


An Ethnographic Study of the Ritual Practices of Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, Myagdi, Nepal

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Abstract

This ethnographic study explores the ritual practices of the academically under-researched area of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, Myagdi, Nepal. This study employed conversational interviews, observations, and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) to determine how these rituals are performed and adopted [Barth's \(1969\)](#) assertion that ethnic groups are maintained through boundaries rather than cultural content alone. The Chaunna Kuriya Magars' practices, such as restricting outsiders' presence during rituals, serve as active mechanisms for demarcating and preserving group identity. The key findings include historical traditions of ritual practices; collective assets of ritual practices; linkage of ritual practices with seasons, weather, and natural resources; connection of ritual functions with nature; and the tie of ritual practices with livelihood. As a nodal study of ritual practices, this research aids young scholars, academicians, policymakers, and government authorities in understanding rituals in general, and those of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya in particular.

Keywords: boundaries, Chaunna Kuriya, ethnography, Magars, ritual practices

Introduction

The Magar community in Chaunna Kuriya, with distinct ritual practices, is located in Mangala Rural Municipality of Myagdi District, Gandaki Province, Nepal. According to Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS] (2021), Mangla Rural Municipality in Myagdi District, Gandaki Province, has a total population of 14,688. Magars are among the 142 castes and ethnic groups identified by the [National Statistics Office \(NSO, 2024\)](#). Recognized as Indigenous Nationalities (INs) under the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act of 2002, the Magar population stands at 2,013,498, comprising 6.9 percent of Nepal's total population, making them the third largest ethnic group in the country ([NSO, 2024](#)). Scholarly research indicates that the major Magar-inhabited districts are Myagdi, Baglung, Parbat,

Gorkha, Rolpa, Rukum, Pyuthan, Tanahun, Syangja, and Palpa, followed by Gulmi, Arghakhanchi, Lamjung, and Nawalpur. In recent decades, many Magars have migrated to India, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Gulf countries, and Malaysia through both formal and informal channels.

The Magars possess distinct ritual practices that vary regionally, reflecting internal cultural diversity. They range from *Prakriti Puja* (animism) to Buddhism; however, many practice Hinduism. Magars are recognized as a tribal group with historical roots extending across the east-west expanse of Nepal. In recent years, references to *Athar* and *Barha* Magarat have emerged in historical discourses as the community seeks to rediscover and reclaim its heritage.

Specifically, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, in particular, continue to uphold their traditional rituals. While the methods of performing rituals vary among settlements,



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their underlying purposes remain consistent in Chaunna Kuriya. *Kotghar* is a shrine or holy building located in Tharpugaun, Ward 4, Mangala Rural Municipality. This *Kotghar* is considered a central place of faith for the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya. The Magars have established an institution to sustain these ritual practices. However, there has been a lack of academic research specifically focusing on the ritual practices, which are central to the governance of these practices among the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya. Their cultural identity is unique even among the other Magars.

In the Myagdi District, although the Magars share rituals, there are notable differences in the methods and procedures of ritual practices. Their belief systems and spiritual traditions also vary. Celebrations differ depending on the local environment and village context. The Magars living in Chaunna Kuriya, in particular, have distinct geographical and cultural boundaries.

In this study, I observed that the ritual practices of the Magars in Chaunna Kuriya differ from those in neighboring areas. Kosonen et al. (2025) articulated that ethnographic researchers largely move on to the field as outsiders who observe people and their activities and may even act as a part of the researched group. The Magars in the surrounding villages do not perform certain rituals or *Pujas*, celebrated in Chaunna Kuriya. A central ritual site for the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya is *Kotghar*. *Kotghar* is collectively/community-owned and operated. Rituals and ceremonies are conducted based on collective decisions and discussions among the Magars (Roka, 2024). This type of organizational structure and ritual process is not found elsewhere, which is why I chose to focus my study. This research aims to explore the unique and specific rituals of the Magars living in Chaunna Kuriya.

Barthian Ethnic Boundaries and Ritual Practices

Fredrik Barth (1969) argued that ethnic groups are maintained through boundaries rather than cultural content alone. The Chaunna Kuriya Magars' practices, such as restricting outsiders' presence during rituals, serve as active mechanisms for demarcating and preserving group identity. Every community has cultural traits and features that define its identity, distinguishing it from other groups. He emphasized that ethnic groups are social organizations that develop and maintain their ritual practices. The ritual performances of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya delineate both geographic and cultural boundaries, which can be understood as ethnic and cultural demarcations. Hence, I have applied this theoretical framework to analyze the ritual practices of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya in Myagdi. As an ethnic group, they possess unique ritual practices that serve as markers of these boundaries. Members of other nearby communities do not participate in these rituals, illustrating the presence and persistence of ethnic boundaries. Despite this separation, stable,

enduring, and often critically important social relationships are maintained across these boundaries, frequently based on clearly differentiated ethnic statuses.

More broadly, there has been little to no research explicitly focused on the ritual practices of the Magars in Chaunna Kuriya, Mangala Rural Municipality. The theoretical review further highlighted that although the Magars of this region maintain close ties within a relatively homogenous group, no in-depth study has yet been conducted on this particular community. Therefore, a focused study of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya remains absent. This research seeks to fill that gap by offering a unique examination of their ritual practices.

Methodological Strategy

I employed a descriptive research design to collect data from research participants, specifically, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya in Myagdi District. This is a qualitative study that seeks rich, contextual descriptions drawn from participants' lived experiences. This approach emphasizes

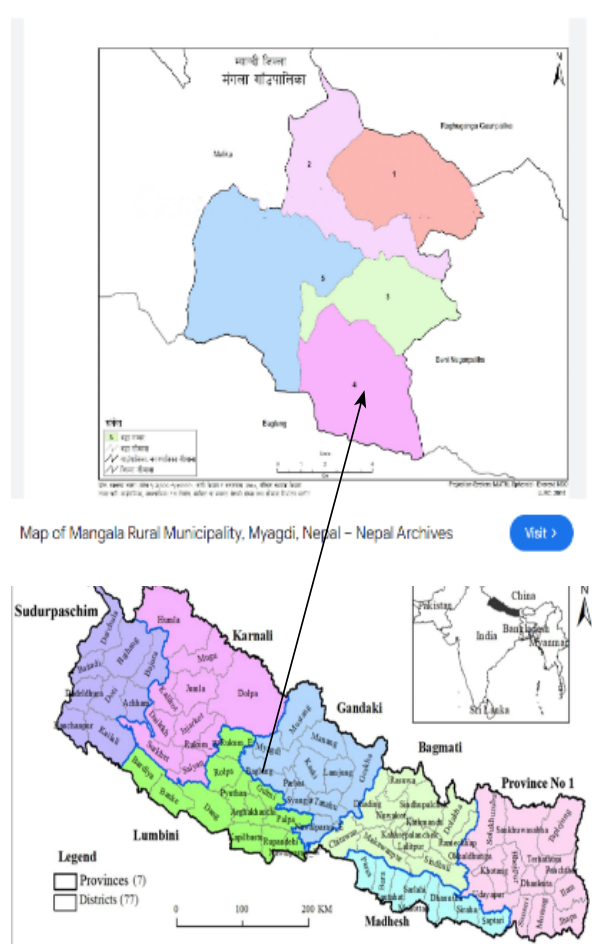


Figure 1
Location Map of Myagdi and Nepal
Source: Google Map, 2025

“how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction” (Elliot, 2005, p. 18). Guided by this perspective, I have illustrated how ritual practices are enacted and understood. The research design enabled me to explore and present thick descriptions of the participants' stories.

More importantly, research design links participants' stories to the initial research questions (Anfara Jr., 2008). To collect this information, I employed an ethnographic research framework for studying the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya. Within this framework, I examined the Magar beliefs, intuitions, and consciousness of the participants. In line with Hastrup (1994), I recognize that ethnographic experiences must be studied in their sensory and emotional depth rather than taken at face value. As an ethnographer, I aimed to document the multiple experiences and practices of the Magars while remaining sensitive to alternative values, perspectives, meanings, and explanations (Blaxter et al., 2010). This research design responds to the subjective and social realities specific to the Chaunna Kuriya context.

Ethnographic studies require flexible and adaptive strategies to engage with participants in specific socio-cultural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). I focused on participants' ritual practices, describing the meanings, values, behaviors, rituals, and ways of life among the Magars. Culture, in this context, refers to articulated behaviors, norms, and practices. Rituals also carry meanings and practices that shape the lived experience (Schech & Haggis, 2002). I specifically aimed to describe the collective behaviors of the Magars, acknowledging that rituals are inherently social practices grounded in their everyday lives. Specifically, my research focuses on Mangala Rural Municipality Wards 3 and 4 in Myagdi District, Gandaki Province, a mixed community of Magars, Chhetris, Brahmins, and Dalits, with Magars as the dominant group, making it a valuable place for discussion. This study is about the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya involved in the *Kotghar* Ritual System. Drawing on Lapegna (2009), I also refer to this research field as a “site,” underscoring its social rather than purely physical dimensions.

Research participants were selected based on availability and accessibility, following the guidelines suggested by Alam (2005), who emphasizes the importance of identifying appropriate individuals for ethnographic interviews. I employed criterion sampling, making criteria for selecting my research participants, which is guided by my worldview, research questions, and paradigms. According to Creswell (2007), criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet specific pre-determined criteria. I engaged with the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya during field visits and held purposeful conversations to gather insights into their ritual practices. In line with the principles of qualitative research, the focus was on obtaining rich and detailed information rather than on the number of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All



Figure 2
Tharpu *Kotghar*, Shrine

participants were over 30 years old and well-acquainted with the local ritual traditions. I employed conversational interviews, field observations, and group discussions. I also gathered information from research participants using the *Kurakani* approach (Rai, 2013).

Tharpu *Kotghar*: A Symbol of Ritual Practices

Tharpu Kotghar is a shrine house where weapons (old and worshiped, but not used in everyday life) are kept. However, the term *Kotghar* is used throughout the text. In front of the *Kotghar*, a *Maula* (wooden pillar is worshipped). It serves as the central point of religious activity. Only after worshipping at the *Kotghar* are the other deities placed outside the *Kotghar* worshipped. It is a social organization of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, in the words of Barth (1969). In addition, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya are an ethnic group bound by rituals.

As it was the month of *Bhadra*, the weather was extremely hot. To collect information for my study, I regularly visited Tharpukot for field observation. On the way, the path passed through forests and lush green rice fields. The *Kotghar* was located in a place called Tharpu; hence, it was referred to as Tharpukot. For the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, it served as a collective and public space. As the school principal was also the secretary of the *Kotghar*, it was easier for me to have discussions and gather information. For personal discussions, I visited his house and spoke with him individually. Small Focus Group Discussions (SFGDs) were conducted at the school. During this discussion, I noticed, “People even walked for over an hour to participate. Elderly members of the community were particularly enthusiastic about joining the discussions on *Kotghar*” (Field note, 2023). This indicates that *Kotghar* is also a symbol of the belief of *Nauthar Magars*.

According to elderly members of the Chaunna Kuriya, “A small pond once existed at the site where *Kotghar* now stands. The water from the pond was notably cold, even

in the summer season” (Field note, 2023). Near the pond stood a large tree covered with Yangkurung thorns. Over time, the elders preserved the pond and began worshipping it as a nature deity, a practice that continues to this day. The area was flat and centrally located in the village, making it an ideal place for worship, gatherings, and communal entertainment. It became a common meeting point for elders to converse. Eventually, they built a structure using dry grass, and with time, a stone wall and thatched roof were added. Later, a stone roof replaced the thatch, and people began living there.

Various beliefs and rituals evolved alongside the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya's lifestyle during the period of permanent settlement, but they could not recall the date, which remains unknown (Field note, 2023). These rituals are deeply rooted in these beliefs. Deities associated with nature, such as fire, water, land, trees, rocks, and forests, began to be worshipped. This idea can be paralleled with [Gharti Magar's view \(2080 BS\)](#). *Kotghar* became the central place for all ritual practices, where the community gathered to decide and organize ritual functions. An important ritual, *Agodeu* (worship of the fire god), involves the gathering of *Jhankris* (shamans). During *Agodeu*, it is a ritual practice to sit inside the *Kotghar*. If a *Jhankri* began to fall into a trance or get injured, stones were thrown into the pond as a symbolic act.

During *Agodeu*, *Dur* (a type of ritual song) is performed by priests, elders, and shamans. These chants include the names of ancestors from different clans, the shamans' ancestors, geographical features of Chaunna Kuriya, crops once cultivated, local birds, animals, fruits, and plants. This helped preserve their historical identity and pass on knowledge about livelihood and community governance. In recent years, fearing the loss of this tradition, youths have begun documenting the *Dur* in writing. This practice can be connected to the ritual practices of the Sumi Naga Community of India as studied by [Chishi \(2022\)](#).

During my field study, I found that *Kotghar* remains the primary venue for organizing *Pujas*, and discussions held there are considered part of traditional protocol. Despite the influence of modern politics, administrative changes, and ritual management systems, their impact on the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya remains limited. While political views vary among community members, the ritual practices emerging from *Kotghar* still maintain their original traditions and beliefs. Activities conducted through *Kotghar* do not require government approval. The Magars of Chaunna Kuriya have a 15-member committee that makes independent decisions. There are no formal written guidelines for the committee's operation. Instead, representatives from Chaunna Kuriya and other participating areas are selected by mutual agreement to form the working group, which serves a three-year term. The *Kotghar* coordinates various *Pujas* and ensures that members of Chaunna Kuriya are informed about upcoming rites and events. The committee meets four times a year

to plan and schedule rituals, and oversees interest from community funds and delegates *Puja* preparations to a group of priests.

Rituals of Arranging Local Materials

Elderly members from Magars would gather ritual materials from their homes to perform *Puja* according to the schedule and programs organized by the *Kotghar*. In this context, AMM 1 (male, 75) expressed, “We commonly use Bhujipatra leaves found in the jungle for banners, and Bhuskat for incense. If any necessary items are unavailable locally, it is a ritual practice to borrow them from neighboring areas” (Field note, 2023). Later, the required *Puja* materials were divided among the *Thar*, and each group collected and contributed its share, helping manage overall expenses. With the gradual introduction of a cash economy, monetary contributions began to replace material offerings. Over time, it became a ritual to collect crops and alcohol from households, while other materials were purchased collectively using pooled money.

In 2056 BS, the community began discussing a new way of organizing *Kotghar*. With the initiative of Magar army personnel residing in Hong Kong and the UK, a pool fund was created. Since many community members now live abroad, those who are interested can still contribute to the fund. In this connection, AMM 1 (male, 75) opines,

According to decisions made by the committee, this fund is invested within the Magar community of Chaunna Kuriya. The interest earned from these investments is used to organize *Puja* ceremonies. Additionally, individuals participating in the *Puja* also voluntarily donate, and these contributions are added to the fund (Field note, 2023).

For any *Puja*, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya use rich flour and turmeric powder to draw a line around the *Than* (shrine). Additionally, *Dhup* (incense) is prepared by mixing *Nauni* ghee (Butter), mugwort, and *Bhuskat* (a plant found in the jungle). It is mandatory to use nine pairs of *Dhaja* (ritual banners). While preparing the *Dhaja*, white and red colors with unfinished borders are used. *Chhyang* (traditional homemade alcohol) is also compulsory. Depending on the deity to whom the sacrifice is being offered, the appropriate animals or birds must also be arranged without exception.

Strategies for Ensuring Role Clarity

The Magars of Chaunna Kuriya develop the strategies to divide roles. To do this, they have their ritual practices. According to AMM 2 (male, 71),

There are priests of Chaunna Kuriya, but in the *Kotghar*, the worship is performed only by the Darlami Gharti. In the Dhule and *Agodeu* festivals, *Chhyang* (a traditional alcoholic beverage) is prepared exclusively by the family members of the Darlami Gharti. The responsibility of cooking and distributing *Chhyang* also lies with them (Field note, 2023).

Hore is a singing ritual; during the ritual, distributing *Chhyang* is part of their duties. They traditionally pour a small amount into a glass and offer it to everyone, following the rituals handed down from their ancestors.

On the day of *Hore*, members of the Darlami Gharti family take on the role of *Makur*¹ entertaining others with humor and laughter. During the festivities, the Ramjali begins beating the Madal only after it has been touched by a Darlami Gharti, highlighting their leading role in the rituals. Again, AMM 2 (male, 71) added, “If Darlami Gharti is skilled in playing musical instruments, they are expected to perform throughout the day” (Field note, 2023). Once they begin playing, other groups follow.

In the *Agodeu* festival, members of the Darlami Gharti family dance while playing the *Nanglo*. The weapons stored in the *Kotghar* are first handled by a Darlami Gharti before anyone else is permitted to use them. On the day when *Parang* is placed in the *Dhaliya*, a bull must be sacrificed- a task performed by the Bajhange Roka. Becoming a *Maruni* (a traditional dancer or role) is also the responsibility of the Bajhange Roka. Meanwhile, the *Madale* (drummer) is usually from the family of Ramjali Roka. All roles and responsibilities are assigned according to ritual practices passed down through generations. For example, after Darlami Gharti cooks *Chhyang*, the *Marcha* thoke Ramjalis bring *Marcha* (yeast) and mix it into the *Chhyang*, then keep it in the pot. According to the rule of Chaunna Kuriya, no activities can proceed without nine *Mana*, nine *Dhup* (incense), and nine pairs of *Dhaja* (ritual banners). The ladder of the *Kotghar* is marked by pricking it in nine places. During a conversation, I noticed a statement of AMM 2 (male, 71), who explained, “Every activity requires the representation of Chaunna Kuriya; without it, the activity is not permitted” (Field note, 2023).

Since ancient times, the area has been inhabited by Magars, and priests representing each of these Magars are present. In *Agodeu*, it is mandatory to have priests from Chaunna Kuriya present. For other *Puja* ceremonies, the responsibility is assigned to the priests, who discuss among themselves, and the available priest performs the *Puja*. Currently, the priests have their committees. The executive committee of the *Kotghar* entrusts full responsibility to the priests’ coordinator, who then oversees completion of the rituals. Unlike other temples, the Magars do not give gifts to priests. Priests’ responsibility is to preserve their society’s culture and rituals, which they do collectively. To carry out the community’s work, the Magars gather together, share meals, and hold get-togethers, valuing collective decision-making. The communal approach guides all their activities. According to AMM 1 (male, 75), “In *Agodeu*, on the southern part of *Kotghar* Bukeni near Kapti Khola, the Chaunna Kuriya live in Soldara, all residing around *Kotghar*. Meanwhile, the Apali/Chhapali²



Figure 3
Knitting of Bamboo Basket

live outside the Chaunna Kuriya area, fearing fire burns” (Field note, 2023). According to elders, if they do not leave, even if harm does not come immediately, it may affect them within twelve years; thus, they believe they should move away. In addition, according to AMM 3 (male, 51),

We have a belief system, if the *Panikatne Puja* is not performed in Chimrikuna, the god will become angry and withhold water. They believe that if dirt accumulates around Than, the god will make the water turbid. To purify the water, hulled grains used for ploughing oxen are thrown into the water, after which the water becomes clean and is used for worship. This practice maintains cleanliness, pleases the gods and goddesses, honors nature, and protects divine beings (Field note, 2023).

Another important tradition involves collecting wild *Sisno* (nettle) from the jungle. After peeling its skin, the nettle is used to make *Radi Pakhi* and rugs. Permission to collect these plants is granted to the community through a *Puja* performed on the first Tuesday of *Paush Maina* (December month). After the *Puja*, they go to the jungle to peel the *Puwa* (nettle skin) and cut bamboo strips to make *Doko* (bamboo basket) and *Damlo* (woven strap). This ritual also symbolizes opening the jungle for use.

According to AMM 3 (male, 51), “During *Puja* in *Kotghar*, an ox sacrifice was traditionally made. However, more recently, rules changed so that the ox is not killed during worship, although elder community members still prefer the traditional practice” (Field note, 2023). To protect the culture and rituals from outside interference, the community has established various rules and regulations to preserve its heritage (Gurung, 1996). I further noticed a version of AMM 3 (male, 51), “As he articulated, currently, since we no longer sacrifice oxen, we symbolically use an ox made of flour for the ritual. After ‘killing’ the flour ox, we then sacrifice a male sheep” (Field note, 2023). After Nepal was declared a Hindu state, killing oxen was banned. Now, in the secular republic, although interference in their traditions continues, it still challenges their self-respect. Yet, they must comply with government laws. Preserving

1. *Makur* is an entertainer during the *Hore* festival.

2. *Apali-Chhapali* refers to groups of people considered outsiders by the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya

the culture and rituals passed down by ancestors is essential for maintaining their identity.

Celebrating the *Dhule* Festival

The annual festival, *Dhule*, is celebrated in the month of Jestha, which indicates the Lunar calendar. It begins on the Krishna Pratipada Tithi and Sukla Paksha Pratipada Tithi of Jestha, and cannot be observed on any other dates. Before the festival officially starts, local liquor is prepared on the Tuesday of the first week. On this first Tuesday, known as the day when *Chhyang* (a traditional alcoholic beverage) is prepared, honey is collected from Chamrikuna and mixed into the *Chhyang*.

As a part of *Dhule*, during the preparation of the *Parang ritual* (a cultural performance), samples are shown to the young men, symbolizing the continuation of tradition. Among the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, where the *Puja* follows specific dates, *Chhyang* is a mandatory offering to the gods. Only *Chhyang* made from wheat and barley is acceptable; *Chhyang* made from other grains is not offered to the deity. AMM 4 (female, 60) explained to me,

One week after *Chhyang* preparation, *Pitri Puja* (ancestor worship) is performed. For every *Puja*, *Chhyang* is prepared in the *Kotghar* (community house) under the supervision of nine respected elders from Chaunna Kuriya: Pun, Budhathoki, Ramjali Roka, Bajhange Roka, Phagami Gharti, Sutparahi Gharti, Darlami Gharti, Masna Gharti, and Marchathoke Roka. Traditionally, each elder contributed one Mana (unit) of wheat or barley from their homes to prepare *Chhyang*. Later, a collective fund was established to purchase the grains, ending the practice of using individual household contributions (Field note, 2023).

Earlier, *Chhyang* was prepared by the Darlami Gharti (relatives such as nephews and sons-in-law of the *Mukhiyas*). Even after the *Mukhiya* system was abolished, the Darlami Gharti (known as Kauthoke) continued this role. However, the *Marcha* (yeast) used in *Chhyang* must be brought by Marchathoke Roka, as per tradition. During *Puja* inside *Kotghar*, *Darlami Ghartis* must perform the rituals, ensuring that *Chhyang* prepared by the Kauthoke is mixed with *Marcha* from Marchathoke Roka before being stored. The adaptation of pooling resources for *Chhyang* preparation demonstrates how the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya negotiate internal change while maintaining collective boundaries, consistent with Barth's (1969) view of the dynamic processes underpinning ethnic group continuity.

Puja is not conducted during the months of *Shrawan* (July) and *Magh* (January) in *Silathur Than*, but is observed in the other ten months. Unlike other *Pujas*, the presence of priests from the Chaunna Kuriya is compulsory during the *Agodeu Puja*. These priests are entrusted with the responsibility of performing the *Puja*. The elders and priests sit together to perform the rituals, while the youth hang *Sisno* outside the *Kotghar*. The hanging of



Figure 4
A Picture of Symbolic *Dotoh*

Sisno operates as a visible marker of a social boundary, echoing Barth's view that boundaries are constructed and communicated both symbolically and practically. Hanging *Sisno* signifies that the household is under ritual restrictions, forbidding work and the entry of outsiders, especially non-Magar groups such as *Apali-Chhapali*. This serves as a clear signal that the sacred period has begun and must be respected.

The explicit exclusion of non-Magar communities, *Apali-Chhapali*, ritual observance not only marks the sacredness of the ritual but also reaffirms the in-group/out-group distinction, which Barth identifies as central to the persistence of ethnic boundaries.

During the study, I witnessed that during *Parang* preparations, young men go into the jungle, accompanied by young women who carry *Roti* (bread) and alcohol. Their purpose is to collect grass for cattle and entertainment during the festival. Boys cut *Gofala's* *Lahara* (a type of grass), while girls gather and tie it. They eat and drink together before returning, meeting again later in the afternoon to continue the preparations.

Likewise, the day of *Hore* song is the main entertainment day, featuring cultural performances such as *Madale*, *Maruni*, *Makur*, and *Tapke Thotro*. Specific clans have defined roles: *Tapke Thotro* includes the Sutparahi Gharti, *Maruni* features Bajhange Roka, and *Madale* includes Ramjali Roka. These roles are inherited and carefully assigned, reflecting deep-rooted cultural traditions.

During this ethnographic study, I participated in *Hore* and witnessed how these activities reflect the core

culture, performed under the guidance of the Chaunna Kuriya elders. Materials such as *Dotho* (a wooden water vessel), wheat bread shaped like gold, bamboo *Dhiki/Jato* (traditional tools for making flour), and *Sisno* were prepared. The *Sisno* hanging signals restrictions and keeps non-Magar groups out. If outsiders cross the boundary, they face penalties, such as being placed inside the *Dotho*. This pot is symbolic and used during dramas and weddings, sometimes representing a boat. At the program's conclusion, the *Dotho* is carried around the *Kotghar* three times, signaling the end of the event and lifting of restrictions. Even non-Magars living within Chaunna Kuriya respect these ancestral rules.

During a *Dhule* festival, no fieldwork or household chores were done, and even non-Magars of the area complied with the restrictions. I witnessed an excavator halt during road construction to respect tradition.

Regarding *Pitri Puja*, essential offerings include tubers, river fish, crabs, and *Paha* (frog), all of which are cooked and offered alongside wheat bread, incense, and a *Dhaja* (ritual banner) tied with dry Kataujo leaves, with one Mana of rice and vegetables. *Agodeu Puja* is held every alternate year. The priest of *Kotghar* selects priests from Chaunna Kuriya, who then conduct the *Puja*. Afterward, the *Dhayangro* (shaman's drum) is beaten to signal a restriction on entering the jungle. During this restriction, no work is allowed in the jungle. Both Magars of Chaunna Kuriya and others temporarily leave the area to avoid inauspicious consequences. The day after *Pitri Puja*, the day of ancestor worship, oxen are bathed, oiled with mustard oil, worshipped, and fed. The elders of Chaunna Kuriya attend *Puja* gatherings. During the *Agodeu* festival, wheat and barley are not sown in certain villages, such as Sirsanne, Mijan, Dhappu, and Dhongsang, because shamans and others move through the farmlands. Shamans perform dances, and spectators observe them, as the farmlands are used as open spaces for them. Where *Agodeu* is not observed, farming continues, but with different methods, such as sowing with a pick hoe rather than plowing with oxen.

Besides this, priests selected for *Agodeu* must come from households without recent deaths, births, or pregnancies. They must bathe before the *Puja* and prepare the ritual items. A shed is built for shamans, and roads are cleared by *Marmi*-men whose wives or daughters-in-law are pregnant, to avoid curses believed to cause birth defects in newborn children.

Before starting work, nine pairs of red and white *Dhaja* (ritual banners) are tied at *Kotghar*. Roads from the *Kotghar* through various villages are cleared with weapons like *Khukuri* (knife) and sickles, but only with the left hand, ensuring weapons do not touch stones or mud. Shamans from Pakhar and Namta gather, and penalties are enforced if they fail to attend. In Chimrikuna, the *Pani Katne* ritual involves sacrificing a pig to appease the rain god to protect from a landslide and flooding, and signal the

lifting of jungle restrictions. In Mijan, the *Shilathur* ritual is exclusive to the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya; outsiders are not permitted in this function. If outsiders participate in this ritual, it is believed they may face an inauspicious situation. This practice aligns with Barth's (1969) broader concept of ethnic boundaries. The Magars hold meetings to coordinate festivals and *Puja*. Their rituals and myths reflect a deep connection with nature, ancestors, and local deities. Their ritual functions please the rain, forests, fire, water sources, big boulders, and hills. In their functions, they commemorate the death of their souls. They usually please their local deities, such as *Sime-Bhume*, *Braha*, *Bhairam*, *Jhankri*, and *Devi Deurali*, for their safety and prosperity. Despite modern skepticism, these beliefs remain strong, as neglecting rituals is believed to harm the community.

Ritual Boundary of Chaunna Kuriya

Chaunna Kuriya refers to a specific place designated by the Magars. In the continuation of living, they depend on all sources of nature, which is why they stay by occupying a large geography. It covers territories such as Tatopani Jalkeni in the east, Bofuwa and Tinchule Dhuri in the west, Dole Khani in the South, Gampha Dhuri, and in the north up to the surrounding Jukithum Danda. With the political changes in Nepal, the Chaunna Kuriya area has also been affected, with parts incorporated into various rural municipalities. Recently, all the forests in the Chaunna Kuriya have come under the jurisdiction of the Community Forest Act.

Likewise, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya are found to keep boundaries to prevent access to other groups. There is a practice of buying and selling land within their community. Gurung (1996) stated that, after the state's land reform act encroached on habitats and other natural resources, forests with more productive land were bought by outsiders with money. In the conversation with AMM 3 (male, 77), I noticed, "Some Brahmins are found to be living close to the Chhetri and Thakalis and getting land from them. Even now, they do not live in the main areas of the Magars" (Field note, 2023). This shows that the Magars have a cultural stronghold in the lands of Chaunna Kuriya.

During my research, I also noticed that during the rule of the Rana, the Chhantyal community, which was involved in mining, came to Barangja, where the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya used to live. They asked for land to live on and to dig mines, but *Mukhiya* and the elderly people refused to give it to them. After Chhantyal went to Nepal (Kathmandu) to report the rulers and filed a case seeking permission to stay and dig a mine. During the Rana rule, they had to travel far to file a case, and after the agreement, they were given a place called Khanigaun in the northern part of Barangja and were also allowed to marry the daughters and girls of Chaunna Kuriya. The Magars of Chaunna Kuriya struggled to protect their lands from the

past.

While discussing with the elderly people, I learned that the boundary of the traditional organization, *Kotghar* of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, was also encroached upon in the name of a public school. To understand the reality, I captured a statement of AMM 3 (male, 51), as he said,

We participated in many discussions, but the people of the government body that built the school told us that the school is a common educational ground; they convinced us to make our children educated, and then we gave the land with their consent, previously, our land was encroached upon in various guises by the central governance system automatically (Field note, 2023).

For activities except other games and some cultural programs, the recent *Kotghar* is congested, which is why we do them in other places, which are 20 minutes' walking distance from the *Kotghar*. Before the school was built, there were plenty of places to gather and have fun in *Dhule* and *Agodeu*. On the day of *Hore*, elders in *Dhule* perform various activities, including dances and games. Now there is also the problem of a place for the audience to sit and watch the program because the big school building has been established, occupying the land. By and large, the *Kotghar* is the common institution of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya for meeting and making decisions. Earlier, whenever there used to be any dispute in the village, they used to sit in the courtyard of *Kotghar* to discuss and decide. Nowadays, that ritual is gradually disappearing. Even if small disputes are settled, some big disputes are taken to the district courthouse.

In addition, the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya practiced collective cultivation when they had plenty of land. In those places, there is a ritual of planting crops in alternate years. According to the direction of the *Mukhiya* (headman), the community collects *Tiro* (tax) and, by arranging a time, restricts and releases jungles according to the rules. When all lands were brought under control, it came under the central rule. However, the Magars believe in the continuation of the traditional rule, although some aspects persist as remnants of the current system of governance. There may not be changes in names and positions, but some aspects of the governance systems are found to be remnants. Nonetheless, the names of the places they determined are mentioned in the song sung during the *Dur* of *Agodeu* by the priests. When the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya settled permanently in Barangja, the community's leader established the necessary rules, even though they were verbal, for running the community. Since they have been continuing these rules in a socio-cultural way, their territorial determination can be estimated. Although the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya have developed a distinct cultural identity, other political and administrative matters are carried out according to the current government system.

Within the area of the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya, there are forests, such as Gampha Dhuri, Solighopte, and

Tinchule. Although they traditionally used these forests, they are now managed under the community forest system. This new arrangement has restricted access to natural resources. Additionally, they are no longer allowed to graze their animals in the forests, leading to a decline in livestock such as buffalo, cows, goats, sheep, and horses in the village. These Magars traditionally had free access to water resources, but today local regulations require payment of a water tap fee. Due to the new system, they felt sad when they could not freely use the natural resources they needed for their daily lives, including essential herbs, grass, firewood, *Puwa* (nettle skin), *Choya* (bamboo stripes), mushrooms, birds, and animals. Today, they are less dependent on natural resources, which previously served as a primary means of livelihood.

Conclusion

The historical elements of ritual practices among the Magars of Chaunna Kuriya form the bedrock of their cultural traditions, passed down through generations. These rituals are communal assets, performed collectively, and are deeply woven into the fabric of the community's daily life. These rituals are closely tied to the seasons, weather, and natural resources, with the Magars performing them throughout the year to honor deities and seek blessings for specific purposes. Moreover, the Magars hold a profound faith in various local deities, and their rituals are intimately connected to nature, involving the worship of stones, water sources, trees, and hilltops. These practices also reflect their livelihood, as they seek protection for their crops, animals, and themselves.

The Magars form a close-knit community with strong cultural and economic ties, centered around *Kotghar*, which serves as the focal point of their faith, governed by ritual practices. This system fosters social and cultural relations marked by mutual respect, harmony, and unity. In this way, ritual practices act as a unifying force, strengthening communal bonds. The Magars of Chaunna Kuriya exhibit distinct features in their lifestyles and rituals that set them apart from other Magar groups. These unique ritual practices align with Barth's (1969) view that ethnic communities possess distinct characteristics that define their identities. The rituals of the Magars play a crucial role in preserving their identity and sustaining their way of life. Future studies could further explore symbolic markers, such as language, dress, or specific ritual artifacts that serve as ongoing signifiers of Magar boundaries in Chaunna Kuriya.

Declarations

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

I obtained verbal consent from my research participants and ensured their anonymity. This study was conducted independently as part of my Master of Philosophy (MPhil).

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials

Data can be shared with others if required.

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