

THE LIMBUS OF NORTH BENGAL: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN TWO DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL

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Article History

Received : 18 September 2020

Revised : 25 September 2020

Accepted : 15 October 2020

Published : 31 December 2020

Key words

Limbu, Transhumance, Tibeto-Burman, Eastern Himalayas, social anthropological.

ABSTRACT

The name “Limbu” was derived from the words “Lingdong” meaning “bow and arrow, belonging to the bigger group ‘Kiranti’ or ‘Kirati’”. The Limbu is one of the indigenous tribes and ancient inhabitants in the ‘Limbuwan’ kingdom of the Eastern Himalayas, identified with their own language, pertaining to Tibeto-Burman, but now on the verge of extinction and only found existing in the remote and isolated villages. The community constitutes a peculiar ethnic group adopting a form of their traditional culture, language and religion which is quite distinct from other ethnic groups of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. Once, they were transhumant and pastoralists, so, they probably took their cattle to higher altitudes in summer and came down to the middle hills during winter, but after the declaration of their living areas as protected areas, they started their settlement in the buffer areas, after being driven away or alienated from their original settlement. They were given lands and begun agricultural and horticultural practices at the lower foothills of Himalayas. Nowadays, primarily they are agriculturists by nature and give much attention on horticultural cash crops. They have been demanding ‘Tribal Status’ for a long. Central Government has granted ‘Scheduled Tribe’ status only to ‘Limbu’ along with ‘Tamang’ in 2003. The culture is now under the influence of Nepalese culture.

This study intends to focus on the origin and ethno history, social, economic and religious & political life on the empirical data, with the application of social Anthropological tools and techniques in two districts of North Bengal.

INTRODUCTION

The name “Limbu” was derived from the words “Lingdong” meaning “bow and arrow “. Ghosal (1993) in his article on ‘Limbu’ in ‘People of India’, chronicles of Anthropological Survey of India, (Singh 1993) stated the word ‘Limbu’ is derived from ‘Li’ (meaning ‘bow’ and ‘Abu’ (meaning Shooter’). Hence, ‘Limbu’ means ‘bow shooter’ or archer. In earlier history, they undertook transhumance. So, they took their livestock from the lower parts of the hills to the upper part during summer and they usually came down to the lower part during winter. Thus, they domesticated the goats, sheep and cattle in the forest areas of Kanchendzonga. Later when this was declared as the protected area they were driven away and alienated from there and were given lands in the buffer zones. So, at the lower part of the hills, they practice mostly horticulture. They call themselves Yakthumba/Yakthung (in Limbu language). They are also known as Shong, Xong or Drenjongka (in Tibet) or Chong, Tsong (in Sikkim). The Lepcha call them ‘Lum’ and the Bhutia call them Tsong (Campbel, 1840 and Risley, 1891). As mentioned Limbu is the offshoot of the “Kiranti” or “Kirati” (Biswas, 1934-35; Dalton 1872: 108, and Risley 1891: 18-19), which has a wider connotation, which covers Rai, Limbu, Sunwar, Gurung, Mangars and Tamang. They are supposed to be originated from Tibet, from where they had migrated to Eastern Nepal before they finally settled in Sikkim and Kalimpong.

ORIGIN

Two versions are there about the origin of the Limbus. Their tradition reveals that they were known as Sewa-Yethang-sa from time immemorial, derived from their legendry, eight brothers (SewaYethang), who were left by their father Sutsuru Suhangpheba with their mother Tetlara Lahadhongna at Sangaek Nugarek Tembhe of this part of Himalayas. The father Sutsuru Suhangpheba had to leave for Muringla Kharingla Tembha with his nine sons known as Phanghangs due to his incestuous relations with his own sister. Later on, he changes his name and also known as the Demigod Sodhuh Lepmuhang. Sewa Yethangs. Those eight brothers. were multiplied into large numbers and established their homeland by fighting with the eight kings of the inhabited areas; they divided their homeland into Thibong (Ten) Yioks (Regions) and 17 Thums (sub-regions), that was ruled by the Thibong (Ten) Chiefs. Thereafter, they were known as “Susuwa Lilim Yakthumba” (means the descendants

of the brave fighters of Sutsuru Suhangpheba). (Note: Yakthumba, the distorted word of Yakthumba, some writers relate this word with drinkers or yak herders, but it is not true. Yak is known as Phungbit in the Limboo language, not yak).

LANGUAGE

They have their own language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. Their language is called Yakthungpan or Limbu Kura and their script is known as Srijonga. The language is now on the verge of extinction as it now exists only in remote villages. The endangerment situation of current dialects is to some extent the result of cultural assimilation, which is a process by which the culture of a minority group is gradually influenced by a more dominant culture. One of the dominant cultures undermining linguistic diversity in the Eastern Himalayan region is modern Nepali culture. Limbu nowadays finds themselves in an uneven situation. In contrast to Nepali, the use of which is very widespread as it is the dominant language for media, trade, public domain and education and the lingua franca throughout the area. The Limbu dialect is mostly used in the home domain and confined to the area where they live and outsiders do not speak this language and thus losing its distinctiveness (Chatterjee, 2015).

POPULATIONS

In the 2011 Census Darjeeling District has a total population of 1,84,034. The following table shows the Limbu population of West Bengal in the Census 2011:

It is mentionable that ‘Limbus’ and ‘Tamangs’ are already got the status of ‘Scheduled Tribe’ in Sikkim and in Darjeeling in the year 2003.

Table 1: The Limbu population in West Bengal (Census 2011)

<i>Population</i>	<i>No. of Households</i>	<i>Total Population</i>			<i>Total population (0-6 years)</i>		
		<i>Population</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Total	11,558	46,847	23,299	23,548	4,418	2,282	2,136
Rural	9,118	36,908	18,452	18,456	3,534	1,820	1,714
Urban	2,440	9,939	4,847	5,092	884	462	422

North Bengal

North Bengal is a term used for the northern part of West Bengal and the north-western part of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a separate country. So, we can talk here only on the part of West Bengal. This part is the habitation of 1.5 million indigenous or tribal peoples having the cultural diversities. It consists of three districts of West Bengal as Darjeeling, Coochbihar and Jalpaiguri. Sitting in the lap of the Himalayas, nurtured by the countless rivers flowing down from the mountains, this valley has mothered civilizations for hundreds of years. The tribal groups are grouped with the North-eastern Tribal groups. Topographically, the two districts - Darjeeling and Kalimpong, which are parts of North Bengal, can be divided into two distinct tracts: the hilly areas in the north and the plain areas at the foot-hills and alluvial flood plains of Duars. On the hilly side of the Himalayan belt as the part of Eastern Himalayas a group is living from the ancient historical period. The group is named Kirat, which is composed of four ethnic tribes: Limbu, Lepcha, Dhimal and Raj. The greater bulk of the people in the hills today are the Gorkhas, Sherpas, Nepalese, Bhutias, and Tibetians. The Gorkha Communities, such as Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang, Mangar, etc.

Habitations

The Limbu is one of the indigenous tribes and ancient inhabitants of this area, who are found to be living in the three blocks of Darjeeling and Kalimpong hilly areas or plain areas of Duars. The Limbu community constitutes a peculiar ethnic group adopting a form of their traditional culture, language and religion which is quite distinct from other ethnic groups of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. In West Bengal, they are mostly concentrated in Darjeeling Sadar and Kalimpong sub-divisions or parts of Jalpaiguri district in Tribal Areas. They have been demanding 'Tribal Status' for a long. Central Government has granted 'Scheduled Tribe' status only to 'Limbu' and 'Tamang' in 2003 (Gorkha Wikipedia, 15th January 2012). The Limbus of Darjeeling District of West Bengal lost their aboriginality in 1835 when the East India Company gave no special privilege to them and then finally in 1847 when the government of India also overlooked their aboriginality and gave no special privilege to them and then made de-recognizing the aboriginality and levelling their status at par with the latter migrants of Nepal. Accounts of explorers visiting this region

indicate the existence of Lepcha and Limbu communities living in the villages of these sub-divisions even prior to the occupation by the colonials. The Limbu community has in particular a close affinity with the Lepcha tribes who is also considered as the indigenous community of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayan tract. There are many similarities between them in respect of language, tradition and culture.

OBJECTIVES

The paper will discuss:

- (i) The origin of the Limbu community as per myths, histories and local traditions.
- (ii) The social and economic sub-systems of them.
- (iii) The religious beliefs and practices of them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Sites

This study was conducted on the sites where a good number of Limbus' habitations are there in the two districts of West Bengal.

- a. **Darjeeling District:** The district is situated in the northernmost part of the state of West Bengal having a shape of an irregular triangle. Geographically, the district can be divided into two broad divisions: the hills and the plains. The entire hilly region of the district comes under the Gorkhaland, a territorial Administration or a semi-autonomous administrative body under the state government of West Bengal. This body covers the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Mirik and the district of Kalimpong. The foothills of Darjeeling Himalayas, which comes under the Siliguri subdivision, are known as the Terai. The district is bounded on the north by Sikkim, on the south by Kishanganj district of Bihar state, on the east by Kalimpong district, and on the west by Nepal. Darjeeling district has a length from north to south of 18 miles (29 km) and a breadth from east to west of 16 miles (26 km). As of 2011, it was the second least populous district of West Bengal. The total area of the district is 3,254.7 sq. Km. While the hilly region above covers an area of 2,320 sq. km. The district occupies 3.68% of the total area of West Bengal state.

Thus the Limbus of Sikkim and Darjeeling District of West Bengal are the aboriginal inhabitants of Limbuwan, the area of which left out in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim. They are not the later migrants of Nepal. Kalimpong sub-division was officially announced as a district of West Bengal, with effect from 14th February 2017.

The original inhabitants of the Darjeeling hills are the Lepchas or 'Rongpa' (the ravine folks) as they prefer themselves to be known. They are decidedly Mongolian in physical features. Until the Mid-19th Century, the area around Kalimpong was ruled in succession by the Sikkimese and Bhutanese. The area was sparsely populated by the indigenous Lepcha community and migrant Bhutia and Limbu tribes.

- (i) **Darjeeling Sadar: Bijanbari:** Bijanbari is a small town lying to the east of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal, India. It is one of the beautiful places of the Darjeeling district with a lovely climate. The weather is neither so cold nor so hot here. As you go further, you will see the river Little (Chota) Rangeet flowing over a bed of rocks and boulders, and separating the hills. There are several picnic spots by the riverside. There is also naturally originated water near Mani Dhara Mandir (Temple) which most famous of Bijanbari. Bijanbari lies in a valley at an altitude of 760 m above sea level. The Little Rangeet River (ChotaRangeet) flows near this town.
- b. **Kalimpong District:** Kalimpong means "Assembly of Stockade of the King's Ministers" in Tibetan, which is derived from the kalon, means "Kings ministers" and pong which means "stockade". Situated at an altitude of 1300 meters on the eastern part of Darjeeling Himalayas, the Kalimpong district was formed on 14 February 2017, after splitting from the Darjeeling district as the 21st district of West Bengal. It consists of the Kalimpong Municipality with 23 wards and three community development blocks: Kalimpong I, Kalimpong II and Gorubathan consisting of 42-gram panchayats. Kalimpong is such a hilly station, located at an average elevation of 1,250 meters or 4,101 ft situated in the Mahabharat Range of Lesser Himalayas. As part of the Himalayan foothills, the Kalimpong area is divided by the large and smaller rivers follow on a series of ridges and valleys. It is assumed that the Kalimpong has five seasons. This is an area where we can clearly observe the rapid socio-economic ecological and

cultural changes that are taking place. The impact of changes is found on the local communities. The 'Limbus' is one of them in the Kalimpong district, who in particular were almost the last peoples who lose their independence in the Nepal's multi-ethnic society but their sense of identity as a separate people is particularly strong in the villages of Kalimpong and Darjeeling Districts (West Bengal) and Sikkim in India.

Village Selection: In Kalimpong in the Pedong and Bijanbari areas as the Gram Panchayat was well spread in the hilly areas it was a great difficult to cover the whole gram Panchayat. So in the Gram Panchayat Kashyong the main village was covered and in the Gram Panchayat Sakyong the village Upper Menchu village was covered. Two villages were selected each from the two Development blocks Kalimpong II and Darjeeling Sadar of two districts. Two sites were selected on the basis of:

- (i) Limboo habitation;
- (ii) Limboo concentration
- (iii) Prominent Limboo Culture.

Two villages – Kashone or Kashyong (Khasmahal) and Sakyong (Khasmahal) were selected in the Pedong, which is 19 km away from Kalimpong city and can be reached in 45 minutes' drive. Two villages – Upper Nore Busty and Sumback village were selected in Bijanbari, which is 26 km away from Proper Darjeeling.

- 1) **Kashone or Kashyong:** This village is known as KashoneKhasmahal village which is located in Kalimpong II Tehsil of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. It is situated 12 km away from the sub-district headquarter Algarh.
- 2) **Sakiyong:** The village is known as SakiyongKhasmahal, very shortly Upper Menchu, which is located in Kalimpong II Tehsil of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. It is situated 0.17 km from the sub-district headquarter Algarh. The upper part of the Sakiyong, which is known as Upper Menchu was studied, where the Limbus are predominantly living.
- 3) **Upper Nor Busty:** The village is situated in the Darjeeling Sadar subdivision and the development block Darjeeling-Pulbazar, which is 44kms away from the district Headquarters and Taluk headquarters. The village is located 13 km from the Bijanbari main market. The Panchayat is Nayanor.

- 4) **Sumbuck:** The village is situated in Darjeeling Sadar Sub-division and is located 13 km away from Bijanbari market. This village comes under the forest range of Darjeeling Forest Division. The Panchayat is Jhepi. The village is situated in the hilly areas in comparison to the Upper Noe Busty. This is a way to reach the Sandakfu.

The following table 2 shows all the necessary information about the administration and locations of the village:

Four villages were studied in the different Panchayats. There are all social categories living over there—General, Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC) are present. A fairly large section of Scheduled Tribes are living in the villages under study. The following table shows the socio-demography of the villages:

In the villages understudy the General castes having the surnames such as Chhetri, Sharma, Scheduled Castes like Vishwakarma, Dayi, Nepali Sasaki and OBC like Rai, Pradhan is living. The Scheduled Tribes population include Lepcha, Bhutiya and Limboos, of them Limboos are pre-dominant. The following table shows the ethnic compositions of the villages under study:

Tools and Techniques

- (i) **Sampling:** The household survey method was used to collect the data of the present study. The households were also identified using a simple random sampling method. Five percent of the Limboo households were sampled in the selected villages.
- (ii) **Tools and Techniques:** The following tools and techniques were applied:
 - a) **Questionnaire techniques:** A pre-structured questionnaire was used to collect the socio-economic and demographic data on the village demography, ethnic variations, village Economy, social structure, economy, religion etc.
 - b) Schedule for household survey covering family size, family type, marital status, types of marriage, type of houses, livelihood dependency, and monthly family income.
 - c) **Interview:** The structured interview method was also adopted for interviewing head and/or family members in order to collect the necessary information.

Table 2: Village Description of the villages under study in the Darjeeling district

Sl. No.	Sub-division	Name of the Village	Tehsil/ Taluk/ Sub-division	Block	Panchyat Samity	Police Station	Distance from District HQ. (km)	Distance from Taluk	Gram Panchyat	Area (ba)
01	Kalimpong II	Kashyone Khasmahal	Kalimpong	Kalimpong II	Algarah	Kalimpong	60 km	21 kms	Kashyone Busty	1091.45
02		Sakyong Khasmahal	Kalimpong	Kalimpong II	Algarah	Kalimpong	64 kms	24 kms	Sakyong	1078.9
03	Darjeeling Sadar	Upper Nor Busty	Darjeeling Sadar	Darjeeling Pulbazar	Bijanbari Pulbazar	Bijanbari- Pulbazar	44 kms	44kms	Nayanor	-
04		Sumbuck	Darjeeling Sadar	Darjeeling Pulbazar	Bijanbari Pulbazar	Bijanbari- Pulbazar	50 kms	50 kms	Jhepi	477.53

Table 3: Total no. of Households and Total population in the villages under study

Sl. No.	Sub-division	Name of the Village	Total No. of Households	STpop	SC	General	OBC	Total population	Sex Ratio
01	Kalimpong II	Kashyone Khasmahal	502	1552	73	824	-	2449	890
02		Sakyong Khasmahal	1,122	2050	185	3518	-	5753	957
03	Darjeeling Sadar	Upper Nor Busty	75	400	30	70	-	500	787
04		Sumbuck	380	270	7	87	-	1576	724

Table 4: Ethnic Composition in the villages under study

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Sub-division</i>	<i>Name of the Village</i>	<i>Total No. of House-holds</i>	<i>Limboo</i>	<i>Bhutia</i>	<i>Lepcha</i>	<i>Mangar</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>State OBC</i>
1.	Kalimpong II	Kashyong Khasmahal	502	702	110	750	-	73	824	-	-
2.		Sakiyong Khasmahal	1.122	850	350	450	400	185	3518	-	-
3	Darjeeling Sadar	Upper Nore Busty	75	400	-	-	-	-	70	10	-
4.		Sumbuck	380	269	-	-	6	7	75	22	-

RESULTS

Social System

Social Divisions: According to Chemjong (1967), Vansittart (1896), Vansittart (1896), Subba (1999) the Limboo tradition says that they are descendants of ten brothers whose names are as follow:

1. Thosoying Kanglaying Hang,
2. Thindang Sawaro Hang,
3. Thosoding Hamlewa Sawaro Hang,
4. Thoding Thangsak Sawsaro Hang,
5. Yokooding Sawaro Hang,
6. Manguiphungma Khambak Sawaro Hang,
7. Moguplungma Longsoding Sawaro Hang,
8. Yokphoding Sawaro Hang,
9. Yokpooding Laingbo Hang,
10. Tatoli Toingbo Hang,

These ten brothers had many children and their descendants multiplied very quickly till they became a Nation and were called Limbu. The Limbus were subject to the 8 'Aapunge' kings of the country. They were highly torturous and the Limbus were very much oppressed. The kings ruled them with such a hard rule and oppressed them so greatly, that eventually, those who were unable to bear with their oppression revolted against them. Then the Limbus have joined together in the place called Ambepojoma Kamketlangma Sumhatlungma, consulted together and determined to fight the kings of the country, and derived them out of the country. So, there was a war between those ten brothers and the kings. Finally, the 10 Limbu brothers defeated the tyrant kings. After defeating those tyrant brothers (8 *aapungee*) there was a controversy among the ten Limbu brothers who would be the king but they decided unanimously that none would be the single leader. So, they would divide the whole territory or region into 17 thums, which were spread over 17 thums. But those 17 thums were under the control of 10 Limboo brothers, who conquered the territory. According to them the inhabitation of the Limboos is known as Limbuwan. This has 17 thum, which are:

1. Mewakhole
2. Mawakhole,
3. Tamorkhola,
4. Aathrai,
5. Fedap,
6. Chethar,
7. Yangrup
8. Panchthar,
9. Chaubisha,
10. Mikliang Pahar,
11. Sakhueouttar
12. Panchkhopan,
13. Samyauttar,
14. Dashnajhiya
15. Khalsha
16. Jhalghora,
17. Chokhola

The Limbus have their own story about the origin of human civilization and “Mundhum”, the oral scripture of the Limbus, which has been handed down to generation next, by the word of mouth exclusively. This Mundhum serves as the canon of the codes of the Limbu socialization, their moral values and the very orientation of their lifestyle. From the time of birth till death the Limbus are disciplined in the life full of religious rituals, traditions and culture, devi-devta, bhut-pret, sime-bhume, nag-nagin and the natural elements. “out of all religions known to this world, only these two religions believe in multiple soul theory” (Subba, 1999).

The historical evidence proves that the landmass lying in between the Ann River in the west to Tista river in the east, prior to the establishment of Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim was known as Limbuwan (the land of the Limbus). In 1941-42 most of the petty kings of Limbuwan, Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim along with the Lepcha chiefs and Bhutias, which lead to a historical tripartite agreement of Lho-man-Tsang-sum”. They followed the formation of the Himalayan Kingdom the area of which

extended from the Chumbi valley in the east to the Arun River in the west and they named this landmass a kingdom as “SONGKHIM” (means a new home in Limboo language) or “SINGHIM” (means wood house in Limbu language). The word later on corrupted to “SIKHIM” and then to “SIKKIM”. However, the Limbhuwan area in between Mechi River and the Tista River is comprising of the present Darjeeling district of West Bengal, the west and south district and a part of the northern district of Sikkim, then Ilam district of Nepal remained under the control of Namgyal Dynasty (SIKKIM) till 1774 A.D, when these areas also surrounded the Administration of Greater Nepal (Prithvi Narayan Saha).

On the basis of the religious beliefs, the Limbus are divided into two: Yumasiem who are nature worshippers and are vegetarian, who do not take alcohol. They believe in the godly incarnation, who appears as a saint and known as Yumasiem and the last incarnation appeared on the 19th August 2004. They have the holy book known as Mondongsapen and they believe in meditation. They celebrate Yamamang birthday.

The other group is Shremasiam who is a non-vegetarians and takes alcohol. According to Chaitanya Subba, who wrote in his book, “The Culture and Religions of Limboos”, three stocks of Kiranti people came from the north, known as “Lasa Kanba” (the common people call Lhasagotra). The second came from the south and south-east India is known as Kashi Thongba clans (common people call Kasigotra) and the third stock is known as Khambongba-Lungbongba. Their clans are divided into two: Lassa Gotro and Khasi Gotra. The Losaa have the sub-clans – Nogo, Pasangdav, Sowden, Phiga, KhamdakPhurombo. The Khasi gotra has the sub-clans viz. Tamling, Phadap, Lingdan. The young Limbu boy is free to choose his marriage partner within the tribe. But they are strictly exogamous (the custom of marrying only outside one’s own clan) and should marry outside the family kind and class.

Family and Marriage: The Nuclear family is most prevalent, but vertically extended families are also common. All the family members are tied together by bonds of love and affection. The father’s property is equally divided among the sons and unmarried daughters.

They are divided into a number of exogenous patrilineal clans or thars, differentiated on a social bar to regulate marriage. All these thars enjoy equal status and thars are totemic regulation of marriage alliance and an indication of descent is

the main function of that. Though they have two gotras like Khasi and Lasa but they have no specific function except at the time of rituals and as a tool for identity maker. The family size and family type in Kalimpong II (Pedong) differ from those of the villages in Darjeeling Sadar (Bijanbari). The family sizes in the former are smaller than that of the villages in the latter due to their fewer landholdings. In the Bijanbari area, the family is bigger and extended as their lands are bigger in size. The following table 5 shows the family size and family type in the villages under study:

The Limbus are endogamous at the community level and exogamous at the *thar* level at the time of marriage. Junior levirate and sororate marriage are permissible. Vermilion and ‘potemala’ are the symbols of a married woman. ‘Rite’ (bride price) is a custom and paid in both cash and kind. The recent changes are a rise in the incidence of divorce and liberalization of the rules of remarriage. Polygamy is not widely practiced; it is practiced only if the wife is barren or has failed to produce sons. Kinship is very important in a marriage. A union with kin is considered successful and ideal. For the Limbus there are three types of marriages: adultery, arrangement, and “theft.” All three are legal. In the case of adulterous marriage, a bride-price is not required. Some compensation is paid to the former husband by the new husband. Also, if the woman is single, the new husband visits the woman’s natal home with offerings to form a closer bond with her family. “Theft” marriages are common. The term “theft” means that she has agreed to be taken without negotiations. Such

Table 5: Family size and Family type in the villages understudy

Sl. No.	Village Name	Family Size (in percentage)			Family Type (in Percentage)			
		Small (1-3)	Medium (4-5)	Big (6 & above)	Nuclear	Extended	Joint	Broken
01	Kalimpong II Kashyong Khasmahal	50	50	–	50	50	–	–
02	Sakiyong Khasmahal		67	33	67	33	–	–
03	Darjeeling Sadar Upper Nor Busty	–	–	100	–	100	–	–
04	Sumbuck	–	–	100	–	100	–	–

elopement is one way to avoid the high cost of a bride-price. The women in these marriages are considered as weak subjects, labour resources, and child bearers. For the Limbus these undesirable marriages, especially theft of married women, are usually initiated at dances.

Economy: The majority of the Limbus resides in rural and remote areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills leading a life of economic hardship and social deprivation. As mentioned above that Limbus were once pastoralists and they probably took their cattle to higher altitudes to summer and came down to the middle hills during winter (Subba, 2010: 119). Nowadays, primarily they are agriculturists by nature but do not pay much attention to horticultural cash crops from which the other tribal communities of their habitat earn a good amount of cash that helped in the economic empowerment of their members. The land is the main resource of them and 80 per cent of the people depend on it. Though their present occupation is terrace cultivation but also work as daily labourers in agricultural fields. They used to own a vast area of land. Because of their pecuniary difficulties, most of them had to sell their cultivable lands to other people. As a consequence, they became agricultural labourers. Most of the families are having no proper cultivable lands and other properties. Hence, a large number of Limbu youths moved to different states as wage labourers (Chatterjee, 2007). A sexual division of labor occurs in agriculture. Men plow the fields, women plant the seeds, and at the harvesting period, both sexes join to complete the job. During cultivation families bring friends to help with the fields. These groups of people share labor with one another during especially busy times.

A sizeable number of Limbu youths are enlisted in the British and Indian Gorkha regiments. Able-bodied young men of this community have joined defence or in police forces. A very negligible number of families of this community have ventured into setting up a small business. Some of the members of this community are employed in Government services. But this number is also negligible. At present, it is seen that some of them are engaged in various white-collar jobs like teaching at schools and government and private sectors. Due to lack of proper education or being handicapped in acquiring the required standard of education they are now gradually losing potential employment opportunities in various government services of both state and central agencies, which the other communities in the areas are

grabbing. However, looking at the past, a good amount of cash at present is now helping them in the economic empowerment of their members. Some of them have also started working in Tea Estates and in Cinchona plantations as daily wage earners. Generally, they are interested in keeping or rearing pigs which are used by them in their marriage ceremonies and in appeasing their deities through sacrifices. Limbus do not encourage the cultivation of bamboos because the land around bamboo groves becomes unfertile. With deforestation, not much fauna remains today. They have very poor knowledge about the economic value of their activities. Unless they get proper education, guidance and opportunity, their economic condition is not likely to be altered satisfactorily. Most farmers are smallholders; as per-capita availability of land has been declining rapidly due to population pressure. The climate and seasons are conducive to growing a large number of high-value cash crops like cardamom, ginger, potatoes and horticultural crops. In general, rice, wheat and oranges are grown at lower elevations, while crops like maize, potatoes, ginger and cardamom are grown in the higher areas. Because of the favorable climate, many people are also commercial flower producers. In the Kalimpong II subdivision in the village Kashyong, nearly two-thirds are cultivators. Due to the better educational status, a good number of the people are in the service. A few of them in that village are involved in labour activities. In the involvement of different livelihood activities, the males and the females almost equal in the Kashyong villages. In the village Sakiyong half of the villagers are involved in different types of services. A good number of the villagers are cultivators. Few numbers of villagers are involved in labour activities. In the village Upper nor busy one-third of the villagers are cultivators and half of the villagers are involved in the service. In the village Sumbuck, a large section of the villagers is cultivators. Few are involved in the service. The following table shows the livelihood pattern in the four villages of Darjeeling district:

In the Kalimpong II sub-division a half of the villagers are medium and the rest half of the villagers are big farmers. In the village Sakiyong, one-third of the villagers are small and a small number of villagers are categorized under big farmers. In the Darjeeling Sadar subdivision in the village, Upper Nor busy half of the villagers are small farmers and a half are medium farmers. In the village Sumbuck a half of the villagers are medium farmers and a half are the big farmers. The following table shows the land ownership pattern in the Darjeeling district:

From the Government Standard Annual income this has been in the Kalimpong II sub-division in the village Kashyong a half of the villagers belong to the middle class and among the rest, 33% belong to the lower section and 17% comes under the rich section. This is just opposite to the Sakiyong village where the lower economic class is less (17%) and the rich people are more in the village than that of the village Kashyong, In the Darjeeling Sadar sub-division, the poorer section is high in the village Upper Nor Busty. The economic solvency is comparatively less. Half of the villagers come under the poor sections. The rest half that is 25% each comes under the lower and middle economic classes. In the village due to good income sources (see table table 7 and 8) sixty percent of the villagers of the village Sumbuck belong to the middle economic class and the rest 40% are included in the rich section.

Religious Beliefs and Practices: The Limbu cultural and religious life are guided by Mundhum, a religious scripture existing for centuries through oral practice. They have a long tradition of narrating or reciting mundhums and performing rituals and ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. There are several mundhums as sources of inspiration, information and enlightenment which considerably help shape the way of life, customs, rites and rituals from pre-birth rites to after death, knowledge of everyday activities to the universe, and so on. Limbus believe in their god, who is the father “TagaeraNingbaFuma” and the creator of the whole universe, and who is worshipped as the Adi Shakti, primordial force or energy. Their supreme spirit is Yumasam. The philosophy of Yumaism is very strong. Yumaism deals with Phedangma systems, various types of souls, after-life destinations, relations with Gods and Goddesses, meaning and purpose of life, morality, ethics and humanity, human nature, rebirth and reincarnations etc. The concept of life in Yuma Samyo tradition believes in the “law of Biogenesis” – *life comes only from life*. Therefore, a natural resource system or a production system, such as farming, forestry, herding, collecting edibles or combinations of these are related to their religio-cultural believes.

Tagaera is not worshipped directly, but instead, she is worshipped as the earth goddess in the Yuba Samang Puja, where goats, fowl and pigs are sacrificed. They have their own tribal priests, known as Phedangma, who are skilled in performing rites, rituals and ceremonies. Samba, Mangba, Yeaba and Yeama are considered as priests too, but they are only oriented in one narrow area. For example, Yeaba (male) and Yeama (female) protect the community from the rage and vengeance of Nahaen, who is short-tempered god and is appeased through animal blood sacrifice once

Table 6: Livelihood pattern in the villages under study in Darjeeling District

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Sub-division</i>	<i>Name of the Village</i>	<i>Cultivation</i>	<i>Forest-based</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Fishery</i>	<i>Services</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Others</i>
01	Kalimpong II	Kashyong Male Khasmahal Female	62.4 61.5		15.8 13.1		21.4 23.9	0.43 1.5	
02		Sakiyong Male Khasmahal Female	40.3 35.5		8.0 8.1		50.9 55.6	0.80 0.80	
03	Darjeeling Sadar	Upper Nor Male Busty Female	33 35.5		8.0 8.1		50.9 55.6	0.80 0.80	
04		Sumbuck Male Female	80.4 67.7		0.00 0.00		17.6 32.3	2.00 0.00	

Table 7: Land ownership in the villages under study

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Sub-division</i>	<i>Village Name</i>	<i>Landless</i>	<i>> 1 ha</i>	<i>2-5 ha</i>	<i>5-10 ha</i>
01	Kalimpong II	Kashyong Khasmahal	–	–	50%	50%
02		Sakiyong Khasmahal	–	33%	50%	17%
03	Darjeeling Sadar	Upper Nor Busty	–	50%	50%	–
04		Sumbuck	–	–	50%	50%

every three years. They also protect from wizards and witches, who attempt to suck people's blood. Samba is adept, skilled in the ancient Limbu scriptures and Mangba is an exorcist, who drives evil spirits away by ritual prayers and incantations.

They perform 'puja' or worship to their primitive and animistic deities of the forest and homes. From birth to death, they are disciplined in their lives, which are full of religious rituals and traditions. They believe in *devi-devta* (deities), *bhut-pret* (evil spirits), *sime-bhume, nag-nagin* and the natural elements. The male counter-part of *Yuba Semangis Yeaba Semang*, the war god. *Agni Deo (God of Fire)*, *GrihaDeo (God of Home)* and *pataldeo* (God of home) are some deities who have been more emphasis by the Limbu. These are the strong indications that nature is deeply rooted in their Religio-believe. Men and women worship the forest deities, but only the women worship women deities. At their daughter's marriage, they carry along with their household deities to the husband's house. The forest deity is believed to look like an old woman with grey hair carrying a basket and a small sickle. Limbus considers this deity to be important for their overall prosperity. That they might have once been shifting cultivators is also indicated by the fact that they rarely have a permanent place of worship. They create an altar for worship at any clean place by slightly raising the platform and decorating it with plants like bamboo and plantain trees. For certain rituals, the decoration of the place of worship is extremely elaborate but everything is dismantled at the end of the ritual and thrown or left at a clean place. No trace of ritual performed or the articles used remains. The next time they have to perform such a ritual they find some other place, although sometimes there are restrictions related to the orientation from the house for performing a ritual.

Table 8: Annual Income in the villages under study

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Sub-division</i>	<i>Village Name</i>	<i>0-84,000 (Poor)</i>	<i>85,000-1,80,000 (Lower)</i>	<i>2,40,000-9,00,00 (Middle)</i>	<i>12,00,000-18,00,000 (Upper)</i>
1.	Kalimpong II	Kashyong Khasmahal	–	33%	50%	17%
2.	Darjeeling Sadar	Sakiyong Khasmahal	–	17%	50%	33%
3.		Upper Nor Busty	50%	25%	25%	–
4.		Sumbuck	–	–	60%	40%

The *patal* deity is *Okwana Samyang*, who is worshipped when a new home is to be built. It is believed that if it is not worshipped at least once a year, calamities will befall the house, at this deity resides in the earth's core. Naheen is a short-tempered deity and to satisfy and relieve him, animal sacrifice is offered once every three years. It is also believed that this god causes death and disease. The ban deity or *Tamjungma* is another feared deity, which, if not properly appeased, will cause misfortune to fall upon the community. To protect the house-hold from harmful calamities, nahangma puja sacrifice a rooster not less than a year old. It is performed by the phedangma, carrying bows and arrows. The ritual of animal sacrifice is seen as the only way to appease deities. For the good health and bright future of their daughters, parents perform a puja where a pair of chickens and saptak (home-brewed black millet beer-tongba) are offered in Mangaema puja. In addition, the most important and necessary offering is a piece of clothing, which should be offered in the name of the designated daughter.

In fact, both pastoralism and shifting cultivation give rise to a non-sedentary life, which is reflected in the deities they worship, the rituals they perform, the places of worship, the materials used for all this, etc. Such a life also depends on collecting food from forests and rivers rather than storing it for the lean season. Although Limbus have been sedentary for over two centuries now, the traces of their non-sedentary life can still be seen. Even today, a Limbu will leave his village and go another on the slightest pretext (Subba, 2010: 120).

The following table 9 shows the rituals and festivals in the Limbus:

In all the festivals, they offer home-brewed wines and beers, along with pork and mutton legs, curd, milk etc. to the Subba (Chieftain).

The secularistic activities of different festivals are performed by different dances. The *Dhaan Nach* (in Limbu word '*yarakama*' or '*yalangma*') is the main dance in the festivals. The dance is said to have originated as a dance-song for the harvest of paddy and is therefore called as the *Dhaan Nach* (the paddy Dance). It is believed that it was developed as people trampled paddy for threshing. It is actually performed after the paddy harvest, but before consuming it. It is danced on any open area within the compound and at *bat bazars* (weekly market), festivals and marriage. In this dance, the relatives are prohibited from dancing together and two dancers touch one another's toes, they have to leave the circle. If the dancers touch their knees,

Table 9: Rituals and Festivals in the villages of the Limbus

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Name of the Ritual/ Festival</i>	<i>Performances</i>
1.	Sawan Sankranti	Fasekpa	In this festival they offer newly grown fruits or cultivated products viz. maize, guava, pitch, cucumber peas, pumpkin to the gods or goddesses Yamamangpa
2.	Magh festival	Cofeklatamalang (Sikkim) –on the Magh Sankranti Kokfakwa-Tongnam (Darjeeling)-on the first day of Magh.	The festival takes place on the riverside. They offer ground fruits, tarul, spotting on those with the vermilion to the gods or goddesses, lighting the lamps and burning the sticks
3.	Dusserah	Vijaya Dashami (Darjeeling)	Khet puja
4.	Depawali or Kartic ceremony	Polyhang	They celebrate singing folksongs throughout the night. In Darjeeling, it is call Lakshmi puja
5.	Kartic puja (Kalimpong)	Undhouli Puja	Ancestral worship
6.	Kartic (Oct-November)	Nowagi (at Kalimpong)	New fruits, vegetables and the paddy becomes ripened
7.	Agrahayanpurnima (Decemeber)	Srijanga birthday celebration (the worship of the king at 19 th Century)	Trinshi birthday celebration
8.	Chait Darshe	During Ramnavami (Darjeeling)	New crops offering festival
9.	Chait-Baisakh (at Kalimpong)	Unbhoulis puja	Fish and river are worshipped

they must ask each other for pardon, make a gesture of “*Namaste*” (greeting with folding palms) and continue with the dance. Boys and girls sing in a stretched tone, holding one another’s hands alternately and in a line, they shuffle one foot forward and another backward. The strained song is known as “*pa-lem*”. This dance reflects the friendship and communal harmony among the people, creating interaction among the opposite sexes and helping them to relax. The song that is sung are love songs

and this creates love and affection among the participants and onlookers. It gives them an opportunity to choose their life partners. Limbu society does not force daughters to participate in the dance.

Chaybrung Nach is also quite popular but it is only performed at festivals and religious occasions. It is performed by large groups in the compounds of the village Subba. To indicate that the dance is commencing, *adhwoja*, which is a cloth banner (flag) attached to a tall pole, is erected. This can be seen from a distance and forms a visual invitation to the dance. The dance is performed by drumming a *dhol*, which is a drum without the black center part. There is no song for this dance, only the rhythm of the drum beating. Other participants spin a yak tail or *chamar*.

Khyali is another song, which has the custom of *chutkibalne* or *jumari* (duet). It is a type of verse, with a slightly impromptu dance. If the girl is unable to answer the queries that are hidden in the verse, she has to marry the boy who has posed the queries. If the girl wins, then the boy must do or pay as according to the bet they have upon, whatever this may be.

Socio-political System

As regards to their socio-political system, the traditional caste council Tummyanghang or JatiSamaj is still in vogue among them. The Limbu society is guided by the Tummyahang, the traditional council of the Limbu village constituted by the senior-most members of the society. The council consists of ten senior members from different clans residing in the village. Each village has their own Tummyahangs but anyone can join in any village as Tummyahang. There should be at least five, in case of unavailability of ten different clans in the village. But there must be at least ten members from different clans from different places for the formation of the topmost council. The function of the council varies. If the community makes any historical decision, then the Tummyahangs of different villages are called and made consensus collectively. The Limbus requires the Tummyahangs in each and every important event of the life cycles such as birth rituals, marriage, divorce, death rites, connubial norms and settling of intra-ethnic disputes etc. There is also the council of shamans but it is also guided by the Tummyahangs. Sharing information and executing customary laws were mostly oral except in cases of conflict. The community heads passed the laws orally and individuals would abide by them. The

Modern statutory gram panchayats look after the general development activities of the village as a whole. The pancha (the local government) can decide on the social boycott. Other moral crimes and sins, as well as major communal crimes like law-breaking, murder and other transgressions, can be judged by the local community *Pancha*.

DISCUSSION

(i) Origin, history, and the ethnic identity

Once the transhumant community still maintains their ethnicity by sharing the myths or folk-tales about their origin among themselves. They integrate the community members with their oral traditions with the initiations of human civilization and “Mundhum”, the oral scripture of the Limbus, which has been handed down from one generation to the next, by the word of mouth exclusively. This Mundhum serves as the canon of the codes of their socialization, moral values, and the very orientation of their lifestyle. The historical Limbuwan kingdom is still vibrant in their minds.

(ii) Social, economic and political life

They have a segmentary social system with patrilineal, patrilocal and patrilineal clan divisions. They are divided into a number of exogenous patrilineal clans or *thars*, differentiated on a social bar to regulate marriage. The Nuclear family is most prevalent, but vertically extended families are also common. The father's property is equally divided among the sons and unmarried daughters.

The Limbus are endogamous at the community level and exogamous at the *thar* level at the time of marriage. Junior levirate and sororate marriage are permissible. Polygamy is not widely practiced.

Living in remote areas, they are leading a life of economic hardship and social deprivation. Nowadays, they are primarily agriculturists by nature and give less attention to horticultural cash crops. The land is the main resource for them. They used to own a vast area of land. Because of their pecuniary difficulties, most of them had to sell their cultivable lands to other people. As a consequence, they became agricultural labourers. Able bodied young men of this community have joined defence or in police forces. A very negligible number of families have ventured into setting up a small business. Some of the members of this community are employed in

Government services. But this number is also negligible. At present, it is seen that some of them are engaged in various white-collar jobs like teaching at schools and government and private sectors.

(iii) Religious beliefs and practices

The Limbu cultural and religious life are guided by Mundhum, a religious scripture existing for centuries through oral practice. They have a long tradition of narrating or reciting mundhums and performing rituals and ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. There are several mundhums as sources of inspiration, information and enlightenment which considerably help shape the way of life, customs, rites and rituals from pre-birth rites to after death, knowledge of everyday activities to the universe, and so on. Limbus believe in their multiple gods and perform 'puja' or worship to their primitive and animistic deities of the forest and homes. From birth to death, they are disciplined in their lives, which are full of religious rituals and traditions. They believe in devi-devta (deities), bhut-pret (evil spirits). Men and women worship the forest deities, but only the women worship women deities.

CONCLUSION

The inhabitations of the Limbu are found to be wide-spread over the Eastern Himalayas, which erstwhile known as the Libuwan. Still, they conserve their traditional culture, language and religion which is quite distinct from other ethnic groups of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. The majority of the Limbus resides in rural and remote areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills leading a life of economic hardship and social deprivation. Though their present occupation is terrace cultivation but also work as daily labourers in agriculture fields. They used to own a vast area of land. Because of their pecuniary difficulties, most of them had to sell their cultivable lands to other people. As a consequence, they became agricultural labourers. Most of the families are having no proper cultivable lands and other properties. Hence, a large number of Limbu youths moved to different states as wage labourers. A sizeable number of Limbu youths are enlisted in the British and Indian Gorkha regiments. A very negligible number of families of this community have ventured into setting up a small business. Some of the members of this community are employed in Government services. They are socially and economically backward, downtrodden. They have their own traditions and culture.

Their language and religion is separate which are considered the culture core of every ethnic group. But practices of these are presently highly threatened; every year it is dwindling down due to various factors ranging from socio-economic to political pressures. The community has suffered immensely due to various reasons and the language and culture are almost at the verge of extinction. The language is spoken by less than 30 per cent of people and due to lack of facilities, the children are not able to learn. The culture and behaviours of the advanced Nepali speaking castes of present Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayan region has greatly influenced the Limbu youths which ultimately influenced the mind setup and reflected in the food, dress and lifestyle of the Limbu youths. Being a minority community if proper attention is not given to its great culture then the thousand-year-old language will perish gradually forever Limbus now willing to adopt modern forces of changes. They are politically conscious and are gradually emerged their way as an up growing community especially the government has granted Tribal status to them in 2003.

RECOMMENDATION

A thorough and broad study is necessary to explore the persistence and change of the Limbu culture on the Eastern Himalayas to show their traditional identity and change under the influence of the other cultures. It is essential to study and document their indigenous knowledge and conservation practices in their own land in natural resource management.

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To cite this article:

Debashis Debnath. The Limbus of North Bengal: An Anthropological Study in two Districts of West Bengal. *Man, Environment and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2020, pp. 127-152