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Redefining Kirant Rai Folk Narratives: Politics of Gender and Self-Identity¹

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Abstract

This paper examines how Kirant Rai folk narratives influence gendered representation, self-identity, and socio-political dynamics within the community. Particularly, it centers on four significant folk narratives: *Hechchhakuppa*ⁱ, *Yala Hang and Sakekung*ⁱⁱ, *Sawanam*,ⁱⁱⁱ and *Sumdima and Paruhang*^{iv}, which I collected through extensive interviews conducted with knowledgeable elders, Mangpa^v, and elder community members. To analyze these narratives and uncover their thematic implications, the study employs Alan Dundes' functional theory and incorporates the political ideas of Ranciere. The primary data for this research consists of narrative texts supplemented by secondary data sourced from libraries and online resources. This study reveals that these folk narratives have played a pivotal role in shaping gendered representation, self-identity, and the individually valued roles that contribute to the socio-political dynamics prevalent in the community since the narratives' inception. By uncovering these findings, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and social dynamics of the people. It highlights the transformative power of these folk narratives and their influence on various aspects of the community's social fabric by broadening knowledge and appreciation of the Kirant Rai cultural heritage while, at the same time shedding light on the intricate interplay between narratives, gender roles, self-perception, and socio-political dynamics.

Keywords: Folk narratives, self-identity, gendered representation, myth, ritual

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Introduction

Nepal, a nation sandwiched between two giant countries - India and China, renowned for its diverse historical roots, serves as the ancestral abode of the Kirant Rai ethnic group, who has resided in the eastern part for a long historical time. This community possesses a vibrant mosaic of myths, tales, and oral traditions that are intricately entwined with their cultural practices and daily existence. Across successive generations, these narratives are transmitted within the socio-cultural realm, yielding substantial impact on the formation of societal structures, educational systems, and political dynamics in diverse manners. According to Barthes, narratives are a universal phenomenon found in countless forms across different societies. They permeate myths, legends, history, and various genres of literature, and have existed since the early evolution of humanity (79). As such, narratives are present throughout one's lifetime, from birth to death, and span from ancient times to the present, transitioning from oral tradition to digital archives. Bronner supports Barthes' ideas by regarding folklore and narratives as expressive actions and interactions that occur in all aspects of human life (6). In this instance, oral folk narratives have been cultivated since the inception of their structured community, with "The Mundum"^{vi} assuming a significant role as a primary source.

The Mundum not only encompasses their oral traditions but also serves as a conduit for passing them on from one generation to the next. The myths derived from the Mundum primarily focus on ancestral origins, progression, and migratory journeys. These narratives as Gaenzle argues, serve as a foundation for reviving and recalling the geographical and temporal dimensions of history, civilization, and evolution. As a result, ancestral chronicles have been mythically intertwined with the landscape (327). The myths developed and disseminated from the Mundum shape the oral narratives, ensuring that every member of the society is familiar with their literal meaning. These narratives significantly influence the behavior, performance, and practices of the people in their daily lives.

Within the context, this paper aims to interpret the folk narratives to uncover their inherent impacts on gendered values, self-identity, and political dynamism within the changing context. It focuses on decoding the profound imprints of these folk narratives on society and its people. As oral culture is passed down through generations, it shapes gendered behavior, individual and collective identity, and leadership approaches in the way people present themselves, behave, and interact with one another. Extensive research and studies have been conducted on the folklore and narratives of ethnic indigenous groups in Nepal and India to explore their oral literature, traditional culture, and socio-cultural practices. Researchers have shed light on cultural, linguistic, and traditional aspects through various methodologies, including ethnographic research, case studies,

phenomenological studies, and an Indigenist perspective. Allen in his review suggests that specific aspects of Thulung mythology have been assimilated into Laurasian mythology without full integration into the primary storyline. An instance of this is the belief in human birth from trees, categorized as a "grandmothers' tale" associated with folklore rather than the "official" narrative (102). Within the Thulung Rai corpus, an intriguing narrative unfolds where the first man, seeks refuge within the womb of the Mother Sandalwood Tree and seemingly undergoes rebirth from it. This account aligns with the findings derived from Thulung data and the broader Laurasian context.

Showing a close affinity between the people and nature, as well as other living beings, Shrestha compiled a book of folk narratives titled *Himalayan Folklore: Tales of Eastern Nepal*, which includes several other tales (2011). Similarly, Bista highlights the ranking of mythical common ancestors as the chief deities of the Rai people, such as Sikatakhu-Budho, Balmo-Budhi, Kulung-Budhi, Mangtewa-Budhi, Molu-Sikari^{vii}, and many others, who receive offerings of food, fruits, and meat during ritual occasions and festivals (44). The cultural and ritual practices of the community are deeply intertwined with the oral folk narratives passed down by their ancestors. Drawing upon extensive field research, Charles McDougal meticulously delved into the complexities of kinship and marriage exchange within the Kulunge Rai community (1979). As a result, his monograph stands as a comprehensive exploration, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of these social practices. Additionally, Gaenzle examined the ritual speech of the Mewahang Rai people from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Through the analysis of ritual speech within its social and cultural context, Gaenzle emphasizes the Mundum as an oral tradition encompassing speech events, ceremonial dialogue, and recitation, which ritual experts refer to as a speech genre (223). Regarding the significance of oral tradition, he reaffirms that it serves as one of the most important means of cultural continuity in a non-literate society.

Turning to folk narratives in India, Kothari's article "On Folk Narratives" explores the vibrant tradition of folk narratives in Rajasthan, where storytellers known as Bhat play a crucial role. The Bhat narrators belong to two groups: Mukhavancha Bhat and Pothibanacha Bhat. They professionally recount stories and narratives related to genealogy, origin, and the history of families and groups (Quoted in Rai 13). One Bhat tells and retells the narratives orally, while the other Bhat records them in written form. Eliade explores the exploration of the structure of mythical storytelling within a culture where myths thrive, with a focus on how these narratives connect to religious experiences and uncover deeper truths (171). The exploration primarily revolves around understanding the structural aspects of these stories and how they are intricately linked to religious experiences by examining the connection between myths and religious practices.

Methods

This paper aims to analyze the influence of Kirant Rai folk narratives on gendered representation, self-identity, and socio-political dynamics of the community. The folk narratives which I collected through in-depth interviews with Kirant Rai knowledgeable elders, Mangpa (shamans), and senior members specifically include *Hechchhakuppa*, *Yala Hang and Sakelung*, *Sawanam*, and *Sumdima and Paruhang*. These narratives hold significant cultural and social significance within the Kirant Rai community. To understand the functions and purposes of these folk narratives within the cultural context, the study draws upon the functional and political theories of folklore and folk narratives put forth by Bascom, Alan Dundes, and Ranciere. The functional approach, forwarded by Bascom and Alan Dundes, highlights how folk narratives fulfill various social, psychological, and cultural needs within the community. Through storytelling and symbolic representations, these narratives contribute to the construction and maintenance of social norms, values, and beliefs.

By examining the functions and roles of the folk narratives, the study aims to shed light on their impact on gendered representation, self-identity formation, and socio-political dynamics in society. In addition to the functional approach, the paper incorporates Ranciere's concept of intimate politics to explore the power dynamics and social implications embedded within the folk narratives. Ranciere's notion emphasizes the inherently political nature of everyday life and interpersonal interactions. Analyzing the narratives through this theoretical lens, the study seeks to uncover how the folk narratives reflect and challenge power structures, social hierarchies, and norms related to gender, identity, and leadership. This framework allows for a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of these narratives and their influence on the social dynamics and individual agency within the Kirant Rai community.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations have been thought to be paramount. Informed consent has been obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and protecting their rights. Confidentiality and anonymity have strictly been maintained to safeguard the cultural heritage and privacy of the Kirant Rai community. The study adheres to ethical guidelines, treating cultural insights and sensitive information with respect and responsibility. Employing these methodological and ethical frameworks, this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the profound influence of Kirant Rai folk narratives on the individual, socio-political and cultural realms of the community.

Sibling Rivalry to Harmony

The narratives of *Sumdima and Paruhang*, as well as *Hechchhakuppa*, serve as metaphors for the innate sibling rivalry that exists among human beings from birth. As the tiger, bear, and man, three brothers with inherent differences, mature, they begin to exhibit opposition toward one another. In the narrative of *Hechchhakupa*, a particular incident unveils:

As the day grew late, the tiger, plagued by hunger and anger, became aggressive upon spotting the youngest brother carrying snacks at such an hour. He lunged at the man, but the youngest brother managed to save him, explaining that the lateness was a result of the long path they had taken. Witnessing the tiger's behavior, the man resolved to prepare for an imminent battle (My trans.; 17-18).

Driven by anger and animosity towards his brother, the tiger sought to end the man's life. However, the man uncovered the tiger's conspiracy and observed its hostile demeanor. Cunningly, the man concealed himself in a large tree, armed with a bow and arrow. This depiction of sibling rivalry between the two brothers—man and the tiger in the narrative echoes Tutt's claim that sibling rivalry, despite the bond shared between siblings, has manifested in various cultures, spanning from Christianity to Egypt and Rome (2). The emergence of sibling rivalry in primitive times seems to have influenced the members living in the community since its early development. The conflict between the tiger and the man, two brothers, engendered a crisis that culminated in the tiger's demise. The narrative highlights the oppositional ideas fueled by rivalry and self-centeredness:

Despite their tireless efforts to revive their brother, *Hechchhakuppa* remained unconscious, unable to regain his former state of awareness. Eventually, convinced that he had passed away, the two sisters, consumed by sorrow and helplessness, departed from the house in opposite directions—one towards the south and the other towards the north. They covered their brother's motionless body with fragments of dried twigs (My trans.; 12 *Hechchhakuppa*).

The divergent paths chosen by the two sisters—one heading south and the other north—illustrate a binary opposition and practice. Their impulsive actions left their unconscious brother in solitude. The decision to embark on separate journeys signifies the development of a rift in their relationship, despite their outward display of hospitality towards each other. Furthermore, the sisters' movements, one towards the south and the other towards the north, symbolize the cultivation of rivalry, fostering values of competition and differentiation on one hand, and the pursuit of achievement and progress on the other. Wellendorf argues that while close relatives often assist during times of adversity and significant challenges, they also have limitations due to a desire for independence in both physical and mental realms, arising from a lack of complete trust in their siblings (3). The

prevalence of sibling rivalry evident in the narratives suggests that it serves as a means for individuals to liberate themselves from dependency and subjugation. The narrative in *Sumdima and Paruhang* recounts the events:

Sumdima, upon uncovering the dead body, proceeded to clean the wounds inflicted by arrow shots and removed the penetrating arrows. Together, she and her son carried the lifeless body back to their house. They placed the body in a corner and she performed various rituals from the Mundhum tradition, using pure water, locally brewed beer made from millet, and offering gingers. This ritual continued for twelve hours. As the twelfth hour passed, the tiger awakened as if from a deep slumber... (My trans.; 19).

Witnessing the fate of her eldest son, she was filled with shock and grief. She recited prayers and incantations, invoking divine power to revive the tiger. Systematically following each step, she utilized her ritual power to bring the tiger back to life. Eventually, the tiger was revived through a combination of maternal love and divine intervention. However, despite his fear, the tiger exhibited feelings of hatred and anger towards the man. Despite being brothers and belonging to the same family, the mother decided to separate them, emphasizing that they should never cross paths again. Although the mother was deeply saddened and pained by the permanent separation of her sons, she agreed to the tragic idea of divergence to resolve the conflict and restore peace.

With this matter, Schechter and Stone define sibling rivalry and reconciliation as "divergent or contrasting events, where sibling identification and normal sibling deidentification arise as a result of conflict resolution and reconciliation, with each sibling developing distinct identities to alleviate the constant competition and comparison inherent in sibling rivalry" (55). It appears that within the intimate domain, the interplay of conflicting ideas and practices gives rise to both rivalry and resolution. The characters Tayama, Khiyama, and Hechchhakuppa in the narrative, *Hechchhakuppa*, in some ways, exemplify the presence of rivalry and reconciliation within the fluctuating dynamics of their relationships. Along with rivalry, the narrative carries a sense of reconciliation:

No sooner did she recognize the sound produced by the brother than she began searching for her brother. When she arrived at their residence, she discovered that Hechchhakuppa and Nayuma were celebrating their marriage in a grand ceremony. It was a joyous reunion, and they shared in the happiness and contentment... (My trans.; 13).

The narrative reveals a sense of reconciliation, wherein the brother, brother-in-law, and sister reestablished their previous relationship, disregarding past grievances. Ranciere suggests that the notions of visibility and invisibility, as they pertain to the evolving dynamics of their relationship over time, have acquired significant meaning (29). The

reunion and reconciliation that occurred among them held great significance for the advancement of human development and civilization, despite minor setbacks. The values of competition and rivalry let alone in the Kirant community and others, foster an environment of harmony and reconciliation

Exploring Gendered Representation and Self-Identity

The folk narratives delve into the theme of identity politics within the intimate sphere, highlighting the interplay of characters' lives. Fearon describes identity as a means to elucidate the political actions and reactions stemming from socially constructed interactions among individuals. In the narrative, *Sumdima and Paruhang*, the main characters, Sumdima and Paruhang, exemplify self-identity and gendered politics of identity as they seek to influence and control each other. The narrative relates:

Being excited and cheerful, Paruhang went to meet Sumdima along with the bird and the air. When he approached Sumdima in her residence, she turned down her face, saying, "You are such an ugly man! I don't believe it." Faced with such inhuman behavior that Sumdima showed, Paruhang felt heart-broke and returned to the sky by committing to take revenge... (My trans.; 16).

The opposing ideas developed by both characters drove them apart and fostered disdain rather than love, as long as they remained apart. In the context of politics, Ranciere, Davide, and Rachel argue that politics entails the act of presenting opposing arguments to make the unseen seen, the seen unseen, the silent loud, and the loud silent. Such interplay of opposing ideas exists at every level of relationships and behaviors (19). The relationship between Sumdima and Paruhang demonstrates the back-and-forth interplay of influence for the sake of self and gendered identity. Her rejection signifies that her ego, shaped by self-identity and gendered identity grounded in matriarchal ideology, serves as the foundation for female autonomy and resistance.

Distinguishing individual identity from social identity, Monroe et al. propose that personal identity emerges from social structures but differs from other attributes, while social identity encompasses various sociocultural elements and features shared by members of a society for a common purpose. To illustrate the inherent value of individual and social identity, the narrative in *Sawanam* recounts:

As the Mangpa attentively listened, he stated, "It is a daunting task because the serpent king is immensely powerful and cunning; if I fail to kill him, he will inevitably kill me someday." He also added, "I must protect you from this malevolent force, even if it endangers my own life..." (My trans.; 26).

The individual heroism displayed by the Mangpa in the presence of the community for the well-being of the people and society represents a personal identity within the context of *Sawanam*, distinct from social identity. The shared social identity among ordinary people

appeared to be jeopardized by the wicked actions of the serpent kings, who preyed upon and devoured innocent individuals. This illustrates the intricate interconnection between individual and social identities. Thus, the politics of self-identity operates within the realms of gendered and social identity.

Gendered identity, operating within the framework of social identity, serves as a reliable pillar of society. The gender role played by Changkuti Mang leaves an indelible mark on Kirant's socio-cultural life. In this regard, Cassino and Yasemin affirm that gender identity influences people's course of action concerning political and social identity, as political identity underpins gender-based ideology and practice. The narrative in *Changkuti Mang* reports:

Upon listening to the Mangpa, the family members felt remorse for their treatment of the boy. They decided to worship the great-grandmother on the following day, inviting relatives, neighbors, and villagers to share in their pain and happiness. As part of the ceremony, a red rooster and a grown pig were sacrificed, symbolizing the Mang's presence in the hearthstone and the bamboo basket filled with paddy grains (My trans.; 25).

The reverence and worship of Changkuti Mang by both men and women exemplify female prowess and dominance in communal life. The politics of gendered identity depicted in the narrative challenges the prevailing ideology of patriarchy. Women's gender identity appears to harmonize with that of men, fostering symmetry in socio-cultural and political existence.

In the struggle for gender influence between males and females, Paruhang and Sumdima engage in a political game of deception and sincerity in which the story unfolds:

Paruhang dropped a beautiful comb as a gift, unable to approach Sumdima directly due to his feelings of inferiority. When she discovered the exquisite comb, she became enchanted by its beauty and the skill of its creator. Deeply in love, they communicated with each other with the assistance of a bird... (My trans.; 15-16).

The beautiful gift bestowed by the unknown person intended to influence Sumdima, becomes a form of politics, translating unspoken emotions into tangible actions. The communication facilitated by the material object and the vibes shared between them leads to their deepening love. Nagar suggests that societal interactions, acts, and constraints are greatly influenced by dynamic situations, giving rise to new narratives and beliefs that maintain a balance of power in society (117). The interactions involving the bird, the air, and the characters create an environment for them to draw closer, although their egos ultimately isolate them. The relationship between the two characters in the narrative aligns with Shaheed's assertion that achieving gender egalitarianism and power balance requires the generation of knowledge and cultural spaces that favor specific genders (851).

Devastated by her response and behavior, Paruhang disappears, vowing to seek revenge. The narrative in *Sumdima and Paruhang* advances:

Faced with Sumdima's inhumane behavior, Paruhang feels heartbroken and returns to the sky, determined to exact revenge. Utilizing his supernatural power, he caused a worldwide drought, leaving no water to drink and causing suffering for all living beings. Sumdima, too, wanders in search of water... (My trans.; 16-17).

The inclination and temperament to seek revenge after her rejection indicate that his actions stem not solely from personal identity but from a socially constructed identity rooted in patriarchy. According to Angu's ideas on identity formation, gender representation, and identity convey cultural values and attitudes, and gender itself is a social construct that remains significant within society (22). His pursuit of revenge reflects a patriarchal ideology, asserting male dominance over females. His psyche seems to be influenced by male domination and feelings of superiority over events. The dynamics of love and hate manifested through visible and invisible, intimate and distant, self and other, shape the fluctuating relationship between them. Both characters engage in politics of avoidance and attachment, entering the realm of intimacy while pursuing their self-satisfaction, self-interest, and self-esteem, aiming to assert superiority over one another. The narrative that encapsulates such politics of closeness and distance unfolds:

The deep affection Sumdima develops for the unknown man causes her considerable distress, with no one to share her feelings with. She thinks, "Oh, my friends, the birds will assist me; they will surely help me convey my message." Brimming with joy, she ventures out in search of the birds, whistling in the air to call them... (My trans.; 16).

Her feelings and intimate attachment to the unknown man, Paruhang, exemplify the interplay between intimacy and distance. Her prolonged suffering for the unknown transforms her invisible emotions into visible ones and the unknown into the known. Such experiences and interests shape the values of a political ideology embraced not only by the but by all human beings in their daily lives.

In this regard, Danglová argues that folk traditions and narratives serve as reliable means for representing and disseminating political ideology and ideas. The oral tradition of folk narratives plays a significant role in shaping political and socio-cultural contexts (329). The oral folk narrative culture from its origins to the present day, continues to represent and disseminate political values and ideology, even in changing contexts. These oral cultural values have become deeply ingrained in the mindset of the community members. The narrative in *Yala Hang and Sakelung* reflects the political values of opposing forces in subtle ways:

Yala Hang, a clever king, responds, "I do not need anything. If you wish, give me an old grinding stone lying in the palace." Hearing the chieftain/king's request, the ruler is astonished and responds with laughter, "I thought you would ask for diamonds, pearls, and other treasures, but you ask for an old stone of no use to us." The king commands, "You may take it with you" ... (My trans.; 21).

The dialectical relationship between Yala Hang and the King of Yalkhom/Kathmandu is evident in their discursive conversation, wherein inherent politics operates on an ideological level. Yala Hang strategically expresses a hidden interest in reclaiming Sakelung, the sole marker of social identity. The king's acceptance of the proposal to give a discarded stone reflects a politics of generosity and gratitude on one hand, but also a politics of hidden interest in preserving state property. The irony present in the offer and acceptance between the kings illustrates the underlying political interests, wherein the politics of love oscillates with the politics of hate. Yala Hang's love for Sakelung as a symbol of socio-political identity becomes a form of hate toward the king, as the discarded stone holds no value within the palace.

Moreover, the discord and contrasting ideologies among the siblings—the man, the tiger, and the bear—play a role in fostering and preserving intimate politics within the sociocultural fabric of Nepalese society. The complex relationship of love and animosity between the man and the tiger represents a struggle for asserting dominance rooted in the notion of "survival of the fittest". In relation to the concept of intimate politics, Stirr asserts that it operates within close social circles, challenging existing orders and positions to establish a domain of self (5). Expanding on the notion of intimate politics, the narrative in *Sumdima and Paruhang* progresses:

While waiting for his brother, the man observes him approaching rapidly, ready to attack what he believes to be the man—a scarecrow. The tiger tears the scarecrow into small pieces, causing the man to cry out in astonishment. Seizing the opportunity, the tiger lunges at the man, mouth agape. In a swift action, the youngest brother shoots an arrow into the tiger's open mouth (My trans.; 19).

Despite being brothers from the same family, the tiger develops a deep-seated hatred and contempt for the man, ultimately leading to his demise at the hands of his youngest brother. The politics of opposition, manifested through conflicting ideas and actions, portrays a familial and social division within the narrative. The contrasting emotions of love and hate that both brothers harbor as they mature drive them to engage in a battle for survival, self-identity, and social recognition.

Approaches and Strategies in Leadership

The concept and practice of leadership, both within families and at the societal level, are pervasive phenomena that organize, educate, incite, encourage, and guide

individual and social behaviors. Smith et al. argue that these leadership practices and strategies extend beyond mere coordination, cooperation, and conflicts within phenomenal structures (54). In the folk narratives, the portrayal of leadership reflects a reliance on individual qualities, dedicated efforts, and collaborative group endeavors. A narrative account in *Sawanam* illustrates the individual role of the Mangpa, who valiantly confronts the serpent king to safeguard and benefit the common people:

On the seventh day, the Mangpa employed his divine powers, creating a sunny day and simultaneous light rain. This enticed the serpent king to venture to the riverbank for sunbathing. Seizing the opportunity, he channeled the divine strength, hurling a thunderbolt at the serpent. Ultimately, he vanquished the malevolent serpent king... (My trans.; 26).

The role and strategies employed by the Mangpa in defeating the wicked serpent king were rooted in individual efforts and expertise. The courage, tactics, strategies, and shamanistic powers harnessed by him to overcome this dangerous adversary exemplify the leadership practices and strategies embedded within the sociocultural praxis. While individual efforts were paramount, the support of ordinary people played a supporting role in the battle. Expanding upon the subject of leadership theory and practice, Biggard and Gary G. Hamilton contend that many leadership theories are based on individual traits, psychology, and efforts, although contextual factors can sometimes deviate from prescribed individual criteria (429). Leadership patterns and strategies employed in one social setting may exhibit similarities and differences when compared to another setting. Similar practices and strategies of leadership can be observed in the narrative *Yala Hang and Sakelung*, where individual heroism and tactics come into play that follows:

That is why Yala Hang rejoiced in his success of wresting it away from the enemy that Kirant had always yearned to possess their land and set off for Pauwathum, carrying the stone in a bamboo-bound basket. Despite its small size, the stone was remarkably heavy... (My trans.; 22).

The strategies employed by the chieftain/ king to retrieve Sakelung and those utilized by the Mangpa to lure the serpent king to the banks of the river share similarities. The leadership practices and strategies employed by both of them transform the invisible into the visible and the latent into the manifest, facilitating the achievement of desired objectives. Yala Hang aimed to reclaim the strength lost by his forefathers in battle, while the king of Yalakhom sought to restore peace, prosperity, and cleanliness to the palace surroundings by discarding the stone. When discussing the tactical and strategic leadership employed by leaders to influence and control adverse situations, Sergiovanni posits that tactical leadership employs analytical skills at a lower-level scope to attain high-level goals, while strategic leadership, conversely, employs artistic and scientific approaches to formulate long-term plans and policies. While delving into the underlying structure of the

narrative, *Sumdima*, and *Paruhang*, we can trace a balanced leadership approach and practices adopted by both protagonists in the story that proceeds:

Witnessing Sumdima's pitiable condition, Paruhang took the initiative to alleviate her suffering by offering paternal responsibility for any children she would bear. He saw it as his responsibility to break her arrogance. Recognizing his kind-hearted and compassionate nature, she found solace and committed herself to give new life... (My trans.; 18).

Paruhang's leadership approach in the narrative justifies the unexpected pregnancy that Sumdima experienced, the origins of which she was unaware. He managed to navigate his wrongdoing by assuming responsibility for the child she would bear. This strategic leadership attribute demonstrated his ability to support her through life's challenges. A true leader influences, supports, and engages both opponents and supporters in converging and diverging circumstances. Similarly, she recognized him as a compassionate and pragmatic man, ultimately embracing her new life with children to ensure the continuity of generational existence. Her leadership tactics aimed to maintain a balanced equilibrium among her sons, reconciling the bitterness they experienced in their interactions. As leadership always strives for the future betterment and advancement of those under its patronage, Sumdima assumed the role of a common patron and protector for her offspring:

She gathered her three children for a meeting and instructed them to separate for their well-being. The youngest son, the man, was to settle in the village, the tiger was to inhabit the dense forest, and the bear was to find a home in a regular forest... (My trans.; 20).

It became her sole responsibility to resolve the conflict between her sons, even though persuading them was a daunting task. Regarding the role of women and leadership since the dawn of human civilization, Hannagan asserts that females have long contributed to the development of a just and equitable society through the use of autonomous leadership strategies and self-determining tactics (465). The conflict among the sons had escalated to the point of potential fratricide, resulting in the elder brother, the tiger, being killed by the youngest, the man. In such a critical situation, her leadership qualities, tactics, and strategies used to resolve the grave conflict deserve recognition alongside other battles and confrontations. Through her leadership decisions and instructions, each brother went to the respective territory assigned by her enabling them to establish peaceful lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined how oral folk narratives contribute to the development and promotion of gendered self-identity, social values, and political beliefs across different historical periods up to the present context. Notably, folk narratives such as *Hechhakuppa*, *Sumdima*, and *Paruhang*, and others play a pivotal role in shaping the

overall socio-cultural and political structure of human beings, influencing the roles of both men and women, as well as the young and the old. These oral folk narratives continuously evolve and transform the socio-cultural, religious, and political dynamics of mankind in response to changing times and circumstances. The philosophical oral tradition, known as Muddum, serves as a guiding foundation, encompassing various aspects of life, including rituals, culture, religion, and socio-political practices. The society adheres to the beliefs and narratives formed within the oral tradition, which encompass folk narratives, myths, rituals, rites, and ceremonies, collectively constructing the structural frameworks for socio-cultural and political interactions that every member of the society engages in according to predetermined rules and regulations.

These oral narratives, with their structural and functional aspects, have played a significant role in establishing social structures and organizations in society. For instance, Hechchhakuppa, the first person to engage in agriculture among mankind, initiated the worship of Mang and introduced the Sakela dance accompanied by music and the Sili/dance style and step. To honor and appease the spirits of ancestors and other natural forces, he offers food items such as local beer, deer meat, and the blood of sacrificed roosters, along with harvested grains of paddy and millet. The establishment of the three hearthstones as a sacred space within each household and the Sakela Than/worshipping site symbolizes the foundation of cultural and ritual development and identities that still exists in the present context.

The narratives of *Sumdima and Paruhang*, as well as *Hechchakuppa*, depict the dynamics of sibling rivalry and reconciliation that are inherent to human nature and birthright. The oppositional tendencies of these characters lead them into conflicts and contradictions within their intimate relationships. Despite harboring anger and hatred towards each other, as brothers, they are driven to the point of contemplating and attempting to kill one another. However, fierce competition and conflict eventually give way to reconciliation, allowing each individual to resume a normal life. Moreover, the oral folk narratives contribute to the framing of socio-political values for self-identity and the identities of people living in society.

Endnotes

ⁱ The narrative on first Kiranti farmer known as Hetchchhakuppa or Raichhaakule who instituted systematic farming in Kirant myth

ⁱⁱ The name of the story on the chieftain/ king with divine power who ruled Pauwathum, Bhojpur

ⁱⁱⁱ The narrative on powerful in deity in the form of stone, Kirant Rai worship in Sakela celebrated twice in a year

^{iv} Story on Great God and Great Goddess in Kirant religion

^v Ritual leader with divine power

^{vi} Oral philosophical tradition that passed on from earlier generation to latter generation that guides every aspect of Kiranti way of life, including ritual, socio-cultural, political experience and knowledge

^{vii} Name of the Kiranti deities and ancestors

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