



An Analysis of the Kirat Limbu Traditional Beliefs and Culture

*Dr. Nawa Raj Subba

Purbanchal University, Edenburgh International College, Biratnagar-16, Nepal

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*Corresponding author: Dr. Nawa Raj Subba

Abstract

The review article provides an overview of the cultural developments of the indigenous Kirat Limbu community. The report comprehensively analyzes verifiable facts and evidence. It considers cultural, linguistic, historical, archaeological, and anthropological viewpoints. According to the Sanskrit book Yoginitra, Kirat Limbu originated in Kushdesh, Africa. Persian history identified traces of Kirat Limbu's ancestors in Mesopotamia. Linguistic evidence also connects Kirat Limbu's ancestors to the Mesopotamian Lepmu race, which parallels Greek mythology. The history demonstrates that Kirat from that region with Shiva/Saba. They arrived at Saptasindhu and developed the Sindh-Harappan civilization, uncovered in excavations. They worshipped Shiva, Pashupati, and Shakti. Mundhum claims that their journey to Nepal took place via India's Ganga lowlands and Tibet China. When they first arrived in Himalayan Nepal, their beliefs were Shaiva and Shaivatic-Bon. Hinduism developed after Aryan accepted Shaiva, renamed Sanatan, and introduced the Brahmin-dominated caste system. As a result, some Kirats became Hindus (Kshatriya). Kashi Limbu abolished wearing the threads Janai and Kshatriya castes for Kirat right but retained native Shivaism under the Yahang, Thebasam, Mundhum, Sattelang, and other names. Another branch imported Buddhist-Bon from Tibet to Nepal under Yuma/Lhasahangma. Thus, the Kirat Limbu beliefs and culture have evolved due to reciprocal influence and assimilation.

Keywords: Kirat Limbu, Himalaya Nepal, Cultural development, Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Kirat is a civilization studied in history. People now use it as an ethnic identity word. It has, in some ways, become a political and national term. The phrase refers to the Tibeto-Burman language family, including the Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar ethnic groups. Despite having a sizable population, they became marginalized within the political structure. Their language and culture have also evolved and changed.

Kirat was a warrior who resided in a fortress, as we can see from a global history, known for its strongholds at the time. As an identity, the word Kirat comes from Mesopotamia's Mediterranean region. Ashur, a Babylonian, developed the Kirataite or Kirat semantic population^[33]. According to linguist Bal Krishna Pokhrel^[26], Limbu's forebears were Lepmu in Mesopotamia and Persia. Even though the Kirat and the Greek phrase are available in global history, they are interchangeable^[26].

The name Yakthung derived from the Kirat semantics of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The term 'Yak' means 'Stronghold' in Kirat Limbu. Thumba is a bold man, and 'Thum' is a place to call home. As a result, 'Yakthung' might refer to a clan, dynasty, ethnic group with heroic figures, or a fortified group of soldiers. According to the study, its origins are in China, Tibet, and India. Kirat and Yakthung are two terms that have similar meanings. The Yakthung appears active in India, a country on the outskirts of the continent^[24]. Kirat and Yakthung, as a result, refer to a fortified community of residents, clans, and brave groups. Because the Kirat progenitor went from west to east, the term Kirat is older than the word Yakthumba.

The clan Limbu in the Kirat family is an exonym, which means bow warrior. The Kirat Limbus' Shaman discusses their ancestral places when they are sick when a kid is born, when they get married, and when they die, which is one of

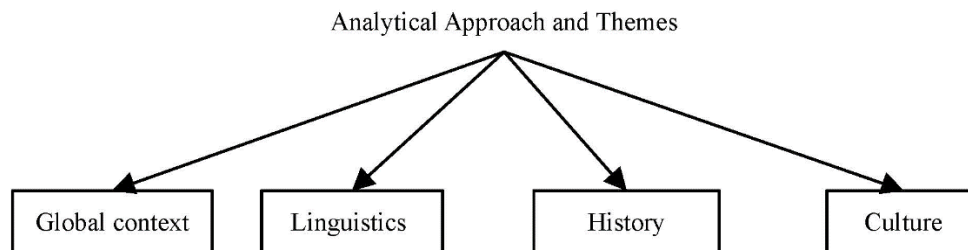
their cultural elements. During the occasions, the Shaman identifies their ancestors and the names of all the sites. For example, the Mangena Yak is a site of ancestral origin. Kirat sees their ancestors and their homeland as their identity in this way. Therefore, the Kirat Limbu people now refer to their ancestral homeland as Mangena Yak.

Kirat Limbu has a strong bond with nature. Therefore, they hold the soul in high regard. They respect ancestors as gods. They believe they are descendants of the Theba (Shiva). Kirat Limbu's faith thus occurs in the Shaivatic-Bon religion. They, however, call their faith by its name. They go by the names Thebasam, Thebasammang, Yahang, Sattedhang, Yuma, Mundhum, and so on. Their priests, Phegangba/ma, Samba do the formalities.

Indigenous peoples such as Kirat Limbu have lost many of their original customs. We can, however, decide which practices are unique. Their ancient texts and history provide information on their habits and beliefs. What are the most recent trends in these beliefs? An analysis of the indigenous' traditional practices reveals their ancestry. We can use this information to learn about their ancient faiths. This paper delves into and analyses the old beliefs and practices of the Himalayas' indigenous Kirat Limbu.

Kirat Limbu's culture stands on Shiva, Bon philosophy, with Animism, Shamanism. They have faiths such as Yahang, Thebasam, Kirat, Yuma, Sattedhang, Mundhum, etc. We can narrow down the distance between different religions by examining the aspects above. As a result, it will cut community animosity.

Analytical Framework



In this article, the writer examined established knowledge. The paper discussed designated knowledge areas. First, there are Animism, Shamanism, Bon philosophy, and Shaiva as global backgrounds. The discussion considered related Indigenous knowledge. Second, the writing assesses knowledge from linguistics. The third section looks at historical and archaeological knowledge. The fourth area discussed is culture and species description.

ANALYSIS

1) Global context

Some faiths and beliefs were universal among humans. Before developing language and script, these beliefs were already in place. For example, Shamanism and Animism were both universal. Bon's faith had a similar effect on the indigenous people. As a result, the indigenous people have a solid connection to the mentioned faith. Within the Kirat Limbu ethnicity, the above beliefs still prevail.

a) Animism

Animism is the idea of seeing the soul in all living and inanimate objects, including human life. This idea is essential to all indigenous cultures' life philosophy, lifestyle, and religion. The soul, according to Animism, shows itself in all earthly natural objects, including air, water, fire, earth, sun, mountains, Rivers Mountains, forests, plains, and so on. Thus, Animism and Shamanism have the most intimate link. These Animism-Shamanism beliefs were abundant in tribal life philosophy, religion, and culture^[18].

Nature adoration Animism derived from the Latin word anima, which means "breath" or "soul." Animism philosophy believes life is in all material things^[16]. Shaman or Dhamizhakri in common or Phedangba/ma, Samba in Kirat Limbu carried out the deeds under this Animism. Animism is prevalent for a variety of reasons. When a person is ill, the Shaman does heal work. If someone needs to conduct any of the planned tasks, if someone needs to erase any hate, if someone needs to build any friendship or marriage, or if a person needs to find any guiding spell, people require the role of the Shaman. He examines divination and communicates with the soul through the divination method.

Shamanism is a common religious practice in the Himalayan region, North Asia, and North America. Shaman has the power to communicate with and affect gods and devils. Religious traditions include fortune-telling, ghosts, occultism, anxiety, magical activities, vows to please gods and goddesses, and indulgence to treat the sick. They also work to prevent calamity, restore peace, and prophesy. People seek Shaman in the community regardless of when people are born, married, sick, or die. In ancient times, the Bon religion, which had this idea and characteristic, arose in the Mansarovar region of Zhangzhong, Tibet^[20].

According to Kirat Limbu Mundhum, the self-manifesting *Ittasing* is the Creator of all creation (Swayambhu). The thoughts, wisdom, and powers of the Swayambhu revealed five potentials: *Chafat*, *Mukum*, *Hikke*, *Iksa*, *Tarak*, which are fire, water, air, earth, and sky^[7]. The philosophy regards Ittasing as the fundamental foundation of the five powers *Panchashakti* (Swayambhu). *Ningwabhu Mang*, the mine of knowledge that is *Ningwabhu*, the God of the mind, is another name for him. The same Ittasing Swayambhu soul will live in these five powers. The soul lives in all-natural, material, and non-living things emerging from these five powers, according to Mundhum's life philosophy.

In comparison, the deities and spirits adored by Shamans are geographically local in Animism. Gods are omnipresent in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. In Animism, the souls get joyful or sad, and Shaman can exploit to gain power by good or bad activities (such as war). The soul communicates with the gods in Animism^[18].

Mount Phaktanglung (Kumbhakarna), Mount Sagarmatha (*Chanjanglung*), Mount Kailash, Mansarovar Lake, Saptakoshi, Kokoha Koshi river, and others are ancestral locations in Mundhum of Kirat Limbu. They attempt to join nature and natural places, creatures, and objects by the soul, considering their fathers' gods and sacred. Phedangba/ma, Samba do worship. As a result, nature-worshipping Animism and Shamanistic philosophy have a strong foundation in Kirat Limbu culture. Shaman Phedangba/ma, Samba has inspired the Kirat Mundhum's opinions.

b) Shamanism

Consideration of the soul as the origin or core of life is a prehistoric tradition. It has impacted the ancient religions of around 95% of indigenous populations. In English, it is known as Shaman/Shamanism, while in Nepali, it is known as *Dhamizhakri* or *Phedangba/ma*, *Samba* in Kirat Limbu. 'Shaman' comes from the Turkish-Mongolian Tungus language^[31]. Shamanism grew in Central Asia, Siberian, Eastern European (Eurasia), North and South American tribes. Anthropology argues that some of its notions extend back to the Stone Age of hunting, or the time when people hunted for sustenance in the forest. As a result, even Kirat's ancestors could not escape this religion.

Shamanism is a spiritual discipline centred on nature worship. They communicate with spirits in natural settings like air, water, fire, sound, mountains, hills, rivers, rocks, etc. According to Isha Gucciardi^[17], they adore heavenly force and discover it in the souls of natural objects.

The practice of a Shaman got established on faith and tradition. They communicate with the divine power by reaching a different conscious realm through the sound of a Bronze-plate (*Chethya*), hand-drum (*Dhyangro*). Shamanism is a philosophy that suggests a cure for a condition and a solution to a problem. It possesses divine authority and jurisdiction. He never works to save power or salvation. Always work solely for the good of society^[17].

In the first stage of Phedangba/ma's spiritual journey, he engages in the music and enters an unstable mental condition. Then, he gets into contact with the soul and converses with it. Finally, he becomes aware of the power and asks for its solution. Similarly, he uses inspiration to show that he has received inspiration or a message. The spiritual message determines karma or worship. This tradition has existed in tribal society since time immemorial and has assumed the form of religion. Kirat Limbu's religious deeds are likewise an example of this.

c) Bon

Bon is a Shamanic and Animism-based primordial religion. Bon translates to invoke a deity or spirit^[14]. In Bon, a Shaman performs worship. He posits a divine heart in a natural object, the patriarchal soul. One of the characteristics of Bon religion is the practice of offering blood to the deity. Bon's philosophy holds that nature, the soul, the parent, the gods, the devils, and others should all be happy.

Himalayan Bon Foundation^[19] has presumed that Yandrung Bon's religion was 16,000 years old. But, according to tradition, Bon founder Olmo Lungrik was born 18,000 years ago in Tajikistan. SenRao Miwochi, another magnificent royal, preached Buddhism in Zhang-Jhung, near Tibet. The religion now has around 100,000 adherents. Bonpos are adherents of this religion.

SenRao Miwochi's birth date is the subject of debate. Some claim he was a contemporary of Lord Buddha. Many experts, however, believe he was a prince born in the dynasty 1050 years before the Buddha. Scholars think that SenRao,

the ancient Bon religion, is an excellent example of Animism^[2]. It is now clear that Bon in Tibet is an ancient East Asian traditional religion. Bon is not only the Tibetan religion but also the conventional religion of Central Asia. Before the Tibetan Empire, it belonged to the Sungsung kingdom^[27].

Some scholars believe the Shaivites entered Tibet from Kashmir via Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, Shaivism intermingled with Bon's religion in the Kailash Mansarovar region of Tibet. Bon followers treat Mount Ti-se (Kailash) and Lake Ma-Pham (Mansarovar) as sacred places. Shiva followers also considered Kailash and Mansarovar as holy places. Scholars believe that Shiv faith influences or intermingled with Bon because they are the same places of pilgrimage for both Bon and Hindus^[10]. Based on the evidence presented above, Shaivism and Bon's interaction and mutual influence have occurred in the Mount Kailash Mansarovar lake region. Bon and Hindu pilgrimage met after Shaivism converted to Sanatana (Hinduism).

According to reports, the Nepalese Gurung minority has decided to write the Bon faith in the place of religion in the next census^[28]. According to the study, Nepalis are free to adopt another's belief, and when they visit Nepal, they visit Pashupatinath, Swayambhunath, and the Kirat temple^[11]. The Gurungs, however, have adopted the Bon faith as their original religion.

A study of the Thakali clan, who live in Thak Khola in the Gandaki zone, revealed their first religion was pre-Buddhist Bon, influenced by Shamanism and Animism. Thakalis believe in Bonism. So, they honour the soul, nature, and the parent. They advocate making sacrifices. Another name for their cultural tradition is *Bon-Nag*. Their mode of worship is known as *Dhom*. They worship Buddhist and Hindu deities at the same time. However, their religion is known as Shamanistic-Animistic Bon religion in common usage^[25].

Teams of researchers discovered Bon stupa in Belhara Dhankuta of Eastern Nepal related to the area's religion and indigenous culture. According to the findings of this study, various ethnic groups of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family imported the Bon religion from Tibet. The study also demonstrates Kirat's tight relationship with Tibet. For example, the Kirat Limbuwan region relied on Tibetan salt. Even though the Bon Stupa at Belhara has been covered with Buddhist now, Hindu, and local culture, the study believes that the stupa preserves symbols of the old Bon religion before the Buddhist Bon religion^[3].

Investigations also revealed that the old Bon religion disappeared in Tibet and Nepal because Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhists did not tolerate the Bon religion after Lamaism in Buddhism. That is how Bon Buddhism came to be known as Buddhist-Bon. According to the study, Bon-Buddhism got recognized by many local names across the Himalayan and mountainous regions. Thus, under the name Yuma or Lhasahangma, the Buddhist Bon religion invaded Nepal in the ninth century in Kirat Limbuwan^[1,13,4,8].

2) Linguistics

In Mesopotamia, blood mixed between the Kashi and Goth (cow-herder/worshipping) families. The Kashi dynasty belonged to the Caspian Sea-dwelling people^[34,6]. They were an initial place of Kirat *Munatembe*^[9]. Bal Krishna Pokhrel, a linguist, has shed more light on the blood mix among Kashi, Guth, and Krum/Saumur. Afterwards, the Guth blood-mixed Kashi and the Kirat ancestor, Krum/Krum/Saumur, blended in the Sumer region. This Kashi-influenced family served as the Kashi/Kashyap dynasty and the Sumer-influenced Kirat dynasty^[26]. Kashi and Saumur have blood mixed with them and cultural impact and intermixture.

Chemjong^[8] and Pokhrel^[26] noted Sumer, Kashi was the ancestor of Kirat. The Sumerians used their preferred materials for burying their deceased^[22]. Kirat Limbu practices burying dead bodies as a rite. They have cemeteries in their area. However, they are also burning corpses due to a shortage of space and Hinduism's influence.

3) History and Civilizations

We can't study history without also studying ancient civilizations. Kirat has a lengthy and illustrious history that spans many cultures. The Egyptian civilization, Mesopotamian civilization, Babylonian civilization, Indus Valley Harappan civilization, Vedic, post-Vedic civilization, and China civilization all have traces of the Kirat forebears Sumer, Kashi, Rudra, Das, and Asura, etc. In Mesopotamia, where blood mixed between Kirat, Khas, and Aryans, the ancestors of Kirat, Khas, and Aryans were rooted as Sumer and Kashi^[26].

According to Chemjong, the Kasai dynasty came from Munatembe, and they got established in Media in the southwestern region of modern-day Persia. Before 1570 BC, they governed Babylon. However, the Elam dynasty drove the Kashi dynasty from Babylon about 1300 BCE.

Kashi and Saumer were both sun enthusiasts. Finkel^[15] finds that Sumer and Akkad called the sun-god 'Ut,' 'Ud.' Kirat mundhum received Om and Ut from ancient Sumer and Akkad civilizations^[15,29]. Many Nepalese and Indians are aware that Kashi is merely the Ganges plain. However, Kashi is an ancient metropolis formerly home to Mesopotamia (Sumer), Central Asia (Taklamakan), and India's Ganges plains^[23,6,26,34].

They travelled east, led by Namdiver Roral priest, to Golku (Goku) in Afghanistan. They split into two teams. One group arrived at the Ganga and Jamuna rivers. The people founded a kingdom near Benaras called Sukigangaji and ruled for 12 generations. In Kirat history, this group denotes the Kashi dynasty/Kashithangba/Khambongba^[7]. A branch of this family went on to govern Kathmandu and set up the Kirat dynasty in Nepal's history.

After the Girvan Yuddha Shah issued a proclamation barring the Kashi dynasty from gaining land privileges (Kipat), there was a riot in Limbuwan in 1865. To defend the Kipat system, the Kashi dynasty Limbu and the Lhasa dynasty Limbu joined forces. By deciding to run marital relationships jointly, they formed a front against Gorkhali. At the time, they hurled three baskets of Janai, a holy thread, into the Tamber river^[21].

4) Cultural and Species description

a) Saba Sammang mundhum

'Saba' means monkey, and 'Sammang' signifies God in Kirat Limbu. Because the nature of this God or associated clan is bright, self-sufficient, and powerful, we can deduce it as a deity. Maybe because controlling him was difficult. People thought the misery and sickness of humans were due to the power of the monkey-god depicted in Saba Mundhum^[30]. People believe Saba Samang is responsible for ailments and a cure-all.

At first look, the story appears both a folk tale with metaphorical vocabulary and instructive knowledge with metaphors and images in word-formation, because of the word 'Saba,' which appears in Mundhum, to Limbu's term, clan. In Saba Mundhum, there is Barahadev Kokoha Mang and the Koshi River, Tamber Khola. According to linguists and historians, the Saba, a lineage of the Tamber Khola region's Sodhung Lepmuhang and an account documented in Persian history, have remote ties^[26,ss34,6]. Linguistically, the famous Kokoha Dev of Bahara Kshetra associates with Sumer. Another branch of the Sumer Kir race, according to linguist Balkrishna Pokharel, was the Suker race in Europe. The Greeks referred to this *Sukar* as *Batrahos*, while the Orthodox referred to it as Coke. The references in Kirat Baraha Kshetra to the Sicilian mythological king Kok (Koklas) and the Koka-Kokaha-Kokahang river are similar and meaningful^[26].

Saba Sammang is also known as *Yechchama* or *Yechcham*, according to another scholar, Jash Raj Subba^[32]. Saba Sammang, according to Phedangba/ma, is the source of a person's suffering. People have to honour Saba by the sacrifice of foods and grains. Saba evolved into an endearing Limbu family and Sammang. It has even morphed into several Limbu variants^[32]. As a result, throughout history and geographies, various historical facts and figures have provided meaningful evidence that Saba, Samba, and Shiva are synonymous. In the Kirat family, a Samba clan worships Shiva as Thebasam. These faiths are meaningful.

Kirat Mundhum has conceptually tied the Kirat race to a pivotal historical moment. Saba Yethang, according to Mundhum, moved like a whirlwind. Some went through Lhasa Tibet and became the Lhasa tribe, while others went through Ganges plains and became the Kashi tribe. Both the Kashi and the Lhasa ethnic groups, according to Mundhum, are Saba Yethangs. These are the same Sumer and Kashi at first, except for the divided paths.

b) Buddhist-Bon

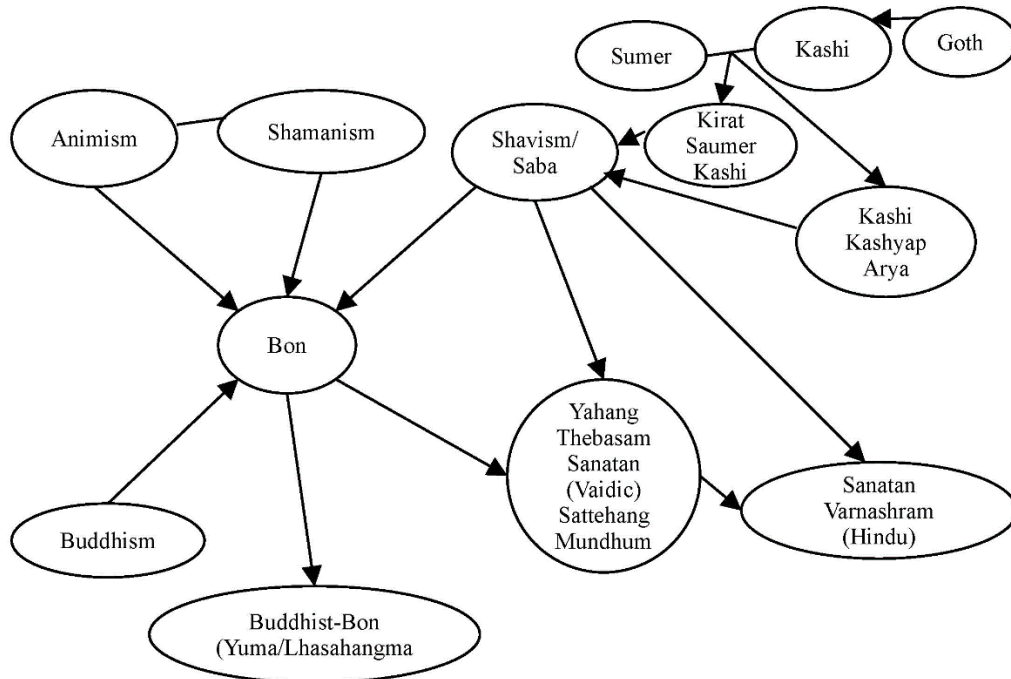
When Buddhism arrived in Tibet in the seventh century, it persuaded the traditional Bon religion. The kings were enthusiastic about preaching Buddhism since they were Buddhists. In Tibet, a separate Buddhist Bon religion results from a cultural fusion between the Bon and Buddhism^[4].

Buddhism forbade the practice of sacrifice and wine. Following the emergence of Lamaism, Bon became associated with Buddhism^[12]. As a result, the Buddhist sister religion Kirat infiltrated Limbuwan under the guise of the Yuma, Lhasahangma faith. Many experts have characterized Kirat Limbu's Yuma religion as a Buddhist Bon religion^[1,13,4].

Both Shaivites and Bons worship Mt. Kailash and Mansarovar lake. Kirat Limbu's religion is a Shaivite mixed Bon religion, as shown by Mount Kailash (*Kohinangjung*), Mansarovar (*Munasarovar*) lake in Mundhum. Both Bon and Mundhum use sacrifice, witchcraft, and magic to solidify their form and essence. This practice is still prevalent in the Kirat Limbu culture.

CONCLUSION

Dynamics of Saumer-Kashi-Kirat-Limbu faiths



The researcher summarizes themes in a conceptual image. Animism, Shamanism, Bon, Shiva, and Saba are the foundations of Kirat Limbu's faith. Kirat Limbu was a worshiper of Shiva, Saba, and the Sun, according to Mesopotamia's history, Persia's history, and the Indus Harappan civilization's archaeology. According to the Vedas and Puranas, Kirat worshipped Shaiva, Shakti, and Lingas in the pre-Vedic period, and they practised Hom/Yagya to worship fire/Agni. Works of literature refer to them as Dev, Das, Asura, Mlhechcha, etc. Kirat Limbu was a Kshatriya in Sanskrit writings because they enjoyed fighting. Due to their aggressive attitude, people compared them with the scary wild animal, the lion Mong, the Mongols, and the Mughals. When people compare them to tigers, they are also known as Ki-Ra-Wa/Kirata.

Kirat is a member of the Omkar family. Their chanting includes the term 'Om.' The Brahmin-dominated caste structure and corruption in Hom/Yagya got problematic after the Aryas in Sanatan. During this time, some Kirats converted to Hinduism and became Kshatriya. On the other hand, Kashi Kirat Limbu abandoned Janai thread wearing or Kshatriya caste to defend Limbu aligns for Kipat right. They continued to speak the faiths of Yahang, Thebasam, Mundhum, and Sattehang. They did, however, refer to Shiva as the patriarch, Kirateshwar Mahadev as the Theba (grandfather).

Kirat Limbu's ancestors became affected by the Bon faith when travelling to Tibet and China. They initially believed in the Shaivite and Bon faiths in the Himalayan region. The sacrificial system of the Bon religion got omitted when Buddhism's influence spread in Tibet in the seventh century. However, in the ninth century, Yuma/Lhasahangma, a Buddhist Bon sister religion, made its way into Kirat Limbuwan.

The culture of the Kirat Limbu community is an example transmitted through influence and interaction. Beliefs evolved across time due to different time settings, political, social, geographic, and other factors.

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