The Living Tradition of Shamanism: Lived experience and socio-economic roles of Shamans in the Kirati Khambu Rai Community

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ABSTRACT:

Shamanism is often regarded as an ancient indigenous religious belief system, yet it continues to exist as a living and meaningful tradition in many communities today. This paper examines shamanism among the Kirati Khambu Rai community as a dynamic social and spiritual practice closely connected to everyday life. Using a qualitative research approach, the study draws on in-depth and semi-structured interviews with practising shamans and employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand their lived experiences, beliefs, and meanings associated with shamanic practice. The findings reveal that shamanism remains relevant through ritual performance, faith-based healing, and strong community belief systems. Despite challenges posed by modernization, formal education, and the spread of biomedical healthcare, shamanism has not declined but has adapted to changing social, economic, and cultural conditions while preserving its core beliefs and rituals. The study argues that shamanism survives as an evolving indigenous tradition that continues to sustain cultural identity, social cohesion, and indigenous knowledge in contemporary society.

Aim

This study aims to deliver the importance of shamanism as a phenomenon. Shamanism as an ancient form of religious practice successfully continues to play a dominant role in many contemporary societies. Studying shamanism as a phenomenon can provide perceptions of how traditional practices advance and persist in the modern world. By far shamanism has been studied from a psychological perspective but this paper highlights the existence of shamanism as a phenomenon through the Sociological lens. It focuses on the relevance of shamanism, the status and role of shamans within the Kirati Khambu Rai community in the Hills of Darjeeling.

Keywords: Shamanism, Kirati Khambu Rai, Indigenous religious practice, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Altered State of Consciousness

1. Introduction

Shamanism, as an indigenous religious practice, dates back to the prehistoric period. It is regarded as one of the oldest forms of spiritual and healing practices in human history. There is no fixed information about the origin of shamanism. Frust (1972) states that shamanism was first found to be practiced by the Siberian hunting tribe. The word "Saman" is derived from the word Shaman which is believed to have originated from the Tungus people in Siberia. The word Shaman according to the Siberian language, means something like a "person who is raised". Shamanism is a common practice which is related mostly to tribal and indigenous societies, such as the kirati Khambu Rai community in the Hills of Darjeeling. There have been constant debates related to the extinction of shamanistic practices, but it would be very limited and misleading to believe that shamanism and shamanistic practices no longer persist. Shamanism, to date, exists as a living tradition that helps many communities shape their social life, belief systems, healing practices and their cultural identity. Despite factors such as modernization, urbanisation, and Education, shamanism remains resilient as it has been adapting to the changes, but without giving up on its core identity.

This paper tries to comprehend shamanism not as a stationary or outdated cultural system, but as a traditional form which is dynamic and evolving along with time. This paper seeks to study how shamanic practices remain functional even in contemporary societies, adapting themselves to social change, economic transformation, and cultural interaction with modern institutions such as formal education, organised religion, and biomedical health systems. Shamanism, too many extent, is successful in fulfilling deep social, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs within different communities, which helps shamanism succeed in existing even in the growing modernity.

Shamanism as a "spiritual practice" (Huels et al., 2020) is deeply rooted in various cultures and societies, encompassing a paradigm of consciousness and healing (Winkelman, 2011). Shamanism acts as a mechanism to reinforce social norms, encouraging group cooperation through ritual and social bonding, and calming anxiety during times of resource stress (emotionally and physically challenged) (Peoples et al., 2016). The practice of shamanism is not limited to a specific culture, as it is believed to be a universal and primordial therapeutic and spiritual practice, shared by humans across different cultures (Itzhak, 2015). Thus, Shamanism as a set of beliefs and practices can be found throughout the world, as a method that has been practised since different ages to attain the ultimate spiritual knowledge in different societies. Furthermore, shamanism is found cross-culturally in hunter-gatherer societies, reflecting the ritual and cosmology of early modern humans (Winkelman, 2002).

Shamanism has been studied by various scholars worldwide, but most of the studies related to shamanism have been done mostly from a psychological approach; however, this paper tries to study shamanism from a sociological perspective and tries to understand the roles and responsibilities that a shaman has to play within a community. This paper focuses on how shamanic knowledge has been transferred from one generation to another and the social meanings attached to the shamanic rituals and practices. The challenges and difficulties that a shaman has to face I the modern world are also one of the factors that this paper tends to cover. However, the paper tries to explore the realities attached to shamanism and also tries to uncover why shamanism should be understood as a living tradition rather than an ancient, outdated practice which is on the verge of extinction.

2. Understanding Shamanism

Shamanism is mainly defined as a set of beliefs and practices which are followed by certain tribal communities not only in India but throughout the world, and the people who perform such religious practices and perform rituals on behalf of the entire community are known as Shamans. These shamans possess supernatural abilities, such as communicating with spirits, healing and entering into the state of trance, which is also

known as the Altered State of Consciousness (**Eliade, M.** 1964). Shamans mainly perform as a connection between the living human and the spiritual realms. Shamans acquire the power to enter into a state of ecstasy, which is non-ordinary and intense and cannot be done by common people, and is regarded as the most important feature of shamanism.

Although the forms of shamanism vary across cultures, certain common features can be identified. Shamans are often believed to possess special powers granted by spirits or ancestors. They are consulted during illness, misfortune, social crises, and important life events. Their authority does not usually come from formal institutions but from community recognition, spiritual calling, and personal experience. Shamans enter into the altered state of consciousness with the help of constant drumming, fasting, constant movement of their bodies and dancing. During the altered state of consciousness, shamans also gain the ability to undergo a Soul-Journey, in which the shaman can enter into the other worlds or the world of spirits voluntarily and can also communicate with the spirits and supernatural beings (**Eliade, M.** 1964).

Winkelman, M. (2000) denotes that shamanism is a traditional set of practices and rituals which mainly aim to heal people mentally, emotionally and physically. He explains that shamanism is a universal traditional practice found in many societies all across the world. He believes that the main feature of shamanism is the ability of shamans to enter into the altered state of consciousness with the use of constant drumming, dancing, fasting and meditation. Many may regard it as a mental illness, but that would be wrong to call it an illness, because in shamanism, the shamans voluntarily enter into a state of trance as they have trained themselves for that, and they are culturally guided by their gurus for years. Another important function of shamanism is that it unknowingly helps in creating social unity and solidarity. Shamans do not perform their rituals alone in an isolated manner; they perform their rituals in front of the people. Therefore, rituals bring people together, they create shared meaning and help in strengthening the trust within the community. Shamanism is not just an ancient form of religious practice, but rather it is a combination of medicine, healing and social solidarity.

However, if we have to look into shamanic studies through a sociological approach, shamanism can be defined as a cultural system which provides explanations for suffering, illness, misfortune and bad luck that people suffer. Shamanism delivers the meaning of a particular situation that scientific explanation and modern studies might not be able to provide a satisfying outcome to the emotional and spiritual requirements. The ability to provide for the emotional and spiritual needs of the people is one of the major factors that help shamanism sustain, even when science and technology are at their peak.

3. Historical Roots of Shamanism

Shamanism was first found to be practised among the Siberian hunting tribe. It is believed that the word "Saman" came from the actual word Shaman, which is thought to originate from the Tungus people who live in Siberia. The word shaman, according to the Siberian language, means something like "one who is excited, moved, raised". "Others, however, argue that the meaning of the original Tungus-Mongol word is "to know". In English, the term is pronounced Shamanism which is the earliest spiritual practice, dating back a thousand years or more (Furst, 1972). In simple terms shamanism can be regarded as a unique type of spiritual practice where the spiritual leader or the practitioner can experience a special state of consciousness during which the shaman who is the religious practitioner is believed to leave his body and enter into some otherworldly realm where he is in contact with the spirits, he is said to be in the trance and this state of being referred as "ecstasy". When we talk about ecstasy, the word can be closely linked with the idea of "afterlife", the realm where the spirits exist, and the shamans can be in contact with these spirits during the trance.

Eliade (1964) is regarded to be one of the most important works that has been done in Shamanism. In this book, Eliade indicates that Shamanism was a traditional religious practice that was found in different parts of the world, but it was much more evident in Siberia, Central Asia, the Americas, Southeast Asia, and also in a few parts of Europe.

Prince (2001) studies Shamanism from an archaeological lens. He made an effort not to study shamanism through myths or any kind of written records rather, he made an effort to understand shamanism by studying the material evidence which has been left behind by the ancient people in the ancient societies. He denotes that although there are no written records about the origin of shamanism and the shamans, there are symbols, pictures, objects and the traces of ritual that have been left behind by the ancient societies, and this evidence helps him explain that shamanic practices had their existence even before written history. Some prehistoric graves that they found seemed to be different and non-ordinary burial practices. There were burials in which certain individuals were buried with drums, animal bones, masks and unusual clothing which did not seem to be ordinary and used in everyday life. Such burials indicate that these individuals had special spiritual roles to play, which seemed to be very similar to those of shamans in later historical societies.

He also debates cave art and rock paintings, which mainly belonged to the Upper Palaeolithic period, which holds paintings that represent human figures with animal features such as wings or masks. Prince argues that images represent shamans when they are in the state of trance, transforming themselves into a spirit of animal spirit during their soul journey. These paintings and arts support that shamanism must have existed at least twenty thousand to thirty thousand years ago (Ibid).

However, shamanism is an ancient tradition that still exists despite colonialism, religious conversion, and modernisation. It has not yet completely disappeared; some communities still follow shamanic practices, such as the Kirati Khambu Rai community in the Hills of Darjeeling. Even in this modern era, shamanism has been able to exist in such communities, although it has undergone a few changes to adapt to the new advanced technologies and modernity. However, for communities such as the Kirati Khambu Rai community, which is an indigenous ethnic group, Shamanism and shamanistic practice have always been the foundation of their existence, and as long as this community exists, shamanism will always remain an important part of the community life.

4. Kirati Khambu Rai Community

Gaenszle, M. (2000) denotes that the Kirati Khambu Rai community is an indigenous ethnic group which is mainly found in Eastern Nepal and in the Hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim, and also parts of Northeast India. The rai people do not have any written documents related to their religious practice; therefore, they have a rich oral tradition and follow an indigenous belief system, which is referred to as the Kirati religion. Oppitz (2010). The Kirati religion mainly comprises nature worship, ancestral worship, and spirit worship. People belonging to the Kirati Khambu Rai community do not worship gods and goddesses in temples; rather, they practice rituals, follow myths and oral knowledge. Shamanism is the foundation of the Kirati Khambu Rai. Shamanism is deeply connected to the everyday life of the Kirati Khambu Rai community, which includes their health, agriculture, family problems and ancestral worship. People belonging to the Kirati Khambu Rai community often call a male shaman a Mangpa and a female shaman a Mangma. However, the Kirati Khambu Rai community traces back its origin to the ancient Kirat civilisation and was the inhabitant of the Eastern Himalayan region. The Kirati Khambu Rai often associate them with nature, and they engaged themselves in agriculture, hunting and scavenging, which played a very crucial role in shaping their belief system in nature and cosmology. Therefore, the Kirati Khambu Rai community does not regard shamanism just as a religious practice, but rather it is a comprehensive structure that acquaints itself with factors like healing, cosmology, creating social order within

the community and also creating an identity of the community as a whole. The entire Kirati Khambu Rai culture and tradition relies on the shoulders of a shaman. The shaman is the central figure of the entire community and is often denoted as "Mangpa" to a male shaman and "Mangma" to a female shaman. Mangpa and Mangmas are believed to possess extraordinary qualities that an ordinary human lacks. These individuals are believed to possess the ability to communicate with spirits, ancestors and also travel through different supernatural realms.

5. Shamans

As outlined by (Krippner, 1985: 454), the shaman initially emerged as a religious figure within certain Siberian hunting communities. They serve as historians, mythmakers, and storytellers who not only mirror the culture of their people but also are responsible for the development of that culture". Shirokogoroff (1935) defined the "shaman as a 'master of spirits' because the shaman controls or 'possesses' spirits, even while they are embodied by them".

Further, it can be said that the word "Shaman" has its origination from the Tungusian language, but the word is derived from the word Saman and has several other variations in its word. But there is not much enough evidence that would explain much about the origin of the word shaman from Siberian Shamanism, there are studies that made the point that Tungnusian saman were to be derived from Chinese "Sha-men", which was itself derived from the Pali (Indian Language) word "samana" corresponding to the Sanskrit word "cramana" (Laufer, B. 1917 cited in Craffert, P. F. (2011). Although both these words were used outside of India, Greek writers who studied Indian culture mentioned Buddhist monks who used names like Sarmanes, Sarmanai, or Samanaioi. Another famous Greek historian Megasthenese writes that later the word Sarmanes was transcribed as Gramanese. This word has also been mentioned in the Arabic records, where it was used to refer to Indian and Bactrian Buddhists as "samaniyya," and later literature adopted the form "caman." In 1010 A.D., Firdausi's Shāhnāmeh had written "caman", which meant the worshipper of idols, which is a Persian word that got its origin from the Sanskrit "gramatna". So, the word has different forms that have been mentioned throughout the world (Ibid).

Shamans are individuals who are believed to possess some extraordinary qualities, such as communicating with spirits, travelling through different spiritual worlds, performing various rituals and also helping people heal their physical, mental and emotional dilemmas. Shamans are primarily the guides or undesignated teachers within the Kirati Khambu Rai community. They hold a very important position within the community as they play a very crucial role not only as a healer or a ritual performer, but also as an individual who holds the entire community together, creating social solidarity. The people belonging to the Kirati khambu Rai community believe that the world consists of various spiritual entities, which can many times be both benevolent and malevolent, and such entities have a great influence on human life. Shamans are believed to have the power and knowledge to communicate with such entities and also protect people from the affliction of evil spirits.

6. Literature Review

Rai, P. (2019) argues that shamanism is an important and multi-layered religious tradition among the Kirati Khambu Rai people. According to the Kirati Khambu Rai community people, shamans are known as Mangpas and Mangmas, who act as the spiritual mediators between humans and the realm of spirits. They are the protectors of religious laws and the rituals of the Kirat Mundhum tradition.

Eliade (1964) defines shamanism as a set of "techniques of ecstasy"; he explains how shamans perform rituals wherein the shamans voluntarily enter into the altered state of consciousness (ASC). Shamanism has been in existence since the hunting and gathering period, and some shamans hold the traditional knowledge of shamanism. Shamans have the power to soul travel to upper or lower spiritual realms in order to heal, protect and bring back the lost souls.

Lewis, I. M. (1989) studied shamanism from a sociological perspective. He argues that one of the most important features that defines shamanism as a unique form of religious practice is shamanic trance and possession. He argues that these features should not be regarded as strange, irrational or fake; rather, he explains that entering into the altered state of consciousness, soul-journey, and communicating with the spirits are all socially patterned and culturally accepted behaviours by the people. He claims that an individual becomes a shaman not just by his personal experiences and choices but mainly because society accepts and validates his/her role as a shaman.

Shamans play an important role in maintaining social order and bringing social solidarity. Shamans give cultural descriptions when people face misfortunes and illness, or any other problems. They provide explanations to people using cultural beliefs about spirits, ancestors that create imbalance, resulting in problems in one's life. Such an explanation reduces fear and confusion and also makes things easier for people to accept the sufferings in a meaningful way without placing blame on any other person. He explains that shamanism works as a coping mechanism for people (Ibid).

(Singh, 2018) argues that shamanism had its existence during the early hunter-gatherer societies. Shamanism is an indigenous religious practice which is mainly governed by shamans who hold the knowledge about it and are regarded as the protectors of the culture. Shamans have the power to heal people and also contribute to social cohesion, striving to maintain peace and harmony within society.

7. Methodology

Research Approach

A qualitative research approach has been adopted to understand shamanism as a lived and ongoing tradition. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been used, which aims to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. The specific use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) enables an in-depth understanding of how shamans perceive their calling, practices, healing, and their socio-economic conditions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Research Design

I**nterpretative phenomenological design has been used**, which highlights the following:

1. The **participants' own understanding** of their experiences, and

2. The **researcher's interpretation** of those experiences within a sociocultural framework.

This double interpretative process helps capture the essence of shamanic life as both **personally experienced and socially rooted.**

Sample Size

The study was conducted with **fifteen shamans** (Mangpas/Mangma) from the **Kirati Khambu Rai community**. A **purposive sampling technique** was used to select participants who:

- Currently working as a shaman.
- Who belonged to different sub-groups within the Kirati Khambu Rai community (to understand the similarities and diversities within the community).
- Both male and female shamans
- Shamans who belonged to different professions (to understand their economic condition).

The sample size of fifteen is appropriate for IPA studies. This research opts for IPA because it highlights **depth over breadth** and also permits detailed analysis.

Area of Study

This research has been conducted in the Darjeeling Hills, located in the state of West Bengal. Darjeeling shares a very close border with countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, making it multicultural in nature. Darjeeling has been a home to numerous indigenous communities, such as Kirati Khambu Rai, Limbu,

Chettri, Gurung, and Tamang, proving it to be a culturally rich place to understand the amalgamation of different cultures.

Data Collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews have been used to collect the data. With the help of in-depth and semi-structured interviews, the participants were provided the flexibility to narrate their experiences in their own words while allowing the researcher to explore the major themes, such as:

- Shamanic calling and initiation
- Healing practices and ritual experiences
- Altered states of consciousness
- Social respect and socio-economic challenges
- Changes in shamanic practice in contemporary times

Each interview lasted between **45 and 90 minutes** and was conducted in a language comfortable for the participants. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been adopted while conducting this research, using IPA has facilitated closely observing, understanding, and interpreting the respondents' actions and their answers. IPA simplified the meanings attached to the actions of shamans.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting this research, the Ethical guidelines have been properly followed. The participants have been informed about the purpose of this research, and informed consent has been obtained from all the participants. The confidentiality of the participants has been ensured. No other topics apart from the research topics have been discussed, maintaining cultural sensitivity.

8. Final Analysis

Lived Experience of Shamans: Calling, Training, and Ritual Practice Spiritual calling of shamans:

Within the Kirati Khambu Rai Community, shamans are not appointed, or any person have the power and the ability to turn himself/herself into a shaman. To become a shaman, an individual has to be the chosen one. An individual is chosen as a shaman before his/her birth, but the process of calling might be received at different times by different people. The calling is understood as a spiritual summons to the shaman. It is the period when an individual is awakened from their mundane life, so that they have to accept the realities of life as a shaman. Different shamans experience different situations in their lives during the process of becoming a shaman. There were cases where a few shamans experienced prolonged illness, weird dreams and unusual sensations before they realised that they were chosen as a shaman. There was a case wherein an individual did not want to become a shaman despite knowing the fact that he was the chosen one; he ignored the fact, which later he had to experience complete body paralysis as a consequence. Later, he recovered as soon as he accepted that he was chosen as a shaman and started practising it (Gaenszle, 2002).

Eliade (1951/1964) talks about shamanic calling in which shamans experience a deep spiritual crisis and transformation. Individuals, before becoming a shaman, often experience a calling, which is often associated with illness, visions, dreams, and emotional imbalance that has no explanation in our everyday life. This shamanic illness itself is regarded to be a part of initiation. During this process of initiation, shamans often experience intense encounters with spiritual beings, see visions about their dead ancestors, hallucinations which somehow help the individual gain powers during the process of becoming a shaman. Eliade denotes that these experiences and hallucinations are not caused by mental illness or are a product of psychological disorder; rather, all the experiences have meanings attached to them and are culturally meaningful.

Individuals who are chosen to become a shaman in the Kirati Khambu rai community do not acquire the powers themselves; even after experiencing the calling and recognising him/her as a shaman, they have to find another senior, experienced shaman as a Guru, who guides them through their journey as a shaman. The individual has to learn the ways and techniques of healing, performing rituals and also the correct way to soul-journey. The initiation process in the Kirati Khambu Rai community involves learning ritual chants, spirit dialogue and ceremonial protocols under the supervision of their Guru. The Guru transfers his knowledge in the oral form, showcasing that shamanic knowledge is based on experiential rather than textual. The individuals who are chosen to be a shaman have to find an experienced senior shaman as their guide/guru who helps them acquire all the knowledge and powers. The senior shaman should also belong to his/her own community to have complete knowledge about their cultural systems and patterns. The real journey of a shaman begins the moment they find a guru, and the real training to become a shaman commences as they undergo a rigorous training process over the years. However, the shamans are not appointed by the people within the community, nor do the individuals choose to become a shaman by themselves; rather, they are chosen through spiritual calling. The calling is understood as a sign that the individual has been selected as the shaman by the ancestral spirits. The shamans, after being chosen has to undergo training, but their training is not formal training; the individual chosen as a shaman chooses a well-experienced senior shaman as their Guru who imparts the novice shaman all the knowledge of shamanism. Though the novice shaman possesses all the supernatural powers, before the training, they cannot make proper use of their powers; therefore, the senior shaman trains the novice, making them a skillful and knowledgeable shaman. The training of the novice shaman is normally experiential, which involves the mentorship of an experienced shaman who teaches the novice the mastery of ritual chants, trance techniques and healing abilities.

Rituals and Altered State of Consciousness

Among the Kirati Khambu Rai community, all rituals, including those for festivals, marriage, death, and birth rites, are performed by the shamans. Shamanism among the Kirati Khambu Rai community often involves a vigorous regimen of bodily movements and actions, along with their belief and spoken words. Shamans often perform their rituals in front of the community people therefore it is performative in nature. Shamans use constant drumming, chanting of their mantra, and invocation of ancestral spirits to enter the Shamanic State of Consciousness. Eliade (1951) has described shamanism as a system of "archaic techniques of ecstasy", which clearly defines that shamanism does not simply sum up to the rituals, rather it is a set of learned methods used by shamans to enter into a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Shamans, after rigorous training, acquire the knowledge to voluntarily enter into ecstasy by using ritual techniques such as drumming, dancing, fasting and meditating. The shamans can fully control themselves and enter and exit the altered state of consciousness according to their will. Winkelman, M. (2000) uses the term "Altered State of Consciousness" for the first time in his book, explaining that what shamans experience, the awakening, is not the normal state of consciousness that common people often enter. He explains ASC as a mental condition in which an individual's emotions, feelings, and awareness differ from those of normal waking consciousness. In shamanism, the shamans can intentionally create such an altered state of consciousness with the help of rituals such as drumming, chanting mantras and dancing. However, shamans in the Kirati Khambu Rai Community often enter into an altered state of consciousness and travel to the other world, where they communicate with spirits and seek their help.

Roles and Responsibilities of a Shaman

Shamans of the Kirati Khambu Rai community are regarded as an individual who possesses complete knowledge about their culture and tradition. They act as a guide who holds the

responsibility of protecting the culture and transferring the knowledge to the upcoming new generation (Gaenszle, 2002). Healing is one of the important roles that shamans often perform within their community. When people do not get any help after trying different scientific options, they often visit a shaman to seek help. Shamans can treat illnesses that are believed to be caused by some evil spirits, witchcraft, and soul-loss or due to an imbalance in nature. Shamans try to find out the reason and treat the illness by chanting mantras and entering into an altered state of consciousness (Eliade, 1964).

Another important role of a shaman within the Kirati Khambu Rai community is to act as a mediator between the human and the spirits. Shamans hold the ability to communicate with the ancestral spirits, nature spirits and also some malevolent spirits on behalf of the people. The Kirati Khambu Rai community follow animism; they are nature worshippers and believe that whatever humans experience is due to nature. Whatever humans are and have are provided by nature; therefore, humans should always respect and try to give back something to nature. However, it is important to maintain a balance between the human world and nature, which includes the spirit world as well, and if for any reason there is a misbalance between the human world and nature, humans have to face the consequences of it. Therefore, shamans help maintain the balance between nature and humans. Shamans communicate with the spirits during times of crises such as illness, death, crop failures and misfortune.

Shamans are the ritual specialists within the Kirati Khambu Rai Community. Their major responsibilities are to perform rituals such as birth and death rites, marriage, agricultural cycles and seasonal festivals. No functions among the Kirati Khambu Rai community people can start without the shamans' rituals. The presence of a shaman in any good or bad function is regarded as mandatory. Through shamanistic practices and rituals, shamans create social solidarity among people within the society. They often perform rituals in front of the people, and for this, people gather together, which strengthens community bonds and shared beliefs. Winkelman (2000) denotes that this social role is one reason why shamanism has successfully survived for thousands of years.

Shamans are believed to protect people from the wrath of the evil spirits. Mostly within the Kirati Khambu Rai community, it is believed that the world comprises not only humans but also various spiritual entities, and some of the spiritual entities are malevolent in nature and can cause illness, misfortune, omen and various other physical, mental or emotional predicaments. Therefore, the shamans in such a situation act as a cure to the problem; the shaman acts as an intermediary who helps restore harmony between humans and the spiritual world. The shamans are also seen as protectors from evil. Apart from that, the shamans are also known for their healing abilities. There are cases wherein people suffering from long-term illness are cured by the shamans. According to the data collected, there were instances wherein the patient was suffering from an unknown illness that was not diagnosed, even by the doctors under medical supervision, who surprisingly seemed to get cured by the healing rituals of the shaman. The participants expressed that people come to seek their help when they find no other way or a solution that would cure their problems. When the people could not find any solutions to their problems, the shamans were their last resort. The shamans had their spiritual way of healing people, but most of their healing procedures took place in front of people. The rituals that shamans performed did not proceed in isolation; they performed every ritual in front of people. However, the rituals performed by the shamans were so ostentatious that they attracted the attention of a large number of people who gathered to witness the shaman perform the ritual. The people belonging to the community gathered together to watch the rituals performed by the shaman, which resulted in creating social solidarity among the people. The ritual performed by the shaman acts as a magnetic force that attracts people who have come together and unknowingly form a strong social bond with one another. Shamanism is deeply rooted in creating the social fabric within the

Kirati Khambu Rai community. The shamans, while performing the rituals generates a strong relationship within the community between humans and the environment. The rituals performed by the shamans are collective events that strengthen social cohesion and collective identity.

The community also follows the agricultural cycle, which often incorporates rituals in which they seek blessings from the spirits that lurk in nature. By performing the rituals, the entire community ensures a good harvest and seeks protection from the disasters that are caused by natural calamities. The entire ritual process and its maneuver is the sole responsibility of the shaman.

The shamans are also regarded as protectors of their culture and tradition. As mentioned earlier, there are no written documents that mention the shamanistic practices followed by the Kirati Khambu Rai community. However, the people within kirati khambu rai community believe in the oral tradition, which can be possessed only by the individuals who are chosen to be a shaman by their ancestral spirit. The knowledge about their culture is all transmitted to the shamans by their ancestral spirits or some divine forces orally, which makes the shamans the masters of their traditions and culture. They pass down the stories, beliefs and rituals from one generation to the next, greatly contributing to preserving their culture and allowing it to live forever. Therefore, every person belonging to the Kirati Khambu Rai community seeks their guidance and suggestions during festivals and ceremonies.

Socio-economic Conditions of Shaman

The shamans within the Kirati Khambu rai community are seen with great respect and treated with great honour. Shamans are regarded as the guide who possesses complete knowledge and are the protectors of their culture, apart from holding other powers such as healing, curing people from illness and entering into the altered state of consciousness. They are seen as the protector of their culture as they preserve the oral traditions, myths, ritual songs and ancestral knowledge. These shamans pass down their knowledge through their apprenticeship, and they do not follow or keep any written texts.

According to the findings, we can experience contradictory factors with regard to the social and economic position of the shamans in the Kirati Khambu Rai community. On one hand, the shamans are treated with respect and are regarded as the foundation of the entire Kirati Khambu Rai community, as they are the protectors and the guides to the entire community. Every shaman holds a crucial position not only within the community but also in the entire society, as they are individuals with some miraculously divine powers which an ordinary person can never attain. But on the other hand, as compared to their social status, the shaman's economic conditions do not seem to balance their social status. Ten shamans out of fifteen seem to experience economic insecurities and do not have a permanent source that helps them generate a stable income that would be enough to take care of their families. As a shaman, their earnings come from the offerings that are made by the families who invite them to perform a ritual, but these offerings are also not fixed. The shamans do not demand a fixed amount in offerings, as it is against the moral values of shamans; therefore, not a single respondent demanded a fixed amount as their offerings. They were sometimes even invited by the families that could not even pay them anything, so even in such situations, the shamans had to perform the rituals for free because the respondents felt that denying the service to people based on their economic conditions would be morally incorrect, and that would also disappoint their ancestral spirits who had chosen them as a shaman and given the powers for the service of the community and not for personal growth. Apart from that, their income depended on the offerings, which further depended on the number of rituals they performed in a month.

Most of the shamans within the Kirati Khambu Rai community indulge themselves in different occupations apart from their shamanic work. Data has been collected which shows that there were shamans who had taken up shamanism as their full-time job, whereas there were other

shamans who indulged themselves in occupations such as carpenter, farming, and business. There were a few shamans who worked as government employees. The financial conditions of many shamans seemed to be below average; shamans did not receive a salary for being a shaman. They received "Dakshina" from the family where the shamans had to perform the ritual. Shamans cannot fix the amount of Dakshina; they accept whatever the family can afford, and during this, some economically stable families give them a good amount, whereas those families who cannot afford any Dakshina give them goods such as a hen, vegetables, and crops. However, the amount they receive as Dakshina is not sufficient for the shamans to sustain therefore, they indulge themselves in farming and carpentry during their free time.

9. Conclusion

Shamanism in the Kirati Khambu Rai community remains a corporeal and meaningful tradition rather than a practice of the past. The Mangpa and Mangma play an important role in the religious, social, and cultural life of the community. Shamans help maintain balance between humans, nature and the spiritual world. These practices are deeply connected to the everyday lived experiences of the people. Shamanism among the Kirati Khambu Rai holds the identity of the entire tribal group. People within this community have deep respect and belief in shamanism and the shamans whom they regard as their protector and their guides. Shamanic practice has been facing much criticism for being indigenous and outdated in nature, in comparison with the highly developed scientific studies, yet shamanism, despite all the challenges, stands strong within communities such as the Kirati Khambu Rai community because it successfully provides the emotional, physical and spiritual needs to the people. Another important factor that helps shamanism survive with all the criticism is its ability to adapt to the new changes that have been brought by processes such as westernization, urbanization and developing scientific knowledge. Shamanism that we experience today is not what the prehistoric people followed; shamans have adopted many changes, especially in the form of rituals, and there are various changes that shamans have been adopting, which lead to shamanic evolution. A new form of shamanism has come into existence, which is termed Neo-Shamanism.

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