

**Oral Text (*Pye*): Soul Journey (*Pai*) and Ancestors-Nature Worship among the Gurung  
of Sikles, Kaski, Nepal**

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**By**

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## Letter for Recommendation

We certify that this dissertation entitled **“Oral Text (Pye): Soul Journey (Pai) and Ancestors-Nature Worship among the Gurung of Sikles, Kaski, Nepal”** has been written under our constant guidance and supervision. The research scholar has, in regular consultation with us, addressed comments and suggestions as per requirement of the evaluators. In our opinion, the researcher has addressed all comments and suggestions provided by final viva experts and research committee. We, hereby, recommend this dissertation for final examinations by Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in the fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.**

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## **Letter for Approval**

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## Abstract

This study concentrates on the traditional ritual practices of the Gurungs and their worldview about human and nature. This ethnographic study starts with a lyric to convey oral texts and symbols in different ritual practices among the Gurung community of Sikles village. Sikles is one of the largest villages among the Gurung community of Nepal which is historically, traditionally, and ritually significant and popular among the Gurungs. The Gurungs of Sikles have been practicing their traditional culture, rituals and local customary rule-regulation for centuries which are hugely supported by their oral history and oral myths called *Pye tã Lhu tã*. My first idea is, in spite of ‘thick’ oral texts and its meaning of different ritual practices among the Gurungs of Sikles, and second, traditional ritual continuity and its value, important and identities of Gurung community.

This study endeavours to explore and analyse the Gurungs’ understanding of their own oral history, oral texts and different ritual practices such as soul journey process in *Pai* ritual, ancestors’ worship and nature worship in this period.

The Gurungs practise their belief system with unique social structure traditionally based on their different historical priestly clan groups, *Pachyu*, *Lauhri* and *Lam* among them. Nowadays, traditional *lams* have been replaced by Tibetan Lamas. Both *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are death, *Pai* (after funeral) ritual specialists. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform these rituals together but have different roles. *Pachyu* are related to Gurung astrology and *tantra-mantra* as well. So, *Pachyu* are astrologers and specialists about this *tantra-mantra* or shamanic activities. *Lauhri* are closely related to nature worships. *Mhinas* are fully authorized for local management and massage relay. The groups are related to nature worships, and village *riti-thiti*. The village leader called *Tdo* or *Mukhiya* has much respected position among the community. He is the representative of the whole village and plays vital role of socio-political decision and institution.

‘Soul journey process’ is a very interesting thing. According to Gurung oral texts, there are three worlds; evil world, living world and ancestors’ world. They believe that no one goes to ancestors world without *Pai* ritual their soul. If the Gurungs do not perform this *Pai* ritual the dead’s soul may suffer and be unhappy, traveling these three worlds and giving trouble to their living family. So, main objective of this *Pai* ritual is to guide the soul from evil world to living world then ancestors’ world. The *Pachyus* chant slowly but emotionally in the third or last day of the *Pai* ritual called *Sarka syepa*.

The *Pai* explains the Gurung concept of *plah* (soul) and their belief related to the three worlds and how these worlds are interconnected. The dead person’s soul needs to be escorted to the world of ancestors so that the person can live their afterlife happily in ancestors’ land or ‘heaven’. The ritual priests, who own and know the *pye*, mediate and communicate between the living people, the soul, the evil forces, and the ancestors located in the three worlds. Thus, only the ritual priests, with their knowledge and power, can bring the soul of the dead from the underworld to the world of the living and take to the land of ancestors. This is very insightful how the oral text guides the soul to the ancestor’s land.

The Gurungs believe and are devoted to their ancestors, they pray and worship their ancestors as God. Ancestors worship is another important ritual for life among the Gurungs of Sikles. *Failu lapa* (worship of *kul devta*), *Chhyopa lapa* (worship of *kul devta*), *Khema theepa* (ancestors’ worship), *Mo lapa* (dangerous ancestors’ worship) are very popular worship among the Gurungs. All these worships are for good luck and blessings to the family. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are main actors for these ritual practices. *Plah khu lapa* is another popular ritual related to a sick person. The ritual is performed for someone who has lost their soul and fallen sick.

These ritual practices of ancestor worship show how the Gurungs maintain their social relationships with their deceased family members who have become ancestors. Hence, the

Gurung culture emphasizes the continuity of sociality between the dead, the living and the different worlds.

The Gurungs believe that nature (all non-human objects, plants and animals) is considered as mother, living subject, and there is intersubjective understanding between human and nature. They believe that people can communicate with plants, animals, water, spirits and all cosmological and physical entities around the village. Without intersubjective understanding and cooperation, the Gurung cannot live meaningful life in the village. Therefore, they have to interact, communicate and understand human through non-human's perspective too.

Nature worship practices for regulating the use and protection of natural resources are shaped by peoples' religious believes, myths, and past experiences of diseases, disasters, and other hazards. These rituals further illustrate that the Gurungs of Sikles embrace 'animism' as their religious belief and practices.

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ACAP	:	Anna Purna Conservation Area Project
AD	:	Anno Domini
BS	:	Bikram Sambat
CAP.	:	Captain
DNA	:	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
DR.	:	Doctor
E.	:	East
G	:	Gurung
LKG	:	Lower Kindergarten
M. PHIL.	:	Master of Philosophy
N.	:	North
NEP.	:	Nepali
NO.	:	Number
PM	:	Post Meridian
RS.	:	Rupees
S.	:	South
UK	:	United Kingdom
UML	:	Unified Marxists Leninist
US	:	United State
VDC	:	Village Development Committee
W.	:	West

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

*“Pye mhasya chhya mhamu, Chhya mhasya lhu mhamu, Lhu mhasya mhi mhamu”*

“Loss of scriptures leads to loss of rituals, loss of rituals leads to loss of culture, loss of culture leads to a loss of human type”

The above statement is a traditional saying of the Gurung ritual practitioners in Sikles village, Kaski, Nepal. They say it because there is the possibility of loss of oral texts which are essential for the Gurung rituals. The ritual practitioners claim that the loss of oral expertise is the loss of the Gurung culture. Hence, these oral ritual texts are crucial for the Gurung religion, history, and identity.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the traditional ritual practices and ritual practitioners of the Gurung people of Nepal. The Gurungs or the Tamu are one of the indigenous peoples from the hilly area with their distinct culture, language, ritual and rites, social structure, and history. According to the Census 2021, the population of Gurung is 298758 which accounts for 2.74 percent of Nepal’s total population. While the specifics of human history can be complex and difficult, a recent study shows that the ancestors of Gurungs were already within the territories of present-day Nepal at least 3000 years ago (Gurung, 2023, p. 244). This study was conducted in Sikles, one of the cultural center villages of the traditional Gurung ritual practices, Kaski district, Nepal. I collected the data for this Ph.D. research in different phases. Preliminary level data was collected on September first- February, 2016-2017. Then, detailed fieldwork started and carried out from October 2017 to August 2019. Again, I have included the data collected until 2022, the long period supported for updating this research.

Until very recently, the Gurung people of Nepal relied solely on oral traditions to pass down their cultural heritage. The quote mentioned earlier is a part of the broader Gurung oral tradition, and there are no exact records indicating who first proposed the saying or when. In this context, the term "scriptures" refers to oral scriptures or text. It is unclear when the Gurungs began to recognize the importance of their scriptures, as their loss could result in the loss of underlying rituals and, ultimately, the loss of their culture would result in loss of their identity or a type of human. This cultural identity is a crucial factor in identifying individuals and societies. In today's rapidly globalizing world, the significance of the Gurung saying quoted in the epigraph of this chapter is even more relevant and important.

These ritual oral texts are narrated during the specific rituals by the traditional Gurung ritual specialists such as *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, and *Lam*. They are the ritual experts who have the authentic knowledge of the Gurung ritual texts to explain the ritual symbolism of these oral texts. Therefore, I have relied on the Gurung ritual specialists to understand and interpret the ritual symbolism of three Gurung rituals (a) soul journey during the *Pai* ritual, (b) ancestor worship, and (c) rituals for worshiping land, soil, river, and mountains or the nature worship.

#### **1.1.1 The Gurungs of Sikles: Ritual Specialists and Customary *Riti-thiti***

Sikles has been the cultural centre of the ancient *Pachyu* and the traditional Gurung religious practices for centuries. The Gurungs of the study area have their customary social institutions that help maintain sociopolitical stability as well as order during their ritual functions and foster social relationships among them. The village has a customary village head, called *Krōh*, and also called *Mukhiya* (Nep.), who has the overall responsibility of managing or organizing village events. There are Gurung astrologers called *Pāedi* who determine auspicious and inauspicious days for ritual performances. *Mhinas* are the

customary village messengers, ritual assistants, and the important knowledgeable customary actors to regulate the village *riti-thiti*<sup>1</sup> (common customary practices).

### 1.1.2 The Gurung Ritual Specialists

Among the Gurungs in Sikles, *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, and *Lam* are three prominent and customary ritual experts known as *Khekis*, equivalent to priests, within the community, mainly belonging to specific clans. The spelling of these names varies among scholars. Macfarlane (1972) uses ‘Poju’ for *Pachyu* and ‘Klevri’ for *Lauhri*; Strickland (1982) uses ‘Poju’ and ‘Hlewri’ for these two, while Moisala (1991) uses ‘Khlevri’ for *Lauhri*. I have retained and used the names: *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, and *Lam* as these terms are used by the locals in Sikles. The Gurungs who use *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* as ritual specialists for their cultural-ritual performances follow and practice the traditional religious and ritual system their ancestors used to practice<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays, the Buddhist Lamas are also used in the Gurung communities. According to the history and *pye tā lhu tā*, the traditional bon or bompo *Lams* were the priests only among the Gurung families from the *Lam* clan at the beginning. I have seen and participated in Bon *Lam* almost twenty years ago as a *Pachyu* priest for funeral and *Pai* rituals *Lam thar*, Sikles.

*Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* are the traditional Gurung priests (ritual experts); contrary to popular belief, these are not Buddhist priests. They are the holders of priestly knowledge in the form of the ritual text *pye tā lhu tā* or the *pye* in short. They learn these ritual texts from their gurus and memorize and chant the *pye* during the ritual performances. Strickland (1983), who studied the Gurung ritual priests, writes, “These priests learn arduously from their teachers the spells (*ngo*) and recited narratives (*pé*) which comprise the substance of their ritual activities”. The Gurung

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<sup>1</sup> *Riti-Thiti*, Customary rules and practices (Gurung, 1996). This is a popular traditional policy for the state and customary rules for the village.

<sup>2</sup> In some areas, Gurungs may also use Hindu priests to perform Hindu rituals such as Rudri, Satya Narayan, and others. Such ritual syncretism is common in Nepal.

*Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* recite the *pye* in a distinctive oral manner, some do it in very poetic ways, Strickland (1983) refers to them as “priestly brads” to “show, and to account for, the degree of individual creative liberty which they are permitted or encouraged to demonstrate” (p. 229).

*Pachyus* (priests) are the most respected ritual specialists of the study area. *Pachyus* are knowledgeable of the ancient *pye tã lhu tã*. They define auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of any event, worship different deities to protect human beings and treat sick people. They also call on the lost souls from heaven, high hills, huge jungle, water, sky, and other places through a ritual they call ‘*Plah khupa*’ or ‘*Plahkhu lapa*’. *Pachyu* are one of the main priests in the death and after-death rituals. Hence, they are crucial for the funeral ritual, *Pai* (after-death ritual), ancestor worship, ritual for the calling for the lost soul, and shamanic activities. However, they are not known as shamans or ‘*Jhakri*’ among the Gurungs in Sikles. The *Pachyus* are astrologers too in Sikles. The *Pachyus* do have the special power of mediation between human and divine power and even evil power or things. They believe and practice in animal sacrifices. Pettigrew (1995) calls the Gurung *Pachyus* shamans and writes:

Shamans are not the only specialists who perform “rituals of affliction”. Although, a *Pachyu* may have a larger repertoire of rituals to appease and control a variety of spirit types, to protect against natural disasters, to overcome infertility, or to pacify angered ancestors, than other specialists. The domain of ritual performance is not his alone. In fact, many other specialists and not-specialists can also perform a variety of functions. In particular, the *dhami jhakris* (Nep.) and the *jharphuk* “brushes and hitters’, but also Brahman pundits, wandering *sadhus*, *Lamas*, and villagers themselves (Pettigrew, 1995, p. 45)

The *Pachyus* are involved in healing and exorcism rituals; they control a variety of spirits and perform treatments by their tantra-mantra and herbal medicine. But they are also important ritual priests related to different ritual performances.

*Lauhris* are next respected Gurung ritual specialists. The duty of *Lauhri* of Sikles are same as that of *Pachyus* like in funeral and *Pai* ritual expert. They are more related to natural worship than the *Pachyus* are. So, the *Lauhri* are official priests for natural deities among the villagers. Particularly, '*Tōh theepa*' (worship of the village boundary) is one of the essential rituals among the whole ritual practices. The ritual practice can be organized collectively as well as on an individual basis. The common practice is called '*Naas tōh theepa*' and individual practice is called '*pyeu tōh theepa*'. Strickland notes, "The hlewri (*Lauhri*) who officiated before the deity's shrine and conducts the calendrical ritual to thiwa (called *Tōh theepa* in Sikles) 'invoking places' rites for the soil gods, the descendants of the founder have certain religious tasks". (Strickland, 1982, p.61). *Lauhris* specialize and are used to perform rituals for nature worship. They can communicate with animals, plants, water, and mountains. It was believed that they understood humans through the lens of nature and cosmological entities. This is like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian perspectivism (1998). The perspectivism allows animals and spirits to see themselves as humans: the jaguar sees the world in the same way as humans (Viveiros de Castro, 2004 & 1998). *Lauhris* are also involved in death and after-death rituals along with the *Pachyus*.

I should emphasize here that the two Gurung ritual specialists, though each may have specific roles in particular rituals, also collaborate and perform together or are involved in similar rituals and shamanic practices (healing, exorcism, and soul journey). In this respect, they differ from the Tamang ritual specialists described by David Holmberg (1989). According to Holmberg (1989), *Lama*, *Lambu* and *Bombo* are three distinct ritual specialists with different roles and expertise and three distinct ritual spheres in the Tamang society:

“Buddhist, associated lama; the sacrificial associated with *Lambu*; and the shamanic associated with *Bombo*” and “Each sphere proceeds from a distinct authority and is marked by a division of labour” (p. 1). The Gurung priests of Sikles do not follow such distinctions and are involved in the officiating of the reading of oral texts, and sacrificial and ‘shamanic’ performances. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* collaborate for death and *Pai* rituals but have different sacrificial acts and ways of chanting<sup>3</sup>. The *Lauhris* also practice sacrifice in their rituals. There are few *Lams* (traditional lamas) and they are involved in fewer rituals than the *Pachyus* and *Lauhris*. Nowadays, the *Lams* are mostly used only for *Loo theepa* (water god worship) in the village.

Besides these three ritual priests (*Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, and *Lam*), village leader *Krōh*, village controller and messenger *Mhina*, and *Pāedi* or astrologer are other main respected ritual specialists for the social and ritual structure. They play vital roles in the sociopolitical stability at the village level. The village leader who is highly positioned for local rules and regulations, is chosen from the more knowledgeable person not only for maintaining the local rules and regulations but also *pye tã lhu tã* – the ritual texts. So, the leader is also known as ‘*Chu khe*’ or knowledgeable person for *pye tã lhu tã*. He is also a judge at the village level. *Mhinas* maintain law and order in the village and convey messages. There are many local customary or village customary practices for *Mhinas* that play a significant role in applying such customary practices. The *Pāedis* are needed to define the auspicious and inauspicious days for ritual performances in the Gurung society.

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<sup>3</sup> Bista (1967) writes that “Ghabre (*Lauhri*) are the priests of all except Lama Gurungs who have priests from their own class. One of the jobs of a priest is to officiate at the christening rite of a newborn baby. This is done on the eleventh day after the birth. Ghabres also conducted the funeral service and a post funeral service called Pa-ye.” I do not fully agree with Bista’s argument about the priest of the Gurungs. Belonging the same community and same group (*Pachyu*), I have observed not only *Lauhri*, *Pachyu* also plays an equally important role in the *Pai* ritual. Moisala, (1991) argued that *Poju* and *khlevri* are representative of traditional shamanistic religion. She acknowledged that Gurung shamanism differs from commonly known shamanistic practice in one essential aspect (Moisala, 1991, p.67).

### 1.1.3 The Ritual Text: *pye*

*Pye* is the Gurung oral ritual text. There are different *pyes* for different ritual practices. The Gurungs have a long oral history and myths which are chanted by their traditional priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* in different ritual ceremonies. The Gurung myths are not only ritual texts but also history (Pettigrew, 1999; Strickland, 1983). The *pye* or oral text is the way of theory, ideology, or principle among the Gurungs. The *pye* condenses and explains core symbols of the Gurung religious cosmology, history, moral codes, and customary practices related to sacred and profane aspects of everyday life. Simon Strickland (1982) was one of the first scholars who studied the Gurung *pye* in the 1980s. He studied the *pye tā lhu tā* (*pye* of *Pachyu* priest Padam Singh Gurung) among the Gurung community in Sikles. According to him the meaning of *pye tā Lhu tā pe/pye* is ‘principle’ and ‘*Lu/lhu*’ means ‘song’ (Strickland, 1982). Hence, the *pye* refers to principle or theory and *Lhu* refers to “culture” or “song” respectively. In this study, I have tried to document and translate complex oral texts (*pye*) and analyse their meanings with the help of the Gurung priests. The *pye* uses distinct and different ritual language, not easily comprehensible to lay persons.

According to a Gurung scholar and anthropologist Judith Pettigrew:

The *pyes* are chanted in a ritual language named *Chō Kyui*. *Chō* is believed to be the Tamu place of origin. According to her, *Chō* language is the initial language among them which is used by priests in different rituals and the language is developed in *Chō* where the Gurungs originated (Pettigrew, 1995, p. 35)

In villages, the old Gurungs also say *Kyui* for *pye*. There are *pyes* for specific rituals which only *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* know and chant during these rituals. They learn these ritual texts from their *gurus*. The ritual language used in *pye* is distinct and not easily comprehensible to the laypersons even if they are speakers of the Gurung or *Tamu* language. The *pye*, as this thesis shows in detail, narrates myths, cultural and political and migratory

histories of the Gurung people, territorial relations, ancestral knowledge, and many other narrations about the Gurung religious beliefs (cosmology), and moral ordering of the Gurung society (Evans et al., 2009; Gurung, 2067BS, Gurung, 2019; Pettigrew, 1995; Strickland, 1982). As the older generation, experienced priests and knowledgeable persons are decreasing, there are threats to the loss of the Gurung culture. As previously noted, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are priests who embody quintessential aspects and perspectivism of Gurung heritage and culture. These leaders are the most important religious authorities for the Gurung and represent pre-shamanic traditions that have not been clearly outlined (Moisala, 1991). Hence, I have focused on the ritual specialists and the analysis of the ritual texts and their ritual symbolism in this study.

#### 1.1.4 Ritual as a Symbolic System

According to Durkheim (1995/1912) “Religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first (beliefs) are states of opinion and *consist of representations*; the second (rites) are *particular modes of action*. Between these two categories of phenomena lies all that separates thinking from doing" (p. 34, emphasis added). The Gurungs practise their distinct life cycle ritual, especially birth, marriage, death (funeral), and *Pai* (soul journey ritual) or after-death ritual. Such rituals are based on their life history. Nature worship, ancestor worship, and treatment for the sick are the other important rituals Gurungs follow and practise in the study area.

In this thesis, I have approached the Gurung religion and rituals as “symbolic systems” (p. 90). According to Geertz (1973) a religion is:

- (1) a system of symbols which acts to
- (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
- (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
- (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (p. 90)

Rituals are “particular modes of actions” (Durkheim, 1995/1912, p.34) or religious practices that dramatize and make the core meanings of a religion public (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1967). According to Geertz, rituals highlight the crucial cultural ethos, worldviews, and cultural constructions of realities - what he calls the "model of reality" - that shape and influence the "model for reality" that, in turn, affect people's understanding and behaviour towards that reality. Bell (1992) shares this approach, and writes:

Ritual is a type of critical juncture where some pair of opposing social or cultural forces come together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behaviour, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and imaginative ideal (p. 14).

Theoretically, ritual is a part of culture that includes various rites and practices that dramatize myths, events, history, and tradition, and communicate cultural meanings to the people who perform them as well as to anthropologists who study them (Bell, 1992). Sherry Ortner (1978) reminds us that the ritual process is primarily a matter of creating meaning for actors, whatever latest function it may perform for the system at large. In other words, rituals are symbolic representations of core values and meanings that the society considers important and that function for the society. Thus, the ritual performance provides meaning to this cultural ethos that the members of the society or the ritual participants can learn and internalize. Thus, the Gurung rituals are important cultural practices that can provide insights into the Gurungs' relationships with their ancestors, ancestral land, geography, and the networks of their customary social institutions. That is why the Gurung saying mentioned in the epigraph, emphasizing the significance of oral chant, oral history, and myths for their history and identity, is very popular among the Gurungs. The Gurung people closely observe these oral chants, rituals, and cultural practices to learn about their ethnic identity and

histories. These ritual practices show the Gurung's belief systems, religious worldviews, perspectivism and religious identity. The traditional and fundamental ritual practices of the Gurung people offer significant insights for anthropology. This thesis specifically focuses on:

- (i) *Pai* ritual's soul journey practices,
- (ii) Ancestors worship, and
- (iii) Nature worship.

This thesis has mainly three main aims. Firstly, it examines the oral history and myths narrated in the different Gurung rituals in the study area with the help of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* who recite orally *pye tā lhu tā* (Gurung oral text and tradition). Secondly, it studies the ritual symbolism of the three major ritual practices to highlight the Gurung believes and understanding of the relations between humans, ancestors, nature, and history. Thirdly, it discusses the role of rituals and customary *riti-thithi* in organizing agricultural production (nature-culture relations) in the study area.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

This study examines three major Gurung rituals and their meanings to understand the Gurung cultural explanations or “key symbols” (Ortner, 1973) about life after death, place of origin and migration (ethnic history), ancestral territories, and the relations between people and nature. According to the Gurung's *pye tā lhu tā* (Gurung oral text and tradition), the Gurungs governed the region for thousands of years and now have they spread all over the country in smaller groups and outside Nepal. As important markers of their traditional culture and ethnic identity, the Gurung rituals mediated by their symbols, and their relationship with the ancestral territories also act as markers of distinctions of the Gurung people from other social groups in the region (see Macfarlane, 2003). In what ways do the

Gurung rituals and their symbolism explain the relationships between people, ancestors, territory, and nature? This was a leading research question for this study.

The Gurung rituals are guided by the oral ritual texts or *pye* which are narrated and performed by the traditional Gurung ritual specialists or priests. The oral chants are long narrations the recitations of which depend on and vary in different ritual practices among the Gurung community. These oral chants or different myths show their history, religion, tradition, and relation between ancestral and Gurung people, nature and Gurung people as well. According to Giri (2018, p. 6) and Yamphu (2014, p. 126):

Mythical narratives and storytelling of a certain community are not mere political imaginary creation rather they communicate faded socio-political activities of their ancestors. And, myths are narrative traditions of a people, their religion, world view and their relation with gods and nature. Both myth and history are stories of the people told by people who went under the earth.

Myths are part of history and history is articulated through story and myth.

Oral tradition of human group such as Mundum is not myth, or must be not only be confined as sacred text rather I argue that it should be treated as oral history, a voice from the past, philosophical texts social and political narrations, thus oral tradition is important for human society to understanding how a group of individuals come together into a whole that adds to each individual and shared identity.

Hence, ritual oral texts and their narrations connect dead and lived, ancestry and history, nature and people, and their interactions. The Gurung ritual experts tell their history and myth through oral text. It was considered a customary practice of transformation of knowledge to the Gurung society; the ritual specialists also demonstrate their expertise in understanding non-human entities around them. As Gurung, all oral narrations are not myth, it is a history, kind of philosophy and way of life. It is orally transferred from generation to

generation. For example, the Gurung have a long oral history about their migration which they call *hyula chupa pye*. According to geography, the *pye* is not myth but oral history. However, there have been fewer studies on the Gurung ritual texts and ritual symbolism, for example, those by Mumford (1989) and Pettigrew (1995, 1999), despite many studies on the Gurung rituals<sup>4</sup>. Scholarly publications on the Gurung ritual texts are scarce (Muford, 1989; Pettigrew, 1995; Kullsvveen, 1999). Research on the Tamu ritual texts, and symbolism conducted by Nepali scholars, both Gurungs and non-Gurungs (Gurung, 2034 BS; Gurung, 2019; Upadhyay, 2017), is descriptive, lacking in-depth, and not well-informed by long-term observations of the ritual performances on the ground as well as by a careful understanding of the ritual languages and text. This dissertation addresses this important research gap.

My motivation for conducting this dissertation research came from the realization of the dearth of works on the symbolic analysis of Gurung rituals that integrate close examination of the ritual texts with extensive participant observation. I myself am a *Pachyu*, a traditional ritual specialist of the Gurung community, having over 35 years of experience in performing traditional/customary rituals. Hence, this study is long informed, informally by my personal experiences, on one hand, and it is based on systematic and rigorous Ph.D. dissertation research, on the other hand. My training and long experience of working as a *Pachyu* enabled me to read and understand the meanings of the Tamu ritual oral texts. The speech used in the oral recitations of rituals is distinct and different from the everyday Gurung language. Its meanings are not easily comprehensible even for the native speakers of the Gurung language. Hence, the description and analysis of the Gurung ritual texts, though critical to understanding the “true” meanings of the rituals, is a challenging project. I have tried to describe the ritual symbolism of the selected Gurung ritual by combining

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<sup>4</sup> There have been many important anthropological studies on the Gurung people, religion, and rituals over the decades by foreign scholars (Doherty, 1974; Macfarlane, 1972, 1997; McHugh, 1889, 2011; Moisala, 1990; Messerschmidt, 1976; Mumford, 1989; Pettigrew, 1995, 1999; Pignede, 1966; Strickland, 1982).

ethnographic observation of these ritual practices and the analysis of the ritual texts with the help of the ritual specialists.

I am a native speaker of the Gurung language as well as a well-versed reader of the ritual oral texts which enable me to understand and interpret the meanings of ritual texts as an insider. Similarly, I know and have worked with the Gurung ritual experts and practitioners of the study area. As such, this study provides an emic perspective on the analysis of Gurung ritual oral texts, drawing upon observations of the ritual and knowledge gained from renowned local ritual practitioners. My subjective position as a Gurung native well-versed in the Gurung ritual language, long-term involvement /experience of working as *Pachyu*, and my academic training in anthropology further enabled me to focus on the research problems of this dissertation. So, this study differs from other similar studies on the Gurung rituals and offers new analysis and knowledge of the Gurung rituals and religion.

The Gurung people and their culture and religions have been widely studied by both foreign and native scholars. These previous studies have focused on population dynamics, economic livelihood, life cycle rituals, social hierarchy, and religion of the Gurungs (MacFarlane, 1997, 2003; Pignede, 1996, Messerschmidt, 1976). Many of these scholars have focused on the Gurung hierarchy (Messerschmidt, 1976), belief system, and priestly groups but not much focus has been given to the Gurung oral histories which are narrated in the ritual performances.

Similarly, there is a tendency among Western scholars to claim that Tibetan Buddhism is the name of the Gurung religion and call the Tibetan Lamas the Gurung priests. The increasing influences of Hinduism, Tibetan Lamaism, and the forces of modernization have posed grave threats and challenges to the continuity of the ancient customary Gurung ritual practices and the preservation of knowledge about these rituals. However, the scholarly debates on the nature and identity of the Gurung religion and rituals have been equally

problematic. Scholars claim that “Gurung at one time were Buddhist with their own Lamas, but increasingly they are turning to Brahmins to conduct their religious services. They also turn to Jankris in time” (Burbank 1992, p. 54). While others write that “some Ghale believe that they originally came from Tibet, while some other Gurung maintains that all came from India” (Bista, 1967, p. 78), and “The religion is deeply imbued with Tibetan effects. Pure Lamaism is very widespread all over the country” (Pignede, 1966, p. 17). These few statements reflect some examples of how anthropological studies on the Gurungs also create some paradoxes regarding the Gurung religious identity and the problem for the study of *pye*. Different researchers emphasize different voices and narratives from different Gurung villages which, on one hand, provide multiple perspectives but, on the other hand, give the impression that the Gurung culture lacks a coherent system of rituals and their meanings.

I argue that these studies are incomplete and not sufficient; especially Gurung traditional *pye* (oral narrations), oral history and traditional ritual actors’ priests. Because most of them are based on experiences and telling of some people and literature reviews. There are some problems with previous studies on the Gurung of the Sikles. There have been no prior studies that have focused exclusively on the Gurung traditional ritual experts and practitioners such as *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* and analysis of their oral ritual texts to explain the meanings (and what these meanings say about the Gurung culture and society).

The focus on the Gurung traditional ritual priests and their oral texts is anthropologically very significant and insightful. First, the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant Gurung’s oral history, myths, and events in their ritual practices in the Gurung language. As a native ritual practitioner, I am fully competent and knowledgeable about the Gurung ritual speech in the context of the ritual performance. They have intersubjective interaction with non-human entities around them. Second, the Gurungs use many symbols (material objects) such as *dhaja* (a piece of cloth), milk, blood, and alcohol for the worship of nature during

different ritual performances such as *Failu lapa*, *Chhyopa lapa* (ancestors' worship). What are the meanings of these ritual offerings and objects? How can these meanings be read, to follow Geertz (1973), as a “model of” (cultural conception of reality) and “model for reality” (practices based on the model of reality) of the Gurung belief system? These are the research questions that this study has tried to address.

In what ways do the Gurung rituals and their symbolism explain the relationships between people, ancestors, territory, and nature? This was a leading research question for this study. To understand this, I selected three Gurung rituals – the *Pai* ritual, ancestor worship, and rituals related to nature worship. These rituals are guided by oral ritual texts or *pye*, which are narrated and performed by *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, traditional Gurung ritual specialists or priests. Therefore, I have focused on the analysis of *Pye* as narrated and explained by *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*.

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My motivation for conducting this dissertation research came from the realization of the dearth of works on the symbolic analysis of Gurung rituals that integrate close examination of the ritual texts with extensive participant observation. I am a *Pachyu*, a

traditional ritual specialist of the Gurung community, having over 35 years of experience in performing traditional/customary rituals. Hence, this study is long informed, informally by my personal experiences, on the one hand, and it is based on systematic and rigorous Ph.D. dissertation research, on the other hand.

This study offers an emic analysis and perspectives on the Gurung rituals informed by long-term fieldwork, careful analysis of oral texts by the Gurung ritual specialists themselves, and the repeated participation and observations of rituals for triangulation of data on ritual symbolism. My emphasis on the ‘emic perspective’ is both methodological and theoretical. The Gurung used multilayered symbols in their ritual ceremonies, but all these ritual texts are orally chanted by priests. It is difficult to ask the priests about the meanings of the ritual performances at the very time of the ritual occurrence. Due to the nature of the performance and time constraints, the priests are less likely to tell researchers the “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the meanings of the ritual symbols. Thus, understanding the deeper and ritual-specific meanings of this Gurung ritual needs –continuous participatory observation of these rituals, knowledge of the ritual speeches, and relations of trust with the ritual priests so that we can ask them to explain the meanings in detail. In this regard, my dual positions and roles as a ritual priest as well as a student of anthropology, I argue, have strengthened the overall validity and richness of the analysis of this study.

Why focus on the ritual specialists? *Pachyus* are the most respected ritual specialists who are knowledgeable of the ancient oral text (*pye*). They define auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of any event, worship different deities to protect human beings, and treat sick people. They also call on the lost souls from heaven, high hills, jungle, water, sky, and other places through a ritual they call ‘*Plah khupa*’ or ‘*Plahkhu lapa.*’ *Pachyus* are also the main priests in the death and after-death (*pai*) ritual. Hence, they are crucial for the funeral ritual, *Pai* ritual, ancestor worship, ritual for the calling for the lost soul, and shamanic activities.

*Lauhris* are the other respected Gurung ritual specialists. In Sikles village, *Lauhris* are called for the death and *Pai* ritual, along with *Pachyu*, and for performing rituals related to nature worship. They are the official priests for appeasing the deities related to nature, such as ‘*Tōh theepa*’ (worship of the village boundary) worship, one of the elemental Gurung rituals in Sikles. *Lauhris* can communicate with animals, plants, water, soils, and other non-human entities. In other words, *Lauhri* priests are believed to have the knowledge and power to enact what anthropologists have called *perspectivism* – interspecies understanding and interactions through the lens of nature and cosmological entities (de Castro, 1998).

The focus on the Gurung traditional ritual priests and their oral texts is anthropologically very significant and insightful. Firstly, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant Gurung’s oral history, myths, and events in their ritual practices in the Gurung language. They can have intersubjective interaction with non-human entities during ritual performances. Secondly, the Gurungs use many symbols (material objects) such as *dhaja* (a piece of ritual cloth), milk, blood, and alcohol for the worship of nature during different ritual performances such as *Failu lapa* and *Chhyopa lapa* (ancestors worship). What are the meanings of these ritual offerings and objects? Understanding the ritual oral texts as well as explanations of the ritual language are important in interpreting the ritual symbolism in the contexts of the Gurung culture, myths, history, and other domains. For this, the traditional Gurung ritual specialists, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, need to be approached as collaborators in any study on the Gurung religion.

There is a critical need to study the traditional Gurung rituals practiced in the ancient Gurung villages like Sikles to understand what *pye* says about the Gurung history, cosmology, how the Gurung religion conceptualizes and underlines the relations of the people with nature, ancestors, and ancestral territories. Therefore, I opted to understand the Gurung rituals and their meanings by focusing on the Gurung ritual experts and practitioners.

There is a critical need to study the traditional Gurung rituals practiced in ancient Gurung villages like Sikles by the Gurung themselves to understand what *pye* says about the Gurung history, cosmology, how the Gurung religion conceptualizes and underlines the relations of the people with nature, their ancestors, and their ancestral territories. Therefore, I opted to understand the Gurung rituals and their meanings by focusing on the Gurung ritual experts and practitioners. In doing so, this dissertation broadly aims to address the following research questions:

1. Why is the *Pai* ritual (soul journey) important for the Gurung people?
2. How do the oral texts (*pye*) explain the Gurung belief and understanding of the ‘soul’ and ancestors?
3. How do the Gurung rituals conceptualize and explain the relations between humans and nature?

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The overall objective of this study is to understand the meanings of three Gurung rituals: *Pai*, Ancestral worship, and nature worship from the perspectives of the ritual practitioners by analysing the Gurung ritual oral texts in the context of ritual practices in the Sikles village.

The specific research objectives are:

1. To explore the meanings of the soul journey processes enacted in the *Pai* ritual,
2. To analyse how the Gurung rituals maintain the relationships between the living and their ancestors, and
3. To examine the nature-human relationships in the Gurung rituals by focusing on nature worship.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

There have been many studies on the Gurung religion written by non-Gurungs, and foreign scholars, but not by an anthropologist who is also a *Pachyu*. This is the first study conducted by a native anthropologist to examine the ritual symbolisms of the Gurung religion by analysing the oral ritual texts (*pye*) and long-term participatory fieldwork. The researcher is also a Gurung ritual priest, a *Pachyu* with a long experience of performing various Gurung rituals, who is also well-versed in the ritual language. Hence, the significance of this study offers an emic perspective and analysis.

This study offers an ethnographically grounded analysis of ritual symbolism to highlight many key concepts and categories in the study of religion but with a focus on indigenous analysis and meanings provided by the ritual texts. The detailed discussions of *pye* (ritual texts) and their meanings a major highlight of this study will be interesting and insightful to scholars, the Gurung people in general, and the anthropology of religion in Nepal. For example, this study provides important insights and perspectives on the Gurung theory of soul, how ritual myths embody Gurung history and territorial relations, and how Gurungs maintain a relation of respect and reciprocity with their family members and kin folks even after they die. Similarly, this study discusses many Gurung rituals that have not been studied before to show how rituals regulate the relations between people, nature, and culture (including agriculture).

This study highlights and contributes to the understanding of ‘animism’ (the new animism) with the ritual symbolism of the Gurung. Similarly, the study can also be used to understand the concept of perspectivism in the study of the indigenous religion in Nepal. In sum, this study brings many new perspectives, insights, and ethnographic data to the ritual study in Nepal.

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

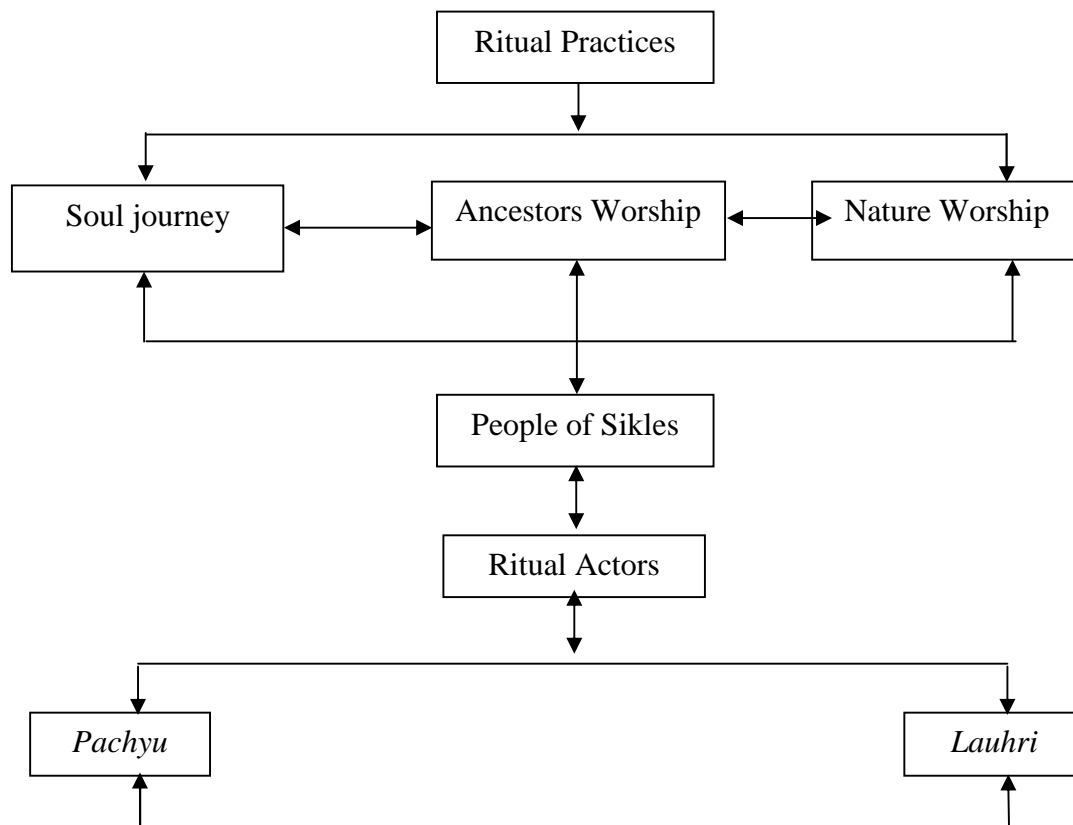
I have used two theoretical approaches to the study of rituals in anthropology. The first includes the symbolic-interpretive approach as exemplified by Geertz (1973) and Ortner (1973). Rituals are “particular modes of actions” (Durkheim, 1995/1912, p.34) or religious practices that dramatize and make the core meanings of a religion public (Turner, 1965; Geertz, 1973). According to Geertz (1973), rituals dramatize the crucial cultural ethos, worldviews, and cultural constructions of realities - what he calls the "model of reality" - that shape and influence the "model for reality" that, in turn, affect people's understanding and behavior towards that reality. I have integrated ‘emic’ understanding, i.e., the explanation of the Gurung ritual symbolism based on the Pye, narrated and interpreted by the Gurung ritual specialists.

The second theoretical approach is animism-perspectivism, revived in recent decades by the works of Viveiros de Castro (2004) and Swancutt (2023). Along with this, I have also included Roy Rappaport’s concept of “cognized environment” (Rappaport, 1979) to discuss the ritually mediated relations between humans, non-humans, and nature in Sikles village. I have drawn on the work of Swancutt (2003) to argue that the ritual beliefs and practices substantiate that the Gurung of Sikles overall follow an animistic ontology. In anthropology, animism is generally defined as “belief in spirits and souls,” first defined by E. B. Tylor in 1871 (Swancutt, 2023/2019, p. 2). But Tylor’s theory of religion, based on the idea of evolutionism that treated ‘animism’ as a feature of “primitive religion,” was later discarded in anthropology. In recent times, anthropologists have again revived the concept of animism without the evolutionary sense (Swancutt, 2023). According to Katherine Swancutt (2003/[2019]), the new concept of animism is not the same as the old concept of “belief in supernatural being” but a dynamic one in which “person or social group with an ‘animistic’ sensibility attributes sentience or the quality of being ‘animated’ to a wide range of beings in

the world, such as the environment, other persons, animals, plants, spirits, and forces of nature like the ocean, winds, sun, or moon” (p.1). The concepts of ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are important in animism, but “Spirits are understood in a broad sense that encompasses the spirits of beings or things, deities, and energies. Souls are often the spirits of beings and things, depending on the social context” (Swancutt (2003/ [2019]), p.1). My study shows how Gurungs also believe that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) share a generic type of soul that influences all involved. In doing so, I show how these rituals provide concrete ethnographic illustrations of the concepts of ‘animism’ and ‘perspectivism’ (Viveiros de Castro, E. 1998).

In this study, I have analyzed the three Gurung ritual practices and the oral texts to show the Gurung religious cosmology and belief about ‘nature’ for regulating “practical and symbolic environmental relations” (Campbell, 1998) between human and non-human beings in the lived ecology (Viveiro de Castro, 2004). By symbolic relations, I mean to show how the Gurungs of the study area perceive and understand nature and their relations with nature. Roy Rappaport reminds us that “Nature is seen by humans through a screen of beliefs, knowledge, and purposes, and it is in terms of their images of nature, rather than of the actual structure of nature, that they act,” which he calls the “cognized environment”(Rappaport, 1979, p.97). Viveiros de Castro believed that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) are each endowed with the same generic type of soul . . . which determines that all entities see and interact with other things in the same way (Viveiro de Castro, 2004, p. 6). He argues that both human and non-human subjects (animals, plants, water, mountains, soil, and souls) can interact and have intersubjective understanding. Hence, I find de Castro’s perspective useful for analyzing the ritual symbolism related to human and non-human interactions in the study area.

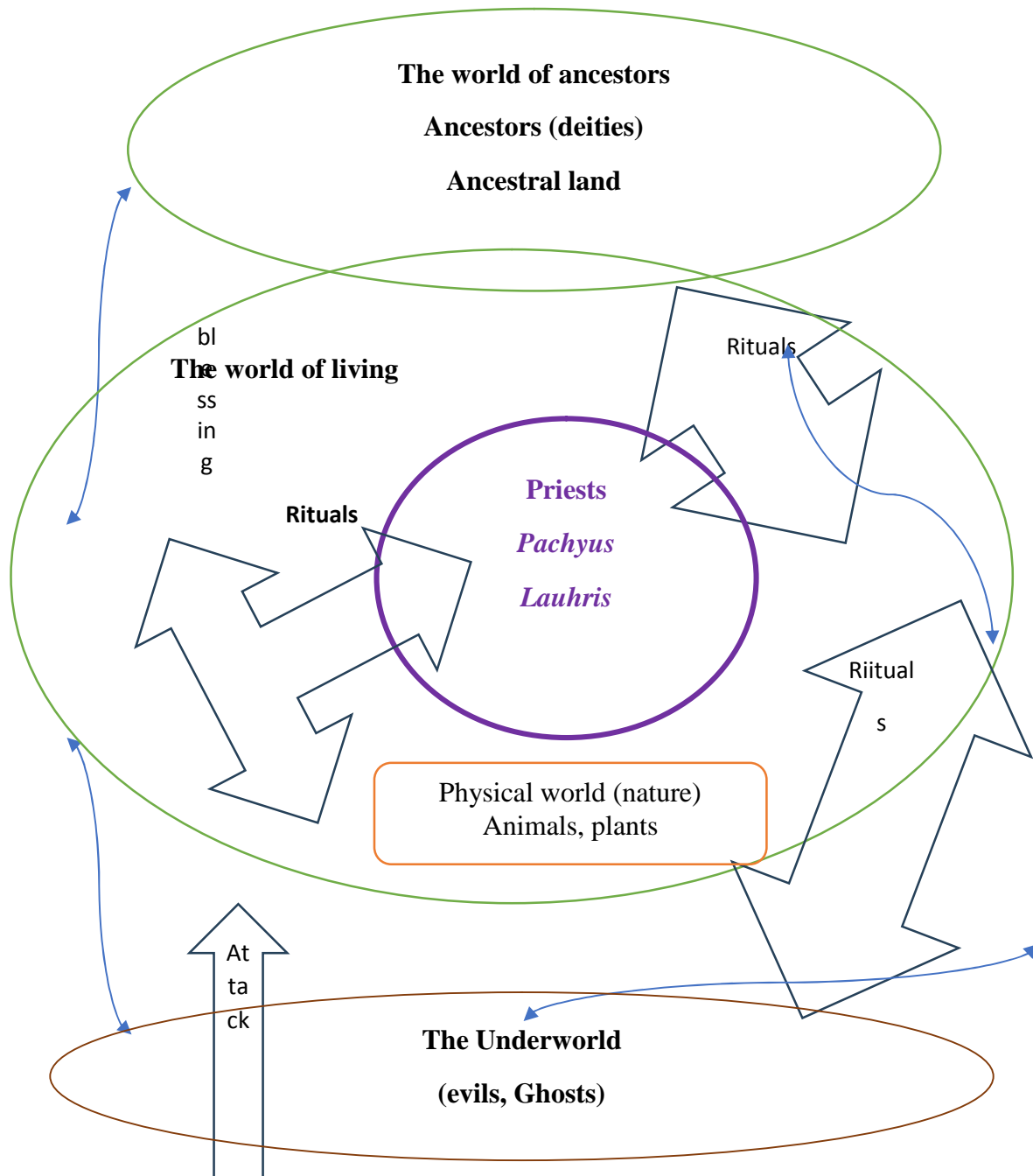
### 1.7 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1.1: Interlink among the Ritual Practices**

The figure 1.1 shows the linkage of ritual practices in Sikles village. Here are given major three ritual practices, soul journey practices of *Pai* ritual, belief system and ancestors worship, and nature worship. Main ritual actors for the cultural-ritual performances among the Gurung community in Sikles village are given. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* who are priestly groups and ritual actors. The ritual and ritual actors are interlinkage between each-other.

## The Ritual Mediations of the Three Gurung Worlds by the Priests



**Figure 1.2: The Ritual Mediations of the Three Gurung Worlds by the Priests**

The other specialists are the village leader or headman, *Pa dis* and *Mhinas*. Village leader organizes the whole village, *Pa dis* are astrologers who define auspicious and inauspicious days for rituals and define luck of the Gurungs life. And *Mhinas* are given full authority for village control and social mobilization and are messengers too. The structure is

very strong and combined with each-other. All these parts are oriented to the local people and their ritual practices.

The figure shows that, local people and rituals are in the centre and the respondents are concerned to the village people and their ritual practices. *Pachyu* are the most essential priests among the priestly groups, especially they are related to psychological treatment to ill. When people fall sick, they directly concern and consult the *Pachyu* for immediate knowing what is happening, wellbeing or bad luck. Then the *Pachyu* decides their auspicious and inauspicious luck and share what must be done to get well. *Pachyu* defines that by checking the throbbing vein in the wrist, counting of their *Lho* (Nepali, *barga*) and other skills. Similarly, *Pachyu* are both death and *Pai* ritual specialist too. In *Pai* (soul journey ritual) rituals, the most important rituals among the Gurungs, *Pachyu* are compulsory. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform it together for these essential rituals. *Lauhri* are also the most important priests for the rituals like the *Pachyu*. The Gurungs do not perform these rituals without *Lauhri*. They are also natural worship specialists in the Sikles and the area. Natural worships are common practices in the village. The villagers say *Lam*, not Lama, they are only *Lam* priest for their clan. In my experiences, until some fifteen years ago, *Lam* and *Pachyu* were common priests for *Lam* clan, especially, in death and *Pai* ritual. Nowadays, they do not use *Pachyu* for such rituals, only the *Lams* perform their death and *Pai* rituals.

In the figure, I have questioned that about the *Tdoh* (village leader) and between *Pachyu* and *Lam*. When I was visiting field work for my master's degree in 2005, there were more than 3-4 *Tdohs* and *Lam*. But during my M. Phil degree in 2014, there were problems for the *Tdoh* and between *Pachyu* and *Lam*. Now, in 2019, in my Ph.D. field work, there was a lack of *Tdoh* in Sikles. They used to help perform all the rituals and local practices. But lack of a professional *Tdoh* in the Sikles and the area is utterly felt. *Lams* were *Bon* priests then, but nowadays, the number of *Bon Lams* is rapidly decreasing and the new *Lams* are heavily influenced by Tibetan Lamaism and new system. So, they do not invite *Pachyu* priests for

death and *Pai* rituals nowadays. This is the question for social structure and its function among the Gurungs of Sikles. All these actors play vital roles for ritual performances, though *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are still major ritual actors and characters. They are the owners of Gurung oral text according to their position and texts. So, this study has focused on the main ritual actors *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*.

### **1.8 Organization of the Dissertation**

This work is organized into eight chapters. There is an introduction and conceptual overview in chapter one. The second chapter is about the detailed literature review of anthropological theoretical frameworks and clarity of the research gap. The third chapter is about the detailed methodological stand of the study. The fourth chapter is about the geographical setting of the study area, priestly composition, people and their livelihood. The fifth chapter is about the soul journey in *Pai* ritual (after death or funeral ritual) which is one of the major ritual practices after death or funeral among the Gurung community. Chapter six is about belief systems and ancestral worship, where detail about the relationship between Gurung people and their ancestors. Chapter seven is about nature rituals and Gurung people. The last chapter, the chapter eight summaries the dissertation and reflects on the main conclusions of the research and its implications.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter covers theoretical and empirical reviews of the important anthropological literature on ritual symbolism (symbolic anthropology) and reviews of studies on the major themes that this study has focused on such as oral ritual texts, ritual specialists, the relationships between ritual, nature, and culture, and the concept of soul.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Reviews**

Religion and Ritual are one fundamental subjects of anthropology (Bell, 1992; Bowie, 2021). There are different theoretical approaches to studying ritual in anthropology (Asad, 2013; Bell, 1992; Keinath, Snoek & Stausberg, 2018). I have used the symbolic approach to ritual in this study. Hence, I will review the major anthropological works on the symbolic approach to ritual to highlight its relevance for my study.

##### **2.1.1 Symbolic Anthropology and Ritual Studies**

The symbolic approach was developed during the 1960s in anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Douglas, 1966; Ortner, 1973; Schneider, 1968; Turner, 1967). Symbolic anthropology studies how people create meaning out of their experiences or construct their own concept of reality using shared cultural symbols, such as myths, ritual performances, natural objects, or body language. According to the symbolic approach in anthropology, meaning is constituted out of interaction between individuals; the symbols and meaning are public in their significance and are not confined to single individual brains or private spheres (Ortner, 1984).

Clifford Geertz was a leading figure in the interpretative or symbolic anthropology school. In his seminal paper on the theoretical position of interpretive anthropology, Geertz (1973) makes a powerful case for anthropology as an interpretative science and asserts that the concept of culture “is essentially a semiotic one” (p. 5). He writes:

Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973, p. 5).

From the above quote, it also becomes clear that the interpretive approach in anthropology rejects attempts at causal explanations for cultural phenomena. Geertz uses the metaphor of “thick description”, a term derived from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle which refers to the embedding of all the minor details of human life in thick layers of contextual significance. Geertz (1973) asserts that “ethnography is thick description” (pp 6-8) and therefore his approach to culture is based on the metaphor of culture as text. Given this, an ethnographer’s role is to interpret the text- that is, reading cultures as if they were texts of some sort (Chhetri, 2008). Prominent Nepali anthropologist, Ram B Chhetri compared culture as text to what a Pundit of *Saptaha* in some Hindu rituals would do i.e., read the Sanskrit text (*puran*) and interpret the dense text for his audience (Chhetri, 2008, p. 55).

According to Geertz, a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

As a system of symbols, according to Geertz, rituals highlight the crucial cultural ethos, worldviews, and cultural constructions of realities - what he calls the "model of reality" - that shape and influence the "model for reality" that, in turn, affect people's understanding and behaviour towards that reality (Geertz, 1973, pp. 93-94). Bell (1992) shares this approach, and she writes:

Ritual is a type of critical juncture where in some pair of opposing social or cultural forces come together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behaviour, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and imaginative ideal (Bell, 1992).

Theoretically, ritual is a part of culture that includes various rites and practices that dramatize myths, events, history, and tradition, and communicate cultural meanings to the people who perform them as well as to anthropologists who study them (Bell, 1992).

According to Mary Douglas, another proponent of symbolic anthropology:

Symbols are the only means of communication. They are the only means of expressing value; the main instruments of thought, the only regulator of experience. For any communication to take place, the symbols must be structured. For communication about religion to take place, the structure of the symbols must be able to express something relevant to the social order (Douglas, 1982, p. 38).

Thus, ritual symbols, to follow Douglas, are structured and they express something relevant to the social order through communicative means. Douglas's symbolic approach to ritual as a system of structure and communicative practice is relevant to understanding the Gurung rituals discussed in this study and the meanings these rituals communicate to ritual participants and practitioners. In this study, for example, I have discussed the Gurung *Pai* ritual, and how the ritual started from the very beginning in ancient times. Thus, the structure of the *Pai* ritual is very classical but the Gurung continue to follow this ritual in a similar structure in the present day. Not only priests but all relatives and villagers are engaged in organizing the *Pai* for three days. The *Pai* is full of its ritual symbolism which the priests narrate and become meaningful during the ritual process.

Victor Turner, one of the influential anthropologists in the study of ritual symbolism, emphasized that "the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific

properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context” (Turner, 1967, p. 19). According to him, a ritual symbol has three properties (Turner, 1967, pp.27-29): it condenses many things and actions in a single formation (*condensation*). Secondly, it unifies or connects distinct significations of meanings (*unification of disparate significata*) through analogy or association in fact or thought. Thus, in the Ndembu ritual, the milk tree stands for, *interalia*, women's breasts, motherhood, a novice at *Nkanga*, the principle of matriliney, a specific matrilineage, learning, and the unity and persistence of Ndembu society. The themes of nourishment and dependence run through all these diverse *significata*.

The third important property of dominant ritual symbols is the *polarization of meaning* into the “ideological pole” and “sensory pole”. The ideological poles of meanings represent the fundamental beliefs, principles of social structure, and other core norms and values that structure different aspects of social life. For example, ideological poles of meanings of “the milk tree but all other dominant Ndembu symbols . . . a cluster of *significata* that refer to components of the moral and social orders of Ndembu society, to principles of social organization, to kinds of corporate grouping, and to the norms and values inherent in structural relationships” (p. 28). Whereas “at the sensory pole, the meaning content is closely related to the outward form of the symbol. Thus, one meaning of the milk tree breast milk is closely related to the exudation of milky latex from the tree. One sensory meaning of another dominant symbol, the mukula tree, is blood; this tree secretes a dusky red gum” (28).

The sensory poles of ritual symbols are concentrated on those *significata* that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings. For example, during the first day of the Gurung *Pai* ritual, when the ritual priests ritually bring the soul (*plah*) of the deceased and put it into a ritual object called *laāh* (ritually, eight hand long bamboo, with eight hand long white cloth

and a wild plant), the deceased person's family members, particularly sisters and daughters, become emotional. They put ghee in the ritual object that represents the dead person's head, offer it food and drinks, and begin to sing emotionally ritualized songs called *krasa*. Thus, Turner's formulation of the properties of ritual symbols is very insightful and useful to study and analyse the meanings of rituals and how people understand and react to these symbols. Turner commented that people perform rituals to achieve particular goals or objectives. "Each ritual", he stated, "has its teleology, its own explicitly expressed goals" (Turner, 1967, p. 32). Symbols play a vital role in ritual performances. Symbols have multiple meanings and voices, and they describe and communicate layered realities and worldviews.

In the context of the anthropological study of rituals in Nepal, Sherry Ortner and David Holmberg studied the Sherpas and Tamangs rituals in Khumbu and Rasuwa-Nuwakot (Ortner, 1978; Holmberg, 1989). Both of them analysed cultural and ritual practices to understand why Sherpa and Tamang interpret everyday life and the larger philosophy of life. Ortner argued that "the ritual process was in the first instance a matter of meaning creation for actors whatever latent function may perform for the at large" (Ortner, 1978, p. 5). Ortner has stressed the cultural meaning and essence of the Sherpa rituals. All rituals as Ortner points out "have a broadly common structure, centering on offerings and petitions to the gods and offerings and threats to the demons and closing with a distribution of ritual food to all present" (1978, p.32). It can be inferred that the merit, luck, and protection believed to be the outcome of such rituals are valued by everyone in the community and therefore everybody would vie for a share as far as possible. Ortner analyses three rituals (Nyungne, exorcisms, and offering rituals) and one secular hospitality event to show how these rituals and hospitality practices symbolize the core values of the Sherpa culture. She argues that "the symbols of the rituals lead us towards the discovery of structural conflict, contradiction, and stress in the wider social and cultural world" (Ortner 1978, p. 3). For example, the Sherpa

ritual of Nyungne underlines the core value of celibacy and monastic ways of life, the most important principle of orthodox Sherpa Buddhism. For the Sherpa, participation in the Nyungne is for acquiring merits and hence negating sin by observing the various rules of renunciation by absenting oneself from food, drink, conversation, and sex (Ortner 1978, p. 35). But Ortner also shows how the Nyungne ritual mediates the contradiction between the value of celibacy and the institutions of marriage and family (Ortner, 1978, p. 52).

Despite the many studies on the Gurung religion, there is very limited focus on the ritual symbolism of the Gurung rituals focusing on the oral texts - the authority of the Gurung traditional religion based on animism and ancestor worship. Hence, I have used the symbolic anthropological approach to examine the ritual meanings of the Gurung rituals in the present study.

### **2.1.2 Anthropology of ‘Soul’ and the Gurung’s Concept of *Plah***

There are numerous philosophical and theoretical perspectives regarding human death and life after death. Belief in the soul of a person and its immortality after death is believed in major religions. Sobol (2000) writes that “The concept of the soul probably dates back to humanity’s earliest attempts to understand the nature and fate of living things and may even be older than homo sapiens” (p. 616). The classical anthropologist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century E.B. Tylor (1870) theorized about the belief in the soul as a defining feature of animism “the belief in spiritual beings” (p. 370). The Gurungs of Sikles also believe in the immortality of the soul. Life and death are relative based on the subjective understanding in different communities and philosophical traditions. Some philosophers claimed that there is life after death and some denied the logic. In Hegel’s philosophy, the human spirit stands between the natural and the eternal world and joins them both as extremes (Niarchos, 2014). Hegel’s anthropology deals with the transition between consciousness and transcendental forms of spirits. For Hegel, Anthropology presents the first moment of the notion of subjective Spirit

and is thereby one of the necessary sciences of cognition (Niarchos, 2014). There was a huge debate about the position of body, mind, and soul in anthropology. It is evident that Hegel's anthropology forms an important part of his doctrine of subjective spirit, which is one avenue on which Hegel himself claimed to go far beyond what he characterized as subjective idealism.

There have been many studies focusing on the concept of 'soul' in different cultural groups in Nepal<sup>5</sup>. These studies have shown how the concept of 'soul' is not limited to psychological aspects of life after death but the concept can help us understand the underlying "core symbols" such as the concepts of personhood, body, health and illness, kinship, and social relations, connection between person, ancestors, and territory, and many other aspects (Desjarlais, 1992; Holmberg, 1989; Maskarinec, 1995; McHugh, 1989, 2011). Scholars who have studied the Gurung religion have also written and examined the Gurung idea of the 'soul' (called *Plah* in the Gurung language) and the meanings of the soul (Kullsvveen, 1999; Mumford, 1989; McHugh, 1989, Pignede (1966); Strickland, 1983). Gurungs believe that a person has multiple *Plah* – men have nine souls and women have seven souls. The *Plah* resides inside a person's body but it is not always under the control of the body and person's mind. The *Plah*, as McHugh (1989) writes:

The notion of the body made alive by the presence of a number of souls (the *plah*) and the consciousness located in that living body (the *sae*). The body is believed to be made up of four natural elements: earth, water, fire, and air, along with a set of *plah* (nine for men and seven for women), which are the life force and keep the body intact. The *plah*, like the Western idea of the soul, is considered essential to life,

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<sup>5</sup> Some these studies among different groups include - Holymo (Desjarlais, 1992), Rai (Hardman, 1996; Nicoletti, 2006), Hindu caste groups (Maskarinec, 1995); Mountain Tibetan Buddhist religious groups (Ramble, 2009), Magar (de Sales, 2016; Magar, JB, 2072 BS), Tamang (Holmberg, 1989; Peters, 2004), Sherpa (Diemberger, 2013; Ortner, 1978), Tharu (McDonaugh, 2000), Thangmi (Schneiderman, 2000), and Gurung (Gurung, LP, 2019; Kullsvveen, 1999; McHugh, 1989, 2011; Mumford, 1989; Pignede (1993/1966); Pettigrew, 1995; Strickland, 1983).

although the individual is not aware of it. The *sae* is the vehicle of consciousness (to lose consciousness is expressed as "his or her *sae* went into forgetfulness" (*Tse sae mleyai*) and its condition is directly experienced. ...

The *plah*, like a soul, is an immaterial essence that one is neither aware of nor able to control. Beliefs about the *plah* convey a sense of the fragility of the person. *Plah* can easily fly out of the body and if all of the *plah* are lost, the body's elements are no longer held together by the life force and the person will die. If some *plah* are lost, illness results. The *plah* can be lost through such ordinary events as stumbling or being startled, or by the experience of intense emotion, illness, or witch attack (p. 79).

McHugh (1989) has clearly illustrated the Gurung concept of '*Plah*' and its relative instability. She uses the Gurung concept of 'soul' to discuss the Gurung notion of personhood and the importance of reciprocity among the Gurung social relations (McHugh, 2011). She has not delved into the analysis of the Gurung rituals in which the concept of '*Plah*' becomes very important and illustrative.

The *Pai* ritual- the soul journey is a major focus of this study. There is a good number of studies focused on the ritual of the 'soul journey' in Nepal i.e. the ritual management of the soul of the dead person. In many cultures in Nepal, the soul of the dead person needs to be taken to the place of ancestors, heaven, and other worlds. In particular, earlier anthropologists in the 1970s identified the "magical journey" (similar to the soul journey) as an important feature of Nepalese shamanism (Hitchcock, 1967). Thus, the ritual soul journey and similar "shamanic magic flight" are concrete signifying practices that explain the cultural understandings (core symbols) related to notions of body, personhood, afterlife, and the connections between different worlds. Similarly, these rituals also elucidate the power and agency of the ritual specialists (shamans, ritual priests) in moving between different worlds and communicating between non-human and spiritual beings. In this regard, Diana Riboli,

who studied the Chepang religion and shamanism between 1990 and 1995, writes that the ability to experiment with outwit the body, thus allowing the soul to fly to the Heavens or travel to the depths of the Underworld is one of the prerogatives of most shamanic religions throughout the world (Riboli, 2000, p. 93). However, she clarifies that such ritual journey is not only “the prerogative of shamans in the case of the Himalayas. Nepal, in particular, has taken in both Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, known as Lamaism, as well as the ancient Bon religion” (p. 94).

The soul journey ritual and the *Plah khu lapa* rituals discussed in chapters five and six of this thesis illustrate the Gurung concept of the *plah (soul)* and explain why Gurungs need to seek the help of the ritual specialists to control their souls. Different scholars have given different theoretical concepts and practices about this ‘*Pai*’ ritual. Hitchcock and Jones said, “Gurung believes that at death the spirit of the dead is captured by demons of the underworld and that they must be separated before proceeding with *Pai* (Hitchcock & Jones, 1994, p. 207).

Pignede (1966), one of the first foreign scholars to have studied the Gurung religion, wrote that:

Theoretically, the pae (*Pai*) must take place between the thirteen or forty-ninth day following the death. Some pacus (*Pachyus*) and klihbris (*Lauhris*) believe that if the pae (*Pai*) has not taken place before the forty-nine day, the soul begins a series of transmigration into bodies of animals or vegetables. A series that ends, one day, with the return to human form (p. 369).

The claim made by Pignede (1993[1966]) that *Pai* must take place between the thirteen or forty-ninth day following the death is not the traditional Gurung practice, and it is not followed by the majority. Some may have followed this under the influence of the Hindu and Tibetan Buddhism culture. The Gurungs of Sikles do not follow this rule regarding the

fixed times for the *Pai* ritual. Comparing the death ritual of the Magar community of Tara Khola, Baglung and the Gurung's '*Pai*' ritual, Om Gurung (1996) writes:

Tarami Magar has a fixed date for the final death ritual. Whenever a death occurs, whether a day before or a day after the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kartik, in any calendar year, the final death is observed only on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kartik of the year . . . The Gurungs, on the other hand, do not have a specific time for their final death rituals. Depending upon their economic condition, the Gurung can organize the final commemorative rites called *Pai* or *Arghum* individually or collectively within three days after the death up to three years or even a longer period of time (p. 81).

Here, Om Gurung's clarification also underlines the importance of the works of native scholars in adding new perspectives and correcting the errors of foreign scholars on the Gurung rituals. Many scholars such as Kullsvæn (1999), Pettigrew (1995), and Pignede (1993[1966]) have studied the Gurung *Pai* ritual involving the soul journey of the deceased person. During this three-day ritual, the ritual priests search for the soul or *Plah* of the dead in different worlds, then bring 'it' back to the world of the living, into the house of the deceased, then put it into an effigy, and then into the body of a sheep before it is finally taken to the land of ancestors. Kullsvæn (1999) has called this post-funeral ritual a second mortuary ritual for the "social burial" of the deceased person in which the soul of the dead person is separated from different places for the final journey in heaven or the "place of forefathers". He called this transmigration. According to Pettigrew (1995), at the end of the *Pai* ritual, "the soul is transferred from the effigy to sheep, the sheep is then given a feast and along with a "companion" (another sheep) is sacrificed. The identification with the deceased is thus central to sacrifice, and to shamanic pwe" (p. 161).

Studies by Kullsvæn (1999) and Pettigrew (1995) are very insightful and important. But the *Pai* and its rituals for the soul journey have many *pye* (texts) that the ritual priests

chant during the three-day ritual event. Pettigrew's (1999) study on the shamanic journey focuses on the political value of shamanic knowledge in linking the ritual and the Tamu's ancestral territory in the context of the ethnic identity movement. I have also focused on the ritual of the soul journey and its ritual narrations of the Gurung ancestral territory but my focus is not on the political significance of this ritual. I have focused on the analysis of the ritual texts and their thick descriptions from an emic perspective (of the ritual priests). My study provides the *pye* texts in the ritual language with their interpretations and the analysis of ritual symbolism. Sticker (1983) and Mumford (1989) have both focused on the Gurung rituals but do not elaborate on the Gurung notion of *Plah* like McHugh who has theorized and explained the concept but in the non-ritual contexts. To my knowledge, these *Pai* texts have not been documented, translated, and analysed in detail. I have tried my best to translate the complex ritual texts and discuss these texts in the ethnographic contexts of the rituals I had observed before and during the study period.

### **2.1.3 Animism and Gurung Religion**

Animism is an important anthropological concept that I have used to describe the traditional religious practices of the Gurungs in Sikles. They continue to follow their traditional religious practices with the help of the traditional Gurung ritual specialists. They do not identify themselves as 'Buddhists' or 'Hindus'; the younger generation may identify their religious practices as 'Bon-Po'. In this study, I have discussed three types of Gurung rituals as practised by the local Gurungs in Sikles. The analysis of these ritual practices and discussions with the Gurung specialists of Sikles support that the Gurungs of Skiles practice 'animistic' religious practices. The concept of animism, generally understood as "beliefs in spirit and soul", is limiting and gives the sense of "primitive religion" (Tylor, 1871; Swancutt, 2019). Instead, I have used the new concept of 'animism' which has been revived in recent decades by different scholars working on indigenous religious practices from the

South American contexts (Viveiros de Castro, E. 1998) and other areas (Kirsch, 2006). In particular, I have used the concept of animism discussed by Katherine Swancutt (2003 [2019]). According to her:

Animism is both a concept and a way of relating to the world. The person or social group with an ‘animistic’ sensibility attributes sentience or the quality of being ‘animated’ to a wide range of beings in the world, such as the environment, other persons, animals, plants, spirits, and forces of nature like the ocean, winds, sun, or moon ....

....to an animistic person or social group, sentience is often envisioned as a vital force, life force, or animated property that is ‘immanent’, accessible, and ‘ready to hand’ in the everyday world, even if this property is usually latent and not perceivable (Swancutt, 2003[2019], (p. 1).

The concepts of ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are important in animism but “Spirits are understood in a broad sense that encompasses the spirits of beings or things, deities, and energies. Souls are often the spirits of beings and things, depending on the social context”. Gurungs also believe in the spirits of non-human entities. Beyond the concept of spirits and souls, the Gurung ancestor worship and the soul journey, I have discussed, underline the relationship between people, nature, and territory, mediated by the rituals. The Gurungs’ cultural practices of worshiping their village boundary, rivers, water sources, forests, land, soil, and other entities of nature by calling on their ancestors as deities demonstrate their religious cosmology of animism. Gurungs also believe that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) share a generic type of soul. This theoretical implication can be used to study other indigenous communities in Nepal. They also believe that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) shared a generic type of soul which determines that all entities affect and interact with other things in the same

way. The important theoretical approach of recent times, *perspectivism* gives ample answers that humans can develop the capacity to understand themselves through non-human entities (Viveiros de Castro, 1998 & 2004).

## **2.2 Oral History and the *Pye* (Ritual Text) of Gurung**

Vansina (1985), Giri (2018), and Krech Iii (1991) argued that “illiterate” communities maintained their history through oral telling. Iii writes, “history in illiterate societies is not different from the pursuit of the past, in the literate ones....and there is therefore, no need to coin a special term, such as ethnohistory just for this reason” (Iii, 1991, p.363). The awareness of the past, in Terence Turner's (1988) terms "a social awareness and can exist only as a part of generalized awareness of the structure and behaviour of a society...since all societies are organized consciously or unconsciously to ensure their own continuity of the past" (Turner, 1988, p.245). Similarly, in the volume *Rethinking History and Myth* (1988), scholars brought together indigenous South American perspectives on the past and demonstrated that both history and myth activate social consciousness and, thus, are both interpretive frameworks (Hill, 1988). According to this formulation, myth and history are not in opposition to each other; rather they complement one another and help to illuminate situations of contact and coping with dominant society and also serve as a resource for social action in the present (Giri, 2018). In this sense, there are multiple ways of remembering and representing the past in a contested present. Oral history, songs, performances, and storytelling in anthropology become important mediums of continuity of the past (Giri, 2018). Ritual is one of the important cultural practices of narrating and thus continuing the knowledge of history (Hill, 1988; Pettigrew, 1995).

The Gurungs have a long oral history and myths which are chanted by their traditional priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* in different ritual ceremonies. The Gurung myths are not only ritual texts but also history (Pettigrew, 1999; Strickland, 1983). The Gurungs *pye t lhu t* or

oral text and tradition, which is the way of theory or ideology or principle among the Gurungs. The *pye* condenses the dominant ritual symbols and explains these through narrations of many myths about the Gurung past, ancestral lands, religious cosmology, and many other things (Pettigrew, 1995).

The study of the Gurung community is incomplete without the study of their own history: *pye tã lhu tã*. It is an oral history that the Gurung priests chant in different ritual practices. Officially the *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* are the Gurung priests and they chant the *pye* in rituals. So, the priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are called ‘*pye tã lhemai lhu tã lhemai*’ which means the owners of the Gurung history or text at the local level. Siman Strickland (1982) was one of the first scholars who studied this *Pye* till in the 1980s. He studied the *pye tã lhu tã* (*pye* of *Pachyu* priest Padam Singh Gurung) among the Gurung community in Sikles. According to him the meaning of *pye tã Lhu tã pe [pye]* is ‘principle’ and ‘*Lu [lhu]*’ means ‘song’ (Strickland, 1982). Of course, the *pye* refers to principle or theory and *Lhu* refers to “culture” or “song” respectively. Besides linguistic competency, Strickland (1982) recited such *pye* with *Pachyu* priests in different ritual performances (Strickland, 1982). He writes a detailed history of *Kahrpa R h2 /karabare*’s history, his nine sons, and the search for honey in different areas. Strickland’s (1982) study is important but it does not adequately focus on ritual symbolism.

Judith Pettigrew (1995) addresses the history of Gurung, traditional norms-values, social contests, the role of different priests in different ritual practices, and the ‘*Pye Lhu Sangh*’ which is the central ritual religious organization of the Gurung. She tried to interpret the meaning of ‘*Pye tã lhu tã*. The oral texts that are chanted by the Tamu shamans and which narrate, guide and explain ritual action are called *Pye* (Pettigrew, 1995).” The *Pachyus* and *Lauhri*s who are the main priests among the Gurungs and they have been chanting *pye* in

different rituals since the beginning. The *pye* is same and same man, but I mentioned here *Karhpa R* and *karbare* by Strickland (1982).

### 2.2.1 Oral Text about Migration of the Gurung

Pirko Moisala (1991) recorded the Gurung songs and beats of Madal in a cassette player that were used in different Gurung feasts and festivals for dancing. Similarly, she explained that the *Ngah /dhyangro*, *Jhyalee*, and *Sankha* are the ritual instruments and the major sources of music in ritual performances. She further explains how and why the people used these instruments and what the sound said. She not only explains the Gurung music and its continuity change but also explains the history of the Gurungs, the migration route, cultural ritual practices, the belief system of the Klinu village in different times, and the priestly role among the Gurung community (Moisala, 1991). She noted that the Gurung came from the north across the Himalayas centuries ago (Moisala, 1990). There are the same versions and arguments that the Gurungs came from the northern side of the Himalayas.

One piece of evidence is that the physical structure, language and way of living of the Gurungs are similar to that of the Mongolian or Tibeto-Burman people. The other is their own *pye tā lhu tā* which describes the Gurungs' migration routes and the history of the Gurung kingdom/ state. Thus, Moisala's (1991) work shows how the Gurung music played during various rituals provides evidence for the Gurung history. Similarly, Ellen Winner (2015, p. 15) says that Gurung are generally believed to have migrated into Nepal from further north through south-west Mongolia, northwest China and southern Tibet, and many thousands of years ago to have lived in the high mountains of western China. Their shamanism includes elements in common with practices in Siberia and western Tibet. The research is nearly logical to that of *pye tā lhu tā*. The Gurungs believe that they came from 'Chō naas'<sup>6</sup> as their place of origin and the kind of culture that was developed in 'Chō naas'.

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<sup>6</sup> Chō Naas-Gurung language -- the ancient state of the Gurung when they had not migrated to Nepal.

The Gurungs believe that when they die, they (their soul) go to the ancestral land in the northern side (somewhere in China and Tibet) from where their ancestors had migrated to the current places in Nepal. Judith Pettigrew (1995) notes:

It is very hard to know what contact the Gurungs have had with Buddhists in the distant past. As long-distance traders and as a people who probably migrated through parts of Mongolia or Inner Mongolia, China, and Tibet, it is likely that they had some early interaction with Buddhism, but it may have been limited. The *pye-ta lhu-ta* incorporate basic shamanic principles, and there can be little doubt that in the course of history it has been influenced by other practices, what is important in a contemporary perspective is that shamans, shamanists, and patrons perceive the *pye tã lhu tã* to be their indigenous religious practices, and to be strongly differentiated from others such as Buddhism or Hinduism (p. 145)

Here, I just want to emphasize that different studies have shown how the Gurung rituals and the oral texts narrate the Gurung distinct history related to their ancestral land, the Gurung ancient/ mythic kingdom, the migratory processes, and the different historical trajectories. This study further adds new analyses and texts to the existing studies

### **2.3 Ritual, Nature and Perspectivism**

MacFarlane (1976) wrote “For many centuries the Gurungs were wandering bands or shepherds who also practiced hunting and certain slash and burn agriculture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, they were also traders over the mountain passes to the north and beginning to be famed as army recruits” (p. 293). The Gurung’s traditional subsistence patterns primarily comprise farming systems and animal husbandry. In this study, I have tried to explain and show how the Gurung rituals are an integral part of the traditional subsistence patterns in Sikles. The Gurungs have their distinct customary institution and rules *riti-thihi* to regulate the rituals and the agricultural system in the village. Thus, I have relied on the

ecological anthropological perspectives (Rappaport, 1979; Paudel, 2016) to explain how the ritual practices mediate the relations between humans, nature, and culture in the study area. There are many sacred places in and around the Sikles village and these places are the abode of ancestral deities as well as the ghosts and bad spirits.

Many of these sacred sites are also the sources of water and forests which the local people use for their daily uses, farming, irrigation, and animal husbandry. These natural sources are also sacred deities who must be offered periodic rituals and gifts of food, drinks and animal sacrifices. Hence, the Gurungs of Sikles have their emic understanding of nature based on their religious cosmology and practical concerns. Roy Rapport (1979) calls this “cognized model” of environment which includes, “a description of a people’s knowledge of their environment and of their beliefs concerning it” (p. 97). This model is useful for understanding how Gurungs see nature “through a screen of beliefs, knowledge, and purposes, and it is in terms of their images of nature” (p. 97). But the Gurungs also act on the objective nature that follows the science of ecology, however, they do not ‘use’ or act on nature simply as “resources” for their livelihood and other purposes. They must follow the customary rules and regulations, and observe the needed rituals to undertake the seasonal cycle of agriculture. Without making the deities (nature) happy and seeking their blessings, the Gurungs believe that agriculture cannot be successful. Thus, there is an intersubjective understanding and relations of reciprocity between humans and nature, mediated through rituals in the study area.

Their intersubjectivity could be understood through the application of Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro, 1998 & 2004). Viveiros de Castro believed that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) each endowed with the same generic type of soul . . . which determines that all entities see and interact with other things in the same way. Human and non-human subjects (animals, plants, water, mountains, soil, and

souls) can interact and have intersubjective understanding (Viveiro de Castro, 2004, p. 6). This perspectivism could be applicable to understanding soul rituals and other nature-culture interactions of the Gurung of Sikles. They are ritually important for natural entities such as forests, water, rock, soil, and others. The Gurungs use such entities for performing different ritual ceremonies. These rituals dramatize and communicate many ritual symbolisms related to the protection of human beings, domestic animals, and agriculture. This study shows how the Gurungs use rituals to appease their deities as well to protect and manage the natural resources.

## 2.4 Research Gap

Based on the literature review, I have undertaken here, it can be argued that ritual experts have not produced and corrected misrecognition of oral text-based ritual interpretation and analysis of the Gurung rituals. Many scholars have explained *Pai*, *pye*, and other rituals of the Gurung. The ritual knowledge is especially based on oral text. The *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are ritual experts of the ritual based on oral text. Oral texts are not transcribed and easily accessible knowledge. Only traditional Gurung ritual experts articulate special ritual occasions. Existing literature did not depict ritual experts' knowledge and observation of the Gurung rituals. All mentioned literature did not analyse rituals through the lens of ritual experts. Being *Pachyu* and an expert on the oral text, this research addressed missing and misinterpretations of earlier research.

There is a long description of the Gurung history and migration route in their own *pye tã lhu tã*. According to this, the Gurungs came from the northern side of the Himalaya and they migrated from 'Chõ naas' (ancient Gurung state or place) where the Gurungs had originated. According to the *pye* and priests, the whole Tibetan plateau and the area beyond are called 'Chõ naas'. There is the absence of chronology which is the biggest problem for the Gurungs for their time and space in distant history. But they have the oral history of

places like Mustang, Manang, Lamjung and Kaski in the *pye* when the Gurungs crossed Tibet and arrived in Nepal at that time. According to the *pye* the Gurungs established their states in different places. In the *pye*, we can gain the name of ‘*Chō naas*’, for instance, ‘*Sa-fu-ti Kyahlsa*’ and ‘*Uicho Chōru*’. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant ‘*Nkyarkulee, Mprakulee, Pokulee and Kukulee, China Tōh China Syō*’ (all states or places lie in somewhere of Mongolia and China according to the oral *pye*) as well. We cannot ensure where the places are located.

According to the *pye* and language, the places may be somewhere in Tibet and China. In the *pye*, they call *hyula ch pa* or state establishment and *S cha kwurpa*, or taking the name of the places where the Gurung ruled and visited in the beginning. There are different myths and perspectives about the origin of the Gurungs. But the history of the Gurungs says different concepts and meanings by different knowledgeable even among the Gurungs. Hence it is very difficult to say and write the history of the Gurungs through an oral text-based ritual perspective. Being a ritual expert and a student of anthropology, I argued that *pye tā lhu tā* is reliable and essential for better understanding and correction of misinterpretation of the study of Gurung rituals and history.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter covers the methodological approach including research design, selection of people, and place. It explains detailed techniques, processes, the positionality of the researcher, methods of data collection, data analysis, fieldwork experiences, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. This chapter provides extensive details of how the researcher managed participatory observation, engaged interview and status of researcher during fieldwork in own community.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

##### **3.1.1 Ontological Perspective**

The Gurungs believe that oral text-based knowledges are authoritative knowledges to understand living people, ancestors, and nature. Being a Gurung *Pachyu* (traditional ritual expert), and anthropologist, I believe in a plurality of reality and world views were interpreted. The Gurung ritual experts interpret their reality based on oral text. Similar contexts prevail when studying indigenous communities of Nepal. Many of them have different world views and understanding of the community. In this research, my ontological position is interpretative because the reality of the Gurungs is interpreted the oral text.

##### **3.1.2 Epistemological Perspective**

Oral text knowledge is main source of knowing the Gurung world. The common Gurungs do not have access to the oral text because it needs long traditional ritual practices and they should be from a family of priests. Being a member of *Kromchhai* family, I have been practising oral text-based rituals in the community. I have access to the oral text knowledge. I knew by doing and other ritual experts who shared their knowledge of the oral text. I employed self-reflection as well as knowledge of the other ritual experts of the Gurung community.

### 3.1.3 Axiological Perspective

Being the ritual expert, I have certain loyalty to the Gurung's traditional ritual practices, knowledge, and the values of the Gurungs. I tried to maintain neutrality, certain values of the Gurung rituals, ancestor and nature worshipping are loaded in my writing. I am one of the authorities who can explain the knowledge of the Gurung oral text. My position and access to knowledge influence common Gurungs. My interpretation can have significance values in the understanding of the Gurung. In this sense, this research is not value-free writing.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study is explorative and descriptive ethnography. Despite being a villager and Gurung ritual expert, I have a long-term field work and participated with my key informants for qualitative data. I employed a qualitative research design. Within the qualitative approach, exploratory, and descriptive designs were used. More specifically, I adopted an ethnographic approach that is considered a methodological hallmark of anthropology. For my issue and research question, an ethnographic method is found well suited because ethnography is never the act of mere description; rather it is 'a theory of describing' (Nader, 2011). Being a Gurung traditional ritual specialist of Sikles, I consciously participated with *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, *Pa di*, and *Mhina*.

As a researcher, I collected my research data and information in different phases. Preliminary level data was collected in September -February, 2016-2017. Then, detailed fieldwork carried out from October 2017 to August 2019. As a ritual specialist and researcher, I engaged and participated in *Pai* ritual and ancestor worship many times in 2019 to 2022 in my research area and in Pokhara as well. And I collected such essential data from the field, the collected data verified again. During fieldwork, I stayed whole time in my own

house in Gairithar of Sikles where my own younger brother Bhasar Gurung and his family have been living. My younger brother is also interested in *Pachyu* and Gurung culture.

### 3.3 Rational for the Selection of Sikles

The study was conducted in the Gurung village Sikles, Madi Village Municipality Ward No.1 Sikles. Parche, Khilang, Sõtã, Chiplee, Tangting, Ghyaprang, Yangjakot are the neighbouring villages of Sikles. All the villages have the same cultural and ritual practices. They use the same *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* (priestly groups) from Sikles. Among many similar villages, Sikles was selected for my research because it is one of the major centres of the traditional Gurung culture and ritual practices in Nepal. The local Gurungs continue to follow the ritual practices led by *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, and the customary practices (*riti-titih*) are still active and functional in Sikles village. Hence, the village was the most appropriate research area for my study. Similarly, being a native of Sikles village also enabled me to do the kind of the fieldwork needed for this study.

Many foreign anthropologists such as Macfarlane (1976) and Strickland (1982) carried out field research in the areas, but their focus was not on the oral text of the Gurung rituals. Pignede (1966) was based in Mohoria village of Kaski district. Though he visited the Sikles area in 1966, his study did not focus on the oral narratives of the traditional specialists. MacFarlane visited Sikles many times, and, fortunately, I participated once in 2013 with him. His study focused on the population and resource management of the Gurung village of Thak (1976). He is one of the experts for Gurung traditional culture and ritual practices. Strickland (1982) studied the oral *pye* of *Pachyu*, he is anthropologist and he could understand oral narrative like ritual specialist *Pachyu*. Similarly, Pettigrew (1995), studied the Gurungs shamanic dialogue in Yanjakot village. In spite of their presence and proximity to Sikles, they did not address issues of traditional ritual performance based on oral text, roles of oral text based ritual specialists, their meaning and inter-subjectivity of human and non-human

communication. How did the Gurungs of the Sikles make and differentiate themselves as meaningful living beings through oral narratives? This question was not addressed through the lens of ritual specialists.

I am familiar with the villagers, ritual specialists, cultural ritual practices, and local customs. I have been active as a *Pachyu* since my early teenage years. I was formally presenting myself there as an anthropological researcher and academic integrity. There was more discussion with my informants *Pachyu, Lahuri, Mhinas*, and others to fulfil my research objectives and research questions. To address the issues of oral text and traditional ritual practitioners, Sikles was an appropriate location for the study.

### **3.4 Positionality and Immersion**

My immersion on the issues of Gurung rituals is both personal inclination and interest of my own people. I belong to the priestly community of the Gurung of Sikles. I spent more than twenty-five years regularly in Sikles, since my birth, childhood and young life. Now I live in Pokhara. I am familiar with all the villagers of Sikles, and their daily activities such as priestly works, farming system, feasts and festivals, food, costume, and other activities. Similarly, I am familiar with priest groups, mother groups, and youth groups. I was interested in local resources such as forest, water, land and management strategies and culture of the Gurungs. My family's background is from agriculture and priestly activities among Gurung society of Sikles. So, I spent more time in agriculture and Gurung priestly work and the work is going on continuously even this period. Though I was familiar, I carried out fieldwork as a researcher for my academic degree. There are limitations of doing research in your own community in a familiar setting. Because of earlier experiences and maintaining a researcher's identity in the village, it is easier to become researcher in my own village this time, so I decided to study Gurung's ritual practices.

Most of the rituals are practised according to their oral myths and local customary rules. I observed and practised for years with the same villagers and practitioners. Though, it was more difficult for me how to visit, how to express my aim and about my research. First of all, when I entered for this Ph.D. in Tribhuvan University in January 2016, personally I was pleased and happy to be a candidate for a Ph.D. Dashain was in the air, on 2016 September, I visited my field area of Sikles for rapport building and met all of my informants. When I told them my aim and study they congratulated and wished me. I spent six months there and returned to Pokhara. However, there were some obstacles and challenges for me. The groups' priests *Pachyus*, *Lauhris*, *Mhinas*, and *Pāedis* were not fully engaged in ritual every day but went to the forest, fields and other homework for livelihood. It was difficult to manage time for discussion.

Especially I got more chances to participate in the death and *Pai* (soul journey) rituals. The months of November-December, December-January and January-February are suitable for *Pai* ritual, and more *Pais* are performed at that time. Ritually, October-November, December-January and February-March months are also for *Failu* worship both *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*. I have performed many *Failu* rituals in the *Pachyus* houses and recorded more videos, captured more photos, and narrations at the period. As I spent ritual performances as a *Pachyu* priest it helped my research work too. I also studied the book 'Gurung cosmology' which was written at 1957, and the book belonged to my father. The book defines auspiciousness and inauspiciousness for luck and future. I studied other hand written book '*Sarka pye*' (the oral text of *sarka* or the *pye* of soul *journey* process in *Pai* ritual) which was written by my father on 1999.

There is a long history of researching one's own community especially from American cultural anthropological tradition. The emergence of British social anthropology was rooted in the study of 'Others'. American Cultural anthropology on the other started

doing ethnographic research among American indigenous communities. Franz Boas (1920) did his first field work with the Inuit living on Baffin Island, in northern Canada. He had intended to study hunting patterns and the like, but the more time he spent with the Inuit the more he realized that their particular way of doing things reflected a particular way of seeing the world. Immersion in Inuit life made him see his own culture from the outside. Boas trained Margaret Mead (1928), Ruth Benedict (1935), Zora Neale Hurston (1935), Ella Cara Deloria doing research among native American people rather than going out of America. This emic approach of understanding self became a trend among many cultural anthropologists. In Nepal, anthropologists started doing research among their own people. Mukta S. Lama (2008) and Dambar Chemjong (2017) have carried out their dissertation research on their own communities. By following this long methodological tradition, I have carried out research among the Gurungs. As a ritual specialist, I tried to carry out research about ritual specialization of my own ritual. It is a new methodological approach. Being the same villager, I am very familiar with all the villagers. Though, personally, I did not use and think any harmful words and behaviour at the local level. I thought that I was just a researcher for my thesis, not more. I have come here to learn about new massage and subjects. I played a good role and always followed researcher ethical values.

### **3.5 Nature and Sources of Data**

The nature of data is mostly qualitative, collected from ethnographic fieldwork. To extract ethnographic data, I stayed and participated in rituals. Similarly, I immersed myself with the Gurung ritual specialists because the researcher is considered as the main tool of data collection in ethnographic research. The reason to employ ethnography is, “ethnography provides a link to the past for the present diversity and should be the context in which we produce the future” (Holmberg, 2008, 21p). Anthropologists define ethnography as ethnography is current history that is not only informed by the past but something that also

indicates documentaries of the emerging moments (Shah, 2004; Moore, 1993). Participation observation is the main tool of data collection in ethnographic research. In the course of the long-term fieldwork and ritual performances, I conducted observations and key informant interviews. Both primary and secondary data are employed for analysis and interpretation of the findings. Secondary data are collected from books, journal articles, magazines and documents.

### 3.5.1 Secondary Data

I have supplemented the ethnographic information with secondary resources. Secondary data were collected from different texts, journals, magazines, news, reports, and bulletins in different libraries. I have gone through books of different *pyes* in Sikles and Pokhara. Most of the *pyes* of *Pachyus* are available in my own house in Sikles because my father was also a ritual expert (*Pachyu*). He wrote and collected many handwritten notes about the rituals of the Gurung. I used different libraries, central library in Kathmandu, Kirtipur, the library of Central Department of Anthropology, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Western Regional Library, Pokhara Public Library, Pokhara, and Himalayan Readers' Corner, Pokhara. '*Tamu Chhya lhu Tã* (yearly journal) from *Tamu pye Lhu Sangh* (the central organization of the Gurung cultural and ritual) Pokhara and others.

### 3.5.2 Primary Data Collection Tools and Techniques

I collected information from observation and key methods. Being an inhabitant and ritual expert of the community, I was already familiar with the people, setting and rituals of the area. They accepted me without interrogation (no need of rapport building as mentioned by many classical anthropologists) to. So, I employed that privilege status to meet, observe and record information about this research.

On one hand, I had already known about their ritual practices and way of living style since years as a villager. On the other hand, now I was presenting for academic research. Consequently, I felt it was difficult to be a researcher in familiar people and settings. It was

initially an awkward feeling to maintain positionality between villager and researcher myself at the same time. I was very excited and gave ethical values for my own village and culture research. Sometimes it was very difficult to make an environment, how to ask for information about rituals because I myself was considered a ritual expert. I realized that some of the informants felt insulted when I asked questions about the oral text and *pye* ritual of the Gurung. Even this environment, I collected data from priestly groups, *Mhina's* groups, *Pa di*, mother groups and local knowledgeable persons. I selected more experienced and knowledgeable priests among the priestly community.

### **3.6 Observation and Participant Observation**

Participation observation has been used during fieldwork of the study area for qualitative information, as well as interviews with villagers who know about these rituals and local traditions. I engaged with the priests, ritual specialists, knowledgeable and experienced old persons, and village leaders who are the custodians of the Gurung traditional culture and rituals. These groups are directly or indirectly related to the Gurung cultural ritual practices.

Before participant observation in every ritual case, I had been ready for how to present among them priests, house family and gathering Gurung peoples because it was easy for saying hello and hi, but not easy for discussing the performing ritual and cases. This is because the priests have certain time and the ritual has to be finished in their time schedule. And also, it is dependent on the nature of ritual, like, death or *Pai* ritual and other worships. For me, the other difficult and uneasy thing was how the priests and other informants perceived my questions and interest because for a long time, the priests and the villagers were confident that the oral texts and ritual performances are sacred and separate. As a researcher, I often facilitated and engaged the informant to illustrate the points they made. Academically, I was a researcher, but somewhere, I participated as a villager and as a priest. Understanding

all these environments and cases, I collected field notes, recorded audio/video and case studies.

Whole my research period, I attended more than twenty death rituals and *Pai* (soul journey) rituals and different worships as a priest and local Gurung in the study area and Pokhara. I collected the data from ten death rituals and six *Pai* (soul journey) rituals as a researcher. As a researcher I participated and observed *Failu* worship on 22 December, the day of Saturday, and 2018 at my own home Sikles. I closely asked with the *Pachyu* Yug Bahadur and took his interview about the ritual, which is given in chapter six, *Failu lapa* section. And I participated in *khema theepa* worship on 8<sup>th</sup> October, the day of Saturday, 2020 own my home and my relatives in the study area. And also, I participated and took notes of *Chhyopa* worship in the house of Lal Bahadur Gurung in Pokhara on 21 October 2023, Saturday. Similarly, on 30 September 2020, Wednesday I was present at *Plah khu lapa* (calling and back lost soul) ritual in Pokhara as a priest.

On 11 October 2018, I met with *Lauhri* priest, Dammer Bahadur Gurung in his house at Pokhara for meeting and interviewed about the *Tōh* theepa ritual and its process. I noted more oral text at that meeting and interview. I met Tilak Bahadur Gurung, a leader of *Mhina* on 19 March 2019 for village *riti-thiti*, like *Naas teepa* and *Pahta teepa* for farming system. And, I met Karna Singh Gurung in his house of Pokhara on November 13, 2019 when he was bed ridden because of illness, and Gardane, on 30 June, 2022, Pokhara. I noted about the village *riti-thiti* for the farming system. On 17th March, Tuesday, 2020, I observed the *Lauhri* priest Yam Bahadur Gurung for the *Seelee lapa* ritual. I met Lil Bahadur Gurung, an expert *Lauhri* at Pokhara, August 2, 2020. I collected more data for *Seelee lapa* ritual from him, and from Falman Gurung for *Sāat lapa* and *Prah waapa* ritual on 25 February 2022. All these rituals and data are for nature worship for the farming system.

I participated and observed *Pachyu* Aas Bahadur Gurung's death ritual and his *Pai* ritual on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017, in the study area. I recorded more major *pyes* at that time. I spent three full days of Kashiram's *Pai* ritual on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Later, I participated in three times in the death ritual and *Pai* rituals at Pokhara in 2020 Duja Gurung who was known as 'Nani Duja' or 'Santamai Maa' (mother of Santa) from Sikles Gairithar. She had been living in Pokhara for years. She expired on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 at the age of 87. I participated in her death and *Pai* rituals as researcher and authentic *Pachyu*. Both the funeral and *Pai* ritual was conducted on the same day. Mou Bahadur Gurung was the leader from *Pachyu* as well as *Pa di* and Yam Bahadur Gurung was the leader of *Lauhri* groups. The family members, Gurungs community, relatives and priests decided to perform the *Pai* ritual immediately. And then they finalized that the morning period was the funeral section and *Pai* ritual from the day period for three days. I collected more primary data for my dissertation at that time. Another event was an unfortunate one where my father-in-law Suraj Kumar Gurung was killed in a housefire and there was a *Pai* ritual after a year. The ritual was started Thursday on 9 October 2023. I participated as a *mbo* (son-in-law). I collected some essential data from this *Pai* ritual as well.

At the end of Magh (January-February) month, I visited pastoral lands, such as *Naas Kgo*, *Se ya Chowh*, *Prolu* (upper land of the village), *Puhra Yuma*, *Lwou pō* (northern land of the village), *Bhulkacha*, *Matkyu* and *Tōh ta* (eastern land of the village) for three days. On 22 May 2019, I went to *Kohla* (one of the historical states among the Gurungs which lies on the eastern side of the study area) from Pokhara to Tankting. *Kohla*, which was my first visit, is a historically and an archaeologically important place among the Gurung community. This golden chance was given to me by the chairperson of ward no. 2, Madi rural village municipality Mr. Ekka Jung Gurung. I got this chance to study *Kohla*. There were geographers, archaeologists, engineers, photographers and anthropologists and local villagers

in the team. I watched all the geographical locations, historical places, and archaeological sites in Kohla. When I observed and studied this whole Kohla I felt so nice because since long time I had been chanting about this Kohla only emotionally and epistemologically in *Pai* ritual. But now, I was present there physically in this geographical location which is my ancestors' land and one of the historical ritual lands for all the Gurungs. I offered *dhup* (incense) to the names of my ancestors and local deities. All the participants discussed to protect Kohla's historical, archaeological, ritual and natural importance. Meanwhile, filmmaker and director Mr. Bhoj Bahadur Gurung recorded a video of a short *Sarka pye* of mine. And I chanted a short *pye* of Kohla state in the video which is available in YouTube also.

On December 19, 2019 they performed three *Pais* in three different places. One was from *Leehka* (one of the traditional clans among the Gurungs) and other two from *Kromchhai* clan. I had to stay and help for *Kromchhai's Pai* belonging from the same clan group. One was my sister-in-law (*paate*) and other was Mr. Padam Bahadur's. I closely observed and participated as a researcher both *Pai* ritual and recorded some information by the leader of *Lauhri* Yam Bahadur Gurung (local name, kancha Neemi or *Kancha Lauhri*). We talked for long time at that *Pai* ritual, because his junior was chanting the *pye*. Other thing, I closely observed was the role of daughters in *Pai* ritual and knew that there are equal role and position between male and female for this *Pai* ritual. I noted about history of *Pai* ritual for several years. The *Lauhri* priest Yam Bahadur told me that the *Pai* ritual (practised after funeral) of *Karu Kyahla*, *Prayachi Kyahla* and *Pāla wuhru Kyahla* (ancient kings of the Gurung community before they migrated in Nepal). I had already known little bit about these *Kyahla* and their rituals. Therefore, the discussion supported me very interestingly. I noted long history and narrations, which supported me while it is presented and analysed in chapter five of '*Pai* ritual'. On 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022, I met Purna Bahadur Gurung from Lam thar and

on the same day with Mahendra Gurung from Dhaprang thar at the morning. I discussed about the nature worship. Then by daytime, I visited *Yeuhra* which is very sacred place in the study area. There are numbers of local deities among the *Yeuhra*, named, *Molu*, *Poori*, *Mpauhtu*, *Tōh theepa*, *nee syura* and so on.

I visited the area of Tangting, Ghyaprang, Cheepli, Parche (other villages for ritual performing with my priestly group) and Pokhara in my research period because the areas are also the *yhōta* (*jajmani* field) of *Pachyus*. I collected some data from these areas too. My last visit was on Wednesday, 22 November 2023 at Ghyaprang and 26 March, the day of Monday, 2024 at Tangting as a priest with my priestly group for *Pai* ritual. Being the same villagers, same community and same group, it was very interesting and exciting to discuss and write about local practices. Though I was present there as a researcher it was my responsibility that I must respect all respondents and informants. I followed ethical codes and rule-regulations of the researcher during fieldwork.

Bordens and Abbott mentioned that the ethics of the researchers are “Your role as a researcher is to make careful observations and record the social structure of the group you are studying” (Bordens & Abbott, 1999, p. 159). Researcher has to be research oriented, they have to be more careful about observation and collect more social qualitative data. Of course, I have also followed these ethical role values as a researcher, basically in primary data collection. Documentary and oral history are major resources for this ethnographic study. The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* recite their oral history in every ritual practice, that’s one of the essential resources for the researchers. I collected more such oral histories by the *Pachyu* priest and *Lauhri* priest for this research dissertation. “The use of history, particularly an oral tradition, is a recent Trend in anthropological research in Nepal”. “The use of oral history and oral tradition have, however, been used particularly to trace the regional religion, and political change” (Gurung, 1996, p.31). I think oral history and oral traditions are identities of

any communities. There are more documentaries and oral history and oral tradition among the Gurungs community of Sikles. The priestly groups used long Gurung oral history in their ritual ceremonies. Here I stress and mention oral texts and oral history and oral tradition. In the context of Sikles, priests are the owners of oral history and village leaders are the owners of oral tradition and village controllers are owners of messengers of the local customary system.

I accompanied *Pachyu* priests when they performed different rituals such as marriage, death, *Pai*, ancestors worship and other worships in various fields which they call *yhōeta* (priestly area for ritual performances and *Jajmani* N.). *Lauhri* are other most respected priests for the same rituals and same field. They are also nature worship specialists. I participated with them in those rituals as representatives of *Pachyu* priests. Besides the life cycle rituals, the *Lauhri* are owners of village protect rituals such as *Tōh theepa* (worship of village boundary), *Seelee Lapa* (village protecting ritual), *Prah waapa* (remove or throwing the demon from the village) and *Rhōsyo praapa* (demand for protecting the human being, animals and grains to local deities before the day of rice planting) as well. Nowadays, there is a lack of local Bon *Lam* priests in the study area. Thus, I honestly say that I did not meet any *Lam* priests for this research. On the other hand, there are few *Lam* clans in Sikles who are gradually changing from local social norms and values, especially in death and *Pai* ritual practices. Because the lam clans are completely changed into Tibetan Mahayana culture and for that they must bring those Lamas from Pokhara or other side, especially, in death ritual.

### **3.7 Key Informant Interview**

In Sikles, the numbers of *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, *Pa di*, and *Mhina* are included in my research who are main specialists and informants in the village. I selected four *Pachyu* priests from *Pachyu* group, four *Lauhri* priests from *Lauhri* group and two *Mhinas* from *Mhina* group for my key respondent. Their information is considered reliable because they are more

knowledgeable and have more experiences than the others. The groups are always performing their responsibilities in Sikles. Professional *Tdoh* (village leader) and *Lam* (priest) are gradually disappearing from their traditional responsibilities and position from the village. That is why I used participation observation and key informant interviews with those groups of people.

I selected some ritual experts and knowledgeable old people for a key informant interview. I selected only four *Pachyu* from the total *Pachyu* of 32, and four *Lauhri* from the total *Lauhri* of 9 among them a priestly group. I conducted key interviews with the *Pachyu* priests: Mou Bahadur Gurung, Yam Bahadur Gurung, Yug Bahadur Gurung, and Khim Bahadur Gurung. And Yam Bahadur Gurung, Dammer Bahadur Gurung, Lil Prasad Gurung and Falman Gurung are selected from *Lauhri* priests. Mr. Mou Bahadur Gurung who is one of the experts for astrologers as well. Tilak Bahadur Gurung and Lok Krishna Gurung are selected from *Mhinas*, and Karna Singh Gurung and Gardane (nick name) are selected from village leaders. When selecting informants, my focus is traditionally and ritually informal parts of Gurung social structure. The groups of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are mostly related to *Pai* ritual and ancestors' worship for this research and the *Lauhri*, *Mhinas* and village leaders are for nature worship. These groups are more knowledgeable and familiar for whole ritual performances. Ritually, I collected the events of funeral, *Pai*, ancestors worship, nature worship and other offering and exorcism practices. For key informants, I took interviews and recorded, and took field notes, somewhere I participated as both the researcher and a priest simultaneously.

During my fieldwork, I met my core informants *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, *Mhina* and village leaders. Especially *Pachyu* Mou Bahadur, a retired Indian army and currently from Dhaprang thar, next is *Pachyu* Yam bahadur Gurung from Gairi thar, who is my elder brother and retired subedar from Indian army. Next *Pachyu* Khim Bahadur Gurung is also an Indian

retired army from the same thar, and Yug Bahadur Gurung is also from Dhaprang thar. *Lauhri* Yam Bahadur, Falman and Dammer Bahadur Gurung are all from Gairi thar and *Mhina* Tilak Bahadur and Cap. Lok Krishna Gurung are from Savathar. They are key informants for this research. And also, Indra kumari and Misiri from the mother group. They helped me every time. Late Karna Singh Gurung and Gardane (nick name) who are the owners of *riti-thiti* in the area and I met with them and discussed local customary practices. I recorded their version and wrote more *pyes*. I participated in more rituals and observed them regularly, such as marriage, funerals, *Pai*, ancestors' worship and nature worships which are deeply included in this thesis.

Oral history, the narration of *pye*, relation between nature and culture, local customary practices are also main issues for this study. So, *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, *Pa di* and the *Mhinas* were the key informants of this study.

### **3.8 Analysis and Presentation of the Research Data**

First, I used a recorder, field notes for data collection. And transcribed different data of what the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant, especially oral texts, and collected some hand written documents. Then I translated the collected oral texts and Gurung language into English. The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* helped me for oral data translation. I coded such data for analysis and presentation. I ordered and organized the research data for narrative and thematic analysis.

Qualitative data analysis poses special problems for me because there are many notes, recorded interviews, and photos. I categorised the number of priests according to their work division and *Mhinas* and local knowledgeable people for key informants. Moreover, I collected *pye* narrations and translated their meaning. They used various symbols in various ritual practices. I collected qualitative, pictorial and audio-visual data. I started preliminary analysis and categories during the fieldwork period. Some handwritten notes about *pye* from

*Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are also categorised and coded. I collected more primary data such as interviews, discussion, participatory observation, and photography from the field.

As John Brewer argued, "Ethnography is best perceived as a process rather than a sequence of discrete stages (like all research), data analysis is simultaneous with data collection" (Brewer, 2000, p. 107), I also started preliminary analysis during data collection. I analysed collected data as Bernard (1994), and Haberman and Miles (1998, p. 180), define in three sub-processes: i) textual reads of the data as per the theory and sub-theory, ii) coalesce and reduction (selecting units, looking at relationships and assembling) the information in some format and themes, and iii) generalization (interpretation of the finding) in search for the pattern in data. More specifically, I analysed individual level analysis for biography and individual case studies. Furthermore, structural and pattern level analysis and interpretation were done when I found connecting literature and group characteristics of respondents. First, I read and noted the category of data from my field note. Then, the collected data have been presented in the forms of description, quotation, narrative, conversation, figure, pictorial and tables whatever and wherever required in the text. For instance, the anecdotes, comments, conversations, observations and narratives have been quoted in the text. Lastly, I tried to discuss data with existing literature and my own reflections.

This research carried out the role of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* who are more respected practitioner priests in the study area and meaning of different symbols in different ritual practices. *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, *Mhina* and local knowledgeable persons are main respondents for this research who play vital roles for social construction and ritual ceremonies. The narrations which are chanted by priestly groups are collected by various sections. The collected data have been presented in the forms of quotation, matrix, and tables.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

All of the participants were informed about the research and their consent was taken. The participants were notified that they had every right to refuse to participate, walk out in between the interviews, and decide to quit the research at any time. They were further ensured that the collected information would strictly be used only for research purposes and would not include any information that could reveal their identity. Only the participant who voluntarily provided consent allowing their information to be used for research purposes was studied. I followed ethical guidelines provided by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) both in the field and issues of plagiarism.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Research**

Being a ritual expert and researcher in your own village is a methodological limitation. Being priest and researcher at the same time my subjectivity was unknowingly overloaded. I could not fully maintain a value-free position all the time when doing fieldwork. Therefore, my position as a researcher unconsciously changed as a ritual expert. Similarly, the period of one and half or almost two years is not sufficient to give an intensive description of the ritual, for any researchers. But my experience and practices since many years helped a lot to collect essential ethnographic data required for the study. Even today, I participated in more rituals with them while pursuing this dissertation. So, I think it is both easier and more difficult to research when one is from the same village, community and group.

A macro-level study does not represent all the Gurung villages of the country or all of the Gurungs of Nepal. The Gurungs are spread all over the country and out of Nepal. They practise different cultural, ritual and social values. For example, the Gurungs of Sikles practise their own culture and rituals and local values but the Gurungs of Pokhara who migrated from Sikles do not totally follow what they had done in Sikles. Oral texts are

ritually chanted and the ritual language which they call *chō kyui* (the language of *chō* state or before crossing Nepal) is very difficult to understand by not only laymen but priests also. So, it is difficult to say all the meanings of such ritual language in English. Ritually and culturally, the Gurung of Sikles are ritually very rich and practise different rituals in different seasons and events. Though, all the rituals could not be covered in this research, only limited on 'soul journey practices, ancestors' worship and nature worship.' Theoretical limitation of the study is always there because I analysed data from symbolic approach, ritual and perspectivism.

Though, my argument here is, despite being a *Pachyu* priest and a local man personally, it did not play the role of ethnocentrism and biasness for this qualitative research. I am fully concentrated with my objectives as a researcher.

## Chapter Four

### Setting: The People and the Study Area

This chapter provides a brief overview of the study area, Sikles village and the general socio-economic and cultural life. This chapter is a way of providing the background for the preceding chapter. Also provide an overview of the major natural resources such as forest, river, and pasturelands and their economic and ritual importance.

#### 4.1 Geographical Location: Sikles

Sikles village is located at a distance 45.06 km from the north-eastern corner of the Pokhara valley, alongside the mountains. Local Gurung call their village *Chyeelee naas* in their native language. Administratively, the village is located in the ward no. 1 of the Madi Rural Municipality. The area lies in 20<sup>o</sup>54'2" and longitude 4<sup>o</sup>12'43"E (Gurung, 2014, p. 17), at an elevation of 2000m on the southern slopes of the Annapurna range.

Sikles borders to Tangting or ward no. 2 of the Madi Rural municipality and the village of Tangting is situated in the east. Machhapuchhre and Sardi Khola villages to the north-west, Sildujure (Taprang, Chipli, Thak) in the west and part of Namarjung (Ghyaprang,) and Yanjakot in the south.

Sikles is one of the most important regions of the Gurung people for their traditional culture, history, and ritual practices. The *pye* says '*Chyeelee kyahlsa nkaru yhulsa*' which means five historical settlements when Sikles was established. According to the knowledgable people, the historical place of Kohla state was lost or dissolved, all the Gurung histories, culture and ritual practices were transferred to Sikles. Hence, Sikles is one of the most important historical and cultural areas of the Gurung people. The village still practises their traditional and local rituals. It is rich in Gurung culture, rituals, its own belief system and traditional customary practices. The village is situated at the elevation of 2000 m above the sea level on the southern slope of the Annapurna range. Sikles has a climate similar to

subtropical type. The actual name of Sikles is *Chyeelee*. The Gurung priests recite ‘*Chyeelee Paehmae tōh*’ and ‘*Chyeelee Nkgaru*’. According to late Aas Bahadur Gurung, one of the renowned *pachyus*, when the *Kohla* state was dissolved, five clans of Gurung migrated directly to Sikles. So, the old name that priests recite, *Chyeelee Nkgaru* in Gurung language. These five clans and their settlements are, *Tu* in *Syuri t /dh* (where the Gurung built their traditional religious/ritual house called *Ko hpo* in their language), *Lihka* in *Lihchkō* or *Plihchkō* (the north eastern side of Sikles), *Pahncha* in *Kanma* (southern side of the *Kōehpo*), *T h* in *Nee chwu* (eastern side of Sikles) and *Lehprō* in *Kirkyu* (western side of Sikles or the opposite side of *Platakō*).

Before my research, late Aas Bahadur Gurung from Dhaprang thar, narrated the myth to me that there were many wild animals around their five clans of Gurung’s (*Tu*, *Lihka*, *pahncha*, *T h* and *Lehprō*) old settlement. In this settlement, people had to face many problems such as killing their livestock, destruction of crops, and killing of local people. A man-eating leopard was particularly dangerous and a serious threat to the locals. After suffering from this killer leopard, locals appealed to the local priest to get rid of the man-eating leopard. The healing priest said that *Tu Lauhri* (local traditional priest) must worship the god of *Yheura* (name of the local worship place). After worshipping the *Yheura* God, the local people felt free and relief from ‘man eating beast’. After some days, the villagers searched the leopard in the jungle above of the village, and the leopard was found dead. It was pressed in the fork of a tree above the village. My father who was one of the popular (*Pachyu* priest in this area), also told me the same myth. Now I would like to mention how the name *Chyeelee* was established.

My father told me that, once people heard a *chyah* (bird) chirping. The villagers heard the voice of the bird, and they got the impression the bird saying “*Chyeelee khu*, *Chyeelee khu*”, meaning “gather the *Chyeelee*”. Because there were five different settlements

of five different clans in the old settlement. Then the people who were settled here and there all gathered in one settlement. So, the name “*Chyeelee*” was given by the bird. Here, Aas Bahadur Gurung (*Pachyu* priest) had told me about five old settlements of Sikles from Kohla and my father (*Pachyu* priest) told me that the name of ‘*Chyeelee*’ according to their understanding and myth. Rudra Bahadur Gurung from Sava thar is a knowledgeable person and has more experience about Sikles. On Saturday the 3rd April of 2022 Saturday, I met him for some information about my research. I asked him about the new name ‘Sikles’. And he told me that, on an unknown date, some foreigner had gone to Sikles and lived there for a long period. The foreigner did not find any sick person in that period. And the foreigner called ‘sick less’. Hence Sikles.

According to this myth of ‘*Chyeelee*’ I want to mention that the former priests were more powerful and knowledgeable. On the other side the *Pachyu* are not only priests but also astrologers and related to the shamanic power. The other point is a good relation between human beings and non-human beings, Gurung people and birds in the case of Sikles. I think that the bird may be sacred and sacred in its voice. The Gurung believe that the bird *Cyeeulee* (swallow) is one of the sacred and powerful gods that created the earth. It played a vital role in earth creation. (The *pye* of syurlu or the *pye* of earth creation by the *pachyu* and *Lauhri*). Therefore, the bird may be swallow, which was flying above the old settlement of Sikles and the Gurung called ‘*Chyeeulee*’ and we can say that *Chyeelee* from *Chyeeulee*.

#### **4.2 The Social Groups and Settlement Patterns in Sikles**

Sikles is predominantly a Gurung village. In addition to Gurungs, there are two Hindu groups, Kami and Damai who are socially known the hill Dalit groups. During the field visit in 2019, I counted that out of 433 households in Sikles village, 387 (89.4%) belonged to the Gurungs while 46 (10.7%) belonged to the two Dalit groups (the Kami and the Damai). 2026

people were the Gurungs in total population of 2259 while 233 were Dalit in my research field Sikles.

I collected that whole caste and ethnic composition at the time of the village development committee which was the local government. And the time was 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017 when there was *Pai* ritual of Aas Bahadur Gurung. After three days and nights of the *Pai* ritual or on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017 I visited all settlements or thars (now they say toll) of the village and collected the above data. I addressed only caste/ethnic composition, their clan group and their geographical settlement of the study area. I think it would be enough for this study.

Geographically, the village is divided into five wards and six thars (settlement). *Kgairi themai* (*Gairi thar*), *Tahrangkyo themai* (*Dhaprang thiar*), *Krōh khi themai* (*Lama Thar*), *Harpu themai* (*Harpu thiar*), *Sapa themai* (*Sava thar*) and *Kwō yee themai* (*Kwiō yiee thar*). *Sava thar* is the centre, the *Sava (sapa) chohw* is the common place of the whole Sikles where the village leaders and the villagers gather for decision making and conducting the village function. The historical and traditional clan of *Kohla* or *Kohlmai* play the role for village management and messengers. There is a *Tharpa* (like small hut by the house) which is called '*Mhina Kuchu Tharpa*' or *Kohlmai Tharpa* (the *tharpa* or house of the one of the proto clans). *Kohlmai* (one of the proto clans among the Gurung) who are also *Mhina kuchu* according to the Gurung *pye tā lhu tā*, and the *Kohlmai*, are owner of such *Tharpa*<sup>7</sup>. The place is sacred and separate for all the villagers. The villagers are mobilized from the *Sapa Chohw*<sup>8</sup>. The *Mhinas* give every common message and special decision (*ghow chōpa*) to all the villagers from the place. The *Mhinas* give a new message in a loud voice, and all the villagers hear his voice and word what the *Mhina* says about the village like *Pahta th pa* (closing the village for outsiders at the time of rice and millet ripe), *Naas teepa* (make the

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<sup>7</sup> Tharpa-Gurung language, like house but smaller in size than house.

<sup>8</sup> Sapa chohw-the centre and common meeting place of Sikles, which is situated in Sapa (Sava) thar.

villagers free of everyday work at Chaitra and Srawan month), *Tusyu pahl pripa* (closing the village after the day of hailstorm) and so on.

Each settlement or *thar* has its patron-client relations between the local Gurungs and the blacksmith or Kami caste. The Kami of each settlement is referred by the name of the settlement, for example, *Kgairi th mai* Kami (The Kami of *Ghairi thar*), *Harpu th mai* Kami (The Kami of *Harpu thar*) and so on. The Kamis are related to their traditional occupation. According to Kami *maila* (he is the second elder brother in his family) from Gairi *thar* who is still involved in the traditional occupation of iron tool making told me in 2076 BS that there were sufficient Kami continuing for their traditional occupation until two decades ago. Locals could easily find the village Kami working furnace. They used to make different utensils and domestic weapons like, knife, spade that the villagers needed. Nowadays, most of the Kami people have migrated to Pokhara because of easy and sophisticated life. Thus, the villagers from Sikles buy and bring knives, spades, and utensils from Pokhara. There are fewer numbers of Damai people (occupational caste groups involved in tailoring) than Kamis. The Damai families are only in *Lama thar* and *Dhaprang thar*. Both Kamis and Damais are Hindus and follow their own rituals, like birth, marriage and death. But they also follow some of the Gurung traditions like *lho* (barga system) for counting age, local Gurung *riti thiti* (local rule and regulation or customary practices) such as *Naas teepa* (closing the village for everyday work) and *Tusyu pahl preepa* (closing the village after hailstorm).

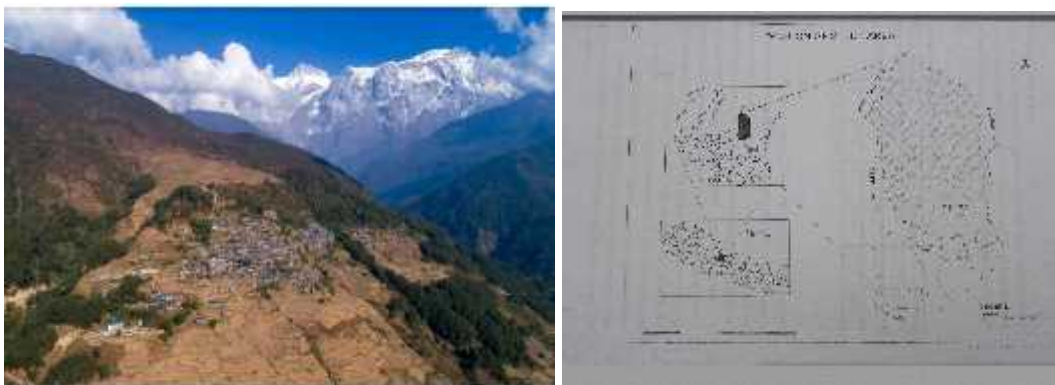
There still exists a relation of reciprocity between the Gurung and the two occupational caste groups (the Kami and Damai). Sometimes the Gurungs need ritual items such as arrows for funerals and *Pai* (after funeral or soul journey ritual) ritual, and *Karuwa* (local language) for ploughing and protecting the houses (*Dhee pahr*, by the priests). They can easily buy these items from the village Kami. In the same ways, the Gurungs depend on the Damai for the clothing items but also for the cloth items needed for particular rituals. For

example, during the hair cutting ceremony called *Khyaper lapa*, the Gurung boy undergoing this rite of passage ritual is required to wear a new cap. The cap needs to be made on the same day of the ritual. I want to write some essential practice and examples which I closely observed in the field. According to the Gurung zodiac sign, when the Gurung boy takes 3, 5, 7 or odd *lho*, then he should first get a haircut. The practice is called “*Khyaper lapa*”. The boy has to put a new cap on and the cap should be ready the same day. Similarly, the girl who takes 7, 9 or 11 or odd *lho*, is given new set of first Gurung dress and it is called “*Nkgyuee chol peepa*”. The set of Gurung dress for the girl undergoing this ritual also has to be ready on the same day. The village tailor prepares these clothes for the ritual boy and girl. Hence, these rituals also connected the Gurung with their village Kami and Damai in the reciprocal relation beyond the wage-labour relation.

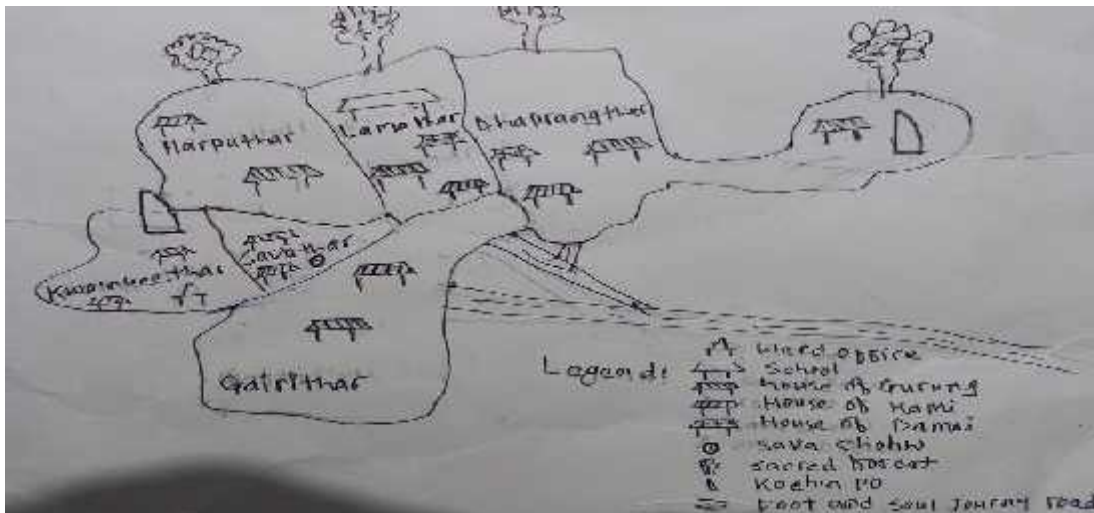
It is better to note that different clan groups and their traditional and ritual potentiality among the Gurung community of Sikles. According to the Gurung social structure and traditional ritual practices in Sikles, no *Kwonmai* can do the duty of *Pachyu* or *Lauhri* priest and no *Kromchhai*, *Lhika*, *Lem*, *Pahchyu* or *kwonmai* can do *lam*. The traditional practice is very unique and durable even today. It is unique traditional, social and ritual organization among the Gurung of the study area. *Kromchhai* (priest clan) Gurung are traditional priest clan among the Gurungs. *Namchu* (Name of the place where *Kromchhai* had first settled from Kohla, is situated above Tangting) *Kromchhai* are more popular and prestigious *Pachyu* priest among the Gurungs. *Lhika* (priest clan) are also a priest group to have established Sikles village from Kohla. Some *Nkosai* (but not all *nkosai* clan in Sikles) clan are also *Pachyu* priest in Sikles. *Tu Lauhris* (priest clan) have been more respectful and popular priest from the beginning. They are ritual and worship specialist. *Krōkhi* (*lam* priest clan) and *Pahncha* (*lam* priest clan) are *Lam/Lama* priest in the area. Both *Tu* and *Lam* are also early

settlers in Sikles. Parche is another village where *Pachyu* (one of the Gurung proto clan) clans are *Pachyu* priest.

According to the history of Sikles, after dismissing the old social structure, it is clear that *Kwonmai* and *Lemmai* are more respected clans in the village. The leader (*Mukhiya* Ne) of the village is chosen from the *Kwonmai* clan after the disappearance of Ghale. According to the history of Sikles, Ghale were early settlers for *Tdoh* (traditional King or village leader). After some years, Ghales disappeared from Sikles and the *kwon* clan was brought as the village leader. The groups play the role of Chieftdom which they call *Tdoh* in priestly language and *Krōh* in common language. I know that, late Ratan Singh Gurung from Dhaprang thar and the late Tek Bahadur Gurung from Harputhar, both from *kwon* clan, were much respected *Krōh* in Sikles. The persons who were not only respected leadership skills but also more knowledgeable and experienced about the Gurung *pye tā lhu tā*. Late Gopal Gurung from Sava thar, from *kwon* clan was also a prestigious leader. He was knowledgeable about village *riti-thiti*. After the demise of these respected persons, there is a lack of *Krōh* and village leader in the area.



**Figure 4.1: Map of Study Area, Photo credit: by Lauhri Falman Gurung, 2020 Source: Sara Louise Parker, 2005**



**Figure 4.2: Location of Study Area, Source: Field work, 2018**

### 4.3 Priestly Composition

**Table 4.1: Priest Clan in Sikles**

Description	No. of priest	Total	Percentage
<i>Kromchhai</i>	23		
<i>Pachyu</i>			
<i>Lhika</i>	8	32	78.00
<i>Nkosa</i>	1		
<i>Lauhri</i>			
<i>Tu</i>	9	9	21.95
Total		41	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 4.1 shows that the *Pachyu* priests are composed of three different clan groups, *Kromchhai*, *Lheka* and *Nkosa*. *Kromchhai* and *Nkosa* perform same practice in their ancestor's worship and in other ritual performances but the *Lhika* are different with *Kromchhai* and *Nkosa*. Especially in *Failu* worship, they totally differ from each other. The *Pachyu* priests are in majority than the others priests in number. The *Lauhri* are only from *Tu* clan, the clan is originally *Lauhri* priest among the Gurungs. In the villages of Yanjakot and Tham, *Lauhri* priests from *Mhobchhai* clan are also found. But in Sikles there are only *Tu Lauhris* who were the royal priests of the Ghale king from the beginning.

The above table 4.1, gives the number of priests who are professional priest in any rituals. The number of *Pachyu* is 32 who are largest number and they almost 78.05% of all. The *Lauhri* is 9 or 21.95% of total priests. *Kromchhai* clan is more populated than the others. So, the number of priests is also more *Kromchhai* clan than the others. The *Lam* does not have any representative on the table according to the field survey. When I had collected the data of these priestly groups in 2063 BS for my master thesis, the number of *Pachyu* were 21 (77.77%), *Lauhri* were 5 (18.52%) and there was 1 (3.71%) *Lam* in the study area. In this period from 2007 to 2019 more knowledgeable and old *Pachyus* were expired. There was growth in the number or *Pachyu*, but capable and skilful have expired at the period. Some young *Pachyu* are taking training and the young *Pachyu* take over the old and expired *Pachyu*. In this period there is a growth of 11 *Pachyus* in the number.

I think most of the young and trained *Pachyu* are less experienced and knowledgeable. It takes a long time to fulfil their Guru's position. The number of *Lauhris* was 5 in 2007. Now it is 9. So there is growth of 4 *Lauhris* in number. No generation gap is found among the *Lauhris* like the *Pachyus*. The *Lam/Lama Kesbir* who was more experienced and aged *Lam* for bon practice expired in the period. Now, there is no representative of local *Lam/Lama* from the *Krõhkhi* and *Pahncha* from Lamathar. Lal Bahadur Gurung and Sukman Gurung perform little bit priestly activities but they can't be fully responsible for death and *Pai* rituals. They just worship the *Loo*<sup>9</sup> God (god of water) in the village. If someone dies or has to perform *Pai* ritual, then they have to bring Krishna from Gorkha who is also a bon practitioner or from Pokhara who are Tibetan Mahayani practitioners. According to my field survey, the table shows that there are sufficient *Pachyus* and *Lauhris* but traditional bon *Lams* have disappeared from the study area.

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<sup>9</sup> Loo-God of water, the traditional Lam worship the god of water.

#### 4.4 Social Facilities

Education, health, drinking water, transport and electricity are the basic needs and social facilities for people. The people of Sikles consume such needs and facilities. There are three levels of schools: a child care centre, a primary level, and a secondary level. Annapurna secondary school was established in 2013 BS. I studied in this school when it was in *Naas Kgo* (above the village) and *poori*<sup>10</sup> (one of the places and local deities). According to old villagers, the school was transferred here and there many times and many places. Now, the school is in the western part of the village called *Thoya*.

Like elsewhere health facility is another important basic need in Sikles. People, including so called *Dalit* communities, believe in traditional Gurung system and indigenous practice. When people get sick, they directly go to the priests, especially with *Pachyus* who are more experienced and capable of finding the cause of different sickness and their treatment. The treatment is based on psychological process and priestly internal power which they call *Nko-Mae* or to tell something sacred for cure and medicines. The priests use secret texts (*tantra-mantra* or *Jharfuk*), shamanistic ideas and herbal medicines for such treatment. If one is feeling ill, then they think that they have been attacked by an inauspicious thing or ghost, witches and other evils. So, they directly concern with the *Pachyus* for suggestions and treatment. The *Pachyu* defines auspicious and inauspicious according to the sick person's *Lho*, *parka* and vein. *Pachyu* finds the reason of the sickness that might be ancestors or *Kul devata*, local deities or *simi-bhumi*, evil things and their body diseases. Then *Pachyu* suggest what might have happened and how to treat them such as '*Paltu waapa*' ritual which is very popular among the Gurung community, and the ritual is performed for exorcise of the evil things.

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<sup>10</sup> Poori-One of the sacred lands among the Lam of Kroh'nkhi thar, Sikles, where they sacrificed buffalo and offered in the past, but now they sacrificed chicken to Poori God.

Most of the people practise and have knowledge for general aid if they have simple problems like small cut wounds while working, if bitten by a snake, or if they have minor diarrheal or burns in any organs. A *Pachyu* treats that all by his mantra and local herbal medicine. Most of the *Pachyus* know the herbal medicines which are found nearby village, farm and jungle. There is health facility, and health post which was established in Panchayat era in *kwōy* thar, named Sikles health post. The health post has been providing good facilities and services in minor cases for a long time. But the health post was transported to Parche village four years ago and the villagers are taking services from Parche, which is very small in size and population. How the villagers of Sikles agreed to transfer the health post from Sikles to Parche is unknown. There is uneasiness and difficulty to take the facilities of health post from Parche because most of the people or target groups are in Sikles. It takes nearly an hour on foot from Mpapu (one of the small parts of Sikles village) of Sikles to Parche.

#### **4.5 The Structure of Houses**

The local Gurung houses in general follow similar structure though the house size differs. In the past the house roofs were made of local bamboo, thatch, wooden planks which were called *Lhicha dhe* , *salme dhe* , *kee phaale dhe* respectively. The stone slabbed roof is called *Yuma dhe*, all the building materials were collected from the locality. But nowadays most of the roofs are of corrugated zinc. All the houses are two stories. The ground floor (*dhe nho*) is for cooking and sleeping whereas the first floor (*Tōhwa fee*) is to store grains and other things not frequently used. The upper part of the roof is called *dhee fee*. Courtyard, veranda, and doors are called *Yu*, *Syaala* and *Mpra* respectively. The inner part immediately after the door is called *Thō* and the next part is *Paāhwa*. The fireplace (*Kwotwo*) is a very important part of the house which is in the middle of the far end. It is where the food is prepared and members of the family eat, gather, talk, make plans and warm themselves. Just

above the fireplace a small bamboo striped mat (*Sō tōhwa*) is suspended in order to dry grains. The door, the fireplace and the area beyond it are always to be clean. The door and the fireplace are believed to be the dwelling place of ancestors' evil spirits (*Mo*). And the area beyond the fireplace, called *Krewu/krepu* is believed to be the place of ancestors' god spirit (*kul*). Just above the *Krewu*, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* keep *Failu dhee* (ancestors' house) which is made of a kind of high-altitude bamboo called *Chh mu mpo*. If a family member is deceased, the *Failu dhee* is discarded in a clean place. After *Pai*, the family and the house itself are considered to be purified and a new *Failu dhee* is prepared. Other houses having no *Failu dhee* have *La dhee* (ancestors' house of non *Failu*); it is placed in the upper floor and worshipped twice a year by *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*. The worship is called *Syo theepa* and *Khema theepa* (ancestor worship). In this case *Pachyu* are related to *Khema theepa* and *Lauhri* to *Syo theepa* respectively.

Sikles is in an inclined place facing east. All the houses are faced to the east. The houses have a door and a window on the ground floor and the upper face has three windows except in some houses. Houses are built of mud and stones. Some houses have been plastered with cement in recent days. The inner part is open with no partitions. The senior most members of the house sit on either side of the upper top of the fireplace and other members sit around it. While taking meals and warming themselves with fire, they sit around the fireplace leaving the *Krepu* vacant. In the past there used to be a small room made between the *Krepu* and the wall in some houses which is called *Chyōh nho*. This secure place is not built nowadays. There also used to be *Khō yō* in order to keep cooking and eating utensils but now people use long wooden planks to display the utensils. The entire inner part of the house is blackened by smoke as firewood is the only fuel used. The people of Sikles say that, such houses are very strong because of firewood smokes. The smoked wood, baskets, winnowing pan and all bamboo materials last long and remain strong. A smaller house called *Tharpa* is

attached with the house. *Tharpa* is especially used for guests. Its ground floor is used to keep animals and firewood for the rainy season.

The Gurung houses of Sikles are not only human dwellings but also an elemental ritual unit. There are *Failu* and *La* (ancestors' god) in every household and the Gurung separate a special place or sacred place for ancestors' god which are called *Failu dhe* (the house of god) and *La dhe* (the house of ancestors god). So, there is ritual relationship between the Gurung, Gurung house and ancestors. Furthermore, the houses are used for storing different grains. The houses are important technologically, and environmentally as well.

#### **4.6 Economic Structure**

In the beginning, the Gurungs worked more for survival than for income. They had large areas for farming and had more animals. It was also done for the fulfilment of ritual-culture functions. In old days a household of Sikles used to have a large quantity of corn, five/six *Bhakari* of millet, and seven/eight *Bhakari* of rice, scores of cows, hundreds of sheep and each household used to have buffaloes. People depended on these works. In the rainy season, they planted rice, millet and maize in the field keeping the animals in high altitudes. After harvesting the grains in winter, they used to bring back the animals in the field so that they are manured. This still happens in a cycle. In winter they collect firewood for the rainy times. These are done not for business and trade purposes but to run their daily lives.

Only in the late nineteenth century, the Gurungs came in contact with the East Indian Company where the young males were recruited as soldiers. This brought a drastic change in Gurung communities. People began to think about income. They came in contact with different languages and cultures. They became economically strong. "Army service is also an important economic pursuit. Most Gurung men have once been or are currently soldiers in British Indian or Nepalese regiments" (Moisala, 1991, 68- 69).

Farming is for survival and joining the army is for economic boost. They have strengthened the economic condition by joining the British or Indian army. If a male member of the family is in the army the family can easily go ahead. Nowadays the number of recruitments is declining. The British soldiers have settled in the UK. Most of the retired Indian soldiers have settled in towns. Consequently, the village is no longer like before and the gross income of the village has declined. But a large number of Gurungs are in foreign employment. They are in the Gulf countries, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Europe and some western countries. This has a good enough impact in the village and considerable help in national remittance.

Apart from farming and foreign jobs, some of the people have started doing business by keeping shops and hotel and hospitality sectors. There are still some old people who have gone to Tibet via Manang and Mustang to buy salt. They say that salt was exchanged with some grains.

It is more interesting information about the coming generation of Tibetan salt. "Sikles is considered one of the early Gurung settlements on the south slopes of the Annapurna Himal from where they later spread out to lower hills. In the past, Sikles provided access to the Namun pass (5200 m), 18 Kilometres to the north-east across which people travelled north to Manang to procure Tibetan salt" (Gurung, 1980, p. 163). People of Sikles and its periphery used to go to Manang and beyond through *Taasa*, *Kori* Namun pass and *Thurchu* (high pasturelands) for salt procurement. This salt trail is now used as a trekking route. Barter exchange system was another good point then. They fulfilled their needs by exchanging them with millet, maize and rice. Moreover, the daily wage was given in the form of grains. The Dhikur system is another good factor for their economic stability. In this system friends or the members of a neighbourhood collect money which is used by the members when needed in

turn. People having large fields and cattle sell those cattle and grains. Some sell handmade bamboo products and woollen mattresses.

Being a local man, I claim since the last 15 years, the agricultural activities, animal husbandry and the production of local objects have dramatically fallen by 70 percent or more. The people of Sikles are seen wandering in Pokhara valley around the year whereas they used to come to Pokhara only in winter for a week at maximum some years ago. They have grabbed new jobs leaving their traditional jobs. Now they sell the Himalayan herbs like *Paanch Aunle* (Orchis Latifolia), *Padamchaal* (Himalayan Rhubarb N, Rheum Moorcroftianum), *poison* (Aconitum Ferox), *Nirmasi* (Azadirachta indica), *Yarchagumba* (cordyceps Sinensis) and *satuwa* (Paris polyphylla) and make some money. They get more money from constructing paths, bridges, taps and renovation of old houses and building houses than the traditional works. These types of works have left the old trades at risk and made the people self-centred. Because of the kilogram system, the old way of wage in *Maana/Paathi* has almost disappeared and traditional skills, art and crafts, knowledge and capacities all have been badly affected.

Animal husbandry is one of the traditional occupations among the Gurung community. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* describe about animal husbandry in chanting and the animals are more important and used in different rituals. Most of the rituals they use different animals for symbols and slaughtering. So, there is historical importance for animals among the Gurung community. The Gurungs use more animals in death, *Pai*, worship than in feast and festivals. For instance, in the contest of my research area, they practise *Tōh theepa* (worship of village boundary) ritual in a year and sheep are slaughtered, *Saã t lapa* (exorcism ritual) and *prah waapa* rituals are practised once a year and a goat and a sheep are slaughter. In more than hundred houses of *Pachyu*'s and more than twenty houses of *Lauhri*'s priests, they

practice yearly ancestor's worship like *Failu lapa*, *Chhyopa lapa* (god and ancestors' god worship) and use goats and cocks for these worships.

The Gurung of Sikles are highly devoted to their local deities, such as *Faima kyu*, *Neesyura* (local deity) and others. The Gurung worship these deities yearly and slaughter roosters. By these different cases we can say and understand that, it is ritually important and necessary for animal husbandry. I told *nkolo* Tirtha, according to Gurung oral chants, a long time ago we Gurung used to slaughter *Ta* (horse) *Lõ* (cow), *Khlaa* (ox) in these different ritual practices. And then he understood that when we came in contact with the Hindus, we stopped slaughtering cows, oxen.

On 4<sup>th</sup> Asar 2078 VS I met Tirtha Gurung who is also from the same village, and currently lives in Pokhara. Mr. Gurung and I discussed the agriculture system and ritual practices. According to him, agriculture or grains are not only food but also ritually important. Different grains play different roles for ritual performances. I told him, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant more texts about the agricultural system and they use different grains in different ritual practices. Especially, they use millet, wheat, and rice. In *Chhyopa*, *Failu* they fill basket by such grains and erect their *Ka tus* (tormas) which are symbols of different gods and *gurus*. The used grain is called '*Chyuu*' (like, millet, corn, and barley) which is very sacred and separate. He also told me that such grains used in the rituals were taken by the priests in the form of wage but nowadays we accept cash money.

#### **4.7 Natural Resources**

There are huge forests, land and water resources in the study area. The forest that surrounds the village is for common use. Materially, Forests are mostly used for firewood, grass and timber, but the highland forests are used for timber. The lands are used for animals grazing. Some lands are used for agriculture. Agricultural lands are divided into two categories according to production. *Saura* or *Sa-mro* (dry lands) where they grow millet,

maize, soybeans and vegetables and *Mblaura* or *mbla-mro* (irrigated lands) where they plant rice. Water resources are another important resource for the villagers. Water is used for drinking, irrigation and for local hydroelectricity for the villagers. I discuss these resources such as forests, pasture land, agricultural land and water.

Physically, natural resources are used for livelihood. Though, there are none materially important such resources for ritual practices. Forest, water resources, pasture land, and agriculture lands are not important only for production but the lands are related to local deities directly or indirectly. The Gurungs believe that the lands and its productions are controlled by local deities. So, they are very devoted to their ancestors as the ancestors visit forest, land, water, farm, home and so on. The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* chant all the names of different places in different ritual practices such as soul journey, calling the soul and nature worship.

These natural resources are very important for ritual practices and social facilities. Such as forest, rivers, well, hill, rock, waterfalls and pasture lands. Especially, in *Pai* ritual, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* priests chant different lands for journey of soul. The priests show and tour all these lands, make rest on sitting places, make drink water and make glad. In the contest of Sikles, Madi River and surrounding areas are used for such ritual practices. One of my informants, Yam Bahadur Gurung (*kancha Lauhri*) says ‘we have to move around and show all these forests, rivers, fields, pasture lands because the dead people wandered and visited the area before their death. The lands are not used by living ones but by the soul of the dead. Being a *Pachyu* and local people myself, there are little bit experience. In *Pai* ritual of Sikles, there is long journey from Sikles (living place) to the heaven i.e. the ancestral land. First of all, the priests chant surrounding area of Sikles for the soul and cross Madi River then upward slope and highland of Namun pass. According to my understanding, when the priests start from Sikles and down slope Madi River, then they chant,

*Mati syō ra kyō chuyuchai*      Now you have arrived in Madi River

*Mati chaa;n ra kyō chuyuchai*      Now you have arrived in Madi Bridge

In the same way, they practise at the same places for ancestors and local deities' worship too. Especially, *Failu lapa*, *Khema theepa* (ancestors' worship) and *Chhyopa lapa* (God worship) worship, the priests chant all these important places which they call '*Se cha kwurpa*' or taking and offering of nature deities. Every year, the local people worship their ancestors, domestic animals, and even in yearly farming. One of the major important practices is ancestors worshipping, and they mostly use local fish of Local River in winter season or upward season and local bird of local forest in summer season or downward season. According to two seasons (downward and upward), the priests and the villagers believe that local fish and birds are more sacred than the others for living people and ancestors. So, one of the most important things is the offer of sacred fish and birds which had to be local.

In the contest of Sikles and the Gurungs, forest is not only for firewood, timber, grass and ecological balance; they are also used for different types of trees and grasses for performing different rituals. Such as *Chhyukuta*, in Gurung name, is used for the symbols of dead person's head and hair in death and *Pai* ritual, *Tnera* (*Simix Marcophylla Kukur* diaine Nep.) for the dead's rib, and so on. They need *R e* (bamboo) and *Mpo* (*Arundinaria intermedia Nigialo* Nepal.) in every ritual. They use different seasonal and sacred leaves for giving and offering their ancestor's food and drinking. The *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* need sacred *Pyoh* (*Mat/Mandro* Nep.), *Kg h* (*Syakhu/Ghum* Nep.), *Tahper* (Basket for *daalo* Nepal.), *Naulee*, *Chyen*, *Chyeeka* (*Chaalne* Nep.) for their rituals. So, forest is not only for firewood and grass but ritually needed for the Gurungs.

The value and importance of natural resources are not only for material production, domestic animals, grazing lands, drinking water and irrigation, but also for non-material

cultural practices, ritual importance for ancestors' worship, soul journey process, and continuation of meaningful Gurung's life in the village.

## Chapter Five

### Soul Journey Practice in the Pai Ritual

This chapter discusses and analyses the soul journey in the *Pai* ritual practised by the Gurungs of Sikles village. *Pai* is one of the most important and elemental Gurung rituals. The *Pai* ritual is part of the Gurung death ritual which is performed after a gap period following the cremation of the deceased person. It is performed when the deceased person's family is socially and economically prepared for the ritual. The ritual is performed to take the deceased's soul to the ancestors' sacred place. Since the *Pai*<sup>11</sup> is performed to escort the soul of the dead to the after-world, the sacred place of the ancestors, I have approached this ritual as the soul journey ritual (Pettigrew, 1999).

In this chapter, I have described and analysed the Gurung *Pai* ritual to show the role of the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* as priests, family members, maternal uncles, brotherhood, relatives, and villagers. I have tried to analyse and interpret the core ritual symbolisms of the *Pai* ritual. According to the ritual order and its values, the first day is focused on inviting and welcoming the soul of the deceased (*Pai ch pa*), the second day is focused on two parts the welcoming the nail or bone of the deceased (*Rhee ty hpa*) and calling the soul of the deceased (*Plah wuipa*) and the third day is the soul journey. Before I discuss these ritual processes in detail, we need to understand the Gurung concept of *plah* or soul.

#### 5.1 The Gurung Concept of *Plah*

The Gurungs believe that when a person dies, the person's soul wanders here and there after the body is cremated. So, the soul is wandering hither and thither without a stop in confusion moving between all three worlds: the evil's world, the world of the living, and the

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<sup>11</sup> Different scholars have used different terms for this ritual. For example, Pignede (1966, p 363) has called it "Pae" while Bista (2002, p. 21) has used *Pa-Ye*. Nowadays, people in urban areas call it 'Arghau', 'Argum' or 'Argu'. But these words are not related to the Gurung language and do not give the meaning of 'Pai' in the Gurung language. 'Pai' should not be translated as *Arghau*, *Argum* or *Argu*. Hence, I have retained and used the Gurung word 'Pai' which is the common term used linguistically by the people in the study area, 'Pai' is a popular Gurung word; people say "Pai lapa" (*doing Pai*) during the *Pai* ritual.

ancestors' world. So, the *Pai* ritual is essential and crucial for finding this wandering soul and escorting it to the world of ancestors. It is an elaborate ritual that takes three days and three nights to complete and requires the collective participation of all the family members, relatives, and villagers. Therefore, the family members of the deceased must be socially and financially prepared to undertake this ritual.

*Plah* or soul is one fundamental Gurung cultural concept that defines their idea of self, person, and the moral basis of a person's interdependence with the community - family, clan, and others (McHugh, 1998; 2001). According to McHugh (1998), the Gurung concepts of body and *plah* are interrelated and define one another such that "the notion of the body made alive by the presence of a number of souls (the *plah*) and the consciousness located in that living body (the *sae*)" (p. 79). In her article, "*Concepts of the person among the Gurungs of Nepal*", McHugh (1998) has clearly explained the Gurung concept of *Plah*. She writes:

The (Gurung) body is believed to be made up of four natural elements: *earth, water, fire, and air*, along with a set of *plah* (*nine for men and seven for women*), which are the life force and keep the body intact. The *plah*, like the Western idea of the soul, is considered essential to life, although the individual is not aware of it. The *sae* is the vehicle of consciousness (to lose consciousness is expressed as "his or her *sae* went into forgetfulness" (*Tse sae rnleyai*) and its condition is directly experienced (McHugh, 1989, p. 79, emphasis added).

So, the Gurungs believe that an individual has *multiple souls*; a male has nine souls and a female has seven souls which reside inside a person's body. The *plah* is unstable. It is an immaterial essence "that one is neither aware of nor able to control" (McHugh, 1989, p. 79) such that it can easily fly out of the body and "if all of the *plah* are lost, the body's elements are no longer held together by the life force and the person will die. If some *plah* are lost, illness results" (McHugh, 1989, p. 79). Since the *plah* is unstable, a living person can

also lose their soul. In other words, a Gurung person is vulnerable to the loss of one's soul which can cause pain, mental instability, other illness, and even death. Therefore, they need to seek the help of the ritual specialists to 'bring' back their lost souls. I discuss these Gurung rituals of bringing back souls in the next chapter. The *Pai* ritual is for the soul of the dead person.

The Gurung concept of *plah* is similar to Yolmo's concept of soul or "*rnam shes*" described by Robert Desjarlais (1992), and the Tamang concept of soul is discussed by David Holmberg (1996, 2005). Both of these scholars focus on the notions of *sem* (heart-mind) which is similar but not exact to the concept of soul. Holmberg (2006, p.95) writes, "Tamang distinguishes between body (*lih*) and heart-mind (*sem*), the latter is the combined seat of emotions and consciousness, which I will gloss here as emotive-consciousness." So *sem* or the heart-mind is the seat of emotions and consciousness, like the Gurung concept of *sae* – as the vehicle of consciousness, used by McHugh (1989). However, *plah* should not be confused with or used as synonymous with *sae* which relates to people's emotive-consciousness. *Plah* is like the "life force" or *bla* (shadow-soul) that Holmberg (2005/1996) has discussed in his book *Order in Paradox*. He explains:

For Tamang, humans have bodies (*ihi*), composed of organs and consisting of bones, flesh, blood, breath, and internal warmth; they also have "heart-mind" or *sem*, which are the seat of consciousness and along with heart (*ting*) and stomach (*pho*)- emotion. The relation of *ihi* to *sem* or body to consciousness is analogous to that of *so* to *bla* through which Tamang formulated ideas of life and death. Life force is intrinsically linked to the body.... when a corpse is burned, the body and flesh return to soil, and the blood to water.... With the annihilation of body and life force, *there is nothing left but the bla or shadow-soul*" (pp. 191-192, emphasis added).

Similar to the Tamang people, the Gurungs also believe that when a person dies and the body is cremated the *plah* leaves the body and wanders here and there in different worlds. Since the *plah* needs a body, it moves here and there in search of a body to live. The *plah* is vulnerable to being attacked and manipulated by ghosts and evil spirits. The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* say that when a person dies, her/his soul is surrounded by three worlds before the *Pai* ritual. The soul wanders here and there and cannot find the permanent world; sometimes, it becomes evil, and sometimes ancestors. So, the *Pai* is the most elemental and important ritual practice for ‘rescuing’ the soul of the dead from the world of evils and taking it away from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors. Therefore, the Gurung families must perform the *Pai* ritual for their deceased family members so that their ‘souls’ can be escorted to the world of ancestors where they can find peace and happiness.

## 5.2 Organizing the Ritual

*Pai* is an elaborate and systematic ritual that requires the active participation and contribution of the family, clan members, villagers, and others. Therefore, the Gurungs of the Sikles village have institutionalized customary rules and practices for organizing this ritual for the individual family of the village. *Pai* is a three-day ritual, so it needs to be scheduled on the days when every family member and relative, particularly those whose participation is required, can be present for the ritual. The following people must be present for the *Pai* ritual:

*Aasyo* (maternal relatives)

*Chahmai chahmimai* (children of the deceased person)

*Kha chi lhe* (person who manage whole *Pai*)

*Khekis* (priests) must be present there.

*La lhe* (person who fetches leaves to serve food)

*Paa lhe* (person who begins making alcohol for the ritual in particular)

*Pãedi* (Gurung astrologer)

*Mbo* (son-in-law)

*Sye lhe* (the person who slaughters the animals for feeding in particular)

*Sōkya* (person with a particular *lho* to start the event in an auspicious way)

*Tahkra* (relatives' brothers)

*Tōh* (people of the village boundary)

*Wah lhe* (the main cook)

Therefore, all these parties should be considered while deciding the proper day for the ritual so that all of them can participate in it. Similarly, a distinct division of labour and responsibilities is practised to organizing the ritual<sup>12</sup>. The clan membership also becomes important for the organization of this ritual. If the *Pai* ritual is for the Gairi *thar* (clan), one person from all the Gairi houses is required to help in bringing the paddy from other villages. This form of reciprocal labour contribution is called *kwahra mbla keepa* (free help in an emergency). The paddy rice is dried and distributed among the clan households and then pounded as rice. It is called *Pai mbla dhōpa* (beating of *Pai* rice). Similarly, clan members contribute labour to fetch and collect firewood for the ritual, and this firewood collection is called *Pai s thupa* (cutting down/collecting of *Pai* firewood). A huge quantity of firewood is needed to cook for many people for the three-day ritual<sup>13</sup>. These customary practices of division of labour and responsibilities, on the one hand, effectively help in the collective organizing of the ritual on the other hand, it gives a sense of unity and shared duty to the community.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, a huge quantity of rice is required for the ritual period to feed the many ritual participants. Since Skiles village does not produce enough rice, the paddy needs to be brought from other villages and then pounded into rice. One member from each house of a *thar/tole*, the settlement of Sikles village is required to volunteer to carry the paddy from other villages such as Taprang, Chās , Bhaise, and so on.

<sup>13</sup> About a quarter of a century ago, banana plant leaves were used to serve food in wedding ceremonies and *Pai* rituals. At least three people used to go to collect the leaves which is called *La keepa* (collecting or bringing the leaves). The use of banana leaves was easy because the leaves were clean and saved time from dishwashing. For the *Pai* ritual of my mother, we followed the system of *La keepa*. Son of my mother's brother and others collected the banana leaves for the *Pai* ritual. But nowadays the leaves have been displaced by stainless steel plates.

### 5.3 *Pai Ch pa*: Inviting the Soul of the Deceased Person

The *Pai* ritual is only organized and offered by a Gurung family after a gap of some time since the cremation of its deceased family member. Gurungs believe that the soul of the dead person wanders here and there during the period between the cremation and the *Pai* ritual. Therefore, the person's soul must be escorted to the sacred place of the ancestors so that the dead person can achieve peace.

The first day of the *Pai* called *Pai ch pa* is dedicated and focused on searching for the soul of the dead person and inviting the soul to the house. The *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform the ritual and use the classical ritual language to call on and search for the soul which may be living here and there in any part of the three worlds. This ritual of calling and inviting the soul may begin in the morning, day, or night according to their zodiac sign. Here, I first describe the ritual processes of calling and inviting the soul of the dead person. Then I analyse the core symbols underlined and their meanings.

#### Starting the *Pai*

At the exact time given by *Pachyu* or *Pāedi*, a cane mat is laid upside down over the *Kyōchu* (the sacred place for ritual sacrifice), and in the courtyard at the same time (see Fig 5.1). *Kyōchu* is for the *Pachyu* priest and the courtyard is for *Lāh* (a kind of eight-hand-long white flag). *Tahkra* (relative brother) is responsible for making the *Lāh*. According to *Pachyus*, laying the mat upside down symbolizes 'sorrow'. The *Pachyus* lay their sacred *K h* made of bamboo on the mat laid upside down and start chanting *pye*. Similarly, during the *Pai* performance, brothers and sons put black coal tika (mark) on their foreheads whereas sisters and daughters apply ash as symbolic expressions of grief. At the same time, on a similarly upside-down cane mat, a clean and new *gundri* (mat made of paddy straw) is kept under which a pillow made from a blanket made from sheep wool is placed. An eight-hand (almost 4 meters) long green bamboo is placed on a white cloth of equal length (*lah*)



**Figure 5.1: Preparation of *Lh* on the First Day of *Pai*. Photo by Researcher**

After reciting the chant, the head of the *Pachyu* beats the drums called *Taunki* and *Tdautu*. Then, the cousin-brothers of the deceased, *tahkra* tie a wild plant called *Chyuku ta* on the top of the bamboo. One of them blows a whistle using his fingers to inform ritual participants of the beginning of the process of the calling of the soul. Then following the beating of the drums by the *Pachyus* and the first splitting of the bamboo take place simultaneously, to call the dead soul and at the same time inform all participants that the soul is coming. We can see how the ritual priests use special sounds such as the beating of drums, whistles, and acts of splitting bamboo as ritual symbols to index the calling of the soul of the dead person. These acts of producing sound attract the ritual participants' attention and prepare them to 'see' the arrival of the soul which is put to a wild plant tied in the bamboo.

Plant symbolism: the priest places the soul of the dead person in the *Lāh*, the eight-hand long bamboo with white cloth and the ritual plant *Chyuku ta*. *Chyuku ta* is a kind of wild plant. The literal meaning of '*chhyuku*' refers to ghee and '*ta*' refers to flowers. But the plant is considered as a king of the ritual tree and is used for death rituals and the *Pai* ritual.

Symbolically, the tree is used to iconize the head and hair of the deceased person. Later in the chapter, I will discuss why this plant is required in the *Pai* ritual.

Sisters and daughters of the deceased person put ghee in *Chyuku ta* during this first-day ritual process called *krasa*. When the priest ritually puts the soul in the *Lāh*, then it is believed to be present therein. Now everybody believes that the dead person's soul is present there. Though people do not see signs that the soul has come, the relatives of the dead person and ritual participants see the *Chyuku ta* as if it is the material form of the deceased person's soul.

Daughters and sisters hold *Chyuku ta*, and put ghee over the *Chyuku ta* as the head of the deceased person. We see the transformation of the wandering and invisible soul taking a bodily form (material form) as the soul is ritually put in the *Lāh*. Some women cry out loud; some of them sob and some of them cry with a certain pitch and a style of suffocation called *Krasa* or *Krasa lapa*. Here's an illustration of *Krasa* that my sibling sisters expressed during the *Pai* ritual of our deceased mother on Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019.

Oh.....my mother you come to our house	If you go, take me too with you my mother
Where were you until this time?	What happened to you, my mother?
Now we are living together, my mother!	We, looking for you
I am missing you a lot, my mother!	Where is my mother?
I cannot see you anywhere, my mother!	What is this lonely feeling, my mother?
Do you see us, my mother?	All your friends are coming here my mother?
Now you cannot go anywhere my mother	
Do not leave our house, do not go anywhere my mother!	We cannot see you with your friends my mother
Do not leave our family, do not go	What is happening to my mother?

anywhere my mother!

If you go, to whom do we address my  
mother?

What is this lonely feeling about my  
mother?

Oh..... My mother now lives in our  
house

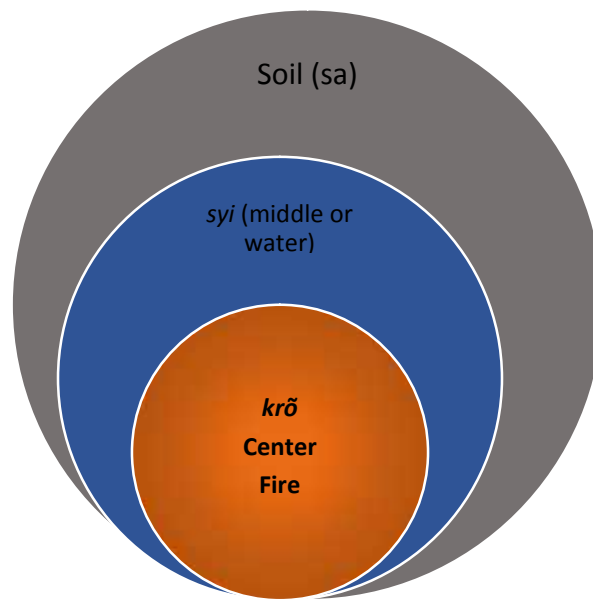
Let us not depart our family, my  
mother.

The above *Krasa lapa* exemplifies how daughters and sisters mourn the loss of their loved family members through sobbing words and songs. Through the *Krasa lapa*, the family members are directly speaking to the soul of the deceased person, now put into the bodily form of the *lh* and *Chhyuku ta*. Then, family members, relatives, and villagers offer food, drinks, and fruits to the soul by placing these food items in the *Lāh*. Hence, during this ritual process, the soul of the dead person, until then believed to be wandering in different worlds (underworld, living world or heaven), is brought to his/her house. The *plah* is made to become visible in the material form inside the *Lāh* and *Chyuku ta*. The invisible is made 'visible'; the soul is ritually brought into a living form such that ritual participants the family members and others can have social interactions of offering food to the dead person's soul. The ritual priests believe that the deceased can 'see' and 'hear' them and accept the ritual offering. Hence, the one-sided verbal communication through *Krasa lapa* is meaningful and important. The *Pai* ritual makes the meeting and sociality between the deceased person and his/her family, relatives, and the community possible. The first day of the ritual 'reunites' the soul with the family and the community.

Let me discuss the rest of the ritual process on the first day. After finishing the *Pai ch pa* ritual, the *Lauhri* priests start the *kye koipa* which is to invite the soul into the *Pai* house. The *kye koipa* is the ritual of inviting and guiding the soul into the house in the evening. For the *kye-koipa*, the *Lauhri* priest makes different *kaitus (torma)*; these *tormas*

symbolize the local gods and deities of the village. According to *Lauhri* Falman Gurung, they make twelve different *kaitus* which represent twelve different *lhos* (Gurung zodiac sign).

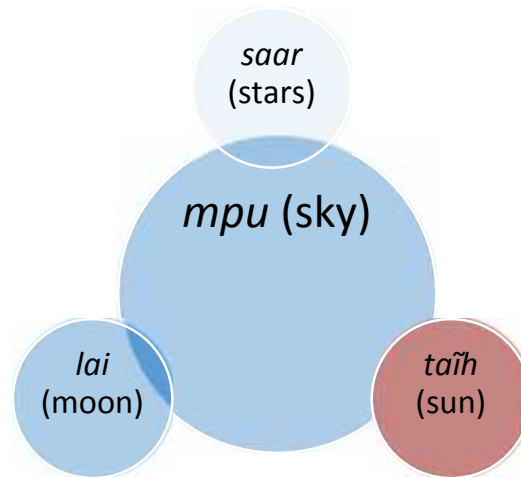
If the *Pai* ritual is performed for the family of a *Pachyu*, the ritual priest (who will be a *Pachyu*) starts *Sinmro theepa* which is a kind of worship for local deities. In my mother's case, the *Pachyu* chanted the *pye of s cha kwurpa* in *sinmro theepa* process. I should emphasize here that this *pye of s cha kwurpa* focuses on the Gurung ancestral territories. The *Pachyu* narrated the names of the Gurung ancestral territories and narrated the migration routes of the ancestors as well as their territory including *Siltu-naltu* (local deities). According to the oral *pye*, the *Pachyus* started somewhere in Mongolia. First, they called the name of earth in three different levels *krõ* (center or fire), *syi* (middle or water) and *sa* (surface or soil).



**Figure 5.2: Three Layers of the Earth According to the Pye**

Then the *Pachyu* chanted about the sky. According to one of the *Pachyu* leaders late Aas Bahadur Gurung, the *pye* chants recognize four elements of the sky: *mpu* (sky), *lai* (moon), *ta h* (sun) and *saar* (stars) which the *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* chant in the *Sane sõ-mpune plee*. In other words, as per the *Sane sõ-mpune plee*, the earth has three elements while

the sky has four elements (see Fig 5.3) Then, below the sky, there are specific place names of the locations on the earth the connections and routes of the Gurung ancestral lands (historic places) called *Wuicho-choru* and *China Tōh-China syō* (historical places) which include: Tibet, Mustang, Manang, and the places of Lamjung and Kaski where the Gurung people are spread.



**Figure 5.3: Four Elements in the Sky According to the Pye**

Thus, this ritual performance and the chanting of this *pye* emphasize the territorial belonging of the Gurung people in these historical places, and the close relationships between the land (historical places) and the living and non-living Gurung people<sup>14</sup>.

The ritual priests slaughter a goat at night; their sacrificial offering is called *kyu' ye* or *kya-kya*. The goat meat is offered to the *kaitus*. During this *Pai* ritual, *Lauhris* also use the gallbladder of the slaughtered goat to examine if the family is subjected to any auspicious or inauspicious conditions. After finishing this *Kya koipa* process, the *Lauhri* priests offer small pieces of *Kāetu* (torma) and curry of the slaughtered goat meat to the ancestors and local deities. At midnight, the sons of the deceased deliver rice to every house of the settlement or

<sup>14</sup> *S cha kwurpa* text is related to both living and non-living Gurung people. It is also used in rituals for the living people.

tole, and to the maternal uncle's house (*Aasyo*) as a ritual gift (*Poh Kaé*). Then, the gathered people eat the rice and goat curry. Then, the first day of the *Pai* ritual process ends.

#### **5.4 *Pai Paapa*: Welcome the Rhee (bon)**

The second day of the *Pai* is called *Pai paapa* ritual in the zodiac language, and *Rhee ty hpa* (in the common Gurung language). The *Rhee ty hpa* is the ritual process of welcoming the bone/nail of the dead person. The literal meaning of this word ‘*Rhee*’ refers to “bone” and *ty hpa* refers to “welcome”. In the death ritual, they cut a piece of the nail, which represents the bone of the dead person, and put it in a secret place, far from the home. When they perform the *pai* ritual, then the *Mbo* (son-in-law) brings this piece of the dead person’s nail in public through a ritual dance. Then all the family and mourners welcome this piece of nail and offer it milk, bread, wine, fruits, and so on. The practice is called *Rhee ty hpa*. According to the oral *pye*, the practice was started by a Gurung ancestor named Pāla wuhru kyahla who disappeared in a river when the bridge he was crossing broke down. When villagers did not find his body, they blocked the river water, sifted its sand, and found the bones and nails of Pāla wuhru. They took them as *Rhee* (pieces of bone and nail) and performed the *Pai* ritual at his home. This is how the use of *Rhee* in the *Pai* began, the *Rhee ty hpa* ritual (see Annex 1).

The second-day ritual has two major ritual events. The first part of the ritual focuses on *Rhee ty hpa* and the making of *Plau lapa* (making an effigy) which takes place during the daytime. The *Lauhris* are responsible for the *Rhee ty hpa* and the making of *Plau lapa*. In the evening, the ritual focuses on calling the deceased's soul – *Plah wuipa* led by *Pachyus*. Now I will briefly discuss the second-day ritual process and analyse the major ritual symbolism.

## The Ritual Process

*Pachyus* begin the second day *Pai* by offering ritual to the ground (soil) or the courtyard where they perform major ritual activities<sup>15</sup>. This ritual symbolizes respect for the earth (soil). The house's family, sisters, and brothers gather with the priest for the *sai nopa*. They come out from the door of the clan house. Then, they all go around in the yard three times in the name of the dead person. The male family members take out their caps from the head while females take out *kramu* (a kind of shawl for females) and wear the inauspicious tika on their foreheads to symbolize their feelings of grief and sorrow over the death of their family member.

For the *Rhee ty hpa*, the *Lauhris* have the major role as the ritual performers while *Pachyus* only plays the *Taunki td'auntu* (drums). The *Lauhris* sit on the sacred (made by chanting some charm) leaf-cane made umbrella which is laid on the upside-down cane mat in the sacred place of the priests for their sacrificial act. There are three bamboos of small species erected in a pyramid-like shape from the ground, which are tied together at the top. Under it, an earthen pot is placed which is called *Sa-pu* (the literal meaning is *soil* and *pot* but ritually it is the symbol of earth). The *kaitus* (tormas) are the symbol of the deceased. The number of *kaitus* (tormas) is the number of dead people whose *Pai* is being performed. According to Falman Gurung, if there is one deceased person, then one *kaitu* is used; if the *Pai* involved more than one deceased person, then they used more *kaitus*. The *kaintus* are kept in a small stone house-like structure.

According to Falman Gurung, during this ritual process, the *Lauhris* chant many *pye* texts for two to three hours before they begin the *Rhee ty hpa* ritual in the afternoon. Some of these *pye* texts include:

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<sup>15</sup> There is a slight different ritual practice between the priestly house and the others. If the *Pai* is performed at the priestly house i.e. a house belonging to the Gurung priest, they start with performing *sai nopa* which is the worship of the yard in the morning. Here, *sai* or *sa* refers to soil and *nopa* means "to worship". The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhri* have their clan house for this *sai nopa* ritual.

The *pye* of *syurlu* (related to the earth and its creation)

The *pye* of *tuhrlu* (transferring the *Plah* to the ritual sheep *kgo*)

The *pye* related to *Prayachi* who was the king who started the *plau* or effigy and

The *pye* related to *Pā lā huru* who was also a king. It is believed the king (*Pā lā huru*) began the *Rhee ty hpa* ritual and *plah mhaipa* (the *pye* of soul searching) rituals.

The *pye* of *tuhrlu* (transferring the *plah* to the ritual sheep *kgo*) explains the use of a sheep to represent the body of the deceased person and the transmigration of the person's *plah* to the sheep. I will discuss this *pye* later in this section. *Pālā wuhru* explains how and why the *Rhee* (bone, nails) is welcomed on the second day of the *Pai*. Similarly, *plah mhaipa* literally means looking for or searching the soul of the dead, for which six places of the hell or the demon land (*sō tu*) and the six places of the ancestor's land (*sō tu*) are addressed. It is believed that the soul remains in those places from where it is brought home during the ritual. The *Pai* not only focuses on *Plau* and *Rhee* i.e. searching and welcoming the soul and escorting it to the sacred land of ancestors, but the ritual is equally important for narrating the ancestral history of the Gurung people and their connections to different sacred geographical locations/areas. So, I would like to explain and analyse the *Plau* and *Rhee* based on my discussions with the key informants *Pachyus* and *Lauhris* as well as based on my observations. The *pye* of *Prayachi* explains the main symbol of the dead person represented by the *Plau* of the *Pai* (see Fig 5.4).

According to the *pye* text, the ritual use of the *Plau* began in the ancient era when one of the Gurung ancestors, named *Prayachi*, was buried under a landslide because of his wife's curse (see Annex II for details). His body was not discovered. After a long time since his death, plants like *Chhyukuta*, *Tnera*, *Yera*, (ritual plants for the *plau*) and other plants grew from the place where *Prayachi*'s body was buried in the earth. *Chhyuku ta* grew from *Prayachi*'s head, *Yera* from the heart, and *Tnera* from his ribs. *Prayachi* families collected

these plants and made the *Plau* to represent his body and performed the *Pai* for *Prayachi*. According to *pye*, the tradition of making *Plau* (effigy or symbol of deceased) begins from *Prayachi's Pai*.

Hence, we can see how the *Pai* ritual underlines the embedded relations between plants and the human body in the Gurung cosmology. These plants grew in the soil where *Prayachi's* body was buried, and hence it can be considered that these plants grew out of his body. These plants represent different parts of a person's body such as the head, heart, and ribs. This illustrates how plants are personified to represent the process by which the bodies of humans and plants interchange. In the *Pai* ritual, these plants are treated as 'sacred ritual objects' that 'personify' the dead person (different bodily parts) but as a 'living and interacting' being during the ritual time (Descola, 2008). This plant-human body relationship provides the framework for the ritual symbolism of the *Plau* and clothes are wrapped around it according to the dead person's gender. During the *Pai*, a lot is explained about the *Plau*, being the symbol of the dead. There are other synonyms for the *Plau*. But in the study area, it is called *Plau*, hence my usage of the term here.



Source: Figure made by the researcher, 2019.

**Figure 5.4: The Traditional *Plau* (effigy)**

### **The Making and Ritual Offering to the *Plau***

In the preceding section, I discussed the myth narrated in the *pye* related to why and how the Gurung began using the *Plau* and the plants in the *Pai* ritual. In the *Rhee ty hpa* ritual, the effigy of *Plau* represents the dead person<sup>16</sup>. It is displayed publicly, and people know the sex of the dead from the clothes (put on in) worn by the *Plau*. *Plau* (effigy) weaving is the major work of the *Mbos* (son-in-laws). The daughters and relatives try to beautify the *Plau* as much as they can by covering it with new clothes, and ornaments. They also offer it with fruits.

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<sup>16</sup> It is also called *Chhantra kgoh* if the *Plau* is for a man and *Chhantra mo* if the *plau* is for a woman.



**Figure 5.5: The Contemporary *Plau* with Offerings, Source: Bel Bahadur Gurung, 2019, Pokhara**

In this ritual of making the *Plau*, the *Lauhris* collect the soul of the deceased person from all four directions and keep it under the *Plau*. The daughters and sisters protect and take care of the soul with their best efforts. They mourn and express their sorrow through *krasa* in which daughters and sisters ask the dead person not to stay hungry and thirsty. They also ask the dead person to wear the clothes he/she likes. They even ask the dead to wish them goodness and to convey their regards to their ancestors. Thus, the *plau* becomes the social body of the dead person with its *plah* and it can feel the emotions and ‘hears’ the conversation. Thus, the *Pai* ritual, which takes after a gap of many weeks or even months of the funeral of the dead person, enables sociality and conversation between the dead and the living.

During this time, the *Lauhris* beat their instruments with nine different beats and tempos while sitting in their sacred place. The *Plau* is now fully decorated; then the *Lauhris* wear their formal costume and dance around the *Plau* playing their *Ngah* (drums) and

*chhyōl y* (cymbals) with nine different beats. They do so in the anti-clockwise direction. It is a graceful view for the people present in the ritual to observe this ritual dance. Many of the people gather at this time in the ritual house to watch the dance of the *Lauhris* and ultimately to witness the act of *Rhee keepa* (taking the bone/nail of the deceased person) later. If the ritual is at the *Pachyu's* house, the *Pachyu* exits from the house playing their ritual instruments and moving around the *Plau* nine times like the *Lauhris*. In this dance, the daughters and sisters of the deceased person help the *Pachyus*. The way of playing the instruments and dancing is different from each other for the *Pachyus* and the *Lauhris*.

After the ritual offering to the *Plau*, the *Rhee ty h pa* ritual begins. *Rhee*. When a person dies, his/her toenail is cut and put safely in a secret place which is done by the *Mbos* before the body is cremated. The same nail is considered the deceased person's bone and brought in the *Pai* with respect.

#### **The Ritual Process of *Rhee ty h pa*:**

The ritual of *Rhee ty h pa* is not performed in the courtyard but in an open place further away from the house. In the case of my mother's *Pai* ritual, the *Lauhri* priest Falman Gurung danced wearing his ritual costume and playing the *Chhyōl y* (cymbals). Holding *Rhee* (bone/nail) in a small bamboo, the *Mbo*, sometimes acted in violent gestures and was sometimes seen caricaturing the activities of the *Lauhri*. The *Mbo* refused to hand over the *Rhee* to the *Lauhri*. In this *Rhee ty h pa* process, the *Mbos* played the role of ghosts or evils of the river. The *Lauhri* played the role of the priests, family, and villagers. The *Mbo* held the *Rhee* or nail of the dead person for a while then the *Lauhri* touched it. Then the family and other relatives offered food and drinks to the *Rhee*.

The *Mbo* put my mother's *Rhee* on a sheep's wool blanket which is laid on a clean local mat. All the mourners welcome the *Rhee*. My sisters (daughters of the deceased) and relatives offered it with food and drinks; incense was burned. First, the head *Pachyu* touched

the *Rhee* (bone/nail); this ritual act is called *Rhee nopa*. After this ritual of welcoming the nail/bone of the deceased person (*Rhee ty hpa*), the next ritual process involved the ritual preparation of a sheep to transfer the deceased person's *plah* into its body. This ritual process is called *Pl y krapa*.

### **The Sheep as the Dead Person**

Another major ritual event of the second day is to transfer the *plah* of the deceased person to an animal body i.e. to a living body represented by a sheep. This ritual process of preparing and putting the soul of the deceased into a sheep is called *Pl y krapa*. Two sheep are needed for this ritual. The sheep that will ritually embody the soul of the deceased person is called *Kgoh*<sup>17</sup>. A male sheep or ram is used if the deceased person is a male, and an ewe (female sheep) if the *Pai* is for a woman. The other sheep, a friend of the main sheep (*Kgoh*) is called *Thu*. These two sheep are placed on the other side of the *Rhee ty hpa* place.

When the *Pachyu* chanted the oral texts, we family members bathed the *Kgoh* and *Thu* used for my mother's *Pai* ritual. Then, both *Kgoh* and *Thu* shook their bodies. The shaking of the bodies by these animals is a sign (evidence of) that the *Kgoh* is ready, and the sheep has been accepted to be used by the *plah* to enter into the animal body; people think and say that the soul has entered the sheep (*Kgoh*)'s body.<sup>18</sup> The shaking of the body by the sheep symbolizes that the *plah* of the deceased is happy with all family members and relatives present in this ritual. If the sheep does not shake off its body or if it lingers the shaking, it is believed that the dead person is not happy.

After finishing this ritual preparation of the sheep, the *Mbos* take the *Rhee* (bon/nail) and sheep (*kgoh* and *thu*) with them and all the people return to the *Pai* house. Now people

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<sup>17</sup> *Kgoh* is the male gender. But in this ritual, the sheep representing the dead person is called *Kgoh* irrespective of the gender of the dead person while a ram is used to represent if the dead person is a man and an ewe for a woman.

<sup>18</sup> People generally consider the shaking off the sheep's body (*kyuu khaarpa*) as the sign of the entering of the soul. They say loudly "It has come! It (the soul) has come". Even the priests can say this. However, the soul calling ritual takes place in the evening, and is performed by the *Pachyus*, not by the *Lauhris*.

dance *Jhya tu* in the courtyard in a circle. This cultural dance takes a long time. 5 to 6 *tdauntus* (drums) and the same number of *chhyōly* (cymbals) are played and at least 20 to 25 other people dance with the different beats and tempos. Sometimes, in some places, people may also sing some vulgar songs in the beginning. The audience accepts such vulgar songs, the dance and singing help to minimize the sorrows the mourning family feels during this moment.

### **Calling the Soul of the Deceased by the *Pachyu***

After the *Rhee ty hpa* ritual and checking if the soul of the deceased person is happy or not happy with the family, the *Pachyus* perform the final ritual of calling the soul of the dead person inside the house. This ritual is performed in the evening and is called *Plah wuipa*; *wuipa* means “calling”. Hence this is the ritual of calling the soul of the dead person. This ritual process also involves the calling and bringing the soul from a distant geographical location in the northern side of Sikles to the deceased person’s village and home. Thus, this ritual performance involves calling the place names and narrating the geographical routes through which the soul is brought home. Thus, it shows the linkages between the ancestral and ritual geographies and the Gurung people (see Evans, C., Pettigrew, J., Tamu, Y. K., Turin, M., & Messerschmidt, D., 2009)

### Bringing the Soul from the Northern Region

The *Pachyus* call the soul from a place named *Kukuli Mharsō*, which according to the *pye*, is located somewhere in the northern side of Nepal. The *plah* is believed to be dwelling in this place before the *Pai* ritual.

Inside the house, the *Pachyus* face towards the door and perform this *Plah wuipa* ritual to find out if the soul of the deceased is present or not. They sit in their sacred place and start chanting their oral *pye*. I participated with the *Pachyus* in the *Plah wuipa* ritual process at Kashi Ram's *Pai* ritual on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2019. The *Pachyus* chant many *pyes* but the *pye* of calling the soul of the deceased is interesting and insightful. When *Plah wuipa* is being performed, the *Pachyus* block and stop the path of evil forces in different places like the door of the house itself, the crossroad of the village, and different places along the way to heaven. This is done so that the soul can safely come to the house from the *Kukuli* or elsewhere. The *Pachyus* read *pye* texts in the following way:

<i>chu sōkya (ghyā) poye kgoisōra</i>	in the middle of this crossroad
<i>chura syaye pumi mpharkyala kāta sai</i>	will kill the sorceress of the east
<i>chura lwoye pumi mpharkyala kāta sai</i>	will kill the sorceress of the south
<i>chur thuye pumi mpharkyala kāta sai</i>	will kill the sorceress of the west
<i>chura chhyoye mpharkyala kāta sai</i>	will kill the sorceress of the north

Thus, the *Pachyus*, as they chant the texts, 'fight' with the ghosts and evil power for the safety of the soul of the deceased. While the physical bodies of the priests are in the ritual house, they travel to these different locations to block the paths of the evil forces. In other words, this shows that the ritual priests have the power and capacity to be in different spaces simultaneously at the same time. Reading their *pye* the *Pachyus* reach a crossroad from the house and scatter some rice grains in the name of the evil spirits reading "*Sali syee chai koisee thy , tdwoli syee chai koisee thy* ". The meaning of this reading or *pye* is, "I blocked

you evil by the rice which is from the soil; I blocked you evil by the rice which is from stone'. Here, the meaning of the soil and stone is the 'land' which is sacred. The rice grows out of this land and gives its sacred power. Hence, this ritual narration shows that the grains, when used in the ritual, become powerful because they grow out of soil and stones i.e. nature. Hence, the priests invoke the power of nature bestowed in grains to block evil and open the way for the soul of the deceased person to travel back to the house.

There are two reasons for this reading. The first one is for the safety of the *Pachyu* himself. The second is for the safety of the soul of the dead person so that it will not face any troubles because of the evil spirits. In other words, the reading of this *pye* clears the possible hindrances and challenges for the soul to come back to the house.

While going to take the soul of the dead person, the *Pachyus* leave the door of the house, reach the place just outside the door, then to the courtyard and reach the crossroad of the village. In Sikles, they go to the north. Along the way comes, Kōy , the north side of the study area. In the *pye*, the specific place names are invoked – which are the paths of the soul calling from Sikles. These are called *Pahcha chowh*, *Aasyo kai*, *Pahcha whō*, *Lōusa ti*, and so on.

Similarly, *Pachyus* go on chanting the names of the places above and reaches the *Chautari* (sitting place) for the soul. Then the places like Nkyarkuli, Mprakuli, Pokuli (near the place of Kukuli), and Kukuli come. It is in the Kukuli where the *Pachyus* meet the soul of the dead person. The *Pachyus* tell the soul that they have come to her/his house for the welcoming event in honour of the soul. The *Pachyus* read in the *pye* like this:

*pmar chinali tōh ne syō ra naa ne dhee*      In your village, in your house

*ra*

*kyō chahkō khāpai khā sai ro*                      As your son is able

*kyō chōko khāpai khā sai ro*                      As your daughter-in-law is able

<i>kyō ko ko khāpai khā sai ro</i>	As your grandson is able
<i>kyō ko ko mi khāpai khā sai ro</i>	As your granddaughter is able
<i>kyō tōko khāpai khā sai ro</i>	As the village is able
<i>kyō syō ko khāpai khā sairo</i>	As the rivers (village boundary) are able
<i>kyō Aasyo kuma ye khā sai ro</i>	As your maternal uncle is able
<i>kyō atko kuma ye khā sai ro</i>	As your relatives are able
<i>pmar cha Aasema chala mbo lasimpo</i>	Food is kept safe for you
<i>pmar th Aasema th la mbo lasimpo</i>	Drinks are collected for you
<i>pmar chhyā chhyā chusimpo</i>	Beautiful goods are kept there for you
<i>mpar t h t h chusimpo</i>	Delicious things are kept there for you
<i>mpar mbo ka chusimpo</i>	The sons-in-law have kept rice for you
<i>mpar mbo sey chusimpo</i>	The sons-in-law have kept meat for you
<i>mpar pahr ko y chusimpo</i>	Nice clothes are kept there for you
<i>mpar puhr ko y chusimpo</i>	Feast is arranged there for you

So, as it becomes evident in the above *pye*, the *Pachyus* reminds the soul of her/his family members and relatives. Hence, it shows the Gurung's emphasis on kinship ties and sociality. By mentioning that his/her family members are waiting for the soul with the things to offer food, clothes, and others, the priests, by ways of luring the soul, also underline the Gurung ethos of commensality and hospitality. This also relates to Clifford Geertz's (1973) concepts of ritual as a "model of" and "model for" the Gurung cultural ethos, values, and practices. In other words, the *Pachyus* promise the offering of good hospitality, one of the fundamental cultural practices of the Gurung hospitality (among the family and kin members (see McHugh, 1989). When the *Pachyu* meets the soul, he explains all the preparations that have taken place at home for her/him (the soul). The *Pachyus* tell the soul that he/she must be hungry and thirsty. They request the soul to visit the home and see all things prepared for the

soul. If the soul does not agree, the *Pachyus* even threaten to break the shelter of the soul, to cut the path, to make the food bitter, and to dry out the water of the soul. So, by acts of both loving and threatening, the soul is brought from *Kukuli Mahrsõ*.

The door is kept closed where a hen is hung. Food, drinks, and clothes brought by family members, relatives, *Aasyo*, and villagers all are declared loudly by the *Mbos* saying “*Ch h you ch h you* (Come Come)”. It is called *solpa*. The chanting of the *Pachyus* and the invitation by the *Mbos* last till the soul arrives. The soul is brought to the top of the *Lãh*, and then to the door. The *Pachyus* count one, two three .... up to nine and tell the *Plah* to enter so that he/she can have all the food, drinks, and goods. When the hen flaps its wings with noise, *Plah* is believed to have come and *Plah wuipa* (calling the soul) ritual comes to an end.

When the *Pachyus* were chanting their *pye* texts, all the ritual participants were seriously listening and watching the hanging roaster. After some time, the hanging chicken tried to fly and cried. Then the priests and participants said “*yui yui*” which meant the soul had come. The family agreed with the *Pachyus* and became happy. The *Mbos* caught the chicken and opened the door for the soul. Here, we see how the Gurung rituals require animals and birds such as sheep and birds not only as sacrificial offerings but also as a “medium” of communication between the living and the dead. In this regard, this can be taken as a common feature of the Gurung animistic religious belief and practice as suggested by Swancutts (2003/2019). She argues that animistic practices show:

The importance of animal spirits and places that are sacred or charged with animistic potentialities. Animal spirits refer to the spirits or souls attributed to animals that may be considered the seat of an animal’s consciousness and motivation animals frequently show their sentience, awareness, and motivation to act through their relationships to human beings (Swancutt, 2003/2019; p. 4)

The *Plah wuipa* process is a very interesting part of the *Pai* ritual. I asked *Pachyu* Khim Bahadur after finishing the *Plah wuipa* of Kashi Ram. Where *Kukuli* was and why he went there for *Plah* (soul). According to him, the place of *Kukuli* lies on the northern side of Nepal or somewhere in the border of Tibet and Nepal. The place is for the soul of the dead person whose *Pai* ritual has not been performed. Again, he said that the movement of the hanging of the chicken proved that the soul of Kashi Ram came to his house to meet the family. He (Kashi Ram) had been watching and listening to every activity. Even though we could not watch him physically, the *pye* was watching and talking to him. The Gurung ritual participants of the *Pai* confirmed this experience of having interacted with the soul of the deceased person. Until the performance of the *Pai* of Kashi Ram, he was yet to become the ancestor; only after his *Pai*, he can go to the land of the ancestors and live happily in peace.

### **5.5 *Pai Leepa*: Escorting the Dead Soul to the Ancestral World**

The last day of the *Pai* ritual called the *Pai Leepa* is performed to escort and farewell the soul to the ancestral world. In other words, this ritual is performed to bid the final goodbye to the dead person. The *Pai leepa* ritual begins in the early morning of the third day and does not end until the soul is successfully escorted to the ancestral world. *Sarka syepa* or *Sarka kui preepa* (dancing the *serka* or singing the song of *sarka*) is the major role of the *Pachyu* in the third-day ritual. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are concerned with the soul journey with the help of their long oral texts.

First, I want to mention what other scholars have said about this *Pai* ritual related to the soul journey studied in other Gurung areas. Mumford (1990) writes:

As the Ghyabre begins the journey, he dances slowly around the pla, beating his drum and chanting his guiding instructions. He first warns that it must be the “white” trail of the gods they will embark on, not the trails of the *klu*, *btsan* or *bdud*. In the chant the soul is *first lured away from its farther home attachments, exactly reversing the*

*soul re-calling rite*. Thus, “Don’t stay here: Don’t stay in the beer storage room. You no longer have the right to remain at the hearth. Your place is different now. Only alive ones can stay here. You are dead now, go (p.188, emphasis added)

Here, Mumford (1990) highlights how the third ritual priest follows “exactly the reversing of the soul calling rite of the second day in which the soul is lured to home from the northern part of the region. In the third day ritual, the soul is lured away from the home to the land of the ancestors. Similarly, Kullsvveen (1999) describes the third-day *Pai* ritual

Finally, they sing a text to bring the souls from the house to the forefathers’ sphere.

The Pajus recounts the names of the places the souls must pass through in order to reach the forefathers’ sphere. They must travel from the deceased’s house northwards up in the hills and eventually to kohla village in the mountains. The pajus count a large number of places. All prominent landmarks are mentioned, like resting places, rivers, mountains, passes, and other places, through which the deceased’s souls must pass when traveling to the forefathers’ sphere . . . (pp. 114-115)

Here, Kullsvveen highlights that the soul journey involves escorting the soul through concrete geographical areas, hence the importance of ritual chanting of all the toponyms or place names and “landmarks like resting places, rivers, mountains, passes, and other places” related to the Gurung migratory history. In other words, the *Pai* ritual journey retells the relations between the Gurung people, their ethnic history, and the landscape (Pettigrew, 1999).

### **The Ritual Dance Performance: *Sarka***

Various ethnographic studies have shown that the performance of special dance and music are integral part of ritual processes across many religious and social groups in Nepal (Dalzell, 2020; Kohn, 2001; Malik, 2009; Wilddess, 2016). Ritual dances and music are very important and central to many Gurung rites and rituals (Gurung, 2019; Macfarlane & Gurung,

1990). The *Pai* ritual is no exception. On the third day of the *Pai*, the performance of the ritual dance called *Sarka* (also called *Serka* in some places) is one of the main ritual actions. The ritual dance is performed by the *Pachyu* priests. Now it is better to provide a short introduction to the meaning of *Sarka* which is a kind of ritual dance for the soul journey.

*Sarka* is a cyclic *Pai* ritual dance performed for the soul of the deceased person. On the third day of the *Pai*, *Pachyu* chants different *pye* texts the whole day; it takes nearly 9-10 hours. *Pachyus*, daughters, sons, sisters, and other female relatives are involved in this *Sarka* ritual dance. The *Pachyus* are divided into two groups and move around in a circle in the anti-clockwise direction. They play a *Tdautu* and a *Chhyōl* (drums and cymbal) and sing the long history of the Gurung in the question-answer style. It is sung with a melodious tune, and hence it is also called *Sarka koi pre pa* (singing the song of *sarka*). On the *Sakra* dance, Stickland (1982) notes that:

That sai, two points may be made: firstly, the phrase ‘hurling songs (kuii Priwa) recalls the alternating song contests described by Stein for the ancient ‘singers of riddles’ as ‘question and answer songs dealing with the creation of the world and with human and divine genealogies. (p. 254)

In other words, in the *Sarka*, the Gurung’s cosmology about the creation of the world and sacred geographies and ecological relations are narrated in the question-answer mode. Hence, the *Sarka* is a very important and interesting part of the *Pai*. For the *Sakra*, the old and experienced people sit in the middle of the *Sarka kwur* (circling of the team) and listen to it carefully. They listen to the stories, find the meanings and some of them even sing standing along with the *Pachyus*. During this performance, we can learn about many symbolic representations such as *Plau* the effigy made of wild ritual plants representing the deceased person, *Kgoh kyu* a sheep, a non-human but living being used as the symbol and representative of the dead person, story on the origin and evolution of the Gurungs, history of

migration, comparison of the dead with different flowers, explanation of various evil powers and getting rid of them, and the sending of the soul to the heaven - all these are dramatized in the *Sarka*. Since the ritual texts and their narrations are important public performances that give meanings to the ritual actions being performed, I need to analyse some of the *pyes* (texts) to illustrate the ritual process and the ritual symbolism.

At the beginning of the *Sarka*, they (priests) ask about the present day, and it is answered by narrating a little bit about the *Pai*. Then they explain about the *Pla*. If the dead person is male, it is called *Chhantra Kgoth* and if it is a female they call the effigy *Chhantra Mo*. The same *pye* is described by Simon Slade Strickland (1982, p. 254) in his study (read from left to right):

Let us tell the pe of the Dead:	What do bamboo strips do?
Let us tell the lu of the Dead:	They form the blood vessels of the Dead
What does neri-wood do?	What does sagi-grass do?
It forms the ribs of the Dead	It forms the flesh of the Dead
What does the white cloth do?	What does the central strut do?
It forms the skin of the Dead	It forms the heart of the Dead
What do the small beads do?	What does the hempen cloth do?
They form the eyes of the Dead	It forms the bottom of the Dead
What does the stem of the tuber do?	What do the bunched leaves do?
It forms the nose of the Dead	They form the hair of the Dead
What do the cowrie shells do?	What do the strings of swollen rice do?
They form the teeth of the Dead	They make the Dead Beautiful.

In this *pye*, we can see how the priest provides the meanings of the ritual offerings offered to the deceased person's souls. They explain how these ritual offerings such as wood, beads, stem of tuber, cowrie shells, bamboo vessels, sagi grass, central strut, hempen cloth,

and others create different body parts of the dead person. Hence, this *pye* provides the homological relations between these objects and human body parts to say that the *Pai* ritual “regenerates” the physical body of the deceased person.

*Sound symbolism:* During the *pye* chanting in this ritual act, the priests play drums and cymbals with different tempos. The beating area of *Taunki* and *Tdautu* (drum) are made of cow leather and the other parts are made of wood. *Chhyōl y* (cymbals) is made of brass. It is insightful to underline here that when the ritual priests are playing the drums and performing the dance while chanting the ritual text (*pye*), they are in fact ‘playing’ the music in different worlds and the sound is believed to be heard in different worlds. In other words, the priests use music and sound to communicate with different worlds from the ritual place. Hence, there is a simultaneous presence of the priests in the different worlds at the same time during this ritual performance. The ritual acts bring these different worlds in a connectivity through the *pye* and the soundscape. And these musical instruments are dedicated to the ancestors. So, through the playing of these drums and producing sound that is believed to have reached across all the worlds<sup>19</sup>. When these instruments are played in the name of the deceased persons, it is believed that the ancestors can hear the sound.

*Analogy with plant:* In the ritual citation of *Sarka pye*, the narrations on *Ta wuiipa* (blossoming of flowers) and *Ta chyalpa* (withering of flowers) are important. The narrations use the analogy of a flower and its life cycle to compare the life cycle of a person. As the flowers blossom, they look beautiful and make the places around them equally beautiful. However, all flowers, no matter how beautiful they become periodically, will wither away and disappear. In the same way, a person is born, becomes young, and looks so handsome/

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<sup>19</sup> According to *pye*, when the instruments are played in the underworld, the sound is heard in the middle part. When they are in the middle part, they are heard in the land. When they are played on the land, the sound is heard in the sky, and when played in the sky, the sound is heard in the east. When played in the East, the sound is heard in the South, and when played in the South, it is heard in the West. When it is played in the West, they are heard in the North and when it is played in the name of the dead, the ancestors can hear the sound.

beautiful that makes her/him as well as others feel good. But one day he/she becomes old and dies. In these *Ta wuipa* and *Ta chyaalpa* verses, varieties of flowers are mentioned blossoming in the high altitude to low altitude. On the falling off of flowers or the *Ta chyalpa*, the *Pachyus* chant the *pye* starting from the low altitude and ending in the high altitude. This text of *Ta wuipa* says that:

<i>A... a... a... tara yheure wui pami sunapuli ta</i>	A person's life is like the sunapuli flower of the highland.
<i>A...a...a...chaye khupila mpi...ri...ri</i>	We decorated you with flower
<i>A...a...a...bha re wui pami mhura ta</i>	It is like the flower marigold that grows in soil.
<i>A...a...a...chura chaye khupila mpi...ri...ri</i>	We decorate you with flower
<i>A...a...a...chura kywore wui pami cha kyal ta</i>	It is like the flower Chaikyal that grows in the low land, which brightens the high
<i>A...a...a...chura chaye khupila mpi...ri...ri</i>	land, middle land and low land, make them colourful.

Here, beautiful flowers and their altitudes are recited to compare and underline the beauty and joys of a person's life. In the *Ta chyalpa*, the *Pachyus* read from the low land to the highland singing the withering of the flowers:

<i>A...a...a... chura kywore wuino</i>	We decorate you with the flower
<i>pahrpami syōna ta</i>	of the low land,
<i>A...a...a...nkiti kyō ye krara wui primupa</i>	We decorate your head with the leafy
<i>A...a...a...bha re (saure) wuino</i>	flower Paati
<i>pahrpami chyō riye ta</i>	
<i>A...a...a...nkiti kyō ye krara wui primupa</i>	We decorate you with the orchid of the
<i>A...a...a...tara yheure wuino pahrpami</i>	high land.
<i>suna khisri ta A...a...a...nkiti kyō ye</i>	
<i>krara wui primupa</i>	

Hence, by narrating *Ta wuipa* and *Ta chyalpa* to symbolize two facets of human life in the *Sarka*, the priests remind the soul and others (the living people) that birth, growth, beautiful experiences, and death are inevitable and must be accepted and cognized by all. They use the natural processes of blooming and withering of flowers as metaphors of human life processes. Such ritual analogy of plant life and human life is common in many parts of the world (Rival, 2020, 2012, 1998).

*Ritual narration of The Gurung kingdom:* The next important chapter of the *Sarka* is the *Hyula ch pa* (the *pye* of the founding of the Tamu kingdom). I referred to *Hyula ch pa* many times in the preceding chapters. This is the history of migration of the Gurung people. According to the *pye*, Gurungs migrated from an ancient place called Sa-fu-ti-kyahlsa (somewhere in Mongolia) to So re Hyula, a place situated in the eastern side of the study area, Nepal. The Gurungs migrated together, not sparsely. When the Gurungs migrated and settled in different places, they established their ‘Tamu kingdom’ preserving and developing their culture, ritual, and tradition. Thus, the *Pai pye* talks about the history of migration, the founding of the Gurung kingdoms, and the preservation of the Gurung tradition.

It is not possible to describe all the settlements of the Gurungs during the history of their migration. The *Hyula ch pa* text has long historical narrations of different places; describing all these places are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the text mentions that the last settlement was Kohla sōthar. So, the history of that place, the classical name of which is *Sōure Hyula* is described here.

I would like to quote the texts of my late father Harka Bahadur Kromchhai *Pachyu* who had a handwritten *pye* of Sarka. From that Sarka book, the history of *Sōure Hyula* is given as follows:

For many years the state of *So re Hyula* (three different settlements before Sikles) was similar to as it existed in the past. The political structure and organization of the state included the King, Kyalpo Ruchu, his servant Chyuimi Whuito, Lemko and Twulisyo (Lemko is the maternal uncle and Twulisyo is the maternal aunt of Chyuimi Whuito), *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, the priests of the state, gentry and the ordinary people. *Syōlee Pachyu* and the *Lams* coming down from Nar, Manang, have also important roles in the history and incidents of Kohla sōthar.

One day, the king Kyalpu Ruchu ordered his main servant Chyuimi Whuito to collect tax (*syura* in the Gurung language) from the state's subjects. He followed the order and he reached to his *mama's* (maternal uncle) house. Mama and Maiju (maternal uncle and aunt) were living in a dire condition. They were not in the condition to pay the smaller amount of tax. So Chyuimi Whuito did not collect any tax from them. When the king asked, whether tax was collected from all the people. Chyuimi Whuito did not lie and told the truth. The king was angry and ordered Chyuimi Whuito to impose Lemko and Twulisyo with a punishment. The king said:

<i>A...a...a... kyar Aasyo lemko maela kra thoto pihmami kra thopo khwo</i>	Behead Mama Lemko if ordered and bring his head here.
<i>A...a...a...kyar Aanki twulisyo maela nkgeh thoto pihmami nkgeh thopo khwo</i>	Cut the breasts of Twulisyo if ordered and bring them here.
<i>A...a...a...kyar s thoto pihmami s thopo khwo</i>	Bring his mouth if ordered to cut the mouth.
<i>A...a...a...kyar ley thoto pihmami ley thopokhwo</i>	Bring his tongue if ordered to cut the tongue.
<i>A...a...a... kyar pa thoto pihmami pa thopokhwo</i>	Bring the shoulder if ordered to cut the shoulder.
<i>A...a...a...kyar yo thoto pihmami yo thopokhwo</i>	Bring the hand if ordered to cut the hand.

The king ordered Chyuimi Whuito to extract a fine from his maternal uncle and aunt; he was supposed to physically punish or even kill them in case of disobedience to the royal order. For the severe punishment they were subjected to, the maternal uncle and aunt cursed their *bhanja* (nephew) Chyuimi Whuito. He became ill for nine days. His body was swollen; he vomited and then died of fever, cold, and heat. Following this death, there was a discussion between King Kyalpu Ruchu and Syōlee *Pachyu*. They concluded that there was a need to perform the *Pai* of Chyuimi Whuito by Syōlee *Pachyu*. Here, we can see the reason for the beginning of the *Pai* ritual. The nephew died because of the curse of his uncle and aunt who became angry because the nephew did not respect the kin ties but obeyed the order of the king to severely punish them. This act of the nephew disrespected the ethics of the kinship; hence he was cursed to death for breaking this ethic and moral foundation of the Gurung social relations.

To follow with the narration – when the priest was asked by the king to perform the *Pai* ritual, Syōlee *Pachyu* said that he would perform the *Pai* without the *Aasyo ko*<sup>20</sup> (without the clothes of my maternal uncle). In the Gurung tradition, when a person dies, a piece of cloth called *Aasyo ko*, offered by his/her maternal uncle and aunt is a must. While giving the cloth, the *Aasyo* (uncle) says, '*khuma tuih nghima thu*' which translates as “warmth in cold and friend in fear” which means “may this piece of cloth provide you warmth in cold and friend in fear”. Hence, this ritual offering dramatizes and signifies the importance of kinship relations and the position of the maternal uncle in Gurung society.

The Syōlee *Pachyu* further said in his *pye* that he had the power to make the lowland sunny and the high land rainy simultaneously. To people’s surprise, *the Plau* of Chyuimi Whuito ate, talked, laughed, drank and the *Pai* came to its end. Here, we can see why the effigy of the *Plau* is needed on the second of the *Pai* ritual and how it represents the deceased person’s body.

After a few days, some Bon Lams were coming down to Sōure Hyula from Nar, Manang. They saw a peculiar insect that was making noise and breathing with difficulty. With a brief study and investigation, the *Lams* found out that the insect could communicate like humans. The insect was Chyuimi Whuito (or his soul) and told them about his misery saying that he did not get the *Aasyo ko* – the cloth offered to the death by his maternal uncle so that he could not get “warmth in cold and friend in fear”. He (the insect) said:

I thought that my *Pai* was done by skilled priests, but Syōlee *Pachyu* did it without the real ritual and I have been barred from entering *Tarke la* (ancestral world). I could not disappear in the *Marke teeh* (hell) too. So, I am wandering here in the middle of this place. If you are going to Sōure hyula, tell the villagers about my troubles,

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<sup>20</sup> The *Aasyo ko* is called *Sona Soche-Lika Lichu* in this practice.

nuisances, and sufferings. Tell them to make my mama and maiju happy by giving some gifts<sup>21</sup>.

The *Lams* informed the priest and the villagers. The *chhōcha* (meeting) of Sōure hyula decided to send a man to the maternal uncle and aunt (Lemko and Twulisyo) of the deceased nephew. But they were not happy because the man was empty-handed; he did not bring any gifts. The second time, he went there with some gifts, and they became happy. The *pye* reads:

<i>A... a...a... chara Aasyō Lemko maela</i>	There Aasyo (Mama) Lemko became
<i>sa tōkhachai</i>	happy.
<i>A...a...a...chara Aanki twulisyo maela fa</i>	There Aanki (Maijoo) Twulisyo
<i>tōkhachai</i>	became happy.
<i>A...a...a...chara Aasyo lemko maela</i>	There Aasyo Lemko may god
<i>sae'n yōkhachai</i>	
<i>A...a...a...chara Aanki twulisyo maela fa</i>	There Aanki tulisyo may god
<i>yōkhachai</i>	
<i>A...a...a...kyara chhyoto mpeerpai fyolu</i>	There they brought the leather
<i>kipakhachai</i>	sweeper of water grindstone (ghatta
<i>A...a...a...kyara r hto mpeerpai ntari</i>	Nep).
<i>kipakhachai</i>	There they brought the remaining
<i>A...a...a...tara Lapru mahrsōra teepai</i>	millet of hand grindstone (ja'nto Nep).
<i>pa hmu kipuyuchai</i>	There they brought the Pa h ( <i>Lauhri</i> )
<i>A...a...a...tara Wuicho-chorura teepai</i>	from Lapru.
<i>chyōh Pachyu kipuyuchai</i>	There they brought the Pachyu of

<sup>21</sup> Here, this *pye*, in the voice of the soul of the nephew, underlines the importance of the maternal kinship relations among the Gurungs (Macfarlane, A., & Gurung, 1990). And explains why the offering of the maternal cloth (*Aasyo ko* ) is important in the Pai ritual.

<i>A...a...a...nkiti tarke la ra chuprichaipa</i>	Wuicho Chouru.
<i>A...a...a...nkiti marke teeh ra</i>	We sent, handed over and mixed him
<i>chuprichaipa</i>	to our ancestors' world (heaven) We hid him from hell.

So, when the maternal uncle and aunt were offered gifts twice, they became happy and forgave all the past grievances against their nephew. Being very poor, they gave the sweeper of the grindstone called *phyolu*, which is an animal leather with thick hair on it, as the *Aasyo ko*, to be offered in the *Pai* of their nephew. They collected the few remaining grains of the grindstone and made *sōpa* (liquor of fermented grain), prepared *Kgoh kyu* (representative sheep) and *Thu kyu* (friend sheep of *Kgoh kyu*). They invited *Lauhris* of Lapru and *Pachyus* of Wuicho Chauru. The *Pai* of Chyuimi Whiuto was performed for the second time. Thus, here, we can understand why these ritual offerings such as grains, liquor, and a pair of sheep are needed in the *Pai* ritual. After this *Hyula ch pa pye*, the *Pachyus* sing the *pye* of *Ta chyaalpa* (the *pye* of the fading flowers) that I have discussed earlier.

*Three different worlds:* Discussing and analysing all detailed processes and their meanings of the *Sarka* is beyond the scope of this single chapter. So, skipping other *pye* texts, I would like to focus on the last *pye* called *Nkyalwa pye* (the *pye* of the underworld) and *Si Mhi sapa* (carrying the dead person) or the *plah paapa pye* (the *pye* of bringing the soul). These texts of the *pye* highlight and explain the different worlds: the world of evils, the world of the living, and the world of the ancestors -- which are commonly referred to as 'hell', 'the earth', and 'the heaven' in popular parlances. *Nkyalwa* is the 'underworld' popularly referred to as 'hell' where the soul is tormented. During the *Pai*, the priests bring the soul of the dead person brought from *Nkyalwa* while *Plah sapa pye* (the *pye* of sending the soul) is the story in which the soul is taken to heaven with the ancestors.

According to the *pye*, there are three worlds for the soul journey: the evils' world, the world of the living, and the ancestors' world. First, the *Pachyu* visits the soul in the world of the evils or in *Nkyalwa* world, and then he brings the soul to the world of the living where the soul meets and socializes with his/her family members, relatives, and villagers. Finally, the *Pachyu* sends the soul to the world of the ancestors.

Anthropologically, the ritual escorting of the soul of the deceased person to the land of ancestors in the *Pai* ritual offers important insights into the Gurung cosmology or what can be called 'Gurung ontology' (cf. Kohn, 2015)<sup>22</sup> of the understanding of the social world and social reality. For instance, the Gurung's belief that there exists multiple but mutually connected but bounded social worlds of the evils, the living humans and others, and that of the ancestors. Similarly, the belief that the human soul or *Plah*, after the death of a person, wanders between the worlds of the living and the evil (*Nkyalwa*) and it can only be in 'peace' when the *plah* is taken to the world of ancestors. For this to happen, the *Pai* ritual must be performed. I will show how through the chanting of the ritual texts as well as through other ritual performances and their symbolic enactments, the ritual soul journey not only dramatizes the realities of these different worlds. It also makes these worlds 'visible' and comprehensible for the ritual participants. For this, I will focus on how and why the *Pachyu* visits these three different worlds for the soul.

### **Visiting Evils World (*Nkyalwa*)**

In this ritual journey, the *Pachyus* perform ritual actions to separate the soul from different evil powers present in different parts of hell. The *Pachyus* call this '*Nkyalwa, thōpa*' or *Nkyalwa yaapa pye* (the *pye* of the underground world where demons live). While singing this *pye*, the *Pachyus* should remove caps from their heads; other people who are present also

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<sup>22</sup> According to Kohn (2015), "Ontology is the study of "realities" – one that encompasses but is not limited to humanly constructed worlds. ...Ontology could be considered in terms of "Becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997) or, as some do, in terms of the variable sets of historically contingent assumptions through which humans apprehend reality --- a position that can make ontology nearly synonymous with culture" (p. 312).

take off their caps. This act (of taking off caps from the head) indicates that the *Plah* is now leaving for heaven (to the world of the ancestors) for good so all the people should show their condolences. The soul is leaving his/her family, his/her relatives, the village, the fields, rivers, and the place forever. Before the departure, the dead person, represented by the sheep (*Krogh*) is offered the final hospitality of food and drinks.

*Feeding the Sheep- the dead person:* The *Pachyus* tell the *Lauhris* in the courtyard that the *pye* of *Nkyalwa* is over so that the *Kyu kopa* (feeding of sheep) event can be done. If the *Lauhri* s are also in *Kyu kopa pye*, then the *Mbos* manage to feed the sheep (*Kgoh*) which is the symbol of the dead person. All the people all gather in the courtyard



**Figure 5.6: The *Kyu kopa* (Feeding of Sheep), Photo by Researcher**

Here, the ritual symbolism of the *Kgoh* – the sheep as the transformed body of the dead person into a living being becomes meaningful and illustrative. During the *Pai*, the *Plah* which is an invisible and immaterial form, is progressively transformed into a visible and

material form (the *lah*, the *Plau*) and finally into a living bodily form of a domestic animal. Like the Amerindian perspectivism developed by de Castro (2019), here, we can see that the Gurung people understand the soul and feelings of the deceased person through the behaviours (lens of) the animal.

People will not be happy if the sheep does not eat the food offered. When the food is eaten by the sheep, they think that the dead person is happy as he/she has accepted the food they have offered. People try to feed the food which was liked by the dead when he/she was living and when the sheep consumes it, they are happy<sup>23</sup>. Here, it is insightful to note that the Gurungs are traditional shepherders, and sheep are the most important livestock with which they have embedded cultural relationships (cf. Evans-Pritchard, 1940). In the *Pai*, the sheep embodies the soul of the deceased person, ‘becomes’ the person, and is offered hospitality, care, and love by the family members and relatives. They ‘read’ and understand the signs of the emotions (happiness and sadness) of the deceased through the behaviours of the sheep.

According to the eyes of *Pachyus* and *Lauhris*, there are five parts of hell. They are *Nkyalwa*, *Re tu*, *Feltu*, *Teemu* and *Lu naas*. According to the pye, all these places are the world of ghosts or evils. In Sarka, the soul is taken to the lowest part of hell called *Nkyalwa naas*, by the evil forces. The *Pachyus* and *Lauhris* read/sing:

A...a...a... *chura nkyalwa naasar nkyō*      You have come here to the village of

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<sup>23</sup> A personal reflection on the leftover food offered for *Kyu kopa*. This ancestral offering is regarded as *inauspicious*; the food offered is called *Chulu* which is a word used in death and after-death rituals. Until a few years ago, after the *Kyu kopa* (feeding of the sheep) event, children used to gather and ask for the food they liked to eat. Some of them even snatched the food. This is called *Chulu py hpa* (to take by force). I have also taken part in such activities and seen other children doing so as a kid. The children snatched sugarcane, radish, cucumber, yam, bread, etc. from the hands of Mbos. The Mbos used to keep the food in good condition for their children. Nowadays, cold drinks, candies, canned drinks, apples, grapes, bananas, and varieties of biscuits are used as *Chulu* but the children do not go ahead to grab them. In those days, people could not get delicious food easily. They offered the best of food to their ancestors, so children behaved in that way. Now the village is connected to Pokhara by road, and at least a member of the family is in foreign employment. So, the people have easy access to money and bazaar and the children are not interested in *Chulu py hpa* anymore.

<i>chuhkhachai</i>	Nkyalwa.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar nkyō</i>	You have come here to stay in the
<i>syukhachai</i>	village of Nkyalwa.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar mo</i>	This Nkyalwa village is the village
<i>kyapako</i>	for ghosts to emerge.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar mo</i>	This Nkyalwa village is the village
<i>syupako</i>	for ghosts to live
<i>A...a...a...chura nkyalwa naasar Aa</i>	This Nkyalwa village is where Aaun
<i>lōhpako</i>	(a kind of evil bird) chirps.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar tohlee</i>	This Nkyalwa village is where sorrow
<i>plohpaiko</i>	boils.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar teepa</i>	This Nkyalwa village is where you
<i>Aatapako</i>	should not stay.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naasar syupa</i>	This Nkyalwa village is where you
<i>Aatapako</i>	should not take refuge.
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyalwa naas whuchai tu</i>	Come upwards from this Nkyalwa
<i>tahla Sali</i>	village,
<i>A...a...a...kyō yehrsyo yehrsyoto chaino ra</i>	Come up from down, come upwards.
<i>ye mo</i>	
<i>A...a...a...kyō yuhrsyo yuhrsyoto chaino ra</i>	come on from down, come upward
<i>ye mo</i>	

Hence, this *pye* describes and details the village of the ghosts. According to the *pye*, *Nkyalwa* village is the kingdom of ghosts. They are born there and they rule it. Birds cry there with sorrow because of another world. ‘Bird cry’ meaning is the sound of grief. Sorrow and pains multiply here and agonies boil. The *Pachyus* explain the sufferings of *Nkyalwa* to

the soul and sometimes threaten the soul so that the soul is frightened. Slowly the soul is brought to Re tu naas, Feltu naas, Teemu naas, and Lu naas. These places are also inhabited by evil powers. The soul is again persuaded by the *Pachyus* to come upwards.

Hence, in this ritual journey to the underworld, the priest takes the soul to hell and shows the severity of the sorrows and pains it will go through if the soul stays in *Nkyalwa*. Then the soul is brought to the world of the living.

### **Visiting the Living World (*sa mhi or swo pmhi naas*)**

After rescuing the soul from hell, it is brought to the world of the living or the *sa mhi or swo pmhi naas*. The soul is allowed to visit the different parts and corners of the house like Chihka tye, Faeka tye, Lhoka tye, Pāhko tye, and Thōka tye. The *Pachyus* guide or display these different parts of the inner house for the soul. After showing the parts of the house, the *Pachyus* tell the soul that the house is also not the place for it to live in. The soul knows that the house is for the living people but not for the dead. The soul is brought to the courtyard telling him/her that the doors will be closed where he/she will never enter. In this way, when the *plah* is brought to the world of the living, the *Pachyus* temporarily takes the soul to its 'home' only to remind her/him that she/he cannot live in and visit the home anymore. Thus, the soul is detached from its emotional and living relationship with the home.

The soul journey marks the final departure of the dead from its home. During the *Sarka*, the old and experienced people sit inside the circle. The *Pachyus* sing songs about the family, daughters, daughters-in-law, and the headmen of the village. Saying that they are *Paure Pachyus*, they tell the *pye* in which the soul of the dead is sent to heaven. Daughters and sisters offer money to the *Pachyus* according to their capacity and skill. *Pachyus* even tell the things of their dream humorously in the courtyard before escorting the soul from the living house and village as follows:

*A...a...a...Nkala ropai mhoraya sailo*      I had a good dream while sleeping.

*mopako*

*A...a...a...chura tocho momupa Paure*      What things are seen by Paure (Pakre)

*(pakre) Pachyula*      *Pachyu!*

*A...a...a...nkal yora mpara kheepai*      I dreamed of wearing gold in my hand.

*mhora momuko*

*A...a...a...chura yora mpara kheepa*      We cannot wear gold in our hands!

*nkyōti ayōpako*

*A...a...a...nkyō chhupai ma/apa ti yō*      Our dead father/mother will get and go.

*yaapako*

Similarly, they jokingly talk about the garlands around their necks, rings around their fingers, and even tie oxen in the name of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*. They say that all these things will go with the dead person as this ritual is being performed in the name of the dead. The daughters and sisters prepare some garlands, rings, or ornaments from potato, arum, paper, and some unusual materials and make the *Pachyus* and *Mbos* wear them. The females say that the *Pachyus* have golden items only in their dreams, in reality, they get such funny things. Smiling, they even exchange some flirts and apply ash or colour to each other's faces. Lately, on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019, in the *Pai* of Kashiram in the study area Gairi thar, the sisters and daughters of *Lauhris* made us (*Kromchhai Pachyu*) put on such garlands and caps. The *Pachyu* recited what he saw in his dream, wearing different ornaments. These activities whereby the *Pachyus* and *Lauhris* are made to wear replicas of ornaments and jewellery, on the one hand, iconize the "real" pieces of jewellery the dead person could take with him/her. On the other hand, it adds elements of humour and fun to the *Pai* ritual of bidding final goodbye to the deceased family members. In other words, such 'secular' elements of fun, humour, and even flirting between males and females may take place during the *Pai* sociality.

In this regard, Kullsvæn (1999) says that men and women exchange colour with each other and they have fun. But this happens when *Chhyakine pye* (*the pye of funny*) begins<sup>24</sup>. The flirts and the colouring of each other go on even after the Sarka is over. Sometimes they give different garlands for the men to wear, like potato garlands, banana garlands, plastic garlands, and so on. After the *Pachyus* are offered some money by the sisters and daughters, the *Aasyos* also offer money to the *Pachyus*. It is called *Aasyomai Kaa chōpa* (putting the lid by the *Aasyo*, though they say that the gift from *Aasyo* for the soul of the dead to buy what she or he needs). But in the *pye* language, it is called ‘*Sona Soche Leeka Leechu*’. These gifts are all done in the name of the dead.

After ‘*Sona soche leeka leechu*’ is performed, the soul of the dead is brought out from the courtyard. The soul is taken to *Tōhka syōka ty* (village and its boundary) and *Nkyeka t hka tye* (village of relatives). The *Pachyus* say that nobody is going to give shelter to the soul so he/she is taken farther from the village. As far as Sikles is concerned, the soul of the dead is taken to the pasturelands crossing the river of Madi. The soul is taken through *yeh* (high land), *kō* (hill), *pro* (steep slope), and *Leeh* (plain land). Thus, as part of the departure ritual, *the Plah* is given a tour of the village, its settlements, and the various geographical places of religious and historical importance for the Gurungs.

### **Making the Soul Forget its Memories**

The *pye* and its narrations of the geography follow specific locations and places such as Taasa, Kori, and F 1 (the high land of Sikles, which is the way of the soul journey process). Then comes Manang, followed by *Mplee Kyu*<sup>25</sup> a place where its water, when

<sup>24</sup> As he says, it is true that the *playing* of colour mostly takes place between different clan groups or Nkolo-Nkolosyo. This does not happen between the same lineages. For instance, I am a *Kromchhai Pachyu* and my sisters do not play colour with me when I am singing Sarka. Between *Kromchhai* and *Leehka*, *Nkosai* and *Pahchyu*, *Lem* and *Kwōn* the play of colour is accepted. If it is between the *Mbos* and the daughters of the *Pai* house, it is a lot of fun.

<sup>25</sup> *Mplee Kyu*-(*Mli kyu* by Kullsvæn, 1999, p. 115). The literal meaning *Mpli* refers to ‘forgotten’ and *kyu* refers to ‘water’. In the *pye*, this is called ‘*Khōesyō kyu*’ (a kind of water where the soul tests if she/he is dead or

consumed, will make the person's memory loss. The *Plah* has an active memory of the world of the living, and that memory must be erased to make it forget its connections with the world of the living. This is achieved at *Mplee Kyu*<sup>26</sup>.

*Pachyus*, *Lauhri*, and other knowledgeable people of the Gurungs discuss the *Mplee kyū* (water that makes you forget) to a great extent. So that even ordinary people know of this place. According to *Sarka pye*, the *Pachyus* make the soul of the dead drink the water of that place. Only after drinking this water, the soul forgets everything from the living world and he/she heads to heaven. Kullsvēen (1999) also mentions that "If a transmigration ritual is not performed, the souls are believed to be wandering somewhere at the foot of the mountain, but not on the top" (p.115). He mentions that there is a stream at the bottom of the ancestors' mountain called (*mli kyū*), which means "forgetting water". Kullsvēen says, a *poju* told him what happens when the souls reach there:

When the souls reach the stream, they take a bath and drink the water. After that, the souls forget everything they have done on earth. The souls totally change; they become pure, and the souls then reach for the fathers' sphere" (Kullsvēen, 1999, p. 115)

Kullsvēen's statement can be verified by these oral texts:

<i>A...a...a... chur Kho syō kyur nkyō</i>	You have arrived here in kho syō
<i>chukhachai</i>	(place) water.
<i>A...a...a...chur kho syō kyur nkyō</i>	Your night stay has become this place of
<i>syukhachai</i>	kho syō.

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not). According to the *pye* of the soul journey, when the soul of the dead body reaches this *mpli kyū*, then the *Pachyū* requests the soul to drink water from it.

<sup>26</sup> It is believed that the Gurung people of Manang, Kaski and Lamjung cannot go to this place because it is at a very high altitude and people cannot adapt to the weather of this place. The *Whuwa ply* of Manang is another important place in the *pye tā lhu tā*. The *Pachyus* and *Lauhri* say that the spirit of the dead Gurungs of Manang, Kaski, and Lamjung go to heaven through the village of *Whuwa ply* (one of the shadow places and way for the soul). *Whuwa* is the name of a place and *ply* means a steep land of rocks. *Pachyū*, *Lauhri*, and some people who have gone near this place say that the area is often covered with clouds.

<i>A...a...a...chur terna lheema kyār teehr</i>	Dip your legs in the water of kho syō.
<i>kho syō kyur chheto pr th no</i>	
<i>A...a...a...chur mperna leehma kyāra</i>	Dip your body in the water of
<i>teehr kho syō kyur chheto pr th no</i>	khoi'nsyo.
<i>A...a...a...chur krolai mbolai saela</i>	Do not weep and cry
<i>thetopa</i>	Try your best to take out the ornaments
<i>A...a...a...chur ntachh mpeechh saela</i>	with close your nose and eye
<i>thetopa</i>	Take out all the clothes despite
<i>A...a...a...chur nkyuichya pruchya saela</i>	difficulties.
<i>thetopa</i>	Drink the water for the first and second
<i>A...a...a...tiro kgeerolee kyu thuyaro</i>	day and go.
<i>A...a...a...chura soro pleero lee kyu</i>	Drink the water for the third and fourth
<i>thuyaro</i>	day and go.
<i>A...a...a...chura nkara twuro lee</i>	Drink the water for five and six days
<i>thuyaro</i>	and go.
<i>A...a...a...chura ngeero prero lee kyu</i>	Drink the water for seven and eight days
<i>thuyaro</i>	and go.
<i>A...a...a...chura kuro lee kyu thuyaro</i>	Drink the water for the ninth day and
	go.

Hence, the final ritual act involves the forgetting of the past by the soul. Water is one of the elemental and fundamental sources (a part of nature) the human body needs to survive and thrive. When the soul is brought to the *Mplee kyu*, the *Pachyu*, as it becomes evident in the oral text cited above, playfully persuades the *Plah* to drink the water from the stream. *Pachyu* first does not tell the soul that by drinking the water, its memory of the lived world will be gone. Instead, the soul is lured by mentioning ornaments and clothes that she/he can take but with an insistence that he/she should drink the water of the '*Mplee kyu*' for many

days. It is assumed that after taking a bath at the ‘*Mplee Kyu*’ and drinking water from it, “The souls totally change; they become pure, and the souls then reach for the fathers’ sphere” (Kullsvveen, 1999, p115). However, the process of forgetting is not simple. Anthropologically, the *Pai* ritual allows us to make sense of what and how the soul may feel and experience while departing the loved ones and the places it grew up with. This perspective has been emphasized to me by the *Pachyu* leader of the study area. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019 in Sikles, I asked *Pachyu* leader Mou Bahadur about the soul journey in the *Pai* ritual. According to him:

The saddest moments for the soul include departing from its ‘home’ in its birthplace and drinking this *khōi syō* water. The soul remembers the house, family members, relatives, friends, villagers, fields, rivers, and jungles. It is very difficult for him/her to forget them while in *kh sy* water. And after taking a bath in the water, the soul should step on a plain stone. If the mark of the foot is seen, it means the soul has not forgotten his/her past life. So, the soul drinks the water and takes a bath there for a maximum of nine days. The *Pachyu* tells them that one has to die and go to mingle with his ancestors in heaven. The dead cannot take anything in material or memory with him/her of the living world.

The explanation by the *Pachyu* leader clarifies why the soul needs to drink water at ‘*Mplee kyū*’ for nine consecutive days. It also tells us how the soul would feel the emotional conflict between remembering and forgetting. The *pye* does not say where the place of forgotten water is located except that it lies somewhere in the Manang district according to the soul journey process. In his study conducted in Manang, Poudel (2016) discussed in great length the different water deities and springs. He discussed “the forgotten water” as a spring located in Bhratangbhir, Manang district. He writes:

All springs are not taken as the ‘holy place’ or ‘habitats of deity’. They equally considered some springs and lakes to be “unholy”, “the habitats of demons”. For

example, people do not drink water from a spring that comes from Bhratangbhir even if they are thirsty. It is called *mle-kyu*, (forgotten water). It is believed that people will forget everything if they drink the water. The villagers use the water only to feed the soul of dead people during the process of delivering it to la (heaven) in funeral rites” (Poudel, 2016, p.112)

After separating the soul from *khōi syō* water, the *Pachyus* show the soul the path to heaven. Pachyu Mou Bahadur claims that “the *pye* says that there is a meeting point of three paths even beyond the *khōisyō* water”. The *pye* says:

<i>A...a...a... chur tu tu kyā mpu prapai kyā</i>	Tu tu way is sky way
<i>A...a...a...chur th th kyā chhō prapai kyā</i>	Th th way is trade way
<i>A...a...a...chur wali kyā teeh prapai kyā</i>	Red way is ghosts’ way.
<i>A...a...a...chur pee kyā chae’n prapai kyā</i>	Blue way is monster’s way
<i>A...a...a...chur taar kyā la prapai kyā</i>	White way is god evil spirit’s way
<i>A...a...a...chur mlo kyā pumi prapai kyā</i>	Black way is the witch's way.
<i>A...a...a...chur wur kyā lu praai kya</i>	Yellow way is water’s god way
<i>A...a...a...chur chyu-chyu kyā khe praai kyā</i>	Chyu-Chyu (mothers’ breast, way is male ancestors’ way.
<i>A...a...a...chur chyu-chyu kyā maa prapai kyā</i>	Chyu chyu (mothers’ breast, way is the female acestors’ way

By showing these different pathways, the *Pachyus* tell the soul that the pathways towards the sky and the trade trails are not suitable for it. The soul is reminded that it cannot reach its ancestors if these pathways (the sky and the trade trails) are followed. Similarly, ghosts would kidnap the soul if he/she chooses the red way while the blue way is full of monsters. The white way is the way of evil spirits which are ready to attack the souls. The black way is for the witches so that the soul should not go through it. The *Pachyus* say to the soul, “*Aachi khe prapai kyār hyar syoto, and aachi ma prapai kyār hyursyoto*’. The yellow

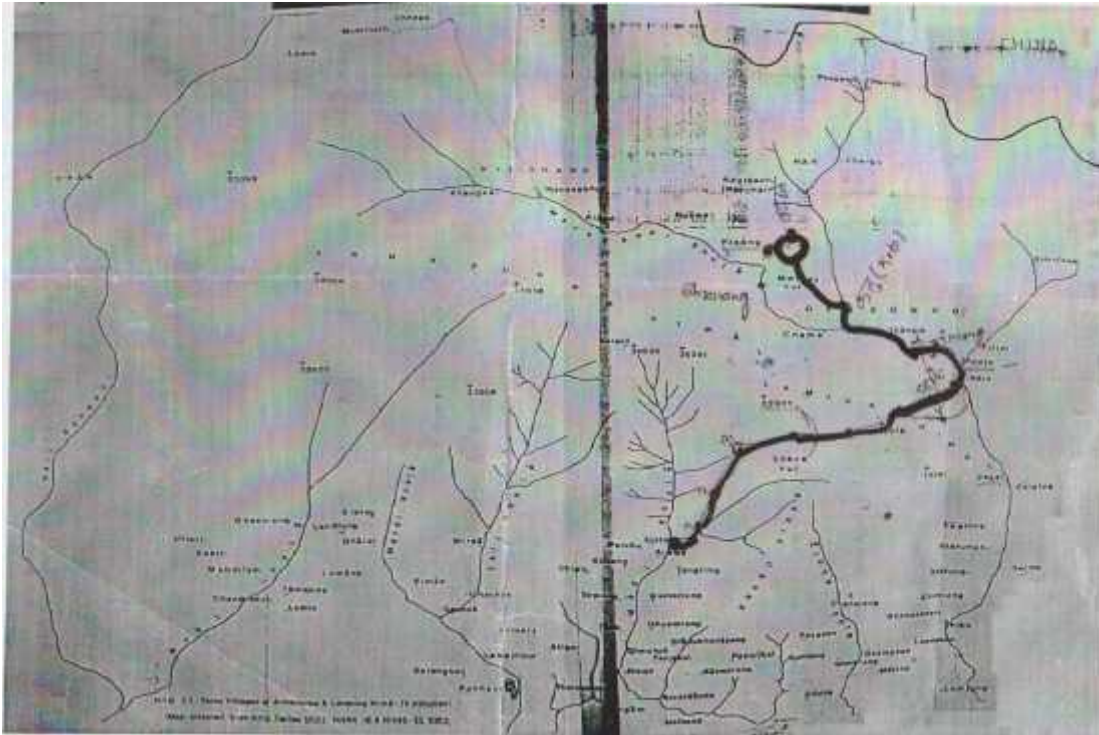
way is the way of the water god and the *chyu chyu* way is the way for male and female ancestors so the soul is advised to go through these two ways so that he/she will see and meet his/her ancestors. One of my *Pachyu* informants said that “*chyu chyu*” means “mother’s breast”. So, the soul of the dead is also sent to her/his motherland which is her/his ancestral world. Thus, even in the after-death ritual or *Pai*, the soul of the dead is sent to their mother’s breast or mother’s path.

### Visiting the Ancestral World

When the soul finds the way of the ancestors, the *Pachyus* count saying: “first floor, second floor, third floor, fourth floor, fifth floor, sixth floor, seventh floor, eighth floor, and ninth floor”<sup>27</sup>. According to *pye*, to enter the gate of heaven, a soul should cross nine steps which are called *Teethu seetoye naas*, *nkeethu pahrwaye naas*. Here, the nine different villages are counted as the layers/steps, but it is the description of the nine different states in heaven. According to the *pye tã lhu tã*, the soul enters all the villages or states and finally, he/she meets the ancestors after in the ninth state. The eighth step is called ‘*Pretu chyō kar mpe naas*’ or the cow’s village. It is a place for cows and other animals. In this place, one gets a milking cow today but won’t find it tomorrow. Today, you get an ox to plough but tomorrow it will disappear. You get woolly sheep, strong horses, and other food today but tomorrow you will not get these things. Therefore, the soul is not advised to stay there. The *Pachyus* tell the soul that he/she should not stay in such a bizarre place so the soul is taken to the ninth step.

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<sup>27</sup> In ritual language, it is said “*Titau, ngkitau, sōtau, pleetau, nkatau, tutau, nkgeetau, pretau, and kutau*”



**Figure 5.7: Topographic Map of the places of the Soul Journey; Source: Strickland, 1982**

After the ninth step, which is the village (world) of the ancestors, so it has a special description in the *pye*. As heaven is believed to be an ideal place, it is a place free from any kind of sorrow and suffering. The soul is connected to its ancestors in the ninth step. *Pachyu* Mou Bahadur chants the *pye* in these lyrics:

A...a...a... <i>Chur Nghe pai Mper kyō</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>chukhachai</i>	with the milking cows.
A...a...a... <i>chur kyow pai khlar kyō</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>chukhachai</i>	with the ploughing oxen.
A...a...a... <i>chur preh pai kyuur kyō</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>chukhachai</i>	with the wool giving sheep.
A...a...a... <i>chur pui pai tar kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to get involved
	with the horses that carry.
A...a...a... <i>chur mphikre chukhamai</i>	Here you have come to get involved in

<i>t hsar/hyular kyō chukhachai</i>	the meeting of gentlemen.
<i>A...a...a...chur umee nghepamai</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>teyh'nsar/hyular kyō chukhachai</i>	with wise mothers.
<i>A...a...a...chur chhami ntilkamai</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>teyh'nsar/khular kyō chukhachai</i>	with the young girls.
<i>A...a...a...chur kwolwo khralkamai</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>teyh'nsar/hyular kyō chukhachai</i>	with the happily playing children.
<i>A...a...a...chur chah chah pyee pyemai</i>	Here you have come to get involved
<i>teyh'nsar/hyular kyō chukhachai</i>	with the crying babies expressing their
	feelings.
<i>A...a...a...chur saarma rur kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come in the time of
	bearing fruits after flowers blossom.
<i>A...a...a...chur ntauma rur kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come in the time of
	bearing fruits even by weeds.
<i>A...a...a...chur teethu plusi kuthu chapai</i>	Here you have come to the place
<i>t ysar/hyular kyō chukhachai</i>	where you sow a grain but nine
	different grains grow.
<i>A...a...a...chur naahka plusee nkes chapai</i>	Here you have come to the place you
<i>teyh'nsar kyō chukhachai</i>	sow in the morning and reap in the
	evening.
<i>A...a...a...chur thō pai mprar kyō</i>	Here you have come where the doors
<i>chukhachai</i>	are always open.
<i>A...a...a...chur loō pai mpeer kyō</i>	Here you have come where the fire is
<i>chukhachai</i>	always burning.
<i>A...a...a...chur cha pai ka r kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to get involved in

	eating.
<i>A...a...a...chur th pai kyur kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to get involved in drinking water
<i>A...a...a...chur syae th wa seenka kaili chyola chyonki poper kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with the big respected figures of the east.
<i>A...a...a...chul lwoe th wa seenka kaili chyola chyonki poper kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with the big respected figures of the south.
<i>A...a...a...chur ndue th wa seenka kaili chyola chyonki poper kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with the big respected figures of the west.
<i>A...a...a...chur chyōh th wa seenka kaili chyola chyonki poper kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with the big respected figures of the north.
<i>A...a...a...chur thepa thepai seenkar kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with the big respected figures of all time.
<i>A...a...a...chur Aachi khe mane kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with your forefathers.
<i>A...a...a...chur Aachi maa mane kyō chukhachai</i>	Here you have come to mingle with your fore-mothers.

These above ritual narrations vividly describe what the ancestors' world or land looks like. The soul re-enters the social world of the ancestors, which is similar to their village and the social life. The dead person's soul is reunited with the people they know and the cattle and other animals they used to interact in the world of living before their death. After seeing the soul off in ancestors' land, the soul is left under the responsibility of the ancestors, and the borderline is drawn between the living and the dead. So, the *pye* says the dead people do

not come to the living world and the living people do not wander the ancestor's world. They live in their respective world with dignity.



***Figure 5.8: The Sarka Dance, Photo by the Researcher***

### Changing the Ritual Dance

After making the soul stay in the ancestors' land, the *Pachyus* declare that the cycle of the *Sarka* (ritual dance) is going to change. The anti-clockwise direction now becomes clockwise. All the members of the family and the daughters and sisters must join the *Sarka*. This is called *Plah sy pa*. This ritual act is performed to bring back the souls of the living which may have wandered along with the *Plah* of the dead person for whom the *Pai* is performed.

For the entire duration of the *Pai*, the soul of the dead and the living people are together and socializing. In the Gurung language, *Plah* is the soul of both the dead and the living. The *Plah* of the living is unstable and vulnerable to flying away or going out of a person's body. When the soul of the dead is sent to heaven, the souls of the living people are believed to go to heaven too. Though the people are in the courtyard of the *Pai* house, their souls are moving with that of the person whose *Pai* is being performed. Therefore, the souls of the living people must come back which is called *Plah sy pa*. All the people engaged in the *Pai* must be present in the *Plah sy pa* ritual act.

In the case of Kashi Ram's *Pai*, many people had gathered in the courtyard. Some of them were priests; female, male, youth, and all relatives had participated in the *Pai* ritual. Some of the knowledgeable men were more experienced with this ritual. *Pachyu* were emotionally chanting their oral texts. The *Pachyus* chant the three levels of the world according to their oral texts. They were chanting under the world 'Marke teeh' or evils world, homeland 'so mphee naas' or world of the living and ancestors' world or 'Tarke la' or ancestor land (heaven). It was the ritual journey of the soul of Kashi Ram Gurung from the evil world to the world of the living and then to the world of the ancestors. When the *Pachyu* separated the soul from the evils, then they ritually arrived in the world of living i.e. in his

house, Kashi Ram Gurung's soul visited all his relatives, neighbours, and the entire village. After that, the *Pachyu* chanted the journey of the soul to the ancestors' world from Sikles.

The *Pachyus* and the gathering peoples reached the upper Manang with their souls. Then, they all were very seriously hearing and watching as the *Pachyu* left the world of the living world from upper Manang. Then, the soul departed to an 'invisible' world explained, and narrated by the ritual texts, which the Gurungs know through the *Pai* ritual. In this moment of the soul journey of Kashi Ram Gurung, one relative's daughter named Ms. Purna Maya, who is about thirty-five years old, expressed her emotions through her facial gestures. She was very serious and gave some symbolic meanings with her activities and body gestures as she listened to the soul journey ritual narrations. Some of the knowledgeable Gurung men share this *pye* among themselves. Next, the *Pachyu* handed over the Kashi Ram's soul to the ancestors. Then, they returned to the world of living by chanting the ritual text. After the end of the soul journey, Ms. P. Maya immediately came to me and shared her emotional experience. She said that she experienced both happiness and sadness when she participated in and listened to the soul journey. She told me that, "according to this *pye* or chant, everybody goes to the ancestor's land after we die".

In this chapter, I have attempted to explain why the *Pai* ritual is very important for the Gurung people. The *Pai* ritual dramatizes and underlines the important cosmologies of the traditional Gurung belief system and "key symbols" (Ortner, 1973) of the Gurung culture. It explains the Gurung concept of *plah* and their belief related to the three worlds and how these worlds are ritually interconnected. The dead person's soul needs to be escorted to the world of ancestors so that the person can have his/her afterlife happily in 'ancestor land'. The ritual priests, who own and know the *pye* can mediate and communicate between the living people, the soul, the evil forces, and the ancestors located in the three worlds. Thus, only the ritual priests, with their knowledge and power, can bring the soul of the dead from the underworld

to the world of the living, and take the soul to the land of ancestors. This is the focus and purpose of the *Pai* ritual.

One important ritual symbolism and emphasis of the *Pai* ritual is the focus on the kinship between the deceased person (and the soul) and the living. The ties of kinship and kinship structure are fundamental to the functioning of the customary Gurung society. All the Gurung rituals necessitate and rely on families, clans, and the village, and are practised together working according to their social structure. This kinship system is not only between the living Gurungs but also between the living and their ancestors dwelling in the ancestor's land. At the end of the *Pai* ritual, the *Pachyus* deliver the soul of the deceased to the world of their ancestors (heaven) and leave the soul under the care and protection of their ancestors. The deceased person can eventually become one of the ancestors. Thus, there is the continuity of the family and kinship relations even after the death of a person. The *pye* says that the ancestors (in heaven) also have a distinct social structure and organized communal life. According to the oral *pye* and my argument is that the kinship system practice continues among the souls of Gurungs in ancestor land.

The *Pai* ritual is equally important and insightful in establishing the connection between the Gurung people with their ancestral territories, and in retelling their histories of migration from the ancestral land of their origin. As discussed in this chapter, the ritual priests recite long oral texts while calling on the soul and escorting it to the soul journey during the *Pai*. In these ritual narrations, the *pye* identifies various geographical locations of the historical migration of the Gurungs and describes the various Gurung kingdoms in the past. The *pye* explains and connects the beginning of the different specific ritual actions and offerings of the *Pai* to these mythic kingdoms, historical characters, and places. During the soul journey that begins from the underworld to the world of the living, and to the final destination in the lands of ancestors, the ritual priests chant about the soul journey through

rivers (drinking water), crossing bridges, crossroads, sitting places, and the specific routes in the actual topographic areas. When the soul reaches a place of drinking water, then priests chant, “Now you have reached here in drinking water and please drink it.” When the soul reaches a bridge, then the priests chant, “Now you are here at the bridge, please cross it.” Similarly, the priests ask the soul to act accordingly when it reaches a crossroad, road, or resting place.

When the Gurungs of the study area cross the Madi river and reach highland places like *Taasa*, *Kori*, *F l* and *Namun* pass for any household work or firewood, cutting grass, barn, and pilgrimage they know these physical places are also the routes of the soul journey. They are likely to think “Next time we have to come this road or way when we die”. In their lifetime, the Gurungs of *Sikles* physically travel and experience many of the places that also constitute the paths of the soul journey of the dead. And, by participating in the *Pai* ritual, they also go on a ritual journey along these paths to reach the land of their ancestors. So, they closely know that pasture land, drinking water, sitting places, crossing roads, bridges, and all the roads are not only used for the living but also by the soul after death. So, geographically, the lands are more essentially used for both the living and the soul.

## Chapter Six

### Ancestors Worship and Bringing Back the Lost Plah (Soul)

In this chapter, I discuss and analyse two different Gurung rituals, (a) ancestor worship, and (b) *plah khu lapa* (bringing back the lost soul of living Gurung) which is performed to bring back the *plah* or soul when a living Gurung individual lose it. According to the Gurung belief, people become ancestors or '*khem ma*' after they die and when their *Pai* rituals are performed (see Chapter 4). I discuss *Khema theepa* to explain the Gurung cosmology and belief system about the ancestors and the power they hold, as well as the significance of ancestors to impact their daily lives. I show how this ritual underlines the connection and relation between living people and ancestors through acts of sociality offerings of food, fruits, wine, and other things during the ritual process. Ancestors are feared and revered among the Gurung. The Gurung people believe that ancestors can do everything-good and bad, for the living people and their well-being. However, I will show how the living people can also 'control' and even 'threaten' ancestors in certain contexts.

I argue that these traditional religious beliefs and practices substantiate that the Gurung of Sikles follow an animistic religion. In anthropology, animism is generally defined as "belief in spirits and souls", first defined by E. B. Tylor (1871). According to Tylor, animism is a form of religion in which the spirits and souls of humans and other beings are considered necessary for life (Swancutt, 2023/2019, p. 2). But Tylor's theory of religion was based on the idea of evolutionism. He considered 'animism' a feature of "primitive" religion. The concept was later discarded in anthropology. In recent times, anthropologists have again revived the concept of animism without the evolutionary sense (Swancutt, 2023). According to Swancutt (2023):

The person or social group with an 'animistic' sensibility attribute sentience or the quality of being 'animated' to a wide range of beings in the world, such as the

environment, other persons, animals, plants, spirits, and forces of nature like the ocean, winds, sun, or moon (p.1) . . . Spirits are understood in a broad sense that encompasses the spirits of beings or things, deities, and energies. Souls are often the spirits of beings and things, depending on the social context. There is no set definition for animism, just as there is no set definition for spirits or soul (p. 2).

This new concept of understanding of animism is well elaborated by the Gurung religious beliefs and ritual practices. Hence, I focus on the *plah khu lapa* ritual to illustrate through ethnographic examples the Gurung belief system of ‘soul’ or ‘*plah*’.

### **6.1 Belief System**

According to the Gurung belief, persons become ancestors after they die only when their *Pai* rituals are performed. After the *Pai* ritual, dead men become *khe* (male ancestors) and dead women become *ma* (female ancestors). If the *Pai* ritual has not been performed, the dead persons cannot become *khe* or *ma*. The Gurungs of the study area follow the traditions and cultures established by their ancestors. They do not have their word or phrase for religion in the Tamu language. The older generation Gurung in Sikles village says, “Our religion is ancestor worship” which is their belief system practice. They do not identify their religious practices as ‘Buddhism’. Now, the Gurung of Sikles also identifies their religion also as “Bon-po”. Bon or Bonpo culture is traditionally practised since their fore-fathers whom they call ‘*kul*’ (ancestors’ deities) and ‘*Siltu-naaltu*’ (nature deities) however, the concept of language “Bon’ or “Bonpo” is a recent trend in the study area.

In the study area, the Gurung do not worship with the help of idols or photos. Unlike the Hindus or Buddhists, they do not go to the temples and do not keep images and idols in their houses. In a certain time of the year, they do some offering to their ancestors with the help of ritual specialists the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*. For the Gurung of Sikles consider their ancestors to be elemental deities. In the major rituals like *Pai*, effigies and certain symbols

are made and worshiped by providing ritual offerings. In other rituals, they construct little *tormas* which are symbols resembling pyramids out of cooked rice- as bodies of deities, to whom these rituals are offered. The ritual participants have a deep sense of respect towards the *tormas* during the period of worship. But when the rituals are finished, the symbols have no meaning anymore. They are discarded in the meeting point of two paths if they are the symbols of evils and consumed if they are symbols of good.

In recent times, the ways of offering and worship have slightly changed in villages. People have started keeping photos of certain Hindu gods and goddesses and the Buddha. Some people are seen wearing a necklace of beads with a small picture of Buddha or any incarnated Lama in it. In city areas some Gurung are seen going to the churches and following different religious practices. Despite these scenes, in Sikles people are still following their traditional norms and values. They keep faith in the animistic powers of ancestors' spirits, natural and local deities, and evil agents.

They worship them twice a year which is called *Khema theepa* (ancestor worship) and *Mo lapa* (worship of ancestors as evils). In *khema theepa*, there is a symbol called *La dhee*. *La* means ancestral god and *dhee* means house. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* worship the *La dhee* chanting in all *La dhee*. *Mo* is considered as an evil spirit. There is a belief that if the ancestors are not worshipped regularly, they turn into *Mo* troubling the living members of the family. So, one or more members of go to the *Mo dhee* (evils ancestors' house) and offered food and clothing twice a year which is called *Mo lapa* or *mo th pa*. Likewise, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* worship their ancestors once a year on a large scale, and this ritual is *Failu lapa*. *Failu* is the god of the clan. The villagers also worship the land they use because they think the land, the jungle and the water are pure and the centre of power. This ritual is called *Simi bhumi* worship.

According to Gurung ritual practice and values, when *Pai* ritual is performed for dead family members after the rituals, their souls are sent to the ancestors' world. Then, they also become ancestors and help the living; sometimes, they can also harm the living. So, there is a continuity of relations between the living and dead family members, who have become ancestors, through different ritual events. The Gurung address their ancestors in different ritual practices such as death, *Pai*, *Khema theepa*, *Failu lapa* and so on. Hence, the *Pai* and ritual relation and connections between *Pai* ritual and *Khema theepa* is closely connected. Now, I will discuss and analyse the Gurung ancestors practised in the study area.

## **6.2 *Khe Ma Theepa* (Ancestor Worship)**

*Khe Ma theepa* (ancestor worship) is a very important and popular ritual among the Gurung in the study area. *Khe* refers to male ancestors and *Ma* refers to female ancestors and *theepa* means to worship or pray. Hence, *Khe Ma theepa* is the worship of ancestors.

Gurung people have different clans and different ancestors based on one's clan group. Each a family performs *Khe Ma theepa* as a member of its lineage clan and pays ritual offerings to all the ancestors of the family's clan by chanting their names. Hence, *Khe ma theepa* shows the importance of clan membership for the Gurung people. The Gurung divide two seasons *Sarkhatwul* (winter season) and *Pahrkhatwul* (summer season) in a year to perform this ancestor worship. For this ritual, winter is called 'downward season' and summer season 'upward season' indicating the belief that ancestors move towards downward direction during the winter and upward direction during the summer. Though all Gurung families perform the ancestor worship, but the priestly house (*Failu dhe*) and non *Failu dhe* (non-priestly house) perform different types of ancestors. The priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* who do not consume buffalo meat have *Failu* or supreme deity (powerful god) in the ritual space the downstairs in the house while the Gurungs consume buffalo meat have upper chamber of the house as *Khema theepa* place.



**Figure 6.1: *Khema thepa* (Ancestor Worship), Photo by the Researcher**

For the *Khema thepa* of the downward season, local wine and pieces of a bird must be offered to ancestors as ritual offerings. Similarly, wine and fish must be offered in the summer or summer season. This shows that the ancestor ritual also connects to the ecology and its seasonal rhythm movement and availability of birds and fishes which the ancestors are believed to hunt and catch during this time of the season. The priest prays to ancestors with flattened rice. I will briefly provide a brief reflection how I performed the *Khema thepa* ritual as a priest for my ancestors at my home.

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020, I got up early in the morning and washed my face immediately. I did not drink water, tea and eat any breakfast. It was the day of *Khe Ma thepa* so that I had to maintain bodily purity because I would call my ancestors to my house by chanting *pye* (text). It was *sarka twul* or downward season. I believe in ancestors and it was an important opportunity for worship and meeting them through this *Khe Ma thepa* ritual. I washed *pyõs* (small pot, which is used for offering sacred wine and bird's meat to ancestors) with water; my sister-in-law fried *Lahwa* (flattened rice) and prepared pure local wine. Then I packed

*pyōs* with bird's meat and pure sacred local wine for my ancestors. Then I started chanting *pye* of (the text of ancestor worship) *Khe Ma theepa*, standing and facing my ancestors. My father late Harka Bahadur Gurung had taught me this some excerpt of the important *pye* that I chanted on that day of *Khe ma theepa*:

<i>Chumai fomai mphomai nkamai kumaila</i>	The family members of this house
<i>Ntahchai kyarpino, khe chai kyarpino</i>	Bless them
<i>Tōh khree kyarpino, syō khree kyarpino</i>	Bless their village boundary
<i>Pōhta kyarpino, kho ta kyarpino</i>	Bless their counsel
<i>Ral chaipu, Mpel kharte kyul parku mpaila paihlu</i>	Bless the goat, sheep, Buffalo,
<i>Mphil ntahchai khe chai Tōh khree</i>	men and their boundary and to remove the diseases
<i>Syō khree khapai pohlee kyarpino</i>	to remove the insects from the
<i>Mpa mrosi tyesir pāhl p hlu nanchyo tiru</i>	field and bless the grain
<i>Fyo nhopai khapai pohlee kyarpino</i>	

As a *Pachyu* recites this *pye* very carefully and emotionally; I experienced that, demanding for blessing. I am conversing and gathering with ancestral deities when I chant this *pye*. The literal meanings of this ritual text are difficult to translate into Nepali or English or even in everyday Gurung language. The substance of this text can be summarized:

Oh! ancestor gods! Bless the family members of this house. I pray to you to keep all the boundaries strong. You bless the cattle and domestic animals; help them grow in number. You bless the family's agriculture and let not any insect attack the crops. I offer all nature deities which are bigger than big and longer than long. I don't know more things, and ask you please tell me what I have to do. At last, *Pachyu* blesses all the family and good luck.

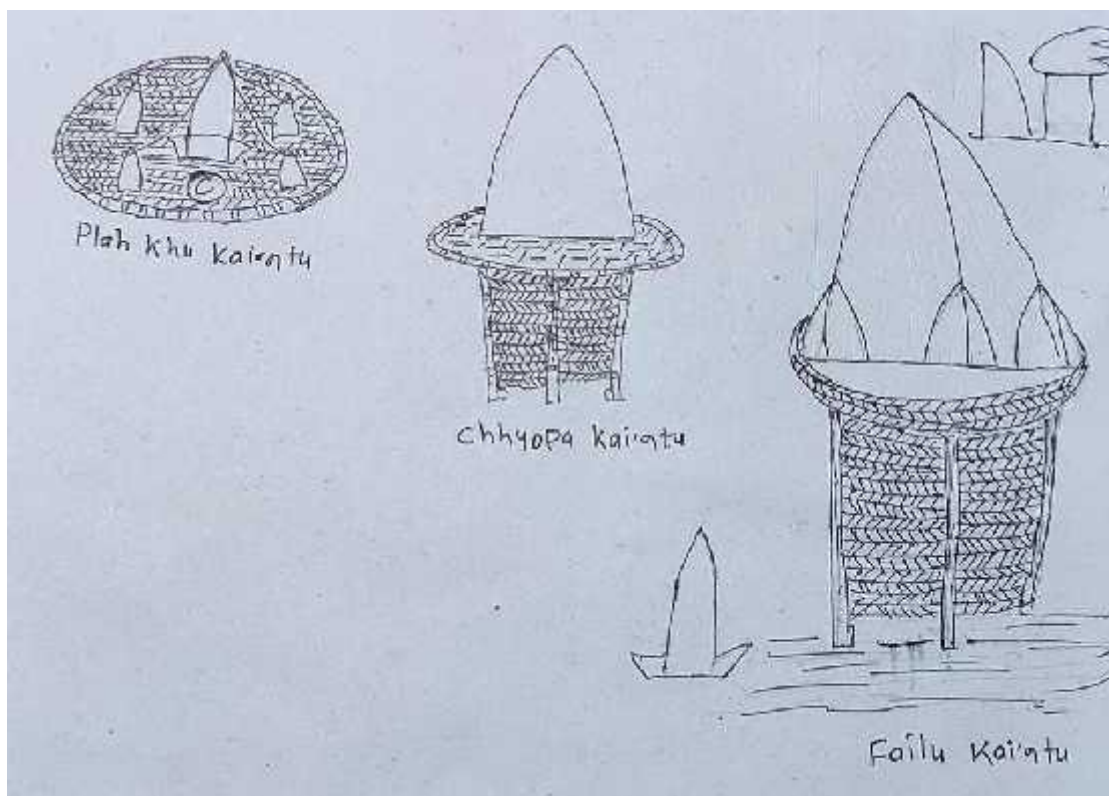
The above recitations of *pye* shows that during the *Khe Ma theepa* the priest propitiation the ancestors asking blessing and protection of family members and their clan (counsel), cattle, fields, and crops for the wellbeing. In other words, through this ritual, the Gurung acknowledge the agentive power of their ancestors and describe them as “bigger than big and longer than long”. It also shows the Gurung belief that they need the blessing of their ancestors for the productivity of their agricultural fields and crops hence for their sustenance. I also need to underline here that *Pachyu* expresses his humility of not “knowing about all things” and asks for the guidance of the ancestors and their power.

On the above day, I finished the ritual within two hours in my home and performed it for my cousin brother's (Kaila daai, elder brother) family in his home. After completing finishing the ritual offering, my sibling brother Bhasar Gurung and Kaila daai walked to a sacred place in the northern side of Sikles, where we do rituals for *Mo Th pa* ancestors who are like ghosts and who can cause troubles for the living people and the village. On that day, I performed a total of five *khema theepa*.

### **6.3 Failu Lapa (Worship of Clan Deities or Kuldevta)**

*Failu Lapa* is a very important ritual performed only in the priestly houses for praying to their deities and ancestors. *Failu* is the name of the supreme ancestor deity and *Lapa* refers to performing ritual. This worship is also performed twice during the two seasons: *Sarkha twul* (winter) and *Pahrkha twul* (summer). The ritual calendar of *Failu Lapa* has been since the beginning. *Kartik* (October-November), *Poush* (December-January) and *Falgun* (February-March) are the months but only on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday based on the lunar movement. When we see a growing moon in the sky in the night, which the Gurung call *Lachhae* (days before full moon ), they can perform the *Failu* ritual on any of the four days during the ritual months. The priests say that these months, days, and lunar periods are the times of their ancestors and deities.

*Failu* is an important and large-scale ritual of the priest families that necessitates and is well participated and supported by many priests, their assistants, clan members and other villagers. A team of five to six *Pachyus* are engaged for this ritual and their assistants they call *Fyochhai*<sup>28</sup> or *Fyosai*. According to *pye*, *fyochhai* should come from brother-in-law's. Now I will reflect on my observation and multiple performances of *Failu* ritual as a priest to highlight the ritual preparation (making of *Ka tus* or rice *tormas*) and processes and their meanings by analysing some selected *pye* chants.



**Figure 6.2: Tormas of Plahkhu, Chhyopa, and Failu; Sketched by the Researcher, 2019**

Priests and their assistants make different *ka tus* (*tormas*) and keep them on different places. The *Ka tus* are different in structures and status. All these *Ka tus* except one (to be discussed later) are the effigies of different Gurung ancestors (deities) and symbolize gods which are ordered into three named categories based on their ranks and power. *Pachyus* mainly worship three gods *lhe* (master or owner), *chhyopa* (ancestor god), and *Paure/Pakre*

<sup>28</sup> *Fyochhei*-helper of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* when they perform auspicious rituals, like *failu*, *Chhyopa*, *Plahkhu*.

(ancestor god guru). *Lhe* are the major *Ka tus* for this ritual. These *Ka tus* are kept on the *Failu dhe* (*failu* house) which is a sacred place called '*La dhe*' *too* (*La* refers ancestors' god and *dhee* means the house the ancestor god). Two clay pots, called *pyō* (small pot) are filled with local wine and meat for the god.

The largest *Ka tus* symbolizes *Chhyopa* (god, ancestral guru); the three smaller *Ka tus* placed around the largest one called *pyarlu* are the three supporters of *Chhyopa*. There are two additional *Ka tus*: one symbolizes the *Sarkya* deity (more powerful *guru* or god) while the other smaller one is *kywu* which is not a deity but a *Ka tus* for removing the inauspicious things.

*Lhe ka tu* (owner *torma*) is the most powerful of all the pantheon of deities of the ritual. Symbolically it has three different forms or faces: happy, aggressive or wraithy, and meditating face. So, the Gurungs believe that sometimes the god may be happy and peaceful while other times, they can be angry and violent. For example, the deity *Sarkya* is believed to be slightly violent who can lose its characters. However, *Sarkya* is prayed as a powerful guru. *Chhyopa* is a peaceful master and symbolizes ascetic nature. I will discuss in detail about *Chhyopa* in the following section.

*Paure/Pakre* is another revered deity worshiped in the *Failu lapa*. These deities are believed to dwell in a place that lies on the way to Manang near the Namun pass, a two-day walk from Sikles. *Paure/Pakre* is equally worshiped by all the Gurungs of the region. The *Pachyu* from *Kromchhai* clan believe that they are the descendants of *Puare/ pakre*, so they call *Paure/ Pakre Pachyu*. There is a high hill in the place called *Paure* which is believed to be the symbol of *Paure* god. It is interesting to note here that stones, rocks, and crest in the hillocks point towards the *Paure* hill. People believe that these geographical markers – rocks and creates are 'bowing' to the *Paure* god represented by the hill.

### The Ritual Process of Ancestor Worship (*failu*)

*Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform this ritual separately; they do not perform it together.

When *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* separate from their father's house (the main house) and build new houses for their individual family, they are required to perform their first *Failu Lapa* in their new houses. This ritual is called '*Failu ryepa*' or 'ancestor worship' to raise or establish the *Failu*. For this *Failu lapa*, the ancestor gods will be offered a goat sacrifice. Following this, the *Pachyu* offers a cock/rooster in the *Failu lapa* but *Lauhri* needs to offer a goat for the same. The priests will use the specific body parts of the liver, heart, and bile of the scarified bird (rooster) or animal (goat) to find the state of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness for the whole family.

The *Failu Lapa* ritual begins in the evening time and ends in the morning. Throughout the night, the priests chant and play their drums and *chhyōley*. There are long *pye* recitations for this ritual and describe about these *Ka tus* one by one. I know what and how that the *Pachyu* recite the *pye* of *lhe* (owner), *Chhyopa* (peace god), *Paure/Pakre* (local deities of nature god) and chant as such:

<i>Chhyo . . . lhe sō teene preeh (fee) sō teemai (god and goddesses)</i>	Oh god <i>lhe sō tee preeh (fee) sō tee</i> (name of the god and goddesses)
<i>Ku sō teene syu sō teemai (god and goddesses)</i>	Oh god <i>kusō tee syu sōtee</i> (name of the god and goddesses)
<i>Th na kyō ka th</i>	You are bigger than big
<i>Rh na kyō ka rh</i>	You are longer than long
<i>Krapa mpae khree kyalai</i>	Even when a hair of mine is trimmed
<i>Pahrpa chhyu khree kyalai</i>	A ligament in my leg is cut
<i>S chai thapil topa</i>	has to inform by the mouth
<i>Le chai thapil topa</i>	has to inform by the tongue

<i>Kra khreema to nki thal topa</i>	It's like carrying two head-straps on a head
<i>Le khreema chhyui nki thal topa</i>	It's like saying two things with a tongue
<i>lhe sō teene preeh sō teemai</i>	Lhe sotine pri sotimai (god and goddesses)
<i>Ku sō teene syu sō teemai</i>	Ku sotine syui sotimai (god and goddesses)
<i>Nkati ase pyeura koihmo</i>	I wanted to recognise the unrecognizable
<i>Areh lwura koihmo</i>	I want to learn the unknown
<i>Thalpa teura koihmo</i>	I began to search the bygone
<i>Chaipa yōra koihmo</i>	I began to look for the remaining
<i>Krapu ntasi larkyo peura koihmo</i>	And I looked for by stepping with the head
<i>Pa h ta ntasi teta peura koihmo</i>	I looked for by carrying by my shoulders
<i>Kyata kyapur teesi reesi mahrkyo sō</i>	I looked to the right, to the left, to my
<i>perma chyui nka h pre sō ne chur koihlo</i>	surroundings and everywhere.
<i>Lhe sō teene prehsō teemai</i>	Lhesautine prisotimai
<i>Ku sō teene syu sō teemai</i>	Kusotine syui sotimai
<i>Nka lhere tarmo preehre churmo</i>	My moon is there and so being the Goddess
<i>Ku re tarmo syure churmo</i>	My Kure is there and so being Syui
<i>Nka lahturchai priyu priturchai priyu</i>	Bless me, gathering here
<i>Chur thepai mphi na kyahlar syo</i>	Stay in the village when grown up
<i>Chur tohpai mphi na pōlar syopai fai</i>	Oh Rheeper Chhyo..... (Ancestor god)
<i>Lau rheeper chhyo</i>	

The text is a small part of the *Failu* worship but has insightful symbolic meanings. The priests chant same text from praying nature god and their clan deities acknowledging their greatness and power by saying “*Th na kyōka th , rh na kyōka rh* or you are bigger than big, you are longer than long”. The priests also lower their positions in humility that they do not know much (possess only little knowledge) and request the ancestor deities to teach and impart them more knowledge. They chant

“*Nkati ase peura koihmo areh lwura Koihmo*”; the literal meaning of this text is “Oh! God, I don’t know, please tell me, oh god, I have not, please teach me”. This ritual communication, in the form of a *pye* text, shows that the ancestors are the source of knowledge which the priests learn from their ancestors. The knowledge is transferred across generations through learning and performing of the rituals. The *pye* is the embodiment of ancestral knowledge in practice. The priests must cultivate the virtue of humility and obedience to their ancestors.

The whole night, the priests chant their texts; most of the texts focus on the relation between priests and the god, and those between the family and the god. They request the ancestors for good luck and fortune for the family. The priests are seen to be physically emotional when they chant and play their drums and cymbals. They play the drums aloud and allowed when they talk with their god and ancestors and request to remove all inauspicious things from the family and the house.

*Pachyu* recites four chapters for this *Failu* worship, and it takes more than ten hours. The ritual is larger in scale and longer in duration than the other rituals. Relatives and neighbours gather for the whole night. The women bring local wine for offering and drinking. The playing of drums and cymbals give melody and emotional music.



**Figure 6.3: The *Pachyus* are Performing Failu Worship. Photo Credit by Lal B. Gurung, 2019**

During this ritual, *Pachyu* believe in the *ka tus* as ancestor gods. The power of ancestors comes to the *Pachyus* while they perform the *Failu*. The sound of the chanting *pye* and playing drums has different meanings and its melodies. When they chant and play loudly, then they are meeting their gods and receiving the power with which they ‘fight’ with and exorcize evil spirits.

It is impossible to mention all the *pye* chapters here, though I want to provide some chants the priests used for blessing the family. This *pye* is called ‘*Wō Nopa*’. It is very difficult to interpret the exact meanings of what the *pye* says. The first line

*la . . . la . . .* mean ancestor god.

*la . . . la . . . la . . . la . . . la . . .*

.....

.....

<i>Syarne thopa chhae khur yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the biggest lifespan be collected from the east, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Lworne rheepa chhae khur yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the longest lifespan be collected from the south, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Nthurne naapa thayo rahpai chhae khur yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the worth be collected from the west, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Chyōhr ne twupa twulsi rahpai chae khur yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the seeds be collected from the north, ancestors' <i>Failu</i> god.
<i>Lye tali chae yupa ngehtali pyoyuai fali pah khoe</i>	Let them be as shining as the moon, as bright as the sun. Thank you <i>Failu</i> god
<i>Kgoti chhyuto pruyupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let them be as pure as the rainfall, thank you <i>Failu</i> god
<i>Prihti ngysō mpyalyupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let them be as peaceful as the lake, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Mpaar gyāh / kyā thō yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the golden path open, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Mpai gyāh /kyā th yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let the passage of money be paved, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Kō tali ntuyupa Fali pah khoe</i>	Let them heighten as hills, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>syō tali rhee'n yupai fali pah khoe</i>	Let them elongate as rivers, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Sar kahma twu tapa fali pah khoe</i>	Let the soil they touch be fertile, thank you <i>Failu</i> god!
<i>Y mar kahma nthur tapa fali pah khoe</i>	Let the stones they caress be gems,

thank you *Failu* god!

According to the above-mentioned oral ritual text, the *pye* uses the images of the four directions as well as natural phenomena such hills, rivers, lakes, and moons to symbolize different states of prosperity and well-being that the priest requests the ancestor gods for the family. By asking these blessings, the ritual texts acknowledge the power of ancestors to help the family with good health, fortune, and good soil (farming). After each request for blessing, the *Pachyu* recites “Thank you *Failu* god” to express the people’s gratitude and acknowledgement of the blessing and support.

### **Bidding Farewell and Escorting Back the Deities**

So, the *Pachyu* calls on the ancestor gods during the *Failu* worship to bless all the family members and ritual participants. The *Pachyus* call on gods from different places at the ritual home and offer them proper ritual and offerings. When the ritual is about to end, the priests use *pye* reciting to pay proper farewell and escort the deities to specific places from where the ancestor gods will return to their dwellings. For instance, they first bid farewell to and escort *Lhe* by chanting. We invited you here to watch your worship, meeting, and blessing all the family. And you came here! We are very glad and happy with you. Now, this is living people's place, but you are a god. So, you have to go to your place or world

Then, the *Pachyu* by chanting *pye*, brings *ka tus* from the *Failu dhee* and ritually takes them to the chowk of the village [they do not physically move out the house]. After this farewell, the gods can go everywhere or their places. After bidding farewell to the supreme deity *Lhe*, the *Pachyus* bid farewell to *Paure*. If the *Failu* worship is performed in Sikles, then the *Pachyus* chant from *Failu dhee* (*Failu* house) and ritually, by ways of chanting the oral texts, go out of the house and travel across specific geographical routes crossing the Madi River towards Sopee, Totee, pōchu kyā, Khaipa lhee, Teyhrali (the ways reach to *Paure*) to arrive at *Paure/ Pakre*. In other words, the ritual of bidding farewell to the *Paure*

invokes the territorial markers and places of the Gurung ancestral territory, and thereby connects the place, people, and ancestors (Pettigrew, 1995; Rai, 2013).

At the end, the priests bid farewell to and escorted back the *Chhyopa*, one of the primary deities worshiped in the *Failu Lapa*. According to *Pachyu Yug Bahadur*, the *Chhyopa* comes from *Wuicho chōru*, a historical and sacred place among the Gurung and *pachyus* shrine, which lies somewhere in China. *Wuicho-chōru* is a holy place for the *Kromchhai Pachyu* where *Chhyopa* god had established his settlement. For the ancestor worship, the *Pachyu* invite *Chhyopa* from *Wuicho choru*. for the *Failu* worship. At the end, they escort back the god in *wuicho chōru* like *Lhe* and *Paure*. After finishing the *Failu*, the priests cut the *Ka tuss* into small pieces and distribute as *parsaad* (items embodying god's blessings) to all people gathered for the ritual.

According to *Pachyu Yug Bahadur*, the gods are invited to the world of the living people for the duration of the ritual so that they bless the family and villagers. After the ritual, the gods must be escorted back to their respective dwelling worlds.

In this way, through this ancestor worship the priestly family and the villagers reconnect with their powerful ancestors who inhabit a different world but who always look after the living people in the villages. The ancestors are their clan members and kin people who have passed away and who have become powerful deities. The purpose of this ancestor worship is to ask blessings from these deities. The ritual is also a social event in which the living people and ancestors socialize, drink, eat together, offer gifts, dramatizes the host-guest relations, and the family and the clan members offer respect and hospitality to their ancestors. By ways of inviting and escorting the deities back to their worlds and dwelling places, this ancestor worship also connects the Gurungs with their ancestral territories; the ritual topographic maps and the lived geographic maps overlap and become meaningful (also see Pettigrew, 1999).

The priests - *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* act as mediators between the ancestors and the living, connecting two different worlds and time, in the ritual event. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* communicate and interact with the ancestors, also with evils. They gain ritual power and knowledge, yet the *pye* enforces humility and subservices in the priests. I will say that everyday Gurung ethics are performed and enacted with the deities during the rituals (also see McHugh, 2001).

#### **6.4 *Chhyopa Lapa* (Worship the Ancestral God)**

*Chhyopa* (ancestor god) is another powerful and peaceful god of the Gurung. It is an ancestral deity who the Gurung people call on more frequently than other deities. The Gurung people believe that *Chhyopa* fulfils what they demand. So, they worship *Chhyopa* when they start their work and demand blessings. *Chhyopa* is especially related with *Pachyu*. So, the *Pachyu* worships *Chhyopa* god.

When I was about ten years old and became interested in *Pachyu*'s *pye*, my father, late Harka Bahadur Gurung, told me about many oral texts about the *Chhyo lapa* and its types. He used to go to different villages such as Parche, Töhta and other areas to perform different *Chhyopas*. According to my late father, a well learned and highly respectable priest, *Chhyopa* god is the owner of the *Wuicho-choru*, a place some believe lies in China. The *Pachyus* are very devoted to the place *Wuicho-choru*. However, they are also not sure where *Wuicho-choru* is located. According to their oral text, the place lies beyond Tibet or somewhere in China, the priests say *Chō naas* (the village of place of *chō*) *Chhyopa lapa* (worship the *Chhyopa*) is a popular worship among the Gurungs community. It is different across practices and the place name may differ.

### **Different Types and Process of *Chhyopa* Rituals**

The Gurung performs different *Chhyopas* for different purposes. For instance, when they build new home, they perform a specific *Chhyopa* “*dhee Chhyopa* or *Chhyopa*” for the new house. They demand peace and happiness in their new home.

If people need to go to foreign countries for work (army, labour work) and other purposes, then they will perform *Chhyopa* at the time of departure which they call *Sait Chhyopa*. They ask the deity to bless them for a safe and pleasant journey, and happiness during the *Sait Chhyopa*.

There is the *Failu Chhyopa*. The *Pachyus* who can't organize *Failu* every year perform *Chhyopa* worship instead of *Failu* which they call *Failu Chhyopa*. Such kind of *Failu Chhyopa* is only performed for the *Pachyu*.

Another *Chhyopa* is the *Popa Chhyopa* which is done for the hunters. The Gurungs perform this ritual before hunting and it is done for the permission and the safety of hunters to the nature deity. They worship all local deities related with nature (forest) saying, “we are coming to you for hunting, please help and bless us”.

There is the *Chhō Chhyopa*. If someone starts his/her business, then he/she *Chhō Chhyopa* to receive the blessing of ancestral deities for better luck and success of their business venture.

These multiplicities of *Chhyopa* rituals suggest that the Gurungs believe that they need the blessing of the ancestor deities for the well-being and success of the various works and destinations they embark upon. The *Chhyopa* ritual addresses the practical needs of the Gurungs in their everyday life. The ancestral deity *chhyopa* is considered to be peaceful in nature, and hence it is more accessible for varied emergent practical demands of the people.

I observed many *Chhyopa* rituals as a researcher and participated in many of them with the *Pachyus*. Here, I draw on these observations to give an overview of the ritual processes and how *Pachyus* chant the ritual texts according to my field observation.



**Figure 6.4: Pachyus Performance Chhyopa. Photo Credit by Lal B. Gurung, 2020**

It is interesting how *pachyu* khim Bahadur starts his job. First of all, he makes *Ka tu*s of rice which is the symbol of *Chhyopa* god. He cooks rice of an odd handful or an odd *mana* (Nep.) or an odd *pathi* (Nep.) for any rituals. After making the *Kaetu*, he erects it on the homemade basket (*dalo and nanglo*, Nep.). Then he sits on his sacred place called *kg h tipa*. *Kg h* is a kind of umbrella for rain made from bamboo and leaves. I also sit on them. He offers mixture *dhup* (incense) to the *Ka tu* and other gods. He holds a rooster and starts his *pye* (text).

When I asked Khim Bahadur about this *Chhyopa*, he said:

There are nine parts of the *Chhyopa pye* called *Chhyopa kyarlu* (the text of the *Chhyopa*); all these nine parts are related to the formation of human life and its

development. These nine texts describe how a baby is formed after the sexual relation between a man (husband) and a woman (wife), how the different body parts of the foetus develop, and then mature into a baby in nine months. Just to cite some examples:

<i>Chhyo ....chhyo ku tye na yache kye</i>	children originated hence
<i>Chhyo ku tye na yuche kye</i>	children originated thence
<i>Kye kye tye na sata kye Syar khashra ku ta ta kye</i>	how children originated originated by the union of flesh and flesh
<i>Nghor nkechre ku ta ta kye</i>	The forehead originated
<i>Pahku tye na chai'nta kyemo</i>	All the organs originated and so did the body.
<i>Naye pa h ma kgawar kyemo</i>	The earth originated likewise
<i>Saye pa h ma tihkyora kyemo</i>	The sky/moon originated likewise
<i>Seeye pa h ma ketara kyemo</i>	The water originated likewise

This text of *Chhyopa kyarlu* shows the Gurung religious view of the conception and growth of human babies. The fourth part of *Chhyopa kyarlu* (about the *chhyopa*) recites the process of developing organs when the child reaches four months in the womb or pregnancy. Then the development of various human organs: eyes, ears, nose, the gums of the teeth, mouth, heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys take place in their period. This is how all the children are born and develop inside their mother's wombs. Then they gradually develop and become skilful, capable, and knowledgeable. The text says that the earth, the sky, the water, and other entities originated to the present forms. However, individuals generally ask *Paychus* to perform this ritual so that they receive blessing from ancestors to fulfil certain wishes or become successful in their life goals. So, what is the meaning of this ritual text that recites and explains how a human baby is conceived, developed, and matured into adulthood with

knowledge, and skill? My research informant, *Paychus*, explained that this ritual text reminds people how they have come to become the person they are today. It also tells people that “demons also originated like this” and also tells them to be careful and understand the negativity in them. The ritual text also says:

“Look at the feet while working  
 Look badly while sitting on a rest  
 Look for the bad tone in voice while talking  
 Look for the bad glare in the eyes while seeing  
 Looking crosswise nose  
 Looking crosswise eye  
 Bad thinking and talking  
 Harmful for good  
 Harmful for people  
 Harmful for gods/ancestors”

So, there is a moral teaching and value emphasized in the *Chhyopa kyarlu*. It asks people to “look at the feet while working; look for the bad in voice while talking; look for the bad in the eyes while seeing”. Like other ritual *pye* texts, it also highlights natural entities such as stones, rivers, forests, water, the earth, and the sky”.

After this text, the *Pachyu Khim Bahadur* recites the rooster called *woh tā*.

According to *woh tā* (the text of rooster) the *Chhyopa* god likes to eat chicken. Therefore, the *Pachyu* sacrifices the cock and offered it to *Chhyopa* god. Then, the priest takes out the specific body parts: heart, liver, and bile of the sacrificed chicken. He defines the status of person’s auspiciousness and inauspiciousness by observing chicken’s heart, liver, and bile. This process of reading the animal body parts as signs given by the deity is called ‘*weita kygopa*’. In this moment I shared to them what Aas Bahadur used to say to me.

In the case of *Chhyopa*, gallbladder is the symbol of wealth if it is bigger except in the case of a sick person, it indicates the person will gain wealth. The heart is the symbol of bravery and courage. If the chicken's heart is hard when it is touched by the priest, it indicates the person has strong personality and become successful. Each side of the liver symbolizes the person's legs. If the right liver, which represents the person's right, is found to be longer, then the person can reach the desired destination on time of because of long steps. However, if the left part of the liver is longer, it is considered bad luck; the person can encounter obstacles.

After studying this *weita*, the *Pachyu* recites '*Thaa kyaarpa*' (exorcism process). Here, *thaa* refers to 'ghost or evil things' and *kyaarpa* refers to 'chase away or throw out of the house'. They believe that if some inauspicious power blocks an auspicious event or new work, *Chhyopa* can remove these obstacles. Then the *Pachyu* blesses good luck to the individual or family or villagers.

### **6.5 *Mo Lapa/ Mo Th pa***

In Sikles, the Gurungs believe they need the blessing and protection of their ancestors for their personal well-being as well as that of their family, cattle, and village. Additionally, they believe that they are vulnerable to evil forces and evil power that they are susceptible to malevolent powers and energies that could hurt them or bring about bad luck. There are many forms and sources of evil powers – ghosts and bad spirits. Sometimes, some ancestors can also become evil or harmful. Gurungs call these types of malevolent ancestors '*Mo*' (used in plural sense). They fear '*Mo*' because they are dangerous and have the power to cause problems for people, cattle, and the village by capturing and manipulating ancestors who are good. Geographically, the east to west boundary of Sikles village mostly borders with sacred ancestral lands. If any Gurungs do not respect and worship their ancestors, then the ancestors may change into *Mo* or evil forces. Hence, each family must perform rituals to pacify and appease the *mo*. This ritual is called *Mo lapa* (also *Mo th pa*). Though *Mo* are like ghosts,

they are also ancestors. Hence, *Mo lapa* is also an ancestor worship. *Pachyus* mentioned to me that there are some major differences between ancestor worships such as *Khema Theepa*, *and Failu lapa* and *Mo lapa* which include:

While ancestor worship is performed at home in the village, *Mo lapa* is performed outside of the village in forest or riverside or hillsides, but in sacred areas.

Ancestor ritual can only be performed by the Gurung priests, but any family member can perform *Mo lapa* on behalf of the family in the ritual place.

The kind of language or ritual speech also differs. In ancestor worship, the priests use respectful ritual speech to call on and request ancestors. In *Mo lapa*, ritual performers use language of warnings and even mild threats like – “We give food, wine, and cloth. Accept our offerings. If you harm us, we will destroy your house with iron rods”.

People offer new and full clothes (like a shirt) in ancestor worship, but they only offer a piece of cloth as *dhaja*. Hence less respectful offering.

While ancestor worship is always participated by family and clan members embracing collectivity and social celebration, *Mo lapa* is performed individually without participation of family and community.

The Gurungs of Sikles perform *Mo Lapa* ritual twice a year. One is performed on Baisakh Purnima, the birthday of the Buddha, and the other during the Nepali Hindu festival of Dashain. However, this ritual is not related with Baiskah Purnima and Dashain. Like the rituals of ancestor worship, the two *Mo lapa* also follow the two seasons of *Sarkha twul* (downward season) and *Pahrkha twul* (upward season) which Gurung people commonly call *Wum*<sup>29</sup> and *Pwum*<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, the priests /ritual performers recite ‘*Sarkha twul*’ and

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<sup>29</sup> Wum-upward season.

<sup>30</sup> Pwum-downward season, the Gurung of Sikles practice their farming system, animal husbandry, nature worship, ancestor worship according to this seasons which they call *pahrkhatwul* and *sarkhatwul* also.

‘*Pahrkha twul*’ when Mo lapa ritual is performed; they do not call it Baiaskh Purnima and Dashain.

In Sikles, each family has a place for *Mo lapa* in a land specified and allocated for one’s clan group. For example, *Kromchhai* clan has its Mo lapa place at *Nee wōh* and *Kwurkwu* (lem clan of study area) from Gairithar has the ritual place in *Thuska* (north- east side of the study area). Since *Mo lapa* ritual is also performed by the non-Gurung families, the Dalit families also have their ritual place close to *Nee wōh*. In Sikles, *Chhyoto Khola*, *Aashma*, *Neetu*, *Molu*, *Tōku chowh*, *Puri*, next *Chhyoto khola*, *Nee whoh* and *Thuska* are covered by *Mo dhee* (house of *Mo*). These the sacred places generally away from the village settlements. People do not cut down the trees and grass in lands where *Mo dhee* are located. They do not use these lands for agriculture; nor its soil and stones for themselves. The ritual is also directly linked with natural resource management. Hence, the fear of *Mo* and the sacredness of *Mo land* also contribute to conserving the territory with its natural resources in Sikles (see Chapter 7). Many of the Gurung families, if not all, and all the Dalit families of Sikles slaughter chickens as ritual offerings to *Mo*. The Gurungs believe that a leaf is more sacred things for worship, so they put rice, wine, *lahwa* (fried unhusked rice), water, milk, curry, blood, meat on the leaf and offer to their *Mo* ancestors. I have visited *Mo lapa* area and observed *Mo Th pa* rituals many times. Once, I had accompanied one of my main *Pachyu* informants Ash Bahadur Gurung for this ritual. When he was ready to offer food and drink to *Mo*, he chanted:

<i>Nkgee wum pwum chapa ka peemu</i>	There are two seasons, we offer you rice
<i>Th pa kyu peemu</i>	We offer you drinking water
<i>Kheepa ko peemu</i>	We offer you cloths
<i>Teepa lho peemu</i>	We build place (house) for you
<i>Pumee lee lee apryetwu</i>	Do not follow (walk) after witches

<i>Syuta leelee apryetwu</i>	Do not follow (walk) after inauspicious
<i>Kyō lhor teetwu</i>	Please stay your place (house)
<i>Ner teetwu</i>	Stay in your platform
<i>Maanar teetwu</i>	Maintain your prestige
<i>Pumee lee lee pyrerapih</i>	If you follow (walk) after witches
<i>Syuta leelee pryerapih</i>	If you follow (walk) after inauspicious
<i>Akui waasir ploirapih</i>	If you follow others culprits
<i>Nkgee rho rho pyi pyi lasya</i>	And bring misfortune and sickness to us
<i>Nkgeeti achya lamu uchya lamu</i>	We have to ignore you
<i>Kgee chapa Ka aapi</i>	We do not give you rice
<i>Thupa kyu aapi</i>	We do not give drinking water
<i>Kheepa ko aapi</i>	We do not give clothing
<i>Kgee tipa lho phuwamu</i>	We have to destroy your place (house)

The above ritual text clearly shows that during the *Mo Th pa* ritual, the villagers, on the one hand, recognize *Mo* as their ancestors and acknowledge the power of *Mo*. So, they worship them with ritual offerings and gifts of food, drink, and clothes. The fact that non-Gurung families also revered and feared *Mo* and made ritual offerings to them in order to show that people recognize the power of these ancestors. On the other hand, they ask, albeit in a warning way, not to follow “witches, inauspicious forces, and culprits”. They explicitly ask *Mo* not to harm and bring “sickness” to the people. The villagers threaten to punish *Mo* if the ancestors become malicious even after the ritual offerings. The ritual recitations such as “we will ignore you; we do not give you rice; we do not give you clothing; *we have to destroy your place*” evidently show that people exercising their agency to warn *Mo* to maintain the honour of being ‘ancestors’. Rituals establish and reinforce not only the dominant and revered status and positions of the ancestors. Rituals also reinforce the mutual

dependency and reciprocity between the living and ancestors. People pay respect and offer gifts of food, drinks, cloths, and animal sacrifices to deities, and expect these deities to reciprocate the people with blessings and protections. Emile Durkheim (1995/1912) reminded us: “Furthermore, while it is true that man is dependent of his gods, *this dependence is mutual. The gods also need man; without offerings and sacrifices, they would die*” (p. 24, emphasis added)<sup>31</sup>. The Gurung *Mo Th pa* ritual I have discussed here attests to Durkheim’s concept of the mutual dependency between ancestors (god) and the people.

### **6.6 *Plah Khu lapa* (Calling and Bringing Back the Lost Soul)**

In the discussion of the *Pai* ritual and the soul journey (chapter 5), I have highlighted why the Gurung families give so much importance and urgency to ‘send’ the soul of their dead family members to the world of ancestors through the *Pai* ritual. This soul journey is the after-death ritual of finding and escorting the lost soul of a dead Gurung individual to the world of ancestors so that the dead person can also become an ancestor or *khema*. However, Gurungs are vulnerable to losing their souls or *Plah* in everyday contexts. If their *Plah* is lost, they can become sick, unfocused, and weak. In other works, the Gurung *Plah* and body, though interconnected, are not the same thing. *Plah* resides in the body, but it is unstable; it can be taken away by other forces such as ghosts and by other entities. For instance, if a child swims in a river, sometimes their *plah* may be taken away by the water. Ernestine McHugh (1989, 2001) has well described and analysed the Gurung concept of *plah* and personhood. She explains:

The body is believed to be made up of four natural elements: earth, water, fire, and air, along with a set of *plah* (nine for men and seven for women), which are the life force and keep the body intact. The *plah*, like the Western idea of the soul, is considered essential to life, although the individual is not aware of it. ... The *plah*,

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<sup>31</sup> This Durkheim’s idea was pointed out to me by my thesis supervisor Dr. Janak Rai. I am thankful to him for the idea and sharing.

like a soul, is an immaterial essence that one is neither aware of nor able to control.

Beliefs about the *plah* convey a sense of the fragility of the person. *Plah* can easily fly out of the body and if all of the *plah* are lost, the body's elements are no longer held together by the life force and the person will die. If some *plah* are lost, illness results.

The *plah* can be lost through such ordinary events as stumbling or being startled, or by the experience of intense emotion, illness, or witch attack (McHugh, 1989, p.79)

McHugh pointedly provides examples of how Gurungs become concerned about the possible loss of *plah* in everyday situations:

Social attention may restore lost *plah*. If a person slips on a path, others will respond by laying their hands on the person's head and shoulders, saying "*shah, shah*" to protect the victim of this minor shock from *plah* loss. Larger events, like illness or the emotional trauma of bereavement, require the tying of a yellow string (*rupa*) around the neck of the person, again while saying "*shah, shah*" (McHugh, 1989, p. 79)

McHugh's studies are insightful and important. However, her focus is on the Gurung notion of personhood and does not focus on the cultural practices (ritual) of finding the lost *plah*. To this gap, Mumford's (1990) study is more helpful and relevant. He discusses the soul calling of the Gurung shaman and Tibetan Lama in the Himalayan region. However, Mumford also does not delve into the analysis of the Gurung *pye*. In this section, I will address this knowledge gap by focusing on the analysis of ritual of calling and bringing back the lost soul that Gurungs call *Plah Khu lapa*. First, I will discuss how the Gurung *Pachuys* find out about the loss of soul. Traditionally, only *Pachuys* are the ritual specialists for the *Plah Khu lapa*.

### **Finding Out if *Plah* is Lost**

When a person feels or suspects of losing her or his *plah*, she and he consult a *Pachuy*. Then the *Pachuy* examines the pulse of the person's hand, checks her/his zodiac

sign, and undertakes ritual method to determine if the person's soul is lost and the possible whereabouts of the lost *plah*. Mumford discusses the soul calling by the Gurung shaman:

The Paju first takes the pulse of the patient to locate the mode of spirit. If the pulse flows very slowly in the right arm, it means the soul has been stolen by one of the invisible gods or demons of the three worlds. If the pulse flows extremely fast in the left arm, a living witch has stolen it (Mumford, 1990, pp: 169-170).

*Pachyus* of Sikles also first check the pulse of a person's first right hand and then left. This checking of pulse is called "*Yo chae nghyopa*" or checking the pulse of the hands. Next, they count patient "*Lho*" (barga, zodiac sign) to identify the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness by method of assessing the "*Paarka*" (houses of eight directions) and explore where the soul has been taken and by whom. Then they perform the required ritual of "*Plah khu lapa*" to bring the lost soul back to the body of the person. Here, I discuss how the Gurungs of Sikles understand this *Plah khu* and believe its ritual practices and process. First, I will address its meaning and the type of *plah khu* according to their practices, and then its ritual performances with oral text.

### **The Ritual Process of Finding the Lost Soul**

*Plah khu lapa* ritual is another most popular ritual in the study area. The literal meaning of *plah* is the soul of living person, *khu* means "to collect" and *lapa* means "to do". Hence, *Plah khu lapa* literally signifies "to collect the dispersed soul". Only the *Pachyu* performs this *plah khu lapa* ritual. One of my *Pachyu* informants told me that there are different kinds and process of *plah khu*:

<i>Dhee plah khu</i>	<i>plah khu</i> of house or in the name of house
<i>Mul plah khu</i>	<i>plah khu</i> of water resources or in the name of water resources
<i>Tduhrchha plah khu</i>	<i>plah khu</i> of graveyard or in the name of graveyard

*krõ plah khu*

*plah khu* of underworld or in the name of underworld

Of these four kinds, *Dhee plah khu*, *Mul plah khu* and *Tdhurchha plah khu* are more popular rituals in the village according to my research informant. The soul calling ritual is not that simple in the way Mumford (1990) has discussed. Since the lost *plah* could have been taken into different worlds, the *Pachyu*s need to be careful and knowledgeable of identifying which specific soul calling ritual needs to be performed. For example, if a person who stays in the house of *parka lhee* (the south direction and the house of fire) according to her/his *lho* and *Paarka*, then *Dhee plah khu* needs to be performed for her/him. Because s/he is in the house of fire, they must be in peace with fire otherwise the fire will harm the person. The process is complex and involves distinct ritual analysis of person's *lho*, the state of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, the exact identification of the location of the lost soul, and the kind of house (house of fire or water or soil or graveyard, and others) the *plah* lives, and if the person can be in peace with the location and the house. The detailed discussion is difficult to translate here. Now, I will briefly discuss the ritual processes for the *Dhee plah khu* (in the name of house) *Mul plah khu* (in the name of water resources) and *Tdurchha Plah khu* (in the name of graveyard).

### ***Dhee plah khu* (in the Name of House)**

*Ka tus* of different heights and shapes are prepared for the *Dhee plah khu* ritual. All these *Ka tus* are kept on a sacred nanglo (Nep., a flat round woven tray made of bamboo). Four *ka tus* are kept on four directions. Like in other Gurung rituals I have discussed so far, *ka tus* represent different deities (ancestors). Taller *ka tu* is placed in the centre. One round *ka tu*, circled by four small *ka tus*, is also placed. The tallest one symbolizes the diety *Sarkya*, one of the powerful gurus or teachers of the *Pachyu*, who has a violent nature. According to one of my main *Pachyu* informants late Aas Bahadur, the round *ka tu* symbolizes the earth because the earth is round like the *ka tu*. These four *ka tus* around the

*round ka tus* symbolize the *Pachyu* gurus of four directions. When the *Pachyus* search the lost *plah* that is 'hiding' in some part on the earth (not in the upper or underworld), they need to make a spherical *ka tus* for this *plah khu lapa* ritual. There are four sacred threads at the top of the four *ka tu*'s which are tied to the tallest *ka tu* of the diety *Sarkya*. The sacred threads are for rays or way of the *plah* from four directions.

The *Mul plah khu* and *Tdurchha plah khu* rituals do not require *ka tus*. A rooster is needed for the *Mul plah khu* and a hen for the *Tdurchha plah khu* ritual. The Gurungs believe that the lost *plah* can go to different places in any of the three worlds (the upper world, the underground, and the surface land or the earth). It can go to hills, forests, rocks, water, rivers, clouds, burial places, or everywhere. So, the *Pachyu* collects the lost *plah* from everywhere. Strickland (1982, p. 241) describes the process of finding and bringing back the lost in the *plah khu lapa*:

Plah Kuwa 'coming to the soul'. The *Pachyu* tells the soul to come to

the house, come to the gold, silver, fine clothes, nine-fold offering of grains, feathers, wooden ralpa-hat, leather belt of bells, rice, and swollen rice, to come from the deities of the four quarters. He tells nine souls to come for a man, seven to come for a woman. He tells them to come to the bell ringing and to the chanting (literally, to his tongue), to come to the place of the rite. The priest repeats this cyclically until a chicken, attached to his foot by a piece cold, flutters vigorously to indicate the arrival of the soul.

*Pachyu* chants more *pye* for this *plah khu lapa*. This *plah khu lapa* ritual needs to be performed on the full moon night or *Lachhae*. It is difficult to mention and discuss all the *pye* of the *plah khu lapa*. My key *pachyu* informant, late Aas Bahadur Gurung, taught me all the

ritual texts, the processes, and the meanings of the *plah khu lapa*<sup>32</sup>. Being a *Pachyu* priest myself, I have used the *pye* repeatedly many times over the years to perform *Plah khu lapa* for the Gurung people. Here, I addressed what he told me about this *plah khu lapa* when we both had gathered.

**Searching the *plah* (*sō rwupa*):**

*Searching in the world of the evils:* First, the *Pachyu* goes to the underground world which is called *mpaipa sō* or *mpaipa sō rwupa* inhabited by big and long gods like evil<sup>33</sup>. There are six different places in the underground world which are called *sō too*.

The *Pachyu* goes to each of these six places. The ritual text details the sequences the *Pachyu* follows to look for the soul in the underground world<sup>34</sup> until to the place where the *plah* is wandering here and there. There is a long conversation between the *syolto thepa-ntolto re hpa* (the evils) and the *Pachyu* about the *plah* (soul). The evils ask the *Pachyu*: “Who are you? you are here in a full dress, what has happened to you?” Then the *Pachyu* explains all the events:

I am the *Pachyu*, this person has lost her/his *plah* (soul) from her/his body. The *plah* is spread all over this place. So, I have come here to collect the *plah* of the sick person (name of the sick man). Please, respect me and give me *plah* (soul)! I must take the *plah* with me.

Then, the evils take the exam of the *Pachyu* and ask:

Are you really the *Pachyu* or *syayekra rahyeyou* (knowledgeable and owner of texts) you claimed to be? Have you really come here to collect the *plah ku or* nine souls (for

<sup>32</sup> A few years before I began my fieldwork, I had noted down all the oral texts the *Pachyu* Aas Bahadur Gurung had recited for me, but I did not mention the date. Unfortunately, he passed away one year after I had my fieldwork.

<sup>33</sup> They are called *syolto thepa and ntolto re hpa sō rwupa* in the ritual text.

<sup>34</sup> In the order of: (1) *tihwa Tōh tihwa syō*; (2) *sō thatir kyu- thatir syō*, (3) *saula Tōh- saula syō*, (4) *saula rehsaula mai*, (5) *t hreh- t rmai* and last (6) to the *tuh'ntu chaitu chaitu khla* (places of the underground world where the soul is walking here and there)

male) and *plah nkgee* or seven souls (for female) or sick man? Then you must do *pyetã* -- it means worship grains for natural deities

Then, the *Pachyu* recites and performs the *pye* of *py tã* (one kind of grain) and proves that he is the real *syayekra rahyeyou*. Then, the evils ask again, “Now you have finished *py tã*. Now do the *kwaã tã* (*pye* of millet)”. The *Pachyu* does or recites *kwaãtã* (*pye* of millet) too. Finally, the *syolto thepa ntolto re hpa* – the long and godlike evils ask, ‘You have to do *syetã* (*pye* of rice)’. *Pachyu* says, “I can’t do or recite the *pye* of *syetã* (rice). If you need *syetã* (rice), then we must compromise”. Then they compromise for giving the soul of the sick man and *Pachyu* recite the *pye* of *syetã* (text of rice) Then the *Pachyu* requests all god-like evils in the following ways<sup>8</sup>:

*Chinalee Tõh ne syõ naane dheer*

(Name of the village? eg, Sikles) *Tõh ye kgoisõ syõ ye kgoisõ na ye dheer ye kgoisõr pai*

*Nka chukhi lhe chukhi ye mphimaila?*

(Name of the sickman) *mphichar ku* (male) *nkgee*

(Female) *ne th manka*

.....

*Chaye kho'n maye nhosõ ra*

*Chaye pyuye plahku* (male) *plah nkgee* (female)

*Nka ye lhe ye khur chõ peesya, preeh ye*

*Khur chõ peesya*

*Yehrka ko chai ntopomo*

*Yuhrka ko chai ntopomo*

Late *Pachyu* Ash Bahadur Gurung did not say the exact meaning of this oral text, because it is difficult to say the meanings of this language and words. Though he explained the essence of this text as:

The area of boundary of the village and house Name of the village, e.g. Sikles the boundary or area of the people, Name of the sick person:

*Utu* (male sick person), or *kyāhmu* (female sick person).

Please, give me my responsibility of taking the soul (nine souls of a male, seven souls of a female)

I can carry it (the soul) up, down, up down!

Then the *syolto thepa, ntolto re hpa* (big and long god-like evils) gives the lost soul to the *Pachyu*. Before describing the next part of the ritual, I will highlight the important insights that I draw from the above-cited ritual text and the ritual conversations between the *Pachyu* and the god-like evils who inhabit the underworld.

The ritual narrations vividly represent the challenges the *Pachyu* encounters in the search for the lost soul. The text shows that the evils recognize *Pachyus* are the learned person and ‘owner of the ritual text’ *syayekra rahyeyou*. Hence *Pachyus*’ power comes from his knowledge of the ritual text and their capacity to recite the ritual words to ‘do things’ or to make things happen such as giving grains. In this ritual storytelling, the evils test if the *Pachyu* is the person he claims to be. When the *Pachyu* demonstrates his knowledge of the ritual text with results, the evils give the lost soul back to the *Pachyu*. There is no violence or conflict involved; conversations occur respectfully. The *Pachyu* reminds the evils that he came to their world out of his responsibility and duty as a priest. I argue that this ritual text emphasizes the important role of the *Pachyu* in the Gurung society.

### Bringing the Soul to the Burial Place

When the *Pachyu* brings the soul from the underworld, he keeps it in the *tdurchha* (graveyard) or burial place. For this section, the ritual text frequently recites the word ‘*koisi th*’ (controlling here). The *Pachyu* recites “*salee syee chai koisi th , tdohlee syeechai koisi th*” which roughly translates to “controlling here by offering rice from soil and stone”. This suggests that the *Pachyu* stops at the graveyard and controls the *plah* by offering rice from soil and stone [feeding the soul?]. Strickland describes this event as ‘making wait’ (1983, p241). The *Pachyu* offers rice (*salee syee-tohlee syee*) in the burial place or *Tdurchha* where there are also presence of *syoltomai- ntoltomai*. Then the *Pachyu* goes to *achi khe-achi ma* or ancestral world by reciting his *pye*.

### Going to the Ancestral World

The *Pachyu* travels through the *Paure-mauhre* or *pakre mhakre*, one of the sacred hills, one of the dwelling places of ancestors. The *Pachyu* needs to send a message to inform the deity and devote a ritual offering to *Paure-mauhre* who is the guru and ancestor of the *Pachyu*. The *Pachyu* brings the soul of the sick man from *achi kheachi ma* (ancestors) by the same method and recites and *koi themu* (controlling) in *paure-mauhre*.

Then the *Pachyu* goes to the way of the six different places of the heaven (ancestral land)<sup>35</sup> and collects the soul from these places by calling his chants). The *Pachyu* recites same the *pye* and have the same conversation that he had with those *syolto thepa ntolto re hpa* (big and long godlike evils) in the underworld described above. Then he brings the sick man’s *plah* from those *syolto-ntolto* (godlike evils) and mixes it with the *plah* he collected at *Paure*, and then with the one present in *achikhe achima*. Then he comes back to the *Chhakō*

<sup>35</sup> These 6 places include: i. *Mokya pa kya samri lhe*, ii. *nkyee lee fi*, iii. *China Tōh China syō*, iii. *Kgarku Tōh kgarku syō*, iv. *Th Th mpuna Tōh sana prahra mpuna prah sō*, and iii. *ko'n ra telee pa nhali pa kahcurpane kahmyur pa kyahlakyahpi api chyuire namyu tinru lhe rhalpu thasi mosi*”

(graveyard) or burial place and makes the offering of *salee syee- tohlee syee* (rice product from soil and stone or from land) again.

There are numerous significant symbolisms in these *pye* recitations. The Gurung religious belief is that a person has nine souls for a male and seven for a female. This section of the ritual text vividly dramatizes how the *Plah* (which is the combination of many souls) of a living person, when lost, spread throughout different places in the three world is dramatized in this work. Two further significant symbolisms are -- the use of grains (rice, millet) as ritual offerings to control the *plah*, hence the symbol of farming, and the reference to the ritual map of ancestral territory (ritual geography) which all the major Gurung rituals (the soul journey, for example) give importance. The relation of respect and gratitude between the *Pachyus* and their guru ancestor is also emphasized through the *pye* recitation.

#### ***Mul plah khu* (in the Name of Water Resource)**

If the *Pachyu* performs the *mul plah khu* (in the name of water resource), the soul is waiting in the water or source of water. Then the *Pachyu* and his helper go to the water for the *plah* (soul). They worship the water. They make a symbol of water god with the cow dung. They wear *plah roo* or *paihroo* (a kind of string which is composed of nine threads for male and seven for female) because the Gurungs believe in nine souls for male and seven souls for female. The *Pachyu* offers a slaughter of the rooster, milk, rice, and *Dhupa* to the symbol of water god for calling the *plah*. The *Pachyu* priest recites his texts about the water god. He defines the state of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness by examining studying the heart, liver, and bile of the form the slaughtered cock. Then the *Pachyu* returns home with chanting his texts.

### ***Tdurchha plah khu* (in the Name of Graveyard)**

If there is a need to perform the *tdurchha plah khu* (in the name of graveyard) ritual, then the *Pachyu* and his helper, who is called *phyosae* or *phyochha* (helper for *pacchyu*), go to the *tdurchha* (graveyard) with a chicken (hen). First, the priest starts chanting ritual words about the *tdurchha* where he already keeps the soul. The recitations go like this:

I kept the soul of the sick man (name of the sick man) here! Now I come here to you. You are the *syolto* (godlike evil) of the burial place of the gold, of the currency! [here, the priest uses the analogy of gold and money to describe the graveyard and the underworld, most likely to flatter and please the god-like evils]. I offer you by *salee syee- tdohlee syee* (grain which is a product from land), I respect you and keep here the shadow soul. Now I come here! Give me the soul of the sick man (sick man name)! Give my responsibility to carry the soul.

The *Pachyu* priest repeats this chant cyclically until the chicken accepts (*ntaka kharpa, Gur*) it by moving its head and body. Then the priest and his helper return home by chanting his texts.

### ***Dhee plah khu* (in the Name of House)**

*Ka tus* of different heights and shapes are prepared for the *Dhee plah khu* ritual. All these *Ka tus* are kept on a sacred nanglo. Four *ka tus* are kept on four directions. Like in other Gurung rituals I have discussed so far, *ka tus* represent different deities (ancestors). Taller *ka tu* is placed in the centre. One round *ka tu*, circled by four small *kaetus*, is also placed. The tallest one symbolizes the diety *Sarkya*, one of the powerful gurus or teachers of the *Pachyu*, who has a violent nature. According to *Pachyu* informant, late Aas Bahadur the round *ka tu* symbolizes of the earth. These four *ka tus* around the round *ka tus* symbolize the *Pachyu* gurus of four directions. When *Pachyus* search the lost *plah* that is 'hiding' in

some part on the earth (not in the upper or underworld), then they need to make a round *ka tus* for this *plah khu lapa* ritual. There are four sacred threads at the top of the four *ka tu*'s which are tied to the tallest *ka tu* of the deity *Sarkya*. The sacred threads are for rays or way of the *plah* from four directions.

In the *Dhee plah khu*, the *Pachyu* stays in his sacred place through the *Plah khu lapa* period. He does not physically go to any outside place. He only makes the ritual journey to different places and worlds to collect *the plah*. He 'goes' (ritual journey) to *chha kō* or burial place by his chant, meets with godlike evils (*syolto thepa-ntolto reeh'n pa*) in the burial place, brings the *Plah* from the burial place and returns home by ways of chanting. After finishing this process, he performs the *mul plah khu* (the soul from water resource), *tduhrchha plah khu* (the soul from the burial place), and *dhee Plah khu* (the soul from everywhere). Family members and relatives gather with fruits and other offerings (wine, bread, fruits, milk, and others). They participate in collecting the soul of the ill person who has lost the *plah*. All of them say, "*lakho! Lakho!* or come! come!" to call on the *plah* of the sick person.

The last *Tdurchha plah khu* ritual I performed for an adult male was in Pokhara on 14<sup>th</sup> Aaso 2077 BS. Since it was a covid period, only a few family members but no relatives gathered for this ritual. In the time of blessing period, I chanted the *pye 'kyaayo py yo* (blessing part) as follows:

*Pōh la lamami krō la lamami syeela fuchai kya* You are here water from fire (centre)

*Pōh la lamami syeela lamami sala fuchai kya* You are here soil (surface) from  
water

*Pōh la lumami sala lamami mpula fuchai kya* You are here sky from soil (surface)

*Pōh la lamami pmula lamami larku fuchai kya.* You are here moon from the sky

*Pōh la lamami larku lamami nkgeerku fuchai* You are here sun from the moon  
*kya*

*Pōh la lamamin kgeerku lamami sarku fuchai* You are here star from the sun

*kya*

*Pōh la lamami pmbola lamami chhyula fuchai* You are here rainy from the cloud

*kya*

*Pōh la lamami Tōh la lammi syarpu fuchai kya* You are here man (active one) from  
the state

*Pōhla lamami se la lamami ta wui ree chai kya* You are here bamboo (like) from  
trees

*Pōh la lamami chheekar lamami syolto fuchai* You are here god (like) from nature  
*kya*

*Nka chukhi lhe chukhi mpheemaila Cha ye khō* (Name of the Sick man)  
*ma ye nhosōr*

In the ritual texts cited above, the first six lines are related to or say about the earth and sky. The texts say there are three layers or three stratum in the earth. *krō*, *syee* and *sa* or underground (centre), water or middle ground and earth or surface. It says there are four matters in the sky including the sky, *lae*, *nkgee*, *saar* and *mpu* or the moon, the sun, the stars, and the sky. The second four lines of the text compare the sick person to be good like clouds or *syarpu* because of the person's cleverness and prestige. "You are longer than long wood, like bamboo because you need to bend down like bamboo", its. The blessing goes continuously. (*see the annex for details*)

Then the *Pachyu*, *Fyosae* and all participants have to do *syoh ...ai* (*syai syai*). It means, "we met! we got you. Now on, now you (*plah*) do not visit here and there!". All the gathering relatives give blessing and good luck to the person who recovers his soul, wearing the sacred thread. At the end, participants take small pieces from all the fruits (*Prasad* Nep.) and other offerings like milk, wine, and bread, after exorcism the evils that had taken the soul. These collected pieces are delivered in a crossroad or out of the house, which is called *syut wappa* or throw the *syut*. The Gurung belief system says that demons come to the

crossroad for its food and drink. Once they (demons) eat these food and drink, they do not come to the home of the person whose *plah* was brought back. This is the meaning of this *syut waapa* practice.

The Gurung believe their ancestors, and they worship in different feast and festivals as ancestors or as ancestors' god. *Khema theepa*, *Chhyopa lapa*, *Failu lapa*, *Mo lapa* and *Plahkhu lapa* are such kind of ancestors' worship. The meanings of these worship shows are ritually related between living Gurung and their ancestors. *Khema theepa*, *Failu lapa* and *Mo lapa* worship are fully concentrated on the ancestors. *Khema theepa* and *Mo lapa* worship are performed twice a year and *Failu lapa* is an annual practice. The meaning of these rituals shows offering practices for ancestors.

*Chhyopa lapa* ritual is performed for blessing Gurung people when she/he does any carrier like, new building, job and so on. And *Failu lapa* ritual is practised only by priests (*pachyu* and *Lauhri*). *Plah khu lapa* ritual for sick men who has lost her/his soul. The *Pachyu* priest make different *ka tus* for this different ritual practices and all *ka tus* are symbols of their god.

## Chapter Seven

### Nature Worship: Rituals, Village Riti-Thiti, and Agriculture

This chapter discusses the major Gurung rituals related to the worship of nature: forest, land, water, and those related to agricultural activities in the study area. I analyse these ritual practices and the oral texts (*pye*) to show the Gurung religious cosmology and belief about 'nature' for regulating "practical and symbolic environmental relations" (Campell, 1998) between human and non-human beings in the lived ecology. By symbolic relations, I mean to show how the Gurungs of the study area perceive and understand nature and their relations with nature. Roy Rappaport reminds us that, "Nature is seen by humans through a screen of beliefs, knowledge, and purposes, and it is in terms of their images of nature, rather than of the actual structure of nature, that they act" (Rappaport, 1979; p.97) which he calls the "cognized environment".

The Gurungs depend on nature and its resources for their everyday life and livelihood. They have 'practical relations' with nature and must embrace their religious beliefs in these practical relations as well. Rappaport (1979, p. 97) writes "Yet, it is upon nature itself that they (people) do act, and it is nature itself that acts upon them, nurturing or destroying them". In this chapter, I discuss and show how the Sikles villagers combine rituals and customary practices – *riti-thithi* in their agricultural activities.

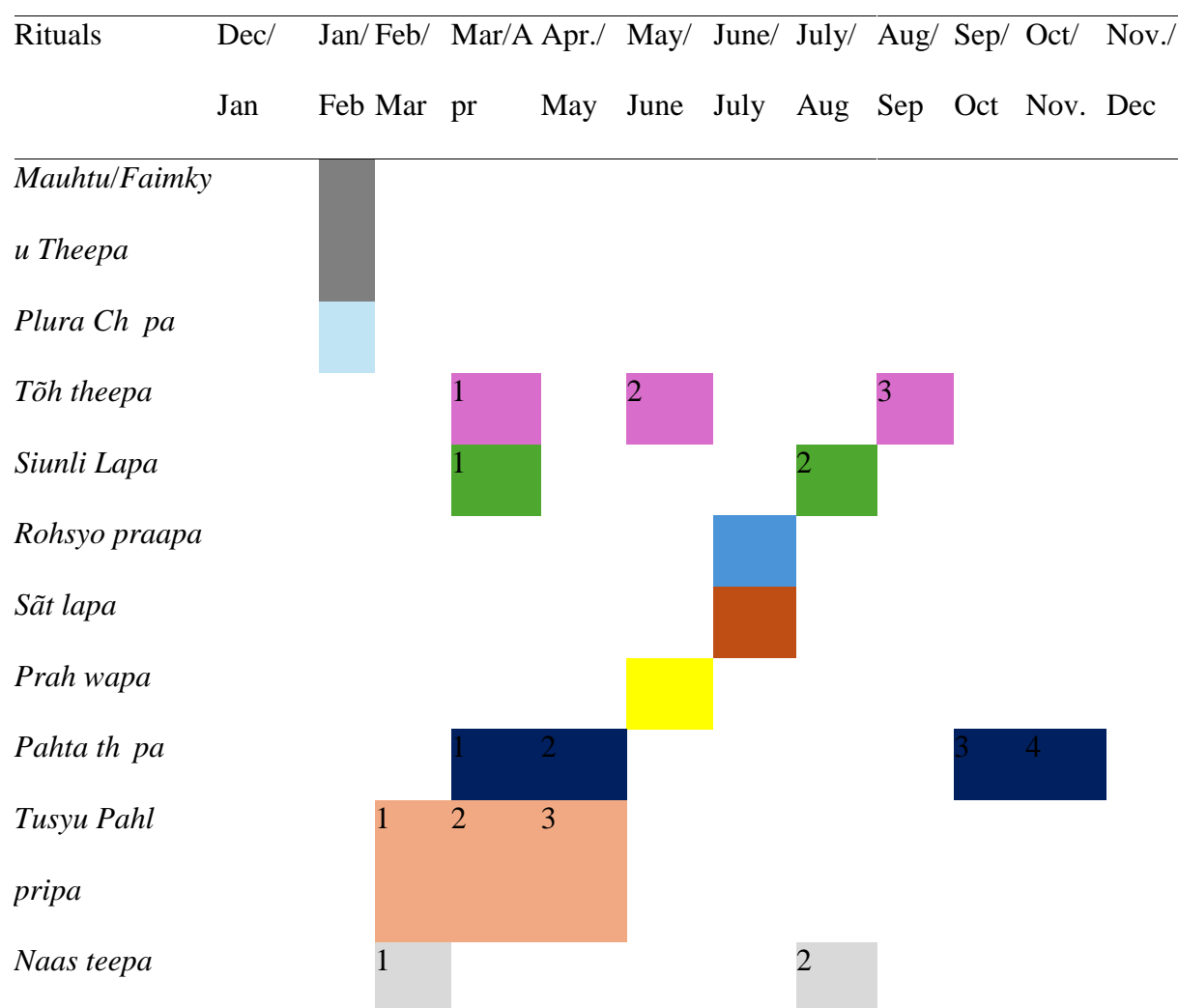
#### 7.1 Sacred Village Territory and Local Deities

The village territory of Sikles has many sacred places. The forest area on the northern border of the village is revered as sacred land the locals call *Yheura*. Villagers also call this place *Yheura Simi-Bhumi* which is located above the village extending from *Tōku Chohw* to *Nee Syura* (geographical location) covering a big area of territory in which there are several water resources, forest fruits, wild animals, and other species. The forest area is also a vital source of water for the villagers. There are various sacred places, which are also important

for different rituals, across the areas between the east and the west part of the village which include sacred springs (*Faima kyu*), forests, pastureland, worship places for *Mo* (evil ancestors, see Chapter 6), and others. *Molu*, *Puri*, *Santa Devi*, *Mpauhtu*, and *Neie syura* (sacred and local deities) are also sacred places in the *Yheura* area that are historically, culturally, and ritually connected with the local villages. Some places are dwellings of deities while demons are believed to be living in some places. Hence, the local villagers are expected to respect these places, local deities related to water and forest, as well as other malicious agents such as demons and ancestors turned to evil forces.

People do not hunt wild animals and birds there. They do not collect firewood, grass, or timber in this jungle and do not use it for cultivation. Even though there is enough dry wood, they do not touch or carry it. A few areas are secular that people can use. Therefore, religious beliefs and ritual practices sanctify the sacredness of this “cognized environment” (Rappaport, 1979) of the people of Sikles. It also shapes peoples’ behaviours and actions toward the forest and other actual environments.

The Gurungs of Sikles perform different rituals (see Table 7.1) throughout the year to worship the local deities of nature and seek their help in supporting agricultural activities and avoiding diseases and disasters.

**Table 7.1: Calander of Rituals Related to the Worship of Nature in Skiles**

Source: Hit man Gurung, 1999

Table 7.1 shows yearly ritual or worship practices for the farming system and village riti-thiti (customary rules and regulations). The Gurung of Sikles practise *plura ch pa* (seedling) in January-February. *Tōh theepa* (worship of village boundary) ritual, one of the major worships, is practiced three times in a year: March-April, May-June, and August-September. Similarly, the *Seelee lapa* (remove the diseases) ritual is performed twice a year: March-April and July-August. *Rōhsyo praapa* (removing diseases and blessing for planting) and *Saāt lapa* (removing evils) rituals are performed during planting season from June-July.

*Prah waapa* (chase the ghost of evil) ritual, popular for exorcising harmful agents, is performed in May-June. *Paahta th pa* (controlling new persons entering in the village) ritual

is performed twice a year: March-April and October-November. *Tusyu pahl preepa* (controlling the villagers after hailstorm) performed in March-April. It is practiced to save people and livestock from possible bad weather after a hailstorm. And, *Naas teepa* (control the village from everyday work) ritual performed on March-April and July-August in the evening.

The yearly ritual calendar suggests that the Gurungs of the study area consider the worship of nature crucial for their everyday life, and the well-being of the village as a system. The Gurungs believe that if they disregard and dishonour nature, bad things will befall upon them. Hence, they do the periodic ritual offerings and worship of nature. However, religious beliefs and ritual practices may not be sufficient to enforce ethical and non-exploitative use of natural resources all the time. Hence, the Gurungs of the Sikles have long followed customary rules and regulations or *riti-thiti* to manage and regulate the sustainable use of natural resources. For instance, there is a *pye*, known as '*Kucha kyaa*' which focuses on how the Gurung began farming. According to this *pye*, Gurungs practised slash-and-burn farming and followed rituals and customary *riti-thiti* from the very beginning of Gurung's history; it says the Gurung people depended on the blessing of ancestors, knowledge of the religious specialist, and the reliance on nature from the beginning of their history.

Villagers must conform to this *riti-thiti*. Being a native of the study area, I can say that the people in Sikles continue to abide by this customary village *riti-thiti*. The village customary institution and organization of the village chief, the village *Mhina*, the ritual priests, and the mothers' group collectively work to enforce the *riti-thiti*. Sara Parker writes about these traditional customary practices of the Gurung village:

This is a system of customary rules and regulations that are developed by a council of village leaders. Respected members of the community were chosen to represent the ward on the village council and after consulting the population within the ward they

developed rules and regulations in relation to natural resources used and village life in general (Parker, 2005, p.24-25).

Thus, local religious beliefs, ritual practices, understanding of the sacredness of nature, and people's practical needs for agricultural activities shape the symbolic and practical environmental relations between villagers, deities, and nature.

### 7.1.1 *Lauhri* and the Nature Worship

In the previous chapters, I highlighted the important roles of *Pachyus* in the Gurung rituals related to the soul journey (of the dead person), ancestor worship, and the bringing back of the lost *Plah* (of the living person). For the worship of nature and local deities of nature, the *Lauhri*s are the chief ritual specialists and performers. Without them, the Gurung families cannot perform these rituals. So, the *Lauhri*s play an indispensable role in mediating the relations between the villagers, nature, and the local deities of nature.

*Lauhri*s from different clan groups are entitled to perform different rituals for the worship of local deities of nature. For example, one of the most important rituals of nature worship *Tōh theepa* ritual is and should be performed by the *Lahuri* from *Tu* clan. The *pye* and myth of the founding of Sikles village say that the deities of nature became happy with the priestly works of the *Lauhri* from *Tu* clan. Hence, they are the 'official' ritual specialist of this ritual, and all the ritual texts or the *pye*, are orally chanted by the *Lauhri*. Similarly, *Lauhri*s from the *Harputhar* clan are responsible for *saāt lapa* rituals; *Lauhri*s from the *Dhaprang* clan for *Mpauhtu*. These *Lauhri*s, who have been performing these different rituals for generations, are both the ritual specialists and the custodians/owners of the ritual texts (*pye*) of these specific rituals. Through these ritual performances, they contribute to transferring knowledge and traditions to new generations. Similarly, the local Gurung astrologers (*Pāedi*) and *Mhina* are important and essential to the worship of nature.

There are, as shown in Table 7.1, at least ten rituals the Gurungs of Sikles village performed throughout the year to worship nature. Discussing all the rituals in detail will be beyond the scope of this chapter. I will focus on the following rituals in this chapter.

## **7.2 Worship of Village Boundary: *Tōh Theepa* Ritual**

*Tōh theepa* is one of the most important village rituals related to nature worship which is offered by the villagers in Sikles and other settlements including Parche, Tangting, Khilang, and Chipli. *Tōh* refers to the Gurung settlements or boundaries of their village or a particular location. *Theepa* means ‘to honour’. Hence, *Tōh theepa* is a ritual to honour the village territory and its natural resources that people rely on for their everyday life and agriculture.

In Sikles, the *Tōh theepa* ritual is performed three times a year: in *Chaitra* (March - April), *Jestha* (May-June), and *Bhadra* (August-September) on a Saturday in the sacred place called *Yheura* inside the forest above the village. The performance of these rituals also corresponds with specific local agricultural activities. I will return to this relationship between ritual and agricultural activities later in the chapter.

### **Myth Related to *Yheura***

All the major Gurung rituals of the Sikles village have their specific myths and histories regarding why, when, and how the Gurung ancestors began doing these rituals. The Gurung ritual priests and village elders know and tell people myths related to these rituals.

Gurungs of Sikles and other villages talk about a well-known myth that how their ancestors began the *Tōh theepa* ritual. Different villages may have slightly different versions of the myth but the key events that led to the beginning of the ritual are the same.

Accordingly, in the time of their great-great-grandparents, a demon posing as a man-eating tiger terrorized the villagers by killing humans and cattle. People used to call the demon turned into a man-eating tiger ‘*Mphee chapa Cha*’. When the actions of ‘*Mphee chapa*

*Cha* ' threatened the survival of the village, people called a meeting and invited the learned priests, village elders, and others to discuss the possible ways to stop the man-eating demon from harming villagers. The priest said that the villagers must worship the deity of the forest 'Yheura' by offering a slaughter of a sheep whose wool has never been sheared before. Such sheep are called *Chhar pae* in its ritual language. After performing this ritual offering, the demon, in the form of a man-eating animal, disappeared and people were saved from this 'Mphee chapa Cha '.

There are different versions of this myth, but all emphasize that the problem of the man-eating tiger disappeared after the ritual offering. One of my key research informants Mr. Damar Bahadur Gurung, who was in his late 60s, also chief *Lauhri* priest (lauhri cheepa) from the *Tu* clan from the village of Gairi thar, Sikles, told me that the Gurung ancestors started this ritual when they lived in the ancestral land of *Chō naas*. They continued to perform the ritual when they migrated to and settled in the present day Gurung villages in and around Sikles. After some generations, the Gurungs scattered into different places and the later generations forgot about the ritual offering. When the Gurungs lived in Kohla, people became sick; domestic animals were inflicted with different diseases, insects attacked the crops, and the land became unproductive. The community became mismanaged and disordered. All the Gurungs were shocked to experience such devastation. They spent challenging life conditions threatened both by diseases and starvation.

People of Kohla requested the Mhimper Khe (master and ancestors of *Tu Lauhri* priest) to perform the *Tōh theepa* ritual. The priest found out that people committed mistakes of ignoring and forgetting the local deities of nature; people had forgotten the contributions nature, and its resources make to agriculture and their everyday lives. Unlike the ancestors before them, villagers stopped offering the ritual. The people of Kohla did not seriously think about worshiping the nature god, which was done by their ancestors. So, the local deities

became unhappy and punished the people in Kohla through diseases and starvation. Then the *Lauhri* leader Mhimper Khe, revived the *Tōh theepa* ritual in Kohla. After this ritual, all the living beings, people, and domestic animals were relieved, and grain became productive.

Diseases disappeared from the area.

According to *Pachyu* informant Aas Bahadur, a similar case of diseases, starvation, and attacks by wild animals such as a tiger/leopard took place in Sikles in the initial period of settlement. Then, the people of the Sikles were spread here and there because they settled in five different places by five different clans. There was a ‘*Mphi Chapa Cha*’ (man-eater tiger/ leopard) and the leopard was troubling to the villagers. The healer *Pachyu* priest declared that *Tu Lauhri* must worship *Yheura* or *Yheura simi bhumi* or the god of nature. The priest said that the villagers should offer *Chhar pae* (sheep of which wool has never been sheared) to *Yheura*. After this ritual, the ‘*Mphi Chapa Cha*’ (man-eater leopard) disappeared from the forest and villagers became relieved.

According to this myth and past events, the *Tōh theepa* ritual is essential for the villagers. It is important to note that this myth and historical account emphasizes that bad luck and disasters will strike the local population if they disregard and forget the local deities of nature and do not use the resources responsibly. This is one of the key values and understanding of the human-environment relations the Gurung religion strongly prioritizes (see also Paudel, 2020). Thus, the Gurung myth of the *Tōh theepa* ritual underlines that people should always respect (*theepa*) nature and reciprocate back through ritual offerings. This myth also helps us understand why the Sikles villagers confirm to the old *riti-thiti* to govern their agricultural and other practices related to the use of natural resources.

### ***Tōh theepa*: Ritual Processes**

The *Tōh theepa* is performed in a sacred place inside the forest north of Sikles. Different clan groups are traditionally assigned different roles and responsibilities to organize

the ritual. According to Jagman Gurung (interview), a respected scholar of Tamu culture and history, there was a *Tōh theepa* place above the village of seven-hundred Sikles among the forest. There are sixteen stone slates in the sacred place. The *Pachyus* of *Harputhar* of Sikles define the day of *Tōh theepa* ritual. Before the day of *Tōh theepa* day, the *Mhina* of the *Kohla* clan messages all the villagers and *Tōh* god for *Tōh theepa* ritual. There are two kinds of slate stone for *Krōh* (a space on which ritual specialists sits). The slate stone of the village leader is called *chāe yo ma*. In the beginning, the slates were for the *Chwuta* of *Gairithar*. There are eleven other slates in *Sava chohw* called *chhāe y ma*. At the time of the *Tōh theepa* ritual, they wash and sacred the ninth slate stone. At the time of conveying messages to the villagers and local deities, the *Mhina* must bathe his full body, wear only a loincloth, and announce the message above the sacred stone. They need to bring out the fire, water, and other instruments of the *Tōh theepa* ritual from *Re che Rōh* (one of the historical clans among the Gurung community). On the day of the ritual, villagers should stop using the forest for collecting grass and firewood. Similarly, they must suspend all agricultural activities and the operation of local water mills on the day of *Tōh theepa* worship.

The Gurung astrologer chooses the time of the waxing moon, which they call *la-chhae*<sup>36</sup> (brightening moon) in the Gurung language (here, *la* means the moon and *chhae* means white or growing). Hence, the rituals are performed when the moon is growing.

Tilak Bahadur Gurung, who is one of the *Mhina* chiefs in the study area belonging to the *Kohla* clan and one of the most experienced *Mhinas*, described the ritual process of the *Tōh theepa* to me:

On the day of the ritual, the team of the ritual performers must leave the village early in the morning, around 1 am to 2 am so that no villager should meet them on the way.

It is considered inauspicious if someone meets the ritual team. In such a case, bad

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<sup>36</sup> La chhae-the literal meaning of la refers to the moon and chhae refers to growing. In the case of Sikles, mostly they worship ancestors and local deities at the period of waxing moon.

luck may fall upon the person meeting them; she/he may get sick or even die within a few days. The ritual team must move out of the village carefully when the villagers are sleeping. *Mhinas* should carry the ‘*Chhar pae* sheep’ to be offered to the deity *Yheura*. On the way, the *Mhina* washes the sheep and *Lauhri* chants his texts. At that time, the sheep should be agreeable or satisfied to all the deities and villagers, which they call *Kyuu khaarpa*. After this, the *Lauhri* carries the sheep, and it should be *khru*pa (washed to become sacred) and *Khaarpa* to be agreeable for the ritual in the ritual places. The *Lauhri*, *Mhina*, village leaders, and other representatives sit on their own *Yo la* (stones) or *Yo plaã* (plain stone) for the ritual.

The *Lauhri* priest recites his oral texts about the nature god and what villagers demand in different seasons. He is mostly devoted to the nature god through his recitation. The *Mhina* sacrifices the sheep and cuts meat into small pieces from every part of the body and offers it to the sacred forest or nature god. The *Lauhri* recites<sup>37</sup>:

<i>Nkyeeti krachai syo laimpu</i>	We devote our heads!
<i>Yochai syo laimpu</i>	We devote ourselves to it!
<i>Kgyuehmati chu Tõh syõ</i>	Please protect this area, people, houses,
<i>Churpa mphimai, dhee'n naa koe</i>	animals, forest, and production!
<i>peenu</i>	You are the owner of the forest!
<i>Kgyehmai tdo thepai lehmai</i>	You are the owner of water!
<i>Chhyu thepai lehmai</i>	You are the owner of the boundary
<i>Tõh thepai lehmai</i>	(area)!
<i>Kyu krai lehmai</i>	You are the owner of head of the water
	(krai-- head)

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<sup>37</sup> The Pye text was narrated for me by the *Lauhri* priest Damer Bahadur Gurung on Asoj 25, 2075 BS at his residence in the village. We talked for about four hours. He chanted the pye and explained the meanings of the pye in the common Gurung language. I noted all his pye - what he chanted and spoke.

<i>Kyu mpee lehmai</i>	You are the owner of the tail of the water!
<i>Kō kuri lehmai</i>	You are the owner of the hills.
<i>Tye kuri lehmai</i>	You are the owner of the rock

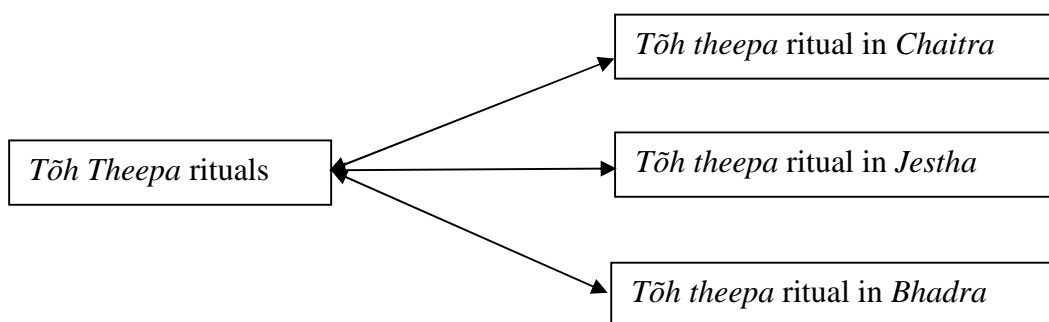
This ritual text shows during the *Tōh theepa*, the villagers express their devotion to the local deity of nature and ask the god to protect the village territory (hence, *Tōh*) and the people, animals, houses, forest, and agriculture. There are many signifying ritual symbolisms expressed in the ritual language and texts. It shows how the people of Sikles make offerings to and ask for help from the god of nature. The *Lauhri* and his texts, and all the villagers say that *Yheura* is the owner of all natural resources such as water, forest, rock, and hills as well. In other words, the ritual text tells people that they are not the owners of nature and the natural resources they use. This is an important ritual symbolism emphasizing the harmony between deities, nature, humans, and non-human beings in the village territory. Villagers believe that if *Yheura* is happy then the villagers gain what they demand, but, if unhappy then they do not gain anything.

*Tōh theepa* is also performed to ask the deity for some specific assistance such as stopping the hailstorm when the crops are ready for harvest, making the rainfall before the paddy plantation, or stopping the diseases inflicting people and cattle. During the ritual, the *Lauhri* offers the pieces of meat to *Yheura*, asks the deity to come down (to the ritual place), and puts forth the request on behalf of the villagers. The ritual event is also an act of communication between the deity and the people, mediated by the ritual priest. So, the *Lauhri* priest recites "Oh, local deities, you are bigger than big, you are longer than long. We offer you different organs of the sheep-ear, horn, tail, heart, lung . . . what you want or what you like, so come down". The *Lauhri* offers various body parts of the sacrificed sheep to *Yheura*, using the *Ntolto re hpa mai*.

### Bigger than Big Nature God

After the ritual offerings, the priests look at the liver of the sacrificed sheep to know the ‘response’ of the god and make predictions regarding monsoon rainfall, productivity, and other events by observing the liver of slaughtered sheep. The conditions of the body parts of the sacrificed animal are used as signs to say if the deity is happy or unhappy with the ritual offerings. The symbolism of body parts is taken seriously by the villagers. For example, when people do rituals asking for enough rainfall, and if priests find enough water in the liver, it signifies that gods are happy with people and their ritual offerings. It means there will be enough rainfall in the season. However, if priests do not find enough water, then they say the gods are unhappy with us and the ritual. Then, they pray seriously and devote themselves to all the natural deities for enough water. The common people also anxiously wait and discuss what would come from *Tōh theepa* worship.

Symbolically, the *Yheura* is a very powerful deity with both malevolent and benevolent characters. In Sikles villagers make ritual offerings to *Yheura* three times a year to ensure better agricultural productivity. Figure 7.1 shows the performance of this ritual in different months.



Source: Fieldwork, 2018

**Figure 7.1: Tōh Theepa Ritual in Different Months**

***Tōh Theepa Riual in Chaitra***

The months of *Chaitra* (March-April) and *Baisakh* (April-May) are the seasons of barley and wheat harvesting in the hilly region. Barley and wheat are one of the major crops and staple food grains in the mountain and hilly regions. This season is also the season of hailstorms which can damage the crops and put the villagers into a situation of food crisis. Hence, the people of Sikles, with the help of the *Lauhri* and his ritual team, perform periodic rituals to appease the nature deity asking for controlling hail and storms in the month of *Chaitra* as they prepare for the harvesting of barley and wheat. The ritual process is the same as I have discussed above. Since the main purpose of the *Tōh Theepa* ritual in *Chaitra* is to request the deity to stop the hailstorm or heavy rain, the *Lauhri* priest recites:

*Pmar Thaām chō peenu*      To put/close/lock the pole/door of gold [in the path of rain/hailstorm]

*Pmui Thaām Chō peenu*      To put/close/lock the pole/door of currency.

The priest prays to the nature god by reciting: "...put/close/lock the pole/door of gold and currency in the source of hailstone". The *Lauhri* research respondents did not know the exact meanings of the analogy of gold and currency used as analogies in this recitation. But they suggest the priest, by adorning the deity's door/deity (analogy of a house) with gold and currency, valuable wealth that humans desire, tries to flatter the deities with his words.

Villagers say that the worship performed at *Chaitra* also covers the month of *Baisakh*. The month of *Baishak* is the "*Baisakhra chou lapa*" or the seasons of wheat and barley harvest. They wish that there will be no heavy rains and hailstorms before the harvest. So, the *Lauhri* requests *Yheura* to close the door of the gold and currency to control the natural calamities.

### ***Tōh Theepa Ritual in Jestha***

The month of *Jestha* is again time for the next *Tōh theepa* ritual. Now, the villagers are very busy digging, ploughing, and sowing both *sa mro* or *saura* (non-irrigated fields) and *mbla miro* or *mblaura* (irrigated fields). So, the Gurungs of Sikles explain how busy they are and without enough hands to help them, by saying “I am willing to borrow extra the hands of dogs and foxes (*“Ntakhi syal yoi nkaeta nkahsiura”*).

The season for millet and paddy cultivation and planting seasons comes basically in the month of *Asar*. The villagers need a good water supply to irrigate their fields. Thus, they perform this *Tōh theepa* ritual in the month of *Jestha* month. Villagers need enough rainwater in this season for planting paddy in *Asar* and irrigation in *Shrawan*. They need enough water in the coming months. Therefore, they perform this *Tōh theepa* ritual in *Jestha* month. The *Lauhri* priest recites and demands enough water to nature god by reciting:

*Mpar Thām Thō Peenu*                      To open the door /pole of gold

*Mpui Thām Thō Peenu*                      To open the door/pole of currency

In this ritual, the *Lauhri* priests pray for the “opening of the door of rainwater”. By offering this ritual and making the offering, villagers believe and hope that the water source will open; enough rainwater will come during the plantation time. But, sometimes, villagers experience a long drought period in the planting seasons. They could not gain enough water for irrigation. Then the villagers say that bad luck must have occurred that may have emptied the place of water in the slaughtering sheep in *Tōh theepa* worship. Villagers think that the god of *Yheura* is not happy this year with them. They think some of them have made mistakes to *Yheura*.

I have tried to explain in this and previous chapters, that the Gurungs have their own cosmological beliefs about how humans and non-human beings live in mutually interdependent and interconnected worlds (three worlds) but are influenced and affected by

good and evil forces and power. Rituals are one of the practices through which individuals and villagers try to maintain a balance or overcome obstacles posed by powerful non-human beings and spiritual beings. This does not mean that the Gurungs of Sikles only rely on rituals; they also act on the “real locally existing environment” as Rappaport (1979) says. For example, the village has a customary rule prohibiting the use of the forest every Tuesday to collect firewood and grass during the month of *Chaitra* when the forest is drier. I will discuss these customary rules in the following sections. So, when villagers experience droughts during the plantation time or hail storms during the harvesting time, they think some of them (people) may have made some mistakes to anger nature (god). In other words, this belief rather than being a superstitious one, asks people to reflect on their behaviours and practices of exploiting the natural resources haphazardly. Hence, there is a moral and practical meaning of ethical ecological relationships.

### ***Tōh Theepa Ritual in Bhadra***

This is the last *Tōh theepa* ritual of the year. It is performed in the month of *Bhadra*. The ritual, like the *Tōh theepa* performed in the month of *Jestha*, is to request the nature god *Yheura* to “close the sources of water and stop the storm and hailstone”. The villagers will finish their plantation and weeding by the *Shrawan* month. They do not need more water for paddy and millet in this season. The millet and Paddy grow in the month of *Bhadra* month. Villagers believe (based on their practical experiences) that from *Bhadra*, there will be slow rain. The heavy rain disturbs the good production of paddy and millet. So, they perform the ritual to stop the heavy rain. During this *Tōh theepa* priest recites:

*Mpar Thaãm chō peenu*

To put/close the door/pole of gold

*Mpui Tha m chō peenu*

To put/ close the door/ pole of currency

The *Lauhri* priest says: "We finished our summer agriculture, finished our planting and irrigation. Now we do not need enough water, please close the door/pole of water resources, nature god."

From the viewpoint of nature conservation, this ritual is important for maintaining the area's ecology and diversity. There are trees hundreds of years old, and the oldest trees are falling naturally; people do not cut these fallen trees for firewood. Villagers are protecting the *Simi-bhumi* not only for human beings but also for animals and crops. All these wild animals, birds, groves, and species are under the care of *Yheura Simi-bhumi* and these are the same family. Villagers believe and say "If we hunt and cut down or harm these family members, then the god of *Yheura* will become angry and punish us. As a result, we will have bad luck till our coming generations"<sup>38</sup>. So, the people separate themselves from the *Yheura* in their daily activities. They are very careful of the *Yheura*.

The people who are living out of the village watch local gods closely, with a deeper interest. If some periodic rituals are happening there, they remember the *Yheura Simi-bhumi*. The priests, knowledgeable and old village elders bless and congratulate people in the name of *Yheura* and say that "*Yheura Simi-bhumi paawuir pih chhyānpa- chhyāpa tatwo*" (to look by *Yheura Simi-bhumi* and bless you). They say, "*Yheura Simi-Bhumile Hami Sabaiko rachhya garun*; let all of us be protected by *Yheura Simi-bhumi*"

### 7.3 Worship of Water

Water is one of the most vital entities of nature for the survival of all living organisms on Earth. Hence the belief that 'water is life' is held universally across all cultures and societies. Similarly, the worship of water – rivers, springs, ponds, and other sources of water – is a universal practice across all cultures (Orlove & Caton, 2010; Strang, 2023). In the study

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<sup>38</sup> Based on my interactions and discussions with local people during my study period. Being a native of the study area, I too adhere to these beliefs and practices.

area, there are many places of water sources. Some of these are considered very sacred; priests and villagers go there to worship the local deities and take ritual baths.

One such sacred place is *Faima*, located on the western side of Sikles or between Parche and Sikles village, inside a thick forest. *Faima kyu* is one of the most popular local deities and one of the main sources of water in the area. The priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* have to take the name of *Faimu kyu* when they perform rituals in the name of *Faimu kyu* when they perform rituals in the name of local deities.

On the first of *Magh*, ritual priests, healers, and ordinary people go to the place of *Faimu Kyu* early in the morning for a ritual bath and praying. First, they wash their full bodies and then they pray *Faima kyu* with *lahwa*, incense, *syee* (rice) and slaughter a chicken as a ritual offering to local deities. They find their luck by observing the heart, liver, and bile of the slaughtered chicken. On this day, healers go to *Faimu* to get blessings from their teachers-gurus to receive knowledge and mantra.

Mr. Yuman Singh Gurung from Parche village, in his late 60s, also, a healer and a priest from *Pahchyu* clan, told me that he was given the healing power and tantra mantra in his dream by his *guru* at this sacred place on the day of *Faima kyu* ritual. He says: "I worship *Faima kyu* every first day of *Magh* month. The god comes to *Faima kyu* on the first day of *Magh* month to give an audience to his followers and those who worship the deity." People also come to this place on the day of the ritual seeking blessings from *Faima kyu* to have children. People believe that *Faima kyu* is a very powerful deity who can bless people with children. There are many individuals in the study area, including the researcher himself, who believe that they were blessed with a child after they worshiped *Faima kyu*, asking for a child, on the day of the ritual at the sacred place.

*Faima kyu* is an important source of irrigation and water mills. Parche village is near *Faima kyu*, so they use the water of *Faima kyu* for water mills and irrigation also. Therefore,

*Faima kyu* is not only ritually important but is also important for drinking water, irrigation, and local watermills. The sacredness of the area and ritual practices have positively contributed to the protection of the source of water since the long past.

*Neetu* is another sacred place in the area. It lies in the west of Sikles, between Parche and Sikles. On the first of *Magh*, the Gurungs from *ko ye* can worship the deity by slaughtering a sheep as a ritual offering. It is also one of the main sources of drinking water and timber. There is clean drinking water in *Neetu* and the water is distributed in *Gairithar* and *Ko y thar*. The trees in the proper *Neetu* are not cut down but people cut trees surrounding *Neetu*.

Similarly, *Mpauhtu* is a sacred place located above the village *Dhaprang Thar*<sup>39</sup>. *Mpauhtu* is also the name of the local deity of the source of drinking water. So, the villagers refer to it as *Mpauhtu kyu* or *Mpauhtu kyu fue* (sacred water). Here, *Kyu* refers to ‘water’ and *fue* is ‘sacred’. People worship *Mpanhtu*, bathe, and say *Mpauhtu kyu fue*.

A very popular and sacred place in this region for sacred water and bathing, the history of *Mpauhtu* is related to the history of *Yheura*. The *Pachyu cheepa* late Ash Bahadur Gurung said that the god of *Yheura* opened the source of water in *Mpauhtu*. It is believed that the god of *Yheura* himself uses the sacred water from *Mpauhtu*.

There are many sources of water within and close to the territorial boundary of Sikles. These sources of water are vital for the local ecology for forests, plants, wild animals, humans, cattle, agriculture, and others. The people of Sikles consider many of these water sources and their surrounding areas to be sacred and an abode of deities, ghosts, and other powerful spiritual forces. Gurungs of other areas also have similar beliefs about water sources. Jiban Paudel discusses the beliefs of the Nhason people of Manang about water and water resources:

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<sup>39</sup> The place lies in the territory of Dharprang thar and is one the most important ritual places of this place (the Gurungs of Dharprang thar). However, geographically, it also comes under the whole Yheura area.

In the imagination of the people of Nhason, water and water sources can be understood both as pure or habitat of goddesses and gurus, and impure or habitat of demons, which are seen in their rituals, cultural practices, and other behaviours. .... Most water sources like springs, lakes, water-falls, and rivers are pure or sacred places where the people of Nhason attend their many rituals and festivals throughout the year. They believe that if they stuff polluted things in the mouth of springs, the spring deity will be angry with them and make stormy rain.... All springs are not taken as the 'holy places' or 'habitats of deity'. They equally considered some springs and lakes to be "unholy" or "the habitat of demons". For example, people do not drink the water from a spring that comes out from Bhkatanbhir even if they are thirsty. It is called *mle-kyu*, (forgotten water). It is believed that people will forget everything if they drink the water. The villagers use the water only to feed the souls of dead people during the process of delivering it to La (heaven) in funeral rites' (Poudel, 2016, p.).

The people of Sikles also have myths of both gods and demons related to the water sources. So, some water resources are not used for drinking. There is a pond named "*Chikre ngyoh*" on the way to *Kohla* from Tangting village. The pond is very clear and sacred. Gurungs of the *Kromchhai* clan do not drink the water of *Chikre ngyoh*. They believe that their ancestors washed their clothes in *Chikre ngyoh*. Hence, they avoid drinking water from the source. People's views, behaviours, and actions toward water sources are influenced when religious beliefs and ceremonial activities instil these sources with powers that are either sacred or demonic. They will not only worship these resources but also avoid polluting the sources which can contribute to the protection of water sources (Kala, 2017; Dunnamah, Williams, Hamangamdo & Kwale, 2016). Rituals and worship play a significant role in the protection of natural resources in Sikles.

Now I will briefly discuss and analyse the ritual worship of the *Mpauhtu* deity. On the last day of *Push* month, villagers from *Dhaprang* thar clean the trail to *Mpauhtu* and the area. People offer *Lahwa* (fried rice) *dhaja* (pieces of cloth), and *dhup* (incense) to the god. They sacrifice a chhar pae sheep as a ritual offering and offer blood and pieces of meat to the *Mpauhtu* deity. Like in other rituals, the ritual priests use the sacrificed sheep's liver to find out the state of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. People told me that one year the underground water came out of *Mpauhtu* on the very first day of the month of *Magh* after they had performed the ritual. People were surprised as they had not seen the opening of the water in the winter season the previous years.

According to the late Aas Bahadur Gurung, the night before the ritual, they open the water on the stone taps at midnight. There are seven stone taps for bathing and all taps are opened simultaneously. People gather for worship and bathing; the water is very cold. First, people are very interested and impatient to take their turn for the ritual bathing and getting the sacred water. So, some people do not sleep at night to take the ritual bath in the sacred water. *Mpauhtu* is very popular for this ritual bathing in this area. People gather from many neighbouring villages and places in this holy place. They come from Pokhara, Lamjung, and neighbouring villages like Tangting, Parche, Khilang, Chipli, Taprang, Thak, Ghyaprang, Yanjakot, Targau, Chhachok, Mouja, Moriya and so on.

*Mpauhtu kyu fue* is not only important for the water source but also for the sacred forest. The place of *Mpauhtu* is covered with a huge jungle as the people of the Sikles do not collect firewood, timber, and grass from this sacred forest. Thus, on the one hand, the ritual regulates natural resource management, and on the other hand, the people of Sikles get a clean source of drinking water.

#### 7.4 Rituals, Agriculture, and Customary *Riti-thiti*

Writing about the relations between religious beliefs, ritual practices, customary practices, and conservation of nature in adivasi communities in India, Kala (2017) highlights:

According to the unwritten constitution of the community, generally, no one can destroy or cut trees in the sacred groves. Collection of dried wood is also not allowed. The trees inside the sacred groves are not touched by the axe in India except when the wood is realized for the repair of religious buildings. Forest is always considered sacred by the indigenous communities in India, and they believe that forest gives power to their deities. In some indigenous communities, especially during festivals, the power of deity is brought to the village temple through rituals and once the festival is over the same power is returned to the forest again by performing some specific rituals (p. 27)

The Gurungs of Sikles also have an unwritten constitution they call *riti-thiti* or local customary practices. They have continued the traditional social structure and institutions that assign various roles and responsibilities to different customary social positions such as the village chief, messenger, priests, and others. These roles and their responsibilities are transparent and approved by the villagers themselves through their meetings. Villagers abide by and follow the customary *riti-tithi* concerning the protection of sacred lands and sustainable use of natural resources.

Religious beliefs and practices of nature worship contribute towards the conservation of forests and other natural resources. No one can easily enter the *Yheura simi-bhumi*. My argument here is that the *Yheura* is located above the village. If people cut down the trees for firewood and fodder for domestic animals, their actions can bring down stone and soil in the village. Then there would be problems of landslides, land degradation, soil erosion, and the water resources may disappear and convert into dry land. This entire problem may affect the

village. So, ritual regulation and natural resource management are interconnected to one another. Rituals and *riti-tithi* protect natural resources which in turn protect animals and human beings. Therefore, the local villagers in Sikles find the value of and importance of these rituals and *riti-tithi* in maintaining the balance in the relation between humans, non-human beings, and ecology. I will provide some examples of the customary practices which incorporate religious rituals and *riti-thiti* in Sikles.

#### 7.4.1 *Plura Ch pa* (Mixing Seeds)

This is a ritual related to agriculture, usually performed in *Magh* month before the seedling of plants. There is a local customary rule that prohibits anyone from doing seedling before the *plura ch pa* ritual. The literal meaning of *plu* is seed and *ch pa* is starting or establishing. In other meaning, *plura ch pa* refers to ‘*Sane Plu pmlopa*’ or the mixing process of local varieties of seeds with soil on a special day by a chosen person. The person who is to mix seeds with soil is called *sōkya* in the Gurung language for this ritual. He is responsible for performing all ritual practices for that year. The Gurung *Pāedi* (Gurung astrologer) finds the right person and fixes the day to mix seeds with soil after calculating their zodiac sign. *Sōkya* mixes the seeds (millet, maize, and paddy) with soil, puts it on the green banana leaf banana, and keeps it in her/his house safely.

Mr. Gardene (nickname) who is 75 years old, and Mr. Karna Sing, also of the same age, from *Sava* thar are the owners of this traditional *riti thiti*. Both Gurungs are retired Indian army. It is believed that the *Sava* tharians have carried this traditional *riti-thithi* since ancient times. I talked to both about this *Plura ch pa* practice. Mr. Gardene was the *sōkya* of that year’s *Plura ch pa* ritual. The year before, in the month of *Asar*, he came with me for the removal of some inauspicious things. The Gurungs of Sikles believe that the person who is *sōkya* for one year could be attacked by inauspicious power. According to Karna Singh Gurung, the *sōkya* needs to stand and look toward *Yeuhra* (the north of the village) and say:

“*Duniyako bhar maile boke, mero bhar timile boka*” (I have taken the burden of all the people [I need to prepare the seeds for all the people], you take mine). This is how *sōkya* communicates with the powerful *Yeuhra* and asks the deity to protect her/him from being attacked by evil forces while performing the ritual of mixing seeds.

During the sowing period and preparing seedlings, *sōkya* persons take out the seed kept in storage and then mix it with other seeds and proceed to other activities in the field like preparing seedlings of millet, maize, and paddy. They have long experiences and knowledge of saving seeds of various local races of crops. It seems *sōkya* people prefer the seeds of local varieties of crops and immediately accept the hybrid seeds recently introduced in the village. They believe that soil (land) provides crops as well as other staple food for their livelihood. Therefore, they pay their great respect to the soil by worshiping it on the same day. Thus, this ritual of mixing seeds honours and preserves the local varieties of seeds and recognizes the soil as the elemental deity of the land.

One of my main informants for this traditional customary practices and local *riti-thiti* was Mr. Lok Krishna Gurung, who is a retired army from India of the captain rank, the elder son of *Saāla Mhina* (leader *Mhina* of his period in the study area) and one of the owners of *riti thiti* in Sikles.<sup>40</sup> According to him, the system *Sane plu mplopa* continues to find its significance and relevance because the process of seedlings is crucial for plantation and, thus for agriculture. Soil is a spiritual agent, a deity. Villagers must respect and honour the soil by choosing an auspicious day for mixing the seeds that will be planted in the soil. He said, “Soil (land) is like our mother for agriculture. So, we need to pray for the land for good crops throughout the year. We need to prepare seeds ritually so that these will be accepted by the soil for the growth of crops and better yields.”

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<sup>40</sup> By the owner of *riti-tithi* means these individuals carry the traditional knowledge and regulations when they take these customary offices and roles as *sōkya*, *Mhina*, *Parchuys*, *Lauhri*, and others—used in the sense of custodians of the customary practices.

#### 7.4.2 *Rōhsyo Praapa* and *Saāt Lapa*: Rituals and Paddy Plantation

The Gurungs of Sikles practise common interests and *riti-tithi* for the local agricultural system, determined by their unwritten village constitution or customary practices. As per this rule, villagers must start planting millet on the first day of the month of *Asar* or after this day but not before this day. They finish millet planting within two weeks or by the mid-*Ashad* month. Now the villagers are ready to plant the paddy.

Paddy plantation is an important activity and its timely completion in a successful manner will likely bring good results in terms of the growth of plants and yields in the harvesting time. Hence, paddy plantation is an important agricultural activity that all households in the village will take seriously. The Gurungs of Sikles follow the customary *riti-tithi* and ritual guidance to begin the paddy plantation. Like all major activities, villagers must start the paddy plantation on an auspicious day and seek the help of ritual specialists to pray for the deity's blessing. The village astrologer or Pāedi (especially Pachyu) gives an auspicious day to begin the paddy planting. The day between fourteen to sixteen of *Ashad* is selected as the auspicious day according to the villagers' time schedule.

The day before the paddy plantation day, the *Lauhri* priest, with the help of *Mhina*, performs a ritual called *Rōhsyo praapa* on behalf of villagers and blesses every house for the paddy plantation that begins the next day. The ritual is performed to ask the deities' blessing for the good health and luck of household members and cattle healthy and strong for the important agricultural work that begins the next day. Similarly, the ritual is also performed by asking deities to stop any diseases, crop-eating lotus, and insects, and to chase off any evils roaming inside the village boundary.

In this ritual, the *Lauhri* prepares a liquid mix of rice which is called *Rōhsyo*. Here, *praapa* means "to splash". Hence, it is the ritual of splash a liquid mix of rice (*Rōhsyo*) in every house in the village for the purposes I have cited above. The *Lauhri* and *Mhina* perform

the ritual in one of the houses and walk to all village settlements; the *Lauhri* chants his *pye* while *Mhina* splashes the liquid rice on the door of every house. platter

According to the *Lauhri* Lil Prasad Gurung from Sikles village, the day before the paddy plantation, *Lauhri* and *Mhina* gather in the house of the chief *Lauhri's* (*Ko hpo*) house to make the mixture of rice and water. Then they go to 'Sava Chohw' (not only physically but ritually central of the Sikles for customary practices) the centre of the village. Then one *Lauhri* and one *Mhina* sit on *Sava Yoō la*, the ritual slate stone of Sava. Two-member team – one *Lauhri* and one *Mhina* to the house of the village chief (then it was Ratan Singh Gurung) in Dhaprang thar. Then the *Lauhris* and *Mhinas* from the two areas i.e. *Sava Chohw* and *Dhaprang Thar*, begin splashing *Rhōsyo*, moving towards the location facing the 'Yheura' simultaneously.

*Lauhri* Lil Prasad Gurung chants the *pye* of *Rhōsyo praapa* while *Mhina* splashes the liquid of rice flour with a broom on both doors and inside the door of every house and says: "Rōhsyo .....Rōhsyo"<sup>41</sup>. The ritual liquid mix symbolizes the blessing and power of deities.

The *pye* goes like this:

<i>Chumai Fomai Mbohmai Nkamai Kumaila</i>	Let the resting place of this
<i>Ntahchai Khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	Family members be managed
<i>Kh chai khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	Let house be managed
<i>Tōh ra Khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	Let the boundary be managed
<i>Syō ra Khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	Let the streams and rivers (boundary) be
<i>Sā wa Prah'nwa Rala Chaipu Khapai Pohli</i>	managed
<i>khaya khala Thaapino</i>	
<i>Mpyela Khartye, kyula Parkhu, Mpaila Paihlu</i>	Be informed if goats are ill
<i>Mphila Ntahchai Kh chai</i>	Be informed if cows, sheep, buffaloes

<sup>41</sup> I participated in the *Rhōsyo praapa* in Sikles with Lauri Lil Prasad Gurung once about twenty years ago. He was not in Sikles during my research period between 2074 to 2077 BS as he left the village for a foreign job. When he returned, I frequently met him in Pokhara and discussed the ritual *pye* in detail. However, I have observed this ritual multiple times.

<i>Tōh ra syōra Chyane pmane krane fane aānte</i>	and peoples are ill
<i>Farkya aulo kyāsya Sormu Kuinela Rāhkai</i>	Resting place, shelter, boundary
<i>Khaya khala thaapino R hkai Khaya khala Thapino</i>	Headache, stomach disorder, cold
<i>Mpa Mrosi tyesira pāhla p hlu Nanchyo teeri</i>	Be informed of locusts in farms
<i>fyonohpai Khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	
<i>Ral Ra plu Kyula Kyu plu Mpyela Mpyeplu</i>	Be informed of demise of the end of
<i>Mphila Mpihplu</i>	Goats, sheep, cows and humans
<i>Thunu Tapai Khaya Khala Thaapino</i>	Let all these be secured.

The above ritual text is illustrative and insightful in understanding how the Gurung ritual priests speak to the local deities just before the beginning of the major agricultural activity of the season (paddy plantation) asking for the good health of the family members of each house so that they will be able to work from the next day. Similarly, they request the protection of people and cattle from diseases, and for the well-managed rivers (good water source but no flood) and the boundary of the village. “Let all these be secured”, the priest asks and prays to the deity. From the next day onwards, the villagers will begin the paddy plantation. Once they plant the paddy, villagers again perform another ritual to get the deities’ help in protecting the newly planted crop. This ritual is called Saāt Lapa.

### ***Saāt Lapa Ritual***

*Saāt Lapa* is another ritual related to the agricultural farming system in the study area. This ritual is performed the next day of *Rōhsyo praapa* ritual i.e. the next day of the beginning of the paddy plantation. Saāt lapa is the ritual offering to the local deity of the village boundary.

The *Lauhri* and *Mhinas* are the main ritual specialists for this ritual. This ritual is performed in the place called *Saāt wu*, located above *Harputhar*. There is a big stone and a cave, so the place is *Saāt wu*. Here, *wu* means ‘cave’ or den. The people of Sikles also say

*Saāt mau* because mau refers to the female gender. According to the *Lauhri* priest, they worship the deity of nature in this ritual and recite: “Oh *siltu-naltu* (local deities), we offer you what you want, and the villagers are going to plant different crops in different parts of the area. Please save our crops and us from any natural disasters”. Hence, the ritual is performed right after the paddy plantation to appease the local deities to ensure the vitality of the soil and the protection of the newly planted crops from natural disasters and other possible damages.

The *Lauhri* priest performs this *Saāt lapa* on the day villagers’ plant paddy. The priest requests the deity to bless the villagers with good luck and good fortune as people start planting paddy. The *Mhina* slaughters a sheep as a ritual offering and takes out the liver of the slaughtered sheep. The ritual specialist ‘studies’ the liver and forecast the future of villages and planting productivity by ‘examining the liver. They offer different parts of slaughtered sheep to the local deity.

The fact that villagers perform the *Saāt lapa* ritual right after the plantation, just a day after *Rōhsyo praapa* shows the importance the Sikles villagers put on rituals as integral parts of their agricultural system. It also suggests the urgency village subsistence farmers feel about protecting their crops given the unpredictability of weather and other malevolent forces that can destroy the crops. This shows people’s belief in performing rituals to ensure good agriculture.

*Rōhsyo praapa* and *Saāt lapa* are good examples of how religious beliefs and rituals are integral to the agricultural production systems in Nepal. Many studies have shown how villagers across Nepal combine period rituals with their agricultural cycle and activities (Castanetti, Bhatta, & Greene, 2021; Khatri, 2003; Pandey, 2018; Paudel, 2020). The Gurungs of Skiles perform periodic rituals primarily to call on the local deities of nature to help the villagers in agricultural activities and to ‘secure’ the safety of the village and its

boundary from diseases, natural calamities, bad weather, and evil forces. Thus, these rituals are integral to local farming.

### **7.5. *Naas tipa* and *Seelee lapa*: Suspending Works, Protecting the Village**

Sikles village follows a customary practice of suspending agricultural and other works' known as '*Naas tipa*' on specific events and days. It is called "*gaun barne*" which means suspending or stopping farming and other everyday activities like collecting firewood, cattle grazing, collecting fodder, and others before or after certain events such as rituals. During the *Naas tipa*, no one can go to the fields to work or the jungle to collect grass or firewood. Villagers observe the *Naas tipa* in the months of *Chaitra* and *Sawan*. The villagers also organize a ritual called *Se lee lapa* on the day of *Naas tipa*. Hence, the customary *riti-thiti* and ritual are combined on this day.

The *Mhina* is given full authority to regulate and enforce the *Naas tipa* but villagers generally conform to and abide by this customary rule out of religious sanction as well as by the pressure of the community to respect the collective decision. In some cases, when people do not follow this rule, then the village headman orders *Mhina* to punish them" (Gurung, 2012, p.59). *Naas tipa* practice is also observed in many neighbouring Gurung villages of Sikles.

When I was in Sikles for my research in *Chaitra*, 2075 BS I closely observed the *Naas tipa* and the ritual that follows it (*Se lee lapa*). I met with *Mhina cheepa* (leader of *Mhina*) Tilak Bahadur Gurung, who announced all the villagers for this *Naas tipa* program and activities. He announced from the *Sava chohw*, the place located at the central part of Sikles.<sup>42</sup> The *Naas tipa* is practised for three Tuesdays in *Chaitra* and three Tuesdays in

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<sup>42</sup> The *Mhina cheepa* announces the day of *Naas tipa* announcing loudly from the centre of the village so that people can hear him and circulate the message across the village. This practice of conveying a message by loudly announcing is called *gho chōpa*.

*Shrawan* months and during the times of *Tōh theepa* and *Prah waapa* (exorcism practice) rituals.

Agriculture works in Skiles village begin from *Chaitra* till *Sawan*. This begins with the performance of mixing different seeds or the *plura Ch pa* in the month of *Magh*. There is a popular saying in Sikles – “*Chaitara pahn khlā pa*, and *Sāwara dhi Khlā pa*.” It says the forest (*pahn*) will be empty (no firewood and grass) in *Chaitra* and in the month of *Sawan*, the house (*dhee*) will be empty (no grains to eat). So, people are stopped from using forests for collecting firewood and grass every Tuesday in the month of *Chaitra*. There is inter-relationship between *Naas tipa riti-thiti* (oral customary system) and resource management. The month of the *Chaitra* is naked and desolate, so *Naas tipa* contributes to the control of forest resources. Villagers believe that if they do not follow the rules, the deity of nature will punish them and crisis will follow, especially in agricultural practices.

According to my informant Lok Krishna, until fifteen years ago, the local rules and regulations were followed strictly; villagers were afraid of the *Mhina* groups and their full authority to enforce the *Naas tipa*. Now, in 2075 BS, I observed some striking changes in the village. There were fewer domestic animals, and many plots of agricultural land were barren. The new generation of villagers practised new trades. However, the same days for *Naas tipa* and *Se lee lapa* rituals on three Tuesdays of *Chaitra* and three Tuesdays of *Shrawan* months have continued in the village. The *Mhina* warns all the villagers not to go to the fields and the jungle, and not to do farming work. Nobody crosses this warning and rule. If someone disturbs the rule then the village leader and village assembly punish him.

#### **7.5.1 *Se lee lapa*: Diseases and Rituals**

Diseases and epidemics threaten humans, society, and their livelihoods. In the past, villagers across Nepal experienced different kinds of diseases and epidemics. People had cultural beliefs and explanations on why such epidemics and natural calamities occur in their

villages. They may also rely on ritual performances to call on deities to protect them from such epidemics. For instance, Rai (2013) shows that when the Dhimal, one adivasi group from Nepal's eastern Tarai lived in the malarial forests, they used the annual village ritual (shrejat) to call on their ancestor deities to protect them from epidemics, floods, and attacks of wildlife. This does not mean that Dhimals relied only on rituals; they have indigenous knowledge about the use of herbs, particular plants, food, and special drinks to keep their bodies adapted to the malarial ecology. But rituals are one of the collective cultural efforts to keep the village safe from epidemics by relying on the power of their ancestral deities.

In the context of the study area, the Gurung's myths about ritual and historical events suggest that their ancestors used to face diseases and natural hazards that used to threaten their lives, livelihoods, cattle, and the whole village. They have many rituals that are devoted to controlling diseases and evil forces from entering the village as well as chasing away these out of the village. In this section, I will briefly discuss two of these rituals.

*Se lee lapa* ritual is related to controlling the entering of epidemics and diseases into the village. The diseases are believed to be brought by bad spirits, witches, ghosts, and outsiders coming from and through other villages. The practice of this ritual also indicates the history of the occurrence of such epidemics in Sikles in the past. By performing the *Se lee lapa* ritual, the priests are believed to 'close' the village ritually and stop diseases from entering its boundary.

The priest needs and uses a part of a specific tree for this ritual. The local name of the ritual tree is '*Tiuru se* ' or '*Tipru se* ' (*Rhus semialata*) or *Bhatkiulo* in Nepali. The tree is broken into many pieces to be used in the ritual. The literal meaning of '*se* ' is 'wood'; '*khlee*' means 'to split' and '*lapa*' means 'to do'. Hence, the ritual is called *Se lee lapa* in the local Gurung language. The Gurungs of Sikles do not generally use the *Tiuru* tree for firewood because it burns faster in the fire. However, the wood is used for controlling inauspicious

power that brings diseases. This ritual is performed in *Chaitra* (March/April) *Shrawan* (July/August) month, on three Tuesdays. *Lauhri* and *Mhinas* are involved in this ritual; *Lauhri* is the ritual priest for the ritual while *Mhina* assists the priest for the completion of the *Se lee lapa* ritual.

### ***Se lee lapa* Ritual Process**

In the first week of March, 2020, I visited my field area to collect some of my research data where *Lauhri* priests were performing ‘*Se lee lapa*’ in Sikles. Yam Bahadur Gurung was the main *Lauhri* priest for this ritual. The ritual took the whole day. According to *Lauhri* priest Yam Bahadur Gurung, people began performing the ritual in the past to protect all human beings, animals, and grains in areas like *Chō* and *Kohla* from epidemics of diseases. *Lauhri* priest performed *Se lee lapa* ritual when different diseases attacked human beings, animals, and damaged grains in the village.

For this ritual, *Mhinas* must bring raw *Tipru* (ritual wood) from the jungle in the early morning period, chop it into pieces of roughly 12cm x 6cm x 1.5cm, and put the heap of those cuboids on the clean ground in an open place in the village.

The *Lauhri* carries a box and small clay pellets as arrows. He also needs an herb, of good smell collected from high altitude, called *Syuri dhup*. He recites his texts, chants *mantra*, and revolves around the pile of chopped wood. As he goes around, he shoots the piles of wood with the clay pellets from different directions. When he is done performing this ritual act and chanting of *mantra*, the *Mhina* slaughters a rooster and sprinkles its blood all over the *Se lee*. This act is "*Khrui peepa*" or 'giving blood'. The ritual chanting, shooting the *Se lee* with clay pellets, slaughtering of a chicken, and sprinkling the chicken's blood over the ritual items (wooden cuboids) make the *Se lee* sacred and powerful to stop the evil forces.

Next, the *Mhina* makes a few garlands by joining many pieces of the *Se lee* and hangs each of the garlands in different chowks or main entries of the village to stop bad spirits and diseases from entering the village.

In the *Se lee lapa* ritual, children gather to take the *Se lee* wood pieces for their house. They prefer to take the red *Se lee* covered with the blood of the sacrificed rooster. Animal sacrifice as a ritual offering is integral to many of the Gurung ritual practices in Sikles. People that the *se lee* covered with blood is more powerful, hence effective in stopping evil forces and diseases from entering inside their houses. The *Mhinas* give a piece of *se lee* to every house the same day after returning from the *Se lee lapa* place. The Gurungs hang that piece of *Se lee* above the door where old *Se lee* pieces are also already hanging. It is believed that when evil beings see these *Se lee* woods hanging in the door, then they will/cannot enter the houses.

In this chapter, I highlight how the Gurung religious beliefs and rituals in the research region help to preserve natural resources like forests, water, pastureland, and others. The villagers perform rituals periodically throughout the year to honour and thank the local deities of nature. Through these rituals, the villagers seek the deities' blessing and assistance in assuring timely rains, healthy livestock, good soil fertility, and protection from diseases and disasters. These rituals show the Gurungs of Sikles believe that religion and ritual practices are integral to their agricultural system.

The Gurung customary practices or *riti-thiti* related to regulating the use and protection of natural resources are shaped by peoples' religious beliefs, myths, and past experiences of diseases, disasters, and other hazards. I discuss how the Gurung *pye* recited and narrated during the ritual performances “dramatize” (Turner, 1969) these experiences. This chapter further illustrates that the Gurung people of Sikles embrace ‘animism’ as their religious beliefs and practices.

## Chapter Eight

### Summary and Conclusion

#### 8.1 Summary

The central objective of this research is to examine and explore Gurung's oral text-based soul, ancestor and agrarian rituals at Sikles village of Kaski district. The soul journey process, ancestors' worship and nature worship are examined and explored from the lens of traditional Gurung ritual specialists and common practitioners. The oral text, ancestor worship and nature-worshiping are interconnected to make the Gurung's life and death in this territory. Though the Gurungs and their culture and religions have been studied by both foreign and Nepalis scholars, their access and understanding of the oral text and oral tradition based ritual interpretation was found limited and misinterpreted. Similarly, the increasing influences of Hinduism, Tibetan Lamaism, and the expansion of Christianity, have posed grave threats and challenges local religious and ritual practices to the continuity of the customary ritual practices and the preservation of knowledge about rituals and nature.

Their *pye tā lhu tā* (oral texts and traditions) was not documented though *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* (ritual specialists) continued chanting orally in different ritual practices. Though several researches have done on the Gurung community, they have not documented convincing stories of oral text based soul journey and ancestor worshiping. Their history, ritual and identity were contested because of misunderstanding and lack of understanding of oral text. Gurungs traditional rules and values, rituals are based on their historical background, events, myths and indigenous knowledge. Thus, the study explored that, how the Gurung perceived about their soul journey practice in the *Pai* ritual. What are the relations between living Gurung and their ancestors? And also, the study focuses that why the Gurung worship nature and follow their local *riti-thiti* (local customary practices). And some major research questions are raised here, in what way do the Gurung *pai* and other rituals

emphasized the relationship between the living and the ancestors? How do the Gurung conceptualized and explain the relations between human and nature? What are the relationships among the underworld (evil world), the living world (human world) and the ancestors' world? All these issues are based and analysed according to their traditional ritual practices. I argued that earlier studies are not sufficient because most of them are based on experiences of urban cantered elites and literature reviews. The problems with previous studies on the Gurung of the Sikles are not focused on the importance oral text in ritual, nature and culture and the traditional ritual practitioners: *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*. Through this, central theme of this dissertation is that relationship with supernatural being such as ancestors and nature deities of any human community is a crucial factor to examine how they define and practise in different rituals and ritual meaning too according to their *pye tã lhu tã*.

To address stated objectives in detail, I employed qualitative research design. Within the qualitative approach, exploratory, and descriptive designs are used. I adopted an ethnographic approach both in data collection techniques and writing style. Ethnography is considered a methodological hallmark of anthropology. Participatory observation, key informants' interview, observation and informal hangouts are tools and techniques of data collection. Being a traditional ritual specialist (*Pachyu*) myself, I played double roles (ritual specialist and researcher) during fieldwork. I maintained everyday field notes, recording and audio-visual records during fieldwork. Descriptive note and analytical note are maintained during field stay. My family's patrilineal ancestors including me are known traditional ritual specialists (*Pachyu*) in the village. The established identity made it easy as well as difficulties in the course of data collection. Since I was one of the interpreters of oral text, they hesitated to speak when I asked them questions and meaning to ritual practitioners. They said that I had knowledge of every aspect of oral text and meaning.

I have long experiences for *Pai* rituals performances because I followed my father late Harka Bahadur Gurung, brother Aas Bahadur Gurung and Grandfather Chandra Singh Gurung, who were more popular and knowledgeable *Pachyus* in the area. I have transformed my identity and role from *Pachyu* and ritual expert to researcher and asking people about some known and unknown issues. Some of them commented that I was a source of information. Though it is academic research I am excited and responsible in my research field and presented as a researcher. Fieldwork carried out from September 2017 to August 2019. As a ritual specialist and researcher, I engaged in *Pai* ritual observation many times in 2019 and 2020. I stayed at my own house Gairithar, Sikles where my younger brother Bhasar Gurung and his family have been living. After the long-term stay, I have visited to observe and participate in ritual occasions in the Sikles village. Recorded data are transcribed and translated by myself. Then, field notes and translated data are manually coded. Then the categories and themes are generated. They are presented in narrative, pictorial and tabulation forms. I employed narrative and thematic analysis techniques.

The main focus of the research is on myths and oral texts which the traditional priests (*Pachyu* and *Lauhri*) have been reciting since ages. However, in the present scenario, especially in urban areas, new practices are being taken into account. This helps only to degrade the history, culture and rite so, we should have to study our own history and culture. The oral text culture has been practiced for thousands of years. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are only the authentic persons of such oral texts and myths. It can be argued that the history of evolution, establishment of states in different places and their culture showed the process of migration of the Gurung in Nepal. The explanations of all these texts are done during death ritual, *Pai* ritual, ancestral worship and *simi-bhumi* puja (local deities worship). Sikles is the centre of sacrament and culture of the Gurung community.

The oral text was considered as a common treasure and authentic source to understand historical trajectories of the Gurung community. Most of the *pye* is in an ancient dialect called *Chō kyuee* in which current Gurungs' vernacular language was mixed. Therefore, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are authentic interpreters of the oral text and further interpretation of the oral text required. It can be argued that oral texts aren't only culture, history, and rites in *pye tã lhu tã* but also there are the explanation of whole lifestyle, philosophy, and civilization of Gurungs as well

To connect my field data to the establishing theoretical approach, I employed symbolic theories in broad and ritual theory, anthropology of death, soul, oral text and perspectivism specifically. Symbols of colours have significant interpretation among the Gurungs like Turner's (1967: 68) argument of milk-tree symbols especially, black, red and white. It was agreed about these colours and its symbolic meaning with Turner and Gurung different rituals practices. The Gurung wears black *tika* (colour) of charcoal on their forehead when they perform death and *Pai* rituals. Symbolically, black colour represents inauspicious, darkness, evils, bad luck and so on. Red colour symbolizes revolt, conflict, winner, not among the human being, but god vs evil, priest vs evil, and human being vs evil. For example, the Gurung wear red colour (*tika*) in *Devi lapa* (the ritual practice for protecting family, animals and grain) and *Kga tu lapa* (the ritual practice for protecting animals) ritual. They slaughter hen and rooster in these rituals and make *Ka tu*. And the whiteness symbolizes peace, auspicious, good luck, bless, auspicious power as well. For example, *Khyaper lapa* (first hair cut) ritual of boys, *Nkyui chol peepa* (giving a set of Gurung dress) ritual of girls, marriage practices they put white *tika*, rice with milk. Likewise, after finishing inauspicious rituals like funeral and *Pai* ritual they put white *tika* which means black day or inauspicious days or impure days are over and now good days or auspicious or days of purity are coming.

Putting tika is not only the case in such ritual practices but also practised in making different *Ka tus* (tormas). They use rice flour to make white torma for gods and ancestors and millet flour or black colour for evils. *Failu* (the worship of super power God), *Chhyopa* (ancestors God worship), *Plah khu* (collecting and calling soul of living people) which are gods and ancestors worship used white torma, but *Rhil kaipa* or *Rhil chōpa*, *Thaaso waapa* (a kind of exorcism of demons in funeral and *pai* ritual) ritual is exorcism of demon and used millet flour torma or black torma. According to the Gurung ritual practices and its symbolic meaning, white tormas are the symbols of god and ancestors while black tormas are symbols of ghosts or evils.

The Gurung practice offering and exorcism in different rituals. It is an offering practice for god, ancestors and local deities, and exorcism practice for evils, ghosts, witches as well. Mostly they use white sheep for offering rituals and black goats for exorcism rituals. In the *Pai* ritual they use sheep, which represents dead men and is called *Kgoh*. *Tōh theepa* (worship of village boundary) ritual is practised for protecting the village boundary and they use sheep for offering local deities. But, *Kyā saipa* (kill the road of witches, or ritually block the road of witches) *Nga h sy pa* (return the power of its direction) ritual for practice exorcism of demon, black chicken and black goat are used.

There is a special research work about Gurungs' rituals. The details of the rituals are presented and analysed in chapter five, six and seven. The Gurung priests *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant long oral texts in Gurung *Pai* ritual. On the third and last day of the *Pai* ritual, they chant the *pye* of migration which they call *Hyula ch pa pye* (the text of State establishment). The *pye* says that Gurungs migrated from somewhere of Siberia, China to Kohla (Nepal).

## **8.2. Gurung Concept of Death and Soul (*Plah*)**

The *Pai* ritual performs and dramatizes the important cosmologies of the traditional Gurung religion and culture. There is a different practice between funeral and *Pai* rituals. The

funeral ritual, some symbols and linguistic lexicon symbolically showed differences. The Gurungs of Sikles don't say he/she died during someone's death. They normally use symbolic words like 'Aarero' (no more), 'Aare' (absent), and *Waathei ro* (left) for the word death. Such soft language is helpful to come out of grief and *pain*. After the death, first *Aasyo* (maternal uncle) should have to offer *Aasyo Ko* (clothe from maternal uncle for death) to the dead body, only then the cremation process starts. According to Gurung there is the high importance of kinship relations in the death ceremony among the Gurungs. That sort of importance is crystal clear because of the role they perform during death. Especially the son-in-law, brothers, sisters and Mawali (maternal uncle or relation) play vital roles during the death ritual. *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform their respective duties reading *pye* to offer goodbye to the dead. Some people take death and after death rituals as common rituals but they are different. Death ritual is the cremation of the dead body whereas after death ritual is to send the dead properly to their ancestors.

In funeral procession, if the family of the dead person calls *Lauhri* than *Lauhris* perform the priestly ritual and if the dead person is of *Pachyu* member, both *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* perform the rituals from home to graveyard. *Tah kra* (relatives' brother) carries the *Lāh* (like a white flag) and *Ghyāh pal* (the Gurungs say path) follows. After the cremation, while coming back, people throw thorns at crossroads in order to keep aside evil powers. There is also the concept of purity and pollution in Gurung culture. After the funeral procession throwing a thorn in the crossroad is an example of purification. Furthermore, they purify themselves with water and inhale the scent of smoke of Dhupi. The members of the deceased get purified in home by a *Lauhri* priest which is called *Thaasō waapa* (a kind of exorcism practice in death ritual).

*Pai* ritual explains the Gurung concept of *plah* and their belief related to the three worlds and how these worlds are interconnected. The dead person's soul needs to be escorted

to the world of ancestors so that the person can have his/her afterlife happily in 'heaven'. The ritual priests, who own and know the *pye* can mediate and communicate between the living people, the soul, the evil forces, and the ancestors located in the three worlds. According to the *pye tã lhu tã*, the soul is uneasily and disorderly visiting everywhere of the three lands (evils, living and ancestral lands) before *Pai* ritual. Therefore, the main assumption of this *Pai* ritual practice is to separate the soul from evil's land and living land and journey to ancestors' land permanently.

One important ritual symbolism and emphasis of the *Pai* ritual is the focus on the kinship between the deceased person (and the soul) and the living. The ties of kinship and kinship structure are fundamental to the functioning of the customary Gurung society. In such rites, family, relatives and social community gather and work respectively. Chanting of priests, brothers, sisters, maternal uncles, relatives and even villagers not necessarily relatives also take part in the rituals.

Soul journey practice, one of the major parts of *Pai* ritual in Gurungs, is taken as of great importance. What Gurungs' believe is, soul is immortal, although the body dies. Therefore, the work in which the soul meets the ancestors in the heavenly place is considered as *Pai*. There is no time frame to perform this after the death of anybody in this sacrament but it ought not to be done within two years, two months, two days. Similarly, it will be applicable for six years, six months and six days too. It must be done on the date provided by the astrologer of Gurungs'. At the end of the *Pai* ritual, the *Pachyus* deliver the soul of the deceased to the world of their ancestors (heaven) and leave the soul under the care and protection of their ancestors. The deceased person can eventually become one of the ancestors. Thus, there is the continuity of the family and kinship relations even after the death of a person. The *pye* says that the ancestors (in heaven) also have a distinct social structure and organized communal life. During the soul journey that begins from the underworld to the

world of the living, and to the final destination in the lands of ancestors, the ritual priests chant about the soul journey through rivers (drinking water), crossing bridges, crossroads, sitting places, and the specific routes in the actual topographic areas. When the soul reaches a place of drinking water, then priests chant, “Now you have reached here in drinking water and please drink it.” When the soul reaches a bridge, then the priests chant, “Now you are here at the bridge, please cross it.” Similarly, the priests ask the soul to act accordingly when it reaches a crossroad, road, or resting place.

The main actors of *Pai* ritual are *Pachyu*, *Lauhris*. They recite numerous stories, myths and history which are contained in oral *pye*. They all come into account according as own fortune which are related to the people of Gurung community and of the dead person of whom the *Pai* is being performed. On the first day of *Pai*, *Pachyus* perform a ritual called *Silmro theepa* (massage for the soul and offering deities). Its aim is to call the soul of the dead from heaven to all the parts of earlier life to visit. The *Pai* ritual is equally important and insightful in establishing the connection between the Gurung people with their ancestral territories, and in retelling their histories of migration from the ancestral land of their origin.

The dead whose *Pai* work has already been done, they all are ancestors. Gurungs believe that they all are their god. Puja (worship) of ancestors is done by admitting the soul is immortal. If their puja isn't done, they will harm the living family, this is the core belief of Gurung community. They also build houses for *Kuldevta* (clan ancestors). They salute their ancestors by saying ‘*Khe-Ma*’ (ancestors). *Khe* are the male ancestors while *Ma* the females. So, God will be both happy and sad according to the worship. According to the Gurungs, if we can keep the god (ancestors) happy, the god helps us and if the god is unhappy due to our activities the god can be inauspicious and even bad for us.

### 8.3 Ancestors Worship

I argue that ancestor worshipping articulates the Gurung cosmology and belief system about the ancestors and the power likely to impact their daily lives. Their stories show how this ritual underlines the connection and relation between living people and ancestors through acts of sociality, offerings of food, fruits, wine, and other things during the ritual process. Ancestors are feared and revered among the Gurung. The Gurung people believe that ancestors can do everything- good and bad, for the living people and their well-being. They believe if they worship ancestors then ancestors might be happy and also protected from evils. So, the ritual plays on kinship and geographical relation between living Gurung and their ancestors.

In chapter six, there is a discussion about the Gurung belief system and relationship of Gurung ancestors and living Gurung. Along with, how evils attack and the procedure to keep them away from us. In the case of Gurung of Sikles, they fully believe in their ancestral and natural power and evils. They worship their ancestors and nature as a god. Ancestors and nature gods can be both god and demons with circumstances. But, Gurungs wish them to be God all the time and they perform *Failu lapa* (ancestors and super god worship) and *khema theepa* (ancestors' worship). Such worship is done on a special day of a special month. *Failu* worship takes place only in *Pachyus'* and *Lauhris'* houses because they not only consider their *kuldevta* as god, but also the mentor.

Gurungs have their own astro-science and it is especially used by priests and elites of the village. Good and bad are differentiated by calculating *Lho* (*barga Nep*) and *Paarka* (eight zodiac signs) and they apply the cure methods. It will determine whether praying or sacrifice has to be done. Hence *Lho* and *Paarka* can show us someone's auspiciousness and problem with ancestors, local deities, witches, ghosts etc. and help perform rituals accordingly. Usually, such rituals are done by *Pachyu* priests.

*Plah khu lapa* (collecting and calling the soul) is its significant example. Not only in Sikles, this ritual is being in practice in the neighbouring villages and in Pokhara. Here *Plah* refers to the soul of a living human, *khu* for collect and *lapa* means 'do'. If someone is in the *Paarka* of doing *Plah khu*, most of the souls wander outside the body like water, graveyards, doors or other parts of the world and they fall sick. If the soul has gone to the source of water *Mul plah khu* (in the name of water resources) is performed. Similarly, *Tuhrchha plah khu* (in the name of graveyard) and *Dhee plah khu* (in the name of house) are performed for the soul wandering in graveyards and doors respectively. If the soul is thought to have gone to the ancestors or somewhere else the *Pachyu* reads the *pye* mentioning all parts. Nine circles of thread are tied around the neck for a man and seven for a woman. It is because there is a belief that men have nine *plahs* (souls) and the women do seven.

#### **8.4 Gurung Concept of Nature Worship**

Observations and narrations indicated that the Gurungs' nature is more than material and physical because a series of rituals interconnected the territory with living, dead and spirits. Lands, rocks, trees, rivers, wells, water are ritually important, because the Gurungs believed them as nature deities. The Gurungs believed that lands, rocks, trees, rivers, wells also have common sense. Though they are different, they can understand humans and surroundings. The natural entities shared humanistic ontological level. According to different ritual practices, both living Gurungs and their ancestors visiting nature and nature play significant roles for soul journey practices and ancestors' worship (see chap. Five and six). So, there are ritual relations among the living Gurung, nature and Gurung's ancestors. The village is rich in Gurungs' traditional skills, ancient knowledge and culture. They have their own original rules and regulations, traditional and social structure too.

*Tōh theepa* (worship the village boundary) ritual and *Rōhsyo praapa* (inviting local and natural deities to bless house villagers, animals and grain before planting) in Sikles. The

*Lauhri* priest does not draw symbolic lines for these rituals. The priest addresses such natural boundaries of four directions by his oral chant. There have both physical and symbolic meaning in these ritual practices. The priests demand their local deities to protect livestock, grain, human beings, and natural resources by performing this ritual.

Sociality of Gurungs can be found in different geography and natural amenities. Their daily lifestyle has connected to forest, water resources, rocks, plants and Hills which all are pure. They pray to protect them. It's believed that local deities will be happy and offer prosperity and happiness if worship is done. *Tōh theepa* or worship of the boundary of a village is an example of it.

This *puja* is done in the northern jungle of Sikles by *Lauhri* priests. This is done for the betterment of the entire village. This *puja* is connected with agriculture. During plantation water is required, and after harvesting it's no more needed, so they pray to *Simi bhumi* (local deities) as their requirements. People of Sikles have strong belief in the local deity called *Yheura* so this *Tōh theepa* worship is done in the same place.

Similarly, they all have to worship occasionally. In order to save the village from catastrophes *seeulee lapa* (protecting the village) is done in *Shrawan* and *Chaitra* month of every year. This is done on three Tuesdays of *Shrawan* month and *Chaitra* respectively. In order to keep nature alive, one has to worship them. People believe that all living will be happy only if nature is conserved. Not only for the drinking water and agriculture, the jungle is important for Gurungs of Sikles to perform rituals. When a death occurs or *Pai* has to be performed, a kind of ritual tree *Chhyuku ta* (ritual plant for *pai*) is needed. It is regarded as a sacred plant. Similarly, leaves are needed to worship ancestors. These leaves are considered sacred in which food is kept and offered to ancestors. That's why the Gurungs believe water, air, forest, sun, moon and the soil to be the part of them.

Not only for the natural resources like forests and sources of water but also for farming have had their own rules and regulations. The seedling is done on a special day preferred by a *Pa di*. In the months of *Magh* or *Falgun*, a mixture of rice, millet, wheat, barley is kept in soil. This ritual is called *Plura ch pa* (mixing different seeds before seedling and planting). Only then, people start their private sapling. This is called *sane plu mplopa* (mixing different seeds with soil) which means mixing of soil and seed. *Sōkya* (Gurung zodiac barga for starting farming system) or the person with barga who can perform auspicious or inauspicious things for the running year faces towards *Yheura* (great local and sacred deity) and asks for blessings while sapling. This tradition is quite suitable and effective.

*Naas teepa* (closing the village for free from every day work in farming period) is another important social tradition of the village. Literally *Naas* means village and *teepa* means stay. But it is in fact the closure of the village when people are barred from working in the field or to go to the jungle. The three Tuesdays of *Shrawan* and three Tuesdays of *Chaitra* and on the days of *Tōh theepa* (worship village boundary) people observe *Naas teepa* events. The head of the Savathar or the man in charge decides and the *Mhina* (village controller and messenger) shouts from *Sava chowh* (centre of the village, Sikles) to inform the villagers. Currently Men Bahadur Gurung is the chief of Savathar (*Sava thar*) and Tilak Bahadur Gurung (*Mhala Mpuru*, nick name) is the *mhina* (village controller and messenger). This tradition helps people take a rest amidst the tiring work as well as the protection of the natural resources. It shows us the relation between the people and nature.

*Tusyu pahl preepa* (closing the village after hailstone) is another important tradition. *Tusyu* is hailstone, *Pahl* is legs and *preepa* means avoid. So *Tusyu pahl preepa* literally means to avoid the legs of hailstone. This happens the day after the severe hailstorm. Depending on the severity of the hailstorm, the head of the village decides this. If the rain and

hail is mild no such action is taken. The *Mhina* delivers the message from *Sava chohw*. On this day people do not go to the fields or jungle like in *Naas teepa*. But this day is stricter as the hens are not left open either. After asking for blessings from *Yheura* and *Simi-bhumi*, people stay home. People are prohibited from hunting and fishing and even they don't enter their kitchen garden. In recent pasts no outsider was allowed to enter the village and even clothes were not hung outside the house to dry. This tradition helps to revive the plants from the beatings of the hailstone. Scientifically, nature worships play two major crucial roles, one is, balance between nature and living being and other is, can use the nature resources for a long period.

### **8.5 Conclusion**

The interpretations and discussions of *pye* (ritual texts) and their meanings provide important insights to scholars of the anthropology of religion. For example, this study provides important insights and perspectives on the Gurung concept of the soul, how ritual myths employed Gurung history and territorial relations, and how Gurungs maintain a relation of respect and reciprocity with their family members and kin folks even after they die. The Gurung concept of *plah* (soul) integrates living and dead in three worlds. The dead person's soul needs to be escorted to the world of ancestors so that the person can his/her permanent life happily in ancestors' land or 'heaven'. The ritual priests, who own and know the *pye* could mediate between the living people, the soul, and the evil forces. Thus, only the ritual priests, with their knowledge and power, can bring the soul of the dead from the underworld to the world of the living, and take the soul to the land of ancestors. The regular mediation was maintained by regular worshipping of the ancestors. The ritual experts can communicate and understand not only living and ancestors but also the language of land and environment. Ritual experts maintained the balance between living, dead, and nature around them. The Gurung's ontology of living, dead and nature is quite similar to de Castro's

interpretation of how indigenous peoples of the Amazon understand the world around them (Amerindian perspectivism) and other anthropologists' idea of ritual symbolism.

It is unique research, because it explored the oral and folk ritual practices even these days and meaning of ritual symbols and also ritual perspectivism. The 'Gurungness' of Sikles is alive because of the continuation of original (oral text based) soul rites, ancestor worshiping culture and natural integration of people and culture. To maintain Gurung life in Sikles, they have to maintain relations with ancestors, souls, and deities around them. They followed nature-ancestors worshiping because they believed that natural and dead soul evaluate and reward peoples' activities in this or another world. On the other hand, practice of these rituals invokes the distinct Gurung identity. The latent objective of the study is to promote the culture of Gurung.

My research suggests that enthusiasm and sensitivity of the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* are the main reasons for the sustainability of the age-old rituals. In the same way because of the common issues and interests of the leaders of the village they also help protect the *pye tã lhu tã*. The *Mhinas'* social duties and strong role for the sound law and order have also maintained the *riti thiti* for ages which is proved to be very practicable for the durability of the rituals. As a whole all the villagers are united to practice any ritual culture that of their origin. The villagers are so attached to their home, birthplace and rituals that a person who dies in well facilitated cities like Pokhara wishes to be buried in his ancestral graveyard in Sikles. The dead body of my brother Gopal's father, my cousin Lok Bahadur and my mother were all taken to the village for cremation. Moreover, the mother of Kol Bahadur Gurung who had expired in the UK was brought to Kathmandu from where it was helicopter chartered to Sikles so that she could be cremated according to ritual of *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*.

Ritual has cleared the relationship of humans and nature. Not only humans, all the other flora and fauna are natural, based on nature. So, we must maintain a balance of this

nature. All the existing living beings will suffer if disturbances in nature take place. In order not to suffer we must worship them and keep close to nature. Rituals are the unwritten law of a particular place which have been in practice for hundreds of years. It encourages people to behave at the same level. Here, we seriously understand that humans, ancestors and nature have deep interrelation. Now there have been risks to nature after the construction of hydroelectric projects, roads, hotels and lodges.

Based on my long-term field immersion and experiences, I can argue that external influences like Tibetan Lamaism, Hinduism, migration, motor-able roads, bridges and hydro powers (in the name of development) have affected rituals but traditional oral text-based rituals continued. The commoners are interested in preserving and promoting traditional oral text-based traditions. For the construction of roads and bridges people have dug in random places which have destroyed the natural sources like soil, stones, trees and water. Some places for natural deities have also been damaged. The construction of hydro powers in different places of Madi River and *Nkacha* (Local River) has obstructed the people to worship the local deities. ‘*Tyemi kyu*’ (local deity) is one of such big and popular local deities.

#### **8.5.1 Theoretical Implications of the Study**

The implications of this study can be explored. This research adds new theoretical knowledge to the anthropology of Gurung ritual practices and the symbolic interpretation of rituals. *The methodological* contribution of the research is the positionality of the researcher and research subject-issue. Being a ritual expert of oral text, and researcher of the practice and meaning of the text could be employed in anthropological research. How can a researcher study the expertise of own issue by reflecting own positionality is a methodological contribution to anthropological research. It will be a methodology to understand and interpret indigenous ontology and practice. In terms of policy, this research contributes to the

documentation of the Gurung oral texts at local and government levels and it contributes to making policies for the preservation of such oral texts and their cultural ramification.

This research adds new theoretical knowledge on anthropology of different Gurung rituals practices such as life cycle rituals, *Pai* (soul journey practices), ancestors worship, nature worships and other specific rituals. This research theoretically supports that on symbolic and perspectivism perspective in anthropological studies.

The conversation between *Pachyu* and soul provided significant theoretical implications in the field of nature-culture debate and cosmological relations of indigenous people. The Gurung have the capacity to communicate and understand natural entities and cosmological beings. The *Pachyu* has developed knowledge and methods to understand the Gurungs' through the eyes of dead souls and natural phenomena. In anthropology, the capacity of intersubjective understanding could have occurred when they shared the same ontology of being or called perspectivism. Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism provides ample depth of understanding of humans through things. It can be argued that human activities and understanding are examined, and evaluated by souls and other cosmological entities. Similarly, the Gurungs of Sikles believed that their ancestors evaluated their activities in the living world. The *Pachyu* can go across the land and sky to take the dead soul to heaven. The question is how do they communicate and understand each other? Perspectivism gives ample answers that humans can develop capacity to understand themselves through non-human entities (Viveiros de Castro, 1998 & 2004). Gurungs also believed that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) shared a generic type of soul. This theoretical implication can be used to study other indigenous communities in Nepal. Gurungs also believed that entities in cosmology and environment (both human and non-human) shared a generic type of soul . . . which determines that all entities affect and interact with other things in the same way.

### 8.5.2 Methodological Implication

Methodologically, this study employed interpretive and historical ethnography in which historical memories and myths were interpreted in relations to people's life and death. An interpretative approach that focuses on the subjective or inter-subjective meanings attached and attributed to social phenomena (Geertz, 1973). When an anthropologist tries to understand human culture, she or he approaches it as an insider, or as a participant and practitioner.

I as a ritual specialist of oral text practitioner and researcher maintained dual roles during fieldwork and the rest of time. I have been a traditional ritual practitioner for more than 35 years. To maintain the objectivity of the research, I neutralized my subjectivity during data collection and analysis. It established that the practitioner of the ritual could be a better researcher. This methodology can be applied by future researchers to study anthropological perspectives on traditional rituals and oral tradition as well as both social sciences and humanities perspectives on cultural change.

The methodological implication of this research is how a researcher can study the expertise of self objectively. It also adds methodological knowledge about how to maintain and present subjectivity in anthropological research. For example, being a *Pachyu* objectively studied *Pai* ritual, ancestors and nature worships are major methodological contribution of this study.

### 8.5.3 Policy Implication

It will be a methodology to preserve the oral indigenous knowledge that to be written in local and government levels. So, this research contributes to documentation oral texts in written for policy implication. Specific places of soul journey are archaeologically important and physically related to the Gurungs ritual practices. Ancestor and nature worships identified indigenous Gurung's history, culture, ritual and others rituals phenomena. This research helps to make policy for the preservation of such valuable places and ritual

practices. It contributes to make policies for the preservation intangible heritage of Gurung community.

Addressing indigenous groups' issues in the framework of inclusive development as well as governance policy has become a crucial issue in Nepal. The policy makers, NGOs and civil society focused their policies on the basis of traditional resources and the cultural status of the people. They could document the oral text and its relevance in their ritual life. Especially there should be scientific and contemporary ways of studying such oral texts apart from cultural and mythical ways. The increase of others' cultures and religions have impact on the Gurung's history, culture, ritual, language and local customary practices. And unknowingly and gradually losing the Gurung identities. Therefore, the study will contribute the documentation of such oral history, folk cultural- ritual practices, local language and customary practices.

**ANNEXES**

### Annex 1: Glossary of Local Terms

<i>Aare</i>	Not (but, here the meaning says death)
<i>Aarkue</i>	Irrigated and non-irrigated land
<i>Aasyo</i>	Brothers of mother
<i>Aasyo kai</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Aasyo kōey</i>	A ritual cloth, which is offered to the dead from her or his maternal uncle
<i>Aayō sy</i>	If did not get
<i>Asapa</i>	Non tasty
Auspicious day	Because one is passive which they call Singer seepa
<i>Bhā yer</i>	Local deities, especially of field and jungle
<i>Chaapa</i>	Giving massage for <i>Pai</i> ritual, Specially, Aasyo, Pachyu and <i>Lauhri</i> with Bread and wine
<i>Chahsai wu</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Cha sapa</i>	Journey of evil things for separated the soul
<i>Chakra</i>	A ritual for controlling landslides
<i>Chahsai plaa</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> Ritual
<i>Chat</i>	Salt
<i>Chat keepar yaai</i>	Has gone for salt (but, here the meaning says death)
<i>Chauhra</i>	Way of Bamboo jungle
<i>Chha kō</i>	Burial place, especially in hill
<i>Chhai lho lapa</i>	Bamboo handicraft
<i>Chhee</i>	Grass
<i>Chhee peepa</i>	Open the jungle for grass
<i>Chhu chhu</i>	A kind of treatment system by the priest
<i>Chhyopa lapa</i>	Ancestor or offering ritual for good luck and bless
<i>Chhyoto</i>	Water mill
<i>Chhyuku ta</i>	Ritual leaf
<i>Chikre ngyoh</i>	Chikre pond, lies in the way of Kohla from Tangting village
<i>Chō</i>	Name of the ancient Gurung state above Nepal
<i>Chō kyuee</i>	The language of Chō state or priestly language
<i>Ch pa</i>	To start or to establish
<i>Chukhhe</i>	respected and knowledgeable person for Gurung ritual practices

<i>Chyah chyuh ntapa</i>	Whole body sick
<i>Chyeelyee</i>	Sikles
<i>Chyeka</i>	Sieve, made by bamboo and used in ritual ceremonies but large in size than Chyen
<i>Chyen</i>	Sieve, made by bamboo and used in ritual ceremonies
<i>Faalne</i>	Highland of Sikles which is used for pasture
<i>Failu lapa</i>	Ancestors worship
<i>Faima kyu</i>	Sacred water or local deities
<i>F lu'</i>	High grazing land of the area
<i>Ghow chō pa</i>	Mhina message all the villager by his loud voice from Sava Chohw
<i>Harpu th mae</i>	The Gurung of Harpu thar
<i>Heelnye ta</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Hyō ta</i>	Jajmani,
<i>Hyula</i>	State
	In special day, like, Naas Teepa, Tusyu pahl Preepa
<i>Jhaara</i>	Free labour for community
<i>Ka tu</i>	Symbols of the god, which are used in different rituals and made by
<i>Ka tu</i>	Torma, symbols or different god in different rituals made of rice
<i>Kamu chohw</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Kamu mai</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Kanma ko hpo</i>	The Ko hpo of traditional Lama in Kanma, where Lama Priest settled
<i>Kapwu</i>	Wild fruit in the area
<i>Kgahra chhō pa</i>	Wall weeding in irrigated field
<i>Kgair Lapa</i>	worship on Barn for animals
<i>Kgairi th mae</i>	The Gurung of Gairi thar
<i>Kgoh kyuu</i>	Sheep, Symbols of dead person
<i>Kgoipa pachyu</i>	The <i>Pachyu</i> of upper tole in Harputhar, Sikles
<i>Kguh'n</i>	Leaf umbrella
<i>Kg h tyepa</i>	The priest ready for ritual and sit on the leave umbrella
<i>Kg hla</i>	Large and cost labour
<i>Kgyo khrupa</i>	Bathing in Dudh pokhari
<i>Kgy ra</i>	The place of water mill, or water resource for water mill
<i>Kharcha</i>	ration for shepherd for some days or months
<i>Khe</i>	Male ancestors

<i>Khee no</i>	Barter system
<i>Khe ch pa</i>	Established her home after marriage
<i>Kheemi th</i>	Bonfire ritual for home family
<i>Khrue teypa</i>	Priests guide the soul of the dead when the dead body is carried on
<i>Khyaper lapa</i>	Baby whose hair is cut first time on an auspicious day
<i>Ko h po kyu</i>	Local sacred water
<i>Kohla</i>	Historical place of the Gurung
<i>Koree</i>	High grazing land of the area
<i>Kra ntapa</i>	Headache
<i>Krayee lapa</i>	to give some money and bless shepherd
<i>Krō</i>	Core place of the earth
<i>Krōhkhi th mae</i>	The Gurung of Lama thar
<i>Ku</i>	Nine
<i>Kutu</i>	Kind of tree with aromatic leaves smelling of lemon (Siltimur Nep)
<i>Kwō yee (yee) th mae</i>	the Gurung of kwoyee thar
<i>Kwō ya</i>	High land pasture
<i>Kwota you</i>	irrigated land
<i>Kwultwu</i>	Nettle-fibre sack (thailo Nep)
<i>Kwur</i>	Circle
<i>Kyā/ghyā saipa</i>	Exorcism ritual
<i>Kye koipa</i>	<i>Lauhri</i> priest perform this ritual on the first day of the <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Kyochya</i>	resource of drinking water in Gairi thar
<i>Kyuee</i>	Language
<i>Kyuee chol peepa</i>	The daughter who is given first Gurung dress
<i>Kyuu khaarpa</i>	To cause to ward off (Manchhaunu Nep)
<i>Laāh</i>	symbol of death or <i>Pai</i> ritual which seen like white flag
<i>La-chhai</i>	Waxing moon
<i>Laāh lye tah</i>	Wild vegetable in the area
<i>Lam</i>	A Gurung priest
<i>Lau tah</i>	Wild vegetable in the area or type of fern (Nihuro Nep)
<i>Lauhri</i>	Most respected practitioner Gurung priest
<i>Lauhri mai kyu</i>	water of <i>Lauhri</i> or one of the water resources belong to <i>Lauhri priest</i>
<i>Lausa tee</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Lhemai</i>	Owners

<i>Lho syu thupa</i>	to count Lho for age and luck
<i>Lhō Pu</i>	Vessel for holding milk
<i>Lu theepa</i>	Worship water god
<i>Lwoh</i>	Barga, the Gurung practise twelve lwoh
<i>Mae woohpa</i>	To purify after death ritual on the way by mixing different incense
<i>Maihma lapa</i>	Exorcism ritual
<i>Mati syō</i>	Madi river (local river)
<i>May tah</i>	wild vegetable in the area
<i>Mblaura/Mblamro</i>	irrigated land
<i>Mbo</i>	Son-in-law
<i>Mhimper Khe</i>	One of the respected gurus of <i>Lauhri</i> priest
<i>Mhina</i>	Village controller and messenger
<i>Mhyuchye</i>	High grazing land of the area
<i>Mo th pa</i>	Ancestors worship or offering ritual
<i>Mpaiku Chow</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Mpalkachi</i>	Wild fruit in the area
<i>Mpauhtu kyu</i>	Sacred water of the Sikles or local deities
<i>Mpo</i>	Bamboo, small one
<i>Mpo peepa</i>	open the bamboo
<i>Mpoutu</i>	Sprout
<i>Mru dhee</i>	king's home, palace
<i>Mu</i>	Below or below land
<i>Mul</i>	Source of drinking water
<i>Mul plahkhu</i>	Worship of the water resources to collect the soul of sick
<i>Myuulu</i>	Burning firewood
<i>Naachye</i>	Bamboo place
<i>Naamee nye</i>	Rest place of the soul when she or he call in the house in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Naas</i>	Village
<i>Naas kgo</i>	Above the Village
<i>Naas teepa</i>	to close the village to avoid daily working
<i>Naaulee</i>	Winnowing tray from bamboo (used in ritual ceremonies)
<i>Namchu</i>	one of the historical places in the area where Kromchhei clan first settled from Kohla
<i>Ndarmaasi</i>	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Nirmasi Nep)

<i>Nee lho lapa</i>	Nettle fibre handicraft
<i>Nee peepa</i>	Open the nettle fibre
<i>Nee syura</i>	A sacred place of Sikles, local deities
<i>Neetu</i>	A sacred place of Sikles
<i>Nga h pa</i>	inauspicious direction
<i>Nhau khwā la</i>	The way of salt trade to Tibet and Manang, Namun pass
<i>Nkacha syō</i>	Nkacha river (local river)
<i>Nkaru</i>	Five kinds of traditional Gurung community
<i>Nkgoh ntapa</i>	Forehead Pain
<i>Nokwur</i>	labour circle
<i>Nopa</i>	Labour exchange
<i>Ntaari ruipa</i>	planting millet
<i>Ntahlchyō</i>	Wild fruit in the area
<i>Ntepa ka</i>	Knead rice
<i>Ntero</i>	Bamboo place
<i>Ntopu tah</i>	wild vegetable in the area
<i>Ntye laahpa</i>	Purchase the decease or exorcism the evil things after funeral ritual
<i>Pā la</i>	wild fruit in the area (auselu Nep)
<i>Paa Ph lapa</i>	Ritual for marriage or wine and bread
<i>Paakta th pa/teepa</i>	Control the village for wheat, barley and millet period from others
<i>Paaltu</i>	A kind of ritual for sick or exorcism of the demon
<i>Paaltu waapa</i>	exorcism ritual
<i>Paatye</i>	Middle sister
<i>Pachyu</i>	most respected practitioner Gurung priest
<i>Pa di</i>	Gurung Astrologer
<i>Pa tah</i>	wild vegetable in the area
<i>Pāh la p h lu</i>	insects
<i>Pahl khrupa</i>	Ritual on wedding day from girl side
<i>Pahl ntapa</i>	Leg pain
<i>Pahre tah</i>	Wild vegetable in the area
<i>Pahrkha twul</i>	Upward season
<i>Pai</i>	A special ritual for soul journey
<i>Pha ntapa</i>	stomach-ache
<i>Plakhhu lapa</i>	calling shadow (lost) soul

<i>Plau</i>	Effigy, symbol of dead person
<i>Plee</i>	Four
<i>Plōh wu</i>	A king of bamboo
<i>Plura ch pa</i>	Mixing different grains for seeds on a special day
<i>Pmaarmye</i>	Bamboo, not young and hard
<i>Pmatmi kyutmi</i>	High grazing land of the area
<i>Pmee ntapa</i>	Eye pain
<i>Pmee peepa</i>	Bon firing in kheemi tyeh'n
<i>Pmera prōh</i>	grazing land
<i>Poori</i>	One of the sacred places where Lam sacrifices poori god
<i>Prah waapa</i>	Removed evil thing from the village area
<i>Prahma</i>	Yeast
<i>Prakhyaa/prokyaa</i>	Child outside the wedlock
<i>Prihpa pachyu</i>	The <i>Pachyu</i> of bottom tole in Harputhar, Sikles
<i>Prolu</i>	Name of place in study area or animals' husbandry place
<i>Proure</i>	Bamboo place and grazing land
<i>Pruma</i>	Zonthoxy (Timur Nep)
<i>Puhrun</i>	Ritual for marriage after Paa Phu'n
<i>Puri</i>	Wild fruit in the area
<i>Push pandra</i>	Fifteenth Poush, the day is important for Lho Twupa
<i>Pwuchu tuhtuhr</i>	Asparagus racemogus
<i>Pyahsi</i>	Besi,
<i>Pye</i>	Gurung oral text
<i>Pye kyuee</i>	Gurung oral text language
<i>Pye tā Lhu tā</i>	Gurung oral text and oral ritual
<i>Pyoh</i>	Mat
<i>Raprōh (raura)</i>	Goat barn
<i>R ka</i>	Gurung male dress by nettle
<i>Ree pye</i>	the oral text about the daughter an ancient period
<i>Re</i>	Bamboo
<i>Rhil chō pa</i>	Exorcism of evils in <i>Pai</i> ritual Rice and flour
<i>Riti-thiti</i>	local rule and regulation for the village
<i>Rodhee</i>	Gurung weeping and sleeping house
<i>Rodheerpa</i>	of/from Rodhee

<i>Rōh</i>	Kgrōh, traditional village leader
<i>Rōh syo praapa</i>	Village barrier, when they ready for planting paddy in mid Asaad
<i>Sa</i>	Earth, soil
<i>Saarkya</i>	materials for rituals
<i>Salatee</i>	a particular irrigated land
<i>Samachye</i>	Forest for firewood and grassland
<i>Sapa</i>	Tasty
<i>Sapa th mae</i>	The people of Savathar
<i>Sapwu</i>	Place of the shot put
<i>Sarka</i>	One of the important parts of the <i>Pai</i> ritual, which is chanted by <i>Pachyu</i>
<i>Sarka twul</i>	Downward season
<i>Saura/samro</i>	non irrigated land
<i>Saura/samro syuipa</i>	To take out weeds in non-irrigated field
<i>Sausyo</i>	The friend of bride
<i>Sava chohw</i>	Centre place of the Sikles, meeting place
<i>Se peepa</i>	Open the jungle for firewood
<i>Se ya chohw</i>	Name of the place, animals' husbandry place
<i>S u lee lapa</i>	Village barrier by ritual woods settled
<i>Silmro theepa</i>	The <i>Pachyu</i> priest performs this ritual on the first day of <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Simi-bhumi</i>	Local or natural deities
<i>Singer seepa</i>	Gurung practise four singers, and they use only three of them in every <i>Pai</i>
<i>So pee (tōhta)</i>	Name of the study area, way of soul journey
<i>Sō kyā</i>	One of the respected persons for auspicious and inauspicious rituals
<i>Sō rwupa</i>	Searching underground world for soul when <i>Pachyu</i> perform plhakhu
<i>Soratee</i>	First day of the month (here is Srawan and Magh srakanti)
<i>Su'n ntapā</i>	oral sickness
<i>Syaye kra rahye you Pachyu</i>	priest
<i>Sye kohlee</i>	Flour gruel of meat
<i>Sye lhe who lhe</i>	The group of people, especially in <i>Pai</i> ritual who cut meat and cook food
<i>Syee</i>	Rice
<i>Syō/khwol chaa'n pa</i>	to cross the Madi river in upward season for high grazing land

<i>Syuree dh</i>	One of the historical places in the area, where <i>Lauhri</i> priest settled
<i>Taasa</i>	High grazing land of the area
<i>Tahkra</i>	Cousins, working in death and <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Tahper</i>	Basket (daalo Nep.)
<i>Tahra nkgyo th mae</i>	The Gurung of Dhaprang thar
<i>Tahsaerpa sye kaar</i>	Dry meat of the Dashain
<i>Tamu chhōj dhee</i>	Council of Gurung house
<i>Tamu Dhee</i>	Gurung House
<i>Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh</i>	Central Organization of Gurung ritual and culture
<i>Tantra-Mantra</i>	A kind of power for treatment
<i>Tasa Lhee</i>	Barren field kept for grazing cattle (actually the word says horse ground)
<i>Tdo</i>	traditional village leader
<i>Tduhrchha</i>	Burial place
<i>Teesya</i>	Kind of shrub (Chutro Nep.)
<i>Teesya Nye</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Thaa Kyaarpa</i>	Remove an evil thing from the sacred place
<i>Thaa Se</i>	evils wood
<i>Thaa sō waapa</i>	Removing evils, exorcism practice
<i>Tharpa</i>	Like house, but small in size (Dhansar)
<i>Th wa</i>	Wild fruit in the area
<i>Thoyo</i>	One of the historical places where the Ghale king settled from Risf lu
<i>Thu kyuu</i>	Sheep, friend of Kgoth Kyuu
<i>Tnera/tnekra</i>	Ritual wood, used for frame of the effigy or Plau
<i>Tō ku chohw</i>	the place of study area
<i>Tōh theepa</i>	Sacred Land worship for the village and the area
<i>Tohrakgyo th syo</i>	Gurung female from Dhaprang Thar
<i>Tōi pa</i>	Grazing land
<i>Totee</i>	Name of place in study area or animal's husbandry place
<i>Tu</i>	Above land or geography
<i>Tu tu syō</i>	The place of water mill, or water resource for water mill
<i>T r wu</i>	wild fruit in the area (Guyeli Nep)
<i>Tumu/tamu</i>	Geographically off and low land, Gurung
<i>Tusyu pahl preepa</i>	To close the village after hailstone

<i>Twoopa</i>	To count lho
<i>Twurtu</i>	to go to someone for help
<i>Tyemi</i>	Yam, Tuber (Tarul Nep)
<i>Weita kgyohpa</i>	study gallbladder for auspicious and inauspicious
<i>Whu ku</i>	a grazing land
<i>Wõ lee tah</i>	wild and domestic vegetable in the area
<i>Yai</i>	Has gone (but, here the meaning says death)
<i>Yeku chohw</i>	Name of the place for calling soul in <i>Pai</i> ritual
<i>Yheura</i>	Sacred land of the Sikles
<i>Yo ntapá</i>	Hand pain
<i>Yori nkakya</i>	Dactylorhiza hata girea (Paanch Aule Nep)

## Annex 2. Gurung Traditional Ritual Specialists *Pachyu* and *Lauhri*

### *Pachyu*

The *Pachyus* are the ancient priests among the Gurung community. Some people call them shaman and *jhankri* in some places as they are knowledgeable of the treatment of for certain illnesses. The *Pachyu* plays a vital role for conducting culture and rituals. Dr Harka Gurung has addressed in his book 'Vignettes of Nepal' (1980), the *Pachyus* as 'Gurung Tribal Priest'. In those days, the Gurungs used to live in tribes, cut down the trees and other plants and use the land for cultivation, practiced animal husbandry and depended on wild products. And the *Pachyu* also shows tribal nature, like, wearing a belt with bells, wearing birds' feathers, and playing horn for sound, using animals' shells and symbolically, porcupine spine to protect themselves as weapon or power. Calling their priest *Pachyu* as 'Tribal Priest' is good because they had nomadic life and were of tribal community.

Similarly, Jagman Gurung, '*pye tā lhu tā* (Gurung Jaati tatha Sanskriti, 2034 BS), has said that 'Jhankri means a wizard that exercises some charms but the wizard remarked here is different from the others. These wizards perform priestly duties. They are called *Pachyu* in Gurung language'. In ancient times, the *Pachyus* not only performed the priestly duties but also engaged themselves in seeing the omens, exorcising, and medicines. They have been doing the job from the time immemorial. So, they are called '*Jhankri*' in Nepali language. Even in Sikles the so called dalits call the *Pachyu jhankri*. But they also use the word *Pachyu* because of the companionship with the Gurungs. My father was famous not only among the Gurungs but also among the Dalits who called him *Pachyu Kancha* or *Kancha Pachyu* (younger son in his family) or *Jhairi (Jhankri) Kanchha Bau*. But there is a difference between Nepali Jhankri and Gurung Jhankri. Gurung Jhankri are not only shamans. It is appropriate to call them priests instead of shamans because of their wide range of works, especially priestly duties.

In nomadic time, when they fell ill, wounded, the Gurungs set the tradition to cure themselves using their own knowledge, spell and charm and local herbs. The *Pachyus* used the wild herbs to cure the ill and wounded so they can be regarded as the first priests of the Gurungs. According to the *Pachyus*' text '*Kyarlu pmarlu*', (history of origin of human). *Pachyus* are believed to originate in '*Chyah kawi Tōh*' (somewhere of northern side) *Kyarlu pmarlu* is the *pye* which explains the places of origins of the priests that is *Pachyu*, *Lauhri* and *Lam* and the other Gurungs. In this text the places of origins of all the Gurungs are not

given. But we do not know the whereabouts of the places, so there is still room for further studies.



**Source: Photo Credit by: Purnima Gurung, 2019**

At 25 Kartik, 2075 BS I met Birsuba *Kromchhai Pachyu* at Sikles and I asked about the word “*Pachyu*” and its meaning. Then he told me the meaning and myth of “*Pachyu*”. According to him,

A woman gave birth to a child daughter, and the child died when she was four years old. Then the mother was in shock, became extremely sad, and said that, ‘I want to go with my dead daughter’ and the people requested the old knowledgeable man, ‘you have to do some Tantramantra to protect the woman, because she is also going with her dead daughter’. Then the knowledgeable *Pachyu* concerned his meditation and suggested to go in the graveyard. The knowledgeable *Pachyu* suggested that the child be buried in left side and mother kept in right side by covering with small branches, and the child’s mouth be suckling her mother’s breasts. The knowledgeable *Pachyu*

said, next morning at sunrise there might be some activities or motion. Then, in fixed time people felt some activities and the child had sucked mother's breast for the whole night. At early morning of next day, the mother removed those covering branches and saw Halki (the planet Venus). She became very happy when she saw Halki in the east direction in second time because the mother was confirmed that her daughter was not dead. Only the soul of child had gone from her body when she was sick very seriously. Then the knowledgeable *Pachyu* brought the child soul from the burial place through his *pye* and substituted in the child's body. Then the child became well.

The people said '*Pa chyuihpa key lapa*' or the work which very respectful. So, the word or language '*Pa chyuihpa*<sup>43</sup>' was converted into '*Pachyu*'. Even today, this kind of ritual is performed by the *Pachyu* when someone loses her or his *Plah* (soul) following a serious accident or any mishap. Instantly *khu* (collect) is done by *Pachyu* priest, which is known as '*Plah khu lapa*<sup>44</sup>' or '*Plah khupa*'.

The *pye* read by *Pachyus* contain a long history of their fore teachers and forefathers. *Raāku pa h* (the text of the *Pachyu*'s drum), *Porul pa h* (the text of the son and daughter), *Krōhlu pa h* (the text of the master and disciples) etc. are the main teachers and ancestors of the *Pachyus*. These teachers have their individual history in the *pye*. The experienced people of villages say that a *Pachyu* is not completely a *Pachyu* if he cannot study the *pye* of *Motā* (demons' text). It is an evil or ghost which possesses enough power to kill people, animals and destroy crops. This *Motā pye* is related to *Pachyu* because only a powerful *Pachyu* can control those evils. According to *pye*, *Pachyus* are available in all directions but from that of the North are the most powerful and trustworthy.

*Syaye Pachyu wuikar Pachyu*

The *Pachyu* who is from east is called  
wuikar *Pachyu*

*Lwoye Pachyu khō yō Pachyu*

The *Pachyu* who is from south is called  
khō yō *Pachyu*

*Nthuye Pachyu khreelee pacchyu*

The *Pachyu* who is from west is called  
khreelee *Pachyu*

<sup>43</sup> *Pa chyuihpa*-very seriously, honestly, and respectively presenting or duty oriented.

<sup>44</sup> *Plah khu lapa*-to collect the living people's souls. Here *plah* refers to soul (bla by Holmberg, 1989), *khu* refers to collect and *lapa* refers to do. The Gurung believe that, if they are ill then *plah* may be lost from her/his body. And the *plah* may be misled everywhere. So, the *Pachyu* have to call such *plah* from the underground, sky, rock, water, graveyard, cloud, hills, heaven or every places.

*Chyōh ye Pachyu teetu Pachyu*

The *Pachyu* who is from north is called  
teetu *Pachyu*

Among the four *Pachyus* of east, west, north and south, *Teetu Pachyu* of the north can satisfy the evil things or ghost. He can perform worships, offerings and other sacred works, the *pye* says. Now we can say that, according to this *pye*, there is geographical relation between the *Pachyu* and its power and the power come from the northern side. Symbolically, the *Pachyu* from north called Teetu is most respected and affective than others. He is more famous and practically knowledgeable in his shamanic and priestly power. Only the *Pachyu* Teetu can trapping ghost or demon and collecting the lost soul. So, the ritual meaning is that, there is historical, physical, and ritual relation to northern *Pachyu* and power.

*Pachyus* regard *Wuicho-choru* the second settlement after *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa*, as the home of their teacher. The *Pachyus* built their first clan house 'Kōehpo' (religious, ritual, meeting and training house of the Gurung priest) here after migrating from *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa*. While performing *Failu* and *Chhyopa* (name of the god and ancestor) *Pachyus* take the name of this place with great respect. So, in the *pye*, *Pachyus* are called 'Wuicho-chorura teepai chyōh Pachyu' which means the *Pachyu* who live in *Wuicho-choru* or the *Pachyu* of northern side.

*Pachyus* have their own traditional and cultural dress which they wear on different rituals. They have a single sided and comparatively smaller *Nkgah* (drum). It has wooden frame and is of leather. The *Nkgah* played by Ayalama and Dhom of Thakali and the Gurung *Nkgah* have similarities. 'The dhom and aya lama have less paraphernalia than Buddhist priest. Their main artifacts are drum, a stick with a bird, and a rosary. The drum (nka) has a wooden frame covered with a membrane on one side. On the other side are two sticks which cross each other in an 'x' for holding the instrument, two small bells are tied to the stick. The priest holds the drum close to his body and beats it with a small straight stick in the direction towards the body' (Vinding, 1998: p309). According to Vinding, dhom and aya lama are traditional priest among the Thakali community and they practise ancient pon religion and culture. I think, both dhom and aya lama have similar practice with *Pachyu* priest of the Gurung community. Most of the instrument and activities are same practice among them.

The next important instrument played by the *Pachyus* is *Chhyōley* (cymbals). It is played striking each other. They are smaller in size compared to that of the *Lauhris*. The next instrument is *Yhirika chhyāpa* (drum, made from cows' leather) which sounds 'dang dang' and commonly called *Tdau'ndu*. It is cylindrical in shape made of the trunk of big trees and one side is covered with goat leather and the other with that of cow. The side with the goat

leather is beaten with hand and the other side is played with a stick. According to the *pye* of *Tda du* (drum) an ancestor of the Gurungs *Paure khe* or *Pakre khe* (pachyus ancestor) had a relationship with this instrument. And *Patu Chhya'npa* (one of the small drums) is another instrument which sounds tang tang and commonly known as *tanki* (Tonkee). It is in the shape of a bowl made of iron or copper and the head is made of cow leather. It is placed on the ground and played first with a smaller stick than two. *Tda du* (drum) and *Tonkee* (drum) are played simultaneously only in death rituals. *Pachyus* also play another instrument called *Pututu* which is in fact a horn of deer. It may be  $\frac{3}{4}$  ft to 1.5 ft long. When it is blown a *Pu.....* is produced so named *Pututu*, but its classical name is *Mphirpu*.

The *Pachyus* wear a pointed cap called *Rhalpwo*. In the past it used to be made of the hair of great Gurus and winding the hair into nine dreadlocks were left across the back which is called *Rhalpwo toh*. Then it was made from the hair of yaks but nowadays goat fur is used for it. Small shells are wound in the *Rhalpwo* which are believed to protect the *Pachyus*. The *Pachyus* regard the *Rhalpwo* as the symbol of their Guru or the head of Gurus. The meaning is that, nobody can disturb and kick him when the *Pachyu* wears his *rhalpwo* which is the symbol of power. On the *Rhalpwo* three sheaf of *tye* (pheasant feathers) representing *Lhe sōti* (three deities) are attached. While performing *Failu* (ancestors' god worship) the *Pachyus* offer respect and dedication to the deities for they feel to gain power from it. The meaning is that, three sheets are the symbol of the bird, the *Pachyu* can fly like a bird by its power, inauspicious and others cannot follow him.

From the left shoulder to the right underarm a *Pahrkhu* (rectangular piece of feminine cloth, two adjacent corners of which are knotted together) is worn. According to the *pye* of the ancestor *Porul Pa h*, his son *Mhiku Chyō* went to the previous villages and settled there. His daughter *Rimai chyoh'n sairulu mhi* got the knowledge. After the death of her father, she went to *Yōhta* (host) but got insulted. She came home, called her younger brother and taught him. In the honour of that *Rimai chyōh*, *Pachyus* wear *Pahrkhu*. Over the *Pahrkhu* they wear a belt containing nine bells. The belt is known as *Lahte'n*. Around the neck they have a string of beads which is proof of their teachers' order and knowledge. In the place of any ritual performances is a bundle of porcupine thorns which also protects the *Pachyus*.

Any ceremonial or sacrificial acts begin with the incense of *siuri* and *Prumai* (mixing different herbal plants for good smelling) to offer aroma to their ancestors. They are sacred and pure priests so they utter a certain mantra and sit on *Syakhu* (a traditional covering of the body while in rain, made of a kind of split cane plant and having pure leaves between the frames) which they call *K h*. They put millet, corn, wheat etc. called *Chyu* in a basket made

of the same split cane. Similarly, the symbols called *Kaitu* (made of cooked rice and shaped) are also put in winnowing trays or baskets made from bamboo and are considered pure. They display the things needed in the particular ritual. *Paa* (local alcohol) is a must to offer to their ancestors by means of leaf-cups. After the display of all necessary things, the guru and his companions take a sip of *Paa* and begin the ritual. They play nine different beats in death and after death rituals and dance in a circle in anti-clockwise direction. They have different beats and timing of playing in different rituals.

In the study area of Sikles, the *Pachyus* offer the service of astrologers too. According to Gurung astrology, they count the *Lho* and *parka* and feel the wrist and can tell the wellness or illness of an individual. They can perform the work of a sorcerer so they are also called Dhami Guru but all *Pachyus* cannot be sorcerers. They have very significant roles not only in the death and after death rituals but also in clan worship, local deities' worship, care of the village, wizardry and other shamanic activities. For that they use fish, birds, chicken and goat meat to offer. They take buffalo as profane so they do not consume buff and do not allow even a piece of buff around the worshippers.

Learning *Pachyu* work and bringing it into practice is a very difficult and tiring job. In the villages they have to do the daily household works, go to the fields to grow crops or harvest them. They need to go to the jungle to collect firewood and fodder for the cattle at home. They get the time only at night time. If one has a father or a grandfather as a *Pachyu* guru in home it would be suitable for him to learn otherwise he has to go to a guru which is sometimes not practical. In my experience, I have been doing this since I was a 4-5 years old kid. My father, being himself an active and popular *Pachyu*, used to be busy for various works related to his position and knowledge. When he was free, he taught me little by little. Now I am 47 years old and can perform the *Pachyu* works in considerable scale but I still feel imperfect.

When a *Pachyu* gains all knowledge after studying all the things, the most experienced and oldest *Pachyu* is to declare that the young *Pachyu* is now mature enough to take all responsibilities for which he has to recite the verbal text and verbal but inaudible mantras in front of his seniors. He is given to lead the ritual work in a *Pai* of their clan and the process is known as *Bhara Ntopa* (mature *Pachyu*) In the third day of the *Pai*, he holds the skin of a goat head with his lips and comes out of the house and moves here and there in the courtyard surrounded by his co-*Pachyus* and sisters so that no one can see him. Only then he is regarded as a *Pachyu*. If there is no new *Pachyu*, anyone from old *Pachyus* perform the duty.

*Pachyu* work is not a profession but a duty. They do not perform the work for money. They cannot fully depend on it. The death ritual *Pai* comes only after seeking the moment, day, month and year. Any ritual can happen in day or night but the night one is difficult and risky as evil things are believed to be active at that time.

‘In societies in which shamans live and work, “Shamanism” is rarely perceived in these terms. Among the Tamumai shamans are “ordinary” people who have a “hard” and dangerous job, one that most people would not want to do. It is so poorly *paid* and involves working at night’. (Pettigrew, 1995, p.28)

If asked by the host to perform any ritual, *Pachyus* must go despite their important works. He brings home about a kilogram of rice and a small amount of money which is not enough for his household expenses. First of all, it is not his work to feed his family from only *Pachyu* work so it is not related to income but to duty. When I was 5 or 6 years old, I used to follow my father and at the end I would get 25 *Paisa* or 50 *Paisa*. My father’s share would be from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15. It was that time. Nowadays I get Rs. 1500-2000 at the end of the hectic 3-day *Pai*. I am writing this not to connect money to *Pachyus* but to say that they have never assumed this work as the source of income but as their responsibilities. They take it easily.

After *Wuicho Choru* (one of the historical places) Sikles is taken as the place of gurus. So old and experienced people say, ‘*Chyeelee Aturpa Pachyu Pachyu Aata*’ which means a *Pachyu* who has not gone to Sikles is not a *Pachyu*. The meaning says that, Sikles is one of the most popular destinations for the *Pachyu* priests. If someone wishes to be *Pachyu* he must go to Sikles for more knowledge and his prestigious. The meaning say that Sikles is one of the central points for *Pachyu* priests.

### ***Lauhri***

*Lauhris* have a very important role in Gurung communities. They are addressed differently from place to place like *Kyahpri*, *Kyauhri*, *Klauhri*, and *Klepri* and so on. In the study area, it is *Lauhri*. The word *Ghyapri* or *Ghyapring* is derived from the *Kyahpri* which seems to be Nepalised. *Lauhris* are especially known to have very important roles in death and after death rituals, the worship to the local deities and the protection of the village. According to Jagman Gurung, 'there are two types of *Ghyapris* viz. *Tu* and *Mhochhe*. They are called *Syuru Pa h* and *Yuru Pa h*. But in Gurung language they are also called *Lhebri*,

*Lauhri*, and *Leuhre* according to different places. But the old name for *Ghyabri* is ‘*Pa h po*<sup>45</sup>. The followers of Bon religion are called Bonpo or Ponpo.’ (2034, p. 47).

In fact, people living in Tibet were called *Pa h* and their teacher was known as *Pa hpo* so *Lauhris* are also known as *Pa hpo*. In the beginning while the nine clans were given their distinct work, the clan *Tu* got the responsibility of *Lauhri* and later on *Mhaucha* clan also learned the work. Nowadays even the clans of *Pru* and *Ko* perform the duties of *Lauhri*.

Harka Gurung (1980, p.377) has called the *Lauhris* as Klipre, Ghyabring - Gurung Shaman or tribal priest. When the Gurungs were hunter gatherers, their rituals were also according to their society so they are called tribal priests.

Bhavar Palje Tamu and Yarjung Kromchhei Tamu have written about *Pachyu*, *Lauhri* and *Lam* in common, ‘*Pachyu* and *kyabri* (*Lauhri*) are similar in many ways. They both use the same language. They are both connected to the word of the ancestors through *Chõ naas*. But the third bon priest, the lambo, reads his books in Tibetan language which is not understood by the tamu’ (2062 BS, p.19). As Palje and Kromchhe Tamu, *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* have similar readings of *pye* in most of the occasions and they chant the *pye* in the ancient *Chõ* language. The way of sitting, reading, and performing are similar. *Chhara* (starting text for funeral and *pai* ritual), *Chyu Chhipa* (offering text), *Chhõ tã* (purity text) and *Sin’cha Kwurpa* (taking name of different places and local deities’ text) are some examples that can be done by *Pachyu* or *Lauhri*. *Lauhri* are known by the ancient names like *Pa h*, *Krõh*, *Rhe*. *Yuru Pa h*, *Syuru Pa h*, *Chyaye Krõh*, *Mhimmar Khe* are their ancestor teachers.

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<sup>45</sup>*Pa hpo*-According to oral *pye* the word ‘*Pa hpo*’ is very ancient. The Gurung who were in *Chõ* they used *Pa hpo* to addressed all Gurung community. And the *pye* says, *Krõhlu pa h*, *Raãku pa h*, *Porul pa h* which are their ancestors and gurus.



**Source: Photo Credit by: Lauhri Falman Gurung, 2020**

The *Lauhri* also wear *Rhalpu* (ritual cap) on their head like *Pachyu* and they put on *urkyan* (like crown) on their front of head, which has *Paintings* of five Bon deities' photos that is called *Urkyan Pa h po*. The *Lauhri* respects and devotes to the *Urkyan*, who are their masters of gurus and also ancestors. They wear *Pyipyi tahr* (a long black gown) symbolising the sky where moon, sun and stars are painted. They tie a wooden black bird on their waist, when they start the *Pai* ritual dance. The wooden black bird is a symbol of power or symbol of the guru. The *Lauhri* also plays a one side *Nkga* (drum) and *Chhyōley* (cymbal), but their *Nkga* and the *Chhyō ley* are bigger in size than that of *Pachyu*'s. The *Lauhri* plays a Sankha (shell) and a bell too when they perform funeral and post funeral rituals. They do not use buff and chicken for their ancestors' worship as well as food. 'The two types of Gurung shaman priests, Paju and klebri, have certain food restrictions. The klebris don't eat buffalo, wild game and birds. As a rule, they cannot eat domesticated animals. Paju also doesn't eat buffalo. They prefer goat and chicken. I was told that tradition is one reason why they have such restrictions. It was not possible to raise buffalo or chicken in the highland region, so the priests only ate sheep meat. A Paju once told me: "we, Paju and Klebris, do not eat buffalo meat, because our ancestors did not accept it. If we eat buffalo meat, then we will be totally

against our ancestors. We believe that if we eat buffalo meat, then we will forget all our shaman-text (mantras), and we will not be able to read it orally. If a Paju or Klebri eats buffalo-meat, he will lose his power. But we used to drink buffalo-milk". The fact that the Gurung shaman priests observe food-restrictions that are different from the Gurung laity underline the connection between food consumption and ritual purity" (Kullsvæn, 1999, p.31-32). The *Pachyu* use chicken but the *Lauhri* do not. All the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* answered with the same meaning as Kullsvæn. If some of the *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* cannot tell *pye* and cannot perform any rituals, then the villagers ridicule them saying, 'why you restrict buffalo, eat it'.

Especially, the *Lauhri* are related with '*thaa ku*' (nine evils power). *Thaa* are inauspicious power for men, animals and grain. The *Lauhri* are one of the major characters for funeral and post funeral rituals specialist. They play a vital role for death and *Pai* rituals among the Gurung community. The *Lauhri* play nine times and nine sounds when they perform death and *Pai* ritual. They make rounds in anti-clockwise direction in their ritual dance. There is very popular '*Lauhri mai syepa*' or '*Pai syepa*' (ritual dance of *Lauhri* in *pai* ritual) in the area. They dance very classically and gracefully with their full dress. The *Lauhri* are also specialist for natural worships in Sikles. Most of the natural worships are related to the *Lauhri*. They performed different natural worship for protecting natural calamities and hail harms. *Tõh theepa* (worship the village boundary), *Sã t lapa* (both offering and exorcism ritual), *Seeulee lapa* (worship for protecting the village), *Prah waapa* (both offering and exorcism ritual) are main natural worships in the area. The *Lauhri* also need sacred leaf, basket, and mat for their ritual compulsorily.

### Annex 3: Gurung Cosmology

A Gurung is incapable of giving his exact date of birth. But he can give his *Lho*<sup>46</sup> (barga Nep.) the sign of the year in which he was born. To calculate his age, he counts how many *Lho* separate that of his birth and the present year, including the *Lho* of his birth, which gives his age with a maximum error equal to one year and 364 days if for example, he was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1955, on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1958 he is two years and a day. But a Gurung counts 1955 plus 1956 plus 1957 plus 1958, thus four years. (To simplify the example, we have used the dates of the Roman calendar. It remains valid if one uses the Nepali calendar). We could say that on average, a Gurung makes himself older by a year when he is his age. However, he knows how many cycles have gone by since his birth and counts accordingly. Even this does not make an allowance for the fact that in calculating his age, a Gurung makes a difference between a person born at the beginning and a person born at the end of a year. (Pignede, 1966, p.337)

The Gurungs have their own astrology to know the auspiciousness of a day, event, time cycle, luck and forecast. It includes *Ngyopa lyeepa* (finding the reason of illness), *Chaipa* (guessing), *Mphut mopa* (finding the reason of serious illness), *Lhei kaahpa* (caught by ancestor), *Yo chae ngyopa* (to feel the pulse) etc. It also deals with the meanings of natural phenomena like rain, sunrise, and landslide, the sudden difference in the flight of birds and insects and interpreting dreams. This practice is traditional and original. The person who knows this method and decides the auspiciousness of a time is called a *Pāedi* (Gurung astrologer).

"Gurungs have their own belief and traditional astrological system, which is universal knowledge among the Gurung community. This astrological system defines auspicious and inauspicious days. Especially *Pāedis* practices astrology and the *Pachyu* and the village leaders are astrologers in Sikles village. (Gurung, 2001, p.31).

The media of practice of these things are *Lho* counting, *Paarka*<sup>47</sup> and *Pmeu* (Gurung zodiac method). The Gurungs decide the auspiciousness of the events on the basis of these three things.

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<sup>46</sup>Lho- Gurung zodiac language, Barga in Nepali, it is necessarily used for finding auspicious and inauspicious days among Gurung community. There are twelve lhos and every lho takes one year since every 15<sup>th</sup> poush to the 14<sup>th</sup> poush.

<sup>47</sup> Paarka-Gurung zodiac language. There are eight Paarkas in Gurung zodiac sign which they call paarka Dhee. The Pāedi counts lho and defines auspicious and inauspicious according to the Paarka. The symbolic meaning of these Paarkas say some are good luck and some are bad. For example, Paarka Soe'n is most bad house and tah is most good house among them.

By just counting the fingers, the astrology of the Gurungs can be learnt easily. A hand written text, *Chhyuee*, is used in special occasions. *Chhyuee* means text or book. There are 12 *lhos* represented by 12 different animals and birds. When a child is born, they are considered to be of a *lho* so they are one-year-old. On each 15<sup>th</sup> of Poush, the *Lho* is changed. That means a child born on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Poush becomes two years old the next day.

There are eight *parkas* represented by metal, soil, wood, water, fire etc. There are nine *Mpyeus* so they are called *mpyeu ku*. Auspicious deeds like *Khyapar lapa* (first trimming of a boy's hair) and *nkgui chol peepa* (first feminine cloths given to a girl) and inauspicious deeds like *Pai* are performed mostly in odd *lhos*. Difference of seven and nine *lhos* between a bride and a bridegroom is discouraged. This is called *Nhgeeti so, kuti so tapa* (seven and nine *lhos* differences between boy and girl for marriage). If someone is ill the *Pāedi* tells the result by observing which *lho* is in which *Parka* by counting them. Some *Parka* are auspicious and some inauspicious. Marriages and construction of new houses take place in auspicious *Parka*. If inauspicious *parka* is there, some worship are performed and the fault in stars are maintained and nuisance are eliminated.

The 12 *lhos* change in a cycle which is called *lho kwur* (circle of 12 *lho*) and change of one *lho* to another is called *lho twupa* (return of *lho*). In each 15<sup>th</sup> *Poush* of Nepali calendar, a *lho* returns and remains till 14<sup>th</sup> of *Poush* next year. This is called *lho syarpa*. According to Gurung astrology, the first *lho* is Mouse *lho* (*chy lho*). It is followed by cow *lho* and the 12<sup>th</sup> or the last is Deer *lho* (*fo lho*). A period of 12 *lhos* is called *lhewar khree*, and it goes on like *lhewar nkyee* (two), *lhewar sō* (three) and so on. In this way a person's age is calculated. The old people neither remember their date of birth or age according to the date of birth. They remember only their *lho* on the basis of which, their age is determined. Now, up to 14<sup>th</sup> *Poush* of 2075 BS, there is *khee lho* (dog) and from 15<sup>th</sup> of the same month, *fo lho* (deer) will come and remains upto 14<sup>th</sup> *Poush* of 2076 BS Counting of *Lhos* is always done in *chō* language. The 12 *lhos* are given in the table below.

### Name of Twelve *lho*

Chō	Tamu	Nepali	English
<i>Chy</i>	<i>Neemee</i>	<i>Musa</i>	Mouse
<i>Lwō</i>	<i>MPye</i>	<i>Gaai</i>	Cow
<i>To</i>	<i>Chy</i>	<i>Bagh</i>	Tiger
<i>Khee</i>	<i>Nama</i>	<i>Biralo</i>	Cat
<i>Pruh</i>	<i>Kroi</i>	<i>Gidda/Garud</i>	Eagle
<i>Prih</i>	<i>Puhri</i>	<i>Sarpa</i>	Snake
<i>Ta</i>	<i>Ta</i>	<i>Ghoda</i>	Horse
<i>Lhu</i>	<i>Kyuu</i>	<i>Bheda</i>	Sheep
<i>Pra</i>	<i>Tumee</i>	<i>Ba'ndar</i>	Monkey
<i>Chyah</i>	<i>Nyema</i>	<i>Chara</i>	Bird
<i>Khee</i>	<i>Ntaki/Ntakhi</i>	<i>Kukur</i>	Dog
<i>Pho</i>	<i>Pha</i>	<i>Mirga</i>	Deer

Source: Field Survey, 2018

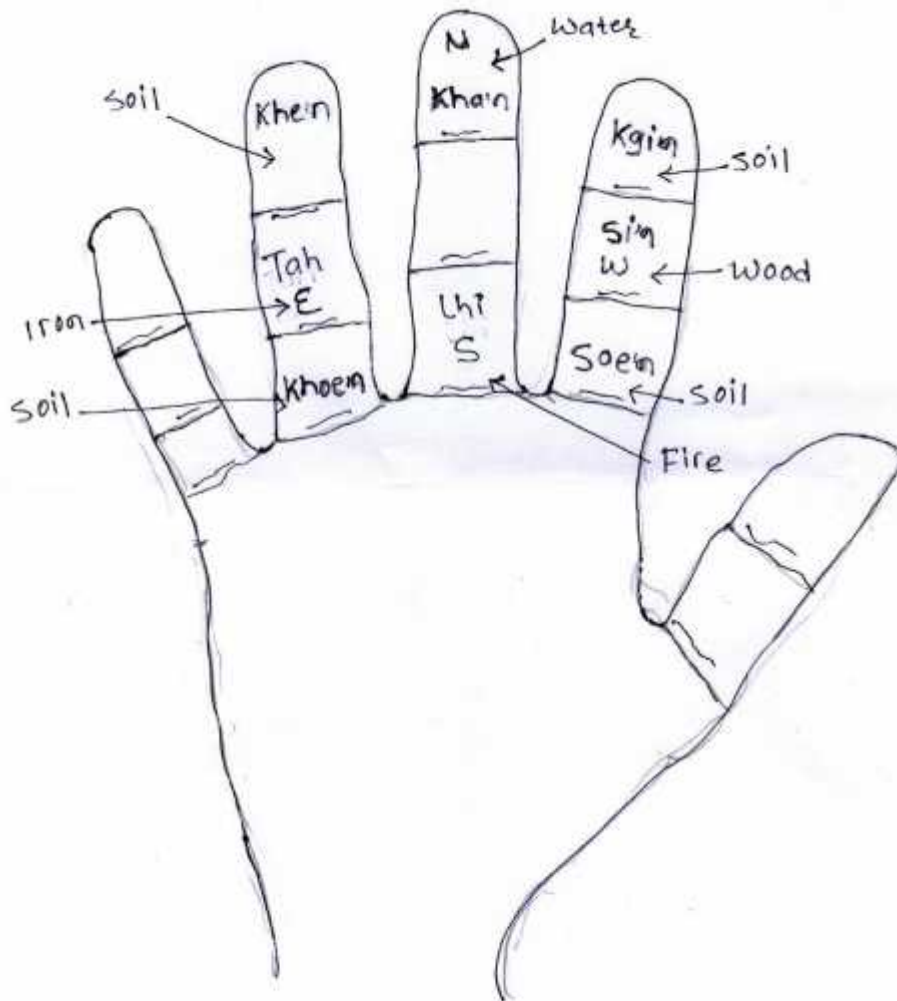
The following figure no. 5.1 shows the *parka dhee* or the house of *Parka*. This is very important for finding auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. The eight parkas are related to eight directions. The *Parka dhee* also changes in a year like the *lho*. For instance, if someone stays or follows *Parka lhi* in this *lho*, then they might stay or follow *Parka khōe* (if male) and *Parka sōe* (if female) in coming *lho*.

### Figure No. 2.1 *Parka Dhee*

Jff soil <i>kh</i>	N water <i>khā</i>	O soil <i>kg</i>
<i>Tah</i> Iron w		<i>si'n</i> wood E
<i>khōe</i> soil g}	<i>lhi</i> Fire S	<i>sōe</i> Soil c

Source: field survey, 2018 Figure No. 5.2 *Parka* and *lho syu Thupa*

**Figure: Parka and Lhysyu Thupa**



Source: Field Survey, 2075 B.S.

In the above figure, the name, house and direction of the *Parka* is given. It is only like the structure of *Parka*. The eight *Parkas* show their colours. Gurung astrologers also use their palm like fig 5.2 and count the age of a person and find the auspiciousness of a day or event. Leaving the small finger and the thumb the three fingers are used in which the middle part of the middle finger is left empty. When counted in this way, *Parka Lhee*, *Parka khõe*, *Tah*, *Kh*, *Khã*, *Kg*, *S*, *Sõe* come denoting fire, soil, iron, soil, water, soil, wood and soil respectively. Their respective directions are south, N. Nairatya, west, N, Bayabya, north, N. Ishan, east and N. Agney. *Parka Khã* is the house of a female and *Parka Lhi* is that of male. When a female's *Lho* is counted, it is done from *Khã* in an anti-clockwise direction. And when it is for males, it is started from the same parka but in a clockwise direction. The counting must stop at the current *Lho*. It is the parka in which the *Lho* stays for the year. So

that age and auspiciousness both are observed here. For example, if a female is of mouse *Lho*, the tip of thumb is kept on *Parka Khã* and the *Lhos* are counted as *Chyu Lho*(rate), *Lwõ*(cow), *To* (tiger), *Hi* (cat), *Pruh* (eagle), *Preeh* (snake), *Ta* (horse), *Lhu* (sheep), *Pra* (monkey), *Chyah* (bird), *Khi* (dog) (this year's *Lho*) and it stops at *Parka Tah*.

The female is now in *Parka Tah* for this year, to the western direction and in the iron house. It means she is not compatible with iron for this year. So, she should not use iron weapons and should not do any business with iron. She will not have good results if doing anything to the western direction. This is called *Nghaipa*. Similarly, a male of *Ta* (horse) *Lho* is counted from *Parka Lhi* and counted as *Ta* (horse), *Lhu* (sheep), *Pra* (monkey), *Chyah* (bird) and *Khi* (dog). Now his parka is *Khã*. It is in the northern direction and in the house of water. He should be aware of water, i.e. river, lakes. If he falls ill, there should be worship in some water springs. North direction is *Nghaipa* (inauspicious) so he should avoid the north direction while working, travelling etc. In this way, with the help of *Lho* and age, anyone's auspicious and inauspicious results can be found. *Parka Kh* , *Parka Khõe*, *Parka Sõe*, are called *Tuhrchha Dhee* (the house of burial place or dead place) meaning graveyard. So, if one is in this house, they must avoid crowded places, graveyards and death rituals. If they fall sick, their spirit goes and stays in the graveyards from where only a *Pachyu* or a *Lauhri* can bring it back to the sick person's body. And the *parka* houses *Tah* and *Kh* are considered auspicious. If a person stays in these *Parka* houses, then building new houses or getting married are good for them.

Besides this, the tradition of studying the heart and livers of slaughtered animals in different rituals has been in practice for ages. The method of studying is different for each ritual. According to one of the highly respected *Lauhri* late priest Kashi Ram, the studying of these organs in auspicious occasions is called *Wuita* whereas that in inauspicious occasions is called *Siuri*. By observing and studying the heart and liver of roosters, goats and sheep which are slaughtered in the rituals, the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of the person, time and event are found.

When a person falls sick and if the gallbladder of the rooster is big and long the sick person is believed to take longer to recover. This is called *Kãa phyõ pa*. Similarly, if the left part of the liver is sliced, it is thought bad for the sick person. This is called *Pi Thopa* or *Pi thoyapa*. But in auspicious events like *Chhyo Lapa* and *Phailu Lapa* the gallbladder is expected to be longer and bigger. In such rituals, gallbladder is taken as the symbol of prosperity. If the tip of the heart is yellowish the Gurungs are happy on such occasions and it is called *Ta* (Flower). If one or some of the left ribs are slightly raised, they are meant to be

that of enemies and the right ribs are for self. It means raised right ribs are auspicious and the raised left ribs are inauspicious, both they say *kyee syee raapa*, left *kyee syee* and *riht kyee syee*. But if both are raised it is considered more auspicious which is called *Kyarai phaipa*. Likewise, in the worship of natural deities and in cowsheds, buffalo sheds and sheep sheds, the auspiciousness is observed by slaughtering such animals as roosters and taking their hearts, livers and gallbladder out carefully.

In the *Pai* ritual, the slaughtering of goats and sheep is in practice. There is its own method of studying their organs. In such rituals people expect the gallbladder to be longer, bigger and whitish. If so then the dead person is understood to get all the offerings and be happy. If the gallbladder is smaller, the dead is understood to be unhappy. If small patches like wounds are present in the thinner part of the liver, it is auspicious and they are called (*pahr*) *Baar*. There is another triangular shaped part (left lobe) present on the liver. They are respectively called *La sur* (ancestors), *Tōh sur* (*Tih sur* or village/state) and *Ngko sur* (priest). If they are plain and clean, the fate of the ancestors, village and priests are considered good and if there are some wounds it is inauspicious. This is called *Khrasa-whasa*, *pys*, and *Kāatu sain* etc.

#### **Annex 4: Gurung migration history according to ritual text**

First of all, I want mention that some scholars' views about this Gurung migration what they say and then what *pye* say,

Messerschmitt, 1974; Buchanan, 1819

Centuries ago, the Gurung migrated to the southern slope of the central Nepal Himalayas probably as nomadic pastoralists, slash and burn agriculture, hunting and to some extent, salt trading between Tibet and the lower region in southern Nepal were the major Gurung economic activities hub.

MacFarlane and Gurung, 1972

It is clear from their language, which is classified as a variant of Chinese and Tibetan and from the physical, characteristic the short stature, unturned eyes, flat nose, and general mongoloid features, that the Gurungs originally came from further north. Almost certainly, many thousands of years ago, their ancestors lived in the high mountains of western China.

Harka Gurung, 1996.

From mustang, Gurung moved to Manang where they came under the domination of klye (Ghale) chiefs later migrated from Tibet, then they crossed over to the South Annapurna Himal, which also marked their transitions from pastoralism to slash and burn cultivation. The Gurungs' first settlement of the South slopes of Annapurna was at Kohla, from where they spread a loose federation of local chiefs.

Tamu & Tamu (2062 BS, p.18)

In tamu tradition, as they migrated from one side to another. They would call the new site by the old name if it was similar in aspect. Tamu *Pye* says that the soul of the dead person is believed to go first to Kokoli Mar tso, which is under water. In the Quinghai region of China lies a huge lake with an island in the middle called Kokonor (or Chinghai). It is similar to Hara Usa Nuur (one of the seven lakes) of western Mongolia, and some nearby places have names ending in "chow" such as Lanchow, lianchow, Kanchow, Suchow, etc. These could conceivably derive from the Cho Nasa of almost six or seven thousand years ago, described in Tamu *pye*.

Tek Bahadur Gurung (2019)

Ancient ancestors of the Tamu had reached Central Asia and Siberia some 20/25 thousand years ago. Later on, they moved to the south and because of unfavourable weather and climate they migrated further south. About six thousand years ago they reached the Yunan area of south-west China. It was the place where they founded and developed their civilization. They went on moving. The results of the DNA tests of the Tamu of Nepal revealed that their ancestors moved to Tibet from Yunan province and then to the south of the Himalayas some two/three thousand years ago.

There has recently been a scientific study and research based on the history of *Pye-tā-lhu-tā*. DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) tests were performed regarding the roots of the Gurungs. Dr. Tek Bahadur Gurung earned his Ph. D for which he took the assistance of science. The DNA tests proved the oral myth and chant of the Gurungs that they had migrated from their origin place to the current settlements of Annapurna region.

The research of Gurung proves that the Gurungs lived in Siberia and many other parts of China. Their oral texts commonly call the different places of China as *Chō* which were the states of the Gurungs. They gradually migrated to Mustang, Manang, Lamjung and Kaski establishing their own states as they had done in the places of *Chō*. It is found in the *pye*.

Now I want to write and argue what the oral *pye* (text) says about Gurung migration. The Gurung priests chant long texts in cultural and ritual occasions. Particularly in the third and the last day of the ritual of *Pai*, the *Pachyu* priests read a long text called *Hyula ch pa pye* (the text of state establishment) which describes the origin and migration process of the Gurungs. This text and the studies and arguments mentioned just above are similar. From the migration or the places from where they had come, their occupation, their physical features and from the *pye* itself, scholars have gathered enough proofs which ensure that the Gurungs came to Nepal from the north. The *pye* is in *Chō* language, it deals with society and ritual-culture so it does not give the time frame of the events that took place in the distant past. They established their states wherever they stayed and finally they entered Nepal via Tibet and stayed in Mustang, Manang, Lamjung and other places like Sikles. They continued their traditional society.

There are long descriptions about the migration process and state establishment in their oral texts, which they call *Hyula ch pa* text and *Se cha kwurpa*; (state establish and taking name of different places of their migration route) in *Hyula ch pa* text. According to one of the *Pachyu* priests, Yam Bahadur Gurung, there is the description of the first state from *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa* to *Kohla* where the Gurung were ruled by Ghale. And, in *Se cha*

*kwurpa* text, there is description of all the places where the Gurungs reached for farming, hunting and surrounding, fighting, learning priest, worshipping and for activities. The places are especially in Mongolia, China, Tibet and the Gandaki region (Gurung, 2001: p29). According to *Pachyu* priest Yam Bahadur Gurung and, as oral history, *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa* was the first state of the Gurungs. *Mhina kuchu* (Nine proto clans of the Gurungs) had established their own state in *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa*. All the responsible people such as priests (*Pachyu* and *Lauhri*, common peoples and other characters had played vital roles in *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa*. They elected the king named *Pahchyö Karu lhe*. There was a close and strong social structure in *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa*. All the parts of the social structures had equal role and equal responsibilities and communal practice among the Gurungs, no one was higher and no one was lower categories for their clan groups and social roles. They fostered domestic animals like horses, yaks, cows, goats, and sheep in the state.

After death of the king *Pahchyö Karu lhe*, Gurungs began to migrate towards *Wuicho-Choru* (second place or state) along with their animals. The scholars' studies show that, the place *Wuicho-Choru* lies somewhere in China. According to their oral history it lies in western China, but we are not sure where the place lies. The place *Wuicho-choru* is their ancestral land. *Pye tā ta lhu tā* says that, *Pachyu* priest established huge *Kōehpo* (religious, ritual, meeting and training centre) in the place and the place is very sacred and popular among the *Pachyu* priests. The *Pachyu* are very devoted towards *Wuicho-choru* since they regard their ancestors epitomizing power. There is very popular word and sentence in the *pye*, “*Wuicho-Chorura teepai chyōh Pachyu*” or the northern *Pachyu* who is living in *Wuicho-choru*. The sentence of the *pye* defines that the northern *Pachyu* are very powerful, knowledgeable and respectful among the Gurung community since the beginning. When the *Pachyus* start *failu* (ancestral god worship), they feel much devotion to *Wuicho-choru*. The *Pachyus* believe that, there is the *chhyopa* god, when they perform *Chhyopa* (ancestral god worship) worship, they have to go in *Wuicho-Choru* by reciting the *pye* for blessing and good luck the family. The *Pachyus* believe that *Wuicho-choru* is the owner of *Chhopa* god. It was since the death of *Choru kyahla* or the king of *Wuicho-choru*, the Gurungs migrated to *Pmuichu hyula* (third historical place). According to the knowledgeable Gurung of Sikles, the place lies in upper Manang of Nepal.

The *pye* describes historical and main places and states where the events took place in the history. So, there are long geographical locations and time from *Sa-fu-ti kyahlsa* to Nepal. According to the *pye*, *mpuichu hyula* may lie in Manang district of Nepal. Kromchhai tamu and Palchhai tamu (2062 BS, p.18) write that,

The Tibetan (Bon people) apparently migrated from the border regions of Qinghai, Kansu, Sichuan and Yunan. Later came a wave of Han (Chinese) immigrants. Chamdo (chhyam toh: nice village) in eastern Tibet seems to have been the gateway to Tibet for all these peoples. A Neolithic settlement at karo not far from chamdo has been dated as being more than 4600 years old. The Han settlers called it Kham suggesting that they grew millet there. They may have been the ancestors of the Khampa (Bhotiya) or Khambu (rai) of Nepal. Later, a third wave of immigrants, possibly the *Mhina* kugi (people of nine clans) replaced the Han settlers. By this time, it had become a cattle grazing area though it may also have been an important trading part.

Geographically, Pmuichu hyula lies in Manang district of Himalayan region. I have mentioned here about the short history of the Gurungs migration according to their oral *pye*. Now it is the history of *Mpuichu*. According to Palje tamu and Kromchhei tamu, there were Khampas in Sichuan, Yunan and Chamdo at the period. In the same time, the Gurungs selected khampa king in *Mpuichu hyula*. When Khampa was appointed chief in *Mpuichu*, he was haunted by nightmares for nine consecutive nights. There he saw collisions of big hills, big precipitations, big stones, big trees and the severing rivers. A few days later, it happened to be true. All the lands including agricultural places were destroyed by the landslide. In this way, the Gurungs were affected by the natural disasters. The Gurungs who survived from the landslides in *Mpuichu* were abandoned and continued to live in Sauche prah'n ma wu with their cattle. Gurung (2007, p.29) argues that, The Gurungs migrated to Sauche prah'n ma wu Ashra Gurung who is also from the Kromchhai clan and from Dhaprang thar. He is 85-years-old and experienced of going to carry Tibetan salt. Once the Gurung of Sikles used Tibetan salt, they brought salt from Tibet which they called 'chatar yaapa'. I discussed this practice and system with Ashra and he said that *Suche prāhma wu* which might have been the territory of present Manang of Nepal. According to the *pye* of this place, Kyalpo chhenpo was the chief of the Gurungs in *Sauche prāh ma wu* at that time in *Sauche prāh ma wu*, the Gurungs could not produce any plants.

According to *pye*, we can strongly say *Sauche prāhma wu* is in Manang. The hardships faced by the Gurungs in *Mpuichu hyula* made them migrate to this place crossing rivers and mountains. This place was too dry for plants to grow. They tried to plant vegetation but in vain. It is explained in the *pye* as:

*Chura plupai chyōh mu kyelai Akhā ko*      The crops sown here cannot germinate.

<i>Chura plupai chyō mu sarlai Akhā ko</i>	The crops sown here cannot bear flowers and fruits
<i>Chura nha chapa yō lai nkyes chapa Ayō ko</i>	One eats in the morning but not in the evening
<i>Chura nkyes chapa yō lai nha chapa Ayō ko</i>	One eats in the evening but not in the morning.

Hence the Gurungs faced big difficulties to overcome hunger and hardships and then decided to go to hunt using dogs. They carried the arrow and bow and followed the dogs in the jungle. They often used to chase wild animals like deer. The hunters travelled long way and big forests. When they reached in Tiuche pankari, in the way of hunting, they saw a deer in *Malwa komiri* (the place and the way of hunting from Sauche to Kohla cheeka). When the hunters arrived in *Malwa komiri* then the dog saw the deer in *Kohla cheeka*. Then, the hunters arrived in *Kohla cheeka* but the deer went in hiding. The hunters could not see and hunt the deer.

While in hunting they lost the prey in the place called *Kohla cheeka* but they found the soil fertile. Being winter, they thought to sow some barley (*kar f preeh f*). For that they shook the carrier of the hunting and utter '*kar f preeh f*'. By chanting some mantras to the soil and scattering the grains, they returned to Sauche prah'n ma wu and told the people what they had just seen during the hunting. In the beginning of rainy season or downward season they came to the place where they had seeded the grains. They cheered when they saw a hand long flowers and half hand long fruits there and went back to Sauche. They told the villagers that *Kohla Cheeka* had been indeed a fertile land.

They remained in *Kohla Cheeka* (another historical place) for a significantly long period and in time came to *Kohla*. *Kohla* (another historical place) was more fertile and they grew barley, oat like grain karu and wuwa, a grain grown in the Himalayas. But the problem was that the crops were damaged at night. So, they were deprived of the food they had grown. Highly knowledgeable *Pachyu-Lauhris* performed an omen. They found out that the crops had been damaged by a horse- like demon. They decided to kill the demon and did so. Then,

<i>Pāhn keu tapo ta tō mai saipai leesō ra</i>	After killing of the wild horse that troubled us
<i>Tapo ta tō mai mplupai lee sō ra</i>	After piercing the wild horse that worried us
<i>Karu mrora th th pyōh khachai</i>	<i>Karu</i> (barley) began to flourish in <i>karu</i> field
<i>Preeh mro th th pyōh khachai</i>	Buckwheat began to grow in the buckwheat field

The Gurung abandoned *Kohla cheeka* and began to settle in *Soure hyula*. According to the *pye* of *Soure hyula* is the last unified state among the Gurung community. I visited the place in 2076 BS *Jestha* 8 to 12. It takes one day from Sikles. It lies in the eastern part of Sikles. It is situated at more than thirty-three-hundred-metre-high above sea level. The place is also another fertile and huge ground. There are three different settlements places in the *Soure hyual*. One is northern side another is eastern side and next another is in western side. So, the *pye* and the Gurung say *Saure hyula* or three settlement. In the *pye*, they say *tu pai naas*, *par pai naas* and *mu pai naas* or above village, middle village and below village. *Kyalpo Reechu/Ruchu* was the *Tdo* in *Saure hyula*. The state is historically and archeologically very important for anthropological and archaeological studies. The place is more important and historical than the other *kohlas* (*Kohla cheeka* and *Kohla sō thar*). Because a *Pai* of a man named *Chyu-mphi wuito* was performed twice here. And the history or the *pye* is very popular among the Gurung community.

According to the Gurung religion and cultural association of Pokhara, Nepal, *Kohla* is an ancient site of *Tamu* settlement before they migrated to Kaski and Lamjung. *Tamu pye lhu sangh*, Pokhara Nepal which is the central organization of Bon religion and traditional *Pachyu-Lauhri* priests, initiated archaeological research of that site in 1994, an anthropological team from Cambridge University and archaeologists from Nepal Archaeology department (see detail in the *Kohla project 2000*, the first season of excavation).

### **Annex 5: *Kōehpo* (Traditional Ritual and Religious Institution)**

Now the *Kōehpos* (ritual and religious house) are developing as a shrine or centre of the *pye tā lhu tā*. *Pachyu*, *Lauhri* and *Lam* are the ancient priests among the Gurungs and *Pachyu-Lauhri* always follows the rule of *Kōehpo*. Hindus have temple, Muslims have Mosque, Christians have Church, Buddhist have Gumba or Monastery and the Bon have *Ko hpo*. Especially the *Ko hpo* is the gathering house of Gurung priests where they talk, conduct meeting and training their *pye tā lhu tā*. This traditional institute has very informal practices in village levels but now, the institution is developing as formal and modern in city areas. “In ancient period when the Gurungs were in China and Northern Himalayan region of Nepal, the *Pachyus* had established their *Kōehpo* in *Wuicho choru* (one of the historical places, somewhere of China), *Lauhri* in *Lapru*, (today’s Mustang) and *Lam* in *Nar* (Today’s Manang). The three places are very sacred and prestigious among the Gurungs. *Pachyu* who are the owners of *Wuicho choru* and the place is related to their ancestors. Similarly *Lauhri s* are related to *Lapru/ Lupra* and Bon *lam* to Manang. The *Pachyus* recite that when they perform *Pai* ritual, ‘*Nkyō ko hpo lhemati ko hpo sy yuchai*’ or ‘we are the owners of *Ko hpo* among the Gurungs and we established the *Ko hpo* and continue the *Ko hpo*’. Pignede (1966, p.425) says that,

The religions of the *pacu* and *klihbri* does not resemble ancient Tibetan Bonism. We do not find any pre-Buddhist or Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Gurung country. Gurung do not know the teaching of Lord Buddha as the Tibetans do. Gurung lamas learned some of the ritual texts of Tibetan Buddhism a few generations ago. The most popular text is that used in funeral and the *pae*. The *pae* is in reality the funeral ritual of the *pocu* and *Klihbri*. Only in recent times have *plih-gi* Gurungs used Lama for *pae*.

Pignede, who studied in Mohariya village in Kaski district fifty-three years ago (?) The study is one of the oldest anthropological types of research among the Gurung community. So, we easily agree with Pignede, when he was walking in Mohariya and another village of the Gurungs there were not any Buddhist Monasteries and Bon shrines. But the *Pachyu*, *Lauhri* and Bon *Lam* practised that. They selected one knowledgeable and oldest priest and his house was known as ‘*ko hpo dhe*’. Or the oldest and knowledgeable *Pachyu*’ house was *Pachyus Kōehpo* and that was same for *Lauhri* and *Lam*. Between these periods, there are development of Buddhist monasteries and Gurungs *Kōehpos*. When the Gurungs migrated from Kohla to Sikles the *Pachyu* priest of *Lhika* clan established their *Kōehpo* in

*Kgankyu*, (north-east part of the study area) the *Lauhri* priest of *Tu* clan established in *Syuri dh* (north-east side of the study area, where they built *chyelee koe'hnpo*) and *Lam* priest of *Pahncha* clan in Kanma (near the *chyelee ko hpo*) *Kōehpo*. The *Kromchhai Pachyu* were from *Namchu* (one of the historical and ancestral places of *Namchu kromchhei*) above Tangting village. *Pachyu* priests recite that about the *Kōehpo* and they recite '*Namchu Kromchhai Tōh*' (the place is owner of *Namchu kromchhei*) in the *Tōhtā pye* (the text of village boundary). The *pye* explains about these three different priests and their *Kōehpos*,

<i>Tara Wuicho chōru ra teepai chyo</i>	The <i>Pachyu</i> who lived in Wuicho Chōru
<i>Pachyu</i>	(somewhere of China)
<i>Tara Lapru mharson'ra teepai Pa h mu</i>	The <i>Lauhri</i> who lived in Lapru Mharsō
	(Mustang)
<i>Tara Naar khurara teepai Lam</i>	The <i>Lam</i> who lived in Nar (Manang)
<i>chahchahmai</i>	

The text says that *Pachyuu* are from *Wuichō Choru* where they established *Pachyu Kōehpo*. *Lauhri* from *Lapru* and they established *Lapru koehn'po* in *lapru* as well as *lam* are Nar Manang. Nowadays, there are no certain houses used for *Kōehpo*, though, they select the house of the head priest and gather. If somebody (*hyoeh'n ta- yoeh 'nche*) has to request for performing cultural and ritual ceremonies, then first, he should go to the head of the priests or *Kōehpo dhe* for the information. Then the head priest calls other priests for a meeting about the ritual. If somebody likes to understand and is interested to learn the priestly work, then they have to go to the head of the priest in *Kōehpo dhe* (house of *Kōehpo*). In the early times, most Gurung were content to remain in their village, but later they started to migrate and settle down in major cities of Nepal and out of Nepal. Soon, there arose a need to have Gurung formal organization.

After 2047 BS there established more Gurung organizations, such as *Tamuy pye-lhu-sangh*, *Tamu Chhoch dhe* (Gurung council house) and *Tamu dhe* (the house of Gurung) *Tamu pye-lhu-sangh* is the central organization of Gurung religion and rituals which was established in Pokhara and is formal and purely concentrated to Gurung religion, Ritual and tradition. Now construction of *Kōehpos* is developing all over Nepal where Gurung are settled. And the process is developing in foreign countries as well. The concept is to develop and protect the Gurung culture. Pettigrew says that "Saving culture."

Now here is a short discussion about the design of *Kōehpo*. All structures are related with *pye*. I have heard many times that some people say lotus temple, some people say lotus

Gumba because of its structure or design. Pettigrew who had long stayed in Nepal and largely studied about the Gurung traditional ritual and institution. Pettigrew (1995, p.185) writes that about Ko hpo,

The design chosen appears, to the unaware lay person, to be one based on the most contemporary modern design available. While the size and lay-out are those of a large urban meeting place, the design has been carefully constructed to incorporate some of the most essential symbols of the *pye-ta lhu ta*. The four outside walls are in the shape of (“rice”) *Kaidu* which represent the powerful and protective *chhyopa* god, the internal wall design is both 12 sided (which represents the 12 astrological years) and eight-sided (which represents an astrological constellation called a *parka*). On the roof are three small chambers which contain the *phailu cho* of the *Pachyu*, *Klyepri* and *Purano Lama*.

Pettigrew describes the saving culture of the Gurungs and *tamu pye-lhu-sangh* organized all these cultures. The *sangh* is one of the representatives for the protection of Gurung traditional culture and rituals. The organization was established for Gurung priests and Gurung shamans where the priests and common people gather and perform their ritual, especially, death and *Pai* (soul journey ritual) rituals. There is a museum where they have preserved the Gurung traditional tools, techniques, priestly instruments and texts. Nowadays, they are conducting priestly institutes and some learners are learning in the organization. Therefore, the central organization of *Tamu pye-lhu-sangh* is not only a ritual or religious one but also a social organization.

According to Sukra Raj Gurung, who is the chairperson of youth community of central *Tamu pye lhu sangh* Pokhara, and official secretary of the centre, there are thirty-two *Kōehpos* all over Nepal and twenty-two *Kōehpos* are in process. I have visited some of them, I reached twice in Morang Kaanepokhari of Eastern Nepal where ‘*Syarlo Tamu pye lhu-sangh*’ (or eastern *tamu pye lhu sangh*) has been established. Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Syangja, Tanahun, Gorkha and Lamjung, where the Gurungs have established *Kōehpo*. They raised fund and built the *Kōehpos* in such places. Not only in Nepal but also in foreign countries like the United Kingdom, Hongkong, America, Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai, Baharain, Saudi Arabia, Israel, India are also very active for *pye tā lhu tā* which are the foreign branches of central TPLS or *Kōehpo*. Nine years ago, I visited Qatar for *Lho Saar* program. Devi Jung Gurung from Sikles and late. Hari Maya Gurung from Kathmandu also accompanied me at the time. In the case of Sikles, there is also a *Kōehpo* under construction named “*Chyeelee Kōehpo.*’ *Risfulu*, which is one of the historical and archaeological places

for the history of the Sikles is the sacred place for the building of '*Chyeelee Kōehpo*. The place is very beautiful view point of Sikles, we can easily see high Himalayan range, highland, forests, high hills, the territory of the Kohla state, and others scenes from this *Chyeelee Kōehpo* of *Risfulu*. The land was donated by late. Sarpan *kromchhei*, late. Damer Bahadur *kromchhei*, late. Lal shree *Lihka* or Krishna *knosai* and Dal Bahadur *lem*. Bal Bahadur Gurung (Tu *Lauhri*, Pam Bahadur Gurung (*Kromchhei Pachyu*), Ran Bahadur Gurung (*Lihka Pachyu*), Bhim raj Gurung, Jagat Bahadur *Pahchyu* Gurung, (U.K.) and Som Bahadur *Tohrchhei* Gurung (U.K.) are the main actors for this *Kōehpo* construction and Suraj Kumar Gurung (Chairman of the Madi village Municipality ward NO. 1), is the chairperson of *Tamu pye lhu sangh* Sikles, Ichchha Bahadur Gurung is vice chairman and Gehendra Gurung playing the role of secretary for the committee. They estimate more than twenty million rupees for the *Chyeelee Kōehpo*. The *Kōehpo* represent all people from Sikles. The *Kromchhai* family of Harputhar are also going to build a *Kōehpo* in *Myeyachu* (western part of Sikles) There is already a *Kōehpo* in *Kgapu kyu* (one of the sacred source of water) of the *Lauhri* family too.

### Annex 6: Traditional Kinship System among the Gurung

Gurung practices a traditional kinship system, which is widely used in their major ritual practices such as marriage, death (funeral) and *Pai* (after funeral ritual). There is inter linkage between maternal and paternal for ritual continuity. Kinship plays a significant role for traditional ritual identities. They address their own traditional kinship language, the following shows Gurung traditional kinship system.

#### Kinship Terminology

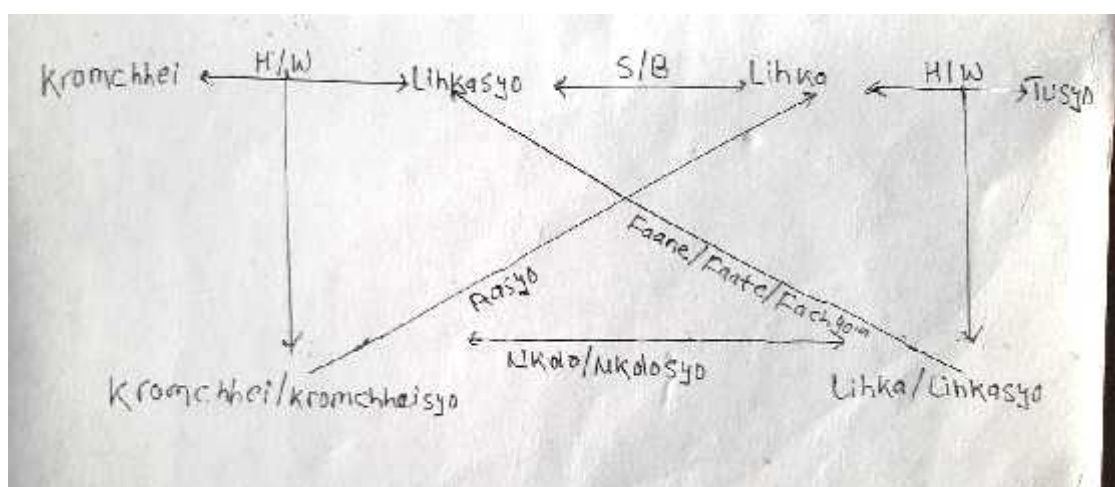
Gurung	Nepali	English
<i>Puhchyu</i>	<i>Bajyei</i>	Grandmother
<i>Pahche</i>	<i>Baaje</i>	Grandfather
<i>Ma</i>	<i>Aama</i>	Mother
<i>Pahpwu</i>	<i>Baba</i>	Father
<i>Aasyo</i>	<i>Mama</i>	Maternal Uncle
<i>Aānki</i>	<i>Maiju</i>	Maternal Aunt
<i>Nkolo</i>	<i>Solti</i>	son of a Mama or Fupu
<i>Nkolosyo</i>	<i>Soltini</i>	Daughter of a Mama of Fupu
<i>Mathepa</i>	<i>Thulo Aama</i>	Elder Mother
<i>Machyopa</i>	<i>Sani Aama</i>	Younger Mother
<i>Pāhy</i>	<i>Kaka</i>	Uncle (the first son)
<i>Pahncha</i>	<i>Sano baba/ Kaka</i>	Uncle (the youngest son)
<i>Kye</i>	<i>Sasura</i>	Father-in-Law
<i>Syumi</i>	<i>Saasu</i>	Mother-in-Law
<i>Aay</i>	<i>Jetha Dai</i>	Eldest Brother
<i>Chō</i>	<i>Bhaujo</i>	Wife of Elder Brother
<i>Chah</i>	<i>Chhora</i>	Son
<i>Chahmi</i>	<i>Chhori</i>	Daughter
<i>Mbo</i>	<i>Jwai</i>	Husband of daughter or younger sister
<i>Phāne</i>	<i>Jethi Fupu</i>	First sister of Father
<i>Phaate</i>	<i>Mahili/Sainli Fupu</i>	Sisters of father except first and last
<i>Phachyo</i>	<i>Kaanchhi Fupu</i>	Last sister of father
<i>Ampmo</i>	<i>Bhena/Fupaju</i>	Husband of elder sister or Fupus
<i>Syō</i>	<i>Sala</i>	Younger brother of wife

<i>Fa/Py</i>	<i>Logne</i>	Husband
<i>Mri</i>	<i>Swasni</i>	Wife
<i>Kwōe</i>	<i>Naati</i>	Grandson
<i>Kwōemi</i>	<i>Naatini</i>	Granddaughter
<i>Ree</i>	<i>Didi Bahini</i>	Sister
<i>Mhyu</i>	<i>Daju Bhai</i>	Brother
<i>Ngyala</i>	<i>Mit</i>	Fictive Friend (male)
<i>Ngyalasyo</i>	<i>Mitini</i>	Fictive Friend (female)
<i>Nky ro</i>	<i>Samdhi</i>	Father of Jwain/Buhari
<i>nky syo</i>	<i>Samdhini</i>	Mother of jwain/Buhari
<i>Samikgi</i>	<i>Logne-Swasni</i>	Husband-Wife

Source: Field survey, 2018

These are the different kinship system between maternal uncle's children and aunt's children. The relation is *solti-soltini* among them. The cross-cousin marriages take place but not essentially. The marriage (*Nky Chyaapa*) is permitted to anybody except their own bloodline. If it is different bloodline but someone's mother has her sisters in that bloodline the marriage is discouraged. For example, I am a *Kromchhai*. I can marry any but a *Kromchhai* girl. But if my mother's sisters are in the houses of a *Pahchyu*, *Nkosai* or *Tu*, I cannot marry the girl from those houses. Hence the Gurungs have brothers and sisters from different lineages. The following figure demonstrates the marriageable relationship among the Gurungs.

**Figure: kinship and cross cousin marriage system**



Source: Field survey, 2019

*Kromchhai, Lhika, Tu* are some of the lineages and the suffix 'syo' means the females of those groups. In the fig: 5.3 above, a *Kromchhai* and a *Lhikasyo* are shown as *Fa* and *Mri* i.e. husband and wife. Their children are *Kromchhai'n* and *Kromchhaisyo* as they are considered to go the line of their father. Similarly, a *Lhika* and a *Tusyosyo* children are *Lhika* not *Tu*. So *Lhika* and *Lhikasyo* are brothers and sisters. *Kromchhai* and *Kromchhaisyo* have *Lhikasyo* as their mother so *Lhika*, their maternal uncles are their *Aasyo*<sup>48</sup>. Now *Lhika* and *Lhikasyo* call the sisters of their father as *Phaane/ Phaate* and *Phachyo*. So, the children of *Mama* and *Phupu* call *Nkolo Nkolosyo* to each other and marriage between them is highly welcome. Gurung people look for the possibility of marriage among the relations not relations among the marriage. The above figure, H is the signal of husband, W is the signal of wife and S is the sister, B is the signal of brother.

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<sup>48</sup> Aasyo-Gurung language, maternal uncle. (Asyang by Holmberg, 19890). According to Gurung kinship relation and their tradition, they practiced paternal and maternal children marriage.

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