

Kirats in Bhutan

The Kirat society and Kirat religion have existed in Bhutan since the time of our ancestors, characterized by unique traditions, culture, customs, worship, language, and the Samjik Mundhum. In those times, oral traditions of worship and rituals involving animal sacrifice were more prevalent. For example, the practice of reciting and singing the oral Mundhum continued for months, lasting seven days and seven nights. However, later the Mundhum was recited only for three days and three nights because it was not written down. The reciters who performed the Mundhum for seven days and seven nights passed away. After their loss, the recitation was shortened significantly to one day and one night. When the reciters who performed the Mundhum for three days and three nights also passed away, the practice gradually declined, and the Mundhum was eventually lost. The Mundhum reciters—Phedangba, Samba, Yeba, and Mangpa—also disappeared. Later, when the Mundhum was written down by Mahaguru Muhingum Ongsi Phalgu Nanda Lingden, the society did not pay much attention to reading the Samjik Mundhum or worshipping it, which caused the number of Sewasaba (priests) to decrease significantly. And the number of oral reciters gradually decreased over the years, and the Kirat community began performing worship in their own way. During that time, many people became confused, and as a result, many converted to other faiths.

When problems and crises related to religion, customs, rituals, traditions, culture, and similar aspects began to arise in society, some of our learned ancestors took initiatives to address them. For example, from 1942 (B.S. 1988) onwards, the late Harka Dil Limbu (Laote) disciple of Mahaguru Muhingum Ongsimang Falgunanda established a Manghim in collaboration with the village community in Samtse Yeseltse (Lamitar) and started worshipping by reading the Kirat Samjik Mundhum. Similarly, from 1974/75 (B.S. 2032) onwards, the late Dal Bahadur Limbu (Bala Nembang) disciple of Mahaguru Muhingum Ongsimang Falgunanda, Krishna Bir Limbu (Mangmu) began performing La-dhung Namdhung Semi Sewa in various places of Dagapela, including Dagakhola, at a place now called Shadu Daha. Furthermore, from 2000 (B.S. 2056) onwards, the late Harka Bahadur Subba (Lingden), the late Tin Hang Subba (Fago), and the senior citizens of Dagana reached an agreement to perform the entire Kirat ritual using fruits and flowers instead of the traditional animal sacrifice system.

The campaign for the reform of Kirat society began organizationally in 2004, led by Mr. Harka Bahadur Subba (Libang), Dhan Lal Rai (Sampang), Shree Man Subba (Phurumbo), Buddha Kumar Rai (Dilungcha), Tara Bir Rai (Khaling), Harka Bahadur Rai (Chamling), Ran Dhojh Subba (Edhinggo), Priti Maya Limbu (Khazum), Bal Bahadur Rai (Lingkhim), Jit Bahadur Rai (Kulung), Kalpana Rai (Samsuhang), Leela Rai (Newahang), and Meena Subba (Tenyung).

Despite facing difficulties and many challenges, the Kirat community resumed the practice of animal sacrifice and worship with fruits, flowers, and the lighting of butter lamps. At the same time, the Kirat community met Lama Neten Lama Wangdi of Tsirang Dzongkhag, who provided further assistance in propagating their traditions.

In 2007, during the 18-day Meonlam Chhenmo at Tsirang Dzongkhag led by His Holiness Je Khemrinpoche, the Kirat people attended the event. Lama Wangdi clearly explained the goals and objectives of Kirat society and Kirat religion alongside His Holiness Je Khemrinpoche. At the same time, Je Khenpo advised that if there were any difficulties in

continuing to perform sewa/worship in this manner, should remember him or Zhung Dratshang, who would always offer support.

Following the religious guidance of His Holiness Je Khenpo, it became necessary to educate the Bhutanese Kirat people about the goals and objectives of Je Khenpo and Muhingum Ongsi Mahaguru Phalgunanda. This education aimed to gradually create a favorable environment for the sustainable progress of Kirat society.

It is known that since 2004, the Kirat Religious Association of Bhutan has been unofficially established and was led by Mr Harka Bahadur Subba (Libang) until July 2008. Subsequently, Mr Ran Dhoj Subba (Edhinggo) served as President until 2017.

In 2009, documents were submitted to the Chhoedey Lhentshog, Chaired by Mr Ran Dhoj Subba, to register the Kirat Religious Association of Bhutan in order to strengthen Kirat society. However, it was later discovered that the registration was not completed at that time due to incomplete documentation.

The Kirat Religious Association of Bhutan was officially named Druk Kirat Chhoetshog as a religious organization and was registered under the Chhoedey Lhentshog (Commission for Religious Organizations of Bhutan) on 24 May 2018, under the Chairmanship of Sangdangenwarumsaba Buddha Kumar Rai(Dilungcha).

Druk Kirat Chhoetshog is managed by 11 Board members elected from among the members at an Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Board comprises a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and seven other Board members. The tenure of Board members, Executive members, and Coordinators shall be for a period of three years, and Members are eligible to contest for re-election to serve an additional term. The Chairperson shall run the office for two consecutive terms, provided he/she gets elected the second time too. After serving two consecutive terms, subject to fulfilment of a three-year cooling period for another terms. The Board meets at least once every three months and a majority of members must be present to constitute a quorum. Its objectives include preserving culture, language, script, and traditions, promoting harmony among all communities in Bhutan, respecting Buddhist heritage and Tsa-Wa-Sum, and organizing religious and cultural activities for peace, unity, and the well-being of the King, country, and people.