

**Changing Discourse on Body among the Rai Women of
Sikkim**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University



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

By

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July, 2021



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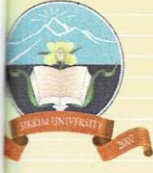
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heart felt gratitude to Dr. Sandhya Thapa, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Sikkim University for being the pillar of support throughout. It is her patient guidance, encouragement and meticulous supervision, that has enabled me to successfully complete the research study.

I also wish to acknowledge my respondents who gave their valuable time and contribution to this research study. Without them, the research would not have been complete. I am thankful towards brothers, Anup and Rhythm from Assam Lingzey who played a pivotal role of introducing the village residents of Assam Lingzey to me, as well as my brother Abhishek for helping me to clarify my doubts and taking me out of bewilderment at times through discussions and suggestions. I am equally thankful towards Akhil Kirat Rai Sang Sikkim and Mrs. Bhutia the owner of ethnic boutique, for their valued participation and contribution to the study.

Furthermore, I am grateful towards all the faculty members of the Department of Sociology, Sikkim University for always motivating me and providing me with their valuable suggestions. I would also like to thank Sikkim University for giving me this opportunity to work in this topic, as well as all the people who have directly or indirectly contributed to this work. I shall forever be grateful.

I dedicate this work to my grandparents, Mrs. Sushma (Hari Maya) Rai and Mr. Ashok Kumar Rai.

Sunaina Rai

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Over the last few decades the accelerating interest¹ in the field of body in social sciences has led to high emphasis on the intensive studies on body, which has challenged the very basic argument of early classical positivists notion of body as belonging primarily to biology. With the coming up of such discourses and contestations, the body has not only been restricted to biological study and analysis but has also been opened for linguistic, cultural and social analysis (Hancock et.al, 2000). Understanding the body discourse becomes interesting even in the field of social science as, body is not a constant and independent entity but is socially constructed and variable as to how it can be understood over time and place (Mc Dowell, 1999). Thus, it may not be wrong to say that the body has a history of its own, which may be based on one's cultural and social aspect and tracing the body through its historicity is important, for it cannot be denied that the body is undergoing tremendous shifts in and across time and place.

Particularly, the waves of modernism and more specifically the post-modern period marked by the onset of transnational capitalism, consumerism, technological advancement, globalization and other modern forces led to a new turn in regard to the discourse on body. In the wake of these modern encounters, the body, therefore, can no longer be limited as a biological fact but has extended to become one's lifestyle

¹ The classical and traditional era in social sciences did not lay emphasis on the subject matter of the body. However, with the onset of postmodern thinkers specifically and their theories, the area of the body has been highly emphasized and regarded to be of great importance.

choice and identity. Therefore, one lens through which the body can be introspected in this aspect may be as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon as it undergoes transformation, suiting to one's choice and becomes open to any form of management, maintenance and manipulation (Goffman, 1959; Giddens 1991).

In the backdrop of this changing discourse, the present study entitled Changing Discourse on Body among the Rai Women of Sikkim is an attempt to explore the dimensions of 'body discourse' and address how the changing dynamics of society is impacting the discourse of body particularly taking Kirati Rai ethno-group of Sikkim in terms of their 'body image', body management and self presentation taking body and beauty care practices, costumes, cosmetics, hair styles and ornaments as the parameters of study. The present study by employing the term discourse intends to draw out contestations and discussions on how the subject matter of the body has been changing over time, and how this is empirically relevant and perceived by the women of Rai community.

1.2.1 Statement of the Problem

Turner (1992) argues that post-modern society often due to its larger vested complexities concerning bodily matters is referred as 'somatic society' where prime emphasis is laid on the body. The greater exposure to post modern conditions and technological advancements brought the process of social transformation in the somatic society, which on one hand has made 'the question of body' negotiable and on the other has led to the evolvement of what Varga (2005) has pointed out the

“virtual body”² and the women of Kirat Rai society are no exception to this impact of social transformation. Rai (2012) has pointed out the strong impact of media, technology and the Kirati youths being more attracted to dominant western culture and fashion. The negotiation on the question of body among Rai women can be seen in the efforts and adjustments made by women so as to fit into the ‘standards’ of how women should present herself in a society, for instance, mannequins in widely prevalent ethnic stores depicts Rai women in ethnic dress having a standard body type and shape which may subtly compel women to fit the depicted ‘body standard’. Provided that, the term body can be perceptual and subjective as the perception of the ‘choices’ to be made in regard to one’s body may vary over the time from one person, community and culture to another, which makes it interesting to explore if there are any variation across time in how the idea of the body and beauty is constructed among Rai women. Body in terms of its presentation may open to various kinds of management, maintenance and modifications as per social norms and set standards, therefore it cannot be denied that the body in the contemporary somatic society has become the source of one’s identity/ status and lifestyle. Therefore, with the onset of modern capitalism, technological advancement and the opening up of the field of manipulation concerning one’s body, so as to fit into the ‘standards’ there is undoubtedly growing uncertainty about the ‘natural body’ and its embodiment. In the wake of all these, the bodily practices and ‘physical control’ on the body may become a central factor in determining the identity of oneself.

² For Varga virtual body is a body created as a result of spread of digital technology in hypermodernity because of the conditions created by postmodernity which leads to a notion that individuality is thought to be maintained by the public presentation of the body.

1.2.2 Contextualizing the Problem

The Rai population in Sikkim trace their descent from an indigenous ethnic group called the Kirat. Therefore, in order to trace the geo-political and socio-cultural aspects of the Rai population it is important to understand their history as a Kirati ethno group. Kirati people trace their designation from Hindu Kush Himalayan Region and are generally referred to as ‘Indigenous Mongoloids’ and ‘Native Himalayans’. Kirati population basically lived on the eastern fringes of Nepal as depicted in ‘Mahabharata’ who later expanded on other Eastern Himalayan regions of Sikkim and its adjoining areas (Subba,2015; Subba,2001).

Nevertheless, Kirati of Sikkim can not be understood in isolation without understanding the socio- cultural context of their counterpart in Nepal. The Kirata group comprises of many ethno communities³ but Rai is considered as one of the earliest communities that traced their descent from Kirat (Subba, 2015). In terms of religious worldview, Kirati Rai traditionally worships local deities and Goddesses namely Sungnima, Jalpa Devi, Chandi along with other Gods. They worship nature as well as their ancestors who reside in their *tin chula dhunga* i.e., three stoned hearths (Bain, 2018). However, the Rais also follow Hinduism to a certain extent and practices Hindu rituals during their marriage ceremony viz., *homyogya* i.e., a sacred marriage ritual before the fire and *kanyadan* (Singh,1993). Monogamous form of marriage by capture, elopement or negotiation (arranged marriage) including village and clan (*thar*) endogamy but sub-clan (*pachha*) exogamy is considered to be commonly followed by Rais. The Rai family structure is usually patrilocal and

³ Including Limboo, Khambu/Rai, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Thami, Thakali, Jirel, Surel, Barman, Hayu, Tharu, Chepang, Toto, Lepcha, Majhi, Monpa, Sarchop, Doya, Chungpa, Takpa, Lishipa and Sherdukpen ethno groups.

patrilineal in nature and traditionally extended families were prominent but now the nuclear family system is quite prevalent (Singh,1993; Rai, 2013). As per the traditional economy, the Rais were involved mainly in hunting and cultivation but in the contemporary period they are involved in various other modern professions too.

Apart from Nepal, Kirati Rai population are predominantly found in Sikkim and Darjeeling too. Though the ethnic wise population of Sikkim was not found in 2011 census but as per 2006 State Socio Economic Census of Sikkim, out of total population of 5,81,546, Rai population accounts to highest percentage comprising 13.5% of total population where 48.98% comprises of female. Since the present study is focused on Kirati Rai women, a brief discussion on traditional perception on the portrayal of ideal Kirati Rai women in Sikkim specifically would not be out of place here.

Kirati myths have always described Kirati women as beautiful with ‘moon shaped’ faces. Traditionally, women used to keep long hair, as women with long hair were considered beautiful. They preferred wearing their traditional attire and ornaments. When it comes to descriptions of Kirati women in literatures, there are numerous literatures on Kirat but only small fragments are written on Kirati women specifically in the context of body discourse. As per the available literature of Rai (*Kirati Rai Jati ka Sanskritik Sampada haru*) traditional/ethnic dress of Rai women includes *fariya* (loincloth) which is a lower garment, *cholo* (blouse) as upper garment and in the middle they wear *patuka* (a piece of long folded cloth tied at the waist). Their ornaments include *chandrama* (moon shaped ornament worn in head), *dungri* (Nose stud) or *chaptusun* (traditional earrings), *bulaki* (septum ring on nose), *jantar* (square

shaped golden ornament worn in neck), *rupiya mala* (silver coined necklace), gold bangles and *kalli* which is silver bangle in legs. Green beads, an ornament called *poteymala* is considered to be a sign that depicts a woman is married (Singh, 1993).

The portrayal of an ideal Rai women and her body image, is often restricted to the traditional presentation of body in these mentioned ethnic dress and ornaments. An analysis of various songs, lyrics⁴ and presentation of women in music videos further makes it evident that Rai women's beauty and self presentation is always associated with the cultural portrayal of body image, as similar to that of their female guardian deity *Sumnina*.

However, a shift from the traditional mode of self presentation including dressing style has been observed among women in general in contemporary society, and Rai women are also no exception. J.R Subba (2015) argues that important events like cultural exchange and intermarriage, migration of people, British Colonial Impact, modernization, globalization has caused loss of Ethno-Cultural and Ethno-Custom practices of Kirata descendants. With regard to this transformation, a question often arises as to what is the impact of these forces and changes on Kirati Rai women in terms of their body management, presentation and lifestyle? No wonder in the contemporary period, the changes and encroachment of the above mentioned forces may have brought about similar instances as Jagger (2000), (cited in Hancock, 2000) has pointed out "the question of self"⁵ especially among women. To substantiate the argument, Mellor D et.al (2009) argues that socio-cultural influences on the body and the western ideas on body image mediated through media platforms together has been

⁴ Kirati *chori* (Kirat's daughter) by Yuma Rai, 2014; *Soi dhole Soi* by Rajesh Payal Rai and Basanti Rai, 2017; *Aam Minma Khaplung Mitunglo* by B.B Rokdung Rai in 2020.

⁵ As the question of self is always intertwined with the question of somatic self.

dominant over the Asian societies including Malaysia which has led to a sense of body dissatisfaction among the Malaysian adolescents. Similarly, Rai (2019) in her research study (unpublished) found that along with the impact of media and socio-cultural influences, the transnational capitalism that facilitated consumerism, role of education that brought awareness, religious worldview of the respondents, geographical factor and the 'standard size of clothes available in market as well as the clothes in trend' altogether contributed and shaped the negotiation on body image, self esteem and identity of University going women students of Sikkim. Notably, it cannot be denied that these forces of post-modern society have influenced and brought about a process of socio-cultural transformation in almost all societies and Rai society is not untouched by the impact of social transformation. Therefore, in the light of this, it becomes interesting to find out how the Rai women are negotiating over their body image and self identity and if the negotiation has impacted their traditional reflection in body image and presentation of self.

The Rais in the contemporary time despite having their own unique dress, ornaments, practices related to body care and beauty, has experienced a certain level of homogenization with regard to their style of dressing, beauty practices and consumption pattern due to the forces of modernization and globalization. Subba (2015) argues that along with the forces of globalisation, modernisation and westernisation Kiratis have also been affected by market capitalism and consumerism. The impact of these modern forces and agencies often finds reflection in the presentation of self among Rai women. However, along with the impact of these forces of change as well as the recent trend of 'cultural homogenization' in Eastern Himalayan region, the counter process of ethnic and cultural revivalism can also be

observed. The trend of cultural revivalism can be traced in the post 1990 phase with the coming up of various organisations like Kirat Rai Yayokkha⁶, Akhil Kirat Rai Sang⁷ and government initiatives lay emphasis on preserving age old culture and heritage. The cultural resurgence is also reflected in the presentation of self and body image among the Kirati Rai women leading to a certain amount of cultural reinforcement, however, with a touch and blend of modernity. The trend is amply evident from the popularity of modernized and customized ornaments, emergence of ethnic boutiques, ready made cultural, ethnic dress available on market in Sikkim. The emergence and active functioning of various community associations or *Samaj* of the people such as *Akhil Kirat Rai Sang*, Rai Cultural Groups at different levels (community, university, schools) work with the prime objective of reinforcing the cultural and traditional values. Nevertheless, they are not totally unaffected by the waves of globalization, modernization, westernization and dominant body discourse in their socio-cultural aspects. It becomes interesting to explore how these forces have impacted the discourse on the body of Rai women. Therefore, the study has attempted to explore in this regard and identify the different factors and its role in the changing discourse on body among Rai women of Sikkim.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

Shilling (2007) argues the subject matter of Body in Sociology can be seen from various lenses based on the analytical concerns which may include body as ‘sexed object’ as seen by feminist theorists, ‘cultivable object’ as seen by body therapists,

⁶ Kirat Rai Yayokkha is an organization of indigenous Kirat Rai in Nepal established in 1990. This organization looks after the social integrity as well as aims to protect, preserve and promote distinct cultural identity of Kirat Rai.

⁷ Akhil Kirat Rai Sang is an organisation founded in the year 1990 that aims to work for the upliftment, preservation and promotion of Kirat Rai culture and heritage. This social organisation works in different geographical locations like Darjeeling, Sikkim, Nepal and others where Kirat Rai population is found.

‘marker of identity and status subject’ as seen by the theorist of consumer culture and also ‘passive object of control’ as seen by Foucauldian analysts. In the contemporary period, body can no longer be considered as a biological fact but has been transformed into a “project” (Giddens, 1991) and “performance” (Goffman, 1959) as because body in the contemporary somatic society is seen as something that can be worked upon (modified, stylized, reshaped, managed...) through performance or the effort(s) put by one to create an impression on others specifically in terms of ‘presentation of self’. Nonetheless, it is often taken as these practices of body management being characterised by one’s fundamental “class condition” (Bourdieu, 1992). For Bourdieu, body is an unfinished entity because it is constantly undergoing the process of development and is affected by various social forces which are inherent to the maintenance of social inequalities. Thus, this unfinished entity or body for Bourdieu manifests social inequality in mainly three aspects of ‘social location’, ‘habitus’⁸ and ‘taste’⁹. Therefore, in the light of this argument it would not be wrong to say that bodies are bound to social conditioning and based on the social conditioning the bodies may be socially produced or reproduced.

Further, drawing from Parson’s subjective understanding of the body “humans do not act according to their bodily passions or dispositions rather act in accordance to their choices in relation to the social norms” (Parson, 1968; cited in Nettleton, 2007)). Douglas (1970) also argues in a similar line stating that “the body in a way is regulated to enhance and maintain the social order”. Further on, she also argues that a

⁸ Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as “a socially constituted system of dispositions that orients thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions of people”.

⁹ Taste refers to one’s personal, aesthetic or cultural preferences and choices. For Bourdieu, taste does not remain constant but may move from one society to another as for him all aspects of life are interconnected in a habitus.

certain perception is attached to the physical body which is mediated by the social body and therefore, the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived.

Elias (1978) on the other hand points out that manners, ways of dressing, etiquettes and codes of conduct are all associated with the body and with the passage of time the codes of body management were developed that brought awareness and self-control associated with the body. Under this ‘Civilising process’ as Elias regards it, every human body according to Shilling (1993) undergoes the process of socialisation¹⁰, rationalisation¹¹ and modernisation which makes the ‘management’¹² and ‘presentation’ of self (Goffman, 1959) crucial.

Foucault (1975) specifically points at how the shift from earlier industrial and sovereign society to new somatic and disciplinary society is occurring, where the body holds key importance to social, political, cultural and ethical activities. His conceptualisation on ‘governmentality’ on the other hand provides us with insights on how power can be vested into bodies coercively so as to control and regulate it through a set of disciplines and punishments, which for him was the imprisonment and ‘panoptic surveillance’. Thus, for Foucault it is through two kinds of power i.e., the disciplinary “anatomy-politics of human body” and the regulatory “bio-politics of the population”, bodies are regulated in performing social tasks that are central to norms and social order of the society. However, on the contrary the power may not always be vested into bodies coercively but also through what Althusser has talked about the ‘ideological hegemony’ through ‘interpellation’ in a subtle manner by

¹⁰ Socialisation is the process through which norms and ideologies of societies are internalized.

¹¹ Rationalisation here is referred to the transition from collective orientation based on traditions, values, customs, emotions to individualization.

¹² In reference to ‘impression management’. Here, management points at the attempts, efforts made and alterations done in order to achieve expected perception.

defining the boundaries and binaries of what is moral and immoral, acceptable and unacceptable to society and likewise, desirable and undesirable.

Though, there are ample perspectives, theories and concepts related to body discourse, the present study specifically has made use of various sociological concepts. The study on how Rai women are negotiating with the dominant practice and 'modern' ideas of beauty and body care, has employed Giddens's concept of body 'project' and Goffman's concept of 'performance', 'management' and 'presentation' of self in everyday life. Bourdieu's concept of 'class condition', 'habitus' and 'taste' has been used to highlight on how bodies are socially conditioned reflecting the taste as per one's class condition and habitus, however the process also reinforces the change in one's perception of self presentation depending on one's reflexivity. On exploring Rai women's negotiation in the wake of cultural resurgence to accommodate the cultural notions of body with the modern dominant concept of body image and self presentation, Giddens's theory of structuration has been particularly relevant. As with the recent trend of cultural resurgence, the social structure of the Kirat Rai society was not only found to be constraining the women to the cultural portrayal of body image, but was also enabling new forms of agency in blending the traditional notion of body and the dominant modern ideas on body. In addition, Althusser's concept of 'ideological hegemony' has remained significant in finding out how 'interpellation' of modern forces and agencies has changed the very socio-cultural connotation of body discourse. As well as reinforcement of the cultural notion of beauty, body management and self presentation in the view of recent trends of cultural resurgence. Understanding phenomenological experience in everyday life (detailed in Chapter 2) based on their taken for granted reality and social world in the

backdrop of modern forces has helped to map the changing discourse of the body among Rai women.

1.4 Review of Literature

Substantial amount of available literature has been reviewed in order to provide a strong base for problematisation and formulation of research questions within the purview of study. The literatures reviewed has been organised thematically under two sections; first, body in sociological study, conceptualisation and theorisation and second, the Kirat Rais.

1.4.1 Body in Sociological Study, Conceptualisation and Theorisation

Hancock et.al. (2000), in their work *The Body, Culture and Society* have not only introduced sociological perspective on the body but has also outlined the various ways in which the body is conceptualized in sociology along with the deliberation on various substantive bodies. Such that, Bill Hughes in his work on *Medicalised Bodies* has extensively focused on how medicine has transformed the conception of the body from a passive possessor of disease to active agent of self-care. Kevin Paterson and Bill Hughes in *Disabled Bodies* have elaborated on the ways in which ‘the body’ and ‘the social’ compete in the constitution of the meaning of disability. Elizabeth Jagger on the other hand has talked about how the transformation of bodies is taking place over time and space. “The sweeping influence of modernity along with the concept of ‘question of self’ due to various forces of modernity such as industries, media, advertisement... has led to the foundation of a consumer culture (Featherstone 1991a). Therefore, the body that caters to those factors of modernity forces tend to be ‘a sign of moral worth and of youth and beauty’. If youth and beauty has been

associated with the modern body, there arises a question as to what about the bodies of older people. An answer to this has been provided by Emmanuelle Tulle-Winton in *Old Bodies* with an argument on body as a contested site for the constitution of old people and old age. The old bodies seem to be in constant contest and resistance with the new 'sign of moral worth' however despite the efforts the old bodies cannot do away with marginalization of it. Philip Hancock and Melissa Tyler under *Working Bodies* have discussed the 'management and rationalisation' of working bodies. The 'body work' (Shillings 1993) based on time, effort and resources helps in maintaining a particular state of embodiment in everyday life. Lastly, Rachel Russel on *Ethical Bodies* has illustrated on the bodies as emerging out of embodied interaction along with the process of 'contemporary modernisation' results in the embodiment of ethics in two ways. First, the 'aesthetic values' and second, the critical consideration of the emergence of ethical subjects.

Howson and Inglis (2001), in their article *The Body in Sociology: Tensions Inside and Outside Sociological Thought* highlighted the growing importance of the topic 'the human body' in Sociology as not just in empirical research but also in sociological theorizing. This work has highlighted the moves that were made in the discipline of Sociology towards an 'embodied' and 'corporeal' Sociology, basically the historical background of how sociology developed its interest in the body in a coherent and systematic manner. The Cartesian Dualism was confronted by Merleau-Ponty who introduced the notion of 'body-subjects' where subjectivity and corporeality were interrelated and intertwined. He argued that the world cannot be perceived without the 'lived body' and the mind cannot exist without the body. However, this phenomenological approach has been critiqued for not doing justice to the 'objective'

structures which were sociologically crucial in understanding phenomena related to bodies and bodily actions. Thus, to fill the gap Bourdieu attempted to relate the embodied agency with the social structure by introducing his notion of 'habitus'. For Bourdieu "practices related to the body are characteristic of a class's or class fraction's fundamental conditions of life" (Bourdieu, 1992).

Cregan (2006), in her book *The Sociology of the Body* has structured her writing under the themes of Body as "Object- the Regulated Body", "Abject- the Bounded Body" and "Subject- the Body of Difference". As an introductory text it provides a broad understanding on the wide range of theoretical approaches to the body based on its embodiment across time, space and culture along with particular reference to medical interpretations on images of the body. Grasping body as an object, a subject and an abject helped in developing understanding of body not only as biological but also as social and cultural, similar to what Bryan S. Turner (2013) has pointed out as 'The Social Construction of the Body' which is simultaneously the immediate feature of self and as well 'an aspect of personal alienation in the natural environment.'

Nettleton (2007), in her work *The Sociology of the Body* has focused on the 'social and ethical significance of the body' and has helped immensely in imparting knowledge in the Sociological Perspectives on the Sociology of Body. She argues that any work on the body can be guided by three broad approaches which are theory-laden. Such that, Social Regulation of Body which has been significantly highlighted in the works of Feminist analysis and claims that bodies are highly politicised and in a way regulated, controlled, monitored and used by social institutions. Ontology of body which provokes discourses on uncertainties arising out in late modern societies

as to 'what body is?' For some sees it as socially constructed (like that of Turner, 2013; Feminist Theory of Judith Lorber), some as a fabrication (Goffman, 1959; Shilling, 2007; Giddens, 1991) and some as intrinsic to mannerism, shape, etiquettes (Elias 1978) and influenced by social and cultural factors. Phenomenological approach that focuses on the embodiment of the body and stresses on the body as based on its lived experiences. This approach focuses on the dualism of 'the mind and the body'. Body, however, is as Leder (1990:1) has referred to as "absent" because we are not always conscious of our actions. Thus, the body can often be taken as a manifestation of "normalization" similar to what Foucault (1975) was talking about and that of which is constructed by and within what Habermas (1981) has conceptualized as the "lifeworld".

Shilling (2007), in his work *Sociology and the Body: Classical Traditions and New Agendas* has pointed out how embodiment of the body has retained its importance in the discipline of sociology over decades. This study on the body started to rise and therefore, took a new turn when it became aware of the new scientific advances taking place in bodies. However, the classical sociologists did not remain aloof from this arena of study and had prepared a field for new advances in social theory and the study of body pedagogies where they could open up new horizons of sociological imagination on bodies. This article further gives a multidimensional outlook on the body and exploration of various possibilities from which the body can be looked into. Firstly, taking Weber's model of actions so as to see if the body practices are based on 'voluntaristic' action of an individual or if it is merely a consequence of the social structure. Secondly, as Comte has viewed the body as being similar to that of civilization and vice versa, the body is seen as being capable of spontaneously

repairing itself (Pickering 1993). Thirdly, taking Durkheim's 'homo duplex' nature of human beings i.e., both egoistic and moral beings, we can understand body as not only constituent of drives, appetites and sensory impression but also of having the capacity to transcend themselves and develop accordingly on the basis of social categories and emotions. Fourthly, Parson's subjective understanding of the actor can be situated in terms of the body where the actor's bodily actions have no longer choices based on bodily passions or dispositions but as choices motivated by social norms.

Adelman and Ruggi (2016), in their work *The Sociology of the Body* have tried to address how contemporary sociology has attempted to 'bring the body back in' so as to enrich our understanding of corporeality and embodiment. Body can be seen from diverse lenses and therefore, be interpreted accordingly. Thus, this article has helped in broadening the knowledge and arising at a logical disputation on the notion of body. Body can be seen as 'a consumer of commodities and lifestyle' that results in 'social shaping of the body' as pointed out by Kevin White (1995:188). This provides a conjecture about consumerism among the mass and therefore the study aims to detect and validate the same. Nevertheless, the consciousness of consumerism can always be questioned and explored. Provided that, if the body is seen as 'a consumer of commodities and lifestyle' a question lingers as to whose culture or lifestyle is being consumed?... Sally Banes (1993) has pointed out that "it was the coming up of art, youth revolt that placed the Bourgeois culture and repressed bodies at centre...." Thus, drawing on this argument the research has aimed to situate how the modern society has led body to become a prime site of 'consumerist culture' for it cannot be refuted that "modern culture and society characteristically associated women with the

body” (Beauvoir 1949), and also find out the pattern of consumerism among Rai women of Sikkim.

1.4.2 The Kirat Rais

Subba T.B (1999), in his book *Politics of Culture. A study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* has provided a study on the three ‘Kirata’ communities namely, Rai, Yakkha and the Limboo. Subba has covered the economic, linguistic, religious as well as cultural aspects of these communities considering historicity as well as substantiating it with his ethnographic study. The family structure as explained in the book along with the section on people, their history, origin and political and economic structural organisation has provided key insights and facilitated better understanding on the Kirat Rais particularly.

Rai (2005), in his book *Kirat Khambu Rais of Sikkim and Eastern Himalayas* has provided an elaborate account on the socio- cultural, socio-economic, linguistic and religious aspects of the Kirat Rais. The study has also focused on tracing the historicity of Khambu Rais. This book has facilitated understanding on the Rais of Sikkim and has also provided the study with vital information on the Rais of Sikkim. The statistical tables provided in the book on various aspects of economy, occupation, house structure, educational level, language spoken, religion and many others have remained insightful to the present study and most importantly the account provided on the Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Sikkim has helped in understanding the organisational structure of AKRS as well as tracing down the important role played by it in reinforcing the cultural notions of body and presentation of self among the Rai women of Sikkim.

Sinha (2006), in his work *Search for Kirat Identity Trends of De-Sanskritisation among the Nepamul Sikkimese* has posed important arguments in relation to the identity formation of the Kirats in Sikkim starting from their history of being called *paharias* by J.C White during his time in Sikkim as a political officer, to being addressed and widely recognised as *Gurkhas* who were seen as strong defence and warriors by the Britishers. This article has specifically helped in understanding as well as tracing the historicity of Kirat identity particularly in terms of Sikkim Himalayas. Sinha mentions that with the passage of time the Nepamul Sikkimese, that is the Sikkimese having Nepali origin and tracing descent from their Nepali ancestors, had outgrew the Sikkim's population. However, in 1994 the Kirati Rai ethnic group along with other five Nepamul communities were declared as Other Backward Classes¹³ (OBCs) under Mandal Commission.

Rai (2008), in his book *KHAMBUS (RAIS); Their Retold Accounts* has also provided a detailed explanation on the prevalence of Rai as an aboriginal tribe in the Eastern Himalayas, particularly of Eastern Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim. It has highlighted the history, distinctive culture, religion, language, and geographical aspect of the Khambu Rais based on empirical study that was conducted by Rai. This book has remained informative to the study and has helped in drawing the socio-cultural, socio-political, religion and geography of the Kirat Rais (Khambus).

Subba J.R (2015), in his work *History of the Kirata Empire* points out the impact of modern forces in his last chapter. He argues that the indigenous tribes have been affected by the forces of globalisation and modernisation which has led to loss of ethnic culture and customs of Kirata people to great extent. He also argues that

¹³ OBC is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify the castes that comes under it as socially and/or educationally disadvantaged.

modern education is another important factor that has led to loss of traditional values, oral mythic histories, cognitive and socio-cultural practices in the modern time. However, on the contrary to what the author has pointed out, modern education is also one of the eminent factor for reinforcement of the same be it through researches going on, literatures being written or associations getting established at different levels for eg., Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Rai cultural association, Sikkim Limboo Literary Association and so on. Provided that, several changes in terms of livelihood, customs, traditions, language, religion can be found in the wake of these modern forces. Subba argues that consumerism has become a new culture of Kirats which may be considered as a byproduct of capitalism. The identities of the youth are defined by the materials they consume which raises questions on the age old traditions, customs and practices due to the driving forces of modernity.

Gaenzle (2016), in his work *Redefining Kiranti Religion in Contemporary Nepal* has provided insights on how the traditional Kirati religion before the late 18th century was considered as a part of the official Census of Nepal. As it was fourth largest religion and was free from interferences of Brahmanism and Hinduism. He writes that the Kirati tradition however in the late 18th century was not free from the infiltrations of urban as well as global forces and context. As a result of which certain changes marked can be seen in terms of the oral transmission of Kirati tradition to scriptural transmission from 20th century onwards. Emergence of several Kirati ashrams and institutions, the degrading status and declining roles of local shamans could also be observed. Further, homogenisation of different Kirati rituals led to a pan Kirati tradition due to the reduction in variety of Kirati rituals being performed. And lastly in the contemporary period with the wake of modernity the age old local traditions having its roots in village started being considered as inferior and backward when

compared to newer ways. Nevertheless, Nepal as a kingdom still has its political and geographical autonomy but the area of study Sikkim however lost its political and geographical autonomy with the incorporation of Sikkim with India in 1975 as a result of which it was since then exposed to mainstream Indian culture, customs and traditions. Thus, it becomes interesting to know how far the Kirati Rai specifically the women counterpart of this geographical region have retained their age old ethnicity and cultural uniqueness in terms of their 'body image' and 'presentation of self'. Furthermore, it also opens up scope for further study and analysis of the Rai ethnic group in terms of its socio-geo-political and cultural context in the geographical location of Sikkim.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Rai community is considered as indigenous and native people of the Himalayas who trace their descent from Kirat and trace their history back to hundreds of years in Nepal and later on in nearby regions, particularly Sikkim and adjoining areas. The folklore and myths have always portrayed Rai women as beautiful and having their own lifestyle, ornaments, style of dressing, customs and belief system rooted in their Kirat Rai mythology, culture and tradition. With the social transformation and the impact of modern forces and agencies, many changes have been witnessed over the years.

The modern consumer society and prevailing dominant discourse on the body has widely impacted Kirati Rai society. The emerging trend of marketing and consumption of modern beauty products, mushroom growth of new and modern ways

of body management and craze of online shopping reinforced through various agencies like media, internet in the era of transnational capitalism, westernisation, globalisation and modernisation has widely affected the presentation of self and body care practices of women. As the fast emerging homogenised culture laden with the dominant idea of beauty and body mediated by the mentioned forces and agencies of modernity is not unknown among Rai women of Sikkim. Therefore, this may often lead to conflict and negotiation among Rai women with respect to the choice of either retaining the traditional reflection on their presentation of self or following the prevailing dominant idea of beauty and body. The negotiating and conflict that takes place in everyday lives with regard to their self-identity, consumption pattern, body image and self presentation becomes interesting and has paved the scope for academic exploration.

A thorough review of literature points out that there are many literatures on Kiratis of Eastern Himalayan Region such that, (Subba,1999/ Subba,2015/ Singh,1993/ Rai,2005/ Rai 2008, Singh,2008/ Rai,2005/ Chemjonga,1963/1966/1978) and several published papers like Gaenzle (2016) on Redefining Kirati Religion in Contemporary Nepal; Sinha (2006) on Identity formation of Nepamul Sikkimese; Rai (2012) on Impact of Modernisation on *Sakewa Sili* festival; Bain (2018) on Anthropological Venture into the Rai Community of Darjeeling Hills; Schlemmer (2004) on Re-inventing Kirati History and so on, but in these existing literatures on Kirat, there is no comprehensive literatures available on Rai women specifically on the discourse of body.

Therefore, the present study aims to fill up the gap by exploring the epistemological background of the body among Kirati women of Sikkim, specifically of Rai ethnogroup. It also aims to explore discourse on the body and its changing dynamics among Rai women through a sociological lens.

1.6 Objectives

The research study aims to meet the following objectives:

- To understand the traditional and cultural notion of body image and self presentation.
- To comprehend the changing discourse on the socio-cultural construction of the body.
- To identify various agencies and factors contributing to changing body discourse.
- To understand how women are perceiving their body, constructing the ideas of the body and negotiating with the dominant notion of body.
- To explore how the recent trend of cultural resurgence reinforces the cultural notion of beauty, body and presentation of self among Rai women.

1.7 Research Questions

- What is the traditional and cultural notion of body care, management and presentations among Rai women of Sikkim?
- What are the dynamics of changes in the social and cultural construction of body discourse?

- What are the factors and agencies contributing to the changing discourse?
- What is the dominant idea of body image and the presentation of self among Rai women? What are the ways of negotiation opted by Rai women to fit in with the dominant ideas of body?
- How do Kirati Rai women in Sikkim perceive their own body and how do they construct their ideas of beauty with regard to body care management and self presentation?
- How is the recent trend of cultural resurgence contributing to the reinforcement of the cultural notion of beauty, body and presentation of self?

1.8 Methodology

1.8.1 Method of Study

Before starting with empirical study it is important to trace the available sources for data collection. Therefore, the secondary sources for data collection have been earlier conducted research, existing literature and Kirat Song (lyrics) including description of the traditional body image and beauty of Kirat Rai women. While the primary data has been collected through in-depth interviews with semi-structured interview schedules. The study is exploratory in nature and is largely based on narratives on everyday life experiences in terms of body presentation and management. Therefore, the study has attempted to present the phenomenological experiences of the respondents into narrative presentation by employing Narrative Analysis. Furthermore, Critical discourse analysis has been used specifically while dealing with theoretical orientation, ideas, contestations and discourses of the theories and

concepts on body among Rai women. The study has also been supplemented by oral history of ten Rai elderly members of both genders in order to understand the traditional practices related to purview of study. Observation has been made for better understanding of the field and respondents. The study is primarily qualitative in nature but has also been substantiated by quantitative data where required. Therefore, the study has followed a mixed method using methodological triangulation.

However, in view of uncertain situation created by pandemic, along with primary interview new methodological venture had to be generated in terms of collection of primary data, such that of, joining and participating in the Kirati Rai Samaj and/or association groups in social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, having a talk with the respondents over WhatsApp call and also where accessible conducting interviews in platforms like google meet, zoom application or whichever platform that was found to be convenient for the respondents. Similarly, observation within the purview of study has been made in platforms like Akhil Kirat Rai Facebook Pages of Sikkim.

1.8.2 SAMPLE AND FIELD

The study has been conducted in both rural and urban sectors of Sikkim. Gangtok is the prime urban sector and similarly a village in East Sikkim, Asaam Lingzey is selected as rural sector for the study to be carried out. Purposive sampling among fifty Rai women of Sikkim has been made taking 25:25 ratios from Gangtok and Assam Lingzey. The sample has been selected keeping in mind the variables like age group, rural and urban set up, work structure (professional workers, non-professional workers, homemakers), religion, educational qualification and income level.

Additional ten elderly members of Rai community and an ethnic Boutique owner having three outlets excluding the main showroom have been interviewed to comprehend its role in the reinforcement of the cultural notion of beauty, body and presentation of self among Rai women.

1.9 Chapterisation of the Study

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

This Chapter is an introductory chapter of the study and includes Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Conceptual framework, Review of literature, Rationale, Objectives, Research questions and a detailed account of the Methods employed in the work.

CHAPTER 2 Theoretical Contestation on the Notion of Body from Sociological Lens

This chapter draws upon theoretical contestations, ideas and concepts and has attempted to provide discourses on the body in general, and touch upon the negotiations opted by the women in the contemporary era. This chapter is entirely based on the Secondary sources and Critical Discourse Analysis.

CHAPTER 3 Socio- Cultural World of the Kirat Rais in Sikkim

This chapter consists of two sections. In the first section, the study has attempted to locate Rais of Sikkim in their historical backdrop and their socio-cultural worldview. The second section provides an outline of the field and sample population and socio-economic background of the respondents.

CHAPTER 4 Changing Socio- Cultural Connotation of Body Discourse – An Empirical Analysis

This Chapter is based on narrative analysis. To provide a base for the empirical study, the chapter begins with an account on the traditional notions of beauty and body care. Using qualitative and quantitative information, the study highlights how Rai women are perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on body and beauty. The chapter also makes a comprehensive discussion on the changing perceptions on body- beauty care and presentation of self in everyday life. The practices and negotiations on body management opted by Rai women in the contemporary time have also been touched upon. Discussing the socio-cultural and socio-temporal changes that have undergone in the purview of body discourse, the chapter finally points out the agencies contributing to such changes.

CHAPTER 5 Cultural Revivalism and its Impact on Notion of Body and Self Presentation

This Chapter deals on how the recent trend of cultural resurgence has reinforced the cultural notion of body discourse among the Rai women. Also the chapter contains an exhaustive discussion and analysis on the role played by different agencies like AKRS, ethnic boutiques, social institutions like family, educational institutions, religion and social media, in reinforcing the cultural notion of body image and presentation of self among Rai women of Sikkim. The later section of the chapter deals with the sociological analysis of empirical findings.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the entire study and highlights the findings of the study. The chapter also attempts to draw a conclusion on the study carried out.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Contestation on the Notion of Body from Sociological Lens

2.1 Introduction

The discourse on the human body has led to a growing consciousness of body among men and women with regard to their body image, self identity and presentation of self in everyday life. The contention relating to how an individual perceives or constructs his/her body image has generated diversity of opinions among academicians of various disciplines. Also, a plethora of observations from socio-economic, cultural, religion and geographical lens have been made into the analysis of body discourse. Theoretically, the body discourse from a sociological perspective can be viewed from three approaches, viz; Social Regulation of the Body, Ontology of the Body and Phenomenological Approach (Nettleton, 2007). Further, in terms of situating the discourse on body in the contemporary time, it becomes imperative to bring in the themes of globalization, consumer culture, transnational capitalism and role of media which are influential forces for the changing discourse on body. Therefore, this chapter seeks to cover the sociological perspectives on the discourses of the body trying to trace if there has been any shift in the theoretical discourse over the time.

2.2 Social Regulation of the Body

A body can be viewed as being constantly regulated, controlled, monitored by various social institutions and also as obliged to the social tasks entering in and around the social order. Giddens (1991) argues on how the body as a competent agent is merely

an identity and representation of the larger social structure. To substantiate, for Giddens body sustains its character depending on the course of social interaction and therefore gets regulated through routinized control by individuals themselves in the course of social interaction. Taking the same line of argument, Douglas (1966,1970) asserts that regulation of the body becomes important in order to maintain social order. A body represented is symbolic to her where the perception of the physical body is shaped by the social body. Therefore, “the social body in a way constrains the way in which the physical body is perceived”. Body has never been free for that matter because the body as an ‘object’ has always been regulated and bounded to perform social tasks which remain central to the social order. Turner (1984) identifies four such basic tasks in a somatic society where the body is obliged to perform tasks within and for the social order. These tasks are reproduction, *regulation of bodies*, *restraint and representation of the body*. Turner’s idea on regulation of the body is similar to Foucault’s work on ‘normalization’ and ‘surveillance’ in his book *Discipline and Punish*. In fact, some scholars say that Turner’s idea on it is itself borrowed from Foucault.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault specifically talks about how the shift from earlier industrial and sovereign society to new somatic and disciplinary society is occurring where the body holds key importance in social, political, cultural and ethical activities. His conceptualization on ‘governmentality’ on the other hand provides insights on how power can be vested in bodies coercively so as to control and regulate it with set of disciplines and punishment through some kind of confinements, which for him was through the medium of ‘imprisonment’ and ‘panoptic surveillance’. Therefore, for Foucault it is through two kinds of power that is, the disciplinary

‘anatomy-politics of human body’ which could be understood as the notion of body as something that could be disciplined and exercised control over and the regulatory ‘bio-politics of the population’ that bodies are regulated in performing social tasks that is central to norms and social order of the society.

Elias (1939) in ‘The Civilizing Process’ illustrates on how during the middle age, the body management so as to fit in the expected societal codes became explicit which as a result brought about awareness on bodily activities and control through socialization, rationalization and individualization (Shilling, 1993). The societal codes operate through normative control over the body and this is done in a similar way as to what Althusser has talked about that is through ‘ideological hegemony’ which strengthens the argument that the control is not enforced coercively but by ‘interpellation’ in a subtle manner. For instance, through defining the binaries of what is moral and immoral, acceptable and unacceptable, desirable and undesirable. Thus, it is undeniable that the societal codes of conduct and behavior is one medium of regulating a body of an individual. In the same line, Frank (1991) has pointed out different typologies of bodies v.i.z., disciplined, dominating, mirroring and communicative bodies (cited in Nettleton, 2007). Situating these typologies in the present context using backdrop of Elias’s Civilizing Process, we can argue on how bodies, particularly female bodies are expected to perform certain tasks as set by the society and it is here Foucault’s concept on ‘governmentality’ comes in. Turner (1984) argues that the tasks that are to be performed by the body are in relation to the government of the body through reproduction, restraint, regulation and representation. Nonetheless, one body may always differ in its form from another despite of the fact

that in a particular society the societal codes may be same depending on the level of how various forces such as patriarchy, commodification, panopticism are enforced.

2.3 Ontology of the Body

In the late modern societies Shilling (1993) argues that the broadening of one's knowledge and expertise on the subject matter of the body, the notion of body and its limitations or boundaries becomes more uncertain. There can be no specific definition as to 'what body is?'. For any specific definition produced on body can be contested, debated and counter debated further. This could be because there are various factors influencing and shaping the construction of the body like religious, cultural, social, economic, educational, political, geographical and many more. Provided that, it is difficult to reach any conclusion because time and space has a vital role to play. The only tendency in avoidance to this dilemma could be of what Shilling (1993) pointed out, "Body can be viewed as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon because it undergoes the process of transformation in the course of interaction in the society and within the limits set by the society". Therefore, the body is always in the process of becoming or as Giddens (1991) views it, 'a project' in order to create an individual's self-identity. For Giddens, this comes as the modern 'reflexive project of the self' that includes 'body project' where the physical body is worked upon so as to be able to represent certain subjects and also provide alienation and resistance to it. This resistance or alienation may happen through negotiations as Ussher (1997) pointed out "women often negotiate with societal norms and expectations in the process of finding a fit between what they want and what they are supposed to be" (cited in Nettleton, 2007). Therefore, contemplation of these arguments leads to a point which Liz Jagger (2000) has aroused, that is, the modernity and its various

forces like industries, media, advertisements did not only bring about 'question of self' but also a 'consumer culture' (Featherstone, 1991) which made self identity more a matter of acquisition and less a matter of ascription. This argument can be reinforced by the Dramaturgical Model of Goffman (1959) where he lays focus on the point that an individual and his/her body acts according to a situation and prevailing condition and therefore is perceived from someone or from a particular act.

Modern sociologists have propounded that historically the consumption pattern has undergone significant changes with the sweeping in of modernity and particularly post modernity. As the consumption does not only limit to satisfaction of needs but has evolved to become means of domination and manipulation. Veblen's (1899) concept on 'conspicuous consumption' and 'lifestyle disease' substantiates the argument which points out how status has become not only a matter of position and possession but also as to what extent one can involve in this 'conspicuous consumption'. Thus, referring to Baudrillard (1994) it can be argued that 'simulacra' is manifested in the symbolic value of the objects of consumption and it is through this symbolic value of consumer objects, that bodies are being controlled. However, it can be pointed out that the process of government or governing the body itself manifests social inequality as Bourdieu points out the importance of social conditioning on bodies that are often based on one's 'capital' (one's economic capital of class based conditions), 'habitus' (expression of everyday life i.e., how one treats or carries their body) and 'taste' (lifestyle choices under certain constraints of influence of certain factors).

In addition to these arguments, The Socio-cultural (Vygotsky, 1997) and Social Development Theories (Vygotsky, 1978) may hold an important place of analysis in sociological study of the body. This theory illustrates how the 'body image' is shaped during different stages of life focusing on the role of different life stages in the construction of body image that could be disturbing. The Socio-cultural theorists point out how an individual compares their body and personal appearance with others and how the dissatisfaction arises over one's personal body image that also impacts on their mental and physical health. And it is here, the Discrepancy theory/hypothesis comes into picture that points out the greater the discrepancy between one's perceived self and the perceived ideal, the greater the dissatisfaction that may lead into anxiety and socio-psychological problems.

2.4 Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach views the body through its lived experience. Therefore, it basically focuses on the embodiment of bodies which provides counter discourse to the earlier provided structuralist approach emphasizing on the regulation of bodies. The Sociology of Embodiment based on phenomenological approach basically focuses on the 'dualism' of the mind (subject) and the body (object) and culture and nature. However, MerleauPonty's phenomenology tries to do away with the Cartesian dualism of mind vs. body because for him the lived body draws upon the subjective experiences and becomes reciprocal to the world. MerleauPonty (1996) on the basis of the duality of mind and body propounded the concept of 'body-subject' where neither mind was purely subject and body purely object but for him there was an intertwining between the subjectivity and objectivity of corporeality. Merleau argues that that body-subject and the world operate in a way that it

constitutes and re-constitutes each other and also interpenetrates each other. However, MerleauPonty's phenomenology was criticized on the basis of over emphasis on material nature of the body at a philosophical level rather than at a sociological level. Bourdieu therefore makes an attempt to make MerleauPonty's phenomenology more sociological by talking about 'united body' where emphasis was laid on the relation between embodied agency of body and the social structure.

For Bourdieu (1992) "practices associated with the body are characteristic of a class fraction and the fundamental conditions of life related to it". Situating the approaches under this we may have Turner's top-down approach where he has emphasized much on the experiences as contributory to the phenomenological studies of how the body is experienced, how habitus are acquired by the body and the body techniques. However, on the contrary, Frank (1991) and his bottom-up approach of the body emphasizes not only the influence and impact of society on the body but the ways in which society is shaped and created through the bodily actions.

Nevertheless, the management and rationalization of the body remains central to body discourse. Hancock and Tyler (2000) argues the change over time from the domain of formal work (paid) to the 'body work' (Shilling, 1993) based on particular time, effort and resources facilitates the embodiment of bodies. Provided that, Russel (2000) in 'Ethical Bodies' illustrates the process of contemporary modernization leading to the body as an embodiment of ethics in two ways of 'aesthetic values' and the 'emergence of ethical subjects' under critical consideration. For it is through the embodied intercourse the ethical subjects emerge. Thus, the concept of lived body and embodiment emphasizes on the fact that self, mind and body are not separate. To

substantiate, Nettleton (2001) points out that body can be viewed as how Berger and Luckman (1967) has viewed it i.e., ‘taken for granted’ or as Leder (1990) has referred to it as ‘absent’ because there is no guarantee to the fact that bodily actions occur in consciousness of an individual which points out that the lived body is both a construct and construction of the lifeworld.

2.5 Body in the Wake of Globalisation

Globalisation as a phenomenon has widely opened up scope for transnational connection of the world and has strengthened the social, political, economic, cultural and geographical ties. On one hand, it has strengthened the connection and aroused interdependence across the geographical boundaries. While on the other, it has encouraged the free flow of western consumerism and global capitalism (Giddens, 1997) since the late twentieth century. Industrialization with the very essence of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, development of technologies, inflow of global ideas have touched almost every aspect of human life with the sweeping in of globalization. However, along with these one of the remarkable events that has occurred in the contemporary globalized time is coming in the waves of modernity. Along the lines of Ritzer (1993) “globalization has facilitated widespread of modern traits that is grounded in the occident¹⁴, such that of, western lifestyle, consumerist culture which has ever since remained hegemonic and normal to the Orientals¹⁵”.

However, globalization does not limit itself to free flow of goods and services but it also extends to the modern trends, development and advancement in almost every

¹⁴ Occident here refers to the Western region especially that of Europe and America.

¹⁵ Oriental here refers to the regions situated in the east, especially east Asia.

field starting from technologies to bio-technologies. Therefore, individuals now in the wake of globalization are well acquainted with the technologies embedding modern western lifestyle and consumer culture. Situating these arguments in the light of body discourse, it becomes undeniable that the dominant idea of beauty and body in the wake of globalization often leaves individuals unsatisfied and open to body work, body modifications and body maintenance. There are innumerable beauty and body care products in the market which opens up a wide scope for choices and preferences. Coming up of globalization therefore, has not limited the users to a monotonous product from a particular region but has extended the choices and exposure to several products and global brands due to free flow of the same. For instance, if western luxury beauty brands like YSL (Yves Saint Laurent), Dior, Estée Lauder, Chanel are easily available in India then even Indian herbal beauty brands like Himalaya, Khadi, Biotique, Ayur are easily available worldwide. Similarly, the Western originated culture of gym, aerobics, Zumba are now widely prevalent in non-western regions and the Indian culture of Yoga in Western regions. Provided that, globalization along with the free flow of goods, services and ideas with regard to the body also directly or indirectly encourages transnational body projects. Study of Casanova and Sutton (2013) argues that globalization has opened up cosmetic surgery tourism where people have been travelling across regions to undergo body modifications, transformation and maintenance through cosmetic surgery/surgeries.

Therefore, contemplating a body under the dimension of globalization brings forth engrossing discourse with regard to the context and this discourse cannot be in isolation to the modern forces of consumerist culture, transnational capitalism and role of media which has been procured by the phenomenon of globalization itself. The

exploration of these forces with regard to the discourse on the body becomes significant in understanding how the body discourse itself can be shaped as a component of these mentioned forces. Also, in the course of exploration new lenses may be constructed through which body discourse may be viewed.

2.6 Body in a Consumer Culture

Body has been undergoing noticeable changes over the decades, for the exact purpose of which the body invites ambiguous discourse on itself. Body in a consumer culture comprehends an individuals' identity and status based on the body image or the physiognomy¹⁶ (Massumi, 2002). The consumer culture with regard to the discourse on the body has remarked on significant developments in the fields of cosmetics, surgery, transplantation and other techniques and processes related to the modification of the body. This particular reason for the circumstance has led to individuals becoming a mere consumerist and their bodies a consumerist site. Furthermore, an awakening upsurge on the 'Question of self identity' closely associated with the notion of self esteem together holds the body image and for the exact purpose the body image, self identity and self esteem becomes an intertwined influential factor in determining what the consumer theorists refer to as status or/and social acceptance of an individual in a consumer culture based on physiognomy.

Jagger (2000) argued that the sweeping in of modernity along with the concept of question of self has led to the foundation of consumer culture where the body catering to the factors of modernity and as a site of consumption tend to be "a sign of moral worth and of youth and beauty". In the similar line, Featherstone (2010) (as cited

¹⁶ The body and face which is the outer appearance marks the identity and status of an individual rather than the inner qualities like personality, confidence and character.

Nettleton, 2007) addresses that the consumer culture has facilitated and normalized the body work in terms of modification, transformation and manipulation provided by cosmetic industries for the attainment of what is regarded as ideal body and face in the larger society. In reference to these, it may be argued that consumerist ideas draw upon the factor of marketization and objectification of face and body to some extent. To substantiate, an empirical study among women students of Sikkim University conducted by Rai (2019) indicates the hegemony of beauty politics being evident starting from the stigmatization of plain face¹⁷ to use beauty products on hair, body and face as a routinized practice or/and as a necessity in everyday life. Following that, using basic and minimal products on a daily basis to eventually full fledged products in terms of situational demand concerning presentation of self in public was found to be an institutionalized practice among them.

The cosmetic/beauty products for consumption are innumerable and of varied range which makes the individuals open to wide scope of choices and preferences and with the coming up of modern culture of accelerated online shopping and craze for the same may lead to what Veblen (1899) has addressed to as ‘conspicuous consumption’. Along the lines of this argument it may be pointed out that the cosmetic industries have undertaken the Indian society on a massive scale. According to Anand (2017) about 25% of the total demand of luxury cosmetic brands namely the Forest Essentials, Estee Lauder, M.A.C, Organix and many more is there in India. Further, his analysis report states that by 2025, India will be the largest amongst cosmetic consumers with 5% share in the global beauty market.

¹⁷ Plain face here refers to the naked face or the face without any use of beauty products.

Thus, these cosmetic industries producing and manufacturing beauty products, online shopping sites extending easy and accessible products and the global beauty market highlights one particular industrial management and the significant role it plays in the consumer society, and that is, of the capitalist industrial management.

2.7 Capitalism and Body Discourse

Capitalism, particularly the capitalist mode of commodity production plays a vital role in shaping the discourse on the body. Capitalist mode of production leads to surplus production of commodities for the purpose of gaining profit which on one hand is made easily available by globalization. On the other hand, the contemporary era of consumer culture makes it a compulsion to consume the products or to at least strive for it considering the material need(s) of the body. Therefore, the individuals can either resist and struggle on the material needs of their physical bodies or simply become a consumer of it. In addition to that, the individuals in the wake of globalization, modernization, consumer culture and industrialization have ample choices as to how they would like to present themselves (that is with regard to their body image) in the larger society. However, it can be argued that the choices may be the demand of transnational capitalism which has somehow resulted in making body what Featherstone (1991a) has addressed to as, “a lifestyle accessory, a thing to be shaped, sculpted and stylized”.

In the context of body discourse, the classical Marxist theory on capitalism has emphasized on the significant contribution of the body (particularly women’s body) with regard to the ability of reproduction of the labor force. It also emphasizes how the physical body is exploited in the course of making profit and gain through the

manipulation of socially necessary labor time. However, in the contemporary time it may not be wrong to bring in a new lens through which body may be viewed and that is of, body as a stimulus to capitalism. The particular reason for the circumstance being body as a consumerist site where a wide array of capitalist arrangements prevails in the process of production and distribution of commodities. For instance, if one is lean they can have the supplements available in the market, if one is fat then they can opt for fitness regimes, if one is dark or brown or colored they can have the fairness products easily available in market and if one is growing old they can have an entire range of anti-old age, age miracle or anti-wrinkle products. Therefore, everything has a structured and easy solution which comes handy in that case.

An empirical study carried out by Rai (2019) among the university going women students of Sikkim pointed out that a factor acting as an agent in shaping the construction of ideas on body in particular a 'beautiful body' among them irrespective of their body shape and size was 'size availability and clothes that were in trend'. This finding highlights how capitalist industrial management and their role can be situated with regard to creating a 'standard size'. The argument behind this inference is that the modern clothes may compromise a large variety but the 'trending clothes' are made so to fit only the standard beauty size of body. And this is where the crisis is identified among young women students in the study, as they were found to be living in the era of tight fitted clothes to enhance their body parts like for instance cropped tops and skinny jeans. The study further revealed that, 'size availability of clothes' i.e maximum size being available in market are Small, Normal, Large and XL, brought about a sense of relative deprivation for those who are not able to fit into the 'normal standard cloth sizes' that are predominantly marketed. Since they can fit only into

extra small or XXL, XXXL sizes, these are not always easily available as per one's choice and design. However, the recent trend of endorsing oversized bodies has been observed with the coming up of the notion of 'plus sizes' in the beauty, modelling and fashion industries. But the larger market still remains dominated by standard sizes making the XXL/XXXL clothes not easily accessible and available in local markets.

Thus, to sum up above posed arguments, it may not be wrong to say that capitalism plays a vital role in the somatic society marked by modern/post modern conditions and also provides concepts of modern bodies, trendy bodies, standard bodies and unvarnished bodies as a useful catalyst for the discourse on body. It is the awareness of these concepts of bodies which enable women to negotiate in innumerable ways with their bodies by creating a sense of dissatisfaction regarding their own body images. It is in this regard; the role of capitalism becomes eminent in carrying out the negotiations through making attainable products of various kinds. That is either by producing and marketing the supplementary products (height growth capsules, slimming tea, wide range of beauty and body care products, trendy clothes and so on) or through their industrial management set up which disseminates and normalises the dominant beauty and beauty standards. With this backdrop, it becomes interesting to identify the negotiations that are being carried out by women of the Rai ethno-community which the study aims to highlight.

2.8 Role of Media and the Discourse on Body

Body in the contemporary time has not only been highly exposed to the modern forces of capitalism, globalization, technological advancement, consumer culture but has also been exposed to the 'virtual reality' (Varga, 2005) which has evolved in the

modern society. Therefore, these modern forces altogether have led individuals opening up to the field of manipulation concerning one's body so as to fit into the desired shape and size. For the exact purpose of which the bodily practices and physical control over the body has remained central in determining the body image and identity of self. This further has led to growing uncertainty about the natural body and its embodiment eventually leading to a somatic society. The somatic upsurge in the light of transnational capitalism, technological development/advancement, consumer culture, globalization and widespread of mediated factors like mass media, social media, advertisements, growing film/cinema industries, coming up of beauty pageants and alarming rate of fitness regimes in the contemporary time holds power to manifest the set standard and also 'normality' and 'governmentality' (Focault, 1978) of body.

On one hand the whole formula to calculate a good sound body, for instance, BMI or Body Mass Index (a person's weight in kilograms divided by the height in meters squared) makes people more ambitious for the attainment of 'good shape' by going to gym, diets, exercise, cosmetic surgery. On the other hand, as Featherstone (1982) has argued, the modern popular media including the print media as well as broadcast media, advertisements and cinema glorifies the "stylized body image" that encourages the body to undergo forms of management, modification and cosmetic maintenance. In addition to that, an empirical study carried out by Rai (2019) highlights internet and social media as an influential source affecting the University going women's perception of body and beauty. The advertisements of beauty products shown in television along with the flash advertisements of the same that pops up while using social media or playing online game(s) was found to be a determining factor for the

purchase of varied beauty and body care products by them. The media including print media (as that of magazines on lifestyle, fashion, beauty and similar others), broadcast media (in the context of television shows, Hollywood and Bollywood movies, music videos...) and internet plays a vital role in demonstrating the body which is appealing and highly stylized. This inference can be situated on the argument that the idealized images demonstrated by the media creates a sense of dissatisfaction on natural bodies through the process of “ideological interpellation” (Althusser, 1970) which subtly compels individuals for the attainment of the idealized images of body. For instance, the projection of a sleek and slender body has been evident since the early times in movies and beauty magazines. Even though in the contemporary time minor rectification has been attempted in the context of visual projection of the body. However, the grounded concept of having an appealing body is something that cannot be done away easily. A suited example to this argument could be the change in the name of a fairness cream in 2020 from ‘Fair and Lovely’ to ‘Glow and Lovely’ after receiving criticisms on racial grounds. Though the term fair has been dropped, the concept of having a glowing face still prevails. In the line of support to the above made arguments, Featherstone (1982) argues the dissatisfaction on one’s natural appearance of body, face is largely due to the awareness one has with regard to the comparisons being made on daily basis with the body image that is highly idealized by the larger media and particularly visual media. Thus, the media has a significant contribution in accelerating the impacts of the modern forces like transnational capitalism, consumerism and globalized concept/ideas on the body largely and further these forces undoubtedly affect and shape the presentation of self, self identity and body image of individuals.

2.9 Summary

The Body in Sociological sense has been predominantly linked to its historicity, theoretical perspectives and thus has been open to analysis based on the factors and forces that influence its development in different spheres of cultural, social, economic, religious, political and geographical to some extent. The above discussed perspectives provide an exemplary guide in situating the theoretical discourses in the empirical study. It contributes in providing a strong grip in the further process of expanding and exploring knowledge and expertise of what body actually is and what are its boundaries as pointed out by Shilling (1993). The role of capitalism in ushering the competency and necessity in meeting the demands of how a body should be presented and managed has been indirectly hinted at by numerous arguments posed above without mentioning the word capitalism directly. Therefore, this chapter has attempted to link capitalism particularly transnational capitalism and its role in the discourse of the body. Further the empirical study will also try to explore more in this regard. In a nutshell, this chapter has provided a theoretical framework on body discourse as a backdrop for the entire research study to be carried out.

CHAPTER 3

Social-Cultural World of the Kirat Rais in Sikkim

3.1 Introduction

“A systematic attempt to apprehend the subject matter of study along the lines of interrelationship between history and biography in its social setting fosters sociological imagination” (Mills, 1959).

The Kirat community have a history of their own which becomes significant to trace if they are to be located in the present context. Therefore, the first half of this chapter presents an outline on the historical backdrop of the Kirat Rai community locating them in the Eastern Himalayan region of Nepal from where they trace their descent and ultimately narrowing down to the area of study, Sikkim. Since the study is purposed to delineate the Rai ethno group of the Kirat community, the chapter also draws upon the socio-cultural, economic life and community organization of Kirat Rais to facilitate understanding of the people, their lifestyle and self presentation in everyday life.

Since the nucleus of study lies in Sikkim, eventually the second half of the chapter introduces the field area by providing a background of the field setting as well as presents the socio- economic background viz; work structure, educational level, religion, age group, rural urban distribution and body weight of the respondents.

3.2 Historical Background of the Kirats

In the contemporary time, the term Kirat is perceived as a hypernym for different ethnic groups who are found to be extended over the Eastern Himalayan Belt. However, in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the Kirats, tracing their history becomes significant. Chemjong (1966) argues that the early history of Kirats in terms of their ancestry can be traced as that of being in Babylon. Further he writes that the Kirats migrated on and did not settle in Babylon and around 1400 BC and 1500 BC, they could be traced in Mittani region of Mesopotamia and Southeast Turkey (Subba, 2015). The Kirats further migrated to the eastern and north eastern countries from there. However, it was in the bank of river Indus of Himalayas, the Kirats under the leadership of their king Shamba Ashur encountered the Aryans and got defeated in the battle which led them to migrate further east and gradually settle in Nepal (Chemjong, 1966). There are diverse perspectives on the origin of the Kiratas. However, going by the various literatures it is generally understood that in the course of migration from one geographical space¹⁸ to another, the new paradigm of Kirats as a distinct tribe was created. There are numerous interpretations and contests with regard to the term Kirat itself. The etymological meaning of the term Kirat, for instance, Chemjong (1966) argues is “a corrupt form of *Kiriat* which in Moabite language denotes a fort or a town in the Mediterranean region”. However, Singh (1990) citing Chatterjee (1951) has given a different connotation of the term Kirat referring to *Cireta*, *Cirata* or *Cirayeta* which denotes a medicinal herb acquired by

¹⁸ Here the term geographical space is used instead of place or region to denote not only the Kirati people alone were migrating to a new place but their social and cultural elements were also being migrated along with them.

the Aryans from the Kirats, who dwelled in the “mountains of Himalayas and north eastern India”.

Tracing the history, Subba (2015) pointed out that the Kirata empire also known as *Nao-lakh Kirat* (nine lakh Kirat) in ancient Eastern Nepal accounts to the third most ancient empire of the world next to Akkadian empire¹⁹ (3,500 BC) and Middle Kingdom²⁰ (3,100 BC) and was established in 2,153 BC by Kirat King Yalamba Hang in Hindu-Kush Himalayan region, who reigned the kingdom from Central Nepal Thankot. Therefore, due to the historical reference of Kirat Kingdom’s existence from 2153 BC until 194 BC being in Nepal under the leadership of 32 kings, the Kirats today widely trace their descent from Nepal. As per the *Kirat Mundhum*²¹, the origin of Kirats of Nepal can be traced back in three races viz., the Khambongbas or the Khambos, the Tangsangthas or the Mongols and the Munaphens or the Chinese who immigrated to the Himalayan regions (Chemjong, 1996). Further, though the Kirats are broadly claimed to be found in the Hindu Kush regions but Rai (2005) points out that larger geographical, linguistic and racial representation is found in the Easternmost province of Nepal especially in Kirata-desa²² and in the contemporary time in between the rivers Sunkosi and Arun. However, Schlemmer (2003) argues that though Kirat is “a generic term denoting the ethnic people of east Nepal, it also represents those ethnic groups found in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills”. Many scholars draw the line of argument that Kirat people of Nepal later migrated to Sikkim and Darjeeling post Treaty of Segowli, 1816 which separated Sikkim and

¹⁹ Empire of Mesopotamia established by King Sargon.

²⁰ Ancient empire of Egypt inaugurated by emperor Mentuhotep II.

²¹ Kirat Mundhum is the ancient folk literature which also suffices as the ancient religious scripture of the Kirats.

²² Kirata-desa represents a country lying between the two rivers viz. Dudh-Kosi and Karki in Nepal.

Nepal in terms of geographical boundary. Singh (1993) also substantiated the argument by pointing out that the Kirats, particularly the Rais reportedly migrated from Nepal to Sikkim and settled there in the 17th century at the time of Gurkha's invasion in Sikkim.

Coming to the discourse on 'Who are Kirats?' in the present context, Kirat today stands as a blanket term for 'Khambu Rais, Limboos, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Thami, Thakali, Jirel, Surel, Baram, Lepcha, Majhi, Chepang, Hayu, Tharu, Toto, Monpa, Sharchop, Doya, Chungpa, Takpa, Lishipa and Sherdukpen ethnic communities of Hindu Kush region' (Subba,2015). They all have their own ethno-language that is drawn from the Tibetan-Burman dialect. However, in Nepal and Sikkim (Nepalese Kirat region), the Rais and Limboos are considered as the earliest communities that came under Kiratas (Hodgson,1858; Dalton,1872; Wright,1877; Vansittart,1906; Regmi, 1969; Schlemmer,2003). Later, various ethno-communities namely, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Tamang, Newar, Magar, Gurung, Thami, Thakali, Jirel, Lepcha, Majhi, Chepong and many others got included under the umbrella of term Kirat in the present context.

Contextualising Kirat Rai ethno-group of Sikkim, it becomes vital to understand who are Kirati Rais. Rai (2005) with reference to Macdougall (1997) points out that Kirat Rai earlier widely addressed as Khambus is an ethnic community who trace their descent from the Khambuho, the original inhabitants of the land Khambuwan in Nepal. The titles Khambu and Rai are used interchangeably or/and as synonymous to denote the people who belong to Rai ethno-community under Kirat. The etymological

meaning of the word Khambu is “Kham” meaning land in Bantawa language²³ and therefore, they are the people living in the land of Khambuwan or the ‘land of Khambus/Rais’ (Rai,2005). Khambu Rais are also known as ‘jimdars’ (Rai, 2011; Singh,1993; Rai,2013) in reference to their occupational association with land and agriculture.

Among the Rais *paccha*²⁴ and *samett*²⁵ is used as a mark in identifying and tracing the genetic lines (Rai, 2008) or descent. As recorded in the Handbooks for Indian Army: Gurkhas (1906), the Khambu Rais have forty six different clans viz. *Ambola, Amchoke, Atpahare, Baingiye, Bantawa, Chamling, Chaurasia, Chinamkhole, Dilpali, Dungmali, Dumi, Harerama, Hatuwali, Hochatol, Hengwa, Jubile, Kaling, Kaple, Kesunge, Kimdung, Kowe, Kulung, Lingkim, Lingmuk, Lingtep, Lohorong, Mangliwali, Nacharing, Nechali, Nawahang, Panglung, Pumarhang, Rakhali, Rapchali, Raldocha, Rungdali, Sangpang, Samsong, Sawali, Seralungha, Sialjong, Sotang, Tulung, Walung, Yamdang and Yakka* (Rai,2008). There are numerous kinds of sub clans under each clan mentioned above.

3.3 Locating Kirat Rai in Sikkim

Sikkim: A Brief Profile - Sikkim stands as the 22nd State of India, constituting the western most part of Eastern Himalayas. Sinha (1975) accounts that the state encompasses between the 80 to 90 miles long Singalila ridges which provide a border for Sikkim and Nepal and Donkhya range that separates Sikkim from Tibet and

²³ Bantawa language is a language of a Bantawa subcaste/sect of Kirat Rai and is also commonly used by the larger Kirat Rai ethno groups.

²⁴ Etymologically Pa means father and cha means son and refers to the paternal birth line.

²⁵ Etymologically Sa means shadow and met means offsprings and refers to the maternal line of forefathers.

Darjeeling ridges marking the southern border of Sikkim. As per the 2011 Census of India, Sikkim holds the population of 6,10,577 out of which male constitutes 52.91% and females, 47.08% of the total population. Sikkim is often seen as a hub of different cultures, ethnic identities, religions and languages marked by different customs, traditions and practices accordingly. Sinha's (1975) highlighted that population of Sikkim can be broadly classified into Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese²⁶ and further classified Nepalese population broadly into Gurkhas, Kirats and Newars. Rai has been classified under the category of Kirats. The Sikkim State Socio-Economic Census (2006) has pointed out 21 communities²⁷ in Sikkim among which Rai marks the highest population of 78,651 that accounts to 13.52% of the total State population of 5,81,546, with 51% of male and 48.98% female.

Although the lingua franca of Sikkim is Nepali, the State has a total of eleven official languages²⁸ including Nepali. Along with languages of other communities, the state government has recognized Rai language as official language in the year 1994 and is taught up to school level since 2002. Apart from these official languages, English and Hindi are also widely used by the people of Sikkim.

In terms of religious worldview, at present the population of Sikkim follow diverse religions such that of Lamaism/ Buddhism, Hinduism, Animism (which has been practiced by communities like Lepcha and un-hinduised Rais and Limboos), Christianity, Yumaism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism and Bahai (Rai, 2013). Of the Kirat

²⁶ Nepalese group comprises Limboos, Rais, Mangar, Newars, Gurung, Tamangs, Chettri, Thakuri, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunuwar, Bahun, Jogi, Bhujel, Majhi and others.

²⁷ Including "Others" that refers to plainsman communities.

²⁸ The eleven official languages are Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa, Mangar, Mukhia, Newar.

Rai population in Sikkim, 81.93% have reported to be Hindus, 16.14% Christians, .44% as Buddhist. Another 1.4% of the total Rai population have been classified as Other religions (Sikkim State Socio- Economic Census, 2006).

Rai (2013) while presenting an account on the marriage system prevalent in Sikkim notes that clan endogamy but sub-clan exogamy is a prominent feature of marriage in Sikkim. The noticeable types of marriage in the State may be classified as being that of marriage by negotiation or *mangni biya*, elopement or *bhagera jane pratha*, marriage by courtship, marriage by service and marriage by capture. Though, monogamy is the expected form of marriage in Sikkim but polygamy and polyandry also prevails to some extent. Inter caste, inter community marriages are also practiced in Sikkim. “Junior sororate is found to be a traditional practice among the Lepchas, Bhutias, Gurungs, Tamangs, Bahuns, Chettris, Newars, Mangars, Kamis, Damais, Sherpas and Bhujels while junior levirate among the Bhutias, Lepchas, Tamangs, Gurungs, Mangars and Kamis (Rai, 2013). Rai community of Sikkim generally practice both marriages by negotiation as well as marriage by elopement.

However, the profile of Sikkim will be incomplete if the history remains untouched. The early history of Sikkim relies largely on the archival sources that are either written by European travelers or taken out from Tibetan accounts. The sources of history from an insiders’ account is virtually non-existent except very few oral history, myths, folklores etc. Risley (1894) in the first Gazetteer of Sikkim mentions that “Sikkim since very early included diverse communities of different race and caste including the Lepchas, Bhutia, Limbu, Gurung, Murmi, Rai/Jimdar/ Khambu, Kami, Brahman, Mangar, Chettri, Newar, Dirzi and miscellaneous including troops with a

total of 30, 458 populations of which 38% were males, 34.68% were females and 27.27% children”.

The historical reference is evident of the fact that Sikkim was actively involved in Indo-Sikkim trade and also trade with Tibet which actively demonstrates that Sikkim as a kingdom was not isolated rather had frequent interactions with the neighbouring regions which may point out possibilities of acculturation. Historically, Anglo-Sikkimese relations during the reign of Sidkeong Namgyal were cordial and explicit (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013). However, ending 333 years of the monarchy, Sikkim was incorporated with India as the 22nd State. Since its statehood, there has been huge expansion of administration and bureaucratic set up. Consequently, many developmental works started taking place, opening the door for exploring other sectors like tourism and small scale industries in an agrarian based economy. The increase in the literacy rate, educational attainment, infrastructural development, impact of information technology and media with the onset of globalisation widely contributed to the social transformation. Sikkim as a state undoubtedly has been undergoing positive changes with regard to its literacy rate as per the Gazetteer of Sikkim (2013), the rise in literacy rate has been significant showing a jump from 7% in 1951 to 82% in 2011 with 87% for male and 76% of female who can read and write. The improvement in literacy and education has also impacted the other aspects of society. That being so, Sikkim has not remained untouched by the impact of social change with regard to the socio-cultural life of the people. One can witness gradual changes in patterns of rites and practices, customs, dresses, ornaments, food culture, occupation which undoubtedly may have to do with some level of social contact with other communities and culture across the globe. Therefore, with the creation and

expansion of ‘reference group’²⁹ and the opening up of new exposure towards global culture, new fields of occupations, attainment of education irrespective of gender, interaction with the wider world led to many changes in socio-cultural life. Accordingly, the shift from traditional to modern and from private to public, opportunities for women to come in the forefront together have contributed to the changes that have been taking place in Sikkimese society. Further, the processes and practices of adaptation to the global cultures in the light of neo-liberalism has also resulted in the social change leading to assimilation of some elements of new socio-cultural practices.

In the foregoing backdrop of history as well as social change that has been taking place in Sikkimese society, it is relevant to understand the traditional socio-cultural, economic and community life of the Kirat Rai of Sikkim, which will provide ground for comprehending the changing dynamics of body discourse among Kirati Rai women.

3.3.1 Socio-cultural Life of the Kirat Rais

The Kirat Rai traditional house is made of stone and mud which has a roof made of bamboo and has a religious three sacred hearthstones known as *chula* or *Samkhalung* (Rai, 2005). However, in the contemporary time, with the creeping of modernity and social transformation the Kirat Rais are often found to be living in buildings and houses made of concrete structure which may or may not include the three sacred hearthstone depending upon the religion they follow. The Rai family is basically

²⁹ Here the term reference group denotes a group of people from other communities, culture and region to whom the Sikkimese people look as their references in adopting cultural elements.

patriarchal where the head of the family is usually the father or the eldest male member. However, in case of the absence of the eldest male member, the mother heads the house and takes decisions on behalf of the family. Their residence is patrilocal and likewise they follow the patrilineal succession of properties. The Rai family is traditionally nuclear extended. Nonetheless, in the contemporary time it is gradually and mostly superseded by the nuclear family (Singh,1993).

In terms of religious worldview, the Rais traditionally do not have a concept of God but were animist particularly nature worshippers. The Rais also worship their deities Sumnima and Paruhang as their creators. Besides, they also worship their ancestors/*maang* (spirit/soul) and perform *pitri puja* in their three sacred hearthstones known as *Tin Chulha or Samkhalung*. Rai (2005) elaborates on the three sacred hearthstones as that of being, two stones behind viz. *makalung* and *sombelung* forming the base and the front stone viz. *pakalung* being the apex. The former is worshipped because it is believed to draw away the unpleasant things like bad health, famine, death in the family while the latter is worshipped to bring good health, wealth and prosperity. Besides, the three sacred hearthstones are also the residing place of the ancestors' spirit/soul.



The Three Sacred Hearthstones

Source: Field work December-January, 2020-21

However, apart from ancestral worship, they also worship *Nagi* diety who holds responsibility for their fertility. All the religious rituals of Rai are performed by their religious head or the *bijuwa*, who is often addressed as *Mangpa*. Further, a larger section of Rais also worship Hindu deities like Devi and Siva and follow the religion of Hinduism which largely finds relevance in the present context (Rai 2008). The existence of Christianity and Buddhism is also not unknown among the Rais in the contemporary time.

The main traditional festivals celebrated by Rais are Sakewa or Ubhauri and Sakela or Udhauri on the month of *Baishak*³⁰ i.e, May-June and on the month of *Mangsheer*³¹

³⁰ As per the lunar calendar the month of *Baishak* falls as the month of April/May.

³¹ As per the lunar calendar the month of *Mangsheer* marks the month of November to December.

i.e, November-December respectively. In Sakewa, the community people gather and perform their traditional *Sili* dance together with Sili Mangpa and Sili Mangma (Rai,2005). However, along with these two traditional festivals, the Kirat Rai of Sikkim today widely celebrates festivals like Dusshera, Diwali, Holi, Shivratri, Christmas and many others based on the religious belief they hold.

3.3.2 Rituals Related to Rites de Passage

Van Gennep (1960) discusses that the rites de passage occurs in a sequence of; rites of separation i.e. from the previous stage, rites of transition i.e. to the next stage and rites of incorporation i.e. marking change in one's status or life cycle (cited in Forth, 2018). In terms of cultural and customary practices associated with rites of passage among Rais, the rituals are associated with the transitioning phases of life of an individual starting from the cycle of birth to death. A publication by Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Sikkim viz the *Kirawa Rhidum Kopsamm*³² has identified the following rites of passage among the Kirat Rais of Sikkim:

1. Pre-Birth Rites

a) *Bun Haekrama* or Pre-Natal Customary Practice

The local religious head or *Mangpaa* performs a ritual where he places bananas, rope made of *sisnu* (nettle) and *Salli Bisalli* (fern) in *nanglo* (a flat round tray woven with

³² Kirawa Rhidum Kopsamm is a book that has been taken out by Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Sikkim which involves detailed information on the rituals and customary practices of Kirat Rais and mentions the belief patterns, the taboos, the information on what is considered 'sacred' and 'profane' and common proverbs among the Kirat Rais. However, the year of publication of the Kirawa Rhidum Kopsamm is missing.

bamboo) which is then kept in the pregnant lady's head. He then keeps ginger and *khurmi* (small sickle) in his

hand and prays for the wellbeing of the mother as well as the child and tries to ask the *purkhadeu* (ancestral god) about the gender of the child.

2. Post-Birth Rites

a) *Hang Chawan* Customary Practice at the time of Birth

Traditionally, it is believed that while giving birth a woman often becomes frightened and bears extreme pain and this may lead to *saato janu* (soul being dislodged). Therefore, a particular ritual is performed by *Mangpaa* after the child is born to bring back the dislodged soul and also prayers for wellbeing and safety of both the mother and child are offered.

b) *Hangchanang Lokma* or Child Naming Ceremony

Child naming ceremony is kept by Rais within five days for girl child and within six days for boy child. In this particular customary practice, the elder female members have a major role to play. The Rais hold the notion of a mother (who has just given birth) and the house being in *jutho* (impurity/polluted) and therefore the *Mangpaa* (religious head) also performs a ritual to purify the mother as well as the house along with the ceremony of naming the child.

c) *Chasumkok Puma* or The Weaning Ceremony/ The Rice Feeding Ceremony

Rooted in the tradition, the Rais perform the weaning ceremony of the newborn with great honor. This ceremony is held within six months for a girl child and within seven

months for a boy child. The food prepared for the child is kept in a plate/bowl made from banana leaves and offered to God first. After offering it to God the food is then fed to the child with a silver coin by the parents followed by the family members. A huge feast is also prepared for the guests.

d) *Tangmuwa Khoma* or Boy Child's Hair Cutting Ceremony

When a boy child is between the age of two to three, the ritual of the hair cutting ceremony *Tangmuwa Khoma* is a must, where the maternal uncle is invited to perform the ritual. This ceremony marks the first haircut of male child since birth and is performed with great value and dignity. After performing the haircutting rituals by the maternal uncle, the boy child is given a bath and is made to wear the new clothes after which he is taken near the sacred three hearthstones of the family and prayer is being offered for his well being.

3. Early Puberty Rites

a) *Titrapma* or *Gunyo Choli* Ceremony/ Coming Age of a Girl

The *gunyo choli* ceremony is performed by Rais, since early times. When a girl child is in between the age of eight to nine, she is given/offered *gunyo* (traditional saree), *choli* (traditional blouse/upper garment), *majetro* (a piece of cloth used to cover head), *hemmari* (a piece of cloth that is tied around the waist in between the *gunyo* and *choli*) and traditional Rai ornaments. There are a variety of ornaments, which can be worn from head to toe. The number and amount of ornaments either of gold or silver given to the child in the ceremony entirely depends upon the socio- economic status of the family.

4. Marital Rites

a) *Sayakam Yakamma* or Customary Practice related to Marriage

Among the Rais, caste and village endogamy and clan exogamy is prevalent. Also, both the matrilineal line of clans among the would-be bride and groom is expected to be different from one another for the marriage to take place. Once the bride and groom decide to get married conforming to the prescribed rules of marriage, the *Kalliyas* often consisting of elderly Rai male members act as a mediator between the two families. The prevalent forms of marriage among the Rais are Marriage by Negotiation, Marriage by Capture (traditionally prevalent) and Marriage by Elopement. Polygyny is also prevalent among the community in the name of *Jari Biya*, where a man can marry a woman already having a husband dead or alive by paying *jari*³³ to the first husband and his family. However, cross cousin marriage or parallel cousin marriage is strictly considered a taboo among the Rais. Dowry system is not prevalent instead bride price is to be offered to the bride and her family which does not necessarily account to monetary items but could be of *dastoor* (in the name of ritual) consisting of *janr* (fermented rice beer), meat and a minimal amount of money. In case of marriage's dysfunction, divorce is permitted among the Rais.

5. Death Rites

a) *Sumasam- Kopsam* or Death Ritual

After a person dies, the dead body is placed on the floor along with a lighted *diya*, *Khukuri*, sickle, bow and arrow. The dead body is then offered water by family members and then taken to the jungle in a coffin for burial. Usually the coffin is carried by the sons or the male members of the family. While the others (usually the

³³ *Jari* refers to the ornaments, clothes and everything that was provided to the woman at the time of her first marriage by the groom's family or equivalent cash.

male members) accompany as the *malami* (funeral procession), one female who is not related to the family of the deceased mops the floor from inside to outside. On the other hand, the *Mangpaa* or the Rai *Bijuwa* prays for the departed soul in the place of burial and finally after placing the stones in the graveyard dug by the son of the deceased with the help of other people, the dead body in the coffin is placed on top of it. The family members then take a fist full of mud and offer it in the grave, while praying for the departed soul and is finally covered with mud. In the whole process, the *Mangpaa* or the *Bijuwa* recites *Rhidum* and prays for the departed soul. The procession then after reaching home from the place of burial sprinkles water with *titepati* (Mugwort/ *Artemisia vulgaris*) to get purged.

The Rais do not necessarily have to follow the *jutho barnae pratha* (the mourning period usually followed by the Nepali Hindus where one has to abstain oneself from others and also from having certain eatables like salt, oil, meat and milk for five consecutive days). However, if one wishes to, then they can mourn for the deceased family members. But universally, the Rais abstain themselves from celebrating festivals on the particular year their family member has died in the memory of the deceased.

Lastly, after seven/eleven/thirteen (the day is to be odd) days, a final *ghewa/maraw ko kaam* (final rites) is kept by the family members, where vegetarian dish is prepared for all the relatives, kindreds, cousins, friends and people of the society who in return brings *sarau* (some amount in cash) in the name of the deceased for the family.

3.3.3 Socio- Economic Condition of Kirat Rais

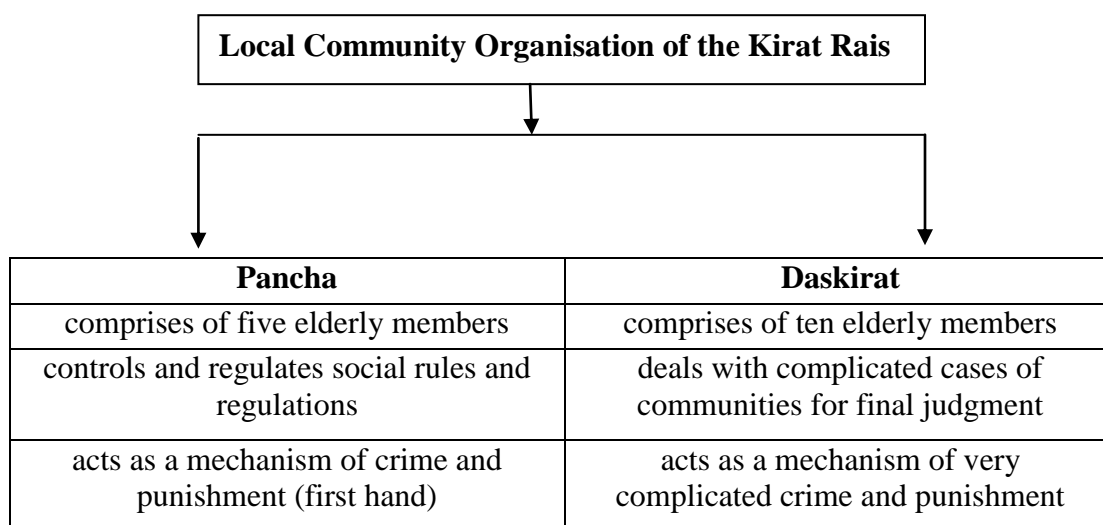
The early history of Rai often considers them as people who transmigrated from one place to another and practiced hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation (Singh,1993). In the line of this, it becomes undeniable to state that their economic life was primarily related to nature. However, since their settlement in Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling they are traditionally associated with “agriculture, animal husbandry, tea plantation and cultivation” (Rai,2005). And it is only after their engagement in these economic activities, particularly that of settled agriculture, their socio economic growth became apparent. Therefore, Land became a vital element of their livelihood and also their main source of income. The Rais ever since have always been associated with land and it is from there that they have received the term ‘Jimdars’ which show an intrinsic relationship between the land and Rais (Rai, 2013).

Singh (1993) further points out that though agriculture is the primary occupation of the Rais, they also generate larger income from military service. Besides, gradually the Rais have also set their foot on various other sectors of employment. As per the Report on OBC Commission (1998), the numbers of Rais in the following posts of State government accounted to; 1 in Selection IAS/IPS/IFS, 12 in Gazetted Grade I, 28 in Gazetted Grade II, 81 in Non-gazetted section and 789 in Class IV section. (Rai, 2005). In the present context, a larger number of Rais can be found in different sections of employment starting from primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sections. This may be mainly due to the urbanization, modernization and widening horizons of education to both men and women, and the traditional Jimdar Rais have come into the fourfold of mainstream economic activities.

3.3.4 Local Political and Community Organization of Kirat Rais

Though in the history of Kirat Kingdom, Yalamba Hang is considered to be a popular figure as a kingdom head of Kirat Rais. This section, rather than providing an account of the Kirat Kingdom, particularly aims to examine the local political/ community organizational structure of Kirat Rais. In absence of comprehensive literature on the political system of the Kirat Rais, based on few available references, the political/ community organization of Rais can be highlighted as follows:

The political organization of Rais revolved around the fact that “village used to be the effective political unit” (MacDougal,1973). Subba (1999) in the line of McDougal argues that *talukdars* who primarily were known as clan headman had the authority at village level to collect the taxes as well as legally settle disputes among the Kulunge Rais. No other authority above the *talukdars* could be traced in the early history of Rais. Rai (2005) points out that, among Rais there are two groups of people viz. *Pancha* and *Daskirat* are senior most Rais (mostly men) who hold great importance in terms of local community organization. *Pancha* and *Daskirat* are those groups, who regulate the social pattern of the Rai community and also control the internal affairs of the community. These two groups however only deal with the social regulation of the community in the present context. Similarly, all matters pertaining to religion are solely dealt with by the *Mangpa*. (religious head). The following flow chart aims to show the differences and functions of *Pancha* and *Daskirat*.



The main difference between *Pancha* and *Daskirat* lies in its composition, functions and jurisdiction. While *Pancha* comprises five elderly members and acts as a council of social control dealing with the minor issues within the community, *Daskirat* comprises ten elderly members and looks after matters of serious and complicated nature. However, in case of the crime being heinous and cases being very complicated for the *Pancha* and *Daskirat* to deal with and solve, the case is diverted to the judiciary for settlement (Rai,2005). The prevalence of *Pancha* and *Daskirat* can be found even today in Sikkim. However, in the present context, only the matters related to the social nature of the Rai community are dealt with by these councils while economic and legal matters are looked at by the modern judiciary system.

3.4. Outline of the Field

Field often holds a major role of providing resources in every research study. This section, particularly recognizing the necessity of the same, attempts to present a general outline of the field areas undertaken for the research study. The study has been carried out in both rural and urban settings. Gangtok being the capital of Sikkim having a cosmopolitan character has been taken as a representation of the urban sector while Assamligzey has been selected from the rural area. Sikkim as a state comprises four districts, viz. North, South, East and West. However, the study that has been conducted is limited to the East district. However, the study is limited to the East district.

3.4.1 Field Setting and Background

Gangtok, being the capital of Sikkim since 1894, is the center of state administration as well as the heart of the state. As per the 2011 census, it covers the total area of 715.64 square kilometers. The distance between Gangtok and Siliguri town in kilometers is 114, while the distance between Gangtok and New Jalpaiguri Railway Station and Bagdogra Airport is 123 kilometers and 126 kilometers respectively. The route that connects Gangtok to other regions and vice-a-versa is the 31A National Highway (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013). As per the 2011 census, Gangtok holds the total population of 102,846 where male accounts to 55.53% and female 44.46%.

Gangtok being a municipal town has several markets in and around with a cosmopolitan flavor, to name a few, *Naya Bazar*, *Lall Bazar*, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, *Deorali Bazar* and so on. Apart from markets, Gangtok is a hub of many reputed

schools, higher educational institutions, hospitals as well State's main administrative centre. It also acts as a vibrant tourism sector of the State. Gangtok is a home to people of diverse communities among which Rai being one of them. As per the community survey conducted by Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh in 1997, the total Rai population in Gangtok accounted for 11,056. In the contemporary time the population has increased almost double-fold. Rai people in Gangtok today, are found to be engaged in different sectors of employment from primary, secondary, tertiary to quaternary and Gangtok being an urban sector agriculture has become a mere choice of people based on the availability of resources (cultivable land, water and others).

Assam Lingzey on the other hand, falls as a Gram Panchayat Unit (GPU) under the constituency-22 Namcheybong in the East district. As per the District Census Handbook of Sikkim (2011 Census), Assam Lingzey village covers a total area of 23,500 hectares while the unhabitated Assam Lingzey Forest Block covers a total area of 5,236,04 hectares. The GPU is located 11 kilometers north of Pakyong Airport and at a distance of 18 kilometers from Gangtok. The easiest way to reach Assam Lingzey is by plying through vehicles available at Assam Lingzey Taxi Stand located in Ranipool. The distance between Ranipool and Assam Lingzey is approximately 14 kilometers. The total population of Assam Lingzey is 2,055 where male accounts to 51.82% and female 48.17% (Census of India, 2011 Sikkim District Census Handbook).

Assam Lingzey GPU consists of following five wards:

Table 3.1: Wards under Assam Lingzey GPU

WARD NUMBER	NAME OF THE WARD
Ward no. 1	Saureni
Ward no. 2	Lingzey
Ward no. 3	Assam-Daragoan
Ward no. 4	Assam Gairigoan
Ward no. 5	Pastenga

Source: cdn.s3waas.gov.in (East District Gram Panchayat Details)

People from different communities live in Assam Lingzey. However, a maximum of Rai people in the village was found to be living in Khola goan also popularly known as Rai goan (at local level) which falls under Ward no. 3. Therefore, in rural area 70% of the empirical study has been conducted in Khola goan and 30% in Daragoan where the Assam Lingzey Village Administrative Centre is located. Both areas of study fall under Ward no. 3. Daragoan can be considered as the starting point of Ward no. 3 and to reach Khola goan from there it takes 3 kilometers by vehicle or 1 kilometer off road i.e., by walking via cliff side path. Almost all the Rai people of the older generation (both male and female) were found to be engaged in cultivation and agricultural work (mostly cardamom plantation). However, few younger generations were also found to be working under different sectors of employment while the children of the village were found to be attending schools and colleges in Assam Lingzey and Gangtok as well.

3.4.2 Outline of Sample Population

The study has been conducted among three categories of sample population viz. Rai women, Elderly members including both male and female falling under the age group of 53- 85 and a boutique owner. The following table 3.2 shows the sample distribution.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Sample Population

Sl. No.	Rural-Urban Distribution	Rai Women	Elderly Members	Boutique	Total
1.	Gangtok (Urban)	25/50%	4/ 40%	1/ 100%	30
2.	Assam Lingzey (Rural)	25/50%	6/ 60%	----	31
3.	Total	50/100%	10/ 100%	1/ 100%	N= 61

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Table 3.2 presents the total sample distribution of the study. The total sample population of the study is 61. Out of the sample population of Rai women taken i.e, fifty, twenty-five representing 50% of total sample have been taken from the urban sector of Gangtok and another 50% from the rural sector of Assam Lingzey. In addition, another 10 respondents of Rai elderly comprising both male and female members have been taken in order to understand the traditional practices which has helped in facilitating understanding on the traditional presentation of self among Rai women. Furthermore, a case study of an ethnic boutique having three outlets in Gangtok town has been collected to understand the recent trend and resurgence with regard to the traditional attire.

3.5 Socio- Economic Background of the Respondents

Though the total number of respondents is sixty-one, in depth and detailed primary information of the empirical study has been generated from fifty Rai women of Sikkim taking various socio-economic variables into consideration viz. religion, rural urban set-up, work participation, age group, body weight and educational qualification. As the larger focus of the study remains on the empirical data collected from Rai women, the section intends to present their socio-economic background. Since all the respondents were women belonging to the Rai community, the community and cultural aspect is not taken as a variable for the purpose of insignificant differences found due to homogeneity in this context. Besides, a heterogeneous group of respondents involving different age groups (least being 14 years and highest being 81 years), body sizes/weight (least being 42 kgs and highest being 78 kgs), economic background (from 5,000- 10,000 to 51,000 and above), religion, work participation (government, private, business, cultivation/farming) and educational qualification have been taken into consideration.

Table 3.3: Rural-Urban set-up of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Rural-Urban Distribution	Total Numbers	Percentage
1.	Gangtok (Urban)	25	50%
2.	Assam Lingzey (Rural)	25	50%
3.	Total	50	100%

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Table 3.3 presents the rural-urban distribution of the respondents, that is of Gangtok and Assamlingzey. It shows that 50% respondents are from urban sector Gangtok and another 50%

from the rural set up of Assam Lingzey. The 100% respondents taken for the study comprises equally distributed rural and urban set-up in order to avoid biases in the representation and data collection as well.

Table 3.4: Age-group Wise Distribution of the Respondents

Sl. No	Set-up	AGE GROUPS								Total
		14-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	80 above	
1.	Urban	2/8%	16/64%	5/20%	1/4%	--	--	1/4%	--	25
2.	Rural	8/32%	3/12%	3/12%	4/16%	2/8%	4/16%	--	1/4%	25
3.	Total	10/20%	19/38%	8/16%	5/10%	2/4%	4/8%	1/2%	1/2%	N=50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Table 3.4 shows the age-group of the respondents based on rural and urban break up. The highest representation of the respondents from both urban and rural setup falls under the age group of 21-30 which is 38%, while the lowest being the age group of 71-80 and 80 above which is 2% each. The break down of respondent's age group and their participation as per rural and urban set up are as follows:

In urban settings, the highest representation is 64% of the age group 21-30 while the lowest is 4% in the age group of 41-50. Another 4% represents the age group of 71-80. None of the respondents belong to the age groups of 51-60, 61-70 and 80 above in the urban setting.

In rural areas, the highest representation is marked by the age group 14-20 (32%), lowest in the age group of 80 above (4%) and there is no representation in the age group of 71-80.

Table 3.5: Religion of the Respondents

Sl. No	Set-up	Animism	Hinduism	Buddhism	Christianity	Others	Total
1.	Urban	1/4%	13/52%	1/4%	7/28%	3/12%	25
2.	Rural	--	24/96%	--	1/4%	--	25
3.	Total	1/ 2%	37/74%	1/2%	8/16%	3/6%	N= 50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Religion can be seen as an indirect factor influencing the way women perceive their body today. The particular reason for the circumstance is that religion aims to regulate and control the behavior of individuals. It acts as a form of social control and also provides a base for morality, norms and values. The lifestyle choices and patterns of individuals are often influenced by those values, norms and morality they hold. Shilling (2007) argues that taking Parson's subjective understanding of individuals as actors, their bodily actions can be seen more as choices motivated by social norms. Therefore, it is interesting to see if religion as a variable is contributing to the variation in larger discourse of the body. Table 3.5 shows the religion of the respondents. In the urban sector the Rai respondents belonged to different religions viz., Animism (4%), Hinduism (52%), Buddhism (4%), Christianity (28%) and others (12%). On the contrary, in the village of Assam Lingzey, the Rai respondents were found to be residing in a close knit society where almost all i.e 96% followed the religion of Hinduism along with their traditional animistic practices and held similar religious values. However, exceptions were there and 4% i.e. one respondent was Christian by faith.

Table 3.6: Income level of the Respondents (Per Month)

Sl. No.	Set-up	Rs. 5,000-10,000	Rs. 11,000-20,000	Rs. 21,000-30,000	Rs. 31,000 - 40,000	Rs. 41,000-50,000	Rs. Above 51,000	Total
1.	Urban	3/12%	5/20%	4/16%	4/16%	3/12%	6/24%	25
2.	Rural	9/36%	7/28%	6/24%	1/4%	--	2/8%	25
3.	Total	12/24%	12/24%	10/20%	5/10%	3/6%	8/16%	N=50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Table 3.6 shows the income level of the respondents. Income as a variable intends to assess the relationship of economic status with the beauty practices, body management and presentation of body image. The economic status has been situated from the income of the Rai women. In case of students and Rai women being unemployed, their family income has been taken into consideration. Amongst the total sample taken (both rural and urban), The highest 48% of respondents falls under the lowest income category of Rs. 5,000-20,000/month. This category comprises mostly those who were working under farming, unorganized and private sectors and also included teachers working in private nursery schools. 20% of total respondents fall under the income range of Rs. 21,000-30,000/month. Another 10% earned Rs. 31,000-40,000/month. While the lowest 6% fall under the income category of Rs. 41,000-50,000/ month. A significant 16% had monthly income of above Rs. 51,000 per month. The respondents earning above Rs. 20,000 and higher income level are mostly the women working under government sector, business women and large scale agricultural farming.

Table 3.7: Occupational Distribution of the Respondents

Sl. No	Set-up	Government employee	Private sector	Business (Self)	Unemployed	Student/Scholars	Cultivators	Total
1.	Urban	4/16%	6/24%	1/4%	1/4%	13/ 52%	--	25
2.	Rural	2/8%	1/4%	2/8%	3/ 12%	8/32%	9/36%	25
3.	Total	6/12%	7/14%	3/6%	4/8%	21/42%	9/18%	N=50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

The nature of occupation and income level together determines the economic status. Therefore, it serves as an important variable with regard to what Bourdieu (1992) points out “one’s body is often characterized by one’s fundamental class condition of life”. Since, the study intends to situate the role of socio-economic background with the dominant ideas of body and beauty in terms of their self presentation, an examination of occupational distribution of the respondents become relevant. Table 3.7 shows the occupational distribution of the respondents. Out of the total sample taken (both rural and urban) 12% work as government employees, while slightly higher 14% work in the private sector. Another 6% are involved in business, while the majority 50% are either students, unemployed or homemakers. A significant 36% of Rai women of Assam Lingzey village, which accounts to 18% of the total sample, were found to be engaged in cultivation of cardamom (mostly) and ginger which they sell in the market. Therefore, their income comes primarily from cultivation. None of the respondents from the urban areas were found to be engaged in agricultural practices.

Table 3.8: Educational Level of the Respondents

Sl. No	Set-up	Illiterate	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate	Post Graduate and above	Total
1.	Urban	1/4%	---	---	2/8%	13/52%	9/36%	25
2.	Rural	9/36%	1/4%	9/36%	1/4%	3/12%	2/ 8%	25
3.	Total	10/20 %	1/2%	9/18%	3/6%	16/32%	11/ 22%	N=50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Education as an acquired ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1984) has a major role to play in changing the habits of individuals through awareness and exposure to the knowledge of the wider world. Education among the Kirat Rai ethno-group is not an age-old tradition, rather it can be observed as a new phenomenon brought by modernity. Therefore, identifying the role of education in the changing discourse of the body across time remains significant to the present study. Table 3.8 shows the educational level of the respondents. A majority i.e. 20% of the respondents are illiterate. A wide gap in the literacy rate with regard to the rural and urban divide could be observed. As in terms of illiteracy 36% belong to the rural sector as against 4% in the urban sector. Another 4% of respondents belonging to the rural sector have only qualified elementary level while 36% from rural areas have qualified secondary examination. 6% of the respondents in general have qualified higher secondary examination, out of which 8% are from urban as against 4% from rural sector. The majority of the respondents from both urban and rural areas are Graduates. In total the highest 32% belongs to the educational category of graduates. The second highest percentage (22%) belong to the category of post graduate level and above, which is higher among the urban respondents (36%) as compared to the rural respondents that accounts to 8% of total sampled population.

Table 3.9: Body Weight of the Respondents

BODY WEIGHT IN KILOGRAMS						
Sl. No.	Areas	40-50	51-60	61-70	71 above	Total
1.	Urban	7/ 28%	13/ 52%	3/ 12%	2/ 8%	25
2.	Rural	10/ 40%	8/ 32%	5/ 20%	2/ 8%	25
3.	Total	17/ 34%	21/ 42%	8/ 16%	4/ 8%	N=50

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Wolf (1991) argues that the fashion and beauty industries act as an exploitative agent for women. She further states that these industries act as a stimulus to the beauty myth which is based on the notion of normative standards of beauty and body weight. Beauty myth for *Wolf* is all pervasive and extends into all areas of human functioning. Therefore, the body weight of the respondents remains an important variable for the study. Table 3.9 shows the body weights of the respondents. The body weight has been taken as a variable with an aim to draw upon respondent's diverse perspectives on the body considering the different body structures of Rai women. Taking both urban and rural areas into consideration, 34% of women represent body weight between 40-50 kilograms, followed by 42% who weigh between 51-60 kilograms. Another 16% belong to the category of 61-70 kilograms while 8% of respondents have body weight of 71 kilograms and above. Taking the diversity of body structures and sizes among the respondents, the study intends to present insights on how Rai women perceive their body and also negotiate on the part of their daily presentation of body image.

Table 3.10: Age-group Wise Weight of the Respondents

AGE Group in Years	Urban/Gangtok Body Weight in Kgs				Rural/Assam Lingzey Body Weight in Kgs				Total
	40-50	51-60	61-70	71 above	40-50	51-60	61-70	71 above	
14-20	2/4%	--	--	--	6/12%	2/4%	--	--	10/20%
21-30	2/4%	9/18%	3/6%	2/4%	1/2%	1/2%	1/2%	--	19/38%
31-40	2/4%	3/6%	--	--	--	1/2%	1/2%	1/2%	8/16%
41-50	--	1/2%	--	--	2/4%	1/2%	--	1/2%	5/10%
51-60	--	--	--	--	1/2%	1/2%	--	--	2/4%
61-70	--	--	--	--	--	2/4%	2/4%	--	4/8%
71-80	1/2%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1/2%
80 above	--	--	--	--	--	1/2%	--	--	1/2%
Total	7/14%	13/26%	3/6%	2/4%	10/20%	9/18%	4/8%	2/4%	N=50/ 100%

Source: Field work December-January 2020-21

Age group and weight are important variables of the study which can have correlation with regard to trendy and changing notion of body size. Therefore, the study by correlating these two variables intends to identify how women of different age groups and body weight perceive their body and accordingly construct their ideas on body and beauty. Similarly, the two variables also attempt to identify if the body care and beauty practices are age and weight specific or not.

Table 3.10 shows the age group and body weight wise distribution of the respondents along with their rural and urban break up.

In the urban setting a significant 26% of the respondents in the age group of 21-50 weighed between 51-60 kgs. The combined percentage of 12% in between age groups of 14-20 (4%), 21-30 (4%), 31-40 (4%) have body weight of 40-50kgs. In total 14% of urban respondents belong to the body weight of 40-50 kgs, 26% in the category of 51-60 kgs. While 10% of respondents have body weight above 61 kg.

Coming to the rural setting, the highest 20% who have their body weight in between 40-50 kgs belong to the age group of 14- 30 years (14%) and also 41-60 years (6%). Another 18% having their weight in between 51-60 kgs are distributed in all age groups except in the age category of 71-80. The combined 8% in the age groups 21-40 (4%) and 61-70 (4%) belong to the weight category of 61-70 kgs. The lowest 4% in the age group of 31-40 (2%) and 41-50 (2%) fall in the body weight category of 71 kgs and above.

The analysis makes it clear that there is no significant correlation between body weight and age. Also there is no substantial variation between the respondents of the rural and urban areas with regard to age specific body weight.

3.6 Summary

The chapter basically gives a comprehensive overview of the socio-cultural world view of the Kirat Rais in Sikkim against the historical backdrop. Intending to contextualize the study, the first section attempts to locate Kirat Rai in the society of Sikkim. Therefore, it starts from the question Who are the Kirats Rais in terms of their socio-cultural markers? To provide an answer, this chapter tracing the history on who they are draws information on the socio-cultural, economic, local political and community aspects of the Kirat Rais.

The second section includes introduction of the field area of study i.e., Gangtok and Assam Lingzey. The chapter in this section also introduces the respondents and presents their socio-economic background.

In a nutshell, this chapter acknowledging the importance of time and space in the social setting of Kirat Rais has attempted to present a discourse drawing on history and ultimately situating it in the present context of the larger social structure.

CHAPTER 4

Changing Socio- Cultural Connotation of Body Discourse-

An Empirical Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Body can be viewed as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon as it undergoes the process of transformation in the course of interaction in the society and within the limits set by the society (Shilling, 1993).

Body in biological lens may connote the physical structure including bones, organs, muscles, nerves, blood, flesh and skin but in sociological lens it emphasizes on the ‘social body³⁴’ i.e., the social aspects of the body and its representation in the wider society. In sociological study, the somatic society has made the body an important factor and a key site of discourse in the contemporary period (discussed in Chapter 2). The society being dynamic in nature is constantly undergoing changes and so the discourse on the body is often shaped by the changes the society is undergoing. Therefore, the fact that the discourse of the body changes often with society and culture becomes irrefutable. The modern somatic society characterized and supplemented by scientific developments, technological advancements, innovations in

³⁴ Social body in the line of argument posed by Booth (2016) refers to the human body which rather than just a mere object is subjective to create certain meanings through the process of social development and also course of interaction and participation with others in the larger society. To substantiate, how a body behaves, acts, responses and presents is itself a social act which may be seen as an outcome of interaction between different individuals in the society. This notion on the social body is drawn from the perspective of Mead’s symbolic interaction and Johnson’s embodied mind.

biomedical fields, coming in of transnational capitalism and impact of globalization, consumer culture, arising of several beauty industries and beauty brands competing against each other have all contributed to what Giddens (1991) argued as “human bodies being both fragile and exceedingly malleable”. No wonder the larger victims of this have been female bodies which have to be maintained and treated so as to fit into the societal codes that are set for them. The concept that “Anatomy is destiny” (Beauvoir, 1949) makes it explicit to argue that the modern somatic society and culture has constantly associated women with their bodies. Thus, starting from the earlier existent simple pre-industrial society to present day complex modern society, women has felt the necessity of presenting themselves as a fit to the expected standard of beauty prevalent at the particular point of time (be it from older days of conventional beauty practices involving oiling and keeping long hair to the present day innumerable practices associated with body and beauty).

With the conceptual backdrop, the chapter presents an empirical analysis on the study of changing body discourse with regard to the question of the body among Rai women of Sikkim. Revisiting the traditional notion(s) on beauty and body care practices among Rai women, the study builds upon the modern day practices of body care and beauty. In order to understand the dynamics of changes in the social and cultural construction of body discourse, the study explores everyday experiences, ideas and subjective perceptions on body and beauty. Furthermore, the chapter also intends to examine the role of various agencies that have shaped the construction of ideas as to what body and beauty is and consists of. In exploring the research question catering to the first four objectives of the study, the empirical findings and analysis in

this chapter is presented thematically taking the variables as age group, body weight, economic status, religion, educational level and work structure.

4.2 Revisiting the Traditional Notion(s) of Beauty and Body Care

In order to understand the changing socio-cultural connotation of body discourse among Rai women it is important to locate them in their historical backdrop of traditional practices on body care and beauty. Therefore, this section attempts to furnish the backdrop for the changing discourse on the body among the Kirat Rai women of Sikkim.

The traditional concept of body and beauty in the history of Rais remained as an aspect which has been left untouched in academic research and no comprehensive literature is available on the subject. However, in order to draw out the traditional concept and practices, interpretations could be made based on scanty references available, myths, folklores, lyrics of songs and narratives made by elderly people. Regarding the general physical appearance of Kirat Rai women, Rai (2005) has stated that Rais are “short statured with strong bodies, broad cheeks, squashed nose, slit eyes which is usually small in size, fair complexion, black and stiff hair, darker colored eyes and well developed leg muscles”. The observation in similar line with regard to the physical appearance of Rai women has been found in the narration of 53 years old elderly Rai member who is one of the founding members of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Sikkim currently working under the language department of the State, Sikkim:

Rai nari haru dekhda kheri pahilo choti tah alik short figure ko hagi, ani moto, ekdammai baliyo tarika ko ra aba... akha alikati mundri nabhako, aaa, nakh dherai

*lhamo nabhako, oath baklo, kaan alik thulo thulo khalko ani amlī haru choto choto,
ra estai khalko praya hamilae dekhchau*

Which is translated as “Rai women when looked at, firstly they have short figure, healthy body and are very strong statured, epicanthic fold is absent, usually the nose is not sharp, lips are broader, ears are bigger in size and fingers are short and this is the general physical appearance of Rai women”.

In the present scenario the exact physical features of Rai women as described above may not be necessarily noticeable. One of the probable reasons for this could be the genetic line of parents in case of inter-caste marriages which is widely prevalent among Rais also in the present context. Following that, in the contemporary time, women can modify and maintain their physical appearance using a wide range of beauty products that are easily available in the market and/or undergoing body shaping and fitness regimes. Consuming supplements to maintain or modify the body, such as calcium that provides height growth and undergoing cosmetic surgeries are some of the ways in which the physical appearance can be modified/maintained. However, in traditional society women hardly gave any importance to body management and presentation of self in terms of beauty and physical appearance as compared to that of the present time. The presentation of self in traditional ornaments and attire remained as the only practice that was found to be made by Rai women in traditional times. These arguments can be situated on the narratives of following elderly people who were asked about the traditional concept and practices on body and beauty.

68 years old female elderly respondent from Assam Lingzey drawing onto her youthful days narrates:

Hamro pali ma tah haath futeko cha bhane kaam kaari bhaninthyo ahilay tah maile, nijangro po bhancha

The literal translation would be: “In our time women with cracked hand skin were considered as those who work hard and pay attention to household chores but now it is considered dirty and unfavourable/unlikeable/inappropriate”.

Similarly, another Rai female elderly respondent who is 75 years old from Gangtok refuting the cosmetic uses and practices narrated:

Uhilay hamro jamana ma tah sunn lae matra ramri dekcha bhaninthea anuhar ma dalnae haru tah kehi theana. Lhamo kapal batera lacha lagautheyo keti haru lae ani tesailai ramri ani ramro bhanintheyo

Which in English translates to: “In our time the cosmetic products that are used in the face were unavailable and it was said that gold ornaments are the only thing that would make you look beautiful. Long hair used to be plaited and Nepali *Chulti Dhago* or *Lacha*³⁵ was used in plaited hair and that was considered beautiful and good”.

Nevertheless, it cannot be refuted that Rai women of traditional times were not completely aloof from beauty and body care practices. Their adorning practices include wearing *lacha*, gold ornaments and few reported using skin products like face cream, boroline, vaseline and home made skin care like milk cream. With regard to hair care practices, oiling of hair with mustard oil or coconut oil was mostly reported. However, as the society started to undergo socio-temporal changes, the traditional and

³⁵ Nepali traditional hair ornament made of long (mostly) red or black threads with colorful tassels attached at the ends.

cultural notions as well as the practices on beauty and body care also underwent noticeable changes. Narrating her experience with regard to her observation in changing body care and beauty practices 69 years old Rai female elderly respondent from Assam Lingzey stated:

Hamro pala ma tah kapal katnu dintheana tara hami muni baine lae katnu thalyo, aba badlindai gayon tah.. Nakkal jhakkal pani kei theana uhilay tah chauda-pandra barsa samma hami tah chappal hai na lagai khali khuttai po hidtheim. Chappal lagako tah yaad hai po chaina malai. Paisa ko dukha hunthyo ni feru tyo bela.

The literal translation would be: “In our time we were not allowed to cut our hair but that changed as my younger sisters started cutting their hair. In my youthful days I never used any beauty products and makeup. In fact, until I was fourteen to fifteen years old, I don’t remember wearing slippers. I only remember walking barefoot. Hardly any importance was given to looking physically beautiful then. People at that time did not have much money also and we had a hard time earning it”.

In the similar line, another female elderly respondent from Assam Lingzey who is 82 years old stated:

Pahila tah chori haru lai compulsory lagaunae dhungri, mundri bhanthyo. Haath ma chura lagai dintheyo chandi ko, khutta ma kalli bhanthyo, Kalli pane lagaunui parnae. Jutta, chappal huntheana tah pahilae khali khuttai po. Ahilay tah nani janminu bittikai moja, jutta po. Keti haru lae kei make-up lagautheana. Nwai-dhwai garnu tah pauntheana tyai kheti pati lae. Kei syarnu pane nabhyaunae. Kapal katnu dintheana ghar bata lacchin jancha bhantheyo. Kapal salakkai hunthyo keti haru ko. Sano nani huda sabbai keti lae jama ani saath-aath barsa pugda dekhi gunyo choli

bhaninthyo tyo dintheyo ani saddai tyai lagautheyo ahilay ko jasto khandrang-khundrung tah theana

Which can be translated as: “In olden times girls had to compulsorily wear traditional ornaments including nose pin, septum ring, bangles in both hands and *kalli* (silver bangle worn in feet/foot). There were no shoes and slippers when I was young, we used to walk bare feet. But now time has drastically changed and soon after babies are born socks and shoes are put in their feet. Women in our time did not use any makeup/cosmetic products. Even there hardly used to be time for taking bath because of all time engagement in cultivation and agricultural work. There was no time for taking care of one’s body and face. Keeping short hair was not allowed for women as it was said that good omen will go away. So hair used to be silky and long. Girls in their childhood used to wear frocks and after they reached the age of seven to eight, they were given *fariya choli*³⁶ by their families which they used to wear in everyday life. There were no hanky-panky dresses like there are today”.

Coming to the attire and dressing, 83 years old male from Assam lingzey who used to work in a post office but now has retired, contemplating old time with the contemporary one stated:

Tyo paila ko keti haru lae ahilay ko jasto. . . . (continues after pause) tyo kurtha pajama tah bharkhar niskeko, tyo dekhi fankey gunyo kalo ani arko rang niske pachi fariya bhantheyo ani tyo lagautheyo. Tehi pahiran ma bastheyo. Bewra bistar, rak chalan bhayera afno junchai bhusan lagako keti lai ramri bhanintheyo hamro jamana ma.

³⁶ Traditional Nepali dress including lower and upper garments.

The literal translation of the above statement: “That *Kurtha* set has recently come. Earlier it was *fanke gunyo* (sari wrapped around the lower part of the body) in black colour and when other colours came out, it became to be known as *fariya* and that used to be worn by the women. That was the attire they used to stay in. A woman with good conduct and good moral values wearing traditional attire was considered beautiful in our time”.

Further being asked on his observation on the practices related to body care and beauty among Rai women the elderly man continues...

Etta sunnuhos hai, hamro didi baine haru sabbai baisa ma thothi bhayo. Hamro pali ma burus paste theana. Phoske dhunga khola ma paunae dhasera dhulo hunthyo ani datta majtheyo. Coila pitera majtheyo. Aba theyo bhane pani sahar ma basne lae challis-paitalis barsa agari dekhi chalako hola tara hamilae tah chalayena. Colgate bhanne tah ma sola-satra barsa pugda matra niskeko jasto lagcha, nakkal ko kura tah acchamma!

“Listen to me, our sisters (elder and younger) all lost their tooth/teeth in their adolescence. In our time the toothbrush and toothpaste were unavailable. We used to brush our teeth with soft rock which we used to rub on hard surfaces and convert into powder like matter and with powder made of coal. Even if tooth brush and paste were there, then those staying in towns might have used it since forty to forty-five years ago but we did not use it. The product name Colgate came out in the market only when I was sixteen to seventeen years old. The talk about beauty practices seems surprising to me as it was virtually non-existent in our time and we were not aware of it”.

Drawing from the above narratives it would not be wrong to remark that the traditional concept and practices on beauty and body among Rai women revolves around the notion of traditional dress and ornaments being worn. Similarly, the portrayal of ideal Rai women in traditional time is often considered to be of one wearing it. But in the contemporary time, traditional Rai dress and ornaments have remained as an option to wear, which the women on a daily basis were not found to be wearing except by very few elderly women. Clothes like trousers, night gowns/ maxis, kurthas and wrappers were commonly worn by them in their everyday lives.

To elaborate on the Rai dress and ornaments the following section presents a detailed account on what traditional Rai dress and ornaments consist of? Rai (2005) points out the traditional dress of Rai woman includes *gunyo choli*, *lacha* and *patuki* while the ornaments consists of “*Chuklung* (worn on wrists), *Sumchang* (necklace made of 25 paisa coins of the Victorian era), *Pungwalung* (Necklace made of 50 paisa coins), *Yangchang* (necklace made of rupee coin), *Nathen* (ornament worn on nose made of gold), *Nabit* (nose ornament made of gold worn on the septum), *Fengrang* (earrings) and *Namtu* (also a flat shaped earring)”. However along with these mentioned above, the Rai traditional ornaments as per the available literature of Rai (*Kirati Rai Jati ka Sanskritik Sampada haru*) includes *chandrama* (moon shaped ornament worn in head), *jantar* (square shaped golden ornament worn in neck) and *kalli* which is silver bangles worn in legs. Also, Green beads, an ornament called *poteymala* is considered to be a sign that depicts a woman is married (Singh, 1993).

Along the lines of these references, the portrayal of ideal Rai women can also be traced from the lyrics of the following song *Kirati chhori* by Yuma Rai (2014).

However, only the sections reflecting on the portrayal of Rai women in this song have been taken out and presented.

(In first verse)

Kirati chhori mai ramri mori, fariya choli ma

Nachna mann lagyo dhol jhamta samai Sakela Silli ma.....

Translation: Daughter of Kirat, I am beautiful, in *fariya* and *choli* (traditional Rai dress)

I feel like dancing, holding *dhol* and *jhamta* in Sakewa Silli.....

(In second verse)

Kapal baati siraima sirful launchu mo sunnai ko

Assirma cha hai hamilai saddhai aakhirma purkhako.....

Translation: Braiding my hair I wear *sirful* on my head made of gold

We have the blessings of our ancestors after all.

Kaanaima chapti, kadhaima haari, yo hamro chinahri

Manav ra shrishtri ka nawlo hami, dharti ka kisani....

Translation: *Chapti* in ears, *haari* in shoulders. This is our identity.

New to civilization and creations, we are farmers of the earth.

Therefore, the above presented lines of the song further accentuates the discourse on body among Rai women in traditional time (prior to modern events of globalization, westernization, transnational capitalism, hegemony of beauty and body politics and

other forces of modernity) being limited to traditional presentation of self. The concept of beauty dwelled upon the same notion and therefore, the modern ways of body management, presentation of self which is widely prevalent today becomes almost null and void. The traditional body image of ideal Rai women in conventional time is usually one where the Rai women are often seen wearing their Rai dress, traditional ornaments and carrying their long braided hair in *lacha*. Similarly, the traditional practices on body and beauty care among Rai women appears to be of very simple and of limited choice.

Nonetheless, over the time sweeping waves of modernity, westernization, globalization, consumer culture and transnational capitalism have paved the way for changes in traditional societies and this ultimately has jolted the ethnic roots of almost all communities including the Rai ethno-group. In the line of this argument, a question often arises as to Where does the ideal body image of Rai women stand in the present context? Thus, the study tries to address this question along the lines of changing socio-cultural connotation of body discourse in the following section.

4.3 Perception of Body in the Changing Context

As highlighted above the portrayal of the body among Rai women historically has been limited to the presentation of self in their traditional attires, ornaments and was restricted and shaped by the same self-presentation based on traditional notion. However, in the contemporary time, the notion of body has been diversified and undoubtedly, the changed time and space plays a crucial role in how today's Rai women are shaping and constructing their ideas on beauty and body care. In the present context, an awakening upsurge on the question of self-esteem closely

associated with the notion of presentation of self together holds the body image of Rai women of Sikkim also. This argument can be situated from the narrative of 38 years old respondent, a biker from Assam Lingzey who is married and currently working in the Department of Public Health Engineering, Gangtok:

I travel daily on a bike while going for my official duty and receive a lot of compliments from people saying I look good riding which makes me happy and proud of myself. Since I am a rider I always wear rough clothes like torn jeans, boots and leather jackets and that is how I like to present myself as it gives me a lot of confidence and clothes other than those do not suit my body image.

Body image, self esteem and presentation of self together have become intertwined and determining factors in identifying the subjective perceptions and ideas on beauty. These factors in the wake of modern capitalist society however do not solely develop in isolation but as a result of constant interaction with the wider society and its various agencies. The influential agents like beauty industries, job roles/ work orientation, capitalism contributes to the subjective experiences of one regarding their body and these experiences are often found to be shaping the way women are perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on body. For instance, sharing her idea of fat and flabby body making it difficult to perform agricultural and household work, 45 years old respondent having a body weight of 60kgs from Assam Lingzey who is married and engaged in agricultural practices states:

I don't prefer a fat and flabby body because we have to do a lot of household work and work related to agriculture and cultivation. The income of my entire family is dependent on this agricultural work itself.

On the question of ‘*How do you find/perceive your body?*’, a high school going student who is 14 years old and has a body weight of 55kgs, narrated experience of how her weight becomes problematic as she does not fit into the ‘normal standard size/ zero figure’.

In her words: *I wish I were slim. I exercise a lot to lose weight. The clothes that I like and are trendy in the market don't always fit me because I am fat so I constantly feel the need to lose some weight.*

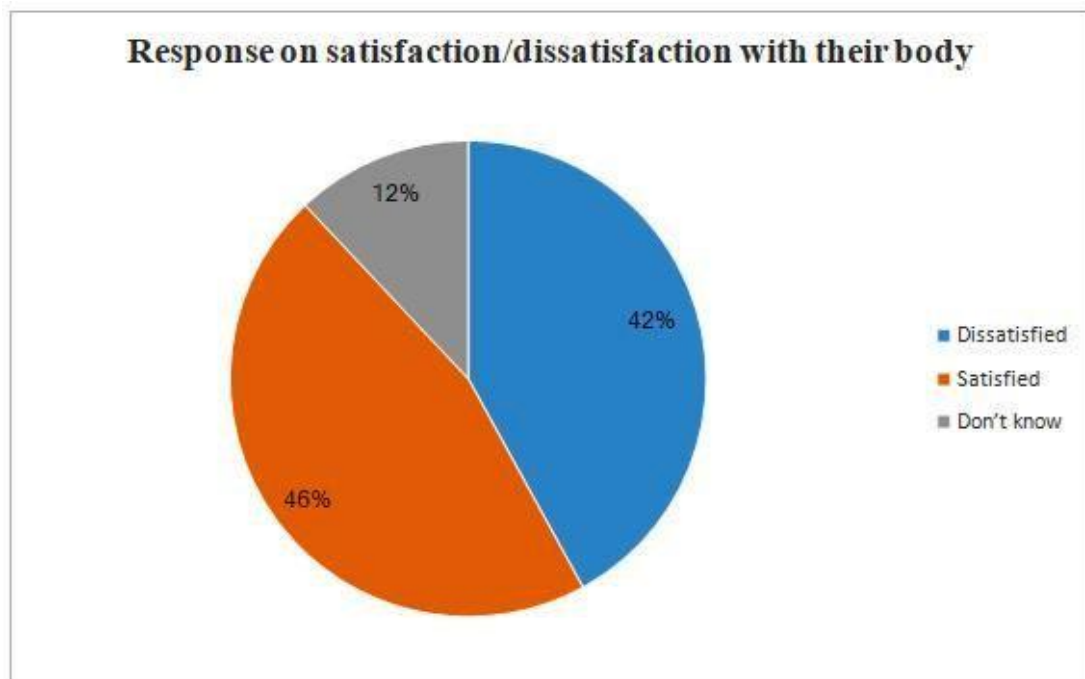
Similar perception has been noted in the narration of a 25 years old respondent from Gangtok who has completed her MA and is currently undergoing B. ED course. Drawing onto her subjective experiences, she narrates:

I am not satisfied with my body, particularly my height. The main reason behind it is, once I got rejected in a Sikkimi police physical interview because my height is just 5 feet. That rejection made me feel that I am really short. Also recently due to lockdown I got fatter and my family and friends were telling me that I look very short and round like a ball. So, because of all these comments, I started daily exercise and I am trying to lose some weight.

The above instances and findings also collaborate the Socio Cultural Theory of Vygotsky (1931/1997) which points out how a sense of dissatisfaction with regard to the body and appearance emerges as result of comparison with the ideal body images one holds, which was empirically evident. The opening up of the beauty realm in the globalized world expedited by information technology has introduced diverse

concepts of beauty, such that of, Korean (K-pop), Indian mainstream (Bollywood), Western (Hollywood) and so on also to Rai women. These mentioned concepts on beauty mostly endorse sleek and slender figure, tall heights, sharp facial features like pointed nose which contradicts the general body image of mongoloid looking Rai women. As a result of the conflicting images and concepts of beauty and body, the dissatisfaction regarding the body image and desire to overcome, among the respondents becomes prominent. This argument in the light of epistemological background can be substantiated by Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1



Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Figure 4.1 shows the response on the query if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their body. The figure indicates that out of the total sample taken 50 (100%), 46% of the respondents answered that they were satisfied with their bodies, 12% did not comment. While the remaining 42% of the respondents were found to be not satisfied

with the bodies they had and if provided a chance were willing to make changes and modifications accordingly.

Substantiating further, responding to the query ‘Given the chance would you like to change any part of your body or face?’ 30 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who owns a beauty parlor in her village and works as a beautician stated:

I would like to change my skin because it is pigmented and for us (beauticians) glowing and clear skin is beautiful irrespective of one’s skin colour. I would also like to lift my eyes because it enhances eye-shadow looks.

In the similar line, 45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is a housewife/home maker showing great discontentment on her facial features narrated:

If provided a chance I would make my lips thicker and erase all marks of my face like that of models. Even I see a lot of actresses having big lips and I like it but I have very thin lips which don't even look good while using lipsticks.

Apart from skin and facial features, many respondents irrespective of their age were also found to be largely concerned with their bodies which can be traced from the narratives of following respondents. A government school teacher from Gangtok who is 28 years old sharing her dislike towards her abdominal area remarked:

I hate my stomach because whenever I wear tight dresses and I eat more food, my stomach bloats and becomes very visible.

While, 40 years old respondent from Gangtok who runs her private business referring to the general height of Rai women commented:

Rai women are usually short and I wish I had tall height as it would give me confidence. I feel I am too short and I don't like it.

In addition to the beauty standard set by Hollywood and Bollywood which has been commonly noticed among the youngsters in Sikkim, the desire to look like Korean celebrities is also not uncommon as evident in the narration of a 16 years old teenager who is a school going student. She expressed:

I want to be fair skinned like Korean girls because I like Korean girls a lot and find them beautiful. Also, I wish I had a thin body like Korean girls. I am a big fan of a Korean singer Liza from Black Pink and I wish to look like her.

Youngsters longing for a perfect body, flawless and glowing skin was evident among many respondents as evident in the narration of 21 years old university student from Gangtok who stated:

I would like to do surgery on my face just to replace it with flawless skin because I think the face is the ultimate part of the body that makes people feel confident. I feel very embarrassed with my face because of the scars and pimples. . . Perfect body for me is having flawless skin and a good figure.

The body size and the associated health concern and awareness was also evident among few respondents. A 24 years old respondent from Gangtok who has recently completed her M.A degree expressed her dissatisfaction of having obesity and also showed health concerns and narrated:

I would like to change my whole body because I have obesity and I want my body to be healthy. I always fear that I may get a heart stroke, thyroid or sugar. Healthy body

is very important when it comes to a perfect body. I also started going to the gym to keep my body fit. However, it has been discontinued due to lockdown.

The relevance of Socio-Developmental theories could also be drawn in terms of understanding how the respondents perceived their body. Puberty and developing stages of life of young women on one hand, and peer influence on the other is an intricate factor which helps in shaping notions on one's body image. Therefore, the way in which the body is perceived is likely to open up to the influences of external forces marked by an era prone to judgments and informal competitions. Besides, the competition is mostly in the subconscious mind with either the visual or/and reality based reference group. The consciousness, the influences and the opinion(s) of others, conditions the way in which the body is perceived and the ideas of beauty are constructed. Nevertheless, body and beauty are often associated together with external and physical characteristics of the body. It may also be because of a highly marketised, commodified and stigmatized body and beauty image in the contemporary time. The empirical relevance of this theoretical arguments can be found in the narratives of following respondents:

A 28 years old respondent from Gangtok who is currently working in a creative firm in Mumbai shared her school days experiences of suffering from an inferiority complex which developed due to her typical mongoloid facial feature.

In her words: *When I was in school I was very conscious of my body because I was on the healthier side and then at that time Korean culture was there where you needed to be stick thin. I was not thin and in fact was chubby and that made me conscious. Also later when I joined another school in Kalimpong, I remember*

everyone called me oh chimsey³⁷ and you flat nose and I then I knew it was that bad which made me feel like I am not pretty and had developed a complex. I used to be called full moon because I have round face, dekchi³⁸ by my friends and I became very conscious after that which literally made me very restricted and conscious. However, that changed after I joined college.

Similar experiences of stereotypes has been found in the narrative of a 26 years old respondent who is from Gangtok and a teacher by profession: In her words

I am very conscious of my height. I wish I had some extra inches is a phrase I say almost everyday to myself. Growing up I have heard my friends calling me purki³⁹, portable and it does not always have to be in a teasing manner sometimes in general conversation also if they call me short and say things like you are very portable then it remains at the back of my mind. I try not to get affected but somehow unconsciously it affects my confidence and it shows especially when I choose shoes having bit platform shoes and slippers/sandals with extra inches of heights.

4.4 Changing Perspectives on Beauty and Body Care

An interaction with the elderly respondents revealed that the traditional notions of beauty emphasize not only in physical appearance and presentation but also as being intangible as that of good natures and one's virtues. In exploring respondents' ideas on

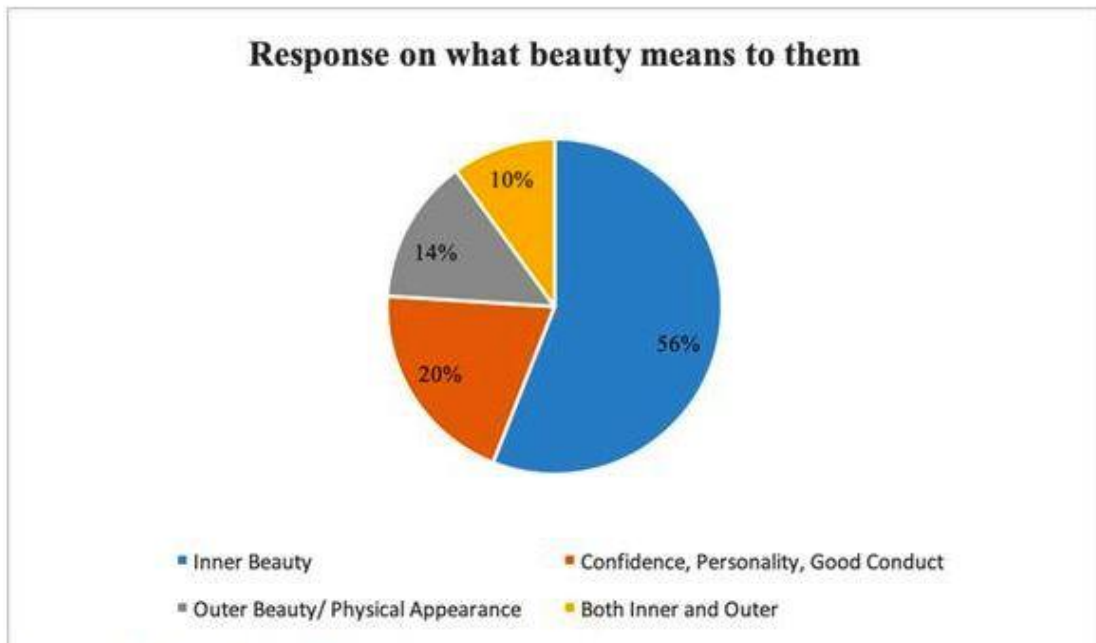
³⁷ Nepali slang for chinky eyes.

³⁸ A round surfaced utensil with flat bottom used to cook food.

³⁹ Purki is a Nepali slang used to denote women having short height.

body and beauty, the respondents did not differ at large in respect to their perception of beauty, as evident in Figure 4.2

Figure 4.2



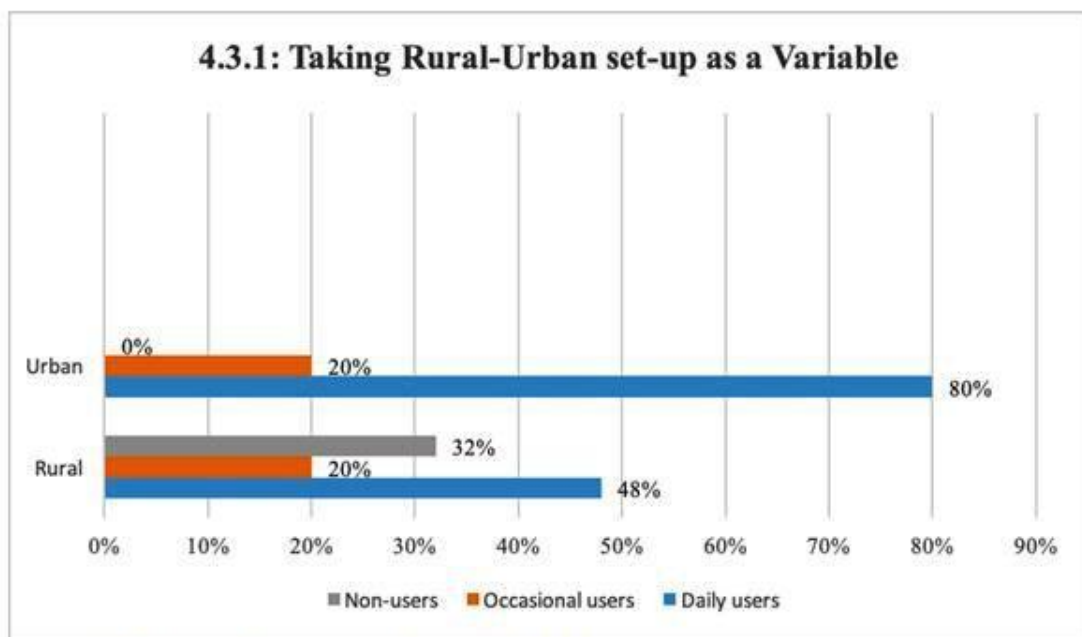
Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Figure 4.2 indicates the response on what beauty means to the respondents. Overall as depicted in the figure above, out of the total sample taken the highest number of respondents (56%) regarded beauty as being intangible i.e. the beauty inside the heart which often finds reflection on the outer actions. While the least number of respondents (10%) considered beauty as both inner and outer beauty. Another 20% finds beauty in (good) traits that human beings possess and 14% out of the total sample taken pointed to beauty as being that of physical appearance and good looks.

Regardless, a notable dilemma was found between the theoretical notion of body, beauty and practical implementation of it among the respondents. Although the

highest percentage of the total sample taken considered beauty as not conforming to outer appearance. Yet when cross examined, it could be observed that the majority of Rai women were regularly or occasionally indulged into beauty and body care practices (Figure 4.3 including Figures 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3). This reveals that use of beauty products has been institutionalized unconsciously and is being seen as a normal practice. Secondly, it is the conscious choice of the women to participate in beauty and body care practices but their notions of beauty remain subjective to their own actions and social construction.

Figure 4.3: Figure on Beauty and Body Care Product Users

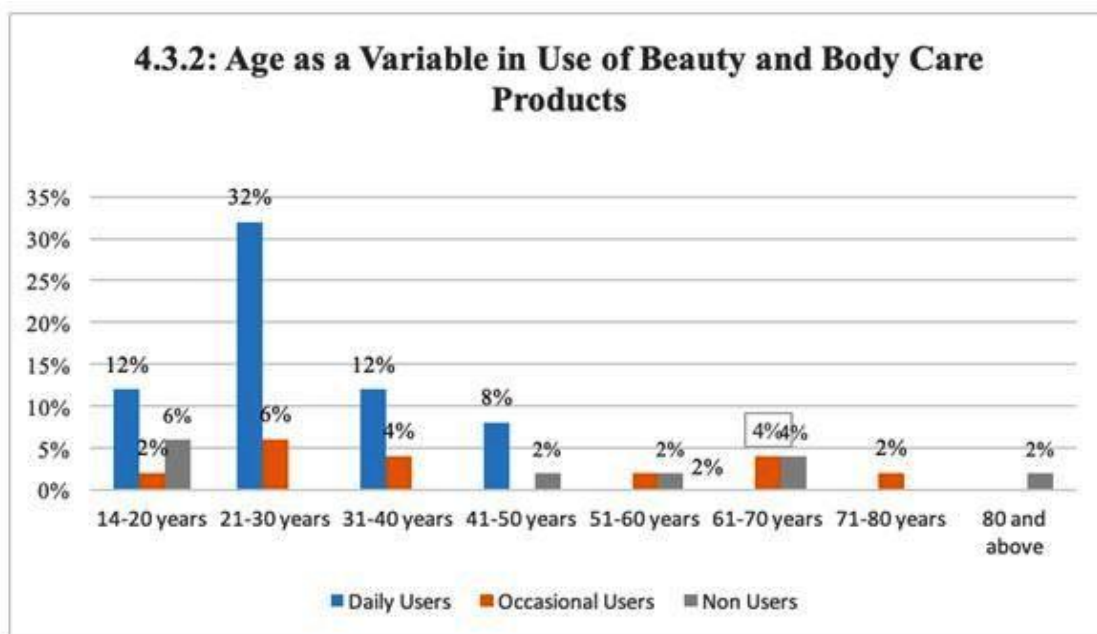


Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Figure 4.3.1 shows the rural-urban breakup of beauty and body care product users. The figure indicates all respondents from Gangtok (urban sector) are beauty and body care product users. Contrastingly, in Assam Lingzey (rural sector) a remarkable 32% fall under the category of non-users. These section comprised of women who were

mostly housewives and also those engaged in agricultural practices who hardly had any time for beauty and body care practices. The findings suggest significant variations in rural and urban set-up.

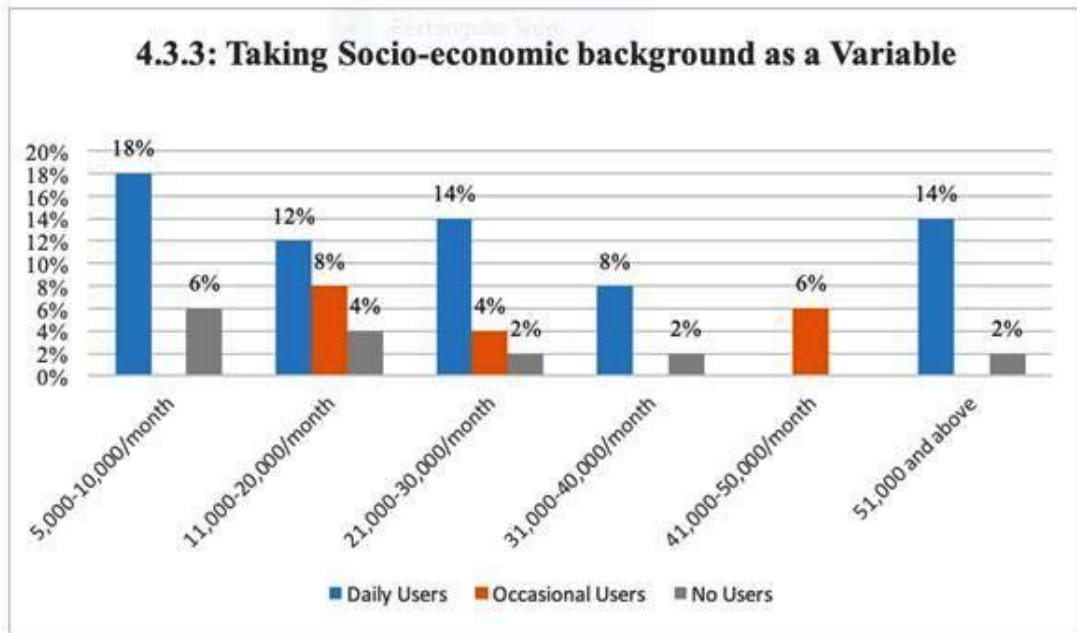
Out of the total beauty and body care product users in Gangtok (100%), 20% of the respondents were occasional users. While the rest 80% were daily users of beauty and body care products of various brands available online and on the market. While in Assam Lingzey (rural sector) 48% of the total respondents reported daily use, 20% to occasional use and 32% did not use any product. A significant variation in terms of the beauty and body care products being used has been observed between the rural and urban areas. While the respondents of the urban area reported to be using the brands like Lakme, Raga, Khadi, Lotus, Maybelline, The Body Shop, Innisfree etc., the rural respondents were limited to use of brands like Fair/Glow and Lovely, Vaseline, Boroline, Boro plus, Aloe Vera, Lakme etc.



Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Figure 4.3.2 shows the age wise variation on beauty and body care product users. The figure indicates that the highest number of daily users account to 32% and are from the age group 21-30 years, followed by 12% each from the age group 14-20 years and 31-40 years. Also, 8% from the age group 41-50 years fall under the category of daily users. Therefore, the daily use of beauty products is found to be an age specific practice as those women falling in between the age group 51 years to 80 and above were either using occasionally or not found to be daily users of beauty and body care products. While the women of the mid age group (21-40 years old), as well as young girls (between 14-20 years old) were involved in regular use, indicating age as a determining factor in the use of body and beauty care products.

In terms of occasional users, the following age group 14-20 years (2%), 21-30 years (6%), 31-40 years (4%), 51-60 years (2%) and 61-80 years (6%) accounted for 20% of the total sample taken. Likewise, those who did not use any beauty and body care products accounted to 16% of the total sample taken and were from the age group 14-20 years (6%), 41-50 years (2%), 51-60 years (2%), 61-70 years (4%) and above 80 years (2%). This group primarily includes students, elderly women and respondents from rural areas.



Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

The spending pattern as well as using the types of branded body and beauty care products is largely determined by one's income level. Figure 4.3.3 shows the variation on beauty and body care product users as per the respondents' income level. In case of the respondents not earning (house wives, students etc.), their family income has been taken for analysis. The figure indicates that 18% of daily users of cosmetics/beauty and body care products belonged to the income group of Rs. 5,000-10,000/month. Another 14% each fall within the monthly income range of Rs. 21,000- 30,000 and Rs. 51,000 above, While, 12% have an income level of Rs. 11,000-20,000/ month. The lowest percentage of daily users accounted for 8% falling under the monthly income between Rs. 31,000-40,000/month. The quantitative data shows that 66% out of the total sample taken who were using beauty and body care products on a daily basis were from diverse income backgrounds (the lowest being Rs. 5,000- 10,000 per month and the highest being Rs. 51,000 above per month). The analysis therefore points out that income as such is not the sole determining factor for use of beauty and

body care products. This is because of the innumerable beauty and body care brands of different price ranges, and quality being available in the market. However, on further query it revealed that income categorically determines the quality and the brand of the products being used.

Coming to the non users, the combined 16% of the respondents from the varied group of Rs 5,000-10,000 (6%), Rs. 11,000-20,000 (4%), Rs. 21,000-30,000 (2%), Rs. 31,000-40,000 (2%) and Rs. 51,000 above (2%) falls under the category. While the remaining, 18% from the income group of Rs. 11,000- 30,000/ month (12%) and Rs. 41,000- 50,000/ month (6%) falls under the category of those who uses beauty and body care products only when they have certain occasions to attend such as parties, marriage ceremonies, festivals and social gatherings. Therefore, the study reveals that income as a sole factor determining the use of beauty and body care practices on a daily basis appears irrelevant. As the decision to use beauty and body care products was found to be their individual choices irrespective of the income status and largely determined by other external factors.

Besides, the study also revealed that in terms of use of beauty and body care products, some form of alternative economic negotiations in relation to their maintenance and management of body and self was found among the respondents. The following narratives substantiates empirical support to this theoretical argument:

45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey having a monthly family income of Rs11,000- 20,000 narrated: *The shopkeeper from whom I buy my cosmetics and body care products has a very good relation with me and is like a brother to me. So he*

gives me things on credit. Even if there is something I like and want to buy but do not have cash to buy he will always give me the product and I can always pay him when I have money.

Another 14 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey whose family income level falls within Rs.5000-10,000/ month talked about sharing clothes and cosmetics with her siblings. In her words, *I am the youngest sister and we are four daughters in total. My sisters always let me wear their clothes and because of that I always have plenty of choices to wear. Same with beauty products as I am the youngest I get the least amount of pocket money but I don't even have to buy cosmetics as I can always use my sister's make up.*

Commenting on her alternative way of negotiation with regard to body maintenance and management, 26 years old respondent from Gangtok who is a teacher by profession and has a monthly income of Rs. 31,000-40,000 remarked:

See I recently have discovered a new thing and this thing is my solution to all needs. Since we are women no wonder what, we always end up buying so many things. We don't always make calculative decisions when shopping and we love experimenting with new beauty and body care products and this results in hoarding products unnecessarily. What I have done now is called thrifting⁴⁰. I have recently discovered that the things you don't use anymore can always be thrifted. I thrift my old clothes, shoes, some unused cosmetics (which I impulsively bought) in Instagram and in return I get cash. With this cash I can always buy things and may be save a little.

⁴⁰ It is a recent trend in vogue which includes buying and selling of second hand products in online/ social media platforms.

The empirical evidence provides enough support for consumerist ideas drawing upon the factor of marketization of face and body. This indicates ‘hegemony of beauty politics’ being evident in relation to the routinisation and normalization of cosmetic use as a necessity in everyday life. Use of basic to minimal products on a daily basis like face cream, skin moisturizer and sunscreen (Spf), lipstick, eye makeup and periodic facials, pedicure, manicure, hair spa, hair colouring etc. and eventually full fledged products in terms of situational demand concerning presentation of self in public and social events hints on the way in which the practice of using beauty/body care products is being institutionalized. However, the basic products used depend upon each individual and their needs addressing their body care schedules which vary with the individual choices. In the contemporary time there are numerous products in the market which always opens up wide scope for choices and preference of one. In addition, the onset of globalization has provided ample choices on beauty products, as well as global exposure to several products and brands due to free flow of the same. These theoretical arguments can be situated in the narratives of a respondent from Assam Lingzey who is 30 years old who shared her postpartum experience on skin and face and narrated: *After giving birth to my first child my face got highly pigmented. Since then I started using products and make up to conceal it. I also put cosmetics from the brand Raga which I order online because it is organic and does not have chemicals. I only drink filtered water, green tea and brown rice for my body and skin.*

The narrative of 63 years old cultivator from Assam Lingzey also substantiates the above argument. She reflects on how the use of cosmetic products has become a

requirement in the contemporary time. In her words, *I am a villager and I never did anything for beauty and body care. It did not matter also earlier because nobody used to use beauty products, everybody looked the same but now I also use lipstick because my lip gets chapped, I use boroline cream because my hands and feet get cracked due to my daily work in agricultural land.*

Similar experience has been shared by a 28 years old respondent from Gangtok. Referring to her daily beauty care schedule, she narrated: *I wear concealer everyday because of acne and face powder for hyperpigmentation. On top of that, I wear eye shadow to give definition to my eyes. I also wear blush, highlighter because I recently have come to know that using those products enhances my facial features more.*

Furthermore, Table 4.1 and 4.2 substantiates that management, maintenance and presentation of bodies as a 'project' (Giddens, 1991) is evident in carrying the modern body images and presentation of self amongst Rai women.

4.5 Awareness and Practices of Body Management

Giddens (1991) views the body as 'a project' as the body is always in the process of becoming, especially when looked at as something which should be worked at and accomplished in order to create an individual's self-identity. Contextually in Sikkim also, irrespective of the rural-urban setup, there is growing awareness of the various fitness programs for body management through various electronic and social media platforms. Moreover, Gangtok being the capital town is witnessing mushroom growth of fitness centers like gym, aerobics, zumba, yoga and meditation centers etc. In the present study, an effort has been made to examine if the respondents are involved in

negotiating and working on their body and making a conscious extra effort for their self presentation. In this regard, body weight and age of the respondents has been taken as a variable to assess the process of body management and their awareness for which few specific responses were collected.

Table 4.1: Weight Wise Response Sheet of the Respondents on the Question of Body Care, Exercise/ Fitness Class, Consciousness about Eating Habits and Visiting Beauty Parlor.

Body Weight	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Q5	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
40-50kgs	11	5	6	10	3	13	9	7	8	8
51-60kgs	18	5	7	16	8	15	10	13	17	6
61-70kgs	6	1	4	3	1	6	4	3	4	3
71 +	4	--	3	1	2	2	3	1	4	--
Total	39/78%	11/22%	20/40%	30/60%	14/28%	36/72%	26/52%	24/48%	33/66%	17/34%
	50/100%		50/100%		50/100%		50/100%		50/100%	

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Q1. Do you care for your body?

Q2. Do you exercise/ go to fitness class?

Q3. Are you conscious about your eating habits?

Q4. Is it important for you to have a body that is liked/appreciated by others?

Q5. Do you go to beauty salons/parlor?

Table 4.1 shows that on the question of body care (Q1) by using products/cosmetics like lotion, body butter and/or consuming supplements like calcium, vitamin capsules, 78% women respondents answered in affirmative irrespective of their weight/ body sizes. While only 22% refrained from body care practices. Out of the significant 78%, the highest percentage accounted for 36% who had their body weight between 51-60

kgs, followed by 22% of respondents whose body weight was between 40-50 kgs. Another 12% who cared for their body weighed between 61-70 kgs and the remaining 8% belonged to the weight category of above 71 kgs.

However, when it comes to exercise by following a workout plan including yoga, regular walk and exercises at home or going to fitness classes (Q2) only 40% were found to be involved in it. These 40% comprised women of different body sizes including 40-50kgs (12%), 51-60kgs (14%), 61-70kgs (8%) and above 71kgs (6%) from both rural and urban set-up. While the majority of 60% refrained from such fitness practices due to lack of time and interests.

Similarly, in terms of eating habits (Q3) the response indicates that only 28% were conscious about their eating habits irrespective of the body sizes and the reason provided was mostly not to gain excess weight and run out of body shape, while some also provided medical reasons for it. Out of 28%, the highest level of consciousness is among those who had their body weight between 51-60kgs. While the lowest was found to be among those weighing between 61-70 kgs. Notably 72% were not conscious about their eating habits. Therefore, no statistical co-relationship between body weight and fitness regimes and also body weight and eating consciousness could be established.

On the questions regarding the importance of having a body that is liked and appreciated by others (Q4) 52% out of the total sample taken falling under the body weight category of 40-50 kgs(18%), 51-60kgs (20%), 61-70kgs (8%) and above 71kgs (6%) found it to be important. While the rest 48% did not find it significant.

Regarding the question of periodic visit to beauty parlor/salons (Q5), 66% goes to beauty parlors/salons every month for undergoing beauty treatments starting from threading and upper lip (which is shaping of eyebrows and removing facial hair present in upper lip) to hair care (hair coloring, hair spa/ hair treatment, straightening), facials, body waxing and other beauty practices. Respondents having a body weight of 51-60kgs accounts for the highest percentage (34%) when it comes to visiting beauty parlors. The remaining 34% out of the total sample having a body weight of 40-51kgs (16%), 51-60kgs (12%) and 61-70kgs (6%) are not conscious and particular about undergoing beauty practices and treatment in beauty parlors/salons which are constrained by various factors. The analysis reveals that weight does not have a direct relation with the beauty and body care practices in salon and parlor.

Table 4.2: Age Wise Response Sheet of the Respondents on the Question of Body Care, Exercise/ Fitness Class, Consciousness about Eating Habits and Visiting Beauty Parlor.

Age Group	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Q5	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
14-24 years	11	3	8	6	6	8	11	3	9	5
25-54 years	24	4	12	16	8	20	15	13	24	4
55-64 years	2	2	--	4	--	4	--	4	--	4
65 years and above	2	2	--	4	--	4	--	4	--	4
Total	39/ 78%	11/ 22%	20/ 40%	30/ 60%	14/ 28%	36/ 72%	26/ 52%	24/ 48%	33/ 66%	17/ 34%
	50/100%		50/ 100%		50/100%		50/ 100%		50/100%	

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-

Q1. Do you care for your body?

Q2. Do you exercise/ go to fitness class?

Q3. Are you conscious about your eating habits?

Q4. Is it important for you to have a body that is liked/appreciated by others?

Q5. Do you go to beauty salons/parlors?

Table 4.2 presents the Age Wise Response Sheet of the Respondents on the Question of Body Care, Exercise/ Fitness Class, Consciousness about Eating Habits and Visiting Beauty Parlor.

With regard to the question on body care (Q1) the study found out that irrespective of the age group, 78% of Rai women out of the total sample took care of their body. Out of this 48% in the age category of 25-54 years were highly involved in body care practices, followed by 22% in the age category of 14-24 years and 8% in the age group 55- 65 years and above. The remaining 22% were not found to be particularly involved in body care practices in terms of use of body care products and consuming supplements.

Coming to the question of fitness regimes being followed by the respondents at home or in the centers (Q2), the study indicates that 40% of women who were under fitness regimes were mostly of the age group 25-54 years (24%), followed by the age group 14-24 years which accounts to 16%. While 16% women from the age group of 55-65 years and above were not at all indulged in fitness regimes along with the remaining 44% who belonged to the age category of 14-54 years.

Further, with regard to awareness and practices of eating habits (Q3), 28% who were conscious of eating patterns were from the age group 14-54 years. Majority 72% who were eating without any restrictions accounted for 16% and they were from diverse age groups of 14-24 years, 40% from 25-54 years 16% from the age group of 55 years - 65 years and above.

On the question of the importance of having a body that is liked and appreciated by others (Q4), 52% of women falling under the age group of 14-24 years (22%) and 25-54 (30%) years found it important to have a body that is liked and/or appreciated by others. While the rest 48% of women in the age group 14-24 years, 25-54 years and 55-64 years and above 65 years found it unimportant.

When it comes to visiting beauty parlor/salons (Q5), out of 66% women who visited beauty parlor/ salons to undergo various beauty treatments, the highest (48%) belonged to age group of 25-54 years followed by the age group 18 % in the age range of 14-24 years. The remaining 34% have never visited a beauty parlor for beauty regimes.

In addition, all respondents in between the age of 55-65 years and above pointed out that to have a body which is liked/appreciated by others is not at all important to them and also they have never been to any parlor in their life. Similarly, they are neither conscious regarding their eating habits nor are they engaged in exercises or fitness regimes.

Thus, Table 4.1 and 4.2 makes it evident that the majority of respondents are involved in body management and maintenance. Although the direct association between weight and body care management could not be revealed, the empirical situation testifies the fact that there is an apparent association between age category and body and beauty care regime. The responses suggest that the age group of 14-54 years are relatively more engaged in body and beauty care practices than those elderly respondents who are above 55 years. The finding suggests that there has been a

significant change in the current scenario, as this was not the case generations back. In the present context of modern society marked by technological advancements, role of social media, transnational capitalism, globalization and consumer culture (as highlighted in Chapter 2), most of the time body is often seen as a prime site of beauty intervention which accordingly shapes the construction of ideas on body and beauty. The empirical situation is evident of the same.

Contemplating the current scenario of body management based on the empirical evidence it becomes clear that there has been a remarkable change as compared to traditional notion on how body and beauty is being constructed, perceived and negotiated with the modern dominant concept of beauty and body. Going in the line of Shilling's (1993) argument, in order to understand the changing discourse of the body among Rai women, we first have to understand the process of the social transformation in the Kirat Rai society. Accordingly, understanding the impact of these external social forces on how one perceives and constructs their ideas on body and beauty remains crucial. Thus, the following section intends to provide a socio-temporal contestation to address the gap noted above.

4.6 Socio-Temporal Changes and the Idea of Body

History in terms of human settlement marks Kirat Rai as simple people who were animist and largely involved in agricultural practices. They are considered as ethnically rich people in terms of tradition, customs, culture and lifestyle. However, as society evolved with time, a series of development and social transformation started occurring in almost all the indigenous communities and Kirat Rai community was no exception to it. Therefore, in the course of time, Kirat Rai society also

underwent a series of changes and development resulting in process of cultural exchange and intermarriage etc. The process of migration of people, British Colonial Impact, modernization, globalization in addition caused loss of Ethno- Cultural and Ethno-Custom practices among them (Subba, 2015). As any other community, Kirat Rais in the 20th century did not remain unknown and untouched to modern forces of modernization, westernization, globalization, technological advancement and industrialization. It was these events which marked their socio-cultural transformation on the one hand and on the other marked their shift from being traditional agriculturists who lived in their traditional thatched houses to becoming a part of the larger mainstream society and living in concrete buildings. The wider exposure to these external forces acted as a facilitating factor which provided ample scope for the community to develop and transform; and with time the new lifestyle has become a ‘new normal’ to the community. This theoretical argument can be evident from the following narration of 63 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who never had an opportunity to go to school and since childhood has been indulged in agricultural farming. Commenting on the necessity of change in society she stated: *It is necessary to change with time. Look at the society now, look at the things now. This is what it is. Can you think of living in a primitive way at this time?* She further said, *Come to my house for a week. I will make dhido⁴¹ and gundruk⁴² for you every day and give it to you every time. Then like traditional times I will give you raari⁴³ to sleep on, bhus ko sirani⁴⁴ as pillow with no mattress, dari⁴⁵ instead of a blanket to*

⁴¹ A Nepalese staple dish made of powdered millet or corn.

⁴² It is a food item made out of fermented green leafy vegetables usually used to make soup.

⁴³ A traditional carpet made out of sheep’s raw wool.

⁴⁴ A pillow made out of bush.

⁴⁵ A handwoven rug.

cover yourself. I will give you that. Can you stay like that?... For two days you will enjoy that, after you will start to complain about things..

Furthermore, with the change in time, the community itself was getting affected by the idea of modernization and this undoubtedly brought about changes in their discourse on body which finds reflection on the way Rai women of today are perceiving their bodies and constructing their ideas on body and beauty. This argument can be empirically traced from the narratives of a 70 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is engaged in cultivation/ agricultural work. recalling her youthful days, she narrated: *When I was young I did not get time for beauty and body care practices because at that time we did not go to schools and had to help the family in agriculture and cultivation but now my daughter buys me Aloe Vera cream so I use that in my face. I also use Vaseline lotion on my hands and feet and wear lipstick to prevent my lip from getting chapped.*

Commenting on the changes in the hair braiding which was commonly practiced by Rai women, 45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is also engaged in agricultural practices stated:

I used to braid my hair with 'laacha' everyday but now I don't wear it anymore because nobody now-a-days in this village wears it and it feels awkward also when I am the only one wearing it. Now I just tie my hair in a bun after combing and use a hair clip/ band.

Regarding the change in the traditional ornaments, 81 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who cannot read and write and is an eldest member of the family commented:

Earlier when I was ten/twelve years old, my mother pierced my nose and gave me dhungri and bulaki (Rai traditional nose ornaments) to wear which was mandatory for all women. Since then I have not opened it. At that time, it was fashionable among Rai women, my mother used to wear it, even my grandmother and friends. Now nobody, even my daughters and granddaughters wear it and I can't force them because now time is different and everybody prefers the trendy ornaments.

The deep impact of the forces of modernisation and globalisation in the community finds reflection in 18 years old student's narrative, who is currently studying nursing and is from Assam Lingzey:

I don't know about any kind of changes among Rai women in terms of their self-presentation because I have grown up seeing what I see today. We all wear normal regular or western clothes. We wear traditional ornaments only when we have to wear something traditional or ethnic.

As discussed in table 4.1 and 4.2 the upsurge regarding body maintenance and fitness regime, finds relevance in the observation of a 28 years old advocate from Gangtok. In her words,

My grandmother, aunties, mother and even my sisters gets up in the morning and goes for walks and indulge themselves in a proper workout and also follow a proper diet for an idle body and fitness. Women of my family are particularly concerned about maintaining the body shape/size, which I don't always agree with.

Similar observation on the beauty practices and body management can be found in the narration of a 39 years old Assistant Professor from Gangtok, who shared her experience of body management related activities of the womenfolk in her family: *Earlier I and the womenfolk in my family used to apply cosmetics according to its availability in the local market but these days we prefer organic herbal brands which is easily available online. Also, my family members have started viewing their bodies in terms of weight. Mostly the conversation is about having put on excess weight and its management.*

The institutionalisation of the changes in beauty and body management is also evident from the narratives of a 41 years old respondent from Gangtok who is working in the post of a coordinator in a private firm. She stated: *I have realized that my mother's viewpoint regarding body and beauty has changed now. Earlier, my mother used to say doing household work itself is exercise for your body and used to tell me not to waste time doing workouts/exercises. Now I noticed that the perception of my mother has changed as she herself does exercises in a routine way. Same with the skin care, earlier she never allowed me to wash my face after sunset due to superstitious belief. However, now she does not have such a reservation and I can follow skin/body care routine without her intervention.*

The narratives posed above makes it evident that the body among Rai women in the present context has become negotiable. The finding lends credence to what Featherstone (1991a) termed the body as “a lifestyle accessory, a thing to be shaped, sculpted and stylized”. The wide gap prevailing in terms of traditional notion of how

one perceived their body and the way they are perceiving it in the contemporary time makes it amply clear that the discourse of body among Rai women has changed significantly and evolved with time. In the present context, with the constant struggle of meeting the set beauty standards and upsurge in various available mechanisms to shape the body into ideal one, the traditional notion(s) on body, beauty and self presentation for them has become an affair of negotiation. The empirical evidence suggests that although the age-old tradition has not withered away completely, nevertheless it has been negotiated in numerous ways.

Therefore, the following section intends to address and explore the way the negotiations are being made by the women in adapting to the dominant mode of beauty and body standards set as an ideal in modern society.

4.7 Self Presentation and Negotiation in the Everyday Life

The concept of beauty and self presentation over the period of time and till date among Rai women have been strongly idealised on the contours of traditional portrayal visualising the traditional ornaments and dress in particular. Amongst many, the *dhungri*, *bulaki* (traditional Rai ornaments worn in nose by Rai women) and *chaptey suun* (a traditional ornament made of gold worn in ears) had a significant impact on idealising a Rai woman and this moreover justified the notion of beauty traditionally.

However, in the present ever evolving dynamic social setting, the idealised image, notion of beauty and discourse of a body particularly amongst the modern day Rai women differ from the past visualisation. The ethno-cultural traits of visualising Rai

women in present context have come in conflict as a result of social transformation with time at large due to sweeping waves of modernity, series of development and advancement, inflow of westernized ideas, information technology and wider exposure in almost all spheres. Therefore, Rai women in modern society are often seen as negotiating with those traditionally idealized body images, as well as the culturally rooted practices related to body and beauty. The following section by presenting narratives of the respondents particularly intends to explore on various negotiations that are taking place in their everyday life in this regard:

Commenting on the discontinuation of the use of traditional ornaments, a 58 years old respondent who is a cultivator by profession narrated:

I used to wear dhungri, bulaki but now I don't wear it anymore and have kept it all. My daughters tell me that I look different and younger without those ornaments as compared to when I used to wear them.

Another instance of cultural borrowing and shifting to trendy saris is found in the narration of a 62 years old unmarried respondent from Assam Lingzey. Referring to her tall height of 5'10 feet, the respondent stated:

I think sari suits me. I don't like Rai dress; I never wear it. I think it does not suit my body type. I only wear Bengali sari⁴⁶. But I have worn a Rai dress in my childhood as my parents made me wear it.

Tradition in the contemporary time has been portrayed through varied lenses and connotations which reflects one's cultural and ethnic identity. A 27 years Old PhD

⁴⁶ Referring to the mainstream Indian style of wearing sari which is draped over the body and a long end is dropped over the shoulder (as evident from her hand gesture).

research scholar from Gangtok who loves the traditional portrayal of her body image occasionally. She commented:

I love wearing Rai dress during social events like programs, festivals and while attending weddings of relatives but not the ornaments because I find it quite heavy and uncomfortable. So I wear it with minimal ornaments which is usually non-traditional.

Similar narration of her fascination to carry the traditional portrayal of body image in social occasions is that of a 28 years old respondent from Gangtok who is currently working in the post of copywriter in Mumbai. She remarked:

I wear Rai traditional dress but only on selective occasions like marriages because I don't find wearing it in pujas and everyday life practically comfortable. Since we are involved in a lot of physical activities, our ethnic dress has become impractical for me to wear. I wear Kurthas in festivals and pujas, casual clothes on regular days and my traditional attire on social occasions.

These above narratives make it evident that the way in which the body is being perceived and constructed does not remain aloof from the larger social context. In addition, the interplay of cultural and religious influence in everyday lived experiences also has an impact on how women are constructing their ideas on body and beauty and similarly perceiving their body. The following narratives provide empirical support to this argument.

Gangtok resident 25 years old respondent's narrative: *I don't have traditional ethnic costumes and ornaments because I never prefer to wear Rai dress. Talking about*

ornaments I am a born Christian (El Shaddai) and my parents do not allow me to wear heavy ornaments or even pierce my nose and ears which traditionally was practised among the Rai community. We believe in simplicity. The narration reflects on how one's religious worldview clashes with her cultural portrayal of body image.

People have their own subjective perceptions on the body as found in the narration of a 24 years old respondent from Gangtok who is a university going student. Pointing at her relatively short height of 4'10 feet, she narrated: *I don't prefer to wear our ethnic costume often because I don't have good height. I am not tall, so it is not feasible for me to wear heels all the time and without heels I feel I don't look good in the ethnic costume.*

On further exploring in this regard, the study found that their ideas of negotiation to a large extent were being shaped and constructed by many factors among which educational influence and role of parents/family are more prominent. The inference that both education and role of socialization and/or parenting plays a vital role in the process of negotiation can be drawn from the narratives of a 27 years old Research scholar from Gangtok who is pursuing her Ph.D from Sikkim University. She stated: *I am currently doing research on the health of women and obesity which made me aware of women and their body, beauty. I would say it has changed my vision and outlook. Earlier I believed looks were everything but now I don't believe so.*

Similar in the line is the argument found in the narrative of a 31 years old respondent from Gangtok who is a microbiologist and has completed her PhD. In her words: *I don't think beauty is everything related to appearance. I have read about women who*

lost their beauty but their work and success has remained bright and evident and this is what makes me believe beauty is not limited to outer appearance.

The role of parents in socialization is also found to be playing a significant role in the process of negotiation and shaping one's idea on body and beauty. This argument finds reflection in a 28 years old respondent's statement who is from Gangtok and currently working in Mumbai.

Earlier I was very conscious about how I looked but thankfully my mother is a very strong figure in my life. When I would get conscious she would know, understand and say these things are not going to matter at the end. She started pushing me to believe it and later on it helped me. It made me confident in what to bring to the table. Like I knew what I was good at. However, at the back of my head, I would think that oh if I had a good body and pretty face that would be a plus point. But then I knew it was not that and I could not do anything about it. So, rather I started to focus on the things that I was good at.

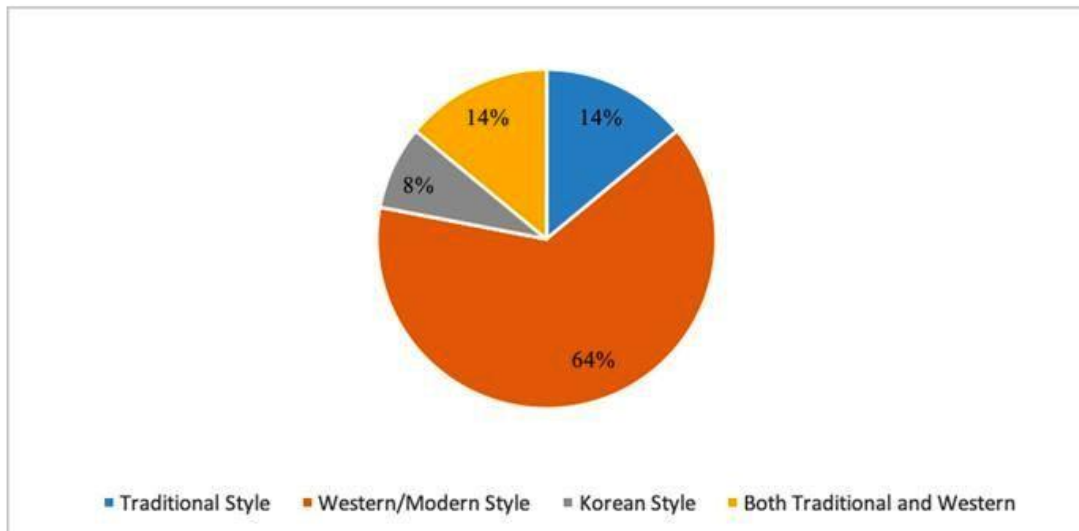
All above narrations collaborate the fact that the willingness of physical transformation and self presentation in the line of prevalent dominant body discourse has hit the perception of Rai women irrespective of their age. Therefore, Winton's (2000) theorisation of "marginalisation of old bodies which puts them in constant contestation and resistance with the new sign of moral youth and it's worth" does not appear relevant in this empirical study. As even the elderly respondents were found to be seeking to fit into modern culture and indulge in practices of body management and presentation. Nonetheless, no generalisation can be made in this regard as every individual has their own subjective understanding of self presentation in different

situations. In the backdrop of these arguments posed above a question often arises as to what has led to this change and how has these changes affected the idea of body and beauty among Rai women? Also, is there any variation across time and space in how the changes are shaping the idea of the body with regard to its very construction and perseverance? Thus, the following section intends to provide an empirical analysis in this reference frame.

4.8 Modernity and its Accelerated Influence

Modern society has made the body a prime site of ‘consumerist’ culture and this finds relevance among Rai women too on the basis of their endorsements of modern practices related to body care and beauty as highlighted in the preceding sections. In the contemporary time, Rai women stand as being largely affected by the influence of Indian mainstream society, foreign culture including that of western culture and Korean culture (also addressed as K-pop mainly amongst young girls) and this certainly has affected their traditional notion and presentation of self in terms of body, particularly dressing. This argument finds relevance in figure 4.4 and table 4.3 and 4.4 indicating their choices on preferred style and dressing/clothing.

Figure 4.4: Respondents' Preferred Choice of Dressing



Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Figure 4.4 shows the response of Rai women (out of the total sample taken n=50/100%) on their preferred choice of dressing. The figure indicates that 64% out of the total sample taken prefers to wear Western/Modern clothes including jeans, skirts, dresses on occasions and other casual wears. The reasons cited did not differ much and remained confined to their comfort and it being 'easy to wear in day to day life'. Following 14% out of the total sample regarded traditional style to be their preferred choice. While another 14% considered both western/modern and traditional attire to be their preferred choice and this choice was utterly dependent on the occasion they had to dress for. In festivals, weddings they preferred to wear traditional costumes, while going for parties and events they preferred wearing sari or party dresses and while going to market and their place of work they preferred to wear jeans and tops or Kurtis. Besides, a section of young Rai girls was found to be preferring Korean style and fashion above all.

Table 4.3: Rural-Urban Breakup of Respondents on their Preferred Choice of Dressing

PREFERRED STYLE OF DRESSING	RURAL	URBAN
Traditional	6 / 24%	1/ 4%
Modern/Western	10/ 40%	21/ 84%
Korean	3/ 12%	1/ 4%
Both Traditional and Modern	6/ 24%	2/ 8%
Total	25/ 100%	25/ 100%

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Table 4.3 shows the rural-urban break up on the preferred choice of dressing among the respondents. Variation in terms of space is found in this regard as the table indicates that 84% of the total Rai women from the urban sector prefers to wear western/modern clothing while only 4% prefers traditional one. However, 8% represents the blend of both and prefers to wear both traditional and western/modern clothing depending on the occasion. While the rest 4% prefers attire of the Korean fashion and this group basically includes the younger students group. In contrast to the urban sector, only 40% of rural women prefer to dress in western/modern style, 24% in their traditional dress, 12% in Korean style and remaining 24% in both traditional and modern styles. The table points out that overall comprising both rural and urban sectors, the women respondents mostly prefer western/modern clothing over traditional. However, when it comes to traditional wear, women of the rural sector are found to be more keen in retaining their traditional presentation of self as compared to that of urban. The popularity of the K-pop/Korean culture was found to be prevalent among the youths of both rural and urban sectors.

Table 4.4: Age Wise Break-up Respondents on their Preferred Choice of Dressing

Age Group	Traditional Style	Modern/Western Style	Both (Traditional and Modern)	Korean Style	Total
14-24 years	1/ 2%	13/ 26%	1/ 2%	4/ 8%	19/ 38%
25-54 years	2/ 4%	16/ 32%	5/ 10%	--	23/ 46%
55-64 years	1/ 2%	1/ 2%	2/ 4%	--	4/ 8%
65 years and above	3/ 6%	--	1/ 2%	--	4/ 8%
Total	7/ 14%	31/ 62%	8/ 16%	4/ 8%	50/100%

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Table 4.4 shows an age-wise break up of Rai women respondents on their preferred choice of dressing. The table indicates that 62% of total respondents preferred the modern western style. Age wise breakup shows that 26% falls in the age category of 14-24 years, while 32% belongs to 25-54 years. Only 2% preferring the modern western style falls in the age group of above 55 years.

Coming to the traditional dress and style, 14% of total respondents prefer this. The age wise variation indicates that the age group of 55 and above accounts to 8 % of total samples, while the percentage is minimal among the younger age group of 14-24 years (2%).

A significant 16% of total respondents reported preferring both traditional and modern styles of dressing depending on the occasions. The highest percentage (10%) belongs to the age group of 25-54 years. While 2% each falls in the age groups of 14-24 years and above 65 years, another 4% falls in the age group of 55-64 years.

An interesting empirical finding suggests that 8% of the total respondents belonging to the age group of 14-24 years preferred and practiced Korean style of dressing. From the above table variation in age and time becomes evident in terms of

presentation of self as almost all women above the age group of 65 were not as indulged into modern/western styles and fashion as compared to those who are in their adulthood and middle ages.

4.9 Agencies in Construction of the Body Image

On exploring the impact of modernity, the study situated the primary roles played by various agencies such as media, internet, family, peer influence, popular cultures like Bollywood, Hollywood, Korean movies as well as social conditioning. The following section intends to empirically discuss these agencies specifically on its role in influencing how Rai women are constructing their body image in the contemporary time.

4.9.1 Role of Media, Internet and Popular Cultures

It is evident from the empirical fact that modernisation to a larger extent has influenced the way Rai women are perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on body and beauty both in terms of dressing and body care. The influential agencies like the use of the internet, the role of media, influence of Bollywood and Korean pop was found to be instrumental too. This argument finds reflection in the following narratives:

The popularity of Bollywood and the Hindi popular culture is one of the prime facilitating factor as witnessed in the narration of 45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is a housewife/homemaker and has completed her elementary education: She stated, *I remember when Basdshah film was released I was so amazed by Twinkle*

Khanna's look that after watching it I shaped my eyebrows and cut my hair for the first time just like her.

Similar essence of the impact of Bollywood is reflected in the statement of a 30 year old respondent who runs a beauty parlor in her village Assam Lingzey and has completed her higher secondary education. Comparing her body with that of a Bollywood actress, she narrated:

I adore Shilpa Shetty a lot. She has a perfect body which suits every/any type of clothes. That is a perfect body for me but I don't have a body like her. What can I do after all? I was born this way but I wish I had a body like her.

Another case of the high influence of Bollywood in the body shape and size is evident in the response of 41 years old respondent's from Assam Lingzey and a post-graduate who is currently working in the department of Rural Management and Development (RMDD):

I like Aishwarya Rai Bachan's body. I think she has a perfect body. I saw her in one of the movies though I don't remember the movie's name but it was my first movie and since I saw her, I find her very beautiful and her body as an ideal.

Interestingly, the role of the media and information technology in disseminating the foreign culture is highly evident as a section of the young generations were found to be highly influenced by the Korean culture. The narrative of 16 years old, school going respondent from Assam Lingzey substantiates this argument:

I watch many Korean shows on YouTube and my favourite K-Pop star is Lisa from Black pink. She is a singer and dancer. Above all, her body is perfect and she is very beautiful.

Similarly, another school going respondent from Assam Lingzey who is 16 years old stated: *I like Korean fashion so I always wear oversized hoodies, and baggy tops. I like dressing Korean and also looking like one.*

Further, the role of internet and social media and its impact on their perceptions on self presentation was also evident among the respondents of rural settings. A 20 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who has recently completed her higher secondary education narrated: *After I saw girls having tattoos on social media I liked it and I also wanted to have one. So after I finished schooling I looked for a design in google, picked one and made it on my hands.* Hinting on similar influential factors, an 18 years old nursing student from Assam Lingzey stated: *While using Instagram, a pop-up advertisement came up. It was one of the fitness applications. After watching the advertisement, I downloaded it on my phone and started doing work out following the instructions provided in that application.*

Another story of the internet and social media as a facilitating factor in the construction of body and beauty image is found in the statement of a 25 years old respondent from Gangtok who is a senior sales executive by profession. Referring to her mongoloid features, she narrated:

I watch make-up tutorial videos on youtube and then experiment on myself to find out what kind of makeup suits me and look good on me. So, now I have discovered eyeshadow defines my eyes and wearing blush, highlighter enhances my face cut. The

narrative of a 26 years old respondent from Gangtok who is a teacher by profession reflects on how social media and the internet has encouraged to enhance her looks. She narrated, *You know I'll tell you this, I am not tall so I watch lots of videos in youtube and Instagram where girls put videos of how to look extra inch tall, how to elongate legs, what type of clothes to wear in order to look tall, and I try those tricks on me. Now, God knows if those videos work but I do it for myself, for a momentary satisfaction.* The narration corresponds to what Varga (2005) has argued “evolvment of a virtual body” which is created by digital technology and is maintained by the public presentation of the body.

4.9.2 Role of Family, Peer Influence and Social Conditioning

Furthermore, along with the above mentioned factors peer influence as well as family have an important role to play as agencies of influence in this regard. Friends, peer groups, family, relatives as well as people of the community are often cordial influencers on phenomenological everyday experiences on body image of the women. In this regard, social conditioning and age factors are most likely to come into play. Empirically locating among the respondents these factors were found to be instrumental in shaping and constructing one's idea of body and beauty.

The above argument on the role of family is posed on the basis of narratives mentioned by a 45 years old housewife/ homemaker from Assam Lingzey who narrated: *When I was in my 20's I never applied any make-up and my face was good at that time. I only started to use make-up after my 30s as my sister suggested me to wear looking at my skin that was getting darker and pigmented.*

Another instance of her daughter's influence in beauty and body care practices was reported by a 58 years old respondent who is a housewife/ homemaker from Assam Lingzey. She narrated:

In our time there was no cosmetics. We never felt the need for it because we were always occupied with agricultural work. But we used to wear Boroplus at that time. But now time has changed, my daughter has a beauty parlor and she makes me do facials and hair care.

With regard to peer influence and also social media mediated ideas on trendy practices related to body, 30 years old respondent who runs a grocery shop in her village Assam Lingzey stated: *When we were in college, one of my friends saw in facebook and shared her idea of getting similar tattoos as a symbol of friendship. So five years ago me and my four other friends went to tattoo shop and made similar tattoos on our hands.*

The socio-economic conditioning of one also remains an important factor in perceiving their own body as well as constructing their ideas as exhibited in the narrative of 45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who works in agricultural farming:

I prefer a body that is slim because in villages we have to do a lot of work and we have to do it fast, for that if we have a body of bigger sizes it becomes difficult to work and fatter the body more tired you get while working. As in villages, work usually includes running and physical labour in the agricultural field.

The social conditioning as an important agency in constructing as well as constraining one's idea of body/beauty is narrated by a 62 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey. She stated: *When I was young, my friends used to cut their hair imitating some actresses. They also used to part their hair in side, cut fringes. But I could not cut my hair then because my economic situation was not sound then and I used to be ashamed thinking what will people tell if I cut my hair despite my family's economic situation.*

In addition to all these factors, perception of the people of immediate surroundings on one's body sizes is also found to be contributing a lot to the construction of the idea of the body. This argument finds reflection on the narrative of 25 years old respondent who is from Gangtok:

I am very thin and clothes don't look good on me. I have been hearing this from my sister that no matter what I wear it is like a cloth hanged in a hanker, which affects my confidence. So, I feel like I should gain some weight.

Following, a 38 years old respondent's narrative on her struggle in finding clothes which fits her body size reflects on how the 'normal standard body size' is mostly emphasized on by the larger fashion and clothing industries in the quest of demand and market. She narrated: *I don't get clothes of my sizes in the local market because I am fat. I only fit into clothes of XXXL sizes. So to get clothes of my choice in my size is itself a task to me.* Therefore, this narrative also points out the synergy between the clothing industries and the fashion/beauty industries which makes the role of capitalism contestable.

These empirical findings highlight how the body is not only confined to itself but is subjective to various factors and agents that contribute to the larger discourse of the body. The underlying factors and agents which have been identified are that of modernisation, use of internet, role of media, influence of foreign culture, peer influence, influence of family, body sizes, capitalism, age and social conditioning. Thus as discussed above all these factors together are found to be imperative in assessing and exploring changing discourse of Body among Rai women.

4.10 Summary

To sum up, the body discourse among Rai women has undergone paramount changes in socio-cultural context. The visual idealisation of women in Rai dress and ornaments remains limited to a mental construct in the contemporary time of modernity. Also, major transformation in terms of beauty and body care notions and practices has been evident among Rai women of today. However, if on the one hand, the changing connotation has led to the loss of etho-cultural representation of Rai women in larger society, then on other there are opening up of arenas where women today can project themselves as advanced, empowered and confident in themselves with regard to their body image cannot be refuted. Further, the fact that as compared to traditional times, the Rai women of today stand much conscious about their health and body cannot be debunked. Women are opening up about their body today and are aware about women related health issues such as obesity, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, anorexia nervosa, bulimia and many more and are negotiating in various ways for self presentation at par with the dominant concept of body discourse.

However, the whole discourse on the body lies central to the social phenomenon and cannot be confined as static or constant because as time changes it changes accordingly. Besides, it remains crucial to note that the very notion of the body is subjective and varies from person to person and across time and space. Thus, it is in this context an ideal body remains an insurmountable question open to various contestations.

CHAPTER 5

Cultural Revivalism and its Impact on Notion of Body and Self

Presentation

5.1 Introduction

The lived body is both a construct as well as a construction by and within the lifeworld (Nettleton,2001).

Culture in sociological lens is widely as what Giddens (2005) considered as “a way of life⁴⁷ that is acquired by the individuals living in a society: which often finds reflection on the lifestyle of those individuals”. Therefore, culture may be seen as being ingrained in individuals as a part of socialisation since early childhood, which over time gets internalised. However, it remains crucial to understand that every culture differs from one another based on its elements of symbols, language, values, beliefs, norms and artefacts. In almost all societies these cultural elements remain a collective representation and source of social solidarity binding all individuals within the lifeworld. But the recent trends of cultural homogenisation and dominance of global culture over the indigenous one, fostered by globalisation has challenged the very essence of distinct and unique cultures, thereby displacing the diverse unique indigenous and traditional culture by the process of homogenisation. The displacement can be traced to various aspects of life, such as deteriorating traditional practices, customs and lifestyle as well as language attrition due to rare use of native

⁴⁷ Way of life involves both the non-material culture like norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, values, morals and language, as well as the material culture like clothing, ornaments, food patterns and so on.

language in everyday life, the trend what Groh (2011) has remarked as “unacceptance of the traditional or cultural body image”. The argument finds relevance empirically in the present study as discussed in Chapter 4.

Nevertheless, the supersedence of global dominant culture on the one hand, and proliferation of cultural homogenisation through the process of Mcdonaldization (Ritzer, 2000) on the other has procured a sense of cultural threat among the indigenous cultures. However, along with the process of cultural homogenisation, the era of globalisation also witnessed the emerging trend of cultural heterogenization embedding cultural consciousness and awareness among the people resulting in the process of cultural revivalism. Empirically the present study has traced similar instances among the various communities including the Rai community of Sikkim. The Rais of Sikkim traditionally had a distinct unique culture which underwent subsequent changes over time, as a result of social transformation at the wider societal level. Consequently, the culturally rooted notion of body and traditional practices which was evident historically has been affected by the dominant idea of body discourse in the process of modernisation. However, along with the threat to the traditional and indigeneous culture, the new cultural consciousness and awareness has led to the process of cultural revivalism among various communities and the Rai community of Sikkim has also witnessed the same.

In the context of the above backdrop, the chapter intends to explore the trend of cultural revivalism that occurred among the Rai community and find out how the process of cultural revivalism has impacted the larger discourse of the body specifically among the Rai women. The chapter also intends to identify the roles

played by various agencies in the reinforcing cultural notion on body and presentation of self.

5.2 Mapping Out Cultural Resurgence and its Impact on Body Discourse among Rai Women

Kirat Rais having a distinct culture and the body discourse being culturally rooted prior to the onset of modernisation has been historically traced in Chapter 3 and 4 of the present study. However, because of certain interventions such as globalisation, modernisation, transnational capitalism, opening spheres of education, coming up of media and consumer culture, the very essence of culture was found to be impacted. This ethno-cultural loss could be traced in various aspects of life amongst the Kirat Rais of contemporary time, such as socio-cultural practices, economic practices and most importantly their everyday self presentation. Rai (2005) and Ethnographic report on Kirat Rai (2007) prepared by Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh⁴⁸ of Sikkim, presents a detailed discussion on traditional costumes, ornaments, hairstyles etc. (Chapter 3 & 4) which constituted the larger body image and self presentation of Rai women. However, this traditional portrayal of self presentation among the Rai women could hardly be situated in the society characterised by sweeping modern forces. Therefore, the traditionally and culturally idealized notion of body image and self presentation failed to persist in their everyday life in the present context.

⁴⁸ Akhil Kirat Rai Sang (AKRS) is an association of the Kirat Khambu Rais founded in the year 1990 in Sikkim. As per its objectives, the association works for the upliftment, development and social welfare of the Rais in the state.

Nevertheless, in the wake of globalisation, as Singh (2018) argues, the processes of cultural homogenization and Mcdonaldization subsequently led to the hegemony of popular dominant global culture which is also reflected in the notions on body and beauty standards which has penetrated into almost all local cultures. Correspondingly, globalization also emphasized the sense of self through enhancement and awareness of local cultural identities globally (Yi Wang, 2007). Consequently, the cultural consciousness was manifested at different levels and this manifestation also finds reflections in the discourse of body and self presentation in terms of costumes/dress and ornaments among the Rai community of Sikkim. The following narratives provide empirical support to the argument posed above;

Regarding the recent awareness of one's own culture, 26 years old Rai respondent who is from Gangtok and a teacher by profession recalling her life experience narrated:

In my college days, I had friends from diverse cultural backgrounds and I always found them deeply rooted in their own culture. I, on the other hand, found myself wearing my Bhutanese friend's Bakkhu on occasions, addressing my Lepcha friend's family members in Lepcha language and learning Lepcha songs which my friend used to listen to. I found myself fascinated wearing Bengali sari and never bothered about my own ethnic costume. Though, there is nothing wrong about it but over the years these things evoked a question on my sense of belongingness, my cultural roots and my own identity. . This realisation made me think and now I have been becoming familiar with my culture.

Largely impacted by the current trend of re-inventing cultural tradition and her attempt in retaining cultural identity, a 30 years old respondent who runs beauty parlor in her village Asaam Lingzey stated: *I think we are not giving importance to our traditional attire and are fast at adopting other's cultures. Now I feel we need to embrace our attire because it is our identity as Rai women and for the same reason I chose to wear a Rai dress in my wedding.*

Similar observation has been made by a 21-year-old respondent from Gangtok currently pursuing her higher education, who commented on the westernization and its influence on the larger society: *I guess everyone nowadays prefers to wear western dress, follow western lifestyle. But thankfully I was born and brought up in a family where traditional Rai culture and customs are practiced very seriously. I was made familiar with our traditional costume at a very young age itself. My grandparents always used to tell me about Rai culture, ornaments and dresses which has helped me a lot to retain the taste of my culture in terms of self-presentation.*

Talking on the importance of the traditional costumes and ornaments and regretting not retaining and owning these, the narrative of a 63 years old respondent from Asaam Lingzey highlights her renewed interest and consciousness of culture. In her words, *I had traditional ornaments which my mother and grandmother had passed down to me but I sold them because we hardly used them. When I think about it today I feel I should have kept it, as now women have started to wear it again. Now even though I want to buy it, I am not able to make it because the price of gold has touched the sky.*

Similar renewed interest in Rai Culture could be found in an observation made by a 23 years old housewife from Assam Lingzey. Contemplating the scenario of her village Kholā goan, where there is a predominant Rai population, She stated: *I do not have Rai dress right now but I had it earlier. Since nobody used to wear it I gave it to my sister but now I would like to make it again as it is trendy and everyone is wearing Rai dresses with ornaments on social occasions and they all look very good in them.* Irrespective of the age difference, alike desire in having traditional costumes again can be seen in the statement of a 72 years old respondent: *I had a Rai dress when I was young. My parents made it for me and it used to wear it but I don't have Rai dress now....as you can see I wear lungi⁴⁹ and a blouse when staying at home and I hardly go out. If I ever happen to go out, then I wear a sari, but now I am thinking of making one because everyone has started wearing it again.*

Although resurgence in terms of dress/costumes and ornaments were quite prevalent among the respondents. But when it comes to hairstyles they were only found to be retaining the traditional style of braiding hair with *lacha* when they had to attend some occasions like Sakewa celebrations. The everyday traditional practice of covering heads among the women with a piece of cloth or shawl is also found to be limited to elderly women. However, apart from the hairstyle, a strong sense of retaining culture in the wake of resurgence has been found among most of the respondents. The same can be situated along the lines of their perspectives on retaining culture.

⁴⁹ Lungi is a common dress worn by women of Nepali community. It comprises a medium long strip of patterned cloth which is wrapped around the lower part of the body.

5.2.1 Respondent's Perspective on Culture Retention

The study brought to the light many perspectives of the respondents with regard to reinvention and retention of culture. Amongst many, few narratives have been posed below.

A respondent of Gangtok who is 27 years old and is pursuing PhD from Sikkim University shared her concern on the diminishing trend of wearing traditional dress among Rai women which reflects her cultural consciousness:

Women of different communities represent themselves in their traditional attire but being Rai women I hardly see it among our (Rai) womenfolk. I feel like we should retain our tradition and prevent it from vanishing.....for which we should make use of our traditional dress whenever we get chances, like in festivals and other occasions so that the coming generation can be aware of our rich culture.

However, commenting on the recent trend of resurgence, a 41 years old employee is optimistic and felt that in the present context Rai women were coming into fourfold and embracing their culture, she stated:

Rai women today have come forward to embrace their culture and even when participating in beauty pageants they represent themselves in traditional costumes, which provides a good platform for showcasing our culture. In my case, I became interested in my own culture when I was 15/16 years old because at that time my father used to actively participate in Rai cultural events. However, before that I was not aware of Rai cultural tradition and the dress in particular.

Certain levels of cultural consciousness can be empirically traced from the above narratives with regard to the awareness of ethno-cultural identity among Rai women of Sikkim. The representation of the cultural body image can be seen as a mere outcome of the cultural consciousness which otherwise has posed a threat to the ethno-cultural identity due to the encroachment of the process of hyper-modernization⁵⁰. This argument further finds relevance in 68 years old respondents' statements from Assam Lingzey. Sharing her observation, she narrated:

Rai choli, fariya, regi, chura, kalli, kopi patta et.al (typical ornaments of the Rai community, mostly worn by women) were worn with pride by most women from our community during our youthful days... This particular trend of wearing our traditional ornaments was quite prevalent during the olden days...but this particular trend of using these in everyday life happened to diminish over time. The other reasons cited were, selling or pawning of gold and silver ornaments to meet the financial needs of the family. Likewise, the changing trend, modernization and the youngsters hardly using traditional ornaments is one of the reasons or it could also be related to the question of one's comfort in using it in everyday life.

However, over the period of time, in this age (68) I have observed that, with collective efforts or our community gentries, various concerned samaj⁵¹(s) and organisations in our village in particular have been initiated with the motive of safeguarding one's traditions, customs and most importantly our culture. The trend of wearing traditional dress and ornaments has mushroomed again, as every household these days has started to preserve such items with the sense of cultural belongingness.

⁵⁰ Hyper-modernisation here denotes the process where modernity is playing a highly intensified role.

⁵¹ Samaj refers to an official association of the community people in a larger social structure.

The cultural portrayal of body image among the Rai women in traditional dress and ornaments in recent times is a part of the larger societal process of cultural resurgence taking place in Sikkimese society. While contemplating the diminishing trend of traditional wear and ornaments, the active role of modern forces like modernization, transnational capitalism, globalization et.al cannot be debunked even in the context of the Rai community. The role of transnational capitalism which made the availability of modern wear and ornaments at affordable prices overshadowed the demand for traditional clothes. Moreover, the factor like unavailability of traditional tailors having expertise in making the traditional dress also contributed to shifting to other clothes which were easily available in the market. This argument finds relevance on the lived experiences of a 62 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is still an active cultivator: *In my youthful days I regularly used to wear Rai choli and fariya, so did my friends and other female family members. I remember there used to be one darjee (tailor) in Ranipool market so we all (referring to Rai women of Assam Lingzey) used to walk approximately 2 kilometres to get our Rai dress stitched. There was no tailor or any tailor shop in our village at that time. Later as time passed that shop closed down and other tailors did not know how to stitch Rai dress.... Since then, I started wearing clothing items like lungi, maxi nighty routinely while staying home. And while going out I draped sari...But now with many places that sell/stitch our ethnic dress, on occasions like marriage I wear it along with a few Rai ornaments that I have made.*

Alongside, hinting on the difficulty to get ethnic dress in the local market earlier, a 28 years old respondent from Gangtok who currently works in a creative firm in Mumbai narrated:

Earlier when I told my mother that I wanted to make our traditional dress, it wasn't easily available. My mother uttered, Heyy Bhagwaan (Oh my God) who will stitch it for you?, Where will we order....We have to get it from Nepal. Now since there are a lot of traditional boutiques making it, I have got few for myself.

However, in recent times there has been a mushroom growth of boutiques selling traditional dress and ornaments in Sikkim and more so in Gangtok. The advent of capitalism and industrialization has undoubtedly replaced manual work with machines, people now have the scope to undergo training for skill development. Education on the other hand has encouraged researchers in relation to indigenous cultures and globalization has facilitated easy inflow of goods and services. Consequently, the factors of availability and resources are conveniently addressed, hence Rai traditional dress and ornaments in the contemporary time become easily available. In the line of these arguments posed above, Table 5.1 intends to show the response rate of the respondents in regard to their familiarity as well as if they own a Rai dress/costume and ornament(s) in the contemporary time.

Table 5.1: Rural-Urban Breakup of Respondents' Response on Rai dress and ornament(s)

Set-up	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Rural	25/100%	---	19/ 76%	6/24%	25/100%	---	16/64%	9/36%
Urban	23/92%	2/8%	16/64%	9/36%	21/84%	4/16%	13/52%	12/48%
TOTAL	48/96%	2/ 4%	35/ 70%	15/ 30%	46/92%	4/8%	29/58%	21/42%
	50/100%		50/100%		50/100%		50/100%	

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

Q1. Are you familiar with Rai dress?

Q2. Do you have a Rai dress/ costume?

Q3. Are you familiar with Rai ornaments?

Q4. Do you have Rai ornament(s)?

Table 5.1 illustrates the familiarity with and ownership of Rai dress and ornament(s) among Rai women respondents of both urban and rural sectors. The table indicates that in relation to the familiarity with Rai dress (Q1), out of the total sample, 96% of the respondents reported to be familiar, while 4 % that comprises respondents from urban areas said that they are not familiar. The rural-urban breakdown shows 100% respondents from the rural sector and 92% from urban settings reported in affirmative of being familiar with the costumes. When it came to ownership of Rai dress/ costume (Q2), a significant 70% of the respondents (76% from rural and 64% from urban) owned their ethnic dress while the rest 30% (24% from rural and 36% from urban) did not have which indicates a minor variation.

Coming to their familiarity with Rai ornaments (Q3), all respondents from the rural sector irrespective of their age were found to be familiar with it. However, when it comes to urban settings, only 92% are reported to be knowing and familiar with it. Further, with regard to the ownership of ornaments (Q4), 64% from rural settings and 52% urban respondents own traditional ornaments.

The study showing more than 58% owning traditional costumes and ornaments makes it evident that Rai women of the contemporary time are collectively endorsing their cultural body image and presentation of self. The occurrence of the same can be seen as a mere outcome of cultural consciousness that aroused through the realization of their diminishing cultural identity as well as the process of resurgence. Therefore, in

the wake of cultural resurgence, the body now has become a cultural site for Rai women where they are perceiving their bodies as a common platform through which their cultural identity can be retained and presented. It is in this process the body image and self presentation among them are being reshaped complying to the traditional and cultural imagination of a body.

The following section intends to explore the roles of various agencies in revivalism of cultural notion of body.

5.3 Roles of Agencies in Fostering the Cultural Notion of a Body

With the onset of cultural revivalism in general and the Rai community in particular, many agencies came in the forefront to reinforce the cultural elements and retain the ethno-cultural identity of the Rai community. These agencies were instrumental in planting seeds of the imagination of bodies based on cultural roots. The present study has identified the roles of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh (AKRS) and traditional/ethnic boutiques specifically in fostering the cultural imagination of a body among Rai women of Sikkim. The following section involves elaborate discussion on the role played by the above mentioned two agencies in reinforcing the cultural notion on body, beauty and presentation of self.

5.3.1. Role of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh (AKRS)

Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh which is an association of the Kirat Rais bearing registration number 443 was founded in the year 1990 in Sikkim. Rai (2005) notes that the head office of AKRS is located in Gangtok but it also has branch offices in three other districts namely the South district, West district and North district of the state, Sikkim. The association has a specified objectives catering to the development, well

being: Socio- economic and cultural welfare of the Rai community. The executive body of the association comprises five central portfolios:

- President
- Vice President
- General Secretary
- Treasurer and
- Public Secretary

However, though the constitution of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh mandates election after every three years for the fulfilment of these executive posts but the following elected members (as shown in Table 5.2) have been carrying out the responsibilities of the association since 2016 based on the decision taken on the Annual General Meeting held on November, 2019.

Table 5.2: Present Executive Members of AKRS Sikkim

Executive Posts	Names of the members
President	Mr. Chandra Khaling
Vice President	Mr. R.B Rai
Secretary General	Mr. A.P Rai
Treasurer	Mrs. Hema Rai
Assistant Treasurer	Mr. Bimal Rai

Source: Fieldwork December – January, 2020-21

In accessing the active role played by Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh Sikkim with regard to planting seeds of cultural imagination of a body among Rai women, several activities were found to be carried out by the association. Various activities of AKRS along with the following activities accounting to the reinforcing cultural notion of body and presentation of self has been highlighted by Rai (2005):

- The association spent Rupees 1,28,848 and bought traditional Rai dresses and ornaments which can be used for different cultural events and programs whenever the association will organise and/or participate in.
- The association has been actively participating in cultural events like cultural shows involving Rai dance and songs, and cultural fashion shows organized within or outside the state. Rai (2005) notes AKRS Sikkim's participation in Eastern Himalayan Festival, 2001 and Losoong⁵² 2002.
- The association along with participation has also conducted many cultural programs/ shows in many festivals that are celebrated in Sikkim. One example of it is the Sakewa festival which has been celebrated at state level since 1999. After 1999 the Rai community of Sikkim has been celebrating Sakewa every year in different districts of Sikkim. In this festival Rai women wear and display their Rai traditional dress and ornaments and also perform their traditional *Sili* dance. The empirical study has found Sakewa celebrations as one of the major factors in reinforcing the cultural notion of body and presentation of self. A detailed discussion has been presented in the later section.
- The association has also been encouraging research on various historical and cultural aspects of the Rai community including dress and ornaments. Rai (2005) notes that sub-committees have been formed under AKRS Sikkim in order to carry forth the research works.

⁵² Losoong is considered as Sikkim's New Year and taking the auspicious occasion in 2002 losoong festival was organized by Sikkim Tribal Youth Association in Gangtok where the AKRS participated.

The outlined activities carried out by the AKRS, Sikkim have undoubtedly helped Rai women to recognize, become familiar and celebrate their cultural body image visualizing Rai traditional dress and ornaments. In this process Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh's role is instrumental in planting seeds of cultural imagination of the body among Rai women of Sikkim. It has been observed that Rai women have been endorsing the cultural notion of a body as well as have been presenting it proudly as their ethno-cultural identity with a sense of belongingness.

5.3.2. Emerging Traditional/ Ethnic Boutiques and its Role

The emerging trend of cultural revivalism opened spheres for the mushroom growth of traditional boutiques in Sikkim. As the people started becoming culturally conscious, the demands of traditional dresses started accelerating. There are two lenses through which the role of traditional boutiques can be understood; firstly, ethnic boutiques as a provider and supplier of the traditional dress and secondly, ethnic boutiques as a medium for planting seeds of cultural presentation of a body. The present study acknowledging the former role attempts to explore the latter with regard to the discourse of the body among Rai women of Sikkim.

Along with the trend of cultural revivalism in Sikkim, among the Rai community the business of ethnic boutiques has bloomed specifically with the formation of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh Sikkim in 1990. As a result, in contemporary Sikkim, there are ample ethnic boutiques which are providing ethnic dresses including the traditional costumes of the Rai community. Therefore, with the creation and the marketing of Rai traditional dress and ornaments and advertisements of the same on various platforms like pageant shows, social media accounts, advertisements in local TV channels or

radios, the role of ethnic boutiques in implanting seeds of cultural portrayal of a body becomes prominent. However, it remains crucial to understand the ways in which the ethnic boutiques of modern society are catering the products with ethnic touch as well as complying with the marketing strategy. The following section intends to provide an analysis of a case of an ethnic boutique to enhance understanding in this context. The case study has been taken based on its active involvement with regard to the Rai ethnic dresses.

The ethnic boutique was officially established in the year 2005. The main showroom of this boutique is located in the heart of Gangtok's cosmopolitan market, namely, the Mahatma Gandhi Marg. But apart from its main showroom attached with a working space, this boutique also has three other outlets situated in and around Gangtok. The owner of this boutique is a 40 years old Bhutia woman who has pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Design and Technology from the Nottingham Trent University, England. The ethnic boutique has designed ethnic dresses and collaborated with various events held in Sikkim, to name a few, Rabong Cho-Dzo fest, Sikkim Red Panda Winter Carnival, Mrs. Sikkim pageant event and Miss Sikkim pageant. The ethnic boutiques of Mrs Bhutia function economically well in terms of business prospects. Excluding collaboration with various events, the sole income generated by selling Rai dress particularly is 20,000-30,000 per month. However, the income rises at times of weddings and Sakewa seasons of Sikkim.

The start-up story of this ethnic boutique traces the trend of cultural revivalism in Sikkim which accelerated the demands of Rai traditional dress. Before the trend of cultural revivalism Mrs. Bhutia used to work from home where she used to design and

stitch a few ethnic dresses and send them to different shops of Gangtok to sell it. But over time, the demands of ethnic dresses multiplied. Mrs. Bhutia narrates:

I once made Bakkhu, a Bhutia traditional dress from my home and sold it. Then I started making a few more and it was easily sold. In the process I received responses from women of other communities too. They also wanted me to make their traditional dresses. Women of the Rai community also started placing their orders. So at first, I researched about traditional Rai dress and practised it several times until I reached a point where people started buying it from me. Had it not been customers' demand, I would not have got involved in this (boutique business). She further says I never thought people of Sikkim would be demanding ethnic clothes but suddenly this trend of wearing ethnic dresses in recent times has increased the demand manifold.. Since then my business has bloomed.

In the contemporary time, Mrs. Bhutia gets high demand for Rai traditional dress, especially during marriage seasons. However, she mostly designs Rai dresses for occasions rather than for daily wear. Though orders for children are also placed in this boutique, the highest demand mostly comes from the working class women and the price range in which the boutique gets maximum orders is between Rs. 2,000-3,000 for Rai *choli*/blouse and Rs. 3,000-4,000 for *fariya*/sari. Apart from these price ranges, the ethnic boutique offers Rai dress in a wide range starting from Rs. 2,000-8,000 for Rai *choli* (upper garment) and from Rs. 3,000 to any higher amount the customers want for *fariya* (lower garment). The choice of quality of fabric and styles/design determines the price of Rai dresses.

However, the modifications that are offered to the customers remain crucial in understanding the ways in which the ethnic boutiques are planting seeds of cultural

notion of a body. The same could be observed with regard to this case. This ethnic boutique gives the customers choice of fabric and style selection. In contrary to the traditional time, ready made *fariyas* are made which are very high in demand. Not all Rai women ask for a patuki/waist band. Only the brides to be and very few other customers ask for it. With regard to modifications provided in her boutique, Mrs Bhutia states:

Basic elements of the traditional dress are retained like the plates in case of Rai choli and small puffed sleeves but other than that I try to provide varieties in fabric and try to present it in different styles... for some I use lace, in some I put embroidery and in some I also put buttons. But in all of the designs I provide, the main element of Rai traditional dress remains intact. I do not like to tamper with the traditional elements because it is a Rai women's identity. However, I try to make it attractive and well designed along with its basic and natural elements by giving touch ups to it because in the present context along with identity, it is also about looking beautiful, good and presentable.

Discussion and Observation: In a fast paced society characterised by modernity, cosmetic industry, media and technology, there is no doubt that the discourse of the body among Rai women has significantly changed. But with the recent trend of cultural resurgence, the culturally rooted traditional body image visualising the traditional Rai dress and ornaments in particular has gotten revived. In the context of Sikkim, it is to be noted that, due to the high influence of modernity as well as penetration of media among the youth, the literal revival of the typical Rai dress strictly in traditional sense becomes very hard because the traditionally available fabric, handloom as well as the handicraftsman (having rich expertise on making Rai

dress) can hardly be found in the contemporary time. But serving the demands of cultural revivalism in respect to the ethno-cultural identity of Rai women, the ethnic boutiques have undertaken the role of meeting the demands by production and supply of their traditional dress with ethnic touch and also reinforcing the cultural notion of a body among them. Nevertheless, in the present scenario a modification in terms of variation in style, fabric, colour and design is prevalent. This modification and blend between the modern designing and styling and retaining traditional elements is a trend one can observe being opted by young Rai women. The modern ethnic boutiques also provide ample choices for the customers to pick from and have addressed the issues of comfort by making readymade ethnic dresses. As foreseeable this has enchanted Rai women of contemporary time in Sikkim. This argument finds relevance in a 30years old respondent's narrative from Assam Lingzey, who narrated:

I used to think of our ethnic dress as that of being very old fashioned and uncomfortable. But once, when I attended the Sakewa celebration, I saw many women in our community wearing the boutique designed ethnic dress. They were looking very beautiful, presentable as well as attractive. Their ethnic dresses looked quite different from the dress I saw my grandmother used to wear.

In the wake of cultural resurgence, these agencies mentioned above were found to be playing an instrumental role in facilitating the cultural notion of body and self presentation among the Rai women. However, the study also observed that, several negotiations were being made by the women in order to maintain and carry the modern body image along the lines of culture and ethnicity. The following section highlights the cultural notion of body as well as the various negotiations being made by them.

5.4 Cultural Notion of a Body and Negotiation

Jagger (2000) argues that modernity and its various forces like industries, media, advertisement brought about 'question of self' among individuals which made the notion of 'self identity' more a matter of acquisition and less a matter of ascription. Contextualising Jagger's argument in the study, prior to the trend of cultural resurgence, Rai women of Sikkim were found to be highly influenced by various external forces of modernity which created a widening gap between their ascribed ethno-cultural identity and their acquired self identity especially in respect to their self presentation. However, the onset of cultural resurgence in the decade of 90's planted seeds of recreating bodies among Rai women along the lines of their cultural representation of body image. This opened scope for body management reinforcing the cultural notion on body, beauty and presentation of self which was found to be one of the influential factors in how the women were perceiving and constructing their own ideas of body and beauty in the wake of cultural revivalism. This lends credence to Douglas's (1970) argument that, "social body in a way constrains the way in which the physical body is perceived" (cited in Nettleton, 2007). As the way in which they would like to make their self presentation physically was found to be influenced by their cultural body portrayal visualising traditional Rai dress and ornaments in particular. This theoretical argument finds relevance on the narrations of a 65 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is in agricultural farming. Speaking on how the modern designed ethnic dresses becomes a misfit to elderly people considering their age, she stated:

In the contemporary time very beautiful, attractive, well designed and embroidered Rai costumes are available which I had never seen in my youthful days. Earlier we

used to wear Rai dress made of malmal⁵³, voile⁵⁴ but now you can stitch the Rai dress of whichever fabric even the very expensive silk and any design you want. It looks very beautiful on girls and women of young age...Now at this age (65) I can't even think of wearing such Rai dresses because I wonder how it will look on my wrinkled face.

Commenting on her subjective perception of ethnic dress not looking good on fat or flabby women, a 39 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who has completed her higher secondary examination and is now a housewife narrated:

Earlier when I wore a Rai dress while going for social functions, people used to compliment me as I had a slim figure. Now I have gained weight so I think I don't look good in the ethnic attire. I feel Rai dress mostly suits slim figured women and the dress also becomes a bit uncomfortable to wear for me because now I only feel comfortable in oversized clothes.....and traditional dress is something which you can't wear by oversize like me (laughs). It needs to fit your body accurately.

Contemplating her body image and self presentation in cultural dress, a 38 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who works in Gangtok PHE (Public Health Engineering) department and is well known in her village as a 'lady rider/biker' stated:

I am a Rai and I like to wear Rai dress but when it comes to handling it becomes very tough for me as I regularly travel on my bike. Also, it does not suit me because usually I carry very rough and tough kind of looks in my everyday life. Even while

⁵³ Malmal is a variety of cotton which is usually very light in weight and soft.

⁵⁴ Voile is also a lightweight cotton fabric but not as soft as malmal.

going to the office, I go in tracks and jackets. If certain occasions are there in the office, where I need to look more presentable, then I wear formal pants. I rarely wear a Rai dress and when I wear it, I try to walk slowly and softly to look more feminine which I always do not find comfortable, as in my casual dress I hardly bother and walk very roughly.

These narratives make it evident that the cultural imagination of a body among the respondents was not found to be aloof from the modern dominant ideas on body, beauty and presentation of self, such that of having a good figure, use of cosmetics and attractive/appealing looks. Exploring further in this regard, the study also traced various negotiations and strategies that were being carried out by the respondents to fit in their ethno-cultural body image while simultaneously accommodating within the modern dominant ideas on body, beauty and presentation of self. Following narratives reflects on the various negotiations and inventions carried out by the respondents to accommodate the ethnic element within the contemporary mode of self presentation:

On a common customary practice of piercing nose and wearing traditional nose ornaments among Rais, a 30 years old respondent who is a beautician by profession and runs a beauty parlour in her village Assam Lingzey narrated:

I have very sensitive skin so I need to take extra care of it. When my sisters pierced their nose to wear dhungri I did not, because when I pierced my ears it took a lot of time to set and I frequently had infection in the pierced area due to my sensitive skin. So whenever I wear a Rai dress I use a clip-on dhungri and bulaki (traditional Rai nose ornaments) in my nose.

Similar narration was made by a 27 years old respondent from Gangtok who narrated:

Being pure Rai (denoting both her mother and father being Rais) I have those typical facial features of Rai, where my nose is not pointed so I don't like a pierced nose. I feel the pierced nose looks good on those who have a pointed nose. . . So just to not look ugly I have not pierced it and never worn dhungri. But apart from it I love and wear all other ornaments.

Blending the ethnic element with modern trend of wearing body fitting or 'skin hugging' dresses, another 45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is a housewife and has completed elementary level of education was keen on self presentation in trendy way as evident in the following statement:

Since I was sick I lost some weight. Recently when I tried on my Rai dress while going to a marriage function, my choli/blouse had become loose fitted so I gave it to my sister. Now I have told the boutique owner to stitch me a perfect Rai dress which will fit my body accurately. I like to wear traditional dresses tight fitted because I feel it enhances your body figure.

The fusion and blend of tradition and modernity is in vogue in Sikkim and so among the Rai women. Such fascination with fusion style can be observed in the statement of a 41 years old respondent from Gangtok, who stated: *I like carrying both traditional and modern looks. I often try wearing the fusion of both. Like I may wear an Indian sari but wear my Rai traditional necklaces with it. Similarly, even if I wear western clothes like long skirts then I like to mix it up with my traditional Rai ornaments like*

our chura and few others that go well with the look. Similar preferences on the fusion style were expressed by few other respondents as well.

Elias's (1939) theorisation on "body management as being done to fit into the expected societal codes" could be situated in the present context. As the larger discourse of the body among Rai women of Sikkim was evident as being reshaped by the notions on body and beauty along the lines of the cultural notion and portrayal of a body, however with a blend of modern trends. And this phenomenon had transpired in order to retain their ethno-cultural identity in the wake of cultural resurgence. Elias further argues that the "expected societal code is what brings awareness on bodily activities and control through the processes of socialisation, rationalisation and individualisation." Contextualising this argument in the present study, the cultural portrayal of a body among Rai women was found to be reflecting on their bodily presentation, especially with regard to their choices of bringing back the trend of wearing traditional dress and ornament(s). And this trend of having a body image rooted in the culture amongst them was found to be rationalised, socialised and internalised through various social institutions, such that of, family, education/schools, religion and social media⁵⁵. The following section intends to examine the role of these social institutions and social media in recreating their interest along the cultural line in context of the body discourse.

⁵⁵ Drawing on Siverblatt's (2004) notion of social media as a social institution which opens up the process of socialization through global social networking.

5.5 The Role of Social Institutions in Recreating Cultural Body Image and Presentation

The present study has empirically traced the roles of various social institutions in recreating the cultural body image and presentation of self among Rai women of Sikkim. The importance of retaining the cultural body image among the respondents of both urban (Gangtok) and rural (Assam Lingzey) sectors were observed to be rationalised, socialised and internalised through the institutions of family, educational institutions/ schools, religion as well as social media. However, the respondents of Assam Lingzey who resides in a close knitted community of Kulungay⁵⁶ Rais in a particular locality with a sense of solidarity and belongingness, unlike the respondents of Gangtok who are scattered in different locations, the keen interest to adopt the cultural body image was found to be stronger in Assam Lingzey. Nevertheless, the vital role played by the following social institutions in both urban and rural areas of the study could be established.

The following subsections intend to examine the role of each social institution mentioned above in reinforcing the body image and presentation of self along the lines of culture.

5.5.1 Role of Family

Family as a primary institution of socialisation has an important role in reinforcing the cultural body image and presentation of self among Rai women of Sikkim. Rai womenfolk in the wake of cultural resurgence were being encouraged and socialised into the cultural representation of body image by their family. This argument finds

⁵⁶ Denoting people belonging to the Kulung *thar/* sub group of Rai.

relevance in the narratives of a 14 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey who is a student. With regard to wearing traditional Rai dress and ornaments, she stated: *I feel more comfortable in western clothes but when I have to dress up for some occasions like marriage or festivals or pujas, my mother asks me to wear our ethnic dress with the traditional ornaments which she has made for me. And she also wears the same.*

The role of the family in socialising the child along the cultural line has been observed in the statement of a 16 years old respondent from Asaam Lingzey who shared her experience on how she was made to wear ethnic dress by her mother against her wish to dress similar to a Korean celebrity while attending a function at her school, She narrated:

We had a school event where I wanted to go in a pretty dress similar to what Rosé (referring to one of the members of Korean Band Black Pink) was wearing in her song called ddu-du- ddu-du....I told my mother and even showed her the picture of what Rosé was wearing. But she insisted that I go in our traditional Rai dress which I did not want to go in. Even after a lot of crying, throwing tantrums, she did not buy me a dress. So, at last I had no option but to wear a Rai dress during the event. After I reached school, all my teachers, friends complimented me so I felt fine for wearing it to the event.

The statement of a 21 years old respondent's from Gangtok also reflects the vital role played by her family members in internalising the practice of wearing traditional ornaments and dress:

I have grown up wearing Rai dress and ornaments. I have also seen the womenfolk of my family wear it specially during our festival Sakewa. This is a generational practice which my mother learnt from my grandmother and I have picked up the practise following my mother since my childhood. Similar is the case with regard to ornaments, my grandmother has passed it down to my mother which my mother says will pass it down to me later.

On the emerging trend of wearing ethnic dress in her family, a 28 years old respondent from Gangtok stated: *From last two years in Bhai Tikka⁵⁷ we have started wearing Rai dress. Now I can't exactly say how the idea germinated but as far as I remember it was a collective decision of me and my sisters. We enjoy wearing it but only during social occasions and festivals.*

These narratives make it evident as to how family is instrumental in reinforcing the cultural body image visualising traditional dress and ornaments. The role of the family can broadly be observed as being that of socialisation and inheriting the traditional ornaments. Socialising the younger family members is one direct role played by family but along with it the passing down of traditional ornaments, cultural knowledge, customs can also be considered as being equally important. The study has observed that many respondents today are able to keep up with the revived cultural body image irrespective of their socio-economic background, as they have the traditional ornaments which have been passed down across generations.

⁵⁷ *Bhai tikka* is a festival celebrated by Nepalese people around Diwali. It is generally a festival of brothers and sisters where the bond between the two is celebrated.

5.5.2 Role of Religion

The study has identified the role of religion in creating the cultural body image and presentation of self which however depends upon the religious belief they were holding. The Kirat Rais worship their mother deity Sumnima and father deity Paruhang and in almost every household of Assam Lingzey and a few houses of Gangtok, a portrait of their deities Sumnina and Paruhang could be observed during the field work. The portrait depicted the cultural portrayal of Sumnima's body image, visualising traditional Rai dress and ornaments. Contextualising this observation in the present study, it would not be wrong to comment that the idea of the cultural body image of a woman in a way was being internalised by Rai women through religious socialisation of their guardian deity Sumnima. Therefore the fact that the notion of an ideal body image among Rai women is shaped through the image of guardian deities becomes irrefutable. Moreover, the religious practices and the rituals in the households were reported to be one prime occasion of self presentation along the cultural lines. To elucidate the argument, the following narratives are presented below;

45 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey commenting on her wearing Rai dress shared:

We are an extended family. After my father in law's demise, my eldest brother in law/jethaju heads the family. He is very strict when it comes to religious rituals, so all the female members of my family make it a point to wear our traditional dress whenever there are any rituals at home. And this practise has been there since I got married (at the age of 21) in this family.

In the similar line, another 39 years old respondent who is an Assistant Professor by profession narrated:

My grandmother used to wear a traditional Rai dress and ornaments. Rest female members of my family and I only wear Rai dress and ornaments during festivals like Sakewa where we worship mother earth and when there is a puja of our chula dhunga/three stone hearth, that represents our ancestors.

Pointing out the importance of rituals in facilitating the cultural image on Rai women in the village, 81 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey observed:

In our village every year we do Rai puja where we worship our deities Sumnima and Paruhang. The date is usually decided by our religious priest/ Mangpa. And when the date is approaching, we can understand that, now women of our village are taking out their Rai traditional dress and ornaments from their trunks. On the day everyone (Rai women of Assam Lingzey) wears a Rai dress and gets involved in the puja.

The narratives makes it evident that religion can be considered as one of the agencies that is facilitating the reviving trend of cultural body image and presentation of self among Rai women of Sikkim. However, this theorisation is limited to those following the religious worldview of Hinduism and Animism. But this argument cannot be generalised and situated incase of Christians and to some extent Buddhist respondents .

5.5.3 Role of Educational Institutions

The role of educational institutions remains crucial with regard to reinforcing cultural body image and presentation of self. The study has identified the role of educational institutions both at individual and community levels. The higher educational institutions like colleges and universities contribute to the awareness and reinforcement of cultural notions of the body through research on community in general and cultural aspects in particular. The educational institutions as an agency in reviving the cultural body image and self-presentation at individual levels is evident in the narratives of a 16 years old student respondent from Assam Lingzey which provides empirical support to this argument. She stated: *I wore a Rai dress once when I had to perform a Rai dance in my school and that was the first time I became familiar with my traditional dress.*

In the similar tone, a 20 years old respondent from Asaam Lingzey also narrated: *I think whatever I know about Rai culture is what I learnt at school because we used to have Rai classes in our elementary level and also had to perform Rai dance on several occasions. Since, I participated in dance very often, my parents bought me a Rai dress and also bought some ornaments which I still wear in festivals and marriages.*

The educational institution as an agency in supplementing the cultural notion of self presentation is evident in narration of a 27 years old respondent from Gangtok. She commented: *During my college days I was invited to the Sakewa festival organised by*

the cultural group of my college, so it was then I went to a boutique to buy our traditional dress for the first time. Before that I was not very familiar with the dress.

Similar experience of being familiar with the traditional costume in college has been shared by a 21 years old respondent from Gangtok, who stated:

I had a fresher's welcome in my college and since the theme was traditional wear, we were asked to be present in ethnic wear. That was the first time I became familiar with Rai dress and wore it. Since I have also joined a music school now, I wear it frequently at different functions like Nepali New Year celebration organised by my institute and various other events.

University cultural fests providing the platform for showcasing traditional costumes has been found in narration of many respondents. One such experience has been shared by a 26 years old outgoing student of Sikkim University, who narrated:

When I was in 2nd year of my graduation, my senior from our community wanted to participate in a cross cultural event organised by our University in the cultural fest. So he asked me to join him and he arranged traditional dress and ornaments for me. It was through him for the first time, I became familiar with our ethnic costumes and ornaments. Since then, I decided to have my own Rai dress because I liked it.

The above empirical facts make it evident that the educational institution is one of the prime agencies in reinforcing the cultural notions of body presentation and among many respondents the seeds of cultural image of a body were implanted and facilitated through the educational institutions. Therefore, Subba's (2015) inference that "modern education is leading to loss of ethno-cultural practices, identity and

customs” does not exactly correspond to the finding of present study, as the empirical evidence supports that educational institutions plays a vital role in providing various platforms for strengthening and reviving the consciousness of cultural elements which in return was found to be helpful in familiarising and introducing one with the cultural image of body presentation.

5.5.4 Role of Social Media

Social media plays a primary role in influencing the notions of body, beauty and presentation of self. From getting influenced by the alien culture (western or Korean) and Bollywood to inculcating the modern dominant ideas on beauty standards, ideal body sizes and consumer pattern, social media is found to have a determining role to play. Moreover, with the onset of the emerging trend of cultural resurgence, the role of social media as an agency in reviving the cultural body image cannot be ignored. The argument is substantiated by the narrative of a 30 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey. Recalling her encounter with visual images of girls wearing traditional dress in social media, she narrated: *When I was in class ten around 2008. I had created my facebook account. So one day I came across a page titled Sakewa. I saw girls out there wearing Rai dresses so smartly and were looking very appealing and attractive. The design, style and colours were different too, which made the dresses look very beautiful. After seeing those pictures on facebook, I also started wearing Rai dress.*

Narrating similar instances of facebook as a medium of making her familiar with traditional dress and ornaments, a 30 years old respondent from Assam Lingzey stated: *In facebook I saw a picture of my friend in a traditional Rai dress and*

ornaments. She is from Nepal. I liked the style and design of her dress so I requested her to get one for me too. Next time when she came to Gangtok she brought it for me.

The role of social media in creating awareness on the traditional costumes is also reflected on the statement of a 28 years old Respondent from Gangtok, who commented:

I became aware through the internet, precisely Social media because I had friends on Instagram from different places. So once, my Instagram friend from Kalimpong had uploaded a picture of her wearing a Rai dress in her sister's marriage, which motivated me to have my own.

Drawing from these facts and narratives it becomes evident that social media has an instrumental role in reviving the cultural body image and presentation of self among Rai women of Sikkim. It becomes pertinent to understand that more access to social media has widely contributed to the way Rai women of Sikkim are reshaping their ideas on body image and presentation of self.

Therefore, it is evident from the foregoing discussions, the social institutions of family, religion, educational institutions as well as the social media has been reinforcing and reshaping the cultural notions on body/ presentation of self in the wake of cultural resurgence. Thus, in order to trace the changing discourse of the body in recent time, exploring the roles played by these institutions remained significant.

5.6 Empirical Findings from Sociological Lens

In order to comprehend the changing discourse on body among Rai women, the study emphasizes on the role of structure in shaping the body discourse. Viewing the body through the everyday life experiences of the women as a result of interaction in and with the larger social structure remained a crucial factor. The empirical findings of the study revealed that, the way in which Rai women are perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on ideal body and beauty has evolved over the passage of time, navigating with the changing social structure. Prior to the onset of modern forces of changes, the women were found to be rooted in their cultural portrayal of body image, similarly their notion of body was found to be restricted to their cultural roots. However, in the wake of globalization, modernization, transnational capitalism, consumer culture and widespread media, they are found to be in conflict with their cultural notion of body so as to fit into the modern dominant body image. Consequently, with the recent trend of cultural resurgence, the Rai women were found to be in constant negotiation with regard to accommodating their cultural body image along the lines of modern dominant ideas on body. The finding collaborated with the argument of Giddens' structuration theory where the social structure is constraining to a large extent while simultaneously an individual as an agency is negotiating their cultural notion with the dominant body discourse, thereby reinforcing the changes.

The study observed, the perception of the body among Rai women was being constructed through the subjective experiences drawn from the changing socio-cultural context. With the indigenous Kirati Rai society being hit by the process of social transformation and forces of modernity, the body management process among the Rai women also started becoming intensified. This led to 'body projects'

(Giddens, 1991) i.e. something to be worked at, in order to create their self-identity in the wake of modernity, at the same time to create their collective identity as ‘Kirat Rai women’ in the wake of cultural revivalism. Goffman’s (1959) idea of “performance” i.e. body opening up arenas of modification, stylizing, reshaping, management through performance or the effort(s) put in ‘presentation of self’ by one in order to create an impression on others was also evident among the modernized Rai women of Sikkim. This finding finds credence to the Dramaturgical Model of Goffman (1959), which argues that “an individual and his/her body acts according to a situation or prevailing condition and therefore is perceived from someone or from a particular act”. The process of cultural homogenization in the wake of globalisation, cultural reawakening, socio-temporal changes as well as socio-economic condition of the respondents remained instrumental in how Rai women chose to present themselves as well as carry their body image. Similarly, the penetration of media and internet bringing awareness on the dominant notion of body and beauty as laid forth by the popular cultures⁵⁸, as well as the influences, perception and judgments of the immediate surroundings like family, peer group on one’s body sizes; were found to be playing an important role in how the women were perceiving their body.

However, their ‘performances’ relating to body management, presentation of self and maintenance of body image was found to be socially conditioned by what Giddens called as ‘constraining structure’ and Bourdieu’s concept of ‘class condition’, ‘habitus’ and ‘taste’. Though class condition was not found to be a determining factor in terms of Rai women’s involvement in the prevalent body care and beauty practices, as many alternative socio-economic negotiations such as thrifting, circulation of

⁵⁸ Popular culture as per the empirical findings refers to the Korean (K-pop), Hollywood and Bollywood cultures.

products, clothes, availability of low cost cosmetic products as well as using credit system for the purchasal was found to be the alternative solution. But class conditions remained instrumental in constraining their taste in body care management practices especially with regard to the quality and brand of the body care and beauty products being used. The study also revealed the class condition of the respondents as finding reflection in their habitus, as respondents who exhibited feelings of reluctance to indulge in body care management practices reported one of the reasons as ‘considering the economic status of my house, what will people think?’. Nonetheless, despite one's class condition the respondents were found in a situation as marked by Ussher (1997), “often negotiating in the process of resorting to how they wanted to carry their body image and what they were expected to be by the society”. Carrying a modern body image in the wake of modernity became a matter of self esteem and creating individual identity. Many respondents in this regard were found as negotiating with their traditional and cultural body image. Taking off traditional nose ornaments like *dhungri* and *bulaki* in order to adapt and fit in to trendy clothes like jeans, maxi dress, wrappers, *lungi*, trousers and long skirts and doing away with the traditional practice of braiding hair with *laacha* as well using cosmetics/ makeups was observed as being some negotiations that were being carried out by the respondents. Such negotiation interestingly was revealed by one respondent from the rural setting of Assam Lingzey who felt how the cultural portrayal of body in the contemporary time remains a misfit to her body image as a lady bike rider. This made her explore new ways of self presentation in rough clothes like torn jeans, leather jackets, trousers etc. to comply with her image as a biker. Taking relevance of Giddens and Bourdieu, these arguments mark the changes that have occurred in structure and habitus over the

time, thereby allowing scope for one's reflexive choices and agency on body management and presentation of self.

The reflexive choices of the individuals on their bodies also find relevance in the way Rai women are negotiating with their every day self presentation amidst the trend of cultural resurgence. Though cultural consciousness and awareness of retaining the cultural body image was evident among them, the study traced various negotiations that were being made to reconstruct and fit their cultural body images with the blend of modern dominant ideas of body and beauty. To mention a few, wearing tight fitted and boutique designed fancy ethnic dresses, maintaining the fusion style blending both modern and traditional fashion, using ethnic design in various fabrics, as well as wearing clip on traditional nose ornaments with ethnic dresses as an alternative to customary practice of piercing nose were found to be in vogue. This empirical evidence finds relevance to what Giddens considered structure as not only constraining but enabling where people are actively entering into reinforcing changes, thus reflecting the duality between structure and agent.

The study in exploring the changing socio-cultural connotation of body discourse, observed the predominant traditional notion of the body over the time as being replaced by the modern notions. However, in the recent trend of cultural resurgence the various agents of social intuitions, viz. Family, educational institutions, religion and social media were found to be an enabling factor for the reconstruction of traditional and cultural body image. Nevertheless, for the women of the new generation carrying the modern dominant body image and self presentation accounted to what phenomenological sociologists have referred as, 'taken-for-granted' and pre

existing social reality'. To empirically substantiate the argument, many young girls stood unaware and aloof from the traditional notions on body, and the modern dominant body image and body care management acquired from alien cultures such that of, Korean, Hollywood and Bollywood remained the reality for the youngsters. Similarly, the influence of Bollywood and its dominant idea of body and beauty image has been observed to be an ideal one among the middle aged Rai women as well.

Furthermore, in understanding the process of changes, the study observed the hegemony of modern ideas on body and beauty among the women. And with the passage of time, specifically with the onset of modernization, globalization and transnational capitalism, these modern ideas of ideal body and beauty, such that of having sharp facial features, tall height, slim and slender figures and clear/flawless skin as well as opting various means to achieve the perceived ideal image was seen as being institutionalized through what Althusser (1970) has pointed out, the 'ideological hegemony' and 'interpellation'. Similar arguments can be placed with regard to the recent trend of reviving the cultural body image in the wake of cultural resurgence. The agencies viz. The Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh Sikkim, the emerging ethnic boutiques as well as circulation of the cultural body images through social media together have planted seeds of cultural imagination of bodies among Rai women through the process of interpellation, i.e, by bringing awareness on the cultural loss and thereby, expressing the needs of retaining it. Thus, the body here is moulded to take a form of common cultural platform through which the distinct identity of Kirat Rai women can be regenerated.

5.7 Summary

The hyper-modernisation and its impact acted as a stimulus in gradual cultural disappearance of the indigenous Kirat Rai community making youngsters accept the dominant modern idea of body image as a part of social reality. However, the sense of cultural loss triggered by modernity also found an outlet in the form of cultural resurgence. Nevertheless, in the wake of cultural revivalism, the cultural consciousness and manifestation of the same becomes evident in various aspects of their everyday life, one being the body image and self presentation. Therefore, the modern dominant idea of the body undergoes the process of reconstruction in the line of cultural image among the Rais of Sikkim. In this context, the chapter presents an exhaustive discussion on the cultural notion of body and the various agencies that fostered it. In the wake of cultural regeneration, the ‘traditional’ itself has become a new fashion statement and carrying a body image within the framework of the culture with some degree of negotiation is found to be in vogue among the Rai women of Sikkim. The chapter also highlights the process of negotiation with regard to accommodating the traditional elements along with the modern dominant ideas of body and self presentation.

However, it becomes important to understand that, society being dynamic in nature and change as the only thing remaining constant, the discourse on the body has to be perceived and understood as ever changing with dynamics of time and space, as well as impacts of various external forces and agencies.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Considering the dynamic social setting, the body may be viewed as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon, as it is likely to undergo transformation through the process of body management, maintenance and manipulation (Goffman,1959; Giddens 1991). It is in this line; body is not only viewed as a material object or as being limited to biology but also as how Turner (1984) views it, “an object constructed discursively”. The somatic upsurge in the light of transnational capitalism, development in both bio-medical sciences and information technology, widespread of mediated factors like media, growing film, beauty/cosmetic and fashion industries, as well as the alarming rate of mushrooming fitness regimes in the contemporary global era, holds power in manifesting and normalizing the set body and beauty standards. However, this power may not always be vested into bodies coercively but through what Althusser (1970) has talked about, the ‘ideological hegemony’ through ‘interpellation’. That is, in a subtle manner by defining the boundaries and binaries of what is dominantly desirable and undesirable. Although, there are many approaches from which the discourse of the body can be viewed. But most importantly viewing the body through Giddens’s (1979) sociological lens demands importance to the necessary consideration of both, the role of social structure in shaping the discourse of the body as well as the empirical phenomenological standpoint of the individuals as an agency of reflexivity and change.

Under the light of these theoretical arguments, the present study entitled ‘Changing Discourse on Body among the Rai Women of Sikkim’ attempts to examine the

changing discourse of the body empirically. Several connotations are attached with the notion of 'body'. However, this study is limited to the parameters of Rai women's perception on body and body image, as well as their involvement in practices related to body management and self presentation in everyday life. Therefore, the study is intended to comprehend the changing discourse on the socio-cultural construction of the body across time and consequently, identify the agencies and factors contributing to such changes. With the onset of modernity and prevailing dominant notion of body and beauty, the study also attempts to explore how the women belonging to the indigenous Kirat Rai ethno group, are perceiving their body and constructing their notions on body and beauty. The study also aims to highlight the negotiation of the Rai women with the modern dominant body discourse. Eventually, exploring the recent trend of cultural resurgence, the study intends to present an intensive discussion on its impact in reinforcing cultural notion of beauty, body and presentation of self.

In addressing these spelled out aims of the study, both primary and secondary sources of data collection have remained significant. The primary data is generated from three categories of sample. Firstly, fifty respondents comprising Rai women from Gangtok (urban) and Assam Lingzey (rural); Secondly, additional ten elderly members of Rai community comprising both male and female from both areas; and thirdly, members of AKRS and an ethnic boutique situated in Gangtok having three more outlets in and around the capital. In the State of Sikkim, Rai population accounts to the highest percentage comprising 13.5% of the total State population of 5,81,546, where 48.98% comprises females (State Socio Economic Census of Sikkim, 2006). The study has been carried out in both the rural and urban settings of Sikkim. Gangtok, situated in

the district of East is the capital of Sikkim having a cosmopolitan and highly urbanized character, while the rural setting of Assam Lingzey falls as a Gram Panchayat Unit (GPU) under the constituency-22 Namcheybong in the East district located at the distance of 18 kilometers from Gangtok. Out of the fifty sample, from where the larger empirical study has been derived, purposive sampling keeping in mind the variables like age group, rural and urban set up, work structure (professional workers, non-professional workers, homemakers), religion, educational qualification and income level has been made taking 25:25 ratios from Gangtok and Assam Lingzey. The secondary data is derived from existing literature on the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of Rai, lyrics of songs and earlier conducted research on the community. However, since no comprehensive study has been made among the Rai women as well as on their body discourse could be traced, the study remains explorative in nature. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interview schedules using both close ended and open ended questions and observations. Since the study is more qualitative in nature, in depth interviews were conducted for collection of the narratives and case study. With the uncertainty created by the pandemic, apart from the primary interview other measures adopted were; making use of updation of Akhil Kirat Rai Facebook Pages of Sikkim, joining and participating in the Kirati Rai Samaj and/or association groups in social media platforms and also conducting interviews for some respondents of Gangtok in platforms like google meet and zoom application as well as telephonic interviews. The data generated has been presented using the mixed method of triangulation and interpreted with the sociological conceptual framework.

The key findings and empirical analysis of the study can be briefly discussed as follows: To trace the changing body discourse among Rai women, understanding the

traditional notion of beauty and body remains crucial. The study taking the narratives of elderly Rais, analyzing the song lyrics and referring to the scanty literatures available, found out that traditionally the Rai women used to carry their body image and self presentation in everyday life on the contours of cultural portrayal visualizing the ethnic dress of Rai *choli* and *fariya* along with the waistband v.i.z. *patuki/hemmari*. This cultural portrayal till date is found to be strongly idealized as an ideal body image of Rai women and this finds reflection on various Rai music videos and its lyrics as well as in Rai mythology discussed elaborately in Chapter 4. Traditionally, at the age between eight to nine, every girl child was offered *gunyo choli* (Rai ethnic dress) with ornament(s) and from then it was worn on a daily basis. Along with many traditional ornaments, *Nathen*, *Nabit* popularly known as *dhungri*, *bulaki* moreover justified the notion of beauty among Rai women. Practices related to hairstyle involved using hair oils and braiding their hair with *laacha*. While, when it came to body care and beauty practices hardly any involvement was observed except for using face and body creams like Boroline, Boro Plus, Vaseline and home made creams out of milk. Therefore, prior to the onset of social transformation, traditional Rai women hardly perceived their body as ‘a project’ (Giddens, 1991) i.e. as something which should be worked at and accomplished in order to create an individual’s self-identity.

However, with the onset of modernity and its forces, the indigenous Rai community underwent a series of social and economic transformation. This socio-economic transformation is reflected in many aspects, such as changes in their religious worldview and traditional practices of marriage, attainment of education, shift in work orientation from primarily agriculturist to other occupations. And most importantly, what Groh (2011) has remarked, “unacceptance of the traditional or cultural body

image” which becomes evident in their conflict with the traditional body image and negotiations on their part so as to fit into the modern dominant notion of body image. Therefore in this context, the study observed an awakening upsurge on the question of self-esteem, individual self identity and self presentation and holding the body image as being instrumental in construction of their subjective perceptions among Rai women as well. This upsurge was found to be a result of influences of several external forces like, beauty industries; popular culture¹ and its ideas on beauty, ideal body; most importantly globalisation accompanied by widespread information technology; job roles/ work orientation and transnational capitalism. The study observed that, modern dominant notion of ideal body endorsed by these forces, contradicted the general body image of mongoloid looking Rai women. Consequently, as Socio Cultural Theory of Vygotsky (1931/1997) pointed out, dissatisfaction regarding body image and desire to overcome, was found to be prominent among 42% of the respondents out of the total sample taken. The dissatisfaction was basically observed as emerging due to the wider influence of popular cultures that shapes their notion of the ideal body. Furthermore, the relevance of Socio-Developmental theory could be drawn in finding out how Rai women are perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on body and beauty. As puberty and developing stages of life of young women on one hand, and peer influence on the other remained an intricate factor that helped in shaping notions on one’s body image. Similarly, the subjective judgements and comments made on one’s body was instrumental in how the body was being perceived by Rai women.

Liz Jagger’s (2000) argument, that modernity and its various forces like industries, media, advertisements bring about not only ‘question of self’ but also a ‘consumer

culture' (Featherstone, 1991) also corresponds to the empirical findings. To substantiate the argument, when it comes to purchase and use of cosmetics and body care products, the study observed that 100% respondents from Gangtok were consumers of it. While contrastingly, in Assam Lingzey only 32% out of the total sample were found to be not using it. Therefore, the rural-urban variation in terms of cosmetic use has been situated. Coming to the age as a factor, women of the mid age group (21-40 years old), as well as young girls (between 14-20 years old) were involved in regular use. While others from higher age groups were found to be occasional users or non users. Therefore, age as a determining factor in the use of body and beauty care products also becomes evident. Irrespective of the economic background, the use of beauty and body care products was found to be a dominant practice. This was because of the availability and use of innumerable beauty and body care brands in varying range and quality that suits their affordability. As well as, the respondents were found to be adopting various forms of alternative economic negotiations like, thrifting, buying things on credit, circulation of beauty products, clothes among siblings. All these empirical evidence supports the consumerist ideas prevailing among the women. However, income was found to be a determining factor with regard to the use of expensive and luxury branded products and beauty practices that found reflection on their socio- economic status.

When it comes to body management, no statistical co-relationship between body weight and fitness regimes; body weight and eating consciousness; body weight and beauty and body care practices in salon and parlor could be established (Table 4.1). Nevertheless, the study testifies the fact that there is an apparent association between age category and body and beauty care regime, as those above 55 years of age were not to be involved in such practices while the young and middle aged women were

found to be actively involved in body and beauty care practices (Table 4.2). Therefore, with the involvement of body care and beauty practices, as well as changing perceptions on body among Rai women, Featherstone's (1991) argument of body as "a lifestyle accessory, a thing to be shaped, sculpted and stylized" stands relevant in the present context. This further contradicts the earlier existent traditional notion, perception on body and thereby, marks the change in the discourse of body among Rai women. This argument further finds relevance with them undergoing constant struggle so as to meet the dominant standards of beauty by negotiating with the traditional notion(s) on body, beauty and self presentation. The Rai women of today are largely influenced by the modern concepts of self presentation and prefer to wear clothes which are western, modern and fashionable (Table 4.3 and 4.4). Also a section of young girls from both rural and urban settings preferred Korean fashion. However, a section of women from the rural setting as well as those who were above 65 years preferred to wear traditional clothes. Thus, age and space(rural/urban) variation here remains significant.

To point out the role of agencies that brought about socio-cultural changes in the way Rai women are perceiving their body, constructing their ideas on body and beauty, getting involved with the modern day beauty and body care practices as well as negotiating with their self presentation, roles of media, internet and popular culture remains crucial. Along with these, the agencies of family, peer group and its influence, social conditioning and age factor of the respondents were found to be instrumental in how they were perceiving their body image in everyday life. Despite the changes in the socio-cultural connotation of body discourse brought about by modern forces like modernisation, globalisation, consumer culture, transnational capitalism, media et.al, the study mapped out an emerging trend of cultural revivalism

in the present context. This recent trend of cultural revivalism embedded cultural consciousness and awareness among the people of Rai community and thus, also reinforced the cultural notion on body and presentation of self. Therefore, Elias's (1939) theorisation on "body management as being done to fit into the expected societal codes" could be situated in the present context. As the Rai women in the wake of cultural resurgence were trying to retain and reinvent their cultural identity through their body image and self presentation. In other words, the bodies of Rai women were seen as a common platform through which their cultural identity could be retained.

The study established the roles of Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh Sikkim, as well as ethnic boutiques in replanting seeds of imagination of the bodies based on cultural roots among the women and most importantly the younger generations. However, in the context of Sikkim, due to the high influence of factors like modernisation, westernisation, globalisation and penetration of social media among the youth, the study has observed several negotiations being made in order to fit the traditional body image while simultaneously keeping up with the modern body image. In this context the ethnic boutique by creating designer traditional dress blending with some elements of modernity in terms of use of fabric, stitching body fitting and ready made dresses, customised design is catering the demand among both the youngsters as well as middle aged women. Further the way in which the reinforcement of the traditional and/or cultural image of the body was being socialised, rationalised and institutionalised, the study has established the role of various institutions. The role of family, educational institutions, religious worldview and practices of the respondents and social media has been found to be instrumental in this regard.

The study in tracing and understanding the socio-cultural change in body discourse has acknowledged the important play of time and space. The studies on the body cannot be confined because as society undergoes transformation and stages of historical development (moving from simple to complex) as what Sociologists like Tonnies (1887), Comte (1853), Durkheim (1893), Giddens (1984) et. al have pointed out, the body is likely to undergo changes in the course of interaction in the society and within the limits set by the society (Shilling, 1993). Thus, drawing from the above discussion the ‘utopia’ of an ideal body even in the contemporary time still remains juxtaposed between the notion of an individual, society, time and space at large; therefore, leaving the spaces for further contestation over discourse of an ideal body.

Comprehending the changing discourse of the body along the lines of phenomenological everyday experiences of the women with regard to their bodily matters has remained significant to the study. Analysing the empirical findings from a sociological standpoint, Giddens’s theory of structuration finds credence to the way women were found to be perceiving their body and constructing their ideas on body and beauty. The Kirat Rai socio-cultural structure was found to be prominent in women’s compliance with the culturally rooted notion of body and beauty in the traditional time. However, the sweeping waves of modern forces as well as the cultural consciousness embarked by the recent trend of cultural resurgence has facilitated the dynamics of change. The study observed that the structure has not only remained a constraining factor but has also enabled the women as reflexive agents with regard to their choices of body image and self presentation. This argument finds relevance in women’s negotiation with the culturally rooted ideal body image along the lines of the modern dominant notion of body presentation. Therefore, in the wake of carrying out this negotiation, the women were found to be involved in what

Giddens has pointed out 'body work/ projects' through "performance" (Goffman, 1959) i.e. body modification, body management and presentation of self. Bourdieu's concept of "Habitus" was found to be playing an instrumental role in not only determining the ways the bodies were socially conditioned but also allowing women's reflexive choices on their body image. Furthermore, in exploring the women's nature and level of participation and/or engagement with the body care and management practices, the concept of "class condition and taste" were found to be relevant factors as evident in variation in respondent's choice of trendy and luxury branded products, although the dominant practices were generally opted by majority of the respondents. The body discourse among the Rai women has changed profoundly over the time with the institutionalisation of modern dominant ideas on body and beauty against the culturally rooted notion of body. Discourse on the body further is observed as being reshaped in the wake of cultural resurgence through the process of regenerating the cultural body image. Therefore, the dominant notion of the body care, management and presentation in varying time periods, being institutionalised and adopted by Rai women lends credence to the process of "interpellation" what Althusser argues in his "ideological hegemony".

Conclusively, considering the importance of time and the evolving dynamic social setting, this study is an attempt to explore the changing discourse on body among the Kirat Rai women of Sikkim. The major findings generated and presented in the study have been limited to the sample size of just fifty respondents comprising Rai women and ten elderly members. Therefore, the study does not claim to leave no stone unturned so long it extends beyond the scope of study and also the findings presented does not intend to be generalised to all Rai women of Sikkim.

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Appendix-I

Interview Schedule

Changing Discourse on Body among the Rai Women of Sikkim

Name of the Researcher: Sunaina Rai

Name of the Supervisor: Dr. Sandhya Thapa

Name of the Programme: M.Phil, Department of Sociology, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India.

Section I (Elderly Members)

1. General Profile of the Respondents

NAME	AGE	RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	CASTE/ CATEGORY	RELIGION	MARITAL STATUS	FAMILY MEMBERS	CONTACT NO.

2. Economic Profile of the Respondents

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	DESIGNATION/ OCCUPATION	MONTHLY INCOME (SELF)	FAMILY INCOME	EMPLOYMENT STATUS

3. Body Profile

Close ended questions (Female elderly members)

3.1 Which of the following things were available when you were young?

Make up/ Cosmetics

Hair Products

Body Care Products

3.2 Where did you get those items/ articles from?

Local Shops

Local Market (nearby)

Town

3.3 Did you wear any cosmetics/make up when you were young?

Yes, everyday

Never

Sometimes

Occasionally

3.4 Do you still wear it?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Occasionally

- 3.5 Do you think wearing make up/cosmetics makes you look beautiful?
Yes
No
Somewhat beautiful
It hides my natural beauty
- 3.6 Do you like wearing make up/cosmetics?
Yes
No
- 3.7 What length of hair was widely prevalent at the time you were long?
Long hair
Short hair
Medium length hair
- 3.8 What type of hair do you find beautiful?
Long Curly Hair
Long Straight Hair
Short Curly Hair
Short Straight Hair
Medium Length Curly Hair
Medium Length Straight Hair
Others
- 3.9 Which body type do you consider beautiful?
Thin Body
Thick/Fat Body
Not so thin body
Not so thick/fat body
In between thin and thick
- 3.10 Do you have Rai Cultural Dress?
Yes
No
- 3.11 How often do you used to wear it when you were young?
Daily
Sometimes
Occasionally
Never
- 3.12 How often do you wear it now?
Daily
Sometimes
Occasionally
Never
- 3.13 Do you have Rai ethnic ornaments?
Yes
No
- 3.14 How often do you wear it?
Daily
Sometimes
Occasionally
Never
- 3.15 Do you prefer regular clothes over your Rai cultural dress?
Yes
No

4. TAKE OF THE RESPONDENTS ON CHANGING BODY DISCOURSE

Open ended questions (Both Male and Female Elderly Members)

- 4.1 What according to you does a beautiful women have?
- 4.2 What do you think of western dresses being widely worn over ethnic dress?
- 4.3 Do you think there is any kind of changes today as compared to earlier times in terms of how Rai women are shaping their ideas about beauty and body? If yes, what changes have you observed?
- 4.4 What according to you might have led to these changes?
- 4.5 Lastly, based on your own experience and observations within your family have you witnessed any changes in beauty and body care practices?
- 4.6 And what about in terms of how young women/daughters, granddaughters of your family views their body?

Section II (Rai Women)

1. General Profile of the Respondents

NAME	AGE	RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	CASTE/CATEGORY	RELIGION	MARITAL STATUS	FAMILY MEMBERS	BODY WEIGHT	CONTACT NO.

2. Economic Profile of the Respondents

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	DESIGNATION/OCCUPATION	MONTHLY INCOME (SELF)	FAMILY INCOME	EMPLOYMENT STATUS

3. Body Profile

- 3.1 What do beautiful women have according to you?
- 3.2 When you look at yourself the mirror, how do you feel? What could be the reason behind you feeling this way?
- 3.3 Is it important for you to have a body that is liked and appreciated by others? If yes, how important is it on a scale of 1-10?
- 3.4 Are you involved in any kind of fitness and/or weight loss practices? If yes, which one?
- 3.5 Do you care for your body? If yes, how do you do it? / If no, why don't you care for your body?
- 3.6 What kind of clothes do you think suits your body the most? Is there any specific reason as to why you feel it suits your body the most?
- 3.7 What do you eat on daily basis?
- 3.8 Are you conscious about your eating habits? If yes, since what age did you start becoming conscious and what was the reason?

- 3.9 Do you use any make up or cosmetics? If yes, at what age did you start using it?
What are the products that you use?
- 3.10 Do you use any body care products? If yes, at what age did you start using it?
What are the products that you use?
- 3.11 Where do you buy the cosmetic and body care products from?
- 3.12 Is there any specific reason for you using/ not using cosmetic and body care products? If yes, what is the reason?
- 3.13 Among the various beauty and body care products available in the market, do you have any favorite brand? If yes, which one?
- 3.14 How much in a month do you spend in purchasing clothes and shoes?
- 3.15 How much in a month do you spend in purchasing beauty and body care products?
- 3.16 Do you have any beauty and/or body care schedule?
- 3.17 How much time do you take while getting ready to go out?
- 3.18 How often do you buy new clothes and shoes? And where do you buy it from?
- 3.19 Have you bought any product(s) after watching its advertisement?
- 3.20 Do you have any role model/ favorite actress or anyone you know, whose body you find very beautiful and attractive? If yes, how would you describe her body? And how did you come across her? If given a choice do you aspire to have a body like her?
- 3.21 Do you go to beauty parlor/ salons? If yes, how often do you go there? How much do you spend there in a month?

4. PRESENTATION OF SELF AND BODY IMAGE

- 4.1 If given a chance is there any part in your body and any feature of your face that you would like to change? What is it that you would like to change and why would you like to change?
- 4.2 Do you have any part of the body that you like the most? What is the reason behind it?
- 4.3 Do you have any part of the body that you dislike the most? What is the reason behind your dislike?
- 4.4 Do you think it is important to present oneself in a particular way in public? If yes, how do you present yourself in public? If no, why do you think so?
- 4.5 I see that you are married, what did you wear in your marriage? Any particular reason behind choosing to wear instead of.....?(if married)
- 4.6 Do you dress differently for different occasions? If yes, how and why? If no, why?
- 4.7 What comes to your mind when I say 'perfect body'?
- 4.8 Do you put in any kind of efforts to fit into the perfect body that you just talked about? If yes, what kind of efforts do you put in and if no, then why?
- 4.9 What comes to your mind when I say 'beauty'? Any reason that made you think beauty is what you have talked about?
- 4.10 Do you use social media? If yes, how do you like to present yourself in social media to public?

5. ON ETHNIC TAKE

- 5.1 Do you think that even today in this time women of a particular culture have their own way of presenting themselves in society in terms of looks and dresses? If yes, you being a Rai woman how do you think Rai women in general presents themselves?
- 5.2 Are you familiar with Rai dress and ornaments? When was the first time you became familiar with it and how?
- 5.3 Do you have Rai dress/ ethnic clothes and ornament(s)? If yes, where did you buy it from? And how often do you wear it?
- 5.4 Do you prefer wearing western/regular clothes and ornaments over your ethnic clothes and ornaments or ethnic over western/regular? If yes/no, why?
- 5.6 Do you think there is any kind of changes today as compared to earlier times of your great grandmother/grandmother in terms of how Rai women are shaping their ideas about beauty and body? If yes, what changes have you observed?
- 5.7 What according to you might have led to these changes?

Section III (Ethnic Boutique)

1. A GENERAL PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

NAME	AGE	RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	CASTE/ CATEGORY	RELIGION	MARITAL STATUS	FAMILY MEMBERS	CONTACT NO.

2. AN ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	DESIGNATION/ OCCUPATION	MONTHLY INCOME FROM BOTIQUE	OTHER BUSINESSES	NUMBER OF STORE OUTLETS WITHIN OR ACROSS STATE (if any)

3. ETHIC BOTIQUE

- 3.1 When did you start your boutique?
- 3.2 From where did you get the concept of Boutique?
- 3.3 How many Rai dresses does your store have to make for a customer in a month?
- 3.4 What kind of styles do you offer in Rai Dress?
- 3.5 Which style does the customers usually pick from all these?
- 3.6 Do they also ask for some design of their own? If yes, can you please share what they prefer?
4. What is the most and least expensive range in Rai Dress?
5. Of which range do you mostly get orders?
6. Which age group (youths, working/women of middle ages or older) of women usually comes to your store to order Rai dress?

7. Does your store offer some modifications on traditional Rai cultural dress?
8. Do you yourself offer it to customers or do they ask themselves for modifications? Why? (in both cases).
9. What kind of future prospects do you see having in this ethic boutique business?

Appendix-II

Field Work Photographs (December-January 2020-21)

Field- Assam Lingzey Village



Off Road Route to Khola Goan/Rai Goan



Rai Elderly Respondents of Assam Lingzey and Gangtok





Some Pictures of Rai Women Respondents of Assam Lingzey and Gangtok











Interaction with Young Rai Girls in Assam Lingzey



Rai Women Respondents of Varied Age-Groups in Traditional Rai Dress





Rai Women of Assam Lingzey Showing their Modern Designed Tattoos



An Ethnic Boutique (of Gangtok) Designed Rai Choli/ Blouse that Reflects on Blend of Modern Touch and Traditional Elements.



