

**Changing Religious Scapes and Identity Construction
among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas**

A Thesis submitted

To

Sikkim University



In partial fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Under the Supervision of

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August 2022

Date: 27th June, 2022

DECLARATION

I, NISHA THAPA MANGER, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the thesis titled “Changing Religious Scapes and Identity Construction among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas” submitted to the Sikkim University in the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my original work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Changing Religious Scapes and Identity Construction among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas**” submitted to the Sikkim University in the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology** embodies the result of bonafide research carried out by **Ms. NISHA THAPA MANGER** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Associateship or Fellowship.

She has duly acknowledged all the assistance and help received during the investigation.

I recommend that the thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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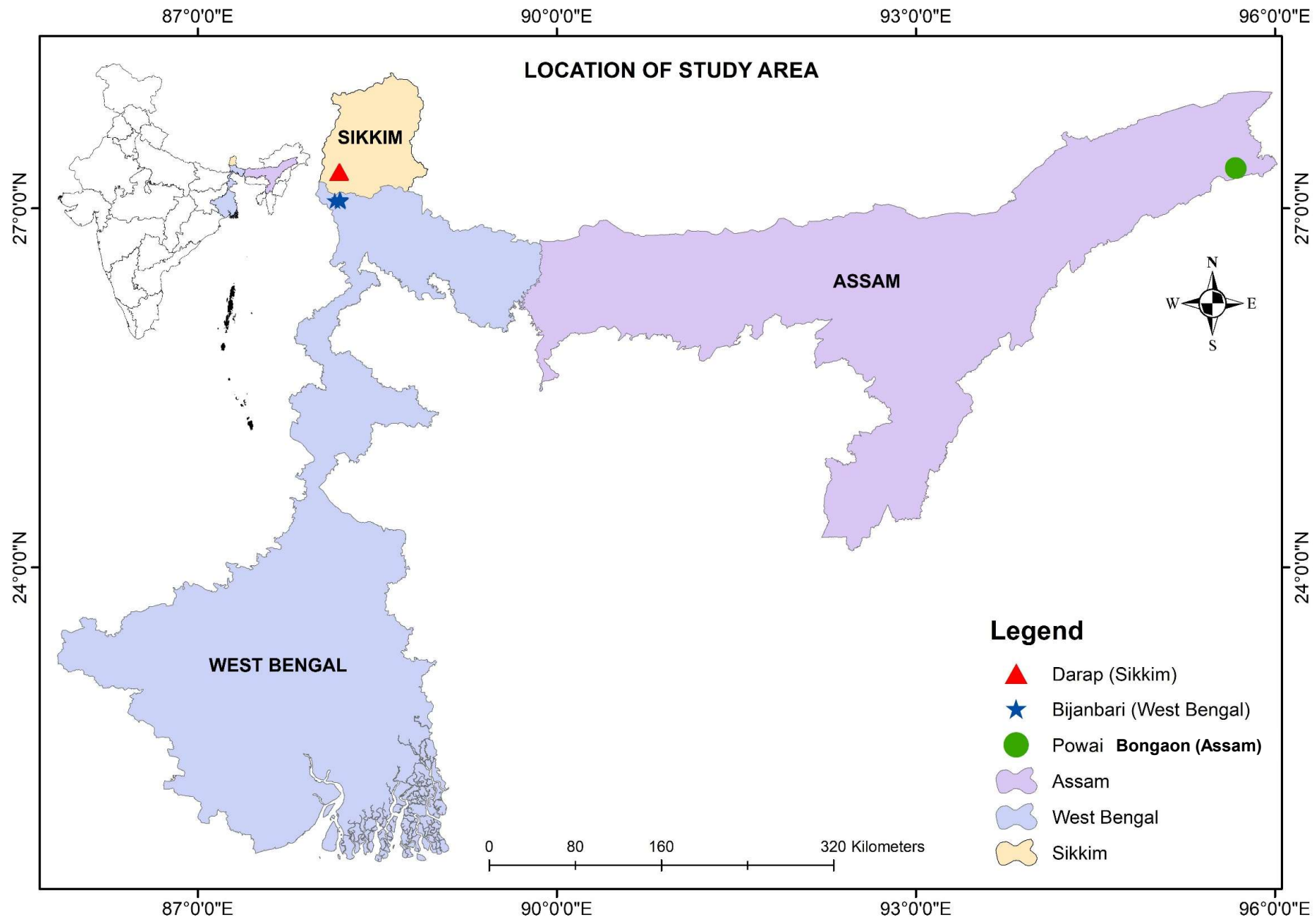
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- **Nisha Thapa Manger**



List of Abbreviations

DGHC	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
EGIDS	Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front
IB	Intelligence Branch
KYC	Kirat Yakthung Chumlung
MNO	Mongol National Organization
NOC	No-Objection Certificate
ST	Schedule Tribe
YMMCC	Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Ethnographic encounter never ends’ echoes an aspect that appears plainly and yet so essential to hold on to as an anthropologist”

- Crapanzano (1980)

On a day on Spring 2019, amid the field work, the researcher, walking towards the field site, sensed someone following her. She then took a detour from the initially intended path and ended up in *Mangheem*¹ (Limbu worship place). Interestingly, this worship place now illustrates this thesis with photographs. Setting up the camera, she started taking photographs of *Mangheem*. During taking photographs, she was suddenly interrupted by a group of women (those following her from the very outset of fieldwork). They instantly called a man, surrounded her, asked aggressively about the purpose of the visits, and confiscated her possessions- camera, field notes, and belongings. They clicked her pictures without her consent, seized all her possessions, and even menaced her. They also opined that the topic under study to be polemic. Despite the unpleasant situation, she kept calm and tried to explain to them that she was a Ph.D. scholar besides full-fledged research; she had no ulterior motive for visiting the place. She further pleaded that if they were required to click her pictures, they could do so and even delete the pictures she took on the field site. However, she asked them to return her field notes and other possessions as those were important for

¹. The term *Mang* means ‘deity’, and *Heem* implies ‘house’, which represents a compound meaning of ‘house of deity’. In that sense, *Mangheem* means worship place.

her research study. She was overwhelmed by the predicament she found herself in and seeing their attitude and aggression made her unsure what to do. She could not control the situation and was forced to leave the village without completing the research study at that moment.

The researcher now finds herself with conflicted emotions. Should she retell the story and further relive the experience she faced, or should she bury it deep within the walls of her memory as an unpleasant experience? The emotions she experienced during the incident resurface frequently and urge her to retell the incidents and relive the same, by relating the emotions elicited during fieldwork and the results. At this juncture, one can notice the researcher conveys through ethnographic fieldwork, that the anthropologist is the gist-calibrated instrument. It is this quality by which anthropologist observe, learn, interpret, and present facts in scientific ways and thus achieve humanistic contributions to knowledge. As unassuming as the situation that the researcher found herself in and the entire incident seems, the experiences collected were different. She had encountered a group whose purpose was to make her leave the village. Their main intention was not to want the present research on Limbu traditional religion to take place.

On reflecting the fieldwork data, the supportive role of the Satya Hangma religious movement² stirred the birth of the Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center (hereafter YMMCC) movement among the Limbus. The movement originated with the recognition, in 2004, of a young woman (the then Sancha Maya Limbu, 15 years

²Satya Hangma religious movement (C. Subba 1995:87) was developed by the ascetic Phalgunanda Lingden (1885-1949), from Panchthar in East Nepal, who propagated its use as a symbol of a reformed Kirati religion in opposition to the Rana regime (1846-1951). This reform started by Phalgunanda regained strength from the 1930s, and can be interpreted as the “Sanskritization” of religious practices (Gaenszle 2011:290). It entailed not merely ‘to rid Kirati religion its ‘bad’ cultural aspects and in external influences in order to find its original purity’ but also to ‘revise’ religion (Schlemmer 2003/2004:132).

old) in Darap, West Sikkim as a reincarnation of *Yuma. Sri Sri Yuma Mang*, as she is called, gives teachings and public speeches at the YMMCC, focusing on spirituality, compassion, and respect between followers of all faiths. She shares many aspects of her teaching and clothing with Omnanada³- the leader of Lovism or Heavenly Path. As a result, this led to the intra-religious division of Yumaism into two sects: the associations version of Yumaism and the YMMCC version of Yumaism (the primary opponent of the association form of Yumaism). The trend of religious change has resulted in severe predicaments of ideological rivalry and complexity in the way of life in Limbu society.

On another note, in the context of narrating a story of a more or less unbroken stretch of unpredictable fieldwork experiences, the researcher recounts the unfortunate incidents of that particular encounter where their intentions were as clear as the reflection of a mirror when they stated, “If you wanted to research Limbu religion then mark the words that there is no existence of a single *Phedangma*⁴ (Limbu priest) in our village”. Nonetheless, if you wish to focus on YMMCC, you will get more than enough insights. They added “Keep in mind that the researchers of past days that tried to study about traditional religion never succeeded in their academics. Hence, if you focus your research on YMMCC then there is no doubt that this will lead to success”.

³Omnanada, belonging to the Rai community, claimed to be following in Phalgunanda’s footsteps. He was born in 1979 in Mainamaina, in the Udayapur district. He has become the global spiritual leader of a religious movement called Lovism or Heavenly Path. Omnanada represents the new revived movement among the Rai. This development shows that the movement has now split along ethnic lines and that the Rai at present have their offshoot (Gaenzle 2016; von Stockhausen & Wettstein 2013; Chettri 2017).

⁴In the actual sense, *Phedangma* is a specific type of ritual specialist, but it is also an umbrella term for ritual specialist. Therefore, the term *Phedangma* will be used as a general term throughout the thesis, and in order to prevent confusion, in cases, the researcher will use ‘ritual specialist’ or ‘Limbu priest’.

The researcher wonder, if these people can challenge the non-Limbus, then what is their reaction to their community members who do not follow what they want? They have cleaved a great chasm within the same community and have separated themselves from one another. Most of the religions have accepted ideology or beliefs that followers must accept without question. This can lead to inflexibility and intolerance. At the same time, scripture and ideology are oft obscure and exposed to interpretation. Consequently, conflict can arise over whose interpretation is the right one, a conflict that eventually cannot be solved for there is no supreme authority. Generally, the winner is an interpretation that interests the most followers.

It is hoped that the readers, through the narration of the above incident, now have an improved insight that the researcher initially received a restrictive perspective by viewing the research topic as polemic and potentially can be unsuccessful. Nevertheless, a hopeful vibe for venture and proven motivation outweighs research criticism for study.

This thesis is ethnography of Limbus, who lives in Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam. They call themselves Yakthumba from the Limbu words *Yakthung* or *Yakthum*, meaning heroes of the hills. Traditions has it that their creator God, *Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Yambami Mang*, created their progenitors *Mujingna Khewangnama* and *Sodhungen Lepmuhang* in the valley of *Phuktanglungma Pembunlungma-Kumbhakarna* (Mt. Kanchenjunga). They have no migration history and claim to have lived in the eternal paradise named *Munatembe* since perennial.

It is understood, that the Limbus are generally animists which denotes nature-based Deities are worshipped. The evolutionary perspectives on the origins and practice of religion among earliest communities by anthropologists suggest that these primordial

groups have passed through various phases from worshipping multiple Gods and Deities to a more sophisticated singular form. Tylor (1871) postulate, that primitive forms of earliest forms of religion have evolved from complex to simpler ways of worshipping. The current research study demonstrates on how Limbu religious practices have undergone transformation and contextualizes the contemporary religious change and Limbu identity.

Thematic Concepts

Religion

“Every way of seeing, is also a way of not seeing”

- Burke (1935:70)

The anthropology of religion is not about religion. If pressed, few anthropologists would be happy to give out a definition of religion with which they felt comfortable, and by far, the majority would be happy to concede that the concept of religion is a western category that does not translate at all well into, or out of, the diverse cultural idioms in which anthropologists work. There may well be aspects of the experiences of many non-western cultural groups that can be loosely defined as ‘religious’ (Nye 1999: 194).

There is an institutionally marked field within anthropology entitled ‘The Anthropology of Religion’. Nevertheless, like many of the theoretical status of the discipline is undermined by anthropologists; uncertainties about the subject matter: mapping out the terrain of religion, no one knows what it is. In that line, all that could be said with certainty is that anthropologists do not study the lone concept of religion.

Religion is intimately linked to culture: anthropologists study people who may or may not manifest religious beliefs in diverse ways. Having marked anthropology of religion as distinct, in this outlook, any religion, or religious manifestations that have been observed should be situated within the totality of people's culturally embedded lives (*Ibid*: 1999 emphasis added).

To be an anthropologist of religion one needs to address oneself to the broader discipline and discourses of social cultural anthropology. There are many different strands of thought within the anthropological study of religion. As Lambek (2002:2) observed, it is the conversation or tensions between these approaches that serve to define anthropology as a discipline as opposed to other disciplines which include religion within their remit.

Eller (2007:2) says, anthropology must offer something which the other discipline does not do. "It must raise specific questions, come from its specific perspective, and practice its specific method". Efforts have been continually made from time to time, through various anthropological studies to achieve this through the method of comparative study by adopting a holistic approach, diachronic study (change and continuity), cultural relativism, and cultural revivalism, etc.

An anthropological approach to paraphrasing is holistic, treating religion as aspect of culture rather than a separate sphere of activity. It is universalistic in its scope, with all human society past and present. It seeks to maintain a delicate balance between local knowledge and qualitative data on one hand and universal categories and generalize facts that lend themselves to theoretical speculation on the other.

What is the anthropology of religion? There are many different answers to such a question, indeed as many answers as there are anthropologists who focus on religion

to contribute to broader debates within anthropology (Asad 1987, Geertz 1973, Buckser and Glazier 2003, Lambek 2002). For a start, anthropologists can and often give socio-economic-political accounts of religious experiences or expressions. Theorizing without direct experience of what is being written about is not enough. There must be some hands-on experience to contextualize much of the religious activity which can be observed in the world today. These are the kinds of experiences that anthropologists feel. They are well trained and able to provide through ethnography. Methodologically then, anthropologists feel they have an edge, they can reach parts that other disciplines cannot reach (*Ibid*: 1999:194-198).

Situating the conceptual framework of religion, anthropological interest in the study of 'religion' extends as far back as the nineteenth century, wherein the emergence of anthropology is seen as an academic discipline (Barnard and Spencer 1996:726). From an anthropological stance, religion is identified as a dynamic entity of human existence studied in the structured social context (Eller 2007:28). The religious studies chiefly emphasized the postulate of 'origin', and definitions were framed accordingly (Bowie 2000:2). The early proponents like Tylor, Frazer, Spencer, and Lang used 'evolutionary theory' as their methodical axiom (Bharati 1971:232).

'Animism' was the prevailing custom as Tylor coined religion to be 'the belief in spiritual beings' (Tylor 1871:383). However, as connotations were exhibited inadequately, the scholars derived innumerable concepts of religion based on ideological conjectures. Spiro has reaffirmed Tylor's insistence that religion involves believing in being that is not encountered in normal empirical processes (Spiro 1966). Frazer (1976) elaborated, 'Religion consists of two elements- a belief in powers firmer than man and an attempt to propitiate or appease them'. Durkheim (1912) distinguished classification of things, sacred, and the profane and said that the

sense of sacredness binds individuals together and creates social integration, thus creating a collective consciousness.

It is opined that religion provides core values of a society and tries to make sense of two unanswerable questions such as death and the meaning of life, strengthening the norms and creating cultural homogeneity (Lepcha 2013:2). Dawson and Thiessen (2014) examined on social dimension – belief, ritual, experience and community shared by the world religions. To this outlook, Marx said, ‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is a religion to be the opium of the people’ (Marx 2001:83). Marx’s definition points to an underlying assumption that religion has a function in society; to alleviate distress in alienated and unhappy humanity (Santucci 2005:42). Religion guides the social and moral fabric of society and ‘orders a universe’, (Van Beek 1985:265) facilitating group solidarity.

Religion has many definitions, disagreements, and interpretations. Dunlap (1946:2) remarked, ‘The very number of definitions is a proof of the difficulty of the task and some scholars have explicitly concluded that trying to define religion is hopeless, though they go on to offer their definitions’. Scholars from various disciplines agree that there is no convincing general theory, and in that state of general stagnation of the anthropological study of religion.

Geertz (2000) proposes the universal definition of religion as a cultural system. For him, Religion is a system of symbols that acts to ‘establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men’ (*Ibid*: 2000:94) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (*Ibid*: 2000:98) ‘clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality’ (*Ibid*: 2000:109) ‘that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’ (*Ibid*: 2000:119). While Geertz was confident

about his definition, in a distinct remark, Asad (2002) criticizes the claim by saying ‘there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but for the reason that the definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes’ (*Ibid*: 2002:116). Religion is a western concept, and there is truth in Asad’s voice.

Regardless, of the definition problem, through the lens of various manifestations and its everchanging dynamics, religion has managed to sustain itself till now. It is theoretically and methodologically diverse, which allows scholars to find different ways to understand this phenomenon.

This study looks at religion as something which reflects on collective life that exists independently of and can exert an influence on the moral fabric of society. Often the diversity of religious ideologies generates an uncalled divide procreating the superiority of one religion over other religions. For instance, until the nineteenth century, the academic founder of western culture divided all the religions into four kinds: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Paganism. In that schema, everything outside the biblical tradition was labeled as ‘idolatry’ – the supposed worship of false Gods, or idols (Paden 1994:14).

Nevertheless, Yinger suggested anthropology has kept alive, an interest in religion as an important part of the life of the man (Yinger1958:495). Anthropologists’ emphasis on ethnography in a classical, empirical, and holistic sense still proves to be important in study of religion. Anthropologists are not concerned with determining certainty or untruth of religion. In actuality, anthropologists are interested in knowing how religious ideas express a people’s cosmology- the notions of how the cosmos is organized, and the protagonist of humans within the world.

In Limbu's perspective, religion is a set of belief and practices which comes from the principle of supernatural entities that influence, control and directs the lives of humankind and various other phenomena in the cosmos. It could be spirits, Deities, or other supernatural entities. The concept of religion among Limbus is somewhat identical to Wallace's (1966:107) 'a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers to achieve or prevent transformations of state in man and nature'.

Identity

"Identity is people's perceptions of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others"

- Hogg and Abrams (1988:2)

Identity is the human capacity rooted in the language in knowing 'who is who', and (hence 'what is what). This involves knowing who we are, who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing whom they think we are, and so on: mapping the human world and places in it, as individuals as members of collectivities (cf. Ashton et al.2004:5). Identity 'refers to how individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities' (Jenkins 1996: 4). Identity is a process and not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can have, or not, but it is something that one does. Identity can be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming' (Jenkins 2007:17). In answering "who am I?" we find our identity but it does not end here. Identity is constantly in the creation of what we want it to be. Identity studies initially focused on forming the "self" as an individual. To exemplify, Meiji and Driessen noted that identity 'is no longer seen as exclusive, as an individual, but more as dividual, divisible and therefore as multiply constructed

across different, often intersecting yet antithetical, discourses, practices and positions’ (Meijl and Driessen 2003:2)

In the last few decades, the focus has change over from the individual to the collective. As a result, identity studies have been relocated to collective site, with gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class form the “holy trinity” of the discursive field (Appiah and Gates 1995:1 as cited in Cerulo 1997:386). It is the ‘we-ness of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which the group members unite’ (*Ibid*: 1997:387).

Consequently, those who share the same identity similarly share the same history. It is also an understanding of who we are and who other people are. From this perspective, knowing who I am is a matter of distinguishing and distancing myself from you and that person over there. The recognition of ‘us’ hinges mainly upon our not being ‘them’ (Jenkins 2008:20). Search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what is not, identity politics is always a necessary politics for the creation of difference (Benhabib 1996:3). For groups to know the difference between themselves, and others, they must “announce” their identities (Goffman 1959,1969, Lamont 1992, McCall 1978 as cited in Hemanowicz, and Morgan 1999:198). By engaging in social practices that highlight their symbolic place in the world. Identity is a process of ‘inclusion and exclusion’; of belongingness and boundaries. Identity is a matter of being and it is this consciousness of belonging to this or that collect and of being a member of an imagined community that determines one’s identity (Shah 1994:1133 as cited in Lepcha 2013:6).

Religion plays an important role in shaping people’s culture and identity. If religion is understood to be an integral part of the culture, culture gives a sense of identity. The

triplet concepts are universal but, each highly contested. Nevertheless, they are at all times intermingling with one another at some level, and these concepts form the base of this thesis. Therewith, it will look at Hinduism, Yumaism,⁵ and YMMCC in Limbu society with an anthropological bent.

Religion can be shaped by culture and culture can be shaped by religion. What happens then when the religious identity precedes the cultural identity? Can the two identities co-exist? Where does religion end and culture begin? Or where does culture begin and religion end? Can the two be separated? Are there any rules that help clarify the boundaries between religion and culture? (Bonney 2004:25). It is in these questions that concepts have taken shape for this thesis. In the study of religion, religion and culture constantly appear as important aspects. At this backdrop, the study of religion requires studying culture and identity. There exists a correlation between religion, culture, and identity. If religion is a cultural tradition, is it possible to separate religion and culture? If the religion is a culture segment, studying religion becomes an ethnographic exercise. In anthropology, there can be no study of religion without a concomitant study of religious changes.

Statement of the Problem

“Conversion can, of course, mean other things”

- Peter Wood (1993:319)

⁵Limbu community attempted to devise a unified and revised Limbu religion, materialized in a recomposed religious practice called Yumaism, after the name of the Yuma (Limbu household deity) with the suffix ism.

Changing one's religion is to change one's world', (Buckser and Glazier 2003: xi). The religion held as a conservative force nurtures social integrity and corpus of meanings, morality and security against threats and innovations. Nonetheless, the modern world has witnessed the germination of religion with the invention of two or three categories (Lester 2002). Religious change, in general, is understood as a form of cultural change, which Malinowski (1961) defines as the process by which existing order of a society that is, religious, and physical civilization is transformed from one type to another. According to Graburn (2011), the tradition became synonymous with that entity that was overtaken by science or modernity (*Ibid*:2011:7).

Among Limbus, it was not only the 'other religion' but the cleavage between the two versions of Yumaism has paved way for significant variations among their religious belief and every day practices, which has similarly led forming different identity within the Limbu society. Therefore, in Durkheim's definition, it is the religion which enhances social solidarity in a society (Durkheim1912). With regard to the Limbu community, there are different versions towards who are the authentic/traditionalist Limbus. Undeniably, when one particular community has more than one religion, they have difficulties claiming one cultural community identity. Hence, the exposure of Hinduism and a bend of traditional religion towards a unified group is perceived as detrimental to their own society.

Lately, Limbus have started making exertions not to get fragmented their culture to find common ground and come along with a shared identity acceptable to Limbus despite different religious backgrounds. This research, therefore, sets out to explore Limbu religious issues and, existing contests and put forth what they are articulating as shared features of Limbus, and whether or not non-such articulation is uniform among Hinduism, Yumaism, and YMMCC.

Review of Literature

“A literature review should not only examine past research but also identify research gaps”

- Hart 2009; Rowe 2014; Webster and Watson 2002

Acknowledging the complexities of the religious changes, and identity construction as a concept and understanding its meaning within the larger context, it is now crucial to examine how ethnic identity has been understood and generated in the Eastern Himalayas literature. The literature reviewed in this part relates to the Limbus in East Nepal, Darjeeling, and Sikkim. Hence, this thesis aims to contribute supplementary to deliberations on Limbus in the purview of Eastern Himalayas that have already been initiated by the literature discussed below.

To structure the conceptual framework of the present study, the researcher has reviewed the corpus of pieces of literature on mapping the existent relevant working theories in the Eastern Himalayas. The framing would slot contemplating the relevant literature of East Nepal, Darjeeling, and Sikkim.

In recent years, Nepal has been undergoing a political transition that has brought societal changes to the forefront (Lawoti 2007). Scholars and also the social activists like (Bhattachan 1995, 2009, Gurung 1997, Lawoti 2012, Mabuhang 2012) consider ethnicity as a rigid and unchangeable phenomenon having essential implications in determining overall life chances (as cited in Subedi and Gautam 2016). Ethnicity is analyzed within the matrix of social exclusion and discrimination towards other ethnic groups in both the hills and plains region of Nepal by Nepali-speaking upper-caste ethnic groups. Ethnic-based organizations have produced numerous books,

maps, and surveys (Gurung et al. 2006, Sharma 2008) to map and quantify the ‘ethnic question’. Drawing on years of ethnographic fieldwork, Hangen’s (2010) provides an exciting perspective on the ethnic politics. It focuses on, one of the earliest proponents of ethnic political parties that participated in elections during the 1990s, the Mongol National Organization (hereafter MNO), which consists of multiple ethnic groups and has been mobilizing support in rural East Nepal. The MNO’s choice to work within national politics was unorthodox because, under Article 112 (3) of the 1990 constitution, the Election Commission barred registration of parties’ formation based on communal identity (*Ibid*:2010:44). Therefore, the MNO contended for Mongol’s rights in party politics without official status. Her conclusive analysis is that the assertion of Mongol racial identity was a political act. Schlemmer (2003, 2004, 2010) has published an interesting article on the change in the concept of Kirat identity in Nepal.

Equally, the concept of re-invention of Kirat tradition is exceptionally relevant in understanding the religious identity that has come to be colligated with the preservation and reinvention of tradition. Religion offers the most potent social fabric, and this leads to the reinvention of tradition (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) as well as reinventing of cultures (Hymes 1969). In the milieu of Limbus which is the emphasis of this thesis, an in-depth study on religion is restricted by limited literature, whereas ample of the existing research on the Limbu, can be situated within a shaman discourse.

From an anthropological outlook, Sagant’s (1996[1976]) grants a whole chapter to discuss aspects of shamanism among the Limbus. Sagant study is mainly concerned with religion, therefore, Sagant’s research inputs are useful for the present research study. Caplan (2000[1970]) examines Limbu-Hindu, and Brahman relationships

through the lens of how socio-economic changes takes place through their caste identity. Additionally, Caplan study has specifically not addressed the ritualistic differences between Hindu and Limbu communities as far as it is deemed necessary to study on 'great' and 'small' traditions in the Eastern Himalayas. Fitzpatrick (2011) study delineates the upsurge of cardamom commercial crop produce leading to the dynamics of human resource labour shifting to occupational mobility is important pathway of social and economic opportunities. However, in this study, religion is not given much attention. Jones and Jones, (1976) has explained a perspective with regard to the roles of Limbu women in their community. Additionally, Jones and Jones do not grant the ritual traditions of Limbus much attention. Nevertheless, Jones and Jones (1996[1976]) did contribute to shamanism discourse in spirit possession in the Nepal Himalayas.

Furthermore, other pertinent scholarly works from Nepal such as Gaenzsle (2011, 2008, 2001, 1999), Schlemmer (2010, 2003), Schneiderman (2010, 2006), Schneiderman and Turin (2006a, 2006b), and Middleton and Schneiderman (2008) works are relevant for the present study since, they have focused on changes in concepts of Kirat identity, identity politics and 'cultural engineering' and the roles of indigenous literature and association members in creating a Kirat identity.

While excellent literature on ethnicity and religion exists in English. Most of these are inaccessible to most of the local population, who are more adept at reading in the Nepali language than in English. A much bigger section of the people has access to books and articles written in Nepali or those books that have been translated into Nepali or Limbu. Thus, it is usually a book, novel and article written in or translated in Nepali or Limbu, and therefore accessible to most of people in East Nepal, which are also the prime sources of history from the masses. Despite the lack of scientific

inquiry regarding historical data, and the tradition of oral history, books, and novels hold great social and political value. This makes it imperative; one is cognizant of the resources that people have access to that favor or contribute to forming specific identities.

Limbu ethnic organization, *Kirat Yakthung Chumlung* (KYC), is at the forefront of the production of literature on Limbu history, culture, and tradition. They publish books, newspapers, and magazines related to Limbu's history, culture, and society. Amongst the readily available popular book available is Chemjong (1948) *Kirat Itihas* (History of the Kirat People), *Kirat Itihas ani Sanskriti* (History and Culture of the Kirat people) (Chemjong 2003), *Kirat Mundhum* (Kirat Oral Narratives), (Chemjong 1961) and recent publication *Limbuwanko Rajniti: Itihas, Bartaman Ra Bhavishya* (the politics of Limbuwan: History Present and the Future) by Baral and Tigela (2008). While these literary sources play an essential role in instilling a sense of belonging, and ethnic history, they also act as reminders of ethnic subjugation at the hands of the state represented by upper-caste Nepali groups. The historical literature (Chemjong 2003, Pradhan 1991) on the Gorkha conquest of Limbuwan (kingdom of Limbu) in Eastern Nepal provides a very general idea about the relations between the Gorkha and the Limbu Kingdom. The movement for the ethnic homeland of Limbus has, therefore, been used as a source of discrimination and other evil practices by the state (Lawoti 2007).

Moving further, the Darjeeling hills have been subject to much academic scrutiny, especially those related to tea plantation (Khawas 2006, 2007, Sharma 1997, Sarkar 2008, Besky 2008, Sarkar and Lama 1986). Pertinent to the area of research, authors like Bomjan (2008) have engaged in writing the history of Darjeeling, which documents the colonial historiography of colonial officers like O' Malley (1907),

District Gazetteer is referred to as the prime source of the history of the Darjeeling hills. In Darjeeling, colonial records are regarded as important sources of identity, and although the state whether it be the monarchy in Sikkim or the British administration in Darjeeling, is always mentioned. The cultural space of Darjeeling is bridged to a narration rather than a discussion of political and other signs evident. In the backdrop of this, a dearth of literature leads to a vacuum in scholarly work in the context of ethnic groups as there are no attempts to unpack the community identity and the cultural space. Themes of Gorkha as ‘martial race,’ and the violent movement for a separate state of Gorkhaland movement in 1986 by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by late Supremo, Subhash Ghising. There has been then focus of several indigenous scholars like T. B Subba (1992, 1999)⁶, Dhakal (2009), and non-indigenous scholars (Samanta 2003; Chakraborty 2000, Chattopadhyay 2008). Almost all the scholarly attempts primarily concentrated their focus either on exploring origin of the evolution of Gorkha identity in the context of Darjeeling hills or to examine the rising ethnic aspiration of the Indian Gorkhas/ Nepalis in North East India (T.B Subba et al.2009; Sinha and T.B Subba 2003). Besides some notable attempts Nepali nation and nationalism in Darjeeling have been studied broader by Pradhan (1991). Pradhan’s scholarly can be appreciated through his major writings reflected in English, and Nepali. In the Eastern Himalaya outlook, his writing on Gorkha Conquest (*Ibid*: 1991) has made him familiar and he has been widely cited by Hutt, Gellner, Turin, Hangen, Chalmer, Schneiderman and Onta (as cited in Sarkar 2015). Contributing to a better understanding of ethnic politics in Darjeeling are scholarly works by Golay (2006), who debates the ironies of Gorkha identity, and

⁶This thesis consists several references which has more than one Subba.Hence, the researcher will use the abbreviations of their names throughout the thesis and references such as, J.R Subba, T.B Subba, Chaitanya Subba, etc. to avoid confusion among readers.

Booth's (2011) nuances to language, and identity. Both of these works are enlightening in the understanding of the Gorkha identity. Chettri and Hangen delineate that at the moment, all ethnic groups in the hills of Darjeeling are in the process of categorically reimagining their history affixed to the geographical pattern of the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom that existed before the unification of Nepal under the Shah dynasty (Chettri 2017; Hangen 2007). All ethnic groups having their language and script, before unification (Chettri 2017; Middleton and Schneiderman 2008) are busy in 'modification of script in order to assert primordialness and vulnerability' which once existed before the Shah dynasty (*Ibid*: 2017). Their focus on all ethnic groups within the fold of categorization of Gorkha identity concentrates more on ethnic revivalism and interactions with the state. However, looking at bigger picture, the ethnic groups' claim of 'primitiveness' draws a line that divides the people of states that one group is above the other. In this outlook, it is worth keeping in mind that 'Primitive' is multidimensional position, characterized by certain perks and as drawbacks. In addition, from an anthropological outlook, T. B Subba's (2010, 1999, and 1990) writing is relevant concerning the Limbus, as is proposed in the present study.

In Sikkim, while the literature on Buddhism, the ethnic Lepcha and the Bhutia abound (Arora 2006, Foning 1987, Little 2008, Bhasin 2002, 2011, Baliksi 2006, 2008, Bentley, 2007, Mullard 2011, Lepcha 2013) there has been limited scholarly work published on the study of the Limbus. The process of politics of identity is mainly knitted in context to social groups verge, however recently, the emphasis has stirred towards within the groups. In contrast to the communities of Sikkim, mainly the Lepcha and Bhutia, the ethnic Nepali community is extremely peripheral, thus creating unresistant towards misuse of politics. (Chettri 2013: 25). Ethnicity is

inherently associated with politics which has been recognized by scholars who have written on politics of Sikkim, before and after the ‘merger’ with India in 1975 (Das 1983; Hiltz, 2003; O’Maley, 1907; Rose 1978 as cited in Chettri 2013). In light to current political context in Sikkim Himalayas, those historic interpretations emulate entire ethnic communities to be uniform, preset thing inclined to as well as all set in lieu of political function. (*Ibid*: 2013). While Arora (2007) and Bentley (2007) debate political negotiation amongst state and the Lepcha’s self-consciousness and awareness in conserving the “traditional” traditions and processes of culture revivalism, a skeleton of scholars like Schneiderman and Turin (2008), Vandenhelsken (2011), Gurung (2010), Phadnis (1980) and Sinha (2006, 2009) have involved with academics on ethnic politics from the development, anthropology, sociology and political outlook. Their writings contribute to a critical understanding of the cultural mechanism behind the resurgence of ethnic identity and themes of the diverse incentives which stimulated this development process. Lama’s (1994) edited manuscript also attempts to make a substantial contribution to research analysis on issues related to the political economy of Sikkim. However, its section fails to satisfy because of mere descriptions or statements of facts, and figures with less critical analysis of the topics discoursed. Accounting the religion and identity of the Limbus in Sikkim, Vandenhelsken (2010, 2016), Gustavsson (2013), Thapa (2017), and Thapa and Mohan’s (2018), analyzing diverse aspects of Limbus like ethnic politics, ethnic and religious categorization, religious traditions, religion as an identity marker, and the detailed role of ritual specialist amongst Limbus respectively in the history of religion and anthropological stance.

In the general backdrop, The Limbu *Phedangma* at a death ceremony is an essential medium as he is invariably possessed by his guardian spirit and speaks the last wishes

of the dead person (Fieldwork observation). The *Phedangma* tradition validates Limbu mythology, and theology, as the origin of everything in the world - animate and inanimate, and is told in detail by the *Phedangma*. However, Hinduism has made its existence in Eastern Himalayas as the researcher has witnessed the two-fold practice of the two religions. Thapa (2017) reported a parallel synthesis of a *Phedangma* and a Hindu priest among the Limbus as well as side-by-side cultural contact of both Yumaism and Hinduism making substantial impacts in Limbus socio-religious life. Apart, of course, both *Phedangma* and Hindu priests do not officiate together. Interestingly, present-day *Suingneem* (the alternate Limbu priest) reformed by YMMCC (see Thapa and Mohan 2018, Thapa 2017, and Gustavson 2013) has baffled researchers and lay people alike. Thapa and Mohan's contribution to Limbu literature on *Phedangma* and Gustavson's on religion and politics is commendable.

Besides these works, the Limbu native writer has recollected script of Limbus, *Mundhum*, ethos of their society, etc. At this juncture, it is vital to note, that various Limbu magazines are being published among which *Emeytnasung* is one of the leading magazines ever published each year. This initiative has been taken with the vision of a renowned personality Mr. Harka Khamdhak [Limbu], since then the route of publishing is still continuing. There is a growing number of Limbu writers writing about Limbus in various books, (English, Limbu) and magazines.

The Limbus have also been drawing attention to filmmakers and growth of documentation can be located within a religion, culture, and shamanism discourse. In contrast, Limbus of Eastern Nepal has been studied extensively, by Western and Indian scholars and a Limbu scholar so far. The Limbus residing in Sikkim and Darjeeling have remained with lacuna leaving a vacuum as this thesis hopes to fill in an anthropological bent. The dearth of literature on religious change has to be sieved

out of the existing literature. While in Assam, unfortunately, there is no academic literature available on Limbus of Assam, which again reiterates the prerequisite to study this subject holistically.

In addition, the indigenous writer Iman Singh Chemjong, and J. R Subba, have an immense role in this thesis and, to a less extent, Chaitanya Subba, Kainla, and Anthropologist T. B Subba. Their writings will function as a secondary source because their accounts are helpful sources when it comes to an understanding ritual practices, religion, oral narratives, language, kinship terminology, culture, identity, etc. They are indigenous writers, writing on their own culture making them a ‘native’ writer, expected to provide more authentic insights into Limbu religion and culture than the ones provided by non-Limbu writers. However, Iman Singh Chemjong and J.R Subba’s writings are susceptible and sensed to be biased because it is informed, that once they were dynamic to association of Limbu society. Hence, the objective of their literature was to show an amalgamated faith and culture of the Limbus. Most of the J. R Subba’s books, and also the books of Iman Singh chemjong, are printed by ‘*Kirat Yakthung Chumlung*’. It is learned that these two native writers did their studies outside leaving back the traditional Limbu way of life. The authors, especially J.R Subba and Iman Singh Chemjong’s specific articulations also make them central contributors to the religious change and therefore constitute essential roles in this present research.

In summation, the above literature review attempts to draw insights into the methodological axions of anthropological nuances concerning different subjects with regard to Eastern Himalayan context. Be that as it may say, while considering the accounts of the Limbu religion, the documentations on religious change and processes of constructing Limbu identity concerning the present study are markedly little. Some

scholars have dealt with reform movement, and syncretic impacts of external religions, the researchers assume the weight of literary dearth in the academic sense remains regarding the after-effects of religious developments in Limbu society.

With this fitting backdrop, this thesis aims to undertake an analysis of Limbu's traditional belief system, schismatic features between the Yumaism and YMMCC and ensuing socio-religious complexities. Moreover, it examines the relationship between Hinduism, Yumaism, and YMMCC and provides an analysis of the changing face of Limbu culture through religion. It also hopes to contribute to the ongoing trend of examining the usage of religion as an ethnic marker, particularly among the elite segments, in the wake of religious reform movement resistance.

Objectives

- i) Reconstruct the religion among the Limbus who still practice their traditional religion.
- ii) To study the traditional form of Yumaism.
- iii) To examine the influence of Hinduism on Limbu social structure.
- iv) Understand the contemporary religious practices and the role of Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center.
- v) To analyze the contours of redefining Limbu society and identity.

Methodology

“Anthropologists could be comfortably identified as the brokers of native’s point of view”

- Malinowski (1922)

For the present study, three villages, namely Darap, Bijanbari, and Powai Bon Gaon, were chosen in three major ethnographic sites of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam to carry out fieldwork. The central purpose was to explore the Limbu traditional religion and its difference from the reformed one. The field sites signify the Limbus for its traditional tag and their sentiments towards the community trying to keep the traditional thriving. While at the same time, the same site also indicates the cleavage formation within the same religion. The fieldwork was carried during 2018 to 2020 periodically.

The study attempted to appraise the role-play of *Mangheem*, and the degree of reformation among the YMMCC and the Yumaism followers. Respectively, the effort was also made to learn about the Hindu influence and the other small groups that have eaten up the already minority Limbu cultural space.

An ethnographic method of participant observation, for everyday life and special events was implemented to gauge people's religious participation, their behavioral pattern and moral conduct. In-depth interviews have conducted to unravel the nature of the phenomena. Notes were taken while interviewing or conversing with respondents and, the recorder was used during formal interviews which needed to be carried out in a limited period. Above and beyond informal interactions were taken up with the respondents to obtain information on their opinions about religious issues and interrelated setbacks. Further, interviews were carried out with religious executive bodies and elite members to ascertain their concerns about the religious dilemma and possible reconciliatory phases. This fieldwork was added with an additional visit to nearby areas of selected sites to cross-check and extend the scope of the study.

Albeit, the overall research was undoubtedly not a trouble-free set of tasks. The investigative fieldwork positioned the researcher to encounter subjects with divergent ideologies and attitudes. At times, the YMMCC subjects (those familiar with the present researcher's earlier M.Phil. research study on *Phedangma*) shillyshally and fumbled to share information with grudgingly answering about specific sensitive issues or stipulating to wait for hours and days to attend the interview with the pretext of inevitable commitment or engagement in livelihood occupations.

Despite the required rapport, the researcher's familiarity with the well-known subjects of traditionalists often tailored hindrances while conducting interviews. In some cases, the receptive interests of YMMCC informants often turned reluctant (visible with their reflexes) after learning the researcher's objectives of the study. The hesitant behaviors of respondents mainly vibrated on two stances that queried- what was the researcher's main focus? Moreover, what if the research was carried out among YMMCC only? Thus, being conscious of facing quandaries, the researcher had to conceal the core purpose decisively and, at times, turned disloyal by, proclaiming the bogus purpose of study (when questioned) depending on the type of subjects interviewed.

Although seems unethical, despite the decisive approach of identifying the researcher's interest in Yumaism-to-Yumaism subjects and YMMCC-to YMMCC subjects turned out to be advantageous in gaining their faith and data. In addition to this outlook, the same approach was applied while interviewing *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* proclaiming the researcher's interest in the center's teachings which once again facilitated winning her trust and acquiring the ample information and the teachings of center. In the same line, for instance, an elderly Yumaism informant once put forth a counter-question to the researcher in the middle of the interview, questioning "are

you interested in *Phedangma* tradition? And did you meet any knowledgeable *Phedangma* and learned *Mundhum*”? In such a case, the consideration for identifying the interest of study is only on *Phedangma* tradition was the best option to maintain rapport and continue the interview momentum. The interpreter’s disclosure of religious identity would ruin the entire situation. The informant, after learning the interpreter was a Yumaism follower, instantly would drop down the enthusiastic response, and answers would lessen to a few words.

On the contrary, the concealment of essential research purposes was not required in interviewing the Yumaism follower (since they knew who was the present researcher and what was the aim of the study?) Hither the researcher does not mean to demean or eulogize either of the religious groups. Hitherto according to fieldwork experience, follower of Yumaism exhibited relatively healthier responses while bridging rapport and coordination. The Yumaism follower informants were more welcoming and open to sharing information without much cynicism on the researcher’s purpose, though few dithered to discourse details about the subtle issues owing to ethical issues. Nevertheless, the endured grit and experiences have enabled the researcher to gather information and learn about multifaceted socio-religious issues, affirmative, and contradictory sights of individuals and groups.

The collected data were analyzed with the comparative method deemed necessary not just to contrast one religion with another but to understand continuity, change, and its differences from the reformed one (Paden 1994). The same set of schedules was used for all three locations with specific questions. The researcher used photography, to document rituals and to serve as a conversation starter when traveling between villages because Limbus of Assam were interested in knowing how Limbus from Darjeeling or Sikkim looked or how different they were, and for that matter which

eventually resulted in discussing Limbus. Video recordings also resulted in similar outcomes when shown rituals or events to a family or a friend, which again yielded discussions about Limbus in general and rituals, culture and traditions. This usage of the audio-visual aids proved to be an effective methodology in researcher's different ethnographic sites research work. Visual aids like pictures were added to strengthen the present research for the enhancement of the writing.

Representing the Other

“The ethnographic observation tends to become the ‘negotiated reality’ between the informants and the anthropologist, at least until the anthropologist’s presence becomes less conspicuous”

- Tierney (1984:585)

Anthropology has always studied ‘other cultures’ (Beattie 1999). Albeit, studying one’s own culture is a popular trend in Northeast India. In contrast, the present research was a study of ‘other’ cultures making the researcher a ‘non-native’ anthropologist. As Bodley (1999) situates, an examination of a wide diversity of other societies encourages anthropologists ‘to view their culture through an outsider’s eyes. In other words, studying other cultures with very different understandings of the world, different customs, and lifestyles, leads to what anthropologists refer to as “defamiliarization” (*Ibid*: 1999). In the same vein, the present research aims come under the wings of studying ‘other’ cultures. In hindsight, before visualization of the existing research theme, an inkling for an attempt to study the current Limbu religious issues stirred up in the researcher’s mind with the self-analogical and optimistic

axiom that- the Limbu religious issues need to be researched and addressed; if not by a present researcher, then at least some other have to undertake.

It is always a time taking process to make Limbu informants to feel comfortable and establish confidence with the researcher to share their views and perspectives about the topic under investigation. So, in this case, it was important to build a rapport with them and become one of them by actively involved in their family activities, communicating with them, eating what they eat, and spending considerable time among them. Whenever they saw the researcher, they would say, “*Khyaeney Yakthum ma ba*” (are you a Limbu)?

In the Darjeeling area, most of the people were delighted to see the research interest and readily expressed the oral tales whatever they would know since the topic was out of interest among the youth. The elderly in particular was eager to speak to the researcher all the details they have in their memory.

In Sikkim, the researcher at the outset received deterrent opinions, from YMMCC adherents by considering the topic of interest to be problematic. Nevertheless, an optimistic vibe for venturing into risk and affirmative motivation overwhelmed the criticisms for study. In turn, the Yumaism followers, who desire to reveal the commonalities and contest religious aspects of both ongoing religions of Limbus embraced the present study in emboldening the facts.

In Assam, the people were always enthusiastic about learning about the Limbus of Sikkim, the culture, and traditions of Limbus and would ask the researcher whatever was in their heads about Limbus epistemology relating to cosmogony, mythology, sacred rituals, and oral narratives.

In all the three ethnographic sites, it was informal, to approach without a notebook because people got conscious and uncomfortable when they realized that whatever they had just said was being noted down. For that reason, everything would be set in mind and later the discussions would jot down in the fieldwork notes at night time. Therefore, it would be meaningful to join the informants in their dialy chores and start to ask things once the ice was broken. With this premise, the camera was a definite an icebreaker and villagers have enjoyed seeing pictures that were captured in-camera. While some would even go for a change of clothes to get their pictures to be taken in traditional attire.

Writing about Limbus, finding answers to questions that set the research tone in present research also meant writing about the community in which the researcher aimed to do full-fledged academic research through abetting and enabling self to search deeper, and fathom the contents of the spells.

Reflecting the stance, some of the Limbus made phone calls or sometimes met informally inquiring about publishing a thesis (as a book) and asked for personal copies. They want to know what has been written. There was pressure to give an accurate representation of the Limbu society.

Organization of Thesis

1. Introduction

-Thematic Concepts

- Statement of the Problem

-Earlier Studies

-Main objectives of the study

-Research Methods

-Chapterization

2. Limbu: An Ethnographic Profile

The chapter attempts to give general representation among the Limbus, and argues the Limbus taxonomy also deliberates the misperception on the usage of words such as ‘Limbu’, ‘Limboo’, and ‘Subba’. It throws light on descriptive accounts of the Limbus relating to their origin and process of migration, clan organization, family structure, marriage patterns, kinship system and terminologies, language and forms of linguistic expressions, food culture and dietary patterns, dress and ornaments, music /musical instruments/ musical performances, visual culture art and craft, socio-political system. It then introduces the Limbus residing in the Eastern Himalayan belts of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam with specific references to the villages of Bijanbari, Darap, and Powai Bon Gaon.

3. Religious and Ancestral Belief System among Limbus

The chapter discusses Limbu concept of ontology, pantheon of spirits, sacred recitals, priesthood, rituals, taboos, oaths and ordeals, festivals, dreams and eschatology.

4. Traditional Limbu Religion: Yumaism- The Revitalization Movement

In this section, detailed information is provided about the Indigenous religious practices of Limbu community, care has been taken to recheck with published works along with the knowledgeable Limbus who could spell out their earlier, traditional forms of their religious faith. The Limbu cosmology and religious pantheon is presented in detail in this chapter. Phedangma's present position in Limbu society, particularly 'The Upsurge of New Forms of Religious Claims and Contestations' in Darap region has been deeply probed and analyzed.

5. Influence of Hinduism among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas

The chapter considers the influence of Hinduism and the possible acceptance of the Hindu religion among the Limbus. It looks at the indirect participation of Limbus in various Hindu festivals as a way of absorbing Hindu culture. It also examines the cultural changes in various social structures. The third part of the chapter questions the religious identity of the Limbus to whether they are Yumaist or Hindu.

6. Contemporary Religious Divisions among Limbus

The chapter discusses the indigenous faith movement of Limbus. It deals with the recent trend of religious development and changes. The discourse also extensively delves into the revitalization movement of Yumaism, reasons for realizing Limbu identity, new worship order, syncretism, the religious movement of Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center, and intra-faith elements and related setbacks.

7. Contours of Limbu Identity Construction

The chapter discusses the direction Limbu identity is taking in the wake of various regional socio-political developments. It also looks at new forms of identity markers that have erased the religious boundary uniting the Limbus to a common ethnic identity. The concluding part looks at the social media usage to further bridge the territorial and religious boundaries.

8. Summary and Conclusions

References

Chapter 2

Limbu: An Ethnographic Profile

Who are Limbus?

Limbus are a mongoloid community living in North-Eastern States of India, Darjeeling, East Nepal, and Bhutan. They call themselves Yakthumba from the Limbu words *Yakthung* or *Yakthum* meaning heroes of the hills. With a mythical outlook, *Mundhum* has that their Goddess, *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, deputed *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Wambhami Mang* (who resides at *Sang Sang Den*) to go forth and breathe life in human beings.

Thence, their creator God, *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Wambhami Mang* appeared in *Phoktanglungma Pemebenlungma* (Mount Kanchenjunga), ready to begin his mission. In a mountain, he identified a spot named as *Mangjirima Manglodama/Munaphen Tembein* foothills of Mount Kanchenjunga. He then mediated and shaped the form that humans would take. He bent his vision of humans with two idols- *Laikkangsa* (male form) and *Simbummuasa* (female form), with precious metals but it turned only to be frustrated because the idols would not come into life.

He invoked *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, and directed using products sourced from life forms that he had already created on earth. With this, he descended from the mountain travelled to the lower hills around, and collected ash of bamboo, fowl droppings, rainwater, and resin. He walked back to *Mangjirima Manglodama/Munaphen Tembe*. He created the first woman/human *Muzina Kheyongnama* from the

mixture of all the collected products and instructed her to extend the Limbu diaspora in the earth realm.

Over time, *Muzina Kheyongnama* entered her youthfulness, emotional, and erotic state in prime of youth and pregnancy. Here, she gets impregnated by *Thusuingbennu Khanglaibennu Yosuingbennu Suritingbennu* (wind) and gives birth to a son named, *Susuwengba Lalawengba*- meaning son of the wind and brought him up in extreme care and affection. The child was trained by his mother with regard to hunting. He followed the instruction of his mother, and trained himself in the skills of using a bow and arrows. He then goes hunting at *Sawa Yukphung* on the hilltops.

When he attended a youthful age, he was now known by others as *Sawa Yukphung Kamba* - meaning a tall hunter. While following a runaway deer, he met *Thosulungma Phiyamlungma*- beautiful lady weaving her handloom. They like each other cohabit giving birth to a son *Sutchuru Suhangpheba*. During parturition period of *Thosulungma Phiyamlungma*, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* cohabited with her younger sister. She gives birth to her son *Samdang Khewa*.

Again, he goes hunting on the lower hillside and meets a beautiful lady *Yosulungma Mukumlungmawho* produced her daughter *Tetlera Lahadongna*. When *Yosulungma Mukumlungma* was in confinement due to giving birth to a child *Susuwengba Lalawengba* cohabits with her younger sister and eventually gives birth to a son *Lingdang Khewa*.

Later, after the death of *Sususwngba Lalawengba*, his daughter *Tetlera Lahadongna* and son *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* met each other unaware of the consanguineous relationship; they fell in love with each other and came into sexual contact. The duo siblings violated the rules and gave birth to seventeen sons and one daughter. As a

result, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is believed to have summoned the two and said, ‘You have sinned. I cannot allow you two to live together. You both now must live in different places and fend for yourself as a punishment’.

Tagera Ningwaphuma on one hand directed *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* to go to North *Muringla Kheringla Tembhe* (highland). On another hand, *Tetlera Lahadongna* was directed to live in *Sangarok Nugarak Tembhe* (earth), and since, the descendants were of incest origin, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* separated them placing them in aluminium strainer. During this activity, 9 boys struck in the aluminium strainer remained there only, hence they were called as *Pegi Phanghangs* later on. These boys had to stay the remaining life along with their father in the uplands. The left out 8 boys are labelled as *Sawa Yethangs*, are the mythical ancestor or the progenitors of Limbus and they were to stay with their mother on earth. Nevertheless, the parents pulled up and down, the only daughter who was stuck in the strainer emanating through the two sides. With this, both her hands and legs were separated. Due to this incident, the daughter’s soul travelled together with *Pegi Phanghangs*, although, the remaining body convoyed the *Sawa Yethangs*. As per *Mundhum*, after the separation of *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* and *Tetlera Lahadongna*, they were renamed and widely identified as *Sodhungen Lepmuhang*, and *Thillilung Thamdenlungma*.

In the shorter version, Limbus call themselves *Yakthum*, which similarly depicts *Susuwengba Luluwengba* or *Susuwa Lillim Yakthum Suwang* informing us that they are offsprings of the wind’s son. Traditions have it, that their creator God, created their legendary heroine *Mujina Kheyongnama* at the foothills of the Mount Kanchenjunga. Nevertheless, granddaughter *Tetlera Lahadongna* and grandson *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* violated the rule with their incestuous union and gave birth to seventeen sons and one daughter. *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is believed to have

separated them by dividing their children between them as a punishment. She directed him to live in the highland and his wife in the lowland of the Himalayas. Be it or may, this might be the reason why Limbus believe in *Yuma* and claims to be the grandchildren of *Yuma*. With their oral narratives pointing to Kanchenjunga as the place of origin, it is only understandable to find Limbus living in the foothills of this Himalayas for a long time.

Most of the literature available is oral migration narratives, given that Limbus origin and migration history is a matter of debate and controversy which restricts the literature with inadequate findings that determine the origin of the Limbus. From a mythical outlook, the *Mundhum* claim origin of Limbus from *Mangjirima Manglodama* or *Muna Tembhe*, *Sinyuk Laje*, *Muden Laje*, *Sodhung Warakden* or *Temending Warak*, and riverbank of Ganga. Interestingly, as per the mythical accounts, the descendants of Limbus had migrated to East Nepal, Sikkim, Assam, and Bhutan. To this vague theme of discourse, the researcher adds up saying, that though the oral narratives can be scarcely interpreted as dependable historic facts. The existing oral narratives on origin and migration cannot be ignored. In the worldview of tribes, the description of phenomena begins from the creation of the universe.

Nomenclature

In spite of several scholars' attempts to enlighten the title, most of the Limbus seem not to agree with the explanations regarding the tags. Although some scholars speculate, the name 'Limbus' is believed to have derived from *Susuwa Lilim Yakthungs* or the descendants of *Sawa Yethangs* (Kandangwa 1990). In this case, it is believed that, 'Limbu' is derived from the words *li* meaning bow and *abu* meaning shooter, which is supposed to mean 'archer.'

Waddel (1899) explains that the name 'Limbu' is an eponym given by the Nepali. To this aspect, most of the Limbus opines that there are no words in Nepali that translate Limbus to mean archers (Fieldwork 2020). Though the Limbus reject Waddel's version due to its inadequate verdicts, this might be quite close to some extent. In agreement with this, the Nepalis reiterate, 'we don't know any tales related to this that validates Nepalis giving the eponym to Limbus (Fieldwork 2019).

To this ambiguity of unauthenticity in words, the researcher adds up by saying that it might have been the Nepali neighbours who first pronounced their name, which was roughly acknowledged by the Limbu themselves when asked and later it anglicized the form of Limbu, which affirmed their identity as they have begun using 'Limbu' as their last names today.

Whilst Chemjong (1948) is in view that the group of ten chiefs were called Limbus who won the land of Eastern Nepal with the help of archery. Dahal (1984) in the same line enhances after their victory with weapons of bows and arrows began to be known as Limbuwan and troops as Limbus. The Limbu language experts propose that the name may have been derived from the word *lingba* which denotes 'self-grown or 'emerged'. Interestingly, (Kainla 1922) states, there is an existence of area called *Lingba* which is in *Limbuwan* and this also supports this theory. The authenticity of the word and its connotation is dubious as there is no consistency between academics and 'native' writers who sometimes outline the denotations.

Shrestha (1995) pronounces Limbu as of recent origin and used for the first time by the Prithivi Narayan Shah in his Lalmohar decree conferred to his Limbu subjects in 1774 A. D. With this Limbus started using Limbus as their surname post-fixed only in 1806 A.D and thereby the Rais and Limbus were separated. T. B Subba

(1999:85) discards Shrestha's meanings and utters this is not true. In this statement, he articulates that the concepts of subtitles such as Limbus vs Khambus and Rais vs Subbas were disorganized. Despite some controversy, Limbus deeper linking with bow and arrows is generally agreed upon since their mythical ancestor's time (Fieldwork 2019).

Digressing the inkling of name given by Nepalis, Rup Lal Khamdhak⁷ (Informant) suggested, that Limbu is a distorted version of *lee-abu-ang*, which means 'shooting with a bow and arrow or archery' (Fieldwork 2020). Also, it is this very *lee-abu-ang* that has been anglicized to form the Limbu in use today.

Unfortunately, there is no consistency regarding the word. Hitherto, the Limbu-Limboo (alternative spelling) usage by the Limbu people has somehow formed confusion among the non-Limbu people. Of late, the Limbus prefer to be called Limbus, finding this word more appropriate while referring to their community.

'Limbu', on the one hand, is how the Limbus of Assam and Darjeeling have always been identified, while 'Limboo', on another hand, is how the Limbus of Sikkim have preferably changed into 'Limboo' while identifying themselves. It is witnessed, that right from the individual's certificate of Identification to daily use, the word 'Limbu' is broadly recognized in Assam and Darjeeling Limbus. In contrast, from common day usage and official documents, 'Limboo' is preferred and used among the Limbus of Sikkim. To add more, in the Thapa, (2017), and Thapa and Mohan (2018) the researcher's uses Limboo because that was what people preferred and it was deemed

⁷ Rup Lal Khamdhak claimed to be a *Samba*, *Phedangma*, and *Yeba* at the same time and claimed to have inherited his vocations from both his mother's and father's sides. He however, will be referred to as *Mundhumist* because of his huge knowledge in the area of *Mundhum* of Limbu.

necessary to respect their preferences since the research was undertaken only in Sikkim Himalayas.

In past days, the usage of Subba was common among all the Limbus in the Eastern Himalayas. Subba means 'village chief.' No doubt, this is in use till today to some extent. In the meantime, Subba was popularised as their surname in due time. In contemporary outlook, there is a growing movement among the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas to rename their titles from 'Subba' to 'Limbu'. During fieldwork, the researcher witnessed, that most of the people still used their surname as Subba, only a few were observed using the title Limbus. The drive to change their last name from 'Subba' to 'Limbu' and tag their Limbu identity runs parallel. For ages, people used either Subba or their clan names like Khamdhak, Nembang, Thegim, Nugo, and Khewa as their last names, nevertheless, at present they use the word Limbu as their last names.

The homogeneity in their last names has an aim for ascertaining through the world of Limbus in order to validate commonality within the Limbu tribe. One of the foremost reasons is to show the strength of the Limbu population as most of the Limbus accepted that the heterogenous title would show less in numbers and similarly, misread the Limbu identity.

With this current outlook, the researcher trusts that choosing a Limbu word as a last name rather using different clan name would probably switch entire Limbus organized and fetch uniformity. This effort of uniting all the Limbus is a conscious change taken by the Limbu society.

Yakthumba is a word common in usage within the Limbus. *Yakthumba* is generally assumed to be heroes of the hills or hillmen in Limbu words. *Yakthum* or *Yakthung* is

the shorter version of what Limbus call themselves to be *Yok- Tumba*, which means ‘the first community settler in the province’ (Fieldwork 2020). It is believed that Yakthumba is a corrupted word of *Yok-Tumba*. In accord with this, it stretches the impression that the tribe has rightly named themselves *Yok- Tumba* because this version matches the certainty of being the first settler of Limbuwan province.

On another note, though Limbus refer to themselves as Yakthum not a single person was found to have used this as the surname. In a stimulating tone, however, Yakthum is gaining popularity as a surname on social media and on the Facebook page for instance, All Limboo/Limbu/Subba/Yakthung Association. These are visible instincts that display the common Facebook pages for Limbus on the World Wide Web. The word *Yakthum* is likewise used with a suffix based on the person’s gender. A man is named as *Yakthumba* and a woman is named as *Yakthumma*. In Darap West Sikkim, people used to ask “*Khyaeney Yakthumma ba*”? Meaning, ‘do you belong to a Limbu tribe’? The etymology of the word Limbu has undergone many interpretations. It is hoped that with this effort of consistency, the Limbu will identify the sameness.

Origin and Process of Migration

The veracity of discourses on origin and migration of Eastern Himalayas people remains vague. Balckburn (2004:15) confirms, “No one knows, with certainty, when or by what route the people of Eastern Himalayas come to their contemporary homelands’ (emphasis added). The paucity of literature implies a major setback, delimiting the decipherability of origin and migratory course. In this perspective, Blackburn further suggests that before the British expeditionary records chronicled in the early nineteenth century, only the two sources cited the hill tribes: The Tibetan

texts which stated contact between the Tibetans and some tribes on the Northern border in the fifteenth century (*Ibid*:2004).

The Limbu or Sirijunga script serves as the source, citing a conflict with Bhutia rulers towards the Sikkim Himalayas in the 18th and 19th centuries. In light of this Sirijunga script, the researcher adds, that the Sirijunga (Limbu literary figure and reformer) movement came to represent a significant threat, mainly to Sikkim Bhutia rulers and their spiritual *Guru*⁸(tutelary protector). Sirijunga's writings and teachings attracted a significant number of Limbus and Lepchas and led to the start of an ethnic awakening. He established centers of Limbu cultural and religious learning in many places throughout the Eastern Himalayas. The then Sikkim's authority felt under threat to want Sirijunga eliminated. Thence, he was killed in 1741 at Martam, Hee-Bermiok located in West Sikkim. He was tied to a tree and he was shot with arrows. The learning centers were subsequently destroyed and Sirijunga's disciples were murdered or brutally suppressed (Fieldwork 2019).

⁸The informants used the term *GururatherYeming* which is used by J.R Subba (2012b:20). Thus, the word *Guru* will be used throughout the thesis.



Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2: Sirijunga's big flat rock where the white thick box-like structure is seen is believed by Limbus that Sirijunga used to carry Limbu manuscript in this box (left). Sacred rocks worshipped by Limbus (right)

Among written records, Risley (1989 36-37) highlighted one common oral narrative of Limbus, which recounts the division of the first ten Limbu chiefdoms into two groups of five each: one originally from India termed Kashi or Banaras Gotra, and the other from Tsang province of Tibet known to be as Lhasa Gotra.

The purview of an indigenous writer suggests the different hypothetical theories of origin among Limbus. The widely accepted theory is Kirata theory. In the current vogue, the writers argue from either Kirati, Chinese or Tibetan hypotheses while reflecting the origin and migration of Limbus. However, the Limbu writers champion this hypothetical view, since Limbu society relies on native oral narratives, tracing their ancestors' routes of imagined origin and existing homeland.

From a mythical outlook, Limbus are labelled as the *Lungbongba Khambongbasa*-connotation also the ancestry developed from soil and rock which sanctions Limbus being arisen from the earth comprising of soil and rock, solidifying that they are the

most primitive and first dwellers in their own mythical Limbu land. The Limbu association with the Eastern Himalayas is deep-rooted. From this standpoint, it is worth noting Blackburn (2004:15) suggestion, that oral narratives and early history are mostly ritual texts and barely tell of historical migration. Hitherto, the memories of migration are strong and have cognizance of being non-native to the region and having migrated from somewhere else.

Limbus considers the foothills of Mount Kanchenjunga to be their place of origin and their mythological country as Limbuwan. It is generally accepted that the land was spread over the vast area that stretches Sikkim Himalayas, Darjeeling hills, and Eastern Nepal. Before the formation of nation-states and political boundaries, the Limbu land is believed to have extended facing east of the River Arun and river Koshi and West of Kanchenjunga Mountain and the river Mechi. It was the upshot of political antagonism that the land was divided twofold, thereby making the Limbu identity straddle between two separate countries. The historical procedures have changed the landscape and Limbus at present owes allegiance to different regions namely Darjeeling hills, North Eastern State, Bhutan, and Myanmar as well. Limbus has transitioned from existence in the foothills of Kanchenjunga to Bonafede citizens of Nepal, India, Bhutan and Myanmar. The ‘political shuffling’ (Roy 2009:16) of Limbu kingdom into distinct nation-states meant diverse provisions and benefits in social, political, and economic domains (emphasis added). To this outlook, the researcher adds the axiom that with these development processes, Limbus have initiated to reflect their identity according to their respective regions.

Chaitanya Subba (1995:17) articulates that the Himalayan region has always been the favourable abode of the Limbus (emphasis added) since time perennial. One can see, that the government census of 2001 has been recorded approximately 150,000

Limbus living in different countries like India, Bhutan and Myanmar. The historians and writers- Chatterji (1951), Chemjong (1966), Singh (1990), and Prapannacharya (1994) have proclaimed the ethnic group of Kirati personifies mongoloids physiognomy of many ethnic groups. To this vague theme of a treatise, the researcher adds, that the existing writings on origin and migration issues are unsatisfactory, and the instance of Kashi Gotra and Lhasa Gotra's hypothesis may be constructed inadequately to prove the vitality. The oral narratives categorizing them into these Gotras cannot be ignored. It demonstrates the identity of contemporary Limbu society with this imaginary ancestor from past and distant places with explicit claims of an ethnic community. The oral narratives and erudite writings draw forth stories of origin and migration surmising Limbus ancestors, and, have transmigrated from some other place. The oral narration aptly plots migration routes between the supposed original homeland, their progenitor's origin place and a present-day dwelling site.

Clan Organization

Limbus is organized approximately in hundreds of clans, which they believe originated from different *thums* (places). Northey and Morris (1974) illustrate different clans derive from these *thums*. J. R Subba (2012:148-58)⁹ illustrates that, the Limbu Clans and sub clans' segregation is a herculean task. Nevertheless, he opines that there are nine hundred and twenty two clans and fifty nine sub clans exist among Limbu groups and highlighted that it is still incomplete. To exemplify, J.R Subba noted that non-Limbu woman married to a Limbu man are also counted as belonging to the same clan.

⁹ J. R Subba in his publications have not stated from where the data of clan and sub clan has been collected.

In the same line, T.B Subba specified (2010: 118) that some Lepcha and Limbu clans are same, and if the clan falls under ‘Limbu’ or ‘Lepcha’ depends largely upon where a given clan is situated. An alike scenario is among Rai and Limbu clan as well. The researcher adds emphasis by giving the instance that the term Yakha may belong to either Limbu or Rai clan. Each Limbu clan has been classified depending on where they are from. Clans are hereditary and follow an inherent blood relationship either by birth or by marriage. In the same way, Lucksom may belong to either Lepcha or Limbu clan. At this point, T.B Subba comments on this ongoing trend in Limbu-Lepcha and Limbu-Rai contexts as being interrelated to their religious and social practices and belief similarity (*Ibid*: 2010).

As per Limbu genealogy, the descent is traced through great-grandfather and great-grandmother. Or through *Thoba* or *Bajey* (grandfather) and *Yuma* or *Boju* (grandmother) of both maternal and paternal lines, but the membership to the clan is inherited patrilineal by the progenies whereby they trace descent through their father line. Limbus needs to know the name of the clan and place of origin because when somebody dies, the soul is believed to be returned to *Samyukna Den* (ancestor’s place).

The ritual specialist’s task is to guide the soul back to the *Samyukna Den* and when the address goes wrong it creates confusion and the soul doesn’t find its way back home. Limbu’s belief in *Samyukna Den* as home to their dead ancestors remains uncontested. The purpose of the clan is to regulate marriage and prevent incest relations. People belonging to the same clan are not allowed to get married unless they are separated by the five generations. With mythical understanding, it is learnt that marriage within the blood relationship is strictly forbidden and if violated may cause the birth of a deformed child (Fieldwork 2020). Limbus is committed to this

system and is supposed not to marry or even fall in love with those belonging to the same clan.

Family Structure

The family among Limbus forms the smallest unit of social structure, consisting of a nucleus of father and mother with son and daughter. In the past, Limbus preferred and practised the system of joint family involving of father, mother, son and daughter, and grandchildren in a single house with a shared hearth, granary, and fields. Contemporary, the Limbu family has divided into nuclear family leading a neolocal residence with their share of land properties and livestock.

According to customary norms, the new family typically begins with settling down of a married couple with separate hearth and field before leaving their parental house. As per Limbus, society sustains patrilineal and patriarchal oriented, the *Aboo* (most of the Limbus often call *Appa or Papa*). Father is assumed as head of the family along with *Amoo* (often call *Aama* or Mommy). It is the father who manages familial dealings. He retains absolute authority over decisive affairs and expects the acquiescence of family members. When the father becomes old, the household responsibility shifts to the eldest son of the family. Nevertheless, the mother undertakes headship in the father's death. The descent is agnate and with the adoption of the paternal surname, clan, and inheritance.

Usually, the residence type is patrilocal in the early phase of marriage, but later turns into neolocal with the settlement of the couple in a new house. As per the Limbu marital costume, the patrilocal residence ends with the birth of a child and the capacity of couples to meet their expenses for neo local residence. The youngest son

obtains the ancestral house and supports the aged parents with elder brother's neolocal settlement after marriage.

A family holds immovable properties such as agricultural fields, houses, and granaries. Familial possessions are shared for common usage, nonetheless, the land properties are equally divided among the sons. Yet, a dependent elder son stays back with his parents until a separate house is a setup. Customarily, the youngest son by the virtue of supporting his parents during old age inherits the house and granary.

On the other hand, movable possessions such as copper plates, bowls, brass or metal pitchers, ampoules or utensils, household implements, livestock, heirlooms, etc. are given to elder son. Ornaments are personal assets of women acquired either from her parental home or gifted by her husband at bride price. That stuff is inherited by daughters and daughters-in-law of the family.

In family life, a male member is particularly distinguished from a female member through their manual assignments. Virtually all the laborious exertion is done by male members such as task of erecting a fence, house construction, etc. Likewise, they watch over the livestock, and collect fodder for piggery, cowsheds, etc. In social religious aspects, they undertake ritual ceremonies and festivals in society. Even though, male members of the family are vested with overall controller of the family, the female member embraces an equal share of onuses in household matters. Female members of the family raise the children, cook food, fetch water, etc. She gathers vegetables, dries paddy, stocks ration for tragic situations, brews rice beer, feeds livestock, daub home with red mud and cow dung, furthermore accompanies her husband in collecting firewood.

Marriage Patterns

The Limbu *Mekhim* (marriage) outside one's clan group is prescribed as the Limbu tribe is being practised currently. Generally, one cannot marry a member of either the father's clan or mother's clan and is supposed to practice this system for at least a five-generation gap in case of an identical clan. In overall, monogamy is the preference and practice.

In past, polyandry is not recognized by Limbu customs and traditions. However, at present, it has taken place in a few cases. Polygyny on the other hand is allowed on few exceptions to produce offspring and save a clan from getting extinct. It maybe the instances of a man marrying additional wives to be 'imported possibly through contact with Nepali people, since in the Limbu language there is no such specific word that contains to signify *Kanchi* to the second wife'. (Morris 1938).

The practices of levirate marriage and sororate marriage are unheard of. Divorce is not permissible, nonetheless, if it occurs then in such a case it is the person seeking a divorce who generally pays the penalty.

Kinship System and Terminologies

The Limbu society is based on clan organization. The kinship pattern is structured on the exogamous clan. Universally, each clan and sub-clan traces their descent from a common ancestor. In a wider spectrum, the sub-tribes constitute numerous clans, which split into sub-clans. Again, every sub-clan includes varied families with a different surname.

In past days, Limbus resided in clan-based settlements and this type of settlement is still predominant in the native villages. However, the villages established in later

periods have fashioned varied settlements. The Limbus trace their genealogy from a mythical ancestor of the living and non-living mortals.

Anthropologists have revealed there is six a basic kin naming pattern or systems used by almost all of the society which they referred to as Eskimo, Hawaiian, Sudanese, Omaha, Crow, and Iroquois. With this outlook, the kinship pattern among Eskimo group is closely associated with Limbu Kinship system.

Limbu kinship terminology is seen along with the descriptive and classificatory category in addressing both the maternal and paternal kin relatives. As per the Limbu terms, the grandfather refers to *Thoba* (often named as *Thatta* or *Bajey*) and *Yuma* or *Boju* for grand mother of both paternal and maternal lines. The *Abo* (often called as *Appa* or *Papa*) stands for the father and *Amo* (*Aama* or Mommy) suggests the mother. The elder brother is identified as *Amphu/ Amphai*. The same way, the elder sister is dubbed as *Anay/ Nanay*. The younger brother is classified as *Nusa*. Likewise, younger sister is specified as *Nusama*. *Mencha* signifies grand son and *Menchama* (grand daughter). The term *Phanag* denotes to father's younger brother. On the one hand, mothers' elder brother, mother's younger brother, father's younger sister's husband, father's elder sister's husband is labelled as *Kuwha*. On the other hand, mother's younger sister's husband is accepted as *Phunaga*. Mother's younger sister and father's younger brother's wife is known as *Suma*. The usage of *Ingya* is common for the father's younger sister and mother's younger brother's wife. In addition, *Tumba* denotes to father's elder brother. Father's elder sister, mother's elder sister, father's elder brother's wife is collectively termed as *Tumma*. Respectively, *Panglee* is addressed for Son-in-law and *Pangmey* for Daughter -in-law. The Elder brother's wife is referred as *Nannaetray and Futray* for elder sister's husband.

Language and Forms of Linguistic Expressions

Limbus calls their language *Yakthungpan*, which belongs to the Tibeto Burman family. In the word of Hodgson (2013), the language of most of the tribal people living in Himalayas has separated into two types viz, “simple and complex linguistic” (as cited in Grierson 1903:177). Juxtaposed, *Yakthungpan* falls under the Sino-Tibetan language of the Himalayas (Sprigg 1959:590).

The Limbu language is ascribed to Sirijunga Teyongshi (1704-1741). At present, numerous scholars have come up with alteration in context to Limbu script. Iman Singh Chemjong has recently attempted to revive the Kirati script (Van Driem 1987:25). Van Driem (1987) affirms that Subhadra Subba (1976) adopted Iman Singh Chemjong’s new and expanded Kirati script with fewer trivial alterations, which has enhanced the Limbu script.

In an important note, B.B Subba Muringla, native to Gyalshing, West Sikkim is credited for the Limbu script that has taken its shape in present-day.

A comparison of the census reports in Sikkim, West Bengal and Assam are discussed below.

Year	India	Sikkim	West Bengal	Assam
2001	37,265	34,292	2,377	288
2011	40,835	38,733	921	780

Table 2.1: Census 2001, 2011

As reported by 2011 census data, there has been a decadal percentage upsurge of 9.58 for the decade 2001-2011.

Sikkim: Limbu language falls under the one of the official languages of Sikkim Himalayas. In 1951, the Limbu textbook that was published by Iman Singh Chemjong, P.S Muringla, and M.B Khamdhak was '*Nisigeg Yakthung Sapla*' and '*Yakthung Ningwaphu Sapla*'. It was the first textbooks published in Sikkim Himalayas. Thence, with the coming of these textbooks, the school system recognizing the Limbu language in schools set its threshold in Sikkim Himalayas (Datta 2019). The school system of the Limbu language started on 11th march 1968 with the Royal Proclamation of the Chogyal Palden Thendup Namgyal (notification number 36/62/990/Edu) the then king of Sikkim. At this point, the researcher adds, currently, Sikkim Central University has introduced M.A in 2016, and Ph.D. in Limbu language and literature in 2021 with the approval of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

West Bengal: In West Bengal state of India, Limbu tribe is scattered in different places of the Darjeeling hills (Singh 1999). The Limbu population is mainly found in Bijanbari, Lama Gaon, Gairi Gaon, Nor Busty, Basbotey, etc. in Darjeeling hills. In West Bengal, the present native speakers' strength has reduced from 2377 to 921 as reported in the census cited above.

Assam: The Limbus of Assam offers unexplored and investigated. They are scarcely aware of history, culture, and tradition. Besides, language is highly marginalized and is on the verge of extinction. Few elderly Limbus converse in their language. Many reasons can be there for a Limbu society to lose grip of their language and to imbibe the language of the nation and other ethnic groups, which one may refer to as

language shift. Language stops evolving once people stop conversing with them. At this point, the researcher opines, that the native language should be transmitted from one generation to the next generation by keeping culture and language alive at home. This will strengthen the younger generation a sense of identity and aid in learning to value their roots and culture.

Language is a part of the culture. It is one of the capabilities of man as a member of society (Hoijer 1948:335). The uniqueness of a language and its script has acquired significance in such that they became a marker of cultural uniqueness. Without a language of one's own, there is no distinct culture, and there can be no people (Karlsson 2000:226). It is this self-same language that distinguishes between different communities. However, unfortunately, youths these days have forgotten their native language or show the least interest in learning their language. At present, the Limbus of Assam, mostly the elderly folks, have faced many challenges in maintaining their native language. They believed their language was vanishing; thus, they felt a sudden need to revive their language and are doing their share of keeping it alive.

On another note, Language revivalism denotes bringing back vanished language to life once again and language constitutes a key component in the revivalist agenda. Hinton (2011) states that going back to a community's specific language usage in the present times in the form of revitalization, to make it more alive is a dynamic process of communities' engagement with their linguistic identity. Language revitalization is a response to language loss (Grenoble 2013). So, to revitalize one's native language the role of community and awareness is equally important. The Limbus of Assam is playing a dynamic role in reviving the language. They are trying their utmost for the upliftment of language by generating awareness among community members in general. Language is the identity of community. In this case, the community members

voice that each individual from all age groups must show interest in learning and knowing their language. The community members must be the custodian of their native language.

In Limbu context, the fear of the loss of their language is a foremost concern among Limbus of Assam. They are at their best in learning language in all possible means. The researcher could sense the eagerness to learn their language as they delineated, it would have been better if the Limbu language could be officially taught at school levels as Sikkim does.

Food Culture and Dietary Patterns

Limbus mostly practices traditional agricultural cultivation. It involves determining the favourable time to plant, harvest crops, preparation of land terracing, sowing, planting, weeding, collecting, threshing, etc. The staple food is maize, millet, wheat, barley, buckwheat, and rice.

The Limbu diet normally includes rice, vegetables, meats, and rice beer. In their culinary method, rice is cooked in aluminium pot placed upon metallic tri stand in the center of hearth. Later, the food dines among family members near to fireplace. The dietary regime includes spinach, green leafy like mustard leaf, etc. and vegetables like potato, radish, squash, tomato, pumpkin, brinjal, bitter gourd, white gourd, french bean, soya bean, ladyfinger, scallions, bitter eggplants, etc. Besides, chilli, ginger, garlic, coriander, turmeric, etc. are used as spices. A variety of tubers such as, arum, yam, sweet potato etc. are eaten during breakfast or leisure time.



Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4: A view of the paddy field in Sikkim (left). A farm haystack (right)



Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6: *Sekuwa* in bamboo sticks on a wood fire in a traditional way mixed with natural herbs, spices, and other ingredients (left). Pork roasted in metal sticks (right)

The Limbus consume meat and fish as a source of protein in everyday diets. They acquire fowls and animals from domestication. Additionally, the nutritional regime includes pickle, *chutney*, the concoction of radish, and spicy ingredients, fermented soybeans, dry meat, pumpkin seed pickle, bamboo shoot, fermented *gundruk* and fermented *sinki*- generally made from spinach leaves and radish, etc. Also, several fruits either wild or locally grown are eaten by Limbus. The self-grown fruit includes

orange, jack fruit, plum, papaya, banana, guava, sugarcane, lemon, strawberry, kiwi, and mango.

The traditional alcoholic beverage is usually consumed at every house except for some. Alcohol beverages are of three varieties: *rakshi* ‘distilled from millet’, *jaar* ‘brewed from rice’, and *tongba* ‘fermented millet beverage’. It is usually sipped after arduous work in the field and served to the guests which signify auspicious service of hospitality and is a symbol of respect to the guest. The local alcoholic drink is also savoured at social and political gatherings, economic enterprises, and sacred festivities, etc. It is brewed locally in houses and taken after a meal as an alternative to water or juices.



Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.8: *Tongba* in a cylindrical wooden tumbler (left). *Tongba* sipped through a long straw in a cylindrical bamboo tumbler by a womenfolk (right)

Additionally, brewing includes different methods. The *rakshi* brewing process is intricate and painstaking. The mixture is added with *morcha* (yeast cake) and stored in a basket for fermentation. After a few days of intervals, a required quantity is mixed into a bamboo basket lined with banana leaves and filtered by putting an appropriate amount of lukewarm water from the top. A container is placed beneath

the lower mouth of the basket to receive the thin white and sweetish liquid. However, the quality and taste may vary due to inconsistency in the brewing process of the individuals.

For preparing *jaar*, a quantity of boiled rice is blended with yeast cake and stored in a container wrapped with banana leaves for fermentation. After two days, the fermented mixture is pored over with warm or cold water and is extracted by squeezing with a netted sack for self-consumption or serving the guests. The texture of rice beer from this procedure is whitish thick and sour. The traditional alcoholic beverage is popular in Eastern Himalayas. It is the indigenous drink of the Limbus which is culturally and religiously important in their society.

In briefly defining the procedures of the traditional alcoholic beverages, for example, *tongba*- in actual is the vessel that holds the fermented millet alcoholic beverage identified as *mandokpenna thee*, which is prepared by culinary and fermenting whole grain millet. People let the cooked millet cool and blend it with *khesung* (the mould, bacteria and yeast source). Then, they collect the mass and preserve in a woven bamboo basket lined with green leaves or plastic, covered with a thick fold of cloth, and place it in a warm place for 2-3 days depending on the temperature. Next, they pack the sweet mass tightly in an earthenware pot or plastic jars and seal it to prevent air from entering. After 7 to 15 days, depending on the temperature, the fermentation process is complete, and the mass is transformed to *mandokpenaa thee*. The *mandokpenaa thee* mature while left in pot after completion of fermentation. During this time, the taste intensifies and becomes mellower. Traditionally, people store it for approximately 6 months. Limbus uniquely consumes *tongba*: they add the fermented millet in a *tongba* (container), pour boiled water to the brim, and leave it undisturbed for 5 minutes. After that, it is ready to drink. They insert a fine bamboo straw with a

blind end. Nevertheless, perforated on side to act as a filter, into the container to enjoy the warm water and alcohol from the millet grains. The more often people sip *tongba* the more it dries, so warmer water is needed as per the requirement. This process is repeated while drinking until the alcohol is exhausted. This brew tastes like an ale with low alcohol content and produces an intense feeling of warmth for enduring temperatures that go below freezing in winter.

Likewise, *rakshi*, a distilled alcoholic beverage which is a strong and clear drink like vodka. It is made from *kodo* (millet) or rice- different grains offer different flavours. The Limbus often occasionally serves this drink in a silver mug or glass. *Rakshi* is poured from a height using a *kitli* (a pitcher) with a small spout, making an entertaining spectacle. *Rakshi* is produced with large amounts of wood, sold, and often consumed at rustic distilleries around the villages. Besides the daily dietetic habits, the Limbus fondly drink tea as a favoured beverage.

Dress and Ornaments

The women of Limbu community have been traditionally wearing *Sim/ Phariya*. This is made out of a long cloth which is spread across 5 metres in length. This is then draped and pleated all over the body by pinioning on both the shoulders by holding together by a *Phaoee* (belt) round the midriff. *Sim* is an ankle length wrap around that is worn with collared chemise coinciding one another. This duo is found and worn in varied pattern and dye found in different styles with the changes coming up with modifications albeit there is particular kind made of *Dhaka*.



Figure 2.9 and Figure 2.10: Women in readymade attire during *Chasok Tongnam* (left). Women in traditional gear made of *Dhaka* (right)

The traditional fabric of the Limbus is *Dhaka* handloom that is usually prepared by weaving the cloth in the symmetrical shapes. This art of *Dhaka* making is passed generationally. Usually, mothers teach to weave clothes and instruct weaving skill their daughter. A Limbu woman is clad in *Dhaka* saree, or *Sim* chemise and stole. In the olden days, the community was skilled in sericulture. Customarily, females in the community would plait their hair in the double pigtales. The hair was not left uncovered, hence they use *Thakumey* (headscarf). Presently, this custom of using the headscarves is uncommon (except by elderly women) and hairstyles are varied.

Limbu women are fond of ornaments and they are often famed for their usage of ornaments made up of gold, silver, glass stones, coral/amber, and turquoise, etc. Limbu women wear *Samyanfung* (headwear)- huge circular disc in gold and a common design features a rounded or of varied shape at the epicentre. They costume *Nessey* (hefty rounded flat gold studs). The most common shapes are the springs of

water with coral or stones made out of different stones. Furthermore, *Laksari* (in their ears, 5 to 6 similar tiny gold rings in a row).



Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.12: The two womenfolk wearing different types of traditional ornaments

Limbu womenfolk wear a gold *Mundri* (as a nose ring), and a *Dhungri* (a stud nose ornament). Limbu women on their hands wear silver bangles and as anklets silver *Kalli* is worn. They adorn, *Phangsese* (necklaces made of nine gold beads which are strung with glass beads). Other ornaments comprise *Labaphung* (crescent-shaped gold ornament worn as hair clip). Limbu women are fond of the *Namloi* or *Yogapa* (large silver necklace) and *Sisiphung* or *Nekkhophung* (flower-shaped gold stud earrings).

Likewise, they also wear *Reji* (coin necklaces made up of ancient silver coins). Besides, Limbu women wear *Swagep* (gold ring for their fingers). Albeit, nowadays traditional dress and ornaments are solely meant for festive occasions and instead prefer modern earrings and bracelets.



Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.14: Reji (left). *Namloi* worn by the Limbu woman (right)

While the customary apparel for male is *Lappeta Sumba*. *Lappeta* is similar to Chinese top that has to be tied on the top right corner. This further need to be knotted on the points given or sometimes it is ready-to-wear that has ingrained button and *Sumba* is the trouser which is ankle length. The menfolk usually carry their *Bamphok* or *Khukuri* (machete shaped knife) and a *Phaoee* (kind of waist belt) to go along with the attire. They adorned their head with *Paga* (kind of hat) usually a blunt shape which is secured at the back with elongated cloth from the same hat.

The Limbu man is generally attired with *Ningkheng* (muffler), *Sardokpa*, *Suthekpa*, *Paohao*, *LappetaSumba*, and *Laoghek*. At present, the traditional attire of man has developed by modern blend and *Silam Sakma* (symbolic batch) pinned up in blazers on the left side to go along with the attire.



Figure 2.15 and Figure 2.16: Man wearing traditional attire with modern blend (left) and the same man wearing the attire made of traditional fabric (right)

Music, Musical Instruments, Musical Performances

Amidst, a busy life routine, the Limbus creates space for leisure time with music, and dance. They stage different ceremonial songs and dances during weddings, festivals, and rites. The recreational ones are performed at any given time and space. Apart, in any event, *Yalang* and *Kelang* dances are popular among the Limbus. It has no fixed time or space of enactment. The dance type is performed during events like marriages, housewarming parties, reception of guests, social gatherings, cultural festivals, community feasts, etc.



Figure 2.17 and Figure 2.18: The menfolk and womenfolk displaying *Yelang* dance (left). Menfolk staging *Kelang* (right) at *Chasok Tongnam* 2019

Among the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas, ethnic- musical instruments such as *Chyabrung* or *Ke* and *Negara* have an important role in Limbu society. Limbus does believe that *Chyabrung* is the lone instrument that certainly belongs to them. Albeit Limbus has a variety of musical instruments which is classified broadly into three groups: string instruments, wind instruments, and percussion instruments to deal with traditional musical instruments in context of Limbu musicology.



Figure 2.19 and 2.20: *Chyabrung* (left). *Negara* (right)

Limbus is fond of musical instruments and many types of traditional instruments are played by Limbu menfolk. As per categorization, in the string instruments- the *Tungeba*, (the single-stringed instrument) is played in *Sewa Samlo* and *Anmemung*, three-string droneinstrument and *Ungdung* are played in *Samlo*. Likewise, in the wind instruments- *Muphra* (kind of flageolet) and *Mephrama* (flute) are blown occasionally. Similarly, in percussion instrument- *Chyabrung* or *Ke* (long cylindrical hollow-log drum) is a famous instrument which is played on almost all the occasions by *Chyabrung* dancers. *Chyabrung* is usually sling from the performer's shoulders with the help of a belt and put it up to the level of the hip. Both palm and stick are used to play for producing deep resonant sounds for essential rhythms.



Figure: 2.21 and Figure 2.22: *Mephrama* (left). *MiklaKom* (right)

Observing the importance of *Chyabrung*, the Limbu ritual specialist also uses these long cylindrical hollow log drums which they hung at poles planted for rituals. With this, it shows the antiquity of *Chyabrung*, as a 'primitive' instrument. Moreover, the ritual specialist also uses instruments like *Chethya* or *Yethala* (brass plate), *Soyeng* (cymbal), *Ponghe* (sleigh bells), *Singsake* (two-faced frame drum), and *Khatantangbas* (kind of small- hourglass-shaped two-headed drum). These instruments are the idiophones of a ritual specialist.



Figure 2.23 and Figure 2.24: Shamanic drum at the altar (left). Shaman with brass plate (right)



Figure 2.25 and Figure 2.26: Bells of shaman

In addition, *Miklakom* (bamboo-harp) and *Phenjekon* (iron or metal-harp) is a melody instrument that is three to four inches long. It is played by placing them between upper and lower teeth producing a melodious sound. While another kind of musical instrument which is popularly known as *Negara* (kettledrum) is seemingly important as *Chyabrun*g to the Limbu way of life.

However, in an interesting twist, the *Negara* is the traditional instrument that has no implements in the song. It is used in rite de passage. It has two shares a male, and a female. A male is branded as *Kumba* and *Kumma* is a female. Generally, *Kumba* is

bigger than the size of the *Kumma*. The *Negara* is accompanied by a bell. Besides, there is a certain procedure to use *Negara* at first the *Kumba* is beaten followed by the *Kumma* and then accompanied by the bell. In the marriage system *Negara* are hanged on bamboo poles and beaten in even beats whereas in death rites *Negara* are to be carried by two-man and the other two menfolk must beat in odd beats including the other who must beat the bell. It dates to the history whereby the *Negara* was gifted to Limbus by the Chogyal king.



Fig 2.27 and Figure 2.28: *Kumma* and *Kumba* (left) and menfolk beating *Kumba* and *Kumma* accompanied by the bell (right)



Figure 2.29 and Figure 2.30: *Negara* hanged on bamboo poles (left) and *Chyabrung* sling in the player's shoulder on straps which are beaten with a stick and palm (right)

The Limbu musicology is generally marked through sustained singing in stated intervals. The tonal accent and glide, pitch level, melodic movement, rhythmic subtleties, and ethos of music based on its acoustics are interesting. Nevertheless, uncharted area of ethnomusicology for the academic research (Chaitanya Subba 1995: 48 emphases added). In instance, rhythm, melody, intonation and morphological, as well as syntactical characteristics, are to be considered then the Ethno-music of Limbus could be organised under the three broad categories viz (*Ibid*:1995).

- a) *Hakpare Samlo*
- b) *Palam Samlo* and
- c) *Nisammang Sewa Samlo*

Hakpare Samlo- In this form, it is mostly sung by the elderly menfolk who are considered well versed in the *Mundhum*. The rendition of *Hakpare Samlo* begins with a slow exposition, commences from the lower register, and moves up and descends creating a touchy cadence.

In the beginning, a chorus is accompanied by a solo voice. It is the opening section or prelude to the composition without semantic references. The composition incorporates melodic phrases and libretto presenting typical tonal syntaxes- moving from its pitch to another. The singer makes the song aesthetically acceptable and touchy through the tonal grace, inner sense of melodic proportions and embellishment of sound and senses with impromptu imagination and vocalization. This section has no rhythmic accompaniment and covers the middle and upper registers in slow and medium tempo, faster than the opening section.

Traditionally *Hakpare Samlo* is sung on almost all occasions, it has both spiritual and profane characteristics with its functional values. Interestingly, when it is sung in the

marriage ceremony, it converts into *Phungnawa Samlo*, linked with certain rites. *Kewaphungba* and *Mangdenhangba* are recalled with great reverence as convention setters of singing on happy occasions. Limbus has a belief that there exists a tradition of singing a song of *Phung Samlo* (flower) by ornamenting the *Phung Samlo* in the water pot and holding a competition among man and woman singer or it could be the singer belonging to same-sex to keep *Iremma* (fading) flowers *Hingma* (alive).

During fieldwork, most of the informants talked about this, nonetheless have never observed. On the other hand, the tradition of singing flower songs (flower with leaves and stems inserted in a water pot) with certain rituals is vague. One of the typical instances of this is the *Phungwachangma Samlo* of the *Tongsing* ritual.

Now and then, *Hakpare Samlo* takes a turn with an attempt to entertain by discussing on youthfulness and love affairs between the couple. In this context, it becomes epicurean- more mercurial and libertine. Similarly, for such attempts fairs that last for a few days or marketplace where a person from different villages gathers, and stays in the provisional shelter are considered appropriate. Get-togethers of people in households on especial occasions is often considered a suitable time and place to sing a *Hakpare Samlo*.

Hakpare Samlo when associated with *Khauma* ritual (the last obsequies ceremony) is recognized as *Inu Iphat Samlo*. The singer of this song mentions *Nawara Phiyang Lingba* and *Nawara Phiyang Lingma* as former singers who initiated singing song on *Khauma*. It is believed, this commenced since the death ceremony of *Tetlera Lahadongnama* or *Ire Idhuknama*, the mother of *Lagerekpa- Mamgerekpa*. It is sung throughout the night and fascinatingly it is full of *Mundhum*.

Hakpare Samlo is also recited on ceremonious rituals of *Sappok Chomen* and *Dundunge*. After the completion of these rituals, the priest and common people prefer to sing a song which they named *Sappok Chomen Samlo* and *Dungdunge Samlo*. In some case, there is also a tradition of crooning *Hakpare Samlo* after the worshipping ceremony of *Kemba Theba Sammang*. Here, the *Hakpare Samlo* is recognized as *Sagaplingba Samlo* which in turn is sung by only those members who know the ritual in full swing.

In the minute of singing a *Hakpare Samlo*, the singer appeals to all the listeners to respond to the issues raised. In this context, if somebody would respond then only the discussion would finally lead to some sort of classical deliberation on the subjects related to human life. With this, participation in *Hakpare Samlo* will further benefit the layman. It is believed the singer must sing at least for five minutes to almost one hour depending upon the issue of deliberation and pause for a few minutes. At this moment another singer must query something in between by singing in the same style for a minute.

During the process of singing, *tongba* is served from time to time to the singers and listeners too. There is no such trend of playing musical instruments while singing *Hakpare Samlo*. At present, stringed instruments for instance *Anmemung* (three-stringed instrument) are used in some events whereby the song is sung for a short duration. In recapitulation, *Hakpare Samlo* is a classical song which upholds myths, analects, and anecdotal reminiscences through *Mundhum* and events of the hoary past. It is a philosophical and religious discourse of moral values retained in the oral narratives.

Palam Samlo- It is an improvised song accompanying *Yalang* (harvest dance). *Ya* means paddy and *lang* mean dance. In the case of young men and women participating in *Yalang*, they sing a song in a form of a contest on the theme of love which requires impromptu imagination for repartee. There could be a lot of people participating in *Yalang* or *Yarakma* holding the hands of the opposite sex in a circle or line however one man or woman must choose one of the counterparts among them and must approach each of them. Occasionally friends come ahead to assist someone in his/her undertaking and accordingly *Palam Samlo* develops choral music without the accompaniment of a musical instrument.

There are several, melodic ranges, variations in tunes, melodic range, tempo, and rhythms of *Palam Samlo*. Therefore, it is difficult to portray the soundscape of *Palam Samlo* as it differs from place to place and person to person. Indeed, not a single Limbu is found who has not taken part in *Yarakma* in his/her youth. Nevertheless, only a limited number of people are well versed in *Palam Samlo*.

The tune or vocalization of the *Palam Samlo* depends on the form of dance. If the dance is *Kemba lang*, the emphasis of the music is on the style of the intonation, pitch finesse and therefore melody. Usually, it is sung in a slow tempo with a long regular gliding tune, difficult to measure with a metronome. If *Yalang* is a *Kushrakpa lang*, then *Palam Samlo* is rendered in medium and fast tempo which is dominated by rhythm, though percussion instruments are not used in the natural setting. It is a serenade in the form of a competitive duet between a young man and a young woman. It takes about ten minutes to one hour to propose from one side. With this, the other side must reply. One who proposes or answers must sing a passage, and others must follow which therefore takes a form of choral music.

The issue of the *Palam Samlo* literally means the relation between man and woman. This can be the fabricated loving relationships, desires, and obstructions, depressed or departure and troubled craving for lifespan. *Mayapi* is the climax and classical discussion of love affairs, and in the same way, *Semmui* is the profound expression of the pathos of the separation and tragic feelings.

Palam Samlo is full of optimistic romantic discussion, the themes of *Palam Samlo* are directed towards love life. *Mimji* (love) is delineated in personified form and raised to a higher level at each stage. If *Palam Samlo* is sung along with *Yalang* for a quite few nights, then the discussion will take the form of epic. The discussion includes the life of the earliest people, the origin of love, relations of affair, relationship for nuptial and similar arena of intrinsic hominid realm. Love in the community is equated with the various kinds of flora found in their worldview.

As per the Limbu belief system, there are several categories of flowers termed as the flower of death, love, youthfulness, separation, sorrow, and so on. In *Mayapi* of *Palam Samlo*, the word love is portrayed in the form of a flower for instance, why and how the seeds of the flower were sowed, where and how did they grow, what happened to the plants, how the blossoms appeared and how did they bloomed, who were charmed by beauty of flowers and finally what happened with the existence of flowers? In common sight, the leitmotif is similar to *Phungnawa Samlo* (song of origin of the flowers) or *Phungwachangma Samlo* (song of growing flowers). However, the sequence varies and emphasises is given where *Mimjyangba* and *Mimjyangma* (singers or lovers) agree to be dealt with.

Every so often, loves as a breathing object is taken from the low land to the snow-capped mountain tops and many times from there to the land of Gods. At this point,

the singer displays their knowledge of the features of places or objects and demonstrates their skills of poetic expression lending sentimental touch to its delineation.

Consequently, the love must pass through the route of those lands where the tender love experiences warm and cold, light and shadow, sun and rain, gales and gentle breeze, desolation and greenery, flood or landslides, scenic landscape, steepness, and smoothness, winding course, and straightway. One must ask for the suggestion of his/her sweetheart to save and nourish their love in every situation of the life journey. In due course, they must bring back love to their world. Yet again, there is a debate between the singers or lovers about whether they should lead their love to the community. With this, they must find the solution to the issues of customs, ethics and moral values of Limbu society.

It is informed, that *Palam Samlo* discussions are held among the singers regarding the issue of who should take the responsibilities of their love. The discussions chiefly center over the male role vs. female role in discharging the obligation of nurturing and caring for the sacred and immortal love, the love untainted by the desire for sexual pleasure, a love that generates a profound feeling of integration and intimacy beyond the spheres of influence of the marital relation. Hither, once again they must follow the dictates of traditional values and moral conscience which is guided by *Mundhum*.

Eventually, they debate about the appropriate place to keep their love. Whether it should be kept above the head, in the eye, within the heart, or on their shoulder. So, they assume that they should keep the greater portion of it in the eye, some portion in the heart, and some portion above the head. Limbus does believe that it is the eye

which brings the people in contact for the first time. In case if they had not seen each other, no question of love would have ever arisen between them, and so they have to keep most of their love in their eyes. Similarly, above the heads signifies the feelings, the sentimental aspects of love.

In the end, they sing the *Semmui Share* of the *Palam Samlo* which is full of the pathos of separation, frustration, evanescent nature of worldly things, life, and uncertainty of the future. The differences of lives, the aspirations, expectations, and imagination on one hand. Whilst on the other side, the bitter truths, periphery, obstacles, and constraints of everyday lives are pathetically depicted. In addition, the fears of the adverse situation which may hinder them to meet and singing together again and having an opportunity to refresh their former memory pre-dominate their ultimate annotations. For them, it becomes hard to separate and tears rolls down continuously making the cheeks wet with tears and visible.

Among Limbus, singing *Palam Samlo* and participating in *Yalakma* with a person of choice is the lone method of entertainment or enjoying life to the fullest. It is a means of communication and sharing feelings amongst a couple and enhancing understanding and cordiality. In some cases, this may lead to marriage unions too. It is noticed; most of the Limbus recognize *Palam Samlo* but only elderly people could deal at length with more than a few facets and contents of *Palam Samlo*.

Sewa Samlo- The religious parts of the *Mundhum* chanted by the ritual specialist in certain rituals is classified as *Nimsammang Sewa Samlo* or *Sewa Samlo*. It is said, the simple hymnody or psalmody of Limbus is acknowledged as *Sewa Samlo*. Nevertheless, contemporary, with the processes of change, it is recognized as a prayer to God or a litany just as *Bhajan*.

Sewa Samlo is typically recited by a single singer whilst others join the chorus. In order to make the *Sewa Samlo* song impressive, cymbals, sleigh bells, *Tungeba* (one or three-stringed instrument) and *khatangtangba* (hand drum) is used. Traditionally *Sewa Samlo* is associated with the propitiation rite conducted at any event. The ritual specialist is believed to sing *Sewa Samlo* in their traditional bent without the participation of any member.

Subsequently, it is confined to ritual specialist, nonetheless at present, it has been modified and popularized by Satya Hangma Religious Movement among the Limbu and Rai communities tagging the line of the Hindu tradition of devotional songs.

Besides rhythms, Limbus has different indigenous dances. The dance excites both the partakers and the audience amidst their arduous life. Limbus relish several varieties of traditional dances based on the performance genres. Nevertheless, the present research, emphasizes on two types of dances which includes as below-

- *Kelang or Chyabrung* (drum dance), and
- *Phedangma lang* (Ritual specialist dance).

Kelang- It is danced by suspending the *Ke* in front of the body with the help of a leather cord following the percussion of the *Ke*. Usually, it is danced without song but when the song follows the beatings of the *Ke*, it becomes more interesting. It is executed by male dancers only albeit on some occasions it is attended by female dancers. In the beginning, this dance was performed on *Himge* (a ceremonial function before occupying the newly built house).

At present, this practice is in rare case however, if the dance is supposed to perform on *Himge* then the *Ke* danseurs are supposed to dance everywhere surrounding the

Murumsitlang by appealing to the *Okwanama* (a divinity) that guards the homes of the Limbu community. Thereafter, the dancers move out of that house and the fore pillars to make number of circles of that house. At the ending of their performance the dancers perform in the annex. There is a belief, that these performers are gifted spiritually. They invoke the placating Deities and Gods. They even shoo away the malicious spirits, thus excaping from the bad events that might occur in the future.

Similarly, there is also the belief, that the performers do not need to chant the *Mundhum* because it is communicated through the dance purposes. At present, *Kelang* is performed generally in the marriage ceremony and other happy events and has begun to include female dancers' side by side. The female dancers stand in between *Ke* dancers and follow the beating sounds of *Ke* by clapping hands, dancing by proper footing, and bodily movement.

Interestingly, there is a different form of *Kelang* which is termed as per the tag of birds and animals however, they are genre-specific names viz.

- a) *Yasa lang* (Himalayan Chamois dance)
- b) *Khire lang* (Stag dance)
- c) *Sippethukpa lang* (dove dance)
- d) *Parewa lang* (pigeon dance)
- e) *Melluk lang* (sheep dance)
- f) *Muiyan lang* (eagle dance)
- g) *Mora lang* (peacock dance)
- h) *Cheerap phem lang* (butterfly dance)
- i) *Yamlakwa lang* (crimson horned pheasant)
- j) *Lang pang pitchama* (cow dance)

- k) *Sanwa lang* (buffalo dance)
- l) *Menda lang* (goat dance)
- m) *Takmi lang* (elephant dance)
- n) *Warup lang* (frog dance)
- o) *Ngabhunji lang* (fish dance)
- p) *Sijowa lang* (swallow dance)
- q) *Kedi lang* (rhinoceros dance)
- r) *Ong lang* (horse dance)
- s) *Mayu lang* (bear dance)
- t) *Sobha lang* (the monkey dance)
- u) *Yema pulang* (flycatcher dance), etc.

In these types of dances, the dancers imitate the activities, behaviours, mating dances, loving gestures, fighting off various animal species, and birds. Various messages are communicated through these dances which heighten the state of sensibility.

Phedangma Lang- There are some ritual dances as parts of the overall ritual performances which are performed by *Phedangma* on special occasions. Their dances are recognized as *Pungsam lang*, *Thepsang lang*, *Ungsam lang*, etc. The dancers in these events are believed to be controlled by the spirits they perform the ritual for the particular event. They scream in the process with enthusiasms. This ritual is performed by beating drums and other equipments like brass plates in the state of trans. While, they dance, shake their heads energetically throughout the process. This process also involves narration of *Mundhum* and spells, however this process of spell utterance or *Mundhum* narration is entirely diverse in the occasion. This kind of dances is observed in *Tongsing* rituals. When *Phedangma* are not in the state of possession, they perform the dances by beating the brass plate with a short baton in

their hands, supported by the resonating sounds of the drum. These dances also follow a similar pattern as in *Ke* dance.

Phedangma is famous for its typical dances which are known as *Tetlang* (Ashman Subba 1989). Some of the *Ke* dancers says that *Phedangma lang* is just other name for *Chirphemba lang* (butterfly dance). The invocation rituals of the night are incomplete without their dance. Even if, the state of possession lasts for few minutes, the dance continues for several minutes. It is said, the crescendo passage of the litany makes the performance more attractive. The dramatic expression of the erotic drives can also be observed in the dance. The globular bells attached to the belts and brass plate which can be played by a baton are some of the musical instruments used in this dance. One can see, an assistant always accompanies such processes.



Figure 2.31 and Figure 2.32: *Phedangma* and *Samba* beating brass plate while rhythmically moving around the erected altar (left). *Yeba* (right)

Visual Culture: Art and Crafts

Limbus exhibits enormous skills through architecture and craftsmanship. The architectural expertise is pre-eminently evident in traditional houses and granaries. Observing the Limbus traditional house pattern, the windows and doors are embroidered with wood carvings. The outer walls of the houses are painted with different materials like red mud, cowdung, and limestone. Each house has *Murumsitlang*¹⁰(main pillar) in the center of the house on the ground floor mostly in the kitchen.



Figure 2.33 and Figure 2.34: Typical house found in Sikkim Himalayas (left).

Embroidered windows with wood carvings (right)

However, the houses are like other ethnic communities in the Eastern Himalayas which could be because of the neighbourhood belonging to different communities in the same village. The rooms and the spaces or the design of the house is drawn from the

¹⁰*Murumsitlang* is also referred to as *Hangsitlang* (Thapa 2017). Sagant refers to *hang* as ‘ancestor’ (1996[1976]: 108). It seems more meaningful to refer to the pillar as *Hangsitlang*, but still *Murumsitlang* (lower pillar) will be used throughout the thesis, since the informants used the term *Murumsitlang*.

history of the community, lifestyle of the people, and their tradition and culture. This infact is seen in other commuinites, and cultures also are coerced with other ethnic communities.

Consequently, the Limbu house is difficult to identify from an exterior outlook. During fieldwork, the traditional houses were seen as rare and the houses are endangered since it is hardly built because of adaptation to modern architecture. In present days, however, the few Limbu houses have a trend of designing entry gates, doors or balcony railings using *Silam Sakma* -symbol to identify the Limbu house with modern touch. The representation resembles the shape of a diamond having nine solid diamond silhouettes which is maintained by the dual axis at the nucleus, one is put up upright. This symbol is seemingly diamond in shape and has nine concentric diamond shapes supported by two axes at the center, one vertically and the other one horizontally. Be that as it may say, the present researcher sense with this evolving modern architecture the Limbu craftsmanship is likely to get extinct along with the traditional housing pattern.

The houses are nearly all same size and structure, with a veranda or porch, one hearth, and a granary. The hearth is fixed with a tri strand. Above the hearth a doubled decked bamboo shelf is fixed in a suspended manner. The lower-level shelf is used for smoking meats and the upper shelf is stacked with firewood's and house articles. The house comprises domestic articles of daily use such as the baskets, utensil, furniture, agricultural implements, etc. The apparatuses are principally crafted from bamboo and cane.

A granary is vital for the Limbu family. It is used for storing grains and valuable products. The granaries are normally constructed in the corner of the

kitchen. The structure is generally rectangular and walled with rough-hewn wooden planks or splits bamboo which is then plastered with the mixture of clay and cow dung.

Moreover, the granary could be of various types and it differ in shape, size, construction techniques, and materials. With this outlook, the granary in the Eastern Himalayas is famous with its name *Dhikuti*- which is built inside house often utilizing one of the existing walls. *Dhikuti* is a long-term method of grain storage. It is commonly four-sided box or bin built of wooden planks, which has the wooden lid, it protects the grains by upholding dryness. The wooden lid also additionally checks the invasion of rodents and insects to the storage.

Furthermore, the granary could also build with bamboo strips. For this, a large mat is plaited using bamboo strips bent into a circular frame and sewn with jute thread. The circular bamboo sheet is fixed in the dry ground using a mixture of clay and cow dung. This fabricated granary is coated with mixed red clay and cow dung and allowed to dry.

Grain is placed in this granary and the top portion is enclosed with a bamboo straw mat. The storage is then sealed with clay and cow dung mixture to protect it from vermin and insects. Besides, the Limbu knows the traditional skill-based works like making *Doko* (wicker basket), *Damlo*, *Namlo* (band of jute or bamboo strip), and plough and so on. Ample of the traditional skill-based products are crafted from bamboo ranging from bridges, roofs, floors, ceilings, walls, mats, trays, water carriers, filters, sieves, containers, etc and a wide variety of utilitarian baskets like *Dalo*, *Dali*, *Thunse*.



Figure 2.35 and Figure 2.36: *Doko* (left). *Namlo* (right)



Figure 2.37 and Figure 2.38: *Thunse* (left). *Dali* (right)

Bamboo is also crafted into mugs, fishing nets, ladles, furniture, and showcase varieties, etc. A common construction of thatched roofs for houses, bamboo poles and strips are used extensively for construction of such roofs. Bamboo pipes are used as irrigation canals in mountainous terrain. Musical flutes like *Murali* and *Bansuri*- flute are crafted. Flute making has been in practice since ancient time. Before, Limbus had the system of measurement for grain until a few decades ago when cereals and grains were measured with the *Pathi* or *Mana*.



Figure 2.39 and Figure 2.40: Mug (left). Ladle (right)

Nevertheless, contemporary, Limbus has adopted the metric system of measurement and the old system could be seen in rare cases. For agricultural use *Nanglo* (winnow) is woven out of bamboo bark- it has a circular rim and is to some extent shallow. For sieving grain and flour, a perforated bamboo sieve is crafted from bamboo strips, it is made in different mesh sizes. Utilitarian baskets like the *Doko*, *Dalo*, *Dali*, *Sholi*, *Thunse* and *Kharpan*, etc. are used for carrying different products and therefore have different shapes and sizes. They are conical in shape, with wide opening and a narrow base. The *Doko* is woven with a lattice, whereas the *Dalo*, *Dali*, *Sholi*, and *Thunse* have a comfortable weave, thereby allowing even fine grains to be carried or stored in them.



Figure 2. 41: *Nanglo*

The *Kharpan* is woven in pairs in a shallow circular fashion and is used for carrying goods-using a bamboo pole on the shoulder. The *Tokri* is another type of bamboo basket with a narrow opening and a wide base which has a usage of container. Limbus hill porters often carry *Doko*. Interestingly, with the perfect shape and lightness, combined with strength, *Doko* has remained unchanged. Most of the Eastern Himalayas villagers use these baskets every day for carrying firewood, grass, and other possessions.

Socio-Political System

Among the Limbus, customary laws are regulated by the Limbu council known as *Tumyanghang*. It is a self-governing society which includes male members as incumbent representatives regardless of age. The administrative structure of the Limbus is essentially democratic, autocracy in any form has not been known to them and in the absence of a distinct clan of nobility, the oligarchy has remained equally unknown.



Figure 2. 42 and Figure 2.43: *Tumyanghang* (left). *Samba* asks permission from the *Tumyanghang* before commencing the ritual during the funeral rite (right)

Although the women are free to attend the council, seldom participate in arbitration. Their social exclusion is due to the prevalence of the patriarchal system with a greater role of men in the political sphere, social restriction for women (for mensuration and child-birth), and shift of residence to in-law's place after marriage.

An informant in his 57's positing shaming as another basis for gender gap says- "customarily all the members of the village are counted as members of village meeting. Membership in village meetings almost starts with his birth in the Limbu society. With the coming of age, he automatically finds himself involved in the affairs of the meeting as a member".

There is no fixed day or time for council, but meetings are summoned when any dispute arises. The *Mangheem* serves as the venue for festivals. Generally, the council is presided by the *Tumyanghang* nominated from the village based on seniority, virtue, dexterity, and wisdom of traditional lore.

In case of divorce through disagreements, the guilty husband has to pay for divorcing from his wife, for childbirth and fostering for breastfeeding and alimony for humiliation of women in society among the couple with children. On the contrary, if the wife is liable for divorce, she forfeits reparation for the bride visiting the husband and payment for the bride price is paid by her second husband in case of remarriage.

Likewise, the cost of funeral rites is levied upon the clansmen who fail to attain and funeral rites of their relatives. The compensations are given either in cash or kind. In the incidence of skirmishes, the *Tumyanghang* intervenes and counsels the Limbus to sustain peace and solidarity. It also acts as the custodian of customary norms and practices by prescribing guidelines for the better interest of the Limbu society. It administers all the social activities based on customary laws and chastises the one who violates them.

On a wider spectrum, in regard with the Limbus political and social structures, the old caste association of *Tumyanghang* is alive within the Limbus. The Limbu society is guided by senior-most members of society. The councils consist of ten senior members from different clans residing in village. Of course, each village has their *Tumyanghang*, but anyone can join the village as *Tumyanghang*. It is informed, there should be at least five at minimum in case of unavailability of ten different clans in village. Nevertheless, it should be at least ten members from different clans from different villages for formation of the topmost council. The function of the council varies. If the community makes any historical decision, then the *Tumyanghang* of different villages are called upon and made a consensus collectively.

The Limbus requires the *Tumyanghang* in every important event of the rite de passage and connubial norms, etc. There are also the councils of Limbu ritual

specialist but it is also guided by the *Tumyanghang*. Sharing information and executing customary laws are said in the form of word of mouth excluding the cases of clash. The headman of the community recites and passes the law and order orally and the person must accept it.

The current panchayat system takes care of the improvement of village in general. The gram panchayats formulate edicts, ordinances, and administer everyday affairs of the village in a centralised form of government. As a policy-making body, it promulgates new by laws on any impending matters. In the incidence of skirmishes, gram panchayats intervene and counsel the villagers to sustain peace and commanality.

Conclusion

The elderly members of the community are always in stress asking the youngster, “What is the identity of the limbu? “You are not a Limbu if you do not speak the Limbu language”. Naturally, the younger ones understand the elder’s concern and the youngster’s hesistant in conversing in their own language. However, the Limbu community has accepted the change among the youngster, it is often heard them saying, that even if they do not know their mother tounge they are an integral part of the Limbu community by virtue of their birth. Moreover, the traditionalists often say things like half and pure Limbu on the basis of their parent’s caste and community, when father was Limbu but the mother a non-Limbu. Again, some say a Limbu is a status given by the virtue of birth or in case of marrage into the community. The discussion on who is pure and mixed Limbu is a topic of discussion that will continue forever. Now, the question on who is genuine and who is phoney in various levels. In this study, the Limbus residing in the region of Darap is believed to be the unalloyed

breed who are more knowledgeable with regard to Limbu culture as Darap is the place where Limbus lives predominantly and has no external influences. Is it true? In this research study, it set out to examine whether living in the majority make a Limbu purer and more knowledgeable than those living in a multi-cultural environment?

Limbus of Sikkim

Sikkim is the land of mystic splendour, a Himalayan state of Northeast India. Most of the Limbus is found in East Nepal near the border of Sikkim. Hence, the Limbus in Sikkim is mostly inhabited in the borderland of the West district of Sikkim. In Sikkim the lingua franca is Nepali, nevertheless Limbus has their own language popularly known as *Yakthung Pan*. In Limbu society, *Mundhum* has its significant role which is recited by *Phedangma*. In this context, it can be said that *Mundhum* is that one thing which upkeeps the Limbu ceremonies thriving. The tradition and culture of Limbus are molded by *Mundhum*, and *Mundhum* is wrought by *Phedangma*. Hence, one can see the interrelationship between the *Mundhum* and *Phedangma*. In fact, the survival of *Mundhum* is by recital from *Phedangma*. So, in the absence of *Mundhum*, *Phedangma* doesn't exist visa vis in the absence of *Mundhum*. Limbu society might collapse as the main tradition and culture relies within *Mundhum*.



Figure 2. 44 and Figure 2.45: Shaman (left). Costumes of a shaman (right)

Sikkim: The Current Outlook

Sikkim is a tiny mountainous state in India. The name Sikkim is derived from the Limbu word, *Su-Him*, an amalgamation of *Su* meaning ‘new’, *Him* means ‘house’, therefore, it means ‘new house’. According to local narratives, when Tensung Namgyal married the daughter of Limbu Chief Yo Yo Hang and built the palace in Rabdentse for her, she named it *Su-Him*. Its anglicized name is Sikkim which is in popularity today. In another note, according to Waddell (1978:10), Sikkim means “the land of mountain crests”.

In Sikkim context, Nathula pass is one of the highest motorable roads in the world. It is this mountain pass in the Himalayan peaks that co-joins Sikkim and China. It is situated on the Indo-Tibetan border 14450 ft. above sea level. The Nathula pass was re-opened in 2006 since then, it has been serving as an official Border Personnel Meeting (hereafter BPM) point. It is one of the three open trading border posts amid India and China, the Nathula pass has played a crucial role in Sino- Indian trade. An amalgamation of *nathu* meaning listening ears and *la* means pass. Nathula pass is renowned for its picturesque beauty with beautiful environment. The temperature

remains low in most of the parts which is located on the old silk route. Nathula pass was sealed for almost 4 decades after the people's republic of China suppressed Tibetan uprising in 1959. However, when former prime minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China in 2003, talks to open the strategic route were resumed. The border is situated just 54km away from the Gangtok capital of Sikkim.

Anonymous (2009), in a remark in *Himal South Asia* states that Sikkim presents a paradox for South Asia. It is an enormously prosperous state, but the economy flourishes owing only to largesse from the New Delhi. Significant potentials for mountain tourism, agroforestry, and hydropower do exist, but for now, the Sikkim is rich merely because of the INR 150 million that the Indian government pours into the state (population 5.4 lakhs by the 2001 census) every year. Besides, that figure is only direct government support, which is supplemented by much ancillary assistance, from rural road building to self-employment schemes. But will the state be able to stand on its own once the pampering, inevitably, comes to an end? For now, in the rush to access official munificence, few seem to be asking this question- nor working to upgrade the local human resource, first and foremost through up-gradation of education. The unchecked rush to the future is also visible in the Sikkim Government opening up the great Teesta River and its tributaries to hydropower extraction without the reference to environment, culture, and economy.

The anonymous author further traces Sikkim owes its enviable status as a sump for central funds to two factors. First is the sensitive border with Tibet, which the state abuts, and second is the ghost, so to speak, of the 1975 merger, when New Delhi engineered move to bring formerly independent protectorate within the Indian union. Both of these factors today lead New Delhi to close its eyes to the inefficiencies, wastage and corruption that take place in this center and state relationship. The

sensitivity of the Indian security establishment to the border with China, of course, goes back to the 1962 war, in which New Delhi was found unprepared and emerged humiliated. The aftermath has been a heightened sensitivity, if not paranoia, regarding the northern frontier, which colours New Delhi dealing with entire rimland, including Bhutan and Nepal. For its share, Sikkim provides the closest point to the Tibetan plateau, to the metropolitan centers of the Ganga basin (Anonymous 2009).

In context to the current outlook, People of Sikkim are modern in their outlook generally and very accepting of changes like people of other states of India. They don't hold on to some rigid old customs, practices, and even attire for this matter. This is the one reason why there are many religious converts and cultural changes in terms of language and dressing in Sikkim. Westernization comes in the form of change therefore people of Sikkim accept the change more freely and absorb it. People of Sikkim always had an individualistic sort of fashion even when it comes to traditional attire. Every man and woman put their little twist on what they wore even if it looked from other's perspectives. For instance, women exchange ideas on weaving and beading with one another and try to follow a similar traditional pattern but if one looks closely, they are not alike. Some are considered more beautiful than the others by the way it is put together, and correspondingly the menfolk who weave traditional bamboo materials, construct houses, etc. have varying individual styles and are looked upon for their capacity in their respective fields. In parallel, the same can be applied when sees into music, fashion, lifestyle, etc. which are interdependent. People tend to admire finer and beautiful things and have an individualistic fashion sense which indirectly creates a healthy and speedy competition thus boom in the fashion world here.

Besides, in the last few years, Sikkim has been attracting several tourists from across the globe. Particularly, after topping the list of the worlds 'best regions to visit in 2014' by one of the top and popular travel guides Lonely Planet. "Picking up national accolades in 2012 for being India's cleanest state with the most innovative tourism project. Sikkim has set new benchmarks for responsible travel in the country." The travel guide articulates that, "checkbox sightseeing has rapidly made way for sustainable community-based tourism in less developed areas, whereas eco-friendly policies have lent new vigour to the virginal Himalayan wilderness that drapes the region's mountains." Praising the food in Sikkim, the travel guide notes that organic farming is new mantra which is promoted immensely. Nevertheless, before travel bug which brings tourist at present. Since long time ago Sikkim has been of interest to scholars, administrators, and explorers. Mount Kanchenjunga the third highest peak in the world is believed to be the guardian deity of Sikkim. Likewise, the various mountain peaks, glaciers, lakes, hot springs, waterfalls, and many rivers add its diverse range of flora and fauna which is integral to the ecosystem of the small Mountainous state of Sikkim¹¹.

When Joseph Dalton Hooker, the world-famous botanist to Halfdan Siiger Danish embark on the expedition to Sikkim in the Eastern Himalayas, a few interesting findings of them have introduced Sikkim to the scholarly world because their topic of interest were generally descriptive narratives talking about people of Sikkim and the region. In recent times, it has been noticeable that the gradual development in Sikkim studies from both foreign and Indian scholars with establishment of Sikkim Central University as well.

¹¹Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2014. <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>. Date of Access: 05.08.2020.

Equivalently, currently with an increased role of tourism in economic system of Sikkim. Also, since culture and tourism are closely associated with one another temples, monasteries, religious festivals, and scenic locations are promoted and financed by government of Sikkim. The Buddhist monasteries have traditionally been, and still are, popular and the monasteries contribute to the representation of Sikkim as a land of Buddhists. However, at present, there is a shift from politics to the ethnic diversity of the region. Limbu people have started to make their houses into homestays which further aids in this shift. Here, it is vital to note that the craftwork has been revitalized and can be seen in the cultural center of Limbus in Tharpu, West Sikkim.



Figures 2. 46 and 2.47: Limbu cultural center in Tharpu West Sikkim

Limbus of Darap

The word Darap originated from the Limbu word ‘*Tan- lap*’ which means land in a funnel-shaped valley. Darap is quite rich both culturally and traditionally and the place is coming up as an upcoming eco-tourism and homestay destination. Darap is one of the unexplored beauties of the Sikkim where one could spend a bucolic stay amidst nature away from the crowd. The important destination of this area is

Singalala Yambung Range, Neydham Holy Cave, Ranidhunga, etc. Located approximately 7 km from the busy town of Pelling West Sikkim at an altitude of 5100 feet, Darap lies in the foothills of Mount Kanchenjunga. The Limbus considers Mount Kanchenjunga to be a guardian deity. The worship of mount Kanchenjunga by the Limbus certifies them living in the place flanking both sides of this mountain, since time immemorial. Darap is mainly inhabited by the Limbu population. Likewise, Darap is a village famous for its largest production of cardamom. Cardamom has become the main source of income for most of the villagers.



Figure 2.48 and Figure 2.49: A view of Darap village of West Sikkim



Figure 2.50 and Figure 2.51: Mount Kanchenjunga saw from Darap village West Sikkim (left). Scenic view of cardamom plantations on the way to Darap village (right)

It was the period for Legislative assembly elections 2019 and the code of conduct kicked off which prevented researcher from conducting fieldwork during the first scheduled month. Fieldwork in Darap was greatly hampered by-elections which were at their height. During that thwarting month, the researcher was privileged to meet one of her friends. Her established networks accommodated the researcher in accommodation throughout the researcher's stay in Darap. In addition, at times, the heavy rain of monsoon was risky. So, after the weather calmed down, frequent trips were made for fieldwork.



Figure 2.52 and Figure 2.53: Associations version of *Mangheem* (left). YMMCC version of *Mangheem* (right) located in Darap West Sikkim

Furthermore, Darap is located in Western part of Sikkim, 135.1 km away from Gangtok the capital of Sikkim. The Darap village is made of a bunch of hamlets, these are acknowledged as wards for official's reasons. The village comprise of 7 wards that has 2000 population out of which the Limbus are in majority who are sparsely populated with 90 %. The concrete path passes the village that connects Darap, Pelling to Gyalshing, and Joerthang. The two vehichels 'Khamdhak' and 'Yuma Samyo' runs as daily service that connects Darap, to Joerthang and back to

Darap. It has the last stop for the motorable road in Darap which ends at the playground of the school in Darap. Darap has two schools allocated to them namely is Darap Senior Secondary School and Singpheng Government Junior High school. Darap has an Integrated Child Department Services (ICDS) too. The total number of household in Darap village is 207. The majority of people belonged to Khamdhak and Nugu who were believed to be the early incomers in Darap.

Table 2.2 Clan Distribution in Village

Clans	No. of Households
1. Khamdhak	105
2. Nogu	85
3. Phurumbo	1
4. Libang	1
5. Parangden	5
6. Yangmaboo	2
7. Pago	4
8. Pega	3
9. Lakom	1

It was observed clans' twig to cluster. For example, in the bazaar area, only Khamdhak were residing in that ward while below the bazaar had the majority of Nugu people households. Sole clan belonging to Phurumbo, Lebang, and Luxom are the result of the marriage relation from Limbus from various different places of West Sikkim. In various cases the husband came and settled down in the wife's houses. The houses were found to be modern and strong. Earlier, Limbus had the

traditional way of constructing the house by erecting *Murumsitlang* and interestingly, it was still found to be in practice.



Figure 2.54 and Figure 2.55: Modern house representing the fusion of modern and traditional (left). *Murumsitlang* and fireplace that is ritually important (right)

Limbus of Darjeeling

Nestled amidst the hills of lesser Himalayas and blanketed by emerald green plantations of tea. Darjeeling is a scenic town noted for the picturesque beauty, jaw-dropping locales, mesmerising sunrises, ancient forests, quaint houses, beautiful colonial architecture, mansions, churches, and meandering toy train in Indian state of West Bengal. The majestic Kanchenjunga towers over this beautiful town. Above the town of Ghoom Jorebunglow there lies tiger hill which has a panoramic view of Mount Kanchenjunga. The tiger hill soaks up the first rays of the sun amidst the highest peaks of the world.

Darjeeling popularly known as the queen of the hills stands at the height of 2050 metres above sea level, thus boasting cool weather all year round. The city is known as the queen of the hills because the lush green slopes dotted with women plucking tea leaves are a sight as mesmerising as no other. Darjeeling the queen of hills, nestling in the grandeur and beauty of towering snow-capped mountains with the abode of God Indra, Kanchenjunga, and snowy sentinels which have an incredibly beautiful name with various origins.

The belief of the Kirati suggests that the upper cave of the *Mahakal Dara* at Darjeeling in past days was called *Duwa-Ling* meaning that stony place, where the Kirati as part of their rites of ancestral used to worship with the stone offerings. Many stone offerings inside the cave still visible today serve as mute testimony to this fact (Fieldwork 2019)

The origin of the word Darjeeling has many related interpretations. One theory suggests that it is named after *Dorje-ling*, the Buddhist monastery that once stood on the Observatory Hill Overlooking Mall, the nerve center of the town. The name Darjeeling therefore appears to be a corruption of Dorjeling, ‘*Dorje*’ standing for the ecclesiastical sceptre or the double-headed thunderbolt (in Tibet the word *Vajrah* became *Dorje*, common of all emblems associated with priestly power), which the Lama holds in his hand during service, and ‘*ling*’ meaning place. Another story goes that the monastery at the observatory hill was constructed in 1757 and completed in 1763, the chief monk of this monastery was Rinzing Dorji Legden La, hence the name ‘Dorji-Ling’ or the ‘the place where Dorji lives’ came into prominence (Malley 1999).

Darjeeling was part of the domain of the Rajah of Sikkim. The British government received the deed of grant of Darjeeling from the Raja of Sikkim out of friendship in 1835. During those times, the population of Darjeeling was sparsely populated with only one hundred inhabitants. The place had much viability besides being a hill station socially. The place could be developed as a replica of European hometown for foreigners. It was also a strategic location to watch over the neighbouring kingdoms (*Ibid*: 1999), of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. With the coming of the British, Darjeeling became a bustling hub for many activities as a hill station the British where new roads were constructed, educational institutions were established and tea plantations were introduced. So, when Campbell took charge of hill station at the end of 1839, he promised free land to new settlers. Another main contribution by the British has been the education system that attracted people from various system. It also attracted people from various regions and countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh etc. (Dash 1947). Ethnically, majority of the people in the hills are of Mongolian origin and Limbus are one among the many. In addition, the physical feature of Sikkim and Darjeeling is comparable. It is the river Rangit and river Teesta which borders the two states.



Figure 2.56 and Figure 2.57: Little Rangit (left). Close up of little Rangit (right)

Das (2014:4) enlightens there is no proper historical evidence or proof about Darjeeling. Nevertheless, there are few legends or stories told by our ancestors, which are passed from one generation to another which more or less talk about Darjeeling. He states, “Darjeeling is an imagined location and space by multiple angles of imagination with different degrees of ownership over the imagined terrain”.

The Nepali

The researcher has used the word Nepali here, because “the word Nepali has a broad meaning. It refers to all races including Limbu. It can’t be denied that Nepali is like a lingua franca in the Himalayan region. Although the people living in this region speak different tongues, there is no one who does not understand Nepali and no race claim that this language belongs to it alone” (Pradhan 1984:37-9 in Hutt 1997:117). Given this, Chettri (2013) also notes the Nepali ethnic group is an ethnolinguistic category, a meta-identity which subsumes numerous ethnic groups under it. It is organized around the Hindu caste system and unified by the Nepali language.

Overall, Campbell (1869) informs that, in 1835 the British Government has ceded Darjeeling, and most of the Limbus who were labourers has started to settle in Darjeeling. Sagant (1976) observes that, since Limbus are basically agriculturalists in their own way, they are mostly settled in remote agricultural (rural) areas. In this context, Limbu settlement is mostly found in Bijanbari. Thus, Bijanbari has been chosen into consideration for the study.



Figure 2.58 and Figure 2.59: View of Agamchok, Bijanbari West Bengal India from little Rangit (left). View from the main Bijanbari town (right)

Outlook of Bijanbari

In the summer of 2019, the researcher walked down to the fieldwork site Bijanbari. It a small hidden place lies east of the district of Darjeeling, altitude of 760 k (2490 ft.) above sea level. There is an ending scenic road that goes down from Ghoom area down to this sleepy town for 22 kilometres. Over this stretch, the road drops by about 4800 ft. Some 13 kilometres along this road the researcher could see great ‘Hima Falls’ which is also a popular picnic spot. There was a beautiful bridge that crosses over fall’s stream. As the researcher went further, she witnessed little Rangit (Chotta Rangit as said by the people) flowing over a bed of rocks and boulders which is surrounded by the beautiful tea gardens. Bijanbari is the headquarter of Darjeeling Pulbazar development block comprising 23-gram panchayats which makes it the largest block in the state of West Bengal.

According to Informant (T.B Baraily), Bijanbari has not existed before 1938-1939. It was only Pulbazaar that existed which used to be famous for its historical importance. He stated, Pulbazaar *haat* (weekly market) took place every Friday, which was one of the largest *haat* in entire Darjeeling district. At the Pulbazaar *haat*, the merchants from Nepal used to bring different livestock and medicinal plants which is later supplied to Darjeeling. During that time, there was only a midway path before the establishment of Bijanbari, at the side of the midway where goose and ducks play around the puddle, nowadays those areas are not seen as it is replaced by the temple presently.

He further detailed, the story which he had heard from M. D Rai, an old personality from the said area who has encountered the existence of Pulbazaar *haat* and goose and ducks swimming across the puddle. When he noticed the existence of geese and ducks in the area, he then thought if there might be any residents and moving forward, he found three Limbu personalities whose kins were known to be the Kins of Dharmey Subba.

In another note, T.B Baraily further said, that there used to be a village named Samalbung which is located up above the present Bijanbari, where it is dominated by group of people belonging to different ethnic communities who used to bring the corpse to be cremated at the present Bijanbari. Likewise, after seeing disruption faced by the merchants and the residents. Mr Goenka a businessperson who lived in Darjeeling, during the reign of the British Empire along with British engineer planned for the construction of a ropeway to meet the need of merchants and residents so that the goods would reach trouble-free at Darjeeling. Later the British government stated that if Mr Goenka is willing to invest for the needful purpose it is indeed a good deed.

Without delay, the British ropeway's engineer inspected Pulbazaar region, where they found that the ropeway towards Darjeeling was a little harder.

In context to Bijanbari, according to T.B Baraily, Bijanbari used to have a small flat land where little vegetation and cultivation were possible. To travel from one hill to another they used to take a straight route and Pulbazaar being located next to the hills was granted impossible for the construction of the ropeway so to hills from Pulbazaar was not possible. Therefore, Bijanbari was chosen for the ropeway. Similarly, the survey started in the year of 1937 and commenced in 1938 and 1939, and finally in 13/01/1940 during the festival of *Maghey Sankrati* the ropeway was inaugurated. Initially, they started operating for a little amount of time for certain observations and kept track for almost 6 months. From 15th July onwards they started using the ropeway regularly. The purpose of ropeway service between Darjeeling and Bijanbari was primarily for carrying goods, and also to awaken the interests of the public towards trade and services and to meet the required needful to be served in the said area.

It is also informed that, earlier, the present day Bijanbari used to be an empty land with only three households, and Mr Goinka thought of utilizing the land to put up a *haat*. He also encouraged many people to utilize the said area for their settlement, but people refused to settle down. He then later makes use of land by constructing *Dharamsala* for a traveller coming from the hills of Nepal and other areas. With the rapid development in the said area, the people started moving there concurrently.

Another oral narrative expresses the account of the region when in 1945 Bijanbari started progressing. It is said, that the Chongtong tea garden [present Degree college area], used to be the field where people sow different variety of seeds which after

germination were displaced to different field. Consequently, the workers from the nursery often asked and inform regarding the details of seeds, and when someone enquire about the status of seeds, they called out the name Bijanbari which is because of availability of different varieties of seeds in the said area. Thus, Bijanbari is how the name was formed with the frequent usage of the word by the nursery worker and this started gaining its popularity with the establishment of the township.



Figure 2.60 and Figure 2.61: Degree College area which was once the then Chongtang tea garden (left). The present-day area which used to be the field to sow the seeds (right)

Limbus of Bijanbari

Bijanbari is located in the Pulbazar which is about 37 kilometres away from subdivision of district of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal, India. The village owing to its toponyms in the Nepali language itself takes root in the Nepali words. Bijanbari, is an amalgamation of *bijan* meaning ‘seeds’, and ‘*bari*’ means ‘field,’ therefore, it means the field of seeds or the area where the seeds are germinated. Hinduism made its way among Darjeeling Limbus when they came in contact with the other ethnic community group of the state, and the opening of educational

institutions was a major boon for this small town. The plethora of ethnic groups interacting with each other had increased along with population somewhat dominating the Limbus. For this study, the village of Agamchok and Lama Gaon has been taken into consideration but will still be referred to as Bijanbari here instead of Agamchok.

Bijanbari is made out of several villages. Bijanbari was politically active during 1980 and hence, it is known famously for governmental determinations. Ten wards encompassed 1206 houses. One can find a paved road that passes through these villages and it connects Mareybong to Ghoom and Darjeeling. There are several transport facilities which run a daily service from Bijanbari to Darjeeling and back. The last stop for the motorable road in Bijanbari ends at the ground of the Chotta Rangeet River. There are three private schools, one government school and one Degree college which was established in 1995. The Degree College lies on the outskirts of Bijanbari town. The integrated child development services also have their centers in all the wards.

The number of Limbu family in Bijanbari were fifty-three in numbers with Phezong Nembang contributing in highest in number, they were believed to be the early settlers in that area. Agamchok ward of Bijanbari had only the Limbus residing in that ward while, the main Bijanbari town had mixed families. Thuswise, it may say, that the village is ethnically heterogeneous and Limbu population is not the dominant anymore. The Limbu households were distributed into 23 clans.

Table no 2.3. Clan Distribution in Bijanbari

Clans	No. of households
Phezong Nembang	9
Chobegu	6
Angdehangbo	4
Tumrok	1
Sambahang	1
Ezom	2
Thamsuhang	1
Pondhak	1
Koyohang	2
Samba	3
Tamling	3
Thoklong	3
Lingden	3
Khewa	1
Kerung	2
Thakleyhang	1
Chemjong	3

Tumbappo	1
Koyohang	2
Singok	1
Kerumba	1
Sambaangphe	1
Settling	1

Phezong Nembang clan were the first settler of the village also known as Dharmey Subba. As per the history, the then only three houses belonged to the Dharmey Subba in Bijanbari during the earlier days. The traditional house of the first settler of Dharmey Subba is still there in existence, among two houses were dismantled, and the only remaining house also cannot fulfil the proper picture of ethnic Limbu house due to some unfortunate casualty of fire broke down in the house which resulted in the turning point of traditional outlook to the modified modern styled house. One can see, there is only one traditional house. Otherwise, most of the houses were constructed with cement and bricks having a gallery. Almost all the houses are two storied with roofs that are made out of iron trust. The kitchen is mostly separately constructed.



Figure 2.62 and Figure 2.63: Traditional house belonging to first settler Phezong Nembang clan (left). The entrance which is low as the typical Limbu house should be and the *Murumsitlang* in the kitchen inside the house (right)

Lamagaon

Lamagaon is a scenic hamlet nestled amidst green foliage and lovely mountains. Located at a distance of 13 km from Bijanbari in Darjeeling. The place is well known for the cultivation of *ishkus* and cardamom. *Iskush* is a popular vegetable in the hilly region. The village of Lamagaon is idyllic and calm. An elevation of five thousand two hundred ft. above sea level, the settlement offers a view of Mount Kanchenjunga. From Lamagaon, one can get a glimpse of lush green tea gardens of Darjeeling. On a clear day, even the distant Darjeeling town and its adjoining areas are visible from this hamlet. On a side note, at night one can see shimmering lights of Darjeeling town. In the morning one can lazily walk along serpentine lanes of village sniffing the fragrance of the Himalayan orchids and flowers. The peace and tranquillity together with the melodious singing of birds and fresh scent of flowers generates charming atmosphere in Lamagaon.



Figure 2.64 and Figure 2.65: View of Lama Gaon (left). Sacks of locally grown gourds ready to be taken outside the village for selling the produce in the nearby market (right)

According to the local narratives, when people of Nepal came through crossing steep mountains they arrived in dense woods, present-day Lamagaon. While wandering on their way to their destination the group of travellers got disappeared in the middle of the woods. Similarly, the other left group resolve to find the lost group, as they decided to call out the lost group in their native Limbu language “*Hau timbey atambey hau, kona pherey lamkon*” (come here this is the path). Similarly, over time when people started to settle in that very place where the name was yet to be decided, and it was the time when settlers urge themselves to keep the name for the place. While deciding on the name the settlers observed long-stretched settlement of the village and they named *Lamkon* which means ‘long village’ which was later corrupted into Lamagoan.

Importantly, Lamagaon¹² is that one place where Limbus worship place is located which is different in the physical landscape in comparison to Sikkim and Assam. They have initiated different concepts in the naming of worship place which they referred as *Yuma Takten* instead of *Mangheem*. It is informed they have given the name *Yuma Takten* because the people [Limbus] believe that *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is omnipresent and just dedicating one tiny room for her is not enough. As the whole world is created by *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. *Yuma Takten*, therefore, means *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is present in the yard or everywhere all around the world guarding and protecting them. In Limbu, *Yuma* means ‘grandmother’ or sometimes it refers to ‘household deity’ and *Takten* means ‘yard’.

The *Yuma Takten* has 8 steps *Mangdhan*. It is learned, that the 9th step *Sangram Pedang Den* is missing because of the local belief that the last step is meant for the ancestor where the soul of the deceased is surrendered for that reason it is not kept in the worship place.



Figure 2.66 and Figure 2.67: *Yuma Takten* (left). Flag of Limbus of Darjeeling (right)

¹²Lama Gaon is chosen because *Yuma Takten* is located in this village which fits with the objective of looking at Yumaism.

The researcher on the other side has witnessed changes in the materiality of three different ethnographic locations. In Sikkim and Assam, the worship place is popularly called *Mangheem*, conversely, in Darjeeling, it is denoted in an alternate name known to be as *Yuma Takten*. The local narrative says that they have come up with changes since they felt *Mangheem* has a certain gap and lack in its meaning which is wrongly pronounced. Not only in the matter of pronunciations in certain terms and titles of different places and elements, but the researcher has also witnessed the variation of a flag fluttering in *Yuma Takten*. In the context of the flag, the *namuksam* an amalgam of *na* meaning 'five' and *muksam* meaning 'power'. The flag consists of five different colours that are blue (sky), red (sun), white (water), green (earth) and yellow (wind) which is believed that the colours are the steps where *Tumyanghang* took their steps in that particular ladder.

Furthermore, Bijanbari town which has a heavy Hindu influence. The existence of the Christian ¹³influence was seen in Lamagaon village. Several churches and Christian schools are established in Lamagaon village. This led to the modern life among the Limbu family visible in both the family in Bijanbari and Lamagaon village. The etymology of the Lamagaon is believed to have come from the Limbu words *Lamkon* meaning a 'long path'. In this research study, a portion of Lamagaon is taken into consideration, however it will still denote as Lamagaon.

¹³There are Limbu Christians not only in Lama Gaon but also in other chosen ethnographic sites of Eastern Himalayan belt, but they have been left out in present research because the focus is on Limbu belief system, Hinduism, Yumaism and YMMCC. Moreover, it would exceed the requirements of the thesis if dealt with the conversion of Christianity extensively.

Table no 2.4. Clan Distribution in Lama Gaon

Clans	No. of Households
Yokso	11
Singok	1
Tamling	9
Shettling	60
Lingden	1
Samba	5
Khebang	1
Inglamphe	7
Yongwago	4
Thebe	9
Laksam	2
Phurumbo	3
Mangmo	3
Saoden	2
Maksingbung	1
Phegwaden	1
Thegim	2

The number of Limbu households in the Lamagaon came to 182 families with the Shetling clan in the majority. It is noticed that clans stick in clusters wise. There are only a few traditional houses and that are pukka houses. The olden houses are made out of mud and tops covered by traditional dried grass. The houses in the region are similar looking for almost all the community unless ones go inside the house to find out the difference, the elements of a typical Limbus that acutally distinguishes from Limbu to another community. The entire house has different annex to sleep, work, and talk which is separate from the washrooms, dining and cooking room. The life of the Limbu person typically starts after the marriage. The son receives a plot from his father property in order to build a house for his wife and his upcoming family.

Limbus of Assam

Nestled in Himalayan hills of North East India, Assam is synonymous with the finest and most expensive tea in the world. Assam provides a heady mixture of splendid tea gardens on rolling mountain slopes. The eastern most part of the Indian state, Assam is the land of exceptional interest which covers an area of 78, 438 sq. km. Assam is situated in the extreme North-East frontier of India. Borders are touched in the North by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur in the East, Mizoram and Tripura in the South and Meghalaya in the West. Famous for green tea and one-horned rhinoceros the world is known abroad by its earlier name. Pragjyotishpur and Kamrup, also recognized as the land of magic and witchcraft with its famous tantric shrine Kamakhya. In the epigraphic record, the name Kamakhya was first mentioned in the Samudra Gupta's famous Allahabad pillar inscription.

Assam is situated on one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. Across geographical boundaries there came the people, ideas, and means of production to mingle together with aboriginals and shape new modes of living. The contacts so achieved both inside and outside India were lasting and ever-increasing. People of Assam from ancient periods not only maintain trade but also exchange ideas between the China, Tibet, Nepal, Burma, and others. In different periods the different races and tribes entered Assam and constitute a composite Assamese culture.

The modern name Assam is associated with Shan invaders who under the leadership of Sukapha invaded and penetrated this land in about 1228 A.D. They established the Ahom rule for about six hundred years up to 1826 A.D. Lastly, British occupied this land and incorporated it within the company's territory. As the country lies in migration routes, people of different origins such as mongoloid, Austric, Negroits, and Aryans entered Assam. As a result, the cultural interchanges of these races enriched Assamese culture at large.

This is the worldwide phenomenon that the history of the people of the world is the history of migration. The history of 'Mana' is not static rather it is ever-changing. From time immemorial different groups of people entered this part of the land and constitute composite Assamese culture. It is found in the Puranas, Epics, Yoginitantra, and other historical sources that from the olden times Nepali speaking people migrated and resided in different parts of Assam. The anthropological and cultural history of Assam is the history of admixture of races, tribes, languages, customs, rituals, and other aspects of civilization.

It is found that some tribes of Assam and Nepal are of the same origin. Both the countries viz. India and Nepal and their parts referred as Kirata Desa and the

aboriginals were known as Kiratas of the time to Burman groups, perhaps migrated to this region. References of the relation between Nepal and Assam are found from the remote past to the recent time. In different periods of history, boundary of the two states touched each other boundaries. Having racial and cultural similarities with people of Assam they are not so negligible in numerical strength and found in process of acculturation. In some places, the process of assimilation is also found in the Assamese society. The role of Assamese Nepali in the economic growth of the state, Assam, is not ignorable at all.

Powai Bon Gaon

The tinsel village of Powai Bon Gaon is situated on the banks of river Dehing, a tributary of Brahmaputra and is bordered by the evergreen mystique Patkai range on eastern side. Since time immemorial this village is inhabited by the different ethnic communities with their unique cultural and traditional values.



Figure 2.68 and Figure 2.69: A village of grass-roofed house surrounded by palm trees (left). Tea plantation in Powai Bon Gaon (right)

The warm hospitality of the people always offers warm welcome to an outsider. The landscape of this area is painted with the lush green tea gardens along the road, the hillocks, flora and fauna, green forests, streams, blue hills, rivers, mysterious clouds, the rich bouquet of arts and cultures of the different community. It's a futile attempt to narrate the beauty of Powai Bon Gaon in short because Powai Bon Gaon is the natural paradise and one can certainly cherish the beauty of god's creation in this heavenly abode.



Figure 2.70 and Figure 2.71: Rice field under the blue sky in Assam (left).

Betel palm tree (right)



Figure 2.72 and Figure 2.73: Satya Hangma *Mangheem* (left). Yumaism *Mangheem*

in Powai Bon Gaon (right)

Powai Bon Gaon is usually predominant by the Nepali community. It is reported that many years ago the land it occupied was a forest. Powai Bon Gaon has been derived from the words *Pabhoi Mukh*. A place where the small stream that meanders its way through the estate and is also called Powai, meets the river Buridehing. People also pronounce and spell *Phauji Gaon* which means the place where the army resides. There are three schools in Powai Bon Gaon and a dispensary on village premises. However, the children have to go to different village to attend a higher secondary school. The level of school dropout is low in Powai Bon Gaon. Powai Bon Gaon is a cluster of villages located 6 kilometres from Margherita. It passes through the famous tea garden of Powai tea estate. Powai Bon Gaon is one of the three largest tea-producing estates of the TATA group in Northeast India. The last public vehicle stop is the Katetong Bazaar. From there on it is about half an hour downhill and one has to walk past the tea plantation field to reach Powai Bon Gaon.

In context to local narratives, there was a time when Nepali settlers were looking for a place to reside and employ their settlement in a dense jungle. The woods were vast and it took days and nights to decide where to settle until they found the section of the forest. It took several days and nights to cut and clear the portion of the forest and prepared a flat area for them to settle. For this thesis, the Powai Bon Gaon village of Katetong Margherita has been taken into consideration because of the existence of *Mangheem* in this village.

Table no 2.5 Clan Distribution in Powai Bon Gaon

Clans	No. of Households
Khimding	1
Chemjong	4
Libang	1
Labung	1
Yonghang	5
Kandangwa	6
Nugo	4
Pheyak	4
Thallang	3
Dewan	2
Labung	7
Luksam	1
Pegha	2
Kambang	1
Khoabung	1
Hupuchongang	1
Thopra	1

Sairmali 1

Samba 1

There are a total of 47 Limbu households in the village with the Labung and Kandangwa in the majority. The typical Limbu house in Powai Bon Gaon is different from the traditional Limbu house which is known as *khim*. From the construction of the house to the raw materials used, Powai Bon Gaon houses are thatch-roofed (or tin) and made of mud walls. The house is usually plastered with mud and cow dung or is white washed. It looks like a typical house found in rural Assam. The kitchen is usually separate.



Figure 2.74 and Figure 2.75: Typical house with thatched roof (left). Typical house with tin (right) in Powai Bon Gon Assam

Conclusion

The brief introduction of the Darap, Bijanbari, and Powai Bon Gaon villages of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam indicate existence of Limbus in the respective places for a long time. All the three ethnographic villages still held on to the origin story of

the village, and also know the clan origin. Moreover, Darap and Bijanbari region are organized in clusters whereas Powai Bon Gaon households are scattered. Last of all, the home in the 3 selected settlements has some traits of the olden households keeping aside the modernization on their appearance.

Chapter 3

Religious and Ancestral Belief Systems among Limbus

The narrator states, that ‘the mythology of God, and ghost was born out of cause, and out of mind of the humankind. Mythology did not come out of anywhere like a thunderbolt. Life generated it in us, and the significance of songs, and mythology is that they exhibit the complex nature of humankind faith founded on reminiscence, and magic of words in *Mundhum*’.

- Fieldwork 2019

Religious compositions of ethnographic sites of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam shows diverse with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. It exhibits varied nature of belief systems that differs from other ethnic groups. The major religion includes Hinduism collectively revered by most ethnic groups followed by Buddhism, Christianity, and other indigenous faith. As to deal with the Limbu belief system, it is vital to position the Limbus within the wider context of Eastern Himalayas, ascribing to their origin, myths, legends, and traditional practices. Limbus occupying the Eastern Himalayas venerates Yumaism faith. Their belief guides the destiny, and moral values of life. The Limbus derives divine philosophies from their belief system, although differing in spiritual characters, and orders of the event or mythical narratives.

At personal virtue, the people gain spiritual and moral gratification from the pantheon of Deities, spirits, and ghosts. In terms of the ethical aspect, the ultimate reality

influences honesty, integrity, equity, compassion, and peace as elements of truth in human conduct.

In the spiritual realms, the emergence of divine spirits manifested the creation of human beings. The mythical accounts of the Limbus reckon *Mujina Kheyongnama* as the ancestral mother of the human race. However, though with trivial variations, narrative version of creation of human being appears uniform. On that basis, the myths of Limbus ascribe rocks and soils as the source of human origin from the lineage *Lungbongba Khambongbasa*.

Similarly, the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas enlightens, the origin of the descent of *Mujina Kheyongnama*. Hence, *Mujina Kheyongnama* is attributed to the ancestral mother creating manifold offspring around the world. Overall, mythology of the Limbus in Eastern Himalayas corroborates parallel narratives of human origin, and survival. With a brief outline of the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas, the researcher attempts an ethnographic analysis of the traditional beliefs, and practices of the Limbus. This chapter consists of primary sources of elderly Limbus who can remember Limbu mythologies and ritual practices. Likewise, the views of elite Limbus are cited for better insights.

Since its inception, the Limbus inherently believes in Yumaism faith, a profound philosophical worldview, within the socio-cultural fabric. The notion of divinity transpired from human psychics for moral carving besides material possessions. In the wilderness, the vivid imagination of Yumaism faith, with grandmother, and suffixism stirred discernment of inspiration. Given this, an informant in his 60's deliberated on the early divinity perception by stating, "It is difficult to trace the evolution of faith in God, but it is interesting to explore, how our [Limbu] forefathers had

developed the concept of God. They might have developed the feeling of presence of a potent power in their surrounding and, a sense of fear, and security for which they submitted themselves to that unseen power. Thus, ancestors had developed rituals to bring themselves close to God, to propitiate the omnipresent, and the mysteries of cosmos beyond the grasp of their control” (Fieldwork 2018).

On another note, an Informant in his 56’s postulated, “*Yuma* is the nearest approximation to the supreme deity known to the Limbus. She rules unopposed in the paradise, she is the one who observes all. She is the unifying force behind all Limbu theology”.

In a distinctive approach, the proponent of Yumaism faith posits ‘*Tagera Ningwaphuma*’, as a guide, and ‘*Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Yambhami Mang*’ as the creator, by fathoming the existence, and creation through their faculty. Thereby, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* supervises, and penalizes the wrongdoers. As per her role, she is arranged into the two varying divinities- sometimes *Tagera Nigwaphuma* (the supreme Goddess), or *Yuma* (the Limbu household deity) based on the Limbu belief system in different settings. At this juncture, the compound term, *Yuma* represents as grandmother, and *Tagera Ningwaphuma* represents supreme Goddess, but jointly treated as one deity.

Further, the deific entities are deemed as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient due to their pervasive nature. Mankind implores supreme beings during inquisitive, and adverse experiences by seeking truth, purity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, justice, peace, morality, and wisdom.

In everyday life, the eminence of Yumaism faith is corroborated by the invocation of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* for justifying truth in *Tumyanghang* (Traditional council),

while settling the disputes. In those terms, when a person is accused of perpetrating an offence, the defendant (if innocent) contends by folding hands and vowing *Tagera Ningwaphuma* during trials. The antiphony exhibits a symbol for the refutation of the charge and affirmation of innocence. In any case of judgement that mislays the truth, the situation is averred as truth is surpassed, and likewise, the revelation of truth as truth is revealed. In the social backdrop, referring to an individual as truth with regular extolment of a righteous man, and frank person reflects the virtuous nature.

Limbus recognize the Yumaism philosophy with divine, psychological, and spiritual ideas. The physical construct posits the sun and moon as a source of warmth, (signifying an optimistic vibe) that empowers humans to strive and accomplish their daily activities. While the psychological and spiritual nuances suggest spiritual power overseeing the destiny of struggling mankind on earth, with primacy of supreme earth over sun and moon. The divine light suggests the universality of spiritual vigilance over mankind. In the creationary view, the earth is dubbed as infinity, signifying the physical manifestation of the universe. According to the two-fold concepts of earth and sky, occupy a higher position for designing diverse tangible and intangible entities. Hence, the earth and sky, created the sun and moon as pairs of vigilance over humankind, with nurture and protection from menaces. However, the divine hierarchy between earth and sky, and sun and moon, resulted in a vague subject of dispute among the Limbu intellectuals.

Despite the vagueness, belief in Yumaism serves the Limbus in realising supreme being, and divine strength in their social cultural life. Limbus seeks, blessing, safety, spiritual gratification, and beseech for bestowing prosperity, peace, and progress in the material world. In that order, the consciousness of divinity handed down through generations evolved into social religious norms. In light of that, Informant in his 63's

condoning the progressive nature affirms, “Yumaism is faith, transcended from the age-old tradition of Limbus, but had no worship pattern, besides few rituals. In customary line, the Limbus offered sacred offerings to different divinities as forms of worship.

The basic coherent nuances are reflected as cultural meaning for Limbus in their daily activities. It exhorted an instinct to regard the intangible forces (benevolent entities) as sources of inspiration, comfort, guidance, and spiritual fulfilment. It reinvigorated a sense of introspection, and the fellow feeling of Limbu society.

Cosmic Voids: The Limbu Ontology

In the constellation of Limbu mythology, the oral experts interpret the ‘beginning’ as void, and configure metaphysical evolution as the cosmic voids in their repository of memories. As per some informants, the term ‘beginning’ designates a remote past, or things beyond human conscience, however, some Limbus, interprets it as a beginning, infiniteness, or void. Therewith that phase was totally dark without any mystical physical shape. On a different note, Rup Lal Khamdhak compares, the nous of ‘beginning’ with Biblical Genesis, by stating to verse 1:1 “In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth,” he compares the image of God similar to the supreme being who generated light of beginning within the cosmos (Fieldwork 2018).

In the opinion of an Informant in his 40’s, the ‘beginning’ is conjectured as primordial and emptiness. On another note, an Informant (Fieldwork 2019) reflects, sun and moon as to the ultimate reality and creator of the beginning cosmos, and

other spiritual entities. By and large, the development of celestial expansion is traced as voids.

On the contrary, a section of Limbu intellectuals challenge, that “If the sun and moon are creators of nothingness, then why *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is believed to create, the creator God *Sigera Yabundhin Porokmi Yambami Hang* and entrusted him, the mission of creating the universe”? The controversialist group endorses the creationary hypothesis from the earth by tracing the lineage of the sun and moon respectively. Further, although, few informants ascribe mythical sun and moon from earth and sky. Nevertheless, interpreted *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as symbolic of a supreme being. Hitherto, in common parlance, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* exists as a single force co-existent with nothingness.

In a wider context, akin to the Limbu concept of nothingness, the section of Limbu group deems, ‘beginning’ like a vacuum or nothingness. Thuswise, despite the parity of ‘beginning’ and ‘void’, the narrative of cosmic progress diverges from each section of Limbus. In some, the cosmic entities emerged from divine vibration, while in others, through gradual evolution from vacuum to creation of divine self-born Gods.

Among Limbus, the ontological construction is articulated in *Mundhum*, generally in events associated with rites and rituals. The *Mundhum* illuminates the accounts of the cosmos, passing through an orderly course of evolution. The comical stages from beginning to earth undergo different phases within the intervals of millions of years. As per the established rhetoric, the narrative of nothingness outlines as -

From vacuum of nothingness, an effort of divine vibration unfolded tiny invisible dark patches. It further emanated trivial flicker lights towards a wider realm in form of flicker lights. It brought forth the outset of a clear traceable enlargement of

infinitesimal rays. The tangible gleams of light shaped into the slender sheet of smoke flowing. The wafting smoke in the space incessantly evolved into cloud-like layers. The dispersed semi-visible layer emerged into the hefty stretch of clouds. The silhouette of the solid stage shaped condensed, and hardened into a solid form as earth (the first tangible creation developed from nothingness), and galactic space remained as the sky (Fieldwork 2018). Therefore, all preludes of sacred recitals validate nothingness as the night that nobody has seen, and the day that nobody has seen. The unseen earth was the gloomiest, the unheard sky was the brightest, and the earth like a fly fluttering in the space procreated life in the world.

Accordingly, the cosmic stages in Limbus are chronologically gauged as nothingness to be darkness where light began and rays developed in thin layers of smoke then after cloud formed the solid stage which formed the earth and sky. Limbu people call *Tagera Ningwaphuma* for her authority in creating, and overseeing different entities in cosmos and earth. In *Mundhum*, the transitory phase of the cosmos from nothingness to the creation of the earth is narrated. The local parlance asserts nothingness to darkness where light began and rays developed.

Creation of Earthly Entities

The Limbus derives ontological thought, from twin concepts of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* or *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Yambami Hang*, delineated in mythology. According to the first type, they made air, sky, water, fire, and the globe. They created the earth by putting a foundation of rocks made out of various magnets. Thenafter, they had to give the color to the surrounding, so the variants of blue was given for sky and water, green to the environment and so on. They then realized that

they sky looked empty and dark during the night therefore, they decided to decorate it with different sizes of stars and moons. In the same way, the earth was designed by creating varieties of flora and fauna. Yet, the earth seen incomplete, hence the beauty in the earth was by creating human life as the ultimate creation.

In the ethereal realms, the spiritual being created the earth in the vague by churning the ocean that developed into the earth and physical entities. Thus, the supernatural creature transformed into a supreme being (epitomised as the creator of the universe, and spiritual beings). In another version, earth and sky, the ultimate tangible stage of the cosmos is synonymously perceived as earth. In spite of varied interpretations, the Supreme Being is collectively interpreted as the creator of earth, and procreator of intangible entities.

While reflecting the Limbus concepts of divine creation. It is now vital to ascribe, Widengren's theory of 'anti-manaim', which postulates 'mana' as an extraordinary power originating from myriad entities in the form of God, spirit or men. Along this line, the Limbus regard *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as the supreme creator of earlier lesser Gods, and the fluid discharge (sweats and breast milk) which altered into the watery content of earth. The intermediate realms between earth and sky are converted into marshy space. Consequently, the waterlogged surface became an uninhabitable for mystical beings. In that situation, the supreme beings joined their heads together for the creation of soil on the earth and a suitable environment for the creation of human life, and its sustenance. The appearance of physical entities is interpreted in two distinct ways.

Narrative 1: Bodies of sun, and moon were created due to the churning of the ocean water of the universe, nevertheless the celestial bodies were lacking the *Lasang*

(moonlight), and *Namsang* (sunlight) on them. Therefore, *Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Yambhami Mang* went to place, recognized as *Tappesa Warok Lerengba Worok*, and requested God of the sun- *Namkejok Mang Mamandin Mang* also known as *Namkejok Mang Namsalling Mang*, and *Mankejok Mang Namangla Mang* to create the sunlight on the sun. They tried to provide the sunlight and the moonlight but could not succeed in it, due to jealousy of *Chaitari Khille* God. Hence, all the God and Goddesses requested the God of light *Thoklingma Mang Kugapma Mang- Tiotti Mang Paotti Mang*. Further, they pleased the God of light who went to the present-day Tibet China and brought *Sinyuk Ponche Pona Muen Ponche Pona* (garland of the ambers, coral beads, and precious jewels) and put on to the sun and moon. Thereupon, God provided the sun and moon with warm sunlight and cool moonlight. As a result, the sun started providing sunlight rising from the east in the morning and providing light and heat on earth during the daytime, On the other hand, the moon started rising in the evening from the east and providing moonlight at night. Then, the creator God made *Tanam* (morning) with the appearance of the sun, and *Yunchik* (evening) with the sunset and the appearance of the moon. Further, the supreme God entrusted the creator God to scale the motion of the sun and moon and thence created natural events of seasonal changes such as winter, summer, warm and cold. Therefore, the earth dwellers derived the concepts of the day, night, light, and dark. Also, the atmospheric sphere contrived temperature, wind, rainfall, etc. In the same way, the earthy province swarmed with the spawning spiritual beings. Nevertheless, since a malevolent spirit infringed into spiritual realms, therefore Supreme Being comforted the troubled beings into the new refuge known as earth. Hitherto, the mythology attaches incursion of an evil spirit that over shadowed the horizon of earth and sky.

Narrative 2: Another version of mythology unravels the existence of two suns- *Lasara Thenamyamba* (big sun), and *Chukchinamba* (small sun) in the primary stage. Accordingly, daylight prevailed inexorably devoid of any night, which troubled humans with resilient heat. To alleviate the suffering, supreme God, and creator God mustered and decided to eliminate one of the suns. So, they assigned birds and animals to carry out the intended task. To begin with, *Tinging Sakek* (bird) came forward carrying out the assigned task, but due to the excessive sunburn, the fowls had to concealed themselves where they find shade of tress and grasses and water for them to drink and survive. In the same manner a lot of faunae came forward to contest the sun and destroy it, but did not succeed. So, the animal with a dangerous look with pointed and hard skin named porcupine comes forward to destroy the sun. It takes the oath that it will for sure destroy the sun, but he would do so only if he gets something. He then asks *Yehang*, as what can he give him if he succeeds in the tasks. To which the *Yehang*, replies all the crops after it is harvested will be yours and you may consume whatever you want. As confident as porcupine sees, he could not come through assurance, and caused him to feel ashamed. Further, the mouse came forward in killing the sun, again the same question was raised by him, as what would he receive in return. The *Yehang* promise him that crops reaped by a man can be consumed by you and your fellow society. By listing to him, the mouse starts making hovels at *Sakphara Yepmi Ek Ti Rap Ha Tip Ha Ek*, the mouse then reached its destined place far away on his assigned task. Although, rays of the sun were too strong, he armed with a bow and arrow shot down the sun in such a way that both of the two suns instantly succumbed to futility and ceased gleaming and as the consequence, the blood dripped all over. In the repurcursion blood that was dropping towards the east side converted into one of the malevolent Deities of the Limbus,

whereas the blood towers the west converted to the Deities of hunters. As a result, blood which dripped in the southern part became evil spirits of the hills, while on the other hand, blood that dripped the north direction turned out to be the malicious spirit in the forest. The sun muddled the shooter as they were trying their best to kill the sun but, in the end, sun was slain someway.

The slaying further led to overcasting of darkness and mitigated comfort, and rest to living beings on the earth. With cessation sun in reprisal, refused to shine again. As an after-effect, an entire world plunged into complete darkness with commotion, and panic among living beings. At that juncture, again the divinities were compelled to create the sun and make it come to being, but the sun refused to come up which came as a challenge to all the Deities Thereupon, *Chiknawa* (bat) goes and hangs on branches of the bush. By looking at the bats face which looked suspicious and funny the sun smirks then eventually come to life, and accepted to gleam again. After glimpsing the first beam of light the rooster sonorously crows. On the other hand, the sun turned out latent, and transformed into a moon emitting feeble radiance at night. The story further outlines, when the sun sets, the bird named *Newal* weeps and hums the sun not to sulk down, and come again the next day. The bird's chirps time to time in the dawn singing beautiful songs to welcome the sun, the fowl boasts in their loud voice to welcome the sun, as the dark has vanished giving them hope and light for the day which has begun. At this point, it can be said, that the day and night appeared in the world enabling humans to work during the day, and rest at night.

The existence of so many roots in the similar tale is difficult to believe if it is heard incompletely in the same sense. The story not just opened an avenue to the creation of evil spirits and formation of the sun, but also detailed as it would not be possible for the life to sustain in this earth without the blessings of the sun on earth. Moreover, the

significance behind the chirping birds and crows of fowls indicates as the beginning of the day. Concerning the multiple narratives (verifying identical themes), Informants posit variations subjected to individuals' interpretation derived from the tales, stories, and myths of oral memories. On those ground, narrative 2 sparked arguments on describing the blood dripped from the sun resulted in the birth of spirits. On this premise, an issue of the contest is how the benevolent spirits, or the source of existence, seeks to take away the lives of people? In response to obscurity, the Informant asserted that though the killing episode may be sceptical, it remains the basis among Limbus of the creation of the sun for the comfort of the living beings.

The Limbu Pantheon: Spirit and Man

To enhance better insights on Nature-Man-Spirit, it is essential to note, Vidyarthi's (1963) literature in which, he presents a vivid account of the close interaction and interrelationship between nature, humans, and spirit among Maler, a hill tribe of Bihar. He describes their natural interactions among these people with a detailed ethnographic account. The book has been divided into three major parts with their headings, nature, man, and spirit respectively. In the first part, he validates the ecological basis of Maler culture highlighting the importance of nature, hills and forest in the life of the people. In the second part, he deals with the social life of the people. He talks about spirits, religious beliefs in supernatural beings, sacred centers, sacred performances, and sacred specialists. In the third part, he reveals the interactions, and interrelationships between nature, spirit, and Maler life. He discovers that each moment of the Maler life is profoundly influenced by nature on one hand, and spirit on the other, and thus he has developed the concept of Nature-

Man-Spirit describing their interrelationships and close interactions. Overall, it was relevant literature when studying the religion of Limbus which represents the Nature-Man-Spirit relationship. The Limbu religion [Yumaism] is, in fact, a kind of Nature-Man-Spirit relationship, while nature is the supreme, man is vital to the cosmos, and spirit a link between the two.

In supernatural realms, earth generated a myriad of spiritual entities as emissary of ethereal domains. The multitude of lesser Gods received authority to exercise their power over a specific territory. The custodians of the tangible realms were categorized into two types- the 'benevolent' and 'malevolent'. Thuswise, the benevolent spirits are closer to earth and malevolent is ascribed to the physical world. Among the multifarious spirits, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is regarded as 'mother of all things', superior to all other spirits. All lesser Gods and countless humanly lives are believed to be conceived from the womb of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* with *Mujina Kheyongnama* (legendary heroine) as her daughter. In that line, the genealogy of spiritual beings is traced from earth to the mother of all beings.

To hold allegiance with *Iksa Khambek Den* (earth), Limbus conceived acuity of benevolent spirits. The spirit holds deific status relating to specific domains and is accordingly implored for the requisite purpose. In the pantheon of benevolent spirits, *Phajiyangpit Mang Makchiyangpit Mang* (the guardian of domestic animals) bestowed first *Pit* and prosperity of livestock to human society. The remains of gigantic mythical *Pit* corpse shaped into fertile earth, trees, plants, fruits, crops, etc. that supported humans' subsistence. Akin to, guardian Deities there is also an impression on *Tagera Ningwaphuma* (deific mother), she gifted fertility and prosperity of crops to humans salvaged from poverty and hunger. The food prosperity was blessed with *Sammangs* (spirit of mother earth) expertness in brewing rice beer.

Along with the earth's power of creating life, *Sandige Pokesappa Mang* (spirit of destiny) moulded the human physique by unifying with the soul. Nevertheless, their mistakes while exertion resulted in body mutilation or disability. *Siyasam Damuhang* (spirit of death,) regulated human life, death, and proprietor of valuable possession like sword, bows and arrows.

In societal sphere, the guardian of domestic animals acts as the guardian of the Limbu family and their home by protecting against evil spirits. A man was abetted with the spirit of fire, gift of war weapons, and hunting tools. *Se Akkum Akwanama Mang*, (house spirit) bestows fortune to the family in their activities. The aesthetic events of singing, dancing, and merry-making were sanctioned by mother spirits therefore, the people enacting artistic actions get inspiration from her and pass down the tradition to the next generation. The spirits of the guardian provide the Limbu priest with skill to perform all ritual procedures. *Muguplung Theguplung Mangs* represent the Deities of smithery and source of metallic products. For nature of the deity of wisdom as 'divine mother' 'considers being vague because of multiple references as 'mother of the sky', the spirit of rain, guardian of snowy ranges, and great ancient one in a higher grade of supernatural hierarchy. Yet again, the same spirit is interpreted as friendly story or a true story in the lower category, as a source of knowledge and wisdom. Hitherto, some benevolent spirits turn hostile to non-compliance with divine rules. In such cases, man acquires absolution only by atonement in form of propitiations. However, despite the mistake, the Limbus acknowledges inspiration and support in their daily life.

In Limbu metaphysical realms, one can see that the corpus of malevolent spirits is majority than benevolent spirits. The malevolent spirits contiguous to the tangible world are termed evil spirits with the virtue of proximity. The evil spirits inflict man

through diseases, suffering, and misfortunes. Amongst them, is *Piccha Sambok Dangma* (the spirit of the forest that exists closest to the human, dwelling in hillock tree). At times, the spirit carries away humans to the forest in their unconscious state. *Tungutlungma Haralungma Mang* (spirit of water) along with superior water spirit executes flash floods and directs waves to strike the riverbanks that cause erosion. Another spirit *Tumbunding Warakma Mang* (water spirit), executes each form of mishaps in rivers and streams. The wild spirits like *Thapsammang* and the custodian of the forest cause chronic ailments and poverty to humankind for intruding and hunting without the prior custom of proprietary rites. The Spirit of the sky is regarded as most dreadful to humankind. The Spirit of the sky along with forest spirits enflames fire in villages, causes droughts, makes trees fall over humans and incites quarrels between the people. Another spirit, *Wagongma* (female water spirit) dwelling in swampy areas, streams, and wild plantains inflicts severe menstrual bleeding among girls, and abortion, and death of pregnant women. Therefore, after death, the ghost of dead women is believed to linger around as *Sogha*. Nefarious female spirit, that deceives humans to perpetrate crimes and provokes them to engage in bloody fights. Similarly, there exist lesser spirits dwelling in different realms such as the spirit of water, the spirit of cloud, the spirit of rain, the spirit of infant fatality, the spirit of epidemics, the spirit of arguments, and the spirits of monkey, the spirit of frog, etc.

Along the creationary lines, earth simultaneously begot the multitude of human's figure. In this context, it is worth noting, Roy (1960:240), since he traces back the origin of the human race from creation to the world to the complex genealogy of semi-spiritual beings. The descent of humans is divided into two separate lines based on gender. The male is represented as *Hangmen* and female as *Mensiya*. The first

human emerged as *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchchuru Suhampheba*, the third generation from *Mujina Kheyongnama* and *Thusuingbennu Khanglaibennu Yosuingbennu Suritingbennu* (wind) in foothills of the Mount Kanchenjunga, realms of *Mangjirima Manglodama* or *Munaphen Tembe*. In the odyssey for hunting, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* son of *Mujina Kheyongnama* follows the instruction of his mother and train himself in the skills of using a bow and arrows, subsequently, he goes for hunting in *Sawa Yukphung* to the hilltops when he attended a youthful age. During that time, he came in contact with several women and with the instinct of sex he committed incest and procreated several children. Akin to this story, daughter *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* unaware of consanguineous relations fall for each other and come into sexual contact. They gave birth to seventeen sons and one daughter, the third generation from winds lineage. *Tagera Ningawaphuma* summoned the couple and was outlawed to heaven for offenders. In course of procreation, from *Mujuna Kheyongnama* in conjugal with wind begot the spiritual being *Susuwengba Lalanwengba*. Thus, Limbus derive the origin of progenies from the son of wind while, *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchchuru Suhampheba* children of *Susuwengba Lalawengba* portrayal personify human nature but are envisaged as intangible beings.

Amongst all the offspring in course of division, the nine sons known as *Pegi Phanghangs* survived with their father in the highland. While the eight sons known as *Sawa Yethangs* lived with their mother on earth. In skirmishes, the only daughter who got into mess while dividing between divine parents became *Dommelokpa Peremsingma* (evil spirits of tree). Consequently, after separation, *Sutchchuru Suhanpheba* became *Sodhung Lepmuhang* and *Tetlera Lahadongna* was named *Thillilung Thamdetlungma*. It is believed, they were made a solemn promise not to

meet again. Hence, their role to save human beings and creatures on earth was conceived among Limbus.

In general view, (Fieldwork 2019) dichotomised spirits as powerful and less powerful, benevolent and malevolent, the position of higher and lower spiritual hierarchy, some lingering detached, and recurrently intervening while others staying close and assisting in daily human activities. Thus, it is complex to orderly position the roles of higher and lesser Gods within the multitudes of Deities because of blended charges in the mystical realms. Despite the vague roles, the ailments incurred by obstructive spirits necessitated remedial by propagating with blood sacrifices and divine spells. It steered the Limbus to perform appropriate rituals under the proficiency of ritual priests to repel or appease the evil spirits and observe related taboos to acquire empathy for the spirits.

The Sacred Incantation

It is noticed, that Limbus lack concrete historical records of their cultural tradition, but then entirely rely on mythological recalls of deliberate migration, village settlement, customary laws, arts, and customs. The mythological stories are sustained in folktales and folksongs. The memory holds an integral part of oral tradition and the knowledge is addressed based on situational or functional needs. In the Limbu belief system, the philosophical nuances are deep-rooted mosaic of social values etched with spiritual ideology. It binds the entire social cultural system and motivates to realize the invisible Supreme Being. However, since Limbus lack written texts, the details of wisdom are corroborated in long recitations and ritual activities by the ritual priests.

Folk Song-

“*Yakthungsa ga keywaye aatikemoye, mennimendha lokmarey attiegery*” (You were born as Limbu but where did you vanish as you moved sightlessly?)

- Padmashree B.B Muringla.

The first-ever composed modern song by Padmashree B.B Muringla which have heart touching lyrics. It is the self-explanatory composition of the present milieu. In a way, it is the sarcastic lyrics to Limbus who pretends to be modern and indicate their passive attitude in the community welfare activities.

In this context, the informant agrees “since there are no any epigraphic records or literary writings throwing lights on the traditions, practices, belief, etc. we have no alternative but to accept the general Limbu faiths transmitted through tales, myths, legends, folktales, folklores, etc. as tradition and spiritual guides of Limbu. Hence, Limbu oral traditions of wisdom have no inscriptions for references”. In esteem to this purview, folk songs of Limbus are transmitted from one generation to another generation in forms of oral literature and oral artistic expression. Limbus has classified their folk songs into sixteen broad categories viz;

Hakparey Samlo: Mostly, seniors and those knowledgeable in *Mundhum* partake in *Hakparey Samlo*. The *Hakparey Samlo* is narrated on the juncture of a ritualistic narration of a specific deity.

Paalam Samlo: In Limbu belief systems, *Paalam Samlo* is one of the most essential folk songs. One can see, the menfolk and womenfolk croon the song while participating in *Yalang*. A large number of people consisting man and woman partake in *Yalang*, forming a circle while holding each other’s hands. Even if, the participants

are many, only one man and woman may choose their counterparts and approach them. *Paalam Samlo* is crooned nearly in a type of contest related to subject of love. So, the dancers should not belong to blood relationships.

It is informed, that *Paalam Samlo* is organized into stages, it begins with an introduction part where each man and woman introduce each other, since it is against the tradition to sing *Paalam Samlo* belonging to blood relationships. After this, the menfolk commence the conversation verses with beautiful tunes followed by the womenfolk. Likewise, another stage of the *Paalam Samlo* includes the way of life of the Limbus which consists verses on, creation of universe, creation of humans, and origin of love, etc. Informant says, in the *Paalam Samlo*, love is associated with several flowers, and it is depicted in the form of flower. Then after in the ultimate stage of *Paalam Samlo* the verse comprises about the relationship status like whether their relationship status is single or engaged. There is a chance of new relationships through the *Paalam Samlo* in case of single status. Here, they talk about if they could carry forward with their love affair, and this is conveyed via *Paalam Samlo*, the answer is received through their very own traditions, values, and customs of the Limbu society.

Shewa Samlo: It is generally recognized as ceremonial songs. It contains *Mundhum* which is chanted by the ritual priests. Consequently, *Shewa Samlo* is confined within the Limbu ritual priests only.

Kheyali Samlo: It states to gags in the poetic language. As per Limbus, it is a duet song amid men and women which contains query and reply too, in the form of poetic language.

Sapna Samlo: It refers to lullaby. As per the Limbu mythology, *Mujina Kheyongnama* gave birth to *Sutchuru Suhangpheba*. She placed the straw in a bamboo cradle to make the baby feel warm, and swung the cradle to make him sleep. Nevertheless, the baby kept crying. Therefore, she crooned but could not make the baby fall asleep. At this juncture, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* appeared in *Mujina Kheyongnama's* dreams and directed her to croon the particular lullaby which would help him fall asleep. She then crooned the lullaby she received in dreams through *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. It is believed, that the lullaby soothed a baby to sleep. Therewith, it imparted the practices of *Sapna Samlo*.

Taamkey Samlo: In an agricultural epoch, humans began cultivation of food crops. At the time, while planting food crops such as, rice, wheat, and maize. Mr. Sarokpa an old personality, crooned *Taamkey Samlo*. Thence, since then *Taamkey Samlo* has been in practices among the Limbu society and is crooned while sowing or harvesting. It is informed, that the *Taamkey Samlo* is crooned as a part of offering prayer and thanksgiving to the deity of crops for bestowal of bumper crops.

Paang Samlo: It is sung while remembering the friends, mostly at times when collecting firewood logs or cutting grasses alone in the forest. So, *Paang Samlo* is crooned to rejuvenate the magic of friendship and reminiscences of friends.

Keysam Samlo: As per the *Mundhum*, *Tigeyjongnama* gave birth to twin sons. One was *Keysami* (tiger) and another was *Namsami* (human). It is believed, that they used to quarrel all the time and jealousy spread everyday. It was challenging for *Tigeyjongnama* to console them not to fight each other. Their fights worsen day by day. As a result, one day *Namsami* made a plan to slay *Keysami*, and slayed him with bow and arrow. After the slaying, the fresh skins were stripped from the carcass and

sundried. Then, he wrapped the skin on both sides of the tree trunk and made a *Chyabrung*. It produced the sound-*Chyap Grung Grung Chyap*, which resembled roar of *Kesami*. With this, the invention of *Chyabrung* commenced, and *Chyabrung* played an important role in Limbu folk songs. It is said, that Limbus has many types of folk songs, and each one of them employ the usage of *Chyabrung*. Additionally, as per Limbu mythology, an elderly man Mr. *Kasurupa* is credited to began *Kesham Samlo* while playing *Chyabrung*. He is the one, *who first crooned Kesham Samlo* at the time of construction of a new house.

***Mundhum*- Oral Recitations: The Repository of Wisdom**

As per Limbu Ritual specialist, '*Mundhum* is an intrinsically interlinking constellation of sacred tales and folklores. *Mundhum* narrates ideological roots with present life by intelligible logical thinking or rendition logic for satisfying any ambiguity. Hence, it is an inexhaustive storehouse of knowledge'.

- (Fieldwork 2020)

A Mundhum or oral recitation is profoundly entrenched with mythological legends, folktales, proverbs, etc. and other forms of poetry like chorales, elegy, and lullaby. The folktales narrated and recapitulated in the different events enhance Limbus beliefs and gratify their curiosity about the mysteries of the world. The narratives enlighten limited human thoughts, state of mind, and emotions with stories reflecting socio-cultural life of the Limbus. It depicts parental love, family bliss, habits of offspring, joy, greed, tears, etc. The important folktales include the origin of man and spirits, the restoration of man and nature, the tale of an orphan prodigy, the resilient and valiant nature of man, the spreading of moral values, the basis of modern

education, the tale of romantic love affairs, songs and dances, acknowledgment of person though immoral but upright for society etc. The verses are generally crooned in house warming party, babysitting, and rites de passage.

Likewise, the folksongs consist of song of a bird, song of squirrel, song of the ritual specialist, agricultural song, hunting song, trade song, love song, etc. The Limbus believe folksongs and dances are a gift of the spirit of arts and songs. Those are learned from cohesive partaking in the community events and transmitting oral memories to generations. Folksongs are sung during festivals, marriage, sowing, and harvesting, etc. Songs are simple, rhythmic, and lyrical that revitalizes mental laxity and monotonous life. The act of singing includes *Chyabrun* as a musical instrument used by the singer. Although, singing is an obligatory task of the ritual specialist, an entrusted proficient individual also performs considering it as their social obligation. It is informed, that they get especial acknowledgment during the enactment nevertheless spend typical life at normal times. Limbu society generally prefers ritual specialist or heads of the family, who are deemed adept at staging art forms, and retaining mythical references while conveying the tales.

- *Festive Songs*

The festive songs include *Sakmang Pero Hangman Tyero* and *Laringe Namringe* crooned with relevance to specific festivities, mythical implications, Deities and spirits, and related rituals. *Laringe Namringe* is further categorized into *Deusirey* (sung by men), and *Bhailini* (sung by women).

In light of *Laringe Namringe*, Limbu believes that *Laringe Namringe* is crooned on the nighttime of the full moon in the month of October. Parallel to *Deusirey* of Nepali society. *Mundhum* says that the Monarch Bali Hang used to be a great personality,

who was precious to the people of Kirtai region. He was a renowned personality known for his extraordinarily noesis of prophecy.

One day he came to know, that his death was for sure on the nighttime of the new phase of the moon of October. So, he held the meeting with the chiefs and gave the news of his forthcoming death which is likely to come very soon on October.

When the said day arrived, all the people of Kirati region took a bath early morning, kept a fasting, and began to pray to *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. At nighttime they lit the butter lamp all over the house and surroundings. They were constantly praying meanwhile suddenly the God of death appeared in the form of shadow. Every single people see his apperance and they bitterly cried and with one voice requested to increase life expectancy of their beloved king. They wept with sorrow and pleaded not to take him away from them. Without him, the entire territory will be in chaos and darkness.

Seeing the devotion and profound love and awe, the God of death replied, 'even though I am not the proprietor of somebody's death yet, I will try to save him'. As soon as he said this, his shadow disappeared and as a result the king breathed his last.

The next morning, after the rooster crow and when the sun began to appear in the sky, the king breathed again and came back to life. He came to senses, looked upon his chiefs and people and talked with them. He said, 'because of genuine prayers of all of you I am saved and alive today'. He was delighted with his chiefs and people of his territory and provided the banquet.

In remembrance of this day, they decided to observe this day as the day of festival every year. They should illuminate their houses and surroundings with butter lamp and ornament the houses with marigold flower.

It is believed, that the people of Kirati region composed a song and crooned with the chorus, '*Phailo/Deusirey*. *Phailo* means 'let us help', *Deusi* refers to 'priest' and *Rey* meaning 'king' which together means 'we helped the priest king'.

In each festivity, the serenade of festive songs begins with a prelude of void describing evolution of the universe and transfiguration of the spirits, humans, and mysteries related to life and death. It is followed by the crooning of festive referring to their meaning namely, fertility in agriculture, prosperity in domestic animals, etc.

Creation of Domestic Animals

The Limbus generally croons the creation of domestic animals during the commencement of every festival. It describes the mythical creation of animals. The recitations describe the matrimonial affairs amid the Deity of wisdom and the Goddess of prosperity. As per the narratives, Budo Nil Kantha [Kirati Raja] allured with charisma of *Yuma*, thus he deputed Mabo Hang to approach *Yuma* for marriage in Gorkha realms. With *Yuma's* convivial hospitality and acceptance of marriage, Mabo Hang returned to Budo Nil Kantha's region and initiated a marital arrangement.

However, after marriage Budo Nil Kantha and his family deputed *Yuma* to do field chores. Later, when they go to see the field while taking mattock to clear the field. Surprised with the equipped fields and witnessing the mattock, etc. positioned on reverse, they came back home. Yet again, the next day when they went to inseminate the crops, they saw the crops were already sowed and were ready for harvesting. It was even more surprising so they assigned Mabo Hang [Jaljitey], and Chemjong [Khalbaley] to query *Yuma* on the said matter. Hence, Mabo Hang joints his hands and

appeals to *Yuma* by stating “who are you, we did not recognize you”? Meantime the soul of *Yuma* entered Jaljitey’s body and said “I am the creator of crops; I am the creator of this world. She further added, you-human beings should offer me first harvested crops.

To meet the proviso, the Kirati Raja deputed Mabo Hang and Chemjong to offer the crops along with meat and alcohol to *Yuma*. Therewith, an idea of offering prayer and thanksgiving to creator of crops envisaged the perpetual sustenance of crops in the worldly realm.

In the creationary line, spirit of plants *Tattandi Mang Pattandi Mang*, is believed to be creator of the plant seeds. *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Yambami Mang* convinced the spirit of plants and brought the seeds of plants enclosed in *Omlari Sukwa Tettari Sukwa* (bag). After arriving on earth, *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Yambami Mang* unpacked the bunch of seeds and reaped them to the earth. The seeds were sowed on earth. Further, plantlets- sapling of bamboo and seeds of food crops, trees and flowers, herbs and shrubs were germinated and implanted on the earth.

After that, there appeared *Kehike Namhike Mang* (spirit of the brimming ocean), also identified as *Mujiri Mubokwama*. Limbus believed, with the shake of her body therewith, appeared gigantic creature as *Phajiyang Makchiyang Pit* (white and black coloured cow), they danced and started sweating. For that effort, the two more spirits *Thiksumba Mang* and *Nisumba Mang* appeared and added fluids by dancing which executed the mission of producing water in the ocean. At that moment, *Sawara Yettungek Mang* (mistress of the spirit of the ocean) scratched her hair and unexpectedly, her hair fell into the ocean. As an outcome, hair manifested the spirit of snakes namely, *Kumakla Asek Mang*, *Kuphora Asek Mang*, *Kuhetla Asek Mang*, and

Kuhitla Asek Mang. After that, *Sawaray Yettungek Mang* when milked her right breast. Milk continued to flow from the breast that formed *Akkam Wallimu Makkam Walli, Tigi Wallimu Chuwalam Wallimu* (water). After the thriving mission, entire spirits assigned for producing water in the ocean. They took a rest for a while and distributed food among themselves.

However, the one spirit which is believed to be the youngest one named *Nendhokke Mang Imetang Mang* was overlooked, and the food was not served. Deprived of share, as a result the spirit in anger caused shaking and frightening the ocean, that manifested frightening, shaking, and causing epidemic diseases spirits namely- *Sapphara Mang Muyongching Mang, Kunuri Mang Chinuri Mang, Kunuri Mang Tumuang Mang, Kunuri Mang Bimuri Mang, and ChokchokeMang Yangyange Mang*. Thuswise, ocean water contains, spirits of snakes, fish, milk, and sweat of the spirits.

Similarly, the creator God *Sigera Yabhundim Porokmi Yambami Mang* visited the realm of *Sapokhe Den Sadhamlung Den*. He then created several animals for the subsistence of human beings such as; *Toktok Pengwa* (deer), *Yasa Khire, Yasa Yongling, Yonghong Makyu* (bear), *Payet Nuge* (tiger), *Kiditongna* (leopard), *Poratongna* (wild dog), *SumdangTokmi* (elephant), *UttaKenda* (rhinos), *Sera* (bone), *LasaPhungpit* (yak), *Namss Sangpit* (cow), *Sammenda* (wild goat), *Melluk* (sheep), *Chitalla Lakhuna* (leopard), etc.

Evolution of Food – Crops

The form of *Mundhum* reflects the spiritual mother connubial with the spirit of wind and parentage of their progenies. In the congested milieu, their offspring demanded provision of nourishment. In response, his mother offered dew and frost to quench his thirst and meat to assuage hunger. The vestiges of meat altered into birds, rats, and squirrels. Thereafter, the spirit of wind invited entire living creatures for a feast by sacrificing an animal. After devouring the meal, the rodents and birds' defecation germinated into vegetation around the world.

It led to the growth of edible plants as the primary food chain for insects, birds, animals, and humans. Likewise, trees were formed that provided forage to squirrels, rodents, birds, and other animals. Mucous streamed and developed as a spring for birds and animals to drink water. Last of all, deprived of share, the mythical being licked the leftover meats. Thus, today, mythical being feeds on ashes in fireplace of hunting grounds. In that condition of severe starvation, a dark placenta appeared on the land. In anxiety, the spiritual mother arranged for a group of ritual specialists to determine the unfamiliar object. Meanwhile, the ritual specialist recognized the matter as the umbilical cord of the earth, which transformed into a cow. The animal was tethered with creeper rope and raised in divine parents' territory. In addition, the benevolent spirit appeared and overlaid the land with a bunch of seeds, which germinated, and the food crops prospered and bear fruit. Contented with the food crops salvage, spiritual mother bountifully endowed food and sanctioned festivity of *Chasok Tongnam* for well growth of crops. Hence, *Chasok Tongnam* is celebrated by the Limbus to honour the sacred blessing of abundant harvest every year.

At the same time, the scuttlebutt of beautiful damsel spread over ethereal spheres. Therefore, every desirous individual belonging to different territories approached in pursuance of marriage. In the spousal contest between various spirits, they intermediated, arbitrated, and negotiated for marriage. Therewith, the damsel run away to the another territory to stay away from the relentless proposals. The spirit of infant fatality, assigned wildcat and also middle world's mystical progenitor of humankind entrusted dog to pursue her. In their quest, the dog trailed towards the territory, while the wildcat withdrew to follow by scoffing at the fruits of the tree.

As a result, the spirit of infant fatality spat on the wildcat, which marked a whitish spot on the forehead. After finding her, the dog and spirit of infant fatality were cordially received by the spirit of a rainstorm. As they travelled down to *Yuma's* land, the spiritual beings wearied of the pursuit spelt chants to inflict her, which resulted in the mysterious death of a damsel on the way.

After three days of burial in *Yuma's* territory, a mythical spirit pressed breast and sprinkled milk over fertile soil. The irriguous action escalated the healthy growth of the paddy in the territory. The share of milk bestowed in the aforesaid territory improved the growing of food crops. Yet, as spiritual beings gauging the prosperous yield of grains invited female wind spirits to blow over to desiccate, and hardened grains. Hence, spiritual beings foretold that rice was a staple for humans.

With time, spiritual beings expressed willingness for sexual desire. To lessen anxiety, the spirit of castration castrated his testicles and spirits of art and songs buried the confiscated testicles in the territory, which grew into wild yam. Later, people of the middle world fervently cultivated and sustained yam. However, mystical animals intruded and devastated cultivated area. Infuriated with the perpetration, the middle

world people assigned a wild cat to determine the perpetrator, but it rather intruded into the fowl shed and attacked the fowls. Disappointed with the former attempt, they employed a yellow-bellied weasel to accomplish the task. The weasel carrying out the vested obligation stalked the hunting trap of humans and devoured the game.

In due course, weasel recognized wild boar as the offender. Thereupon, the middle world dwellers subpoenaed the finest archers to annihilate the wild boar. In compliance, the archers along with the dog followed the boar. In their quest, they shot down wild boar. Nevertheless, the wounded boar sprinted and sheltered in the *Yuma*'s territory. In prompt trailing, the archers tracked behind whiffing pawnmarks but adversely lost the way back. In pursuing the boar, the archers arrived at the lawn of *Yuma* land laid with paddy for sun drying and received amiable hospitality. The following day, *Yuma* dispatched the archer with straw of paddy strapped in his ears.

With returning of archer, the middle world people obtained the paddy grain, which served as saplings for fetching prosperous food grains. Yet, they lacked the wisdom in farming- clearing the jungle, acquiring framing tools, and setting up cultivable land. So, at that time, they dispensed wildcat to seek the spirit of the metals for providing farming tools. Nevertheless, the spirit of metals disaffirmed their necessity and detained the cat for defecating in his territory. In rejoinder, the middle world people took over the axe and machete from the spirit of metal in return for getting hold of the wildcat.

With the dawn of new beginning, the people were prompted to fell trees and clear forests for agriculture. They acquired metal for igniting fire from the spirit of metal and woolly fibres from the the tree trunk. The striking of metal for igniting fire with a stone flared the woolly fibres, burning down the waste of the forest. Further, with the

help of the spirit of the wind, the fire spread and burned the eyes of a wild bird, the tail of the bird, and the head of the snail. As agriculture flourished with the prosperity of rice, millet, and maize. The entire territory coveted the prosperity of the people of middle world. They disputed *Yuma* for deprivation of food and unfair conduct despite being in instantaneous realms. In antipathy, the spirit of the forest destroyed the harvests and entire cultivated area by deploying wild animals, birds, and pests.

As a result, some paddy proceeded to evil spirit realms in panic, while others remained within the field. Agitated with the tumult, the middle world inhabitants deputed the mystical beings to beseech *Yuma* for salvaging their hardship. Despite their tenacious appeal, *Yuma* rejected to meet their demand without any extent of the sacred offerings. After this, the middle world people tendered *Chasok Tongnam's* ritual with sacramental gifts like sacrificed goats, pigs, and fowls to appease her. In the reciprocity, *Yuma* gave the better-quality paddy and received provision for the seeds of paddy. Henceforth, the *Chasok Tongnam* rite marked the bestowal of the surplus crops.

Man and the Struggles

Man and the Struggles *Mundhum* is recited on *Nahangma* (war dance) ritual by invocatory spells of the void to *Sawa Yukphung Kemba*. In formal practice, *Nahangma* is observed by fixing a shield on top of the altar along with a sword otherwise bow and arrow and an arch to its left and right side, attached with *Sungkhimba/ Chiretta* and ginger, along with *Peheng* (bamboo sticks), filled with water, millet, and yeast. The event is observed in the house lobby to deter malevolent spirits. The mythical recital unfolds man's struggles for existence. The narrative of

experiences of *Sutchuru Suhangpheba* and *Samdang Khewa* at the low land and *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Lingdang Khewa* at the low terrestrial. The children born out of the incest relationship brought about depraved penalties in the Limbu community. In addition, the narrative of rivalry centers between *Naamsami* (human) and *Keysami* (tiger) twin brothers.

In festivity, usually the oral recitation begins through an emphasis on *Susuwengba Lalawengba's* childhood story. As per the allegoric spell, *Mujina Kheyongnama* under the supervision of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* went to Hilli *Yachho* (place) and brought the leaves of *Kekyo Na* (a kind of tree having velvety soft leaves). She then went to place named *Chokepho Pangbhe* and brought *SidiyangdangMadiyangdang* (a kind of child rearing basket). She hosted a birthday feast for *Susuwengba Lalawengba* by inviting the spiritual being. Meanwhile, with *Susuwengba Lalawengba's* relentless cry, she offered a leaf of *Kekyo Na* to console him, which altered into *taga* (garment). Hitherto, her attempt to console the child by baby-sitting and humming lullaby turned futile. Wearied with a hysteric state, the spiritual being claimed by the gifting of plant. However, her body deteriorated by constant babying.

Later, as *Susuwengba Lalawengba* demonstrated ambulatory activities, a spiritual being presented his wooden sword, but, at the child's discontentment, the spiritual being offered him another sword carved from a tree. Acquiring the new plaything, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* remained ecstatic and amused. At a youthful age, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* started nastily crushing insects, toads, birds, etc. and slain deer and other wild animals. The enactment compelled *Mujina Kheyongnama* to desolate *Susuwengba Lalawengba* from the middle world. The abandonment forced him to refuge in caves and tree hollows with scanty food.

Glimpsing the awful state, spirits of livestock prosperity entrusted spirit of house and assets as guardian of *Susuwengba Lalawengba* in affording house and basic requirements. Spirit of fate advised fastening yeast at house entry to defend against the intrusion of malevolent spirits. Yeast practically debilitated memories and visions of the spirits. Gauging the appealing state, guardian of domestic animals gifted artisan skills, the art of amusement, and the tactics of warfare. Likewise, the Goddess trained in hunting to shoot down the bird. The training in exile continued until adulthood with the attainment of required skills.

In his itinerary, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* moved towards the evil spirit territory to avenge the world. He crumpled away bamboo, severed the climber plant, and frightened other existing beings. Further, he saw venomous snakes wagging their heads to strike. The scene introduced *Susuwengba Lalawengba* with the idea of head-nodding as a deliberate war tactic to strike at the precise time. Nevertheless, in retort, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* chopped away several gourds blocking the way. As gourds rolled down to mystical human territory and a dog distributed to the entire world. Tragically, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* slaughtered a mystical human assuming a gourd.

To salvage from fatality, *Susuwengba Lalawengba's* wife instructed him to carve stairs in a tree and fondle a huge boulder, which impulsed a yell inside from the stone. Imitating the boulder, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* reiterated nine times to the dead human and enabled them to regain sense. With the support of female evil spirit, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* cut the nine layered doorway of evil spirit realms and acquired fervency for war. He further hacked off banana plants and reached the banana garden. At that instantaneous, the legendary bird excreted *Susuwengba Lalawengba's* head and the mystical being smirked in resentment. In the indignation

on *Susuwengba Lalawengba* invasion, hornbill protested his arrival. At that time, the female spirit affixed a trap with banana and limbs of cow, goat, and pig as bait in a tree for entrapping the intruders.

Susuwengba Lalawengba when moving forward discovered a series of bamboo and cane containers hung for disposing of corpses. As, *Susuwengba Lalawengba* attempted to grab the cane container, he was intruded on by an immoral tongue, so his wife cautioned him from heading forth and returning to earthly realms. In backtracking, the spirit of art was shredded in the wrist from the medicinal creeper and fastened with beads on *Susuwengba Lalawengba's* hair. The spirit of art knotted with extended bead tails, hide out his face from malevolent spirits. Thus, constant conflicts moulded *Susuwengba Lalawengba* as witty warrior and turned his character different from others.

The Spiritual Journey

The oratorical journeying to the kingdoms of the Goddess of prosperity differs in each event or from the village. In general, the recital traces a specific place or village and embarks on the journey orderly quoting the nearest villages and emphasizing different aspects of village life, people, Deities, fortune, etc. As per Limbu belief, the *Phedangma* are assumed to have mystical wings to soar over and lead the soulful route to different spiritual realms and landforms.

However, the oral recitations have to include each village and the singer need to be active without falling asleep, otherwise, the skipping of oral recitals gets distracted and the evil spirits tend to linger. The oral recitation stresses an oratorical journeying

to the land of the Goddess of prosperity. The point of departure embarks from the respective village of raconteurs' venue of singing through entreating the blessing of the benevolent spirits. The spiritual journey embarks into spiritual realms of the Goddess of prosperity to express gratitude for bestowing surplus crops and implores her to receive the reciprocated ritual gifts.

In the journey of the eternal world, the narrative embarks about the surface of earth mentioning varied landforms and the scenic beauties such as mountains, valleys, rivers, plains, sacred places, the dwelling of varied clans, habitats of animals, etc. The recital seeks blessing upon different landscapes to be fit for human habitation and hospitable towards the humans. The spiritual journey of prosperity implies journey to the residence of the spirit of domestic animals.

Feast: Oral Recitations

The recital of the feast centers on a mystical woman's arrival to the spirit of seasons territory. As per narratives, her advent reinstated new prospects of life and bestowed prosperity on earth. For that reason, the people observed the feast to acclaim her generosity. In that event, they rejoiced for abundant yields after harvesting crops. Hence, it is observed as a New Year festival with the onset of spring. In the festivity, the menfolk gather around a bonfire or hearth inside the house at dusk and croon chorales song, emphasizing the mystical woman and spirit of the season's tale. The chorus depicts seasonal changes by comparing the winter season as to the old women and the spring season to the attractive youthful girl.

The allegory expounds as, in beginning, human society appeared on the earth's surface. It is believed to be an established civilization with people and self-sufficient villages. Nevertheless, the whole civilization was destroyed by a disastrous flood, discharged by spirit of water whose son-fish was accidentally trapped and executed by the people of human society during the feast. At that moment, a bat appeared as a guest in human society enquiring about festive meat. In response, the people of human society revealed about a fish entrapped in water for the feast. After ascertaining the fact, the bat left for the domain of water. Arriving at the deepest point, the bat noticed the wife of the water spirit lamenting the abduction of her son. So, the bat said about her son being slayed and consumed in the feast by people of human society. The entire territory was ruined by rainstorms, floods, and erosion. As a result, the world shrunk down into the water and turned into darkness.

After the wreckage, an extraordinarily beautiful woman emerged as the spiritual bride of human society to state the story of damage and stimulate new hope for another civilization on earth. The mystical woman floated around to establish charisma and affection among people of human societies on her way. Thence, oral narratives portray the spiritual women as the most charming and gorgeous bride representing symbolic attraction and enthusiasm. She greets the guests by serving alcoholic drink and entertains with charismatic demeanours. Through her bigheartedness, people relish joyously singing and dancing in life. Thereupon, her beauty altered into natural entities like green garments turned into the vegetation on earth and her white robe transformed into clouds. The seasonal changes portray her appearance through different social events. Her sweat and tears instilled into water and rain. The songs and music turned into the chirps of birds and bustling insects. Hence, her natural body embodied the appeal and elegance of human society.

Chorales: Chorus of Merriment

It is a melodious chorale with wavering modulations, which serves as a dedicatory song, and is crooned during the New Year *Kakphekwa Tongnam*. In addition, *Paalam Samlo* is crooned at recess after labouring in the field and *Keysam Samlo* on feast after the construction of the house. The elderly man usually a chorales expert in the Limbu society leads the chorus sitting around a bonfire outside the house or premise or hearth of the house, and followed by another male member. The chorus known as the *Keysam Samlo* is sung in merriment after the completion of the newly constructed house. The singing describes the creation of man, early house dwellings, acquiring skills, techniques of labour, and the safety of the house and family members. The theme of *Kokphekwa Tongnam* entails appraisal of the spiritual bride, human society, and harvest festival. It exalts nature and the seasonal changes by implicating winter as an old lady and spring as an attractive youthful damsel. Hitherto, due to differences in narrative and tune, the chorales are categorized into different chorales. *Keysam Samlo* is a dedicatory chorus that resonated during the ceremonial event of a newly constructed house. *Kokphekwa* depicts the existence of human society and the origin of the feast. *Paalam Samlo* is usually sung during any social events. The rhetoric of singing expresses, in the beginning there was nothing but an emptiness in the universe. The mysterious and invisible power began emitting ethereal vibration, which shattered the eternal silence and filled the emptiness with waves of pulsation. The ethereal dirt emerged and turned into earth. The primarily soft earth hardened in due course of time. The earth was considered female and the sky was regarded as male. The unification of earth and sky begot entities like stars, planets, insects, and animals. Later, a spiritual woman was born out, whose son *Susuwengba Lalawengba* procreated several human offspring.

Funeral Hymn: Elegy for Deceased

Limbus expresses dirges in the form of a funeral hymn during a person's death. To a great extent, it aids as a means for the grieving family and relatives to express their emotional breakdown. The spell is considered a farewell song for the mortal being.

As per the funerary tradition, when a person dies, the villagers visit the household of the deceased to pay homage to the departed soul. In that grieving moment, parents, relatives, ritual specialist, and *Tumyanghang* or funeral-goers usually vocalize the funeral hymn. To the family's dismay at death and separation, the funeral hymn maintains to serve as a tribute to the deceased and consoles the mourning. The ritual specialists particularly hired for the purpose are remunerated with cash and gifts for their service. The nature and contents of oral recitations vary based on the age (elderly or young) and gender (male or female) of the deceased. Even though, the tune and intensity of despair are the same in both cases, the life history of mature people is intensely expressed compared to younger ones. The spelling of funeral hymns is restricted for deceased young boys and girls, especially unmarried individuals for being immature with lesser life stories to describe. Death by accident or murder, and death after childbirth is deemed as an act of malevolent spirits. The elegy sung overnight involves the obituary of a deceased person, family, and ancestors. It corroborates birth and death as inevitable processes and natural for a man who takes birth to meet the death the ultimate truth of life. The elegy indispensably stresses diverse themes corroborating the creation of man, life history, cause of death, an eternal journey of soul, dirge, grave good, the burial of the corpse, sympathy for lifeless, prophecy, the destiny of man, death of adults, death of youths, death of children, death after childbirth and dreams.

To illustrate dirges, the researcher substantiates an excerpt of the singer addressing the deceased for a long life declaims, “You were blessed with long life by the life creator of the baby in the womb, and so you lived a long life. In instance of short life, the singer says, “creator of the baby has blessed you with short life, so you breathed a short life”. At the funeral, the singer with poignant tones stimulates the sentiments of assembled mourners and compels them to weep. The oral recitation and lamentation reflect the affection for the deceased and aid as an eternal song for deceased. By dint of elegy, the Limbus articulates their aggrieved emotion, despair, and faith. It serves in edifying the enquiry of human death and life after the ultimate truth of life that is death. It manifests several facets of a dead person’s life and instructs the departed soul to embark on eternal path of heaven and hell. Though *Mundhum* includes elegy as sacred hymns, the ritual specialists refuse to croon until and unless the funeral occurs in the villages. The singing is avoided owing to the vindictive undertone that distresses the ritual specialist’s life. In a similar posture, the ritual specialist of Bijanbari village concurs, “I have narrated elegy, *Mundhum* and several times singing elegy whole night make me restless for many days. If a singer fails to complete the verse or fumbles to recite, the bad omen will inflict the singer and his generations” (Fieldwork 2019). Therefore, repercussion of adversative omen has restricted elegy recitals to funereal event.

Lullaby

The lullaby is individual or private. It is reckoned to have derived from a life creator, who crooned a lullaby to *Susuwengba Lalawengba* by carrying in her arms. In a social context, singing the lullaby is marked among womenfolk, particularly in their motherhood and babysitters while cuddling kids. After the departure of parents for agricultural work, the elder brother or sister looks after the baby by humming lullaby

with rhythmic jerks to ease the child's cry. The lullaby serves as an incentive for kids to grasp the narrative contents. It propels much impact on the mentality of the kid by lulling them to calm down and sleep. The prelude of lullaby commences with the maxim taking a rest on my back, why would my younger brother or sister cry, my brother or sister, do not fret and sleep on my back.

Phedangma: The Priesthood

Limbus performs different sacraments with relevance to the childbirth, sicknesses, death rite, festivities, fertility rites, etc. In that regard, *Phedangma* on behalf of a person performs rituals to pacify unseen spirits, as symbolic of healing sickness, resisting inflictions from the malevolent spirit, and thanking benevolent spirits for bestowing prosperity. Etymologically, *Phedangma* is an umbrella term for Limbu ritual specialists. Although the majority subscribes as *Phedangma*, at present, the elite Limbus designates as *Morabong*. In a broader context, the taxonomy of ritual specialist diverges among the Limbus and level the *Phedangma* into different categories. They act as an intermediary between humankind and the spiritual world. In Limbu's social setting, they possess a mediatory gift with supernatural spirits for redressing the grievances of grief-stricken people. They play an integral role in performing the technicalities of rites and rituals. Therefore, Limbu society esteems *Phedangma* as the 'divine mediator' or the 'spiritual guide' for their altruistic services. In the past, the *Phedangma* received remunerations in kind in the form of meat, rice beer, and valuable items for their tasks. Nevertheless, these days, they are gifted both in cash and kinds with meat and rice beer otherwise sometimes cash as a token of appreciation. The office of *Phedangma* is neither hereditary nor elected,

rather officiated by those who possess inborn divine gifts, quality of fortune-telling, expertise in sacraments, and conversant with the mythical narratives. Limbus believes, that the Supreme Being determined attribute of a ritual specialist in individuals during gestation in mother's womb. Albeit, in the case of YMMCC followers, the apprentice pursues the sacred training from senior *Suingneem* to acquire wisdom, experience, and ritualistic expertise.

The status of the priesthood is held by both genders, a man or woman with obligatory wisdom and proficiency in sacred divinations undertakes the priestly assignments. Nevertheless, the ritual specialist does not enjoy especial privileges in society, instead leads the normal lifestyle akin to village cohorts. While ordaining the roles of ritual specialist, they perform manifold tasks with an entitled area of expertise.

Phedangma as a Clairvoyant

In the hierarchy of priesthood, the *Phedangma* and *Samba* (clairvoyant) occupy the position of highest order. The ritual specialist conversant in sacred dogmas and rituals performs role of shaman, fortune-teller, castration experts, and singer priest. In the Limbu context, the family of an incapacitated person normally assume inviting *Phedangma* to perform rituals and propitiate gifts to ward off intrusive spirits. The *Phedangma* stages the rites by invoking spirits, swathed with priestly attire draped below the abdomen, tiny bells, and a sword. In the ritualistic act, the *Phedangma* spells or chants by rattling the machete shaped knife or a bunch of tiny bells. In the divine interface, the *Phedangma* determines the lingering soul of the sick person and mediates the spirit causing sickness. Thereby, he beseeches the spirit to liberate the soul in exchange for sacrificed animals or fowl as gifts.



Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2: *Phedangma* (left). *Ablak* (Rudraksha beads) are believed to be important costumes of *Phedangma* (right)

Samba

In probing health disorders, the *Samba* generally verifies by touching or clutching the patient's body parts and accordingly prescribes remedies. In the curative process, they prescribe the dietary restrictions, to abstain from eating meat and fish and consume lighter food such as vegetables for a certain period and refrain from outdoor events like moving out of house, Crossing River, and agriculture drudgery for weeks too. However, the restriction observances differ as per the nature of ailments. To appease spiteful spirits from future inflictions, *Samba* suggests enacting major or minor rituals and an essential sacrificial animals or fowls for precise ailments. In case of the bone fracture, dislocation, etc. they knead the body parts to detect physical disorders. Thus, they treat patients with physiotherapy and band the medicinal herbs to cure bones, joints, and neural problems. In customary therapy, the use of honey wax is vital in the treatment of fractured bones as it retains healing properties.

Sida Samba: Castration Experts

The castration experts perform the role of veterinarian, with expertise in the castration of goat, sheep, and pig in the society. They also treat dislocated joints, fractured bones, and nerves of domestic livestock such as cow, cattle, pig, dog, etc. It is believed that whoever visits the realms of Gods of domestic animals in dreams and acquires dexterity of castration from spirit of castration, becomes a castration expert. Hence, to invoke the commiseration of the spirit of castration for success castration, the castration expert charges offering gifts for prosperity with rice beer and meat.



Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4: *Samba*

Yeba/ Yema: Fortune Teller- Augury Priest

This type of ritual specialist proficiently reveals the reason of sickness or the perpetrating spirits. They detect the intrusive thief barging into the house and the whereabouts of the hidden stolen goods in the likely space or direction of hidden place. On invitation for the task, the fortune-teller normally performs minor divination and examines rice for uncovering the facts.



Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.6: *Yeba* and *Yema* during the Sirijunga festival

Sam Mundhum: Singer Priest

This category of ritual specialist contrasts with other ritual specialist by limiting the skill to recite *Mundhum* and chorales during festivities and elegies in funeral services. They are acquainted with wisdom and narratives of Limbu myth and tales. In the festivals, a singer priest leads intoning and enactment of dance. By tradition, while crooning *Mundhum* wears a tiny bell and a rattling knife around their waist. As per, the traditional concept of dress, the tiny bells and knife safeguard the priest from being swayed away by malevolent spirits. Tiny bells provoke sensible and intrepid enactment of the singer priest and the attire to impress the Deity. On other hand, the voluntary singers narrate dirge tracing the life story and successes of the deceased and lead the soul over an eternal journey. The ritual specialist suggests the departed soul to abstain from revisiting the world or family members and perpetrating any sort of troubles.

Rites and Rituals: The Sacred Divinations

Limbu belief system entails manifold rituals about their domestic well-being such as, healing, calamities, death, fertility of the crop, festivity, etc. The mankind acquires inspiration from the plethora of benevolent spirit, and is reprimanded by the malevolent spirit. Informant concur, that benevolent spirits also rebuke humans for their offences at times, for instance, the deity of crops, fined with grave weakness or failure of crops on rebuttal of food crops rituals. Thus, offering sacrifices is vital to propitiate and gain commiseration of spirits. It is obligated for Limbus to accomplish rituals by reciting *Mundhum* and offering sacrifices. Hitherto, the category of ritual proceedings, relevant spells, ritual materials, and taboos differ subject to necessity or grounds of individual or Limbu society.

To this fact, let the researcher edify the ritual practices in the following manners.

❖ *Yangdang Phongma*: Birth Rite

During the birth of a child in the village, people in recognition come up and witness the newborn baby. As per traditional naming practices, the child is named instantly after three or four days (depending on gender) after delivery. Thereupon, after bathing the child, a *bhoto* (cloth) is draped in the child's body and then placed in a *Phoondak* (cradle). Besides, some mugwort is swirled in thread knotted and hung on the edge of the cradle by either parents or relatives for the purification, and rice is served to the child's mother. This ceremony is added with a ritual to consecrate the new beginning and prospects. The same evening, the family member hosts a feast and sumptuously devours along with relatives, neighbours, and friends. The birth ceremony is observed by gifting clothes and other valuable items to the child by the partakers and subsequently, the mother observes strict dietary taboos.

❖ *Chesama*: Funeral Rite

Limbus categorizes death into natural death and unnatural death. Natural death means a person's death at old age after living entire life. While unnatural death on the other hand denotes sudden or premature death which is further categorized as *Sogha*. It is said, that the unnatural death involves death meted in vehicular mishaps, murder, suicide, drowning, falling from a hilltop or tree etc. and the *Sugut* suggests death incurred during child-delivery, miscarriage and spiritual possession.

In enacting funeral rites for the person dying a natural death, the funeral hymn is recited by the ritual specialist during the mourning period to guide the deceased's soul on the spiritual journey to the ancestor's abode. The corpse is wrapped in white clothes and carried to the village graveyard by *Cheysaba* with a bamboo stretcher for carrying a corpse. In event of death, the corpse is normally buried in sideward or normal sleeping positions. In the entombment, the possessed articles and clothes and blankets are cordoned with the body. Besides personal things, grave goods in the form of sacrificed fowl or pig with rice beer in a container is kept adjacent to the grave. The following day, the family member along with kin and kins, neighbours and other villagers observe involvement of the entire village to comfort the bereaved family. The kinfolks take bath in nearby rivers at dawn and a male member accompanies them and ignites the bonfire on riverbank, which is crossed over by all partakers while returning home. It is interpreted, that the rituals circumvent bad omens and vicious spirits lingering around. Along with the purificatory rite, a section of family members undertakes to visit the grave rite by revisiting the grave and offering sacred possessions. Thereafter, on the third or fourth day, the rite for concluding restriction is observed by avowing chants and whacking leaves of sacred plants around, and placing raw rice beer and a lump of rice and bamboo frame for

smoking meat in the site. The ritual of concluding taboo is sanctified by catering the foods and cohesively devouring among family members and gathered people.

In context to unnatural death, the corpse in case of unnatural death away from home is treated awful and placed outside the house veranda or lawn for family and villagers to pay homage. The corpse is not maintained for overnight mourning, but instead disposed it away early even if death occurs at night. As per Limbu funeral norms, one-rupee silver coin is placed on the forehead of a dead person. Likewise, *Phedangma* places a *Shamingma Yang*, *Sidingba* and *Sapsing* to circumvent the ghost before burial. After the burial of dead body, even if funeral events like unapproved acts and rite for concluding restriction taboo within three or four days are observed alike a normal death, but visiting grave is excluded.

❖ Rites of Festivity

In the festivities, traditional rites like a ritual for healing and fortune, the ritual of crops and bestowal of crops to humans are performed to acknowledge the blessings of benevolent spirit, the services essentially deal with the welfare and prosperity of humanity.

❖ Rituals for Livestock Prosperity

The rituals for livestock prosperity are enacted in household traditional rituals. In the ritual dealings, meat chunks, rice, and ginger wrapped in taro leaves are placed on north side of the house, where ropes for tethering cows are shelved by articulating sacred chants. In that manner, the event relevant Deities such as the Goddess of prosperity, spiritual guardian, and spirits for livestock prosperity are propitiated by sacrificing pigs and fowls to acquire fortune, the welfare of humans, and prosperity in livestock, and food crops.

❖ **Ritual Offering to the Goddess of Prosperity**

The rite is staged during *Yokwa* festival marked by preparing the soil for cultivating crops. In the sacrosanct practice, a circular band of bamboo, two pairs of the sacred leaves, and mogwort twigs are placed in the center of a bamboo. Rice draped in taro leaves, chicken, and container comprising rice beer is fixed in the ritual site. The ritual service is performed by delivering chants to invoke blessings of the Goddess of prosperity and spiritual guardian for a prosperous harvest and protection from pest attack.

❖ **Ritual Offering to the Goddess of Crops**

Similar to the ritual offering to the Goddess of prosperity ceremony, the ritual offering to the Goddess of crops implies a parallel attribute of fertility ritual. In this ritual type, the villager visits the paddy field and offers ritual acts in thankfulness for bestowing prosperous yields every year, and sanctioning healthy harvest for the existing year to Goddess of prosperity and custodian of the land. In the sacrosanct affair, the proceedings are enacted by erecting pair of sacred leaves and twigs encircled by three stones in a triangle position. As a propitiatory offering, a chunk of meat is fastened on one side of erected frame and ginger and unbrewed rice beer on another end. The ritualistic process further employs recitation of sacred chants and sprinkling rice beer over it.

❖ **Rituals in Hunting**

In hunting events, menfolk usually offer ritual offerings to *Mishekpa* (spirit of the forest) before venturing into hunting under a massive *Paramsing* tree assumed as the dwelling of the evil spirit for approving their task in the forest, safety from the

dishonest schemes of malevolent spirits and fortune in obtaining games. The ritual gift involves ginger and rice beer draped in sacred leaves. Nevertheless, the propitiatory conduct does not involve the sacred chanting. After the laborious chases, those hunters succeeding in obtaining games offer thanksgiving ritual in resting place by affixing two bamboo sticks crisscrossed fixed with taro leaves.

Oaths and Ordeals

The oath and ordeals include probing the veracity of truth and justice in society. It is essentially held to resolve disputes over properties such as land and water sources, livestock, murder, adultery, theft, etc. In case of inefficient disposal of issues due to lack of valid evidence, witness, or discontent with the council's verdict. The contending parties seek to accomplish ordeals under the presidency of *Tumyanghang*. To unearth the validity of the issue, oaths and ordeals is assumed by invoking *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as the supreme judge. The recitations generally maintain, Witness mother Goddess! I being innocent confirm the truth in the name of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* and renounce to speak untruth. The methods of ordeal every so often vary in contingency to pertinent viz, in resolving any sort of disputes based on agreement from the rival party.

Traditional Festivals

In veneration of higher constellation of Deities, Limbus observes festivals for the comfort and prosperity of the human life by pacifying spirits with the assistance of ritual specialist. It reflects the Limbu worldview of benevolent and malevolent spirits

and their influence on human life. Festivals manifest social solidarity, integrating people in a single purpose. All types of festivities are agricultural oriented vis-a-vis of fertility-rites. In the past, celebrations lacked fixed dates and every village relied on feasibilities, topography, and seasonal changes for carousing. The cyclical variations regulated the agendas of fishing, trapping, associated rituals, and sacrifices, etc. At present day, it serves as a medium to conserve customary values and related oral legacies.

Chasok- Thisok Tongnam (Harvest festival)

It is a major festival celebrated collectively in the Limbu inhabited areas. In the primaeval times, the celebratory day differed in the villages. Today, to suit the people residing in urban areas and government employees, the date of the *Chasok- ThisokTongnam* festivity is fixed on the 15th of December every year. Limbus observes the *Chasok- Thisok Tongnam* festivity every year after harvest. It is a gesture of thanksgiving and prayer to nature for a bountiful harvest and entreaty for the recurrence of prosperity in the ensuing year, and no one is allowed to eat new harvest until the rituals are over. It is also an offering to the Supreme Being and lesser Gods who are believed to have given them their first seeds of the crops. They offer their respect and thanks to them for providing not just the seeds, but looking after their crops and protecting them from any disease or natural calamities. Their belief in supreme beings and lesser Gods is such that in case of any natural disasters, it is predicted that they will protect and rescue Limbus. In the event, the priest executes rituals with the sacrifice of pigs. After the ritual, people devour feasts with rice beer and delicacies served by womenfolk. In vivacity, the men and womenfolk clad in the traditional attire relish merrymaking. Elderly people sing folk songs and youths dance with great animation.



Figure 3.7 and Figure 3.8: *Phedangma* in *Chasok Tongnam* 2018 (left). *Phedangma* chanting *Mundhum* during *ChasokTongnam* 2016 (right)

❖ *Yokwa or Yumang Tongnam*

Yokwa or Yumang Tongnam is agriculture-based concerning fertility-cult before the preparatory phase of wet field, sowing and transplantation of crops in February. The vital purpose of *Yokwa Tongnam* is to propitiate Deities like, *Khamjiri Khambongba Lungbongba*, *Yabhungen Yabhungrekma*, *Madenhang Lungumhang*, *Nugohang*, and *Hayuhang* for bestowing prosperous harvest. It involves sacrosanct events like rituals, chants, and sacrifices. Traditionally, it is observed in February each year after the preparation of wet fields for sowing in foothills. The following day is marked by a community feast in the village. All the members partaking in the event share the feast.

Kak Phekwa La-Gaenge Tongnam (New Year)

In simple understanding, it marks the New Year for Limbus, with the arrival of the first month January. It is observed in the appreciation of nature and its influence on human life. In the past, the village council decided on the date of festivity a week earlier before the actual celebration. However, the contemporary Limbu society fixed

the date on the 14th of January every year. The event commences by offering thanksgiving to the *Tagera Ningwaphuma* in the goneby times and buying off the evil spirit to leave the human being for this year. All the destructive vibes of the goneby age have to be forgotten and let go. Hence, a day before the New year, the community provides different kinds of *Bantarul*, *Ghartarul*, *Simaltarul* (yams), etc. to *Yuma Mang* the (household deity) for acknowledging the deity for guarding the people against starvation, mudslide, draught, deluge and etc.

During the initial day, the menfolk venture for fishing and trapping, while women prepare rice beer. The villagers engross in the preparation of rice beer and other culinary for festival. In the gravity of event, villagers sacrifice fowls and pig for feasts and drinks. In the evening the elderly menfolk and youths perform singing and dancing while visiting the village. Each house offers meat chunks as mark of cordiality. In reciprocity, they dedicate prayers for peace, health, and prosperity of the family.

Sisekpa- La Gaenge for Limbus.

Sisekpa- La Gaenge is observed in July and is believed to be culturally the auspicious day. The festivity signifies the closures of starvation and poverty. To go with the historical legendary tales, *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, it is said that the *Yuma Mang*, the almighty, divine who is an earthly embodiment shall go to each and every household on this day to curtail the devastating famines and hardships faced by the people in this following day, and bestow them with copious amounts of foods and showers all the human beings with prosperity for the future times to come. It is also symbolizing to get rid the burden of diseases and prevent any sort of deprivation and starvation.

Following day, the Limbus ornament and make their house door with various locally available foods like cucumber, millets, colourful flowers, edible gourd, corn and

pumpkin and decorate it as a hanging sling to welcome *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. In importance to the event, Limbus welcome the Yuma Mang to enter step into their houses by putting up a lamp (butter) along with some sweet and readily eatable vegetable and fruits as a gesture. Later in the day, all the Limbus will rejoice in merry loudly saying “*Sakmang Pero Hangnam Tyero*”, meaning all the bad, famine has vanished and good things are coming on the way.

Balihang Tongnam

It is parallel to the *Tihar* festival celebrated by Limbus which falls in October or November depending on the date of new moon day. The celebration normally continues for a week long. In the festivity, villagers sacrifice animals and share meat chunks with their family, friends, relatives, and neighbours. According to Limbu legends, many years back Bali Hang lived, who possess the supernatural powers especially in prophesying and was loved by every one in the society.

One day he had a vision about his death, he would die in new moon day. In sympathy, the *Kakwa* (crow) informed the bad news of BaliHang’s death to the chiefs and citizens. Thus, the citizens visited the king and asked him if the news was true. He affirms, the news to be true, and that he had a vision of death which is fixed on the day of *Amavasya*. The citizens unanimously determined they will ensure that there will be no dark on the night of full moon day.

With the arrival of full moon day, the citizens lit butter lamps all around the houses and surroundings and ornamented the house with marigold flowers. The darkness of the night was engulfed by butter lamp’s light and they joined their hands and offered their prayer with full faith and a single voice in unison. They kept praying *Laringek* requesting to set early and *Namlingek* to rise early for retention of Bali Hang life and

to save him from death. Thence, the God of death misidentifying the night as a day, did not arrived to take the soul of Bali Hang. Thuswise, Bali Hang' life was spared from the dreadful night. The next day as the mark of his new life, the entire citizens hosted a grand feast and sumptuously devoured with traditional foods and alcoholic beverages. In the evening, the entire chiefs and subjects went door to door dramatizing *Laringek Namlingek* and playing of *Tye-onsiro [Deusirey]*.

Since then, during the specific day of *Bali Hang Tongnam*, Menfolk and womenfolk visits around different houses in groups singing *Bhailo*, *Bhailini*, and *Deusirey*. One can see womenfolk singing *Bhailini*, and menfolk singing *Bhailo*, and *Deusirey*. While singing these songs, the singer states, “*Hami tesai aayeko haina*, “*Bali Raja ko hukumai ley*” which means “they have not come without any means, but on the command of Bali Raja.

Teyongshi Sirijunga Sawan Tongnam (Birth anniversary of Sirijunga)

Teyongshi Sirijunga Sawan Tongnam is celebrated by Limbus to mark the birth anniversary of Sirijunga. It is observed on 8th of December (official fixation) every year. He is regarded as the inventor of the Limbu script and is credited for the revival and spread of Limbu literature. As per legend, he visited Sikkim and propagated the Limbu language and literature. Since then, he has been a towering figure in the history of language for which he had also maintained martyrdom. According to the historical record, the Lamas who belonged to the *ta-tshang* sect had conspired and murdered *Srijunga* in the year 1741 at a place called (*Reshi*), also known as the confluence of *Kalej Khola*.

To mark this as a mythical/historical site, the Government of Sikkim gave the place name as Sirijunga Road. Additionally, a Mangheem was built to symbolize the significance and importance of the place



Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10. *Teyongshi Sirijunga Yuma Mangheem* in Martam West Sikkim (left). Limbu ritual specialist during *Sirijunga Sawan Tongnam* (right)

Taboos

The observation of taboos holds a crucial place in the socio-religious domain of Limbu culture. The general conception of taboos revolves around shared conjecture of abstaining from outdoor works or activities in relevance with the sacred occasions for evading adversities and the wrath of spirits. It mechanises as collective binding force by dictating actions and demeanours of people. Thus, it aids in upholding fundamental social values etched within the Limbu social framework. In precision of affairs engrossed with taboos, Ering (1974:10) have vividly remarked, that “Taboos are usually observed when traditional seasonal festivals are celebrated, spiritual offerings are made, tragic accidents occur in the society, epidemics break out in the

village, a person dies in the village or family, abortive child-birth takes place, heinous offences are committed etc”.

In light of various taboos, the prevailing taboos are sorted into individual or family and society levels, based on the intensity of causality, impact, and participation. At individual level, the relevant taboos are fixed and exclusively observed by person or jointly by family based on necessitated contexts. In that setting, it becomes an endeavour to satisfy the valid regulations ordained for mitigating ailments, misfortunes, and dodging plausible reprimands incurred for breaching statutes and offending the spirits. In the situation of withdrawal or defiance of taboos, the individual or family members undergo chastisement in form of ailments, mishaps, hardships, etc. In some cases, the fallouts of taboos insinuate obscured meanings, appear incurable, and therefore become vital to circumvent the enactment of unapproved acts.

For a better perusal, let the researcher draw reader’s attention to some pertinent taboos related to personal or familial dealings. The taboos observed at the community level involve coherent abidance and involvement of every single society member. For instance, at festive events, after proffering sacred offerings and animal sacrifices, people abstain from crossing rivers, entering restricted areas, doing outdoor chores, striving in agricultural fields, etc. The restriction period varies depending on festival. In the milieu of community rituals, people stay within the village periphery and refrain from travelling, agricultural labours, and outdoor activities, etc. In inadvertent events such as miscarriage, death of a woman due to abortion or childbirth, accidental death, and fire mishap, etc. Villagers coherently observe village taboo instantly after appraising the event through a general announcement on the incident day, by

refraining from the agricultural toiling, gathering firewood from the forest, sun drying paddy, etc.

In abiding funeral norms, the bereaved family observes the involvement of the entire village and rite for concluding restriction taboo. On the day of demise, the family, relatives, and clansmen observe involving entire village restricting outdoor activities, and agricultural works as symbolic of condolence to the departed soul. In observance, clansmen impose a fine against absentees to maintain unity among fellow members. In addition, the third or fourth day witnessed as *Yum Chama*, signifies the family's completion of funeral taboos, and resumption of daily activities.

Womenfolk observe the specific taboos in society. They uphold dietary taboos during the pregnancy to abstain from the defective childbirths. In the post-natal period, the family observes taboo restricting moving out of house for a day. In congruence, informants remark that women usually abstain from gobbling raw meat and fresh vegetables being capricious of body shrinkage similar to contraction of meat and vegetables after cooking. In the same vein, menstruating women were restricted to visit the worship places. They stayed isolated in a room or specific place in the house by evading brewing and cooking. Additionally, women during the menstrual periods avoid entering the granary to fetch cereals and collect vegetables from the garden or field. They are prohibited to attend to rituals.

Interpretation of Dreams

Limbus has their version of reading dreams. It is believed that the soul precedes body. The soul psychosomatically ushers the individuals to spiritual realms and determines

their physical state and likely fate. From a religious context, as opined by Informant in his 56's, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* exercises dreams as a unique medium for conveying messages or visualising prospects to man. In coherent posture, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* reveals awaited events either beneficial or adverse through the dreams. Accordingly, the meanings embedded in dreams are interpreted in conformism to the praxis of life. In the divinity sense, the interpretations of dreams are treated in a way to correlates with the coherent narratives of *Mundhum*. For example, if a person holds a sacred tree branch in dreams, it indicates prosperity. Albeit, all dreams are not interpreted by *Mundhum*, but revealed juxtaposed to human living conditions. In some cases, dream teller interprets the same dream with varied implications. Perception of vague explanation of dreams is construed from archery contests in deific kingdoms. Limbu myth explicates, that fortune-tellers vied archery aiming trees in their ethereal realms. As per rationalisation of the contest, the one incapable of hitting the tree turns inapt in advocating facts in traditional council, while the thriving one adeptly articulates the meanings.

Life after Death: Eschatology of Soul

In Limbu eschatology, soul leaves the body and embarks on a spiritual journey to an ethereal world. Given that, a hired ritual specialist recites elegy for the deceased's soul during the soul's itinerary passage. At this juncture, the natural death is regarded as the normal affair of life, while unnatural death is cogitated act of an evil spirit. In the case of normal death, the soul travels to the ancestral domains known as *Samyukna Den*. Realms of *Sangram Pedang Den* entail two heavenly realms heaven and hell. The first signifies the soul's blissful eternal heaven, while another one

implies the sinner's soul denied in *Samyukan Den* which is directed to *Khema Yongsongb Pangbhe* (hell) and suffers from the inferno. It is believed, that different causes of death like unnatural death led to varied domains of eternal refuge though not regarded as hell. Further, souls departed by natural death undertaking divine itinerary to heavenly realms are surmised as *Sam*. In broader terms, *Sam* signifies souls existing within each human being. Implicit with benign nuances, it is reflected to be free from worldly injustices during lifetime and receive eternal harmony in paradise.

In contrast to notion of soul, the man's spirit succumbed to unnatural death as an insinuated ghost. In the former case, the spirit of people who dies in mishaps or murder, etc. are referred to as *Sogha* and in the latter, *Sugut* is insinuated as the souls of women succumbing to death during pregnancy or childbirth by means of abortion or miscarriage due to vicious deeds of female malevolent spirit. The ghost lingers around the ancestor's domain and troubles human beings. Along the established lines of Limbu eschatology, informant posits an additional theory advocating for the non-existence of hell. However, if this premise is accepted as valid, then the intriguing sense reflects, where does the sinner's soul rest after death?

In retort to this obscurity, Informant affirms, that whoever commits sins is bound to be rebuked within lifetime through the traditional council verdict. The perpetrators castigated and vilified by the society for their sinful deeds amount to substantial punishment equivalent to misery in hell. On another note, the burden of ancestral mistakes is extended to descendants at the cost of chronic ailments, bodily infirmities, and deformities. Moreover, the informant stresses on tautology of reincarnation after death. Therewith, the deceased's soul reincarnates in the form of numerous entities like insects, birds, animals, plants, trees, etc. Therefore, parents advise their children

to refrain from the unwanted slaying of insects, birds, and animals, and plucking leaves and flowers.

Chapter 4

Traditional Limbu Religion:

Yumaism- The Revitalization Movement

Limbus religion is understood and perceived as bit of contested and multi-layered to comprehend, and even it is seen as problematic to deconstruct. Over the years, many scholarly studies indicate that the earliest forms of Limbu religion comprise the practice of worshipping nature-based Gods and Deities, also known as animism, but in the due course of time, it is being influenced externally by regional religious forms especially Hinduism in their social fabric.

To unravel the purest or primordial forms of Limbu religion and its practices is a herculean task, since few external forms of regional religious have pervaded into their original practices, thus becoming a syncretic way.

Bonney (2004) states, that to define religion in conventional terms, a group's religion was not changed any form and still in its original way, is ascribed even to the Limbu society in this research study. This study specially cited all the available primary and secondary sources which are available on Limbu society and its social institutions by the early writers, (both academic and non-academic) who attempted to record many aspects of Limbu society before they started to synchronize. The researcher has consulted to see the authenticity from the knowledgeable Limbus where then can recollect about their community's religious position.

The research takes the view that the stories/interpretations come from various sources might have its own version of explanation; however, it has its own limitations and biases.

Researchers on the religion and religious studies informs us, that to comprehend religion and its social significance, one must look into the rites of de passage and the belief systems associated with the process. Substantiating the arguments proposed by Siiger (1972) an holistic understanding of practices and beliefs attached to a community's religion should be drawn from different mechanisms and ways like the prayers they offer, the legends and myths and cults embedded in.

Additionally, to consolidate the Siiger's views, Stocks (1975) further emphasizes, that to classify any ethnic/group religion which they claim as indigenous/original, shall only be authenticated by referring to their oral narratives, central myths, legendary folk tales etc, and this shall further enrich our understanding about the primitiveness of the religion. Along these lines, the present research study has also taken serious interest on the Limbu myths, folk tales and other oral sources for a very comprehensive understanding.

Interview inputs indepth and focussed interveiwis were the main strategy coupled with detailed observations with regard to the contemporary changes towards 'original' Limbu religion. The 'original' Limbu religion will perhaps be only possible with an in-depth study of all tales. It is noticed that some of the stories and narrations were on the brink of disapperance along with the substantial socio-demographic transformations where older ones are getting morphosis until recently.

Taking into consideration the myths among Limbus, though there are unique in thier own way, however, they have some similarities with the other myths worldwide. 'Oh,

we also have an Adam and Eve story, we also have the story of Noah, we also have the story of Babel' (Longkumer 2010:88 as cited in Lepcha (2013: 61).

Similarly, Limbus also has a creation story, a flood story, and the tower story. While tracing the Cosomolgy of the Limbus, a vernacular perspective about all these narrations has a role to play in decoding the Limbu origins. The study found different shades of one narration of a story in varied places, this has led a difficult task to take a single view of the story, as there is no uniformity to spell out a common Limbu Identity.

With regard to the flood disaster story where *Nigwabhu Mang* -fish, (semi- fish/semi-human avatar) is believed to swam over the floods that pulled the ship to mighty mountains, rescuing *Sodhung Lepmuhang* (Limbu chief), his followers, and animals. After the flood disaster subsided, they prepared the lands for farming by cutting down the jungle. Different species of animals began to procreate again, to this premise fish, is believed to provide the knowledge and power for a new life.

Interestingly, the Limbus of Darap narrates the *Sodhung Lepmuhang* mythology regarding the flood story. As per them, humankind was committing sins out of their selfishness and was rapidly growing daily. Seeing this, the couple *Sodhung Lepmuhang* (Demi-God) and *Laoti Phungphahangma* (Demi-Goddess) made an effort to bring people to the route of virtue and God, but they could not succeed. Hence, *Tagera Ningwaphuma* decided to destroy all people, excluding the couple, and sent a messenger, *Musekha Sekhanama*, in the form of a small fish.

Later, one fine day *Sodhung Lepmuhang* went to the nearby river to take a bath. Meantime, a little fish came near him and said, "Save me *Lepmuhang*! a big fish is chasing me". To this juncture, *Sodhung Lepmuhang* took the fish and placed it into a

vessel, but it turned insufficient for the fast-growing fish. So, he transferred the fish into a pound, a river, and eventually into the ocean. In due course, the fish was saved, and thanked *Sodhung Lepmuhang* for saving it from distress. Furthermore, the fish stated, “She would come back and help in a deluge which is likely to come and destroy all the mortals of the earth”. She then advised *Sodhung Lepmuhang* to be equipped for an upcoming flood and build a ship consisting of many compartments in which animals, birds and other creatures could fit. Likewise, the food should also gather and keep on the ship. However, the fish said, “As the earth will go down, water would come near the ship, at that time, he should tie the ship in her horn with a strong knot. It is believed, that *Sodhung Lepmuhang*, after returning home, and carrying out the intended task, built a ship and placed animals, birds, and other creatures on it. He deposited the stock of foods inside the ship then, along with his wife, he shut the door of the ship.

Soon after torrential rainfall started and there was darkness everywhere. The deluge began enveloping on earth. Nothing could survive in the deluge. At that time a fish appeared near the ship, and *Sodhung Lepmuhang* tied the ship to the fish’s horn. The ship followed the fish. After days and nights, the rainfall stopped and there was silence everywhere. Sun appeared in the sky, the water started going down, and the hills around started appearing. The ship stopped at the mountain peak, after that the fish directed *Sodhung Lepmuhang* to go down to earth along with all the creatures and start a new life of peace and happiness and also guide future generations, on the path of sustainable peace and happiness.

It is these differing accounts of the same flood story that can be puzzling while dealing with Limbu myths, as everybody would know about the flood, but not everyone would have a similar mountain peak that drowned or did not drown during

the deluge. This shows two competing narratives of the same story within the same community.

Localized versions of the *Sodhung Lepmuhang* mythology are more authentic to Limbus of Darap since, the stories have been directly passed from their forefathers according to the *Sodhung Lepmuhang* mythology. However, it could pose a challenge to unite the community through local myths as community myths. One can then see a two-tier cosmology of flood myth, which is impossible to separate because the local myth is bound within a *Sodhung Lepmuhang* mythology, and the general myth is accessible to the broader world. Another problem while trying to understand Limbu cosmology is the usage of the same name for different Deities or the usage of many names for the same deity.

Henceforth, it was a blurring and often not easy to arrange a time line about the various events associated with regard to a deity. If we take the case of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, the supreme Goddess of Limbus and *Yuma*, is believed to have often been used interchangeably. They are often regarded as the same deity- where *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is perceived as a formless power, whereas *Yuma* has a worldly aspect. The possible Limbu deity appears to be given different names J.R Subba (2009:323) states that other names of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, for instance, are- ¹⁴*Sinyuk Hangma*, *Muden Hangma* and *Thak Thakkumma*. J.R. Subba (2009:323) express, that there is an admixture of all the main characters, often labelled with different names of one single deity. This leads to difficulty in identification. Despite these confusions, one may endeavour to concretely define what is the real meaning of religion among

¹⁴Here we see the problem in Limbu mythology pointed by J.R Subba regarding the different names for the same deity or vice versa.

Limbus, it is clearly understood from all the anthropological facts that, there is no equal word or term for 'Religion' in Limbu language.

Untill recently, the religion of Limbus is often referred to as 'Yumaism'. Some Limbu groups and associations often state that the earliest form of Yumaism is the religion of Limbu or Limbu religion. This is fully endorsed and supported by the Limbu society. Otherwise, there is no clear evidence that Limbus hold a particular religion. Limbus have deep faith in all the ethereal things and spirituality as Tylor (1871) points out, that tribals believed in the existence of varied spirits like, the good and evil, while they appease and rever as the situation demands. The focus has come into attention when Limbus started to reject and accept certain beliefs and practices when other religious faiths have entered into the Limbu religious scapes. So, the central question remained around the traditional form of Limbu religion.

Perhaps, animism¹⁵ is the straight forward explanation about primordial form of religion among Limbus. A thorough analysis is essential on how Limbus practiced thier belief system the pantheon of dieties and Gods, leading them to label as Polytheists. Tylor's typology about the evolution of religion might be taken to consider how primitive forms of religious worship leading to be monotheistic worship. The following analysis shall present the trajectory of animism to monotheism (Tylor 1871).

¹⁵T. B Subba (2010) describes the Limbu belief system as 'animistic'.

Notion of Heavenly Bodies

In decoding the religious world of the Limbus, there is a clear-cut distinction between 2 sets of supernatural phenomena/world. One is the all merciful benevolent and the other is the malevolent. The pleasant, good happenings to ascribe to the benevolent spirits and Gods, while the unpleasant, bad is attributed to the malevolent forms.

Despite the evil spirits need to be appeased, God could also suffer from ill-will if the sacrifices were neglected. Hence, it was essential to please both the Gods and demons, although it can be argued, that religion was dominated by the fear of evil spirits.

Understanding the Gods

Tagera Ningwaphuma is the only God in the beginning of universe according to the mythology among Limbus. It is spelled out that the whole world was created digging the rocks from the earth. The feminine aspect; she decorated the vast sky which was empty, filled with myraid stars. Along with it, she also stuffed all living things like animals, birds and plants. The mighty Himalayas, rivers, tributaries, mountains were also created by her. The supreme and only God, *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, is a unique symbolic and iconic being, also referred as the creator God is central in Limbu prayers, offers, worship, and even thanks giving.

The informants express that, the three original Gods include *Tagera Ningwaphuma*- the creator God, *Sigera Yaphundin Hang Porokmi Yamphami Hang*- the creator of the universe, and *Mujina Kheyongnama*- daughter of the creator God. *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchuru Suhangpheba* were believed to be the first couple

equivalent to biblical Adam and Eve hence the progenitors of the Limbu race. *Mujina Kheyongnama* occupies a prominent position among the Gods and is also known as the ‘Goddess of procreation since she is the mother of humankind associated with childbirth and responsible for conception of the child, and its sex. While the Goddess is responsible for giving the soul to a child, the sex of the child depends on the kind of sacrifices, and invocations made by the parents to the Goddess. Children of *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchuru Suhangpheba* were deemed illegitimate because of their parents’ incestuous union.

Besides listed three, a significant ‘God’ in the cosmology of the Limbus is the hunting God known as *Sakeseppa Sanenjongba* among the Limbus. Interestingly, *Sakeseppa Sanenjongba* is also believed to have given Limbus bows and arrows and taught them how to shoot. He is regarded as the king of the jungle-master of all animals, occupying an essential place in the hunting complex of Limbu society. While it is only logical for hunter-gatherer society to look up to the hunting God, it can be noticed, that the character is also referred to as *Sikari* and, *Toksongba*. The presence of God in these names gets confusing whether hunting God is a God or a devil or both. Informant in his 54’s well enlightens the transition of the God to a devil with his argument that the powerful hunting has turned into primarily malevolent being because the hunters have neglected proper ritual sacrifices (Fieldwork 2020).

Who are the Evil Spirits?

The evil spirit is believed to be the abandoned children of *Tetlera Lahadongna* and *Sutchuru Suhangpheba*, the first Limbu couple who were forced to divide their children because of their illicit relationship. After the birth of seventeen children, the Supernatural being of procreation is believed to have separated the couple by dividing

the children among them. In the course of the division of seventeen offspring, a sieve was made, and the couple came to an agreement that those offspring who remain in the sieve would follow a father, and those who pass down would accompany the mother.

In this process, eight of them passed down from the sieve, and eight of them remained in the sieve, while one got in a mess, neither could pass down nor remain in the sieve. Seeing this, the couple started dragging from both sides. As a result, the legs and hands get severed from the body and fell. With this unhappening incident, the devastated daughter went off into the mouth of death and turns into an evil spirit. Among the numerous evil spirits, the most dreaded and dangerous are for instance, *Chambekoma Chamdang Matimma*, *Sakhera Mukhem Lungma*, *Sakhera Bebeingma*, *Thosuudingma Chammahangma*, *Hilelema Hingden Mukma*, *Lairoba Namiroba*, *Lambangaba Nambangaba*, and *Lakhemyangba Namkhemyangba*. These evil spirits are believed to be the born of incestuous relationship of *Sutchuru Suhangpheba* and *Tetlera Lahadongna* who violated the incest taboo and left the impression that ‘sexual pleasure is the ultimate goal or accomplishment of mankind’. The evil spirits are hard to please, and keep troubling the humans for they are the outcome of the incest taboo.

The existence of so many evils spirit in the Limbu cosmology is hard to fathom. As soon as one leaves the village, the influence of evil spirits upsurges and nobody is ever safe from their weird persecution. The virgin woods that are never cleared and hence uncontrolled, is the actual domicile of the evil spirit, where they go on forays daily and night. The Limbus feels insecure when moving around in the forest, defenseless against the unpredicted attacks of the evil spirits.

Heaven and Hell: The Two Opposites

The opposites of hell and heaven are ambiguous according to the Limbu mythical narrations. *Sangram Pedang Den*, is the abode of Gods, while *Samyukna Den* is the place or ancestor's abode. It is said, that there is a place on top of the vast sky which is called as *Sangram Pedan Den*, while the below consists of wind, water, and fire which cause devastating catastrophes like the earthquakes. If we go by this logic, there is no place for hell. In general terms, hell is a place, where all guilty and bad individuals are taken for punishment. There is ancestor worship and all the departed souls do go the eternal skies.

The Country of Gods as Heaven

It is a strong belief that all the departed souls will travel to the country of Gods, where it is a blessed place with bountiful happiness and peace.

The Ancestors Country

The Samyukna Den is an immortal place, where all the departed ancestors will reside there permanently. This place is located closer to the Mt. Kanchenjunga. This place is bountiful with all the resources and all the departed ancestors do not have any problem for all their wishes and likes. Further, absence of disease or any famine, and people are immortal there. They are infants in the morning, adults during the day, and the older people in the evening.

The informant in his 64's stated, "The people of *Samyukna Den* live are immortal; every morning, they are infants, at noon, they are grown up people, and in the evening, they are old people. They wear the traditional Limbu attires made of nettle cloth. They are somewhere in between the Supernatural being and ordinary human

beings; they are not Supernatural being as they live on earth, but they are also not human since they are immortal” (Fieldwork 2019).

These mysterious mythological creatures embody, God-like and human-like characteristics making them semi-divine beings who have access to the domain of the Gods. When the creator God *Tagera Ningwaphuma* made rice, millet and maize she put the people of *Samyukna Den* in charge of these crops. They are believed to have given humans their first seeds of the crops. Limbus will never vanish because the people of *Samyukna Den* are looking out for them and will come to their rescue if tragedy strikes. It is supposed, there was a time when the way to *Samyukna Den* was easily accessible, and people from *Samyukna Den* would come to the earth. It is believed, that only a ‘pure Limbu’, one who has Limbu ancestry, who speaks the mother tongue, and follows Limbu tradition, is given access to this ancestor’s country. There is a belief in an unfathomable power in the ancestor’s country of ancestors. Periodic and regular worshipping and prayers are offered to receive all the favors and protect Limbus from any kind of drought and famines.

Patterns of Worship

Informant in his 48’s said, ‘we the, Himalayan inhabitants, have always been nature worshippers. Nature is a benevolent mother that provides bounties for sustainment of human beings. The rivers, mountains, streams, forests, and the biodiversity there have always been sacred to us [Limbus]’ (Fieldwork 2019). Worship is rendered almost exclusively to the good spirits and not to the evil spirits. For, says the Limbus, the good spirits never do us, any harm; it is only the malignant spirits who we have to fear.

Limbu do not have a permanent place to offer prayers and worshipping. Place is not a constraint to pray *Phedangma* where ever they wish and desire. There is no mention of places of worship, or idols, etc. sacrifices, and offerings are made of *thi*, flowers, fruits and other similar items. *Phedangma* is the ritual specialist who offers prayers from birth to death life cycle.

It is noticed, that prayers and offerings are centered on the natural settings of environment. It is equated with an eco-centric approach. *Yakthumba* is an emotional tone, where Limbus calls themselves with this iconic figure. It is also translated as ‘hillmen’, Limbus identifying themselves as the people inhabiting the hills. It is reported, that group invocations used to be made by Limbus and it was a collective worshipping pattern.

Informant in his 53’s said all the individual members in our village use to participate in this common worshipping pattern. Untill recently, this phenomenon is rapidly disappearing. Despite low participation from all the members, concerned elderly continue to worship in this way, thus following the traditional ways. (Field notes)

Worshipping the Earth

In the Limbu language, *Iksading Khambek Den* means earth. So, this ritual is worshipping of land, marked by prayers to the earth. It is celebrated during the spring season, and is officiated by *Phedangma*. This ritual is observed annually among the Limbus.

Heem Tongnam

In Limbu, *heem* means house, so *Heem Tongnam* is the prayer to the *Heem Sammang* of house. It is usually members of certain households/clans that come together and invoke the blessings of *Akwanama* divinity.

Namyoba Tongnam

In simple understanding, *Namyoba Tongnam* is the worship of sprouting of mugwort-*artemisia Vulgaris*. In Limbu society, the twigs of *Namyoba* are essential in every ritual. This ceremony is seen as the celebration of nature. The ceremony is conducted by a *Phedangma* along with members of the community. This is a way of giving respect to the environment and the surroundings. The opening recital commence by thanking creator God *Tagera Ningwaphuma* for creating the plant containing essential oils such as cineole, wormwood, thujone, etc. While the worshipper acknowledges the creator, he/ she says, the responsibility of ‘molding and shaping nature’ is in the hands of the prime-baby grass. In the past, the observance of *Namyoba Tongnam* was celebrated as an annual event by the Limbus, while at present, Limbus has stopped celebrating it.



Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2: Mugwort (*Artemisia Vulgaris*) a sacred herb

Chasok Tongnam

Limbus observes *Chasok Tongnam* each year after reaping paddy around October, and November. It is a thanksgiving ceremony and prayer to the year's produce. It is believed that no one is allowed to consume the fresh harvest until the rituals are over. Also, it is an offering to Limbus ancestors of *Samyukna Den*, who are believed to have given them their first seeds, of the crops. They offer their reverence and thanks to them for providing not just the seeds, but looking after their crops, protecting them from disease, and other natural calamities. Limbus belief in these ancestors is such that in case of any natural disasters, it is predicted that these ancestors will protect and rescue the Limbu tribe.

Kyamalung, Khumlung, Lunglung, Yanglung and Sunlung– Wish Stones

Limbus has been installing *Kyamalung* for ancestors, *Khumlung* for settling disputes, *Lunglung* for protecting the boundaries of the land, *Yanglung* for fixing the relations between those in love, and *Sunglung* after death.

The word *lung* is the stone erected to commemorate a special occasion or an event. In Limbu, *lung* means stone. The *lung* is upright stones found in different parts of Limbu inhabited areas with a sacred sentiment attached. An example can be taken from widely known Martam in Bermiok west Sikkim, where Teyongshi Sirijunga Singthebe is believed to teach the Limbu language and sermons. It is a historical landmark where the stones stood witness to a sacred place for Limbus where they pay homage and worship the great saint. These stones have withstood time and stand tall at Martam, Bermiok, West Sikkim, 37.7 kilometers away from Gyalshing subdivision west district of Sikkim. Thus, deriving the name Martam which means the lap of God.



Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4: Footprint on the rocks found in *Mangtolung* (left). Rocks adorned with prayer flags (right)

The use of stone in traditional Limbu burial has also been accounted for in detail by Campbell (1869:155) as he mentions the lining of stones when somebody dies in the family. The Limbus raises a square stone tomb on the site of the cremation, placing an upright stone on the summit. Over the grave, flat stones are used as cover. With the earth around, a low spherical mound is raised, on top of which four longish flat stones are balanced; this is considered the typical outside arrangements of a grave.



Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6: Limbu gravestones in their land

Likewise, Limbus also had huge stones during the construction of their house. While the focus is usually on the ingenuity of carving the wood and constructing the house without a nail, the wooden pillars usually stand on the big rocks at the bottom. Hence, it is crucial to choose the perfect stones that could hold a Limbu house together. The *lung* is thus a valuable item during house building. Besides, the fireplace in a Limbu house traditionally consists of three stones.

Mundhum

Mundhum is commonly understood as religious traditions of Limbus- In ethos of Limbu society, the original oral recitations that hold the mythology, stories, legends, histories, sermons, morals, and philosophical exhortations are the representations of their every day life, including all the rites of passage. They revere the legend sacredly through the oral recitation. One of the main aspects in performing the ritual is the oral recitation of *Mundhum*. It narrates the entire story of cosmic and earthly world, prophix human existence.

Phedangma accompanies the narration. An emotional lamentation and a pleasing sound command the attention of the listeners. Here, the emphasis on nature is evident. *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is the main Deity/God who has passed the divine/sacred scripture to the 8 learned, and wise individuals who are also called as *Sawa Yethang*, they are believed to be the progeny of *Tetlera Lahadongna*. As per, Chaintanya Subba (1995), *Mundhum* consists of all the necessary inputs of about life and death, path towards reaching enlightenment, the every day life cycle rituals.

Kaila (1996:33), declares, *Mundhum* is an excellent source of Limbu societal creation, their every day life practices where all the folk tales, myths, belief systems are deeply embedded. T. B Subba (1999: 46-47) states that *Mundhum* is challenging to

define, but are oral narratives about the origin of the world, human beings, plants, animals, customs, traditions, rites, and rituals, agriculture, hunting, fishing, etc. Hither, the researcher may add, *Phedangma* recites *Mundhum*, receives this sacred knowledge through dreams and ably supported by the other senior ritual specialists in every social and religious occasions.

Phedangma / Samba/ Yeba and Yema

These are licensing sacred people between celestial and human beings, very titles that derive the names *Phedangma/ Samba/ Yeba and Yema* for the traditional Limbu religion. They are required to officiate rituals in rite de passage. They are often considered as mighty to drive away the evils and even come closer to Gods by offering various prayers. However, they cannot practice black magic since their job is to help people ward off all evil. They can be both female and male. The road to being a *Phedangma/Samba/Yeba* and the making of *Yema* is not voluntary, or by one's will, it is through a process of irresistible compulsion by the individual. When a spirit possesses his/her entire body and guides that person through a shamanistic initiation led by a senior ritual specialist during the first few times. There are only a certain number of these specialists in every clan, and when one dies, the office should be passed on. While it is possible for a mother and son to both be ritual specialists, it is not hereditary. If one's grandfather is a ritual specialist, the succession depends on the availability of individuals in the ancestral line. In the ritual process, the specialist chant/performs prayers and sermons orally, a possession is noticed by some mysterious forces within the hearts of hearts.

Who is Phedangma and Samba?

It is interesting to note that, though there is a feminine suffix of *ma*, but *Phedangma* are generally men. A *Phedangma* and *Samba* is a male ritual specialist or the high priest regarded as a shaman, medicine man, healer, or exorciser. Indeed, *Phedangma* and *Samba* are knowledgeable figures indispensable to Limbu society. According to legends, *Phedangma*; ‘on one circumstance, we will do whatever you command when we worry human beings with disease and illness. We will go and leave them in peace if, reciprocally, you will give us something; fowls, eggs, pigs, or any other animal’ (Fieldwork 2019). The evil spirits swore to leave the humans at peace if they would be propitiated with offerings.

Among the *Phedangma*, *Samba* and *Yeba/ Yema*, the *Phedangma* is deemed more powerful than the *Samba/ Yeba and Yema*. In addition, ideally, *Phedangma* and *Samba* similarly carry out death rituals in case of natural death. Likewise, marriage ritual, ritual of *Mangenna*, and *Nahangma* for the prosperity of lineage and clan. Jones (1976) states, that *Phedangma* must be the straight incarnation of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. Informants, revealed that *Phendangma* takes the highest, top position as ritual specialist in their society. Despite the role of *Phedangma* and *Samba* were labeled generally. The informants underlined that *Samba* is an expert in *Mundhum*. *Phedangma/ Samba* and *Yeba* are all menfolk, while there is only one kind of women folk ritual specialist who is popularly identified as *Yema*. *Yeba/ Yema* specifically, do the task of making the dead soul to journey to the eternal world. Whereas, *Samba* and *Phedangma* is not associated with this kind of task. The remaining activities are almost identical; nevertheless all of them equally worship Limbu Dieties. Additionally, they hold sacrifices annually. There is thus, a difference in the way of

conducting rituals, using different items as offerings and calling upon different Deities.

In this premise, this research study adds, the indispensable existence of the ritual specialist portrays them as the critical players of traditional Limbu religion, and culture in totality. It is these specialists who embrace the history and tales of the Limbus and the landscape as they invoke the spirits of the land and ancestors. With this, more than shamans and healers, they become keepers of the Limbu tradition.

Who is Yeba/Yema?

Yeba/ Yema is usually a priest/ priestess or the male/female shaman intermediating between the humans and the spirits. He/she is defined as an exorciser or any experienced person. The *Yeba/Yema* is to ward off illness and disaster by blood sacrifices and communication with the supernatural being. Nevertheless, to the routes of *Samyukna Den* all the dead souls. The *Yema* and *Yeba* (sometimes written *Yama* and *Yaba*) are called *Yea* or *Ya*. In contrast to the *Phedangma* and *Samba*, the *Yeba* and *Yema* sphere is “outside”, because they often deal with harmful Deities entering the locality from “outside” or from unnatural deaths and jealousy. It is firmly believed, that most of the misfortunes and illness are any other unpleasant situation in the houses are caused by these spirits.

There are no differences between a *Yeba /Yema* regarding the role and ritual equipment. It has been suggested that the *Yeba/Yema* is of shamanistic origin, due to features such as their ecstatic performances using headgear during their performances, exorcism, and the spiritual fights. For ordinary divinations, the *Yeba/ Yema* wear a *rudraksha* necklace. The necklace is placed against the forehead, and the eyes are closed, and this helps to concentrate. *Yeba/Yema* is deemed the most

powerful. They can bring out to the outer world, even the innermost secrets of the nether world. They were sent specifically to the mother earth in order to protect all the humans, animals and plants from the evil spirits. are referred to in most invocations.

Phedangma/ Samba/ and Yeba at Chasok Tongnam (2019)

Though there it is essential to have the services of ritual specialists, one can notice that these traditional ritual specialist's roles and functions are somewhat sidelined and heirarchially below the religion among Limbus. It can ascribe to that, due to some extraneous factors, their roles and functions are dwarfing. During *Chasok Tongnam* in 2019, the ritual specialist from all over Sikkim assembled in *Saramsa Khet* (Ranipool), it is reported that these days the ritual specialist's performances are not much in this region. Nevertheless, in *Saramsa Khet*, one could witness the ritual specialist *Phedangma* and *Samba*.

Below are some of the pictures from the ethnographic site.



Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8: *Samba* with feathers and Lepcha bag (left) *Phedangma* banging on copper plate. *Samba* with cowries in *Chasok Tongnam* 2019 (right)

In the village, *Phedangma* and *Samba* are seen in simple everyday clothes or *Daura Suruwal* and headgear during the events, while *Yeba/Yema* is seen in long white robes with belted robes. *Yeba/ Yema* is known to wear long white robes, feathers, beads and bells during the ritual. Likewise, all the paraphernalia like, beads, feathers, and the cowries along with sound produced by the plates made of copper all belong to the *Yeba/Yema*. It was interesting to note that Limbus witnessed *Samba* with feathers during the festivity.

Likewise, the second picture exhibits the *Samba* from behind, giving us an equally baffling picture of the shaman with cowries, and feathers which are usually seen on *Yeba/ Yema*, as the *Daura Suruwal* was the only indicator of them being *Samba*. The dancing was not altogether strange because, when possessed, *Phedangma* and *Samba* also dance all around the place and in the kitchen hearth. However, there is fear of the ‘authenticity’ of *Phedangmaism* being taken away with staged performances. The traditionalist has well noted, that the threat to the traditional religious specialist from all angles. There was a conscious effort to see what the things are taken for revival.

In the case of *Phedangma*, there is some debate about the word origin and usage as a Limbu shaman as *Phedangma* in general. Since, at present, *Morabang* is defined instead of *Phedangma*, which means ‘different types of Limbu shaman’. From this, the meaning of *Morabang* is being adjusted to make it possible to distinguish the different types of shamans generally, because *Phedangma* falls explicitly under one category of Limbu shamans.

In contrast to Limbu traditional shaman, sensing a need to fill the lack of traditional shaman in Limbu society, a YMMCC follower is willing to favour anyone interested to be *Suingneem*. It is reported, that the centuries old folk tales and myth of the

Shaman among the Limbus is confined to destiny. A conscious effort has been made to increase the figures of the shamans, known as *Suingneem* through training to disseminate and preserve the traditional culture among the Limbus. The majority of Limbus argue that a traditional shaman cannot be made, but has to be destined.

The Upsurge of New Forms of Religious Claims and Contestations in Darap Region

For long, Darap has been the homeland of traditionalist Limbus. Darap is identified as that one place where Limbu culture is at its 'purest' form; most of Limbus reside in this area, leaving the place is unaltered even from the traditional one. Until recently, in the Darap region, a newer form of spiritual place where spiritual *Guru Sri Sri Yuma Mang* resides. The coming of the reform version of religion in Darap meant that Limbu's traditional religion was under attack. A reform version of religion was creeping into their place, and people feared losing their traditional religion- their *Phedangma* tradition. Traditionalists argue that Darap is the place that has remained unchanged in Limbu culture. They say, that the Limbu name for Darap is '*Tan- lap*', which is an amalgamation of two Limbu words, *Tan* meaning 'land', and *lap* meaning 'funnel shape'. In short, it could be understood as Limbu Home land.

It is Undeniable, that there is close attachment of the cultural heritage to the Limbu land of Darap which has been recognized today as the spiritual place for Limbus like Benaras for Hindus, Gaya for Buddhists, Mecca for Muslims and Jerusalem for Christian (Roy 2007: 51 as cited in Lepcha 2013). While Darap always existed as the homeland of a traditionalist, the realization and integration of Darap as Limbus land is an imagination that has united Limbus bypassing the religious barriers formed after the acceptance of other religion. Limbus from all religious backgrounds accepts Darap as the land where traditional culture is at its purest form because it has become

essential to own and integrate Darap with the Limbu Cosmology for the establishment of a united Limbu belief system.

Chapter 5

Influence of Hinduism among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas

“If we look at the legend, Tihar and Dashain do not exist in Limbu society,” said Rup Lal Khamdhak, (An authentic *Mundhumist*- expert in oral literature). It is the major festival of Hinduism but with the coming up of a majority of caste conversion into Hinduism, this festival has been influential. He added that our ancestors did not celebrate these festivals because they did not fit with Limbu culture. Limbus has never asserted Tihar and Dashain to be the festival of Limbus. Tihar and Dashain is the general festival all over the Eastern Himalayas, and especially among Hindu Nepali communities.

It has been witnessed that shopkeepers were busy vending more bakery and sweets than on regular days, and people had a more challenging time finding seats on the daily transport vehicles. People would book the vehicle a month before so they are not troubled while traveling to their homeland during the holidays. Besides school, children enjoyed vacation while looking forward to new outfits, delicious food, and visiting relatives from both far and near.

Tihar and Dashain are known to be the lengthiest religious festivals celebrated for almost fifteen days in Eastern Himalayas. It is an important festival for Hindus. Limbus says, though these festivals have been celebrated for decades, they dissent it and that Tihar and Dashain are not their festivals. The intrusion of Hindu dominance and Hindu culture has posed threat to the culture and nature of indigenous people. Due to this, most of the minority sects of Eastern Himalayas amalgamated against

Tihar and Dashain celebrations. The idea of rejecting this festival is defined by Hangen (2005:50) as a “strategy” used at the state level by an ethnopolitical organization representing different minority groups in the present day.

In this chapter, the researcher looks into the spread of Hindu festivals in the Limbu society. The present study has taken the Eastern Himalayas for its “traditional” tag. It is believed one will find most of the Limbu population in Eastern Himalayas. People here are identified for their strong feeling toward the community and constantly longing to thrive in culture of Limbus. In this chapter, various domains of society where direct and indirect permeation of Hindu culture had taken place are discussed. Further discussion on various cultural changes as a consequence of contact with Hindu are made to discuss whether Limbus are Hindus or Yumaist for in present-day, almost all Limbus in Eastern Himalayas professes Yumaism as their religion.

The Spread of Hindu Festival in Limbu Society

Dashain

In the Limbu region of the Eastern Himalayas, households were being cleaned and daubed with cow dung and red mud. It was time for Dashain which meant it was time for the yearly ‘autumn cleaning’ along with the eating, drinking, and merry-making. Villagers were seen going to weekly markets or towns to purchase new outfits, especially for their children and to restock the food that would not be available in the village.

Daughters who had married away would be coming home during the Dashain and it would be a suitable time to serve them delicious food. The Limbu household would

offer the local *thi* and fried pork to the guests. While mutton was the preferred meat for Dashain, pork was usually served in Limbu homes. The ninth day of the Dashain festival was known as *Maarko Din*, (the day of slaughter) which meant the day when goats were slaughtered to appease the Goddess, Durga. Even the deprived family would save cash throughout the year to be able to purchase a goat/ sheep for slaughter on this day.

On this occasion, as an alternative of goats, Limbu households were seen slaughtering pigs. They had their rituals and practices attached to the day of the slaughter, which was unlike from a typical household in the Hindu Nepali community. At a certain Limbus place, the slaughter had been occurring each year for the last few decades. The house had been cleaned and recently painted with red earthen, but it was not Dashain ritual that awaited us there; the Limbu family would be celebrating an annual ritual conducted to appease the ancestors. Limbu informant says, “We have to give Dashain *bhaag* to our ancestors”. Similarly, the reciprocity of food items and meat with neighbours and friends, seemed it was a part of Dashain celebrations.

At the corner of the house, shrine was built using banana leaves, which were also carpeting the area of worship. A copper plate with raw rice was placed in the middle of the shrine along with a copper vase that held some mug wort. Also on the plate was an oil lamp with fruits and flowers. The bamboo sticks were placed in each fourth corner surrounding the plate within the shrine. There was also a spear nearby which would be used later to slaughter the pig. Before *Phedangma* presided over the ritual, the eldest member of the household came over and lit the oil lamp in the shrine and listed the names of the family members of the house. Then, the *Phedangma* took over as he faced the shrine, placed a bowl of water, and added pine on an ember-lit lamp. The burned pine produced sweet incense which was a part of the worship. He then

held a wrapped banana leaf and used it as a wand by dipping its tip in the bowl of water now, and then as he began his limitations. Seated next to him was his disciple holding a fowl that would be later used during the ritual.

It was informed, the fowl was required because the pig to be slaughtered was a male and the presence of a fowl balanced the need for a male-female pair for the ritual. Incantations were brief and simple. *Phedangma* would sprinkle rice and water on the shrine and the fowl amid his chants. The fowl needed to shrug off the water, and that was also expected of the pig as the *Phedangma* left stay in the middle of the ritual and sprinkled grains of rice and water on the pig as well which was outside. The shrug by the pig and the fowl was an indicant that the family members could now go ahead with the slaughter. Upon returning to the shrine, he offered bits of the rice grains, millet, and *thi*. After that the fowl was hit with the wooden baton, and its blood was offered to the deity. *Phedangma* then heated the blade of the spear on his incense lamp, and handed the spear to be used to slaughter the pig.

Once outside, it took just one strike with the spear and the pig was left squealing as it slowly bled to death. The Limbus does not have taboos about pure and impure food, and slaughtering a pig during Dashain had now become a tradition in Limbu households. While the meat was consumed for feasting and merrymaking, the informant added, it had an economic advantage in selling the meat to villagers at 280 rupees per kilo. Also, the daughters who visited once a year, they can look forward to eating pork at home.

Conversely, the daughters do not receive the same kind of welcome compared to other Hindu Nepali homes. Limbu families do practice the costumes of Dashain, which is the receiving and giving of *Tika*, which is prepared by mixing rice, yogurt,

and vermilion applied on the forehead. Nevertheless, Limbus do not adorn their foreheads with red *Tika*, popular and significant to Dashain customs as red is to symbolize blood relations. They use the tika without colour.

Frequently, the homecoming daughters were those who had eloped with a non-Limbu, and these visits could be an occasion for renewing ties between daughters, and sisters who married out from their natal relatives, as well as between these women and their affine (Caplan 1970:184-185). Since, Dashain is not the festival of Limbus, the visits could be superficial. There is no different than when visiting their parents' home on a non-Dashain occasion. Their non-Hindu orientation prevents them from knowing myths related to the festival, and falls short of these visits as a 'context for rehearsing customs, relating myths, and legends, and in other ways demonstrating shared cultural background' (*Ibid*: 1970:185).

The homecoming could be nostalgic including stories and reminiscences of childhood days but then it did not necessarily facilitate the meaning and significance of Dashain. However, Dashain for Limbus could be understood as a festival serving as a chance to negotiate their relationship with the nation and the Hindus, as the ritual runs parallel with the nation's Dashain celebration.

Although, the Limbu observance of the traditional ritual does not have much in common with the Dashain tradition. The Limbus has an excuse to "rejoice" the nation's festival and are identified to feast the hardest. It is Dashain and we celebrate it to the fullest," said Limbu menfolk, intoxicated by alcohol even after the festival of Dashain was over. His statement indicated that for Limbus, Dashain does not intend anything unlike the prolonged celebrations, the traditional rituals practices are observed only at the main households which just lasts for hardly one hour. Yet, the

Limbus had to rejoice Dashain since they have substituted the Hindu festival with their traditional ritual practices as they look forward to celebrating Dashain each year.

Tihar

The Limbu homes of the Eastern Himalayas were seen doing an autumn cleaning as the part of pre-Tihar festival. People were busy dusting, mopping, vacuuming, repainting the houses and cleaning brass/ copper items. Villagers were noticed going to bazaar to buy home decor items, especially the clay lamps and marigold flowers, without which the festival would be incomplete. It is believed that the clay lamps/ lights are beautifully lit to ward off the dusk of the night of the new moon.

It was Tihar time, and the people were fussing over ornamenting houses with marigold flowers and coloured lights along with clay lamps. Also, villagers were seen cooking traditional food items like *Selroti*. Tihar continued for five days long and bestowed with traditional touch with its cultural characteristics.

- On the first day of Tihar, villagers were seen honoring crows- a messenger of death.
- On the second day, Dogs- guardian of the god of death was honored.
- On the third day, the cow- often regarded as goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) was honored, and at night the groups of womenfolk visit the village and play *Bhaileni*.
- On the fourth day, the ox was honored as an ox is the indispensable helper for the farmer. Besides, the groups of menfolk visit the household in villages and play *Deusi*.
- And the fifth day also meant the last day of Tihar resembled *Bhai Tika*.

On the day of *Bhai Tika*, the brother visits the sister to receive *Bhai Tika*, which also means the right time to meet each other, and exchange gifts. As a mark of *Bhai Tika*, sister puts a rice batter, colourful *Tika* on the brother's forehead, garlands him with marigold flowers or globe amaranth, and serves a portion of delicious food.

Limbu house would serve pork meat and alcoholic beverage. Limbu families practice the costumes of *Bhai Tika*, which is the receiving and giving of *Bhai Tika* between brothers/ sisters. Limbu however, do not adorn their neck with the flowers popular and significant to *Bhai Tika* customs flowers. It is believed in Limbu society brother, and sisters are not allowed to exchange or give the flowers garland. They use only *Tika* without adorning garland. For Limbus, they have to celebrate *Tihar* because they have substituted the Hindu festival with their Bali Hang Tongnam¹⁶ as they look forward to celebrating *Tihar*.



Figure 5.1 *Selroti*

¹⁶Most of the informants seemed not knowing the detailed activities which take place during *Balihang Tongnam*, but informed about *Tihar*, when people visit each other's house, and play *Deusi* and *Bhailni*.

Nag Panchami

Nag Panchami (festival of snakes) is another Hindu festival where Hindus worship snakes. This festival is celebrated in *Panchami Tithi* in the *Suklapakcha* of *Sawan* during the full month of August. On this day, the people of Eastern Himalayas worship the snake with reverence, and to appease the *Nag Devta* by offering prayers, sweets, and raw milk for the snakes either at the source of water or at such other sacred place.

People glue printed posters or a replica of *Nag* with gum ceremoniously above the doors of their homes on the day of *Nag Panchami* to ward off evil spirits. It is believed, *Nag Devta* ensures a household from thunder strike and other natural calamities. It is noticed, Limbu homes were no different from Hindu homes as posters of snakes were glued above the door. Complying with the worldwide belief that snake posters above the door would ward off evil spirits. Limbu homes followed suit.

Besides the universal knowledge of *Nag Panchami*, Limbus were not fully aware of mythological reasons behind the snake posters or the festivals. Hitherto, they were keen to welcome the Brahmin priest who visited different houses, and pasted the snake posters above the door of house for this occasion. “We give him a few rupees, and he does the *Puja* for us by praying *Agastha*, *Pulastha*, *Baismapayan*, *Sumantu*, *Kalyanmitra*, and *JiminiNags* to save the house and members of houses from thunder strike” said a villager of Sikkim, and Darjeeling where Limbus were found to be living along with other ethnic communities. Nevertheless, the occurrence of snake posters was less evident in Assam, although not necessarily absent.



Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3: Nag Panchami on the door

Overall, the researcher adds by saying, the blending of two different faiths- such as, the identification of indigenous Deities with Hindu Gods and Goddesses, and modification of indigenous religious festivals with concurrent Hindu festivals is the process of identification of already existing local traditions with great traditions of Hinduism.

This process of identification helped to be more acceptable to local people. Similarly, the assertion of a new identity was an essential step of syncretism. The word syncretism is derived from two Greek words; syn meaning ‘with’, and krosis- ‘mixture’, which means the mixing together of two or more elements (Bowie 2000). Syncretism is the cultural mixture which includes a religious blend that emerges from acculturation- the exchange of cultural features when culture comes into uninterrupted first-hand contact (Kottak 2002). It is the hybridization or amalgamation of two or more cultural traditions, blending ideas and practices of different traditions. ‘Syncretism is a process enabling the individuals experiencing the contact with moving from one to another, and back again, with psychological ease’ (Apter 1991:240).

Naming Ceremony of Limbus

In Limbu tradition, the typical naming ceremony is known as the *Yangdang Phongma*. The naming ceremony of a new born baby takes place after three /or four days after the baby's birth, based on gender. It is believed that a newly-born child is not in complete possession of the soul till three/or four days after the birth. So, the *Phedangma* is called on the third/ fourth day to perform the *Yangdang Phongma* to bless the child and offer prayers to their respective clan ancestors by calling upon the Deities of birth. In Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Assam however, *Phedangma* was often replaced by Brahmin priests challenging his role and altering the Limbu names to Hinduized names.

There have been occasions when the *Phedangma* would have given a particular name like "Neesa Hangma". Nevertheless, the Brahmin priest would take a look at a *Patro* (religious calendar) and rename the child to "Dhan Maya" here one can understand direct infiltration of Hindu culture through a Brahmin priest in Limbu society. Despite having a Limbu name, it appeared like societal pressure to have a name acknowledged by Hindu priests. It would give more authentication and acceptance, as it would be easier to pronounce amongst neighbours. During fieldwork, one man specified, he had both the names given by *Phedangma* and Brahmin, but he preferred to use the latter.

In other instances, the baby would have a Limbu name, but when one would go to the hospital to register the baby, most health workers would not be able to write or pronounce the Limbu names. So, they would give the baby a new and easy name which would be easy to pronounce and that would be registered as the official name

of the child. Even visits to health posts to treat the child resulted in a change of name as the worker would name the baby at his/her linguistic convenience.

Furthermore, Bhim Hang Limbu and Bishnu Maya Limbu were the names in practice today as they combined religious and ethnic connotations. These days, there was also a trend of mixing Nepali/Hindu names, with a Limbu suffix. Such as Leela Hang with Hang being the suffix that is usually added to male Limbu names. In all the three ethnographic sites of Eastern Himalayas, the majority of the villagers gave their Hindu-inspired names during the household census. There were only a few individuals in the village that used their Limbu names. Though they have an official and a Limbu name, they often use their non-Limbu name.

Hindu Caste System among Limbus

The practice of the caste system in Limbu society is absent, but their nationality in a Hindu country has compelled them to be a part of the caste hierarchy. The caste system unified non-caste societies and attempted to integrate them. The Buddhists were also incorporated into the practice of the caste system, although they did not purely abide by them. 'It was how the nation encouraged the religion of the high caste Hindus as 'the nation culture to make a homogenous state of Hindus' (Hangen 2005).

The Eastern Himalayas followed the Indian Varna system of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishyas, and the Shudras. The Varna system that was rooted in Hindu philosophy has categorized the people in terms of purity and pollution. 'It laid down a complex system of rights, obligations and permissible forms of behaviour which varied according to different ethnic communities that belonged in its categories' (Guneratne 1999:163). It divided the population into two castes, but a third category was sandwiched between to put up the tribals known as *Matwalis*.

The fact that Limbus has no caste could mean they are of the lowest caste. During the census, the researcher has seen, a certain feeling of inferiority as the Limbus was poor and economically dominated by the other ethnic groups. Hitherto, Limbus were not making any effort to climb the social ladder either. 'They did not rise in rebellion even when they were relegated to double-chinned position within Hindu society' (Bose 1996:175). Limbus seemed unmoved about the position they were given in the caste system because they had managed to maintain a distinct identity outside the caste system.

Acceptance of caste system has also been understood as the 'initial step of Sanskritization' (Jones 1976:68), and the Limbus, indifference to the caste system, somehow kept them away from this phenomenon. While tribals are known to be absorbed by the Hindu social structure as the 'caste system is not precisely immutable it is usually assumed to be; (Bose1996:172). It is believed Limbus remained on the outside, absorbed only those that fit their preferences, and abstained from the hierarchical systems of the Hindu society.

Embracing Hindu Ways

One cannot deny the truth that Hindu ideas had been socially absorbed and noticeable in their daily life. One of the core characteristics of the Hindu method of tribal absorption was 'worshipping a Hindu Gods' (Bose1996:169) and Limbus are not far from this invocation. Limbus visits temples and invokes Hindu Gods. Appeasement of Hindu Gods could also be seen through posters at home. Although this could also mean an acknowledgement of the good fortune associated with the Gods. Irrespective, Hindu traits found their way back into Limbu homes in a modest style.

As a part of everyday make-up, young girls were seen putting a *Tika* dot on their foreheads. *Tika* is a Hindu identifier as it could also mean the third eye of Lord Shiva. Likewise, elder women were seen to be wearing *Potey* (glass beads) which were likely to be worn by married women in Hindu culture. These were negligible hitherto, absorbing features besides the inconspicuous participation and observation of numerous Hindu festivities. It has been seen that Hindu religious concepts had penetrated Limbu culture dominating and absorbing features besides the inconspicuous participation and observation of various Hindu festivals and celebrations.



Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5: Shrine with the poster of Goddess Laxmi (left). Small temple along with idols of Ganesh and *Shiva Linga* saw next to the *Yuma Takten* (right)

Cultural Change in Eastern Himalayas

Limbu society was influenced mainly by Hinduism because it was the majority religious tradition. Hinduism was also the official state religion for a long time in

ethnographic field sites in Eastern Himalayas, exposure to which was unavoidable. Hinduism is believed to be non-proselytizing religion. Thus, Limbus were never converted to this religion. However, the assimilation and absorption of the cultural and religious ideas of Hinduism dominated the tribal worldviews. It is reported that Hinduism is not Limbu religion.

Nevertheless, in recent days, Limbus own Yumaism to fit their culture. They have not just been transformed from traditional religion to Yumaism, but is also trying to transform Yumaism to fit the Limbu religion. The following paragraphs will examine the cultural changes Limbus has faced or retained since in cultural contact with Hindu society.

Family

The Limbu families of the Eastern Himalayas are nuclear and close-knit. Membership in the clan is inherited patrilineally. Daughters are found to give a helping hand in household chores from a young age. In contrary, sons are found helping in the fields. Most of the families worked in their fields and farmed their products. The constant help in fields by the children has led to a high percentage of school dropouts among Limbu children. Limbus believes, it is crucial to know one's family origin or clan because different clans had different death rituals in Eastern Himalayas. To this aspect, Limbus dig the grave, and before putting the corpse in the ground, *Phedangma* throws in a few coins as a part of a ritual to pray to the deity of the land to bury their dead.

Marriage

In Eastern Himalayas, the limited number of clans makes it challenging to find partners when Limbus reaches marriageable age. Everybody in some way is related, and the observance of seven generations in the father's clan and five generations in the mother's clan even make it more difficult to find spouses. There is a wide occurrence of late marriage among the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas.

Limbus prefer to live in their ancestral homes and help around the house and the fields rather than finding a spouse from an outside community of far place and having to adjust to their lifestyle. A female informant in her 40's said, "We like marrying within our community and living in our native place. Why then would we marry outside the community belonging to the other place and suffer? But there are also cases of Limbu women marrying someone of an outside community; she will automatically fit into her husband's community, while the practice of a son bringing a non-Limbu means the wife will take his family line. Some Limbus also has cross-border marital alliances. Indeed, the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas is often seen to partake in cross-border nuptials. Marriage is a union among two families, clans, villages and geographies.

During the marriage systems, one can see the *Phedangma* officiating the wedding. The *Phedangma* starts by invoking the spirit of the clans that were being united, offering *Tongba* and rice to mountains and the rivers. Then, the couple is called upon to drink *Tongba*. After that the *Phedangma* chants his share of prayer.

Kinship

Kinship terminology has been chiefly replaced from Limbu to Nepali. The term of reference for maternal uncle and aunt has changed from *Tumba-Tuma* to *Mama-Maiju*. Marriage within the clan is not permitted hence clan exogamy is the rule of the Limbu society. Limbus was knowledgeable about clan origin, an essential feature of Limbu society.

Despite negligible population, the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas seems to be known for their clan addresses. Each clan member can tell the name of the place where their soul was supposed to return after death. The influence of patrilineal descent and the practice of using the father's clan name is not uncommon. Therefore, the children needed to take on the father's clan name unless they have used "Limbu" as the last name.

Language

The lingua franca at Sikkim and Darjeeling was Nepali while Assamese was the lingua franca at Assam. Limbus residing in the village of Eastern Himalayas speaks both the Limbu and Nepali languages through the elderly encouraging the younger generation to speak in their mother tongue. Informant (Assam) in his 60's said, "If we do not speak in Limbu language, then the others will not be able to identify us". For him it was essential to maintain the linguistic boundary of the community. At this juncture, one can see the Limbus making a conscious effort to maintain the linguistic boundary of the community. They make a conscious effort to speak in the Limbu language as the neighbours praise them regarding their ability to speak in their language, and have learned some Limbu words and phrases.

Undeniably, Limbus of Sikkim is fortunate enough since the Limbu language is one of the major languages spoken and written in Sikkim. The children learned to read and write their mother tongue in school as the Limbu language is incorporated into the education system in Sikkim. Textbooks often included Limbu stories and poetry, exposing students to learning Limbu history in the school. Nonetheless, it is not the same with the Limbus of Assam and Darjeeling.

In the last decade or so, however Limbus of Darjeeling and Assam have organized Limbu language classes for both adults and children who are willing to learn the native language. They learned to speak, read, and write in the Limbu language. Learning together ancient scripts gave them a sense of ‘belongingness’ to their ancient culture. It was deemed necessary to organize the language school for fear of the younger generation losing their linguistic traits, and becoming more of a Nepali. ‘Nepali is the language of the Hindu conqueror, (Jones1976:68) nevertheless, the Limbu language is spoken in Limbu households. The villagers also take pride in the existence of several Limbu books.

Food

The fields were ripe with rice when the researcher reached the proposed field for the research study in Eastern Himalayas. It is one of the main crops in Limbus daily diet. They farm maize, and millet. They also cultivate vegetables and are also seen farming ginger and cardamom.

Limbus is non-vegetarians and is fond of pork and also rears them for economic reasons. Beef is not readily available, but if served, they are free to consume it. Limbus knows different fruits, and roots available in the forest. There were no food restrictions and most residents of the Eastern Himalayas were non-vegetarians.

In case of death in the family, they would stop eating meat for a few days. *Thi* was freely available at any time of the day and season. *Thi* was readily available at people's homes at any time of the day. One could find villagers consuming *thi* from early morning, and most of the time, they walked around with smiley faces going about everyday work. When intoxicated, they seemed bolder to confront those who had wronged.

Dress

Limbus does not wear anything out of ordinary from fellow villagers. The menfolk wear regular pants, a shirt, and a jacket or a sweater, while the womenfolk wear *Lungi*, and blouse, salwar kameez and sarees when they go to town. It was also common to find Limbu menfolk wearing the *Dhaka Topi* (Nepali hat) and the Limbu womenfolk wearing *Dhaka Choli* (blouse usually worn by Nepali women) around the village. Most men seemed comfortable with *Dhaka Topi* regularly.

Undoubtedly, it depicts an amalgamation in Eastern Himalayas as they try to assimilate, but retain their cultural identity through dress. Unlike Sikkim, the traditional Limbu dress was not readily available in Darjeeling, and Assam. The women's dress was easier to find than the woven jacket for men. Often, they brought the traditional dress from Sikkim and the Darjeeling Limbu Association was known to have brought traditional attires from Sikkim to make them available for Darjeeling Limbus. In contrary, Assam would bring from Nepal.



Figure 5.6 and Figure 5.7: Menfolk in Nepali *Dhaka Topi* (left) Woman in *potey* and *tika* (right)



Figure 5.8: Limbu man and woman in traditional gear

Yumaist or Hindu?

Despite the influence of Hinduism in different walks of life and the subtle acceptance of some of its practices, Limbus does not accept Hinduism as their religion. They refuse to be identified as Hindus, especially for census purposes. They choose to call themselves Yumaist instead. Yumaism is their accepted religion, although it shows

syncretized versions of Hinduism and traditional religion. Exposed to different religions, they have managed to pick and choose what fits best for their benefit and existence.

Today, while Yumaism is labeled as the religion of the Limbu, it is difficult to come to the conclusion because the Limbus of Darjeeling is very inconspicuous about the presence of Yumaism in their homes. Their shrines at home are simple and include Hindu Goddess, symbolic representation of *Silam Sakma* and sprigs of mug wort in water filled vase. In Darjeeling only one *Yuma Takten* is in existence.

After an hour's walk from Darjeeling-Bijanbari stands *Yuma Takten* behind the playground. Located right behind the playground, some people think of an exclusive Limbu place of worship, but other communities are known to attend the same too. The *Phedangma* are known to visit both Limbu and non-Limbu homes for different rituals. Located in a prime site, the *Yuma Takten* hardly receives any recognition for its many years of existence. It was established on 26.01.2008.

Similarly, it is learned that *Mangheem* in Powai Bon Gaon-Assam was established in the year 2014. It is speculated that the Sikkim influenced the construction of *Mangheem* in Powai Bon Gaon Assam. An informant in his 60's said, 'Hinduism is a later addition to our culture', and fully aware of the presence of *Phedangma* which is required to officiate religious Limbu rituals. There is a simultaneous presence of *Phedangma* and a Pandit. He mentioned that the two works co-exist together.

With the establishment of temples, different Hindu rituals were observed and practiced, introducing Limbus to Hindu worldviews and a different set of ideologies. *Phedangma* of Darjeeling was not considered highly skilled and *Phedangma* from Sikkim still came for special occasions. In this case, too, Limbus had managed to

select the rites that worked for them and discarded those that they did not think were necessary.

The simultaneous practice of both Hinduism and traditional religion was evident in all the three ethnographic sites of Eastern Himalayas. Till today, the pandit and the *Phedangma* co-exist together, although the regions are running short of *Phedangma*. The gradual incorporation of Hinduism into the Limbu lifestyle permeated beyond the religious sphere of Limbu culture. In the bottom line, they were receiving more than they bargained for as the dominant Hinduism culture and religion became a part of their everyday life.

Conclusion

Having lived in contiguity with the Hindu communities with constant contact and exchanges, the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas has gradually absorbed Hindu traits and the Hindu way of life. In Eastern Himalayas, Hinduism was a nation-promoted feature. There was a time when the nation tried to propagate minimal Hinduism as respect for cows and participation in Dashain and Tihar. Limbus failed to meet both the standards with their non-observance of pork and beef and a replacement of their festival during Dashain and Tihar. They did not meet the minimum requirements, but lived outside the Hindu structure and absorbed some traits.

Even if the Limbus denied their association with Hinduism, Hindu religious ideas had penetrated their culture visibly through the inconspicuous participation and observation of various Hindu festivals and celebrations. Akin to the Hindutva *Dhvaja* (flag), the Yumaist unfurls sacred flag during events. At greater display, the flag is hoisted in the Yumaist homes as symbolic of spiritual identity in a religiously varied society. With an affinity to Hinduism, Yumaism extends visits to Hindu temples and

undertakes the rites of putting vermilion on the forehead, consuming Prasada, (religious food substance) and tying the sacred thread on wrists deliberated as uncalled and despicable practices.

In general purview, today, portraits and calendars of Hindu Deities are found affixed to the walls in many Yumaist houses, which depicts the close link between Yumaism and Hinduism. Hitherto, they refused to be identified as Hindus and embraced Yumaism as their religion. The kind of Yumaism embraced by the Limbus of Darjeeling and Assam was connected with Sikkim. Limbus of Darjeeling refrained from the Hindu Gods, and despite their absorbing Hindu practices, they identified themselves as Hindus who were willing to combine Limbus traditional *Phedangma* tradition with religious practices. Limbus is found to be practicing Hinduism and their traditional religion a syncretic religious practices is witnessed.

Phedangma the Limbu ritual specialist and the Pandit, Hindu religious specialist, both do not contradict among themselves, but they exist parallelly, as ritual specialists. Nevertheless, there is a perceived cold war among the Limbus that some of the Hindu elements have percolated into Limbu religion also complaining, that it is eating away Limbu identity. While the researcher set out to explore if Limbus of Eastern Himalayas were Yumaist or Hindu, one cannot wind up with a clear-cut conclusion because the boundaries between Hinduism and Yumaism have blurred to create a syncretized religious identity.

Chapter 6

Contemporary Religious Divisions among the Limbus

The informant opined that, “Yumaism has not attained the full-fledged stage of religion. To consider as religion; Limbus need to have sacred texts”.

- Fieldwork 2019

In religious history, doctrinaire religions emerged after the establishment of organized states and cultures. The world’s majority of religions acquired contemporary structure through cultural reformation. Although Indigenous/ tribal religions/ religious beliefs, and practices existed, restricted to primeval societies never spread beyond their original place. Indigenous tribal societies are complexly integrated and, therefore complex to verify distinctions in religious, social, cultural, and political rubrics. The tribal identity was limited to a clan, family, and village or cluster of villages.

To this premise, the researcher may explicate, that in the yester years, Limbus were not conscious of their ethnic-tribal identities, and their world was confined to their family, clan, and village. With this, the Limbus identity was overturned to the Nepali Hindu identity because they have all been on the receiving end. It offered a new world-view, social framework, reputation, amenities, mediums, creativity, and exposure to Limbus life.

At the crux, Informant states (Fieldwork 2020), ‘Our community identity is deeply embedded in our language, indigenous faiths, and traditions. Every devoted person is now trying to recall their ancestral roots to preserve their own identity. Hence, we

should rejuvenate ourselves to enrich the culture of our great ancestors. It is the prime time, to realize this truth, and resolve to cling to our indigenous faiths instead of wavering our cultural heritage to the whims of unscrupulous people who merely search for vested gains in the name of religion. I am sure, our indigenous cultural heritage and faith are purer and richer in values and tradition. Hence, we should not allow foreign yoke of capricious nature with selfish intention to wipe off our traditional beliefs and practices, which are natural and scientific’.

During the reformist movement, the Bonafede indigenous faith groups assimilated new traits in their religious taxonomy, mostly borrowed from major religions like Hinduism. In the context of prevailing cultural syncretism. Behera (2016:112) has constructed analytical axiom postulating syncretism to manifests primarily from two processes, ‘presupposition’ and ‘parallelization.’ He further adds that the ‘presupposition’ process of syncretism interplays, through symbiosis, acculturation, and superposition that ensue three distinct possibilities. Initially, the superimposed (traits) dominates along with the older one. Then, the substratum (tradition system) continues to exercise dominance, and lastly, in logical probability, there may be the prevalence of balance between various elements.

On the other hand, ‘parallelization’ denotes to composition established among different traits such as ideas, rites, divinities, symbols, practices, etc. through means of interpretation, amalgamation, exchange of qualities, and identification (*Ibid*:2016:112). Hence, however, his study is on Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh but, correspondingly contributes when studying Limbus and understanding the Limbu religious outlook which is syncretic.

Throwing light on assimilative trend of new religious traits, an informant in his 60s clarifies, “In yesteryears, rituals and worship practices were done discretely by each family, revealing uneven features. Therefore, seeing the present mode of life, it was necessary to accommodate new religious practices that fit in. Therefore, Yumaism was introduced to be the religion of Limbus and it was a modification to develop Limbus belief system in an orderly manner. However, even though practice patterns may have changed, spiritual essence remains the same”.

Furthermore, in the process of assimilation, Yumaism adapted doctrines, philosophies, and liturgies of other organized religions. Nevertheless, one needs to be cautious in their adoption process because alien cultures, which grew in a particular period and specific context, may not suit others’ context. At the same time, blind assimilation may cripple the traditional freshness and originality of one’s religion and culture. The religiosity of Yumaism which is a contemporary phenomenon, threatened the traditional praxis-oriented belief systems of the Limbus. As such wise, the integrative norms and orders to traditional faith and other innovative trends have resulted in streamlining of Yumaism into two sects.

Quest for Nomenclature

At the outset, an apt nomenclature was essential for embarking on a new indigenous faith movement. Hence, the essence of naming *Yuma* faith with concrete terminology split into ‘Yumaism’ and ‘Yuma Samyo’ schools of thought. It was spearheaded by the Limbu scholars, Iman Singh Chemjong, who was reinforced by majority supports

later by J.R Subba. With this, the Limbus started determining Yumaism¹⁷ as their new identity for the Limbu religion. It further elicited literary contest amongst the elites in pursuing religious concepts and designations.

On contrary, the coming up of a reformed movement laid by YMMCC once again unnecessarily created confusion while creating a Limbu religious identity. The center also claimed to be Yumaism or Yuma Samyo religion by faith, which again questioned the religion of Limbus. Yumaism, on the one hand, could refer to the ‘traditional religion of Limbus’ while at the same time Yumaism, on another hand, could refer to the ‘YMMCC version of Yumaism.

Antithetical to the YMMCCC perspective, Informant (Fieldwork 2019) contended, “As far as Limbu religion is concerned, YMMCC has never been considered as sort of religion in Limbu society”. He further said, “The essence of true Yumaist has vanished among the YMMCC followers. The YMMCC is a fabricated one; simply imitating other’s religions. It is awful to witness this new trend of practices and claiming themselves as Yumaist” and their religion to be Yumaism.

The traditionalist condemns the new religious order of YMMCC to be in the syncretic form of the other religions. It is postulated as a tacit incursion towards indigenous faith that dilutes the traditional essence. Therefore, they despise the role of agencies based on the socio-cultural and religious gap between other religions and the Limbu belief system. Viewing the proximity to other religions, the traditionalist’s thus refrains from YMMCC services and related activities.

¹⁷The researcher asked most of the informants whether they knew when Yumaism was first used and who introduced, but no one answered it.

Process of Re-Structuring of Limbu Belief System

It is reported, that in primordial times, the traditional beliefs and practices were observed discretely at home or collectively in festivals. Limbus maintained plurality and never endorsed any specific shrine for worship. They are solely gratified by rituals and incantations performed by ritual specialists. Nevertheless, later, the awareness of globalization and the heavy influence of Hindus awakened the Limbus to pursue significant structural changes in their religious domains to safeguard their cultural identity and contest their Nepali identity. In this premise, the associations coined Yumaism as the religion of Limbus. This shaped the traditional belief system into a new religious order.

Alarmed with the disorganized nature of indigenous faith, the Limbus restructured their faith with new methods of worship by constructing *Mangheem* as their religious shrine. In a view, that Limbus traditional belief system were fading away thence, ‘coining Yumaism’ and construction of worship places for the religious purpose was the only way to preserve culture and display Limbu’s distinct identity. Concerning the strong necessity of preserving Limbu faith. The Informant (Fieldwork 2020) expressed, “Tradition meant the way of life of a society practicing its socio-religious culture, the way of preserving history, literature, and all others norms of social life inherited from time immemorial, which may be called social character and identity”.

It is informed, that most of the Limbu scholars toured several Limbu villages in Eastern Himalayas with the tenacity to study Limbu social customs and religious folklores with recording aids. After that, they felt the need for written scripture on oral literature. The learned informant says, that a ‘traditional faith to be called a

religion, must have a scripture¹⁸, and it must be practised. So, we the Limbus must work on it sooner. Unless we do it now, we may not do it all' (Fieldwork 2020).

On another note, with the need for outlining a structure for traditional faith, Rup Lal Khamdhak (Fieldwork 2020) asserts- that "After seeing other's religion and comparing one's faith system- we realized, our religion was unorganized, though existed for a long time. When outsiders enquired about our faith, we failed to explain sacred values and practices. We do not have religion to portray and, failed to recognize our religious identity. Hence, we realized celebrating the festival, feasts, and merry-making was not the whole thing in religion. So, our basic idea for reforming Yumaism was to preserve age-old belief systems, promote a larger sphere, and have a religious identity of our own.

Textualizing Ethical Codes

At the outset of socio-cultural resurgence, Limbu intellectuals became aware that oral narratives were imperative to sustain their dignity, identity, and cultural history. The dearth of textual documentation and proper practices were gradually slowing down. Hence, having sensed the requisite of documenting oral traditions, educated Limbus started documenting the various aspects of Limbu society.

For the most Limbu intellectual, the religious aspects, and the cultural identity were synonymous. Thence, culture became the crux of religious ideology in Yumaism. Accordingly, the literary works were predominantly culturally oriented, and religious identity emerged as the central theme of writings. Ascertaining enormous ignorance

¹⁸Scripture here meant transforming of oral texts into sacred scriptures to form a scriptural canon involving *Mundhum*.

of philosophical bases of Yumaism and identity loss by embracing other world religions, the elite group strived to construct a new ‘religion-cultural identity’ within the premise of ‘culture’. Additionally, the belief systems and moral values of Limbus were textualized and printed in periodicals, books, etc.

Mangheem: The New Worship Order

In primordial times, there was no specific time, space, texts, confession or structure of worship. Usually, Limbus independently worshipped numerous Deities in their homes with self-oriented rituals and altars. Generally, a sickly person visited the house of *Phedangma* to receive healing rituals/propitiations or at times, the *Phedangma* voluntarily reached out to the sickly person in vice versa. However, with the establishment of *Mangheem*, the primaeval Limbu faith became a methodical belief system. The *Mangheem* became the ultimate worship place for the Limbus. Today, the Yumaist gathers in *Mangheem* during the festivals to attend worship services.

With the revitalization process, ancestral beliefs and practices viz., rites and rituals, appeasement of spirits, animal sacrifices, and taboos were realized as insignificant in endowing inspiration, ethical values, and peace to human life. In this context, the informant states – “The practices [rites and rituals] conducted by *Phedangma* are mainly aimed at worshipping evil spirits. The *Phedangma* never mentions a word about Yumaism and all the rituals are chanted in classical language [primaeval spells], which cannot be followed by the present generation. Therefore, there is a diminishing tendency in our [Limbu] society. It may be observed that people believe and have faith in Yumaism in their inner being but, due to a lack of expression of

faith other people [outsiders] take the Yumaism as a concept and not as a faith (Fieldwork 2019).

Mangheem signifies a place for worship in the Limbu belief system. The construction of the *Mangheem* represents different trajectories of changing religious scapes among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas. At the crux, *Mangheem* has also been associated with the Satya Hangma and YMMCC religious movement but is separated from the association's version of *Mangheem*.

In the Eastern Himalayas outlook, the first *Mangheem* was constructed in Mangshila, North Sikkim, in 1983. Juxtaposed to earlier, today Limbus can take part in community ritual which is conducted in the morning and evening *puja*. However, according to the informants, *Mangheem* was first associated with the grand community festivals such as the Sirijunga birth anniversary and the New Year festival. When it comes to the idea of *Mangheem*, Satya Hangma religious movement might have been influential as it perhaps existed already in the 1930s. Informant in an interview, claimed that the Limbus of Sikkim have invented, and designed the *Mangheem* which was constructed in Mangshila.

J.R Subba (1998:114-15) states, *Mangheem* was spread together with the Satya Hangma religious movement. Moreover, since this link has not been stated in his later publications, it might suggest that the political function of *Mangheem* outweighs the historical origin of Limbus. J.R Subba's (2012:181) later publication delineates, that the *Mangheem* is an authentic and central part of Yumaism that has been constructed based on Limbu mythology. The pyramid-shaped *Mangdan/Sangbhe*, for instance, means the eight upper realms of the universe, along with *Tagera Ningwaphuma* dwelling in the uppermost realm. However, *Mangdan* similarly resembles a small

stupa. Generally, it seemed to be agreed upon that *Phedangma* and *Samba* are the types of ritual specialists who is considered to be the ‘purest’, to carry out ceremonies in *Mangheem* because *Yeba* and *Yema* mainly dealt with dangerous evil spirits and were not regarded as suitable for *Mangheem puja*.

It is learned, *Yeba* and *Yema* are forbidden from *Mangheem puja*, while the knowledgeable senior Limbu menfolk could be more suitable in need. Also, alcohol and blood sacrifices are strictly prohibited inside the *Mangheem* and the ritual are substituted with fruits, and flowers. Here, it can be assumed, that the decision to allow only *Phedangma* and *Samba* to conduct *puja* in *Mangheem* also, seems like women are excluded from this particular task.

Furthermore, *Phedangma* and *Samba* are grounded in a narrative, which permits them an added compassionate or loving background rather than the *Yeba* and *Yema* whose task instead is to appease malevolent spirits. Perhaps, one may question if the reason is to create a different ritual function for the *Phedangma* and *Samba* since they are believed to be declining. It is learned, that the *Mangheem* is not limited to the village’s inhabitants. Anyone could visit, meet, and attend the *puja*. As a result, *Mangheem* could be meant a place for Limbus to meet one another and has the potential to construct a sense of ‘Limbuness’ and ‘belongingness’.



Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2: Mangshila *Mangheem* (left). *Mangdan* inside the *Mangheem* (right)

On the contrary, the *Mangheem* of YMMCC appeared to be more of a contested issue. It is one of the core contestants of the association's authority which is visible in the YMMCC located in the Eastern Himalayan belt of Darap West Sikkim. The researcher has seen, *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum* (Holy text) on Yumiasm, which *Suingneem* was trained to be *Suingneem* specifically to YMMCC. A white cloth is put on by the *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum*. It was no different than ordinarily printed book and the text in it was mainly written in the Limbu language. Nevertheless, some pages were in English which also provides the readers with interesting perspectives regarding the YMMCC position.

The *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum* is printed in the first-person perspective where *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* addresses the reader directly. It informs us, that the sacred oral recitation, the *Mundhum* which is offered by the book neither was nor created by her, but it was presented by the holy, powerful *Tagera Ningwaphuma* by the process of Meditation. Additionally, the book states that the most of the regional traditional aspects were in pure form and was handed by *Tagera Ningwaphuma* by the *Phedangma*. With the passage of time, many of the local practices have undergone

changes, for example, sacrificing an animal to please the powerful dieties. It is argued that *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, the way of worshipping by act of blood shed was completely not accepted and it is wrong. Thereafter, the woman in godly form was given the status of *Yuma Mang*, and the full name as *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* to bring reform and spread the *Mangden*, the scripture considered to be sacte or the Godly word throuth the textual form. According to *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*, the existing *Mangheem* and the existing *Mundhum* must be sanitized. It is reported that the *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*, opined that the present *Mangheem* and *Mundhum* need to revised and put in a sophisticated way.

Further, to cement the Limbu religion uniformly, it is deemed necessary to advocate meditation and establish cylindrical-shaped mediation centers. At this point, the researcher sense, the YMMCC criticizes the association's version of Yumaism, and attempts to redefine *Mundhum* as well as the *Mangheem*. She added, contemporary, the *Phedangma* is endangered. Thus, the *Suingneem* is an alternate to *Phedangma* sent by *Tagera Ningwaphuma* (Fieldwork 2019).

It is reported, that J.R Subba and Limbu associations is seen to form an internalized belief. At this point, it can be argued that the vision to sanitize the Limbu religion is somewhat identical to YMMCC form of Yumaism. One can also see in J.R Subba's book where he has been criticizing most of the Limbu ritual specialist's role and performances including the deadly, blood sacrificies in most of the ceremonies.

It is argued that the Yumaism may not be in a holistic form of practices to most of the Limbus, the efforts and activities of YMMCC's in context of changing the Limbu ritual practices are stated much more specific. The YMMCC seems incorporating their redefined *Mangheem* and *Mundhum* in their teachings.

Informant in his 54's opined, the YMMCC is controversial in Limbu's belief system and further stated that the center's teachings to be false. He said, "most of us do not recognize her'. The main functioning body also known as the Apex Body has not confirmed this woman (Her) as the *Yuma* of Darap. In this scenario, it may be taken into notice the all the support and validations towards the despise for YMMCC and the claims for the disregard for the practices, where the Center thinks they are right in their own way. Nevertheless, YMMCC still continues to assert that the Yumaism needs to be sanitized. (Fieldwork 2018).

To explore the Limbu worship place, the researcher has earlier briefly discussed that the new religious elements that is introduced in *Mangheem*. Hitherto, the researcher attempts to shed light on the syncretic traits and praxis that have clear reflexivity of other faiths. In situating syncretic interfaces in the present research field site, the YMMCC made contact with the Satya Hangma movement and gained overt Hindu patronage and religious assimilations into reformistic agendas.

While undertaking observation at *Mangheem*, some syncretic elements aligning with Hindu practices have drawn researcher's notice. At the first glimpse of *Mangheem*, bell hanging outside an entrance door is ceremoniously rung by followers and taking-off footwear while entering mirrors the tradition of Hindu temple entry. In addition, also, the ritual of burning butter lamp and incenses on the altar and sprinkling water over the follower's forehead which is replicative of Hindu rituals is evident in Yumaism ritual.

As per the research observation, *Mangheem* is weakening day by day. Limbus are not sustaining their religion in efficient and disordered manner. If their religion and its system get standardized and competent, they will not covet other's religious

faith, flaws are within them, and they need to introspect before blaming others. Hence, Limbus should not criticize Satya Hangma or the Hindu family followers. Instead learn from them. In a way, it has enlightened Limbus to look back on their ancestral faith and traditions. No one has instructed them – but they are their ‘eye-opener’. If they did not exist, Limbus would have never realized to develop their religion. The researcher argues, with this, ancestral faith of Limbu society will be strengthened.

Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center: The Religious Movement

A contemporary religious division among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas is evident since, the religious formation seeks to change the aspects of the Limbu belief system. Apart from Satya Hangma, Lovism, Heavenly path, Satpal Ji Maharaj, Brahma Kumari, and Sri Satya Sai Baba religious movement. The emerging YMMCC established in 2004 in Darap West Sikkim, claims to be the religion of Limbus. Historically, the revivalist ideas of Satya Hangma often seem coerced with Yumaism and the associated changes, where the YMMCC is often opposing the perspective/version by the Yumaism into newer forms.

The members of the Limbu association claim, that the YMMCC to be puzzling and debatable. One can see, that the Limbu belief system is totally based on the oral tradition, but on the corollary, the YMMCC has textualized the *Mundhum*. The YMMCC alleged that her holiness, *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* is the reincarnation of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, and also YMMCC has revitalized the role and significance of *Phedangma*, by introducing *Suingneem* as a substitute for *Phedangma*. At present, the YMMCC is the rising religious movement which has followers from various

ethnic communities apart from Limbus, which contrasts to the Yumaism- religion of Limbus propagated by the Limbu association.



Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4: *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* (left). Displaying *Mangdan* during *Maghe Sankranti* celebrated by YMMCC (left)

Remarkably, YMMCC seems to be effective, uniting an individualized religion which urges people to ‘know their soul’ and actively participate in the regular worship and meetings in YMMCC *Mangheem*. In fieldwork (2019), *Suingneem* said, unlike the *Phedangma* tradition, it is not obligatory to be a Limbu to be a member of YMMCC. It is just one has to take a vow in front of other existing members of the center, uttering that he/she will lead life according to the teachings of the center.

In YMMCC, *Mundhum* has been spiritualized and the training is given during regular worships and meetings in YMMCC *Mangheem*. It also contains conferences- in line with how J.R Subba describes an ‘ideal’ Yumaism should be. As a result, one might query whether the seeming success is because it is a real religion? Even though YMMCC is new, it can’t be ignored that has some dominating characteristics of religion.

On other hand, association's version of Yumaism does not have the same because it is reversed upon a pre-existing ritual tradition, which perhaps needs to validate in the past as an age-old tradition of Limbus. Limbus are concerned about propagating Yumaism as the belief system of the Limbus, and a chief question is, Whether the belief system constitutes an essential dimension in the age-old tradition? YMMCC, having changed many of the structures of age-old tradition by incorporating the worldly deity in their teachings, sense to have created a deity in which people can believe.



Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6: Depiction of Sirijunga and *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* in the shrine of Limbu house (left). YMMCC religious flag dangling above the houses (right)

Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center: Outlook of Traditions

Before initiating any ritual, the YMMCC adherents offer their prayers to *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, *Sigera Yabhundin Porokmi Yambami Mang*, and her holiness *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*.

- Fieldwork 2019

According to the informants, *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* has presented the YMMCC tradition in her lines. They deem, that YMMCC has been able to bore fruits of spiritual essence which itself identified as a religion to people. Rather than being concentrated within confined boundaries, YMMCC is bestowed with the *Mundhum*- Holy Scriptures. The holy text has 72 topics, 327 sub-topics, and 12771 words. In addition, the ways of performing rituals have influenced the masses at the optimum. The informant further added with the blessing of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* to propagate spiritual values and practices to people, and to give eternal life to Yumaism, Limbus is fortunate to have her holiness, *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*, as an ardent preacher of Yumaism.

During fieldwork (2019)¹⁹, *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* revealed that to give eternal life to Yumaism there are *Suingneem* (disciples), *Sewamsas* (devotees), and *Sewarobas* (followers), who may perhaps aid in propagation and give concrete shape and uniformity to the belief and practices of Yumaism. She claims that the words written in *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum* are not her creations but, have been presented to her by *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, which she has received through meditation.

She further added, the old pure traits were carried forward by the ritual specialists. Nevertheless, after 10 decades the same tradition had shifted their main focus on animal sacrificial. She also said, *Phedangma* are gradually ceasing to exist as does the *Mundhum*. Therefore, *Suingneem* is introduced as the alternate Limbu priest. They acquire the *Mundhum* through textualization'. It is reported, that the center's teachings could only have brought further development to Yumaism. At this point,

¹⁹Interview of *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* was taken in *YumaYok* (resident of Yuma) Darap West Sikkim in 2019.

researcher sense, that she criticizes the *Phedangma* tradition and seek to redefine Limbu priest, oral tradition, ancestral belief systems, and *Mangheem* so far.

On a different note, the *Phedangma* tradition adherents (Fieldwork 2020) informed, the Limbu priests (*Phedangma, Samba, Yeba and Yema*) are regarded as a part-time magico-religious practitioner. Through a steady state of ecstasy, trance or possession, this priest can gain knowledge of supernatural being, there were about, their desires, and requirements. Intrinsically, they are a shamanistic priest in Limbu society. Limbus believes, these shamanistic priests are sent by *Tagera Ningwaphuma* to look after her children [the human being] on earth. One cannot become a Limbu shamanistic priest, therefore must be the will of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*.

In addition, *Phedangma* gain mystic knowledge, it is verbal, and delivers *Mundhum* via long term memory where the subornates keeps repeating the stanza, that further makes it crystal clear. *Mundhum* is recited by *Phedangma*, and it is *Phedangma* who keeps the culture and tradition intact. At this juncture, one can see that adherents perceive *Phedangma* as the ‘custodians of tradition’ as far as the *Mundhum*, which has its central role, is passed down orally.

The researcher argues, institutionalization and textualization however, have redefined *Phedangma* tradition. Nonetheless, has changed the perspective of Limbus being identified with the ‘richness’ of oral tradition which is passed down verbally. Also, *Phedangma* tradition has been defied by the YMMCC and has equally contested the ancient tradition. Thuswise, it has challenged the associations in creating a united Limbu religious identity. The religious divide is the upshot of Limbus being fragmented. To this line, this research points out, that the age-old tradition is not to be mixed with the ‘reinvented tradition’. When the old traditions are still alive, there is

no need to revive or reinventing the existing traditions. Changes may come in situational context, but that does not mean that one has to reinvent the tradition because it blurs the Limbus belief system and gives an impression to be confusing and complicated.

Changes in Rituals

Rituals are an essential component of religion. Perhaps, every religion has its rituals as far as it is the instrumental part of religion. Individuals attempt to influence and to connect with the supernatural realm with the help of this activity. It is performed both privately and in groups. By participating in those activities' individuals proclaim their acceptance of the associated beliefs and values that ritual symbolizes.

Turner (1967) perceives ritual as prescribed proper behaviour for the occasion not given over to technological routine, having reference to believing in mystical beings or powers. For him, ritual is a periodic re-statement of the terms in which people of a particular culture must interact if there is to be any coherent social life.

As explained by Turner (1968), a ritual is the concentration of custom, where society's values, norms and knowledge are reaffirmed and sometimes created. According to Durkheim (1995), collective representation, which is necessary for the existence of society, must be periodically strengthened and recharged. This is the function of ritual. Rituals also exercise profound force and influence over their performers. The author (*Ibid*: 1995:220) maintained, "Forces are reawakened in their consciences and intense emotions are stirred up. In these effervescent social milieux, and indeed from that effervescence, those religious ideas seem to have been born".

Rappaport (1999) likewise, asserts ritual has creative functions in two different senses; not only does ritual inform participants of meanings, but also, sometimes, transforms them or their surroundings. Douglas (2002) similarly, believes that ritual generates a symbolic universe that unifies the society, simultaneously playing the role of maintaining the society's order.

Bell (2009) observes that ritual enlightens not only meanings but also brands meanings. However, there are other scholars too who have different opinions regarding ritual. For example, Asad (1993:55) upholds a symbolic understanding that ritual is “a product of modern European scholarship and ritual should be understood as the instrumental behaviour of everyday life”.

Staal (1995), on the other hand, says that the ritual has no meaning, goal or aim. He believes, “ritual is a pure activity for its own sake. The important thing is what you do, nor what you think, believe or say. In the ritual activity, it is the rules that are important not the result” (*Ibid*: 1995:487). Nevertheless, one thing is sure this activity is an important aspect of religion.

In YMMCC tradition, the rituals can commence only with the *Lung Ling, Toh-Ming*. The name is derived from the Limbu word, *Lung ling toh-ming*, an amalgamation of *lung* meaning a ‘plate’ made of stone, *ling* means ‘lamp’ and *toh-ming* for ‘vase-shaped’ out of stone; therefore, it means a plate, a lamp and a vase formed out of stone. *Lung Ling Toh-Ming* as a worshipping gear prevailed since the time of creation and the existence of Yumaism.

Similarly, another crucial element is the altar, it is believed that the nine steps in the altar are necessary with the ninth step tapering towards the heavenly world at the top. The eight steps of altars should be such as green, blue and yellow. At the same time,

the ninth step of the altar should be in white since *Mang Thoray* (stairway to heaven) color is white.

It is informed, that some fresh grains of *Tumdum-Seri* (rice) and a fresh shoot of *Namyophung* (*Artemisia Vulgaris*) -either seven or nine shoots with filled water should be placed in the *Lung ling Toh-Ming*. Limbus believe that there is a logic behind the usage of seven or nine numbers of *artemisia vulgaris* fresh shoots because it indicates the seven powers of the rainbow and the nine *loks* (worldly) from the earthly world tapering towards the heavenly word.

As mentioned earlier in the initial stage, *LunglingToh-Ming* made of stone was prevalent in past days which at present are replaced by copper or bronze plate with a vase and an oil lamp. It is supposed that the offering of the prayer would be fervently heard by God when used such items. During the rituals, an altar is to be made where the *Lungling Toh-Ming* is to be placed on the right of the altar along with a symbol of a star cone ornamented with flowers, nine shoots of *artemisia vulgaris* in the middle, and seven shoots on the left, that is later used for the body purification through sprinkling.

Likewise, the offering of fresh rice in the rice measuring container is to be placed on altar. In addition, the placement of coins in a coin accumulated container made of copper is to be placed on the left. Also, one *manghuklingl* (sickle) is to be placed in the middle to keep away the evil spirits. Besides, burning of fresh pine leaves kept in a *sangghorma* (charcoal container) is the important item used in each ritual performance. Then after, when all these items are safely placed on the altar, the ritual process begins with the lighting of 108 oil lamps. In a situational context, they can light either 108 lamps or with a minimum of 9 oil lamps.

Additionally, it is learned that the ritual process in YMMCC tradition contrasts with the ritual tradition which is evident in an age-old tradition. In YMMCC, the ritual tradition is seemingly simple and brief. They commence each ritual with the elements as mentioned above, and with the simple process of keeping the prayers and offering fruits and flowers to the almighty God.

The significant change one can see is the changes brought up in the birth and death rituals. They have challenged age-old tradition by redefining the rituals. In YMMCC, they believe, the almighty God comes and benisons the newly born baby be it either male or female on the third day. They believe the soul does not make a distinction between male and female. Therefore, the birth ritual is done on the third day after birth regardless of gender.

Similarly, the changes have taken their shape in death rites in contrast to age-old tradition. The YMMCC, have changed the system of death ritual by introducing the death purification ritual to be done on the ninth day irrespective of gender. Also, the system of distributing *mikto-ok* (clothes and keepsakes) to the clan and relatives in age-old tradition has been challenged by forbidding the system mentioned above. According to the center's teachings, the deceased soul remains in the earthly world for eight days and it is on the ninth day the *Yaat Cham Mang* (soul God) comes to guide the deceased's soul to heaven. At this juncture, one can see, that the ritual tradition guided by the *Phedangma* and the importance of *Mundhum* has been defied by the YMMCC.

YMMCC has coined the *Suingneem* which is an amalgamation of three words, *su* meaning 'divine souls of the heaven', *ing* meaning 'preacher and disseminators of spiritual values', and *neem* means to 'identify the existence of the human soul',

‘purifier of sins’, ‘preserver of living sentiments on earth’ and ‘guider of the human soul to the world of souls’. In short, it could be understood as the preacher who disseminates and teaches the practice of holy text chant and performs all kinds of rituals as per their allotted ranks.

There are five types of *Thanching* (revelation) in *Suingneem* viz;

- *Singwadung*- Draped in the white ritualistic costumes performs minor purification rituals for the ailed.
- *Yhapmudang*: Draped in the green costumes performs the ritual for individual welfare and safety.
- *Fungwadang*- Dressed in blue ritualistic attire identifies good and evil, virtue and vice.
- *Samudang*- Clad in yellow attire performs soul-guiding rituals identifying the presence of the human soul.
- *Mukwadang*- Attired in saffron costumes and retains enormous spiritual power.

In other words, the colors of the ritualistic costumes of *Suingneem* are white, green, blue, yellow and saffron. It is learned that *Suingneem* is allowed to use the ritualistic costume only after profound observation of *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*, and after attending the counseling classes. For instance, initially, the ritualistic costumes are handed to the *Suingneem* then after completing the three months counseling classes, holy text is handed to them with strict compliance.

However, *Suingneem*, capable of reading and writing can only receive the holy text. Interestingly, the ardent *Suingneem* well versed in the holy text and able to perform the ritualistic norms is given promotion as prescribed in the *Suingneem* rank.

Hitherto, spinsters *Suingneem* throughout their life must continue in the same rank. Likewise, there is a food taboo for *Suingneem* for instance, meat, alcohol, tobacco, garlic, and fermented foods. Besides, in cases, where the *Suingneem* converts to the other religions their ritualistic costumes should be deposited at *YumaYok* (residence), Darap west Sikkim.

Another essential point, according to the YMMCC verse is, *Sewaroba* (follower) is identified as the believer of Yumaism who has not performed *Mang Loop Pa* (soul purification) ritual in the name of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*. As informed, the apt age for the follower to attain soul purification ritual formalities is after 13 years of age. After that the follower is titled as *Assewasama* (devotee) with this, the *Sap lingkho sok* (power) is possessed by the almighty God through a soul purification ritual. However, if a person in receipt of soul purification ritual case defies the commands of God. He/she suffers bitter experiences from the creator and the religion he/she practices.

One of the informants expressed, that once an individual attains a soul purification ritual, he/she should propagate YMMCC version of Yumaism for two months. The informant added that propagation of YMMCC to more than five individuals would benefit from acquiring enormous spiritual power. However, if an individual remains passive, it would result in meagre progress in life with the most minor blessings. It is believed, that the message of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* would reach innocent people, and make them turn into virtues, and the propagator shall be blessed with good luck and progress in life. Notably, the *Mantras* possessed during the soul purification ritual are kept confidential within the YMMCC teachings.

The present research points out, the current changes in Limbu rituals, especially the dissension between a new religious movement-YMMCC, center on the cult of a

woman *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* considered being a reincarnation of the Limbu deity *Yuma*, and those who think that only the *Phedangma* tradition represents the Limbu tradition. This dissension reflects not only the different concepts of a Limbu religious identity, the definition, and role of ethnic boundaries, but also varying valorizations of Limbu autochthony. The present situation discloses a new form of opposition to a renewed cult of *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* illustrating a tension between Limbus attachment to their region, and the connection to the broader religious and political network.

Core Identity of Limbus

Kertzer and Arel (2002:11) delineates, that identity can be objectively determined through ancestry. According to the two authors, the usage of identity categories in mechanisms of state administration creates a particular view of social reality. Parallel to Anderson's (2006[1983]) interpretation, they stated, that categories are assigned and conceptualized as shared with several other people as a common collective identity. In turn, the set categories encourage people to view the world as composed of distinct categories (Kertzer and Arel 2002:5). Although ethnic identities are articulated as static categories in such contexts, ethnic or religious identities must be analyzed as processes of identification. Similar to Beckford's constructivist approach, Hall (1996:14) underlines, that an individuals articulate their identification or resistance to the positions to which they are ascribed.

It is therefore important to analyze how individuals produce, perform, and portray these positions, as well as processes of resistance and negotiation. For instance, the definition of the Scheduled Tribe (hereafter ST) status with its vague criteria provides characteristics of the ST community. Also, if these criteria are acted upon and

incorporated as aspects of the community's identification-such activity can potentially create successful resources for political assertion and be used strategically too, for example, mobilize groups.

The materiality of the social practice seems to play an increased role in the ethnopolitical landscape. Materiality in this context denotes specifically to newly constructed physical objects which is claimed to represent Limbu cultural heritage and have led to a revitalization of Limbu material culture. Relevant at this point, is Comaroff and Comaroff's (2009:150) method of ethnic identity. They emphasize ethnicity as a commodity, i.e., as a product that can be bought and sold in a marked context. The authors state, "Identity is increasingly claimed as property by its living heirs, who proceed to manage it by palpably corporate means -to brand it and sell it, even to anthropologists, in self-consciously consumer able forms." (*Ibid*: 29). Notions of the authenticity of such 'properties' become key by drawing upon differentness or otherness related to the group's immediate surroundings. In Comaroff and Comaroff's understanding, visible content, which represents a group's ethnicity, is always the product of specific historical conditions. The material objects affect human perception and frame the motivation, meaning, and materiality of social practice (*Ibid*: 38).

To inquire about activity in these mentioned processes of articulating, inventing, creating, or syncretizing ethnic or/and religious identities are crucial to be able to grasp power structures and power-plays. Who or what segments are capable of defining or articulating a group's possessions in which a group's identity is to be represented? Who can act upon the ST criteria and potentially utilize these as political or social resources? Who will ultimately benefit from the specific articulations? As aimed at politics of identity and its negotiations of rights, rhetorical strategies draw on

categorical or stereotypical identities. Also, Moore (1994:5) argues, “that resource flows are determined by a field of power within which identity is constantly being reformulated in categorical terms. The power to define reality is economic and political”. At this juncture, it is relevant to link Beckford’s (2003:3) idea of religion as a social construction, where the meaning of the category of religion itself is constructed into a Limbu identity, which provides a sense of the Limbus being a unified and robust community.

To coin a single category, which groups the Limbus’ ritual practices into ‘a single concept can be understood as an anti-syncretic process’ (Shaw and Stuart 1994). A single term resists diversity, syncretic tendencies, fluidity, and flexibility. A single category may likewise, be an attempt to construct a ‘great’ tradition. In addition, a seemingly institutionalized religious category contrasts and may contest the earlier and vague representations of the Limbu belief system as, for instance, a nameless, animistic, or syncretic religion. In the ethnopolitical context where the Limbus is, according to themselves, wrongly recognized as Hindus or Nepali. A single religious entity might also be analyzed as an attempt to resist the tendency of being grouped in these two categories.

If one considers the association member’s concern, about Limbus turning their backs on the “traditional” Limbu religion. An independent Limbu religious identity, similar to ‘Buddhist’ or ‘Hindu’ religion can, on one hand, be capable of “competing” with the ‘Hindu’ category. On the other hand, an independent religious identity itself proves that the Limbu community is a unique ethnic community: something of immense importance in ethnopolitics.

However, as per the researcher's knowledge, Yumaism has not become an independent religious category in official censuses, statistics, or documents, although this may be one of the associations' objectives. Nevertheless, these categories are promoted on websites, such as Wikipedia and Facebook, and the former is an essential source of knowledge today. At this juncture, one finds Yumaism and YMMCC being promoted as the Limbus' religion. The function of religion is central to creating a distinct Limbu ethnic identity in the political context. The tendencies discussed at this point can be linked to what Gellner (2007[2001]:178) has found in the ethnopolitical situation in Nepal, where he claims that religion rather than culture, or religion as culture, is increasing in importance as a marker of identity, arguing that the religious allegiances have become more self-conscious, more problematic, and much more politicized.

New Age Limbuism: Ritual Specialist vs. Religion of Limbus

Limbu Priest- Phedangma: The presence and the study of mediums, shamans, oracles, and the spirit possession constitute a significant research tradition in the Eastern Himalayas. The terminologies applied to Himalayas' ritual specialists' contrast among scholars and the concept of 'shaman' is particularly examined differently however, this description is not accepted throughout.

The ancient and renowned description of the shaman was given by the eminent scholar named Eliade, (2004 [1951]), he exhibits the critical notion of shaman wherein the ritual is performed through the journey of souls or the supernatural flights to reach out to the different world. For example, that of upper and lower terrestrial through transform. The author Hultkrantz (1973:66) ponders if it makes sense to bring out the

ideal of Shaman, outside the North-East Asian regions where the term originates. Terminologies are place-bound and Hultkrantz claims that the terms can lose their adequate meaning and nuances if applied to similar phenomena elsewhere.

However, if we refrain from applying, for instance, ‘shaman’ in an Eastern Himalayas context, the term itself loses its comparative usefulness function. Another worth noting is, that the frequently used concept, ‘Spirit possession’ which Jones (1996 [1976]) highlights, in a similar tendency as Lewis, that the concept ‘shaman’ can be applied to the individuals who can conduct soul journeys and, also to the individuals that is possessed by the evil spirit, that is known as tutelary possession’ that specifies the particular type of spirit possession. (Thapa and Mohan 2018)

The ritual specialist of Limbu is generally known as *Phedangma*. They are the ritual specialist who acts as mediators between Gods, humans, and spirits. They are regarded as the custodian of Limbu culture and religion and officiate various life cycle²⁰ rituals from birth to death. These experts who can banish evil spirits and pacify the Deities through animal sacrifice. The path to becoming a ritual specialist is not by choice, but due to some ‘irresistible compulsion’, when the spirit possesses the ritual specialist’s entire body and guides them through a shamanistic initiation led by a senior ritual specialist throughout the first few times. The ritual specialist is also considered to be an incarnation that indicates, the special talents are passed through *Guru* from from whom they receive the special powers, and also guide them when they undertake journeys to otherworldly realms.

²⁰Life-cycle rituals are found in every society and in every religion although their relative importance and degree of elaboration of the rites may vary. Limbu society is not an exception. Birth, marriage and death rituals are important life-cycle rituals performed by the Limbu people. Thuswise religion plays an important role in life cycle rituals.

The tutelary deity of Limbu ritual specialist is believed to be inherited either by patrilineal lineages or by matrilineal lineages. The ritual specialist is the key player in the Limbu religion and culture. This, ritual specialist holds the history and stories of the Limbus and the landscape as they invoke the spirits of the land and the ancestors. Thus, concerning these, they become shamans and healers, but they are custodians of Limbu culture and tradition.

Religion [Yumaism]: Bell (1997:211) henceforth demonstrated that the religion includes a core part of the culture as a whole, not as an independent sphere which contradicts the paradigms of functionalism, structuralism, and phenomenology. which tended to think of paradigmatic or authentic ritual as a matter of relatively immutable sets of strategies, intent on preservation and promotion of the stable structures of the socio-cultural system.

Along with understanding religion, contextualization and interpretation become fundamental practices in investigating religion. In examining people's relatedness to religious phenomena and empirical narratives in which human beings communicate, such as speech, texts, and gestures are therefore subjects to interpretation. The approach of empirical narratives emphasizes the related characteristic, for example knowledge, which Hastrup (2004:456) states, that it connects itself in the relationship among people or between the objects and people, and in the sense that it emerges within a dialogical field.

In studying the processes of religious change, the relationship between religion and other aspects of the broader social context must be underlined. Since, the concept and the meaning of religion are socially constructed, which according to Beckford (2003:3) culturally constructed meanings are constantly being contested, rejected,

modified, or confirmed. According to him, it is not to theorize religion as a generic object, but rather to bring out, and express the varied meanings and significances communities have historically attributed to religion.

Anderson (2006[1983]:13) coined highly powerful concept 'Imagined Communities', which along with the 'Invention of Tradition' perspective is useful to explain the religious change among the Limbus, although the author is primarily preoccupied with nationalism. Anderson emphasizes that some shared or imagined symbols or 'sacred' language can facilitate ethnic communities to be imaginable.

Hobsbawm (1983) opines, that the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions are not to be mystified by 'Invention of Tradition'. As continuous processes carried out by people in different ways depending on the situational context and invention must be linked to broader changes in society and may be applied to all religious traditions.

Anderson (2006[1983]:6) discusses a similar tendency and stresses that ethnic communities should not be distinguished by their genuineness, but rather through how they are imagined. Perceiving a tradition as genuine also stands in contrast to Beckford's understanding of the social constructivist approach, where he emphasizes relativism in, for instance, how the concept of religion is believed and lived out by different societies.

Diehl (1969) states the interface of religion causes the entire change of sacred meanings; by which an individual accepts a new set of concepts which is different from the previous religion. It is hence, abstruse in mapping the valid account of the religious experience. The rising individualistic trends contravening societal pattern adds up to the complexity of the situations (*Ibid*: 1969:145).

An individual unaffected by the encounter remains intact within the old religious tradition and does not capitulate to alteration. Nevertheless, whether conversion transpires or not, the attitude and reaction against the native tradition develop new selectiveness in their religious behaviour and attachment towards ideas and practices.

Moreover, J.R Subba's (2012, 2011, 2009, 2005, 1999, 1998) publications, are frequently identical in context to religion of Limbus. Nevertheless, a bit of transition in his work after the publications in 1998 can be encountered in his rhetoric. Earlier, when the Limbus were not accorded the ST status, he declared that Yumaism is animistic religion because many Deities are the personification of natural phenomena.

J.R Subba (2012:10-33) in later publications, appears unwilling to apply the term animism to Yumaism. He reports that Yumaism is no longer animistic or polytheistic but has become a monotheistic religion. He further emphasizes Yumaism as a Limbu way of life has become a philosophy.

J.R Subba describes *Mundhum* as secular and philosophical as it contains intellectual understanding and reasoning. Here, it seems a parallel illustration of being a philosophy rather than a religion which is seen within Buddhism too.

In addition, J.R Subba demonstrates that Yumaism is a monotheistic and ancient religion for he states ancient religions were monotheistic. The highest form of divinity is female, and undoubtedly his description fits the version of Yumaism and, further traces the origin of Yumaism from 25,000 to 7000 B.C (J.R Subba 2012:37). He argues that Yumaism has developed from an animistic to a philosophical stage of evolution, It seems he maintained for the truth and homogeneity of Yumaism.

Another significant illustration of Limbu identity is the religious traditions of the Limbus, which has been experiencing a tangible transition lately. It is seen that ethnicity has been gradually politicized after the implementation of Indian Constitutional laws concerning Scheduled Tribe status. Then after, identity politics and ethnic polarization gave birth to a greater emphasis on embedding religion and ethnicity into the identity of Limbus. J.R Subba and the associations can be noted to be the main actors with concern for cultural production and are also promoters of religious change among the Limbu.

Ethnic mobilization methods, where well-off individuals have established ethnic associations, appear to be economically and educationally advantaged individuals. They function as decision-makers and spokespersons irrespective of their indigenous group concerning procedure parallel to what Schlemmer (2003: 120), describes as 'indigenous'. The present research reveals that the Limbus follows this extensive trend with the most respected members of the associations being men, in their 50's to 70's, who are much more wealthy and highly qualified.

On different note, delineating on identity, identifying with the broad umbrella term 'Nepali' was unsatisfactory within the Limbus endeavors on the road to the ST status. Therefore, claiming a unique Limbu identity illustrates the contractedness of identity for Limbus. At this point, the Limbu identity can be understood as a counter-part to resist the undesired 'Nepali' identity.

In development and propagation of the term Yumaism to be the religion of Limbus, which Chemjong coined. Limbus identification with Hinduism is rejected by offering a seemingly similar institutionalized and normative religion as an alternate. The YMMCC separates itself from association's version of Yumaism by defying the

association's authority by spreading a different form of YMMCC version of Yumaism, which contests the dominant position of the seniors, ritual specialists and oral traditions.

Dynamics of Yumaism and Age-Old Tradition

J.R Subba (2012), clearly contributes Yumaism with a philosophical base borrowing ideas from the Christianity and Hinduism, in line with Phalgunanda's Satya Hangma religious reform movement (Vandenhelsken 2016). Further, J.R Subba (2008:306 and 309-310) delineates, in giving shape to Yumaism, the life of Sirijunga has been reinterpreted, his religious features having been brought to light in addition to his literary achievements. Sirijunga has been depicted as the founder of Yumaism who came to propagate in Sikkim, accompanied by his eight disciples.

Yumaism, and the transformation of Sirijunga into a religious figure, took a new turn in 2004 when a 15-year-old woman from Darap in West Sikkim was possessed by *Yuma Mang*. She was consequently accepted as the reincarnation of Srijunga and YMMCC was established for her in the Darap region. Similarly, the present-day Hindu ascetics, the young lady known as *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* does not consume salt, boiled water, rice, or cereal, and delivers a speech during festivities concentrating on spirituality, compassion, and, mutual respect among people of all faith and origin (Gustavsson 2017). Since the 1980s, various Limbu rituals have been given enormous prominence and transformed into community and temple-based performances. Current religious changes in the Limbus thus include a move from the household to the community as the space and object of a cult (Vandenhelsken 2016).

On April 20th 2000 and on December 4th 2002²¹, when J.R Subba was the president of the ‘*Sikkim Yakthung Sapsok Songchumpho*’ he had addressed the Honorable Prime Minister of India, wherein he explicitly stated that the religion of Limbus as Yuma Sam Samyo. He further, illustrated that Yuma Sam Samyo is an animistic religion and stressed that meat and alcohol are fundamental to the Limbu ‘primitive’ culture. However, J.R Subba and association’s attempt to move away from primitive characteristics can be observed.

Yumaism in literary representation is given a Christianized dimension, transforming Limbu ritual tradition into a great religion. J.R Subba attempts to formulate Limbu traditions by systematizing the belief system to build a normative foundation. Since, Yumaism is largely articulated by elite segments associated with political and ethnic associations, the articulations and attempts to revive the religion can approximately analyzed in the socio-political context. Although, the tradition between age-old *Phedangma* tradition and Yumaism has not been delineated in the literary representation, empirically there are differences (researcher’s emphasis).

Even if J.R Subba is closely involved with the associations in Sikkim, bibliophiles must be aware that there are numerous voices within the Limbus association’s ideas and guidelines. As *Yumaism* implies, *Yuma* holds a central position in Iman singh

²¹Letter addressed to Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee from members of the Limboo community. “Sikkim Limboo Action Committee for Tribal Status. Head Office: Limboo Heem, D.P.H. Area, Gangtok”. Dated: 4. 12. 2002.

Letter addressed to Home Minister Shri L.K. Adwani from J.R. Subba, President Sikkim Yakthung Sapsok Songchumpho. “Inclusion of Limboo (Tsong-Subba) Community in Scheduled Tribe List and Reservation Seats in the State Assembly”. Dated: 20.4 2000.

Subba and J.R Subba understanding of the deity. The outcome of Christian education is evident in both authors. Since, the authors portray *Tagera Ningwaphuma* and *Yuma* as ‘great Deities.

Chemjong (2003[1966]:25, 99), delineated *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as a destructive power, omnipresent almighty God, and the creator of life on earth. *YumaSam* is believed to be an aspect of a fierce spirit and a worldly messenger of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*.

On the contrary, while Chemjong cited *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as a male deity, J.R Subba emphasizes *Tagera Ningwaphuma* as a supreme Goddess. *Yuma* and *Tagera Ningwaphuma* are empowered with central positions and prominent roles concerning Yumaism. Nonetheless, there are discrepancies in the indigenized author’s and the association member’s arguments on *Yuma* and *Tagera Ningwaphuma*.

Risley (1989[1894]:153) explicitly stated that *Tagera Ningwaphuma* is the great deity of Limbus. Furthermore, Limbu (2011:63) identifies, Fatanagan to be perceived as the extensively respected deity of Limbus in her work in Maunabuthuk, Eastern Nepal.

Balicksi (2008:104,180), notes on the Limbu deity as Ajo Goka, which is also understood as *Tsong Goka* and *Kame Ajo* because it is the deity of the Limbus worshipped by Lhopos (Bhutia) all over Sikkim Himalayas.

Sagant (1996[1976]:371), pursues a larger extent to Chemjong and interestingly advises that the the cult of *Yuma*, which is a recent marvel that comprehends of *Nahangma* who certainly belongs to the olden cult. This however, in the recent times, might have influenced in the *Yuma* cult. According to the myths, it is relevant to note

that, the pursuit between the two Deities *Nahangma* and *Yuma* is evident because it narrates how they wrench one another into pieces whenever they confront.

Fitzpatrick (2011:62) illustrates, that *Yuma* implies ‘to come down and is used to depict ‘descending to a lower area’, and the verbs ‘sitting’ and ‘staying. His translations are noteworthy and authentic concerning Chemjong and J.R Subba understands of *Yuma* as the descended and worldly daughter of *Tagera Ningwaphuma*.

On another note, *Yuma* as a grandmother uniforms the underlying set of household rituals, since, the contemporary understanding of *Yuma* and *Tagera Ningwaphuma* correlates with Risley’s representation and the Limbus. Equally central is to bring out Gazetteer of Sikkim (1989[1894]) in light of the evidence that it has a crucial role regarding Limbus concept of their history, and imagined identity construction.

Moreover, *Mangheem* worship can be seen as an attempt to standardize a Limbu ritual. It is observed, that the shamanistic practices such as soul journeys, trance, and spirit possession do not seem to be desired practices in *Mangheem*. Instead, the ritual practices are dedicated to *Tagera Ningwaphuma* (researcher’s emphasis). At this point, the politics of syncretism are visible. By syncretizing these chief elements in Yumaism, the religion of Limbus seems similar to a great religion, which can compete in ethnopolitical context by exposing a robust, and unique religious facade.

Juxtaposed, the most useful and productive scopes of the rituals found in the *Phedangma* tradition, for example, in bringing blessing to the household, the member of the family and the produce. J.R Subba in his later publications (2012a and 2012b) and also YMMCC emphasize a extremely individualized religion. According to J.R Subba, a personal relationship with *Yuma/ Tagera Ningwaphuma* will revive

Yumaism among the Limbus privately. Since religious knowledge, he believes, must not be limited to the ritual specialist. Similarly, the YMMCC informants stressed that the *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* teachings had to be incorporated into each and acted upon. YMMCC shares similarities with other newly emerged religious organizations. As one can see, J.R Subba also propagates many similar ideas as the center. It is likely to assume that his literary and normative descriptions of Yumaism were also influenced by ideas found both within these individualized and reformist religious movements and Christianity.

Constructing and Reconstructing a Limbu Identity

This study has demonstrated that the religious tradition of Limbus is considerably experiencing a change in today's Limbu society. Subsequently, Limbu ethnic associations could be said to be key role players regarding cultural construction and are agents of religious change among the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas currently. Ethnic mobilization systems, where well-off individuals have established ethnic associations, appear to have roots in the political climate of 1920s Darjeeling. Like Schlemmer interpretation as "Indigenists" (2003:120), the representative and decision-makers often is an individual who is financially and educationally in vantage.

The present study also discloses that the Limbu follows this drift since the association's members are menfolk or senior citizens in their 50s to 70s, much well-off and highly qualified. The much-debated ST criteria contend 'animist' as characteristics which a tribal community must have.

The changing religion among Limbus, propagated by the Limbu ethnic associations can potentially be a political and ethnicity which can become a cultural resource. This concept when acted upon could be a strategic aid when in the process of formulating and negotiating the Limbu communities' rights to enlighten their political representation. It is necessary to recognize while footing these culturally and conjointly defined concepts instrumental.

It is well known that Limbus identity with the 'Nepali' was unwanted during the processes of Limbus endeavours toward the ST status. In this milieu, by postulating different Limbu identity, it discloses the construction of Limbu community identity. With this matter of defining Limbu identity, it could be understood as a counter approach to resisting the unwanted 'Nepali identity'.

Through development and propagation of Chemjong's term Yumaism as the Limbu religion, the identity with Hindu is rejected on the one hand. While on other hand, YMMCC offers a similar institutionalized and normative religion as an alternate to associations versions of Yumaism. The YMMCC visibly separates from the association version of Yumaism by challenging the associations by propagating their form of Yumaism, *Mangheem*, *Suingnnem*, and *Mundhum*.

Religious Identity Construction as Commodification

Ethnopolitical climate has led to competition amongst the ethnic groups, where they yearn to achieve the enhanced socio-political benefits the ST status could render. As one can see, physical objects representing the material culture and heritage of Limbus have been mostly constructed in selected ethnographic sites for present study.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:150, 29), demonstrate an understanding of ethnicity as commodification, or a 'property' of an ethnic group that potentially could be sold to, such as researchers, the government, tourists etc.

To be recognized Limbus as a distinct group having their religion, the material culture plays a crucial role. In Sikkim, on one side, *Mangheem*, a study center, statue, and administration building for the ethnic associations, etc, has been funded by the Sikkim government, where the government have provided money to the Limbu association recent creations towards the development of their religious institute and cultural heritage. It can be said, the government specifies an exact definition of a religious community or what constituted a religious community in a material sense. For an association to receive financial funding from the government, the demand for the institution should be created. In this instance, Yumaism could contextualize and employ meaning to this newly constructed institution by grounding them in a fabricated context which gives the visual aspect of historical continuity.

Given the indiginity in Sikkim, this physical construction emphasizes the Limbus belonging to the Sikkim's scapes which displays their native cultural heritage. At this juncture, it is suitable to link up Hobsbawm's (2012[1983]: 4-10) thought of 'invention of tradition', as ancient materials collectively through process of formalization, ritualization, and repetition make sense of historical continuity.

Additionally, for the associations to form a distinct Limbu community, some shared elements meant the impression of 'Limbuness', or what Anderson (2006[1983]) has referred to as an 'imagined community', possibly is central when it comes to ethnic, social and political mobilization. At this point, one may question to what extent these physical constructions are active institutions? The present study discloses that mainly

the study centers were not actively used, and the participation in the *Mangheem puja* appeared to be limited to people from urban areas. However, informants from both rural and urban areas often look upon Sirijinga as a symbol of Limbu. The present study reveals, the YMMCC's contrasting tendencies because the religious institution constitutes indispensable elements in the YMCCC pedagogy, due to the center's emphasis on education and organized religious meetings and worship.

Issues in Disputing the Practices of *Phedangma* Tradition

The researcher underwent a difficult situation during fieldwork because of being accompanied by the follower of the *Phedangma* tradition. It was also challenging due to the tendency of being directed toward *Phedangma*, or senior Limbu menfolk those who were regarded as knowledgeable about Limbu belief system, culture, and *Mundhum*. On different contexts, YMMCC followers, however, regarded *Phedangma* as unknowledgeable, and the researcher would find the Limbu belief system complex. Their unwillingness of the researcher's approach to the *Phedangma* and senior menfolk would be related to the perceived authority as well as chief position of the *Phedangma* as the 'custodian of culture and tradition.

Mundhum, play a significant role in the context of ritual and is passed down orally. It is believed, that *Phedangma* are incarnated and the vocations are kept in certain families for which the blood relationship matters. During the rituals that have been observed, *Phedangma* carried out the rituals without much involvement from the household members. To the highest degree, the rituals took place inside the house or near the house. Excluding rite de passage rituals, most of the rituals are carried down according to the biannual harvest seasons. The objectives of the household rituals are

to bring prosperity to the household, its members, clan and lineage. In rite de passage, such as marriage and death, ritual, family members and villagers, through the system of reciprocity, assist and celebrate together with the household host. Hither, social dimensions, such as belonging to a clan and geographical origin and place play a vital role.

According to informants, *Phedangma* have become debauch, since they started claiming that the Deities demanded meat and alcohol to be pleased. While the truth is, it is the *Phedangma* themselves who wanted to be served meat and alcohol. Hence, informants specified, ritual blood sacrifices are the creation of human beings and not something that infer straight from Deities. The overloaded negative narration on road to *Phedangma* might propose a desire to challenge the authority of the ‘custodians of tradition’.

The above-mentioned view of informants seems an attempt to redefine religious practices and a method of controlling the practices conducted by the *Phedangma*. One can see, if the decisions come from them, they would become the expert or the ‘keepers of the tradition’ - instead of the *Phedangma*. With this, it displays the layers of power-plays involved in terms of defining religion that is underlying factors of the changing religion scapes among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas.

Apart from the powerplays, also there is a social change which is central to take into consideration when reappraisal position of *Phedangma* tradition contemporary. The tradition of an apprenticeship through an older experienced *Phedangma* which must be undertaken during the first few times on the way to becoming a *Phedangma* is challenged by the changing social settings in the present day. For instance, education

is seemed to be perceived as important. Often, schools with good education facilities and colleges are always located away from native villages.

With this, thriving *Phedangma* are not able to speak in Limbu language being far from their native place. Of course, with the coming up of education it has increased job opportunities in urban areas. Nevertheless, keeping aside the increased interaction with urban lifestyle as such, a few people choose to stay back in rural villages. Some of the informant's fears about the seeming declining number and diminished power of *Phedangma* which are perhaps associated with the situations discussed in the lines mentioned above.

Routes of Syncretism and Anti-syncretism

The practice of non-Limbu ritual specialists and fluctuation in religious practices overall are intense that Limbu ritual traditions and ethnic boundaries are fluid and flexible. Hence, the usage of Yumaism- coining a single term that sets the Limbus ritual practice can be seen as 'anti-syncretic process' (Shaw and Stuart 1994:8). A single category defies the diversity, syncretistic characteristics, and fluidity in ritual practices. Likewise, processes of anti-syncretism effect, according to Shaw and Stuart- selecting and identifying religious elements as false (*Ibid* 1994). For instance, blood sacrifices in ritual traditions of Limbu.

In addition, *Mangheem* worship can be comprehended as an attempt to standardize a Limbu ritual. As seen, the *Phedangmaism* practices such as soul journeys, trance, and spirit possession do not appear to be hankered practices inside the *Mangheem*. Rather,

at least according to the finding of the present research, there are mostly the practices devoted to the single Goddess *Tagera Ningwaphuma*.

At the same time, the anti-syncretic tendencies are extremely syncretic. The philosophies and practices, for instance, community worship places, the assertion of a 'high' deity, community festivals, and cultural heritage objects are also found in other religions, particularly those that may be referred to as 'great' or 'world' religions. At this juncture, the politics of syncretism are evident. By syncretizing these fundamental elements in Yumaism, the religion seems similar to a 'great' religion, which can 'compete' in the ethnopolitical setting by exposing a robust, united and unique religious facade.

The process of syncretic and anti- syncretic is identifiable in YMMCC. The center's teachings can be viewed as anti-syncretic because they draw clear boundaries between themselves, and Yumaism, and the *Phedangma* tradition. Adding on, for instance, their introduction of an alternate ritual specialist is on the ground of remarking the 'old' *Phedangma* tradition as impure. However, they have been, in syncretic, integrated elements from Yumaism, for instance; *Mangheem*, administration building, community festivals, and *Mundhum*, but their importance and exercise are remolded. Hitherto, it can still be argued that these elements render a sense of "Limbuness".

Contrasted, to ceremonies present in the *Phedangma* culture, example getting good fortune to the house and the family. YMMCC accentuate a highly modified religion. It is learned, that YMMCC shares commonalities with other religious organizations that have emerged as at present day. For instance, an organization such as Sri Satya Sai Baba and Lovism has a substantial number of followers and the YMMCC have

adopted many of the elements shared by these organizations. The indigenous writer J.R Subba as well propagates parallel ideas to the YMMCC. Here, one can assume that his literary description of Yumaism is being highly influenced by ideas found among the reform religious movements.

Chapter 7

Contours of Limbu Identity Construction

It is a general notion that, Limbus is short-tempered. They wrangle amongst themselves, and the present researcher has seen at times, where they strike each other. “Why do Limbus fight with one another?” when asked to an elderly Limbu man (Informant in his 40’s), he stated that, “For there is jealousy and envy in Limbus blood since eternal. Quarrel between Limbu brothers is natural. Affirming what was reported, ‘their cold character is evinced by their numerous terms of egoism and hostility, and by the fact that the words of abuse exist in their language. Limbus self-presentation considered them to be short-tempered.

In this chapter, an examination of the reconstruction and route of Limbu identity in terms of the various socio-political developments responsible for the emergence of a common ethnic identity is presented. At present, Limbus has realized that the various boundaries between different Limbu groups are only ‘imagined realities’ because they have begun interacting with one another to overcome the religious and geographical division.

Overlooking the differences of the past and determined to change the course of history, Limbus refuses to accept the yester year’s identity. They are embracing their assertiveness and are also refusing to be the Hindu. Today, none of the Limbus in any of the three ethnographic field sites agrees that they are Hindu. They prefer to call Yumaist rather Hindu as they are all on the same bandwagon to safeguard Limbu culture. They have realized that the loss of religion, culture, tradition, mythology,

language, and literature can be regained and preserved only by Limbu themselves. Contemporary, Limbus are making a conscious attempt at the construction of a pan-Limbu identity as one can see an emergence of a shared identity.

Overlooking the religious boundaries consciously fashioned in a way that strengthens the social and political position of their fight for survival. There is an intentional effort to keep the difference between these religions aside and work hand in hand with each other in the construction of a shared religion and identity.



Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2: Tug of war between the menfolk (left). A little boy in traditional gear with *Chaybrung* (right)



Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.4: Bright yellow mustard blooms dazzle on a hillside (left).

Dried corn hanging on the balcony of a typical Limbu house (right)

Claims of Political Identity

Limbus claim that, there is a blunder in the way Limbus represent them whenever a census is conducted, as the strength of the Limbu population is blurred because of Limbus representing themselves with a different title. There is no uniformity among Limbu which labels them as one, but it can be said that their numerical status indirectly has been an alarming note to Limbus. At this point, the present researcher believes that, this may be one of the reasons for them receiving Schedule Tribe titles respectively²². This outwardly generated categorization is for the upliftment of the backward class people telling, a community on the receiving end. At the same time, it does not speak for what the tribal people think of themselves, Limbus do identify themselves with the official tribal identities that has given to them by their respective governments. In Sikkim and Darjeeling regions, Limbus can be seen as the

²²2001 census figure do not include Limbu and Tamang as scheduled tribes, they were accorded schedule tribe status in 2003

marginalized group that is in receipt of the government push through these categorizations with regard to seat reservations and stipends in education, employment, and development of the tribe. On the other hand, Limbus of Assam is categorized in the Other Backward Class category and is trying hard for the Schedule Tribe status.

Politically, there has been a representative to speak on behalf of the Limbus. Moreover, there have been Limbu candidates who fought elections and won the vote. On a side note, they have often been criticized for sticking to party lines and not doing anything for the community. However, the recent developments have seen an emergence of a new generation of educated 'Limbu elite' who are changing the political setting and the identity of the Limbus.

The following paragraphs depict the political movements in the Eastern Himalayas regions and examine the voices resounding in these hills. Comparatively, Limbus are behind other communities in several spheres particularly when it comes to education and employment, but in their own pace and manner, Limbus has been able to garner support and solidarity for their survival.

A Shift Towards Religious to Ethnic Identity?

In the contemporary times, the severe contradictions amid the teachings and practices of Hinduism on one hand, and association's version of Yumaism and YMMCC version of Yumaism, on the contrary are accountable for disintegration of the Limbus. The disintegration of religion amidst the Limbu community is openly discoursed. Nonetheless, the hidden fact is that earlier it was Sikkim that had a widespread notion

which later invented Yumaism as their religion in the name of civilization. It is noted that, at yester years, Limbus had already absorbed Hinduism and remained Hindu. However, at present, some Limbus was willing to convert to YMMCC with the perks of development which would indicate them as civilized in this modern era.

Equipped with education and knowledge of Limbus culture, a handful of converted Limbus worked for the preservation and promotion of Limbus culture. Nevertheless, the majority of them flaunted their newfound identity by imitating the new teachings of YMMCC and ignoring the traditional culture. In the process, YMMCC also lost Limbu stalwarts. Later, the gap widened when this community got involved with YMMCC events. The YMMCC believers did not contribute in the events organized by the Limbu community which further led to the unblemished partition from the Yuma²³ist Limbus. However, these margins of religion were made by the Limbu themselves. This was done into make the difference marking one social group from the other providing it with a model that separated different groupings in mind. Recently, it is because of the boundary-crossing behaviour between the Yumaist Limbu and YMMCC Limbus which have to leave out religion as a hurdle for their common purpose.

An informant in his 56s said, ‘religious boundaries should not be an obstacle, the Limbus whenever in need for Limbu cause should come together and be united. Indeed, the community’ solidarity should be an overwhelming phenomenon, as the religious divide seems non-existent at the end of the day’. At this point, the present research assumes, if Limbus belonging to different religions would shed their religious cloaks for a societal reason. The religious identity will be blurred on the one

²³Yumaist here refers to the Limbus who are the followers of associations version of Yumaism.

hand, while on the other hand it will acknowledge Limbus following different religions as an effort for the stability required of the society. Therefore, one can see, there is numerous ways on the routes to identity construction as its religious identity appears to be taking the form of a secular identity.

Making of Name as an Identity Marker

In the past days, a Limbu would pronounce a non-Limbu name for their child. Nevertheless, Limbus today is conscious and is on-trend of keeping the name of a child in Limbu, but why do Limbus want to keep a Limbu name for their child?

There is no denying when there would be a time when Limbus was fond of naming their children, especially with Hindu or Nepali names. If there were no last names, their name would not indicate their Limbu identity. In that case, a name is a vital identity marker as well. Name is a set of words through which an individual is identified. An individual name could be related to the language, religion, and place of that individual as religion, mythology, customs, beliefs, culture, folk tales, etc. get mirrored in the name of a community.

In Limbu society, the naming ceremony known as *Yangdang Phongma* is an important tradition, especially in traditionalist Limbu homes. At present, name choices for a new born baby are plenteous, but *Phedangma* is necessarily required to officiate the rituals even these days.

Besides, Limbus also has a gender-specific naming pattern, which even makes it easier to name the child. Suffixes like Hang/Hangma, which means king/queen, is used accordingly. Some names are used for both genders depending on the suffix used for instance, Uma Hang for a boy and Uma Hangma, for a girl. The instances

were mainly of the first name, which plays an integral part in one's name. It is this very word, that itself identifies the Limbu people. While the same would not be the case when a Limbu lacks the suffixes, in its name. In this milieu, the last name will show the Limbu identity, and the first names in the case of Limbus, apparently would prove otherwise.

In Sikkim, most of the Limbus has Limbu names, whereas Darjeeling and Assam Limbus carry both Hindu and Limbu names. So, the influence of different religion and culture has kick-off off non-Limbu, posing a question about their identity today.

However, the realization of an individual's identity in a name has finally struck the right chord by the educated Limbus, who are naming the present generation with Limbu names. At this juncture, the present research sees the name as an identity marker that is going through some changes to reaffirm the identity of Limbus.

Symbolic Representation: Neesaas a Limbu Community Flag

The Limbu Flag was widely used during the movement of demand for the restoration of Tsong seats which took place in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The flag of the Limbus comprised of three colors which are blue on the topmost side, the mid portion has the image of *Silam Sakma* which is colored white in it and the green below.

It is reported that, the color blue signifies for water and sky, while purity, truth and peace is symbolized by white color, in the same way, the color green symbolizes growth and harmony. It is said, to have put the symbol of a *Silam Sakma* was to reflect the identity of Limbus while bringing the fellow members of the community under one banner.

The flag is known as *Neesa* in the Limbu language and has indeed been a symbol of Limbu identity, and a uniting factor between Limbus. As of late, Limbus has been hoisting the flag on different Limbu occasions. It has become a symbol of Limbu identity and Limbus has started identifying with *Neesa* on various occasions.

Limbu villages/houses also started putting up the Limbu flag in their homes. It seems a way of displaying their identity to their ethnic backgrounds. Hoisting of *Neesa* in a way can be a secular rite in the construction of Limbu identity.



Figure 7.5 and Figure 7.6: Symbolically represented *Neesa* dangling above the Limbu houses (left). *Silam Sakma* (right)

Teyongshi Sirijuna

On December 8th every year marks the birth anniversary of Sirijunga, popularly recognized as a ‘revivalist hero’. The portrait of Sirijunga displaying him tied to a tree with arrows in his chest conveys the notions in the mind of ‘martyrdom’.

The *Mangheem* which is located in Martam, West Sikkim, is dedicated to Sirijunga. Martam is believed to be the place where Sirijunga was killed. This historically significant place links up history and religion while creating historical and religious

ground for the Limbus. Outside the *Mangheem*, a small statue of Sirijunga can be seen, while a more giant statue of him has been constructed on a hilltop near Hee Bermiok, West Sikkim.

Gaenzle (2011:287) has also observed the Sirijunga statue in Dharan, East Nepal. It can be said, the way of materializing and displaying symbols representing ethnic communities may have been seen concerning the current ethnopolitics of the nation.

Indeed, the Sirijunga statue displays the Limbus 'unique' symbol in Sikkim's landscape and marks their belonging. It could also be understood as a claim by Limbu society to have a 'great' tradition, parallel to Hinduism and Buddhism. Hence, Sirijunga as the symbol turns out to be crucial because he is one of the personified figures which could represent the Limbu community respectively. The ethnic association has invested considerable amounts of time and money in making the Sirijunga statue a symbol of Limbu. Additionally, Sirijunga is characterized as a cultural hero but, does not have a ritual function.

In addition, Sirijunga is believed to have sacrificed his life for the Limbu civilization as he saved the language, religion, and culture from being wiped out by Bhutia rulers. Sirijunga is fondly remembered, and his birth anniversary marks as a government holiday in Sikkim to commemorate his contribution to Limbu society. On 8th December every year, usually the day commences in the morning by *Phedangma* offering prayers at *Mangheem*, which is attended by only a handful of people. The celebration is a mark of respect to the cultural hero - Sirijunga.

In many ways, he is a hero- a great personality in which the Limbus finds solace and strength. For the community lagging, Sirijunga was somebody who withstood the stereotype and stood against his aggressors to give courage to Limbus. His historic

feats not only voice bravery but also have become a symbol of unity for Limbus today.

The birth anniversary of Sirijunga is a one-off occasion where Limbus, irrespective of their age, gender, and religion, and geography, flock to the venue proudly attired in their traditional attire. It has somehow been a deliberate effort to bring Limbus together from all walks of life under the name of Sirijunga's birth anniversary. All the Limbus remembers their adored Sirjunga on his birth anniversary. Indeed Sirijunga- the cultural hero as the inclusion of symbol can be sensed as a brilliant integration into the imagined state.

Cleavage to Convergence

Informant in his 60's opined, if individual Limbus acts alone, then the Limbu community will never thrive. Regardless of different religions, Limbus should unite and put an effort together to benefit the Limbu society (Fieldwork 2020).

Harka Khamdhak (chief editor of Emeytnasung), is acknowledged as someone passionate about the Limbu language and literature. His intense effort on the issue of the Limbu Emeytnasung (annual Limbu magazine) itself proves his love for Limbu community. His hard work encourages young Limbu to be aware and take the initiative to be the custodian of Limbu culture and tradition. One can see the finest effort made by the Limbu counterparts to come jointly belonging to different religious backgrounds in constructing the Limbu community identity. At this backdrop, education, and social networking sites, such as Facebook will be examined further as these have become the factor of convergence in the construction of Limbu identity.

Role of Modern Education in Limbu Society

Education has paved the way for dialogue and action among the Limbus. There was a time when Limbus would not have easier access to education, but with the development of the education system, Limbus is on equal footing today. They have been well educated, exposed, and passionate about the role of education in reinforcing their traditional values.

It was informed, that parents wanted their children to know about their traditional culture. Also, they are keen on giving the best education to their children, which often means sending them away from the village, or even to a different state for further studies. There is thus a fear of losing one's culture in the plethora of cultures they get exposed to, but it is often that place where the cultural consciousness begins.

An informant in his 30s said, that having attended a school out of his native place all his life, he did not speak the language, nor was he aware of Limbu oral traditions while growing up. Hence, he was embarrassed of not knowing anything about his own culture when away from home and vowed to educate himself about his traditional heritage. With that zeal, he started talking in the Limbu language. There was enthusiasm in his quest as he said, "our mother tongue is already in our blood, we just need to make an effort to speak".

It is engaging to note that, the young generation of today has taken the initiative in many ways in uniting Limbus of different regions under the same umbrella. Likewise, one could see educated Limbus have become promoters of Limbu tradition and culture. The religious gap of the yesteryears has slowly vanished as the community has rather strengthened the spirit of belongingness. It has not only

made them cognizant of their culture but has encouraged them to engage in activities that can prolong their community identity.

It is seen some students had appeared for secondary exams but failed and could not make it to 12th grade, but there were students who were pursuing their 12th grade. Similarly, there were bachelors, and post-graduate students from all the three villages of Assam, Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The dearth of emphasis on education is a matter of concern among the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas. In all the three villages of selected ethnographic sites, there were schools near the villages, but one had to walk to the next village to attend senior secondary school. It is reported that, if one were to attend a good school, he/ she would have to walk uphill finding affordable transportation to reach school or go via bus. In such instances, it was somewhat easier to stay back at home and give a helping hand to parents to do chores in the house and the fields. The parents would appreciate the extra help and did not seem to make an intense effort to boost their child to go to school, as it tends to be expensive to send a child to school. Another reason for dropping is the students' failure to be promoted to a higher grade.

In Roads of Media: Facebook and Fashion

In the era of social networking today, many people, irrespective of their age, has access to Facebook. With an easy access to internet on an individual's mobile phones, the Limbus of Eastern Himalayas also have been noticed to be the active users of Facebook.

Few internet-savvy Limbus have created Facebook pages to share their knowledge on Limbu-related issues. For instance; Limbu Rituals & Cultural, Limboos around the

world, *Yakthung Pan Him*, Limbu tribe, we are Limbu, All Limboo/ Limbu/ Subba/Yakthung community, *Limbu Sanskar Sanskriti Page Ma Swagat Chh Yaha Harulai Sewaro*, Limbu community, Development of Limboo language and cultural, World mixed Limbu group.

Of the many pages on Facebook talking about Limbus, the present researcher may refer to the pages that are most frequently visited by Facebook browsers. “Limbus around the world” is the Facebook page for Limbus on the World Wide Web. There are about 3.6 k members, it has been used for Limbu related events and news taking place globally.

“Limbu Rituals and Cultural” is another page that has 32.1k members. It was created on 10th June 2018. It has become a platform to share Limbu culture, and tradition, and in a way, it is also the quickest method for a news announcement. Undeniably, there has been interest in using this form of social networking in order to develop more consciousness and enable cultural awareness among Limbus. At this point, one can say that this enabled them to construct community identity and markedly show Limbu identity worldwide.

Religious Endurance and Co-Existence

The Limbus believe that major religion like Hinduism cannot embraced per se, fathoming that their belief system is different and inadaptable to cultural system of Limbus. For instance, the class-based society of Hindus categorized into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra is deemed adverse practice for homogenous and classless Limbu society.

Also, the Hindus abomination of beef intake differs with Limbu food habits- who are voracious meat eaters. Thus, from religious posture, YMMCC is comparatively regarded befitting and accepted largely. Nevertheless, today, in the environment of religious perplexity, the Limbus ascribes to religious pluralism and tolerance for communal harmony. The Limbus advocate for sympathy, caring, cooperation, forbearance, and counselling for each other.

As per informant (Fieldwork 2019), “the right to profess any particular faith is upon person’s choice- one may choose to remain adhering traditional Limbu religion or accept YMMCC”. At individual level, the consanguineal affinity somehow abet in minimizing the presentiment of religious discrepancy and fall-outs. Therefore, it becomes unavoidable for non-YMMCC families or relatives to shoulder their certitude and hold back from denigrating their alien faith due to inherent blood ties.

Instilled with same rationality, the YMMCC eschews from mortifying the traditionalists by reckoning necessity for integration with Yumaist family member or relatives. Despite allegation for cultural loss and non-compliance in social events, the YMMCC followers exhort traditionalist group to probe and empathize the rationale behind their abstinence from ritualistic entities.

Hitherto, in lieu of negotiation, the YMMCC followers affirm to evade drinking and rituals practices, despite their surety for decent nature, speech and actions. As per collective colloquial, if both the religious groups adopt and render equal efforts for cultural preservation, then the religious disparities won’t matter and exist.

To embark on a confirmatory venture, the Yumaist has to literally initiate billeting and inviting YMMCC followers in traditional events, rather than being silent seekers. Thus, in the milieu of perplexity and procrastinated reconciliatory undertaking - either

the YMMCC followers need to voluntarily involve themselves in social events or Yumaists followers have to convivially invite them in traditional activities, though pragmatic implementations and its affirmative upshots may seemingly require and take longer time.

Syncretic Ways of Conversion

In the progressive course of Limbus, imputation of YMMCC followers as catalyst of cultural shift (from traditional to modern) and declining culture is arguably erroneous and parochial. In this stance, besides YMMCC, the factors of cultural changes are clearly manifold.

To ponder upon the Limbus, the various developmental activities have affected the housing patterns. Turning away from living in traditional thatched houses, the Limbus now prefer modern buildings made of Reinforce Concrete Cement (RCC) with iron-sheet or tiled roofs. The houses are embellished with interior designing and supplemented with varieties of appliances. The kitchen wares consist of utensils obtained from market fridge, Chinese potteries, food blenders, stove, oven etc. Many families afford personal transport like cars and two wheelers for easy mobility.

In place of simple dietary habits comprising rice, meat, and vegetable that is cooked (steamed, boiled or roasted) with local ingredients, the culinary currently includes oil, spices, recipes, and techniques such as frying, baking, steaming, marinating, microwaving, and barbequing.

The dietary includes market stuffs like packed foods, fruits, vegetables, sterilized milk, sugar, biscuits, bakery items, juices, vindicated meat, and fish. Today, there is

greater appetite for exotic foods like the American Hamburger and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Italian pizza, Chinese Chow-Mien and Tibetan Momo and *Faley*.

Many are adapted to drinking imported alcohols; smoking cigarettes and Beedi; munching beetle-nut and gutka in supplementation to habits of drinking and pipe smoking.

With surge of globalized market space, distinctive changes are palpable in existing vogue of clothing patterns. In consequence, the young people have nowadays adapted to merchandise readymade dresses, Indian Khadi garments, branded western apparels like formal suits, shoes, shirts, short pants, jeans etc., with successive market trends. This has minimalized the regular wearing of traditional attires. The traditional dress is preferably worn only during social-gatherings and celebrations. The weekly markets held in the town areas fetch various goods and articles vended by the outsiders. The women with greater choice of available market products and designs purchase glaring clothes and cosmetics.

Among the youths (both girls and boys), a greater penchant is seen for enhancing their looks with varying hairstyles (short and long) and colors. Undeniably, this tendency indicates clear detestation of old-fashioned such as bowl-shaped haircut and reception of newer styles.

As part of profitable enterprise, regularly circulated newspapers reach to the farthest places and keep well-informed with regard to daily events. The news broadcasting media and popular internet social media like Facebook helps to keep abreast of latest events; sharing information and abridging gap between friends and families.

In the aesthetic sphere, the traditional festivals have taken a reformatory makeup. The Limbus today hosts annual harvest festival with mass throng of revellers from different villages; captivated with cultural-night.

Numerous festivals, formal and informal get-togethers, marriage, and birthday parties are ecstaticized with merriment attuned to modern Limbu and Bollywood songs. More often, popular Bollywood songs are played in each house, localities, and market areas. Limbus of each age group is avid of watching Bollywood movies during leisure times. These predilections have pressed down the value and essence of old-style folksongs and dances among youths.

The classy socializing functions like birthday, engagement, wedding, marriage anniversaries, and house-warming parties are to some extent normal among Limbus today. In the get-togethers, well decorated and extravagant pandals are erected; cakes are arranged from bakeries for birthday; extravagant feast is thrown for the guests; rings are exchanged during engagement ceremony and marriage with bestowal of expensive gifts. With arrival of winter, families or friends drive out for picnic and celebrate New-Year party. This delight for borrowed events has ameliorated traditional customs of birth, marriage, and death feast in more unconventional way.

Conclusion

The docile Limbus of yesteryears had been educated. At one time, there was a religious division within Limbus, however, education had imparted them to put aside their religion-based identities and unite with one another for the betterment of the tribe.

Today, Limbus are connecting through social network sites, across religious and regional boundaries to put an effort together and assert Limbu ethnic distinctiveness. They are in the realization that the responsibility lies in the hands of Limbus itself, to maintain the distinct identity. Limbus understood that the loss of religion, culture, tradition, and language, can be conserved only by Limbus themselves.

Fostering unity across regions and religions, the modern secular Limbus are undoubtedly key players in the route of their community identity. They are becoming culturally visible, articulating a broader definition of Limbu culture and identity.

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusions

‘Every Limbu individual, irrespective of their different religion by faith, consentaneously agreed upon them being initial Limbus by blood’ (Fieldwork 2019).

An informant said, that “the sense of “Limbuness” contributes to identity construction among Limbus”. Moreover, the present research has come across, all Limbus, irrespective of different religion, are making conscious efforts for the upliftment of the community, and amalgamation of the Limbu into one.

As epitomic reference, belonging to the different religious background, Limbus jointly has also certainly revived the idea of Limbu unity. To this line, the imprint Limbus is giving is highly optimistic. It is hoped, that the feeling of “Limbuness” will possibly erase the religious boundaries and be a landmark for Limbus. Indeed, this is not an easy task to get done in an instantaneously. Given the famous saying, “Good work takes time”, that would for sure take a lot of time. The silent hostility among the dual set aroused the feeling to us versus them. The varied devout individuality would not disappear so soon. Hitherto, it has been informed, that an effort has been laid to identify Limbus as an amalgamated community.

The contemporary trend of cultural loss, acculturation of westernization superseding traditional lifestyle, preferences of Nepali, and English language, replacing native dialects, and acculturation of new, and syncretic entity on age-old belief system, noticeably seems disadvantageous to existing Limbu culture. In more extraordinary vivacity, the reformation of the indigenous faiths viz. Yumaism, and YMMCC has

been attuned to praxis of extraneous religions. To this aspect, Informant states, “The changing time probably calls for, change in traditional practices, even if dilution in the tag of religion makes it seem alien to most of us [Limbus]. Those grew at times, when Limbu traditional practices were still a part of lives, although several traditional practices made us flinch” (Fieldwork 2020).

In the present research, it has examined an influence of Hinduism among Limbus of Eastern Himalayas. It was obvious for Limbus, that being exposed to other religions, the construction of varied religious identities was bound to become problematic at the core of the Limbu community identity. Karlsson (2000:19) has remarked that the one’s identity is never static, neither do they appear from nowhere, it is made via primary associations, by relations, and is always intricate in the phase of translation (Karlsson 2000: 19, Longkumer 2010: 12). In context to Limbus, the religion exposure in affirmed sentence only intended to mean changing culture, and constructing an identity that has its pro and cons in different context.

This research delineated the age-old belief systems of the Limbus, and the advent of Hinduism, for which Limbus imitated. Limbus belonging to the community had no term for religion, until they were accustomed and started following Hindu religion, and recognized their society as the believer of Hindu religion.

The recognition of the newlyfound religion drastically altered the way they looked the world, their living, and the identity of the Limbu society. In context to Hindu religion, Limbus was successful in retaining the remains from previous tradition, as Limbus practiced traditional religion and Hinduism side by side. Promoting syncretism meant both the religion and culture. At this juncture, the Limbu community were efficient in making union of their own choices, with Nepali ethnic

group, with Hindu religion that aided as a shared group helping in the formation of collective identity. With cultural invasion from Hinduism, the Limbus strive to preserve their cultural identity.

Other than that, Hindu religion was not officially familiarized. The existence of Hindu was something which could not be overlooked, since Limbus immersed the traits of Hindus that interrogated Limbus religious identity. Limbus influenced by Hinduism was to syncretize not just the culture, but the traditional Limbu religion, and Hinduism. Having outlined the basic gist of present research, where Hinduism has been characterized by absorption, one can sum up, which the cultural changes occurred in Limbu social structure across different geographical regions influenced by the Hindu religion. Moreover, this research demonstrates several similarities and dissimilarities concerning the Limbus social structure living in the Eastern Himalayas.

The Limbu family is still a small unit, as they prefer nuclear families in all the three ethnographic regions of the Eastern Himalayas. Their clan system is still intact to patrilineal descent.

A marriage system among the Limbus was clan exogamous, and the intermarriage between Sikkim and Darjeeling Limbus was more prevalent. It was desirable to marry within the Limbu community, however they were fine if they married other tribal community. People married late in their lives as they keep searching partners from the same community, which limited choices in proper alliance for nuptial.

The kinship system among Limbus remained unharmed, although there exist some linguistic changes, as Limbu terms were being replaced by Nepali terms.

There has been an ‘awakening’ (Anderson 2006) about Limbu language. The birth of Limbu language winter classes in Darjeeling and Assam shows an attempt to reclaim authority in their mother tongue. Sometimes, Limbus who already know the language are known for creating a linguistic boundary, excluding those who do not know the Limbu language. Nevertheless, ‘language is not an instrument of exclusion’ (Anderson 2006: 134). Anyone who makes an effort, can learn the language, and for that Limbus are headed in the right direction.

In context to Sikkim, the Limbus have been fortunate to have the school system and Sikkim Central University recognizing the Limbu language up till Ph.D. level. Darjeeling Limbus are optimistic about the Government of West Bengal, announcing an introduction of Limbu language in the school system. However, for Limbus of Assam, the lack of government facilities to safeguard the Limbu language is a matter of concern.

Taking account of socio-cultural facets, it is coherent to note, that the most potent boundary marker was drinking *Thi*. It is vitally used in rite de passage, pacifying different Deities and consumed as a festive beverage and elixir after tiresome labors in agricultural fields. *Thi* is that one thing, which strongly separated Yumaism, and the YMMCC followers. The restriction on alcoholic drinking, imposed by center marked the boundary amongst the Yumaism and YMMCC followers. At this juncture, one may say that, because of its alcoholic nature, a line is drawn between them [Limbus], putting the YMMCC Limbus in the latter category.

Nevertheless, why was *thi* such a thing that demarcated the boundary? One of the core reasons, was that Limbus would offer this alcoholic beverages to the supernatural being in every event. This alcoholic drink is also scattered in the open air

for the purification usually with the pipe, which is used to sip the same. It plays an integral part in rite de passage such as birth, marriage and death and other occasions too. Most of the Limbus does not know the story of origin of the *thi*, but they do recall the famous saying, '*Rakshi khanu janyo bhaney dabai, khanu janena bhaney bish*'- 'If you know how to drink *thi* in correct manner, it is medicinal, but if you do not know how to drink *thi*, it is poisonous. Indeed, the drinking of the *Thi* has been blamed for the collapse of Limbu community. Nevertheless, through its mythical origin and the attached story, the present research sees, brewing, preparing, drinking and offering of *thi* as an essential unifying phenomenon.

On another note, despite belonging to different religions by faith, parents today encourage their children, especially those studying or working outside their native places, to retain traditional dress. It is construed, that wearing the outfits at festive events abets in showcasing Limbu identity in distant places. Similarly, in the traditional attire outlook, the Limbu dress, for instance, is the emergent fashion among the womenfolk. It is noticed that Limbu women clad Limbu dress as casual, and even in departmental offices at times. The Limbu Pore (embroidery design) is known as appealing and perceivably voguish to many.

With promising sagacity of 'cultural preservation', the elites recognized Yumaism as the Limbus religion. Their primary goal envisioned revitalizing the indigenous belief system. The basic idea for revitalizing [Yumaism] was to preserve age-old belief system, promote a more significant sphere, and have their own religious identity. However, the Limbus has germinated Yumaism with the invention of two categories, one category demonstrates the Limbu traditional belief system and on the other hand, another category [YMMCC] contests the traditional belief system, with its religious reformist nature.

In the milieu of Yumaism, contrarily, recognition to YMMCC was the beginning of a development of Limbu religion, the common mistake of the Limbus was deciding to part ways from the age-old traditional belief system that considered them to be those defectors. This belief among the YMMCC [center's version of Yumaism] identity was challenged by the Yumaism [association's version of Yumaism] followers [Limbus], those who held them responsible for neglecting traditional belief systems. A boundary, built between Yumaism Limbus and YMMCC, created different religious identities, which differentiated them into 'us' and 'them'.

In the present, YMMCC worship order, reformist *Sri Sri Yuma Mang* gained the status of revered 'deific figure' along with portraits of Sirijunga. The followers admire her charisma, and in-depth acuity of center's philosophy. As of now, YMMCC followers light incense and offer garland over her portrait and prayerfully pay homage with folded hands. Based on the fieldwork, it is coherent to establish, that the traditionalists [Yumaism] claim the tradition of the age-old belief systems as 'original' and despise the newer form. In this regard, a question lies, is it appropriate for YMMCC to claim their religion as Yumaism and identifying themselves as Yumaist, when they are embracing change and forsaking Limbu belief systems? The YMMCC must realize that their version of Yumaism has already diluted the essence of the traditional belief system with the blending of Satya Hangma elements.

In the Limbu context, the changing religious esteem is a personal matter which involves individual's divine experience. On this premise, the YMMCC teaching is deemed uncomplicated and easily adaptable. The prayers connote functional aspects for salvaging personal problems and healing mechanisms. In behavioural facets, the followers affirm, acquiring the wisdom from YMMCC's doctrines. However, in retrospect, the center's ideology imposing worship of 'single God' forced the

followers, to disengage from all facets of age-old beliefs and practices. Along that line, worshipping local Deities is assumed to validate veneration and appeasement of various Deities, which according to YMMCC teachings is wrong.

Aside from that, it is vital to note that, after the revitalization process, even the Yumaism have resolved to curtail ritual sacrifices and put more weight on fruits and flowers offerings. The associations decided to curb 'blood sacrifice' in rituals, seeing the economic burden, in expensive offerings such as animal sacrifice. It was reported, in past days, when blood sacrifices were obligatory, most of the Limbu family, were compelled to sell their ancestral land, which made them poor. Indeed, the reason for the downfall of the Limbu community. Hence, the associations urged, to bring the changes in the ritual traditions with low-cost rituals.

In hindsight, the Limbu ritual specialists performed prognostic rites with fowl, egg, rice, and revelations through visions. Nevertheless, at present-day, when one sees in YMMCC teachings, the traditional practices, is replaced with religious prayers. In addition, instead of the evil spirit repellent rituals, Kohl (black dots) is rather applied on kids forehead to repel incursion of evil spirits, which gives an impression of Hindu influence, among the Limbus. Likewise, the YMMCC teachings, have also adapted the Christian tradition of avoiding alcoholic drinking.

In outlining the major revelation from this thesis, in a nutshell, the socio-religious differences between Limbu segments probably have a crucial role in the changing religious scapes one sees in Eastern Himalayas contemporary. Overall, the research has shown, that religious changes promoted by Limbu associations revolve around processes of Limbu identity construction. In light of this result, it is hoped, that the

readers now have improved insight into some of the manifold reasons and ways of explaining the religious and cultural transitions within the Limbus.

On the whole, central to this thesis has been the formation of Yumaism, as the unique Limbu religion. What one now sees is, that by constructing their worship place, Limbus are making a point to their surrounds that they are not who also belongs to the Hindu religion but, they are the distinct group having their separate religion. The present researcher reasons; physical construction is most potent when claiming a distinct community identity. Paradoxically, the associations seek to construct a distinct Limbu identity

In a recapitulation of the comprehensive treatise, in changing scenarios, the changes were inevitable. It is the dynamic configurations of religion and identity that continually interact and has reshaped the Limbu identity. With the decreasing differences between religious boundaries of Limbus, the sense of “Limbuness” lies in certain developments in lieu of the Limbu cause. It has allowed them in solidarity across religious boundaries displaying a stronger unified front. The religious divide of the yesteryears is no more a problem, as Limbus is seen as embracing a secular religious identity that overlooks the religious differences. So far, they have been successful in creating a cultural consciousness that has facilitated group solidarity. For the time being, there is the much-needed ‘One-ness’ among Limbus thriving in Eastern Himalayas.

Despite, the need for imparting nous of religious tolerance to accept the religious differences, the negotiation between the counterparts seems doubtful given that the exclusionism from revering any local Deities (among YMMCC). The Limbus are seemingly dichotomised into two categories, ‘Yumaism’ vs. ‘YMMCC’. These two

sets observe festivals and ritual traditions of Limbus separately. On the one hand, Yumaism sustains age-old ritual traditions and festivals while on the other hand, YMMCC observes several centers' events. During fieldwork, it is witnessed, that the YMCC maintains pessimistic views towards the non-believers.

In aspects of necessity, the Limbus need to introspect, revive and adapt appropriate resolutions in order to reinstate the religious difference. However, the initiatives must not be at cost of acculturating modernity, syncretic course and exclusivity. The center's boundary marker behaviour in religious context has brought friction against their own people which may be assumed as inanity. At this juncture, the YMMCC must realize that the center's teachings have already diluted the essence of traditional belief systems with blending of other religions elements. If not realized in time, the front runners of Limbu religion and culture have a foreseeably dismal future, either altering into a completely distorted religion.

In continuity prospect, the dynamism of animosity, and alienation based on religiosity remain indomitable often retriggering spasmodic religious issues. The YMMCC and Yumaism skirmish exists as endless pursuits. The reticent antipathy of 'us' and 'them' continue to remain amongst the religious groups. The prospect of negotiating religious break lurks as a farsighted dream since both groups abstain from undertaking constructive measures. Albeit a grim vista of overhaul, still the optimistic reflexion and pledge to resolve disparity with collective striving for cultural adjustment would serve religious tolerance and co-existence. The sentience of religious issues would help to do away with controversies. As the Limbu culture is inevitable from undergoing transition with advancing time, the viability of adjustment course ultimately depends on individual's choice. Yet, the shared consciousness for retaining the indigeneity remains fundamental at any cost.

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Appendices

Glossary

Ablak: A garland made of *Rudraksha* seeds which are worn by Limbu ritual specialist across their chest while conducting rituals.

Ajo Goka/Tsong Goka/ Kame Ajo: A deity associated with the Limbus, as per Balikci (2008:377) which is worshipped by Lhopos all over Sikkim.

Balihang Tongnam: A revived festival of Limbus. The activities, which take place during the festival closely resemble the Nepali festival of Tihar, where people visit each other houses playing *deusi* and *bhailini*. Balihang is believed to have been an ancient king of Limbus who survived a severe illness, and people therefore spread the joyful news of his survival to their neighbours.

Chasok-Thisok Tongnam/ Chasok Tongnam: Harvest festival.

Chaubandi Cholo: Wrapper and blouse traditionally worn by Nepali womenfolk.

Chemjong: Limbu clan.

Chumlung: Limbu council.

Chyabrun/Ke: Long cylindrical hollow log drum used for festive occasions by Limbus.

Dasai: Festival celebrated by different ethnic Nepali communities.

Daura Suruwal: Traditional Nepali menswear.

Falaincha/ Ipung Heem: Gravestone.

Guru/Yeming: The incarnate shaman's tutelary deities/ tutelary protector from whom they receive their powers when carrying out rituals.

Hang/Hangma: Suffix to male/female, or powerful person that is king or 'ancestor', according to Sagant (1996([1976]): 108).

Heem/Him/Khim: House.

Iksading Khamdek Den: Earth.

Kanchi: Youngest.

Khamdhak: Limbu clan especially found in Darap West Sikkim.

Khukuri: Machete shaped knife used by most hill communities but symbolically associated with the Eastern Nepal and Indian Gorkhas.

Kipat: Land-holding system of the Rai and Limbu communities in the Eastern Himalaya.

Kirat/ Kiranti/ Kirata: Kirat speakers of the Tibeto-Burman language.

Kitli: Pitcher.

Kodo: Millet.

Lappeta Sumba/ Daural Suruwal: Traditional attire for Limbu menfolk.

Lho Mon Tsong Sum Agreement: A legal document signed by leaders from the three mentioned groups: Bhutia (Lho), Lepcha (Mon) and Limbu (Tsong) in 1663, can be seen as an attempt to stop rebellions against the Chogyal.

Lung: Stone.

Mangdan/Mangdhan/Mangtan/Sangbhe: The eight-stepped pyramid-shaped altar inside the *Mangheem* both in associations version of *Mangheem* and YMMCC *Mangheem*. The *Mangdan/Sangbhe* is believed to symbolize the eight top-most realms.

Mangheem: Limbu worship place.

Matwali: Alcohol drinking ethnic groups, which were placed below the Brahmins and Kshatriyas but above the untouchable castes in the caste hierarchy by Jung Bahadur Rana in Nepal.

Mekhim: Marriage.

Morcha: Yeast cake.

Mujingna Khewangnama and *Sodhungen Lepmu*: Limbu Progenitors.

Mundhum: Oral literature chanted by the ritual specialist verbally. On the contrary, the YMMCC has scriptualized, and are the words of *Sri Sri Yuma Mang*- the worldly incarnation of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* who resides in Darap West Sikkim in her residency.

Murumsitlang/ Hangsitlang: The central pillar in Limbu households.

Nahangma: Sagant describes it as a warrior deity and a beautiful woman, armed with a bow, shield, sword and perhaps a helmet, and is believed to dwell on a snowy

mountain. A rivalry between *Nahangma* and *Yuma* is evident in a myth, which Sagant believes to have given precedence to the 'Yuma cult'. In order to ritually bring prosperity to the clan or 'raise the head' of the head of the household, a ritual for *Nahangma* must be carried out. However, *Nahangma* is also referred as war dance.

Nahen: Jealousy. It appears to be referred to as a spirit or negative emotion which can cause severe harm to the household.

Neesa: Limbu community flag.

Negara: Kettledrum.

Okwanama/Awkwanama: A Limbu deity associated with *Murumsitlang* or is perceived as a turtle or a supporter of the universe, or a deity of the land or soil. According to Sagant (1996[1976]) the deity has similarities with *gzhi-bdag* or *sa-bdag*.

Phedangma tradition: The "older" shamanistic ritual traditions of the Limbus, where rituals are carried out for the prosperity of clan, lineage, harvests, the household and its members inside or near the household. Ritual animal sacrifices are done in order to appease the deities and spirits.

Phedangma: An umbrella term for all ritual specialists, but is also a specific type of an incarnate shaman who deals primarily with household rituals and deities, as well as natural deaths.

Phuktanglungma Pembungma / Kumbhakarna: Mount Kanchenjunga.

Samyukna Den: Ancestor's place.

Sangram Pedang Den: The highest realm where the God dwells or the country of God.

Satya Hangma Movement: A socio-religious reform movement founded by Lingden Phalgunanda in the year 1920.

Satya Hangma: Truthful prince

Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Yambami Mang: Creator God of Limbus.

Sikari: A Limbu hunter deity, but is also claimed to be a Rai deity.

Silam Sakma: Limbu symbolic figure. *Silam Sakma* is derived from the three Limbu word *si*- death, *lam*-path, and *sakma*- to block which together means blocking the path of death.

Sim/Phariya: Traditional dress for the Limbu women.

Sirijunga Script: Limbu script.

Sirijunga Teyongshi: The second incarnation of the Limbu cultural revivalist hero.

Sirijunga Xin Thebe: The first incarnation of the Limbu cultural hero.

Sirpong: Small brass bell.

Sogha: It refers to an natural death's spirit.

Sri Sri Yuma Mang: The worldly incarnation of *Tagera Ningwaphuma* according to the teachings of the YMMCC.

Subba: A title for a village chief. Commonly used as a surname of Limbus.

Suingneem: Alternate ritual specialist of YMMCC.

Tagera Ningwaphuma: Often perceived as the main, 'high', and omnipresent deity or goddess.

Thisok/ Thi: Rice liquor which is often offered during ritual contexts.

Thums: Place.

Tongba: Beer made from fermented millet and is often offered to deities during rituals.

Tongnam: Festival.

Tsong: It describes Limbus of Sikkim.

Tumyanghang/ Jatisamaj: Limbu village council consisting of both male and female seniors.

Yakthung Pan: Limbu language.

Yakthungba /Yakthungma: The Limbus endonym for male and female.

Yathala: 'Brass plate'- the ritual specialists use during rituals to invoke their *guru* or other deities.

Yeba/Yaba/Ye/Yea: Male incarnate ritual specialists, who mainly appease evil or harmful spirits, carry out death rituals in cases of unnatural deaths. This type of shaman is not allowed to carry out *Mangheem puja*, according to association members.

Yeebungden: Graveyard.

Yehang: A religious Limbu council, probably on a village level.

Yema: Female incarnate ritual specialists who carries out similar rituals as the *Yeba*.

Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center: A revivalist movement seeking to purify and improve Yumaism by challenging the Yumaism promoted by the associations. The shamans found in the *Phedangma* tradition are rejected, and have instead replaced them with the *Suingneem*.

Yuma Samyo: 'Yuma Religion' another name for Yumaism (J.R. Subba 2012b: iii).

Yuma: *Yuma* means grandmother in Limbu terminology. According to Fitzpatrick, *Yuma* means 'to come down' and is used to describe 'descending to a lower area', as well as the verbs 'sitting' and 'staying' (2011: 62). *Yuma* is also referred to a type of ritual specialist.

Yumaism: The Limbu religion promoted by the Limbu associations. The indigenists or the Limbu ethnic association members does not reject the *Phedangma* tradition, but is promoted as a 'great' tradition, a unified and systematized religion of the Limbus.

Yuparung Hupma: Engagement.