

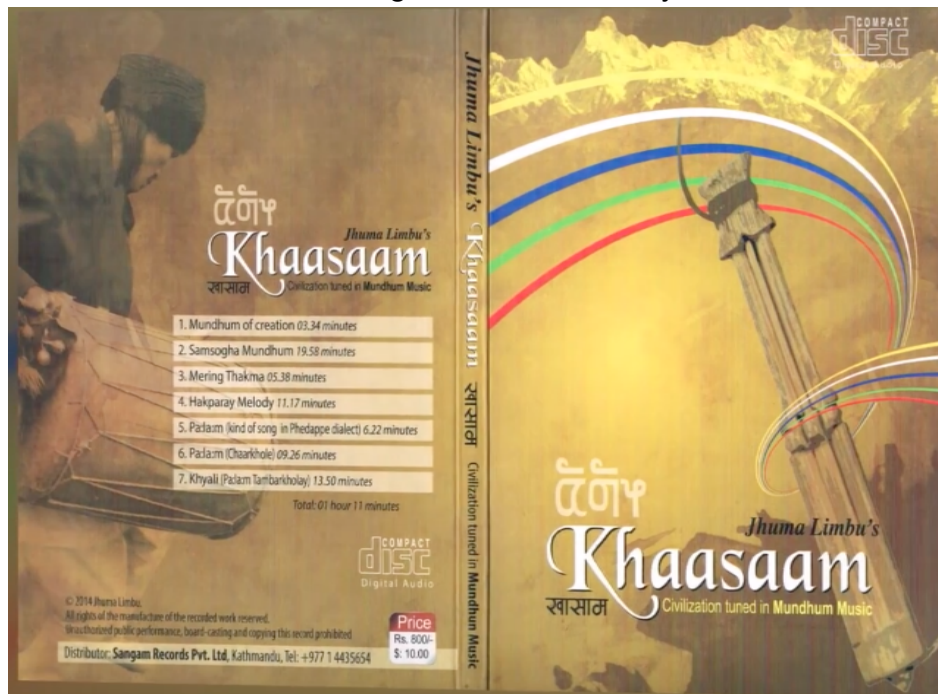
Khaasaam: Delinking, Relinking, and Linking Yakthung Indigenous Mundhum (Music) Theories, Philosophies, and Practices

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Jhuma Limbu's Mundhum Music Album *Khaasaam*

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Abstract: Jhuma Limbu's *Khaasaam* album revisits and reframes Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum music culture, history, stories, narratives, and civilization. The *Khaasaam* explores Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum-based music and traditional musical instruments. The Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum includes oral-based Kirat and/or Kirat-Yakthung theories, philosophies, histories, narratives, and social norms and values that have been preached, practiced, perpetuated, and maintained for centuries in Kirat and/or Kirat-Yakthung communities in South-East Asia such as Nepal, India (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, etc.), Bhutan, Burma, Thailand, and beyond. In a nutshell, Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum has shaped the Kirat and/or Kirat-Yakthung communities. Limbu's album suggests that Mundhum is the heart of the Kirat-Yakthung civilization; Mundhum adheres history, philosophy, music, and culture, etc. So, in Kirat-Yakthung communities Mundhum, music, and history are relative; meaning, if there is no Mundhum, there is no history, if there is no Mundhum, there is no music; if there is no Mundhum, there is no Kirat-Yakthung civilization, and/or there is no Kirat-Yakthung existence at all.

Keywords: Kirat-Yakthung civilization, melody, creation, Phedangma, Yema/ba, Samma/ba, Tumyang, Cherokee, matriarchal lineage

Introduction

The Kirat or Sawa Yet Hang or Susuwa Lilim Mundhum philosophies and histories are constantly framed, reframed, formulated, reformulated, told, and retold from one generation to the next. The Kirat-Yakthung histories have been passed down to the new generations via the music Mundhum rhetorics such as Hakparay, paalaam, samlo, and khyali to mention a few. Jhuma Limbu introduces her *Khaasaam*, a Kirat-Yakthung indigenous research-based Mundhum music in the age of digital age, and the *Khaasaam* executes the similar type of telling, retelling, framing, and reframing of Sawa Yet Hang or Susuwa Lilim or Kirat-Yakthung history from the 21st century's digital media perspective, or the *Khaasaam* updates the Sawa Yet Hang culture, history, and narrative via the 21st century digital music perspective. The literal meaning of *Khaasaam* is "civilization" in Kirat-Yakthung (Limbu or Limboo) language, and Jhuma Limbu uses the term "*Khaasaam*" to refer to ancient Kirat-Yakthung civilization and/or *Tamarkhole* Yakthung civilization in this collection. The *Khaasaam* album is not only about historical development of Kirat-Yakthung civilization and Mundhum music, but it is also about Kirat-Yakthung oral-based art and history, Mundhum rhetorics (oral-performance-based rhetorics), and Kirat-Yakthung civilization. The *Khaasaam* music is one of the most discussed Mundhum music albums in the Kirat-Yakthung indigenous communities within

Nepal and beyond. This review succinctly reflects what *Khaasaam* music is; why it is important in Kirat and/or Kirat-Yakthung communities in the context of the 21st century; how it delinks Khas-Aryan-, Indian-, and western cultural colonization; how it relinks Sawa Yet Hang and/or Susuwa Lilim epistemologies; and how it links Mundhumic ethic- and/or indigenous epistemological wisdoms across the world.

Theoretical, philosophical, and historical aspects of the *Khaasaam*

The *Khaasaam* album portrays the development of Sawa Yet Hang, Susuwa Lilim culture, and Kirat-Yakthung culture; it depicts the congenial relationship between culture, creature, nature, and music. It reintroduces “Mujingna-Kheyangna” or “Mujingna-Muyangna,” the first female figure in Sawa Yet Hang or Kirat-Yakthung communities (see Lumphungwa, 2017) and her (Mujingna’s) first musical instrument *te?la phakwa* (leaf). The *Khaasaam* reintroduces many other traditional Kirat-Yakthung musical instruments such as *yaa-pangkhe*, *chetthe* or *yaa-thal, ke, phatung, mi?la-kom, taa*, and so on that have been popular in Kirat-Yakthung communities (across the world). Despite the fact that Kirat reign spread far and beyond the Himalayan range in South-East Asia, the *Khaasaam* evidently depicts that Susuwa Lilim and/or Sawa Yet Hang culture originated in the lap of *Phaktanglung* or Mt. Kanchanjanga (also see Kaila, 2017; Mabuhang, 2069 BS). This is one of the reasons why many scholars, researchers, historians, and activists more often than not discuss the *Tamarkhola civilization* when it comes to Kirat-Yakthung culture/s, music, philosophy, politics, economics, and civilization.

Jhuma Limbu grew up in the eastern part of Nepal (known as Limbuwan); she perceived, processed, navigated, and practiced everything that Tamarkhola Kirat-Yakthung culture offered her. Limbu also grew up singing popular Indian music and Nepali (mainly mainstream Khas-Aryan) music, for Limbu ethnic Mundhum music was denigrated both in Khas-Aryan-centric social institutions and academic institutions. Moreover, due to the Khas-Aryan colonial suppression, Yakthungs were not allowed to research, write, document, and circulate Kirat-Yakthung cultural, linguistic, and music literacies until 1990 in Nepal. Although Jhuma Limbu started her career through mainstream Nepali music such as “Ye Sailaa,” “Amber Sangeet” music album, and Nepali national anthem to mention a few, she later felt the lack of Kirat-Yakthung music research and Mundhum-based music composition (in Limbu communities). So, she gradually researched, composed, recorded, and circulated Kirat-Yakthung-based Mundhum music. Currently, Limbu, beginning from the *Khaasaam*, is reframing and/or relinking Sawa Yet Hang, Susuwa Lilim, and Kirat-Yakthung civilization, or Limbu is delinking Khas-Aryan-,

Indian-, and western cultural colonization; she is relinking Kirat-Yakthung, Sawa Yet Hang, and Susuwa Lilim Yakthung epistemologies.

Jhuma Limbu's *Khaasaam* is an example of what leading-edge Mundhum music in relation to ethnic music or indigenous music is and how it should look like; it also demonstrates how indigenous research should be conducted to relink our traditional Mundhum epistemologies and share or link our (indigenous peoples') century-long colonized traditional wisdom, culture, and identities within our Yakthung communities and beyond. The *Khaasaam* significantly contributes to relink Kirat-Yakthung historical cultural values and practices. For instance, according to Yakthung Mundhum, "Mujingna-Kheyangna" created the Susuwa Lilim social norms and values; "Lahadangna" shaped Sawa Yet Hang community, and she was the responsible leading female figure to norm and form Sawa Yet Hang and/or Kirat-Yakthung communities. Similarly, among many female figures, "Yuma" was one of them who cultivated, enriched, and mobilized Kirat or Kirat-Yakthung communities (across the world). Sadly, after the Khas-Aryan invasion in 1774, they (Khas-Aryans) imposed Khas-Hindu ideology, Hindu religion, and Khas-Aryan-centric principles as the norm in invisible form. They converted Kirat-Yakthungs into Hinduism; they made them (Yakthungs) see from the Khas-Aryans lenses. In so doing, the Khas-Aryans mostly displaced and destroyed Sawa Yet Hang wisdom and Kirat Yakthung civilization. The Khas-Aryans also forced Kirat-Yakthungs to preach, pursue, and practice the patriarchal Hindu cultural practices (by destroying Tagera Ningwaaphumaa, Lahadangna, and Yuma, matriarchal Mundhum theories and philosophies). Despite the para-colonial patriarchal logic (see Powell, 2012; Vizenor, 1976), Kirat-Yakthung culture has been preaching, perpetuating, and maintaining the matriarchal culture. Similarly, the music album, *Khaasaam*, among many dynamics, speaks to several factors that are central to Kirat-Yakthung indigenous matriarchal culture, philosophies of Sawa Yet Hang culture, preaching of Susuwa Lilim civilization, and/or Kirat-Yakthung oral-performance-based Mundhum rhetorics to mention a few.

Diving into the center of *Khaasaam* Mundhum music

Track 1. The Mundhum of creation introduces the audiences to the first musical instrument, i.e. leaf that Mujingna-Kheyangna or Mujingna-Muyangna had played. According to the Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum, Mujingna-Kheyangna not only was the first human being who used leaves as musical instruments to entertain herself, nature, and creatures, but she also shaped the Sawa Yet Hang social norms and nurtured Sawa Yet Hangian citizens. Jhuma Limbu in this part tactfully attempts to depict how the first music and/or first musical instruments looked like and shares them with her audience. Jhuma

creatively opens up this section without playing any set of modern musical instrument/s. This part presents the relationship between human, nature, and creature; meaning, she plays leaf as a musical instrument, or this part demonstrates how Mujingna-Kheyangna played the leaves as musical instruments to introduce music in Sawa Yet Hang community. This part includes Kirat-Yakthung music ritual act such as sound, music, and instrument (to create a melody).

Track 2. Samsogha Mundhum includes melodious music and introduces Yeba and melodious *Samsogha* Mundhum (dead spirit Mundhum). This section introduces the birth of good spirit and bad spirit in Kirat-Yakthung culture and/or in Yakthung culture. It demonstrates how the knowledge of good vs. bad was/has been constructed in Kirat-Yakthung community, and what kind of relationship they have and how the concept of good vs. bad differs in Kirat-Yakthung culture from that of the para-colonial Khas-Aryan and western cultures. This part demonstrates historical background on how Kirats and/or Kirat-Yakthungs separated good spirits and bad spirits. The *Samsogha Mundhum* shows that there has never been the concept of “versus” or “against” in Kirat indigenous communities. In Yakthung culture, rather than displacing, destroying, and killing the bad spirits, they create their own respective space/s; for instance, space of living beings “Iksadin Khambekden” and space of bad spirits “Khema Yongsoden” (also see Subba, 2015, p. ix). In this section, musical instruments are introduced, and melodious music are played to appease the bad spirits to settle in their own respective space/s.

In Track 3. Mering Thakma, Jhuma Limbu relandscapes the classical Sawa Yet Hang and Susuwa Lilim Yakthung blues. Limbu reintroduces *Mering thakmaa* or *Hamlakwa* blues that we still practice in Limbu communities. In Limbu communities, when family members or dear and near people die, they have a practice of mourning, and that is reflected in this tract. This tract has a linear relationship with the *Mundhum* of creation (track 1) and *Samsogha Mundhum* (track 2); it shows the linear development of music. For instance, track 1 is recitational; track 2 is more melodious compared to track 1; and *Mering Thakma* (track 3) is much more melodious than track 1 and track 2. Overall, the track 3 is a collection of Kirat-Yakthung blues that are sung during death, disaster, calamity, or catastrophe. It includes a wide range of emotional and mournful *Mundhum* blues. This part succinctly portrays the birth of love, loss, death, and disaster in Kirat-Yakthung community.

Track 4. Hakparay Melody introduces one of the most popular Kirat-Yakthung classical and formal music, called *Hakparay* music. Limbu contends that “*Hakparay*” music was originated in Menchhyayem region; Menchhyayem is located in the midst of Taplejung, Sangkhuwasabha, and Tehrathum districts in Limbuwan, Nepal. According to the Kirat-Yakthung *Mundhum*, a Yakthung man named “Sam Kelo-Kelo Kewa” is believed to have introduced the *Hakparay samlo* or *Hakparay* music (Limbu, 2016). Later, young

Yakthungba/mas pursued and practiced the Hakparay samlo that Sam Kelo-Kelo Kewa introduced in Yakthung laje, Limbuwan. According to Jhuma Limbu (2016), Hakparay samlo is one of the most formal classical Kirat-Yakthung music in the history of Kirat-Yathung civilization. When Kirat-Yakthungs sing the Hakparay, they sing in a perfect linear order such as creation of universe, creation of human beings, creation of creatures, and others respectively. Thereafter, they sing about society, civilization, and social practices. As Kirat-Yakthung culture is (still) one of the most respectful cultures, they first address all the respected people of the society and general community members (of the society); then, they begin to sing (that is the main theme/part of the Hakparay samlo).

One of the reviewers grew up in Yakthung Laje, Limbuwan, but he barely heard of it as a young kid. As a teenager, neither could he sing nor his colleagues did because it was/is one of the most difficult Mundhum samlos to sing. This was/is one of the reasons why the Hakparay Mundhum music is on the verge of extinction in Yakthung communities (Nepal, India, Bhutan, Burma, and Thailand). In one of the interviews, Jhuma Limbu mentioned that the Hakparay music is not for everyone; it is difficult to learn specially for younger kids (teenagers) because Hakparay is one of the hardest and highly revered classical Yakthung Mundhum music. In Hakparay, people use only formal and elite language. Jhuma Limbu's (2016) implication, in the interview, indicates that Hakparay Mundhum music is a symbol of Kirat-Yakthung civilization; it is the heart of Yakthung culture. While singing the Hakparay Mundhum music, it demonstrates the singer's both language competence and performance. The Hakparay music is also one of traditional Mundhum music that bridges the Sawa Yet Hang culture or Susuwa Lilim culture and the 21st century's Kirat-Yakthung culture/s.

Track 5, 6, and 7 include a collection of "paalaams" (Limbu or Kirat-Yakthung music) that have been sung in Yakthung laje, Limbuwan. The paalaams have been popular since the Kirat-Yakthung civilization started in Yakthung Laje, Limbuwan. According to the Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum, Yakthungs and birds had a very close relationship; the birds helped Yakthungs to bring (paddy) seed to Sawa Yet Hang village, and Yakthungs planted paddy. During the harvesting time, birds almost ate up all grains (paddy); so Yakthungs chased them away by saying "ha--ha--ha--ha" (while chasing the birds away). Since the chasing of birds (from the paddy field) took days, weeks, and months, Yakthungs composed it (ha--ha--ha--ha) as music, which they call/ed "ya?lang" or paddy dance (Mabuhang, 2069 BS). All Sawa Yet Hangian citizens (including young and old ones) started singing it during the paddy harvesting time. Thereafter, "ha—ha—ha—ha" or paalaam became one of the most popular music among young-, middle age-, and old people in Yakthung communities. Gradually, paalaam has become very popular among young Limbu people. In paalaam performace young men and women who are biologically related are not culturally permitted to sing and dance.

In track 5, Jhuma Limbu reintroduces “Phedape” paalaam in Phedape paalaam melody. This is an old paalaam melody that was popular hundreds of years ago in Phedap region, Limbuwan. As young Yakthungs have been constantly oriented by the mainstream social institutions that Yakthung Paalaam was/is inferior, currently, young Yakthungba/mas do not sing it like in the past (Limbu, 2016). In track 6, Jhuma Limbu introduces “Chaarkhole” paalaam that has been sung in the Chaarkhola Limbuwan region for centuries. Similarly, track 7 includes “Tamarkhole” paalaam, which was originated during Kirat-Yakthung Tamar Khole civilization. The Tamarkhole paalam samlo was very popular and is still popular. Young Yakthungba/mas still sing paalaam samlo in this melody. Though they (tracks 5, 6, and 7) are paalaams, they are geographically and/or geo-culturally different ones. So, Limbu’s paalaam collection suggests that Mundhum theories, philosophies, and practices differ from each other in the way orator, audience, language, and reality are conceived. The Mundhum philosophy is a key concept and the key epistemological assumptions that Mundhum, culture, and music differ significantly. The Mundhum-centric *Khaasaam* music helps Kirat-Yakthung indigenous peoples relink, redefine, reframe, and reconstruct the relationship within Kirat-Yakthung language, truth, reality, and Mundhum rhetorics. Kirat-Yakthung Mundhum theories and practices support Kirat-Yakthung discourse and inform us that there is no single universal Truth. In the same manner, these three “paalaams” (track 5, 6, and 7) practically urge that truths, realities, and Mundhums differ from culture to culture, place to place, person to person, and time to time. The 5, 6, and 7 paalaam tracks expose how reality, knowledge, and truth are local, discursive, and contingent. In short, within Yakthung communities, they have diverse “paalaam” Mundhum theories, philosophies, and practices that theoretically and practically imply that truth is impossible without Mundhum as it is Mundhum that embodies Sawa Yet Hang and Susuwa Lilim epistemologies; it is Mundhum that penetrates all oral-performance-based histories and reformulates (multiple) truths. From this perspective, Mundhum unveils realities (multiple realities); Mundhum shapes realities; it theoretically and philosophically orients Kirat-Yakthungs not to engage in the search of the Truth or in one definite Mundhum rhetoric (that we more often than not hear from Yakthung colleagues).

Transnationalizing Yakthung Indigenous music, wisdoms, and narratives in the digital age

Like in the Mundhum, the Cherokee and many other Indigenous people (in the western hemisphere) use story and song to tell listeners about creation and relations to the land and to the animals. The Cherokee (one of the Native American communities) have

anthropomorphized stories about many plants and animals in which they interact with one another to create the world around us. These songs and stories are/have been passed from generation to generation. These stories were told to one of the reviewers (as a child), just as they were told to her mother when she was young, and her mother before her. As these stories are passed down and shared between the generations, it is a way for Cherokee oral culture to continue and to grow into the future.

Another of the most significant similarities one of the reviewers has seen in the cultures is the ways in which certain cultural markers are carried on the mother's line. Cherokee culture is also matriarchal, and the family clan is carried on the mother's side. There are 7 clans of the Cherokee people, and it is considered taboo to marry within one's own clan (Duvall, 1). Since the three bands of the Cherokee communities are also scattered across a large geographical range. With the Eastern Band on the East Coast and the Nation and Keetoowah in Oklahoma, the tribe, along with our stories and traditions have been spread and separated due to the forced removal during the Trail of Tears, but are still continued through practice of these traditions throughout the branches of the tribe.

Much of the music of the Cherokee people has been lost to colonial genocide and suppression. However, there are also a number of western songs that have been translated into Cherokee and are now sung at gathering and events such as *Amazing Grace*. By singing a song like *Amazing Grace*, but singing it in our heritage language, we are showing evidence of this colonial linking, but we are also relinking it to traditional languages, languages that colonial influences worked to wipe out entirely. The practice of powwows also works to keep the traditions and practice of Indigenous communities in the Americas alive and growing. While historically the Cherokee have used a water drum, a hollowed log half filled with water with a stretched skin over the top, the practice of drumming has also continued into the present, especially at powwows. While this is not the same as the water drums, this more pan indigenous practice accents the importance of instruments, especially procession instruments, to the Cherokee people (Voegelin, pp. 469-470).

Conclusion

The *Khaasaam* insightfully reflects what digital Mundhum music pedagogy is from both traditional indigenous (Mundhum) perspective and the 21st century global Mundhum music perspectives. The *Khaasaam* album is or can be one of the driving factors that ignites how indigenous music theories, philosophies, and practices delink (para)colonialism, relink indigenous epistemologies, and link them with global

Limbu & Jennings/JOGLTEP 4(2) pp. 638-646

communities in the digital age. The *Khaasaam* album demonstrates how delinking, relinking, and linking Mundhum music methodology can shape and reshape Kirat-Yakthung communities including global indigenous communities. Jhuma Limbu's *Khaasaam* albums unveils oral- and performance-based Mundhum realities that Mundhum or Mundhumic-music is community-generated and community-maintained rhetorics. In a nutshell, the *Khaasaam* album puts Mundhum at the center of Yakthung indigenous studies since Mundhum is inseparable from Sawa Yet Hang wisdom; it is inseparable from Kirat-Yakthung epistemology and civilization. As the *Khaasaam* suggests that Kirat-Yakthungs use Mundhum and Mundhumic samlos (music) to primarily adhere Kirat-Yakthung communities we belong to cement our Yakthung *phu-nesahood* in our local and global Kirat-Yakthung communities.

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Limbu & Jennings/JOGLTEP 4(2) pp. 638-646

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