



Nachhiring Cultures and Festivals: Implications for the Community and Identity of Kiratis in Nepal

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Abstract

Culture is the heart of human civilization and the distinct identity of any ethnic group. Festivals are the continuation of civilization because they preserve cultural heritage, transmit traditions across generations, and sustain social cohesion. The day culture and values disappear from a person's life, that person can no longer be considered truly human. This research finds out the current status of Nachhiring cultures and festivals, which belong to the Kirat ethnic group in Nepal. It applies qualitative research methodology, using the ethnographic method. Participants include individuals from Sotang Rural Municipality, Solukhumbu district. Findings show that Nachhiring cultures and festivals are rapidly disappearing. Only the senior Nachhiring people are used to explaining the Nachhiring cultures and festivals and are worried about their innate extinction. Due to the modern education system, over-social network inclination, and governmental reluctance, minor ethnic treasures have been pushed to the margin. Realizing this harsh reality deeply, this research has been prepared with the objective of highlighting the importance and necessity of Nachhiring culture and festivals in the lives of today's modern young students and youngsters.

Keywords: Nachhiring, Tos, Yangkhulu, Sakhumbu, Masimi, Nokchho

Introduction

Nachhiring belongs to Kirat ethnic groups in Nepal (Grollmann, 2018). Just as each ethnic group has its own geographical settlement, the Nachhiring people primarily live in the eastern region of Nepal, especially in places like Sotang and Mahakulung Rural Municipalities of Solukhumbu and Rakha-Bangdel-Bakachol-Sungdel-Patheka-Aiselukharka of Khotang district (Rai, 2020a). They have also been inhabiting other districts like Taplejung, Panchthar, Terhathum, Sankhuwasabha, Bhojpur, Udaypur, Sunsari, Jhapa, Morang, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur; and outside Nepal in India, Bhutan, Hong Kong, UK, Australia, USA, and so on.

In a scholarly context, the term "Nachhiring" refers to a caste, a sub-caste, and denotes a group

of people. There is not much evidence found in written materials such as books or articles that thoroughly study the word Nachhiring from a linguistic or ethnographic perspective. Some writers have used the term "Nachhiring" in poems, essays, or other literary works, but no extensive study has been done yet. The name "Nachhiring" is mainly used by people of the Nachhiring lineage themselves. There have been various assumptions and interpretations about the origin of the Nachhiring word from a sociological and anthropological viewpoint. The senior sociologist Dor Bahadur Bista has viewed Nachhiring as 'Sotang' and 'Pelmang'. Prof. Sueyoshi Toba has opined the term as "Nachhiring" or "Kulung". The senior sociologist Dr. Om Gurung has stated Nachhiring as "Nacheri". Some sociologists have related it to "Wangdel," "Parali," or "Rakhali". When

studied linguistically, it is understood that the word Nachhiring might have originated from a deviation or transformation of some earlier word (Rai, 2024).

Being an insider from the Kirat ethnic group, I have witnessed that Nachhiring people have their own traditional customs, rituals, and culture with unique moral significances that have been passed down through generations through oral transmission of moral, religious, social, and cultural functions. From one generation to the next, these traditions have been inherited, and it is found that the Nachhiring community completes all life-cycle rituals, such as birth and death rites, through these moral teachings and Mundhum. Moreover, they have customary ways of celebrating festivals like Dashain, Tihar, Saune Sakranti, and Maghe Sakranti with their own traditional methods. They worship various deities such as Sitakhau Purbya, Nwagi, Nagi, Tos, Saipom, Kheplem Therma, Sahalma, Shikari, Sansari, Wayu pooja, streams and rivulets pooja (Kholanala pooja), land pooja (Bhume pooja), forest pooja, new crops offering pooja, etc.

According to the 2021 Nepal National Census, by population by caste/ethnicity and sex, the total population of the Nachhiring community is 7,300 out of a total 29,164,578 population (National Statistics Office, 2023). The Nachhiring population was 7,154 by caste/ethnicity and sex in 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The low percentage (0.025%) of this community in the 2021 census shows its endangered status in Nepal's ethnic demographic. Those who belong to the Kirat community have experienced a gradual decline in Nachhiring culture, rituals, and festivals, which raises concerns for the sustainable preservation and promotion of Nachhiring heritage. Thus, the purpose of this research is to find out the current status of Nachhiring cultures and festivals and to accustom the Nachhiring youngsters with their implications in this digital world.

Literature Review

Indigenous knowledge and culture in Nepal

preserve identity, language, and the environment. Rai (2025) found that Mangsuk is an oral Kirati tradition, which is the oral teaching of the Yamphu mother tongue. It combines ritual, learning, and community practices. The formal education system should recognize it to support indigenous culture and language. Mammadova and Abdullayev (2025) mentioned that preserving cultural heritage boosts economic benefits like tourism and jobs. There must be policies that include heritage in economic planning. Lama (2021) found that Nepal's indigenous knowledge helps preserve culture and the environment. This is passed through language, art, and traditions. Lama also stressed that future research is needed to scientifically validate the applications of these knowledge systems. Subba (2023) argued that Kirat identity is diverse and shaped by history, culture, and language. There is a need for a broader view to promote the inclusion and fairness of this knowledge system. There exist smaller Kirat groups in different areas who have shared cultural identity and heritage aspects in common. Rai and Rai (2021) included that Mangsuk and Mundhum teach Yamphu knowledge, values, and beliefs to younger generations. However, the modern education system sidelines these indigenous traditions. Indigenous learning should be preserved through the formal education system. Rai (2020b) included that Rai people follow Mundhum and Suptulung rituals to teach culture and knowledge. These practices are connected to nature and identity. The formal education system has not recognized their educational meaning. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples mentioned, "Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment" (United Nations, 2007, p. 4).

Research highlights that indigenous knowledge in Nepal faces challenges from migration, weak institutions, and limited legal protection. Malla and Adhikari (2025) explored that migration of people from villages and weak institutional support in Nepal have made conserving

indigenous knowledge difficult. They argued that community events and respecting senior citizens can help pass knowledge to younger generations. Policies need to officially recognize these citizens as culture bearers. In Nepal, the Guthi system of Newar people has supported sustainable tourism by combining culture and economy (Shrestha et al., 2024). Collaboration strengthens social ties and the identity of the community. Indigenous practices should guide the development of tourism by respecting their century-old traditions. Hossain and Ballardini (2021) stress that current laws do not fully protect indigenous knowledge and rights. The prevailing legal frameworks have gaps in cultural rights and self-determination. They suggested that a principle-based approach combining human rights and property concepts could improve protection. Dawson et al. (2021) indicated that indigenous knowledge protection is insufficient under current laws. This can be made effective by combining human rights with property principles, which can offer better protection. It is important to note that ethical principles like fairness and cultural rights are key in the initiation of indigenous peoples' movements and advocacy.

The above research highlights that indigenous knowledge and culture are important, but little is known about Nachhiring cultures and festivals. These traditions need to be preserved for younger generations. This research aims to fill this gap by conducting an empirical study by interacting with elderly people from Nachhiring culture in Nepal's eastern hills and by observing their cultural practices and rituals.

Methodology

In this study, qualitative research design was used to explore an in-depth analysis of the research issues (Makateng & Mokala, 2025). I applied the ethnographic research method to unpack Nachhiring cultures, festivals, and their implications in the present context (O'Reilly, 2012). I conducted in-depth interviews with four Nachhiring senior citizens and observed their cultural practices and rituals. The narrative findings and observation data have been

interpreted through thematic analysis (Ahmed et al., 2025). The participants included [P1], age 70; [P2], age 73; [P3], age 67; [P4], age 78; and [P5], age 76. They were purposively chosen (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024) as they are community leaders and senior citizens who have ample traditional knowledge of Nachhiring cultures.

The research area is mainly based in Sotang Rural Municipality, Solukhumbu district. The district consists of 2,785 Nachhiring people according to the population by caste/ethnicity and sex data of the 2021 Census (National Statistics Office, 2023). Nachhiring cultures and festivals are solely celebrated in this region. It is inhabited by these ethnic people who have traditionally preserved their practices.

Ethical procedures were applied by seeking informed consent from participants, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities throughout the research (Al Habsi, 2024). I paid special attention to cultural sensitivity, respectful participation in rituals, and ongoing consent during the prolonged interactions (Iphofen, 2021). This research's trustworthiness is ensured through bringing rich interview narration from the field through in-depth interviews. Observational data complemented the qualitative texts. My reflection as a representative of the Kirat community has maintained reflexivity to minimize bias and ensure rigor in this study (Tariq, 2025).

Findings

I found the diverse current cultural and festive situations of Nachhiring people in the study area. I have presented them under thematic headings: Sakhumbu/Poorkha, Mauke, Masimi, Nokchho/Dhami, and Tos.

Sakhumbu/Poorkha

[P1] is the Sakhumbu or Poorkha in the Nachhiring community. Sakhumbu is supposed to be the knower of Nachhiring culture and sacrament. Sakhumbu is the principal actor in performing all rites and rituals throughout the year. Upon interaction, I found that each and every single ritualistic activity is completed

under his direct guidance and supervision. [P1] shared, “I don’t have spiritual power like the wizards or shamans. They have life-long cultural and sacramental experience for performing each and every Nachhiring mundhumi function.” Even the three kinds of Nokchhos/Dhami – who are not all-knowers – ask him for the cultural and sacramental completion. During a festival, I saw him teach a young Dhami the proper offering and chants, showing how cultural knowledge is passed down.

Mauke

[P2] is the "Mauke" in the Nachhiring community. The term "Mauke" is derived from the term "Mauka" – special food or holy food – which is forbidden to eat even by Sakhumbu, Nokchho, and laymen. The Nachhiring community prepares varieties of holy food in the course of performing all ritual functions. Among them, Mauka is one of the major blessed foods (Prasad). [P2] explained, “Only one person is allowed to eat this holy food 'Mauka'. In the long run, this Mauka eater began to be recognized as Mauke.” This person is prohibited from using common people’s utensils, mates, tools, bed, quilt, pillow, chair, plate, etc., and even green vegetables. He has to abide strictly by these communal laws. [P2] further elaborated, “There is a belief that if I breach them, I might die or become deeply sick. Likely, if ordinary people eat this food, they might feel their mouth twisted, become lame, limped, sickened, and weak enough to die.” That’s why only Mauke is allowed to taste this holy food. During a ritual, [P2] carefully prepared the Mauka and warned a young member not to touch it, showing the Mauke’s sacred authority and responsibility.

Masimi

[P3] (Masimi) has a significant role in the Nachhiring community while performing dance in Tosh culture. In Tosh, the dance activities proceed only under the supervision of Masimi. During Tosh Pooja, Nokchho can't enter the Yankhulu (Bhumesthan) before Masimi's entrance. Masimi takes Silim (a stripe type of

wood) and Buyem (Yak's tail) in his hand and enters the Yankhulu by dancing around the Simal tree (a holy tree in Nachhiring). Nokchho and other performers follow his footsteps. [P3] explained, “A Masimi is chosen on the basis of ritual knowledge (Mundhumi gyan) and cultural dancing ability.” During Tosh Pooja, I observed [P3] lead the dance, with performers following his steps, showing how ritual authority and cultural knowledge are passed on.

Nokchho/Dhami

The Nachhiring community is incomplete without the presence of Nokchho. They have a great impact on the community from birth to death. [P4] detailed, “There are three types of Nokchho for performing Nachhiring cultures and sacraments: Selemi Nokchho, Khu Nokchho, and Tos Nokchho.”

According to [P4], Selemi Nokchho's major responsibility is to heal sick people and make their house free of problems, sufferings, threats, and tensions. In other words, their core role is to create a peaceful environment within the hosting house. Through rice speculation, they remove bad stars’ marks, sanctify the oven, and heal the sick people. Another responsibility is to guarantee the accidental dead's soul reaches Pomlalong (heaven). To foretell, they cut the layers of halbei (a kind of kachur) into pieces and set them into pairs.

Likewise, Khu Nokchho performs nwagi pooja, nagi pooja, dedam pooja, chhidam pooja, etc. They offer special food to please their ancestors for blessings, offer chhorsa (pig's tail part), and perform other sacramental activities. They are highly respected in this community because there is a belief that a whole family's year-long prosperity, happiness, peacefulness, and success depend on their satisfactory performance. While performing Dedam, they also forecast by cutting chiribei (a kind of kachur) into pieces and setting them into pairs.

Similarly, Tos Nokchho or Shibu Nokchho performs all the Tos-related activities. This Nokchho is nominated through the Sarbhukham

process (a group of people who know every step of all kinds of Tos). Every Nachhiring highly respects the Tos Nokchho. Nachhiring people celebrate seven Tos in the entire year. The Tosh Nokchho has to perform all these seven Tos.

During my observation, the three Nokchhos performed their rituals carefully, showing how their roles sustain Nachhiring cultural and spiritual life.

Tos

Tos is the heart of Nachhiring culture and civilization. [P5] highlighted that there are seven different Tos, which Nachhiring people celebrate in seven different time-frames, spaces, and for seven different purposes. All Nachhiring people gather in specific holy places to gleefully and frantically enjoy and celebrate them. As per conversation with [P5], the seven different Tos are briefed as follows:

Soskha Tos

The literal meaning of "Soskha" in the Nachhiring language is – "throw away or put aside." This Tos is celebrated on the previous day of Falgun Poornima. While celebrating it, all the prevailing diseases, infections, or negativities on the earth, in nature, in society, and in flora and fauna are supposed to be put aside through the Tos Nokchho. After celebrating this Tos, Nachhiring people look forward positively, conceiving that the whole year will be full of joys and prosperity. Their life would prosper. With the positive vibes, they begin to cultivate their lands. Also, this Tos is celebrated with the determination that a good season is to come and that it is the appropriate time to start preparing the farm. This Tos is performed collectively at Yankhulu (Bhumesthan). Before this Tos is hosted, one kilogram of grain is collected and stored in different toles for making jaand (a kind of alcohol).

Banchhyor Tos

Another equally essential Tos in the Nachhiring community is Banchhyor Tos. The literal meaning of the term "Banchhyor" in the Nachhiring language is – "to cut or clear the bushes." This Tos is celebrated on the previous

day, or "the day of Chaturdashi," of Chaitra Poornima. This celebration reminds the initial practice of living by clearing the bushes or way of life in the jungle at that time. The purpose of celebrating this Tos is to invoke the almighty for a happy, healthy, and prosperous life without difficulties and catastrophes. On this very day, Nachhiring people uproot weeds in the field, put them aside, and chop trees as per reminiscence. They also wish to have germless crops on this occasion. It is also regarded as the indication of the planting season.

Rumul Tos

The third equally significant Tos in the Nachhiring community is Rumul Tos. The meaning of Rumul in the Nachhiring language is – to consult or to discuss. According to Nachhiring belief, it was instigated as preparation for war. This Tos is celebrated on the previous day of Ngerya Tos. It is hosted on the Triyadashi of Jestha Poornima. It came into existence as preparedness for war. According to local ancestors, there had been a terrible war between the Thulung King called Dharme of Deusa and the Nachhiring of Sotang. Nachhiring battled valiantly and conquered the Thulung Dynasty. After the war, there was drought, famine, heavy rainfall and no rainfall, and low grain production. When all the Nokchhos were requested to find a solution, they suggested Ngerya Tos. Therefore, Rumul Tos was conceived. It is mainly celebrated in Sotang Rural Municipality of Solukhumbu district. In addition, Rumul Tos is also regarded as the supplementary Tos of Ngerya Tos.

Ngerya Tos

The most indispensable Tos in the Nachhiring community is Ngerya Tos. In a word, it is the Tos of pride and victory. The term "Ngerya" is derived from "Nger." The literal meaning of "Nger" in the Nachhiring language is – war or battle. Ngerya Tos is celebrated on the Chaturdashi, or the previous day of Jestha Poornima. According to Nachhiring ancestors, this Tos evolved from a battlefield background. According to Sakhumbu Bal Kumar Nachhiring, it has not been too long since its commemoration

commenced. He further added that there had been the kingdom of Nachhiring, and across the Dudhkoshi River in Deusa, there had been the kingdom of Thulung King, Dharme. According to Mr. Nachhiring, the Thulung King Dharme came up to Budhi Danda (from where Sotang is clearly seen), erected a large, elongated-shaped stone, and offered a bull buffalo with the pledge of invading and capturing Sotang. That stone still exists there. Unfortunately, King Dharme lost the war and hid in the den of Chaplikom, Sotang. The Nachhiring warriors revealed him while he was drinking jaand (a grain-made special alcohol) and eating fried corn flour. First, he requested them to let him finish and suddenly jumped down from the den to his death. His head was pierced through with a bamboo spear and set up at Hitising, Sotang. His eastward-facing mouth was always turned toward Deusa in the morning. This caused many catastrophes in Sotang, like drought, famine, and heavy rainfall. To get rid of these precarious situations, the Nokchhos suggested burying his head with commemoration. Only then could happiness and prosperity return. Eventually, the Ngerya Tos originated.

Chalim Tos

Chalim Tos is the fifth major Tos of Nachhiring people. The term "Chalim" is the derivative form of the Nachhiring word "Chalei," which means "Seed" or "Seedling." The purpose of celebrating Chalim Tos is to worship the grain seed and the seedlings. Henceforth, Chalim Tos came into existence. This Tos is celebrated on the previous day of Asar Poornima. In addition, this Tos is also celebrated invoking to ward off diseases from the plants.

Sama Tos

Sama Tos is another equally crucial Tos for Nachhiring people. The literal meaning of "Sama" in the Nachhiring language is "Diseases or Sickness." Hence, Sama Tos developed from Sama. To ward off diseases, evil ghosts, invisible powers, and sufferings, this Tos is compulsorily celebrated on the last day of Shrawan Masanta (last day of Shrawan month). This Tos is

performed not at Yankhulu but at Tos Nokchho's house collectively. According to Nachhiring convention, the time after Chalim Tos is performed and before Sairum Tos is completed is called the most critical time. People suffer a lot from various evil spirits or powers. Therefore, this Tos is conducted to free people from all sorts of troubles during it.

Sairum Tos

The last but equally significant Tos in Nachhiring is Sairum Tos. The literal meaning of "Sairum" in Nepali language is "Sheer uthaunu." This is the supplementary Tos of all Tos. There is a belief that when all Tos are completed successfully, this final Tos is performed invoking enough power and strength for all to combat against evil spirits, diseases, and troubles. This Tos is also not performed at Yankhulu but at Tos Nokchho's house. This Tos is performed on the fifth day of Jamare Aunshi (Aswin Shukla Panchami). After the Sairum Tos worship is completed, the way to conduct any good work is open. With the successful completion of it, everybody feels free of sufferings, haunts, troubles, and negativities. In summary, the seven Tos are key rituals in Nachhiring culture. The community follows the Tos Nokchho to keep traditions and well-being. Together, these practices sustain Nachhiring identity and cultural harmony.

Discussion

Culture includes knowledge, belief, and habits people share in the society (Tylor, 1889). This indicates that culture is learned and shared, not innate or biological, and the Nachhiring community is no exception. Culture often originates from or is attributed to a specific region, making it the heart of a society or community. The study reveals that Nachhiring cultural and festive practices are maintained through key roles such as Sakhumbu, Mauke, Masimi, and the three types of Nokchho/Dhami. Sakhumbu acts as the principal custodian of cultural knowledge, supervising all rituals throughout the year and guiding other ritual performers. Mauke holds sacred authority over holy food, while Masimi leads dance rituals during Tosh celebrations.

The Nokchhos ensure spiritual and social well-being, performing essential sacraments and forecasting auspicious outcomes. The seven Tos festivals structure the Nachhiring calendar, promoting identity, cohesion, and continuity of cultural traditions. These findings align with Rai (2025), Rai and Rai (2021), and Rai (2020b), who highlight those oral traditions and rituals are vital for preserving indigenous knowledge, yet are often marginalized by modern education systems.

These findings resonate with broader literature on indigenous knowledge in Nepal, which emphasizes challenges such as migration, weak institutional support, and limited legal recognition (Malla & Adhikari, 2025; Hossain & Ballardini, 2021; Dawson et al., 2021). Experiences from the Guthi system of Newars illustrate that community collaboration can preserve cultural heritage while promoting social cohesion and sustainable tourism (Shrestha et al., 2024; Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). Additionally, studies by Lama (2021) and Subba (2023) underscore that indigenous knowledge sustains language, environment, and cultural identity but requires validation and broader recognition to support inclusion and fairness. Today, Nachhiring people, with pride, can assert themselves as a unique community. Tosh and Yangkhulu are treasured cultural assets, and while urban and semi-urban members may be alienated from their pristine practices, the significance and spiritual connection of names, rituals, and festivals cannot be separated from lineage. Cultural and spiritual connections distinguish individuals and preserve the community's identity, even amid modern adaptation or digital influences.

Despite these insights, little research exists specifically on Nachhiring cultures and festivals. The study confirms that these traditions are rapidly disappearing, primarily preserved only by senior community members. Overreliance on digital devices and social media alienates younger Nachhiring from their cultural heritage. The research addresses this gap by

documenting Nachhiring rituals and festivals through interactions with elders and direct observation, highlighting the urgency to connect modern youth with ancestral origins. Preserving these practices ensures continuity of cultural knowledge, festivals, and language, sustaining spiritual, social, and cultural harmony within the community (United Nations, 2007; Rai, 2025; Rai & Rai, 2020). The emotional concern of elders over declining participation demonstrates the community's collective recognition of cultural preservation as essential for future generations.

Conclusion

This study shows that Nachhiring cultural and festival practices, led by Sakhumbu, Mauke, Masimi, and Nokchho/Dhami, are crucial to preserve and promote community identity and cohesion. Unfortunately, these traditions are rapidly declining as they are only preserved by elders. Young people are increasingly disconnected from these heritages due to modern education, urban life, and technological influences. This needs to be reformed through awareness, education, and youth participation. Limitations of the study are that it is restricted to a specific area and relies on small qualitative interviews and observations. Future scope of the study includes exploring other regions, including quantitative research, and examining ways to integrate these practices in educational and community programs. Thus, preserving Nachhiring culture is essential to maintain identity, heritage, and continuity of indigenous practices for future generations.

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