



SOCIETY AND ECONOMY:

B THE LIMBOOS OF SIKKIM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER -1	1
INTRODUCTION	
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Evolution of the Notion 'Tribe' in India	3
1.3. Definition of Tribe	4
1.4. Tribes in Indian Constitution	5
1.5. Distribution of Tribal Population in India	6
1.6. Socio-Economic Problems of the Tribal Community	8
CHAPTER -2	12
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Changing of Dialects of Tribes	12
2.3. Land Issue of Tribal Community	13
2.4. Failure of Developmental Policies for Tribal Community	14
2.5. Food Starvation	15
2.6. Health Issues of Tribes	15
2.7. Socio-Economic Conditions of Tribes	16
2.8. Gender Disparities in Education Level	18
2.9. Historical Evolution of Tribal Community in Sikkim	19
CHPATER- 3	25
STATE OF SIKKIM	
3.1. Introduction	25

3.2. Administrative Division of Sikkim	27
3.3. Demography of Sikkim	28
3.4 Literacy Rate	31
3.5. East District	32
3.5.1. <i>Religion-wise Distribution of Population</i>	34
3.6. Sex Ratio	35
3.7. Literacy Rate	35
3.8. West District	36
3.9. Religion Classification	38
3.10. Sex Ratio	39
3.11. North District	39
3.12. Religion Classification	41
3.13. South District	42
3.14. Religion Classification	44
 CHAPTER- 4	 46
 ECONOMY OF SIKKIM	
4.1. Introduction	46
4.2 Sector- wise Classification	47
4.3 Workers' Profile	49
4.4. West District Workers Profile	50
4.5. North District Workers Profile	51
4.6. South District Workers Profile	51
 CHAPTER-5	 59
 THE LIMBOOS: A TRIBE OF SIKKIM	
5.1. Introduction	59
5.2. Demographic Trend of Limboos in Sikkim	63

5.3. Limboos: Autochthonous Inhabitants of Sikkim	66
5.4. Decline of Status of the Limboos in the Sikkim	69
5.5. Religion and Festivals	69
5.5.1. <i>Life Stages According to Yumaism</i>	72
5.5.2. <i>Shaman-Phedangma</i>	73
5.5.3. <i>Teachings of Yumaism</i>	75
5.6. Literacy Rate	76
5.7 Limboo Culture	78
5.8. Limboo Traditional Dress	78
5.8.1. <i>Female Dresses and Ornaments</i>	79
5.8.2. <i>Limboo Male Dresses</i>	79
5.9. Wedding Ceremony	80
5.10 Traditional Songs and Dance	81
5.11. Traditional Musical Instruments	83
5.12. Classic Food Items of the Limboo	83
CHAPTER-6	84
ECONOMY OF LIMBOOS	
6.1. Introduction	84
6.2. Employment Status	85
6.3. Income of Limboo Community	87
6.4. Development Policies for Limboo Tribe and other Tribes in Sikkim	88
6.4.1. <i>Land Revenue</i>	89
6.4.2. <i>Sikkim ST, SC and OBC Development Corporation (SABCCO)</i>	90
6.2.3. <i>Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)</i>	90

CHAPTER- 7	92
SURVEY ANALYSIS –LIMBOO HOUSEHOLDS	
7.1. Profile of Study Area	92
7.2. Research Questions	94
7.3. Objectives of the Study	94
7.4. Hypotheses	94
7.5. Data Source	96
7.5.1. Sources of Data	96
7.5.2. Type of Data	97
7.6. Methods of Analysis	98
7.7. Results and Discussion	112
7.8. Regression Analysis	119
7.8.1. Empirical Regression Model	119
7.8.2. Correlation	120
7.9. Logit Regression Model	121
CHAPTER – 8	124
CONCLUSION AND SUGESTIONS	
8.1. Conclusion	124
8.2. Implications and Suggestions	128
8.3. Limitation of the Study	128
Bibliography:	129
APPENDIX- I	135
Table: 1: Tribal Population	135
Aborigines	135

Limboo Script/Sirijunga Sak-Sak	138
APPENDIX- II	139
1. Map of India	139
2. Map of India	139
APPENDIX- III	141
Questionnaire	141
INDEX	153

CHAPTER -1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The *adivasi* (original inhabitants) is the collective name used for the many tribal peoples of India. Officially they are termed as “Scheduled Tribes” (STs) but this is a legal and constitutional term which differs from state to state and area to area and therefore excludes some groups who might be considered tribal. Adivasis are not an homogenous group — with over 200 tribes speaking over 100 languages, which vary greatly in ethnicity, culture and language; however there are similarities in their way of life. There are over 50 million adivasis constituting 7.5% of the Indian population, thus making it the largest tribal population in the world. Adivasis are found throughout India especially in the mountain and hill areas- geographically unsuitable for smooth and comfortable living. They are concentrated in the central states of India, notably Madhya Pradesh, Orissa (now renamed as Odisha), southern Bihar, the Western *Ghats* (hills) of Gujarat and Maharashtra and northern Andhra Pradesh. There are smaller groups in the mountain areas of the south, notably in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The other concentration is found in the North-Eastern states, (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunchal Pradesh, Sikkim) but here the situation is significantly different as in most of these states (the exceptions are Assam and Tripura) adivasis are a majority and are likely to remain so since regulations restrict settlement by outsiders.

Despite their relatively low share in the total population, tribal population have played a vital and significant role in societal development and over development of the economy despite their own underdevelopment. Every tribe has its own intrinsic rich culture, customs, traditions, values which are distinct from others.

In this context, Sahlins (1968) considers tribe to be an ethnographic heritage from Neolithic times. Tribe possessed magnificent skill and knowledge of art, dance and music, biodiversity, medicine and folk remedies, folk culture, knowledge and protection of plant varieties, handicrafts, design, literature which is called traditional knowledge. Tribes are playing a magnificent role in maintaining sustainable development by preserving natural resources within which they live. They do not exploit mineral resources which are mainstay of Indian economy as industries and for that matter; capitalism cannot exist without mineral resources. In fact they do not use mineral resources at all but tribes supply abundant industrial labours at low wage rate, especially unskilled (Sen, 1992). Tribes are mainly subsistence cultivators and practise traditional farming. They are eco-friendly farmers because they do not utilize chemical fertilizer, pesticides and other sophisticated tools which can degrade land and environment. Because of their knowledge and protection of medicinal plants further they are helping in keeping ecological balance by protecting several medicinal plants from exhaustion and extinction. Foundation (2001) reported that 83 varieties of trees, 21 varieties of herbs, 18 varieties of shrubs, 10 varieties of grasses and 11 varieties of climber are utilised for medicinal purposive among the tribal people in India.

Excellent knowledge of traditional treatment helps treatment cost-effective for Tribes themselves and for their neighbours. And they are much self reliant in health issues as compared to other ethnic groups (Shankar and Kavita, 2010). India is also known for ethno-botanical richness in the world and this could be possible, arguably only because of eco-friendly nature of tribes. In India there are about 7,500 plants out of total of 17,000 plants which are used to treat various diseases by 4,369 ethnic communities of India (Loganathan, 2001). Tribes are playing a vital role in preserving and conserving many natural resources like culture, values, traditional farming, green vegetation, medicinal plants etc. from extinct. Perhaps, this fact

Constitution of India does not permit to discriminate to weaker section like Scheduled Tribe on basis of their race, caste, religion, culture, place of birth, dresses, etc. rather Constitution has framed and enacted various provisions for their safeguard. Chhetri (2013) advocates the Constitution also enjoins upon the state to make special provisions of affirmative discrimination for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes.

1.2. Evolution of the Notion 'Tribe' in India

Adivasis are some of the earliest inhabitants of the sub-continent and once inhabited much greater areas than at present. However little is known of their history although it appears that many were pushed into the hill areas after the invasions of the Indo-Aryan tribes 3,000 years ago. The tribes were not integrated into Hindu caste society; they stood outside it but there were many points of contact-religious belief and trade contact. In turn some Tribal rulers conquered and ruled over non-tribal people and some tribal people permanently settled and entered caste society.

The British government made substantial inroads into adivasi society. British rule brought money, government officials and moneylenders into tribal areas, beginning the process of encroachment of adivasi land by outsiders. As a result there were tribal revolts from the mid-nineteenth century in several parts of eastern India and this forced the administration to recognize the vulnerable position of tribal people and pass laws to protect their lands from outsiders. These laws (some of which are still on the Statute book) have completely barred the sale of tribal lands to non-tribal people and have made provisions to restore the alienated lands. Christian missions began to proselytize in some tribal areas where (in contrast to Hindu and Muslim areas) they achieved a degree of success and also, most notably in the North-East, began the process of education and political awareness. Tribal people played little role in the run-up to independence and

it was only in the north-east that they had enough political consciousness to make demands for separation or autonomy.

It is a fact that tribal population are minority in India which constitutes only 8.6 % to the total population of India but unlike the SCs population they are not discriminated by majority population in our societies. In India approximately 700 tribal groups are found (Chhetri, 2013). The word 'tribe' was introduced by colonial administration. It was part of the universal trend to dichotomize the indigenous people and colonizer, the savage and civilized, the tribes and non-tribes (Singh, 1995). During the colonial period British rulers had to face tribal insurgency and unrest but that insurgency was suppressed by using armed forces by colonial rulers. At same time British government had realised the problems of tribes and to solve those problems the British administration had also passed the Scheduled District Act in 1874 to administer uniform throughout the tribal territories (Sen, 1992). After British government the Constitution of India had recognised Scheduled Tribe as weaker section of society based on their socio-economic condition. Any tribal group becomes Scheduled Tribe only when it is notified by Constitution of India under Article 342 of the constitution (Suresh, 2014). It is very transparent that tribes are socio-economically backward and exploited more as compared to non-tribal people. Weak accessibility of basic needs like food, cloth and shelter are fundamental problems faced by tribes in our country. In addition to this problem, lack of potable water, low level of education, inadequate medical facilities, lack of mode of communication etc. are also main characteristics of tribal community.

1.3. Definition of Tribe

Tribes are often referred to as *Adhivasi*, *Vanyajati*, *Vanvasi*, *Pahari*, *Adamjati* and *Jan Jati* latter being the Constitutional name. Different anthropologists, sociologists and social scientists have been defined term 'tribe' in different ways

and there is no specific universal definition of term tribe (Basu, 2000). Naik (1968) asserts that anthropologists are unable to give any appropriate definition for tribe. Many anthropologists have defined a tribe is no different from a caste (Ghurye 1943, 1959; Beteille, 1974; Bailey, 1960). According to Empirical Gazetteer of India "tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a same dialect, occupation to occupation a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so". According to Mazumdar (1958) a tribe is the collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members who occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations. In India among many definitions this is much relevant and accepted (Chhetri, 2013). According to Suresh (2014) a social group is usually an identified by a common territory, dialect, cultural homogeneity, social and political organisation. It may include several sub groups.

1.4. Tribes in Indian Constitution

Some of the important policies and provisions for STs in the constitution of India are as follows: **Article 15 (4)**: The State to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the SCs and STs; **Article 16 (4A)**: The State to make provisions in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services in favour of the SCs and STs; **Article (243) D**: Reservation of seats for the SCs and STs in every panchayat; **Article 243 (T)**: Reservation seats for the SCs and STs in every municipality; **Article 332**: Reservation of seats for the SCs and the STs in the legislative assemblies of states; **Article 342**: To specify the tribes or tribal communities to be STs; **Article 339 (1)**: Appointment of a Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled areas and the welfare of the STs in the State; **Article 340**:- Appointment of a Commission to investigate the condition of

socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations to remove such difficulties and improvement their conditions.

1.5. Distribution of Tribal Population in India

India, one of the pluralistic and multi cultural countries in the world, has rich diversity in cultures, languages and races. It is second most populous country in the world. The population of country constitutes different social ethnic groups like Scheduled SCs, STs, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and General Castes. As per 2011 Census, India's total population is 1.21 billion comprising of 0.62 billion males and 0.59 billion females. India's population grew by 17.7 % in a decade. In India, sex ratio is 940 females per 1000 males. According to 2011, census total literacy rate is 73% which is grew by 8% from last a decade. While male literacy rate is 80.1% and female literacy rate is 64.6% which grew by 5.6% and 10.9% respectively. It has also second largest ST population only after Africa (Chhetri, 2013). In India total tribal population is Ten Crore Fourty Three lakhs (2011 census) which is 8.6% of total population of country. Of the total ST population, male and female population are 50.3% and 49.7%. Sex ratio in ST has grown to 990 per 1000 males in 2011 from 978 females per 1000 males in 2001.

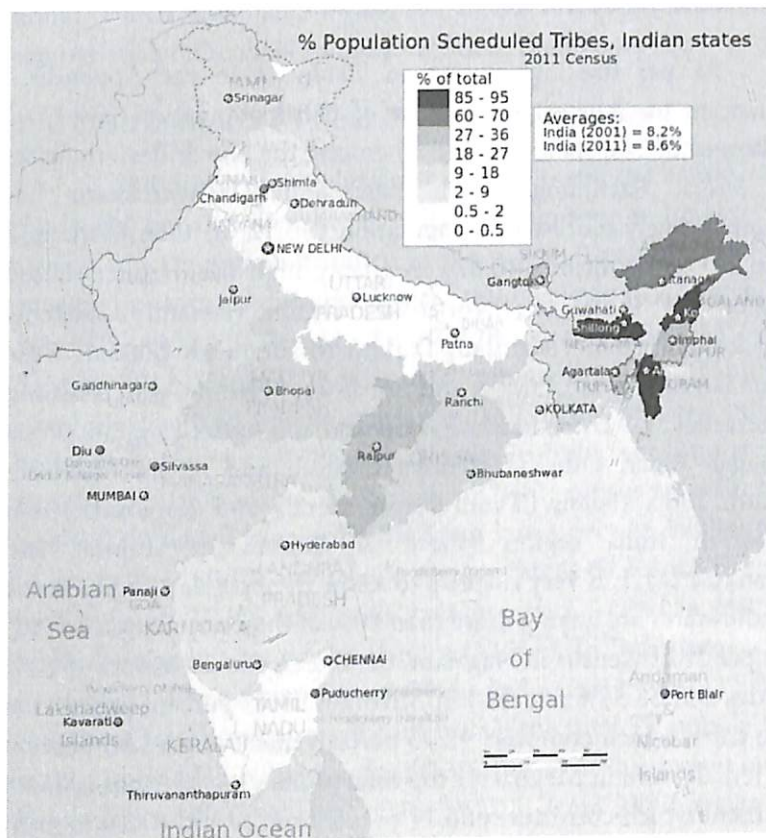
In brief, in India tribes are scattered throughout the country as non-tribes population. Almost they are found in every states and union territories of India except few states and union territories of country. Four most tribal dominated states are Chhitisgarh, Odisha, Jharkand, and Madhya Pradesh it is followed by North East "Seven Sister"¹ And other tribal dominated areas are Chotanagpur region, Central India, South India and North India (Census of India 2011). In Punjab and Haryana there is no any

¹ "Seven Sister" (Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya)

tribal population and union territories like Chadigarh, Delhi and Punduchery have not any ST population.

As per the information in Table-1.1 in the Appendix , Mizoram has highest percentage of tribal population (94.47%) followed by Nagaland (86.145%) among the North Eastern states of India. Excluding North East States, Chhattisgarh has comparatively more tribal population (30.62 %) than Jharkhand (26.20) and Odisha (30.62). Arguably high tribal concentrated regions in India are; North-East region (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim), Sub-Himalayan region of north and north-west (Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal and Utter Pradesh), Central and eastern region (West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Andra Pradesh), South India region (Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka) and Western India region (Parts of Rajasthaan, Gujurat and Maharastra). It is very surprise to know in north-east region some of the states are having more than 80% of their population are ST. As per 2011 Census in Nagaland 86.47 percent are tribes (84.51% males and 88.58% females) in Mizoram 94.43 percent population are tribes which comprise 92.96 percent males and 95.93 percent of females and in Meghalaya the total population of tribes is 86.14 percent which constitutes 86.11 percent males and 87.19 percent of females. Similarly in Sikkim 33.79 percent of total population of state are tribal people. 32.58 percent are males and 35.16 percent are tribal female population. Although it is less percentage comparing with previous north-states but it is remarkable comparative to national level. The major tribes of the world are given in the Appendix-1

Map-1. 1: Tribal Population of India



Source: Google Map (retrieved on 15/03/2018)

1.6. Socio-Economic Problems of the Tribal Community

Tribes are the weaker and impoverished section of the society. Despite central as well as state government special constitutional efforts tribes cannot escape from some serious and unsolved problems. For instance, the tribe of Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh facing land alienation problem. When non-tribal settlers lending money at higher rate of interest for long time, tribes fall in debt burden and to payback debt they concede their land (Rao et al, 2006). Displacement is also one of the serious problems for tribal people in our country and this is caused by

development projects. At least 55% of tribespersons² are displaced by various projects like irrigation systems, hydro power project, road construction, mining, construction of large scale industries etc (Saxena, 2006). Besides above mentioned problems low level of literacy rate and dropout rate, inaccessible health services and safe drinking water, poor environmental sanitation and hygiene, social barriers preventing utilisation of available health care services and vulnerability to specific diseases like G-6PD deficiency, Yaws and endemic disease like Malaria are unsolved problems (Suresh, 2014).

In each and every sphere tribespersons are facing different challenges including in agriculture sector. The tribe farmers are comparatively getting less income from their land vis-a-vis non-tribe farmers. Although their capital investment is much higher than their counterparts and it shows they are willing to increase their productivity, return is much lower than other farmers (Phansalkar and Verma, 2014). Apart from these, contemporary tribes are struggling with challenges like malnutrition and food crisis. Starvation is such a big obstacle for innocent tribes it has become painful for them because it takes lives on a significant scale. For example in Jharkhand 35 members of the Birhor tribe died because of starvation in 2008 and Birhors are the primitive tribe of region (Khera, 2009).

Even during British period weaker sections had faced lots of problem especially in religious field. All the primitive tribes have their own religion, faith and believe but some of the adherents, during the colonial period, joined other (Christian) religion (Preet, 1994). Because of conversion of religion, their culture and identities have been lost. In addition to this, problem related to disease, medical system, medicinal practice, diagnosis treatment and health rights are serious hindrance for tribal development

² Tribespersons: Tribal people.

The reserved forest is gradually increasing in India and this is because of government demarcation and declaration of new forest area as reserved area. Central as well as state government are doing this by enacting various forest Acts. It is a folly to say such policies have always positive impact in society because such policy also possesses disadvantages. Forest policy almost always hits the primitive tribes since, they are a part of the forest and their entire livelihood is based on it. Tribes of northern coastal Andhra Pradesh (AP) were practising 'Podu' (shifting cultivation) but mercilessly converted their cultivable land into reserved forest (Rao et al, 2006). The Kolam, Naikpods and Gonds are other tribes of Andhra Pradesh who became victim of forest policies adopted by state government. Even today tribes like Sauriya Pahariya, most of them do not know whether country is independent or slave (Narayan, 1986). It clearly shows that majority of tribes in nation are far from transportation and communication and they are far from general prosperity of nation. In India tribes are scattered throughout the country as non-tribes. Roughly tribal dominated areas are Chotanagpur region, Central India, South India and North-Eastern (NE) region including Sikkim. Conversion of religion, Land alienation, displacement, starvation deaths, malnutrition, identities crisis, and destruction of natural habitat are common phenomenon faced by the tribal societies. In addition to this, inaccessibility of health services, safe drinking water, unemployment, low level of literacy rate, indebtedness and exploitation by non-tribespersons are fundamental challenges faced by innocent tribes in our country. Thakur (1988) also stated that due to detribalisation and modernisation some of the primitive tribes are vanishing. In NE region every state has almost equal literacy rate more than on an average 70 percent. But if it is in case of tribal of NE states then only 'Mizo' has 60 percent of literacy rate while most of the others tribes have low. Whatever government policies are implemented for tribal development those policies are not successful. Anthropologists concerned with the planning for the development of the tribe are finding some gap between plan and real

development (Narayan, 1986). Because of failure of those policies the gap between tribes and non-tribes communities is widening. Since from the beginning of India got independent, the policy maker, planner and academicians are working to improve the socio-economic conditions of weaker sections but have remained as it is. Not only at national level but also state forest reserved area is also increasing and Tripura gives a pertinent example. In 1908-09 the forest reserved area was only 52 square kilometre (SqKm), and within 30 years it increased to 1,373sqkm (Sengupta, 2013). On the other hand agricultural production and yield rate of the Reang tribe decreased and also food availability substantially declined in Tripura. In contemporary world modernisation kills traditional culture and interest. Conversion of religion is serious problem facing by most of tribes in north east region. In Sikkim some of the Lepcha and Limboo tribes are already converted into 'Foreign Religion'³. And 'Mizo' of Mizoram state have adopted Christianity (Narayan, 1986).

³ Foreign Religion is Christianity