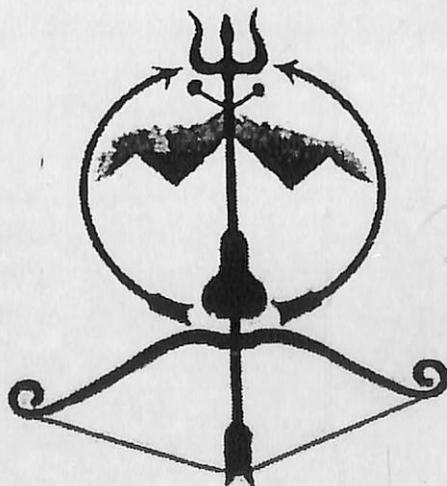


**ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT
OF THE
KIRAT KHAMBU RAI
COMMUNITY OF SIKKIM**



Submitted by
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9th November 2004

INTRODUCTION

Before I go into the details of the ethnographic report of the Kirat Khambu Rai community of Sikkim, I would like to give clarification regarding words like -KIRATA / KIRATI /KIRANTI, KHAMBU and RAI

KIRAT KHAMBU RAI

History:

A. Origin of word KIRATA/KIRAT/KIRANTI:

According to G.P.Singh, the word KIRATA has been possibly derived from Cirata or Cireta or Cirayita, also known as 'Kirata – Tikta' or 'Anarya – Tikta' - a bitter plant of the non – Aryans¹, grown in the lower regions of the Himalayas, which forms the country of the modern Kirantis or Kiratas. This is the name of a drug which was obtained from the Kiratas by the Aryans and used for medical purposes. It is also possible that the Kiratas themselves might have given the name to the drug, which was as bitter in taste as they were². (G.P.Singh:- Kiratas in Ancient India – 1990, pg. 96). The most popular Pali and Prakrit form of an appellation 'Kiratas' used in Sanskrit and common parlance, is 'Cilata'.

It is not correct to state that the term Kirata was loosely applied to any hill folk, no doubt aborigines³ or used only for the primitive cave dwellers of the Himalayas, foresters and uncivilized or barbarian mountain tribes⁴. It is also not a correct explanation that in Sanskrit literature, the term seems to have been used indiscriminately to designate only the border tribe of the Northern and Eastern Frontiers⁵. Nor is it quite proper to call the Kiratas as a mere Himalayan mountaineers and to identify them only with the Kirantis, who once reigned over a large portion of Eastern Nepal⁶.

They were a distinct class of tribe having their settlement in the Gangetic Plains, the valley of Nepal, the hills and the mountains of Northern, Central and Eastern Himalayas, Vindhya region, etc. As a matter of fact, not only the non-Aryan mountain tribes possessing the rude culture, but also the degraded members of the Aryan stock leading the savage life of foresters were known as the Kiratas in ancient Times⁷ (G.P.Singh- Kiratas in Ancient India – 1990, pg.95).

“It is the consensus of opinion among Indologists that in Sanskrit the term 'Kirata' indicated the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains particularly the Himalayas and the North Eastern areas of India who were Mongoloid in origin”. (Kirat Jana Krita – S.K. Chatterji – Page 26-27)

The Kirat of North (Rais) and The Limbus of the South were known to the ancients by name of Kirata on account of their living by hunting and carrying on trade with natives of the plains with Yak tails, shellac, cardamom, etc from the earliest period (S.C. Das 1904 – Page 3n).

B. Geographical Spread of the Kiratas/Kirats/Kirantis:-

Kiratas as a whole, as described in the classical literature can be identified with those tribes of North Western India, North Eastern India including Assam, Bengal, Tripura, Orrisa, Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet and Burma, who had settled in the plains, valleys, and hills between the epic age and the 5th Century A.D. (G.P.Singh :- Kiratas of Ancient India – 1990, pg 113).

The earliest recorded references including the appellation Kirata, occur in the Vedic literature, including the Samhitas and the Brahmanas, which were compiled roughly between 4500 – 1000 B.C. The hymns of the two later Vedic texts, the Sukla – Yajur Veda⁸ and the Atharva Veda⁹ throw light on their dwellings in the caves and mountains of the Eastern Himalayan region, their contacts with the Vedic Aryans, antiquity, etc. (G.P.Singh- Kiratas in Ancient India – 1990, pg.19).

It is generally held that the name Kirata was applied to the numerous fair complexioned or yellow coloured hill tribes of Mongolian race that lived in all parts of the Himalayas. But, on the basis of the description of the physical features available in the epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) and the Puranas, we find that they were both yellowish and darkish complexion. Their general and physical characteristics show that they were a race of dwarfish stature with short arms, round face, projecting chin, broad head, flat nose, oblique eyes, etc, whose descendants are mountaineers and foresters

The Ancient Kiratis have not at all disappeared from the history of India. One section of them is geographically, racially and linguistically represented by the modern Kirantis in the Easternmost province of Nepal.¹⁰

The Kirantis or Kiratas are no doubt those, who were dwelling on the slopes of the Himalayas, especially in the Kirata – desa, on the mountainous country lying between the Dudh –Kosi and the Karki rivers in Nepal. They are generally identified by Khambu, Limbu and Yakha or Yakthumba tribes. They are believed to be the descendants of the ancient Kiratas of Nepal¹¹.

The Kirata tribe even at present occupy the portion of the Eastern Territory of Nepal between the rivers Sunkosi and Arun. The Nepalese traditions and chronicles or 'Vamsavalis' also proved that they were an offshoot of the tribes now living in that part of the country called Kirata – Desa.¹²

The Kiratis living between the Sapta- Kausaki and Sapta – Gandaki (representing ancient Nepal) have been correctly identified by Hodgson with classical 'Cirrhaeae' (Kiratas)¹³ with regard to the affinity of the tribes, thus conjoined, he observed that they are closely allied race having essential community of customs and manners, and they all inter-marry. In the genetic term also, the Kiratas include the Limbus, the Ekas (Hodgson's Yakhas) and Rais and that in appearance and habit, they are all very much alike to each other. They are subdivided into various tribes. A vast majority of Rai-Limbu now found in Sikkim, Nepal and Darjeeling still call themselves as the Kiratis (G.P.Singh-Kiratas in Ancient India – 1990, pg.113to 116).

Eastern Nepal and its neighbourhood have been appropriately named as Kirant country. The Kirantis or Kiratis inhabiting this country in the larger sense are sub – divided into three different parts- viz:-

- a. Wallo Kirat or Hither Kirat from Sunkosi to Likhu river, including the Limbus, Yakhas and Lohorungs.
- b. Majh or Middle Kirant from Likhu to Arun river comprising (Khambus), Bontawa, Rodong, Dungmali, Khaling, Dumi, Sampang, Bahing, Thulung, Kulung, etc.
- c. Pallo or Further Kirant from Arun to Mechi river and the Singilela inhabited by (Limbus and Yakthumbas) Chourasya.

The old name of the Kirat country in Eastern Nepal was "Nao- lakh Kirat" The Khambus live to the Northern East of Jimdars and Yakhas, or the Southern spurs of the Himalayas. They are also associated with the fighting tribes of Nepal, who are placed under the head of Kirats.¹⁴ Hodgson



Yalamber

The first Chieftan (King) of the Kiratas / Kirats

Jitedasti (Jitadesi, Jitadastihang) was the seventh ruler of the dynasty. He was the most prominent among the early ruler of the dynasty. The king after being persuaded by Arjuna went to Kurushetra, took part in the war of Mahabharata on behalf of the Pandavas against the Kauravas and lost his life. According to Pt. Bhagwan Lal Indraji¹⁶. He had ascended the throne five hundred thirty six years later than the Gopala Dynasty –(i.e first ruler of Nepal). The Kiratas were finally dethroned by Abhira Gupta by the end of the Seventh Century A.D., which was the end of the dynasty but not the total annihilation of the Kirata population.) (G.P.Singh- Kiratas in Ancient India – 1990, pg.128,363,364,396).

The classical scholars unanimously speak of a ‘Tezpat’ or Malabathrum (Cinnamomum albiflorum) as the principal article of the Kiratas trade. The tribes allied to Kiratas of eastern Himalayas and the Gangetic Delta (the people of Khasi, Jaintia hills, the Garo hills, Sikkim and eastern Bengal) exporting ‘tez pat’ to China have been designated both as Basatae (Besadai) and Sesatai (Sesatae) in classical literature.

The Kiratas of Sikkim are said to have maintained trade relation with China. The ‘Tez pat’ (Malabathrum) was also sold near Gangtok. Lassen has identified that “ Basatae of Periplus” and Besadae of Ptolemy with Cirrhadae (Kiratas) or tribes of Sikkim¹⁸. On the basis of the information supplied by some noted authorities on trade and commerce Mr. Schoff has suggested that the location of their annual fair must have been near the modern Gangtok (27° 20’ N, 18° 36’ E) above which the Cho-la or the Jelep- la pass leads to Chumbi on the Tibetan side of the frontier. The import of the Silk from China has also been supported by J. Wame Edgar,²⁰ who extensively traveled in the frontier areas of Tibet and Sikkim. S.K.Chatterjee is also of the opinion that the Kiratas of Assam imported raw silk yarn and silk cloth from Thinaï or China [G.P. Singh – Kiratas or Ancient India 1991, Page 210 to 213].

has placed the complex pronominalised language of Nepal under the head of Kirantis, which is connected with Tibeto- Burman group.

The most powerful section of the Kirantis who settled down in the valley of Nepal in ancient times, probably in the pre-Christian era, are identified with the present day Kiratas – i.e Kulung, Thulung and Yellung¹⁵. (G.P.Singh- Kiratas in Ancient India – pg.116, 117).

The Kiratas colonized the valley of eastern Nepal, North Videya, in sub Himalayan region after having conquered it and set up a dynastic rule in pre-Christian era in succession to the Abhiras, and ruled for about 29 generations from 400 B.C to 700 A.D. Their first king was Yalamber (Yalambara, Yellung or Yalambhang) and their Kingdom extended from river Trisuli in the west to the river Tista in the east.

"The Kiranti people of East Nepal, more commonly known as Rai and Limbu, form together one of the largest single ethnic groups in Nepal, second only to the Tamangs. As numerous as they are, they are divided into a number of smaller 'thar' (clan) / Tribal units, the major two being Rai and Limbu. Rai is technically a term meaning 'headman' but has over the years become the popular generic term of reference for the entire ethnic group. The Rai in some districts are called 'Jimidar' or 'Jimi', in other areas 'Khambu' and in some places they are referred to by a particular 'thar' clan designation. In the course of time 'Rai' came to include the Yakha people, a third sub-division of the Kiranti.

Limbu people are addressed as Subba, a term which like Rai means 'Chief' or 'headman'. In general however, when speaking of the Kiranti people we refer to Rai and Limbu not Rai and Subba.

Northey and Morris have written concerning the origin of these terms when Shah Gurkhas conquered the Kiranti Tribes, the Gurkha Kings established some of the Jimidars as local rulers and gave them the title of Rai and Limbu headman similarly called Subba. In time the use of these names came to include whole groups and now we find Jimidars called Rai, Limbus called Subba and the Yakha people Dewans". (People of Nepal – Dor Bahadur Bista, Kathmandu – 1971 Page 32).

"When we turn to the myths and traditions of the Rais and Limbus themselves, this much is clear; it is unanimously asserted that they arrived as immigrants from elsewhere, there are none who claim to always have been where they are now. Physically, linguistically and to some extent culturally, the Rais and Limbus are related to the larger Mongoloid tribal people spread eastward through the sub-Himalayan region and hills of Assam (now North-Eastern States). Their movement into Nepal hills must be understood in relation to the spread of Mongoloid Tibetan Burman speaking people throughout the eastern Himalayan region as a whole which was probably gradual and effected by a series of displacements.

Rai tradition relates that the first of the ancestral Kiranti entered Nepal's eastern hills through the Barakshetra gorge of Kosi valley, the natural gateway into the region through the Mahabharat Range which separates the hilly interland from the plains. According to Kulunge Rai version, there were three brothers Khambuho, Menho and Meratup. Once through the gorge the brothers separated, each taking his respective followers and set out independently as they penetrated up the different river valleys such as Sun Rosi, Dudh Rosi and Arun Rosi.

The term 'Khambu' often is used to refer collectively to the Rais.

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE RAIS AND LIMBUS IS CONCEIVED OF AS THAT BETWEEN THE DESCENDANTS OF TWO BROTHERS.

Certain writers (W.Brook, Northey and C.J.Morris, The Gurkha, London 1928) speak of a tripartite division of the Kirati into Khambus, Limbus and Yakkhas but it is preferable to treat the latter simply as one of the tribes within the Rais; infact they refer to themselves as Yakha Rais." (The Kulung Rai – Charles McDougal – Page 3).

According to Eden Vansittart (Gurkhas – 1906-pg 99), the Kiratis include :-

- I. Limbus or Yakhumbas
- II. Rais or Khambus and Yakkas

By right it should apply to the Khambus (Rais) only. But as Khambus, Yakkhas and Yathumbas can and have intermarried for many generations, the three nations, although at one time quite separate

have for all practical purposes, being fused into one and the same nationality, hence we find their manners, religious ceremonies, customs and appearances are almost the same. To the Khambus, Yakkas and Yakthumbas, therefore, might for all practical purposes be applied the term Kirantis.

C. The word **KHAMBUBU** :-

In relation to the Kathmandu valley, the Kirat country is divided from West to East into

- I. Wallo Kirat or Hither Kirat from Sunkosi to Likhu river
- II. Majh or Middle Kirat from Likhu to Arun river
- III. Pallo or Further Kirat from Arun river to Nepal's eastern frontiers.

Middle Kirat also known as Khambuan has long been recognized as the land of the Rais, or the descendents of Khambuho. So the residents of Khambuan was known as 'Khambus' who later came to be known as 'Rais' (Charles Macdougall- The Kulunge Rai - 1979, pg 2-3).

D. The word **RAI** :-

The king Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of Gorkha, having conquered the Kathmandu valley in 1768 had consolidated his position there, proceeded to expand his kingdom east ward. In 1773, he issued a proclamation to the Kiratas of the middle Kirat- Khambuan (i.e Khambus/ Rais) advising them that the Makwanpur principality no longer existed; he urged them to transfer their allegiance to him, for he is Makwanpur's succession by force of arms; promising them (Khambus) the security of their lives and property. He appointed local Kirati Headman, who was given royal commissions and the honorific title 'Rai' or 'Chief' to act as intermediaries between them and the state, since the rapidly extended Gorkha kingdom lacked the administrative machinery to directly rule the newly conquered territories the local Headman were allowed a good deal of autonomy for their allegiance to the king (the Limbu Chieftains took the title of Subba) Rais are not a single tribe but rather a collection of tribes, exhibiting among themselves differences in language (dialect), culture and social organization although they do share a common culture base and have similar social structure.

(Charles MC Dougal-The Kulunge Rai-1979 page 7-12).

It must be mentioned here that Rais are also known as "Khambus" or "Kirat Rais" or "Kirat Khambu Rais". They are the synonyms of the word "Rais"

Thus the word "Rai" in the above context is radically different in meaning from the words 'Rai', 'Roy' and 'Ray' in the context of Hindu Aryans living in different states in India. The Kirat Khambu 'Rai' is a very backward hill tribe (Community) living mainly in the North Eastern Himalayan belt of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Doars of West Bengal, the North Eastern States and Eastern Nepal. Kirat Khambu 'Rai' people are Mongoloid and not Hindy Aryans as suggested by some people. 'Kirat' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'a hill living by hunting' and that is the meaning given to the Kirats by the Aryans in ancient times. When agriculture was introduced in India, the Kirat Khambu Rais are basically hunters and are very skillful archers. They are gatherers of fruits and roots and follow 'Jhum' cultivation-Slash and Burn cultivation.

ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT OF THE KIRAT KHAMBU RAI COMMUNITY OF SIKKIM

Kirat Khambu Rais are one of the oldest ethnic communities of India. The Rais and Limboos are collectively known as Kirats. The very fact that while many other ethnic communities were included in the list of scheduled tribes of the Indian Constitution, the Kirat Khambu Rais were left out, proving the extreme backwardness of the Kirat Khambu Rai people. Other brethren the Sherpas, Lepchas and recently the Tamangs and Limboos were fortunate to enjoy the fruits of reservation and other facilities. Unfortunately, we the Kirat Khambu Rais have been left out from inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes in December 2002. Hence this memorandum. In fact memoranda were submitted on several occasions' in the past. We humbly hope that we will be included in the list Scheduled Tribes of the Indian Constitution without further delay.

MAJOR POINTS TO BE COVERED FOR DETERMINATION OF SCHEDULED TRIBE STATUS FOR KIRAT KHAMBU RAI COMMUNITY OF SIKKIM AND OTHER STATES OF INDIA

1. **Ethnic Community/Tribes Name** : ✓ KIRAT KHAMBU RAI
2. **Geographical Distribution** : ✓ KIRAT KHAMBU RAI predominates in the State of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Mirik and Dooars of West Bengal. A large number of Kirat Khambu Rai is also living in Assam and other North Eastern States.
3. **Population** : Near about 8 Lakhs 8

Demographic Feature of Sikkim

For the first time a census was conducted in February, 1891 in Sikkim which divides the population as follows:

Race or caste	Males	Females	Children	Total
Lepcha (ST)	2,362	2,399	1,001	5,762
Bhutia (ST)	1,966	1,960	968	4,894
Limboo (ST)	1,255	1,159	942	3,356
Gurung	1,108	1,047	766	2,921 ✓
Murmi (ST)	801	778	1,288	2,867
Rai Jimdar	742	691	587	2,020 ✓
Khomboo	726	648	589	1,963 ✓
Kami	626	464	580	1,670
Brahman	521	372	521	1,414
Mangar	363	346	192	901 ✓
Chettri	303	253	273	829
Newar	240	183	304	727
Slaves	124	99	103	326
Dorzi	102	92	93	287
Miscellaneous	350	72	99	521
Total	11,589	10,563	8,306	30,458

Source: "The Gazetteer of Sikkim" 1894 page 27.

The linguistic classification of 1991 census Vs Race-wise census of 1891 could be roughly compared as follows:

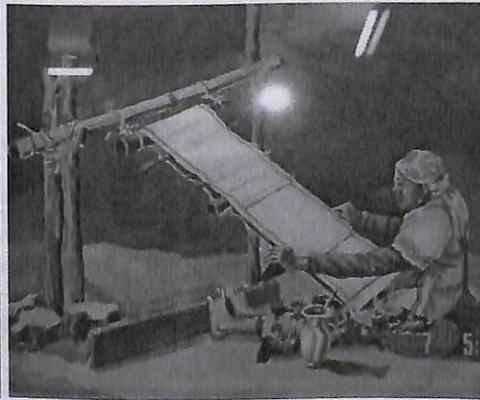
Rank	Caste-wise Cencus 1891		Linguistic census 1991	
First	Lepcha	18.93%	Nepali	18.11%
Second	Bhutia	16.00%	Rai	17.710%
Third	Nepali	13.81%	Bhutia	12.46%
Forth	Limboo	11.00%	Limboo	9.30%
Fifth	Rai	9.77%	Lepcha	9.26%
Sixth	Gurung	9.59%	Gurung	6.47%
Seventh	Tamang	9.39%	Tamang	5.78%
Eigth	Magar	2.95%	Newar	4.33%
Ninth	Newar	2.80%	Sherpa	4.24%
Tenth	Sherpa	-	Magar	2.61%

Source: Gopal Pd. Dahal, in. NIRMAL 1996 pp. 9.

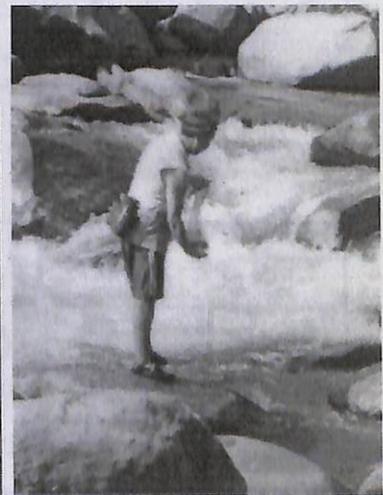
4. **Traditional Occupation** : Hunting, Fishing, Weaving, Gathering of wild fruits, tubers and wild honey, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Army and Tea Growers



Hunting with bow & arrow
(Talibey/Beli-phu)



A Rai Lady weaving cloth on a home-made
weaving machine (Tan)



Fishing in the river with a home made
fishing net (Jal)



Cattle Herders in front of the cow shed
(Goath/Gaya)



Wheat cultivation and washing of
wool by Rai ladies

6. Genealogical Map-
history of Migration/Origin:

A) As to the question about the origins of the

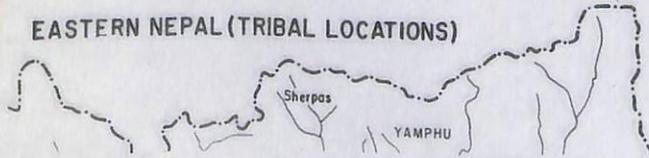
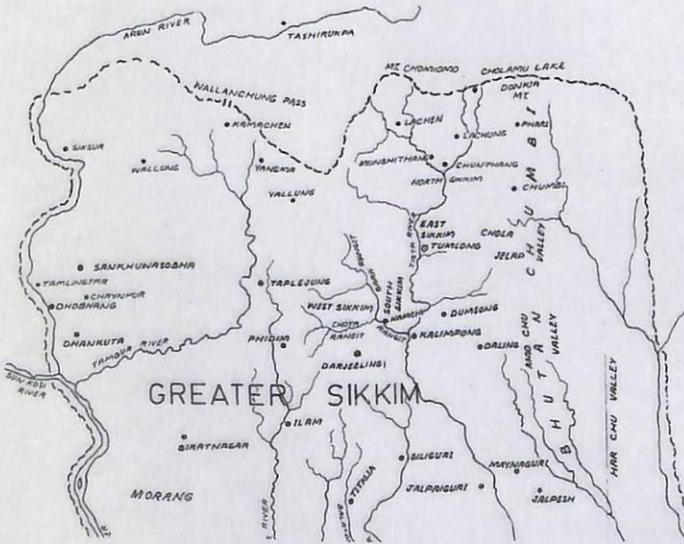
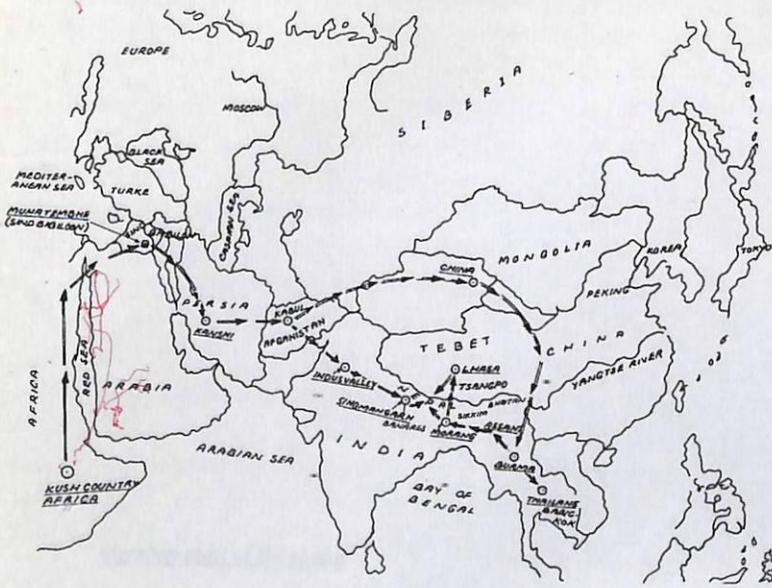
Rais, they are the aboriginal tribes of this region. They are a Mongolian race and descendents of the Kiratas which have been described in the old Sanskrit texts particularly in the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana (Martin Gaenzle- 1991- 4). They are described as a warring race inhabiting the north and north eastern Himalayas. They are described as uncouth barbarians on the border of civilized India, living as gatherers of fruits, tubers and by hunting and fishing. They had "golden skin colour". There is an episode in the Mahabharata in

which lord Shiva, disguised as a Kirata, turns against Arjun, but in the end, presents him with the miraculous "Pasupata" weapon.

G.P.Singh, Professor Dept. of History, Manipur University, Imphal has written in his book Kiratas in Ancient India- that the dynastic rule of the Kiratas in the north and north eastern Himalayas was established from 400 BC to 700 AD.

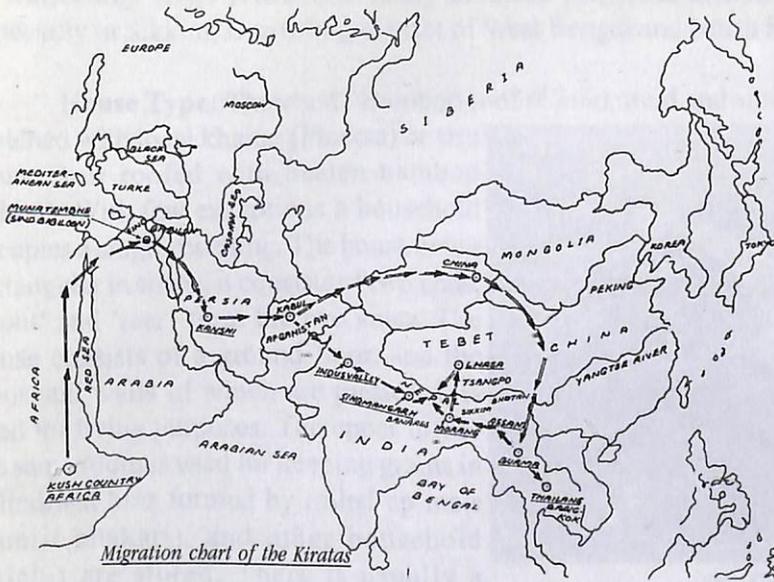
There were 29 rulers in this dynasty and Yalambar was the first king. The kingdom extended from river Trisula in the west to river Teesta in the east. Abhira Gupta defeated them in the 1st Century AD which saw the end of the dynasty but not the total annihilation of the Kirata population.

B) With the establishment of tea gardens by the Britishers in the hills of Darjeeling in middle of 19th Century, a large number of Kirat Khambu Rais started working in the tea gardens but others still remained as farmers.



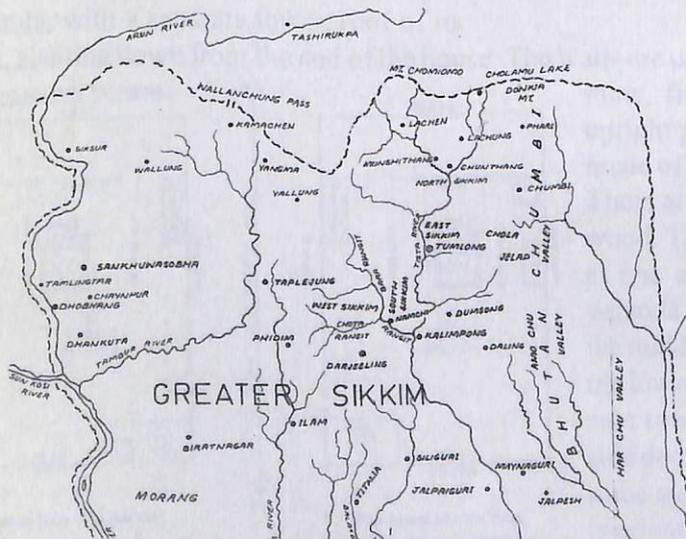
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Migration chart of the Kiratas

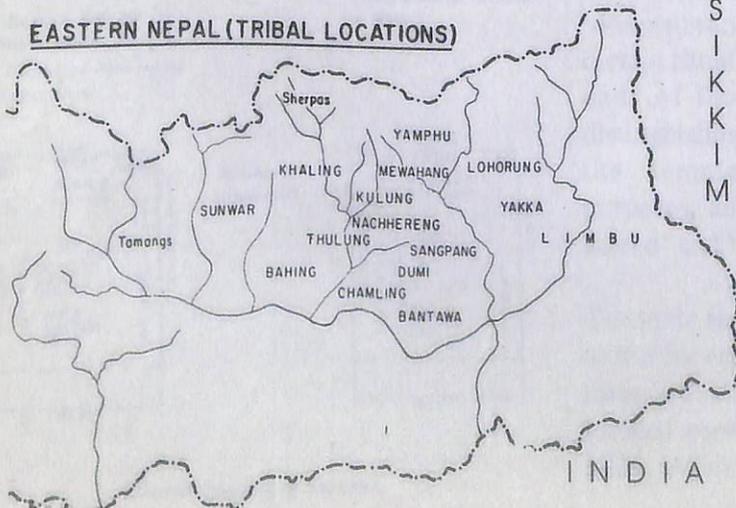
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Map of greater Sikkim which includes the eastern parts of Nepal

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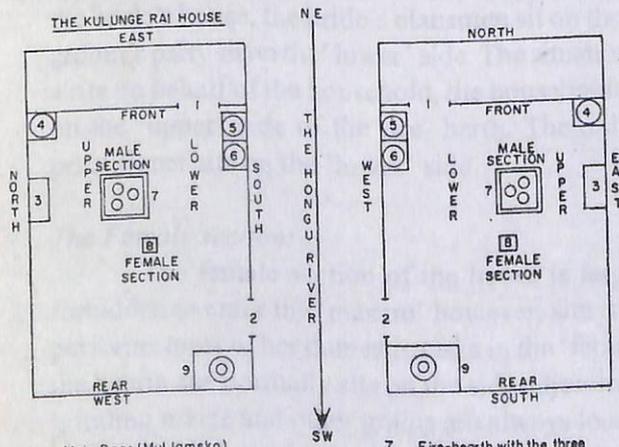
B) With the establishment of tea gardens by the Britishers in the hills of Darjeeling in middle of 19th Century, a large number of Kirat Khambu Rais started working in the tea gardens but others still remained as farmers.

C) It is to be recorded that Kirat Khambu Rai also served the British army as soldiers, but after Independence a majority of them joined the Indian army. A major recruiting depot was in Darjeeling. After retirement many of these personals settled in various parts of India but especially in Sikkim, Darjeeling district of West Bengal and North Eastern States.

7. **House Type:** Thatched / Bamboo roof (*Chim*), mud and stone House (*Khim*). The House is thatched with local khahar (Phuksa) or siru (Luwei) or roofed with beaten bamboo (*Chim*) With few exceptions a household occupies a single dwelling. The house being rectangular in shape, it consists of two ends, 'front' and 'rear' from the two sides. The house consists of a ground floor, and the floor and walls of which are plastered, is used for living purposes. The upper loft of the same room is used for keeping grains in cylindrical bins formed by rolled up mats (gunri/ bhakari), and other household articles are stored. There is usually a veranda, with a separate lower, roof of its own, slanting down from the end of the house. The walls are usually made up of split reed - bamboo

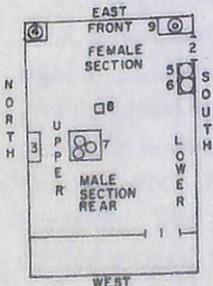


Kirat Khambu Rais House (Khim)

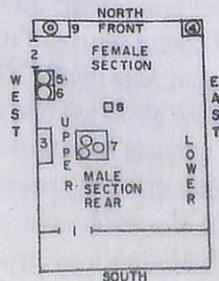


- 1 Main Door (Mul lamsko)
- 2 Side Door (Jaskyala)
- 3 Altar (Dampe)
- 4 Beer Pot for Purbe & other household gods
- 5 'Upstream' Beer Pot for Nagi in summer
- 6 'Downstream Beer Pot for Nagi in winter

- 7 Fire-hearth with the three stones Pakalung, Makalung and Sombelung
- 8 Central Pillar for supporting the roof
- 9 Milling stone for grinding of grain



Alternative Arrangement



mats, fitted onto a framework of wooden upright poles. Some of the houses have walls made of stone plastered with mud.

There are two doors, made of heavy planks of wood. The main door (Mul lamsko) is situated at one end of the house, usually where the veranda is attached. The main door is not in the middle of the end wall but off center toward the lower, or side facing the river. On the same side toward its other end will be the second side door (Jaskyala). A small window is on the same side of the house as the door. The house is oriented in terms of the cardinal directions. North and East as auspicious, while south and west are inauspicious. The front of the house is oriented 'upstream' and the rear is oriented 'downstream' an important distinction for certain ritual purposes. The 'front' and 'rear' ends of the house is another dichotomy distinguishing the 'male' end of the house from the 'female', important for other ritual purposes, and in fact a distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane'.

The male section extends from the main door to the far end of the fire hearth, and includes three sides of the latter. The fire hearth is located between the main door and central pillar, but much closer to the latter; it is closer

Internal structure of Rai house

to the upper side wall, away from the stream, then to the lower side wall, facing the stream. The hearth itself is a shallow pit lined with flat stones sunk into the ground with their sides protruding to mark off an area about nine feet square, having above it a raised drying rack, which is removable. In the fireplace are 'three upright stones embedded in the ground, (Samkhalung/Siltulung/Chula/Sutilung/ three hearthstones), on which vessels are placed for preparing food, and which also have great symbolic significance, are thought to be repositories of supernatural powers and play an important part in household rituals. Above the fire hearth, upper wall, is a small shelf, forming an altar (damphe) on which offerings are placed and ritual paraphernalia kept.

The Male section:

The male section of the house is divided into two parts. The area between the fire hearth and the near upper wall facing away from the river is 'upper' (masum), while the remainder, or larger part extending from the upper, masum edge of the fire hearth to the lower wall facing the river is 'lower' (lamichini). The upper side is especially sacrosanct, where Purbe, the household god and personnel gods and goddesses of the household reside. Females are at no time allowed to enter the masum, nor may their belongings be put there. It is thought that women entering this area might cause them to be barren.

The 'upper' and 'lower' in a more important sense is the distinction between 'we' and 'they' between in-group and out-group. Where the 'upper' section of the house is the domain of the house owner the 'lower' section is for guests and visitors. This division is an important one during marriage ceremonies; the seating arrangement is usually clear cut in practice as well as in theory. At the bride's house, the bride's clansmen sit on the 'upper' side of the fire hearth, while persons of the groom's party sit on the 'lower' side. The situation is reversed at the groom's house. While performing a rite on behalf of the household, the householder, himself or a ritual specialist engaged by him, sits on the 'upper' side of the fire-hearth. The only exception is for a funerary rite, when the ritual practitioner sits on the 'lower' side.

The Female section:

The female section of the house is larger than the 'male' section. Though the woman is forbidden to enter the 'masum' however, she is allowed to enter or occupy the 'male' section. She performs most of her domestic tasks in the 'female' section of the house. While preparing food over the hearth she normally sits on the side adjoining the female section. The milling stones (Uhatu) for grinding maize and other grains are always located along the end wall of the female section of the house on the 'lower' side. Also during the period of ritual impurity following childbirth, the woman and her baby occupy a straw covered place in the 'female' section of the house on the 'lower' side facing the river.

The dichotomy between 'upper' and 'lower' to some extent cross cuts that between 'male' and 'female', 'upper' is associated with 'male' and 'lower' with 'female'. The most 'sacred' portion of the house is the 'upper' part of the 'male' end; the most 'profane' portion is the 'lower' part of the 'female' section.

Right is associated with 'male' and left with 'female'. Ideally women should eat with left hand, whereas men eat with the right hand. While performing rituals, the householder sits on the right and his wife on the left. When standing side by side during parts of marriage ceremony, the groom should be on the right and the bride on the left. We have noted that the main door is the 'male' part of the house, and that the side door is in the 'female' part. Auspicious occasions such as weddings, the main door is used, the marriage party enters the house by the main door and for inauspicious occasions, like funerals, the side door is used. Before taking the corpse outside for burial, it is carried around the fire-hearth in a counterclockwise direction, and is removed from the house through the side door. Sleep - a person always should sleep with his/her head towards the north or east, never toward the south or west: the head always should have an 'upper' orientation and never

be pointed toward the river. By contrast, during the funerary rite, the corpse is always placed along the end of the house which faces south least, with its head pointing toward the river.

The following sets of oppositions are associated with the dichotomy between 'upper' and 'lower': upper: lower; hill: river; auspicious: inauspicious; clockwise: counter - clockwise; main door: side door; right: left; male: female; we: they; our: others; Gods: Gods; North: south; East: West.

It is thought that during the summer the gods are present in the high peaks upstream, whereas during the winter they are in the lower valleys downstream. The Rais have an important series of rituals associated with Nagi, the water serpent. In the front of the house, along the 'lower' wall are two adjacent stands for placing large earthen pots for beer. Rites are performed for the god Nagi during the summer (ubhaulti), when Nagi is up in the mountains, a jar filled with beer (di) for ritual offerings is placed on the 'upstream' stand, rites of the same series are performed during the winter (udhaulti), when Nagi is lower down in the valleys, the jar is placed on the 'downstream' stand. These beer stands are known as 'dichardi'.

During rites for health and well being of the household performed by shamans, then the latter exorcises malignant supernatural agencies for the benefit of all or part of the household members, the latter sit in a line in the front portion of the house, facing the front end wall. However, a corpse is always placed at the rear end of the house, along the rear end wall.

Samkhalung/chula/situlung/suptulung/sutulung: (The Three Sacred Hearthstones)

The 'front' and 'rear' are also mediated by the ternary division of the three hearthstones. The latter form a triangle, with the apex toward the 'lower' side and the base toward the 'upper side'. The apex stone is 'pakalung' and the two stones forming the base are 'makalung (toward the rear end of the house) and 'sombelung' (toward the front end of the house). Pakalung brings good things, such as health, crops and wealth, Makalung and Sombelung drive away bad things, such as famine, disaster and death. For all household rites a libation of beer is ceremonially poured on these stones from a special gourd container called chingna/ cindo/ wabuk/ sakewa. This ritual act, known as daplo kuim, the rais consider one of the most ancient and most powerful parts of their ceremonial heritage. A



Daplo Kuim: Libation of millet beer (Hengma) being poured from Wabuk on the Samkhalung



Mangpa (Rai Priest) in front of Samkhalung performing Mang (Pitri Ritual)

person who makes the offerings is the senior male member of the household's clan who is present; for some rites the householder himself may do 'Daplo Kuim'. Seated in the masum part of the house behind the hearth, the officiant first pours beer from the chingna on to pakalung (apex), then makalung, and last on sombelung, that is clockwise direction. (for funerary rites it is done in a counter - clockwise direction). This is repeated twice. After three libations have been poured on each stone, directions are reversed and the procedure changed. Beer is pured

on sombelung and then a trail of beer is dripped around behind sombelung in the directions of the 'front' part of the house; finally, beer is poured on pakalung, in the lower part of the house, and then rising, the officiant takes the chingna from palalung directly to the dampe altar on the wall behind the hearth, in the 'upper' part of the house, and pours a libation of beer on to the altar itself. The beer trailed from sombelung and makalung toward the 'rear' and 'front' sections of the house respectively drives away evil forces from those quarters; the beer transferred from paklalung to the dampe altar brings prosperity and good health. Note the opposition of sombelung and makalung, sharing the same function to pakalung, having a complementary one. (Charles Mc.dougal-The Kulunge Rai - 1979-page 67)

8. Characteristic of the Kirat Khambu Rais:

A. Physical appearance:



Kirat Khambu Rai Males

According to Sueyoshi Toba- (Rites of passage -An Aspect of Rai Culture-1992- page 8,9) the Kirat Khambu Rais have short robust body, broad cheeks, flat nose, thin and pointer whiskers (Baagjunge). Their eye slit is narrow, skin is lighter in colour, hair is black and usually stiff. They have dark eyes; scanty beard and the muscles of their legs are well developed, being mountainous people.



Kirat Khambu Rai Female

B. Disposition (Character):

Kirat Khambu Rais have positive and open attitude to life. They are an intelligent, creative and skilled people. According to Northy (1974- 24) they are brave and courageous. They are well mannered, cheerful and amicable; but when intoxicated can be aggressive. They are honest and generous and have a good sense of humour.



Kirat Khambu Rai Male Dress

9. **Dress:**Original dress of **Kirat Khambu Rai Male** comprises of head gear (*Feta/Pagari/Sayabung*), *Betebung* Shirt (*Dawra/Lockchham*) Pant *Suruwal/Langsup*) sleeveless coat made of stinging Nettle plant fiber, (*Chhakchha/Fenga*), Waist Band (*Patuki, Chakchhinma*), A large knife (*Khukuri/Dabhay*). Usually footwear was not commonly worn.

Kirat Khambu Rai Female: Shawl (*Mujetro/Burkey/Tangdoma*) Blouse (*Cholo/Yamlung*) Sari (*Guniu/Tamphay*), Waist band shawl (*Hembari*), Waist Sash (*Patuki Chhakchhima*), every Kirat Lady used to keep *Khurpi* (small carved knife), Pig hair round brush (*Kuchi*), Musical Instrument (*Binayo/ Dong*).

Machunga (Dotengwa), Hair Band (Lachha/Tangkhi). They weave their own clothes on Tan-(wooden weaving machine) from cotton, wool and fibres made from the bark of stinging nettle (Sisnu/Ganam).



Kirat Khambu Rai Female Dress

10. Ornaments: Male ornaments: Gold necklace (*Kantha/Lolopot*) and ear rings (*Kundal/Phingrang*). Female ornaments: Head ornament (*Samyabong*), *Sirbandi (Chomdup)* Gold necklace (*Kantha/Lolopot*) Gold Necklace (*Nawgerdi/Bhitat*), Nose stud and nose ring (*Dhungri-Bulaki / Nathen-Nabit*), *Chandrahar Rupawa, Chura, (Chhuklung), Rejee (Yanchang), Hansuli (Phetlung)*, Flat gold earrings (*Chheptesum/Nadup*), *Tilhari (Surem)* hand and ankle rings (silver *kalli /Langkung*).

11. Food Habits: Since Kirat Khambu Rais were primarily agriculturist, at morning before going out for work they used to take fried *popcorn/soybean/tubers* and fermented millet beer (*Jand/Hengma/Umma/Arakha*).



Preparation and eating of Dhero (Jagulo/Yuwa)

At the daytime they take *Dhero (Jagulo/Yuwa)* (cooked corn/millet /buckwheat dough) with *Gundruk* (a kind of fermented vegetable soup) an *Kalo Dal* (pulses) along with few pegs of *Arakha* (home made wine). At dinner, Kirat Khambu Rais loved to eat pork meat (*Baksha*) Beef (*Pisha*) with com millet *dhero* or *Roti*. Fermented Soybean

(*Kinama/Goyong*), Stinging nettlesoup (*Sisnoo/Ganam*), Bamboo shoot (*Tusha/Lim*), Wild flowers (*Nakima/Daimbung*), insects (*Rato fatengra/Grasshopper, Grub/Larvae of wild Bees*) Frogs (*Man Paha/Lusa/Dhelu*) Deer (*Mirga/Khis/Chaketosa*), Porcupine (*Dumsi/Khas*) Tubers Homemade wine is a must drink before good night sleep.



Sipping of millet beer (Jar/Hengma) from a Bamboo container (Tongba/Thokla)



Plucking of stinging nettle leaf (Sisnu/Ganam)



Frog (Man Paha/Lusa/Dhelu)

One of the delicacies of Kirat Khambu Rais is *Wachippa / Damlappa / Tito*. This is of two varieties:

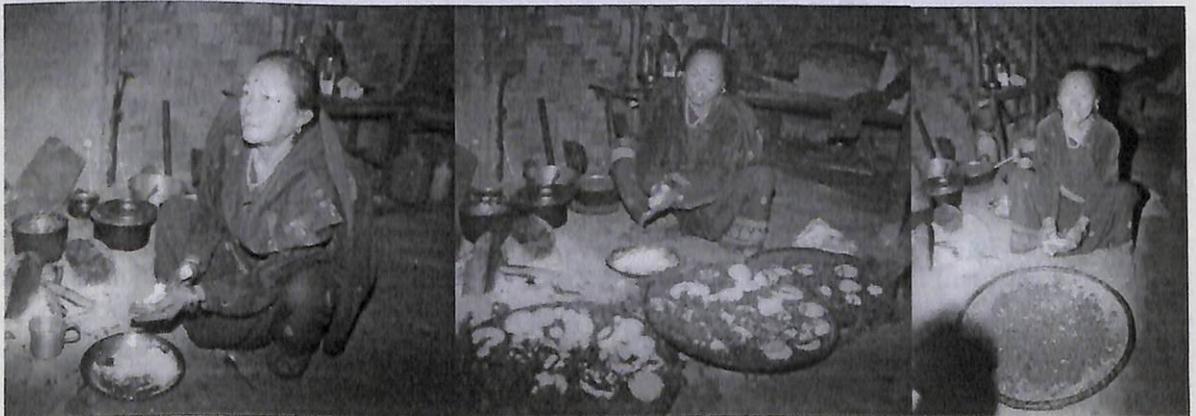
a) *Non-vegetarian: Titey (Wachippa)* : The outer feathers of the fowl is plucked, the inner



Preparation and eating of Wachippa

down feathers is burnt and collected in a dish. This *riley* powder, along with the cut pieces of the chicken and rice is made into a *khichery*. This is *Wachippa*, which must be eaten by all family members and guests during *Mang (Pitri Pula)*, ancestor worship and other special occasions.

b) *Vegetarian: Titey (Damlappa / Nakhilbung) Hallalumbey* flower / Bitter flower is collected, powdered and mixed with cooked rice and served to the family members and guests. This is generally adopted among the *Kabil- Panthi Kirat Khambu Rais*.



Preparation of Marcha (Yeast) used for fermenting cooked millet in order to produce millet beer (Jard/Hengma/Umma)



Hive of Wild Bee (Aringal), was harvested from a hollow tree trunk. Larvae/Grub of the wild bee being cooked and eaten



Dhiki for pounding paddy into rice

Jhato (Chumbo) for milling maize, millet etc.

Okbli (Chipu) for pounding millet, paddy etc.



Pig slaughtered and disected out

Pork & Beef ready for consumption

Bhir Mauri (Wild bee)

12. **Name of SECT: /Thar/Subgroup** {Kirawa Khambu Rodungchio Tharchi} The Athpahare, Kulung, Khaling, Chamling, Chanrasaya, Chinthang, Thilung, Thulung, Dungmali, Dumi, Nachereng, Puma, Bantawa, Baying, Yaku, Yakha Dewan, Rungchengbung, Lambichong, Lohorung, Waling, Sangpang, Sotang and Mewahang are the main subgroups / thars but at present there are about 50 such subgroups/thars, speaking totally different dialects (Prof. W. Winter-Linguistic Survey of Nepal-Origins and Migrations of Mewahang Rai-by Martain Gaenzle-1991, P.3).

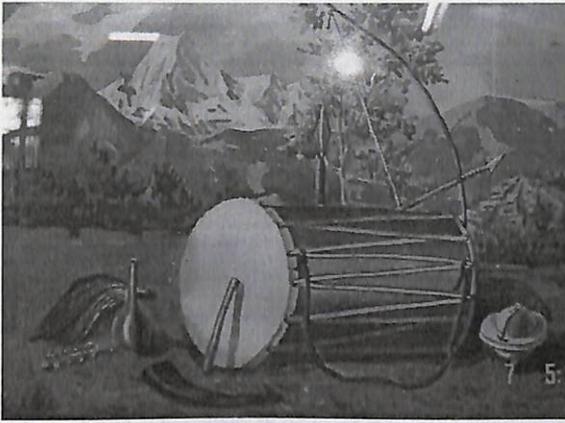
13. **Name of Clans with meaning in English: PACHHA.** Different Kirat Khambu Rai have different types of Clans which are too numerous to mention here i.e. *Walkchalis, Bungchhen, Khaptawli, Lakchhawa, Bultin*, etc. This *Pachha* helps to identify from where that particular Kirat Khambu Rai hails.

14. **Name of Sub-clan in English: SAMET** (Different Kirats have different type of sub-clans i.e *Dikwa, Bukchhapa, Pumacha, Wachhihang*, etc. This SAMET further pinpoints the family root of that particular Kirat Khambu Rai. Whether exogamous or endogamous: Kirats Rais are generally exogamous

15. **Totums:** Kirat Khambu Rais Venerates '*Samkhalung*' - Three Stones where fire is burned and kept in the kitchen as "Sacred Place" (Sanctum Sanctorum). Nobody is allowed to go there accept the members of the family. It is also regarded as the resting place of the ancestor's souls.

16. **Taboos:** There are numerous Taboos prevailing in Kirat Khambu Rais Tradition

17. **Prohibitions:** Most of the Kirat Khambu Rais do not eat goat (mutton) meat.



Chamar (Tail of Yak), Silibbey (Iron tongs with bells), Wabuk (Dried Gourd), Phung (Horn of wild buffello), Dbupmaken (Dhol), Talibey (Bow & Arrow), Chenbiken (Brass Cymbal)



Lady playing Muchungo (Dotangwa)- a metallic musical instrument



Binayo (Dong)- a bamboo musical instrument with a string attached

18. Use of Distinctive articles: Kirat Khambu Rais are experts in use of bows- arrows (*Talibey/ Beli/Phu*), are very skillful like Tarun Deep Rai of Namchi, South Sikkim Junior National Archery Champion), *gulely, matingra (gurlabey) Khukuri (dabey/betho), vala, balshi (Kungri), paso (Yatat), Jal (Gnasetkhi)*. Since they are hunters from ancient times, Kirat Khambu Rais are also dexterous in Bamboo works and snares. Kirat Khambu Rais have their own typical music like *Dhol (Dhupmaken), Binayo (Dong), Muchunga (Dotengwa), Zampta (Chhenbiken)*. Kirat Khambu Rais are also expert in blowing leaves to bring out musical tunes to accompany songs.



Making of bamboo basket-Doko (Sep) & Mandro (Gurma)



Making of Dalo (Bukho) & Nanglo (Thamboku) from bamboo

21. Permission/Restriction to mess up with relations:

Permission: *Theyawabung* (elder brother's wife), *Nichhama* (wife's younger sister) are permissible to be married)

Restrictions: Younger brother's wife is even not to be talked with. Married women folk should cover their head with clothes or shawls while talking or exchanging pleasantries with men folk elder to her.

Traditional Political System:

- a) Name: Pancha and Daskirat (Rais) Pancha comprising of five elderly Rais- solves small cases and Daskirat - comprising of ten elderly Rais deals with complicated cases and gives judgement which is regarded as binding and final.
- b) Structural Organisation: Only the Raipas (Pagari wearers) senior most Rais of the Village constitute Pancha and Daskirat (Ten Rais)
- c) Functions:
 - i. Economic control: Kirat Khambu Rai Pancha does not interfere in economic aspect of the community.

- ii. But entire social rules and regulations are controlled and regulated by Daskirat.
- iii. Religious Affairs are on under the control of *Mangpa* (Priest)
- iv. Crime and Punishments mechanism - *Pancha/ Daskirat* has full power as far as crime and punishment is concerned. It interprets the rules and regulation of the tribe and any ruling passed by them is final and binding.

22. Religious Systems:

A) Structure: the Kirat Khambu Rais do not follow any religion in the strict sense of term. They are "*animists*" and *nature worshippers*. The religion, which the Kirat Khambu Rai follows, is mainly worship of ancestors *Maang (Pitri Pujas)* and nature worship.

Kirat Khambu Rais do not believe in heaven or hell. There is no religious hierarchy. Kirat Khambu Rais engages *Maṅpa* in their religious rites.

B) System: the most venerated deities are *Sumnima* and *Paruhang* who are regarded as the creators of the Kirat Khambu Rai people. Then, comes the ancestors. The main shrine of Kirat Khambu Rai is called *Samkhalung* (sacred kitchen) having three stones where all the important religious rites are conducted. Kirats also believe that all the souls of the dead *Raipas* and *Raimas* dwell here.

NAGI

According to Martin Gaenzle (*Himalayan Space-Cultural Horizons and Practices* -p.142 – 145), this important cult is linked with the agricultural cycle. It is mainly celebrated during the harvest season in the 'descending time' (Udhauli/Sakela), together with the first fruit rituals in autumn (full moon of November-December). In the case of need, such as illness and misfortune, the rite can



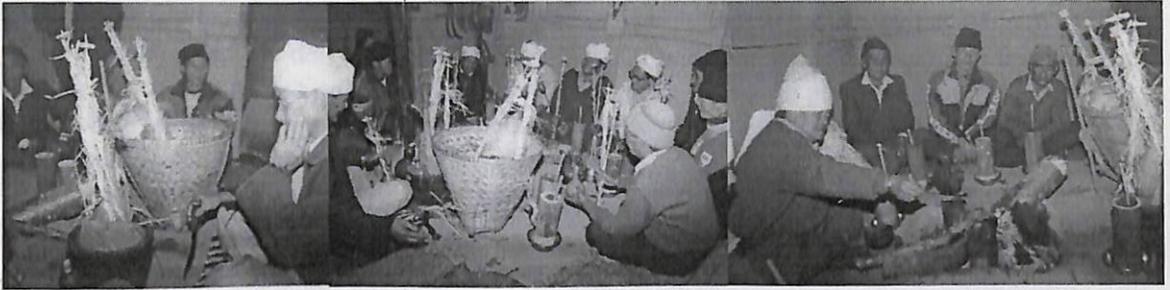
Sumnima and Paruhang
The creators of Kirat Khambu Rai People



Preparation of the different parts of the pig (*cbabodam*) and chicken (*sarudam birudam*) and arranging them in the *thumche (dboba/tooe)* for the Nagi rituals

be celebrated at any other time. Its overall purpose is to ensure general prosperity and fertility through the presentation of offerings: these are given to buy head soul (*Saya Khetma*) for the living creatures.

The performance is addressed to the snake deity- 'Nagi' which is the primal being in Mewahang /Kulung /Sampang /Chamling, etc. mythology, the one which stands at the very beginning of the creation process and from which all beings ultimately originate. Thus it is the most apical ancestors, and the Mewahang/Kulung/Sampang/Chamling etc. often say; "we are the children of 'Nagi'". The



Kuruwa Nagi - Nagi Nokcho/Nagi Lamlocha (Head Nagi) with his 8 assistants (Kuruwacha) performing the Nagi ritual

creation myth recounts how 'Nagi', which lives in the waters, made a mud clod flow down the river from the source. This mud clod eventually ended up in the plains where it burst with a big bang, resulting in the creation of human being from whom eventually Somnima descended.

Thus Nagi is an aquatic being which is seen as responsible for the fertility of humans, but also of the soil, water and earth are closely associated in Rai cosmology.

When performing the rite the 'Nagine' - i.e. the respective tribal priest, sits in front of his offerings of grains (unhusked rice), millet, millet beer, ginger, holding a sword in his hand and recites in a singing voice.

He sits in the back part of the house in the lower half facing 'up hills'. After an initial invocation of the deity, he begins his first journey, proceeding from the hearth inside the house through the door, over the veranda and then travels through the ancestral territory, the 'cairi.' He passes by the watering place (dhara), crosses a small rivulet, enters the ancestral territory of the neighbouring Yamdange and proceeds on down the confluence where the Sankhuwa River meets the Arun River. There he presents the offering to 'Nagi', asking the deity to be satisfied and benevolent, and particularly to provide 'Saya'. The confluence of the two rivers is equated with the plains, i.e. the Tarai, which is associated with good rice cultivation and low land settles like the Tharu (bajuho thairuho). After thus having given his due, the 'Nagi' returns up the same way, making sure that no souls (lawa) are left down there.

Back at the hearth, the priest together with the assembled elders celebrates an offering to the three hearth stones (Situlung/Samkhalung/Sutulung/Chula): It is followed by a special head-raising ceremony (saya poikma) performed on the patient (madauro/ somoniya /tunkha) of the client household. The priest proceeds upstream, following the Sankhuwa river up to its source. This is the place where 'Nagi' is said to reside, and here a divination (bonbo) is held in order to enquire about the state of the client household. The divination is not addressed to the snake deity directly but to the



Saya Poikma-Head raising ceremony being performed on the patient

Dichari-Chekudi Bukudi-round earthen vessels for keeping millet beer for the Nagi ritual

Nagine performing Nagi ritual

'whistling Thrush' (Makwa-yumma), which for reasons laid down in the origin, myths-is in charge of this function. After the deity has indicated its will through the priest's words and through his trembling (i.e. mild possession), he returns, proceeding on the same path, naming the places he traverses, he eventually comes back to the house. The rite concludes with a head raising ceremony for the clients and for the Nagire himself:

The Nagi is of two types:

- (a) Sada (Lili) Nagi.
- (b) Kuruwa Nagi.

(a) In Sada (Lili) Nagi only unhusked rice, millet and ginger is offered.

(b) In Kuruwa Nagi: along with unhusked rice (dhan /ra), millet (kodo /lis), ginger (aduwa / bichu /bechuk), chimfing (beljam bung), different parts of a whole pig (baksa) and chicken (wa) is offered. The different parts of the pig are known as 'Chabodam' and chicken 'Sarudam-Birudam'.

In Kuruwa, there is the head Nagine (Nagi Nokcho /Nagi Lamlocha) and eight assistants (elders /Kuruwa Cha). The Head Nagi recites, guides and performs the rite, while others (Kuruwa Cha) chant after him.

According to Charles Mc Dougal (The Kulunge Rais-1979-p66), the Kulunge Rais have an important series of rituals associated with 'Nagi' the water serpent. In front of the house, along the lower wall, are two adjacent stands for placing large earthen pots for beer (Chaneko jar /di). When rites are performed for the god Nagi during the summer (Ubauli /Sakewa), when Nagi is up in the mountains a jar filled with beer (Di) for ritual offerings, is placed on the up-stream stand. When a rites of the same series is performed during winter (Udhauli/Sakela), when Nagi is lower down in the valleys, the jar is placed on the 'downstream' stand. The beer stands are known as 'dichardi / dichari'. Even today, Kulunge Rai of Assam Lingzey, Nandok, and other Rais of Yangang, Sosing and other parts of Sikkim perform this Nagi Ritual.

C) **Function:** All the religious functions are performed by *Mangpa* also known as *Bijuwa*.

D) **Rai Priest:** They include *Mangpa* or *Bijuwa*, *Nakchhong*, *Mabimi-Kubimi* and *Dowang*.

- i) *Mangpa* or *Bijuwa*: is the main Priest of Rais. *Mangpa* conducts the *Samkhalung* ritual ceremony as well as other religious rites of household deities. He performs *Thomwa/Chinta* to keep safe and well being of the family members and also prophecy the future happenings in the family and society.



Mangpa performing Maang (Pitri puja). Millet beer, ginger and new produce of the land being offered to the souls of the ancestors who reside in the Samkhalung

Mangpa and Mangma

ii) **Nakchhong:** Conducts the Sakewa (Worship of nature) ritual ceremony, which takes place twice in a year- i.e. *Dongwangna* - A prayer to appease the natural power of cultivating and *Donglasha* (a prayer to appease the natural power of harvesting) *Dongwanga* is celebrated on the full moon day of Vaishak-(May-June) and *Donglasha* on the full moon day of Mangsir (Nov-Dec).

iii) **Mabimi:** Chanting *Mundum* (oracle chant) performs the last rite of the deceased in the following terms:

- a) One who dies a natural death after advanced age, his/her departed soul is allowed to live in the *Samkhalung* (three erected hearth stones), as a venerable ancestor
- b) The deceased soul of an un-married man/woman is allowed to live in *rongeli* i.e. the atmosphere of outside the main door of the house.
- c) The young or immature married or adopted persons departed soul is kept in *Namelung*-i.e. ever sunny stone on the lap of highest mountain.
- d) One who dies an unnatural death such as accidental or suicidal death that person's soul is allowed to live in *hillaten* i.e. blood shaded rocky place.
- e) A woman who dies during delivery, her soul is allowed to dwell in *Manmangten* i.e. gloomy and steep rock.

iv) **Kubimi:** Conducts the above cited terms and performs in the absence of *Mabimi*.

v) **Dowang:** Performs only minor religious rites and to cure a sick. He chants the spell to ward off the affected evil spirits or the diseases of the sick person and uses wild herbs as medicines. Senior or experienced *Raipas* may also conduct some of the minor religious rites in absence of *Mangpa*. There is also important role of *Raimas* whose function is to minor religious rites and marriages.

E) **Deities:** The Kirat Khambu Rais believe in various deities such as 1) *Aitabarey*, 2) *Sikary*, 3) *Aathaney*, 4) *Naya* 5) *Buddheni* and 6) *Yowa*. The Kirat Khambu Rais perform various respective rites worshipping these deities.

F) **Yearly Festivals:** the main Kirat Khambu Rai festivals are *Sakewa* and *Sakela*.

Sakewa is celebrated on full moon of *Vaishakh* (May- June) every year and *Sakela* is celebrated on full moon of *Mangsheer* (Nov- Dec). There are numerous folk tales and songs and dances on the subjects of Kirat Khambu Rais.

SAKEWA: The Kirat Khambu Rais's, Great Festival.

Sakewa is one festival, which is celebrated with great enthusiasm by all Kirat Khambu Rai. It is a harvest festival where worshipping of crops is done (Baali Puja). It is also known as *Bhumi Puja* or *Chandi Puja* or land worshipping ceremony. It is generally celebrated by all Kirat Khambu Rais; especially in the villages. Sakewa is celebrated on full moon of Baishakha i.e. May – June. (Sakewa/ Ubhauri /Bungbanwa /Dongwanga).

In Sakewa, people in the villages gather in huge circle and dance (Sili). They follow the hand and foot movements of their leader viz. Sili Mangpa (Male) and Sili Mangma (Female). The hand movements follow a specific sequence and all must strictly follow the action of the leader.

Of the various Silis, "Chasum Sili" is very popular. It is a dance depicting planting of paddy, harvesting, husking, cooking and finally eating the cooked rice. "Paklewa Sili" is a very simple dance there are no specific hand or leg movements. Some Silis depict the activities of animals and birds. "Narowa Sili" is one of them, which depicts the lifecycle of the crane (Karang – Kurung). With the movements of their hands, the dancers show how the cranes raise their chicks, teach them how to fly, fly freely in the open sky and when they are attacked by hawks, they huddle together into two circles and fly in clockwise and anti-clockwise direction to confuse the hawk.



*Akta Swang Sengma
(Water spout worshipping ceremony)*

*Narilung (Linga) worship
with offering of chicken*

*Khutlung Khutma (Three hearth stone)
worshipping ceremony*

Kirat Khumbu Rais are basically Nature worshippers. It is believed that they are descendants of Puruhang and Sumnima of the Himalaya Kailash and Sagarmatha. It is customary that some rituals must be performed before the Sakewa. The Nakchung (village priest), Maheng Kulu (Assistant to Nakchung) and the villagers proceed to the sacred place, which is generally located in the hilltop. On the way, the Nakchung performs Akta Swang Sengma (Water Spout /Dhara Ceremony). The altar consists of a Phallic stone (Linga/Narilung/Pao) with Trisuls on either side. Nakchung and his assistant carry grains, ginger and rice wine in wabuk (cindo/dried gourd) while the devotees carry the grains, other produce of their land and water in Chunge. In olden times, traditionally a chicken or both a pig and a chicken were offered as sacrifices at the altar. Then the Nakchung chants prayers and sprinkles water, wine, grain and ginger at the altar. The Nakchung request Mother Nature to



Sakewa Sili (dance) - Chasum sili

Paklewa Sili (dance)



Thanking mother nature for good rain, good sunshine and good harvest during Sakela

protect the village from disease and draught and for good rain, good sunshine and harvest. Then they proceed to the open space in front of the house where the Nakchung fixes a bamboo pole on the ground. Then he enters the house, goes to the Samkhalung / Situlung / Sutulung (the three hearth stones representing the ancestral deities of the Rais) of the house. (The hearthstones represent the

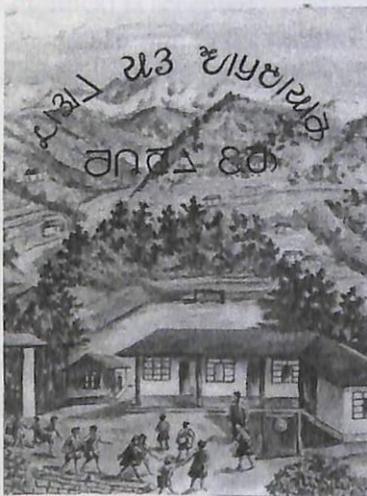
ancestral deities of the Rais). The Nakchung performs the Khutlung Khutma (Fire Place / Three hearth stone worshipping ceremony). Ginger and chicken at the hearthstones. The hen sacrifice is called Mang hulu. Finally the villagers enter the house, dance around the fireplace, wine, dine and proceed to the next house.

It is difficult for us to say when the Sakewa celebration started. It most probably started when man learned about agriculture and farming.

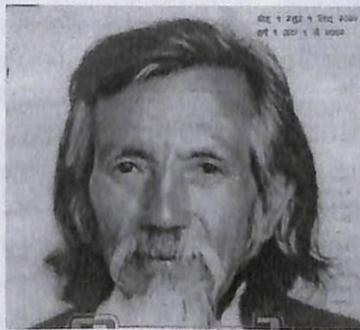
Sakela (Udhauli /Dongdawa /Donglasa) is celebrated in full moon Mangsheer i.e. Nov- Dec for thanksgiving for good harvest and peaceful climate.

Therefore, it was appropriate that once or twice a year, we should thank Mother Nature and offer grains and sacrifices for good rain, good sunshine and harvest.

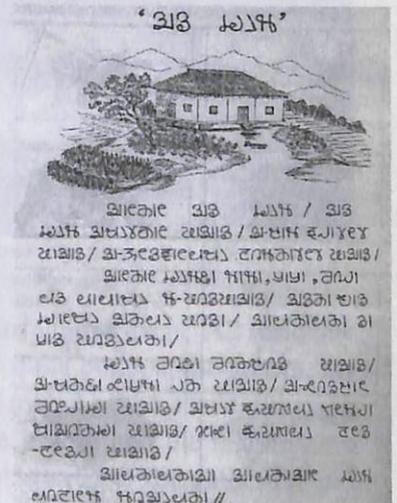
23 Kirat Khambu Rai language and script: Kirat Khambu Rais has twenty three different dialects of which Bantawa dialect has been officially agreed upon as a common lingua franca on 15.6.1996. As we did not have a script of our own the Kirat Khambu Rai script popularized by late Guru Kripasalyan Rai of Daramdin, West Sikkim was adopted as the official Kirat Khambu Rai



Kirat Khambu Rai Text Book for Class-I



Lt. Kripasalyan Rai of Daramdin, West Sikkim



Ang Khim-A lesson on 'My House' in Kirat Khambu Rai Script

script on 23.5.1998. It is derived from the Kirat Lipi (from which the Limboos have taken the Srijonga Lipi), but some modifications have been done to make it more computer friendly and student friendly.

In January 2003 two text books, Rai Chammary Lachep (Rai alphabet text book) for primary class and Rai Young Chaplaplayak- Bushy Dak for class I have been printed by the AKRS. They are been taught in the various schools run by the associations all over Sikkim. The text books have also been submitted to the Education Department, Govt. of Sikkim and from this year the Govt. has appointed two regular Kirat Rai teachers from this Academic Sessions.

Social Structure: Father is the head of the family. In his absence, mother takes over the charge of the head of the family. Seniority in age, irrespective of sex, is very much respected in Kirat Khambu Rai Society.

Type of inheritance: The sons inherit both movable and immovable properties from the father in Kirat Khambu Rai community.

26. Forms of marriage:

According to Charles MC Dougal (The Kulunge Rai - 1979, page 103-121), there are three types of marriage: (A) Arranged marriage (B) Marriage by fine payment (Jari) (C) Marriage by force (elopement).

Of these the arranged marriage is considered to be the most prestigious.

I. Arranged Marriage takes place in two stages:

Initial Marriage Ceremony

Final Rite of Marriage. But in modern times generally the initial and final rites are combined to save money and time.

(A) Initial Marriage Ceremony: (Sagun / Niwa)

Kongpi/Bongpa, an intermediary, takes liquor provided by the boy's parents and goes to visit the members of the girl's family. The first visit in the 'sodhana' - 'request,' second is 'multheke' - larger presentation of liquor- the main payment. The third visit is called 'bhakha' - the promised date of fulfillment. The couple is formally engaged from the time of the multheke is accepted.

In addition to the multheke, a personal gift as makamundari/saya mundari, is given to the bride from the groom which consists of ten rupees (in silver rupee coins).

At the time of initial marriage ceremony itself, the groom is expected to give the bride a coin necklace, consisting if possible of 50-100 silver (Indian) rupee coins, gold nose rings, gold earrings, (Chepte Sun), gold necklace (Tilahari).



Multheke-Large presentation of liquor in wooden and earthen vessels

The initial ceremony of the marriage is known as sagun- the auspicious event. All residents of the village have a standing invitation. The party (janti) consisting of the bongpa, the groom, his lokondia, some village notables leave the grooms house and proceed to that of the bride. Entering the house, the bride and her lokondi being seated to one side, the groom and his lokonda are escorted there and made to sit down on the mat beside them. Beer is served to the gathering and there are few speeches proclaiming the suitability of the marriage and wishing the couple well in the future.

The bride and groom in-turn the bride first and the groom present bowls of liquor provided



Sewa Chongma (Dbog-Bbet) Prostration in front of the parents & elders and Sino Phero

Lastur-A set of 8 copper vessels, liquor, grains and pork

by the grooms family to the members of the brides family and rest of her relatives, along with salutation. This is known as "sainu phemu" 'the changing of the relationship'. During sainu phemu



Lastur- liquor with head of a pig



Lamtumma - Bidding farewell to the bride and the bridegroom

the bride and groom move around the room in a clockwise direction. The 'makamundari' presentation and the 'sainu phernu' are the two absolutely indispensable features of the initial marriage ceremony. Then the groom's party escorts the bride to his home. At the groom's house there is a feast. The next day, the bride is dressed in new clothes and she wears the ornaments and jewelry given by her husband. A larger procession led by bongpa, village elders, a band of musicians of Tailors (Damai) caste, the bride and groom, the lokonda and lokondia return to the bride's home. They must take a gourd container and a large earthen vessel, both filled with beer (Chaneko jar); two large wooden containers (kathuwa) and a single bottle, all full of liquor (arakhalhengma), a leg of pork, and twelve seers of either eleusine (millet) flour or roughly ground maize. The party enters the bride's house where a large gathering is awaiting them.

Daplo Kuim is performed first. Ritual beer brought by the groom's family in the gourd (Chindo/Wabuk) is held by the senior male of the bride's clan and poured as libations of beer on each of the three sacred hearth stones, working round in a clockwise direction and finally on the alter (than/damphe). The gathering is fed by the bride's family with beer (hengma/arakha), eleusine/millet (diro/jagulo), maize chakla and plenty of curried pork (balesha). Again the liquor brought by the relatives is served - songs are sung in "sakumbo Kura" a special ritual idiom, for the purpose of blessing the couple. There is a general 'sainu phernu'. Later in the evening or on the next day, the groom's party, escorting the bride reach the groom's house where the 'daplo kuim' is performed again, having the gourd (Chindo/Wabuk) sent by the bride's family.

(B) Final Marriage Rite:

The final marriage rite can take place only if the wife's family agrees, which the husband has to go and approach the wife's family members. The time interval between the initial and final rites may be ten years or more. Economic factor also plays a major role. In the bridegroom's side all members of the local clan segment, close relatives and friends contribute dinuman/songche consisting of one mohar (half a penny) for the marriage. While in the bride's side they contribute one seer of grain (muleschem) for preparation of beer (Arakha/Hengma) for the guests.

The janti / procession, along with the bride and bridegroom proceed to the bride's house along with the lastur and other prestation. They are led by two Kongpies /bongpas and they carry the following gifts consisting of one ceremonial gourd and one large earthen pot, both full of millet beer (di), two large wooden vessels filled with liquor (Arakha/ hengma), a leg of pig/head of pig (Baksha/pork), twelve seers of grain along with the 'Lastur' consisting of a set of eight copper vessels. Outside the house, they are met by the bongpas/ kongpi of the wife's group and the two parties ceremoniously greet each other and offer bowls (Kasako dabukas) of liquor to each other. 'Daplo

Kuim' rite is performed and then food and beer is served to the gathering. Later in the evening, the husband presents the 'Lastur' to his wife's family and again the Daplo Kuim is performed.

The Kongpies /bongpas from the bride grooms side tell the wife's side- 'the groom has brought the lastur and given it to you. You in turn have given your daughter. Accept the gifts and be happy'. The men in the bride's side tell the bride-'the bridegroom has presented the gifts for you. Now he alone has rights over you. Live happily with your husband and with your in- laws'. This act is known as "Vakdatta" - i.e the father declaring that he has given his daughter to the bridegroom in presence of witnesses.

The formal authority and responsibility with respect to the woman (jimma/ eeche-e-men) are now transferred to her husband. The importance of the final rite of marriage is that it transfers final and ritual authority as well as responsibility with respect to the married women from her natal family to her husband, secondly, it fully establishes the legitimacy of the children of the union, both those born prior to and subsequent to the ceremony itself. One of the most significant effects of the final rite is that the final bonds of marriage can no longer be broken, divorce is now impossible. Within a year after the completion of the final rite, the bride's family reciprocate with gifts (daijo/ chumri) to the bride and her husband, for the benefit of their children.

In summary, the Kirat Khambu Rai marriage is a process involving a number of discrete stages separated by time intervals rather than an event at one point in time. The interval between the initial and final rites of marriage may be ten years or more.

Marriage by fine payment: (Jari) Elopement with another's wife (*Jari*) is also practiced by some Kirat Khambu Rais but such persons should face the '*Pancha*' (comprising of five elderly Kirat folks) who generally impose fine (*Jarikal*) on the person to pay the former husband. Marriage by force (Elopement) In marriage by force the unmarried girl is abducted willingly or unwillingly whether or not the girl agrees to marriage, her abductors must pay a fine to her family as damages for having flouted their authority over her marital destiny. The abductors inform the girl's parents within three days and the marriage formalities are carried out later.

27. Life Cycle: All the rituals pertaining to birth of Kirat Khambu Rai child is conducted by *Raima*. (Women Folks) including naming of baby (*navran*). Senior Raipas and Raimas also conduct marriage. There is no any major role of *Mangpa* (Priest) in performing marriages. Death: Kirat generally practice burial system. The soul of the (Raipas and Raimas), it is believed that they automatically go and reside in '*Samkhalung*' and need to perform elaborate last rite. But those who die unnatural death such as accidents, suicide, or untimely death it is believed that the soul do not have any place in *Samkhalung*. As such *Mangpa* has to invoke the (the deceased for) rites to appease the soul of the deceased from peaceful rest. Otherwise, it is believed that the souls do harm to living beings and surroundings. In death of infants, the body of the child is left covered by stone boulders in a cave along with the cradle. The entire death ritual is to be performed by senior and well versed *Mangpas*

28. Ritual attached with major Traditional Occupation and yearly festival of the Community: Kirat Khambu Rais have been performing *Shikari Puja* for God of Hunting, from time immemorial for successful hunting. *Sakewa Puja* is also performed for good harvest, timely rains, calamity free year (in May-June) and *Sakela Puja* is performed for thanksgiving for good harvest, peaceful climate (in month of November and December).

29. Concept of Disease and Treatment in Traditional way: Some times Kirat Khambu Rais even blame *Dewa, Sichey, Jugitra, Dogutrey* like bad spirits for headaches, nausea, vomiting. For

good health and better future and general well being Kirats Rais perform Pitri Puja and other deities worship. For this sort of ailments *Mangpa* or Bijuwa is summoned to appease those angry spirits, sometimes even scarifying a cock or hen and pig. Bijuwa and *Mangpa* also perform *Chinta/Tomwa* (a kind of ritual to ward off evil spirits) and *Khargo Katnu* (rite to transfer possible ill luck to sacrifice cock/hen/pig). Kirat Khambu Rais believe in ancestral blessings for the well being of the patients.



Mang Kham/Than (Sacrificial Altar) with the Hoptang (Sacrificed Pig and Red Cock)

The Mangpa (Bijuwa/Dhami) performing Chinta / Tomwa, holding Wasbiliken (Dbayangro) to appease the angry spirits and for the ancestral blessing

So far as other ailments and its treatments are concerned, the role of *Baidang/Homae* (medicine-man) is very important. He diagnoses and provides traditional herbs and medicine for the patients.



Mangpas performing Chinta / Tomwa with Gbungring and by beating the Zarke Tbal (Brass plate)

Blood of Deer (Mirga / Khisa), Gall Bladder Bear (Bhalu / Masa), intestine of Porcupine (Dumsi/ Khasa), lever of monkey (Badar/Tamanchu/Popangsa), Rhododendron Flower (Guras), Chireta, Roots of Stinging Nettle (Ganam) are used as medicines.

30. Funeral Ritual

According to Charles MC Dougal (The Kulunge Rai-1979 P.124-127) The dead body is buried, only rarely it is cremated (if it is the wish of the deceased). The *Mundum* decrees that cremation must not take place.

Two rites are performed:

- a. The first, Mishia is performed soon after death, when the deceased is buried in a field near the house.

- b. The second, Shilum Kattu, is normally performed on the third (incase of women), fifth (incase of men) or seventh in general and a month or more after death in Kulunge Rai {a subgroup of Kirat Khambu Rai}.

Very poor households may combine the two into one rite, but this is thought to indicate a lack of respect for the deceased, and as such is reprehensible. The body is generally laid flat on a mat but in



Body of the deceased laid near the Samkhalung

Mangpa chanting the Mundum for the soul of the deceased

The body being carried on 'Chelemse' to the graveyard

Kulunge Rai the body is flexed, with the arms crossed on the chest and the knees drawn up and tucked into the body, as in the fetal positions. The corpse is wrapped in a white cloth and this is secured by tying it with cord. It is then placed on a tilted platform prepared from bamboo, and at the head and at the foot of the platform is placed a basket containing buckwheat; a bamboo vessel containing beer also is put beside the corpse. The corpse has to be placed on the west side of the house with the head pointing north. In case of man, a set of arrows, a bow and a Khukuri is placed to the left side of the corpse to protect it from evil spirits; in case of woman- a Khurpi is kept. One brass plate (Kasa ko thaI) is kept facing down on the head and one on the feet - dabuko ghoptyo. A copper oil lamp is kept burning at the head end of the corpse.

If death occurs in the evening or during the night, some friends and close kin remain in the house with the family until dawn, at which time the ceremony is begun. Restrictions must be observed by the next of kin, it is a taboo to cut the hair, to sing, or to give or receive formal greetings.

Mishia:

For this first rite it is not mandatory to call a priest (nokchhol nakchung), but one is usually summoned. One unit of grain is collected from every household in the village; if they attend the



The body being laid in the grave and covered with flat stones

funeral they must bring liquor also. Clansmen of the deceased bring an offering of buckwheat in a basket; in addition they bring a small offering of liquor and an offering of beer. Siblings of the deceased may not drink any of the beer brought to the house from outside. During the ceremony in the house, the priest addresses the deceased, explains to him that he is being put to rest, and ritually feeds him some buckwheat and gives him some beer to drink. While this is being done, one of the priest's assistants kneeling at the foot of the corpse chops downwards through the air repeatedly with a khukuri, chanting whi, while another assistant kneeling by the head, and holding a bow and arrow, alternately chants hai, hai hai hai (hoot hoot hoot). Meanwhile, some persons prepare the 'sibalo' commemoration flags to be set by the grave, while others attend to preparing the grave itself. When the burial place is reached one of the parties shoots an arrow on the ground and the grave is dug. Even if the deceased is the owner of the land, it is a ritual to buy the land by offering one rupee coin for the burial ground. The latter is dug about six feet deep and just long enough to accommodate the corpse on one of the fields at a level lower than the house, and to the 'south' or toward the stream. The grave is lined on all four sides- but not on the bottom - with large slabs of stone. Two other big, flat stones are prepared so that they may be ready to be placed over the top of the grave after the corpse is put to rest. When all is in readiness, a chicken is killed by throwing it down on top of these slabs, a cock if the deceased is male, and a hen if female. One leg is put inside the grave and the remainder of the chicken ritually thrown away. In some Rais the wings of the chicken are sent to the house to be put under armpits of the deceased. Inside the house four men pick up the corpse on "Chelemse" - stretcher made of bamboo and woman's brothers may not carry her, otherwise there are no restrictions. The deceased is carried around the fire hearth in a counter clock wise direction being set down on the floor once on each of the four sides. The men carry the corpse out of the back door and take it to the grave, which they likewise circumambulate in a counter - clockwise direction, setting the body down on each of the four sides, ending up on the lower side, towards the stream. Women are present at the graveside as well as men. A piece of cloth is spread over the top of the grave and held taut. The men raise the corpse, and swinging it over the grave let it go, so that it drops inside carrying the cloth down with it as an under covering.

The deceased's wife gives some tobacco, which is placed inside the grave along with provisions of food and beer. The two slabs are then used to cover the top of the vault. First the wife of the deceased, and after her his sister, then his father, and finally each of those present, throws a handful of earth on top of the grave. The women then file back into the house, being purified with water mixed with marcha (fermenting agent for making millet beer) before entering the courtyard. "Marcha" (a kind of yeast-used for fermenting millet into beer) is added to water with a view to making it holy. To a Hindu the use of "Marcha" (which ferments rice and millet to form rice beer and millet beer) may look strange but the Kirat Khambu Rais like other tribal people have accepted intoxicating drink and meat as things relished by their dead ancestors and deities.

The men who remain construct a roof over the grave (in Kulunge Rai) consisting of matting on top of a bamboo frame. A basket with a bamboo container of millet beer is placed on top of the roof as an offering to the deceased, and is securely fastened there. The eight sibalo are then placed along the sides of the grave, four on each side.

The entire party then goes to the stream, where they wash to purify themselves. Meal is then shared at the house of the deceased, together with a copious amount of beer and liquor.

The last rites are performed on the third (for females), fifth (for males) or seventh day in general. In Kulunge Rai a minimum of one month



A roof of matting constructed over the grave

should transpire before the Shilum Kattu rite is performed; that is considered the minimum "decent" interval. This period of time is necessary to honor the deceased by "feeding" him (her), so that he (she) will be remembered by relatives and friends. The spirit of the deceased is "kept" in the vicinity in order to be so honored. Some relatives or friends may have been away from the village at the time of death, in which case they would not have an opportunity to pay their respects to the deceased. One the day following death an offering of cooked grain, meat and beer is taken to the grave; then one day is omitted and the offering again made; then two days are omitted before the next offering and so on. At the time of Shilum Kattu all outstanding financial matters relating to the deceased are discussed, and any obligations to pay debts formally recognized. The rite cannot be performed unless there is some beef on hand, but this need only be a token amount- some dried beef is kept for such occasions. All households contribute, cooked grain, which has fermented, to the family of the deceased for the purpose of making beer. It is mandatory to summon a priest for this rite; if a priest was called on the occasion of the "Mishia" rite, the same man must be used for "Shilum Kattu". The participants gather in the house of the deceased. Seated in *the* 'lower' part of the house, facing the fire hearth, the priest holds a long bamboo bow and an arrow, with the point wrapped, in his left hand, while in his right he holds a sickle and an arrow with the point bared. Chanting in "sakumbu kura", the priest instructs the deceased regarding the road to the land of the dead, "pomlalubum" and enjoins him to begin the journey. Time to time the priest simulates firing the arrow from the bow, shouting at the same time. This is to exhort the deceased spirit to depart. Before the party leaves the house to visit the grave where they will make the final offerings of food and beer and cut the "sibalo", the "daplo kuim" ritual of pouring a libation of beer over the hearth stones is performed, however, contrary to the nonnal practice, on this occasion "daplo kuim" is done in a counter - clockwise direction. The beef for the deceased is roasted and beer poured on it.

The party, consisting of men, woman and children, files out of the house and goes to the grave, walking around it in a counter- clockwise direction. Each person halts and puts something into the offering basket - tobacco, sugar cane, taro, a potato, anything. The "sibalo" are then cut. With a "khukuri" a man chops through the pole on which the "sibalo" flag is suspended. The sibalo flags are then placed underneath the roof which covers the grave. It is striking indeed that the last action of the funeral drama focuses on the relation between brother and sister, giving final emphasis to its solidarity. The sibalo which a deceased man has been given by his 'sister' cannot be cut by any of his own clansmen, they cannot be cut by his mother's brother or his wife's brother, but they may be cut by his sister's husband.

During the night Chinta/Tomwa is performed by the Mangpa/Mabimi (Dhami/Jhakri/Bijuwa) to persuade the soul of the deceased to go and reside in the Samkhalung. He chants the Mundum (Oracle Chant) and performs the last rite.

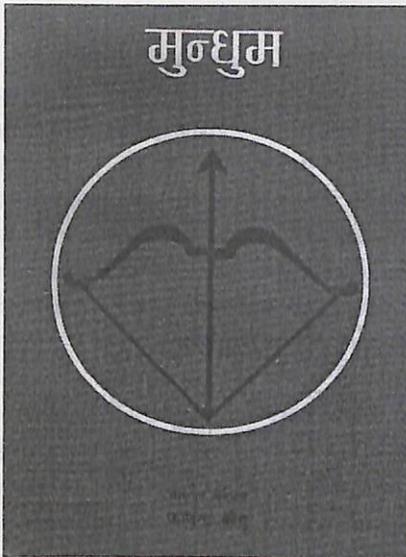
MUDDUM / MUNDUM:

According to Martin-Gaenzle-Origins & Migrations of Mewahang Rais - 1991, page 223, Oral Tradition (Thuturi Baed /Spoken Veda), is one of the most important means of cultural continuity in a non-literate society)

What Allen found to be true in the case of Thulung Rai applies also to the Mewahang Rai. The Traditional culture is oral through and through (Allen 1976 6a: 261).

Nevertheless, it may be said that the cultural heritage of the Kiranti lives on more independently and steadfastly in the oral tradition, than in any other domain. The total corpus of performed texts- that is, myths (Sacred, legend, folk tales), ritual songs and ceremonial dialogues- is called Muddum by the Mewahang, as it is by other Kranti groups. It generally refers to inherited knowledge concerning the ancestors. It comprises:

- (a) Histories of the origin of the ancestors.



मुन्धुम

धाप्लो कृतका

मिगाजा

इव बि धाप्लो कुचिकिन खल जम, विरु-मुजम देने स्वादीम धाप्लो पावा वा मानिम बीम छो ओ । खल जम, विरु लुजम होवुनइ धाप्लो मुमुपाम बीम छुमुओओ । मिगाजा देकील नु नम यो सिलमु छोओ । न मिगाजा होवुनसी छो ओ । इव मुका नु बिका बि हुवमुसी छो ओ । मिगाजा बी किम भी मो छो ओको पि वा कुचिकीओ य छो ओ । मिगाजा होवुनसी न नु इव बिका धाप्लो पापजा खल विमु नु मोदी ।

उप्रीसीमा पिब बनावेडा

विरुअ मुफरवेड सबे जम, कपीरक (दान, उट्टा, कोदी) कोही बलिघरि मरि चकिम । पो मुफरवेडम विरु वामुले यो जम, कपीरक कोही जिन खल हुनेन । पो जम बाली भाको मारी वा बेदीका हुनु परेड । मिगाजा विरु जमच मोलकक केरिपयो हुनु परेड । यो मुफरवेड परमा सबे वामु हुने । परमा कुशर भयमा विरु कुफरवेड जिन दको हुने ।

इव धाप्लो वेतका होवुन छोओ । शुपमबी पिपीकी धाप्लम इ छोओ धामइ होवुन धाप्लो छो ओ । इव बि विरानीम व इ मोरि । कुचिकिन होवुन किमबी छपबी का दुहाबा देने हातु मिवाज मोदी मिवाज व धाप्लोबी कुवाज पुन खलन सोवेन जन नु बी वेङ्गरीकोम मेपु विमु छो ओ । न होवुन किम डिरेम मेपु वयो होवुन, मुवुनकिम बीम बबनीन किम विम जन नु बि धाप्लोबी नु देतो कुची किम मेपु बालो खल न किम विम तामु जन न देतो धाप्लो बइमुओओ ।

विरु अरु धाप्लो पाप वामु परीवारमा हुने । मारी सेकारको मुफर मारिने अरु नै विरु हुने । विरुअ अरु सबैको मेका मडिवाइकको अरुमा पुकारि दिने चरगइक हो । मरुमा विरुमा दिनेमा कोही धाप्लो धारको हुनमाओ मरेकारक इव । मरेपवा अरुअ अरु मरेको उरुको नाममा कोही विरु अरुको अरुअ अरुमा विरु अरुअरु दिनु परेड । मरुको धाप्लो परमा सबेजिन मरु विरुअरु । मरुको धाप्लो परमा सबेजिन मरु अरुको अरुअरु मरु विरुअरु होवुन मरेको अरु मरुको नाम मरु विरु अरुअरु । मरुअरु सबे सलन वामुअरुअरुको धारको नाममा विरुअ वामुअरु परेड ।

कोही हुनुन । १



Muddum / Mundum written in Devnagri Script

- (b) Beginning with the primal creation of the universe.
- (c) The emergence of natural and cultural and cultural orders.
- (d) Continuing to the settlement of the ancestral territory.
- (e) It also concerns the proper means of communicating with ancestors and ritually maintaining the order they have established.
- (f) It evokes a way of life predefined by the ancestors, a self-enclosed world, rooted in the past.
- (g) For the Kiranti people, it is the very essence of their culture, the foundation of their identity (cf Allen, N.J – Shamanism among the Thulung Rais ; 1976 a ; p258; Hardman, c-n.d. Vitality and depression : Religion; 1996 –p. 165, 173 Martin Gaenzsle – Origins and Migration of Mewahang Rai, 1991, p.223,224

According to Imam Singh Chemjong, the word “Mundhum” means “The power of great strength” and the Kirat people of east Nepal believe it to be true holy and powerful scripture (I.S.Chemjong- History & Culture of the Kirat People vol I & II, 1966 I:21)

Hardman derives this power of tradition from the potential ‘danger arising from unsatisfied and indignant ancestors (Saya) {Hardman, 1996 n.d. 175ff} There was no written religious book of the Kirat Khambo Rais, although recently, some writers have started documenting the Mundum (Thuturi Baed Spoken veda) in written form- “Mundum” – by Phanindra Kohyu –Bk Sm. 2051.

There was no written religious book of Kirat Khambu Rais. They solely depended on the spoken verses of religious rites by *Mangpa*. This oral narration is called “*Thuturi Baed*”- “spoken Veda”. As such the cultural influence of other communities have made inroads to this less developed tribe. Other customs, festivals and traditions crept into the Kirat Khambu Rai Community due to economic and educational backwardness. However, the distinct religious, cultural and social tradition of Kirat Khambu Rais is still being followed and observed. If proper support is not given on time waves of other powerful religious, cultural and social forces will soon engulf this unique ancient culture and heritage of Kirat Khambu Rais.

In the milieu of the present day religious and cultural propaganda orchestrated by other rich and powerful communities this humble and native religion and cultural entity will surely be engulfed and indeed vanish forever. Tribal Status if accorded to the Kirat Khambu Rais is one way of seeing to it that this cultural asset of the great Indian people and its lasting diversity will be safeguarded.

Thus the word "Rai" in the above context is radically different in meaning from the words "Rai", "Roy" and "Ray" in the context of the Hindu Aryan living in different states in India. The Kirat Khambu "Rai" is a very backward hill tribe living mainly in the North Eastern Himalayan belt of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Dooars of West Bengal, the North Eastern States and Eastern Nepal. Kirat Khambu Rai people are Mongoloid and not Hindu Aryans as suggested by some people. "Kirat" is a Sanskrit word meaning a 'Hillman' living by hunting and that is the meaning given to the Kirats by Aryans in ancient times. When agriculture was introduced in India the Kirat Khambu Rais also opted to farming yet tradition has it that the Kirat Khambu Rais are basically hunters and are very skillful archers. They are gatherers of fruits and roots and follow (Jhum) cultivation-Slash and Burn cultivation.

The primitiveness of culture of the Kirat Khambu Rais becomes obvious when we refer to their form of religion. In fact, it is not religion in the straight sense of the term, because there is no concept of a God. The Kirat Khambu Rais are ancestor worshippers. They worship the ancestors annually. The place of worship is the most sacred place to a Kirat Khambu Rai. It consists of a fireplace (*Chula*) made of three stones "Samkhalung" (sacred kitchen). Above the *Samkhalung* a small platform like structure is made which is supposed to be the seat for the spirits of ancestors being worshipped. The *Samkhalung* forms the sanctumsanctorum, so to say and only clan members are allowed to go near it. Even married daughters have no right to go near it. Every item produced from the land has to be ceremoniously offered to the *Pitris* (ancestors). Only after such offering one is entitled to eat and drink the items (e.g. newly harvested rice and rice beer, millet beer (*Pumdilo Hangwa*), *hengma* (*Arakha*) ginger etc). A Kirat Khambu Rai cannot kill his pig (*Bak*) right away; he must perform a puja before killing so that this killing becomes a religious sacrifice. The newly married bride has to be ceremoniously presented to the *Pitris* (ancestors) 'at the *Samkhalung*. Without it she cannot become a member of her husband's clan.

Marriages of a girl remains null and void if the father fails to give his daughter in marriage 'formally' which consists in declaring that he has given his daughter to the bridegroom in presence of witnesses. This act is known as "*Vak Datta*". This practice is confined to the Kirat Khambu Rais. Even if young women elopes with a man de facto, lives as his wife, begets children, the woman remains a maiden (*Kumari*) in the eyes of the father and the clan unless *Vak Datta* is given. From this we can guess the importance of '*Vak Datta*'.

In 1995, under the patronage of Dr. Pawan Kumar Chamling, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim, the Govt. of Sikkim recognized 'Kirat Khambu Rai' language as one of the State Official Language.

Only recently during the Annual General Meeting of the Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh Sikkim on 15.6.1996 a common Lingua Franca of Kirat Khambu Rai was agreed upon. It was agreed that '*Bantawa*' dialect will be the official 'Kirat Khambu Rai' Lingua Franca. Kirat Khambu Rais had never written any book as they had not developed a script. Only on 23.5.1998, the Kirat Khambu Rai script (popularized by Late Guru Kripa Shalyan Rai of Daramdin, West Sikkim) was adopted as the official Kirat Khambu Rai Script. Now text books for Pre-Primary and Class I have been printed and is being taught in schools of Sikkim. A book on grammar and dictionary is being written All this shows that the Rais are no better than the Santhals, Uraos, Kols, Bhils and others of the plains:

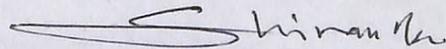
From the above details we can conclude that we the Kirat Khambu Rais are a very backward community (Tribe) of Sikkim, India. Our History, Culture, Tradition, Costume, Food habits and mannerism depict a tribal trait. Limbus and Rais (Khambus) have always been clubbed under Kiratas /Kiratis. According to Eden Vansitrat (Gurkhas-1906p.99) - their manners, customs, religious ceremonies and appearances are almost the same. They can and have intermarried for generations.

When a brethren, the Limbus were included in the Scheduled Tribe list of the Indian Constitution in December 2002, we the Kirat Khambu Rais were sadly left out. Therefore, we, the Kirat Khambu Rai, would like to solicit the Government of India to kindly include us in the Scheduled Tribe list of the Indian Constitution as early as possible-in the next session of the parliament.

In conclusion, we would say that without the sympathetic consideration of the Government of India, the Kirat Khambu Rais, one of the ancient community/tribe of India, would cease to exist as a distinct community/tribe. Historical forces like assimilation will surely overwhelm the Kirat Khambu Rais in the twenty first century. We are afraid our people will always remain backward, poor and helpless if the Government does not come to their rescue.

Considering all these aspects of the Kirat Khambu Rais, it is solicited that they should be included in the Scheduled Tribe list of the Indian Constitution as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. Shiva Kumar Rai)

President

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