

3.1 Social Structure of the Khambu Rais in Darjeeling Hills: Continuity and Change

This chapter attempts to examine the diversity and commonality generally found among the Khambu Rais on the basis of their social structure. It also discusses what may be regarded as ‘basic’ in the way Khambu lifeworld is maintained. Social structure as a concept is widely popular in the anthropological and sociological domain where various theorists have provided different interpretations of it. Social structure has been understood variously and such attempts have given birth to a rich body of anthropological literature. However, for the purpose of the present study we have used the term social structure in the way Radcliffe Brown had used it. Radcliffe Brown’s idea of Social structure more or less helps us understand the cruciality and specificity of Khambu Rai social structure and thereby what exactly is meant by the claim of belonging to a community like the Khambu Rais. In an attempt to define social structure Radcliffe Brown draws our attention to what he called the “network of actually (already) existing relations”. That patterned regularity in behavior to which the members conform and accepts them as social norms and rules. This entire network of patterned relationship is what constitutes social structure in Brownian sense. Here the basic institutions which constitute the integral part of structure (like family, kinship, marriage, religion, customs, etc.) and which is maintained by network of social relations is what corresponds to Khambu Rai social structure. I tried to describe how the Khambu Rais social life has constantly renewed their social structure. While their actual institutional frames constituted of marriage, life cycle rituals (like ancestor worship, death rituals, birth rituals, *Mundhum*, *Sakela*, *Sakewa*, etc), shamanistic practices continue to survive with some changes but its general structural form has indeed remained intact with little changes so far. Besides changes what was retained and continued as part of standardized mode of behavior of the Khambu Rai is discussed in this chapter. Hence contextualizing it with regard to present field sites of Paiyong, Newahang and Dalep villages was necessary. This chapter thus deals with the field data and analyses them for understanding the relevance of social structure in

contemporary life processes of the Khambus. It is argued that the diversity of the Khambu Rais is attributable to the peculiarity of their social structure. Although understood to be a single group, innumerable sub-groups known as *thar* (clans) constitute what we know as Khambu Rais. Hence understanding of this complex nature and functioning of their social life demands that one should deal with their social structure at the first place.

3.2 Social Structure of the Khambus

Rai tradition relates that the first of the ancestral Kirati entered Nepal's eastern hills through the Barakhshetra gorge of the Kosi Valley, the natural gateway into the region through the Mahabharata Range, which separates the hilly hinterland from the plains. According to the oral narratives shared by the informants there were three brothers, Khambuho, Menho and Meratup. Once through the gorge the brothers separated, each taking his respective followers, penetrating the different river valleys, such as the Sun Kosi, Dudh Kosi and Arun Kosi. Most Rais in the Middle Kirat claim descent from Khambuho, and, in fact, Middle Kirat is known as Khambuan; but some, such as Chamling and Sampang are thought to be descendants of Meratup and others descendants of Menho. This is one version of the myth of the Khambu ancestors collected from the field. Similar versions do depict the origin of other Khambu clans and groups. But what is important in these stories is to note that the Khambus as a group are the descendants of the brothers (kins) who in course of time diverted to different directions and created diverse clans and sub-clans in the process.

3.3 Khambu Rai Family Structure

Khambu Rais have a patriarchal family structure with the eldest male member as the head of the family. In case of death or absence of the head, either the wife of the head or the eldest son takes the responsibility of the family. It varies from joint to nuclear structure as in case of joint arrangement other male members like head's brother can act as the person of importance to take family decisions. Sometimes the head's wife's role as the decision maker in the family is significant. Although the female members have some right to decide about family issues and freedom to choose one's life partner, it is generally through the male line the lineages are traced and is referred to as *haar* (bone). Thus whether it be mourning ceremony or marriages the family observes and maintain do's and don'ts only for members of father's lineage. In case of marriages, it is strictly

followed that the boy or the girl to be married should not fall within his/her paternal clan. Thus the Khambu family is patrilineal one.

Field study revealed that the normal age for constituting a family for girls generally ranged between 18/19 and above and for boys it ranged from 21/22 and above. Age of marriage for girls and boys varied depending on the level of education and one's willingness to get married. In general four types of family structure was found in the field where the basic trend of increasing nuclear families with wife, husband and children with neo-local settings was common, secondly the existence of some joint family structure with brother and his family along with aged parents with a single hearth still reflected the existence of tradition (with the highest of three generation under one roof). Another type that was found in the field can be referred to as single parent or separated family where either of the parents lives with the child/children. In some cases family was broken due to natural deaths of one parent or in other case they were divorced or separated. The last type was a typical grand parent family where the grand children resides with the grandparents in the absence of the parents either working outside the village or state. The following table gives a clear picture of the family types found in the studied region.

Table No.3.1 Types of family in the three field sites

FAMILY TYPES	PAIYONG	DALEP	NEWAHANG	TOTAL
Nuclear Family	29	14	4	47
Joint/Extended family	15	1	5	21
Single Parent /Broken family	5	3	3	11
Grand Parent Family	1	-	-	01
Total	50	18	12	80

Source: Fieldwork data

As far as Khambu Rai family structure is concerned the matter of filial piety as observed was wholly depended on environment of the home, their socialization into the practices, and attitude of the elders, etc. They even shared that the future generation would be in more pathetic condition as the aging head of the family consequently withdraws from the duties/responsibilities and passes it on to the other reliable members. As seen in the field situation most of the Khambus understand their

obligation towards the family and similarly takeover the authority in hand realizing the condition of the old parents. The role of elders and parents continues until the children grow up and run the family and take the responsibility by themselves. As observed in the field situation, the practice of ancestor worshipping (*pitri puja/ kul puja*) among the Khambu Rais was in itself an indication of the special position (importance) of the elders in their society. It seemed that the importance of the elders will continue to exist as the Khambus were found to be very particular both in remembering the ancestors at regular intervals (at occasions of vital familial events like birth, marriage or deaths) and in propitiating them with all the respect while observing rituals.

3.4 Khambu Kinship Structure

The importance of kinsmen in Khambu family life is deeper with the relations of blood i.e. a Khambu is more closely tied up with relatives of consanguineous relations. They tend to provide greater support and affection while in need. As regard the affines their established nature do compel the kinsmen to maintain relational obligation but in terms of dealing with issues of inheritance, marriage or *pitri puja* their importance is less compared to the biological kinsmen. In the occasion of marriage the potential groom has to be sure that the potential bride is not belonging to his own *thar, pacha/ samait*. Clan exogamy is strictly practiced by the Khambus. Both the families should be unrelated to each other either through paternal clan (known as *haar/ bone/ blood*) or through the maternal/ natal clan (known to be *dudh ko sambandha*). Such marriages among the Khambus are known to be pure the affinal relations created out of such unions are termed as '*bir kutumb*'. Generally the daughter-in-law falling under the category of *bir kutumb* is referred to as *Langthimma* by the Khambu Rais. Similarly, in a death ceremony where the kinsmen related with blood/*haar* having the same *pacha/ samait* (different for male and female) is under compulsion to perform all the mourning rituals. Again, in case of exogamous relation (*anajat sambandha*) is established in a particular house then the Khambu Rais of surrounding places and *Raipas* would boycott that house from the entire auspicious programmes to be held in that household. Thus for the purification of the hearth stone and kinsmen (*sakha santhan*) the head or the brothers of the head (*banga*) has to visit houses of the Khambu Rais and *Raipas* of different *thar, pacha*, etc. and request (*bol binti*) them to sort out the problem. The prevalence of fictive kinship among the Khambu Rais is found in case of marriages particularly when the daughter-in-law is selected from outside the community. (It is the

responsibility of the potential groom and his family to find a fictive brother for the would-be daughter-in-law from within a Khambu household of the locality (of a different *thar* and *samait*). This is required for the potential groom from outside the community who could have her *bir kutumbh* by establishing the fictive kinship and could be identified through the same *thar* and *pachha* of her fictive brother (*maiti*). Such fictive brothers are termed as *Raj maiti* (or *hangs chaiwa*). Thus the acceptance as a member of a Khambu Rai family is secured through fictive kinship. In other words, fictive kinship authenticates the Khambu identity for the one who may be outside of the Khambu Rai community.

As the lineage among the Khambus passes through the father (male) line like any other patriarchal society, with the approaching age the eldest male in a family becomes the carrier of tradition, followed by his successors. This does not mean that only the elder son is responsible for performing rituals, rather the presence of all the male members in the performance of rituals – whether concerning ancestor worshipping or any other rites – is necessary to complete such performances. Even the married/ separated brothers invite each other during the performance of such rituals as their presence in most cases is needed to complete the rites. The concept of *haar/* bone always reminds Khambu Rais of their relation of reciprocity, assistance and dependence during most occasions. Besides, the transference of familial possession in terms of property among the kins, their unities do derive from their obligation to remain connected as mediator of tradition in the successive generation. The mutuality and cordial relation with the tradition holder (among other Khambu Rais as well) besides, the other kinsmen whose presence are necessary during the performance of traditional rites, do help them to develop affinity and friendship.

There are few descriptive kinship terms in Khambu Rai society which is applied only for particular kinsmen. This is used as a term of address like *mamma* (for mother), *papa* (for father). Besides, most of the kinship terms are classificatory or in other words a single term can be used to refer to multiple kinsmen like *bubu/ bua* (elder brother), *niche* (younger brother), *nicha* (younger sister), *nana* (elder sister), *chuaa* (referred to a person resembling mother's brother), *banga* (referred to a person resembling father's brother), *nini* (referred to a person resembling father's sister), *demma, timma* (referred to a person resembling mother's elder sister), *dewa, tippa* (referred to a person resembling mother's elder sister's husband, father's elder brother), *dikku* (referred to a

person resembling mother's elder brother), *dini* (referred to a person resembling mother elder brother's wife), *namit* (daughter-in-law, sister-in-law), *makcha* (son-in-law, brother-in-law), *chokcha* (son and daughter of one's sibling), *chana* (mother's younger sister, father's sister in law), *kopa*, *diwa* (grandfather), *koku*, *dimma* (grandmother), *chichi* (son and daughter), *chadima* (mother-in law), *chadiwa* (father-in-law). On occasions of *maagi vivah* (marriage by request) the importance of *chuaa* (mother's brother, maternal uncle) is central as the boy's party has to first approach girl's *chuaa* (mother's brother) for proceeding the discussion of marriage with the girl's parents. As per the clan differences the marriage rituals (*dastur*) vary, nevertheless intention and purpose remain same in all such cases. For an ego the importance of kinsmen like *chuaa* (mother's younger brother) as he reaches an age of 3/5 year is significant as he (*chuaa*) is solely responsible to cut an ego's hair in a ritual known as *tangmuwa kapma*. On occasions of death of either of the parents, the importance of sister's husband (*makcha*) as a ritualistic person to perform the hair cutting ceremony, presenting a food to the dead is important. Here the role and function of maternal uncle (*chuaa*) and sister's husband in some ritualistic occasion do reflect some influence of maternal lineages in Khambu Rais social life.

Kinship relationship among the Khambus also involved certain do's and don'ts associated with certain kind of relation. There are certain categories relatives with whom they indulge in friendly behavior while with there are some others with whom they have to behave in a restricted manner. Joking relationship exists between *Sali-bhena* (wife's younger sister and elder sister's husband), *pushai-bhadaini* (husband of father's sister and daughter of wife's brother), *solti-soltini* (wife's brother and husband's sister & vice versa). These kinsmen usually engage in a light banter to teasing and leg pulling. Among the Khambus marriage is permissible between all these relationships. Similarly avoidance relationship does exist between *chadimasimma-makcha* (wife's elder sister and younger brother-in-law), *sippabua-namit* (elder brother and younger brother's wife), *napma-nappa* (husband's mother and wife's father and vice versa). The avoidance relationship is that of awe and respect. Basically both types of relationship signifies the behavioral practice where some kinsmen indulge in free conversation and comments and share their views to each other, while in the other cases the kinsmen shy away even from each other's presence.

3.5 Khambu Clan Structure

Let us begin with the popular Nepali sayings like '*jati rai tyeti kura*' (Rai dialects are as numerous as the number of Rai clans are) and '*Dus Rai Das Bhasa, Ek chula*' (there are number of Rais as well as numerous Rai languages but there is commonality in their culture epitomized through the notion of 'single hearth'). These mundane references actually imply diversity within the single Khambu Rai group on the basis of clan peculiarity and differences. Among the other Kirati groups Khambu Rai has its unique feature where they are divided into numerous discrete local groups, having almost similar social structure but at the same time exhibiting quite marked social and cultural variation (Mcdougal 1976: 205). The Khambu Rais are not a homogeneous group but congeries of tribes belonging to different clans (*thar*). Rai community includes a number of *thar* segments which is again further sub-divided into *pachha* (lineage) and *samait*. To discuss about the creation or a division process of the Khambu clans is utterly difficult a task. One is reminded here what Sir Eden Vansittart once had said: "to get a full and correct list of Rai tribes and clans would, I believe, be impossible, as numbers of fresh clans are continually being added. Any peculiarity of manner, speech or habit is apt to give a nickname, which becomes a clan. The fact of living in any particular district, or marriage into any particular clan, often causes the creation of fresh clans" (Vansittart 1896: 129). Although attempts have been made by different scholars to identify the number of clans of the Khambu Rais but they failed to reach to any agreement on the number of clans. The number of Rai clans differs widely. For example, while Campbell (1840) proposed a list of 28 Rai clan names, Hodgson (1858) compiled a list of 17, Sir Herbert Risley (1891/1981) estimated Rai clans and kindred to be around 57, Vansittart (1896) listed 45 and John Morris (1993/1933) listed 73 Rai clans (including Yakkha). The record of the KKRSS (*Kirati Khambu Rai Sanskritik Sansthan*) in 2004 provides an estimation of around 37 Rai clans. Even in the present field site as many as eighteen clans were traced out and most dominant among them were Chamling (25 households) followed by Bantawa (18 households), Newahang (12 households), Hangkhim (4 households) and others. The distribution of the Rai clans found in the three field sites is provided below:

Table No.3.2 Types of Khambu Rai Clans (*thars*) in the three villages

Sl. No.	Clans (<i>thars</i>)	PAIYONG	DALEP	NEWAHANG	TOTAL
1.	<i>Newahang</i>	--	3	9	12
2.	<i>Lohurung</i>	1	--	1	02
3.	<i>Yaphule</i>	--	--	2	02
4.	<i>Bantawa</i>	5	13	--	18
5.	<i>Chamling</i>	24	1	--	25
6.	<i>Luhun</i>	--	1	--	01
7.	<i>Nembang</i>	1	--	--	01
8.	<i>Khaling</i>	1	--	--	01
9.	<i>Bungchen</i>	1	--	--	01
10.	<i>Tamkuley</i>	2	--	--	02
11.	<i>Dungmali</i>	1	--	--	01
12.	<i>Sangpang</i>	3	--	--	03
13.	<i>Hangkhim</i>	4	--	--	04
14.	<i>Ranungcha</i>	1	--	--	01
15.	<i>Sakten</i>	2	--	--	02
16.	<i>Sotang</i>	1	--	--	01
17.	<i>Khesang</i>	1	--	--	01
18.	<i>Thulung</i>	2	--	--	02
TOTAL		50	18	12	80

Source: Fieldwork data

The divergence of clans among the Khambu Rai is, in fact, one of the important structural components that have persisted even today. In the absence of any written sources, each Khambu Rai clan referred to their own oral history or myth to support their clan origin. A sense of being Khambus/ Rais as one group is diluted when it comes to different clans as the variation differentiates them on the pretext of language, rituals and ancestors. It will be more confusing to add that the clan system, even though whose exact number is not clear, includes a number of clan like sub-groupings as well.

The kinship structure of the Khambu Rais represents rather a loosely structured system of hierarchically arranged agnatic descent groups. The member of a given unit at any level claim common agnatic decent; named common ancestors, although they cannot be cited by everyone and are not always consistently arranged, from the points of articulation whereby clans are grouped into branches, branches into sub-tribes and sub-tribes into tribes (McDougal 1976: 206). This is precisely why the Khambus use separate terms for clan and lineage like *thar* and *pachha* respectively (Subba 1999: 61). For example, if we take Bantawa (*thar*) clan of Khambu Rai we can find further sub-groups like *Amchoke, Desamum, Khamle, Packhole, Baralamcha, Dilungpa, Kumara, Ruchibo, Banu, Baralung, Dungmali, Logum, Rungmangcha, Bungchen, Harimana, Mangpang, Sutunga, Bungchio, Butangpyer, Nacha, Tanglukwa, Darpali, Kaung, Newang, Kowa, Dikupa, Maker, Samsong, Bilpali, Hangchen, Lungum, Samewa, Aripang, Dibet, Kemyung, Pungchehang, Bokhim, Babak, Diem, Kimdin, Rahadung, Chinamkhole, Katonjeli, Nacharing, Rajalim, and Hankim.*

Scholars like T.B. Subba thus mentioned ‘Khambu’ is a community/ group/ tribe and *Bantawa, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Thulung, Sangpang, Nechali*, etc are clans (*thars*) and *Tamangchha, Thimra, Morokha* and *Wadiri* denote lineages (*pachha*). But clans like *Ishara, Khamtu, Charghare*, and *Kangmang* are sometimes written as *thar* and at other times as *Pachha* (lineage). Thus the boundaries between clan and lineage are not really static or fixed in their society (Subba 1999: 62). Another interesting aspect of Rai clan structure is the presence of *Samait* (that represents brother and sister together as ancestors) for a clan or a number of clans. Thus even if *thar* or *pachha* is different, the individuals may belong to the same *samait*, in which case they cannot intermarry and they have to observe mourning in case of death of one of the *samait* members. If we again take the case of *Bantawa* clan of Khambu Rai, they have different *samait* for male and female. For male there are two *samait* (like *Chahgcha, Natcha*) but for female there are four (like *Chenkhama, Bungkhama, Chimitma*, and *Changkhama*):

Samait is a ritual name and its connotations did imply honorific ancestral titles. This name is important in rituals for purposes of recognition by the ancestors and so that respect is given to the original order, thereby strengthening it (Hardman 2000: 60). Thus for Khambu Rai, even if the *thar* and *pachha* remains same, *samait* differ between individuals and families. Speaking about other processes through which the

Khambu clans increased in numbers over time is through clan-fission i.e., splitting of the one of the proto-clan; dispersal and separation and immigration in new locality and adoption of Khambu clans. For example *Chinamokhole* clan of the Khambus derived its name from *Chinam* which is a place in Bhojpur in Majh Kirant. So the Khambus of Chinam became *Chinamokhole*.

3.5.1 *Pachha* (sub-groups)

The origin of the *pachha* (sub-groups) again is followed by some myths and if we take the cases of some sub-groups (*pachha*) of the Bantawa clan of the Khambu Rai the story goes like this in case of Newahang *Pachha* (sub-group) of Bantawa *thar* (clan): The ancestors of the Newahang had come to the Kirat Pradesh from the coastal region of India and settled there. One of the descendants of that lineage at some point of time became a 'Hang' (king). In Khambu dialect 'newa' means sea and Khambu words often ends with 'pa', 'chy'o' thus the word 'newapa' is formed. Again they used to be a kingly (*hang*) group once, thus originated a word 'Newahang'. They are one of the sub-groups (*Pachha*) of Bantawa clan of Khambu Rai and they exist till today.

Similar stories are found of other clans of Khambu Rai, like the story attached with the origin of sub-groups (*Pachha*) of Sorong *thar* (clan) follows like this: The ancestral father of the Sorong clan died all of a sudden after having four sons. A widow mother looked after and brought them up. As their mother was hard-working, their family was self-sufficient. All the four brothers grew-up, but as they grew they became selfish. The eldest one was greedy and once with a plea to make a honey in a cliff, he commanded them a task to perform, thinking to push them from a cliff but was unsuccessful. The second-eldest (*maila*) brother was of same nature. He too had similar bad intentions, once he brought some poisonous-root (*Bis-tarul*) from the jungle and asked the mother to prepare 'jaar' (a home-made alcohol prepared with millet, wheat). With a thought to kill all the family members he added that root in that drink and pretended to drink while the rest drank and died. Except the youngest who drank less and was unconscious for a while. Since these second-eldest (*maila*) brother was a fraud, he was known to be 'ramthang soreng' and since the youngest brother survived after a pain, thus was known as 'khek dang soreng'. Later the descendent of these two brothers was known with similar sub-group (*pachha*) names. Similar myths and stories follow for each and every Khambu clan-groups as well as sub-groups (*Pachha*). A popular

saying like '*nau lakh Kirat*' (nine lakh Kirat) actually hints at their large numbers and divergences in terms of clan and sub-clan groupings.

3.6 Marriage Rules

There are a number of marriage rules traditionally practiced by the Khambu Rais which are again linked up with their clan system. Most of the clans howsoever localized consist of several lineages which are agnatically related. Line of patrilineal descent or patrilineal clan is conceived as *haar* 'bone' (it defines whom a person may not marry). Marriage rules allow 'breaking the bone' and division of the clan by marriage between members of the same clan only after seventh generation. When two lineages of the same clan have reached a depth of seven generation a marriage is allowed between them. If this opportunity is missed marriage again becomes forbidden between segments of the clan. A marriage that is permissible after seventh generation would be considered incestuous in any generation before the seventh and any generation following. Thus the importance of the 'notion of bones' provides a basis for marriage rule for the Khambus (Hardman 2000: 60). Again, a Khambu should not marry any woman of his mother's natal clan within three generation i.e. only in the fourth generation such marriages are permissible. If any union occurs before three generation it is classified as *dudh-phora* that is 'to break the milk'. Again marriage is allowed with '*pani chalne jaat*' (caste above the polluted ones) and usually such marriages in which a daughter is given or daughter-in law is received from '*pani chalne jaat*' it has to be announced (making fiancée by public proclamation) that from today a lady of this *thar* (clan), *pachha* and *samait* does not belong to this family or in case of daughter-in-law is approved as member of a particular family then she is accepted to this *thar*, *pachha* and *samait* respectively. Marriage is prohibited (and regarded as incestuous) among blood relatives/ cousins among the Khambu Rais and such cases of marriages are known as '*Chitaki*' (marriage between brother and sister) and '*Pataki*' (marriage between sons and daughter of two sisters).

3.6.1 Marriage Rituals

Khambu Rai generally prefers endogamy but instances of inter community marriages are acceptable today. Marriage is settled through negotiation (*dotma khatma*), or elopement (*khama khatma*). In case of negotiation all arrangement are done mutually and negotiation is facilitated by *Kongpi*, the mediator. In case of elopement the boy and

girl after some period of courtship decides to start a conjugal life. Elopement is usually arranged by boy's family. They have few customs which are related to marriage such as *bulukhum* and *sapten sengma*.

3.6.2 *Bulukhum*

Custom of *bulukhum* is unique among the Rai community. By this custom metal containers are considered as the true witness of the marriage. At the time of solemnizing the marriage, a metal container (*bulukhum/ Kasey Dabuka*) made up of brass and a silver coin is presented from the bridegroom's side and '*fengma kongpi*' (the mediator from girl's side) and '*lepa kongpi*' (mediator from groom's side) have to beat the container with the silver coin thrice alternatively after promising to fulfill the words spoken by them for the wellbeing of the bride. The Rais believe that human beings can change their mind any time but the sound of that particular metal container does not change and hence, any violation of the promise made by them at the time of beating the metal container with silver coin will bring misfortune to the bridegroom (Bain 2018: 1049).

3.6.3 *Sapten Sengma*

After elopement or after taking the girl by force, the bridegroom's family has to send mediators called *Kongpi* to the house of the girl within three days. Once the reporting is done by the mediators (*kongpis*) and the reporting is accepted, a day is fixed for *Sapten Sengma*, i.e., a ceremony for appeasing the village deity (*saptenhang*) for forgiving the boy and the girl for having eloped without remembering the village deity. This is done in a place nearby the girl's house. Members only from the boy's side can join. Prayers are offered to '*saptenhang*' for forgiving the boy and the girl by sacrificing a cock. The cock's meat has to be cooked at that particular spot using utensils brought from the boy's side and all has to be consumed by the members of the boy's side only. The members of the girl's side cannot eat it. If it is not done, it is believed that the village deity would curse the villagers and little children and village elders would suffer from breathlessness and would even die. Once it is done, the boy and the girl are presumed to be forgiven by the *saptenhang* and villagers would not suffer. Residence after marriage is invariably patrilocal (Bain 2018: 1049).

3.7 Birth Rituals

The birth of a child in a Khambu family in fact is a ritualistic occasion which involves maintenance of certain do's and don'ts. The birth of the Khambu child generally takes place in the paternal house, except rarely in the maternal house (when it does so happen, it is usually referred to as '*choowakhim*'). The birth of a new child in Khambu Rai family is termed as '*Hangcha pukma*'. The expecting lady has to follow several restrictions soon it is known that she has conceived. It is expected that no one should speak any words that will give her a tension, the expecting mother is not also allowed to participate in any inauspicious event, nor even she should be shown a dead body, even of the animals. These kinds of prohibitions have their traditional as well as religious explanations. The way an expecting mother thinks and experiences have a direct bearing upon the mental and intellectual development of a child. Thus, a child must get a healthy environment before s/he takes birth and the social organization of the Khambu Rais is well prepared for that. This shows the far-sightedness of the Khambu predecessors.

One or two months before the birth of a child a kind of ceremony (called as *Chankhi*) is done for the protection of womb and the health of the mother and child through the mediation of *Mangpa* and *nachhong*. The house where the baby is born is usually termed as *Chankhi* and is regarded as polluted. In this regard the family members, relatives and neighbour's has to take into consideration certain things like-

- i. The family members of the house where the child is born should not pluck anything like flowers and fruits nor should they work in the field until the name-giving ceremony (*Nawran*) gets over.
- ii. The hearth of that family is regarded as polluted thus for all the male members of that family an arrangement is made to cook food in a separate place. The food prepared for the mother of a new born (*Chayangkuma*) is not shared with any other members of the family.
- iii. Male members of any other household tries to keep safe distance from the said house (*Sutak-pareko*) and avoid visits and any meal cooked in that house.
- iv. The females of Khambu Rai in any case should not give birth to a child in her family of orientation.

- v. Prepared food, which is to be eaten by the mother (*Chayangkuma*), is served in two banana leaves (one on the front side and the other on the backside). This is done with the belief that the women, who die while delivering the baby, might get food even after their death. If an expecting mother eats food without following this practice, Khambus believe that she might suffer.

3.8 Death Rituals

The rituals concerning death are no less significant. The role of a *mangpa* (shaman) in case of death rituals appears to be of utmost significance. The Khambu Rais mostly bury dead bodies but cremation is also practiced. A burial ceremony is usually performed by a religious head (priest). Mourning is observed by the nearest kinsmen of the deceased, who abstains from eating salt, oil, meat, etc. for five days in case of male and three days in case of female. After the mourning on the fourth and the sixth day, in case of female and male respectively, a purification ceremony is performed following various rituals. On the same evening of the day of purification, a *mangpa* (shaman) conducts an elaborate rite called '*chinta*'. In this occasion the soul of the dead is called upon by the *mangpa* who is asked about his/her unfulfilled desires or reasons for his/her death in case of unnatural circumstances. The dialogue between the soul and the priest sometimes continues for long hours and all the relatives and other elderly persons gather to persuade the soul along with the *mangpa* in different ways so that the dead soul could rest in peace.

3.9 Mangpas/ Mangmas (Shamans)

The presence of religious functionaries known as *mangpas* (male shaman) or *mangmas* (female shaman) itself is an interesting aspect of Khambu culture nevertheless their numbers are not so large in the sense, few of them serve the interest and are in great demand. To become a *mangpa* is not a choice rather a divine selection. Anyone who feels to be possessed by '*deuta*' or deity becomes a *mangpa*. The deity (*deuta*) is believed to take complete charge of the man's body and is entirely responsible for the instructions and recantations spoken by the *mangpa*, who is regarded merely as a human vehicle through which the spirits work. A process of acquiring knowledge and becoming a *mangpa* requires a *guru* (guide) who helps the search for knowledge. Khambu life revolves around the presence of these shamans who are believed to have the special power to communicate with the spirits or the ancestors. Consultation with

the so-called *mangpa* is must whenever there is certain illness or misfortune caused in the Khambu families. Risley notes 'Rais are compassed about by a multitude of nameless evil spirits, who require peculiar management in warding off their caprice. To appease and propitiate these is the special function of the *bijuwa* (shaman), a class of wandering mendicants peculiar to Sikkim and the Eastern part of Nepal' (Risley 1999). Among the Khambus the services of their *mangpa* is required in all occasions, right from their birth to death in every household.

3.10 Kul-puja/ Pitri-puja (Ancestor worshipping)

In the absence of any written record of the Khambu rites and rituals their knowledge is preserved in the form of '*thuthuri ved*' (words passed on orally) which is specially known by the *mangpas/ mangmas* (shamans) of the Khambu Rai. Still today they claim to have been living with their ancestral traditions and cultures. Khambus who are divided into various *thar* (clan) and *Pachha* although have their respective rites and rituals as per their clan but there is commonness in the overall life process maintained by the Rais. Hence, popular sayings like '*dus Rai, ek chula*' (ten/ multiple Rais but one hearth) has a connotation that in spite of differences in languages and rituals of each and every Rai clan one can find in every Khambu household an 'ancestral-hearth' (*samkha/suptulung*) made of three stone which itself shows their commonness in terms of faith/ belief. Each Rai house has a small room in one corner where *Samkhalung/ Samkha*, the sacred hearth like structure, made of three erected stones for the purpose of performing all the sacred family rites, is kept. No one, other than family members would be allowed to enter into that sacred and secret place. Even married daughters are not allowed to enter into this sacred space where the *Samkhalung/ Samkha* is kept. It is believed that the souls of their ancestors dwell in this place (Bain 2018: 1047). In the month of '*Mangsire*' (November-December) with the ripening of paddy (*dhan*), millet (*kodo*), ginger (*aduaa*), etc. Khambu Rai performs their '*Kul-puja*' or '*pitri-puja*' (ancestor worshipping). The hearth which is made of three stone had their respective names like *Sitlung* or *bada /Sawalung* (male stone); *Mitlung* or *Chhekulung* (female stone) and *Rumilung* or *Taralung* (witness stone). Within the hearth, it is believed that the ancestors of the Khambus reside and that is why they are regularly worshiped twice (once in June-July and again in November-December) every year. Depending upon the variation in clans some Rais worship their ancestor once in a year in *Mangsire* (November-December). Khambus right from their birth till death do

maintain their entire religio-cultural practices in these fireplaces, non-compliance of which is believed to result either in death, or in pain, hardships, diseases etc. in the family. Although seen as traditional practice, this has its own significance with regard to family and society of the Khambu Rais.

Among the Khambu Rai there is a tradition that they do not eat anything new (*nuangi*) like fruits, cereals, etc. without offering it to their ancestors. *Kul puja* (that varies from clan to clan) is required to be performed before such items are consumed. When the rituals of ancestor worshipping are over a feather of a fowl is burnt and turned into powder, which is further mixed with rice, meat and ginger. The mixed item as such is considered to be a '*prasad*' (offering presented to ancestors/ God) which is popularly known as '*wachippa*' among the Khambus and this is distributed only to the Rais.

3.11 Kirat *Mundhum*

Mundhum (versical prayers handed over to generation after generation orally) act as a pattern or model in which different Khambu Rai groups define their kinship and relatedness. It is an overall philosophy of the Kiranti way of life. It contains knowledge about the ancestral past and a means to maintain a past in the present. Thus an ancestral past become and intrinsic and ever-living part of the present, acting as a constant reminder of an image or consciousness of the knowledge, morality and correct order of nature and society. It contributed towards the sustenance of a correct form of relations which have to be respected. The ultimate strength, support and protection of their society and the individuals within it are seen as coming from the primeval past, from the original beings and ancestors, their lore and traditions, and from the intermediate powers that was invested in the natural order of the world. It is the *mundhum* which distinguishes each Kiranti tribe in their own eyes from the other Kiranti and non-Kiranti tribes and in a dual process links them to other Kiranti groups. *Mundhum* gives each tribe (and sub-tribe) cultural identity and unity. It is one of the key ways through which each tribe maintains its boundaries and experiences, and expresses its own distinctiveness in relation to the other groups. In particular it sets each tribe apart from the Hindu groups and binds them closer to those who share many of the same traditions and concepts. The *mundhum* is quintessentially tribal (Hardman 2000: 65).

3.12 Sakela and Sakewa (Festivals)

As nature worshippers Khambus respect for nature can be well ascertained through their two festivals of Sakewa/ *ubhaulti* (festival in the month of Jyest/March-April) performed for good crop and another Sakela/*udhaulti* (festival in the month of Bhadra/August) is a thank giving (to nature) ceremony during harvesting period. These two comprises of the ritual dance performed by the Khambus particularly during two occasions in a year i.e. *Ubhaulti* (March-April) and *Udhaulti* (November-December). These two performances constitute the intrinsic elements of Khambu culture. These dances are usually performed depending on the agricultural calendar with man and woman (or sometimes simply woman) dancing in a circle, accompanied by cymbals (*jhaympta*) and drums (*dhol*), where dancers usually mime agricultural acts. These dances are usually performed to ensure agricultural prosperity by pleasing the ancestors and the land. Today, these dances form the cultural heritage of the Khambus. These dances contain the folkloric practice which is celebrated like a festive occasion though it has lost its traditional manifestation with significant changes including the repudiation of blood sacrifice, use of alcoholic drinks and transforming the whole ceremony by giving it 'noble' motivations, such as feeling of togetherness in mystical harmony with deified nature (Schlemer, 2003/2004:135).

3.12.1 Dance Forms, Musical Instruments of the Khambus and their Deities

For the Khambus, dancing is not just an expression of joy or worship. Dancing hold lessons from their ancestors. It depicts their lives, their present and past. It commemorates their relationship with nature simply because the forces of nature must be imitated to show reverence to it, out of love and reverence. Kirat Khambu Rais have their own dance form called *Sili* based on the movements of animals and creatures in nature. *Sili* is also based on various agricultural activities right from tilling the land for cultivation to harvesting (Bain 2018: 1052). The Khambu festival is generally celebrated through a performance of a *silli* dance popular amongst them and performed alongwith their own Khambu songs, dance-steps and musical instruments. This dance forms depicts either a life cycle of birds, animals, cultivation and so on. There are variants of *silli* like '*Bali hang silli*' (story associated with it of Bali hang king), '*Bhuruwa silli*' '*Chasum silli*'. The Rai community has its traditional musical instruments made out of wood and bamboo, *binayo* (dosangwa, is a small instrument made of bamboo and thread which is played with mouth) and the most important *Dhol*

jhamta (Ken Chamukhi). *Dokan* and *bausang* are flutes made from bamboo (Bain 2018:1052).

The importance of the bow and arrow in the life of Khambu Rai can be gauged by the fact that bows and arrows are still worshiped even today during the rituals like birth and death of a Khambu Rai. When sufficient meat was not available, even feathers were made into delicacy which is in practice even today in the form of ‘*Wachippa*’ which is made from chicken feathers. It is mixed with chicken and cooked along with rice and eaten during religious occasion and festivities these days (Bain 2018: 1046).

As nature worshippers and followers of animism the Khambu Rais basically preferred to be known as a descendant of ‘*sumnima*’ and ‘*paruhang*’ who are regarded as their supreme (primeval) deity. Besides they also worship a few natural agents like: *Khoklihangma* (the forest goddess), *Samkha* (the hearth god) *Lelemma* (the snake god), and *Wairing* (the hunter god). *Baktuncha* (the hearth god) who is worshipped after the *mangsire* (November-December) harvest. *Homkumang* the supreme god of energy, *Satnanchiko* (snake god) is the affinal deity worshipped inside the house, *Chawamang* (the river god), *Helamang* (the monkey god), *Samkimang* (the dog god) are some such natural objects that they worship besides worshipping of their ancestor (*pitri puja*) has its own significance. Besides, all these deities need to be propitiated with the sacrifice of blood in order to avoid being subjected to different kinds of sicknesses.

3.13 Language

The Khambu Rais are in fact, a form of a disparate collection of small group with marked linguistic variation. The difference that is generated through clan has its bearing in the variation of Khambu Rai language. Each *thar* of the Khambu Rais are believed to have their own dialects. Grierson has counted 18 speech forms which in most cases are mutually unintelligible. Schlemmer reports 22 Rai languages based on the official census. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji, among others, Rai languages have a pronominalized (Austic/ Kol influence) which strongly indicates earliest migratory waves of these people compared to other Tibeto-Burmans whose language are non-pronominalized (Chatterjee 1998: 23-24). Taking into account the differences ‘*Kirat Rai Bhasa Tatha Sahitya Parisad*’ (Kirat Rai language or literary body) has grouped Rai languages in the name of the tributaries of Saptakosi river under four

division like – Sunkosi groups (Jerung, Wambule, Tilung, Chamling, etc), Dudhkosi groups (Khaling, Thulung, Kulung, Bahing, Nachhring, Sotang, Kowi, Dumi, Sampang, etc.), Arunkhola groups (Yamphu, Lohorung, Mewahang, Bunglawa, Bantawa, Dungmali, Chitang, Chiling, Lingkhim, Fangdu, Ali, Mugali) and Tomarkhola group (Belharey and Athpaharia). In the process of such developments about twenty-six languages are believed to have survived. Although today it is the Bantawa language that has gained its popularity among the Khambus as it is regarded simple, almost widely used and known by most Khambu Rais. Regarding the script of the Khambus it was the *Sirijanga* script which was regarded by the Khambus as theirs but when Limbus claimed that *Sirijanga* script belongs to them, ‘*sumhang* script’ at present is used and regarded as Khambu script.

3.14 Perceiving the Reality in the Field: Observations gathered from Paiyong, Newang and Dalep villages

The social structure of the Khambu Rais never wholly defined their lifeworld in contemporary time but its continuity and maintenance through the observance of rituals like ancestral worshipping and rituals concerning local Khambu deities do make them feel different from others in significant ways. The most important structural unit of the Khambus being the presence of its innumerable clans (*thars*) does not seem to have much deeper variation. As was found most of the Rais are unaware of the peculiarity concerning their clans in particular. It was although on the basis of clan (*thars*) that rituals varied but ‘*thar*’ in particular was restricted as a naming category. While the identification of being a Khambu Rai of different *thar* ends as one reaches the organizational platform but in reality also it (*thar*) has been active only at ritualistic performances. ‘*Thar* formation’ among the Khambus is intrinsically linked with myths, stories, etc. hence the existence of *thar* peculiarity as it existed earlier can never be expected. Today what has remained and what is known to most of the Khambus is just their *thar* (clan) name.

If we consider the ritual practices related to vital events like birth, we find that most of the Khambus do regard it as an obligation. Similarly, marriages happen to be more vital area where the advertisement of one’s uniqueness was thought more important. As someone like Narbahadur Rai (*sadhu* by religion) was found saying ‘*dastur*’ (rituals) has to be done as he confirms he has been doing, otherwise people may say ‘what kind of Rai is he?’ So villagers and the Khambus there revealed a kind

of situation where fear of their culture and tradition getting lost and desire for its maintenance/continuity was in no way related with what their community is demanding for (i.e. tribal status). They regard it (tribal issue) something which has been raised up by the organization and they do actively support it. It was seen that many Khambus are unhappy with the way transformation is taking place in the rituals concerning marriage like in place of *raksi* (local alcohol) to be presented, nowadays Khambus are also seen using a modern alcohol like rum, beer, whisky, etc. Again in occasion concerning life cycle it is mostly the one *thar* language (Bantawa) is expected to be used but most Khambus today are using straight *parbatey bhasa* (Nepali language). Thus the area of contention does exist within Khambus, where basically those who had adopted a foreign religion (say Christianity) displease them. Most gain pride in their own tradition where someone like Chandrasher Rai was found saying 'till he is alive he won't change his religion' (he meant Hinduism). While no one had even a clue of the strict diversion between Hinduism and tribe, they experience Hinduism and tribalism as same thing. With the changes in the system, where dependency in agriculture and nature is not there for all the Khambus but they were still seen trying to offer their rituals as per the tradition. For some it has been reduced to mere practices or traditional obligation, some have even started making some alterations by abandoning sacrifices. So, despite of the spatio-temporal changes and acceptance of mainstream religions the performances of their local traditions have altogether a different meaning for them. While *samaj* (connoting society) does have its utmost importance in Nepali life so in case of Khambus whether it be a Christians, Sadhu, Hindu, Sai-Bhakta their primary concern was on the 'unity as a group'. Organization, which in a village level is popularly known as a 'Rai *samaj*' was seen to have been acting as a platform to its members. There were other reasons too for taking a membership to the organization basically for the non-Hindus. As they said, they became members of the organization to procure the OBC certificate smoothly. Marriage of the Khambus has a traditional mark of their own where the 'practices like elopement' is a must even today.

Their dependence on *mangpa* as someone with a special power of healing, who can drive away the evil spirit possessing, is still needed to be approached in case of illness. It was observed in the field that the *Sadhu* Khambus do also approach the *mangpa* even though they differ substantially from both the Hinduised and the animist Khambus. While on the other hand the *Sadhu* and Christian Khambus do not perform

chinta (long elaborate rituals done by *mangpas*), but most of the Hinduised Khambus were found to have been practicing *chinta* rather mandatorily especially in cases like death in the family.

Though it is said that every *thar* of the Khambu Rai maintain its own dialect, but the field situation revealed an altogether different reality. Among the Khambus of Paiyong village it was found that almost all of them are aware of Bantawa (one of the clan of the Khambus) language but were unable to speak their own clan languages. Interestingly, *thar* wise distribution of the Khambus says that there are only five households who belonged to Bantawa *thar* while the rest of the 45 households are distributed among 14 different *thars* and none of them know their own *thar* languages. It was also found that by Khambu language most of them meant ‘Bantawa’ (*Bantawa* is one among the many *thars*). There might be various factor for Bantawa language gaining in prominence among Rais, it seemed that the organizational encouragement is probably the strongest one among such factors. The language of the Khambus even when found alive among the older generation people, its usage is reduced to the observance of a few rituals alone. Having a language of their own, which today has more or less been replaced by Nepali language, appears to be more an issue organizational mobilization rather than a medium of conversation or literary use. Its use today among the Rais has been limited within a few speakers and that too is context-specific/situational. The organizational efforts to rejuvenate Khambu language also depend upon language standardization and institutional support – issues which are available in the context of Sikkim where the introduction of Khambu language in school curriculum have brought some significant changes in this regard. Most of the older generation Khambus (who knew their language) were dissatisfied as most of the Khambus today are unable to speak their own language. It was found that almost all of the Khambus in the field situation were unable to say anything about the Khambu script, some even thought Subba (Limbu) and Khambu have the same script. Immediately after the Limbus were accorded tribal status the Khambu organization started popularizing *sumhang* script as the Khambu script instead of *sirijanga* script, which earlier was commonly referred to as the script of both the Khambus and the Limbus. Overall, the impression gathered from the field is that the Khambus in the three field site have awareness towards their own language and script but they could hardly write or speak the same (except a few exceptional cases families belonging to

mangpas and *Raipas* were found to be able to speak only in *Bantawa* language). Khambu organisation's effort to stress on the indigenous language appears to be more a case of symbolic capital than of practical use.

Issues like Kirat *mundhum* being the area that basically lies outside the knowledge and practice of common Khambus and which was/is dealt by the *mangpas/mangmas* made them feel that it's a *mangpa's* affair. So for most of the Khambus having a detailed knowledge of it was not possible, while some regard it to be known by *mangpas* only. As Khambu Rais are identifiable by their worshipping of '*chula dhunga*' (ancestral hearth), almost everyone was found to have possessed it except the *sadhu* Rais, who were said to be practicing their own method of ancestor worship without a hearth and blood-sacrifice. Keeping a *chula-dhunga* (ancestral hearth) and worshipping it regularly (once or twice a year) was still practiced by Khambus of all the clans (*thar*) whereas as per clan rituals the requirements of items for this ritual differed. Paiyong village represented the blurring of differences between Hinduised Rai and an animist/ naturalist Rai. To be a part of their own traditions and gaining a sense of Khambuness (or say some attachment to the roots) has been maintained with whatever they have learnt from their predecessor, may be not in the exact manner as their ancestors did but most of them were found doing the same. The belief with which the *chula-dhunga* (ancestral hearth) was kept earlier may not be observed in the present day but their continuity with those practices does provide them some satisfaction. While the life of most of the Khambus in Paiyong village, Newahang village and Dalep village still revolves around agriculture being a primary occupation so their dependence on nature and the yearly performance of all the rituals concerning homage to nature was observed on regular basis.

The dynamics of Khambu Social structure as observed in Paiyong, Newahang and Dalep villages has been a story of change and continuation. While some elements of Khambu social structure has changed due to intermingling with other communities and as a result of adaptation and adjustment (like language issue, clan myths which are almost nonexistent or not known to the Khambus of present generation), most Khambus were able to remember the names of their *pachha* (lineage) as well as *samait*. The importance of *pachha* and *samait* basically at the time of marriage and performance of death rituals might be a possible reason that explains as to why these still constitute the very basic of what we may call as Khambu social structure. One of

the markers of structural continuity was also noticed in their ancestral hearth-stone (*chula dhunga*) which was kept by almost all the households visited (except the sadhus) in the field situation. Thus followed the obligation of practicing *kul/pitri puja* once or twice a year as per clan norms. It was found that there were one *mangpa* in a Paiyong village at present (named Sangpang Kaila) and another in Dalep (named Lallu) whose services the Khambus received during any illness or for the performance of *chinta* during death and other rituals related to birth in the household. While most have stopped propitiating all the local deities (like *Sikari*, *Burani*, *Aitabarey*, *Devi thaan*) only a few were found to have practiced them (at least one or two of such deities) as per their clan norms.

Khambu reality as perceived by the researcher through multiple rounds of field visits/stays at Paiyong, Newahang and Dalep villages revealed that Khambu Rai community is divided into different clans/*thars* and religions like Hindus/ Hinduised, Christians and Sadhus form a category of distinctiveness. The attempt to explore the reality as represented by the Khambu Rai organization (KKRSS) on the one hand and the general Khambu Rais on the other regarding the genuineness of their claim of being a 'tribe' it was observed that each of the three villages do reveal their own stories. Though organisational mobilizations are normally considered as a process from above, the reality in the field situation revealed that the claim of a tribe by the Khambu Rais has increasingly become a mass phenomena and extended the aspiration of people beyond the limits of 'beneficiary value' where even an uneducated Khambu sees in the demand the security for their forthcoming generations and thereby naturally attaches an obligation to support the cause. The mobilization and the ethos of being 'tribal' has reached the heart and mind of every Khambu individual in the Darjeeling hills, nevertheless everyone do not justify the claim. We intend to examine these questions with adequate detailing in the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

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