

## Haircut and Dress Giving Rituals of the Gurungs of Sikles Village

By Gurung P.B.

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<b>Author(s)</b>	Pol Bahadur Gurung
<b>Association</b>	Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University
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<b>Email</b>	poltamu06@gmail.com

### Abstract

*This article is about initiation rituals (Khyaper Lapa and Nkyuee Chol Peepa) of the Gurung boys and girls of Sikles. It also analyzes the relations of the rituals with symbols of the Gurungs. The main objective of the paper is to explore traditional ritual practices, their customs, and the values of rituals and customary practices among the Gurungs of the Sikles village in Nepal. The ritual and customary practices have been practiced in traditional ways in spite of the penetration of modern cultures at Sikles. It argues that Gurung boys and Girls become mature after doing the initiation rituals. They were considered and treated differently by members of society. Girls before the initiation were considered children without gender disparity. After the ritual, she is considered a mature woman who can participate in agricultural and livelihood activities. Both the rituals accumulate merits for the family and the community. Participatory observations, interviews, and case studies methods are employed to explore relations between rituals and symbols. Besides main functional practices, the rituals embodied the symbolic power and power of the community. Social and cultural unity and power are expressed through division of work and gift exchange. Close kin people and neighbors gathered not only to offer a blessing to the novice but also to revitalize social and cultural relations among them.*

**Keywords:** Belief, Merits, Ritual, Symbol, and Tradition

## Introduction

The Gurungs call themselves 'Tumu'. The word 'Tu-Mu' is derived from the geographical location of 'up land' and 'low land'. It indicates their migration from north to south or from above to lower geographical location. Their oral history (*Pye ta'n Lhu ta'n*) mentioned their origin and migration from upland to lowland. It means *that* they migrated from somewhere of *Mongolia* to *China-Tibet* and entered in Mustang-Manang of Nepal. According to their *Pye ta'n Lhu ta'n* they established their own state and self-governed from starting to Nepal, which they called *hyula chu'n pa* (*autonomous state*) in their oral history. MacFarlane argued that the Gurungs themselves were undoubtedly an amalgam of several different people who have migrated into this area during the last thousand years (MacFarlane, 2003). They adopted by incorporating both Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan cultural and civilizational characters. This cultural amalgamation is clearly observed especially in their religious and ritual performances, which is a bewildering mixture of Hinduism, Buddhism, and beliefs very similar to the old Bon religion of Tibet (MacFarlane, 2003: 17-19). Their language is predominantly Tibeto-Burman. It seems certain that they overlap in origins and culture with many of the neighboring tribes, particularly the Tamangs.

Their distinct cultural practices and ritual performances are markers of their traditional identity. Most of the traditional rituals and cultural characteristics are closer to Thakali, Tamang, and Tibetan Lama. They have their own traditional priests called *Pachyu*, *Lauhri*, and *bonpo Lam*. The *Pachyu* and *Lauhri* chant the Gurung's oral history in different rituals. The history is chanted priestly language during the ritual performance which they called *Cho'n kyui*. 'The *pye* is chanted in a ritual language named *cho kyui*. *Cho* is believed to be the Tamu place of origin' (Pettregrew, 2006:35). The language is used only in rituals performances by the priests. The language of everyday communication is slightly different from ritual language. Nobody easily understands the language accepted by the priests and knowledgeable old Gurungs peoples (Gurung, 2015). The Gurungs believed that in ancient traditional religion which they called *khe Ma* (kul deveta) or ancestors deities, natural or local deities (Siltu-Naltu), and different evils things (tha, mo, ree). They are slightly influenced by Hinduism. So, they worship Hindu gods and practice Hindu cultural values. These days, the Gurungs are living in the city area are mostly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, Hitchcock and Jones argued that the Gurung religion was a combination of three strong traditions: indigenous shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism), and Hinduism. Gurung shamanism appears to be closely related to the old Bon religion of Tibet and northern Nepal' (Hitchcock and Jones, 1994:199). The argument is nearly related to the Gurung practices. These rituals and cultural performances are observed during birth, marriage, and funeral, post-funeral, and local traditional practices.

The Gurungs of Sikles have been practicing different types of rituals on different occasions. Their priests chant oral mantras and symbols to link their life with their history and meanings of being Gurung in Sikles. The Gurungs followed the rituals practices of their ancestors. Their rituals like birth, naming, *kyaper lapa* (first hair cutting of son), *Nkyuee chol peepa* (giving a set

of Gurungs dress for daughter), marriage, death, and *Pai* ritual (after death ritual) has been practiced following rules of their tradition. *Kyaper lapa* (first hair cutting), *Nkyuee chol peepa* (dress giving), rituals are a symbolic manifestation of entering the world of manhood, womanhood, and meaning of life within particular locations. Different symbols play different roles in different rituals. The meanings and values of the symbols are interpreted by the priestly groups. Local *Riti-Thiti* (local rules and regulations) in which the entire village was united set values and compulsions of rituals Nobody goes against these local practices. These customary rules and regulations manage and sustain the whole village.

### **Research Problems**

The Gurung community and their traditional social norms and values are not new for social science research in Nepal and across. They have been widely studied by both foreigners and natives. Their focus was their economic livelihood, lifecycle rituals, social hierarchy, and religion (MacFarlane, 2003, 1997; Pignede, 1993). They have not explored oral history, meaning, and interpretation of *Kyaper lapa* (first hair cutting), *Nkyuee chol peepa* (dress giving), rituals, and symbols in the Gurung community. Being a traditional Gurung priest (*Pachyu*), I have been practiced the oral mantra of Gurung rituals. I have not only insider experiences and reflections but also ritually authoritative interpretations of an oral archetype of culture, ritual, and symbols. Misinterpretations and incorrect practice were corrected. Moreover, there is a lack of symbolic perspective on the understanding of Gurungs rituals performances in existing research. So, there is a gap to understand the oral narrative of the Gurung and the taken-for-granted stories of the Gurungs. In Sikles, oral narratives and oral text are still continued during the rituals. The main theme of the Gurung society and ritual practices through oral narrative and ritual texts are still unknown. We generally know that there are more debates and more different opinions among the Gurungs about exactly who are the Gurungs. And also, different researchers carry out different voices and different narratives from various Gurungs villages which are also controversial with each other. This study focuses on rituals practices that the traditional Gurungs social values and have most important for further studies. The main objective of the paper is to examine the oral stories of the first haircut and dress-giving rituals of Gurung boys and girls at Sikles.

### **Research Methods**

Being a traditional ritual expert and practitioner of the Gurung community of Sikles, I have both observed and narrated the meaning of oral texts of the ritual events in the community. Participant observation and interview are the main tools of the data collection. The main source of my understanding, skill, and understanding of the oral text was my father (who was a ritual expert in my village) and another expert who shared knowledge and skills. The Gurung of the Sikles was selected because they observed traditional ritual practices and employed traditional ritual priests. I have recently observed *Khyaper lapa* (haircut) and *Nkyui Chol Peepa* (dress giving) rituals at Sikles I have participated in both of those rituals as a priest and as a researcher. My personal

memories and reflections are used because I belong to the Gurung of Sikles. Qualitative information extracted from explorative and descriptive research designs is used to analyze the narratives.

## **Review**

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The ritual sequences communicate transformation stages in both the inner self and outer world revealing a philosophy of history as well as a philosophy of the mind. The ritual may be seasonal, following a culturally defined movement of change in the climatic cycle or the inauguration of an activity such as planting, harvesting, or moving from winter to summer pasture; or they may be contingent, hold in response to an individual or collective crisis. Contingent rituals may be further subdivided into life-crisis ceremonies, which are performed at birth, puberty, marriage, death, and so on, to demarcate the passage from one phase to another in the individual's life-cycle, and rituals of affliction, which are performed to placate or exorcise preternatural beings or forces believed to have affected villagers with illness, bad luck, gynecological troubles, serve physical injuries, and the like (Turner, 1977:183-184). Here, Turner mentioned that human beings are crossing one phase to another phase by learning and passing different cultures, and rituals. According to this understanding, cultural rituals are not practiced in one phase but it is a learning process. He explained the life-cycle rituals as passing from pre-liminal to 'communitas' stage. He used the concept of liminality to indicate the ritual stage of the person (Turner, 1977). After the ritual, the person enters into the world of 'communitas' (complete member of the community). His concept of liminality is suited to analyze the Gurung's *Kyaper lapa* (first hair cutting) and *Nkyuee chol peepa* (dress giving) rituals. It's interned human being in socialization, confident and mature. Culture rituals are continually rotational-based. It is like a school, where the members learn step to step in society.

In Nepalese ritual contexts, Sherry Ortner and David Holmberg studied about the Sherpas and Tamangs rituals in Khumbu and Rasuwa-Nuwakot (Ortner, 1978; Holmberg, 1989). Both of them analyzed cultural and ritual practices to understand why Sherpa and Tamang interpret everyday life and larger philosophy of life. Rituals mean through which people relate to the sacred, it is religion in action. Rituals are not only meant by which the social bonds of a group are reinforced and tensions relieved but also a way that important events are celebrated such as death, made less socially descriptive and less difficult for individuals to bear' (Holmberg, 1996:375). The meaning and values of rituals are not only complete its formality, but this is very crucial and significant for human social solidarity and social harmony. Ortner argued that 'the ritual process was in the first instance a matter of meaning creation for actors whatever latent function in may perform for the at large (Ortner, 1978:5). Ortner has stressed the result of rituals or why the ritual has to perform? According to her, ritual performances are latent. The results of rituals are latent while the performances have manifested. She focuses on the key symbols and the symbols are less commonly employed and more commonly employed. Ritual ties between

society and its members with each other. It controls and manages the society for social rule and regulation. So, rituals are social practice for social relations.

### **Gurung Rituals**

The Gurung have been practicing different rituals their whole life. Life cycle rituals are the main rituals of the Gurung. 'Although, rituals are religious in nature, those which play a crucial role in religious activity they are embedded everyday life and livelihood of the Gurung community.

Their life cycle rituals are: birth, haircut, dress giving, and marriage, death, and after-death rituals. When the baby is born, she/he takes one year, because of Gurung zodiac sign or *lho*. After that, there start sleeping (day and night). If the baby is a girl then it takes seven and nine nights for the boy, then the baby and the mother get a public audience of the sleeping bed which they called *Row Chho'npa*. The Gurung *paendi* gives the babies names according to the zodiac sign and defines the luck of the new baby on the day of *Row Chho'npa*. If the son has aged in *lho* 3, 5, 7 or 9 or odd *lho*, the *So,nkya* (special *lho* of the year) has to cut the baby's hair in auspicious day and time called *khyaper lapa*. If the daughter is the age 5, 7, 9, or 11 to giving or wearing a set of Gurung dress called *Nkyui chwol peepa* in auspicious day. Both hair cutting and dress giving rituals are stages passing from childhood to adulthood.

Marriage is another important life cycle ritual practice. The Gurung have their own marriage practice. They mostly practiced cross-cousin marriage which is still prevalent in their society. Earlier researchers also indicated that there was a very popular kinship terminology between the girl and boy, *Nkolo* and *Nkolosyo* (Soalti Soaltini- Brothers and sisters of husband and wife called each other by addressing solti for male and soltini for female) in cross-cousin marriage.' (Gurung, 2014:35-36). In terms of the arrangement, they preferred both arrange and love marriage, but they followed their own traditional custom in the marriage system. *Paa fu;n Thu'npa* or *chapa* (to drink or eat wine and bread), *Puhrun lapa* (gathering all relatives and public the massage what happening the girl), *Khee'n chu'pa* (the married girl go to the married house) are the process of the marriage system among the Gurung. The *Pachyu* and the *Lauhris* are the main characters in the death ritual. Although, there have to gather *Reemai chahmimai* (sisters-daughters) *Mbo* (daughter in law), *Tahkra* (brother), *Asyo'n* (mother's brother), and all relatives and villagers for playing their roles. The priests chant their *Pye* (oral texts) about the death ritual.

Almost the Gurung are still practicing burial traditions at the village level. The villagers gather three whole nights in the death house they called *Turo*. *Pai* is a very important and necessary ritual among the Gurung community. Basically, the ritual is for the worship of dead people's souls meeting with their ancestors. It takes three nights regularly; all the practice is based on their zodiac sign. They divided the first day, the second day, and the third day, which they called *Pai Chu'n pa* or start the *Pai*, *Reeh thehpa* or well come to the bone of the dead body and *Pai leepa* or to throw the symbols like *Plau*, *Lha'n*, bon or nail of the dead people in a sacred place. *Pai* ritual is a very essential and popular practice among the Gurung community. The ritual is

during for journey and meeting the soul of the dead body to their ancestors in heaven. The priests control and remove the evil things which are an obstacle to the journey of the soul. They chant the whole history of the Gurung, migration route, ancestors, and evil power. The priests pass the soul from *Nkyalwa naasa* (underground world) where the evils are living, So, *mee naasa* (called mhee naasa when everyday life conversation) (living people's world) to see *mee nasa* (the world of dead people or ancestors land). In this paper, I have focused on *Khyaper lapa* ritual or the first hair cutting of the Gurung boy, and *Nkyui Chol peepa* ritual, or the first given a set of Gurung uniforms for the Gurung girl.

### **Khyaper Lapa (First Haircut) Ritual**

Mostly *Khyaper lapa* ritual is crucial and one of the important rituals for the Gurung boy. The meaning of *Khyaper lapa* refers to cutting the hair of a son for the first time on an auspicious day. In Sikles, the *Pachyu* played a vital role in this ritual because he was also a *Pae'n di*. It is very difficult to define for the auspicious day because there are much more rules and regulations for *khyaper lapa* ritual. So, the guardians have to be ready when the son takes three or five or seven or nine or an odd *Lho*. The ritual is performed in odd *Lho* and odd months. If the son has age or *Lho* in 3, 5, 7, 9, or 11 then the *Pae'n di* gives an auspicious month and day for the ritual. According to the Gurung zodiac, if the son was born in the month of Asoj (September-October) then the ritual has to be performed in Mansir (November-December) or Magh (January), and so on. If the day of *Khyaper* is not well prophesied, the boy is believed to face many problems like the boy becoming dumb, deaf, or even dead. It is also believed that if the day was very auspicious, a sick boy could heal slowly, a weak boy could start walking and a boy with few oratories will speak fluently. So, the *Pachyu* or *Pain'di* should work very seriously about the auspiciousness of the day of *Khyaper*.

Before the ritual, the house of the boy both outside and inside made neat and tidy and shielded with some materials. There are some rules of restriction and prohibition of food and drink to all the family members. The boy is tied like an animal to *taltu* (some sticks inserted to the grounds in two lines crossing each other so that a place is created to keep a kind of plant called *Nkara chhi* considered pure with sugarcane). The novice boy is made secure from evil powers by the *Pachyu*. This process is generally called *Pahr*. The novice boy is tethered like an ox and the *So'nkya* (hair cutting) of that year begins to trim the hair of the boy for the first time. It is also said to the boy that now he has no longer a calf, he has become a young ox and he can now walk freely. After the haircut, the boy's head is covered with a white turban. A boy without *Khyaper* is not allowed to wear a turban. The *So'nkya* carried the boy on his back and entered the house. Family members, neighbors, and relatives give blessings to the boy by applying Tika of rice soaked in yogurt to his forehead and keeping *Paihru* around his neck. White color is a sign of purity in Gurung rituals. So that white Tika is used in *Khyaper*. The *Pahiru* is a sacred thread of nine pieces. The nine pieces symbolize the nine ancestors. The blessing is called *mala* in the Gurung language. The boy and the *So'nkya* are fed with a little milk and alcohol which is called *Nge-Paa Toh'npa*. The boy publicly tastes the alcohol for the first time. If he could not drink, he

could smell it. The boy was not allowed to go outside the periphery of the house for three days. After that period the boy's head was shaved. The process is called even marriage jokes. In other times people don't ask when the first hair of a boy is going to be cut. Rather they say when the marriage is taking place.

I have observed Khyaper *lapa ritual* of Nicolas Gurung who is also my relative. He was running three *lho* at Kartik 2077 B. S. Being a Pachu, the novice grandmother (Nani Dhuja) came to me for the decision of haircutting day. I opened my cosmological books and chose the date. Early morning of the chosen day, I presented Nicolas house. There were gathered all his relatives give bless to Nicolas. Nicolas was a small child and tethered him as an ox out of the house. The meaning creates that; he is an ox running three years. He was totally silent the whole period and when Nicolas chewing grass and sugarcane as an ox. Then after the *So'nkya* carried Nicolas inside the home. All the gathering relatives blessed him and put on tika in his forehead. They said that Nicolas crossed childhood, crossing rituals for his life cycle period. The gathering relatives watched seriously his ritual practices and said that now Nicolas was Gurung because of such ritual. Nicolas drank three drops of local wine three times. Because he was ritually being Gurung and the Gurung understand that local wine is a symbol of sacred.

Nicolas, did not go to his Montessori, did not go to his neighbor and friends, but his friends came with him and played inside the home. This is why, the Gurung believes that there is a being and recently finished the ritual, so we have to protect him from evils and other inauspicious things. He wears *Pahr* and the Gurung peoples believed that *Pahr* has the power for protecting life. Again, Nicolas did not public at least three days. Now he is running for four years, sometimes meeting him and his grandma asked him who cut his hair, then he answered 'Mama'.

### **Nkyui Chol Peenpa (Dress-giving) Ritual**

*Nkyui Chol Peepa* (dress-giving) is a very important and sensitive ritual for the daughters. It is the ritual in which a daughter is given the first feminine clothes of women. That means a Gurung girl gets the first Gurung costume.

The ritual is performed at the age of *Lho* 7, 9, or 11 when the daughter is mature enough for wearing *cholo*, *kramu* and *Nkyui* (like long skirt). In the odd *Lho* and odd month (according to her birth *Lho* and month) the *Pae'ndi* chooses auspicious day for a set of the new Gurung dress. I have performed with my youngest daughter Yasha Gurung, Techhya Gurung who is the youngest daughter of my youngest sister. But I mentioned here the case of Himani Gurung.

Himani Gurung is *mpupru* (eagle) *lho* and she is running seven *lho* or seven years in his Mansir 2075 B. S. She is living in her maternal home with her mother and father. She is the latest child and second daughter in her family. She has one young brother and they are five family members altogether. They live next house to me. In 1<sup>st</sup> Baisakh, Nepali new year according to Nepali calendar 2075 at day time, her mother called me in her house and took advice for her daughter's '*Nkyui Chol Peepa* day'. Then I returned home for the Gurung zodiac books.

I went to her house with my taking my books and we sat on the balcony together. I chose 15th Baisakh 2075 B. S. on Saturday. I suggested to him, it is difficult to find the day of *Khyaper* lapa of a son and *Nkyui Chol peepa* of a daughter. So, it is an auspicious day for your daughter's ritual take it soon. She agrees with my suggestion. When the day came, I went to her house and *Sailee Tuhlsyo* already sewing Himani's Gurung uniform since the dark period. Some of her relatives were also gathered. I made *Pahr* for Himani and wore it for protection from any inauspicious things. Tailor, Himani, and I sat on the balcony.

There a winnow with unbeaten rice is kept. And Himani stands on the rice which means now the girl is ready for household works like beating the rice and grinding the grains and she has now responsibilities like that of a woman. At the fixed and auspicious time, the undresses Himani's and she makes her wear the Gurung costume stitched on the same auspicious day. Now she is looking for a Gurung lady. All the relatives give blessings to her with the white Tika and *Paihru*. They wish Himani to be good, industrious, free from unholy things. as she is now a grown-up lady. Most of them say that now you are a Gurung girl from this day. The girl should not change the new clothes for three days and only after that time she can go in public.

Here are some symbols and their meaning for this ritual. Before this ritual, Himani wore a shirt, pants, T-shirt, frack, or whatever she like. But this day her mother's father gives her a set of Gurung uniforms. So, the practice shows that she transfers to Gurung lady in her community and society. Symbolically, she can do some work like beaten rice, curry little drinking water, cook light food, and so on. All the gathering relatives say such a blessed kind of language and words to Himani. Her father and mother were saying 'now you are a member of this Gurung family and you have slowly grown responsible'. After then the ritual was finished and all gathering relatives were joined in haves. They again blessed Himani's father and mother.

## **Discussion**

Rituals are not only birth, marriage, death, and after-death practices. There are more ritual practices in nature and resources for protecting and sustainable use of such resources and local deities. They believed that human beings are connected, and dependent on nature. The Gurung believe in natural resources and local deities, they worship such deities to protect human beings, animals, and grains. 'Local gods govern natural forces that affect agricultural prosperity, suppressing earth, stone, and water. David Holmberg rightly pointed out the roles of rituals on humans and livestock. He noted that causing harmful agents containing social discord and general protecting human and livestock' (Holmberg, 1989). The argument is very similar to the Gurung practices. The Gurung is devoted to the natural, cosmological and social power or forces.

Indigenous and local resources management is traditionally practiced among human beings. They understand that the life cycle rituals, cosmology, and nature were connected. To understand the rituals of the Gurung, rites of passage (Gannep, 1967) and the concept of liminality are appropriate concepts of internal and external transformation of the novice and the society. Thus, ritual anthropology within symbolic anthropology is guiding theoretical

perspectives for the analysis of the first haircut and first dress-giving rituals of the Gurung. Ortner argued that Nyungne was a micro practice of monks among the Sherpa of Solu (Ortner, 1978). She argued that observing Nyungne was the best way of accumulating merits that could help to balance sin committed in this married life (Ortner, 1978). The Gurung rituals could be analyzed through the lens of merit-making and making unity of cosmology and society. Therefore, rituals are the window to observe the wider world of the native community. The haircutting and dress-giving ritual unite people, planets, and nature in the Gurung community.

Participants offered gifts and money (Dakshina) to the novice. The material gift (mostly clothes) and money have not only material value rather the gift is considered spirit and relations of the gift-givers as clearly stated in the enigma of the gift (Godelier, 1999). The exchanging objects carry with them both economic and symbolic value and their values cannot be transferred. It is argued that the significance of gifts in social life is by focusing on sacred objects, which are never exchanged despite the value they possess (Godelier, 1999). The first haircut of the boy and dress-giving rituals of the Gurungs not only revitalize kinship and social relations but also transferred the roles and psyche of the novices. Community is theological and religious bondages of human being as a group (Badal, 2020). Thus rituals are the identity of humanity.

## **Conclusion**

The first haircut and dress giving rituals are the second stage life cycle ritual of the Gurung of Sikles. The auspicious date and modality of the rituals are decided by the traditional ritual and oral text expert called *Pachyu*. The *Pachyu* is the most important ritual authority that plays a significant role to observe the lifecycle ritual of the Gurung. Gender dimensions and differences can be observed in their life cycle ritual. The boy observed the haircut ritual whereas the girl observed dress giving ritual.

After completion of the ritual, the boy entered into the world of maturity or stage of mate selection and marriage. The boy is allowed to drink, carry the load, and move independently around the village and out of the village. He could represent the family in any meeting and other occasions. Internally, the boy considered himself as an adult and accumulated more confidence while working independently. The girl also entered into the world of womanhood. It is an indication of both biological and cultural change. After the dress-giving ritual, participants teased her as a future bride. It was argued that the girl was transformed from a girl to a woman whose biological changes could be observed thereafter.

The social and cosmological dimension of both rituals was the unity of the living and dead of the Gurung. Relatives gathered and offered a blessing to the novice. Long life and good luck of the coming days of the novice are wished by the participants. The *Pachyu* offered and satisfied the family god for the positive energy of the novice. Cosmological beings also support the better future of the novice in this world. As a *Pachyu* and a researcher, I argued that cutting hair means transforming from unclean and childhood to pure manhood stage of human. It was argued that it is considered accumulating merits as directed by the ancestors. The merits of the boy and girl

are the merits of the family, community, and the merits of the ancestors. Giving a new dress symbolizes new roles and changes. The relatives and neighbors come with gifts to the novice and the family. The reciprocity of gifts binds the people together. It not only renewed relations of the people but also unite people with ancestors.

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