

Collective Knowledge and Cultural Practices in the Marriage Ceremony of the Chamling Rai Community

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Abstract

This paper explores the collective knowledge and practices in the marriage ceremony of the Chamling Rai community. Modernization, migration, and socio-economic changes are affecting indigenous cultures and practices, although the Chamling Rai community continues to sustain the marriage ceremony as a collective practice. In the research, open-ended interviews and secondary data are the main research methods for data collection. Sanchep practices in the marriage of the Chamling Rai community is the main finding of the research. Although ritual dialogues, decision-making, voluntary collective labor, shared meal, collective blessing, and group dances are also main collective indigenous knowledge and practices in the marriage ceremony. These collective functions and practices help the mechanisms to transfer indigenous knowledge, social norms, and values across generations. The study shows that the marriage ceremony of the Chamling Rai community plays a vital role in preserving cultural collective practices.

Keywords:

collective practices, indigenous knowledge, Sanchep, marriage ceremony, Kirat ritual

Introduction

Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethical country. So, different ethnic groups and castes have their own practices and lifestyles. Mostly, the indigenous people of Nepal have collective cultural practices. Among them, the Chamling Rai community, a sub-group of the Kirat Rai community, is one of them who have distinct indigenous collective knowledge and cultural practices. Because they have been following their cultures, rituals, and traditions collectively (Rai, 2079, p. 98) for years, which are transforming their cultural practices through myths (Mithak), Mundum, ancestors (Purkha), and ritual performances rather than written texts.

Marriage ceremony is a significant event through which people express their shared values, social relationships, and transmit collective knowledge generation to the next. In numerous indigenous cultures, marriage represents not just a personal bond between individuals but also a communal institution rich with symbolic interpretations, ritual practices, and customary regulations that mirror the community's worldview (Pallathadka et al., 2022). Within the Chamling Rai community, a sub-group of Kirat Rai, the marriage ceremony plays a vital role in preserving knowledge, identity, and collective practices Rai, (2020), which is the living archives of indigenous knowledge, oral history, and ritual display of art that have been maintained through enduring cultural traditions (Rai, 2020a).

In recent decades, most of the indigenous people of Nepal have maintained their indigenous knowledge and practices, which are collectively performing, but globalization, migration, modernization, and socio-economic changes have increasingly challenged the continuity of indigenous cultural practices in Nepal (Shrestha et al., 2025). In addition, policies of the state, changing religion, inter-caste marriages, rapid urbanization, and changing livelihood patterns, etc., are the reasons for the shifting of the rituals of indigenous people (Shrestha & Praveen, 2024).

Indigenous people of Nepal have different collective practices in different events. The Kirat Rai community has different collective knowledge which they apply to their cultural and ritual practices. The ritual, expressed primarily through collective dance, functions as a dynamic process of identity formation and empowerment. Ultimately, Sakela runs as a space of memory and unity which shows reconnect individuals to their collective past while ensuring the continuity of Kirat identity in contemporary society (Ghimire et al., 2019). For the Chamling Rai Community, these transformations are visible in the adjustments made during marriage ceremonies. Though this community has collective practices in the marriage ceremony.

Although the oral traditions, linguistic heritage, and shamanic practices have been studied in Kirat Rai communities, the Chamling sub-group of the Rai community has not been examined academically. Rai Puspa Raj cited that a foreign researcher conducted shamanistic research in the 1970s in Nepal on different castes and groups like Limbu, Kulung, and Thulung communities (P Rai, 2020a). This limited work highlights a gap in understanding how the Chamling Rai community preserves their collective knowledge through marriage ceremonies and how these ceremonies serve as sites for cultural reproduction. By focusing on the Chamling Rai marriage ceremony, this study aims to address these gaps and provide a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems within a specific cultural setting.

According to Rai (2018), there are four main types of marriage practised in the Rai community: arranged marriage, marriage by capture or elopement, marriage based on mutual agreement (love marriage), and marriage by fine payment (known as jari bibaha). Bhogi Raj Chamling, a Mundum expert, states there are nearly six types of marriage: stolen marriage, capture or elopement marriage, sister-in-law marriage, arranged marriage, fine payment marriage, and widow marriage. According to Thapa (2080), Chamling Rai has five marriage practices: arranged marriage, love marriage, stolen marriage, capture or elopement marriage, and fine payment marriage (Jari). However, Rai (2014, p.114) argues that there

are three main types: an arranged marriage (magi bibaha), marriage by capture or elopement (chori bibaha), and love marriage (prem bibaha). Most Rai families prefer arranged marriages over other types, and there are communal or structural norms guiding partner selection rather than individual preferences.

Indeed, indigenous knowledge in Nepal highlights the significance of collective practices in preserving cultural resilience (Bhattachan, 2002; Pradhan, 2019). "Ma-Hukma is an important collective festival of the Limbu community, during which descendants gather to conduct clan worship. The time of the festival may be a night, three nights, or sometimes three to seven nights (Subba, 2079)." Every year during Ubhauri, members of similar clans and families gather at the riverbank, where the Tangsing Mundhum is sung and recited as part of the collective ritual practices (Kaila, 2079). Similarly, Jharphuk is associated with the collective belief system of the Magar people, who view illness not merely as a physical ailment but as a manifestation of spiritual imbalance requiring holistic intervention (Bhurtel et al., 2025).

The Kirat Rai community has a saying, "Dash Rai, Dash Bhasha, Ek Chulo", which proves that the Kirat Rai community have collective practices (Hatuwali, 2069, 62), though they do not have their written rules, norms, and values for the collective practices. According to Etzioni (1968), collective practices consist of individuals who are bound by social rules together through common social values and norms (Brewer & Chen, 2007).

Under these circumstances, groups whose members are linked less by common culture than by a common history or common experiences of dominant structures can qualify for a group right only if group members' own act of identification is invested with enormous ethical significance (Holder & Corntassel, 2002). Conversely, the average score in the orientation toward collectivist interests was higher than that towards individualistic values in the participants (Gutiérrez-Carmona et al., 2021). While collectivism may focus on the level of group categories, such as in-group/out-group or demographics, relationalism focuses on the actual relations between the persons within the collective (Zaharna, 2016).

The integration of indigenous knowledge into science curricula not only fosters inclusivity but also contributes to the broader goals of decolonizing education and promoting educational equity. The study advocates for a curriculum reform that acknowledges indigenous epistemologies as legitimate and valuable sources of scientific knowledge (Oladipupo et al., 2025). So, it is necessary to implement what is sought by the constitution to create an impact on the Kirat community so that people can come together to learn and earn education about their local culture and traditions in order to meet the global challenges (Rai, 2020).

Different assumptions about individual choice shape how relationships are understood in OPR research, especially in terms of trust, mutuality, and satisfaction. While Western perspectives often see dissatisfaction as enough to end a relationship, the African perspective values commitment to social roles, meaning relationships may continue despite dissatisfaction. Here, "rational behavior" is fulfilling social expectations, which broadens the understanding of relationships, community cooperation, and collective action (Zaharna, 2016).

Despite the centrality of social groups to the concept of collectivism, surprisingly little attention has been given to the meaning of “collectives” in the theorizing and the measurement of collectivism. In this paper, we will argue that even though the construct has been labeled “collectivism,” the target in-groups referred to in most existing measures of this construct are not collectives (or even groups) at all (Brewer & Chen, 2007).

The main query of this research is what ways do collective cultural practices are performed in the Chamling Rai community in the marriage ceremony? How are collective cultural practices performed in Chamling Rai marriage ceremonies to strengthen social cohesion, social collaboration, and cultural identity by marriage in the Chamling Rai community? The main objective of this research is to understand the collective indigenous knowledge and practices in the marriage ceremony of the Chamling Rai community and to point out different collective practices in the Chamling Rai community while performing the marriage ceremony.

Methods

Khotang district has been selected as the study area. Among them, Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality, Sakela Rural Municipality, Halesi Tuwachung Municipality, Khotelang Rural Municipality, and Diprung Chuichumma Rural Municipality are densely populated areas of the Chamling Rai community. The sampling unit is the Chamling Rai community, where a cultural expert, who is called Hosung and Pasung (an elder person). Primary data have been collected by the open-ended interview, and secondary data have been collected through a review of existing literature on culture, traditions, and customs, and sociological studies on marriage rituals. A key informant interview schedule was used to collect detailed information for identifying collective practices. After reaching the field site, the researcher conducted planned interviews as well as informal conversations with Hosung and Pasung. The Basic qualitative research method is used in this research, and data were analyzed through screening, editing, and interpretation. This study is limited to the Chamling Rai community and does not include other Rai groups.

Results

Sangchep/Rosung and Collective Practices in Marriage

Sangchep/Rosung is a collective of indigenous knowledge and practices within kin and other relatives. It is practicing "to social harmony, integrity, mutual help and support rather than monetary benefits and it is not just a celebration or process of giving, receiving, and returning; it generates differences in society in many ways. It is also known as a unit of social system (Rai, 2014). But nowadays, it is financial and other materials only. Though it is performing continuously from the generation. Shubhaser Rai, Chamling cultural expert (Hosung Pasung), explains that each family should maintain and preserve the economic contribution from their kin and relatives as a historical collective document, which is known as 'Sangchep'.

Collectiveness in Mundum Rituals and Languages in marriage

Chamling Rai performs different Mundum Rituals in marriage through conversation. Sometimes, the conversation starts from the bride's side and sometimes from the groom's. They use collective languages in the conversations; our, yours, etc., during the

performing period. Bhogiraj Chamling has taken in Mundum Hosung (...) two sides, the bride and bridegroom party, and conversations.

Suppose we give our daughter to you. What could you do for our daughter if at her new home she would not cook well, would not know how to collect firewood in the jungle, how to farm chickens and pigs, and how to respect and please her in-laws? What would you do to our daughter then? ... Your daughter is being our daughter - in - law. If she did not know how to cook, collect firewood, farm chicken and pigs, fetch water, respect her father and mothers-in-law, we would teach her. We would not blame you. (Chamling, ...)

The bride party states collectively and respectfully to the bridegroom party (Janti) about the bride and her weakness without any hesitation, and responds from the bridegroom party in the same way.

According to key informants, the Chamling Rai community states and performs Mundum and rituals collectively in each step of marriage. Before marriage, at the time of proposal, the parents of the bridegroom, called the nearest blood relatives, called Waitung for communication, discuss collectively. Before the marriage ceremony, at the time of marriage, and at the end of the marriage, at all times.

Collective Decision-Making Practices in Marriage

Every function of marriage in Chamling Rai is decided collectively. At the time of proposal, parents call waitung, and they decide who will be Kopi (Kaliya), the person who is appointed as the main performer in marriage. Key informants define that all functions performed in marriage, like choice of Sungkakho Wakalo (Khana Bhanse), team for preparing food, cooking and serving; Suindhima (Raksi Bhanse), alcohol collector and distributor; Khopami (Nimtalu Heralu), the person who looks after kin and relatives; Toroppa Oini (Behula ko Sathi); Toroma Oini (Behuliko sathi); Rungchhoropa (Nimtowal), the person who informs kin and relatives; Saawaini (Butcher). They do not perform even a function without a collective decision.

Key informant Tej Kumar Rai, who is called Maila Dhama locally, says the ritual performed in marriage, which is called Hosung (Rit), materials and communications, are collectively discussed by Hosung and pasung. Second day of marriage, Chamling Rai performs a special function, which is called. Sungkakho Wakalo, farewell of Bhanse and Kaliya at home, both of bride and bridegroom. On this day, Hosung-pasung asks for excuses from the side of waitung to Sungkakho Wakalo, Suindhima, and Kopi. Now, from the side of Sungkakho Wakalo, Suindhima, and Kopi, they choose a leader among them recently and bless to bride and bridegroom for their bright future. In Hosung or in this period, Kurungma (Mawali), the maternal house's persons, play a vital role in Marriage. From the side of Kurungma, the blessed bride and bridegroom.

Interview with Tej Kumar Rai, 2082/08/01

The above statement shows that decision making process in the marriage ceremony in the Chamling Rai community is performing collectively from history and collective practices, which is the central idea of the indigenous Kirat Chamling Rai community.

Collective Practices of Labor in Marriage

According to informants, in the past, the Chamling Rai community used to collect leaves of Sal (Chhima) or Chiuri (Olsi) or Nibharo () as a plate in a marriage ceremony. Where they used to divide in group to collect them. But nowadays, we use plates instead of leaf plates. Likewise, constructing a food-making house (kitchen camp), a temporary shelter for Doni Tapochi, which is called Sumkhim (place where Doni stay at night), cooking food and serving kin and relatives are physical collective labor practices. They collect rice and alcohol in Waitung. Other kin and relatives also collect. According to them, at the marriage, Chamling Rai perform conversation which is called Hosung, which is another collective practices which is unable to conduct individually. Without the permission of Waitung, Hosung and Pasung also could not convey Hosung.

All mentions above are unpaid or voluntary labour systems, which are important cultural features.

Collective Practices of Sharing (Exchange) and Participation in Marriage

Singhser Rai, an informant of this research, says that the Waitung collect rice and alcohol at the house of marriage. Waitung should not add or return immediately, but share or exchange a similar volume of things within Waitung when other members of Waitung perform such a marriage (Interview with Singhser Rai-2082/08/02). Generally, Doni (Janti) goes in a group to a marriage ceremony, but in the Chamling Rai community, they have different roles, responsibilities, and duties. In the marriage ceremony of the Chamling Rai community, all the members of the community have different but collective functions, and those functions are performed in sharing values.

Collective Blessing Rituals in Marriage

According to Rai (2066, p. 86), there are collective practices in blessing rituals within the Chamling Rai community. They bless the bride and bridegroom either at the bride's home or the bridegroom's, respectively. First, the guardians of the house, Waitung, Kurungma, kin, and relatives, put Tika and bless the bright future of the bride and bridegroom. Nowadays, some of them provide monetary or material gifts to the bride and the bridegroom. Each blessing represents the couple's entry into the clan and community.

Collective Meal Practices in Marriage

Chamling Rai does not eat a meal alone in marriage ceremony. They have meal village wise, kin and relatives-wise and also depend on distances practically. First, the bride and the bridegroom should start to take a meal, then Doni starts to eat rice. Informant says that if we do eat before the bride and the bridegroom, it will be evil in their myths. So, it can be said that eating together is central to the Chamling Rai community. They collectively prepare and serve indigenous food like Wachipa, chicken burn feather and meat of chicken and Sahikhui, says Sailakhui nowadays, roasted blood and meat of pig meet which serves all kin and relatives.

Collective Songs and Dances in Marriage

Chamling Rai community perform Rai (2013) defines 'Sakela Sili' as one of the collective cultural practices, which is a main ritual of the Kirat community, constructing multidimensional social, ecological, and religious meanings that make visible the symbolic depth of Kirat. At the marriage ceremony, Sakela Sili also perform in the Chamling Rai community, and they sing songs collectively.

Discussion

This study explored how the Chamling Rai community maintains collective cultural practices through their marriage ceremony, despite social, economic, and cultural change. The results show that marriage among the Chamling Rai community, participation, kinship cooperation, ritual performance, and oral knowledge transmission play central roles. This collective knowledge supports social cohesion, identity preservation, and preserve social system and indigenous knowledge that has been transmitted across generations.

A major finding of this research is the importance of Sancheh/Rosung as a system of collective support. In particular, Sancheh is a mutual help and social harmony for the exchange of resources within kin and relatives. Although it is monetary because of modernism, migration, and socio-economic changes, the Chamling Rai communities are maintaining records of historical documents. These continuing indigenous practices show that indigenous societies and practices are sustained through collective reciprocity rather than formal written norms and rules. It indicates that the Chamling Rai community has strong kin and relative-based solidarity.

Collective Mundum rituals and practices during marriage are another finding in research. The ritual dialogues from both sides (bride and groom) show a vast communal ethic and responsibilities. The use of collective pronouns, "our", "yours ", "we" in conversation, reflects a worldview in which marriage involves collective.

Another key finding of the research is the collective decision-making process used in every stage of the marriage ceremony. Roles and responsibilities provided to the members of the community depend on a collaborative approach. These practices are strengthening the social harmony, coordination, and minimising social conflict during communal events.

Besides this, there are extensive collective labor practices and a collective sharing and participation system in the marriage of the Chamling Rai community. Collective labor and mutual support within Waitung is another collective system of sharing and participation. Finally, collective blessing, collective meals, and collective songs and dances represent the collective practices of the Chamling Rai community in the marriage ceremony.

The result shows that collective practices in the Chamling Rai community in the marriage ceremony play a vital role in sustaining collective indigenous knowledge to

strengthen kinship bonds and reinforce collective identity. Despite the pressure of individualism, globalization, and modernization threads for preservation and transfer of individual knowledge. Few academic works have explained how collectivism supports the survival of indigenous knowledge systems. This gap highlights the need to examine the role of collectivism in protecting cultural identity and strengthening resilience within the Chamling Rai community.

Conclusion

This study is limited to collective practices in the marriage ceremony of the Chamling Rai community. There are different indigenous knowledge and practices in the marriage system of the Chamling Rai community. Use of symbols, dialectical performances, diplomacy, etc., is also a central issue for research.

Overall, the research concludes that collective practices in marriage are not only cultural traditions but also systems of social organization that maintain solidarity, reciprocity, and communal values, which are supportive points for collectivism. Despite the influence of modernization, the Chamling Rai community continues to preserve these deeply rooted indigenous practices, demonstrating resilience and strong cultural identity.

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