

Kirat Traditional Musical Instruments:

“KE”



The Kirat Khambu and Limbu traditional musical drum, known as the "Ke" (also called Buluk Ken in the Khambu Rai language), is officially referred to as Chhaybrung. It serves as the main rhythmic instrument for the Sakela and Ke Lang dances, many of which are shared across Kirat communities. This large, traditional, hollow, rectangular wooden drum is the central cultural and religious instrument of the Kirat community. There are many theories and stories about why the instrument was named "Ke."

The Kirat ancestors narrated that as the "Ke" evolved, its shape and type also changed and were modified. The larger it was made, the louder the sound it produced. When made and played large, it sounded like a tiger roaring. In the Limbu language, a tiger is called a *keva*. Therefore, this instrument was named "Ke" because its sound resembled that of a *keva* (tiger). A natural question arises about who invented the "Ke" at that time, and who were the dancers. According to the Mundhum of "Ke," their ancestors said that Ladhak~hang, Namdhak~hang, Pebu~hang, Lapsa~hang (also known as Sappriba and Lembriba), Kanden~hang, Handen~hang, Laden~hang, Phungden~hang, Pa-soi~ba, Te-nei~ba, Sodha~hang, Nanggen~hang, Kesang, Namsang (also known as Sembari and Pembariba), Aawaaso~hang, Pataso~hang, Sakfari~hang, and Lembari~hang invented the "Ke" at different times.

Laden~hang, Phungden~hang, Sodin~hang, Langdin~hang, Kanden~hang, Handen~hang, Se-ongge~hang, Ongge~hang, Netin~hangma, Huktin~hangma, Angoti, Sangothi, and many others were the first dancers. According to the ancestors, they imitated the dance and movements of birds and animals while playing the "Ke."

Examples of these dances include Putuke Lang (Dove), Ka:wa Lang (Crow), Charphemba Lang (Butterfly), Mora Lang (Peacock), Ingwa Lang (Cock), Syabon Lang (Wild Dove), Sekpindang Lang (Ghoral), Pengwa Lang (Deer), Takmi Lang (Elephant), Keva Lang (Tiger), Yasa Lang (Thar), Mayu Lang (Bear), Nabhonji Lang (Fish), Khebakpa Lang (Gangatta), and other religious dances

such as Kusrakpa Lang, Lam Ke, Lamdak Lang, Singkhekwa Lang, Samba Lang, Thakthamma Lang, Me:kam Lang, Nampetchong Lang, Manglang, and others. These dances have remained in the Kirat Limbu society to this day.

Likewise, Kirat communities have many stories and theories about the "Ke." Among them, one of the most popular stories of the "Ke" Chhaybrung within the Kirat Limbu community is as follows: In the early days of human civilization, a woman named Tigenjongna, also referred to as Phaksara Tigenjongna, who was in the form of a goddess, gave birth to twin sons. One child was Kesami, born as a fierce and wild tiger, and the other was Namsami, born as a human, who was alert and wise. When the sons grew up, the older son behaved like a tiger, so he was called Kesami, meaning tiger's child. The younger son behaved like a human and was called Namsami. In the Kirat Limbu Mundhumik language, the human race is referred to as Namsami. The two were brothers who initially lived together but grew apart due to their vastly different natures – one belonging to the forest, the other to fire (human civilization).

Now, the conflict between the two brothers, Kesami and Namsami, whose fundamentally different natures as animal and human caused constant quarrels and growing jealousy. Their mother worshipped, seeking to maintain peace, lighting lamps and placing two pairs of kalashes made from Ondang flowers in Kesami's name and Sekmuri flowers in Namsami's name. Despite this, the quarrels intensified. Kesami threatened Namsami, saying, "Now I will kill you." The conflict escalated until Namsami decided to kill Kesami to save himself.

Namsami devised a clever plan: he fled to the forest and climbed a Shimbol tree (silk cotton tree). Kesami chased him and climbed the same tree. From the top, Namsami said, "If you are going to eat me now, open your mouth; I will jump into it myself." Kesami closed his eyes and opened his mouth, but Namsami then shot an arrow from above in his opened mouth, killing him. Namsami succeeded in his plan.

Their mother worshipped accordingly and declared that since the brothers had not stopped their quarrel by killing each other, the flower of the kalash bearing the name of the one who died would wither, while the flower of the kalash bearing the name of the survivor would flourish. Finally, the kalash with the Ondang flower withered, and the kalash with the Sekmuri flower blossomed. Therefore, in Kirat Limbu society, there is a very strong belief that the Sekmuri flower is revered and worn proudly during the head-raising ritual and is believed to be essential for maintaining strength. However, they do not use the Ondang flower on any occasion or worship; they say it makes their heads go down and will have negative effects.

After the brothers' deaths, Namsami invented the musical instrument called the "Ke" (Chhaybrung) in honor of his brother. It produced a deep "Hurung Hurung" sound, resembling the roar of the tiger Kesami. Upon hearing this, their mother, Tigenjongna, said to Namsami, "I have no regrets that you killed your brother. You invented the musical instrument 'Ke' (Chhaybrung), and through it, his name is immortal." And again the mother gave this advice to Namsami: from now on, whenever you begin any occasion or good deed, always play the "Ke" in memory of your brother at the beginning of the occasion. This will not attract the attention of any enemies, and you will never feel alone. In that belief, the Kiratis have continued to play the "Ke" at the beginning of every occasion or good deed to this day.

The "Ke" cultural tradition, which has continued since that time, remains a primary identity of the Kirat community today.