

Ethnography of Tin Chula (three stoned hearth) System: An Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Bantawa Rai Clan

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the essence of Tin Chula system (three stoned hearth), the indigenous cultural heritage of classical Bantawa Rai clan as an epitome of living existence. The Tin Chula is the central point from which whole aspects of Bantawa Rai's socio-cultural phenomena exist. The Tin Chula and its Mundum (also Mundhum- is oral tradition of ritual performance with the power of indigenous knowledge) are valuable indigenous knowledge aspired by indigenous education system in Bantawa Rai clan.

The prolonged and in-depth involvement with my participants in this research journey provided me with cultural construct of Tin Chula and Mundumic indigeneity. The open narrative interviews and participant observations provided me a space to use ethnographic method on this research journey to investigate into the cultural heritage of Tin Chula system as an indigenous education. The Mangpa or Nachhung, (a shaman) as the priest is the head ritual performer who by connecting him/herself with the spirit of ancestors does healing functions, making prophecies, finding resolutions of spiritual difficulties or problems of the households. Tin Chula in the classical Rai Bantawa is the heart of all the ritualistic performances an indigenous educational and cultural process and system. It is spiritually linked with the deities and ancestors like; Parohang and Sumnima, and naturally deceased souls including great grandfather and mothers to brothers and sisters.

Key words: *healing functions, cultural process, indigenous education, ritual performance, cultural heritage*

Introduction

The Rai community is a set of cultural mosaic in itself. They are the indigenous group of people who carry a unique tradition of Tin Chula (three stoned hearth) system. This paper tries to investigate into the essence of Bantawa Rai clan's Tin Chula system; the cultural heritage of a classical Rai community evolved in the form of epitome of living existence.

Rai(s), a vibrant and virtuous ethnic group of people of Mongoloid origin (Rai, 2012) who fundamentally hailing from the eastern hilly region of Nepal. They are also found in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, South-Western part of Bhutan and Doors of West Bengal. An ethnolinguistic group belonging to Tibeto-Burman (Sapkota, 2023) and ethnically enriched with linguistic variances within the community. Traditionally, they are the cultivating tribal and indigenous community in the eastern hill. Originally, they belong to the area between Tamor River in the east and Dudh Koshi River in the west.

Conventionally, the socio-cultural facets are governed by norms and values of community that are finely integrated with natural bonding enriched by the legacy of indigenous knowledge (Khatri, 2008) which is not only narratives and practices, but it also includes the wisdom and ethics too (Mustonen, et al. 2022). As the Rai ethnic group of people are being divided into two sects, one who follow conventional cultural system. They believed to be classical and traditional group, as they liked to describe themselves as "Sanatani" a Sanskrit word that define the human's cultural existence beyond the primordial period (Nar Bahadur Rai, June 22, 2024, personal communication).

They are the nature worshipers and the Mangpa or Nachhung, (a shaman) as the priest is the head ritual performer who by connecting him/herself with the spirit of ancestors performs healing functions, making prophecies, finding resolutions of spiritual difficulties or problems (Rai, 2020). They believe in sacrificing animals during any ritual performance.

The other one who follow the path of Satyahangma the religious sect established by Phalgunanda in which all the religious and cultural rituals are

performed by Sewa-Shava the priest without sacrificing animals. Both groups agree upon worshipping the same deities but in different ways. They also keep “Tin Chulo” however with different purposes of ritual performances (Mrs. Shyam Bahadur Rai, personal communication, June 14, 2024).

According to Gaenzle (2016) Phalgunanda (Satyahangma sect) addressing his disciples communicated that when Limbu and Kiratis-Rai community give up their ancestral practices of shamanism, animal sacrifice and consumption of alcohol, they would be able to regain their ancestral kipat lands. This addressed that classical traditionalist Rai community has been practicing their animism and shamanism since the primordial period with that of the existence of Paruhang and Sumnima (highly revered ancient god and goddess anonymously referred as Hindu god Shiva and goddess Parvati).

This paper endeavours to investigate the cultural heritage of Bantawa Rai clan who follow the orthodox aspects of Tin Chula system based on the theory of traditionalism. According to Gaenzle (2016) tradition is the transfer of holistic cultural epoch from one generation to other in an oral tradition in the Rai community. Bizumic (2018) notes that the traditionalism is to pay reverence and provide sustainability on traditional norms and values, morality and practices of own social group. In addition, he clarified that one has to fight and keep intact with all the changing social norms and values, morality and practices of the community.

In context of Bantawa Rai, this clan is struggling to sustain their conventional cultural aspects of Tin Chula tradition and associated Mundums (also Mundhum- is oral tradition of ritual performance with the power of indigenous knowledge) at present (Rai, 2020) because of threat from colonialist forces such as other religious groups, migrations, modern education, urbanization and the like. The Tin Chula tradition and its associated Mundums content with indigenous education system are the integral aspects of spiritual practices in the Bantwa Rai clan. The existence of Tin Chula and its myths tell Bantawa Rai’s civilizational depth, a valuable indigenous education system.

Jacob et al., (2015) notes that indigenous education specially focuses on teaching indigenous knowledges, models, methods, and content within the

contexts of daily life (p. 10). The classical Bantawa Rai has been following the method of delivering Mundum as a sacred tradition of their clan and is indigenous to the clan. It is stubbornly striving to decipher and transfer knowledge of Tin Chula system and its Mundumic cultural rituals to the present generation for sustaining the value of indigeneity. Indigenous people of Bantawa clan are motivated to recognize their unique contributions to their indigeneity to indigenous education system. Jacob et al, (2015) argue that the theory of indigenous education is based on empowering indigenous people with skill to support and enhance learning from their own perspectives which lead them to pursue future embracing the diversity of indigeneity.

The practice of shamanism in Bantawa Rai is central to their cultural rituals that concern Tin Chula in all the cultural ritual performances. Dhungana and Rai (2016) find that shamanism is a system and tradition of indigenous knowledge. They further posit that indigenous people live with their own worldviews interacting with nature, social and cultural environments along with the non-indigenous communities. In the context of Bantawa Rai as a community live with their own perspectives interacting with nature, their own socio-cultural settings and constructing their ways of belief system concerned with the Tin Chula and its Mundumic educational values.

In this context, how does the classical-traditional or conventional (here after referred also as classical sect) Bantawa Rai clan portray the significance of Tin Chula orthodox of their culture? The explanation of historical existence of Tin Chula tradition and its values in connections with various festivals, events and occasions, and natural phenomena, and its indigenous educational values is the ethnographic venture of this study.

Literature Review

The "Three-Stone Hearth," or Tin Chula system, is central to the Rai Bantawa community of Eastern Nepal. This traditional form of cooking tool is not limited to the preparation of food; it fosters a sense of community and solidarity within the Eastern Nepal Rai Bantawa culture. While the system encompasses socio-historically grounded adaptations, it is also influenced

changing socio-environmental conditions to the present. In this regard, this literature review focuses the socio-cultural, historical and social frames within literature available on the Tin Chula system.

The Rai Bantawas are a culturally distinguished with a diverse and rich heritage consisting of varied traditions, subsistence practices with traditional rituals. Every ritualistic performance carries cultural importance and reflects a community's collaboration and resource stewardship towards their ecosystem.

An examination of the Tin Chula system's embedded practices provide subtle insights into the sustainable practices of the whole cultural system. Understanding the ecosystem within which a culture operates and indicates resourcefulness of the culture. Revitalizing traditional ecological practices helps communities and preserves culture in the process.

As noted in the findings, the Tin Chula system is a critical focal point in cultural understanding of the Rai Bantawa. The system illustrates the various dimensions and social cohesion and integration potential of an adaptive culture, particularly in cultural practices and community integration activities.

Appreciating the value of these old practices help to build resilient social frameworks that sustain modern challenges. This contributes positively to cultural identity and promotes the region's sustainable practices.

A Classical Traditionalism of Tin Chula in Bantawa Rai Clan

The word classical is used to describe about something which has form, style and the content of ancient value and traditionalism; in broad sense it refers to sticking into a conventional values, customs and practices (Sharma, 2023). In this paper, classical traditionalism refers to the conceptual framework based on conventional norms and values of Bantawa Rai entailing customs, and belief system existing since the primordial period of Parohang and Sumnima (Parohang and Sumnima are divinely figure portrayed as creator god and goddess respectively considered as their first ancestors or deities by Bantawa Rai).

The cultural vantage of classical traditionalist experiences, one with traditional norms who follow animal sacrificial conventions. They sacrifice birds and animals; especially rooster and hen, and pig while performing rituals.

They are the followers and practitioners of animism, conservatives and are dedicated to preserve the legacy of sacrificial culture (Reang, 2017) with the oral form of Mundum performance. They believe that the Mundum singer or performer gets divinely connected with the holy spirit of ancestors and make request to provide the family or individual with the good health, prosperity and happiness. The criterion for getting connected with the holy spirit is one with elderly and experienced individual among the Bantawa Rai Kul (sub-group or clan) chosen to perform Mundum. Sometimes, this Mundum performer also make some prophecy of the related house or family and suggest or advice for the remedy too (Prem Bahadur Rai, July 15, 2024, personal communication).

They believe that the cultural aspect that they are following are the most ancient one and thus, due to antique characteristics they relate their Tin Chula culture with the origin of Parohang and Sumnima during the primordial period. The Parohang and Sumnima are their ancestral deities concerned with the evolution of Bantawa Rai albeit filled with cultural complexities and linguistic intricacies (Subba, 2023) based on the geographical localities. Parohang is revered as the god of sky that represents heaven, rain, and the spiritual realm whereas Sumnima is revered as the mother goddess who symbolizes the earth, fertility and prosperity (“Kirat Mythology”, n.d., para. 3, subtitle: Deities) and these deities symbolically exist in the Tin Chula as ancestors and the proprietors of a family of Bantawa Rai clan.

Methods and Materials

For this research, I took an ethnographic approach since I wanted to attain a detailed understanding of the social and cultural aspects of the Tin Chula system of Bantawa Rai Clan-community. Ethnography, which comes from the field of anthropology, describes the methodology that seeks to understand a culture from the cultural group's perspective. For this, I encompassed total involvement and participation in the Bantawa Rai's community to unravel everyday life (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The emphasis is to figure out not simply the actions but the meaning, sense, and rationality behind the actions and the social order that comprise the described social and cultural order.

Research Paradigm and My Positionality

This research resides in an interpretivist approach, which asserts that reality is socially constructed and, therefore this study relies on subjective ontology and epistemology. Knowledge emerges from the meaning that individuals generate from their experiences concerning a phenomenon. Thus, in this research, I am not a dispassionate objective viewer, but an implementer of the data collection process and interpretation engaged with the perspectives of multiple realities.

Considering my positionality carefully is important for this study. I am a community member and a researcher, and a member of the Magar Indigenous Community of the same place. I understand the unique viewpoint that I must override and the prism I must filter the field through. I practiced the critical form of reflexivity to understand the predispositions, the interfacing with the community, the data collected, and the analysis. I also kept a reflexive journal for this purpose.

Research Setting and Participants

I conducted the 2 months (June and July 2024) fieldwork with elder members of the Bantawa Rai community and a Bantawa Shaman who conducted all the community's rituals from birth-to-death.

I used purposive sampling. Key informants were my colleagues, students, or neighbors who are members of the Bantawa Rai community. They supported me to identify the research participants according to their roles or knowledge regarding my research questions. Participants were then recruited through these key informants, providing access to a wider social network. I used data saturation process to inform my sample size, which stipulates that data collection should continue until no new themes are emerging.

Data Collection Methods

The principal methods used in this study involved participant observation, open-ended interviews, and informal and engaged conversations. In addition, I also clicked photos and performed video recordings of the rituals.

Participant Observation

I was involved in participant observation specifically during family performances of ritualized “Chinta”, the Shamanic rites performed at home of Bantawa Rai. For this, I received information through a phone call, a human messenger, or sometimes, I was given the date and time during interviews. Such participant observation occurred when my research participants were asked to perform Chinta and other shamanic rituals requested by the community’s households to perform at home. These included performances for the birth ritual and death rituals. In addition, Chinta-an individual healing ritual-it is performed when a Bantawa Rai community member fall sick. The community believes that before a sick person is taken to the hospital, Shaman must see the sick person for spiritual healing. Not doing so is believed that the sickness would be aggravated, and sometimes he or she may expire untimely. Therefore, I had to vary the days and times I spent in community to provide a more comprehensive account of the activities and interactions.

Depending on the contextual frameworks and propriety standards, I participated from passive observation to active participation in the repeated activities. The aim was to seize the social world as the participants do; I even followed the structural events along with the informal and engaged conversations to understand the community’s lived experiences related to Tin Chula system. After every observation session, I wrote detailed and descriptive field notes, separated into two parts as follows:

Descriptive Notes: These are the objective accounts of events, conversations, settings, and behaviours.

Reflective Notes: These include my impressions, hunches, emerging themes, and reflexive thoughts regarding the role I played, along with feelings and experiences.

Open-Ended Interviews

I conducted open-ended interviews with a wide range of people. I drafted the open-ended interview guides to surface in detail about participants' narratives and their experiences with convictions and practices around Tin Chula and the cultural rituals woven around it. This approach provided enough opportunity to address pivotal themes while also being nimble enough to pivot to unanticipated emerging themes. The interviews, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were recorded and transcribed.

Artefacts

As part of data triangulation, artefacts were collected to understand the cultural context of Tin Chula, including photographs of Tin Chula, a video recording of a Chinta ritual that shaman performed, and a Mundum book which describes a series of rituals. The book was authored by the community elders.

The Collection of Data

The collection of data was a repetitive or cyclic process. A concurrent approach was used while data was being collected, which guided my observations and interviews. This approach was based on thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the analysis was conducted in the following phases:

Acquainting with the textual data: This phase involves several readings of the transcripts and field notes to gain deep immersion into the data.

Initial Coding: This phase involves the generation of concise labels for the key features of the data across the entire dataset.

Searching for Themes: This entails the collation of codes into possible overarching themes that capture key patterns of meaning.

Reviewing Themes: This involves checking to see if the themes hold together in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset and refining them as necessary.

Defining and Naming Themes: This phase involved the building of a clear interpretation of each theme.

Phase of Producing the Report: Integrating thematic analysis into a synthesized narrative is compiled with the relevant empirical and theoretical

literature and illustrative extracts and vignettes from the field notes and interviews.

I performed the analysis without the aid of any software apart from an AI tool that automatically checks spelling, sentence structure, and grammar in the Microsoft word document. Some of the words included in the study originate from the Devnagari script and the Bantawa Rai Bhasha.

Ethical Considerations

The research has garnered ethical sanction from the local committee of Rai Yayokkha from the Bantawa Rai community in Morang district of Nepal. The ethical principles which guided this research include the following:

Informed Consent: The informed consents were obtained verbally from all participants before the interviews. This was framed from the participant's perspective as a means of exposing and showcasing their culture while they were in the process of preserving some of the cultural elements of Tin Chula. Participants were keen to support the study about Bantawa Rai's culture of Tin Chula. They believed that this kind of research can positively impact on the younger generations who are being influenced by Euro-cultural system.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Identifying details were kept confidential and all identifying information (names, specific locations) were replaced with pseudonyms in field notes, transcripts, and the final report.

Minimization of Harm: I was attentive to the possible psychological and/or social harm, and I stopped any line of inquiry that seemed unduly distressing. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time.

Reciprocity and Respect: I sought to establish a relationship of mutual respect and acknowledgment of their time and participation, ensuring that I did not impose any undue expectations.

Findings and Discussion

Evolution of Tin Chula and its Existence in the Divinely Three Worlds

To enrich the discussion about the evolution of Tin Chula, I bring here the oral narrative or the myths popular among the Bantawa Rai. As Berk

(2016) concludes that the history of civilizations is full of mythologies (p. 72). The cultural history of Bantawa Rai clan resources its cultural aspect from the myths that have become a narrative in the sub-group. Speaker 2 narrates:

During the primordial period, there was only space. At this period our ancestors, highly venerated as Parohang and Sumnima, installed divine Tin Chula in all three divinely world named as Mrtityu Lok (supposed to be lying under the ocean bed), Prithvi Lok (on earth) and Swarga Lok (in the sky or at the top of the Mount Everest). The Rai community believed that their ancestors live in all three divine worlds. During the ritual performances, the Bantawa Rai Bijuwa (shaman) connects all three world's Tin Chula and make different prophecies and performs healing functions (Wettstein & Stockhausen, 2013; Rai, 2020). They pray and revere Tin Chula for benediction and prosperity as their main deities- Parohang and Sumnima reside since the origin of the earth.

Tin Chula, (the three stoned hearth) specifically named in Bantawa Rai sub-group as Shamkhalung. Here, Shamkha means ancestors and lung means Stone. The three stones have their own significance that are representative of ancestors. For example, father ancestor is Papalung, mother ancestor is Mamalung and Ramilung is the symbol of socio-cultural and spiritual aspects. The Tin Chula is only the holy place and shrine in which all the dead spirits of ancestors live (The Tap HD, June 18, 2023; 1 to 42 seconds). It is the core aspect of all the rites and rituals performed from birth to death. Tin Chula, the Shamkhalung is a holy place of the Bantawa Rai clan in which all cultural and religious Mundums are performed in it (Rai, 2020).

There are different mythological narratives about the evolution of Tin Chula among the Rai community. A nuance understanding is necessary for the core insight of the Tin Chula system. I believe it is necessary to present some of the mythical narratives constructed and shared since ages in the Bantawa Rai clan of ancient and traditional or classical sect (Wettstein & Stockhausen, 2013). In doing this, I present here the narrative of speaker 1:

“The evolution of Tin Chula system took place when the crown of to be king Balihang fell on the ground and turned into stone. Balihang wanted his crown to be put by his sister, but she was discovered with menstrual

cycle on that day. When it went as rumour among the attendants of the crown ceremony, the to be king also heard it and the crown from his hand fell due to the shocking news. As soon as it fell it turned into stone. At this moment, his sister fled the scene, and the audience accused her to be bad omen for this coronation ceremony and thus, started chasing her into the forest. As a result, the Shakela song includes her name as 'Soesoela' -hai hurrah haha meaning Soesoela has fled turning crown into stone, so need to search her"

Vasyl et al., (2028) note that there are no stone fence in between natural and supernatural worlds because gods and people can interact with each other under the mythological worldview. Such myths and legendries have given birth to several Mundums in the Bantawa Rai clan which are functional in ritual performances, and it is an indigenous education.

Sacrificial Ritual and Tin Chula: a Connection with Ancestors

In classical Bantawa Rai, the sacrificing of rooster(s) and hen(s) is performed in almost every ritual they observed. However, before sacrificing it; the Mangpa (shaman) confesses through the medium of Mundum that he is sacrificing it since it was taught by their ancestral deities Parohang and Sumnima. The Mangpa convinces the birds (rooster or hen) or animals (pig) by performing Mundum and he sent their soul(s) to the home of spirit of deities, and they dwell together. This is how, through divine system, sacrifice of roosters and hens are performed through Mundumic permission seeking of the sacrificed. All the sacrificial activities are conducted only after seeking Tin Chula's permission where all ancestors reside. Oestigaard (2022) asserts that in a traditional culture of community a sacrifice of animals or birds is the way of engaging devotees with that of divinities which entails the belief of maximum chances of fulfilling their wish. Speaker 3 tells:

In classical Bantawa Rai, sacrificing pig and chicken is common phenomena. It is our traditional culture practiced and transferred from generations to generations from the time immemorial. It is the way we make our ancestors and deities happy who then bless us with good health

and prosperities. The sacrificial process is not determined by us, it is deities and ancestors who suggest and advice during the ritual performances. But nowadays, some changes are being observed.

In the classical Bantawa Rai, animal sacrifice is offered when the deities want to. The rooster or hen, pigeon, duck or pig is sacrificed when time, place and need is experienced through the message of their deities who live in the Tin Chula. It is performed for the betterment of the family members. Rai (2020) agreed that the sacrifice is done for divine purposes when deities allow it and it's the pious offering as well as necessary for fulfilling the deity's ritual. In Bantawa's scarifying tradition, four legged animals are preferably sacrificed rather than two legged birds. However, speaker 1 says:

Pig sacrifice is better than chicken as deities prefer it the most, but it has become quite expensive nowadays. So, roosters and hens are sacrificed mostly by the people while performing any rituals in the Tin Chula. The significance of sacrificial culture in classical Bantawa clan is discouraged by the market price hike of animals and birds required for rituals. Because of which the traditional cultural practice of Tin Chula is decreasing on trend.

During the sacrificial rituals, Mangpa delivers a confessional Mundum that he is sacrificing in front of all these Hangchhadungda Beridungda (audiences: s drummers, elderly people, family members, friends, relatives and neighbors who attend the event). The Mangpa; further communicating with the to be sacrificed birds or animals says that it is made for this purpose by Parohang and Sumnima. To avoid the sin of killing it, the Mangpa delivers the Mundum and tells that he was permitted by Parohang and Sumnima to kill it asking to provide success, prosperity and healing power for the family.

By communicating with the deities or ancestors and rooster alongside, he sprinkles Jaadh or Rakshi (ale or locally brewed alcohol) or pure water on its head and body as an offer. When the rooster or hen moves its head and body, symbolically agreeing upon the message spoken as Mundum; then the sacrifice is made. Finally, soul of the birds or animals is sent to the Papalapda or

Mamalapda (ancestral father or mother's home) from where it had originally come from.

New Tin Chula and Mundhum Oration: Unscripted but Powerful Means of Connectivity with the Divinely Ancestors

In classical Bantawa Rai clan, when a son begins living separately after marriage or a new house is made, and or when the father expires; a new Tin Chula is compulsory to be installed inside the home. During this occasion, a special Mundum is delivered by the Mangpa of same clan albeit the delivering dialect differs as per the clan (sub-group) within the Rai community (Subba, 2023; Schlemmer, 2019). To illustrate and exemplify the Tin Chula system, I present here the Tin Chula culture of Bantawa Rai clan to bring in the nuance understandings of the language used (Subba, 2023; 2024; Rai, 2020; Schlemmer, 2019)

Classical Bantawa Rai perform Mundum for new Tin Chula with the following materials as necessary requirements; Four stones, three are cylindrically shaped and one flat. The three stones are kept in triangular form, and one is placed in the centre symbolizing the balance of fire or mother earth. Ginger, rice, millet, Chimfing (a spicy scented flower product of tree), bow and arrow, gourd, ale, home brewed liquor and water, khukuri (knife), sickle, hammer, spade, plough, Juwaa (Harness), a traditional slingshot and mud marble, beaten rice, meat, bone, horn of all wild animals (Chanamkhrop in Bantawa dialect). Tupla (a tip sliced banana leaf) to be placed on the floor to hold all the required materials. When that Tupla is placed on floor and made as "Thaan" (an especial spot with all collected paraphernalia on it), the Tupla is transformed through Mundum and is called Ripenla in Rai Bantawa dialect. It is believed that (rishi pukha ripenla) meaning the Mundum origins from this Ripenla. When it is done, the pure water from Chindo (gourd) is poured on all three stones and act of cleaning is performed offering droplets of Jaad, Rakshi (home brewed liquors), bits of all the materials collected for rituals, and the Mundum is performed as:

“Today, I am (as a main guardian of this new house, pronouncing his name, clan, forefathers’ names) or (Mangpa on behalf of the family) keeping you as main Shamkhalung (Tin Chula, three stone hearth). You are all responsible for providing, my family members with protection from diseases, enemies, fire and rivers and so on. You are all responsible for blessings and wishes for the family now onwards. Me and my family members are revering and venerating you now to support us in every moment of our lives. You are the Parohang, Sumnima and all our ancestors and deities. We worship you with rituals required on all occasions, festivals and functions and ask you benedictions for long life, food security, animal security, grain security, fish security, and so on. We also ask for peaceful life and let the foes go far away and the neighbours, friends and relatives spread now onwards”

Schlemmer (2019) posits that Mundum is a legacy of ancestors and is intrinsically local in its tone rooted in its clan, community and territory. The language of Mundum is different in terms of provoking the deities and divinity which are pronounced during the performance of rituals. Rai et al., (2009) argue that mundumic language is a divinely language which differ from day today language. They further pen that it is only used for superhuman beings during the ritual performances to evoke the ancestors.

Tin Chula: a Sacred Shrine venerated from Womb to Death through Mundumic Rituals

Fundamentally, classical Bantawa Rai does not have common holy place as such for pilgrimage and worship as that of Hindu going to temple, Muslim going to Mosque, Christian going to Church and the like. They revered and venerated Tin Chula for generations. It has been a Mundumic celebration for classical Bantawa Rai clan which is referred as Tin Chula Tirtha Dham (Khambu/Khambuni, 2020) meaning the Tin Chula is their pilgrimages and shrines for worshipping. He/she asks for long life, prosperity, peace, favour for everything for the family. In traditional Bantawa Rai subgroup, the womb ritual begins when a baby reaches 16 to 24 weeks in the mother’s womb as

when s/he starts moving (American Pregnancy Association , n.d.; Mater, 2022). The womb ritual's Mundum is delivered as:

In the clan of your father and mother (reciting the name, clan, birthplace, name of the ancestors and local land deities) born with physically and mentally sound health. Today, by flooring clean leaves and Chindo (gourd), Jaad (ale), ginger, Akshata (rice) on it, we are praying you along with our deities and ancestors. You come with long life, full of wisdom, simple but knowledgeable and full of prosperity. You should come with all good qualities for the betterment of your parents and the family.

Showing towards the hen to be sacrificed later in the Tin Chula, the Mangpa delivers: you have evolved in the form of golden bird from the place of Tin Chula. Today, we pray for your secure and healthy birth with safety of your mother.

In classical Bantawa, first rice feeding ceremony is observed with Mundumic ritual. For son it is performed within six months and for daughter within five months of birth (Bokkhim Rai & Bokkhim Rai, 2020). They assert that the first rice feeding ceremony's Mundum is delivered by reciting the name, clan, ancestors and deities of the family:

Om! Om!! Om!! I am uttering the Mundum with which the Shaman of Paruhang and Sumnima had averted all nine planets' negative effects plagued by God of death. Let this recited Mundum evade all the negative impacts on this clan of child by eating food prepared by own family clan mother in the family's Tin Chula. Let her/him not fall ill after eating this food and prevent all the negative effects like, witch spells, whore beholds, and all kinds of devil spirits be escaped.

After all these Mundumic rituals, the Mangpa and parents put Tika (mixture of rice and yoghurt put on forehead or paste of sandalwood powder on forehead). In addition, relatives and friends put Tika on the forehead of the child and provide with foods to eat like; rice, meat, pudding, milk and other food items given at this time to test and new clothes are also given as gifts.

This festival is celebrated pompously nevertheless the financial condition of the family is relative to the celebration.

When a daughter is to be married, she must be shown in the Tin Chula delivering the Mundum by naming all three stones (papalung, mamalung and Ramilung) of Shamkhalung (three stone hearth) as per the dialect they practice. In the august presence of elder members of the community, one of them (the eldest and experienced one who can connect himself with the deities and ancestors) naming the girl to be married and her groom convey the message of acceptance of the Sagun (gifts) brought by the groom's family for marriage proposal. The Mundum goes as (facing towards the Tin Chula):

We accepted the gift brought by Kutumbha (groom's family). You (Tin Chula) please provide benedictions, do not be angry; we already accepted the gifts for marriage, okey!

However, if the girl does not want to get married with the groom; then the following Mundum is delivered in front of Tin Chula and groom's family as:

Reverend ancestors of Tin Chula, our daughter has not reached the age of marriage, she does not know how to behave, she has not completed learning about how to behave with the relatives, friends and neighbours. Due to which your relatives and family would not be happy with our daughter. So, we are returning your gifts and please accept this fact. Do not repeat coming for the same purpose please!

When the girl or daughter agrees to marry the boy, she is brought to the Tin Chula and Mundum is performed by venerating ancestors and deities by Mangpa or the elder and experienced member of the clan as:

Yoday on this auspicious day, we are sending our girl child to her home. Let you provide her with all the good behaviours and morals to be followed in her whole life. We expect to see that she makes everyone happy there. Bestow with all the benedictions she needs to fulfil her duties at her home. Today, onwards she is no more the member of the Tin Chula and do not expect to get food or drinks from her. She is given

as a daughter in law of (telling the Gotra of groom) and we are keeping out of the Tin Chula by today. We have kept all the materials required on clean and pure banana leaf; so please be satisfied and bless our innocent daughter for her new life, okay!

In the culture of Bantawa Rai clan, there is a special ritual called ‘Bakdan’ or ‘Bakdatta’ meaning a systematic cultural process of handing daughter to the groom (Rai, 2019). He further posits that unless she is provided with a Bakdatta by the biological parents even the married daughter is considered as unmarried. For this, there is a special right reserved by the biological parents of the girl. It is called ‘Ukhundi culture’ in Rai Bantawa (ibid).

When daughter in law comes to home, the first ritual observed is to show her in the Tin Chula and ask for blessings. They pray and worship for her that she would live a better life and keep all family members happy and prosperous throughout her life. The Mangpa and the family head pray and wish for her healthy and long life. They also ask for the power of healing from the diseases if she would be infected by any kind of diseases. During this occasion, the rooster and hen are sacrificed and offered to the Tin Chula for asking blessings and wishes (Suk Bahadur Rai, July 7, personal communication).

In groom’s part, the Mundum is delivered by Mangpa or elder and experienced person, naming the Tin Chula (Samkhalung):

We are all set (ready) with all the required materials for Rit (gifts for girl’s family to be given in marriage) like, Jaad, Rakshi, pork, money. To find out whether this auspicious day would be without violence and any negative actions, we are flooring a clean and pure banana leaf and cutting the slice of ginger. Please show us the good divination for the day and this marriage event.

The Mangpa then slices ginger to know Jokhana (good or bad oracle) for the day and the marriage ceremony. If the sliced ginger shows the cut side part on the leaf means its positive actions; no Mundumic resolutions are required; and the opposite side symbolizes the negative actions may occur. When three

times sliced ginger shows other side then it is considered that ancestors and deities are still not happy and thus, the Mangpa and the elder and experienced members pray and revere the Tin Chula pleading for the good oracle. After the completion of Mundumic pray; again, ginger is sliced in the same process to know the oracle until it is positive (Karna Bahadur Rai, July 5, 2024, personal communication).

In classical Bantawa Rai clan, the funeral ritual is observed by worshipping and revering Tin Chula followed by the procedural oral tradition of Mundun performance for the deceased member of the family (Schlemmer, 2019). The death type is categorized into two: natural (by ageing) and unnatural (untimely demise) deaths.

The natural death is readily accepted in the Tin Chula in the tradition of classical Bantawa Rai clan. The souls of such death are considered as good souls and would be able to bless and benedict the family members for their betterment because they are benevolent qualified for blessings. They are placed in the Tin Chula along with their deities- Parohang and Sumnima, they are considered as ancestors and prayed, worshipped and venerated for all the benedictions (Wettstein & Stockhausen, 2013). The classical Bantawa Rai clan believe that such souls would live positively guiding the family members and empower family and shower blessings for prosperity.

The unnatural death is still categorized into three: Hullaten (death by accidents like; vehicle accident, suicides, drowning, etc.), Mamangten (death due to unsuccessful delivery of child), Sukkaten (death due to internal diseases) such members who attained unnatural death are kept out of the Tin Chula as they are malevolent (Bain, 2018). Sometimes such souls trick and play hide and sick to be seated in the Tin Chula for enjoying blissful abode. However, the Mangpa, the Mundum performers, the Dholays (who help Mangpa by delivering Mundums and beating drum) and elderly and experienced members try convincing those souls that the place of Tin Chula is not meant for them, and they must leave for other places such as Hullaten or Mamangten or Sukkaten as per the type of death attained. As per their choices except Tin Chula, the souls are allowed to be seated by the Mangpa and

associated members of the funeral ceremony. The infant and dead child's souls are kept in the flower garden through Mundumic procedures. The unnatural death is not accepted as good soul because it is believed that they do not contain positive energy and thus they are discarded (Karna Bahadur Rai, July 5, 2024, Personal communication).

Discussion

The Tin Chula system in Bantawa Rai clan is an indigenous education system which is bestowed with indigenous knowledge, method and procedures in the form of Mundum which is specific to rituals. The Mundum conveyed in a Bantawa dialect is the educative procedure in the form of spiritual indigeneity connected with the natural phenomena. The indigenous community like Bantawa Rai clan has been historically and deeply intertwined with nature that foster deep spiritual practices without the influence of other religious practices (Asante, 2024). He further explains that to understand the conservation strategies employed by indigenous community like Bantawa Rai, requires deeper understanding of their spiritual teachings and interpretations of the human environment relationship (p. 35).

The majestic culture of Tin Chula system of classical Bantawa Rai is observed as sacred shrine. It has been kept alive as a central value by the sophisticated oral Mundum delivery that differs from other clans linguistically (Subba, 2024). It is believed that the system of worshipping and revering Tin Chula began with the existence of Parohang and Sumnima during the primordial period. The classical Bantawa Rai clans believe that the tradition of Tin Chula culture is divinely established in three divinely worlds perceived as Mrityu Lok (world under the ocean bed), Prithvi Lok (world where we live now) and the Swarga Lok (the heavenly aboard). The Tin Chula is revered and venerated through the medium of Mundum performed by the Mangpa, the shaman in these three worlds. The Mangpa is solely responsible for performing the Mundum who receive messages directly from the deities and ancestors seated in the Tin Chula. The messages received from the deities and ancestors are passed to the concerned family and thus, merry occasions and correctional events are performed. The benedictions or wishes are being asked by doing

ritual practice (Rai, et al., 2009; Rai, 2019) for the family's good luck and prosperities.

The Tin Chula is a heart of the classical Bantawa Rai culture that is acclaimed by installing it in every home. In the context of individual human being, it is practiced through Mundum performance (Rai, 2020) from the time when a baby is conceived in the womb of mother to death of an individual. The dead person, who achieved natural death, is kept in the Tin Chula and revered as deities and ancestors. The unnatural death is not accepted in the Tin Chula believing that such souls would not be able to bless and fulfil the wishes of the living family members. The classical Bantawa Rai has the traditional belief system that unnatural death; considered as reverse side of the ancestors (Schelmmmer, 2019), carries only negative energy that harms and blocks the family from the path of progress and prosperity.

The Tin Chula is necessary to be established when a son is separated and starts living with his own wife and children, after father's death or new house is built. The spirituality of Tin Chula begins with the conception period and the installing of Tin Chula (three stones hearth) at home.

When a daughter gets married; there is special Mundumic three steps method to send her groom's home. First of all, she is shown in the Tin Chula and asked permission to be taken out of the Tin Chula by asking blessings from the ancestors and deities. After seeking permission from the Tin Chula, she is taken to the Mul Khamba (main pillar of house) for asking her exit and she is taken at the main door for the same purpose and then she is taken out of the home; completed to be the daughter of law in her groom's home.

When daughter in law is brought in the home, it is obligatory to show and ask permission to be a daughter in law at home in Tin Chula. Naming the Tin Chula (Samkhalung) and calling the name of local deities and, deities of Tin Chula, the Mangpa and the elderly and experienced persons deliver the Mundum orally to ask for long life, prosperity and healthy relationships with the family members, neighbours, relatives, friends, kith and kins of the family (Mitra Kumar Rai, July 18, 2024, personal communication).

Schlemmer (2019) found that the death in the classical Rai community is funerated as per the type of death that a person attained. The person with natural death is venerated and allowed to be seated in the Tin Chula along with the deities and preceded ancestors. It is considered as good soul who can bless and stand with the family members for their prosperity. They bring positive energy in the family. The unnatural death is considered as negative soul, and the soul is not allowed to be seated in the Tin Chula. The classical Rai community believes that such soul would not be able to bless and fulfil the wishes of the living family.

In the words of Rai (2020) the Mundumic knowledge and education are limited to few elderly people in the community. She also agrees upon the viewpoint that there are very few works conducted on Tin Chula system academically due to which one of the highly valuable indigenous education systems is under threat. This traditional indigenous knowledge and education based on Tin Chula and its Mundum delivery tradition require further implications to be carried out by the academic researchers and policy makers.

Conclusion

This study facilitated me to explore and understand the nuance of cultural heritage of Tin Chula system and its Mundum as an indigenous education system-a tradition of classical Bantawa Rai clan. My conversations with research participants in narrative interviews and participant observation emphasized, how Tin Chula system is revered and venerated in classical Rai Bantawa, albeit; lexical differences occur in the process of delivering the Mundum in an oral tradition.

The in-depth involvement with the research participants allowed me to interrogate about the Tin Chula system and its oral Mundumic Procedures. The Tin Chula is a core of all the socio-cultural observations and ritual performances intrinsically valued indigenous education system related with spirituality (Deer, 2022; Rai, 2020) in Bantawa Rai clan. It is considered as a heavenly abode to deceased souls. Deer (2022) notes that to understand various viewpoints of indigenous experiences, it is necessary to understand spiritual

aspects of those experiences and it is also necessary to understand about their related socio-cultural ceremonies.

Tin Chula and its Mundumic ritual performances are the indigenous perspective education. It teaches the method of installing Tin Chula and perform Mundums of various rituals historically locating the deities and ancestors on it. It provides the decolonizing value on existence of indigenous education system aspired by the specific Mundum for specific ritual value. It is an indigenous way of knowing and recognizing the roles in protecting educational value which is intrinsic to indigenous perspective of Bantawa Rai clan guided by Mundums (Rai, 2020).

The Tin Chula system and its associated Mundumic rituals are necessary to be included in the integrated curriculum by revitalizing the indigenous dialect used by Bantawa Rai to protect the indigenous knowledge.

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