

In Loving Memory of My Dear Guru Chandra Bahadur Rai

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Chandra Bahadur Rai was born in the village of Hilepani in Okhaldhunga district in the month of Asadh of the Nepali year 1989. The honorific name 'Bahadur' - brave, courageous, bold - was a fitting qualification for this much-respected man without any doubt. As a young man, Chandra Bahadur served in the 6th and 10th Regiments of the Royal Gurkha Rifles. During his time of service from 1955 till 1967, he was stationed in Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore and Calcutta. He participated in several military operations and received two medals, which he used to wear with much pride on his jacket. Chandra Bahadur was in his mid thirties when he was discharged from military service and returned to his native town.

As a young man, Chandra Bahadur Rai married Utra Maya Rai, with whom he had three sons and two daughters. Utra Maya died of an illness in the month of Baisakh in the Nepali year 2027. In the month of Asoj of the following year, Chandra Bahadur had the chance of meeting Ramjana Rai, whom he married shortly thereafter. With her he had three sons and one daughter.

I had the chance of meeting Chandra Bahadur many years later, in November 1996, when I went to Nepal to study the Wambule language. As I only spoke a little Nepali, the people from Hilepani decided to send me up to Chandra Bahadur, who had some knowledge of English and knew how to deal with foreigners. After I had informed him about the purpose of my visit, Chandra Bahadur agreed to teach me all he knew about his native tongue and his culture with much enthusiasm. Ever since I am most indebted to Chandra Bahadur and his family, who gave me a true home during the many months of research in eastern Nepal.

Chandra Bahadur had an exemplary command of his native Wambule language. From the first day that we worked together until the day I left, he proved to be an intelligent, trustworthy, patient, witty and very hospitable language consultant. A large part of my work on the Wambule language and the people who speak it is the result of his ever-lasting enthusiasm.

A place where stories were told

Chandra Bahadur's house was a place where stories were told. I was able to listen to many traditional texts such as myths and legends, and stories from daily life and conversations. Chandra Bahadur often helped me transcribing and translating the spoken texts I recorded. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to Chandra Bahadur because he helped me collect word lists, phrases and paradigms. I still remember the long hours we worked together on the complex conjugation of a single Wambule verb. He never lost his patience with me.

Chandra Bahadur's house was also a place where religious practices were upheld. My guru was a member of the Santa-Bhes group. The Santa-Bhes have abandoned the traditional shamanist beliefs commonly found among the Rai, and worship Shiva, the most important god of the Nepali Hindu Pantheon. Twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, the household had the custom of honoring Shiva by performing the 'dhup-bati' - incense and lamp - ceremony. I always looked forward to this ceremony, as I knew that it soon was time to eat 'hepa-khamsi'.

We have lost a great man

My dear Wambule guru died on the 17th of Magh 2061. I much regret never having been able to meet him again after my last visit to Hilepani some five years ago. Chandra Bahadur Rai is dead, but his voice will live on in the stories he left behind and hopefully also in my work on Wambule. We, the Wambule, have lost a great and much respected man.

May your soul rest in peace, Chandra Upo.