

Tribhuvan University
Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Performance in Limbu Mundhum: A Study of Cultural Representation

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement for the M. Phil Degree in English

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Letter of Recommendation

It is recommended that the dissertation entitled **Performance in Limbu Mundhum: A Study of Cultural Representation** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the M. Phil Degree in English by Ramesh Kumar Limbu has been completed under my supervision. I recommend it for readily acceptance.

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Prof. Dr. Abhi N. Subedi

Supervisor

Letter of Approval

This dissertation entitled **Performance in Limbu Mundhum: A Study of Cultural Representation** submitted to the central Department of English, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the M. Phil Degree in English by Ramesh Kumar Limbu has been approved by the under designed Members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The Limbus, one of the ethnic groups mainly inhabiting in the eastern part of Nepal, live their own distinctive culture based on traditional ritual performances under the guidance of Mundhum. The Mundhum is an accumulation of religious narrative text that consists of mythological stories, legends, prehistoric accounts, pragmatic and philosophical exhortations, and so on in oral form. The existence of Mundhum, thus, rests on its performativity owing to its oral tradition. The Mundhum is recited or narrated by Limbu ritual/religious actants in cultural/ritual observations, that is, rituals pre-birth to after death. Mundhum as a performance culture best represents everyday-life activities of the Limbus, a constitutive of Limbu culture, history and religion. This research work focuses in particular on some of the major Mundhum performances and their reflections in socio-cultural and religio-historical aspects of Limbu people. It also emphasizes on the roles of ritual performers, participants and audience that they play for enlivening the cultural, historical and mythical properties. Moreover, it brings to light how the Mundhum performance has become common aspiration and symbolic representation, and how it can be the window to see the various socio-cultural representation, psycho-behavioural natures as well as manifestation of gender power in the Kirant Limbu people and thereby their community.

Chapter One: Limbu and Mundhum Culture

The Limbus

The Limbu, one of the vital groups among Kirant people, is an indigenous ethnic community of Nepal. The Limbu Kirantis, traditionally known as wanderers and hunters, hill and mountain dwellers, users of medicinal herbs and spices, physicians and architects; nature worshipers and animists, and indigenous land owners; have very strong attachment to agro-pastoral tradition. Mainly, they are found inhabiting the area of eastern hilly districts of the democratic republic of Nepal such as Taplejung, Panchthar, Ilam, Jhapa of Mechi zone and Sangkhuwasabha, Tehrathum, and Dhankuta of Koshi zone which is historically known by farther Kirant or Limbuwan, their native territory. Now, Limbus are also found in many other parts of the country including the Kathmandu valley. They are known as the original settlers of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam and other many places of India, as well as Bhutan and Myanmar, too. And of course, because of modernization and globalization, at present, they are found being globally spread over as both permanent and temporary residents. They designate themselves as *Lungbongba Khambongbasa* - meaning the lineage emerged from the rock and the soil which confirms them being autochthons in the land of this country. Their connection with hilly areas is very old. Chaitanya Subba (1995) says, “Himalayan region was always a favorable abode of Kiratas since the remote past” (17). The government census 2001 has recorded 359,378 Limbus in Nepal that is 1.58 percent of the total population, and 333,633 Limbu mother tongue speakers. Moreover, more than 150,000 Limbu people live in different countries like India, Bhutan, Myanmar and many other places of the world.

Genetically, “the origin of the Kirat people of Nepal can be traced back in combination of three races [...] known by the names of Khambongbas or the Khambos, the Tangsangthas or the Mongols and the Munaphens or the Chinese” (Chemjong, 3). According to various writers and historians such as Chatterji (1951a), Chemjong (1966a), Singh (1990b), Prapannacharya (1994a, 1994b) have asserted that Kirant people embody the mongoloids physiognomy and speak Tibeto-Burman languages. Chemjong and Prapannacharya have presented different ethnic and tribal groups like Limbu, Rai, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Newar, Lapcha (Rong), Thakali, Malla, Tharu, Dhimal, Kisan, Raji, Marchha, Saukha (Vyansi), etc. of Nepal and Ahom, Dimachha, Karvi, Kuki, Naga, Koche, Mizo, Manipuri, Khasia, Jayantiya, Garo, Vaiphei, etc. of Anunachal, Tripura and the eastern part of India as the descendants of ancient Kirants. At present, the historic dynasty comprising Limbu, Rai, Yakkha inhabiting the major part of eastern Nepal and Sunuwar of central Nepal after the takeover by the Lichchhavi Kings, designate as Kirants with possession of their own distinct language, culture, tradition, religion and oral literature called Mundhum.

Different historical documents reveal that the term “Limbu” was used by Gurkha (Nepal) administration after 1774. The decrees and letters of Sen rulers before the unification of Nepal and the genealogies of various clans of Limbus also divulge that the Kirant leaders were conferred the titles of Raya and thus they were known as Raya and later Rais. Limbu also seems to be recent use of Susuwa Lilim Yakthungs or Yakthungbas. Some believe that Yakthungba is a derivative of Yaksha and some interpret its literal meaning as the ‘Yaksha winner’. In Limbu language it denotes “heroes of the hills” (Yak – hills, thung- heroes or mighty warriors), which bears the connotation of

Kiratas. Today Limbus and Rais have separate entities; however, they share the common tradition, customs and way of life. The groups of ten chiefs were called *Thibong Yakthung* or ten Limbus and the land which they won with the help of Li or bow and arrows were called Limbuwan (Chemjong 1948, Dahal 1984). The descendants of Lilimhang of Susuwaden (capital in the east Nepal or within the region of seven rivers) or the progeny of Limbukhang, the great grandson of Lilimhang, were known as Limbus (Mabohang & Dhungel, 1955). Gorkha rulers might have called the inhabitants living around the ranges of Limbusringam, the sanskritized version of Lumbasumba (Kanchanjunga) as Limbu (Kandangwa, 1990b). Literally, “Lingba” denotes “self-grown or emerged” and some of the Limbu language experts believe that “Limbu” may have been derived from “Lingba” and there is also a place named Lingba in Limbuwan which also supports this assumption (Kainla, 22).

Limbu community possesses distinctive language, literature, culture, tradition, religion, rituals, folklore, folk- treatment and so on. They have their own mother-tongue known as Limbu language which they call *Yakthungpan or yakthungba-pan*. Limbu language has the characteristics of pronominalization and falls under the rubric of the Tibeto-Burman subfamily of Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Harka Gurung (2004) proclaims that, “Ethnic groups are mostly Mongoloid and speak Tibeto Burman languages. On the other hand, most caste people are Caucasoid and speak Indo-Aryan languages” (49). This language “has object agreement of a complex type” (Angdembe, 1998:17). The Limbu language is normally subdivided into four major dialects: Taplejunge or Tambarkhole, Chatthare, Panthare, and Pheddappe. Though, in some recent days, there is a small voice of claim that the Chatthare dialect is to be considered

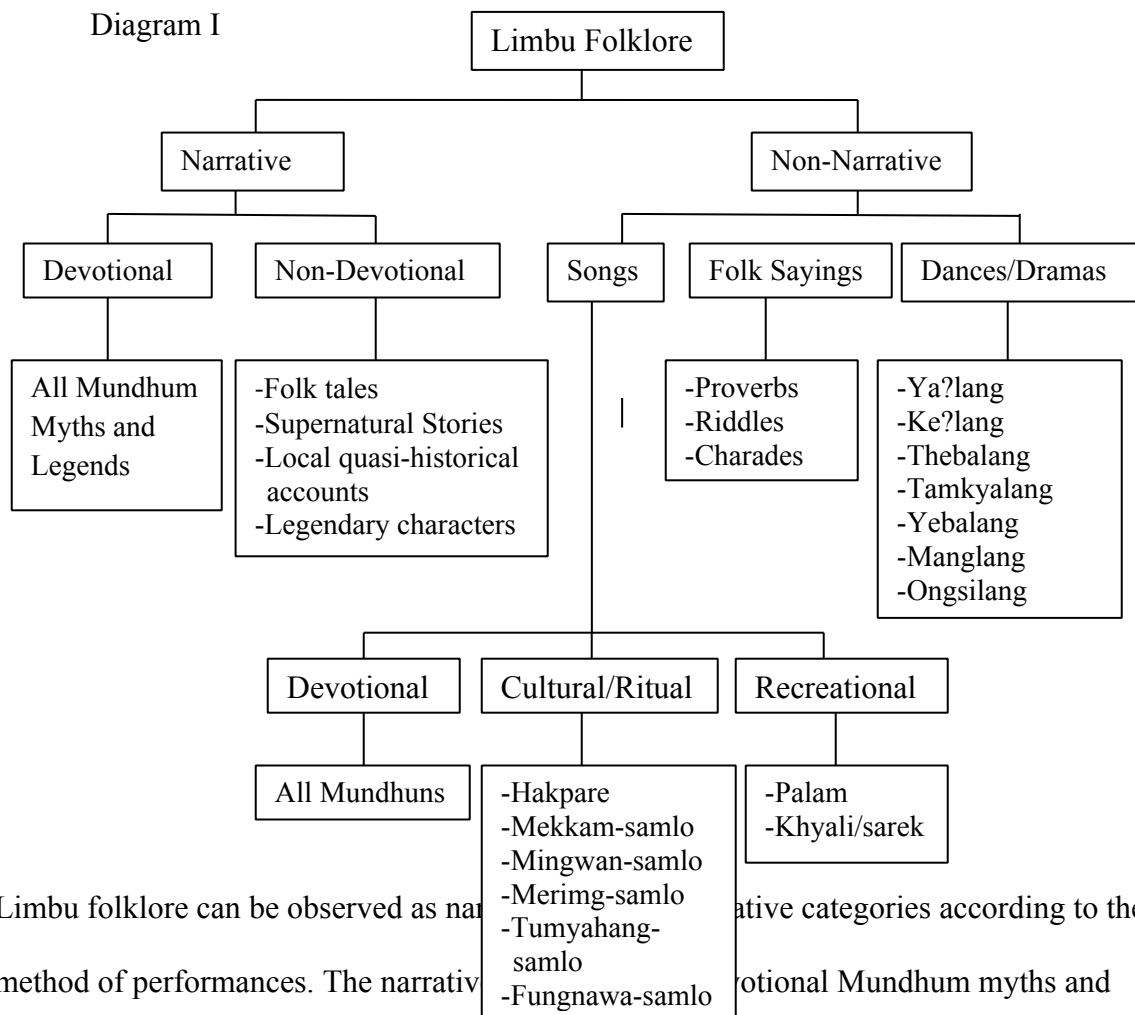
as a different language from Limbu proper it cannot suffice the criteria as a different kind of language thanks to its high degree of intelligibility and just a minor dialectical variation with rest of the Limbu dialects. Limbu language is also spoken by most of other non-Limbu people in Limbuwan region. This language is the one among Tibeto-Burman languages which has its own written form or script called *Srijanga* named after *tyewongsi* or intellectual Limbu king of Limbuwan who “had introduced [this script] among Kirant Limbus during the end of the 9th and early 10th century” (Kainla, 1992). Besides their own mother-tongue, most of them can understand and speak the link language (Khas) Nepali which, currently in Nepal, is also language of the nation. The use of Nepali language was made more effective in this community only after the takeover of Limbuwan by king Prithvi Narayan Shah of the house of Gorkha. After the Gorkha [technical] conquest in the second half of the eighteenth century, linguist George van Driem (1990) notes, “the influence of the Indo-Aryan language Nepali, or Khas Kura, became increasingly felt in Pallo Kirat 'Far Kirant', the homeland of the Limbu, Yakkha, Yakkhaba and Mewahang”.

Limbus are rich in folk literature that includes Mundhums, proverbs, folksongs like *palams* and *khyali*, cultural songs like *hakpare*, and riddles, various folk sayings, puns, charades, folktales, folk narratives, etc. In the Limbu folk literature, the Mundhum is a broad umbrella term that incorporates various entities such as legends, myths, folklores, prehistoric accounts, sermons and moral and philosophical exhortations in poetic language. They have a long tradition of narrating or reciting Mundhums and performing certain rituals and ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. A Mundhum that consists of legends, folklores, sermons, prehistoric accounts and moral or philosophical exhortations in poetic language lies generically into a narrative oral poetry. Limbus express their inner feelings and moral contents in beautiful proverbs and charades. The

riddle designates another popular genre among them. Limbu youths sing palam in their daily life on the way to forests, in the working fields and perform *ya?lang* or paddy dance on various socio-cultural occasions of various rituals like wedding ceremony, death rite, fair and on festivals. Elderly Limbus narrate various types of secular and supernatural stories, and many folktales. All these kinds of Limbu folk literature are integral parts to Limbu folklore.

Limbu folklore which consists of all oral traditions, myths, songs, dances, legends, stories, tales, riddles, charades, drama, arts and above all the Mundhum performances can normally be shown in the following ways.

Diagram I



Limbu folklore can be observed as narrative and non-narrative categories according to the method of performances. The narrative category includes devotional Mundhum myths and legends, and non-devotional folklores like folktales, supernatural stories, quasi local and

historical accounts, legendary characters and so on; while non-narrative one consists of songs, folk sayings, dances and dramas. Mundhum is an accumulation of cultural and ritual references often orally recited by the actants, ritual practitioners, healers, or shamans such as Phedanngma, Samba, Yeba, Yema, Mangba, Yuma and Ongsi. It consists of legends, mythologies, history, tales, songs, psalms and so on which are described in more detail in the next sections.

Among folk dances, ya?lang (paddy dance) and Kelang (drum dance) are the most popular dances in Limbu society. The ya?lang is a traditional Limbu folkdance which essentially consists of the genre of dancing and singing that both go in unison. It is a duet performance and therefore, the participation of female and male youths is a must, an absence of any one of them cannot be implied it as a ya?lang. It is usually performed in getting together of guests/youths, on marriage ceremonies, death rituals, festivals, or in the fair, marketplace and in other special celebrations and occasions. Such folksongs and folkdances, performed in the community, have great value and significance for they help demonstrate socio-cultural and historical heritages as well as depict tradition, culture, behavior and life styles of the people. Among Limbu folksongs, palam and sarek or khyali are primarily recreational songs. They can be sung at any place and on any occasion. Even though, they are categorized under recreational kind of songs they also provide us with a lot of past information, ongoing activities, and upcoming plans and aspirations. Limbu youths while dancing ya?lang exchange their feelings of love and affection, experience of pain and pleasure through exceptionally melodious and heart-rending tune of palam, a folk song literally known as “a course of holding talks.” Palam is a folksong traditionally sung only during ya?lang performance. The palam, in the view

of Nar Bahadur Yanghang (1995), “is a ya?lang song, a medium to exchange feelings of love and affection, includes major elements of Limbu folk culture.” Another poetic song called Sarek or khyali is an esteemed short-tuned and a versed tête-à-tête expressed in the dialogic form. It is also called *panthak* (debate) or *panchang* (discuss), and used while getting mutual introduction, before beginning the ya?lang and bidding farewell especially between male and female. It is also exchanged between male and male or female and female, too. Besides, other kinds of Limbu cultural and ritual songs like hakpare samlo (esteemed song), namdatte kesam-samlo (wedding song), thakptham-samlo (new home-entry song), mingwan-samlo (naming ritual song), mering-samlo (separation song), tamkye-samlo (agriculture song), tumyanghang-samlo (gentlemen song), agnekwa sammet-samlo (cradle song), sewa-samlo (devotion song), etc. are sung only during their own specific occasions and at particular locations. Namdatte kesam-samlo is also known by mekkam-samlo and is performed on wedding ceremony, whereas mering-samlo, which is also called hamlakwa-samlo, is sung at the time of death of the relatives. Among them, only few of the dances accompany the songs.

Limbu dances, both recreational and cultural-ritual kinds, significantly designate a cultural property. Ya?lang being basically a recreational one, it is danced at anywhere and on any occasion by the youths. Such dances are also performed by non-Limbu folks with a great pomp and joy in a group along with Limbu folks. Kelang, which has got its various ways of dancing, is performed in view of both entertainment and cultural and ritual purposes, and is danced only on the auspicious occasions. Similarly, Hangsamlang or Thebalang deserves its space as another ritual dance, and is also known as the majestic power dance of *theba* (grandfather). It is performed displaying weapons like *pheja*

(khukuri), *li*: *tong* (bow and arrow), *kongphe* (sword), *kho* (shield), and danced majestically playing musical instruments such as the *tangke* (kettledrum) and the *ta* (cymbals). Another kind of agro-based dance called Tamkye-lang is performed while weeding corn plant. The ritual or devotional song called Mang-sewa-samlo and the dance Manglang are performed both in the communities of mainstream Mundhum followers and follower of Satyahang group. Thus, all above given dances do accompany with their own distinctive songs but now they are found gradually getting lost due to lack of proper conservation as well as national and global cultural intrusions. Likewise, the Yebalang/Yemalang is a completely ritualistic dance. Yeba, Yema and Phedangba are the Limbu actants, shamans or savants who have actively been involving in the ritual acts of carrying out all Mundhum performances of Kirant Limbu people in oral form. Therefore, they are the Mundhum reciters, singers, narrators, dancers and above all they are by tradition well trained cultural performers.

In addition, there are cultural festivals such as Chasok-thisok (harvest festivals), Yokwa (celebrated with the worship of agricultural divinities before cultivating the field), Kokphetla teyan (the first day of *kokphetla* month, that is, on mid- January), Sisekla teyam (the first day of *sisekla* month that lies on mid-July), etc. There are very few village feasts and festivals; however, there are many important domestic rituals. In fact, for Limbus, all rites and ritual observations do significantly manifest as an occasion of special kind of festivity.

The Limbus live a distinct folk life based mainly on agrarian economy, nature and traditional way of life. Every economical activity carried out in this community, thus, centralizes on the soil, the rock, the forest and the river. It is being a major source of

earning; most of the Limbus are employed in agriculture and produce food-crops like, rice, maize, wheat, barley, millet, etc. They also keep domestic animals such as pigs, cows, buffaloes, oxen, sheep, and so on. Cattle are raised as an integral part of the household economy. Besides agriculture and animal husbandry, Limbus involve in traditional skill based works like making up of *doko* (wicker basket), *namlo*, *damlo* (band of jute or bamboo strip), plough, etc. by males and weaving silk and cotton cloth, shawl, *topi* (cap), etc. by females. They exchange other various kinds of goods with these things or sell them to other people after they spare for their daily use. The customary barter system is still considerably found being practiced in most of the areas of this community. Various folk foods and drinks are prepared in daily life and on various cultural occasions and festivals.

They have their own distinct social tradition and native culture. Their various rituals like birth, marriage, death and others establish their distinct heritage and identity. We can observe, despite of their various internal clans within themselves, their language and culture, behavior and sentiments, value system, assumptions and ideologies are one, alike and the equal. There is no social and cultural hierarchy as such in them. They believe in the whole society as one. Hence, it is said that Limbus represent the uniform nature of value and belief system, the laissez-faire and democratic society. And Mundhum, the religious scripture, provides special guidelines of such cultural and social behavior to the Kirant Limbu community.

The Mundhum

The Mundhum refers to the Kirant Limbu ritual narrative texts, both in oral and written form, consisting of legends, folktales, prehistoric accounts, and sermons, moral or

philosophical exhortations in a poetic language. It consists of various sacred narratives on Kirant mythology and folklore of varying date and origin. “The word Mundhum means the power of great strength and the Kirant people of east Nepal take it to be a true, holy and a powerful scripture”(Chemjong, 18). And there is a belief that the Supreme goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma, mind of supreme knowledge and wisdom, imparted the sacred knowledge and scripture of Mundhum to the eight wise leaders known as Sawa yet-hang, the progeny of Tetlara Lahangdona. According to Chaitanya Subba (1995), “Mundhums are the source of inspiration, information, and enlightenment for Limbus and guidance of the way of life, customs and rites-de-passage”. Every religious or ritual activity is observed through the guidance of Mundhum. Subba further says, “Rituals, often regarded as sacred performances, provide the clue for the correct exegesis of the Mundhum and demonstrate their symbolic values, functional importance and social sequences (ibid). For Bairagi Kainla (1996), “Mundhum occupies great social and cultural importance in the Limbu tribe. It gives a superb expression to the development of religious, moral and social beliefs and assumptions in many mythological legends and folk tales”(33). Similarly, Mundhum extends over a wide dimension of socio-cultural discourses of Kirant Limbu people as Kainla assesses that “Tongsing Mundhum has the same importance for the Limbus as the eighteen purans have for the Brahmins” (ibid). Even though, Limbu culture and rituals are so effervescent and efficacious from the time immemorial, we find by the time, very less analytical works have been done over the Mundhum. Much of the works of writers/authors/compilers/researchers, carried out so far on Mundhum, has focused on its structural dimension. This research work, at this juncture, by focusing on some of the important sections of Mundhum finds out how the

study of Mundhum performance culture can be an inlet to understanding many common concepts about Limbu culture, society, religion and history; and how Mundhum as a ritual performance culture provides religio-historical and socio-cultural representation and reflection in the life of the Kirat Limbu people.

Mundhum is found to have observed in different ways and with different native nomenclatures in the communities of Kirant people. It is called Muntum, Mundum and so on in the Kirant communalities of Rais, Yakha and Sunuwar. To some extent we can observe variations in Mundhum performance procedures and honorific denominations among them. However, it has established itself a distinctive culture and religion of Kirantis known by Kirant religion or Mundhum religion. According to Chemjong, the word Mundhum refers to the power and strength of Kirant people. For him Mundhum is a religious scripture, not only of Limbus but of all Kirants. Some critics also remark that Mundhum is not a scripture since it is an accumulation of oral narratives. But when we see the grand style, epical verse and coherent pattern of language in Mundhum show its vibrant written form sometime in the past. Kainla (1996), an eminent scholar, who has also documented several Limbu Mundhums observes that, “With the basis of beautiful and decorative language or many words used in Mundhum, it can be inferred that this language was a language with a written tradition in the unknown past” (37).

Essentially, the Mundhum which is known as an oral literature occupies much esteemed place to keep live the spirit of rites and rituals. The credit to preserve this Mundhum goes to the shamans such as Phedangma, Samba, Yeba, Yema, Mangba, Yuma and Tumyahang or gentlemen. They are actants who recite [oral] expert narratives, as in the words of performance culture critic Victor Turner; they do “reflexive storytelling and

performance both in formal performances and in everyday life” (44). They recite the Mundhum that reflects greater social and cultural importance in the Kirant people. It gives a superb expression to the development of religious, moral and social beliefs and assumptions drawing from various mythological legends and folk tales. Accordance with the Mundhum, Tingding Nahen is believed to be rooted amid Kirantis’ primitive gods, their ancestors, and among men, women and youths. Mundhum is a religious scripture existing for centuries through oral practice which embraces very vibrant performative aspects of the actants and observers, and enthusiastic participation of the audience. Tongsing Mundhum, during performance of Tongsing tikma section, takes us on a voyage or pilgrimage to the land or abode of the father and forefathers. Thus, it gives us a feeling that only the coordination between the past and the present, the liveliness of continuous tradition and association with geo-cultural space make the wholeness of life. The recitation of Mundhum in poetic language makes it further vibrant and performative. Limbu oral poetry, as performance expert Abhi Subedi (2000) finds, embraces a “sense of immediacy” which “leads to the creation of myth and thereby the rituals.” Hence, for him, “the rituals in Limbu are poetic sagas, stories of human victory, loss, love, agony and happiness” (24). The Mundhum can also be taken as a rite for the peace of the dead souls of the forefathers or getting united with them and perpetuating tradition of good names earned by them or as a rite of unison with the forefathers by retaining ancestral grace or as a rite of keeping alive the tradition by singing about the events and chronology from the creation till the present. To accomplish such rituals, Phedangba, Samba, Yeba, Guru or Mahaguru (actants) have to prepare necessary materials for the ritual performance and also for themselves since “The transformation of the human actant

into a god figure (the basis of many rituals) necessitates perhaps more preparations than the transformation of an actor into a role of a theatrical character” (Gilbert and et al., 61). They are required to prepare various things like altars, paraphernalia, materials and others as per the need of performances. Their assorted gestures, actions and reactions, and thereby situation creations in fact play important role of make belief to the ritual performances.

The essence of Limbu culture lies in the tradition of ritual performances which help manifest their ethnic identity. Political factors have been found to have played influential roles for restructuring their identity; however, Limbus’ culture is still effervescent and lively thanks to the persistence of the traditional ritual performances. Joane Nagel, a Professor of University of Kansas considers that, “Political policies and designations have enormous power to shape patterns of ethnic identification when politically controlled resources are distributed along ethnic lines” (8). But the Limbu ethnic tribe has been safeguarding its traditional norms and values as Dr. Durga Prasad Aryal notes “there was no complete extermination taken place although some feebleness in Limbu religious activities seemed after the fall of Kirant kingdom” (11).

There are many native, national and international writers and scholars who have really contributed in compiling, documenting and writing books and articles about Limbu language, literature, culture, tradition and so on. Kirant king Sirijanga had adventured to introduce a different script known as *Sirijanga* script at sometime between the end of 9th century and the beginning of 10th century. In the long course of time, due to various crises relating to invasions and encroachments over Kirantis, their script and literature were on the verge of extinction. However, Teongsi Sirijanga Thebe, an insightful personality, had

fortunately resurrected this almost disappearing script again during the first half of 18th century. Similarly, Mahaguru Phalgunada (1885-1949), a rationally enlightened persona, brought great revolution in the field of language, literature and culture in order to make corrections in tradition and culture prevailed during his time in the Kirant communities. Iman Singh Chemjong, another man of letter and Kirant history, culture and literature expert, has immensely contributed to the society by authoring a good number of documents and critical books mainly on history and culture, and language and literature of the Kirant people.

Likewise, other enthusiasts who documented Limbu differently can be listed as Lalsor Sendang (1840-1926), Bajbir Thalang, Iman Sing Chemjong, Kalusing Papo(1930), Harka Jang Makhim (1930), Nirmal Limbu and Jivan Das Rai, Sher Bahadur Neyonghang and Mohan Lal Hangam, Prem Bahadur Mabohang, Kajiman Kandangwa, Khadga Bahadur Subba (Nembang), B.B. Chemjong, Chandra Prasad Nembang, Rana Dhoj Nembang, Krishna Bahadur Laoti, Virahi Kainla, Khagendra Singh Angbohang, Bam Prasad Laoti, B.B. Laoti, Keshar Kumar Limbu, Bairagi Kainla, Vir Nembang ‘Mering’, Rana Bahadur Menyangbo, Ashman Subba, Mani Shankar Shreng, Dr. Chaitanya Subba, Ranadhoj Shreng, Laxman Menyangbo and many others have made great contribution.

The foreign writers discussing about Limbu language, culture and tradition can be named as W. Kirkpatrick (1811), F.B. Hamilton (1819), G.B. Mainwaring and A.C. Campbell (1840, 1842, 1855), B.H. Hodgson (1844-1864), H.W. Senior (1908), G.A. Grierson, R.K. Sprigg (1959, 1966, 1984), Boyd Michailovsky (1979, 1988) A. Weidert (1982,1983, 1985), George van Driem and others who have initiated scientific studies

and made contributions in the development of literary status of the Limbu language. The works of B. H. Hodgson have been tremendous contribution for the preservation of Limbu script, documentation of Limbu Mundhums and customs. Bairagi Kainla's all scholarly works really embrace the solution of serious questions in the field of Limbu culture, literature and ritual performances. Hence, they are socio-cultural and religious manifestations of Limbu community. Besides, *The Culture and Religion of Limbus* (1995) by Dr. Chaitantya Subba is, in fact, a great research work on Limbu culture and religion, and successful to create an open horizon to the researchers from home and abroad.

Some of the native speaking writers outside Nepal are also considerably found getting endeavoured in doing significant works on Limbus. They are Jashang Maden, Laxman Laoti, Hillihang Kambang and others from Darjeeling, Sanchaman Limbu, Padam Singh Subba Muringla, B.B. Subba Muringla, Mohan Subba Phurumbo, Aitaman Tamling, Harka Bahadur Subba Tamling, N.B. Tamling, Maniraj Phedap Hukpa, Maita Singh Phurumbo. P.M. Subba Nembang, Harka Bdr Khamdhak, Mohan Ijam, Sat Kumar Singdhawa, Lalit Muringla, B.B. Pakkhim, Man Bahadur Tamling, Dewman Yakthung, S.R. Khajum, J.R. Subba and among others from Sikkim.

While talking of the Mundhum, its collection and compilation began very lately by some of the cultural enthusiasts such as Iman Singh Chemjong (*Kirat Mundhum* 1961), Asman Subba (*Kirat Samyonu Yechchhamthim* 1989), Bairagi Kainla (*Limbu Jatima Kokh-Puja* 1991, *Tongsing Takma Mundhum* 1994, *Samsogha Mundhum* 1994, *Sasik Mundhum* 1995 and other), Randhwoj Shreng Chongbang (*Sumsenwa Yagransing Mundhum* 1992, *Kirant Yakthung Phungnawa Samlo* 1993 and *Yakthung Mundhum*

1994), Rishi Kumar Sambhahamphe, Kalempong, India (Yakthung Chokthim 1992), Dr. Chaitanya Subba (The Culture and Religion of Limbu 1995), J.R. Limbu, Sikkim (Sumsemba Yagrangsing Tangsing Takma Mundhum 2001), Laxman Menyangbo (Yakthung Mundhum 2005), Manjul Yakthungba (Maulik Kirant Dharma Sanskar 2006), Kirant Dharma Tatha Sahitya Utthan Sangh (Kirant Samjik Mundhum), etc. are highly impressive efforts made in the field of Mundhum in written forms. Those written texts basically focus on the part of structures how and why different rites and rituals are observed? What materials and arrangements are required to perform particular rites and rituals? Furthermore, they provide us with the knowledge of historical and mythological events and incidents took place in the time of the ancestors and the prehistoric world that was/is being recited by the people. Taking some of the above written texts as references, observing Mundhum rituals personally and also having necessary inquiry with Tumyahang, Phedangma, Samba, and Yeba this research extensively critiques the impact of Mundhum ritual from the perspective of performance culture that prevail in the Kirat Limbu community.

Thungsap Mundhum and Peysap Mundhum are two major categories of the Mundhum. The Thungsap Mundhum refers to the oral Mundhum literature consisting of the epical text of sacred ritual in poetic language. Limbus have a tradition of reciting Mundhums (legends, mythology, history, tales, songs, psalms, etc.) in a special manner on special occasions. It is an epic song or poetry recited by the learned Sambas or poets. The Kirant priests in the beginning were called the Sambas where, *sam* means song and, *ba* means the one who (male) knows the *sam* or song. The Peysap Mundhum is a written book about religion. It is divided into four parts. They are Soksok Mundhum, Yehang

Mundhum, Sapji Mundhum, and Sap Mundhum. Mundhum ritual observation can have mainly two elemental properties they are Samjik/Chamjik Mundhum and Habek Mundhum. *Sam* means ‘soul’ and *jik/chik* means ‘to comprehend’ – so it is comprehension of soul or gain confidence over soul. Habek is the state of Mundhum narration or the Mundhum performance.

On the other hand, the Mundhum can also be classified into two parts on the basis of observations carried out for. The first is Chukmuba-hingmuba Mundhum or rites done for safeguarding the living one and the next is Yagu-chansi:ma Mundhum or rites done for redemption of the deceased one. The detail list of rites and rituals are given in the Appendix and some of the major rituals of Chukmuba-hungmuba Mundhums consists of Manggenna, Yangdang phongma (naming ceremony), Sappok chomen (worship of womb for safe delivery of child), Nahangma, Akwanama, Sakmura wademma, Manghup wademma, Kudap ingma, Phungwa changma, Panglum chama, Chotlung changma, Tongsing tikma, Phungsot tesingma, etc. and Yaguchangsi:ma Mundhum comprises the rituals like Kham i:ngma, Sam sama, Yumsa nakma, Khauma, Mikwa sangma, Nahen sakma, Sugut sepma, Sogha sepma, Sasik thepma, Yomasing yamma, and so on.

To perform such rituals the ritual officiants such as Phedangma, Samba, Yeba/Yema, Ongsi are required to narrate or recite the related myths and legends. There are several kinds of myths in Mundhum such as creation myth, Manggenna myth, Phungwa changma Myth, incest/sin, envy and jealousy, Sogha Myth, Sugut/Sugup Myth, Yuma Myth, Theba Myth, Phungnawa/Kummathakma Myth, Kemba theba, Okwama, clan/lineage Myth, Wagongma Myth, origin of Phedangma/Samba/Yeba/Yema/Ongsi Myth, Master spirit myths, Misam sepma Myth, Chasok tongnam Myth, and so on.

Basically, the Mundhum is an oral narrative text comprising mythological legends and prehistoric accounts. An oral narrative text, Finnegan Ruth (1992) says, “is an essentially ephemeral work of art and has no existence or continuity apart from its performance. The skill and personality of the performer, the nature and reaction of the audience, the context, the purpose are essential aspects of the artistry and meaning” (28) of an oral performance. Through performance, oral literature does often circulate more publicly and openly than much written literature. Hence, Mundhum holds great religio-historical value and socio-cultural importance in the Limbu community. And that is possible as a result of its effective performance and intimacy as Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1990), notes that “oral tradition [Mundhum] is by far the most intimate and the richest of historical source, the one which is most filled with the sap of authenticity” (1). The Limbu folk rituals in general have endowed with very strong characteristics, components or properties to be an intangible cultural heritage. It contains symbolic representations of the past knowledge and skills, and combination of oral, customary, performing and material heritages based on traditional beliefs, customs and thinking of Limbus and it describes the deeds of ancestors, including their contributions towards communities, society and as a whole the humankind. The basic characteristics of folklore or intangible cultural heritage (here Mundhum), as Tulasi Diwasa and Chura Mani Bandhu (2007) point out, are that “It is traditional rather than modern; it is group based rather than individual; and oral rather than written. It is handed down from generation to generation”(9).

The existence of Mundhum lies on its oral recitation. And oral traditions have the nature of multi-leveled, fluid and fleeting. This truth is also applicable in orality of

Mundhum performance as everything in this world is sought to have changes over a time. Talking of this comprehensive reality of change and continuity, Donald A. Messerschmidt (1982), a Washington State University professor, admits that “We have ignored patterns of change which represent continuity in the adaptive social processes we have observed” (265). Also, in the larger arena of studies about socio-cultural transformation, several scholars have admonished us to go beyond the single and most often static examples of change to seek more reliable patterns of cultural/ritual continuity. For an instance, Fredrick Barth (1967) has argued for “the necessity to specify the nature of continuity in a sequence of change” and for “the importance of the study of institutionalization as an ongoing process” (661). Obviously, the Mundhum religion also stimulated to have division into sects as in other religions. In the process of dynamism, we notice, there are mainly two sects - a mainstream tradition follower of Mundhum and Satyahangma group. The first one keeps more proximity to ritualistic and animistic ritual whereas the second one adopts improvised and rectified socio-cultural practices. One of the social critics, Jeffrey D. Webster (1998), quotes to B. B. Subba as saying that, “Phalgunanda’s teachings which were strongly influenced by an ascetic branch of Hinduism, are today promoted by a small but active sect of Kirati religion known as Satyahangma.” But now those Satyahangma followers do not agree with this opinion as they claim that their rites and rituals were originated early in the primitive age. The sect, initiated by Mahaguru Phalgunanda, is now leading by Mahaguru Atmananda who is considered to be reincarnation of Mahaguru Phalgunanda Himself. Whatever be the case, their performance is also currently getting popularity, namely, Kirant Religion and Literature Resurrection Association.

Mundhum: An Oral Poetic Song of Ritual Performance

Mundhum is the oral poetic text which has existence through its performance. Every Limbu ritual has recognized conventions of poetic expression. Some of these relate to the occasion, the audience, performer or purpose. Among the most fundamental of these conventions are those that pertain to the verbal style of the piece and, in the case of oral literature like Mundhum, to the mode of performance as well. The main means of performance of Mundhums are through singing, intoning, and spoken voice. Hence, singing voice and recitative type of delivery is a very common medium of Mundhum performance. This delivery and performance is simply carried out by the Limbu actants or shamans – Phedangma, Samba, Yeba, Yema, Mangba or Ongsi. They are not only the religious practitioners and performers of Mundhum rituals but also the sources and authorities of Mundhum rites and rituals, customs and codes of conduct. Although compilation and documentation of some sections of Mundhum are accomplished so far as directives of ritual performance, they are not found being widely practiced by the laypersons of the society. Only Satyahangma group of Mundhum ritual performers have initiated such practices after learning Mundhum scripture and getting approbation from the concerned authority as a system of priesthood.

The language of Mundhum is classical, mostly allegorical and full of rhetoric; therefore, it contains distinct linguistic style, versification, rhythm and melody of singing and methods of recitation for different kinds of Mundhum performances. Melody and rhythm of Thebasam or Kappoba Mundhum differs from Yumasam Mundhum. Similarly, Himsammang Mundhum differs from Apchara pokchana sung during Kokhpuja. The singing tune of Dungdunge ritual is different from the tune of Mikhu kejaba and so on.

Regarding the versification and rhythm of such Mundhums, Bairagi Kainla (1996) mentions,

The sentences of singing the Mundhum of Yuma are long, while the sentences of the Mundhum of Thebasam are in short feet and each sentence begins with ‘he...’ and closes with ‘...um’. While singing and reciting the Himsammang and pokchana Mundhum, the sentences begin with ‘payung’ and ‘sh...’, respectively. The feet are small but at the close no foot or word is repeated like the closing of each sentence of the Thebasam Mundhum. (35)

Similarly, Limbu community retains its own treasure house of poetry maintained through immediacy, involvement and intimacy of oral tradition, a source of a real living museum. This oral poetry that being implied in for conveying merit of actual life and the sense of urgency is, therefore, problematised by Subedi (2000) that, “Limbu oral poetry (here Mundhum) should be looked at as a unique genre of folk poetic culture” (27). Indeed, Limbu language itself is highly poetic and performative as most of the socio-cultural activities are poetically performed; it is full of rhyme, rhythm and prosody, and therefore, it’s a poetic song. “The term *song*”, Finnegan (1992) says, “is often used interchangeably with *poem* in lyric sense and the quickest way to suggest the scope of *oral poetry* is to say that it largely coincides with that of the popular term *folk song*” (12) (my emphasis). The use of verse form like lyric, rhymes, assonance, alliteration, prosody helps make the language smooth and flowing, and so goes along with the life activities unifying its theme concurrently. And more interestingly, they have culture of poetic forms even in their daily activities, in conversation and even while putting forth their

ideas and opinions in the meetings or in many other gatherings. Hence, this oral poetic song of Limbu ritual performance is “a unique cultural practice, a storehouse of socio-linguistic property as well as cultural representation, an amalgam of oral tradition and creativity, functional as well as recreational heritage and so on” (Limbu and Adhikari, 127).

In brief, Limbus as a unique ethnic community have sustained with their traditional ritual practices based on time-honored ritual performances guided by their religious scripture, Mundhum. Every Mundhum performance, therefore, is one of the embedded practices with social, cultural, and religious importance from the time immemorial. It is the Limbu religious narrative myths of ritual intervention with identical embodiment of performative characteristics which we discuss in the next chapters.

Chapter Two: Performance Theory and Mundhum

The term ‘performance’, as most of the other terms, is contested, slippery, and unstable. This is what a part of vibrancy of the study of performance across disciplines and the academy. Performance retains extreme popularity in recent years across wide ranging field of study and activities like arts, literature, and the social sciences. Generally, to perform is to carry out, accomplish, or fulfill specific task in specified standard.

According to Deborah A. Kapchan (1995), “to perform is *to carry something into effect* whether it be a story, an identity, an artistic artifact, a historical memory, or an ethnography. The notion of agency is implicit in performance” (479); that is, whatever

kind it is whether of human, of animate or of object. Performance can mean not only theatre but also many other disciplines like cultural, ritual, economical, a parade, a protest, terrorism or almost every branch of the human sciences – sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics. Hence, the notion of theatrical performance as formal or on stage show has now transgressed boundaries, broken up structures, and reconstructed socio-political milieu through cultural interventions. Making it more explicit, Schieffelin (1998) states that “The central issue of performativity, whether in ritual performance, theatrical entertainment or the social articulation of ordinary human situations, is the imaginative creation of a human world [...] and these need to be explored ethnographically rather than a priori assumed” (qtd. in Bell, 9). Similarly, Limbus have their distinct way of ritual performativity created in the world of Myths. Actants in ritual performance are often distinguishable from actors in a play not by their functions but by their approaches to the performance. For that reason, “Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice” (Conquergood, 145).

The theoretical concepts, though being contested, can give enough ground for delineating various genres and open a floor for further discussions. Among many aspects of Limbu folk-life, culture and literature, Mundhum is one of the embedded practices with social, cultural, ritual, and religious importance from the time immemorial. It is the Limbu religious narrative myths of ritual practice with embodiment of a great deal of performative characteristics. Each narrative of Mundhum, as other narratives do, has mainly two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse, that

is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. Mundhum contains narratives of mythical stories including mythologies, genesis of the universe and living beings, which is communicated in oral poetic language in every ritual observance. Oral poetry, says Finnegan Ruth (1992), “does indeed, like written literature, possess a verbal text. But in one respect, it is different: a piece of oral literature, to reach its full actualization, *must be performed*. The text alone cannot constitute the oral poem”(28). Therefore, for the materialization of orality its performance is a must. As Mundhum is based on oral tradition so it is also called an oral literature or *thuthure Veda*. Long before the written world, Elizabeth Bell says, “information was stored in bodies, in cultural memories, and in oral tradition enacted only in their performance” (57). Pre-historical, quasi-historical, legendary and all other information of Limbu ancestors can be obtained through Mundhum. It’s an oral document, history and great source of past knowledge, not only a pile of information but a well-established and logical set of practices. The entrenched oral poetic form of Mundhum further demonstrates to its cultural and linguistic grandeur. The words are invested with great power where simultaneous narration and ritual performance adds dramatic attributes accomplishing ritual of oral culture. Phedangma (Limbu ritual performer) delivers the oral myth to the audience through memorization where his assistant- *anglanggoba-sanglanggoba* repeats the verses which become more instrumental in making it further clear and lively. Different bodies and entities related to orality such as precepts, history, religion and others exist only in their repeated sayings or recitations and performances in appropriate contexts. Mundhum, in this way, best exemplifies for such tradition where every verbal utterance produce meaning. Walter Ong (1982) traces the orality as a technology and notes that “the spoken

word is always an event” (75). Mundhums are recited, the words are spoken by the ritual artists (religious practitioners) and made an event performative not only for decoration but for instrumental in keeping cultural information intact.

The Limbu ritual performers like Phedangma, Samba, Yeba/Yema, during Mundhum ritual observations, recite or narrate stories of expertise and the everyday. Ritual and performativity is said to be understood relationally where the actor (both on and off the stage) is a ‘double agent,’ performing between identities which makes it possible to work on “being” and “becoming” simultaneously. John Tulloch, as Clifford Geertz, does allow blurring the genres of formal performance and everyday performance with stories of expertise and the everyday. Wherein notions of ‘performativity’ that come from discipline dealing centrality with formal performance (theatre studies) and everyday performance (anthropology). Therefore, all the spectacles of Mundhum ritual performance are generated by the performers’ recitation of myths and their movements over the space defined by the religio-cultural formation. The Limbu shamans along with their assistants known as *anglanggoba-sanglanggoba* or *yegapchi* set out for ritual journeys over the ritual contours. Many of the requirements for this ritual are similar to those of drama: actor(s), audience, costume, space, language (s), and a specified amount of time. Moreover, manifestation of mythological and historical events and settings, cosmic and earthly spaces, mythical and legendary stories, culturally authentic characters, philosophical language and so on in Mundhum ritual make it always performative. Various kinds of performances are accomplished during Mundhum ritual observance from where something happens, emerges, and grows in through a process; a set of activities or specific behaviours.

Theorists while creating definitions of performance, as Elizabeth Bell (2008) notes, tend to feature three interrelated concepts - performance is both process and product, performance is productive and purposeful, and performance is traditional and transformative. The Mundhum performance brings about an emergence of a religious belief system in the lives of Limbu community and happens to be a mode of communicative behavior and a type of communication event framed in a special way of display for the benefactors and/or audience. Through medium of recitation of Mundhum myths by Limbu religious practitioners, mostly used by the term Limbu shamans, knowledge of various sources are communicated. Shamans are mediators, actors, actants and above all culturally bona fide ritual performers. They link, through their performance, between the divine and the human. Hence, performance is a communicative process, an exchange or interaction between speaker and listener, message subscriber and receiver, the source and the goal. Ronald J. Pelias (1992) claims that “All performances are transactional communication events between speakers and listeners” (15). As it is further said that performance denotes doing things and things done, the performers take the double roles – as an expert and a normal people. They are required to practice and rehearse for having expertise because only the performance of trained or skilled shamans can make the ritual performance lively and successful. To be an actant for Mundhum performance, one has to go for long time practice even after they are chosen by the supernatural beings such as deities, divinities and spirits. They are further examined by the existing shamans and the community that whether they are worthy of practicing shamanism. Learning to perform in an oral culture, however, relies on participation and apprenticeship: there are no training manuals.

The process of performances, most often described as *emergent*, “is made of twice-behaved behaviours, restored behaviours, and performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse” (Schechner 2002b, 22). The actants, during Mundhum ritual practice, have to create their own identities, bend time, reshape and adorn their bodies different from ordinary daily life and perform with the identification of an authentic persons or specialists for ritual performance. As theatre artists they also use special kinds of dresses (garbs/gears), materials and decorations, and communicate mythical stories during performance. The Sambas wear white turbans like the Phedangmas. The Yebas and Yemas wear knee-long gowns like a maxi. The Yebas wear round turbans on their head with the feathers of the jungle fowls or partridges and porcupine shafts in crossed and upright position sewn all around its rim. While Sambas wear turbans made with porcupine shafts, feathers of parrot or partridge inserted in slanted (instead of crossed) position in its rim. The Yebas also carry two small bags called *omlari tektari sukwa* woven with the strip from the leaves of the orchid flowers and hung in crossed position on the shoulder reaching below the waist. The rim of the turban and those small bags are embroidered with cowry shells. Many other materials they use are cowry shell, weapons, tusk of tiger and boar, slices of ginger, *achheta* (unhusked rice), porcupine shafts, feathers of the jungle fowl, and so on. Ritual is usually a sacred observance and all above costumes and paraphernalia are also sacred and not used randomly (or even seen in some cases) at non-ritual times or places.

Limbu ritual observances are carried out through recitation of Mundhums and in the course of its processual unfolding, Mundhum performance becomes a product, an accomplishment, or an event. Normally, a set event with a set procedure is accomplished

during ritual observation. Such observances are carried out with certain objectives to be fulfilled in the part of all - organizers, performers and audience. Every ritual is observed with oral recitation of Mundhum and essentially it turns out to be a live performance. Mundhum is being an oral literature, its recitation, recollection or performance depends upon the mood, situation and capability of the shaman and should be made optimally normative. There is no such an inflexible rule entailed during live performances. The live performance as such, as Peggy Phelan (1993) remarks, “disappears even as it is happening, and it happens differently each time” (qtd. in Bell,16). Every Mundhum ritual performance is, therefore, a new performance; it is always a doing and a thing done, a process and a product. Such ritual observance in Limbu community is a perennial process accomplishing certain sacred activities for social, cultural and moral value systems. Furthermore, dynamicity and generative features together with change in Mundhum performance helps constitute meaning of product and purpose. Hence, Mundhum performance causes, creates, and produces both itself and things outside of it. Such productivity of performance has many purposes that are often termed as functions, uses or intentions. And this purposeful productivity is utilized to do a number of things for individuals, groups, and culture and thereby best represents the Limbu people and the society.

In this way, Limbu rituals are performed drawing immense references of prehistoric characters, events, actions, and belief which help to establish traditional status quo which tends to privilege, in the words of Dwight Conquergood (1995), “to the ritual performers for threshold-crossing, shape shifting, and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters, and jokers, who value the carnivalesque over the canonical, the

transformative over the normative, and the mobile over the monumental” (138).

Phedangma, Samba, and other all Limbu ritual practitioners equally utilize the above privileges during Mundhum rituals performed on theatres created by the Limbu community from the time immemorial which helps them consolidate the unity that is necessary for continuity to the life and the community. Mundhum rituals practice, hence, becomes a site of transformation over time and space and sometimes, even becomes a paradigm for cultural resistance.

The emergence of Mundhum myths, as other do, has resulted in through ‘breach and crises’ to which anthropologist Victor Turner terms as “liminal”, a crucial event and process of performance culture. He argues that both ritual and theatre crucially involve liminal events and processes, and have an important aspect of social metacommentary. For him, “Social movements take the shape of breach, crisis, redressive action and leads whether towards the restoration of peace and ‘normality’ among the participants, or social recognition of irremediable or irreversible breach of schism” (8). This liminality is the meeting point where performer and audience come together and tend to bring about modes of changes and transformations. This is innovative trope of dynamism to which another Theatre expert Shiva Rijal (2004) asserts as ‘cross-cultural intervention’ of audiences and performers or, he says, theatre creators. In the context of Mundhum performance, liminality takes place twice; first, in the time of the origin of Myth itself and second, during ritual observation. Whatever be the case, performance holds possibilities to imitate, to create, to transform a life world and to stake claims about that life world. Many performance theories also claim that performances constitute culture – ongoing, dynamic, cultural processes and structures that are revealed in concrete

manifestations performed by individuals. The constitutive elements are the components, the working parts, the gears and the machinery for culture, technology, and performance. Mundhum ritual has long-rooted constitutive elements persistently being performed in the Limbu community, and embodies various performative components. Although native people do possess few material belongings they are rich in cultural and ritual performances. And the performances, Herbert Blau (1990) says, “moves between expectancy and observance, between attentiveness to what happens and astonishment at what appears (264). Mundhum performance too traverses between certain expectation and observance but generally pays, to some way, its attention within the set of activities and expected outcome fixed traditionally. The ritual performance like Mundhum not only moves between expectancy and observance as it includes various other objectives such as aesthetic, pragmatic and spiritual. It is not only related to ‘give and take’ of performer and audience but also of implicit religious belief and conviction working in it as the major driving force.

Generally, a performance is a specific action or set of actions –dramatic, music, athletic, and so on – which occurs on a given occasion, in a particular place. And Mundhum observation has great manifestation of such specific set of actions even though the degree of such elements may be higher or lower. Nahangma, Manggenna, Sappok Chomen and other ritual observances demonstrate powerful enactments of shamans and participants. Hangsamlang or Thebalang deserves its space as another ritual dance, and is also known as the majestic power dance of Theba (grandfather). It is performed displaying weapons like pheja (khukuri), li:tong (bow and arrow), kongphe (sword), kho (shield), and danced majestically playing musical instruments such as the *Tangke* (kettledrum) and the Ta (cymbals). The Tongsing ritual itself consists of a series of

performances where not only Sambas and Yeba/Yemas perform it but all recipients including member of households, observers, and audiences also participate actively. The dramatic elements that emphatically demonstrating rites in Tongsing ritual can be taken like while beating/winnowing the rice to offer to the God, invoking or hosting Gurus, cleansing sins and evils of various types, propitiating evil stars, throwing stone ball, revitalizing life flowers, and among others. The ritual or devotional song called Mang-sewa-samlo and the dance Manglang are performed both in the communities of mainstream Mundhum followers and follower of Satyahangma group. Likewise, the Yebalang/Yemalang is a completely ritualistic dance. Yeba, Yema and Phedangba are the Limbu actants, shamans or savants who have actively been involving in the ritual acts of carrying out all Mundhum performances of Kirant Limbu people in oral form. Therefore, they are the Mundhum reciters, singers, narrators, dancers and above all they are by tradition well trained performers.

Chapter Three: Mundhum Ritual Performance

Ritual is a solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order guided by certain religion, a divine belief or practice. Such ritual and religion can have great impact on shaping up the human culture of the society. The culture is collectively the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement, a way of life; it is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by men as a member of the community. The Limbu communities mainly residing in Nepal and India have their own religious and ritual belief guided by their oral religious text known as Mundhum.

Mundhum consists of various religious myths, legends and prehistoric accounts and have great importance in observation of all cultural, ritual and social ceremonies like Manggenna (Ritual of safety and vitality), Nahangma (Ritual for revitalizing family chief), Tingding nahen (Rite for warding off envy and jealousy), Sakmura wademma or Manghup mande wademma (Rite for letting flow the curses), Tongsing takma (observing Tongsing ritual), Kui-kudap khama (Propitiating Nature divinities), Sappok chomen (Ritual for safe delivery of a child), Yangdang phongma (Naming ceremony), Mang i:ngma (Worshipping deities), Sammang chyang khama (Appeasing master divinities), Mekkhim chokma (Wedding ceremony), death rites, and so on.

Manggenna Ritual (Ritual for safety and vitality)

Manggenna, a ritual performed usually in every six months that is in winter and in summer, has great significance in the lives of Limbus. It means, says Subba (1995), “act of worship to raise one’s head”. The ritual is believed to deliver success and prosperity, power and energy of Pichchamma (symbolically Earth) through revitalizing one’s feeling

of dejection and sufferings. For this, Manggenna or literally 'sister' plays the part of supporting to her 'brother' and vice versa. It is performed inside the house, on the altar banana leaves are placed in cross position. As a symbol of manggenna or supporter, a cockerel for woman or daughter and young hen for man or son is sacrificed. Various gestures are done by Phedangma and beneficiaries together during manggenna observation. Morning is thought to be the better time for Manggenna observation but also found observing in the evening. There is also a custom to observe this ritual along with many other rituals like Sappok chomen, Yangdang phongma, Mekamma and Chotlung phongma, etc. The worship of revered Pichchamma, an agile enlightening goddess emerged from earth takes place in detail. The Mundhum is that when Senchhere Senehang the youngest among Sawa yet-hang went to his father Sodhung Lepmuhang to ask for invincible power, he was given away two swords which could yield up the secret of power known as Ngerere Nahangma, a boon- bestowing god. There appeared sparks as they clashed each other while he waved them in the air. The spark that flew towards the sky became Ngerere nahangma sam and the spark that fell on earth became Khambuling pichchamma, thus, Pichchamma is Manggenna (sister) of Nahangma sam; in short, manggenna refers to the symbol of power and earth. Now it is observed for protecting oneself from accidents, obnoxious acts, disputes, fighting, wars, and envy/jealousy and for success. During this performance, apart from Pichchamma, a deep reverence also goes to the gods like Tagera Ningwaphu and Sodhung Lepmuhang.

The Mundhum of Manggenna performances may be slightly different from one clan to another clan because of their different forts or ancestral land in the past. The myth of Manggenna has linkage with the origin of human kind. According to the myth as

Samba and Yeba recite, after the creation of universe, land, oceans, aquatic animals, mountains, plants, birds, insects and animals, the Creator god Porokmi Yamphami, in fact, accordance with the instruction of Supreme Goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma, wanted to create a very pretty and immortal human being from precious metals like gold, silver and diamond. He attempted several times but his efforts went in vain as it could not speak and have life. He threw in different directions and hence, resulting in emergence of several kinds of divinities. The another figure of human beings prepared from earthen clay could not get well-developed in terms of size and strength that they had to forcibly throw sticks to bring down red peppers from its plants, had to use axes to cut down fern plant, and a single drop of goat excrement would a full load for them. He, therefore, threw them under the earth which turned into *Khambongba Lungbongbasa*, the offspring and real masters of earth. Later on, Porokmi Yamphami developed a design of human being from ashes, soil and dew drops which turned into lively and started speaking. At this time, with feat of fury he spat heedlessly on this creation which soon left taking breath and became mortal being due to utter humiliation. Being once again too anxious, Porokmi Yamphami went to confess his misbehaviors and asked for help to revive the human creation, with a great pity Tagera Ningwaphuma instructed him to perform a rite of Semirima manggenna for reviving the creation. From then onwards, this ritual gets symbolic significance of giving new life, vigour, strength and prosperity and protecting oneself from evils, praying to the gods for their supports from the betterment of human beings. The way Phedangma performs this ritual bears the ideal features of performance culture. Body gestures and other role play of Phedangma and benefactors is highly performative, for instance, mimetic actions of Phedangma along with recitation of

Manggenna Myth, his play of double roles, way of reciting, responding to the God and audience, act of divination, his interventions with the surrounding, and so on. He links to human and divine, worldly life and that of spiritual. Sometimes, he also seeks for consent and approval from the laymen as well.

Manggenna ritual performance, hence, is for the manifestation of mutual respect and support among one another in the Limbu community, especially between the brother and the sister. One feels happy in another's progress and prosperity. There remains behaviour of near and dear among them. They regard as protector, supporter and benefactor of one another, and live the life with the belief that power, vitality and progress rest on the mutual cooperation among them.

Nahangma Ritual

This is a ritual observance for reinstating vigour and prosperity of the head of the house, raising the head of family chief and bringing good health and enough harvest in the family. It is, to quote Subba (1995), "a ceremony to enable him [family head] to make successful attempts for the good fortune of his family. It is often conducted to recuperate from deteriorating health and depression and overcome difficult situation"(147).

Nahangma which has many practical values in the family is observed either once a year or in every three years and either beginning of 'low season' or beginning of 'high season' depending on the convenience of the family members. And this beginning is also called a fall, a period of transition, or liminal. Whereas, Yehang Laoti (2005) writes that "Observation of Nahangma takes place in every three year in the name of householder on the occasion of his/her birthday" (43). The birthday again refers to the liminal, a threshold between completion of previous and initiation of forthcoming year. While

performing Nahangma the Phedangma pleads to the almighty god for energy, success, prosperity and longevity of the benefactor and the whole family. Narrative stories are recited saying, *thang tithing- tithing, thang yeppit-yeppit, thang wechcha-wechcha* (Limbu phrases meaning- getting high-up, up with energy, up with prosperity) along with physical gestures and performances.

Primarily, Nahangma is a rite of invoking Mukkum sam or 'soul of energy' of the family head in which the main deity of invocation is Sodhung Lepmuhang, a revered divinity or source of inspiration. A well-grown up red cock for nahangma and two chicken (a cockerel and a hen chick) for Manggenna are required as Nahangma ritual is usually followed by Manggenna. According to an anthropologist Philippe Sagant (1976) "Nahangma is a warrior goddess, *na* means the Other World and *hang* means the power.... The cult is associated with Nahangma, but the ancestors (Theba sam, Lumaepa) and the gods of the lineages (Manggenna) are invoked as well" (12). For Nahangma observation, an altar is constructed, banana leaves are spread on the floor, a plate full of uncooked unhusked rice and some copper coins, a flowers-vessel of small water pot, pure water, bamboo-sticks filled with water are placed inside the four corners. Millets and yeast, *sungkhingba* or swertia chirayita, ginger, pepper and salt are also required. Only Phedangma or Samba can perform this ritual, however, Sambas are preferred in this ritual since they are well-versed in the Mundhum. Propitiation of spirits of nature and other minor divinities and ancestors' worship are carried out concurrently. After protecting himself and souls of his clients from the various forms of attacks caused by evil spirits on the spiritual way to *chotlung* (the land of salvation, glory and success set up by ancestors), Phedangma makes a start of the journey to the world of Nahangma

and brings forth the soul of his clients. Phedangma uses his paraphernalia such as turban, dagger, porcupine quills, crystal stones, teeth of various animals including tiger, bear, wild boar, bells and blowing horn, etc. After the invocation of different gurus, he begins reciting Nahangma myth starting from creation of the universe, the gods, the living creatures and finally to the human beings. The myth relating to amorous experiences of Sawa yukphung kemba, Sutchuru Suhangpheba, and Samdang Khewa at high land and Tetlara Lahadongna and Lingdang Khewa at the low land are excitingly narrated. The narration continues with the description of offspring destined with innocuous and incestuous relationship and its tragic consequences, the myth of Pajai Tentumyanga and Irere Idhuknama, the brother and the sister's incestuous relationship, and Porokmi Yamphami's (paklum) stone throwing (a symbol for power of divinities) due to draught that pervaded on earth. When he threw the stone shot-put on the horizon it caused rainfall but at the same time it was broken into four parts and thereby originated evil spirits causing sickness and misfortunes. Knowing the importance of *puklum* as a source of unceasing power and eternal energy Sawa yet-hang have started to perform ritual journey to the *chotlung* (symbol of power, prestige and progress) of human beings. Invocation of powerful master spirits or *sires* of various types do accompany on the journey and secure them from evil spirits of Nahen (jealousy and envy). All these scenarios and activities really strengthen to create a very performative atmosphere. Phedangma himself carries the soul of his client safely throughout the journey, while he also manages the *sires* or master spirits to carry loads of materials required for the journey to the wonderful world of Nahangma is indeed the most fascinating part this performance.

Ritual journey, both in Mundhum recitation and in person, starts from *hangsitlang*, the central pillar where the Akwanama divinity resides and protects the house, and moves ahead to the hearth from where smoke of fire is sent forward for clearing the path on which *sires* follow the participants of spiritual journey carrying the loads and driving away evil spirits. Reaching at the porch phedangma calls upon muiyan sire (hawk spirit) for the help, he approaches to eaves and yard to start journey via the land of *namyoba* (*Artemisia vulgaris*), *kattekwa* (fern), *hanghangse* (*viburnum coriaceum*), *parsekpa* (*saurauia napaulensis*) and various other vegetation, flora and fauna, birds and animals, villages and rivers to the higher altitude of winding paths, requesting Achumbung Aroti and Singsara Taodingma divinities to construct bridges across many rivers. The long voyage begins at the centre post. It leads to the junction of the three roads, at the meeting of the tree springs where the fields of flowers stretch endlessly. The imagery but performative descriptions of women and men busy in the activities like poultry farming, piggery, animal husbandry, bamboo works and so on makes the journey more effective and lively. Master spirits are frequently requested to protect the clients' soul. Performance reaches at the crossroad of eight paths – the path of *sogha*, *sugut*, *khema yangsang* (world of dead souls), *sammang* (divinities), *sire* (master spirit), Phedang and Sawa yet-hang (eight kings or leaders) and the path of Tummyahang (gentlemen). Blocking the paths of dead, evil spirits and other divinities, the expedition takes them to the right hand-side where two master-spirits lie, and they reach to the *chotlung* of the soul of children, *chotlung* of women, men – the domain of Nahangma, the Other World in Sagant's term. At the land of youths they throw *paklum* (stone shot-put) at nearby hills called Sangsanglung Saodham. Nahangma is believed to be lying between

two rivers known as Awari and Chappari where phedangma, symbolically, places now the soul of his client properly in front of altar and performs the procedures of Nahangma, straightens the bed or seat of *Nahangma sam* (soul of Nahangma) with the help of sword, through incantation and adds soil of various lands if it is denuded, and prays for the better life. In this way, most of the scenes are mimed during performances owing to the best possible time, available materials and surroundings.

Through both Mundhum recitation and physical performance life representing *Tungun warak* (ocean, river and great lake) is strongly embanked with soil of various lands so as to fill enough water in rivers, lakes and oceans. Fishes and other aquatic animals and plants are preserved in the water. Various evil spirits such as *saba* (monkey), *muiyan* (buzzard), *phikwa* (munia), *nahen* (jealousy and anger) and *lechham, phungsam* (ill-destined souls) are blocked with Phedangma's sword by shouting and yelling and instilling energy and vigour in the client (s). He gives his client the sword and places the live chicken on the layman's left and right shoulders, on his head and feet, behind him and in front of him. With the point of his sword, the priest traces a circle around him on the earth. The head of the house then starts to howl and stamp his feet, he slashes the air with his sword. He jumps up and down, stamps, whirls around several times. When the chicken is killed with one blow of a club on its spine; the drops of blood from its beak is allowed to flow on two banana leaves. "Has blood flowed?", cries the anxious family. 'It has!', answers the priest. If not blood dropped then it is taken as a sign of bad omen, therefore, blood drops with proper condition is essential to give them full satisfaction.

Sacrifice of chicken takes place, and divination is done by observing the reaction of chicken before sacrifice, for instance, while sprinkled water on its head, the nature of

blood drops flowed through its beak on banana leaves placed at the altar, and examining its entrails like intestines, liver and bile. During sacrifice, the phedangma together with family hear usually mime a war dance, raise the sword high and shout out assuming the sacred dancing space of Nahangma by yelling and jumping. This rite is observed during rising season and declining season, the time of transition, gap or breach. The phedangma takes a symbolic ritual journey to the wonderful ancestral land. He mimes repeatedly to the different activities through theatrical semiotics- gesture, movement and expression. Such stamping, shouting and jumping at some part of the performance “signifies the treading down the evil spirits under the ground and also to arouse their energy in order to sue it to activate human life”(Suzuki, 158).

When the Nahangma ritual comes to an end, the head of the householder is raised. After the act of *sam phungma* or collecting soul It is believed that ‘his soul has risen’, to which, Philippe Sagant phrases that his ‘head is held high again’. This is a complex religious state, which ensures certain powers. Its exterior sign is the pennant or the banner (flag). Royal or domestic, these powers are of the same nature, a vitality restored to its original purity and energy, entirely concentrated upon the act of letting blood, whether in hunting or at war, ensuring prosperity. This life force resides in the crown of the head.

After having done a contract with the divinities like Tibhukko Tiyangnama or Tiwako Tionhangma (one of the divinities) to protect the altar for certain duration that is usually one to three years, the actant prepares to make a return journey taking souls of all with him. He enters into the state of trance trembling violently while he invokes the master spirits which is the most critical spiritual journey of this ritual performance. He descends down the same path he journeyed ahead, blocks the paths of evil spirits on the

way and approaches at the central pillar of client's house that accomplishes the soul journey. Here, he performs the final invocation with the offerings to the respective divinities and spirits on behalf of benefactors; prays for consecration, progress and prosperity so as to avoid obstruction, distress and failures. He adorns the client with turban, sword, shield and other things, and then performances of dances, shouts and yells, etc. helps exhibit a warlike environment. Finally, Nahangma ritual observation comes to an end when phedangma destroys the altar. And then wishing for the bests, *mangsot* or sacred food is distributed to all. It is believed that with due performance of this ritual, the head of the house will regain the power, prestige and prosperity and avoid impending bad days, adversities, miseries, misfortunes and illness.

Mundhums embody the great source of knowledge which helps for constructing Limbu culture. They have a set of beliefs that the ancestors' past offenses have some impacts in their lives. Therefore, they are required to perform various rituals for getting rid of the adversities and reinstate the power and vitality in their lives. They do not completely believe in fatalism, rather, they take various measures to overcome their problems. Incestuous relationship, they think, is the crime and the means of impurity. Hence, they have a custom to see up to four to seven generations of kinship while getting married. And while seeking for good fortune in the soul journey to the Chotlung, a place for salvation, glory and success, they never intervene to any other people of the society. For instance, they perform Nahangma ritual for "raising one's head high" but not by "laying one's head down." They also have the nature symbioses as Mundhum guides them to preserve nature and living beings.

Sappok chomen (Womb worship for the safe child delivery)

Sappok chomen is a ritual performance carried out for the safe delivery of the child in womb. It is observed after 5/6 months of conception. It is by tradition a three day long performance in which the ritual of first two days is accomplished outside the house and the rest one day is done inside the house. But now a day it is accomplished even within a half day. In this, Phedangma, after creating a commendatory environment, begins narrating the myths of various divinities specifically of Yuma and her various forms. Different altars are prepared to worship different divinities and spirits associated to this rite. Sappok chomen ritual consists of some major episodes such as *pacha khengma* or invocation of master spirits and other spirits like *muiyan sire* or hawk spirit, *miyang sire* or cat spirit, spirits of *nahen* (jealousy), *sogha* (unnatural death), *sugut* (stillbirth and child death at early ages) and sorcery. Secondly, the observance for propitiating *kudap* (nature and hunting divinities) is carried out. Thirdly, a ritual of releasing from pledged bond if any on behalf of the client known as *pacha hanma* or *pangbhe chamma* is done. Fourthly, the worship of Yuma sam (the supreme divinity), thebasam and himsammangs (guardian divinities) and finally, propitiatory rites of apchara pakchanama, wogongma and manggenna (rite of regenerating strengths for prosperity and happiness) are performed.

The ritual performance becomes more spatial and temporal for instance, if observation takes place in the evening, the invocation begins with the words *iksa imsinglo*, *khambek imsinglo* or the earth, the land began to fall asleep, and if it takes place in the morning, it begins with *iksa serero*, *khambek serero* or the earth the land started to brighten. Moreover, it is observed first going at the water source and worshipping deities

like Wojangma and Pakchana/ma. Worship of Yuma and Theba is done inside the house where Phedangma vows to some particular rules that are to be followed by pregnant woman such as - no lifting up or carry heavy loads, no crossing rivers, hills; to maintain proper food habits, to see and not to see the things, etc. Additionally, the social norm is that both husband and wife are restricted to sacrifice animals during pregnancy. Hence, this ritual represents for physical and psychological reflections, for instance, feeling of youth, conception, pregnancy, and caring, eating and so on.

Furthermore, the liturgical procedures and performance of those various divinities create such an environment that makes feel full of vitality in the psychological domain of the expectant mother and the all members of the households.

Tongsing Mundhum

Tongsing is the greatest and most imperative Limbu ritual performance that comprises most of the religious activities along with elaborate ritual of various myths, legends, narratives and oracles. It is, for Subba (1995), “the most important religious ceremony of the Limbus” (156). While, Kainla (1996) says, “Tongsing Mundhum can be called the social get-together held for the happiness and prosperity of all men, families and societies or the family rite of unity”(34). It also refers to the planet or the crisis and therefore, taken as a religious rite of getting rid of misfortunes or propitiating malevolent stars and hence, overcome the crisis and achieve desired goal. Furthermore, it is a prayer for the peace of the dead souls and welfare and goodwill of the living ones. Literally, Tongsing is a cooperative act, getting together, coming to the agreement or conciliation; becoming correct or befitting. And technically, a small bamboo basket filled with earth on which *ghungring* or one side or both sides tufted small sticks are positioned upright in

the middle representing the spirits of deceased persons and living ones, placed at the bottom of about twelve feet bamboo pole planted in the center of the courtyard.

Therefore, “Tongsing takma or *tonsing tak* is a ritual of winning cooperation of ancestors and divinities through invocation, incantation, dramatic performances and using symbolic paraphernalia” (Subba, 156). Yagrangsing ritual is the propitiatory rite to please the supernatural forces, an ancestral worship to bring forth happiness, calmness, cooperation and prosperity for the succeeding generations, and thus avoid befalling distresses and misfortunes. It is a ritual of exorcising evil spirits from individual, family or community, and also ceremony of invoking various divinities or deities to bestow good harvest, better opportunities, prosperity, and ward off illnesses, difficulties and natural calamities. This ceremony can also be taken as an observance of ritually segregating the paths and souls of dead persons from living ones and reach at the pinnacle of life and achieve peace, happiness, prosperity and longevity.

As Tongsing Mundhum is an elaborate ritual of various myths, legends, narratives and oracles handed down from one generation to the next generation it immensely embodies social, ethical and religious concepts and helps shape attitude and behavior of Limbus. If it is observed in every year then there is usually observed one night *tongsing*, and if it is observed in every three years there will be three nights and four days long performance. There are different but corresponding sections of performances and all sections have their distinct values whilst jointly create a logical coherence among one another. Tongsing Mundhum is alive from time immemorial in the oral tradition “as it is poetic, versified and singable. Impregnated with meaning through the blend of verse, rhythm and movement, and making it sweet [...] lyrical and a grand literature” (Kainla,

35). The portrayal of various symbols, images, language, gestures, etc. make such ritual performances livelier. Hence, most of them are highly performative - physically, linguistically, mentally as well as representationally.

Among the types of Tongsing performances, Ighechchhing Tongsing is observed solely by the close relatives when a person dies, Ikhemasing Tongsing is conducted collectively, while Sese Sangsang Tongsing is performed on other usual occasions. The ritual performer, Samba is enough for observing the one night Tongsing and for three-night-tongsing Yeba/Yema is required for the rituals of earlier two nights and Samba performs for the last one night. Two poles *ke-sing* and *yagesing* are erected each for samba and Yeba respectively with seven steps of ladder symbolizing the steps of the worlds, *sanglangoba* would assist to Samba and *yagapchiba* would assist to Yeba during performances, *samba* narrates the elaborate Mundhum while Yeba performs ritual dances. Yeba/Yema makes divination and wards off evil spirits like *sogha* or unnatural deaths, *sugut/sugup* or death at parturition, *sasik yangdang* or stillbirths or early death of child, *tingding nahen* or envy and jealousy, expunge evil spirits that incite for incestuous relations and *sogen soma* or evil doings, *chellung khoklung* or symbolic act of physical intercourse, *naso thapan* or depression and psychiatry, *sangdok yaplek* or ghosts, devils, pestilence, etc.

A big bamboo basket (*yarumphu* or *saplumphu*) and a drum (*ke*) are hung to the poles and twigs of *sapsing* (*phoebe lanceolata*), a sickle, and small curved knife are kept inside the basket; poles are decorated with tasseled or tufted sticks of *muktubung* (*neyraudia madagascariensis*) at various places of the poles. Tongsing of men and women is placed at the bottom of the poles, Sambas/Yebas start performance by invoking master

spirits, summoning powerful ancestral Phedangmas, Sambas, Yebas and Yemas for assistance of the whole ritual, beat drum and brass-plates and shiver violently, sacrifice a piglet and offer local beer and one rupee in invocation ritual. Then, they begin to recite the Mundhum of creation of the gods, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the ocean and aquatic animals, plains and mountains, the rivers, forests, animals, birds and eventually the human beings for various purposes. They recite the Mundhum episode by episode taking pauses and drinking *tongbas* after the completion of each section. Several gods are referred to specific situation and event. Tagera Ningwaphuma is the most referred and revered as Supreme God or Goddess, the Creator of the world and then Porokmi Yamphami as creator God of human being. Even though, Tongsing Mundhum performance serves as a very complex and elaborate ritual practice consisting of a series of myths with corresponding acts, in this work, we will discuss only those which exhibit higher degree of performative elements.

Idhuk sogha pakma (Drive off evil spirits of unnatural deaths)

Most important section of observance performed in the first night of Tongsing is Idhuk sogha pakma or ritual of driving off evil spirits of unnatural deaths. For this ritual performance, the myths of origin of *sogha* (evil spirits of unnatural deaths) are recited while a multicolored thread tied on both sides of the sticks of *muktubung* that is stretched between the door and the eaves. Many other items of foods are placed on the leaves of *sapsing* (phoebe lanceolata) hung at the thread assuming that soghas would take rest on it and taste those foods. Along with recitation of the origin of *sogha*, Yeba casts a spell on *soghas* and calls them to come to the thread and accept their tasty foods. The typical sound pattern of utterances would strongly charm them and the moment they start taking

food Yeba throws arrows from his bow pointing to the *soghas* sitting and eating on leaves, causing them to fall down into the broken earthen pot filled with *khesik* (walnut) and small pieces of crystallized silica as a symbol of light and fire, where the Yeba beats them wildly in a trance by beating the brass plates rapidly. He drives them away following around the house up to the crossroads to the western direction (as evil spirits belong to the western direction), at this moment, Yeba shouts, yells and shrieks in the dark in which the participants of all the family members and spectators intermingle in this carnivalesque performance. Two persons representing pheasant and partridge stay alert on the crossroads pretending to allow the *sogha* pass through. By erecting poles the participants draw a line of white powder of corn and sand. A vertical and horizontal crossbar of *muktubung* is also installed, an altar is prepared by placing a flat stone and banana leaves on which various worship items like bamboo sticks (*tongbas*), two sticks of *munktubung*, walnut and nicker bean (representing steep rocks and hills), and pieces of broken earthen pot (representing mountains) are kept. With sacrifice of eggs and a pair of chicken and through Yeba's spells and rite of exorcism the path of *soghas* is blocked. The ritual hence embodies superb enactment qualities.

Similarly, the ritual of cutting down the *paramsing* (a tree dwelling evil spirits) so as to destroy the ominous tree completely is another way of rendering elements of performance. At this time, Yeba recites the myth of *sogha* and *sasik*, and together with his assistants and the benefactors cut down the *muktubung* in place of *paramsing* into pieces and throw into the hearth which is known as *soghasing khakma*. Moreover, this ritual is followed by another ritual called *khijo apma* or shooting at the symbolic *soghas* and its foods hung on the thread. The illustrative dramatization of the myth not only

overwhelms the spectacles but they themselves also involve in the performance. The Yeba/Yema perform this ritual of driving away of evil spirits instead of killing them because they have a belief that if they once kill the evil spirits that would bring an end to their ritual vocation in the community.

Mang-hup Mangde Wademma (To let flow curses/the festival of goodwill)

A ritual performed to avoid the effect of curse, Mang-hup mangde wademma, relates the myths of Mujina Kheyongna, the earliest woman on earth and her natural son Susuweng Lalawengba who designated himself as Sawa Yakphung Kemba after having trained as a great hunter. From the cohabitation with many beautiful maidens he had also got children. He had got a son child named Sutchhuru Suhanpheba from Phiyamlungma, a girl child Tetlara Lahadongna from Mukkumlungma, and Samdang Khewa and Lingdang Khewa from two maid-attendants. He was not given any edibles to take with him while he went for hunting as his wives began to feel envy and jealousy to one another. Because of this, even he could not kill any animal and consequently, he died of hunger. From his decayed parts of body different plants symbolizing the evil spirits grew up like spirits of stillbirths, curse and witchcraft, and many other evil spirits causing troubles and illnesses. Later on when his dog informed to Mujingna Kheyongna about the death of her son, she was shocked first and started lamenting over the death of his son. She also learnt that her daughter-in-laws did not provide any foodstuffs to eat while he went for hunting; therefore, she cursed them to get ruined from incest, suffer from stillbirths, curse, witchcraft and mental disorders, immature death due to thunderbolt and other accidents. She herself also died on a cave and turned into sugut, a spirit of death at parturition. This ritual is also mimed with various activities like the consequences of

originating curse, way of getting rid of it, and so on. In fact, curse is thought to be the major cause of misfortune, ill luck and impediment of progress and prosperity, and it is therefore disliked and feared in the Limbu society.

Lungdhung Kai Phekma (Incest)

The myth of Lungdhung kai phekma narrates several incestuous relationships of the human ancestors in the prehistoric time. They, at that time, were not enough conscious regarding such relationship. One of them is between Sutchchuru Suhangpheba and Tetlara Lahadongna, the brother and sister in blood relation, son and daughter of Susuweng Lalawengba and grandson and granddaughter of Musingna Kheyongna, a legendary heroine and the first woman of human being. After giving birth of seventeen children they were complained as being incest by their bitch after she was severely beaten by Lahadongna with a broom, hence, she openly disclosed the fact that of their incestuous relationship and giving birth of seventeen children who, later on, they were separated from each other by dividing the sons. Nine sons on Suhangpheba's part went to the heaven and became sambas or scholars while eight sons on Lahadongna's part went to the earth and became Sawa Yet-hang, the progenitors of Kirant Limbus. Sambas and Yebas recite the Mundhum of incest, and through intervention the culture they symbolically perform this ritual making model of genital organs of clay and other items and simulated through gestures.

Yeghek Lengma (Divination)

It is the most carnivalesque kind of performance in which Yeba dances beating brass-plate in full emotion and trembles violently, under the aegis of spirit possession he enters to the process of necromancy and divination; by violating the boundary, he enters

wherever he wants, eats whatever he gets, destroys the things whatever he thinks ominous, takes out various articles, garments and other possessions of the dead one or that contains evil omen. He may search such things going to the houses of his clients and close neighbours who are participating in the tongsing ritual. He foretells the future of his clients about upcoming incidents such as accident, fighting, certain failures, serious illnesses and deaths, etc. In this ritual, another interesting act is use of sign, symbols and gestures while communicating like a dumb with a belief that he is possessed by *Keba Sire* or dumb master spirits.

Paklum Lepma (Stone Throwing/shot-put)

Another kind of more performative ritual is the Paklum Lepma or stone shot-put throw ritual which represents prestigious game of adventurous endeavour of youths, a reminiscence ritual of divine attempt for prestige and welfare of humankind. The myth narrates that due to desecration caused a great draught on earth, Porokmi Yamphami, the Creator God threw the stone which caused rainfall on earth. It is being a symbol of vigour, energy and success; the male youths of today throw it for the same in this ritual. Similarly, for women and female youths, the rituals like Phungwa changma (revitalizing life flower) and winnowing are also performed which symbolically demonstrate strength, youthfulness and skills.

Tingding Nahen Ingma (Warding off envy/jealousy)

Another ritual performed in Tongsing ritual is Tingding Nahen Ingma or warding off envy/jealousy. It serves as a major performance since all other ritual narratives are virtually concerned with it, upholds the greatest significance in the Limbu Mundhum. According to the Mundhum, as Limbu Phedangma, Samba and Yeba recite, Tingding

Nahen is believed to be rooted amid Limbus' primitive gods, their ancestors, and among women, youths, etc. (Menyangbo, 2005). Therefore, it is believed that such jealousy has still greater impact on their generations resulting in illness and misfortune among them. For instance, envy and jealousy between the two wives of Susubeng Lalabeng is subtly presented in the following when he asked some food stuff to eat for journey to meet his mother:

Ma~a-ho,	thosulungme ga	Oh	[she] upward-living
	Phiyalungma re		Phiyalungma
Ma~a-ho	yosumlungme ga	Oh	[she] downward-living
	Mukkumlungma re		Mukkumlungma
Ma~a-ho	chesak mebirun	Oh	given no food stuff
	Chaffan mebirun		given no materials
Ma~a-ho	tingding mu yuktu	Oh	envy was provoked
	nahen mu yuktu		jealousy was incited

(Menyangbo, 54)

The ritual Tingding Nahen Ingma is also observed with a belief that the people have to bear the sign of pain, anxiety, adversity and scarcity owing to various reasons, for instance, whether the mythical characters Sikera Ekthuknama (also called Irere Idhuknama), the daughter of Sodhugen Lepmuhang put curse on the herdsmen or Yaklabu's act of frightening herdsmen's cattle, or the curse of our ancestors who slain each-other as they happened unable to segregate the cattle among them. The performance

of it features a lot of enactments; one rooster, eggs are speared on the sharp tops of bamboo sticks and manglok (a thorny tree) as a symbol of blinding the envy and jealousy.

Tongsing Takma Mundhum

Tongsing tour is symbolically ascended towards *chotlung*. In this, Samba and Yeba/Yema recite the Myth of soul journey similar to the myth in Nahangma ritual. It consists of a series of observances and extensive episodes of ritual performances. Therefore, after the completion of each episode is followed by acts of taking a short break, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and even playing and talking and so on. Communication is important here. In Mundhum recitation, the mystic communication between human and supernatural forces takes place. The Samba and Yeba, as role player, dramatically (by means of physical and verbal actions) interact with a large number of addressees of both human and supernatural. They give information of various things, places, actions, etc. For instance, they say- we are now here, there, doing this act, we are reaching, returning, and so on, and audience or recipients also respond accordingly. Therefore, it becomes an interactive performance that can be accomplished even in the absence of the addressees which then happens to serve in the form of a dramatic monologue.

The ritual and symbolic *tongsing* of deceased ones is taken up to the world of the dead people (khemaso khedukso pangbhe) to hand over to the ancestors while *tongsing* of living ones is carried over *chotlung*, the Utopian world of perfection, wherein, filling up water and fish in the pond of *chotlung* an emblematic return takes place after protecting the flower garden thereof. While doing so, all the spectacles of a performance are generated by the performers' art of recitation of myths, bodily gesture and movements

over the space defined by the religio-architectural formation. Besides aesthetic and spiritual pleasures, the ritually choreographed journeys manifest for spatio-cultural, message-oriented, traditional and ritual realizations as well.

Similarly, most of the practices of Tongsing ritual usually employ elements of dramatic performance. Khema Tongsing Semma is for separating the *tongsing* of the dead persons from the living ones. This ritual is performed when recitation of the myth reaches the land of the dead and observed by breaking the thread tied close to the Tongsing of Tumyahang (gentleman) and Tongsing of Suhangma (a lady) from the Khema Tongsing of dead ones which is then thrown away. Moreover, the sections and scenes of other rituals like Warak thengma or barricading the lake, Phungwa lingma or growing flowers, Chotlung kepma or approaching the climax of Mundhum, Sam phungma lingma or collecting and handing over the souls, Silam sakma or blocking the path of death, and Nahen sakma or blocking envy and jealousy all have great ritual values and performative dimensions. In particular, all Mundhum ritual observations apparently do characterize the various degrees of performativity.

Because of the guidance of Mundhums, Limbus have got distinctive kind of culture. Tongsing Mundhum performance provides a feeling of communal harmony and sense of goodwill. It is for creating an environment of common interest, mutual cooperation among people of the community, memorization of ancestors and ancestral deeds. Limbus have no tradition of segregating others, as in many other cultures do, and treat them as inferior maintaining hierarchy but instead they have tradition of equal behave. Limbus, through ritual performance, recollect the good works of ancestors and rectify their mistakes. For them, any mistake done by anyone can have adverse effects in

the future, therefore, one should be always honest, non-injurious and free from guilt. Even curses, envy and jealousy can bring upon the cause of misfortunes and adversities. They have learnt that one should be cooperative, helpful and free from selfishness which has, in the long run, been sometimes the cause of misfortunes. They believe in evil spirits that resulted in through the misfortunes of their own progenitors but not in the people that they live with. The Mundhum has also taught them to be liberal and guiltless in every behavior, and indeed they are. They are simple minded and sincere in nature. The cultural and societal norms have been strongly ingrained in them. For instance, there is a great fear of being immoral has subconsciously been embedded in their mind; it turns into so because Mundhum does not contains the teachings of playing strategic games, taking advantages from others, having suspicions on being dishonest and so on. They simply get engaged in the activities guided by the mythical world of Mundhum. Such nature of Limbus has been the cause of their sufferings now as the ownership of most of their cultivable lands has been shifted to the non-Limbu people.

Chapter Four: Mundhum Performers

Performers and Their Roles

As has already been mentioned, Mundhums consist of narratives of mythologies, cosmic origin, genesis, history, tales, songs, psalms and so on and recited orally during observation of rites and rituals. The actants, the officiants, the ritual practitioners or the ritual performers like Phedangma, Samba, Yeba, Yema and Ongsi play the roles of reciting or narrating the Mundhum myths and songs orally and observe Mundhum rituals. They are traditionally institutionalized and authoritative to perform various Mundhum rituals. Using a loose definition, some western writers have observed the Limbu ritual performers as 'shaman'. They have argued that Limbu shaman who as a part time specialist and through the controlled trance or state of possession, have been able to divine the future, diagnose disease and misfortune, and otherwise bring aid to their clients. Some others have termed them variously as 'shaman', 'priest', 'controlled ecstatic', or 'spirit-possessed' but each term has its shortcomings as it is inadequate to fully define and encompass all the characteristics of those religious ritual performers at least in the context of Limbu ritual officiants. Limbu officiants serve their clients both as diviners and healers through power of the spirit possession and the trance, as well as priests who offer sacrifice, prayer and perform rituals without the aid of supernatural power as well. They are guided through indigenous traditions, distinctive performance genus, mythological themes, and religious-philosophic base. They designate as religious ritual artists with possession of communal trust and role to be played in cultural stage. The similar roles and embodiment of performers in the country is envisioned by Abhi Subedi (2006). He writes,

In reality, the history of Nepali performance culture is the history of the artists, the performers. The role players and their roles were institutionalized by creating trust, a communal institution [...] this system makes endowment of land to deities. The custodians of the deities and the land thus were/are given the responsibilities to continue the legacy of performance. (33)

These features best characterize the roles of Limbu shamans as the ritual performers. The actants, through guidelines of traditional Mundhum text, help execute the rites and rituals according to their roles assigned traditionally. Such deep-rooted traditional institutions function autonomously in the socio-cultural and religious domain of Limbu community. Hence, this long tradition of institutionalized Mundhum performance has survived by retaining the basic traits of their culture and religion. The actants who are also custodians of Mundhum, through ritual performance, continue their native responsibilities of worshiping deities and propitiating divinities which endows them with tremendous source of power and proximity to the land by establishing as native dwellers. Through their role of mediating between divine and human they transform themselves into another being which we call an actant, a ritual practitioner, a healer, or shaman accordance with their particular role play in the society. Sometimes, a same actant can play different roles in different ritual practices for instance, worshipper, propitiator, healer, or priest and also a shaman. Western anthropologists like Philippe Sagant, Rex L. Jones, Shirley Kurz Jones, and John T. Hitchcock have studied the Limbu religious practitioners placing them into the category of shamanism. However, Sagant prefers referring 'priests' to the Limbu religious practitioners rather than 'shamans' which is, to some extent, a rational

observation since all Limbu religious practitioners do not possess shamanic complex in every ritual performance. For instance, Phedangmas, as worshipers and propitiators of gods, deities and divinities, generally perform cheerful rituals and therefore need not often practice much about trance, occult and séance. A Samba, known as specialists of Mundhum, is believed to have great power in his word performance. Similarly, Yeba/Yema, Yuma and Mangba have got traditional performing roles which do not exhibit shamanistic feat of characteristics in their every ritual activity. Hence, they are religious practitioners and actants who officiate the religious service and ceremony guided through Mundhum.

The characteristics delineated for shaman are often referred to magical flight, spirit possession, and the control, memory and cultural orientation of trance. Some authors have proposed that true shamanic ecstasy implies possession by spirits, others take an alternative view, believing that the true shaman experiences only magical flight. Lewis (1971) argues against interpreting shamanic ecstasy as being exclusive to either phenomenon. His definition includes both magical flight and spirit possession, and he notes that “they can exist separately or coexist in various degrees” (49). The Limbu ritual performer mediates between the two worlds of men and gods. As in the naturalistic theatre, the body undergoes a conscious and voluntary transformation so that one person (the actor) ‘becomes’ a completely different – likely fictional – character. This process is based on the conception of the body as a composite signifier which can be trained to convey the desired characteristics through facial expression, gesture, posture, movement, and so on.

In fact, the cultural performance of such actant is a very decisive element; it is impossible to abstract from the cultural milieu. His mystical journeys and alternative personalities are not idiosyncratic; cannot be isolated him from the community. The spirits who possess him, and the worlds to which he travels, are recognized by the community and part and parcel of the belief system.

Mundhum Officiants and Types

Limbu ritual performers like Phedangma, Samba, Yeba/Yema and Yuma are believed to have spirit possession of various statuses which determine their traditional roles. Spirit possession can be defined as an altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien form with vital and spiritual attributes, e.g. the spirit of a superhuman form such as a witch, sorcerer, god, goddess, or other religious divinity. Rex L. Jones (1976) has mentioned three types of spirit possessions – reincarnate possession, tutelary possession, and oracular possession in which tutelary possession has more influence in Limbu actants. In tutelary possession, time is designated but not the space. It is periodic and specific possession during a séance or ritual and is never relegated to an institution such as temple, church, or monastery like incarnate possession where an individual reincarnates the spirit of a deceased individual and then takes up residence in a monastery or religious centre, a full-time religious practitioner for example Lamaism in the Buddhist society. In oracular spirit possession an individual becomes possessed by a spirit, a god or goddess on designated occasions such as a village ceremony, a curing séance or a ceremony of divination. The Satyahangma, an ascetic group of the Limbu ritual practitioners are found to be classified into oracular possession.

Nicholas Allen (1972) designates two types of officiants – the first as ‘mediums’ and the second he defines as ‘tribal priests’. These two categories are also found in other ethnic groups in Nepal. The medium is in personal contact with certain spirits; he has undergone an initiation, he wears shamanic garb; his ritual journey is characterized by a trance, mimed actions, dramatization, the symbolism of ascent, etc., which tend to prove that he practices soul projection.

But Limbu religious practitioners of mainstream Mundhum followers have distinct identity as they do not take up permanent residence in religious centre and perform their role as Buddhist Lama, Hindu priest, Christian Pope, Bishop, Pastor and Vicar, etc. They differ in many ways to the shamans of other communities such as Dhami and Jhankri of Aryan community, Bon-po of Tamang, Pajyu and Khepre of Gurung, Puimbo (male) and Ngiami (female) of Sunuwar, Dewa nokcha or Bijuwa of Thulung Rai, Garau of Raji and Tharu, and so on. Oral literature, performativities, soul journey, spirit possessions, spectator and benefactor’s assumptions and other determine such distinctions among Limbu ritual performers and non-Limbu ones. Hence, Hitchcock (1976: xix), remarks that “Limbu shamans are specialists in the oral literature of the Limbu and call upon spirits and deities not found elsewhere in Nepal. Furthermore, they seldom refer to themselves with the term *jhakri* or *dhami*”. The way of ritual practice, use of paraphernalia, costumes and others can make them distinctive to other shamans. Dhami and jhankri beat the drums while Phedangma, Samaba do not beat it. Even Yeba and Yema use it only during invocation of Gurus. Instead, Samba and Yeba/Yema usually beat the brass plates.

Phedangmas, the senior in hierarchy among actants, have variously been named as Phungiri phungappo phedangma, Khamjiri khambong phedangma, Lungjiri lungbong phedangma, Namjiri nambong and Henjiri hembong phedangmas, according to the origin of their ancestors. On the basis of healing art they can be classified into two major divisions: firstly, Mangyamding sodingdhungma phedangma who uses herbal medicines, animal teeth, bones and other parts of the body, amulets, talismans, etc. along with other oral means, and secondly, Segekwa asokphungwa phedangma who entirely rely on incantation, charms and propitiatory rites (Subba, 76). A phedangma has a special role to worship and propitiate household deities and divinities and does not perform the activities of samba and Yeba/Yema. In this context, the remarks of Rex L. Jones (ibid) as “He is a ‘jack-of-all-trades’ shaman” lacks up genuine research regarding the role of Phedangma. Similarly, Sambas perform more complex roles than the Phedangmas who are required to be well-versed or have high proficiency in Mundhums as they are considered inheritors of the profound knowledge of Mujoklung khejoklung Samba, a self created wise man or demigod who could narrate the myth of universe creation and interpret the mysteries of governing the universe and life and supernatural or metaphysical world through oral tradition of learning between guru and disciple. They have to acquire mastery over Mundhum through devotion, practice, perseverance and performances. Sambas, according to their roles, also get entitled with different ancestral names such as Sajuwet mundangwet samba, the senior most one, and other sambas like Digonda thegonda Samba, Thappura theyonge Samba, Thangseri musediteannang Samba, Sikiling kambokling Samba, and so on.

Yebas and Yemas, from earlier, have retained their status with a distinct role. The role of Yeba and Yema is same. The only distinction made between them is in terms of sex – the Yeba is a male while the Yema is female. Their role is to wipe out the evil spirits like *Sogha* (unnatural deaths), *Sugut/Sugup* (death at child delivery), *Sasik* (stillbirth), and barring *Nahen* (envy, jealousy, anger, etc.), *Warakma* (water spirit), *Muiya sire* (eagle spirit), *Miyang sire* (cat spirit), etc.

The names and institutions representing various specialties differ among myth narrators although the myth of the origin of Phedangma, Samba and Yeba or Ya are similar. They were the spiritual advisers and experts to execute the ritual performances preceding birth to after death. The cultural rites including Sappok chomen, Yangdang phongma, Naramapma or Nara-womepma, Changwan lekma, Mekhim, religious or spiritual rituals like Nahangma, Mangenna, Tapfeng, Yumasam/Thebasam thepma, Him Sammang, Akwanama, Tongsing, Manghup tema, Sakmura wademma, Lakat sammang tuwa, Tongsing tikma, Phungwa changma, Aja kakma, Nahen lakma, Samlingma, and death rites such as Kham ingma, Samsama, Yumchama or Yumsama, Khau:ma, Mikwa sangma, etc. are performed with those actants in the Limbu community.

In fact, ritual performance is different from sacrificial and puja practice to the degree how they are overtly dramatic, theatrical or performative and mediating bridge between the divine and the human worlds. The myths of Mundhum narrate that Supreme goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma who imparted the sacred knowledge and scripture of Mundhums to the eight wise leaders known as Sawa yet-hang, the progeny of Tetlara Lahangdona. They were Mohikkum Ongsi, Phejikkum Phedangma, Sawali Samba, Yebhung Yeba or Yema, Sam Mundhum-Yep Mundhum (Mundhum singers or reciters)

and Siyanding sida lam (users of medical herbs) and they have to take care of Sawa yet-hang and their people (Chemjong 1961a). Hence, Limbus have their own way of performing rituals that are traditionally carried out with the help of actant, priest or sacred specialist called Phedangma, Samba, Yeba/Yema, Mangba, Ongsi and Yuma. They perform various but specific ritual roles of Limbu culture, tradition and oral literature including healing various kinds of diseases and illnesses, propitiating deities and preventing from befalling misfortunes. They are known as *samniba* or capable of seeing supernatural beings.

The Ongsi, another category of officiant to observe rituals, is believed to be a senior most Samba and an ascetic one who mostly involves in preaching and devoting to the god. Chemjong (1961b) has described them as wise persons with great erudition, leading a mundane life abandoning the worldly things in search of knowledge. Asman Subba (1989) has indentified them as religious practitioners mostly concerned in devotion to God Tagera Ningwaphuma and preaching. While, Subba (1995) assumes giving references of Ongsis of Kedem clan of Miwakhola and *Onsis* of Taplejung and Phedap areas and claims that they have the power, characteristics and methods of healing human illnesses and propitiating divinities which bears apparent impressions of northern Lamaism and local *sambas*. Mahaguru Phalgunanda, one of the national personas, had initiated a slight different kind of ritual practice known as Satyahang ritual which is now steering up by Atmanada Lingden under the specification of Kirant Religion and Literature Resurrection Association. Mahaguru himself is identified as Ongsimang, and this practice followers claim themselves as Ongsis. They perform every ritual activity

under the guidance of Kirant religious scripture, Mundhum but it has notable differences in terms of performance procedures.

Satyahangma ritual practitioners follow the same Kirant Mundhum which they call “Kirant Samjik Mundhum”, a religious scripture anthologized under the aegis of Mahaguru Phangunanda Lingden in the first half of the twentieth century. There is no much difference as such between the scripture and the oral Mundhums practiced by the traditional religious practitioners like Phedangma, Samba, Yeba and others but the difference only lies in its performativity. Satyahang Mundhum performers basically follow priesthood system, asceticism and devotion to the Almighty God Tagera Ningwaphuma, Yuma and others. They believe in change and continuity or dynamism with the view that traditional Mundhum practice has leading towards superstition and conservatism. And therefore, they have brought about changes in the methodological form of ritual performances. They refrain from any means of animal sacrifices, use of alcohol, etc. in the ritual practices and even in their day to day lives. The use of pure water, fresh flowers, *achchheta* (unhusked rice), incenses, oil lamp, fruits, sacred food items, and so on. They also practice the ritual of *homa* or oblation of ghee and rice, and eventually they are often criticized as influenced from Hinduism. By reading and reciting Mundhum scriptures the actant performs all kinds of ritual performances with construction of specific altars and puja places.

Mangbas, an another category believed to be experts in dealing with the spirits of *sogha* (people died in accidents, disaster or other unnatural deaths), *sugut* or *sugup* (women died in delivery of child) and *sasik* (stillbirth), have, in fact, come from native Rai kirantis who play the role similar to Yeba and Yema of Limbu ritual performers.

They are found at the bordering community of Rai and other communities. Besides, there is another kind of religious practitioner found in the society known by Yuma who claim themselves as being possessed by the spirit of Yuma Sammang, the supreme divinity of Limbus. They are devotees of Yuma. Now a days Yuma Sammang spirit possession is found in the people of both Limbu and non-Limbu communities who take the supreme goddess Yuma as their tutelary deity and sometimes invoke the goddess Yuma in Limbu language even by non-Limbu Yumas.

Officials' Role in Mundhum Performance

In general, all Limbu shamans perform at births, weddings, deaths, harvest rites and periodic rituals for the welfare of households. Which one will be called upon is a matter of individual choice and availability. They are called upon “to officiate at a number of household rituals and life-cycle ceremonies, in addition to their activities as psychopomps. On these occasions, they do not call upon their tutelary deities, not do they go into a trance” (Jones, 50). Normally, all serve as ‘actants’ in that they are capable of performing set Limbu rituals. Particularly, Phedangma performs the cheerful kinds of rites such as Sappok chomen (womb worship), Yangdang phongma (rite of removing impurity during birth and naming the child), Tendham mekhim (wedding) and death rites like Sam sama (handing over the soul of the dead one to the ancestors), Yumsa nakma (to have assent of tasting salt and other pungent food items), Khauma (rite of death ritual purification). They also have authority to perform harvest rites like Chasok-thisok (offer new crops to the god) and many other revering services of nature spirits. They also carry out the procedure of *khaikma* (diagnosing) and *khaloma* (predicting) the common illnesses and sufferings. Furthermore, they also propitiate household divinities including

Yuma, Theba, Akwanama, Him Sammang, Manggenna, Nahangma, other divinities like Chokhoba, Pichamma, Mishekpa, Lungmaepa, Saba, and nature divinities Tamphungna, Khanjama, Takshangba, Shenghama, Warakma, etc.

Sambas, known as *mundhumtangbas* or possessor of Mundhum, mostly perform mythical and philosophical rituals such as Tongsing, Kudap (group of nature divinities) propitiation along with death rites, wedding, Nahangma and other. To safeguard the households and the human beings from befalling misfortunes due to ancestors' erroneous conducts such as incest, envy and jealousy, curse and social anarchy is their major vocation. They manifest a vast realm of knowledge and power in cosmogony, eschatology, human evolution, theological interpretation, philosophical explanation, value system, cause and effect of natural phenomena and diagnosing and healing various kinds of diseases and illnesses. To be a proficient performer, they need to learn and practice constantly throughout their lives to excel at Mundhum rituals.

They exercise for supernatural powers, extraordinary strengths, profound knowledge and weird insights through their primeval master spirits, predecessors to recent gurus. Every priest is required to perform specific rituals accordance with his/her specialties to help the mankind overcome spiritual crisis and human sufferings, and plays the role of intermediaries between human beings and gods or spirits. Furthermore, Subba (1995) remarks their roles as,

[...] religious practitioners, preachers, conveyers of traditional messages from generation to generation, perpetuators of age-old values and belief systems, healers of illnesses, diseases and personality disorders through distinct way of diagnosis and treatment method, and also astrologers,

foretellers and performers of various rituals for the welfare of the households. (72)

Moreover, they are the link of the past and the present, world of human and divine, tradition bearers and savants, and above all, Limbu Mundhum ritual performers.

Audience in Mundhum performance

Mundhum ritual performance that we are discussing in this work is related to the performance of real life situation. The Mundhum performers or ritual practitioners show their performance only when a person, household, or community (recipient/beneficiary) would ask them to perform. The ritual is therefore performed for the sake and/or requirement of those people who manage such occasion. The event organizers are both recipients and audience of such ritual events, and the ritual performers who are loosely termed as shamans carry out this job on behalf of the earlier. In this sense, ritual performances take place with the consent and arrangement of the active audience or participants; it can not be performed simply on the interest of the performers. Hence active audiences or participants play significant roles in Mundhum performance and they serve the roles including somatic engagement, personal and cognitive responsiveness in it. As active participants they take part in various performing activities, respond on different occasions and assist with various means. Sometimes, both performers and active audiences are seen as interactive co-producers in creating the performance event. For instance, including Nahangma, Manggenna, Sappok chomen and in most of the segments of Tongsing ritual performances invite such active participants and respondents for the successful accomplishment. They together with performers enter into the performing space and act out their various roles with a belief that their desires will be fulfilled. They

pray, plead, shout, laugh, play, sing, dance, and make response of various other interactions. It is the most intense emotional bonds that are critical in maintaining alliances in the community. This most effective unifying concepts, hence, relates to facets of life that Limbu people are most concerned about and become most emotionally involved with. Hence, audience, in multiple designations as a receiver, a benefactor, a beneficent, a respondent, a participant, an event organizer, and so on, acquires a pivotal role in the Mundhum performance.

The roles that Phedangmas, Sambas, Yebas, Yemas, Ongsis and participants play in Limbu ritual performances as per the guidance of Mundhums have intrinsically been their daily way of life, an essential ideology governing themselves. They help to form their behavior, nature and identity, and thereby their religio-historical and socio-cultural representation.

Chapter Five: Religio-Historical Representation

Religion, philosophy and morals can be understood as products of the social condition of man, and the source of religion and morality is in the collective mind of society and not inherent in the isolated minds of individuals. Religion has been one of the defining elements in the politics of belonging and identification in modern lives. Therefore, religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites and rituals are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. In the words of Emile Durkheim (1912),

Collective representations are the results of an immense co-operation, which stretches out not only into space but into time as well; to make them, a multitude of minds have associated, united and combined their ideas and sentiments; for them, long generations have accumulated their experience and their knowledge. (29)

Limbu community is based on religious, social and cultural belief guided by Mundhum performance. Religion is meant as the determination of human life by the sentiment of a bond uniting the human mind to that mysterious mind whose domination of the world and itself it recognizes, and to whom it delights in feeling itself united. To form such multitude of determination and belief, Limbus have gathered a strong traditional knowledge and understanding which helps make an effervescent ritual practice and a religion known as Kirant religion or Mundhum religion. The Limbus, one of the main branches of the historic Kirant dynasty inhabiting the major part of eastern Nepal after the takeover by the Lichchhavi Kings, have their own distinct history and religion based on oral literature called Mundhum. They have a long tradition of narrating or

reciting Mundhums in their own native language and performing rituals and ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. A Mundhum that consists of legends, folklores, sermons, prehistoric accounts and moral or philosophical exhortations in poetic language lies generically into a narrative oral poetry. There are several Mundhums giving sources of inspiration, information and enlightenment to shape the way of life, customs, rites and rituals.

Religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion, and consist in representations; the second are determined modes of action, and take in performance. Both are resultant and complementary to one another and therefore go concurrently. Historically, the Mundhum which is known as an oral literature embodies various knowledge and experiences gained from the long struggled past generations and occupies much esteemed place for keeping live the spirit of rites and rituals. Hence, it has been cultural heritage of Limbu community. The credit to preserve this Mundhum performance goes to the shamans such as Yeba, Yema, Samba, Phedangma, Mahangba and other Tumyahang or gentlemen. They recite expert narratives of the Mundhum myths both in formal performances and in everyday life that reflects greater social and cultural importance in the Limbu ethnic group. It gives a superb expression to the development of religious, moral and social beliefs and assumptions drawing from various mythological legends and folk tales. As Mundhum is a religious scripture existing for centuries through oral practice which, we see, has immense contribution to enhance the Kirant civilization and mores, and guide their daily activities. All ritual practices whether it is a worship of divinities for good health, progress and prosperity or warding off evil spirits causing misfortunes has great

religious value in the community. Limbus worship Tagera Ningwaphumang as omnipotent Almighty god. Limbu people have also esteemed faith on many other gods- Yumasammang and Thebasammang are worshiped with the same power and veneration. of Creator god, Himsammang, a protector of house in the image of Tagera Ningwaphu. *Sam* means soul and *mang* means god so Limbu live with the belief that those various gods and goddesses, deities and divinities are the products of *sam* or the soul. They have a belief that *mang* can be felt through *sam* as the work of air is seen but not the air and similarly the effort of god is seen but not the god itself while god has sights upon us.

Various rituals altogether from Tingding nahen ingma (warding off envy/jealousy), Phungwa changma (revitalization of flowers), Sendang lahi ingma (propitiation of hostile planets), Mang-hup mangde wademma (wash away swearing) to Si:lam sakma (block way of world of death), and among others are mandatory worships of Limbus to be observed, all concerned with Tongsing tikma (to follow/sing or narrate Tongsing) and closely related to the way of daily activity. Tongsing incorporates the action courses leading up to the *chotlung*, a sacred place to obtain happiness and prosperity. *Chotlung* is believed to be meeting point of happiness and prosperity. Tongsing ritual has temporal and spatial importance since it is performed for salvation of both living and dead people. It is observed for progress, happiness and prosperity of living people whereas; it is for peaceful salvation of souls of the dead ones. *Tongsing*, in the previous times, was performed by/within family circle or being collectively in every three years and used to become more expensive but now it is preferred to be performed collectively. *Tongsing* is mainly of two types- *Teen-raate Tongsing* (three-night

Tongsing) and *Ek-raate Tongsing* (one-night *Tongsing*). In the first night of *Teen-raate Tongsing* the ritual of wiping out of the bad spirits known as *Sogha-sugut nu Mukumsemi Sepma* (a ritual to eliminate evil spirits caused by the death of pregnant women, due to accident and fire) is observed. *Tang-amba Thepma*, a ritual to prevent being evil spirit during one's youth, *Thakthamma*, a ritual of benevolence for victims of malnutrition, *Só-umrung*, a ritual to ward off transgressors, *Thakchum Thakpe Tomma*, an observance for protecting women in their youth, and *Poklung Chagma* to save to the male youths are all observed in the second night of *Tongsing*. These rituals are for purification of the whole premises and then the remaining one last night is remarkably significant as it is for observance of prosperity and protection of the whole living beings. Indeed, *Tongsing* is only one night performativity in which after flower is revived in the *Kalasha* (water-vessel), an act of soul reinvigoration for both alive and deceased people, the *Mundhum* also provides the narrative ritual of warding-off evil spirits and deflecting the influences from the hostile planet. There are several myths and prehistoric accounts that deal with various causes of origin of rituals. The causes are mostly because of activities of gods and earlier human ancestors that resulted in the emergence of various deities and divinities and also various kinds of evil spirits. The *Mundhum* in one of the sections narrates that there were two suns - *Lasara Thenamyamba* (big sun) and *Chukchinamba* (small sun). Once, the big sun procreated the inauspicious planets when its eyes were broken, the small sun also set with a shock and most of the people who were considered to have existence along with the creation of stone and soil also died by flooding, drowning and sliding in the darkness, and thereby transformed into evil-spirits which cause sufferings to us even today. Whatever be the case, the misfortune, *Mundhum* narrates, means

movement of planets on man supposed to control or affect the man's fate. The custom of cleansing or propitiating evil stars, performing rites to prevent misfortunes, ill-luck, disasters along with destructive results of such planets and to avoid or prevent the wrath of those as well as to pacify them during the disasters is also common observation in the Limbu community as in others. It is generally found that every activity is shaped through the culture guided by thoughts of religion at least in the existing generation of Limbu community.

Besides cultural, ritual and religious narrative descriptions Mundhum provides various kinds of empirical and historical information. History is the living past of man and it is the records of past events. All Mundhums provide distinctive narratives of past events and happenings in which Manggenna Mundhum (worship for one's safeguard), Nahangma Mundhum (invigourating the family head), and Tongsing Mundhum deserve important historical representations. For example, *Manggenna yok* documents the genealogy of Limbus. *Yok* is a ford or the place where an ancestor of particular clan of Limbu was first inhabited. According to Prasad Thebe (2000),

Manggenna Mundhum describes the first origin of Kirants was at Munatembé of Asian Himalaya from where they shifted to western part and inhabited in Mediya of Persia and then in Babylon. Later, coming to the east they populated in Gokul then after Chitaugad to the plain area of Ganges and Yamuna. Inhabiting for long time in Sukhi Kangi they entered into Nepal along the way of Bagmati River. (39)

The description of such information of the *Mundhum* concurs with other histories, for an instance, in *The Kirant History and Culture*; Iman Singh Chemjong too presents

the similar accounts bringing references of various Indian, British and Chinese historians. According to Chemjong (2003), Kirants were originated on the river bank of Tigris and when they set up an empire in Assyria were known by Asuras [...] who gradually extended their empire to Mediya, Persia, Babylon, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, India and other Eastern areas. They established Babylon or Babel as capital city from where they ruled all over the regions (49). Likewise, Limbus' other earlier inhabitants, as the myths of the Mundhum narrate, are Mungjiri Mangkowet (Mongolia) or Muna Tembe (remote lowland) of Sinyuk laje (China), Muden laje (Tibet) to the southern plains, Sodhug warakden (oceans) or Temending warak (Indian oceans) and river bank of Ganges. From there, as various historical sources account, their descendants had moved to the eastern parts such as Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Assam. In the words of Chaitanya Subba (ibid),

[...] Mundhums are the foundation of cultural history as well as religious faith and practices of the Limbus. The geography and cultural ecology of Mundhums have become some of the interesting areas of further exploration and the understanding of such fields may help to get insight into the history, origin, migration, habitat and civilization of the Limbu Kiratas. (291)

Presently, the eastern part of Nepal known as Limbuwan is the native abode of Limbus, their native landscape. The native landscape becomes the arbiter of appropriate behavior requiring sustained observation and continuously respectful actions. In this way, cultural, ecological, and spiritual values are inseparably intertwined in this holistic and dynamic living world. Hence, they have such authentic attributes of not only landscapes

but also of religion, cultures and traditions that commemorate, recognize, and value heritage places through the daily activities of their lived lives. According to Thomas D. Andrews and Susan Buggey (2008), “The belief systems associated with [...] the related concepts of land, time and movement that embody meaning in the cultural landscape”(64). In addition, native cultural landscapes are living landscapes where authenticity involves authenticating change.

Performance of Nahangma further gives the head of the house access to a part and parcel of ancestral land connecting intimately to the first of the lineage. Journey of the wonderful world of Nahangma provides the glimpse of both historical and religious representations. Activities like Paklum lepma or throwing of shot-put by the male youths and weaving on loom by the female youths portray religious and historical significance of such rituals and a symbol of identity, progress and prestige. Embankment of water pond and rivers and growing up of flowers and aquatic animals gives proximity to the life force and thereby creation of a distinctive image.

Every religious performance of Mundhum includes myth bearing metaphoric connotation, a ritual model of communication whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed. Through such ritual model of communication one can develop feeling of communion, sharing, participation, association, fellowship, common faith and community. Such ritual observances have become special moments and representation of shared beliefs in the lives of Limbus.

The Mundhum is a religious scripture comprising a number of legends, hearsays, and historical recollections chanted or sung by the Limbu shamans. According to *Yeboko Yedhara* (Yeba) Rajesh Limbu (2009), in the ancient times, after the creation of the

world, one male and one female were created in the high mountain. Their generations began reproducing more and more progenies but slowly they became unruly, immoral and irreligious. Therefore, Tagera Ningwaphuma imparted the sacred knowledge and scripture of Mundhums to the eight wise leaders known as Sawa yet-hang, the progeny of Tetlara Lahangdona. While reciting Tongsing Mundhum, the Sambas and Yebas (Limbu shamans or pundits) recite the myth of the origin of universe, man, family and society. Tongsing Mundhum is the conglomeration of these myths recited orally from time immemorial and sung, narrate and performed ritually. The word Tongsing seems to be the combination of two words – *Tong* and *sing* where, *Tong* is the root form of the verb *tongma*, to be like-minded/ to get along to compromise. *Tongsingma* means the act of meeting together Thus Tongsing Mundhum can be called “the social get-together held for the happiness and prosperity of all men, families and societies or the family rite of unity” (Kainla, 34). Therefore, Limbu folk religion can be taken as a religion of socially unifying and sharing nature. To quote Emile Durkheim again (1912),

[...] sharing ecstatic rituals are a way of creating bonds between people through an entity that transcends the importance and the identities of the individual participants. Thus, it can be argued that not even the severest times of stress might induce one family to turn its back on another family associated with a common transcendent entity. (236)

During ritual performance, Tongsing Mundhum takes us on a voyage or travel (pilgrimage) to the land or abode of the father and forefathers. Thus, it gives us a feeling that only the coordination between the past and the present, the liveliness of continuous tradition and association with geo-cultural space that can make the wholeness of life. In

the Limbu oral poetry, Abhi Subedi (2000), finds a “sense of immediacy” which “leads to the creation of myth and thereby the rituals. So the rituals in Limbu are poetic sagas, stories of human victory, loss, love, agony and happiness” (24). Tongsing Mundhum can also be taken as a rite for the peace of the dead souls of the forefathers or getting united with them and perpetuating tradition of good names earned by them or as a rite of unison with the fathers and forefathers by retaining ancestral grace or as a rite of keeping alive the tradition by singing about the events and chronology from the creation till the present.

The Mundhum incorporates all the religious aspects of human life, ritual observations and rites of passage, and also gives the complete range of philosophical exhortations. It also provides several descriptions of historical reports of various occurrences. The Mundhum explains every theological problem on the basis of its capacity of oral tradition. Thus, the Mundhum ritual followers have got a separate recognition known as followers of Mundhum religion or Kirant religion. In spite of some conventional rituals that still pervade in Limbu ritual performances, it is ever effervescent and dynamic culture. And in the recent culture of change and continuity some rational corrections are, of course, to be made in accordance with the demand of time and situations.

Chapter Six: Socio-Cultural Representation of the Mundhum

Rituals, Jeffrey C. Alexander says, “are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication” in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, “share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication’s symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another’s intentions” (1). Culture and identity, Cohen P. Anthony (1993) observes, are “two

frequently used and abused words” in which he prefers to include another term that is “symbol” rendered from everyday life (3). Mundhum ritual performances through symbolic values demonstrate Limbu culture and identity and tend to concretize socio-cultural and religious representation. Talking of a performance approach to culture Victor Turner argues that it reflects dynamic cultural processes, enables possibilities between and within cultural structures, and provides opportunities for critique and transformation. In this sense, performances are constitutive of culture, not something added to culture; performances are epistemic, the way cultural members “know” and enact the possibilities in their world, the performances are critical lenses for looking at and reshaping cultural forms.

The Mundhum being a text of Limbu cultural and ritual performance provides immense guidelines and structural processes about how to conduct particular kind of rituals so that it fulfills both aesthetic and practical requirements of the human beings. Such cultural activities are further helpful to represent their distinct identity and value system. People identify with their lives and the world through their art, literature and other cultural expressions and thereby articulate their socio-cultural images. The Mundhum has been alive in memory from the time immemorial owing to its diversity and vivacity in the form of rites and rituals, festivals and ceremonies. Such rites are performed along with the preaching as a means to get rid of greed, adultery, evil souls, evil stars, anger and jealousy that were grown-up in the process of forming and developing society. There are many mythical and historic accounts, regarded as *mangpan* or sacred verses, in Mundhum that deal with complete rituals and rite de passages have immense manifestations on socio-cultural life of Limbu people. Ritual performances also

present various ways of living lives, daily activities and behaviours. ritual performances are indeed social occasions for getting together, mutual cooperation and collectivity. For instance, in the earlier part of Tongsing Mundhum that ends on the afternoon of the third day following the second night by performing the rites over a nearby stream with a promise to purge oneself of mutual enmity and ill-will, and cleanse one's mind and heart. This can also be called the festival or rites of community or family goodwill.

Similarly, flowers have very lofty value in the life of Limbu people because their life-style and honor are thought to be closely related to various kinds of flowers. As the flowers contain various colours and fragrant similarly all human beings have a life, that's why flower should be revived afresh if someone has got intense despair as a result of various kinds of adversity in life. For them, flowers are the sign of vivacity and energy; they embody great values which we can see from beautifully gardening of them in their houses too. During the rite of Phungwa Changma, the flower is revived that signifies to revitalization of life. Description of flowers, trees or vegetation, insects, animals, rivers, topography, etc. made during a long voyage as described in the *Tongsing takma* section of Tongsing Mundhum proves the intimacy of the Limbus with nature. Here is a short stanza Subedi (2000) translates like,

They placed flowers like life
Over where there was a loom
Let's fill life with vital energy
Let's do the welfare, let's protect
Let's pray, let's call! (24)

Tongsing Mundhum ritual has various goals and objectives, for instance, relief from diseases for easy living, desire for having children, longevity and health, desire for achieving food and drink and wealth, growth of cattle and affluence of grains, destruction of enemies and safety from those having resentment. Besides these aims, this Mundhum is recited and performed also to receive blessings of one's ancestors, avoid mishaps affecting the family or individual members, shake off the wrath of the ghosts or dead souls and establish the dead souls in the land of the dead or to salvage by detaching them from the living people.

Obviously, a man faces evil days or misfortunes or pains and sorrows owing to many reasons in his life. According to the Limbu Mundhum, an accumulation of oral tradition and literature, the blood drops flicked away from the broken eyes of the Lasara Thenamyamba (big sun) pervaded human life as the gods and goddesses or evil stars afflicting pains. Similarly, the scattered bits of stones thrown by Porokmi Yamphami also gave birth to different evil deities and stars afflicting human life with misfortunes and disasters. There is a belief in the Limbu society that they must perform various kinds of rituals so as to get rid of the evil spirits of curse, envy and jealousy; they have also pray and propitiate different deities, divinities and ancestors for achieving prosperity, longevity and success in their life. For instance, while performing Kokh-Puja ritual (prayer for the safe of womb), Phedangma recites:

He: yo tutu semmena	The place separating life of livings
He: yo tumyang semmena yakpi	[or] May death pluck away life
He: yo- sodhungen walak chapte bi?	Whether their Water of Life
He: yo- sodhungen walak pette bi?	May not get dried?

Tho- sodhungen walak menchapte

It may not spread away

-Sodhungen walak mendeye.

Not get spilled over and dry.

(Limbu Jatima Kokh-puja, 45)

We find Mundhum, through the narration and ritual practices, accomplishing a wider realm of life experiences to meet cultural and religious necessities of the Limbu community. These necessities provide us with an insight into understanding the common spirit of the community; understanding the socio-cultural rites and rituals about birth, life and death; and understanding the concept about the creation of the universe, origin of creatures and human beings, geo-spiritual history and genealogy of the Limbus, etc. For an instance, the most important cultural and religious ceremony of the Limbus is Tongsing Mundhum, an incorporation of various myths, legends, narrations and oracles that are closely related to the daily activities of Limbus, because they guide their social, ethical and religious concepts by shaping their behaviours and attitudes in different life activities. With such socio-cultural and religious performance it is expected to bring peace, progress, prosperity and happiness in individual life, families and thereby in the whole community. At this point, what we understand is that Mundhum leads the people retaining faith exclusively in the traditions for the welfare of the whole existence not only of creatures as it is completely free from the politics of covetousness and temptation. Moreover, Tongsing is a ritual of creating an occasion of social solidarity, reconciliation, moral and psychological purification and strengths and also an occasion for correcting themselves from any deviation. It is also a ritual to appease supernatural agents to avoid befalling distresses, disasters and other probable misfortunes. Various functional divinities are invoked or communicated to “bestow a good harvest, better opportunities

and prosperity and to ward off illness, difficulties and natural calamities” (Subba, 156). It is also a perpetual ritual of socio-cultural properties, tradition and identities initiated by the ancestors; it is a ritual of ancestry worship, a formal ceremony of accepting and fulfilling various responsibilities. The ritual performance and poetic narration of Tongsing underlies a classical concept of a whole: the beginning, the middle and the end.

The Mundhum provides tradition of cultural liberty in Kirant community in terms of caste adoption system as any one who prefers could join the Kirant race fulfilling some rituals as per the scripture. If any other caste or tribe or race or religious people who wish to be member of Kirant family then, one should accept them happily as per the ritual popularly known by Chokphung Thim. Because, Mundhum says, “It is better to gain rather than lose, better to be many rather than a few, and better to increase the member of family than decrease” (Chemjong, 63). Thus, culture as identity becomes a mode of action and representation, it refers to a decision people make to depict themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity. The symbols used for this purpose are almost invariably mundane items, drawn from everyday life, rather than from elaborate ceremonial or ritual occasions.

Despite the various types of coercion and intrusion from the side of Hindu ruling classes over the Limbu socio-cultural rights and religion Mundhum rituals seem ever vibrant and effective socio-culturally and historically. As a result Nepal was declared to be a Hindu kingdom (in the past) and Kirants were forced to be Hindu they were deprived of their religion, their culture and even their language. The people, who learnt and involved in spreading Srijanga script, were severely prosecuted by the then authorities. Ashok Nembang (2003), one of the Limbu cultural enthusiasts, mentions:

When I was carrying some Limbu script books brought from Darjeeling and Sikkim, on 21st October, 1970, A.S.I. of Ilam inquired and caught me blaming as a reactionary activist. He first threatened and then stroked me. As a result, my jaws and cheeks were swollen for four days. Both ears deafened for long. The scars of wounds caused by hitting of *ghunguru* stick and nails of boot are still being indicator of despotic behavior of that time. (3)

In short, Mundhum, in spite of unfavourable political situation, provide us with a comprehensive insight into understanding the Limbu community from various angles such as historically and socio-culturally, which consist of different but complete events in themselves, which are related with various daily activities and religious and socio-cultural dimensions of the community. This truth entrenches an argument that the narrations and ritual performances of Mundhums, as Dilli Bikram Edingo (2007) writes, [...] are accomplished not in isolation somewhere in desolate forests but in front of a large audience, which is in principle the Limbu community itself; an hence, the whole community authoritatively designates the category of the secondary receivers, the ultimate receivers. (174)

Gender and Power Representation in Mundhum

Limbus have been following their own traditional religion of ancestry-worship of different deities and divinities, natural and celestial entities, and hence known as practitioners of naturalism and animism. The set of ancestral myths including creation myth, origin myth of deities and divinities, demigods, human being and their development, institutionalization, formation of various concepts, ideologies, philosophies

and so on implanted in the long course of time and circumstances as a whole is called Mundhum and its performance ritual is called Limbu folk religion. And of course, there are various socio-cultural reflections are seen from such religion in the lives of Limbu people. Among them, the notion of gender and power is also found being greatly reflected through several myths of Mundhum.

In the oral Limbu folk tradition, the myths such as Creation myth, Yuma myth, Manggenna myth, Okwama myth, Dobate myth, Kummathakma myth etc. have great manifestation of knowledge and power vested in the female deities and divinities. Limbus are known as believer of Yuma Sammam, the grandmother divinity who is the all ruling domestic divinities. She is required to be worshipped even during invocation of the male divinities. The supreme creator Tagera Ningwaphuma herself is the female Almighty and representation of the supreme mind and wisdom. She represents for supreme power and ultimate knowledge as she plays the most dominant roles in all the activities early from creation of the universe, natural world, man and other creatures. Another domestic divinity advocating mythic representation of female in Limbu ritual practice is Okwama who stands for the significant responsibility that females possess in the Limbu socio-cultural domain. Similarly, among Limbu shamans, yemas have distinct and prestigious status from the past to the present times. Yema Phakkokko Phakkomlama was believed to be embodied with the powerful feats in tantras and mantras.

Manggenna myth refers again to a mythic persona literally 'sister' and symbol of infinite power and earthly warmth whose necessity never lasts. She is symbol of life, energy, progress and prosperity, and armour of symbolic 'brother'. Another myth of Kummathakma is a symbol of gender equity. It is a song called Phungnawa samlo

performed on the occasion of marriage that draws the reference of first marriage of human ancestors, make balanced between male and female by weighing them and wearing gold and silver by female and *khukuri* by male. Such practice has great logical importance for females in Limbu community even today. Likewise, myth of Dobate is a metaphoric sharing of male in female's suffering. Mythically, male used to conceive in thigh. It shows that of the male undergoing such experience of childbearing and labour pain during pregnancy. Due to pain in conceiving child in the thigh he died and turn into a propitious deity called Dobate deity who protects, assists and eases delivery of pregnant females now. This myth and the performance advocate that the success rests only on the participation, sharing and gender equity in every activity. Due respect and most prestigious position given to females in ancestry-worship as such and its regular practice in the Limbu community is the traditional, religious and cultural authentication of females' tutelary roles in the family and thereby also in society; and it is "a kind of religious and cultural construction of a normative domain where various concepts and knowledge about the males and females and their socio-cultural roles are derived from and where females' supremacy is conceptualized" (Edingo 4).

Above all, Mundhum tradition and its representations both in performance ritual and in real life situation offer immense privileges to the woman of Limbu society, and overtly demonstrate the 'gender as power'. It is, therefore, the question to the general world concept, as Simone de Beauvoir puts forth, "[...], woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (152). To the contrarily, Limbu women are not the like who "is often very male pleased with her role as the Other".

Over and above, although ritual performance in the guidance of Mundhums has sustained Limbu culture, it also consists some of the inconvenient liturgical procedures that demand more expenses on both time and materials. The excessive use of sacrifices and alcoholic drinks grown over a time can be other causes of being inconveniences for the new generations. Furthermore, older ritual actants like Phedangmas, Sambas, Yeba/Yema, Yumas are dying and new generations have less interest in becoming a ritual actant. The impacts of other cultures in this age of late capitalism have also been great threat for safeguarding Mundhum rituals and Limbu culture. Therefore, certain rational kind of institutionalized Limbu Mundhum performance is, in fact, sought after. There is an urgency of getting together all the stakeholders and find out the solutions which can attract to the new generations in the cultural world of Limbu people. Otherwise, this ritual has to face great crises in the near future. For Dhruba K. Menyangbo and Arjunbabu Mabohang (2009), no interest of Mundhum in the new generation, inability of comprehending the value of Mundhum, death of Mundhum experts, and take Phedangma, Samba, Yeba and others as the conservative actants are major challenges.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Mundhums constitute the Limbu religious Shastra consisting of sacred myths, prehistoric accounts, and philosophical exhortations in oral form. Every cultural and ritual observation, hence, necessitates its performance through recitation of Mundhums at specific space and time. Limbus live a distinct life with their distinctive native culture and social tradition, and retain various kinds of Mundhum ritual performances like Sappok chomen, Manggenna, Nahangma, Tongsing, and other rites de passage such as birth, naming ceremony, wedding ceremony, death rites and so on. The frequent recollection of the various corresponding modes of spiritual and worldly activities, in

fact, generates a reified cultural product. Thus, these rituals are the manifestations of their intangible cultural heritages passed on from past generations. They have been a great source of knowledge to form their own distinctive culture. The lives of Limbu people, thus, are found immensely influenced from the guidance of the Mundhum performance, and thereby constructing and shaping up a distinctive ideology. Such ideology tends to construct Limbu culture and behavior, and those culture and behavior represent the Limbus as a whole.

A person is evaluated through his/her culture and this culture is the collective product, a jointly formed concept of the society. Culture, says Mark J. Smith (2002), “is a ‘suturing’ concept; it indicates a space within which competing visions of the role of human existence can be played out, all of which seek to fix the meaning of culture” (20). Similarly, various rituals ‘suture’ one another through performance of Mundhum ritual in spite of the external intrusions of modernism and globalism. This is cultural histories of everyday life that helps us attempt to understand the ‘structure of feeling’ that underlies the Limbu culture and its shared values. Mundhum is based on historical and cultural tradition which involves configurations of rules of conduct, established narrative text and institutionalized practices, and thereby discourse leading to representations. Mundhum as a performance culture performed ritually, and is conceived in terms of certain social, cultural and ideological contexts. Mundhum performances provide religio-historical and socio-cultural representation of the Kirant Limbu people by shaping their activities in terms of culture, nature, behavior and including gender, geo-origin and so on. Hence, Mundhum performances are transformative, constitutive and epistemic actions in the lives of Limbus. It reflects dynamic cultural processes enabling the possibilities between

and within cultural structures and provides various opportunities for critique and transformation. Mundhum performances are therefore constitutive of Limbu culture, history and religion, and critical lenses for looking at and constructing symbolic forms of life of Limbus.

In addition to, Mundhum observation best characterizes many properties of theatrical performances – plot, characters, and narratives. It further serves as representational art offering us a direct presentation of its imaginative reality and ‘make believe’. Every ritual or episodes of ritual contains one or more mythical plot with proper context that are narrated or recited during ritual performance by Mundhum performers/actors like Phedangma, Samba, Yeba, Yema, Mangba, Yuma and Ongsi. They are bearers and preservers of Limbu culture and tradition; they are also Mundhum narrators, reciters, religious practitioners and above all ritual performers. Recently, Satyahangma Mundhum ritual practitioners are also contributing greatly in safeguarding and improvising Mundhum ritual and its performative aspects and thereby the way of lives of Kirant community. In the context of cultural/ritual performance that takes place in the real life situation and hence they become the way of life, the cultural representation. Mundhum performers do not directly play the role of mythical characters but they narrate the stories of those characters and perform their own roles. But only in some cases, they also happen to act out the roles of mythical characters.

Manggenna performance imparts a lot of information relating to the clan genealogy, native landscape, importance of sister and brother, mutual cooperation, and so on. This ritual has established the sense of gender equity. Likewise, Nahangma ritual performance helps to conceptualize respect, honour, and cooperation among family, society and people of the world. It also highlights the feelings that envy, jealousy and curse represent misconducts which are, then, bearer of misfortunes so everyone should stay away from it. At the same time one should not possess these things in the mind and

the behaviour. Furthermore, it also provides epistemic, philosophic and pragmatic knowledge which largely help shape individual and communal activities. Performance of Sappok chomen is for share and care or mutual support during the hard time of bearing child. Tongsing ritual further deals with the subject ranging from the universe, living beings and non-living being, vast knowledge and activities of the past, worldly and spiritual viewpoints. Therefore, Bairagi Kainla argues that Tongsing Mundhum has the same importance for the Limbus as the eighteen Puranas have for the Brahmins. The everyday life activities and cognitive domain of Limbus are seen highly influenced from the different segments of Tongsing performances. The nature, the thought and the behaviours have been constituted in accordance with the Mundhum performances which is in reality the Limbus and the Limbu culture. And such practices provide with the framework of identity construction with the experience of same emotions and same understanding which underlies the cultural representation, the force of fundamental sense of self.

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Some Visuals of Ritual Performances



A Phedangma officiating Manggenna ritual



A Phedangma officiating a Wedding ritual and Phungnawa samlo



An actant propitiating to the Master spirits



A Samba in his ecstatic state during Tongsing ritual performance



A scene of Tongsing Mundhum dance



A Yeba with his associates performing One-night Tongsing ritual



A Samba performing ritual of *Sam Phungma* or collecting souls



Act of Sakmura wademmma/Manghup mangde Wademmma



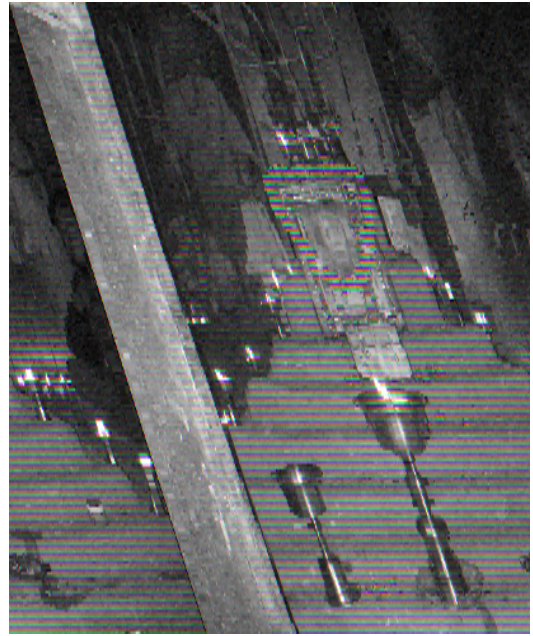
An actant performing Nahen ritual



A host performing Aja kakma ritual



A Sanglanggoba using *achchheta*
for self-protection



An altar for Yuma puja or prayer in
Satyahangma tradition

Major myths and rituals to be performed in Three-night Tongsing

Idhuk sogha pakma (Drive off evil spirits of unnatural deaths)

Mang-hup mangde Wademma (To let flow curses/the festival of goodwill)

Lungdhung kai phekma (Incest)

Misam sepma Mundhum (Myth of putting out the fire spirit)

Sangdok Aplek Pokma (Originating devils and ghosts)

Yeghek Lengma (Divination)

Phung Summa Mundhum (Myth of accumulating life flowers)

Lahi Namhi Kubokma Mundhum (Myth of originating divinities)

Phung Semma Mundhum (Myth of segregating flowers)

Irere Idhuknama ren Mundhum (Myth of Irere Idhuknama)

Yagrangsing Phongma Mundhum (Myth of raising yagrangsing)

Phungwa Changma Samlo (Song of growing and segregating flowers)

Paklung Lepma (Stone throwing/Shot-put)

Khema Tongsing Semma (Separating the tongsing of the dead persons)

Warak Thengma (Barricading the lake of Chotlung)

Phungwa lingma (Growing flowers)

Chotlung Kepma Mundhum (Approaching the climax of Mundhum)

Sam phungma lingma (Collecting and handing over the souls)

Silam sakma (Blocking the path of death)

Nahen sakma (Blocking envy and jealousy)

Mikwa sangma (Ritual of cleansing tears)

Hiwa Tukma (Wiping out the Tears of Blood or Curses)

Propitiating Tappheng and Themangdema