

## Nexus between Thulung Death Ritual and Ecological Consciousness

### **Abstract**

*This thesis is an analysis of the Thulung Death Rituals of the inhabitants of Ilam district in eastern Nepal. The death ritual of this community is eco-friendly and it shows the direct link with ecology. The way they show the reverence towards nature gives a special place and distinct identity to Thulung community. This ritual in Thulung ethnicity is primarily dependent on nature. While decaying the dead body inside the ground, it promotes the nature rather than polluting it, and hence death ritual in 'Thulung' is eco-friendly. This thesis also explains the relation between human and nature. It also shows how Kirati people are conscious in preserving nature and its importance. For this purpose the research has used some insights from ecocritical criticism and some ideas related to performance studies.*

**Key Words:** - death ritual, ecocriticism, cultural artifacts, ecosystem, Thulung ethnicity

Thulung is one of the large ethnic Kirat communities within the Rai group. The umbrella term 'Kirat' refers to the main four ethnic groups, Khambu or Rai<sup>1</sup>, Limbu or Subba, Sunuwar or Mukhiya and Yakkha or Dewan. It is assumed that the term Thulung is derived from the two independent native words *thumu* and *lung*. The literary meanings of these words are *thumu* 'establishing' and *lung* 'stone'. So, the common word Thulung implies the core meaning 'establishing a home or residence made up of stones'. In other words, the literary meaning of the word Thulung signifies the dwelling made up of the stones, or to shelter in a cave (which is made up of a huge flat stone). Historically, it is convincing fact that the Thulung ancestral used to live in

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<sup>1</sup> The ethnic group *Rai* is also known with the terms *Jimindar*, *Jimdar*, *Jimi*, etc.

the cave before the stage of building and living in the houses. Initially, the proto-form was supposed to be ‘Thumulung’, and for the time being, phonologically changed into ‘Thulung’.

Linguistically, Thulung is one of the endangered Tibeto-Burman languages of eastern Nepal. It belongs to the western Kirati sub-group among the 25 Khambu or Rai ethnic-groups. Basically, Thulung people are considered as the inhabitants of Dudhkosi valley (i.e., surrounding of the Dudhkosi River, which is one major branch of the Saptakoshi River) in eastern Nepal. They are also known as ‘Thulunge’, ‘Thulu prochyu’<sup>2</sup>, Thulung and their mother tongue is named like *Thulu Lawa*, *Tholong Lo*, *Thulu Loa*, *Thulung La* ‘Thulung language’, etc. Besides, it is also called Twakku Lwa, or Toaku Lwa ‘own language’. The majority of the Thulung speakers are scattered in different areas, viz., Deusa, Mukli, Ranem, Kangel, Lokhim, Jubu, Dipdi, Necha, Ribdung, Salle, Kuibhir, etc., within the Sagarmatha zone, the southeast part of the Solukhumbu district in eastern Nepal.

Among these wide historic areas in *Majh-Kirat Pradesh* ‘mid-region area’, Deusa-Mukli (jointly pronounced these adjoining two renowned areas or Thulung villages towards the northern part of Dudhkosi River) is considered as the origin of the Thulung ethnicity. This particular wide area in the hill region, also known as the *Thulukhom* ‘Thulungland’ or the origin of Thulung ethnicity covers the adjoining area of the three districts, viz., Solukhumbu, Khotang and Okhaldhunga in the surrounding of the Dudhkosi valley.

Besides these three districts, the census report 2011 shows that Thulung people are also scattered in other 32 districts throughout the country. Among them, a

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<sup>2</sup> Here the term *prochyu* refers to the ‘Kirat Rai’ community, and so as the *Thulu prochyu* refers to the ‘Thulung Rai’ community.

majority of them are living in different districts, which include Khotang, Okhaldhunga, Bhojpur, Udayapur, Panchthar, Sankhuwasava, Tehrathum, Ilam, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, in descending order. Observing different aspects of the ritual phenomenon, a typical Kirat culture is directly related to nature and their ancestral, so as in 'Thulung', the fourth largest Kirat community among the Rai group. In this regard, this thesis primarily is based on the Thulung community of Pashupatinagar area of Ilam district in eastern Nepal in connection to the ecological consciousness.

The present study has been carried out with the main objective of exploring the connection of death ritual in Thulung community with the issue of 'ecocriticism' as a theoretical base to explore the relationship with the death ritual in Thulung Community. The term *Ecocriticism* is derived from the two Greek words *Eco* or *oikos* and *critic* or *kritis* which means 'house judge' and observes in nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning. In other words, ecocriticism is a study of culture and cultural products like artworks, writings, scientific theories, etc. that is in some way connected with the human relationship to the natural world. It is also a response to the need for a humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. It is also believed that ecocriticism elucidates relationships between human and non-human nature.

In this regards, we can say that ecocriticism is fundamentally an ethical criticism and pedagogy, one that investigates and helps make possible the connections among self, society, nature and text as well. Furthermore, it is also considered as the human acts occur within a network of relationships, processes, and systems that are as ecological as they are cultural. Similarly, human and biological environments are mutually interdependent.

This research employs the issue of ecocriticism as a theoretical base to explore the relation with the death ritual in Thulung community. The death ritual in Thulung is also considered as eco-friendly as it shows the direct link with the ecology or the natural balance. We can experience that the Kirat people worship various forms of the natures like land, hearth together with the fire, river, large tree, jungle, hill or mountain, cliff, water resources and thunder, throughout the year.

Some of the events found in Thulung death rituals complete the meaning of many of the themes previously considered in relation to domestic or village rituality. In critical observation of death ritual in Thulung community there can be found main three steps: pre-funeral, funeral and post-funeral function, such that there is a clear-cut consequence of these distinct steps. They are described sequentially as follows.

In the pre-funeral functioning, immediately after the death of a person, it is announced to the villagers in loud voice and they all stop to do their works on that day and gather at that house as soon as possible for funeral function. The senior females from each house bring a small quantity of non-filter local beer in the name of a dead person. When they gather all the informed people from the society, then it starts the funeral activity which is described below. Finally, the third step, called post-funeral function is performed after the funeral process<sup>3</sup>. This stage is also considered as the final stage of the funeral function in the Kirat Rai communities.

Thulung ethnicity covers a wide geographical area in eastern Nepal and traditionally from birth to death, they perform various rituals: periodical, seasonal and occasional. However, this study focuses on the death ritual from the perspective of the

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<sup>3</sup> The post-funeral function is also known as *danikhapma* or 'maraute kaam' in 'Thulung' locality.

theoretical issue called ‘ecocriticism’ of the Thulung community from the Pashupatinagar area of the Ilam district in easternmost Nepal. The Thulung community in this area is in minority and also is the combination of mixed society; however, with a deep interest and great importance Thulung people are following their traditional rituals till the date.

According to the census of 2011, there are 20,659 (8% of the total population of the ethnic Kirat Rai group) Thulung native speakers in Nepal. Among them 10,681 (i.e., 52% of the total Thulung population) are female, and 9,978 (i.e., 48% of the total Thulung population) are male. However, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of the Thulung speakers due to the geographical distribution and multilingual setting. In recent publications of the different authors, it is roughly claimed that there are more than 85 distinct *pachha* ‘clans’ within the Thulung ethnicity. Despite this claim, some others argue that there are distinctly identified 55 *pachha* ‘clans’ only in Thulung till the date.

According to the senior citizen from the Thulung community, it is believed that three generations ago, their ancestral migrated in Ilam area from their traditional homeland Deusa in southeast Solukhumbu district (that belongs to the *Majh-Kirat Pradesh* ‘mid-Kirat region’). So that there is a direct link of Thulung people from Ilam district historically with ‘Deusali’ or ‘Deusa Thulung’ (i.e., Deusa as the origin of the Thulung ethnicity in Solukhumbu district) called *Lannachyo*<sup>4</sup> as their ancestral motherland or ‘the Thulung homeland’ or their origin. There are many Thulung people living in different parts/villages, viz., Salleri, Sribung, Ilam, Banjho, Bhitte, Chitre, Pyang, Barbote, Fikkal, etc. of Ilam district. The census report 2068 shows

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Lannachyo* is originally pronounced as *lwanna* which means ‘got’ or ‘found’ and *chyoy* means ‘baby’. So, there is a myth about a foundling from which one of the clans *Lannachyo* is initiated in Thulung ethnicity.

that there are 1,089 Thulung people (i.e., 5.3% of the total Kirat Rai population) throughout the Ilam District.

Historically, based on distance from the Kathmandu valley, the whole Kirat region in east Nepal has been found separated into three distinct Kirat Pradesh 'Kirat regions'. They are *Wallo-Kirat Pradesh* 'hither or nearer Kirat region' (the geographical region in between two rivers: Sunkoshi and Likhu), *Majh-Kirat Pradesh* 'mid or central Kirat region' (from Likhu river to Arun river) and *Pallo-Kirat Pradesh* 'farther Kirat region' (in between Arun river and Mechi river). Among these three distinct historic Kirat regions, Thulung inhabit in both the mid and farther Kirat regions since a long time before. Thulung are inhabited mainly in 13 districts (Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, Udayapur, Khotang, Bhojpur, Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha, Tehrathum, Taplejung, Sunsari, Jhapa, Ilam and Panchthar) in the hilly region of eastern Nepal.

Thulung are traditionally a non-literate ethnic Kirat group of eastern Nepal. Like other Kirat communities, a distinct Kirat ethnic group Thulung has its own language, customs, ethnonym, social norms and values, and generations to generations, there is still existing orally transmitted their own mythology. In day to day ritual practices, a ritual specialist or expert from the Thulung local community is needed to meditate and communicate with the transcendent world. In a historic Thulung community, there are various ritual practices, viz., birth, name-giving, food-giving, cloth-giving (or hair shaving), marriage, death rituals, etc. It is also believed that there is a slight difference in the ritual practices within the Thulung communities from different areas.

Like many other Kirat communities, the death ritual in Thulung is compulsory. The death ritual is a most in two senses that firstly, it satisfies the family

members and secondly, even the departed soul (or spirit) of the dead person. So, the shaman or ritual expert<sup>5</sup> has an important role to guide the departed soul or the spirit of the dead to *balamdel* its 'final resting place' to join the ancestors and stay together with them forever there. Otherwise, it is believed in the Thulung community that dissatisfied spirit might give trouble to the family members, neighbours, and/or relatives generation to generations too. So that nokchho 'shaman' or 'ritual expert' with her/his muddum 'shamanistic knowledge', guides the departed soul to its certain destination<sup>6</sup> called *Balamdel* 'the place where all the departed souls from the natural death are ritually guided or sent'<sup>7</sup>. In terms of the nature and their implications of the death in Thulung community, there are mainly of three types: natural, unnatural and child death. The ritual phenomena are certainly different in accordance with the death category in the Thulung community.

According to the types of death in Thulung community, the funeral rites and the death ritual phenomena are performed differently in the following circumstances. As mentioned earlier, the three different types of death are described as follows:

#### (1) Natural Death

This is a most common type of death in any society and so as in the Thulung community. A normal death of a family member in old or matured age or passing away in a natural way is called a natural death. Here, the term 'natural' is considered as general or normal. Likewise, a natural death in the Thulung society is also known as *nuplam* 'normal death' in Thulung community. This type of death is called "good

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<sup>5</sup>The ritual expert sometimes also acts as a physician and treats the people the people by propitiating gods and spirits during an illness.

<sup>6</sup> Among 25 different Kirat ethnic groups, each of them have the separate *Balamdel* 'the place where all the departed souls from the natural death are ritually sent'

<sup>7</sup> In Thulung community, it is believed that the departed souls stay at a fixed place called *Balamdel* which is located in the place called Katunje in Okhaldhunga district in east Nepal.

way” or “normal way” and socially accepted with the sense that the departed soul may rest in peace. Additionally, the family members who pass away with the natural death are respected as the live ancestors in the Thulung community.

In this type of death, it is believed that those souls departed satisfactorily and due respect, are welcomed annually during the autumn season (while harvesting the new crops from the field) in the hearth and is offered the new cereals in their name. Every year, all the departed souls of the dead persons are invited into the hearth of the respective families of his or her clan on the occasion of the ritual performance. The Thulung people bury their dead in a cultivated field near their houses. A ritual expert is necessary for the burial. He addresses the spirit of the dead and requests it to go to its final resting place called Balamdel to join the ancestors.

## (2) Unnatural Death

The term ‘Unnatural’ signifies the inauspicious. So as the death that is inauspicious or unfavorable is called unnatural death. In Thulung community unnatural death in their native word is also called *jaksulam*. The word *jaksulam* is derived from the two independent words *jaksu* ‘badly’ or ‘abruptly’ and *lam* ‘way’, and hence the word *jaksulam* refers to the unnatural or deviant or accidental. It is believed that the soul of the person departed from the unnatural death chooses the “bad/wrong way” or socially unacceptable procedure. Such type of death like falling from the tree or cliff, being killed by someone or even by wild-beast or domestic animals, death during childbirth or pregnancy, committing suicide, drowning in the river or pond, by hanging, etc. fall under the unnatural death. The person who inherits the land and houses is responsible for the death rituals of the departed soul.

Generally, the eldest son inherits the parental property so, he is considered to be the one to follow the tradition and even performing the death rituals. In this type of



death, the departed soul is considered to be unsatisfied forever and is not invited into the hearth of the family of her/his clan on the occasion of the annual ritual performance. In this type of death, the dead body is buried not in the land belonging to the responsive family, but in the jungle far from the community. The body of the dead person is buried facing downward thinking that the departed soul should not come out from the ground.

### (3) Child Death

When a premature child or babyhood or infant is born and dies or, if a child dies before s/he has teeth, then the death is considered as inauspicious or child death. It is believed that the departed soul of the child also is not invited into the hearth of the family of his or her clan in the occasion of the ritual performance. The process of death ritual in this type of death is almost the same. Only the procedure for the funeral rites is different. In this type of funeral rites, the dead body is not put into a grave, instead, it is wrapped with a fresh white cloth and is kept in vertical position in a clay pot and the pot is buried safely in a cave or a secluded place somewhere in the jungle. (Figure 10 shows a cave for making the funeral spot for child death.) Then it is covered with thorns in order to make it safe. On the same day, the shaman or ritual expert guides the spirit of the dead child to its destination.

In Kirat culture, Death ritual is one of the most important acts of performance in the presence of the clans, neighbours and relatives and so as in the Thulung community too. Historically, Kirat people believe themselves as *Bhumiputra* 'son of the earth or land' so; they bury the dead body with the typical Kirat ritual after the death. During the social process, the body is affined whereas the soul is considered to be gathered in the *Bukuli* 'hearth' by the *bijuwa* or *nokchho* 'shaman'.

Ecocriticism demands for a better understanding of nature, and it both interprets and represents the natural world. It seeks to protect the ecological rights of nature. Since ecocriticism implore for a better understanding of nature and it seeks to protect the ecological rights of nature, and so as in Kirat philosophy, the social belief and the ritual practices focus on the preservation of ecology, promoting the environment and balancing the nature. As a result, they inherently worship and ritually guide to the preservation of ecology. Traditionally, Kirat people believe themselves as the worshipper of the ancestor and nature. Almost all the required materials for the ritual practices are originated to the nature and the theme of worshipping also tends to its preservation. In daily practices of the Kirat community, every activity is related to nature.

There are many similarities between the different ethnic Kirat communities. In Thulung death ritual, initially, the dead body is cleaned with *sun-pani* 'gold-water' thinking that the impurity is removed. The old clothes are replaced with the new one and then it is wrapped in the fresh white cloth called *sankhim* 'Katro in Nepali'. Covering with that fresh cloth, it is knitted with the pieces of fresh bamboo stripes called *pepersu* in the native language. Those stripes are made from the fresh green bamboo which is cut at the very moment. Ritually, required things like boiled rice, banana leaves, fresh green bamboo vessels with local beer or alcohol, are kept near the head of the dead body.

Similarly, a coin is placed on the forehead of the dead body. Traditionally, long ago, they used to put or offer the precious stones called *jee mala* or *matimala* (stone beads) at the tip of the hands and legs in the name of the departed soul thinking that the dead person will be satisfied using that precious stone even after her/his death. However, in the present context, many graves in different Kirat communities at

night time have been dug up in search of such stone. So, Kirat people stopped offering such precious things in the name of the dead person thinking that the grave might be dug up immediately in search of the precious stones. On the other hand, the departed soul will be irritated and give trouble with such temptation.

According to a local informant Mrs. Lal Maya Rai (76 years) of Pashupatinagar (Ilam), “Long time ago, Kirati people used to offer male buffalo on the occasion of funeral rites in the name of dead person.” She shared her true experience that they used to kill a male buffalo and a pig and eat the meat instantly which was supposed to be a part of death ritual at that time. But nowadays, such primordial types of rituals have undergone change. However, in modern tradition, offering any animals in the name of the dead person is considered as too conservative thought and old tradition, which is not logical and socially intolerable. So, offering any precious stones or animals in the name of departed soul in recent trend is entirely ignored.

In a book about Kirat ethnicity, *Rites of Passage: An Aspect of Rai Culture* Sueyoshi Toba talks about the culture of the Rai Community. He talks about the death burial process in the Kirat Rai culture:

Most human societies have beliefs in souls, spirits, or an afterlife of some sort. Furthermore, it is also elucidated that the special rituals in Kirat communities are generally performed when people die. Like other rites of passage, these death rituals vary greatly, but they do have certain elements in common. All attention centre upon the deceased and upon the bereaved. The disposal of the body of the deceased is also usually a focus of these rites. (37)

In Thulung ritual practice, immediately after the death of a person, the dead body should be kept nearby the main door. The traditional belief and custom say that the

head of the dead body should be pointing towards the main door. After that, during the funeral ceremony, people gather with respect and offer flowers and garlands to the departed soul of a dead person and pray for the rest of peace. So, this is the reason behind making garden and plants the flowers around the grave.

After gathering of the neighbours, relatives or concerned people, it starts the funeral procession. Two senior females smear the house with left hands using the mixture of cow-dung and water (excluding any type of soil) in the reversed direction to normal practice (i.e., outwards)<sup>8</sup>. In the meantime the body is covered with *sunkhim* ‘a white fresh cloth’ then the dead body is offered local alcohol by the shaman through its mouth with the left hand. Then it is wrapped with a fresh bamboo mat and tied up it with two fresh green bamboo pieces with strips and then it is carried to the place where it supposed to be buried<sup>9</sup>.

The funeral procession is always lead by the shaman (i.e., shaman). Before starting the funeral procession, they take out firewood with fire from reverse site to the common practice with the left hand by the shaman and on the way, the shaman or elderly person holding burning firewood lead them all. They should be alert to keep safe touching the dead body safe from the touch of pets and the people from other castes while carrying to the burial place. In case it happens, it is traditionally believed that the departed soul would be irritated and give trouble to the family members forever. In this case, it is case the departed soul is considered as *hili sasi* ‘a form of ghost’

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<sup>8</sup> In Thulung community, it is extremely prohibited to smear the house with left hand and any two persons once at a time in any urgent cases too.

<sup>9</sup> There should be used a bamboo which is cut at that very moment and all the things should be prepared with that bamboo only.

After reaching the destination (i.e., the proposed place to be buried the dead body), a coin is offered to the land in the name of the departed soul<sup>10</sup>. Then they start to dig a grave. While digging the land, they start with the left hand which is considered the reverse way as the usual way of digging in normal practice. After finishing digging the grave, the footprint is wiped out with *seuli* (small fresh branches with leaves particularly of *Castenupsisindica* ‘Nep. Katus’). Then, the grave is paved with flat pieces of stones in the shape of a cubical box. The dead body is taken around the grave three times clockwise, and then it is put gently inside the grave. While putting it the head should be kept eastward. Then, two symbolic ladders made of nettle stalks or thorny plants particularly of raspberry (the one with seven steps in the reverse direction in the name of the dead person and another ladder with nine steps in upward direction for the members of the funeral procession) are kept in vertical position, and first covered again with the flat stones and mud. After the dead body is buried inside the stone box within the soil, those who take part in the funeral procession (i.e., all the relatives or the kinships) offer the soil, called *matti* ‘the soil offered in the name of the departed soul of the dead person’ into the grave three times with left hand and reversely and immediately, offer three times to self with right hand for one’s well-being.

Then, the shaman calls the spirit of the dead person and takes out the ladder and chants for the separation of the departed soul from those who appear in the funeral procession. The shaman persuades the departed soul to be fully satisfied

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<sup>10</sup> Offering a coin in the name of departed soul to the ground signifies the respecting or worshipping the nature or showing the ritual belief in favour of the ecology.

forever and be rest in peace with other departed souls or ancestors. A part of chant for the symbolic representation in proper Thulung language is given as follows<sup>11</sup>

*... ane, gana ne hesaka re damna ma. hamraknama re ilamplanchenna.  
hangkobomubaira, pomuwobaira. ago bare aneganaka ne guilaiparjyolna ma  
laknalo ne minulaksawou, am ilamjyongkadeptolada. aneganakailam ditto  
minukatunjeghela re ganabatpakhombu e. meddakhollekhali la laksa.  
guikalalannenokchho-kharawabesaka hila boku. memsakaganabimubasi,  
bisakapomubasi ma ethatwakkusulambomubasisyo.*

(Translation: ... today, how did you separate from us? Why did you forget your way? You still had to do and eat a lot here on this earth. Now, you left us and departed from us. You follow your own way, and you determine to follow your proper way to reach the destination. You should not miss your way in this regard. You should reach the Katunje (in Okhaldhunga district) and stay together with the ancestors there. That is the right place where you should directly go and we shall ask later on with the help of shaman whether you reached there or not. We shall call you together with the ancestral on the occasion of our annual ritual and you should come on that occasion only. Then you should stay in your own secret place and should not miss from there.)  
(Source: Mani Kumar Rai, 45)

When a male is dead, the grave is made sharp-pointed (i.e., like a hill) and a *betho* 'Khukuri' is kept above the head on the grave. Likewise, when a female dies, the grave is made the flat top and a *khurmi* 'Sickle' is kept above the head on the grave. Besides, the selected personal materials used by the dead person are also put on

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<sup>11</sup> The presented chant in 'Thulung' language is transcribed from live recording in an occasion of funeral rites in Pashupati in 2016.

the grave. But in recent trend, the useful materials are sent to the child and senior citizen care centre instead of putting on the grave.

After the completion of burial activities in the grave, all the participants touch and cross over the fire and throne put on the way to return from there, so that the departed soul should not follow them and return to the house again. Everyone steps over the throne one by one saying that 'forgive us, and protect us'. Before entering the house, they all step over a piece of burning rapped cloth called *supe* 'a burning rapped cloth made from a cloth piece' for the safety and protection of individual soul.

While returning from the grave, they all go directly to the water resources, where the son(s) of the dead person have their hair cut. In this social process, maternal uncle or son-in-law is needed for haircut and sisterhood collects the cut hair in *thahar* 'leaf-plates'. In the absence of maternal uncle or sisterhoods, anybody from the close relatives can play this urgent role. While cutting the hair, there should be started with the left hand in the reverse direction as well. After cutting the hair, they have a bath in the water source.

After returning to the house from the funeral procession, the family members are considered ritually as impure. So, it is prohibited to do daily activities relating the occupation or profession for minimum three days. During that period, they are not allowed to have some certain edible items like salt, garlic, oil, etc. for few (particularly odd numbers like 3, 5, 7 or 9) days. Normally, the regular salty, oily and sour foods are avoided for 3 days. However, due to the influence of modern concept and acculturation, there is flexibility in social obligations, rules and regulations as well. It seems the reflection of the direct impact of such hurdles even in the Thulungrituals and they are reducing the number of days for prohibition period too.

In the collection of the essay, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and further he says human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature.”(xix)

Just like the statement about the ecocriticism mentioned in the essay, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, by Cheryll Glotfelty, there is a direct link between the Thulung culture or ritual and the physical world and vice versa too. For example, in death ritual in Thulung community, they need the land different materials that grow in nature or physical world. Ultimately, the dead body decays inside the ground and it affects the physical world or nature too. As a result, this interrelation between the physical world and the human activities balance the nature which is a suitable example of ecocriticism in the Thulung ethnicity.

Likewise, Gerg Garrad in his renown book '*Ecocriticism*' he talks about the Red Indians as an idealized indigenous culture links it to the other major eco-critical inflection of dwelling, the notion of the Ecological Indian. From this book, it is understood that the ethnic groups either Red Indians or the Mongoloid like Thulung from the Himalayish country Nepal, there are some similarities like the worshipper of the nature as Thulung people and ecologically conscious as well.

Ecocriticism invites the entire outlook into its trends to show the relation between the living and non-living beings. It is believed that human body is formed with the composition of the five components or elements available in nature (i.e., Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space). When the dead body is buried in the ground, it decays and those components mixed again into nature. In other words, nature regains



the elements formed from the decomposition of the dead body. The burial process itself is the eco-friendly and spiritually symbolic representation of ritual in the Thulung community within the Kirat ethnicity. So, that the Kirat ritual (from birth to death) is entirely dependent on nature.

It neither destructs the nature nor pollutes the environment, but it is eco-friendly indeed. During the time of impurity, the clan members of dead person use *Artemisia vulgaris* 'titepati' to discard the impurities. The use of *toba* 'green bamboo vessel' in the funeral procession also symbolizes the respect upon nature. Ecocriticism investigates the relationship between the literature and the physical environment with the proper world. Ecocriticism keeps the environment at the center and believes nature as the foundation of knowledge required for sustaining any ritual or culture.

In *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, ISLE, the official journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, explores not only the inter-relationship between human beings and the natural world, but also it publishes articles from literary scholars, environmental historians, specialists in the visual and performing arts, environmental philosophers, geographers, economists, ecologists, and scholars in other fields relevant to "literature and environment." The interdisciplinary character of nature is not only limit to the text but also in other fields too. Ecocriticism is, by nature, an interdisciplinary exercise. Cultural works engage environmental history, sociology and natural sciences.

According to the Kirat culture, people die at different ages and due to different causes, so accordance with the way of the people's death, the funeral rites are performed differently. If a child dies, then the dead body is cleaned with *sun-pani* 'gold-water' and is put on new clothes and then it is wrapped it in the fresh white cloth. Then it is put into the slightly broken clay pot and the lid is covered with the

cloth. The child is kept sitting upright position inside the vessel. It is believed that the spirit of such child goes to the *Paruhang* 'sky'. It is also believed that the child gets rebirth again on this earth. Here, the symbolic representation of cleaning the dead body with *sun-pani* 'gold-water' and is put on new clothes is a direct link with the relationship between nature and culture, and gradual growth of ecocriticism indeed.

There is a direct link in between the Kirat ritual and the ecology and so is Thulung ritual is related to ecology. Since Thulung people are the worshiper of nature, and hence, their rituals from birth to death are dependent on nature. The things that are found in nature, depending on the things they bury the deceased body. Consciousness raising is its most important task indeed. The in-depth research in Thulung ritual shows that there is a deep relationship in between the nature preserve and the Thulung death rituals.

A pioneering theorist Richard Schechner talks about the entire field, which ranges from everyday life to rituals and arts. A performance study is a field where we can use the performances as a lens to study the world. The method of research projects the study of literature research and oral history with performance practice. Schechner's goal is to unite all applications of performance under one theory which is inclusive of its many applications, with the practices of both classical and modern theater. In this regards, Schechner observes that the social codes of our daily lives are adapted to greater or lesser degrees by everyone. In Performance Studies, Schechner asserts that 'Performing onstage, performing in special social situations (public ceremonies, for example), and performing in everyday life are a continuum'. Schechner in his contention each and every one of us in some sense as a 'performer' is difficult to dispute. (143)

So as the performance of Thulung rituals under their culture can be taken as the example of the application of Performance theory, where they perform their ritual practices in day to day life activities and the death ritual as well.

As with all academic studies, performance theory is founded on certain key principles, which include such terms as ‘presentation of self’, ‘restored behaviour’ and ‘expressive culture’, and incorporates social drama and ritual. His concept of performance, which contrasts sharply with previous, principally modernist, approaches to the arts, asserts the importance of different ‘systems of transformations’, which vary enormously from culture to culture, and throughout historical periods and movements.

Purification is the most important aspect of ritual in the Thulung. Meanwhile, *bijuwas* or *nokchho* ‘shaman’ plays an important role in the purification of the lineage and houses too. When people die, naturally the soul of the dead person is invited into the hearth. In Thulung rituals, the departed souls from the natural death are welcomed into the hearth by offering the new crops and local alcohol with the right hand whereas the departed souls from the unnatural death are not welcomed into the hearth, but are welcomed in courtyard and are offered the new crops and local alcohol with left hand outside the house. The study is related to the ritual of Thulung community which provides provisions for a close relationship between the everyday life to rituals and arts which is also considered as an ethical value of ecocriticism.

We can find performance everywhere, in daily behavior, in the professions, in the arts and in the language. So far as the performance theory is concerned, the death ritual in Thulung Community is a unique. In the 7th day of the death of a person, all the relatives are invited to the purification aspect of the death ritual. Traditionally, this type of performance is called *marautekaam* ‘the ritual performance in the name of

dead people'. Since the death ritual is considered to last no longer, there should be done within few days in the odd month and day. If somebody dies on the last day of a month, it would be counted as even from the day of death and there should be an obligation to perform all the rituals on the same day too. At that time, relatives bring local alcohol called *chachhuwa* 'the alcohol brought especially in the name of dead person'. The shaman offers a little portion of alcohol from each vessel nearby the hearth by chanting and recalling the dead person on that occasion. In figure 9, we can see the ritual expert offering the local beer and alcohol on the hearth in the name of a departed soul. When it is finished to offer *chachhuwa* before the dusk, the shaman guides the departed soul persuading it up to the *balamdel* 'holy place' of Thulung community (i.e. Katunje in Okhaldhunga District)<sup>12</sup>. (In figure 8, 9 and 10, the shaman performing *Chinta* in the process of calling departed soul in its farewell function where, he perform for the guidance of departed soul to reach up to the destination Katunje, Okhaldunga.)

In everyday life performing involves people in a wide range of activities from solo or intimate performances behind closed doors to small group activities to interacting as a part of a gathering, from individual activities to team effort, personal work to social functioning, even in the ritual activities in any society. And so as in the Thulung death ritual. In this occasion, the shaman or ritual expert chants in this way:

*ane, gana ne damna, ilamdidanna mane, ham re bomu ma, kukuka ne ane kane  
hamwo miboku syo, ganaka ne khole parjyolna, bukuli wo parjyolna ane  
ganane mekotinga danna mane. hopmanga khi dimsyo, bungma wo gasle,  
nepsung wo damle. gui khotle nga michi wo memanga dimso. gana ne lanna*

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<sup>12</sup> Then, all the departed soul staying at *Balamdel* are invited and offered the crops and alcohol annually in the occasion of Hearth worshipping called *Nagi*.

*lone silai wo dukhagwamu mibasi syo. isulamduwa, ilamdilanga jyongka  
laksa, odda ne aneguika ne ganalai lam phaktosyo, minulaksa, anumibikasyo.*

(Translation: today, unfortunately you died, and got lost, all of a sudden, you separated from us, there is no more way to stay together. Fate is destiny; nothing can be done furthermore in your name. Unwillingly, you left us, separated from all relatives too. As we know, everything disappears, sun also hides and flowers weather too. We all people in the same way disappear one day too. When you departed from us, you should not give us any trouble. We have sent you to your destination and you should go there directly and should not return here.) (Source: Mani Kumar Rai, 45)

According to another informant, Vice-Chancellor of Kirat Rai Academic Council, and the researcher (Linguistics) Dr. Netra Mani Rai, “in context of performance theory linked with the recent revived concept of post-modernism, ‘think globally, act locally’, not only in Thulung community of Ilam District, but also in whole the Kirat communities, there is a direct influence of Hinduism even in death ritual. However, the Kirat ethnic groups have tried their best to preserve their typical rituals. In the local context, Thulung community in Ilam are still following the tradition and the dead body is still buried in the land rather than burning it in the river side<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, the existing traditional activities like offering the precious stone, coin, banana leaves and alcohol in the name of the departed soul are considered as the symbolic representation of the interconnection of the death ritual with the ecology in Thulung community, even in the Pashupatinagar (Ilam) area. At this point, we can see the remarkable value of ecocriticism in the sense of possible connections among self, society and nature.

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the ritual rites, some Kirat communities, it has been changed the process of burial rites and started burning in the riverside.

Furthermore, some certain ritual activities like drinking milk for a year in mother's death, even millet beer or liquor, active participation in entertainment like singing and dancing, initiation of new works like construction of new house, eating meat, eating on a metallic plate, wearing new cloth, using mustard oil, greeting or bowing to others in any occasions, eating anything touched by other caste, involving or managing marriage ceremony or any other ritual activities in the family are ethically prohibited. However, in modern fashion, due to the acculturation and globalization, many typical ritual practices and social believes like food habits, dressing, and daily practices related to death ritual have been gradually simplifying or avoiding day by day.”

In this regards, Mrs. Himali Thulung Rai (52 years old) expresses her views that the Thulung community in Pashupatinagar area is mixed up with many other castes. Within the Kirat Rai ethnic group, there is the combination of Bantawa, Chamling, Koyee, etc. in different proportions. So, there is not clear and pure ritual performance of any ethnic Rai groups. They all follow the common types of ritual performance. On the other hand, in context of Nepal, there is also the direct influence of Hindu culture globally. However, she claims ‘there are some certain activities like mourning practices, calling the departed souls in the hearth annually, the newly grown fresh crops offering to the name of the ancestors who departed earlier, the procedures for ritual performance, etc. are different from other ethnic Kirat Rai groups’.

According to Mrs. Rai, the required materials on the occasion of calling the departed souls in the hearth and offering the newly harvested cereals are paddy, rice, ginger together green plant, banana leaves, bamboo vessels, fresh green leaves etc. In connection with the death ritual together with the social belief and the ecology, Nicholas J. Allen has talked about the myth and oral tradition of Thulung community.

He says ritual language prayers are sometimes uttered without being chanted. When at a death ceremony, the mourners utter blunt and awkward instruction to the soul of the departed. Death ritual as a whole is discussed briefly through it reflects the core values of the society.

So, the shaman or ritual expert guides the departed soul with chanting this way:

*gana ne ane gukulai parjyolna, minu balamdella laksa, minu laksama medda  
khollye nga bumi, mam wo bumi, pap wo bumi, medda khotle ghryomsaka  
kohenga bumu, yetha nokshyo kharawa besaka hilaboku, memsaka bumusy.  
Gukuka ganalai wo aki mam-pap nga rwaku syo.*

(Translation: today, you separated from us and left alone, you should go directly to *balamdel* to stay together with the ancestral. All the ancestral are there and you should enjoy with them forever. We shall ask with the help of shaman whether you are there or not. You are now the member of the ancestral there and should not leave them at any cost. Make sure, you are also an ancestor from today and you will get the respect as one of the ancestral there.) (Source: Mani Kumar Rai, 45)

Death ritual has its own myth. According to the myth in the Thulung community, there used to live two sisters and their younger brother named *Tayama*, *Khiyama* and *Hechakuppa*, respectively. Their parents were *Patisu* (father) and *Dilidoma* (mother). They lost their parents while they were the child and they were orphan in childhood. With lots struggles, *Tayama* and *Khiyama* looked after their younger brother.

Despite their hardwork, they suffered from starvation in their childhood. They used to go here and there in search of foods. One day, when both sisters went to the

jungle in search of food. They took so long time searching foods. Unfortunately, Hechakuppa became unconscious due to hunger for a long time. When sisters came back, they found their brother lying on the ground unconsciously. They surprised seeing the unexpected situation and thought that their brother already died, so they felt sorrow and grief.

The two sisters did not have any specific idea about the funeral rites as they were too young. Instead of burying the dead body in the ground, they covered it with fresh green banana leaves and with some ripe bananas. Due to the sudden death of their beloved single brother and his live memory, they could not stay furthermore in the same place and Tayama (elder sister) moved to the upper hillside (or mountain) and Khiyama (younger sister) moved to the plain area (or Terai). Before leaving to each-other, the two sisters planted two kinds of flowers for the well-being and symbolic natural representation of their good health. They also made a promise to meet each other in the same place where they plant the flowers and to know each other whether they are fine or something is going to happen.

Then *Tayama* became a bird called *Munal* and flew to the mountain side and *Khiyama* became peacock and flew down to the Terai. After some time, *Hechakuppa* came into consciousness and looked around his two elder sisters, but he could find them nowhere there. He was very hungry and frustrated. In the meantime, near the grave, he found some bananas and ate it. He also started to hunt dove for surviving. While eating those doves, he threw the goiter on the ground. There was a collection of cereals in the goiter and from that seeds of different cereals, it sprouts and started to grow as the plant on the ground. In Kirati myth, agriculture was started from that time. From that time it is believed that the death ritual in Kirat community was



started. And hence, from this Kirati myth, the process of germination of seed and growing plants is the support to nature and eco-friendly too.

Thulung death ritual is depended on nature. Every activity of human has its great impact on nature. This thesis tries to show the positive impact of nature on the human being. Thulung people consider themselves as a lineage of nature so their ritual is also related to nature or ecology. They believe in transforming themselves into the earth after their lives. After the death, the person is buried. A stone tablet with an inscription of the date, the name of the deceased and carving of the sun and the moon at the top is erected in the middle of the *chautara* (Rest-platform). (Figure 5: The name plate (with a brief description of the died person) fixed by the side of the grave.)

Various types of flowers are planted around the grave. It is a common practice among the Kirat Rai communities and so do the Thulung people to construct a stone *chautara*, erect a wooden bench, and plant a couple of bar-pipal trees in the memorial of the dead person to provide shelter and shade for way-farers by the main trail as a memorial to the dead. In addition to this event, mourning is observed by the nearest kinsmen of the deceased, who abstain from eating salt, oil, meat and liquor for six days. (Figure 2, 3 and 4 shows the external view of the grave together with the decorated garlands offered to the departed soul. Offering garlands by the family members, neighbours and the relatives in the name of departed soul.)

The son or other relatives who inherit the property of the deceased person are supposed to finance these constructions and also to provide a feast in the name of the dead person. To the feast, they invite all the villagers and relatives, even if they happen to live in a different village in the surrounding areas. The guest and the people

who helped to construct the memorial are served boiled rice, male-buffalo meat and local drinks.

From both aspects, ritually and scientifically, the death rituals is one of the important acts of performance, that differ from cultures of different ethnic Rai groups too. It is seen that the people who inherit the property is responsible for the construction and also provide feast in the name of the dead. It is believed that the act done will help the dead people to gain the prosperity in the next world.

In its fundamental aspects, an ecosystem involves the regular circulation transformation and growth of energy and matter through the medium of living things and their activities. Photosynthesis, decomposition, herbivore, predation, parasitism, and other symbiotic activities are among the principal biological processes responsible for the transport and storage of materials and energy, and the interactions of the organisms engaged in these activities provide the pathways of distribution. The food-chain is an example of such a pathway.

After the body is deceased, it is buried in the grave. The death ritual in Thulung ethnicity is primarily dependent on nature. So, there is a close relationship between the human being and nature. The required materials that are used in the performance we get it from nature. Things like the stone to make the grave, planting flowers around the grave, making Chautari and planting *bar-pipal* in the name of the dead people, making garden near the house, etc. The different materials found in nature they bury the deceased body inside the ground or earth, so that soil becomes fertile to grow new plants. As a result, it balances the ecology together with the promotion of nature. So, we see distinctly that there is a close relationship between nature and the death ritual activities in the Thulung community.

While talking about the non-living part of the ecosystem, in, general, circulation of energy and matter is completed by such physical processes as evaporation and precipitation, erosion and deposition. So that the ecologist is primarily concerned with the qualities of matter and energy that pass through a given ecosystem and with the rates at which they do so. Of almost equal significance, however, are the kinds of organisms that are presented in any particular ecosystem and the role that they occupy in its structure and organization. Thus, in the description and comparison of ecosystems, both quantitative and qualitative aspects need to be considered.

While decaying the dead body inside the ground it promotes the nature rather than polluting it. All the body parts decompose and dissolve into the soil and there will be recirculation of the components to maintain the ecology. From the viewpoint of performance theory, the death ritual in Thulung community is eco-friendly and in favour of the ecocriticism too.

This shows the recycle in the nature and the natural process of the ecosystem. Likewise, there is a continuing process of regenerating the nature and maintaining the ecosystem with the support of the human life too. In Kirat or Thulung death ritual, nature is taken as an important aspect of the human being with great honor and respect. So, their life is closely rooted in nature before and after death.

From above interpretation, we can draw the conclusion that death ritual in Thulung community is directly linked with the nature accommodating (i.e eco-friendly). The required materials for the death rituals are; seuli, green bamboo, rice, fire, throne, nettle, stone, etc. which is directly linked to nature. This show that favour for the ecocriticism. (Figure 1 shows the ritual practice of offering the specified materials.)

Furthermore, it justifies the definition of ecocriticism, articulated by Cheryll Glotfelty as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and the connection of human culture to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism theory says that, “Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environment concerns and examine the various literatures treats the subject of nature.” From the perspective of the death ritual of Thulung community that Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections specifically between nature and ritual.