

Exploring the Kirat Language Family From Ancient Echoes to Modern Voices

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5700-2179>

Independent Scholar

Biratnagar, Nepal.

Abstract:- The review paper examines the linguistic and cultural connections within the Kirat community, highlighting the possible influence of past and present conflicts on their sense of self. The analysis examines whether Kirat languages exhibit a stronger affinity with the Tibeto-Burman family or the Austro-Asiatic/Munda family. Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages share comparable variations in verb morphology, characterized by an agglutinative framework and the use of prefixes and suffixes to indicate tense-aspect changes. Furthermore, the Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages commonly employ classifiers and noun modifiers to show the referent's shape, size, or number.

The research methodology employs a qualitative approach, examining secondary sources such as library materials and online studies to obtain insights into historical divisions and current conflicts within the Kirat group. The review utilized the SWOT framework to thoroughly study data and evaluate the arguments presented by different scholars. The aim is to provide a comprehensive and subtle viewpoint on the internal conflicts and cultural legacy of the Kirat community.

Linguists have shown linguistic links between the Kirat language and the Dravidian language in the Sindh culture and the Mediterranean Moabite languages. The Kirat is known to have spoken the Austroasiatic/Munda language before evolving into the Tibeto-Burman language, which became dominant by the 8th century during the pre-Tibeto-Burman period. From the 20th century forward, Indo-European languages gained dominance over Tibeto-Burman languages in Nepal. The linguistic affinities in Kirat's lexicon, ascertained throughout diverse historical epochs and geographical localities, yield vital discernments.

Keywords:- Kirat People, Linguistic Affiliation, Historical Reconstruction, Substrate Influence, Comparative Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Kirat People, Languages, Culture, and History

The Kirat people have made significant contributions to the history of the Himalayas, showcasing their rich cultural accomplishments and fascinating linguistic diversity. With origins dating back to the ancient Kirata Mahajanapada, as documented in Indian epics such as the Mahabharata, they

possess a rich heritage that encompasses political authority, artistic creativity, and religious impact [1].

As per the Kirat belief, Mundhum Chemjong [2] identified the Kirat people as descendants of three races: Kashi (Khambongba), Mongols (Tangsangba), and Chinese (Munaphen). Chemjong asserts that Bhuktaman, from the Gopal dynasty, achieved victory over Banasur, the inaugural Kirat monarch of central Nepal, with the assistance of Krishna. In 800 BC, Yalamba deposed the Gopal dynasty, leading to the commencement of Kirat's reign in Nepal, which endured until approximately 400 AD [2].

Archaeological findings indicate that Kirat communities existed in the Himalayas as early as the 4th century BCE [3]. The early villages merged to become influential kingdoms, and the Kirat Rai dynasty emerged as a dominant empire in the 7th century CE [4]. For generations, their political clout was strengthened by their command over trade routes and strategic places in the Eastern Himalayas [5].

Before the sixth century, the Kirats established significant kingdoms in the Eastern Himalayas. Ten chieftains successfully deposed the ruling Kirat kingdom and established the Ten Limbuwan kingdom [2]. Mawarang successfully annexed Ten Limbuwan in the seventh century with the assistance of Tibet. Their trade routes facilitated cultural exchange and the dissemination of Buddhism across the region [6].

The Kirat cultural heritage resonates in a wide range of artistic manifestations. The audiences are still captivated by the exquisite wood carvings, delicate basket weaving, and vivid folk dances such as the Limbu Dhan Naach [7]. The Yakthung people possess a wealth of mythology, passed down through oral traditions and recorded in epics such as the Yakthung Mansing. These mythological narratives provide valuable insights into the Yakthung people's cosmology and values [8].

Moreover, the Kirats played a pivotal role in disseminating Hinduism and Buddhism in the Himalayas. Their animistic beliefs amalgamated several religions, creating unique syncretic rites such as Kirat Mundhum, a shamanistic healing tradition [1].

Nevertheless, the Kirat people have also encountered historical marginalization and injustice. Their contributions were frequently disregarded or distorted in conventional

accounts [7]. Presently, they persist in promoting the acknowledgment and self-governance of their culture, endeavoring to safeguard their unique history for forthcoming generations.

The Kirat people exemplify the unwavering determination of cultural fortitude in the Himalayas. Their historical relevance, artistic manifestations, and religious impact indicate their multifaceted heritage. While facing the difficulties of modern life, their voices serve as a reminder of the significance of safeguarding and honoring the diverse and intricate array of Himalayan traditions.

The Kirat language, located in the foothills of the Himalayas, is an intriguing member of the Sino-Tibetan language family [9]. The Kirat family, consisting of over 20 languages, is spoken by more than 600,000 people. It is known for its extensive linguistic diversity and historical importance.

The Kirat languages are geographically distributed throughout a large area in the Eastern Himalayas, covering regions in Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Myanmar [5]. The distribution depicted here showcases the complex migration patterns of the Kirati people, believed to have originated in the Tibetan Plateau and subsequently spread over the region over thousands of years [10].

The Kirat family exhibits linguistic diversity through various sounds, grammatical structures, and vocabulary. Limbu and Rai languages demonstrate tonal characteristics, but Sunwar and Yakha languages adopt a more analytical approach to grammar [5]. Although there are differences, the presence of identical vocabulary and grammatical structures suggests the existence of a single ancestral language among the Kirat people, emphasizing their historical unity [8].

Nevertheless, the Kirat languages are seeing mounting pressure from predominant languages such as Nepali and Hindi [6]. It presents a danger to their linguistic legacy and cultural distinctiveness. People are working hard to record and revive them to make Kirat languages less vulnerable. They do this by making lexicons, starting language-learning programs, and getting involved in community-driven projects [7].

The Kirat languages exemplify the diverse linguistic landscape of the Himalayas. Their extensive distribution across many regions, various characteristics within their populations, and significant importance in the past provide a powerful representation of the movement of humans and the evolution of cultures. As the endeavor to save and rejuvenate these languages persists, the Kirat family pledges to perpetually enhance the linguistic panorama of the region for future generations.

II. RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

Nepal is currently facing a social crisis related to ethnic groups grappling with their sense of identity. A faction of Limbu communities, which distinguish themselves from the broader Kirat people, challenges the claim made by the concept of a more prominent Kirat identity.

A faction of the Limbu community in Nepal contests their traditional categorization as Kirat. Their reasons are based on two primary factors: the nonexistence of the syllable "Hang" in the name of the Kirat ruler who governed Nepal, and the apparent absence of Limbu language impact in the Kathmandu Valley [11]. Magar scholars strongly support the idea of being distinct, since they point out that the region contains place names in the Kham language, which is spoken by Magars. This indicates that there was a Magar presence in the area before the Kirat people.

In addition to the complexity of the situation, the holy scripture of the Kirat people, known as Kirat Mundhum, recognizes a common lineage between the Magars and Limbus [11]. Magar historians argue that the language historically spoken by the Kirat people was initially more akin to Magar. However, it underwent major divergence as a result of Chinese migration in eastern Nepal. This divergence ultimately led to the prevailing influence of Tibeto-Burman languages among the Limbus [12].

This conflict prompts important inquiries: What is the reason behind the geographic names in the Kathmandu Valley being more closely related to the Magar language rather than the Limbu language, despite their common Kirat ancestry? To examine these inconsistencies, a meticulous methodology is necessary, taking into account past contacts, changes in language throughout time, and the intricate interplay of cultural factors [8].

The primary inquiry of the review is: "Which language family do the Kirat languages belong to Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic/Munda?" When examining the Kirat language family in the study "From Ancient Echoes to Modern Voices," determining whether they are affiliated with the Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic/Munda language groups involves analyzing linguistic data and considering the intricate interplay of historical and cultural elements.

The investigation into the linguistic origins of the Kirat languages points to two main possibilities: the Austro-Asiatic/Munda family, which has ancient origins in South and Southeast Asia, and the Tibeto-Burman family, a prominent branch of the Sino-Tibetan language group that spans the Himalayas. Both families claim a potential connection to these mysterious languages.

III. METHODS

This qualitative study aimed to comprehend the intricate fabric of identity within the Kirat community. It explored the hypothesis that historical and social conflicts might have played a role in creating divisions within families. The study examined a range of sources, including library resources and online studies, to gain valuable insights into the potential link between historical fractures and present-day tensions. A thorough evaluation was carried out utilizing the SWOT framework. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of evidence both supporting and opposing the initial premise. This investigation aims to shed light on the intricate relationships inside the Kirat community, offering a nuanced

perspective on their internal disputes and fostering a deeper understanding of their rich cultural heritage.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Determining the exact language spoken by the Kirat people before the arrival of Tibeto-Burman speakers in the Himalayan region is quite challenging due to the lack of written records and linguistic evidence from that period. However, there are several theories and arguments surrounding this topic:

A. Hypothesis in the Indus Valley Civilization

The notion that the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) might have accommodated populations who spoke Kirat and Dravidian languages has gained support in recent years. This is primarily based on interpretations of Persian historical sources and archaeological discoveries. Nevertheless, this idea continues to be the subject of intense controversy and necessitates a meticulous analysis of the data and its constraints.

The primary basis for this concept is derived from Persian chronicles, namely the *Bundahishn* (a Zoroastrian cosmological treatise) and the *Shahnameh* (an epic poem) authored by Ferdowsi. The scriptures refer to three distinct groups connected to the Indus Valley: the Bhil, the Dev, and the Dash. According to several researchers, these names are believed to be associated with ancient Kirat and Dravidian tribes who spoke languages predating the Indo-Aryan languages [13].

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assign a precise linguistic identity to these phrases purely relying on Persian sources. The temporal disparity between the IVC and the creation of these documents (about 1000 BCE) gives rise to considerable ambiguity. Furthermore, the Bhil, Dev, and Dash may denote larger ethnic groups or geographical classifications rather than specific language associations [14].

There are archaeological findings in the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) are cited by supporters of the Kirat-Dravidian hypothesis as corroborating evidence. The following items are included:

➤ Symbolism

Shiva lingams, Pashupati seals, and animal art discovered in IVC sites have similarities with components observed in subsequent Hindu and Dravidian traditions. Nevertheless, ascertaining a direct connection between these symbols and Kirat or Dravidian speakers is conjectural, given the absence of definitive associations between particular symbols and linguistic groupings [15].

➤ Linguistic Traces

Certain researchers have endeavored to unravel the Indus Valley script by establishing connections with Dravidian languages. Nevertheless, these interpretations face significant disagreement and are not widely acknowledged by the archeological and linguistic communities [16].

Ultimately, the notion that Kirat and Dravidian languages existed in the Indus Valley Civilization is a captivating yet unsubstantiated conjecture. Although the existing evidence provides hints that go in a specific direction, it does not provide the necessary power to demonstrate these links conclusively. Conducting thorough and meticulous research using rigorous methodologies and a critical perspective is crucial to understanding the complex language patterns of this ancient culture.

B. The Moabite-Kirat Connection Theory

This theory proposes a potential link between the Moabite and Kirat peoples. Gerard Fussman (1995) posits a thought-provoking hypothesis regarding a probable correlation between the ancient Moabite language and the Kirat languages of the Himalayas. This hypothesis is supported by three fundamental principles [17]:

➤ Common lexicon

He recognizes a suggestive, albeit restricted, set of cognate terms shared between the two languages, specifically numbers and pronouns. The shared features mentioned are interesting, but their importance and probable borrowing patterns need further analysis [18].

➤ Linguistic typology

Both Moabite and Kirat languages demonstrate typological characteristics, including the use of prepositions and the lack of grammatical genders. Before assigning these commonalities to a shared ancestry, it is important to carefully explore the possibility of areal dispersion or autonomous evolution, as suggested by [19].

➤ Geographical proximity

Fussman suggests that the connection between the Levant and the Himalayas may have been established through a historical migratory route, potentially passing through Central Asia. Nevertheless, the validity of this scenario relies heavily on the available but restricted archaeological and historical evidence. Therefore, additional research is required to confirm the time and feasibility of such a movement [20].

This article examines the fascinating potential for a linguistic correlation between the ancient Moabite language of southern Jordan and the Kirat languages in the eastern Himalayas. Based on the knowledge provided by linguist George van Driem, the research explores the mysterious complexity of human languages, analyzing historical and linguistic evidence that indicates a common origin.

The narrative commences by decoding the Meshah Stele, an inscription from the 9th century BCE attributed to the Moabites, which unveils unforeseen resemblances with Northwest Semitic languages. Nevertheless, unique grammatical characteristics, such as verb morphology and the utilization of classifiers, suggest a possible connection to an alternative linguistic ancestry. Next, attention turns to the Kirat languages, which are Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The presence of similar verb inflexion, classifiers, and shared vocabulary items in these languages leads to the need for additional inquiry.

Although these language traits present exciting possibilities, the research highlights the importance of caution. When examining historical relationships and loanwords, it is essential to carefully analyze the extent and distribution of related vocabulary to determine if there are only surface-level similarities. Sound alterations and other historical processes further complicate the linguistic landscape.

The historical backdrop provides further evidence, as the estimated spread of Tibeto-Burman languages into the Himalayas aligns with the rise of the Moabite monarchy in the 3rd millennium BCE. The time alignment indicates that Proto-Kirat and Northwest Semitic languages likely had early connections facilitated by trade routes, cultural exchange, or migrations.

The narrative emphasizes the intricate nature of linguistic heritage, interconnecting several regions over thousands of years. The Moabite-Kirat connection remains an enigma with unresolved aspects, mainly due to the absence of recorded historical evidence from pre-Tibeto-Burman Kirat settlements. The report suggests that future research should use comparative reconstruction approaches and historical contextualization to investigate the nature and breadth of this possible language relationship.

C. Austroasiatic Languages

Some scholars suggest a possible connection between the Kirat languages and the Austroasiatic language family, particularly the Munda branch [21]. This hypothesis is based on shared vocabulary and grammatical features observed in certain Kirat languages like Limbu and Rai [22]. However, this connection is not universally accepted due to the limited data available and the possibility of borrowing or convergent evolution of the shared features [23].

D. Pro-Tibeto-Burman Substrate

Another theory proposes the existence of a distinct, unknown language spoken by the Kirat people before the arrival of Tibeto-Burman. This "Kirat substrate" is believed to have influenced the development of Kirat languages through borrowing and contact phenomena [24]. While this theory lacks direct evidence, it helps explain certain unique features of Kirat languages not easily accounted for by their interaction with Tibeto-Burman alone.

E. Multiple Influences

Some researchers suggest a more complex scenario involving multiple language influences on the Kirat people before and during their interaction with Tibeto-Burman speakers. This could involve interactions with other language families like Dravidian or even unknown local languages [4]. This possibility highlights the dynamic nature of language evolution and the difficulty in reconstructing pre-historical language contact with certainty.

F. Unveiling the Linguistic Lineage of Kirat Languages

Where the Kirat languages belong – within the Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic/Munda language families – has sparked debate among linguists for decades. While both

hypotheses hold merit, compelling evidence points towards the Tibeto-Burman affiliation as the more likely scenario.

➤ *Verb Morphology*

One striking similarity lies in the verb morphology of Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages. Both families exhibit an agglutinative structure, where morphemes (meaningful units) are added to a verb stem to modify its tense, aspect, mood, and person/number agreement [9]. For instance, the Limbu verb "lakh-pa" ("he wrote") consists of the stem "lakh-" ("write") and the suffix "-pa", indicating past tense [8]. This agglutinative approach contrasts with the isolating nature of Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages, where verbs typically lack inflectional morphology [5].

Furthermore, shared verb morphology extends beyond mere agglutination. Both families employ similar mechanisms for expressing tense-aspect distinctions, often utilizing prefixes for past/present and suffixes for future/perfective [6]. Notably, the Kirat Rai language Sunwar resembles Tibeto-Burman languages in its verb morphology, indicating a closer historical connection [7].

➤ *Classifiers*

Classifiers, noun modifiers marking the shape, size, or quantity of the referent, are another shared feature between Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages. These classifiers often take the form of nouns or numerals and are closely associated with the noun they modify [10]. For instance, the Rai classifier "ko" indicates a single elongated object, as in "ko dhunga" ("one log").

While not exclusive to Tibeto-Burman, the extensive use and specific types of classifiers employed in Kirat languages closely resemble those found in their Tibeto-Burman counterparts. This shared system, including classifiers for humans, animals, flat objects, and round objects, strengthens the argument for a common ancestor [5].

➤ *Noun-Phrase Structures*

The typical noun-phrase structure in Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages follows a 'subject-object-verb' order (SOV). This arrangement distinguishes them from Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages, which predominantly display either verb-subject-object (VSO) or subject-verb-object (SVO) order [9]. Additionally, Kirat languages often include modifiers such as adjectives and possessive pronouns before the noun, mirroring the Tibeto-Burman pattern [8].

This consistent SOV order and similar placement of modifiers suggest a shared grammatical backbone between Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages. While exceptions and variations exist within both families, the overall pattern indicates common ancestry.

Comparative analysis reveals numerous cognates (words with the exact origin) between Kirat and other Tibeto-Burman languages, especially in core vocabularies like body parts, numerals, and kinship terms [9]. Additionally, shared grammatical structures like subject-object-verb word order and

agglutinative morphology (building words by adding suffixes) further solidify the connection [5].

➤ *Geographical Distribution*

The distribution of Kirat languages aligns with the historical spread of Tibeto-Burman languages across the Himalayas. Their presence in Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Myanmar follows the migration patterns of Tibeto-Burman speakers [6].

➤ *Historical Evidence*

Early historical records, such as Tibetan chronicles, mention interactions between Tibeto-Burman and Kirat communities, suggesting a longstanding connection [11].

G. *The Austro-Asiatic/Munda Hypothesis*

Here is a Glimpse into the Munda Echo: Exploring Lexical Links between Kirat and Austro-Asiatic/Munda Languages.

While the Tibeto-Burman affiliation holds significant weight in discussing Kirat languages' lineage, the possibility of an Austro-Asiatic/Munda connection remains intriguing. This essay explores the argument for this alternative hypothesis by delving into the realm of lexical correspondences, mainly focusing on core vocabulary like pronouns, numerals, and basic verbs.

➤ *Pronouns and Numerals*

One potential clue lies in shared pronouns and numerals between Kirat and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages. While not as extensive as those observed with Tibeto-Burman, certain cognates (words with the exact origin) emerge. For instance, the Rai word "mi" for "I" finds parallels in the Munda language "mi" and the Khasi language "mi", all suggesting a common ancestor [5]. Similarly, numerals like "ti" ("two") in Limbu and "tii" in Korku (Munda) hint at a possible shared origin [8].

However, while evaluating these resemblances, exercise caution. Loanwords and chance similarities can also play a role, making it crucial to consider the number and distribution of cognates across core vocabulary. Sound changes and historical interactions can further complicate the picture [6].

➤ *Basic Verbs*

The search for Austro-Asiatic/Munda connections also extends to basic verbs. Some scholars point to shared vocabulary for crucial actions like "eat," "drink," and "sleep" between Kirat and Munda languages. For example, the Limbu verb "saam" for "eat" bears a resemblance to the Santali (Munda) verb "sam" [11].

However, as with pronouns and numerals, establishing definitive links remains challenging. It is also possible to ascribe the existence of cognates for basic verbs to substrate influences, where an earlier Austro-Asiatic/Munda language may have left its mark on the Kirat vocabulary before the arrival of Tibeto-Burman speakers [17].

➤ *Potential Substrate Influence*

Some academics suggest that an earlier Austro-Asiatic or Munda substrate language spoken in the area may have influenced the Kirat languages [8]. This concept could explain phonological features and vocabulary differences from mainstream Tibeto-Burman languages.

➤ *Cultural Interpretations*

Pre-historic interactions between Kirat and Austro-Asiatic/Munda groups could have led to linguistic borrowings and shared cultural elements. This hypothesis, however, lacks strong evidence of sustained contact or significant substrate influence.

H. *Evidence for the Substrate Hypothesis*

➤ *Shared Vocabulary*

While the number of cognates between Kirat and Munda languages is smaller than Tibeto-Burman, certain lexical similarities persist. For instance, the Limbu word "ta" for "father" and the Mundari word "taat" point towards a potential shared origin [11].

➤ *Phonological Similarities*

Some scholars suggest that certain phonological features, such as breathy-voiced consonants in some Kirat languages, may be remnants of Munda influence [8].

➤ *Differentiation*

The long-term isolation and independent development of Kirat languages complicate the identification of substrate influence. Distinguishing between shared Munda vocabulary and potential loanwords from neighboring languages can be challenging.

➤ *Time Depth*

The timeframe of the proposed Munda-Kirat contact remains unclear, making it difficult to assess the extent and nature of the influence. Reconstructing the historical and linguistic landscape of pre-Tibeto-Burman Kirat communities is a complex task.

➤ *Alternative Explanations*

Other factors, such as areal features or convergent evolution, could also explain some of the observed similarities between Kirat and Munda languages.

While the substrate hypothesis remains a debated topic in Kirat linguistics, it offers an intriguing perspective on the development of these languages. Further research employing comparative analysis, historical reconstruction, and areal linguistics can shed light on the possible Munda influence and its contribution to the unique linguistic identity of the Kirat family.

The substrate hypothesis is not necessarily in opposition to the Tibeto-Burman affiliation. Both influences could have played a role in shaping the Kirat languages. The question of linguistic ancestry is often complex and multifaceted. A nuanced approach is crucial when considering multiple potential influences.

By delving deeper into the substrate hypothesis, we better understand the dynamic history and diverse influences shaping the Kirat language family. The quest for linguistic roots is an ongoing journey, and each piece of evidence adds to the captivating puzzle of their unique linguistic heritage.

V. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A. Weighing the Scales:

❖ *Tibeto-Burman vs. Austro-Asiatic/Munda Affiliation for Kirat Languages*

The quest to unravel the linguistic lineage of the Kirat family has long captivated scholars, with two leading contenders vying for dominance: Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda. Both sides present compelling arguments and face intriguing challenges, making a definitive conclusion elusive. Let us delve into the strengths and weaknesses of each affiliation hypothesis.

❖ *Tibeto-Burman Affiliation: Strengths*

➤ *Shared Vocabulary*

Extensive cognates exist between Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages, particularly in core vocabularies like body parts, numerals, and kinship terms [9]. This shared lexicon suggests a common ancestor and a close historical connection.

➤ *Grammatical Similarities*

Both families exhibit agglutinative morphology, where morphemes are added to verbs to modify tense, aspect, and mood [8]. Using classifiers and subject-object-verb word order further strengthens the Tibeto-Burman connection.

➤ *Geographical Distribution*

The distribution of Kirat languages aligns with the historical spread of Tibeto-Burman languages across the Himalayas, suggesting a shared migration pattern [5].

❖ *Weakness*

➤ *Potential Substrate Influence*

The Austro-Asiatic/Munda hypothesis proposes that an earlier Munda language may have influenced the Kirat lexicon before the arrival of Tibeto-Burman speakers. It complicates the clear identification of shared vocabulary as solely Tibeto-Burman inheritance.

➤ *Exceptions and Variations*

While similarities exist, some grammatical features and vocabulary in Kirat languages deviate from the Tibeto-Burman norm. It raises questions about the extent and nature of the shared ancestry.

➤ *Alternative Explanations*

Areal features or convergent evolution could explain some of the observed similarities between Kirat and Tibeto-Burman languages.

❖ *Austro-Asiatic/Munda Affiliation: Strengths*

➤ *Lexical Correspondences*

While not as extensive as with Tibeto-Burman, certain cognates exist in core vocabulary, like pronouns and numerals between Kirat and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages [5]. It suggests a possible shared linguistic heritage.

➤ *Phonological Similarities*

Some scholars propose that certain phonological features, such as breathy-voiced consonants in some Kirat languages, may be remnants of Munda influence [8].

➤ *Potential Substrate Influence*

The Austro-Asiatic/Munda hypothesis explains the presence of Munda-like vocabulary in Kirat languages, even with Tibeto-Burman as the dominant influence.

❖ *Weakness*

➤ *Limited Evidence*

The number of cognates between Kirat and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages is significantly smaller than Tibeto-Burman, making it difficult to establish a definitive link.

➤ *Distinguishing Loanwords*

Differentiating between shared vocabulary due to ancient contact and later loanwords from neighboring languages can be challenging, weakening the case for Munda influence.

➤ *Time Depth and Reconstruction*

Reconstructing the historical and linguistic landscape of pre-Tibeto-Burman Kirat communities remains complex, making it difficult to assess the extent and nature of potential Munda contact.

While the evidence for a Tibeto-Burman affiliation appears more robust based on shared vocabulary, grammatical features, and geographical distribution, we can not rule out the notion of an Austro-Asian/Munda substrate impact on the Kirat languages. Further research employing comparative analysis, historical reconstruction, and areal linguistics can shed light on the relative contributions of these two language families to the unique linguistic tapestry of the Kirat languages.

The linguistic ancestry of any language family is rarely a binary choice. The Kirat languages may have been shaped by multiple influences throughout their history, with both Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda playing a role in their development. Our understanding of this fascinating linguistic puzzle will undoubtedly evolve as research continues.

B. Kirat in Uttarakhand Exhibits Austro-Asiatic Ties

The Kirat people are first mentioned in India in the sixth century BC. [11]. They were originally a nomadic people who inhabited the hills of Uttarakhand (ibid.). Today, the Kirat language, spoken by approximately 500,000 individuals across India, Nepal, and Bhutan, belongs to the Munda language family [25].

Linguistic scholars have long recognized the connection between Kirat and the Munda languages. One of the first to document this connection was George Abraham Grierson, who classified Kirat as a Munda language in his monumental survey of Indian languages in the early 20th century [25]. Similarly, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a renowned Bengali linguist, acknowledged the Munda influence on Kirat, characterizing it as "a Munda language with a strong admixture of Indo-Aryan elements" in his book "The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language" [26].

Recent linguistic research further strengthens the connection between Kirat and Munda. A 2012 study published in the journal "Language Dynamics" found that Kirat is a "close relative of the Munda languages" [27]. These findings highlight the shared heritage and ongoing evolution of the Kirat language within the Munda language family.

In his book "Himalayan Yatra," Sankrityayan mentions the Kirat as one of the oldest inhabitants of the Himalayas, speaking a language distinct from Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages [28]. He observes similarities between the Kirat and Munda languages, suggesting a possible connection [ibid]. Sankrityayan also highlights the influence of Sanskrit and other neighboring languages on Kirat languages, emphasizing the process of language change and adaptation [ibid].

C. Timeline of Tibeto-Burman Migration to Kirat Region

Determining the exact timeframe and reasons for the large-scale migration and dominance of Tibeto-Burman languages in Nepal and India is complex due to the lack of precise historical records and the gradual nature of the process. However, here is a breakdown based on current research and understanding:

➤ *Earliest Arrivals*

Scholars believe isolated Tibeto-Burman-speaking communities may have been present in the Himalayan region as early as the 3rd millennium BC [9]. However, these groups were likely small and scattered.

➤ *Primary Migration Waves*

The significant influx of Tibeto-Burman speakers generally placed around the 1st millennium BC to the 5th century AD [5], and that period witnessed several waves of migration driven by various factors.

➤ *Establishment and Spread*

By the 5th to 8th centuries AD, Tibeto-Burman languages had established themselves in large parts of Nepal and the Himalayas, gradually displacing or influencing other languages [6].

❖ *Reasons for Migration*

➤ *Population Pressure*

Growing populations in the Tibetan Plateau likely led to southward expansion in search of new land and resources [8].

➤ *Environmental Changes*

Aridity and climate fluctuations in the Tibetan Plateau could have also pushed communities southward [11].

➤ *Trade and Warfare*

Trade routes through the Himalayas and potential conflicts with other groups may have influenced migration patterns and encounters with local populations.

➤ *Cultural Diffusion and Intermixing*

While Tibeto-Burman languages gained dominance, cultural exchange and intermixing with existing populations in Nepal and India also shaped the linguistic landscape.

D. Challenges in Determining Language Family Affiliation

Unraveling the linguistic ancestry of the Kirat family remains an enticing but intricate challenge for scholars. While compelling arguments exist for Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda affiliations, several factors impede a definitive conclusion. Let us delve into the key challenges hindering the quest for absolute certainty:

➤ *Limited Historical Documentation*

Scant historical records exist for the Kirat people and their languages before the arrival of Tibeto-Burman speakers. This lack of written documentation makes it difficult to reconstruct their pre-contact linguistic landscape and pinpoint the timing and nature of potential interactions with other language families [11]. Reliance on oral traditions and comparative analysis introduces challenges regarding accuracy and interpretation.

➤ *Competing Interpretations of Shared Features*

While shared vocabulary, grammatical features, and phonological similarities form the backbone of affiliation arguments, their interpretation can be subjective. For instance, cognates between Kirat, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages exist, leading to competing claims of ancestral connections [8]. Distinguishing between shared inheritance, loanwords, and convergent evolution further complicates the picture.

➤ *Complex Linguistic History of the Region*

The Himalayan region boasts a rich and intricate linguistic tapestry, with numerous language families and dialects interacting over millennia. This complex history increases the possibility of substrate influences, areal features, and convergent evolution mimicking affiliation markers [5]. Isolating the specific contributions of different language families to shaping Kirat languages becomes immensely challenging.

➤ *Methodological Considerations*

The choice of methodologies employed in comparative analysis and historical reconstruction significantly impacts the conclusions drawn. Different weighting of shared features, reliance on specific datasets, and varying interpretations of sound changes can lead to divergent affiliation arguments [9]. Addressing these methodological discrepancies and reaching a consensus remains a crucial hurdle.

Determining the definitive language family affiliation of the Kirat languages remains a multifaceted puzzle due to limited historical documentation, competing interpretations of shared features, the complex linguistic history of the region, and methodological considerations. However, by continually refining our research methods, incorporating new data, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, we are getting closer to discovering the secrets of the Kirat linguistic lineage.

Kirat linguistic lineage. Understanding the challenges can ultimately pave the way for more nuanced and robust conclusions about their fascinating linguistic heritage. The quest for linguistic ancestry is rarely a singular path. As we embrace the complexities and challenges of the Kirat language family, we gain a deeper appreciation for the dynamism and fascinating history of human language evolution.

E. Beyond the Binary Model

➤ *Mixed Origin Model*

This idea says that the Kirat languages came about when a lot of different languages mixed and interacted with each other. It agrees with the strong proof that Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages are related [9]. Still, the growth of Kirat languages may have been affected by a complex interplay of these factors, which could have included other languages from the area or older layers [ibid].

❖ **Strengths:** This model gives a thorough account of the different features of Kirat languages. There are words and parts of grammar from both the Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda language families in it [ibid].

❖ **Weaknesses:** It's hard to tell the difference between the different linguistic inputs from different sources. The chronological order of contact and impact is very hard to put back together. Also, it can be hard to tell the difference between shared ancestry and borrowing after touch [ibid].

➤ *Independent Kirat Language Family*

According to this different theory, Kirat languages are part of a separate language family [8]. This idea says that the similarities between Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic/Munda languages might be due to convergent evolution or areal traits instead of direct genetic transfer [ibid].

❖ **Strengths:** This method takes into account the unique features and traits of Kirat languages that might not easily fit into existing language groups. Through its developmental path, it makes it possible to find a language's ancestors [ibid].

❖ **Weaknesses:** Some people don't think there is enough strong proof of unique features and progress in the Kirat family to support its status as a separate language family. Not having a clear ancestral language makes it harder to piece together history and do comparative study [ibid].

F. Influence of Khas Nepali on Tibeto-Burman Languages in Nepal

When Khas Nepali, an Indo-European language, was made Nepal's official language in 1962, it was a major turning point in the country's language history. Even though it helped bring people together and give the country a sense of unity, it was bad for the many Tibeto-Burman languages that a lot of people spoke. This essay looks at how important this ruling was as a turning point in history and how it has changed the Tibeto-Burman languages that people in Nepal speak today.

Before the 1960s, Nepal had a language setting with a lot of different languages [29]. Nepali quickly became important when it was linked to the ruling class and used in government and schools. It was first spoken by the Khas group. But Tibeto-Burman languages were spoken in many places, especially in hilly areas [ibid].

The main goal of the declaration in 1962 that made Khas Nepali the official language was to improve national unity and make government and communication more efficient [30]. It accomplished some goals, but it also had effects on the Tibeto-Burman languages that were not meant [ibid]:

❖ *Exclusion of Tibeto-Burman languages*

Tibeto-Burman languages were demoted to "regional languages," which meant they lost official status and could not be used as much in government, schools, or the media [31]. The group's exclusion caused their social standing to drop, and knowledge and customs were passed down from one generation to the next [ibid].

➤ *Schooling and official lessons Unfair Treatment*

Nepali was chosen as the main language for instruction, which was hard for Tibeto-Burman speakers, especially in remote places where they didn't have easy access to Nepali-language schools [32]. Because of this, the number of people who could read and write went down, and people of different languages had different chances to go to school [ibid].

➤ *Concerns about identity and culture*

Many people now speak and practice Nepali, which has made people worry that Tibeto-Burman traditions and identities are being lost over time [33]. The fact that these languages aren't used much in media and public spaces has made Tibeto-Burman groups feel alone and left out [ibid].

➤ *Overcoming the Shadow*

Even with these problems, Tibeto-Burman dialects have survived. Many efforts [33] have been made by communities to strongly oppose the loss of their languages:

- Language revitalization programs: To promote the teaching and learning of Tibeto-Burman languages, community-based projects use local schools, cultural groups, and online platforms [ibid].
- Advocacy and changes to policies: A lot of Tibeto-Burman groups are working hard to get their languages more recognized and used in national education and media programs [ibid].

Dictionaries, grammar books, and literary works are being documented to protect the history and promote the cultural uniqueness of these languages [32].

Without a doubt, making Khas Nepali the official language of Nepal has changed the languages that people speak there [ibid]. It brought the country together and made communication better, but it hurt the Tibeto-Burman languages by pushing them to the sidelines and causing problems in schools and with culture. But the Tibeto-Burman groups' determination and toughness give us hope that they will continue to survive and grow [ibid].

The results showed that Nepal needs to work on making sure that national unity and linguistic variety can live together peacefully. It means making sure that all languages have the chance to grow and make important additions to the country's unique cultural landscape.

G. Opportunities for Kirat Languages

Even though it's hard for them because their language is changing and other cultures are mixing [34], the Kirat people stick to their traditions. The passing down of traditional knowledge systems from one generation to the next in areas like farming, health, and protecting the environment makes sure that their unique biological understanding is kept alive [ibid].

Cultural festivals and community-based projects also try to bring back language and customs, which makes their cultural identity stronger for future generations [6].

Researchers pointed out that the Kirat people have historical importance that goes beyond the different languages they speak. Their old lands, constantly changing cultural practices, and ongoing attempts to keep their traditions alive show that they are a strong and flexible group of people. Even though they have to deal with the problems of modern life, their long-lasting impact continues to weave the cultural tapestry of the Himalayas, showing how important it is to protect different identities and customs.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the review paper highlights the connections between the Kirat languages and tries to figure out if they are related to the Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic/Munda, and Moabite language groups. The Kirat languages which are known as Tibeto-Burman share names and numbers with Austro-Asiatic and Munda languages, as well as verb morphology and the use of classifiers. This suggests that the languages may be related. It is possible to see that the Kirat language and the Moabite language are linked through their shared vocabularies and grammar structures.

Ancient records show that Tibeto-Burman and Kirat people interacted with each other, showing that the two groups had a long history of being connected. In short, the study says that the relationship between Tibeto-Burman people is important and also talks about how interesting it might be for

the Austro-Asiatic/Munda people to have a connection with the Moabite people.

The Kirat people used to speak the Austroasiatic/Munda language, but their language changed over time and became the Tibeto-Burman language. Before Tibeto-Burman, the Tibeto-Burman language was the most common. This was the case by the 8th century. Over the 20th century, Nepal's language situation changed dramatically. Indo-European languages became more popular than Tibeto-Burman languages. The language links in Kirat's lexicon, which spans many historical periods and geographical areas, give us very important information.

The paper talks about how hard it is to figure out where the Kirat languages came from. It is hard to figure out the past of the Tibeto-Burman language because there aren't many historical sources from before it became spoken. Still, the paper gives an overview and insight into the Kirat people's complicated language system and rich cultural history that stretches from West Asia to the Himalayas.

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