all the details to make anyone understand as to how Chamling Rai makes house, setup fire-place, worship enlighten forefathers (Chamling B. B., 2010).

Rokdung B.B (2016), 'Thopribung' 'Ajambari' (collection of rai songs, poems and stories) -it comprised many songs, poems which is written in Rai language and also done translations (Rokdung, 2016).

The splendour of Sikkim (2007) (culture traditions of the ethnic communities of Sikkim)-Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim This book emphasizes the culture and traditions of various Nepalis communities (Sikkim, 2007).

Subba J.R (2011) 'History culture and customs of Sikkim'. This text attempts to study the history and origin of the ancient Kiratas, their population and their settlements, their food habits, family pattern, gender issues, community relationships, religion and belief system and their folk dance, songs and musical instruments (Subba J. , 2011).

History of Kirat Rai

The Rai are called Khambu, an ethnic name given by the Kirat king "Khamsoso Hung". They were landlords or zamindars and their rulers were given the title of Rai/Raya. The word Rai is found in the copperplate inscription of a Jumla king, Raja Punya Malla, in Shak Sambat 1259 (1338 AD) (House, 2007).



male rai people in sakela festival at darjeeling

The Kirat emperors established their empire in the Hindu Kush Himalayas around 2153 BCE through Emperor Yalamba Hung. They are now mostly found in the Solukhumbu, Okhaldunga, Khotang, Bhojpuri and Udaipur districts of Nepal. Prithvi Narayan Raja Shah conquered the Kirat Empire around 1831 BCE and he appointed village heads and gave them the responsibility of collecting taxes and land reforms according to the KIPAT system (a measure of land that existed mainly in the eastern part of Nepal). The Rai caste owned the Kipat land and were called Kiptiya and the rest of the tribes were known as Raiti. Later Prithvi Narayan Shah gave the title 'Rai' for the Khambu and 'Subba' for the Limbu.

Language of Kirat Rai

The Kirat Rai community is found in the hilly regions of Nepal and northeastern India, in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Assam. In Nepal and India, the language of the Rai community is called "Rai" or "Khambu Rai" and "Kiranti Rai" or "Bantawa". It is a subgroup of the Kiranti language family, a branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. There are varieties of the language, including Bantawa, Chamling, and Khaling. The Rai script is called "Rai Sirizonga". The language is usually transmitted orally within the community. People of Nepal (Rai) (2007) -Pilgrim Publications

Indigenous Costume and Ornaments of Kirat Rai

The Kirat Rai have their own distinctive traditional clothing and ornaments that reflect their cultural identity. The clothing and ornaments of the Rai community vary between different subgroups and regions:

INDIGENOUS RAI COSTUME

Nowadays men wear ordinary Nepali dress like Daura-Suruwal, Fenga, and women wear Phariya, Patuka, Chawbandi, (Piece of cloth around waist, Lunggi, Blouse and Cholo, Shawls etc.

Costumes are: **Shawls: Sapa shawl:** Made of home-spun cotton, this off-white shawl is worn by unmarried men and women, and also used as a blanket during winter.

Raiyat Kachon: A significant shawl used by Tangkhul (a sub-group of Rai) male and females, especially by chiefs and important persons during ceremonies, and as a bridal shawl.

Luirim shawl: An important shawl used by men in the Tangkhul Naga society, also known as "Ritimand" in the Tangkhul dialect.

Other garments: In earlier times, men would drape shawls around their bodies as upper garments.

The Rai people are known for their Jhakri tradition, where shamans play a role in healing spirits, especially during weddings and funerals.



picture 1



picture 2

Picture (1) Taken by Chandra Chamling Rai, Date: 24/12/22, Time: 10:54, Place: Dooars, Venue: Birpara, High school ground, Travelling mode: Bus

Picture (2) Taken by Anita Rai, Date: 27/5/23, Time: 01:50, Place: Ranka, Venue: Paruhang Saptan, Mangkhim.

Male dress- Dawra surwal and Fenga

Female dress - Chawbandi cholo , Phariya (sari), Dhaka shwal



some photographs with the artists along with their costume and ornaments

Artist of Kirat Rai



The expertise regarding the Costume and ornaments of Kirat Rai Mani kumar rai, Father's Name - Harka man Rai, Mother's Name-Krishna Maya Rai, Age-37, Address-Namthang Kabrey South Sikkim, Occupation-Rai Language Teacher, Qualification- B.A passed, Religion-Kirat is an artist who has given the information regarding Rai music and Dance along with the costume and ornaments of Kirat Rai. He has done So many work on Folk music-worked as Silli dance instructor and musician and performed in many States.

ORNAMENTS

They wear ornaments like chyapte soon (flat gold) on their ears, and phuli/Dhungri and bulaki on their nose. They wear necklaces, like kantha, which consists of glass beads, gold rings, Puwalo, Sirphul and regi/Haari. Ornaments are:

Head ornaments: Shirphul: A distinct disc worn on the forehead. Chandarahar: A necklace, which may be square or round. Crescent half-moon shape tripartite gold headband with a star (Sirbandi): A characteristic headband.

Ear ornaments: Dungri: A large gold stud. Chaptesun: A round, flat gold earring.

Nose ornaments: Bulaki: A striking septum ring.

Other ornaments: Vintage silver ornaments: are also part of the Kirat Rai community's traditional jewelry.

Ornaments in details:

Puwalo - It is a beads like jewellery, used to wear by Kirat Rai Women as their daily wear jewellery.



puwalo
(picture taken by anita rai)

Sirphul - it is a gold-plated traditional head ornament, which looks so attractive and fashionable for hair accessory, worn at the top of the forehead.



sirphul
(picture taken by anita rai)

Bulaki - It is a nose ring, worn on the middle of the nose which hangs right down to the upper lips. It has some religious values too. But nowadays youngsters wear only on special occasions only, but women in villages still wear it regularly.



bulaki
(picture taken by anita rai)

Dhungri - Traditional Dhungri earrings feature a flower motif and are constructed of rare gems like pearls, rubies, and emeralds in addition to gold. It has six or more leaves and resembles a daffodil blossom. Only ancient ladies in a distant region of Nepal can be seen wearing one of the oldest decorations, which is progressively vanishing.



dhungri
(picture taken by anita rai)

Regi/Haari - It is made up of silver coated coins used to wear on neck and shoulder during the festive occasion of Rai community.



regi/haari
(picture taken by anita rai)

Cheptey Soon - It is golden coated coined like structured earrings which is used to wear especially while dancing, singing and on special occasions.



cheptey soon
(picture taken by anita rai)

Kantha - Indigenous women from groups like the Gurung, Magar, and Limbu (Kirat) wear necklaces called kantha. This traditional necklace gives ethnic costume clothing a traditional touch. This necklace is created by stringing together red felt pads and gold beads, which contrast each other beautifully in colour.



kantha
(picture taken by anita rai)

Conclusion: Changes in the structure of society and culture are natural. In the case of the application of folk culture of the Kirat Rais, this change can also be acknowledged and research on indigenous clothing and body ornaments can be continued. This study found that computers can pave new paths through geospatial technology by preserving and preserving traditional patterns in line with current cultures.

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