UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY: EVIDENCE FROM PUMA

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The most significant and most obvious factor behind the growth of ethnic and cultural diversity in Nepal, is of course, the country's multilingual context. Multicultural context, in turn, reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity, and social thinking of the period during which the context came into existence. We can argue that cultural and ethnic diversity has always been a source of strength and unity in Nepali society. This article addresses the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Puma people. The future of Nepal will be even more ethnically and culturally diverse than it is today.

Key words: *Ethnic and cultural diversity, mythology, ritual rites, ethno-linguistic documentation*

1. Cultural background[1]

Today, in Nepal, the development of a truly multicultural and multiethnic society is continuing. As an illustration of the increasing cultural diversity in Nepal, consider the following statistics. In 1991,Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal (1991) reported that ninety-two languages were spoken in Nepal. Such ethnic diversity is more significant feature of life in Nepal as Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal progresses. The total languages spoken in Nepal rises from its 1991 level of 92 languages to 123 languages in 2012(Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) 2012; Eppele et al. 2012). Opinion polls, for example, repeatedly show that large numbers of Nepali believe that multicultural society has benefitted the country. In contrast, there is clearly a need for a rational analysis of ethnic and cultural diversity in Nepal. This paper demonstrates ethnic and cultural diversity of Puma, one of the endangered Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal, focusing on mythology, people and language, ritual rites, and kinship.

The Puma language and culture are comparatively more conservative than other *Rai* groups. They have preserved cultural practices and language that have disappeared in other Rai communities (Sharma 2014). For example, certain genres of ritual speech, such as *hopmacham*, a kind of song which is sung in many Kirati rituals (mainly in marriage) praising the forces of creation like the earth and man, are extinct in Bantawa and Camling, the two largest Rai Kirati languages,while it is still well-known and sung in the Puma community. Like many Rai-Kirati people, Puma celebrate *ũbhaulī* 'the rising time'

Gipan 3:2. 175-199.

(around early August) and *ŭdhaulī* 'the descending time'(around early February) (cf. Gaenszle 2007) and worship 'nature' twice a year, once before planting during the rising time and once before harvesting during the descending time. The major festivals that Puma celebrate and worship are *sāmkhā*(ancestor worship; spring festival), *khaliphenma*(worship of ancestral beings to keep them satisfied and make them look benevolently on their descendants), *caṇḍī pūrṇimā* (cultural dance).

In fact, the available evidence shows that, when a community loses its language, it often loses a great deal of its cultural diversity and linguistic heritage at the same time. In the same way, speakers of these languages feel the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity. Research has shown that there is an urgent need of high quality audio-visual recordings of endangered languages of Nepal as many as possible to analyze primary data for producing basic grammars, ethnography and dictionaries.

This paper is organized as follows: in §2 I provide a brief discussion of the Puma mythological world and describe ethnogenesis and ethnolinguistic analysis of Puma clans; in 3§ I discuss about the Puma people, their language and linguistic areas and genetic affiliation; in 4§ I describe relatedness of annual ritual and agricultural cycles; in §5 I present Puma kinship terms; in §6 I provide brief discussion about the ritual rites such as birth, marriage and death; in §7 I explore some interesting sociolinguistic observations; and in §8 I provide conclusion and discussion of the facts presented in the paper. As a first step in providing such an analysis, this paper identifies multilingual situation as the main factor behind the present level of cultural and linguistic diversity. It then discusses the justification for documenting languages before identifying the real importance associated with the multiethnic and multicultural diversity issue. Finally, it offers conclusion on ethnic and cultural diversity focusing on Puma.

2. The Puma mythological world

Mythological stories told by the Puma with respect to the origin of the world and their ancestors are part of a common Rai mythology, also found among the Bantawa and Camling. Gaenszle (1991), quoted in (Tolsma 2006), describes how Kirati mythology is interwoven with the kinship system. In the villages I have heard different versions of the same story. The stories were recorded and translated into Nepali. Each telling was different, even by the same narrator. There is every reason to believe that it is extremely difficult to determine which details are convincing to the story.

2.1 Genesis

In the beginning, there was no *bakkha* 'earth', but only a single aqueous orb. Then, the stones *chetlungma* and *maklungma* were created. After the stones had become visible, with the help of termites the water-hunter and serpent queen were created. After the creation of the earth and insects, the gods thought of creating human beings. In the beginning, they created a human made of iron and tried to call it, but the human could not produce a single word. The gods attempted to make a golden human, but this creature

also failed to speak. In the end, the gods created a human made of a mixture of bird's dung and ashes, which was able to speak, and in this way humans were created. Prem Dhoj Rai (p.c.) says that the proof that humans are made of dung and ashes is given by the bad smell emitted by rubbing one's body (cf. Sharma 2014).

2.2 Puma ethnogenesis

It is said that there were parents who were called *Patesung*. They had three children: *Tongwama*, *Khiwama* and *Hekchakupa*. Soon the children became orphans, and they had to struggle in order to survive (Sharma 2014). *Tongwama* and *Khiwama* were elder and younger sisters, and *Hekchakupa* was the youngest brother. Thus, the sisters raised their brother, and used to weave to make clothes for themselves.

2.2.1 Narrative

According to the recorded texts folk_tale_01, hekchakupa_01, hekchakupa_02, hekchakupa_03, hekchakupa_04, and hekchakupa_05 (Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) 2004; Gaenszle et al. 2008; Sharma 2009; 2014), one day *Tongwama* and *Khiwama* were working on their loom. *Hekchakupa* was very hungry, and took one fistful of uncooked rice to his eldest sister *Tongwama* and asked her to prepare a meal for him. She asked him to take it to the other sister *Khiwama* because she was busy. However, *Khiwama* in turn asked him to take it to *Tongwama* as she was also busy. Again, he took it to this sister. As *Tongwama* was preparing the meal, *Hekchakupa* was playing and laughing to himself, dancing around the fireplace. Suddenly he leant on a burning piece of wood and knocked over the cooking pot. *Hekchakupa* was so sad and started to cry, until eventually he cried himself to sleep. Then after having finished their loom-work, *Tongwama* and *Khiwama* entered the house and found *Hekchakupa* asleep. They could not wake him up, and thought that their brother must be dead. The girls covered him with banana leaves. When they started to trample on the pile and heard a stalk break, they thought that their younger brother's ribs had broken. Next they put one banana, one sickle and one piece of ginger under his pillow, and fled to *Bhoṭ* (Tibet) and *Madhes* (Tarai), having changed into birds. After having had a full sleep, *Hekchakupa* woke up and looked hither and thither, but he did not see his sisters. Then, he started to cry again. While crying, he looked at his pillow and found a banana, a sickle and ginger. He ate the banana when he got hungry. One day *Hekchakupa* found a seed of a banana and planted it. When he was eating a ripen banana, *Cakrangdhipma*, a witch, found him and took him to her house to kill and eat. The witch had a daughter named *Congdhongcongma*. *Cakrangdhipma* asked her daughter to kill and cook the lice of *Hekchakupa* (a indirect way of asking her daughter to kill *Hekchakupa*) and to hang his roasted heart and liver on the door. *Cakrangdhipma* went to invite her brothers.

Congdhongcongma started to look for lice on *Hetchkupa*, but she did not find them. She asked him how he did not have any filth or lice on his head. *Hekchakupa* told her that his mother poured about half litre boiling oil on his head by having him in an upside-down position on a mortar. He had neither lice nor filth in his hair. *Congdhongcongma*

requested him to do the same. *Hekchakupa* boiled oil and poured it on *Congdhongcongma*'s head. Then, she died and *Hekchakupa* put on her clothes. He hung the heart and liver on the door and cooked the remaining parts. *Cakrangdhipma* came with her brother, dancing around the house. She chewed *Congdhongcongma*'s heart and liver hanging by the door. *Hekchakupa* greeted *Cakrangdhipma*'s brothers, having taken the elder brother as younger and vice-versa. He served a meal. *Cakrangdhipma* and her brothers ate *Congdhongcongma*'s meat too much, and they got intoxicated by it and fell asleep. *Hekchakupa* climbed on the roof and started to shout 'the witch is a child-eater!' Then, *Cakrangdhipma* chased him. While she was chasing him, they got to *Hekchakupa*'s mother's parents' home. They served rice husks and nettle curry to the witch, and rice and chicken curry to *Hekchakupa*. Next day *Cakrangdhipma* was given a bundle of a tiger, bear, and hornets and was asked to unpack her bundle in a dense forest. *Hekchakupa*, their nephew, was given a bundle of domesticated animals, grain and money, and was asked to unpack his bundle on a plain area. Then the two of them took to the road.

2.2.2 Analysis

As *Cakrangdhipma* unpacked the bundle into a dense forest, the contents bit and stung her, and she died. *Hekchakupa* unpacked his bundle in a plain area that he liked. The cattle, grain, and money came out and he saved money to bring wife. Though he invited his sisters, they were ashamed to accept the invitation. According to the version of the legend ELDP: hekchakupa_04 (Sharma 2009), *Hekchakupa* and his wife sent several animals to look for the sisters. They sent a flea, which was killed after it had bitten *Tongwama* and *Khiwama*. Then they sent a *ṭangṭupmi*, a kind of bird that frequents rivers, which did not come back either. They sent a red cock. When *sisters* heard the cock crowing about their brother's prosperity, the two sisters became afraid and chased the cock in order to catch it. As they kept chasing the cock, they reached *Hekchakupa*'s decorated house. The sisters ran off in shame. After *Hekchakupa* put *mahada*, a kind of sour fruit, salt, rice and roasted pork on a winnowing basket, they ate, and then dropped their feathers, one each into the winnowing basket as a *sangcep itma calana*, a token of gift. The ceremonies carried out by *Hekchakupa* and his wife, and his two sisters in the mythical past are nowadays performed by the Puma during their religious ceremonies in honour of the ancestors, whom they ask for happiness, peace, health, prosperity and good fortune. In this way, today it is believed that Puma people are the offspring of the mythical hero *Hekchakupa* (cf. Sharma 2014).

2.3. An ethnolinguistic analysis of Puma clans

According to the oral tradition of the Puma, after the creation of human beings, their ancestor had two sons, *Dabalung* and *Palun*. The elder brother *Dabalung* lived in *Sobhe*, *Satmara* in Diplung and younger brother *Palun* lived in *Bukula*, Palun village. *Dabalung* had seven sons, and *Palun* had five sons. However, one clan *Henyongcha* was in excess when the ancestors distributed the clans. Shree Kumār Rāī says that *Henyongcha* was also *Dabalung*'s son from his second wife. Similarly, it is said that *Palun* also had another son. Overall, Puma has fourteen clans. *Henyongcha* perform their ritual themselves and

they ask only ancestors of their own clan, while the other seven clans invite all ancestors of the seven clans during their ritual ceremonies in honour of the ancestors for prosperity, strength, and good health. In addition, while honouring their ancestors, *Dabalung* call '*Dabalung/Diplung Bobbi*', *Palun* call '*Ruthum Bobbi*', and *Henyongcha* call '*saksalung-tangalung bobbi*' at Pauwasera. Though Puma society is divided into two lineages, all Puma have the same *samet*, *namdhungpa* for males and *namdhungma* for females (cf. Sharma 2014). This *samet* is needed in the life cycle rites and ceremonies such as naming, marriage and death.

According to Kamal Bahādur Rāī in his recorded text DA_satpacha, some clans such as *Garaja*, *Hadira*, *Limmachit* and *Thumrahang* of *Dabalung*, have names *hangsami*, *sibilisip*, *citaci* and *lopali*, respectively, in *mundum,* the ritual language. While reciting the oral ritual texts, general clans are not called. The *mundum* names of the clans are used during recitation of ritual texts by shaman at wedding ceremonies to welcome and honour ancestors (Rai 2007; Rai & Rai 2007). The clan names recorded in Figure 1 are based on the text (DA_satpacha), andRai (2007) and Rai & Rai (2007) which is adapted from Sharma (2014). The clans below with a shaded area do not have sub-clans, while the clans without a shaded area have further sub-clans. The clan *Henyongcha* is presented with different colour to show it is distinct from the other seven clans, according to the mythology. The four clans of *Dabalung*, namely *Limmachit*, *Hangthangga*, *Dumanglung*, and *Henyongcha* do not have sub-clans, while the other four clans, namely *Garaja*, *Hadira*, *Thumrahang*, and *Yongduhang* have three, five, three, and two sub-clans, respectively. On the other hand, only *Mithahang* of *Palun* has three sub-clans, while other clans such as *Tongmalung*, *Metlongthong*, *Wabihong*, *Khahong*, and *Khirihang* do not have any sub-clans.

Figure 1: Puma clans
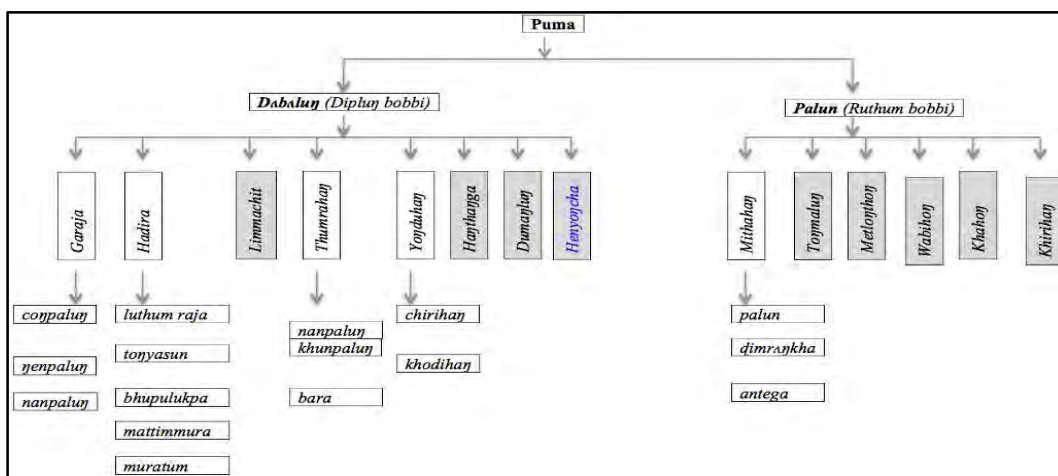
3. The Kirati people and their languages

The term 'Kirati' denotes both a geographical and linguistic meaning to the Tibeto-Burman peoples native to eastern Nepal, specifically the Limbu and Rai groups (Opgenort 2004:1–2). Thus, it refers to both 'people' and 'language'. Kirat is the name of the eastern part of Nepal, geographically mountainous and hilly region. It is subdivided into three distinct regions: Pallo Kirat, Majh Kirat and Wallo Kirat (van Driem 2001). The languages spoken in this region are known as Kirati languages, one of the branches of Tibeto-Burman corresponding to Benedict's Bahing-Vayu nucleus (Benedict 1972: 4–11) and Kirati is one of the important ethnic groups in Nepal. It comprises languages like Limbu, Yakkha, and Rai as collective language groups.

Puma's close relationship with the languages Bantawa and Camling has been recognised from survey research. Hanßon (1991:78) argues that Puma shares the highest degree of lexical agreement with Camling whereas most grammatical features are shared with Bantawa in the south of the confluence of the Sunkoshī and Dudhkoshī rivers. This close relationship of Puma with Bantawa and Camling is obvious and they are classified as Central Kirati in all classifications. van Driem (2001:710) notes that the Puma area is sandwiched in between Bantawa territory to the east and Camling territory to the west.

3.1 The Puma people

The Puma people are one of small ethnic groups of Nepal most affected by migration, modernisation and modification. They have their own language, rich cultural heritage and tradition. Despite the recent advances in modern science and technology as well as wider use of Nepali language as a *lingua franca*, they have retrained their distinct identities in a remarkable way, particularly in rural areas where they have maintained their language and kept their tradition with originality (cf. Sharma 2014). According to the CPDP (2004), most Puma people older than forty years still have some knowledge of the Puma language, but language competence varies considerably from family to family.

The Puma people are friendly, helpful and very open living in the rural areas of southern-eastern part of Khotang district. The majority of the migrants are found in Belṭār, Basahā and Maḍibās of Udayapur distirict.Moreover, many Pumas also live in urban areas like Kathmandu, Dharan, and Itahari. There has also been an increase in their number of Pumas who have settled more or less permanently aboard such as UK, USA, Hong Kong and Europe.

The Puma people practise sedentary agriculture and animal husbandry. They are educationally, politically and economicaly highly marginalised.*Boksa* 'pork' is their preferred meat, while eating *sungsa* 'goat meat' is forbidden for some Puma people. In the past, they were not allowed to touch goats either. But now goat husbandry is becoming a source of income.

Drinking alcohol is a common practice among all Rai-Kirati people, and as such they are quite different from the higher caste Hindus in Nepal, who did not drink any alcohol in the past but now some of them do and who eat castrated goat (Tolsma 2006). Not only

lower castes living in Puma villages such as *Kāmī*, blacksmiths and *Damai*, tailors, but also higher castes such as *Kshertī*, have largely adopted the Puma way of life in as much as they drink alcohol and eat pork.

3.2 Population demography

Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal (2001) reports about 4,000 people speak Puma, which is 0.02 percent of the total population of Nepal. However this figure seems too conservative. Puma people living in the core areas claim that there should be at least 10,000 Puma people and among them there should be more than 6,000 Puma native speakers (Sharma 2004; Sharma et al. 2005). The total population of Puma by mother tongue speaking district wise is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Puma(Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) 2001)

Country Development Region *District*	*Mother Tongue by Districts*		
	Total Population	Male	Female
Nepal (Total)	**4310**	**2115**	**2195**
Eastern	4307	2112	2195
Jhāpā	34	17	17
Sunsarī	1	0	1
Dhankuṭā	1	1	0
Khoṭāng	***3762***	***1852***	***1910***
Udaypur	502	239	263
Saptarī	7	3	4
Central	3	3	0
Kāṭhmāṇḍu	3	3	0

3.3 The Puma language

The Puma language is one of the endangered Kirati languages spoken in Khotang district of the eastern part of Nepal. Puma people call their mother tongue *rokungla* or *rokongla*, in which *la* denotes 'language' and *rokuŋ* denotes 'jungle' (cf. Sharma 2004). The *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simons & Fenning 2013) has an entry for Puma under 'Kirati', with the ISO 639-3 code *pum*. Puma was not mentioned until the 1980s; it was one of the discoveries of the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (1991).

Hanßon (1991:78) mentions that Puma is one of the languages newly found in the Linguistic Survey of Nepal field research. He gives further description about the language that the verbal agreement patterns in Puma appear to have preserved several archaic elements that seem to be found nowhere else in Central Kirati. In Language Vitality and Endangerment, UNESCO (2003) states that the extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural knowledge … speakers of these languages may

experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity. Language is closely tied with identity and it is important to survive with own identity.

3.4 Genetic affiliation

Genetically, Puma can be grouped under the southern branch of the central group of Kirati languages, as it shares innovations with Camling, such as voicing of preglottalised initials and merger of the back and front rhotics (Sharma et al. 2005:1–2). It should be noted that not enough is known yet to have a full understanding about the groupings within the Kirati languages, and the exact genetic affiliation of most languages within the family is still a matter of dispute.

The past and present of the Himalayas is characterized by massive population dynamics and mutual influences for a long time. Therefore, comparison with geographically close languages from the Indo-Aryan, Munda and Dravidian and Sino-Tibetan families should also be considered to get a fuller understanding of the picture (Ebert 2003: 546).The genetic affiliation of Kirati (based on Michailovsky 1994; van Driem 2001; Opgenort 2004; Bickel 2011) is presented in Figure 2.

This division is based on shared phonological innovations in the initial plosives and has not been seriously contested. Bradley (1997:16) offers a rather unspecific tree that sums up eight branches of the Kirati group. Opgenort (2005) has refined Michailovsky's analysis, using an innovative method of combining lexical isoglosses, i.e. counting etyma that are shared between languages, with phonological isoglosses, i.e. counting shared phonological innovations (cf. Doornenbal 2009).

Figure 2: Genetic affiliation of Puma language
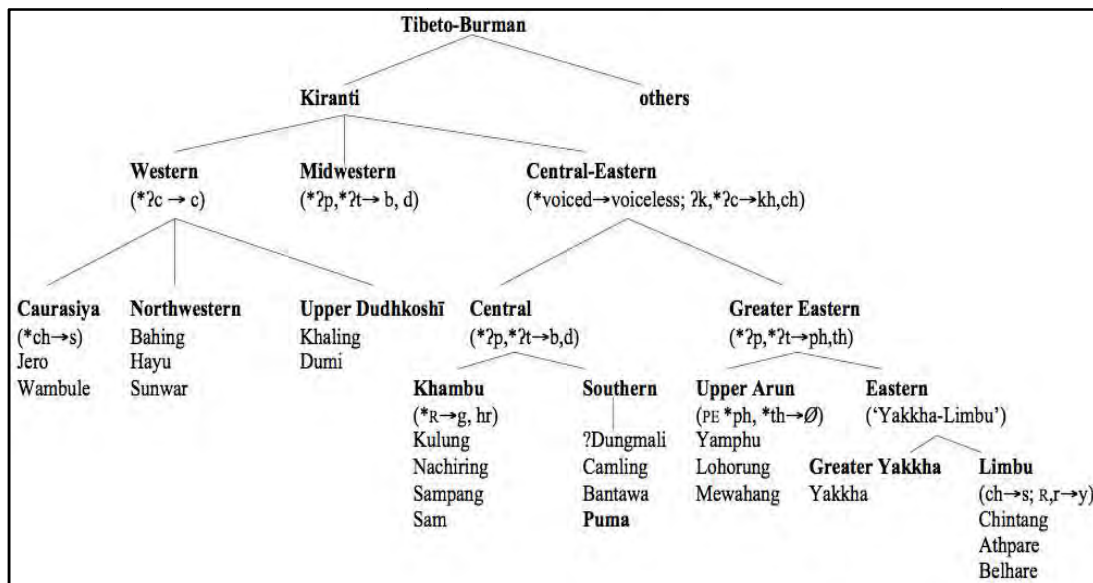
3.5 Puma linguistic areas

The Puma people reside mainly in the valley of the Ruwākholā, a western tributary to the Buwākholā which flows into the Sunkoshī (or Dudhkoshī) River a little further to the south(cf. Gaenszle et al. 2008). The core Puma speaking area is limited to five Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Khoṭāng district (Latitude, 27.0167 and Longitude, 86.8500). These are: Diplung, Mauwāboṭe, Devīsthān, Pauwāserā and Cisāpānī.

There are also Puma who have moved into some settlements to the south of the Dudhkoshī such as Belṭār, Māḍibās, Siddīpur, Basahā and Caudaṇḍī Village Development Committees in Udayapur district, where they also speak their language. Thus, the Puma linguistic area extends to the southern foothills of the Himalayas close to the Saptakoshī river confluence.

Based on first-hand information and frequent field visits, the heartland of the Puma speaking areas can be identified as Diplung, Mauwāboṭe and Pauwāserā VDCs. It is best retained as a mother tongue in Mauwāboṭe, south-west of the Ruwākholā, whereas it is most in decline along the trail on the north-eastern side of the valley, through Devīsthān VDC up to Cisāpanī. Besides Khoṭāng and Udaypur, Puma also live in other districts of Nepal like Pãcthar, Ilām, Jhāpā, Sankhuwāsabhā, Morang, Bhojpur and Kāṭhmāṇḍu. The Puma people living outside Khoṭāng and Udaypur generally have not retained their language and speak Nepali (Sharma 2005).

4. The annual cycles

4.1 The annual ritual cycle

The preceding section has demonstrated that the language plays the crucial role in the cultural diversity. It is also true that the role of ritual in society is significant as it is tied with cultural diversity. For example, the Puma have an extensive number of rituals which can be categorized as annual rituals, life cycle rituals, and special kinds of rituals. Like many Kirati groups such as Mewahang (Gaenszle 2007), the annual ritual cycle among the Puma is also strongly influenced by acquaintance with the Hindu cycle, and farmers generally follow the Nepali calendar when planning agricultural activities. According to Gaborieau (1982), cited in (Gaenszle 2007: 113), the calendar of the Hindu castes in Nepal is formally divided into two halves, the time between the winter solstice and the summer solstice, when the sun's course moves to the north (SKT. *uttarāyaṇa*), and the other six months, when the sun's course moves southward (SKT. *daksināyaṇa*). Gaenszle (2007) notes that among the Rai there are some striking structural parallels to the concepts proposed by Gaborieau, but one has to be careful to distinguish the differences. According to Shree Kumar Rai (p.c.), the Puma annual ritual cycle is divided in two halves: *ũbhaulī* (NEP., 'the Rising Time') which starts in the month of *Māgh* (January/February) on *srī pancamī* (NEP) and *ũdhaulī* (NEP., 'the Descending Time) which begins in the month of *Shrāwaṇ* (July/August) on the day of *nāgpancamī* (NEP.) (cf. Gaenszle 2007:113–114) and they generally follow the Nepali calendar. These two halves are linked to the agricultural cycle as well. Further, Gaenszle (2007) argues that

the division appears to have a more pronounced and articulate meaning among the Kirati group.

Like the other Kirati groups such as Mewahang (Gaenszle 2007), the view of the annual cycle as an upward and downward movement in both ritual and agriculture prevails among the Puma. The annual rituals are performed to pay respect and honour to the ancestors and to ask for prosperity for the new farming cycle. According to Shree Kumar Rai (p.c.), in Puma the first ritual to be performed is the *phagu* and no other rituals can be performed until it has been completed (cf. Sharma 2014). Each household performs the *phagu* once a year in the month of *Baisākh* (April/May). The Puma traditionally celebrate *samkha, manggen* and *goṭhpuja* at least twice a year, once during the Rising Time and once during the Descending Time. The ritual *samkha* is celebrated once in *Baisākh* (April/May) or *Jeshṭha* (May/June) and once in *Āshwin* (September/October). The *mʌnggen* should be performed once between *Baisākh* and *Āshāḍh* (June/July), and once in *Mangsir* (November/December) or *Māgh* (January/February). Similarly, *goṭhpūjā* is celebrated once in *Mangsir* or *Māgh* by sprinkling water to a pullet (cock) and once in *Baisākh* or *Jeshṭha* by sacrificing the same cock which has been sprinkled upon in *Mangsir*.

The *ŭdhaulī* 'the Descending Time' *nāg pancamī*, begins the fifth day of the bright half of *Shrāwaṇ* (July/August). Gaenszle (2007: 116) notes that as among the Hindus, *Shrāwaṇ* is known as the Black Month (Nep. *kālo mahinā*) during which the gods disappear underground and therefore cannot be worshipped. Like many neighbouring Kirati groups such as Wambule (Opgenort 2004), ritual ceremonies are preferably scheduled in what the Puma consider to be auspicious months. Perhaps inauspicious months are the fourth month, *Shrāwaṇ* (July/August), the seventh month, *Kārtik* (October/November), the ninth month, *Paush* (December/January), and the twelfth month, *Chaitra* (March/April) because no rituals are scheduled in these months, even in case of need. The *ŭdhaulī* season begins with the *nuwānggī* ceremony, the harvest ritual which should be performed in the fifth month *Bhādra* (August/September) or sometimes in *Āshwin* (September/October). The name of the ceremony is a loan from Nepali *nwāgī/ nwāī* 'the first rice harvested dipped in curds and sugar' (cf. Opgenort 2004:26). As soon as there is a new harvest of rice, the *nuwānggī* season begins, where the ancestors, deities and spirits are honoured by offering them a portion of the new fruits/harvest. According to Shree Kumar Rai (p.c.), the *nuwānggī* is an obligatory ritual for the priests, *ngapong* and the people who have only planted rice. Unless the *nuwānggī* is performed, people are prohibited to eat new rice and ginger. If they do, it is traditionally believed that mishaps, such as physical and mental illness will be caused by ancestors that have been upset. So, psychologically and physically people will be in trouble (infertility of harvest, bad harvest, misfortune etc.) (cf. Sharma 2014). The autumn season is also a mix between harvest and ancestral rituals, which overlaps with the major national festivals such as *Dashain* and *Tihār*(cf. Gaenszle 2007).

By the beginning of eighth month *Mangsir* (November/December), generally the *lewa*

pūjā, the other harvest ritual, which is also known as 'the soul raising of millet', is performed. However, it can be performed in the tenth month *Māgh* (January/February), if people do not have time to celebrate in *Mangsir*. Generally all the harvest rituals must be finished by *Mangsir* because the following month *Paush* (December/January) is considered an inauspicious month and the new season begins in the month of *Māgh* (January/February).

In Puma, there are also special ancestral rituals, such as *khali*, *monghim*, *hongma pūjā*, which are neither harvest nor annual rituals (cf. Sharma 2014). One of the biggest rituals of Puma is *khali*. It is a sacred ceremony which should be performed in the months between *Baisākh* to *Ashāḍh* or *Mangsir* to *Māgh* but not in *Paush*. The ritual *khali* is celebrated for the ancestors and deities of a particular family to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the family after the marriage of a family member or to seek strength, protection and fortune for the family either after the death of a relative or an incurable illness, accident and mortal fright of a house head. It is the ritual which should be performed in both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies. Hence, the ritual *khali* is primarily performed in three occasions: after the marriage of son or daughter, after the death of a relative, and after serious sickness of a house head (Shree Kumar Rai, p.c.) (cf. Sharma 2014).

As has been presented in the section 2.3, the Puma people are divided into two groups according to their clans. The exact date and the month of annual and harvest rituals varies between *Dabalung* to *Palun*. The description of ritual ceremonies presented here is primarily based on *Dabalung*. However, the ways to perform the rituals are alike. According to Shree Kumar Rai (p.c.), the only distinction they make is that people of *Palun* clan begin their rituals fifteen to twenty days later than the people of the *Dabalung* clan do.

In Puma both the Rising time and the Descending time are marked by rituals (*phagu*, *samkha*, *manggen*) for the ancestors and deities, which last roughly three months in the month of *phagu*, and two months in the rest of each season. The ceremonies such as *samkha*, *manggen* and *goṭh pūjā* are homologous rituals, one for each of the two seasons (the Rising time and the Descending time). All this reflects the Kirati notion of time as half-year seasons which are closely linked to the cycles of nature and agriculture. Most of the rituals in Puma are related to planting and harvesting. In the ritual rites oral texts is chanted by *ngapong*, a priest, or a shaman or elder. Tolsma (2006: 7) states that the ritual language is used in the same way as Sanskrit is used in contemporary Hindu rituals.

4.2. The annual agriculture cycle

In the Puma community, agriculture is the main economic activity. The Nepali New Year begins with the month *Baisākh* (April/May). The first full moon of *Baisākh* marks the beginning of the ritual *phagu*, which is also known as *caṇḍī*, the most important Kirati ritual (Opgenort 2004; Gaenszle 2007; Borchers 2008), falls roughly in the middle of the Rising Time. The *phagu* ritual is celebrated for a week. About one or two months before

phagu, corn is sown. Soon after *phagu*, the labour-intensive time of the year begins with sowing and planting grains and vegetables. Two crops are obtained annually from irrigated fields, while only one crop is grown on non-irrigated fields. Except for a few fields at Mauwāboṭe, Ward numbers 6, 7 and 9, the fields in the Puma areas are not fertile. Corn and millet are the main summer crop in all Puma areas such as Diplung, Pauwāserā, Mauwābote, Devīsthān and Cisāpānī and usually cultivated in those fields where mustard, wheat and buckwheat are the winter crops. In the forest fields villagers cultivate mainly turmeric, ginger and beans (NEP.*boḍī*) (cf. Sharma 2014).

There are two varieties of rice and millet: the fast-growing and the slow-growing. According to Gaenszle et al. (2008), the fast-growing rice (e.g., *taulī* and *ragadhān*) is planted in *Caitra* (March/April) and is harvested in *Āshāḍh* (June/July), while the slow-growing rice (e.g., *bhaday*, *ate*, *cucce*) is planted in *Āshāḍh* (June/July) and is harvested in *Mangsir* (November/December). The varieties *ate* and *cucce* are the most popular among the Puma because these are suitable for their climate and land. Similarly, the fast-growing millet is planted in *Jesṭha* (May/June) and is harvested in *Āshwin* (September/October), while the slow-growing millet is planted in *Āshāḍh* (June/July) and is harvested in *Mangsir* (November/December). The varieties of millet such as *serema*, *angdalung*, *dipsali*, *saliong*, *pungyungwaca*, *langtenkuca*, and *pangtenkuca* are quite popular in the Puma community (Gaenszle et al. 2008). After *phagu*, rice and millet are sown and planted. In *Āshāḍh* (June/July), soybeans are sown. Corn is harvested in *Shrāwaṇ* (July/August). Buckwheat is sown in the month of *Bhādra* (August/September). Mustard and potato are sown in *Āshwin* (Septemebr/October) and wheat is sown in *Kārtik* (October/November). *Mangsir* (November/December) is the month of harvesting of many crops such as buckwheat, soybeans, beans, rice and millet. There are no major agricultural activities in winter after *Mangsir*, except that in *Paush* (December/January), ginger and turmeric are harvested.

Oranges are a major fruit crop in Cisāpānī and Diplung. It is harvested between *Mangsir* (November/December) and *Paush* (December/January). In addition, fruits such as mangoes, guavas, bananas, lemons are also cultivated. Large quantities of oranges are produced and they become a main source of income during this period. The other major source of income comprises tomatoes, ginger, garlic and *sinkauli*[2](cf. Sharma 2014). In Pauwāserā and Mauwābote large quantities of tomatoes are grown, while little is cultivated in other Puma areas. Similarly, the other vegetables that are grown in the Puma areas include spinach, onion, peas, cauliflower, cabbage and chayote[3].

According to the local villagers, following the harvest, fields are ploughed for the preparation of the next crops. If necessary and based upon the nature of crops, fields are manured before ploughing. Usually the irrigated fields are prepared and manured in the autumn, while non-irrigated and low quality fields are enhanced with manure in the

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[2]*Sinkaulī* (*tejpattā*) refers to the aromatic dried leaves of the bay tree which are used in cooking for their distinctive flavour and fragrance, particularly in tea and curry.

[3] Botanical name is *sechium edule*.

spring as well. The ploughing is performed only by men, while the planting, the harvesting and the threshing is performed by both men and women, but the harvesting and the threshing is primarily by men and the planting is by women, however winnowing is performed only by women, using bamboo fans. Agricultural activities are undertaken by household members, sometimes supplemented by hired labour. Like other Nepalese groups, the Puma practice reciprocal exchange labour (cf. Vinding 1998:96–98). Although the Puma produce many of the goods needed by the household, none is self-sufficient and all households have to buy goods and labour. The households, which do not produce sufficient grain to meet their requirements, must buy at the market. In addition to rice and animal products, the Puma buy salt, sugar, cooking oil, kerosene, tea, lentils, soap, cigarettes, matches, kitchen utensils, batteries, torch lights, sweets, biscuits, noodles, milk powder, beaten rice, clothes, footwear and medicine.

4.3 Relatedness of annual ritual and agricultural cycles

The relatedness of annual ritual and agricultural cycles is presented in Table 2 (cf. Sharma 2014) where the signs used for the agricultural activities stand as given below. The signs used here are an updated and revised version of Gaenszle et al. (2008).

→ = preparation (ploughing, manuring, irrigating)
^ = sowing
# = planting
  = harvesting

Table 2: Annual ritual and agriculture cycle

Months	Māgh (Jan/Feb)	Phālgun (Feb/Mar)	Caitra (Mar/Apr)	Baisākh (Apr/May)	Jeṣṭha (May/Jun)	Āshāḍh (Jun/Jul)	Shrāwaṇ (Jul/Aug)	Bhādra (Aug/Sep)	Āshwin (Sep/Oct)	Kārtik (Oct/Nov)	Mangsir (Nov/Dec)	Paush (Dec/Jan)
RITUAL CYCLE — Puma	begin ūbhaulī (the Rising Time)						begin ūdhaulī (the Descending Time)					
	goṭh puja			phagu					nuwaṇgī		lewa pūjā	
				samkha					samkha		goṭh pūjā	
				maṇgen								
				goṭh pūjā								
	khʌliphenma			khʌliphenma							khʌliphenma	
National	Srī Pancamī	Holī	Caite Dashain	Caṇḍī Pūrnimā			Nāg Pancamī	Tīj	Dashain	Tihār	Dhaṇḍī Pūrnimā	
							Janai Pūrnimā					
AGRICULTURE CYCLE — Rice1		^	#			■						
Rice2					^	#					■	
Millet1			^		#				■			
Millet2					^	#					■	
Maize	^	#					■					
Wheat			■						→	^		
Buckwheat								→	^	■		
Ginger			→	#							■	
Turmeric			→	#							■	
Potato	■							#				
Mustard	■							#				
Orange											■	■
Bean				^							■	
SEASONS	WINTER		SPRING		SUMMER (MONSOON)				AUTUMN		WINTER	

4.4 Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry also plays a significant role in the subsistence economy of the Puma. Cattle and goats are an integral part of the subsistence economy, while fowls are an integral part of the rituals, as many rituals need hens and cocks for sacrifice. In addition to reproductive purposes, buffaloes and cows are kept for milk and dung production. Oxen are kept for ploughing and later they are sold for transport and traction. Pigs and sows are also kept mainly for meat and a mother pig must be sacrificed in some rituals such as *khaliphenma* (cf. Sharma 2014). After an animal has been slaughtered the meat is dried and later used either for making curry or mixing with vegetables. Cattle are also a source of some cash income. Goats and chickens are one of the main sources of cash income in Puma areas. Diplung and Pauwāserā are the major goat rearing villages.

5. Puma kinship terminology and social structure

Most of the Puma kin terms have the same form for reference and address. Those terms which have distinct terms for reference and address are also provided in brackets. Like Nepali and Tibeto-Burman languages, Puma diferentiates kin on the basis of generation, age within a generation, gender and in-law relationships, kin by sibling *vs*. kin by spouse. In addition to making distinctions on the basis of generation, Puma differentiates on the basis of age within generation in terms of the relative age of the kin with respect to the speaker. Table 3 below presents the Puma kinship terms(cf. Sharma 2014).

The kinship address terms *akko* 'elder brother' and *nana* 'elder sister' are widely used as respectful terms of address for male and female strangers of around the same age of the speaker[4]. Nepali and many of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal distinguish an individual's age within a generation by birth order. Nepali is rich in gendered kinship terms such as *jeṭho/ṭhūlo* 'first-born male', *jeṭhī/ṭhūlī* 'first-born female', *māhilo* 'second-born male', *māhilī* 'second-born female' *kāncho* 'fifth-born male', *kānchī* 'fifth-born female', *ṭhā̄hilo* 'seventh-born male', *ṭhā̄hilī* 'seventh-born female' and so on up to eleventh-born[5]. This system is also attested in Italian (cf. Turin 2012: 145). However, the gender principle is not strictly justified in the above Puma sibling terms. No such terminological distinction is present. Both younger brother and younger sister are classified together under the blanket term *nicha* which is indifferent as to gender.

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[4] This also holds true for Nepali, in which *dāī/ dāju* 'elder brother' and *didī* 'elder sister' are commonly used as terms of address for strangers of the same age (Turin 2012: 144).

[5] The complete list of Nepali gendered kinship forms includes: *jeṭho/ṭhūlo* 'first-born male', *jeṭhī/ṭhūlī* 'first-born female', *māhilo* 'second-born male', *māhilī* 'second-born female', *sāhī̃lo* 'third-born male', *sāhī̃lī* 'third-born female', *kāhī̃lo* 'fourth-born male', *kāhī̃lī* 'fouth-born female', *sānokāncho* 'fifth-born male', *sānīkānchī* 'fifth-born female', *ṭhūlokāncho* 'sixth-born male', *ṭhūlīkānchī* 'sixth-born female' *ṭhā̄hilo* 'seventh-born male', *ṭhā̄hilī* 'seventh-born female, *rāhī̃lo* 'eighth-born male', *rāhī̃lī* 'eighth-born female', *antare* 'ninth-born male', *mantare* 'tenth-born male', and *pānī jantare* 'eleventh-born male'. Note that the feminine terms for the last three are not attested in author's Parbate dialect.

5.1 Puma kinship terms

Example (1) below provides the common ethnological abbreviations (cf. Vinding 1998: 146; Turin 2012: 132) used for indexing kinship relationships. Abbreviations are combined to indicate complex relationships.

(1) M = mother   F = Father   B = Brother   Z = sister
     S = son   D = daughter   H = husband   W = wife
     E = spouse   G = sibling   C = child
     e = elder   y = younger   m = male   f = female
     m.s = male side f.s = female side

Table 3: Kinship terms

GENR	MASCULINE		FEMININE	
	TERM	GLOSS	TERM	GLOSS
G+3	*sakudippa*	FFF, FMF, MFF, MMF	*sakudimma*	MMM, FFM, FMM, MFM
G+2	*dippa*	FF, FFB, FMB, MF, MFB, MMB	*dima*	MM, FFZ, FMZ, FM, MFZ, MMZ
	sayaŋappa	SWFF, DHFF	*sayaŋamma*	SWMM, DHMM
G+1	*papa, pa*	F	*mama, ma*	M
	tuppa	FeB, FeZH, MeZH, MBWeB	*tumma*	FeZ, MeZ, FeBW
	bʌŋŋa	FyB, MBWyB, MyZH, FyZH	*chʌnna*	FyZ, FyBW, MyZ, MyBW
	dikku	MeB	*dini*	MeBW
	cʌkka	MyB	*chʌnna*	MyBW, FyZ, FyBW, MyZ
			māiju	MyBW
	pusʌĩ	FyZH	*phūpu*	FyZ
	sāno buwā	MyZH	*sānimā*	MyZ, MBWyZ
	ŋappa	SWF, DHF	*ŋamma*	SWM, DHM
	chadippa	EF, EFB	*chadima*	EM, EMZ
G±0	*khimhoŋpa*	H	*khimhoŋma*	W
			bunnima	W (loving term)
	pʌkka	eB (reference)	*nana*	eZ, HeZ (reference)
			bhāuju	eBW
	akko	eB (address)	*nana*	eZ (address)
	nicha	yB (reference)	*nicha*	yZ (reference)
			nammet	yBW (reference)
	yayo	yB (address)	*simma*	yZ (address)
	buwa	HeB	*busunima*	HeBW
	sibe	yZH f.s.		
	mokcha	yZH m.s		
	sālā	WyB	*sālī*	WyZ
	jethu	WeB	*ana*	WeZ
	bhenā	eZH	*nana*	eZ

	dewar	HyB	*dewarānī*	HyBW
	mokcha	HyZH	*nanda*	HyZ
G-1	*cha*	S	*cha*	D
	throŋchacha	S	*marchacha*	D
	chodumpa	S (abusive)	*chorumma*	D (abusive)
	mokcha	DH, yZH m.s.	*nammet*	SW, yBW (reference)
	hʌyakpa	SWB, DHB	*hʌyakma*	DHZ, SWZ
	chocha	GCm	*chochoma*	GCf
G-2	*chodum*	SS	*choduma*	SD
	yorumpa	CS	*yorumma*	CD
G-3	*yorumpacha*		CCC	

5.2 The morphology of Puma kinship terms

A number of Puma kinship terms yield readily to language-internal morphological analysis, where they are formed by reduplication or nearly reduplication, such as *mama* 'mother', *papa* 'father', *nana* 'elder sister', *nicha* 'younger brother or sister', *dippa* 'grandfather', *dima* 'grandmother', *tuppa* 'father's elder brother, and *tumma* 'father's elder sister'. According to Turin (2012: 145), the strategy of doubling is a common feature of kinship terminologies in many of the world's languages, including the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.

The kinship terms *thorongchacha* 'son', *marchacha* 'daughter' are formed by indexing form of *cha* 'son/daughter, child' in which *thorongcha* means 'boy' and *marcha* means 'girl, woman'. Perhaps the morpheme *cha* is also attached to terms such as *mokcha* 'daughter's husband', *nicha* 'younger brother/sister', *yorumpacha* 'great grandchildren', *chadippa* 'spouse's father', and *chadima* 'spouse's mother'(cf. Sharma 2014).

The native gendered suffix *-ma* 'FEM' and *-pa* 'MASC' are found as suffixed elements of the noun, such as *dima* 'mother's mother', *dippa* 'father's father', *tuppa* 'father's elder brother', *tumma* 'father's elder sister', *khimhongpa* 'husband', *khimhongma* 'wife', *yorumpa* 'grandson', *yorumma* 'granddaughter', *ngappa* 'son/daughter's father-in-law', *ngamma* 'son/daughter's mother-in-law', *chadippa* 'spouse's father', and *chadima* 'spouse's mother'(cf. Sharma 2014).

5.3 Puma kinship terms and their Tibeto-Burman cognates

In this section we compare and contrast the Puma kinship terms with a number of cognates in Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Nepal. We deal with the terms in Puma which have clear Tibeto-Burman cognates and subsequently a number of kinship terms that are related to Tibeto-Burman etyma. The Puma terms *ma* 'mother' and *pa* 'father' are identical to the Tibeto-Burman roots reconstructed by Benedict *ma* 'mother' (1972:148), *pa* 'father'(1972: 19). The Puma term *cha* 'child' corresponds to the Tibeto-Burman reconstruction *tsa~*za 'child (offspring)' (1972: 27) as well as in other Tibeto-Burman languages such as Thakali, Tamang and Gurung (cf. Sharma 2000: 16; Turin 2012: 147).

Puma *nana* 'father's elder sister' corresponds to Tibeto-Burman **ni(y)* 'father's sister' or 'mother-in-law' (Benedict 1972: 69), and also to Bantawa *nana* 'father's elder sister', Newar *nini* 'the husband's sister, father's sister', Thangmi *nini* 'father's sister, mother's brother's wife' (Turin 2012: 147); Limbu *nyaʔ* 'cross aunt' (van Driem 1987: 483); Dumi *nini* 'paternal aunt' (van Driem 1993: 402); Yamphu *niŋi* 'mother's brother's wife' (Rutgers 1998: 560) and Kulung *ni* 'paternal aunt' (Tolsma 1999: 223).

Puma *bangnga* 'uncle' appears to be cognate to Tibetan *a-baṅ = baṅ-po* 'father's sister's husband, mother's sister's husband', Cepang *pang* 'uncle', Vayu *pong-pong* 'father's brother' and archaic Chinese *xiwaŋ/xiwaŋˢ< *phwaŋ*(Davids & van Driem 1985: 136), corresponding to which Benedict (1972) posits the reconstructed Tibeto-Burman root **bʷaŋ ~ *pʷaŋ* 'father's brother'.

In Puma, kinship terms are employed to address and to consanguineal and affinal relatives. Kinship terms in practice often replace an individual's given name, both as a term of address and of reference. Kinship terms are also used metaphorically as terms of address and reference for non-kin in which a person's age and social position with respect to speaker determines the choice of kinship term used. For example, an elderly woman may be addressed by a younger person as *dimo* 'grandmother (VOC)' or *nano* 'elder sister (VOC)', depending on how great she imagines the age difference to be. Such metaphorical usage of kinship terms for non-kin is widely observed in many other cultures and is certainly prominent among the peoples of Nepal (Davids & van Driem 1985: 139; Turin 2012: 148). The ordinal terms also are used by non-kin familiar with the family of the addressed. For example, the ninth-born son of family is called *antareo* 'ninth-born male' (MAS, VOC) by the parents and the neighbours (Sharma 2014).

6. The life cycle and its rites

6.1 Birth

When women become pregnant, Puma say that they feel like vomiting and they prefer to eat sour food. As pregnancy advances, women are not allowed to work too hard – particularly carrying or lifting heavy loads. During a wife's pregnancy period, couples should not have sex and should avoid killing animals because it is believed that the foetus might be damaged during intercourse and harmed if its parents commit sins (Sharma 2014).

When it is believed a baby is ready to be born, a house should be cleansed by sprinkling it with local liquor. A household may call a midwife because most Puma women give birth at home, and do not have easy access to the health posts or hospitals. Sometimes a close female relative such as a mother-in-law or a neighbour with prior experience assists during delivery. Since they have little knowledge of how to deal with complications, as in other Nepalese community, pregnant women occasionally die during childbirth(Sharma 2014). As pregnant women usually keep doing their daily chores, they occasionally give birth while working in the fields or walking on the way.

As in another Kirati groups, the Wambule (Opgenort 2004:45), in Puma when a baby is

born, performance of field labour such as ploughing, sowing and planting is not allowed. After delivery the mother and her baby are considered impure (NEP.*sutak*), and are purified at a naming ceremony by slaughtering a rooster; this takes place on the third day after the birth (Sharma 2014). A ritually polluted mother is not allowed to touch the centre fireplace of the house until after the purification (naming) ceremony. According to Manbahadur Rai in the recoded text (birth_death) (Sharma 2009), the mother is not allowed to touch water and food until twenty-two days after the birth because it is believed that elder people should not eat meals cooked by a woman who has recently given birth. This custom is still in practice among the Puma. The period of birth until purification is considered inauspicious and other ritual rites such as marriage are not allowed.

6.2 Marriage

The Puma are ideally endogamous. Clan membership is essential for marriage practices because members within the same clan or sub-clans (such as *Hadira*, *Garaja*) are not allowed to marry. Marriage is usually initiated either by the bridegroom or his parents or his relatives. It is also possible for a girl's parents to take the initiative. Usually in the West many people select a spouse with whom they share common interests. This factor plays no role among the Puma. However, nowadays, some young boys and girls have started to initiate marriages by telling their lover that they would like to marry.

Marriage in Puma society is of two types, namely arranged marriage (*dotmapa biha*, NEP.*māgī bihā*) and marriage by theft (*khumapa biha*, NEP.*corī bihā*). Marriage by theft is the traditional way, but later arranged marriage became popular. Less frequent are marriages that involve stealing the wife of another man (NEP.*jārī bihā*), and marriages by capture (abduction) (NEP.*gandharva bihā*). Marriage by capture is initiated by the boy with or without his parents' consent. Opgenort (2004:48) notes that marriage by abduction takes place after there has been a fight between the boy's and girl's families during which both parties grab at the girl and the winner is the one who in the end manages to capture the girl. These two uncommon types are performed without ceremonies.

6.2.1 Arranged marriage

Arranged marriage, known as 'begging' (*dotmapa biha*), is initiated either by the boy's family or by relatives. In contrast to marriage by theft, the boy cannot proceed without informing his parents and obtaining their approval. The term *dotmapa biha* may be composed by the instrument nominalisation *-ma=pa* on the verb *dot* 'beg' plus *biha* which is a loan from Nepali(Sharma 2014). Rarely do the boy's parents go to the house of the girl themselves. Rather they send a couple of *koŋpi* 'negotiator of a wedding', who are usually the boy's maternal uncle and a relative who is older than the boy. According to Shibadhan Rāī and Kalpanā Rāī in the recorded texts (magibiha) and (DA_bihe) (Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) 2004), respectively, the negotiators present a vessel of liquor known as *wabup wasup* and a one rupee coin to the girl's family

and request their permission to speak. The girl's father accepts the liquor and the coin, and the *kongpi* present a formal marriage proposal by saying: "We are sent by so and so (name). Our son (name) from the clan (name) has reached the age of marriage. Your daughter (name) has grown up. We need a bride. Our son (name) would like to marry your daughter (name). Our son is like this, having such and such qualifications, social and family status. We have therefore come to your house to ask for your daughter(cf. Sharma 2014)."

Through the mediation of the negotiators, the girl's parents, brothers and sisters try to determine how the parents are, what their family status is, what the job of boy and his father is, how much they earn, what qualifications boy has, and whether the boy is the right suitor for the girl. If the marriage is agreed upon, the presents are accepted. If not, the gifts will be returned through the *kongpi*. When the girl's kinsfolk agree to the marriage, several negotiators such as *letpakongpi* (negotiators between the boy's and girl's family), *phengmakongpi* (negotiators of the girl's family), and *khidi* (assistants of *letpakongpi*) (cf. ms. Puma marriage, CPDP 2004) are sent to discuss the details of the marriage (Sharma 2014).

6.2.2 Marriage by theft

Marriage by theft, known as *khumapa biha* (NEP. *corī bihā*) is initiated by the boy. This type of marriage is also known as *bhāgī bihā* or elopement. The girl is said to be stolen by the boy. However, this type of marriage usually involves love. That is why sometimes it is called love marriage as well. A couple are considered husband and wife if they elope and spend nights together. Usually they decide to run off to the house of one of the boy's relatives without informing their parents and obtaining their approval because the couple fears that their parents may reject their relationship(cf. Sharma 2014). However, elopement sometimes takes place with the knowledge and encouragement of the girl's parents, either because their daughter is pregnant and they fear that her lover's family may oppose the marriage, or in order to save the expense of a proper marriage if they are from lower class family (cf. Vinding 1998:232). To inform the girl's family about the elopement, the boy's relatives, usually his maternal uncle and another older relative go to the house of the girl's parents as negotiators. The negotiators also carry presents such as *wasup* 'liquor' and a coin. The presents are accepted only if the marriage is accepted. If not, the presents are refused and the girl must come back home (cf. Opgenort 2004:49). In the case of a *corī bihā*, *kuṭuni* is a main negotiator to persuade a girl into marriage (cf. ms. Puma marriage, CPDP 2004).

The marriage ceremony is identical for a *dotmapa biha* and *khumapa biha*. The main role is played by the *kongpi* and *kutuni* 'negotiators' who are from each party. The marriage ceremony starts when the bridegroom and *dakmi*, (NEP.*jantī*) 'a marriage procession' go to the parental home of the bride, where the bride's kinsfolk and friends are waiting. The bridegroom and *jantī* are welcomed by the bride's family who apply a mark (NEP.*ṭīkā*) to their forehead. After a meal, a bronze bowl is taken for rituals in the bride's kitchen. According to Shreedhan Rai, as recorded in the text *magibiha,* four coins and a vessel of

liquor is given to the bride's parents, and a cock is also sacrificed. The bride's family formally accepts the offer of marriage given by the bridegroom's family. The bride and groom exchange blessings (*ṭīkā*) and flower garlands (NEP.*mālā*). Later, the bride is dressed in a red sari, wearing jewelry presented by the groom. The groom applies some red vermilion powder (NEP.*sindur*) in the parting of his bride's hair(cf. Sharma 2014). Before the newlyweds take leave, the groom's party sings and dances in praise of the bride's family. The bride and the bridegroom are carried out by the girl's brothers. Black umbrellas are used to protect the bride and the bridegroom from evil. Then the bride says farewell to her own family. At the groom's house the newly-weds are received by his parents. Texts of the oral tradition are chanted, while the bride is entering the groom's house. The groom's parents present their son and daughter-in-law.

6.3 Death

On the day when a person dies, kinsfolk and close relatives of the dead person gather to bid farewell and perform several ceremonies. The Puma have a custom of taking and burying their dead, preferably on the very day that the death occurs or very soon thereafter. Graveyards are generally located at a short distance from the village in the jungle. Fellow villagers and relatives are not allowed to perform any field labour such as ploughing, planting, sowing and harvesting because it is believed that crops would be damaged(Sharma 2014). Besides the members of the household, the close relatives of the dead person such as children and siblings and their spouses should be present. The attendance of daughter's and sister's husbands is considered important as they play a key role in the funeral rites.

6.3.1 Narrative

Here I present a general description of the death ceremony told by Manbahadur Rai in the text birth_death (cf. Sharma 2014). Before taking the corpse to the cemetery, coins are placed on the face, mouth and forehead. The legs and hands are knocked down by bringing *mānā* and *pāthī*[6] because it is believed that the deceased should not take any good things with him/her. The body is covered with a white cloth. Lying on its back and face up, the corpse is tied to two long bamboo poles and several bamboo rungs which are placed at right angles to the long poles (cf. Opgenort 2004:51). This is carried by two males, usually the offspring of the deceased. The funeral procession consists of males who belong to the family or the daughter's or sister's family, close relatives and neighbours, and friends. Then the funeral procession starts. It is preceded by a person who carries *chatala*, a bag of white cloth which contains uncooked rice, fried unhusked rice, coins, and three black lentils. It is followed by persons who are carrying three pieces of burning firewood and a person who carries a bamboo vessel filled with pure water and yeast in an upside-down position. However, Manbahadur Rai argues that it varies a little among the Puma according to different hamlets and villages. The dead person is taken to the graveyard feet first.

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[6]*Mānā* and *pāthī* are measures of capacity which are loans from Nepali.

6.3.2 Ritual chant

After reaching the graveyard, the dead body is sprinkled with the pure local liquor and texts of the oral tradition are chanted by the *ngapong* 'a ritual specialist' saying: "You all gods and goddess whoever live here, you should leave from today. Though you are older residents, you should leave here because now a new resident is coming."(cf. Sharma 2014) After having sprinkled the dead body, the mourners start to dig a rectangular hole to fit in a way that the body is placed with his/her head pointing towards the west because when the sun rises men have to perform field labour (cf. Opgenort 2004:52). The sons of the deceased shave off their hair and cover their heads with a white cloth.

According to Manbahadur Rai, the Puma make a box and bury their dead in it in graves to make sure wild animals will not have access on it. The box is cleansed and swept and then the corpse is placed inside the grave lying on its back with the arms alongside the body; the box is then covered by stones. After having covered it, the cloth over the face and the stones are removed saying: "You are becoming a stranger from today, go and take yourself from here." Then all the mourners look at the face to pay their last respects. At last, the face is covered again by stones saying: "We are offering you stones and soil. May not your heart hurt! The very important persons like *rājā māhārājā*, king and emperor died in this way. The people like horse-riders, elephant-riders, air-passengers also died in the same way" (cf. Sharma 2014). After saying 'man is mortal, and we need to persuade our heart,' the body is buried and covered with several layers of stones and soil, making a raised mound.

6.3.3 Structure

The mound is fenced by stones. The bamboo poles used to carry the corpse are broken into three pieces and left at the feet side on the grave. Similarly, *chatala* is placed at the side of the head, while the bags filled with rice and coins are left at the side of the feet. Then, the grave is protected by making a one-sided shed with the help of three bamboo poles and thatch. After finishing making roof, the soul is expected to leave just before the grave is covered completely. To take out the soul, two ladders are made of bamboo strips. One ladder is placed down in an upside-down position for the dead body. The other ladder which is in a right-side up position is for living beings and is taken out at last. After this it is thrown away, and the handles of spades are taken out and left by the grave. It is believed that the funeral procession's soul goes downward while they bury the dead body. So, their living soul should be taken out by ringing these spades. Then, the priest and the relatives start to return to the village. After walking a little bit ahead, thorns are placed and pressed with stones to stop the dead soul in each of five steps in three places which the mourners cross by stepping over them(cf. Sharma 2014). This type of custom is prevalent in non-Kirati community as well. After having returned to the village, they gather at the house of deceased and are offered food and drink. Family members and other relatives abstain from certain food for specific days, which depends on the kind of death and whether it is good or bad.

6.3.4 Death interpretation

Like the neighbouring people, the Wambule (Opgenort 2004:51), the Puma make a distinction between auspicious and inauspicious deaths. Auspicious or good deaths include normal death due to old age and minor illness or heart attacks. Inauspicious or bad deaths involve accidents, falling, drowning, murder, and incurable wounds that are caused by accidents (Sharma 2014). If the death is believed good, the mourners abstain for five days and if the death is believed bad, they abstain for just three days. However, the funeral rites last until the ninth day after the death.

During this period of ritual impurity (NEP.*juṭho*), the sons of the deceased cover their heads with a white cloth. They are not allowed to eat meat and salt. A ceremony of purification (NEP.*suddāi*) is performed on the ninth day after the death. After the death of a family member, *khaliphenma*, a ritual ceremony must be performed very soon thereafter (maximum up to two months)(Sharma 2014).

7. Sociolinguistic observations

(a) Conversation without lingua franca

Interestingly, migrant Rai people usually adopt the local Puma language as their mother tongue (CPDP 2004). However during my SOAS ELDP fieldtrip on Puma (Sharma 2012), the author and Shree Kumar Rai, Puma native speaker, noticed that two close neighbours, a Puma speaker and a Bantawa speaker, of Buyāṭār village of Pauwāserā VDC were in conversation. It was really interesting that they spoke in their own mother tongue without using any contact language or lingua franca, neither Nepali nor Bantawa. Their understanding is because of both knowing each other's languages.Similarly, other migrant Rais such as Kulung and Thulung speak Puma in the daily life and their own mother tongue at home with their family. They do not speak Bantawa, no Camling either, whereas Bantawa and Camling do speak their language at home and in conversation with Puma. Bantawa and Camling both understand Puma well; so Puma speakers use Puma while the Bantawa speak in Bantawa when turn taking in conversations (cf. Sharma 2014).

(b) Asymmetrical use of language

The other striking thing we noticed is, in Bansilā, Pauwāserā VDC, children speak Puma instead of their mother tongue Bantawa or Camling. Perhaps it is primarily due to heavy influence from Puma speaking friends and their own father as well. This kind of asymmetrical use of language has been found for Australian languages (Peter Austin, p.c.) (cf. Sharma 2014).

(c) Dominant use of Nepali language

The language situation we found in Dā̃dāgāũ of Mauwāboṭe VDC was the reverse, compared to Pauwāserā. Two Puma adults were in conversation speaking in Nepali whereas both of them knew Puma very well (cf. Sharma 2014).

(d) Morpheme decline and use of shorter form

In daily conversation in the village, the use of the genitive marker *-bo* is in decline, and the shorter form of the connective, for example *maki* 'why', is in use instead of *nammaki* or *nammakinan* (cf. Sharma 2014).

(e) Reverse use of ritual language

Ritual performance in ward number 6 and 9 of Cisāpānī VDC is also interesting. In ward number 6, Bantawa perform rituals in the Puma language, though they claim that they are using their own Bantawa language (Sharma 2014). In contrast, in ward number 9, Puma perform rituals is Bantawa, but they also claim that they are using the Puma language.

(f) Language shift

In Siddīpur VDC of Udayapur district, we found that Puma adult speakers use their mother tongue to talk with Bantawa adult speakers; however, they use the Bantawa language to talk with Bantawa children. Likewise, in Āhāle, Pauwāserā VDC, parents use Puma with their elder daughter who can understand Puma but cannot speak it fluently (Sharma 2012; 2014). In return, she uses Nepali with her parents. On the other hand, parents use Nepali with their younger daughter who has no knowledge of Puma. Research on language shift shows that first-generation migrants may continue to use their native languages but that their children or grandchildren will be native speakers of Nepali.

8. Conclusion

Multilingual situation is the most important determiner of ethnic and cultural diversity in Nepal. However, it would be a mistake to assume that cultural diversity is problem-free. The truth is that cultural diversity, as well as being of long-term benefit to Nepali society, has the potential to create its own immediate problems or to worsen existing ones. Diversity raises complex issues that must be considered and brings real challenge that must be addressed. Every society has unique ethnic and cultural diversity. For example, the Puma people have preserved cultural practices that have disappeared in other Rai communities. The mythical characters *Tongwama*, *Khiwama* and *Hekchakupa* are quite popular in Rai-Kirati mythology with different name. Puma has altogether fourteen clans, descending from *Dabalung* and *Palun.* The annual rituals are performed for paying respect and honour to the ancestors and asking prosperity for the new farming cycle. To analyse cultural diversity of the community in this way like Puma, documenting of endangered languages and producing and training of researchers to effectively undertake language documentation works is inevitable. And overall the loss of any language is a loss of linguistic and cultural diversity but most importantly, a loss for its speakers. As a result, when a language is lost, a unique diversity is lost. By making ethnic hostility less likely, the comprehensive linguistic and ethnic documentation help produce conditions in which understanding and acceptance can replace ignorance and intolerance. The result should be a more fully integrated multiethnic society in Nepal.

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