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Reclaiming the Kirat Root Culture in Rajan Mukarung's *Khuwalung: An Iconic Emblem*

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

This study analyses the representation of Khuwalung in Rajan Mukarung's play Khuwalung: An Iconic Emblem. The play has reclaimed the root culture of the Kirat and re-created the identity of the Kirat while educating the audience regarding Khuwalung. It has examined the text in light of relevant theoretical insights from Heather Ahtone and Steven Leuthold's discourse on indigenous aesthetics. Ahtone's and Leuthold's ideas concerning metaphor, symbolism, song, and cosmology are vital for understanding local indigenous bodies of knowledge and contemporary art. They believe that to be familiar with indigenous cultural metaphors and symbols is to understand indigenous aesthetics, as the metaphors and symbols are manufactured through culture. Moreover, it is supported by Stuart Hall's critical insight of representation in relation to stereotypes while approaching the play. This qualitative study is based on the interpretation of the play through close reading. Further, personal interviews and available literature on the text have been used to interpret the text under scrutiny while analyzing the text. This study has given prominence to indigenous aesthetics to reclaim the value of the Kirat root culture. Moreover, it has linked the indigenous activism anchored to Khuwalung to academic research.

Keywords: indigenous literature, reclaiming culture, Kirat, media, power hegemony

Reclaiming the root culture is one of the prominent aspects in the recent domain of academic discourses, including cultural studies, postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and the studies of margins, which often give emphasis to the value of the indigenous people's indigenous root cultures. For a very long period, dominant groups were able to subdue the root culture as the feeble culture and thereby excluded

the marginalized culture. Contrarily, many scholars have emphasized the value of the root culture of the oppressed. Stuart Hall, for instance, uses the term representation and politics of significance, i.e., the dominant groups undermine the importance of the icons of the oppressed communities by representing the marginalized culture as irrelevant and peculiar, whereas they present their dominant culture as superior and conventional. According to Bhogiraj Chamling's article written in Kantipur, Khuwalung is worshiped by the Kirat community, considering it to be the Kirat ancestry. The very Khuwalung, an iconic stone of the Kirat community, was represented as a hindrance to the development in Nepal. The Khas Arya, the dominant community of Nepal that has occupied most of the seats in the parliament, is valorizing the mission of development, and in the process, Khuwalung is considered and represented as a hindrance to development. This conflict brings forth the commercially hit play *Khuwalung* written by Rajan Mukarung and directed by Kiran Chamling. This play represents Khuwalung as a momentous icon to Kirat community and illustrates the importance of Khuwalung in Kirat community. Mukarung articulates that the state should recognize Khuwalung as an iconic rock that carries a profound belief in the Kirat community and, therefore, make a plan to preserve Khuwalung instead of demolishing it. The preservation and recognition of indigenous ancestry is the essence of many indigenous artists and indigenous activities. For that reason, the reorganization of Khuwalung will be an achievement not only for Kirat community but for the whole indigenous groups of people of the world. As John Paul Rangel states, many indigenous artists are engaged in a dispute for acknowledgment and identity through different mediums. Among them, many indigenous artists are reclaiming their culture through counter-storytelling, where they re-appropriate symbols and fix gaze, which are encoded by the dominant group.

A huge stone- which lies at the confluence of the Dudh Koshi, Arun, and Tamor rivers- was perceived as an interruption of the development. On 1st March, Rising Nepal published an online article concerning Khuwalung with the title, "Kirant sacred rock at risk of being the target of development." The article broadcast the announcement done on 20th February 2021 by the then prime minister KP Sharma Oli. Oli announced that the Nepal Government was launching a water jet route along the Koshi River, and in the process, the stone, which happened to be the Khuwalung in Saptakoshi, needed to be broken down using a crane to facilitate the way. At the moment, some Kirat people agreed with the Prime Minister regarding the demolition of the Khuwalung as the essential process of development. However, the speech of demolishing the insignificant-looking object invited various protests near the rock by the other Kirat people, who were aware of the significance of the Khuwalung. The ordinary-looking rock turned out to be an influential and prominent symbol or icon for the Kirat community, where the Nakchhong (Shamanic tribal priest of Kirati Rai community) perform their rituals. The performance of Rajan Mukarung's play *Khuwalung* is also a form of protest, and it contributed to the protest against the Nepali state. Therefore, this study begins with the question: What is the hidden aspect that turned Khuwalung from ordinary rock into a significant object for the Kirat community? What underlying aspects of the play attracted the people, both Kiranti and non-Kiranti communities, in the Mandala theater to watch *Khuwalung*? How does the play represent the elements of indigenous aesthetics and promote the Kiranti root cultural values? How does the play imply the political and historical events of Nepal to exemplify the contemporary situation?

Khuwalung can be seen through different aspects, but for this paper, I will borrow the idea from Heather Ahtone and Steven Leuthold regarding indigenous

aesthetics, whereas Stuart Hall's idea of representation will be the main key theory while approaching the play *Khuwalung*. Hall's critical insight into representation is essential in regard to understanding how power plays an important role in shaping the idea of representation. Likewise, Ahtone and Leuthold's critical insight of indigenous aesthetics concerning material production through the concept of relationships. The relationship connotes nuanced connections with place, oral histories, song, cosmology, and communal responsibilities. I will borrow indigenous aesthetics and cultural studies as a methodology. This paper will be qualitative study and will be an interpretation of a play through close reading, reading historicity in a play. Further, this paper will also bring relevant theoretical insights on nation/nationalism-hegemonic nationalism, from Pratyoush Onta, for instance, how the Nepali society has been led by Khas Aryan and their culture in the cost of indigenous culture while promoting nationalism. Personal interviews and available literature on the text will also be used in this paper while analyzing the text.

Khuwalung carries the origin and the history of Kirat civilization. It connects the broader mass of indigenous people's belief system, which is represented as the most valuable entity by the literary text that is manifested as *Khuwalung*. *Khuwalung* is considered as a mythical rock and is worshipped as a religious site by the Kirat community. Mukarung reclaims the root culture through counter-storytelling. Regarding the reclaiming of the identity by the Indigenous community, John Paul Rangel argues, "Counter-story involves being aware of historicizing narratives and producing work, academic or creative, which reclaims cultural...and purposeful representations that not only reveal critique, but also counterpoint" (Rangel 14). Like Rangel's argument, Mukarung shows a combination of survival and resistance by presenting the story of the origin of the Kirat community and enacting survivance.

Mukarung has shown the story of the origin of the Kirat community, their journey, and how they spread all over Nepal, following the dam of the river and the journey is recorded in the form of a song, "Aiyo ni Hau," which is staged in the play by the Kirat in the play. The Kirat people worship different *Lungs*, which are regarded as their ancestors and they ask for their guidance whenever they face difficulties. Even when the Kirati people decide to migrate following their ancestors' suggestions, they pray to Khuwalung. They perform dance and sing songs. Basically, the play shows the continuity of Kirat culture, its worldviews, language, cosmologies, and belief system. The setting and prop has been used thoughtfully. Most of the prop used in the play carries Kirat identity.

The play shows the challenges Kirat community faces during pre-historical period. The play starts with a group of Kirat people hunting at the forest but they fail to hunt despite offering the libation to their ancestor. So, they decide to leave the place and migrate somewhere else where their ancestors instruct them. But before migrating, the 'Bairi' king ambushes Kirat kingdom. The king wants the Kirat community to be refugees which starts war between those kingdoms. Kirat kingdom wins the war but then they have to face the plague. As Rangel argues, native artists reimagine history and tell their stories of triumph and survivance: a combination of survival and resistance; Mukarung has done the same. Mukarung presents the oral narrative of Kirat history in his own creative style. He has creatively illustrated the stories of triumph: famine and plague, conflict with Bairi kingdom

Mukarung has shown Khuwalung as the milestone of Kirat community. Only with the presence of Khuwalung the Kirat community was able to cross the river. Before crossing the river, the Nakchhong pray the Khuwalung, "Oh Diwalung Khuwalung/ Oh Sabalung Khuwalung/ Now we are going to a new place" (Mukarung

Khuwalung np). With this Mukarung want to highlight the spiritual value regarding Khuwalung in Kirat community. The historically and mythically rich Khuwalung was announced to demolish for which Mukarung rather than just remembering and fantasizing the Khuwalung, wrote the play *Khuwalung*. According to Rangel, Chris Pappan a heritage artist like other native artist uses their art as a vehicle for addressing the violence and trauma, rather than just remembering the trauma. Native artist through their art educates the less educate regarding native culture and their heritage. Pappan collects the researches old photograph of native people and old map, combines them, combines themes of distortion and displacement, and then paint them. His mixed media painting is part of the series called Displaced People. He claims that “the Displaced Peoples series also provides opportunities to educate those who are less informed about Native Americans” (Rangel 191). Mukarung is similar to other Native artist. Pappan shows the displacement and distortion of native people through painting whereas, Mukarung present the significant of Khuwalung through play. Both have different medium and subject but what makes them similar is, they both present the native culture and reclaims indigenous heritage while educating the less informed native people. Instead of making overt critique of the Khuwalung conflict, Mukarung creates *Khuwalung* and tells the stories of survivance and triumph. Mukarung educate those who are less informed about Khuwalung and its importance in Kirat community.

Khuwalung highlights the existence of Kirat dynasty with its own customs, language and homeland which has been limited to any other cast with no specifies identity after the employment of Jaat legally by Junga Badhur Rana. While forming the nation state the concept of country was overlapped with that of realm. Richard Burghart has highlighted the problem regarding the matter of overlapping. He asserts

that, “despite many different ethnic groups...with its own customs, language and homeland. . . .Now they are all registered in the census as language group. . .only the language and customs of the Hill Country are identified with the Nepalese way of life” (Burghart 35). The concept of nationality made the ethnic group turn into a species. The notion of nationality which is identified as Hill Country has excluded indigenous existence which later was proved when Nepal was declared only Hindu kingdom in the world. As Stuart Hall claims in discursive approach that power produce discourse, likewise nationality was the production of the power. Hall uses the word, ‘conservative Englishness’, where the style of hair, clothed and the skin tone is “coded in conservative Englishness look” (Hall 310). Similarly, hilly language and custom was coded as Nepaliness, in the cost of indigenous custom and language. In the regime of Hindu kingdom indigenous people did not lose their custom and language only but they also lose the right to their realm and space, which has leads to the unawareness of religious indigenous sites.

Because of the lack of awareness about the importance of Khuwalung, idea of demolishing it for the development of country was floated. The news of demolition by the member of Khas Aryan generates a huge pressure on the Kirat community and spawns a conflict against the state. The proposal of demolition of Khuwalung is also shown in the prologue of the play. In the prologue some people with Aryan featured face wearing modern dress approach Khuwalung in the boat and discuss the demolition of the Khuwalung which is therefore performed in-order to represent contemporary political scenario of Nepal where indigenous monumental icon is not recognized, this shows the contemporary political hegemony.



Fig.1. “Khuwalung”. Source: *Street Nepal*, 28 July 2022.

Mukarung has beautifully pictured the contemporary political scenario through the prologue. When the modern characters discuss the demolition of Khuwalung, the river level rise and the boat start foundering. The foundering of the boat symbolizes the distressed and rage of the Kirat ancestor in the news of the demolition of Khuwalung.

Right after the prologue we are taken back to the past, to Kirat Kingdom where Kirat civilization were not yet spread all over Nepal. The rise of water in Koshi River is a metaphor of the rising voice of Kirati community against the plan of demolition of Khuwalung. Rajan Mukarung has dramatizes the Kirat people's resistance to the interference and the hegemony of others on the Kirat community by portraying the battle in the play. Mukarung has also shown the inhibited attitude of Kirat people against the interference of others in their culture who declare to guard their ancestry in *Khuwalung*. For instance, they do not back off from the battle when

foreign Kingdom invades their Kingdom despite their already taken decision to migrate from the place where Bairi king has attack, with the blessing of their ancestors. This battle somehow gives the message that they will protect their land and fight for it no matter what the condition is.

In the play Kirat people has to face plague which was occurred because of the interference of foreign kingdom like the death of Laius in *Oedipus* brought the ghastly faith in Thebes. The plague symbolizes the melancholy of Kirat deities and ancestors of the Kirat people on the interference of foreign Kingdome. At the end of the play the prince of foreign kingdom loses his life while crossing the river which symbolize that the interference of other in their culture will not be forgiven by the Kirat ancestors. The death of the prince in Khuwalung symbolizes the punishment given by the ancestors. Through symbol and metaphor Mukarung is presenting the resistance against the interference in Kirat culture.

The ingenious use of metaphor and symbol made the *Khuwalung* a commercial hit, got the state attention and received abundant optimistic feedback from the audience. Several newspaper articles were written specially focusing the core of the play Khuwalung, the rock itself. Many discussions and debates in television and radio has taken place regarding Khuwalung. How the rock stands domineeringly. Where as many poems and voluminous YouTube materials have been created. Beside this, there are profound number of unrecorded dialogues which is not possible for me to include all of them. Only selectively few discussions are mention regarding why Khuwalung should be pristine. For example, in an article, Kaushal Yadav argues, “Alternatives must be put forward so that history is not erased in the pursuit of material wealth. Khuwalung, then, must stand tall, reflecting Nepal’s historical and cultural heritage amidst the high currents of the Saptakoshi” (Yadav18). He further

says, cultural heritage always has greater worth than the quick fix of development.

Similarly, *Lokpath*, one of the popular news and media portals, has published an article regarding Khuwalung. The article has covered subject like what Khuwalung is, how Khuwalung came into national limelight and how the state has responded to this issue. It informs that “Kirati cultural activists, politicians and even public are talking about ‘Khuwalung’. To glance at this burning issue, RSS has outlined the issue in its nutshell” (*Lokpath* np). The article has covered several pieces of interviews of important Kirati figures. One of them is the poet Dewan Kirati, who thinks that Khuwalung is one of the greatest iconic Kirati natural landmarks. Kirati argues, "In the vast and ancient Kirati community, we have many places, rivers and hills which are so important based on Kirati folklores, myths and oral traditions" (np). Kirati adds added, "Khuwalung contains an incredible mark in this tradition” (np). The whole article has explained what Khuwalung issue is and how within few days Khuwalung has evolved itself from its limited cultural domain to mainstream discourse.

Another article was written by Birat Anupam. He has written an online article concerning the plans and policies regarding Khuwalung. According to him, “CM Rai assured on the protection of the sacred stone. He argues, "There is no official plan, policy, decision and any attempt to destroy Khuwalung. . . these sorts of religious and cultural heritage are our treasures. It is our duty to protect, conserve and promote these heritages”” (Anupam15). He further assures that both Khuwalung and waterways is important according to RSS that is why they will find a middle path so that waterways will be upgraded and Khuwalung will be protected.

Online Radio Nepal has published an article entitled “CM Rai pledges to develop ‘Khuwalung’ a tourism area” in which Manu Manjil informs the audience

that the Province-1 Chief Minister Sherdhan Rai has pledged to conserve and develop 'Khuwalung' as a tourism hub. According to Manjil, "He made this commitment in course of his visit to the Khuwalung area. . . .The Khuwalung would be conserved as a center of faith of all Nepali people across the globe so as to promote it as a religious and cultural tourism hub, CM Rai stressed" (Manjil np). The article reports that federal government would also cooperate for the wider development of the area. Till date, Khuwalung has caught the attention in the political arena and many article is written concerning the preservation of Khuwalung.

Beside news article introducing Khuwalung and its issue, the article "Khuwalung Encroachment and Resistance: Shifting and Silencing of the Indigenous Movement in Nepal" by Tara Lal Shrestha et al. is the only academic article which has focus the issue of Khuwalung from the perspective of cultural hegemony, which points out a serious call for emergency. They found that despite federal democratic republic since 2007, indigenous community are compelled to live in disillusionment because of the continuing hegemony of the dominant ruling class. They claim, "Khuwalung movement at first seemed to be a counter-resistance initiated via the issue driven by power politics. . . .Awakened by the atrocious infliction of political torment and silence in the flowery rhetoric of authoritative assertion depicts the vulnerability of the indigenous movement" (Shrestha et al. 9). Shrestha et AL. argue that until and unless the state does not acknowledge the beauty and aesthetic of cultural diversity of the country, there will be misunderstanding and the Khuwalung movement might be baffled.

The leading news house Kantipur TV HD covers news regarding *Khuwalung*. The article talks about the drama showing the civilization of Kirat community and the reason behind the composition of the play by Rajan Mukarung i.e. the ongoing

dispute regarding Khuwalung. On Falgun 7, 2077, the then prime Minister KP Oli Sharma announced the demolition of the rock which was in the middle of the route (Chatara to Bhojpure), which disturbed the Kirat community. The disturbance turned into conflict and the demolition was stopped but in this process Rajan Mukarung's *Khuwalung: An Iconic Emblem* was formed. The news further reports the brief summary of the drama, "the drama satirically illustrates the conversation of demolishing the Khuwalung and with its demolishment are shown the demolition of Teen Chula. Right after that the play takes to the early period of Kirat civilization" (Shah np). The article reports the support received from the audience by the play.

Similarly, another online news portal, *Ratopati*, has also featured article concerning Khuwalung dispute. In "the last couple of months, Nepali press and cultural discourse is in undated with Khuwalung issue. Conservationists, Kirati cultural activists, politicians and even public are talking about Khuwalung. RSS glance at this burning issue and states that it has outlined the issue in its nutshell" (1). Every news house from *Kantipur TV HD* to *Ratopati* has highlighted the iconic value regarding Khuwalung but not many articles have emphasized on reclaiming the root culture. *Khuwalung* itself is the first major drama which is written in order to reclaim the root culture. That is why Khuwalung has never been linked to academic area till date and this paper is going to be a research-based academic paper. This paper will be helpful for future research paper which will analysis the indigenous aesthetic and it will also be helpful for the one which wants to know how Kirati community, along other ethnic communities, has been silenced from the period of formation of nation state.

Rajan Mukarung is one of the most prominent writers of our time who believes that there is absents in Nepali literature which takes about indigenous culture.

In an interview with Srizu Bajracharya, a Culture and Arts reporter for *The Kathmandu Post*, Mukarung was asked, did he always dreamed of being a writer, with that Mukarung answered, he always liked to write for himself and often won in school competition which encouraged him to write so he started learning Nepali grammar and taught Nepali for two years and also worked as editor for four years, yet he never felt he was made for government job. But that does not mean he felt ease while attending literary events. He says, “But when I used to attend literary events, there too, I used to feel alone, as people never talked about our culture and ethnic identity. That’s when I felt, ‘it is we ourselves who have to write our stories for people to understand our culture and identity’” (Bajracharya np). That silence and absences of cultural ethnic identity lead him teamed with Upendra Subba and Hangyug Agyat to start a literary movement in Nepali literature, called Srijanshil Arajakta, in 1999.

The discussion of indigenous art is not emphasized much in the area of Nepali literature neither the indigenous literature is seen as mainstream literature which has been highlighted by Hit Badhur Thapa, “Quite a good number of literatures have been produced by indigenous authors and writers in their mother tongues and Nepali language. However, such literatures have rarely found attention from the mainstream academia, nor treated them authentic” (Thapa 11). The struggle for recognition and the pass over attitude regarding indigenous art in mainstream literature is not limited to Nepal only but the problem is on the subject of every indigenous literature. Paul Rangel points the similar problem vis-à-vis indigenous literature, “Native art is often delimited as primarily ethnographic and Native artists continue to struggle for acceptance into mainstream art markets” (Rangel 6) because much of native material culture is regarded as artifact which is different to mainstream art. That is why Mukarung as an indigenous writer wants to change the scene of Nepali mainstream

literature. Mukarung aims to bring the culture, philosophy and lifestyle of Rai, Limbu and Janajati to mainstream literature. He claims that, “in academic books and popular literature books that people recommended as must-reads to each other, our identities’ narratives were missing in those stories, our experiences had no mentions—the result was a generalized Nepali identity, pushing our community further down” (Mukarung Rajan Mukarung np). He noticed that the problem wasn’t just about native representation; it was about the need to work on literary works that accepted diversity. He believes that the Nepali literature which is published only represents identities and culture of Hinduism. So, Srijanshil Arajakta, according to Mukarung is questioning indigenous representation in the stories that were coming out.

Unlike Nepali literature the West has many writers who have been producing literary texts that reclaim their culture, which has been misrepresented or silenced in history. Writers like Suzan-Lori Parks, Paulla Gunn Allen, LeAnne Howe, Thomas King, N. Scott Monday and many more are parleying in highlighting their culture in mainstream through their writing. According to John Paul Rangel artist like Charlene Teters, Teri Greeves, Micheal Nicoll Yahulanaas and others are reclaiming their culture through their art. Rangel states, “All of these artist come from different backgrounds, experiences and complexities of identity but they all seemed to convey on the importance of community, personal and communal expression, future generation and participating in social change through producing work and creating dialogue about it” (Rangel 225). Likewise, Nepali literature have very few writers who re-write and write about their indigenous culture and tradition. These absences of voice are very dangerous to indigenous community. For instance, Bryan Brayboy has pointed out in his first tenet, “Colonization is endemic to society” (Rangel 41), the dominant society has created a fix gaze to look at indigenous people which should be

challenged. If it is not challenged it will be encoded within them, “Brayboy claims, Native people internalize and perpetuate these misconceptions when they fail to challenge them” (41). That is why the absences of reclaiming culture in Nepali literature should not be acceptable. Like Mukarung desires, more Nepali scholars and indigenous artist should come forward for the sake of reclaiming and re-educating indigenous people to exercise sovereignty and carry the tradition of continuity through different medium.

Even the late bloom of print capitalist phase in Nepal was started enthuse to print religious books which can be one of the reason behind the limited number of recognition for indigenous scholars and indigenous artist in Nepali literature. As Abhi Subedi states, Nepali literature has just entered the print capitalist phase from the beginning of 20th century in Banaras to produce religious books. Despite the just entered print capitalist phase Nepali literature has gone through many changes from poetry to essay writing and also in its form to theme. Subedi claims that unlike any phase now with the rise of fiction writers’ there are experimenting with motif, motives and moments in history. And the result has brought a writer who projects themes for discussion and writing that has been neglected till then. Subedi argues, “Representation question, thus, has become a versatile subject that has gained momentum after the political change of 2006, and Nepal’s new constitution that has addressed the rights and identities of people and linguistic group” (Subedi12). Like Subedi's claims in vignettes of Nepali literature, Mukarung’s *Khuwalung- Dhunga ko Baato* has addressed concerns related to the rights and identities of indigenous community. And the play has been one of the most popular and talked play in today’s time as it has voiced the neglected and silenced.

The next reason for the lack of indigenous scholars and artist is because of

nationalism. Before 2006, Pratyoush Onta claims that the Nepali literature was only focused on nationalism:

During the reign of the Panchayat system (1962-1990), the monarchy, Hinduism and the Nepali language were considered the triumvirate of official Nepali nationalism.... Making the Nepali language its medium, this national culture was propagated through state-owned print and radio media and most forcefully, through the standardization of school-level educational textbooks since the early 1960s” (Onta 2).

The establishment of nationalism and enforcement of Nepali language did not only become the reason for the shortcoming of indigenous literature but it has also lead to homicide of indigenous culture and language. Onta claims that, “the promotion of the Nepali language (a Indo-Aryan language) ...mother tongue of the high caste Hindus of hill origin, as the official language of the state was done at the expense of more than 100 other languages spoken in the country" (306). Forming Nepali as a nation language promoted Indo-Aryan language and did not only suppressed indigenous language but took the voice of indigenous people.

Nepali as a nation was created on the basis of inequality and discrimination: language based discrimination and cast based discrimination. Onta argues that, “Under the absolute control of the King, Nepal functioned...with no legal or constitutional recognition of ideas related to the concept of equality until the mid-19th... Hindu ritual-based hierarchy and inequality was legally recognized as the basis of the state” (305).Further he claims that the pre-1990 polity promoted discrimination related to cast, religion and language which became a source of social inequality not only in what could be called the ‘cultural’ domain but also the ‘material’ domain of the polity. As a result, today when we talk about Nepal as whole we often exclude the

indigenous culture, and what we understand is Hill Aryan.

The Khas-Aryan imposed their cultural-traditional value and succeed to subordinate the indigenous culture due to which indigenous history, culture and arts are often forgotten. According to Tara Lal Shrestha et al, “Khas-Aryan’s continuous accession to power. . . . To . . . sustain supremacy, they strategically implemented several hegemonic policies that constantly paralyzed the ‘Others’” (Shrestha et al. 2). Owing to the idea of cast system and nationality the indigenous were often exclude howbeit, admiringly these days as Abhi Subedi has stated in *Vignettes of Nepali Literature*, in this third phase people are hearing the voice of minorities (Other). Now people are being aware of the importance of the identity. In the play the defeat of Bairi kingdom is also the metaphor of the end of cultural hegemony. As a result, *Jaari*, a movie based on the indigenous culture, Limbu community, like *Khuwalung* is being recognized. Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) post an article on 22 July, 2023 reporting *Jaari* completing 100 days of screening in Nepali Cinema Hall. *Jaari* was able to attract its audience like *Khuwalung*. *Khuwalung* in 2022 became the first play that brought most of the ministers and politician to the theater and informed about the iconic rock Khuwalung to its audience. That is how *Khuwalung* has somewhat awaken the admirer of indigenous art and artist in Nepal.

Even though people are being aware of the importance of indigenous culture and its literature, inequality and discrimination has brought the menacing denouement; indigenous culture is mislaying day by day. This induces various indigenous movement in Nepal by many political parties and artist. Indigenous artist tries to reintroduces their history and preserve their culture through their art. Mukarung as an Indigenous artist does the same. He prolongs Kirat culture by representation the Kirat traditional storytelling song, dance and pray, identical to what

Heather Ahtone, a native American researcher claims, “every time an Indigenous artist creates an object that reflects concepts rooted within her culture, this same artist is perpetuating that culture one more day as an act of self-determination” (ahtone73). Mukarung is perpetuating: informing and reintroducing Kirat culture and Kirat kingdom through *Khuwalung*. *Khuwalung* shows that abandoned side of the history, of Nepal. The play has displayed the Kirat Kingdom; community of Kirat people living with their own value, cosmology and custom, a civilization with their own ruling culture and norms. There are characters like minister, soldiers and their leader: Hangba and Hangma.

Like almost every indigenous artist Mukarung is using media to recuperate the overlooked narratives of Kirati people who were living there since ancient time, following their tradition. The existence of Kirat kingdom and its narrative is told through the dialogue exchanged between Hangma and Hangba, when they lose their son in the battle field. Hangma, on the loss of her son, cries and accuses Hangba of ignoring her pain; Hangba, a ruler and a fighter knows the art of fighting but has no idea about the pain that comes at the loss of the relatives, a pain of the mother who has lost her child. Then Hangba delivers a dialogue in which he tells the audience about the long-lived Kirat dynasty and their pedigrees. Denying the accusation, Hangba says, “Incorrect! We had never won this kingdom in any war; this kingdom was built by our ancestors. They constructed this kingdom from a dense forest. Blessed us. They learned to live here, with its air, soil, water, forest, and hills. They lived here with their nature in harmony. We are also following our ancestors' way of living. Some wins, some loses” (Mukarung *Khuwalung* np). Through the dialogue, Mukarung is reclaiming the land, which is in the verse of devastation for development. He informs the audience about the Kirat Dynasty, the longest-ruling

kingdom of Nepal, which ruled for about 1500 years and has been there since the pre-historic period and is often unheeded while prioritizing unity and nationality. Faye Ginsburg explains, “as indigenous communities use media to recuperate their own collective stories and histories . . . have been erased in the national narratives of the dominant culture and are in danger of being forgotten in local worlds as well” (Barber 7). Through *Khuwalung*, Mukarung is bestowing the histories and stories of the Kirat dynasty, which was necessary because Kirat narratives have spun into the subject of negligence in national narratives, similar to what Ginsburg has noted.

Kirat narratives like histories, stories, and events are required to be underpinned today since they have turned out to be the subject of lapse. Behind the upsetting loss of Kirat narratives is not the lack of fascination or mysterious content, but it is because of power. As Michel Foucault has claimed that an event or history is all about the usurpation of power: “An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but...the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, that entry of a masked ‘others’” (Foucault 437). After Gasti, the last king of Kirat was defeated by the Lichchhabis then the power of Kirat started to downfall. The entry of cast hegemony in the society which Ram Shah conducted it into legal document called *Muluki Ain* and the notion of nationality made the Kirat narratives fable, which requires miniature attention. After the hegemony of cast system took all over Nepal, the indigenous were started to be seen by the glance of dominated group. The Kirat narrative then got misrepresented and misinterpreted, which became the reason for its negligence.

In the history text, one is merely told about the defeated dynasty. One is never told the story of the defeated Hindu kingdom. Even in the television series that covers

the story of one kingdom they always show the winning battle and the days of glory of that particular kingdom. Similarly, in the history text books, one always reads about the glorious battle won by Shah's (Hindu) Kingdom. Foucault thinks that the world is a profusion of entangled events rather than events reduced with initial and final value that is why he seeks for true historical sense. He claims, "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existences among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (438). Like Foucault desires Mukarung has endorses the existences of lost events which is unwanted in most of the narratives. In the play, a foreign Kingdom attacks the Kirat Kingdom to seize it and rule as per their rules, then they were defeated by Kirat Kingdom.

Fig.2. "*Khuwalung*". Source: *Street Nepal*, 28 July, 2022.



Through their dress and language, it can be said that that it was a Hindu kingdom which in the history is only known for wins and bravery. Therefore, Mukarung is presenting the next side of the history, the defeat of the undefeated Khas Aryan in Kirat kingdom.

The dominant culture often misrepresents Indigenous people whether in

movies or any narratives, it is because of the power. Most of the people who present indigenous people relay on the misguide interpretation. For example, in Nepal, Khas Aryan are in the power which leads them in the ingenious side where as indigenous people are placed on opposite to them, like black skinned people are shown opposite to white skin people. That is why one can say power plays its role everywhere in regard to making meaning. In this regard, Stuart Hall argues, “As such what needs to be noted about ethnographic museums is that they do not simply reflect natural distinction but serve to create cultural ones, which acquire their cogency when viewed through the filtering lenses of a particular discipline” (Hall161). For instance, when one thinks of Kirat Rai, they immediately picture a short-headed person, friendly, pork with alcohol, Sakela dance, and their traditional dress because of the popular culture which has created an image. Stuart Hall claims that through the stereotype, “we understand the world by referring individual objects, people or events in our heads to the general classificatory schemes into which- according to our culture” (257). Often, the portrayal of the Kirat community in mainstream media is shown as middle-class people with regular private jobs or the family of the British army. Not only in Nepali mainstream media but even in India, the neighboring country, the Kirat community, or Mongolian face people are shown as gatekeepers (*bahadur*) and house workers. Both Nepali and Indian mainstream media are creating the stereotyping of Kirat community, as middle-class people with immaterial values. Hall defines the stereotype in this way: “[W]e understand the world by referring individual objects, people or events in our heads to the general classificatory schemes into which- according to our culture” (257). In films, the Mongolian face characters are always fixed in nature: strong, courageous, fit for labor work where the brain is not often required, and hot-headed. It is possible to establish the stereotype because of power

hegemony. Stuart Hall argues that “stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequities of power. Power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group” (258). It is a similar case with all the stereotyping of the Kirat people or most of the indigenous people. To break this stereotype, Mukarung has shown a brave and experienced Kirat community who endorse the knowledge of the art of living with nature in harmony.

With the medium of media Mukarung is correcting the established gaze of Kirat people. The media which is the medium for creating the stereotype of the minorities is not limited to that only, but it can also be used for correcting the established stereotype. Stuart Hall claims that according to our culture we understand the world which leads to stereotyping and that can be fixed through same media that has created the stereotype. In this regard, Bal Bahadur Thapa, in his study on a Gurung film *Anagarik* by Ram Gurung, argues, “Not necessary, mass media works along the line of the state ideologies all the time. Should they be appropriated with courage in a creative way, they can also be used for challenging the state’s nationalist ideologies the way *Anagarik* does” (50). Thapa claims that through media, state had promoted hill based upper caste Hindu nationalism in Nepal at the cost of indigenous communities and their voice. But later he ensured that films like *Anagarik* challenged the state’s nationalist ideologies. Like Hall, Thapa believes that media can create and break the stereotypes.

Mukarung has resorted to the second option and through media, he wants to challenge the fixed gaze. In the play, one can find the Kirat people dancing *Sakela*. Through *sakela* (Kirati tradition dance), the Kirati people pass down the knowledge of agriculture, season and life. Chandra Kumar Hatuwali, and Kirath Chad further asserts, “According to Kirat mythology, Sumnima is the earth and mother of

Kirat Rai. . . The process of agrarian system is pervasively found in Chasuma Sili. The steps like destroying the forest, plugging, seeding, uprooting, planting, weeding round the plants, cutting down, heaping, chaffing, drying, weighing and to act or imitate of eating rice and to put rice inside the pocket are basic elements in Sili” (Rai19). *Sakela* can be seen as a storytelling of the way Kirant Rai live and their journey. Chandra Lumar Hatuwali Rai et al, argues, “The Sakela dance ‘is performance’ more than ‘as performance’ in its nature and ritual. As Schechner suggests, Sakela dance is historically meaningful; it has a context of commemoration of their ancestors, it has already taken a form of tradition” (20). Different Sili is performed according to place and cast but the meaning of all the sili is same. Sili means the imitation of bird, nature and bird. During *Sakela* dance they sing song which carries the message of love, life, death and philosophy. This shows the dance and song of Kirat community is form of art that teach the way of living in harmony with nature, which is needed for everyone to maintain the balance and reciprocity with every living creature. According to Dik Badhur Rai, “It is done together by acting or by symbolic objects. For examples, in mourning rituals spreading water, oil or animal's blood may be part of the purification. . . . Additionally, yeast water purifies the shrine” (Rai 16). The alcohol which is used against the stereotyping the indigenous is actual an important part of the indigenous people which is used for purification.

Hall claims that through reversing the stereotypes one can bring the change in regard the way people assumed according to culture. Mukarung has use this strategy and shown the different side of Kirat people then being short headed. When the enemy kingdom attacks them and loss, they do not kill the nemesis prince who had killed the son of Hangba and Hangma, the Kirat’s leader. Instead of taking revenge

they show mercy when the foreign prince asks for forgiveness. Hangba being a father forgive the foreign king understand that he has lost the battle and pleading for life. He believes the warrior who killed her son is long dead, now only the piteous man is pleading for his life. The merciful nature is a confirmation of their enlightenment which they have gained with the knowledge they are blessed through their ancestors, familiarity with reciprocity or the rule of living. Beside the forgiving nature one can also understand the ethic of Kirat community through the dialogue of King and Queen, the leader of foreigner kingdom. Here, the queen is pleading with her king to bring their son back from the Kirat kingdom:

QUEEN. Your lord I have told you not to use force but instead you could have offered them to become our bonded for entire lifespan.

KING. My queen we were not the one that rebuffed your advice, but it was them who did not accept it. They are too determined. They denied saying wishing for wellbeing is better than being in bonded. They believe bond upsurge restriction. The one who suspect and fear believing on another intension of wellbeing is filled with dishonesty.

QUEEN. Neither the body has returned nor has any information about my son's well-being.

KING. Do not have any doubt. They are of pure heart. They live for peace. They are not a kind which believes on attacking. They are like bees, hardworking and only attacks when they must defend themselves. The one who need shelter and ask for mercy they accept them. They had sent all the soldiers who has called war and lost. They treat strangers as a guest. Be cocksure. Our prince will return safe and sound. (Mukurung Khuwalung np)

With this conversation, one can have a hint of the nature of Kirati people which

carries the forgiving nature and have a high ethics. Jeromy Bruner claims, “it is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, that self is a product of our telling and not some essence to be developed for in the recesses of subjectivity” (Adhikari 109). Mukarung has re-created, rewritten and presented the true nature of Kirati people; peace lover, merciful, and wise which has been different then the stereotype that has been created by mainstream.

The play also highlights the attitude of Kirat community affirming life. When Kirat Kingdom has to face the famine and was denial of any more pray by their ancestor, they accept the fact and decides to migrate without accusing the ancestors or the faith. The acceptance affirm life provides them with peace. One can find philosophical message affirming life in the dialogue below:

KANXA: It means we have to migrate somewhere else. Hunting period has ended here? (Sits leaving bow unconcerned.)

KANXI: (goes near to Kanxa and lean. Touches Kanxa’s hair caressingly.) So, now what. If the land, ancestors, and Mang Chula have given us farewell, they surly have given us departure with pleased heart. Wherever we go with their blessing it will be beneficial for us, it will not be detrimental.

SAILA: Right. (Stands.) In this world dying and extinction is equally active. Offering land is also similar to that. When landslide and flood start to rubble life there is no option left besides leaving. The land should be left when plague and epidemic spreads. (np)

Through the conversation, one can understand that the characters know the rule of life. Despite being pessimistic they accept the faith of life and holds their optimistic attitude toward their ditties and ancestors. They understand death and extinct is inevitable which makes them enlightened.

Similarly, we can find the divine relationship of Kirat community with the place and nonliving entities. When the kingdom face plagues the elder worship stone and sky, others also follow her and they start dancing. Performing dance is a form of worshiping and Kirat believes stone as their ancestors, land as mother earth and sky as father, that is why they perform *sakela* after worshiping stone and sky. The elder ask permission to give them blessing as they have to leave their nesters place. Hangba tells Nachhung that they accept whatever their ancestor's demands and ask *Mundhum* to guide them. They decide to follow the road that *Mundhum* shows and settle there. The problems like famine and plague does not stop the flow of their life instead Nachhung tells Hangba to pray Khuwalung with all the rituals, follow the Koshi River, and search the clumps of bamboo. They will their find the prey and guidance of their ancestors, and build new territory.

Usually the songs and dance are not seen as an important or standard form to be insert in mainstream play because it is not practiced by the popular culture, but for indigenous artist it is prominent and logical for meaning-making. A sense of belonging is passed down to the individual when they perform rituals, dance and sing which helps the community to survive. When the indigenous dance and sing they fell the blessing of ancestors and they sense the belonging to the community, like Steve M. Leuthold claims rituals, dance and song, practices of the community, express commitment to the community. Even though the song, dance and picture carries meaning the practices of using these are not preferred in popular culture that is why the audience feels disconnected and creates confusion when they see pictures, dance, and song in text or the play. K. J. Keller argues that "this link between literature and ceremony results in Native American literature taking on a more 'holistic' nature and blending basic literary forms, which 'has led to much confusion among non-Indian

collectors and commentators'. Different genres (by a European definition) can blend together in a Native American text. . .the same way a ceremony includes song, story, incantation, etc. as part of the whole" (Keller 6). That is why the audience should realize Indigenous aesthetic is culturally based expressions. The audience should have the knowledge about what indigenous art carries and what impact does songs and dance makes rather than comparing the indigenous art with western modern art. Courtney Cottrell brings the similar approach form art historian, David Penney regarding indigenous art being culturally based art. Penney believes that representations of a group or community, even though art, have their own cultural system of aesthetics. Penney argues that "because they are culturally based, there is a need to identify and recognize Native participation in the discourse surrounding Native arts" (Cottrell 4). But due to large influence of western European standard of art the indigenous aesthetic is not regarded worth of any serious thought and interest. In the same way, the play *Khuwalung* can be bewildering for the audience if they try to critique it in the basics of western European standard form of art but if the audience can have related it with cultural system of Aesthetics and understand it as a continuum of cultural production they would adore the rich indigenous art.

Mukarung is illustrating the aesthetic of understate Kirat tradition in contemporary society where the dominant culture is ruling the world. In the beginning of the play the theater is filled with traditional Kirati music with which the audience is taken to the atmosphere of Kirat community, who always enjoys the tradition of communicating through dancing and singing. In the play Kirati people sings their cultural song and dances Sakela (cultural dance) in every situation which provides them with fate and blessing from their ancestors. Indigenous people pass down the skills, awareness related to problem solving and conceptual thinking by performing

the practices of community. According to Paul Rangel, “Indigenous education with Native communities often includes instruction and mentoring on language, songs, dance, creative expression, morality, ethics, values along with skill based activities with materials, problem solving and conceptual” (Rangel 104). Through cultural song and dance the indigenous people carry their historical and cultural memories.

Indigenous people educate their younger generation about their history, geneses stories and knowledge becomes inhabited. In the play, the Kirati people sing song “Aiyo ni Hau”. The song is a tale of their migration; it is somehow a description recorded by the Kirat people for their younger generation in order to handover the history of their foundation. “Aiyo ni Hau/ neither could stay this side nor could cross the other side/ Aiyo ni lailai *fulrani* turned into water” (00:00:06-00:00:40). It narrates the story of a sister who lost the life while crossing the river. The loss of a sister in the process of crossing the river is also mentioned in *Mundhum*, religious scripture and folk literature of Kirat community. In the play Hangchama losses her life in the process of crossing the river.

Afterwards the story tells the audience about the promises made by all the brothers and sisters to meet at Khuwalung when they decide to settle in different regime following the river: “aiyo ni hau as many rivers as there are/ that much banghalo/ aiyo ni lai lai lai shall meet in Khuwalung (Mukarung 00: 02: 0026-3:00:00). The song is basically telling how a sister lost her life and how the brothers moved to different part of the river, started the civilization and promised to unite in Khuwalung one day. The similar story can be heard in different narrative because of its oral tradition. *Mundhum* was always passed down to its younger generation through songs and storytelling. As, Indigenous aesthetic is about the continuity of the erudition culture and demonstrating it in an aesthetic way, this is the beauty of indigenous

anesthetic.

Khuwalung was performed for almost a month and in between they improvised the script that is why the final in print script is not yet finalized. The improvisation was done in every act according to Mukarung. He informed that the actors were given script, conversely, they were sometime only informed about the environment and asked for their own adlib. The improvisation was necessary intending to catch the attention of the current audience. Among many stories of *Mundhum*, *Khuwalung* is a play of one particular story that narrates about the Khuwalung, how magically Khuwalung appears in the middle of the river to help the Kirat people cross the river while migrating from their territory. Notwithstanding, in *Khuwalung* the Khuwalung does not appear but instead of reenacting the part of magical appearance of Khuwalung, Mukarung shows us how Kirat people ties rope around the Khuwalung and cross the river with the blessing of their ancestors.



Fig.3. *Khuwalung*. Source: *Street Nepal*, 28 July 2022.

The improvising was necessary in an effort to appear more realistic to the audience like, the native writer Yahgulanaas has done in *A Tale of Two Shamans*. Yahgulanaas

tells the story grounded in Haida ideology, ontology and mythology, but not as a Haida speaker would do. He did in his own way and tells the story through his own interpretation. Rangel on the appreciation of Yahgulanaas states, "His taking the disparate pieces and consolidating them is in keeping with the storytelling tradition of finding the right elements to retell this story while also creating a new version" (Rangel 90). Both Mukarung and Yahgulanaas is continuously retelling their story through their art through different medium and is creating new version, relevant to the current audience while keeping their cultural sprite in the same way as a native artist does. Mukarung has succeeded in grasping the attention of the audience with his creativity and courageous writing.

Besides improvising Mukarung has done some experiment in the play with language. There are total twenty-eight different Rai language which linguists has identified till date and each actor in the play delivers the dialogue on their own language; ergo, twelve languages were used in the play. Mukarung claims, "The actors have used twelve languages, only if you pause and hear, you will notice that different actor has used different language while delivering the dialogue" (Mukarung Interview- personal interview). With this Mukarung has shown the astonishing linguistic diversity of Kirat Rai community which is difficult to notice instantly while enjoying the drama. But the close attention can heed the diversity of language. With the use of diverse language, the play is representing the whole Rai community, which has scattered all over the world. The use of diverse language awakes a feeling that the story is about a community, i.e. of Kirat. The difference between languages, stories, even the difference in method while conducting ceremonies feels merely and the connection of community is stimulated strangely.

Khuwalung is believed to be a form of ancestors that came to protect the life

of their descendant that is why different language speaking Rai sense the feelings of belonging to one family, viz. descendant of Khuwalung or the descendant of same ancestry despite using diverse language and practicing different methods while practicing ceremony. Mukarung has strikingly represented Khuwalung as a linkage that connect the present Kirat community members back to their origin story.

Heather Ahtone recurs that one will never understand the rich indigenous art and culture if one continues to see the indigenous art and culture from foreign gaze, i.e. from Khas Aryan or from colonial gaze. In the context of the Native American communities, Ahtone argues, “While the current scholarship about Indigenous American art is welcome. . . the present void. . . Critics often avoid writing seriously about Native American art because what they consider ‘universal art values’ are actually twentieth-century Eurocentric art values” (Ahtone 375). Now the scholar should not be limited to the concept of art and confined it into twentieth-century Eurocentric art values. It is time to understand native culture by understanding their coded language: “The use of relationships is a part of the coded language embedded in all aspects of Indigenous American culture. Drawing relationships is a fundamental way of understanding nature and of forming one’s personal identity.

The use of non-human signifiers for clan identities, animate and inanimate, is commonly layered with relationships linking present community members back to the genesis stories” (376). As Ahtone has mentions about seeing relationship as a code language, one can see the relation of Khuwalung with the Kirat community in a senses of ancestor and descendant that form a communal identity. For that abandoning of foreign contemplation is must to understand the indigenous aesthetic and culture, which means to understand the importance of ordinary looking rock, Khuwalung, one must understand the coded language embedded in Kirat culture. Then only one can

understand how Khuwalung has carried a whole history and identity of Kirat community.

Mukarung has also presented the position of an elder in the Kirat community. Kirati community relies on the communal experience and knowledge; they follow their elder's guidance. Kirat follow their elderly knowledge, according to Pushpa Raj Rai, "Nachhung is not compulsory need to worship due to changing role of Nachhung. Its function is replaced by the elder people who know about the Mundhum (236). The Nachhung which is the messenger between their ancestors and the Kirat people is replaced by house elders. In the play, the elder works as mediator between the ancestors and the Kirat people. The elders are requested to pray to their ancestors for their guideline and blessing when they face problems this shows the prominence of the communal knowledge and elderly experience. While praying their ancestors they also pray land, river and ditties.

Regardless of all the praying they fail to control the situation, "Maila: No, (shakes head) brother and sister-in-law, (looking to his married sister) yes, my Maile, asked the Mang Chula, prayed stream and river. Promised to offer offering. No! Denied. They will not allow pray" (Mukarung *Khuwalung* np). Regardless of all the failed attempts and a negative respond from their ancestors they hold their faith towards their ancestors and elderly experience. They concern their elder for solution relay in interdependence and mutual accountability. The interdependence is often found in indigenous community. Steve M. Leuthold claims that Indian directors implicitly put forth a model of community different than that found in middle-class America. Native Americans base their model of community on assumptions of togetherness, interdependence, and mutual accountability. He states that, "Many of the indigenous documentaries that I watched demonstrated a great respect for elders

as holders of wisdom and sources of collective memory in Indian cultures. (This respect is so profound that *Elder* is often capitalized in print form)” (Leuthold 170). Indigenous people seeks for ancestors and elder’s guidelines because they emphasize the personal or collective experience. The mutual accountability and independence is shown in the play.

Further, the role of the female characters in the play also shows the position of women in Kirat community. Sumnima is living metaphor for earth in Kirat community. Sumnima represents all the women in Kirat community. Contrasting to how most of the female in popular culture is shown weak, simple-minded and householder, in *Khuwalung* female are shown worriers and intellectual. Female participates in battle as a soldier and above all their advice are heard. In the play when the foreign prince asks for mercy Hangma advises the leader to grant the life of the lost prince who is pleading for forgiveness. Hangchama says, “Somehow I feel he is dedicated. Sympathy grew on me. His first sentence shows the deep dedication for his life” (np). Hearing Hangchama the prince was forgiven for killing the prince of Kirat Kingdom in the battle. Hangma poses a rhetorical question, "What did we win Hangba? What did we win? What did we win? We lost our son. Lots of people had died. Lots of them are left disables. What did we win Hangba?" (np). With this rhetorical question, one can understand that the Hangma is aware that no one wins in the hazardous war. According to Rai Puspa Raj, “Chula is made by three erected stones. . . .Pakhulung...represents the ancestors, Makhalong. . .represents the relative of mother and Siptulung is the main household deity. Fire is symbol of the power and light” (Rai 235). Among the three stone, Mang Chula (Makhalong) represents the female ancestors. By presenting the brave, intellect characters like Hangchama, Kanxi and Hangma, Mukarung is illustrating female the way Kirat community understands

female to be.

For indigenous writer the visual elements are as important as the song and dance for meaning making of the text. Many indigenous writer struggles to publish their book with visual elements. Leslie Marmon Silko claims that “this practice seems odd to many European-American authors, editors, publishers, and even graphic designers. We tend to view photographs and illustrations as mere value-added elements, which can usually be skipped with the same efficacy as a footnote” (6). Silko has seen the condition where the author has to compromise and skip the use of images or keep the image at the back of the text, which erase the essences of the text, “The uniquely Native American element of this text got whitewashed” (7). The visual elements are a crucial part in Indigenous literature because it gives its readers and audience the knowledge of their origin and helps them to understand their rich culture. K. J. Keller points out the tendency, “Native American literature is to intersperse visual elements throughout a text and to control the design of the work holistically” (11). That is why the characters of *Khuwalung* is seen in forest carrying weapons made from bamboo for hunting and Khukuri, carrying Chindo, wearing allo clothes and slippers. In the left side of the stage there is a dense forest with clump of bamboo and cluster of banana bush where two boars are seen running.



Fig.4. Khuwalung. Source: *Street Nepal*, 28 July 2022

Next to this one half of the stage is Triveni river (junction of three rivers, Saptakoshi). All these prop and setting is indispensable. Kirati people, special in Rai community all these prop is used by Nakchhongs (In Rai community they are bridge connecting living with ancestors and sprites) while performing rituals. Like branch of bamboo, banana leaf, called Tupla which is compulsory while praying, and Khukuri, it is said that Khukuri was first used by Kiratis. Boar's meat, its leg, and head is exchanged in some of the Rai community in the ceremony like marriage. As Heather states vital signs signifies the pulse of the culture, to understanding the importance of these material is to understand Kirat culture a bit more.

The characters of Kirat people carrying the weapon for hunting and wearing the allo clothes is an often shown indigenous person wearing in popular culture to shown indigenous characters less civilized. But the characters in the play possess the outfit so as to show them their antiquity which indigenous people values and are proud of. Keller explains that in the introduction to the 2012 edition of Leslie Marmo

Silko book *Storyteller* Silko has stated that, “I wanted readers to have a feeling of the landscape and the context of the Pueblo villages where the stories take place, so I included photographs. . . .I wanted readers to have a sense of the family I came from, so I included family snapshots, too” (Keller 5). Likewise, Mukarung has shown a group of Kirati people hunting in the dense forest in the play caring Khukuri and other weapons made from bamboo for hunting. With this Mukarung wants its audience to know the origin of Kirat community so that the audience can understand the importance of their antiquity in Kirat community and in ingenious aesthetics.

At last the song “Aiyo ni Hau” tells the sad reality of the contemporary time, in spite of being rich in history, culture and aesthetic Kirat community or indigenous community as a whole is demising every day. The holy book *Mundhum* and its teaching has become a story that everyone has forgotten. The song is a mourning of the reality where the Kirat culture, its identity is disremembered and overlooked. “Aiyo in Haw” is an interjection which is used by someone when they are hurt; basically it is used to express pain in Nepali. The title of the song is symbolizing the pain of indigenous people. The pain is caused because of the treatment their culture is facing in the contemporary time. The narrative of indigenous culture is almost lost because of the hegemony of power. The song is expressing the eternal ache, “Aiya ni Haw/ Neither can forget nor could remembered/ Aiya ni Lai Lai *Mundhum* became story (00:00:50-00:01:22). The song is lamentation of the cultural delirium which has affected every indigenous people. The Kirat people today are not fully aware of *Mundhum* which is record of Kirat civilization, history and experience but they are also incapable of forgetting it. The hegemonic society has created the Nepaliess which has erased the existence of *Mundhum* that is why the actuality of *Mundhum* has become a story in contemporary period.

When *Khuwalung* was yet to be recognized by government, and both Kirati and non-Kirati people, the play *Khuwalung* has succeeded to introduce the *Khuwalung* to the citizen of the whole country, Nepal. *Khuwalung* created awareness of the existence of *Khuwalung* to the younger generation of Kirat people. Politically, too, *Khuwalung* has been recognized as the source of Kirat belief system. As a result, the state has announced to preserve it and fund the budget regarding its development and protection. Most of the leaders from different political parties watched the play *Khuwalung* and applauded it. Corresponding to this, in the recently held 2022 general election, the leaders like Sudan Kirati, Ashok Rai, and Rajan Rai carried the agenda of protecting *Khuwalung* as a result the state has separated the budget regarding its development and protection according to budget speech of fiscal year 2023/24- Ministry of Finance. *Khuwalung* helped the citizens realize the importance of cultural identity.

Khuwalung is reclaiming the Kirat culture and territory through song. The song performed in the play is not limited to entertainment but it also carries cultural knowledge and history. The song, graphics, and picture, which play a prominent role in meaning making, are not accepted as standard form of literature. Consequently, the indigenous artist is whitewashed and misunderstood. Nevertheless, Mukarung presents Kirat community, like many indigenous writers presents. In *Khuwalung* he brings songs, dances and adopts all the customs in which indigenous people are often presented, wearing clothes made of allo and carrying weapons, which is popular in mainstream media and deconstruct it. Mukarung has used the same media which has established the fixed gage concerning Kirat people and decoded it. The power creates hegemony due to which one finds inequality in the society. Nevertheless, the contemporary society is calling for the oppressed. The missing narratives are being

searched and like Subedi claims the third phase in Nepali literature is for minorities' voices. Audience and reader should have knowledge about the coded language which Heather believes is very important to understand indigenous aesthetic. The culture is represented in an effort to keep the culture alive. The same culture is the record of changing event that is the reason one will find changes in culture with respect to time. Beside coded language as Heather has point, Leuthold believes that the audience should also focus on metaphors and symbols which carry cultural meaning. Often metaphor and symbol carries the communal knowledge as, indigenous people believes in communal knowledge and shared experience which is reflected intentionally in the indigenous literature.

The indigenous artists reclaim their culture through their art. The indigenous narratives are usually based on the oral tradition which creates different version of narratives of the same story. As indigenous aesthetics is the continuation of the culture, one will find many changes yet the symbol and the metaphor remain unchanged according to the culture. Every culture tends to have its own survival experience and expansion that makes it different. Every culture has its beliefs and cosmology, which shape beliefs regarding any object living or non-living. Khuwalung, a huge stone, is believed to be the form of Kirati ancestors which can be heard in the Kirati songs and in Nachhung prayers.

While reading or witnessing indigenous cultural art, it is important to understand that seeing the relationship and beliefs through the eye of western culture or through distance can create misunderstanding. Therefore, it is necessary to see the relationship as a code language. Khuwalung itself was seen as an obstacle for the development of waterways in Nepal but for Kirat community Khuwalung is the ancestors' blessing or the Kirat themselves are the descendent of Khuwalung which

links all the different language speaking Rai living in different junctions of the world. Since the Panchayat system (1962-1990), the Nepali state has spread the ideology of high hill Hindu nationalism in which the indigenous culture was not only neglected but it was somewhat terminated. As a result, *Mundhum* and *Khuwalung* was unfamiliar to many people in Nepal. Chanting the concept of nationalism has brought some misfortune like cultural catastrophe and unawareness towards the indigenous culture which brought *Khuwalung*. *Khuwalung* has educated the less informed people regarding Kirat culture, and its civilization. Politically also *Khuwalung* has been recognized as the source of Kirat belief system. Many indigenous artists from all over the world are reclaiming their culture through different media which link every indigenous artist. That is the reason the reorganization of one indigenous cultures or literatures is the achievement of the indigenous people and artists. *Khuwalung* has successful educated the less educated regarding the cultural importance. The paper is limited to how *Khuwalung* has reclaimed the root culture, highlighting the cause behind the *Khuwalung* dispute. Further, one can write paper concerning the indigenous literature in Nepal, its significance and the reasons behind its drawback. Alongside one can bring different indigenous communities' texts and analyze them.

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