CHAPTER: 2

THEORIES OF IMMIGRATION

The first chapter dealt with the definitions of ethnicity and the causes that led to the rise of ethnic consciousness among the people of the state of Sikkim and especially among the Limboos. So, this chapter will deal with the fluidity of the identity of the Limboos that have been one of the reasons for the rise of ethnic consciousness. Drawing on the theories laid down by several authors, this chapter examines the continuously re-defined and re-interpreted identity issue of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim. The chapter starts with what Limboos believes to be their historical land; battles and conquest and the drawing of the geographical boundaries which made the Limboo population straddle between the two nations of Nepal and India. Such fluidity of the geographical boundaries has confused these tribesmen and has made them search for their identity. The history writing has given various designations to them and has further added to their confusion. So, the chapter deals with those theories given by several authors regarding the origin and migration stories of this tribe. The old members of this tribe believes that there are several places in Sikkim which was named by their ancestors, thus those names have been collected which in some ways authenticate the presence of Limboos in the land of Sikkim from the time immemorial.

HISTORICAL LAND OF THE LIMBOOS

The history of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim is the history of little known which might need a lengthy introduction. Such unknown history makes it important for the researcher to inform the readers, their land and location before going on to explain their changing identity. In fact, the relation between the land and the people is fundamental to understanding of history. At every turn of events the land exerts its influence, sometimes broad and obvious, at
other times subtle. But this influence is always there. The land influences the people themselves. There is a mutual relationship between a people and the land they inhabit. Just as the people mould and use the land to suit their purposes, so the land itself forces an adaptation on the people, even shaping their thinking and outlook on life; also making them change their location and ultimately their identity. The influence that land exerts on the people makes it important to start the narratives of the Limboo with their land and the part of the community within which they live. The pressure of the land and its environment on the Limboos are seen in their very nature, food habits, culture, tradition, religion and their identity formation.

The oral narratives term the historical land of Limboo as Limbuwan\(^1\), thereby claiming modern eastern Nepal and modern western Sikkim to be their homeland. No doubt, the worship of Mt. Khangchendzonga by the Limboos itself certifies that this community has been living in the place flanking on both sides of this mountain, since the time immemorial. Mt.Khangchendzonga occupies an important place among them. The mountain is revered by this people on all their occasions, whether sowing the seed or while reaping the fruit of their labour. Even the Limboo priests talks about the presence of their ancestral home\(^2\) in the areas around the holy mountain. The use of the word Limbuwan to depict their homeland might have been due to the frequent use of the word ‘Li-abu’. Such frequent use of the word ‘Li-abu’ meaning bow and arrow by the Limboos as their important weapon might have made their neighbour designate them as Limboo and their land as Limbuwan. As the word ‘Li’ in the Limboo language refers to bow and ‘abu’ means arrow. In fact, bow and arrow is used in Limboo rituals such as marriage, religious ritual and most importantly for asking blessing

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1 The Limboo claims modern east Nepal and modern western Sikkim (India) to be their ancestral land. Here, the word Limbuwan has been used as constructed by the Limboos.

2 When searching for the spirit of their deceased ancestor, the Limboo priest goes beyond the mountaion of Khangchedzonga whether to help an individual raise his head high or help a deceased get their way on their death.
from God for the protection of man-kind. Even their King Sirijunga Hang\(^3\) is seen to be carrying bow and arrow as his weapon in the pictures and images that are found in Limboo houses.

According to their oral narratives, Limbuwan was divided into seventeen thums (districts) and was ruled by the ten powerful chiefs. This land of Limbuwan is said to be conquered by them through the use of bows and arrows. Though their oral narration talks about the ten Limboo chiefs, it never discusses about their supreme king\(^4\). The absence of the supreme King might have made the Limboos get attached to Sikkim through an annual tribute; thereby accepting the suzerainty of Phuntsok Namgyal, the first king of Sikkim. As Mullard\(^5\) writes that ‘by and large the areas directly under the control of Phuntsok Namgyal can be identified with the regions in modern western Sikkim, small parts of eastern Nepal (namely parts of Limbuwan) and the areas just east of Ravangla (now in modern south Sikkim administrative division)’.

The treaty of Lho Mon Tsong sum\(^6\) signed by the three ethnic communities of Sikkim i.e. the Bhutias, Lepchas and Limboos, itself certifies the early settlement and the importance of Limboos in the early Sikkimese history. Though the treaty reflects the victory of the Lho

\(^3\) Sirijunga Hang is credited to have invented the Limboo script and his incarnation Sirijunga Tyeongsi is credited to have revived the Limboo script and religion for which he is believed to have been killed by the Tassang monks of the Pemayangtse monastery.

\(^4\) There are narrations of the presence of their Kings like Bali Hang and Sirijunga Hang, but not much is said about their reign or their successors. It remains obscure whether they were chiefs or the kings. Sirijunga Hang is credited to have invented Limboo script with the help of the God of knowledge.

\(^5\) Mullard writes that there are number of documents in Sikkimese Palace Archives, which details the taxes collected in Sikkim in what is now eastern Nepal and that all the sources seem to indicate that Morang, Ilam and Taplejung districts of modern Nepal was about the Sikkimese influence in Eastern Nepal. for details see Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication.

\(^6\) For more detail on the treaty of Lho Men Tsong sum see Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication.
or the Bhutias over the Mon (Lepchas) and Tsong (Limboos), this treaty however does not mean the end of the domain of the Limboo chiefs. The Limboo chiefs continued to rule over their domain where their overall suzerain power was the Namgyal ruler. Sometime later, these Limboo chiefs changed their allegiance, when some supported the Namgyal rulers; others sided with the rulers of Nepal or were brought into Gurkha fold when Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successors started conquering the Himalayan foothills as far as Sikkim.

The Limboos constitute a populous group which remained virtually autonomous until the 1780s. Although, as early as the beginning of sixteenth century, portions of Limbuwan came to fall under suzerainty of the Sen Kingdoms of Makwanpur (in the present day Narayani Zone) and Vijaypur (3 Km. East of present day Dharan, Nepal) or owed allegiance to the Maharajas of Sikkim. Limbuwan before the Gurkha conquest in fact consisted of many local independent Limboo kingdoms which were fiercely defended against intruders. Van Driem further writes that the Limboos were last to be conquered by the successors of Prithivi Narayan Shah and incorporated into the state of Nepal. With the passage of time, the Gurkha invasion as well as the willing submission through a generous treaty changed the boundaries of Sikkim and modern Nepal. There are the stories of (das) ten Limboos who fought with the Gurkhas for twelve years after which they got defeated. The Gurkhas there killed all the Limboos for which they had to hide in the mountain to abstain from cruelty and oppression of the Gurkhas. Though Stiller is of the opinion that by 1774 Nepal had gained the whole of

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7 Prithivi Narayan Shah became the king of Gurkha, a small kingdom in the modern day Gurkha district about 50 miles north-west to Katmandu in 1743. He is responsible for extending his Kingdom’s rule and creating a momentum towards a unified country for which he is termed as the architect of modern Nepal.


eastern hills, including all the territory of Singalila watershed and controlled the entire territory as far east as river Teesta, it should be kept in mind that the boundaries of Nepal and Sikkim as they are today were only set down much later with the treaty of Sigauli in 1816. The Gorkhalis conquered the Darjeeling hills and the portion of western Sikkim in the 1780, and held on to these territories until the 1816. The war between Nepal and the British east India Company, thus ended with the treaty of Sigauli outlining the new borders.

Indeed, east Nepal was one of the last areas of Nepal to be conquered by the Gurkha army in the late 18th and 19th century. Only after the death of Prithivi Narayan Shah in 1775, did the Gurkha army made the first substantial foray into east Nepal with the battle of Chinapur in 1776. Later, Limboos began to be recruited in the Gurkha army as early as the battle of Chinapur and in 1776 many Limboos fought in the Gurkhal side against their own people. Victory in the battle of Chinapur against the Sikkimese King, led the Gurkhalis to increase their control of east Nepal, but due to the strong Limboo resistance and continued presence of Limboo forces, it was only in 1786 that the annexation of further Kirat was completed and the war in Limbuwan ended. While Fitzpatrick talks of such battles between the Gurkhali force and the Limboos, Risley (1894) has quite a different story to tell. Risley suggests that the political tension within Sikkim led the fourth King of Sikkim Gyurmed

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11 It has to be kept in mind that throughout the history of Sikkim, their territorial possessions have been frequently changed whether it be in the western side caused by attack from Nepal and Bhutan or in the northern part due to the interference of Tibet etc.


Namgyal demand too much from the Limboos who switched their allegiance to Nepal. Apart from the policies of the Namgyal rulers towards the Limboos, their administration was quite weak which made it easier for the neighbouring countries to raid on them quite often. The neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bhutan kept on attacking Sikkim where both were successful in number of occasions. In fact, the ambition of the Gurkhas to control trade route to Tibet had lured them to conquer the part of Limbuwan (present east Nepal) for which the Gurkha rulers lured the Limboo chiefs with the kipat tenure\textsuperscript{15} which was finally abolished with the land reform act of 1964. Such battles of conquest and conspiracies made the land of the Limboos get divided into two making the Limboos straddle between the two nations of modern Nepal and India (Sikkim), thereby giving the Limboos two distinct identity i.e. the Nepalese and Indian identity.

**LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF SIKKIM - THE PRESENT SENARIO**

Sikkim is situated in the north eastern part of Indian sub-continent. Once a smallest kingdom in the world, enclosed and protected by Mt. Khangchendzonga; Sikkim was ruled by the Namgyal dynasty for more than three hundred years when it was finally merged with the Indian Union as the 22\textsuperscript{nd} state of India. Sikkim joined the main stream India with effect from 26\textsuperscript{th} April 1975 by thirty-six amendment act of the constitution, thereby enacting Article 371F with a view to make special provision in administration. It has a strong tradition of regional political parties and thus it is barely identified as a mainstream of the Indian system.

The word ‘Sikkim’ comes from ‘Su-Him’, which is a Limboo word means ‘new-house’. According to the local narratives, when Tensung Namgyal married the daughter of Limboo chief Yo Yo Hang and built the palace of Rabdentse\textsuperscript{16} for her, she named it Su-Him.

\textsuperscript{15} Kipat is the communal land ownership issued by the Nepali Government by which individuals had right to the land by the virtue of being members of particular social unit. It was abolished by the Land Reform Act of 1964.

\textsuperscript{16} The ruins of Rabdentse palace could be seen in west Sikkim.
Sikkim, believed to have been blessed by host of supreme being and place to have set foot by lotus born Guru Padmasambhava\(^\text{17}\) is believed to be once large enough to cover Thang La near Phari in Tibet, in east upto Tagong La near Paro in Bhutan, in south Kishangunj in Purnia district of Bihar and in west to Timar Chorten on Tamar river in Nepal. Partly due to the ambitious intruders and partly due to the British interference, Sikkim got squeezed into a small mass proving to be the second smallest state of India, being lost in the vast Indian subcontinent. The present day state of Sikkim covers 7096 square kilometer. Having an area of 7096 sq. km; the state is almost rectangular running 114 km long and 64 km wide. It lies between 27 to 28 degree north latitude and 88 to 89 degree east longitude.

The location of Sikkim along the Himalayan crossroads has been, historically, both a blessing and curse for Sikkim and its people. While Sikkim profited from trade with all of its neighbours its favourable location has also been a desirable prize for its stronger neighbours to both the east and the west. As a result of this, the history of Sikkim is not a peaceful one. Instead it is characterized by, almost, continual warfare with either Nepal (following the establishment of the Gorkha kingdom) or Bhutan. As such the history of Sikkim, like most states, is intertwined with the histories of its neighbours. Events that play a prominent role in the histories of other states of the Tibetan and Himalayan region also are significant in the history of Sikkim. Many specialists of Tibet and the Himalaya know that Sikkim is considered as a hidden land, theoretically and spiritually separated from the world at large. Yet contrary to the theoretical model, interaction between Sikkim and the wider region was prevalent\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{17}\) Also known as second Buddha is said to be the manifestation of the mind of Avalokitesyara, the speech of Amitabha and body of the Sakya muni Buddha.

The population of Sikkim in the present day includes Aryan as well as non-Aryan linguistic and cultural groups belonging to multi-religious communities. It is perhaps the geographical location of Sikkim bordered by Nepal in the west, People’s Republic of China in the north, Bhutan in the east and the Indian state of West Bengal in the south that gives it a multi-ethnic look. Though located in the frontier zone and being the place worthy of tourist attraction, the frontierization has never generated the state of restlessness giving the population a feeling of peace. The population of Sikkim as figured by Richard Temple\(^\text{19}\) was 5000 of which 2500 were Lepchas, 1000 Limboos and 1500 Bhutias but such small group soon got outnumbered by the migrant communities increasing the population to 610577 in the year 2011. The first population of Sikkim undertaken in the year 1891 numbered the Lepchas as 5762, Bhutia as 4894, Limboos as 3356 and Nepalese as 15,458. Continuous migration of people from surrounding states as well as neighbouring countries has made Sikkim a home of numerous ethnic groups, the largest being the Nepali speaking group\(^\text{20}\) comprising the Hindu population. The multiple communities that have emerged in the state of Sikkim live in peace and tranquility. The largest group in Sikkim is the Nepali speaking community comprising of variety of ethnic and religious groups. Everyone have contributed respective share towards the growth and development of the state. Unlike the other north-eastern states, the Christian missionaries have little or no impact on the land of Buddhism. It is only recently that Christianity has flourished ranging about 7.64% of the total population. It was the religion of Hinduism brought by the migrant communities that has an immense impact on the Buddhist and the animist indigenous population accounting around 59.98% of the total population.


\(^{20}\) Here, it should be noted that the high caste Nepali speaks their mother tongue Nepali and almost all the caste groups in Sikkim have their own mother tongues but they hardly speak in their language and they are being introduced in the school curriculum only recently.
Sikkim has since the past never experienced the assertion of identity movement as in the other states of north-east India. The identity politics of contemporary Sikkim is layered and complicated by the cultural, religious, linguistic and racial diversity of the twenty groups residing there, and the class, educational and the occupational differentiation within them. The cultural linguistic differences exist between these groups. However, these broad categorizations underplay the competing definitions, the internal variations, and the intersections between the diverse ethnic groups in Sikkim. Instead of strict demarcations and absolute hostilities between ethnic groups, there are degrees of inclusion and exclusions, which determine ethnic relations in Sikkim. The situational selectivity of ethnic identity plays a crucial role in inter-ethnic relations. These also serve as a buffer and a bridge between conflicting ethnic groups\(^\text{21}\).

Though almost all the caste groups have distinctive culture and tradition and are seen reviving it, there is no evidence of violent outbreaks, which did not happen in the past or at present. Throughout the state, different caste groups are busy making caste based associations, the making of the Limboo associations also couldn’t be ruled out. The reviving of their culture and the making of associations testifies the rise of the ethnic consciousness which in future might prove fatal. Apart from Bhutia-Lepcha, the so called Nepalese denotes multi-ethnic groups and the assertion of any of the ethnic group as a separate entity in the future, might lead to internal breakdown, which may prove beneficial to other communities living in Sikkim.

Sikkim is dominated by Buddhism as well as Hinduism, but religious difference has never occurred and peace has always prevailed. It is only recently with the rise of ethnic

consciousness that almost all the communities in Sikkim are trying to go back to the roots of their origin and trying to get back their lost culture and tradition. The assimilation as well as acculturation of the Limboos of Sikkim with the so called Nepali migrant communities has made the Limboos get lumped with them although they like the Nepalese never migrated\textsuperscript{22} from the post-boundary Nepal but have settled here from time immemorial; it is only that their land got divided between modern Nepal and Sikkim.

**HISTORY AND IDENTITY**

The migration of the Nepalese group into Sikkim engineered by the British colonial power changed the fate of the Limboos to a great extend. Acculturation between these two groups was to such an extent that any outsider would fail to distinguish between these two groups. In addition, the abolition of the Tsong seat\textsuperscript{23} in the state assembly and the political lumping of Limboos with the Nepalese might have made some of the writers designate the Limboos as Nepalese. Archival research for the period 1830 to 1917 reveals that the British administrators were conscious that the Limboos were indigenous to Sikkim. In 1835, when the British raj annexed the Darjeeling hills, the officers commented that ‘they were practically uninhabited excepting a few hundred Lepchas and Limboo’. A map of British Sikkim drawn by Captain W.S. Sherwille in 1852 states, ‘this mountainous countries from 1500 to 4000 feet above the sea level is inhabited by a warlike beardless race termed Limboos’.

\textsuperscript{22} Balikci (2008) talks about a dozen of Limboo migrants who migrated from the Nepal region of Dhankuta who were given land at the northern part of Sikkim. Balikci has categorised the Limboos as Tsongs, the aboriginal inhabitants and the later migrant Limboos who lately migrated to Sikkim. For more detail see Balikci, Anna (2008). Lamas, Shamans & Ancestors - Village Religion in Sikkim: Brill Publication.

\textsuperscript{23} In the general election of 1967, the last king of Sikkim, Chogyal Palden Thendup Namgyal provided reservation of one seat for the Limboos out of 24 member seats in the Council of Ministers.
Another British archival map showing the approximate race distribution in Sikkim in 1892 demarcates the ethnic settlement of the Lepchas, the Bhutias, the Limboos and the Paharias (Nepalese) in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills. A statement printed on the map clearly stresses ethnic-settlement: ‘Line north of which Paharias are not allowed to settle’\textsuperscript{24}.

Tracing the ethnic roots of these ethnic categories in the past, one finds that during the 1891 Census of Sikkim its population was ethnically differentiated into thirteen groups. However, after 1891, the imperial administration delineated four groups namely, the Lepchas-Bhutias, the Limboos, the Nepalese and the others. In 1915, when the land revenue rates were finalized, the imperial regime differentiated between only the Bhutias-Lepchas and the Nepalese. From 1931 onwards, they progressively categorized all groups, excluding the Lepchas-Bhutias, as Nepalese. If colonial policies protected and transformed the the Lepchas and the Bhutias into the indigenous group of Sikkim, the other policies discriminated against the Limboos, who were indigenous to Sikkim, by treating them as Nepalese immigrants.

Various histories that have been put forward terms Limboos either as an immigrant from the Tsang province of Tibet or from the region of eastern Nepal. Unfortunately, the history of the Sikkimese Limboos has not been well documented, perhaps due to numerous reasons. It is the theory of Limboo migration from the Tsang province of Tibet which is accepted on the ground that their Tibetan migration has made the Lepcha and the Bhutia tribes of Sikkim designate the Limboos as Tsong. Even in the eyes of the British official, the Limboos were a member of a Tibeto-Burmese mountain tribe\textsuperscript{25}. Further, Leo E Rose (1963)\textsuperscript{26}


writes that large proportion of Nepalese immigrants in Sikkim is Limboos from eastern most hill districts of Nepal, having a long historical relationship with the Lepchas of Sikkim. Even the politician of Sikkim like Basnet (1974)\textsuperscript{27} in his work ‘\textit{Sikkim- A Short Political History}’ claims the name Sikkim to be of Nepali origin while the accepted fact is that the name ‘Sikkim’ was the name given by the Limboo Queen of the second Chogyal Tensung Namgyal. Being a politician, it might have been his political move to make the fate of the Nepalese safe in the atmosphere of the then political turmoil. The Limboos are now being treated as the migrant groups and are debarred from those facilities which they should have got otherwise. Several writings on Sikkim have termed the Limboo as migrants from Nepal and some have even gone to an extent of terming them as lower caste Nepalese.

The social and political processes too have added to the quest for distinct identity among this tribe. In addition, the flexibility of the geographical boundaries, battles of conquest, conspiracies and acquisition, and the theories of their originality have confused this community and has made them search for their identity. While gaining in rhetorical power, as people becomes more conscious and confused about their identity, identity study as a phenomenon is losing its historical foundation. Instead of emphasizing the process of identity formation, recent scholarships have abstracted the process of negotiating the tensions and discourses of labels that occurs in the site of globalised world. “Imagined communities”, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term, are regularly emerging, thus making identity look like a “thing” that can be lost and found like checked baggage within sites of power and disempowerment\textsuperscript{28}. While asserting for the distinct identity, the Limboos do turn to their past memories and bring into forefront their unheard voices into the living memory. But such

\textsuperscript{27} Basnet, L.B. (1974). Sikkim a Short Political History: S. Chand, New Delhi.

\textsuperscript{28} Saikai, Yasmin (2004). Fragmented Memories: Struggle to be Tai Ahom in India: Duke University Press
memories too could be constructed in an individual’s mind- it may not always convey truth, which makes it unreliable for understanding the past and their root cause for studying identity studies. Rather than the past narratives, the reason for the identity assertion can be found in the socio-economic as well as political policies of the concerned Governments.

Their quest for their identity can be easily reflected from their actions. During the visit to the different Limboo villages, the elderly men as well as the youths assisted the researcher. Having the researcher belonged to the same community, the research generated interest in them too. They saw in the researcher the one who could further their quest in making of their identity. They kept the researcher in their house, fed the researcher, organized meeting with the Tumyanghangs\(^{29}\) and even presented the researcher with their genealogies. Limboo identity has always remained flexible as it is based on oral tradition which gets erased with time. So, in this thesis the researcher have explored the theories given by various historians and writers on the origin and migration of the Limboos and have analysed how history writing, process of acculturation and assimilation have brought about changes in their identity over time. When the researcher initially started collecting the narratives of their origin and migration the researcher was petrified as the researcher felt that the sole responsibility of giving the Limboos a distinct identity would rest on the researcher as the story of their original homeland has always been a matter of discussion among Sikkimese Limboos. Now it was the researcher’s task to tell them their story. Now the researcher became their voice, on the other hand the researcher feared that the researcher’s Christian identity would create distrust. Though the researcher was born in a Limboo family but was also a Christian, who had no idea about the Limboo culture and tradition. So, the researcher started participating in their ceremonies, used archival sources along with their oral history and interviewed large section of Limboos. The researcher even started learning their language

\(^{29}\) The Limboo elderly men are termed as Tumyanghangs.
and script, though it was a difficult task. In all, the Limboos were extremely helpful and took
delight in teaching the researcher their language and script. Not only did they helped the
researcher in teaching language but even provided with the documents and accompanied the
researcher in several places.

MIGRATION THEORY

Hidden beneath the histories of great Kingdoms, war and conquest is the history of a fringe tribe, and their resistance and survival. Believed to be brave and cruel in battle, putting
the old and weak to sword, carrying the younger to the slavery and killing on the march such captives who are unable to proceed; this marginal hill tribe collaborated with the state
building processes both in Nepal and Sikkim. Political antagonism has resulted in their land
being divided into two, thereby making the Limboos, a community which straddles the two nations of Nepal and India. Great battles were fought, political boundaries changed, old system of Governance was replaced by new ones; this ethnic group, however, has managed to survive despite such sharp changes.

The identity of this community have been continuously re-defined and re-interpreted,
which have made this tribe sustain fluid identity under their changing history. The history of the Limboos particularly rests on the narration of stories of their ancestors by different agents in different periods of time, sometimes constructed by people on the basis of their preferences. It is this fragmented memories that has gained acceptance in present day. Though researchers like Vansittart reports that Phedap was the original homeland of

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31 It’s a place in modern eastern Nepal, bounded on the west by Tamor Arun watershed and on the south by Lumba River.
Limboos, several authors have alleged their own theories explaining the origin and migration of the Sikkimese Limboos.

The origin and migration issue of the Sikkimese Limboos is still a matter of debate and controversies and, without relevant documentary sources, has not, nor seems likely to be elucidiated by the historians. The oral tradition of the Limboos mentions their creation by their god by mixing bamboo ashes and bird’s stool. Though they are said to be among the earliest settlers of the land of Sikkim, their ancestors do have migrated from somewhere, sometimes back, as their oral tradition makes repeated mention of the migration of their ancestors. Although Xaxa\textsuperscript{32} holds that terming of tribals of India as an indigenous does not reflect an empirical reality and is more a political construction, I am terming the Limboos of Sikkim as an aboriginal indigenous people of Sikkim on the ground that they inhabited the landmass of Sikkim even before they were conquered by the people from outside and have been marginalised as an aftermath of conquest.

Limboo population is sometimes divided into three groups on the basis of their migration. The ones who did not migrate anywhere after getting settled in Limbuwan were known as Bhuiphuta or Khambongba Lungbongba; and the ones who migrated from Limbuwan region into Tibet and Kasi and came back to Limbuwan are known as Lasha gotra and Kasi gotra respectively. Such division amongst the Limboos is rejected by the elderly members of this community and terms such division to be a process that might have been adopted by their ancestors to get sanskritized. Rather, it would have been the shifting of the villages by the Limboos to cope up with the ecological constraints that might have divided this community into such groups.

THEORY OF KIRATA ORIGIN

The first and the widely accepted theory, is the theory of the Kirata\textsuperscript{33} origin which is perhaps quite a wider concept as Kirata denotes wide range of ethnic community. According to the Kirata theory, the Limboos are descended from family of Kirat-asura, who once fought against the Aryans. Designating the Limboos as Kirata and varying in the issue of the migration, the authors have put forward different stories to support their theory. Kotturan\textsuperscript{34}, quoting from the Rigveda ‘\textit{drive back the Kirats to the caravans}’, says that the Limboos are the descendents from the ten brothers who decided to leave their home at the Indo-gangetic plains, due to the onslaught of Aryan invaders and settled down in the mountains of Eastern Himalayas. While Kotturan talks of the migration from Gangetic to the Himalayas, Sanyal\textsuperscript{35}, terming them as the inhabitants of the lower Himalayas, talks about their migration from Assam along the river Brahmaputra to India, some period before 1000 B.C. Sanyal writes ‘\textit{a Mongolian tribe called the Limboos, a constituent of the great Kirat race that once inhabited the lower Himalayas from Punjab to eastern end of Assam, to Burma and Cacher, floated down from the high Himalayas as a great human stream to settle in south-eastern portion of modern Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Darjeeling district}’. Sinah\textsuperscript{36}, supports the view of Sanyal, whereby the migration of this tribe started from north-east of Assam into India and Tibet.

\textsuperscript{33} In Sikkimese context Kirata comprises of many communities such as Rai, Yakkha and many others communities of mongoloid descent.

\textsuperscript{34} Kotturan, George (1983). The Himalayan Gateway-History and Culture of Sikkim: Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.


Quite different is the view of Gurung and Lama\textsuperscript{37}, who at one time quotes Swami Prapanacharya and designates the Limboos as the true Aryans having their own kingdom of Limbuwan, bordering the land of Rongs or the Lepchas. On the other, they state that the Limboos were one of the branches of Kirata tribes who according to Rig Veda, resided along the Kangra Valley of Northern India and even fought with the Aryans for forty years. Moving further, Gurung and Lama, discuss the presence of a cruel Limboo King Phurumpho, which resulted in Limboo’s easy acceptance of the Namgyal Dynasty. But their theory fails to explain the process of migration of the Limboos from Kangra to Sikkim.

Likewise Subba\textsuperscript{38}, on one hand relates Limboo with the people of Indus Valley Civilization, claiming them to be the shoot of ancient Indian race, who at the arrival of Aryans migrated to eastern Tibet and back to Limbuwan via Walangchuk and again on the other, he gives contrary opinion designating them as the nomads to have wandered in the various places of inner south-Asia. A highly civilized Harappans are again given a nomadic identity. It is quite unsure whether he is trying to explain that the Limboos after the coming of Aryans left their land and became wandering nomads or whether he is referring to something else.

If one goes by the theory put forward by Chemjong\textsuperscript{39} whereby the term Kirata is used to define a race, one cannot talk about the sole identity of the Limboos. Chemjong (1966) is the first author who embarked on such a hypothetical archaeological and etymological synthesis


\textsuperscript{38} Subba (1999) relates Limboos with the people of Indus Civilization on the basis of similarity in their religious belief. For more details see Subba, J.R. (1999). The Limboos of the Eastern Himalayas - With Special Reference to Sikkim: Published by Sikkim Yakthung Mundhum Saplopa, Gangtok Sikkim.

\textsuperscript{39} Chemjong, Iman Singh (1966). History and Culture of the Kirat People, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. Publisher- Tumeng Hang Limbuwan East Nepal, Mechi Anchal.
and adopting Chaterjee’s terminology, he regroups all mongoloid populations under the category of Kirata and perceives them as an essence. Wherever behavior, attitude, and culture are the topics of discussion, the use of race except as a symbolic marker for other lines of distinction is inappropriate. Race, also differs in culture— not just as a result of different histories, but intrinsically, as part of their very nature. In fact the use of term Kirata to denote the mongoloid group seems to be constructed one as Schlemmer writes that Kirata indigenist try to write their own attested history by setting themselves up as dignified nation. Chemjong lists various hypothesis which makes him to see Kirata origin and influence in all the ancient civilizations from the Mediterranean Sea to Mongol or Cambodi and to him and his numerous followers, the historical anchorage and the guiding thread of their re-written history are confirmed by the word Kirata, thereby offering Kiratas a glorious perspectives.

Though the oral tradition demarcates the southern boundary of the Limboos to the plains of India and the Indian Ocean, it never talks about their Indian ancestors. In fact the theory of Limboo migration from the plains of India to the Himalayas is not acceptable as the culture, customs, dress, food habits etc of this group is opposite to the Indians. The theory put forward by Subba (1999), regarding their migration via Walungchuk is a common story that runs among this tribe and there are also stories of Walungpa being brought into Limboo fold.

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Such conversion of people into Limboo fold is supported by their ritual of Chokphung, whereby many people are brought to their ethnic fold, but such ritual is no longer in practice. No doubt the Walungpas mostly settled in western part of Sikkim does share close relation with the Limboos and the ones who have recently migrated from Walung to Sikkim even speaks fluently in Limboo language; sometimes even translating the word Wa-Lung to be of Limboo origin as Wa in Limboo refers to fowl and Lung - stone, often rectifying that it refers to hen like stone.

**THEORY OF CHINESE ORIGIN**

The second theory, which is termed as the theory of Chinese origin, explains the migration of the Limboos from China. Chemjong categorizing the Limboos as the Kiratas considers them to be the migrants from the Sichuan Yunan province of China, who left their native place due to the tribal antagonism and settled in a place called Nam Maw in north Burma under the leadership of Pongbo Hang. Further multiplying this group spread to east, west and south. A branch which spread to south-west settled in a place called Mokwan and began to address themselves as Shan Mokwan. Shan Mokwan migrated towards the hilly terrain of present East Nepal and came across the land of eight Kirata chiefs. Settled under the sovereignty of Kirata chiefs, they were suppressed which made the war inevitable. The Shan Mokwan emerged victorious, seized the country and fixed its boundaries as Tibet in the North, Jalalgarh near Purnea in the south, River Tista in the east and River Dudkosi in the west. Terming their land as Limbuwan, they divided the conquered land among the ten chiefs.

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and changed their name from Shan Mokwan into Yakha Thumba\textsuperscript{45}, meaning the head of hill tribes.

Chemjong\textsuperscript{46} also accepts the similarity between the Limboos and the Karen, natives of Arakan and brings out the similarity in their culture, dress and military tactics. Strengthening his theory, he further writes that the compact mass of Limboos settled mostly in the western part of Sikkim signifies the existence of their historical kingdom of Limbuwan which later on was jeopardized by various invasions. There is no doubt in the argument that the bulk of Limboos are found in the western part of present day Sikkim and present east Nepal, and that this land at some point of time formed the land of the Limboos, so termed by the Limboos as Limbuwan, but it seems quite exaggerated as it is unable for a migrant group to win over the existing authority of the eight chiefs.

Subba\textsuperscript{47} too is of the opinion that the Limboo progenitors were created through the process of biogenesis in the North East Asia during the ice age and started descending downward following Yellow River of north China and Yangtse River of south China. Collecting finger millets and dry paddy seeds on the way, this hunter-gatherer nomadic tribe arrived in the Himalayan region during the archaic period or as early as 25,000 years ago, bringing with them their practice of soyabean cultivation. Subba further writes that their Mundhum\textsuperscript{48} demarcates their land as China-Tibet (Sinyuk Muden) in the north, the plains of India and Indian Ocean in the south (Teymen Worong), Arun River in the west (Aruna-

\textsuperscript{45} The Limboos call themselves Yakhathumba, meaning the head of the hill tribes.

\textsuperscript{46} Chemjong, Iman Singh (1966). History and Culture of the Kirat People, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. Publisher- Tumeng HANG Limbuwan East Nepal, Mechi Anchal.


\textsuperscript{48} Mundhum is the spiritual instruction from the Limboo ancestor which is passed down orally from generation to generation, through the institution of Shamans.
Baruna) and Brahmaputra in the east (Tusroti Umroti). After occupying the land of Limbuwan, they remain isolated from the rest of the world when finally they came into contact with the people of Sikkim in 1642 and Nepal in 1774. Having no strong monarchical system, this community managed their political, religious and social affairs through the social and religious council of Tumyanghang and Yehang respectively. No wonder that this tribe had come down from China but their isolated sustenance seems quite unacceptable.

**THEORY OF TIBETAN ORIGIN**

The third and the most accepted theory in Sikkimese context is the theory of Tibetan\(^{49}\) origin, which upholds the view that the Limboos are the immigrants from the Tsang province of Tibet. This theory has always found favour in the Sikkimese historical writings as the Limboos are known as Tsong in the local Bhutia dialect\(^{50}\), for having been migrated from the Tsang province of Tibet. The designation of Limboos as Tsong has often been a matter of confusion and controversy, which has contributed to the misleading identity formation of the Limboos, often confusing the writers like Bhattacharya and Joshi\(^{51}\). Leaving behind the state of confusion, the researcher goes on to explain the theory of the Tibetan origin. Authors like Risley (1894), Hooker (1999), Sagant (1996), Balikci (2008), Das (1902), Dutta Roy (1984), Subba (1999), Wangchuk and Zulca (2007) etc. have all supported this theory.

\(^{49}\) Though Tibet now has become the part of People’s Republic of China, in the above context I am talking of an independent Tibetan empire prior to the conquest of Tibet by China.

\(^{50}\) Limboos are referred as Tsong by the Bhutias and Chung by the Lepchas, the same way Limboos refer to Bhutias as Mudenba and Lepchas as Emmeypa in their local dialect.

\(^{51}\) The writing of Bhattarcharya and Joshi often creates confusion among the readers as in their work they have separated the Tsong from the Limboos. It seems that they were unaware that the name Tsong, Limboo, Subba and Yakhathumba denotes a single tribe. For details see Bhattacharya, Arpana. The Prayer Wheel and Sceptre: Nachiketa Publications Ltd. And Joshi, H.G. eds. (2004). Sikkim-Past and Present: Mittal Publication.
Comparing Nahangma, the Limboo goddesses, with God dgra-lha, of the nameless religion of Tibet, Sagant\textsuperscript{52} brings out similarity among the Limboos and the Tibetans. God dgra-lha is named by the word which means chief or a king and the word ‘hang’ used by the Limboos resembles the Tibetan power, ‘dbang’. The Limboo goddesses Nahangma sitting at the top of the mountain resembles the sacred Tibetan mountain war gods. The powers feared by the Tibetan have their seats in all places: in the right shoulder, dgra-lha; in the right armpit, mo-lha; in the heart, zhang-lha. These Tibetan conceptions correspond to those of the Limboos. For Limboos and for Tibetans alike, ‘the souls are hardly different from the gods’. And in Tibet, around 1900, the ga-ra butchers slaughtered their pigs in the same way as the Limboos by piercing the heart with the boar-spear\textsuperscript{53}.

Not only are the Gods and Goddesses similar among the Limboos and the Tibetans, but Wangchuk and Zulca (2007)\textsuperscript{54} also talks about the Limboo ancestral affinity with the Tibetans. They are of the opinion that Uba Hang, who is said to have revived Yuma Samyo and discouraged Buddhism among the Limboos was the one who led the campaign in April 846CE southwards into Limbuwan and carved a new kingdom for himself. Even today the festival of Tong-Sum-Tong-Nam is celebrated in his name. If Wangchuk & Zulca talks about the royal origin of the Limboo ancestor, Sarat Chandra Das (1902) records the popular belief that Tibetan ancestors of Yakathumbas, migrated into present Limbuwan through Kangla pass following the lost Yak and made their first settlement in Yangma valley of Tamar Khola region\textsuperscript{55}. Jones & Jones (1776) writes that the ten Kingdoms of Limbuwan corresponds to the


\textsuperscript{53} ibid

\textsuperscript{54} Wangchuk Pema & Mita Zulca (2007). Khangchendzonga - Sacred Summit: Little Kingdom Pvt Ltd, Gangtok

legendary founding of the Limbuwan by ten brothers who are believed to have migrated from Tibet and India. According to him, there were three brothers namely Khampen Hang, Tokle Hang and Murek Hang. It was the second brother Tokle Hang who travelled to Assam crossing river Teesta and it was his descendants who defeated the Lepchas and ruled over Limbuwan.\footnote{Dahal, Dharni Dhar (1984). Sikkim Ko Rajniti Ithiaa: Vol. 1, Subba Prakashan Gangtok.}

Dahal\footnote{Fitzpatrick, Ian Carlos (2011). Cardamom & Class- A Limbu Village and its extension In East Nepal: Vajra Publications.}, talks about the religious convulsion that led to the mass migration of Limboos from Tibet to Bhutan and Nepal. According to him, the spread of Buddhism in Tibet led to the conversion of some Limboos into the new Buddhist fold. This led to the religious division among the Limboos, as the Buddhist Limboos got closer to other ethnic Tibetans belonging to the same fold. The dominated non-Buddhist Limboos were forced to migrate to Bhutan and Nepal. Again during 7th century A.D. Guru Padmasambhava arrived in Bhutan and tried to bring Limboos into Buddhist fold, discarded by the Limboos the Guru returned back north. This angered the Tibetan Buddhist who made attack on the Limboo settlement in Bhutan. They massacred the Limboos and the place in which this incident occurred is named as Tsong sa Dzong by the Dukpas of Bhutan. Then the remaining refugee Limboos moved eastward and settled down in Sikkim, which was under the domain of the Lepcha panu. The theory put forward by Dahal seems quite unacceptable as the Buddhist groups are shown to have travelled too far chasing the Limboos.

When one tradition talks about the migration of Limboos with the pioneer Lama Katog from the Tsang province, the shamans that researcher met during the field visit narrated the story about their migration from the Tibetan land along with their Guru Lha tsun
Chen po. According to this narration, Lha tsun Chen po, during his journey to the hidden land was accompanied by the Limboo followers. On the way, he climbs the mountain of Khangchendzonga (Phoktanglungma) for meditation and for conferring with the Sikkimese guardian deities. As he doesn’t return for several days, the Limboos believing him to be dead begins to mourn but he finally returns back adding joy to the Limboos, and then they enter into Sikkim. This story of the Khamdaks\(^{58}\) coincide with the Buddhist belief, which speaks of the place in the vicinity of Jannu where one of the monk who discovered Sikkim in the mid-seventeenth century, Lha tsun Chen po, meditated and conferred upon the Sikkim’s guardian dieties before opening the northern gate to the hidden land. The Khamdaks (Limboo sub-group), mostly settled in western Sikkim talks of their migration from the Tibetan region following their Guru Lha tsun Chen po. Even during the Manghenna\(^{59}\), the Shamans once used to take their soul to the region of Kham in Tibet\(^{60}\). Travelling through the rough road for an hour from Darap towards Rimbi in western Sikkim, two pine trees resembling the pine of the Dubde monastery can be seen from the distance. Having survived for hundreds of years, these trees are about 100ft high and 30ft wide. They believe that those pine seeds were given by their Guru Lha tsun Chen po to their ancestors Mana and Tojey. The elderly among the Limboos still pronounces Rimbi as Limbith, meaning ‘a doubt whether the seed would grow into tree or not’. Below the pine trees is a Buddhist stupa (manay), which is quite surprising to be found among the Yumaist\(^{61}\) Limboos. The Khamdaks, though Yumaist by faith still calls upon the Buddhist monks for their rituals and Buddhist flags could be seen flanking in

\(^{58}\) Khamdaks are one of the Limboo sub-groups.

\(^{59}\) It is a Limboo ritual of holding one’s head high. During the performance of Manghenna the soul of a person for whom the ritual is being performed enters the body of the Shamans. The Shaman in the trance takes his/her soul to the place of the ancestor, often uttering the voice of supernatural.

\(^{60}\) But these days the Khamdaks claim Rimbi in western Sikkim to be their ancestral homeland. It might be a constructed local narrative, though not historically correct and might reflect other realities.

\(^{61}\) The Limboos are Yumaist by faith. They believe in their supreme God Tagera Ningwaphuma.
the front porch of their houses. Not only do they profess Buddhism but even talked of their grandparents who were Buddhist monks by profession. But the presence of such pine trees all over western Sikkim especially at places such as Yuksam, Darap, Pelling and Geyzing creates doubt in such oral stories.

Even their migration with Guru Lha tsun Chen po seems constructed as on the basis of the evidence it appears that Lha tsun Chen po departed Tibet in the fifth month of 1646 (Fire dog Year) and arrived in Sikkim in the tenth month of the same year and it was around this time that he met the first Sikkimese Chogyal (King) in Yuksam near Narbugang, where he offered him the ritual ornaments of Chakravatin\textsuperscript{62}. This evidence makes it impossible to accept the theory of Limboo migration following their Guru Lha tsun Chen po, and if it would have been true then there in fact would have been no need of signing the treaty of Lho Mon Tsong sum, which shows that the rule of Phuntsok Namgyal did not remain uncontested but was challenged by the rebellion or war. Further, Lha tsun Chen po explains his reason for leaving Tibet to be the prevailing political climate in Tibet. While there is no specific evidence of individual persecution, the political climate in Tibet during the late 1630s and the early 1640s was a period of extreme upheaval, both in terms of Political organization and religious participation. It implies that at the time Lha tsun Chen po fled Tibet, he, his teachers or his religious traditions were under threat from the change in the balance of power in Central Tibet and the arrival of powerful Mongolian army and secondly, the consolidation of the Gelugpa\textsuperscript{63} state, the coming of the age of Dalai Lama and his liberal attitude towards the

\textsuperscript{62} Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication

\textsuperscript{63} Gelugpa means the ‘virtuous tradition’. It is associated with His Holiness Dalai Lama. In the 17th century, the Gelugpa school became the most powerful institution in Tibet and it remained so until China took control of Tibet in 1950s.
Nyingmapa\textsuperscript{64} traditions. It was the consolidating period of Central Tibet by forces loyal to the Dalai Lama and after the establishment of the Gelugpa dominance in Lhasa in 1642, that Lha tsun Chen po left for Sikkim\textsuperscript{65}.

**THEORY OF POST-BOUNDARY MIGRATION**

The fourth theory indeed is of the recent origin and speaks of the migration of the Limboos from the region of modern Nepal to modern Sikkim. Balikci\textsuperscript{66} divides the Limboo population in Sikkim as early and later migrants. According to her, the Tsongs of the western Sikkim, belonging mostly to Lasha gotra and Buddhist by faith are the early settlers of Sikkim and has close affinity with the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The later migration took place during the reign of Sir Tashi Namgyal, when in 1938 a dozen of Limboos from Dhankuta in east Nepal who did the construction of Tsuk-La-khang (the royal Chapel) were later granted permission to settle and open fields within the Phodong Estate of Mangshila. The Limboos thus worked on rebuilding of the Gangtok Palace and its chapel after which Sir. Tashi Namgyal gave them permission to settle at the place of their choice on monastery land within the Phodong estate where the Lopos had asked for help in clearing the jungle of dangerous animals. They were paid in kind until cash was introduced in 1990. They initially worked as labourers for the Tingchim Lhopos in return for food until they had cleared sufficient fields for themselves. They cleared the jungle of dangerous beasts and helped

\textsuperscript{64} Nyingmapa literally means ‘ancient’. It is the oldest school of Buddhism and was started in Tibet by Guru Padmasambhava. This Red Hat sect of Buddhism incorporates local religious practices, local deities, elements of Shamanism which is shared with Bon.

\textsuperscript{65} Mullard has provided a detailed and interesting account of Lha tsun Chen po. For more details see Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication.

Tingchim villagers carve paddy traces below the lake, and like Nepalese did everywhere in Sikkim, taught them how to plough and practice permanent irrigated agriculture. The most significant changes brought about in Tingchim by the arrival of the Limboo settlers were first in the expansion of methods of cultivation and later in the transformation of the whole economic structure of region. Among all the different ethnic communities represented in Sikkim, the Limboos are those who are the ones Tingchim Lhopos feel closest to and get on with best. Limboos are perceived as being sincere, adaptable and even respectful and grateful for working for the Lhopo landowners. The Limboo population of neighbourhood Mangshila has increased at much faster rate than the Lhopos.

Mangshila has close to two thousand Limboo inhabitants while Tingchim’s Lhopos population of around two hundred and twenty has barely doubled since the 1920s, the increase in population is not only due to their high birth rate but also due to the constant flow of the new immigrants from Nepal in search of the economic opportunities in Sikkim. At first, there were only two Limboo families in the early 60s, relatives from Nepal of the Mangshila Limboos, but year after, more seasonal workers came and stayed after being offered the opportunity to cultivate one or more of a Lhopo’s grain fields. While some families worked for Lhopos, others found work in building or road construction for the army or the state. Among the Limboos, settled in North Sikkim, none is from the Buddhist Tsong community. A few Limboo families in Tinchim belonging to the Lasha gotra consider themselves partly Buddhist and claim their origin in Tibet while the great majority of Tinchim Limboos are Hindus, belonging to the kashi gotra and claiming their origin in Varanasi, India.
This view of Balikci is supported by Sagant\textsuperscript{67} who talks about the transformation of the Kipat land in East Nepal and the successive wave of immigration favored by the existing legislation which reduced the land available for farming and forced the Limboos to emigrate to Assam and Sikkim. The plot of land left by the Limboos who emigrated to Assam or Sikkim went with the office of the Subba, who lost no time in selling it in order to avoid trouble, should the emigrant return and challenge the transaction. Each year many people migrate from the village. They go down to Assam or Sikkim for a few months, looking for work to make up the deficit from their inadequate farms. There they join relatives who have been there for several generations. Caplan writes that if on one hand the Gurkha rulers sought to placate the Limboos, ever jealous of their rights, by providing safeguards of their lands. On the other hand, they lost no opportunity to reduce the area under Kipat tenure and at the same time convert these lands to raikar tenure (government land). The ‘eating’ of the Kipat land, as Limboo puts it, was possible because the documents confirming Kipat holdings did not specify the areas and boundaries: they simply said ‘\textit{lands being cultivated from the time of your ancestors}’.\textsuperscript{68} So, in east Nepal, when the Hindus came as immigrant settlers they have tried, by fair means and foul, and with conspicuous success, to ‘eat’ Limboo land. So, the landless Limboo had no other choice but had to flee. Some migrants settled permanently as there was no longer enough land in Nepal and they were overhead and ears in debt. For poor there was only one solution: flight to Sikkim or Assam. Sinah\textsuperscript{69} writes that during the cold


\textsuperscript{68} Subba, T.B. (1999). “Limbu Nationalism and Integration”. In Ethnicity, Nationalism & Integration. edited by Ajit K. Danda: The Asiatic Society

weather many Gurkhalis of martial castes, Rais, Limboos, come to work as sawyers in the Assam forest. Very few of them, however, settle down permanently in Assam.

The case study provided by Fitzpatrick\textsuperscript{70} also talks about the migration of the Limboos from Nepal to Sikkim mostly as cardamom labourers, which enabled and still enables a section of the Limboo society in the villages of east Nepal to become wealthy and either buy a land or pay back the debts that they incurred, thereby reclaiming their land. Apart from the labour migration, Fitzpatrick also discusses the people fleeing away from their villages to abstain from the punishment. An example of a marriage between the eldest daughter of a Jaisi Chettri and a Limboo villager at the village of Mamangkhe, east Nepal goes on to prove the fact. This couple had run away from the village to get married and lived in Sikkim for seven years after which they returned back. If this study talks of temporary migration, there are also studies of Limboo couples who had to leave their village on marrying among the closed ones. Such couples had travelled and worked in Sikkim, often never returning back. Fitzpatrick even writes about the households of Jhapa, Nepal having the longest trend to have members who either worked in the army or in Sikkim. Hard hit by economic or else social problems, the Limboo chose Sikkim as their safest destination, and their choice for Sikkim might be due to cultural similarity as well as the presence of their kin group in that distant land.

Fitzpatrick writes: ‘With the abolition of the Kipat land, the Limboo in the region of east Nepal began to turn to the Hindus for financial assistance in forms of loan which would be given in exchange for temporary possession of the Kipat land as mortgage, until the Hindu

\textsuperscript{70} Fitzpatrick, Ian Carlos (2011). Cardamom & Class- A Limbu Village and its extension In East Nepal: Vajra Publications.
creditor was repaid in full, with access to kipat land covering the interest in loan. Increased debt led to the increased amount of Kipat land being mortgaged, which in turn led to the increased debt. The Limboos, thus began to lose their land in the hand of the migrant Brahmin-Chettri settlers, whom the Limboos designate as cunning and industrious, and who were historically encouraged by the Gurkha state to settle in the east as a means of extending political and cultural control over unconsolidated territory. Ultimately, this all led to many Limboo becoming landless and obliged to work on other people’s land as sharecroppers, find wage labour as agricultural workers, government employees or Gurkha soldiers or migrate else-where’.

The late migration of Limboos in Sikkim is temporary as well as permanent. During the researcher’s field visit, the researcher came across few households viewed as the later migrants. They had come as the labourers among whom some of them have settled permanently while others returned back to their own homeland. This wave of early and later migrants is often denoted as U-Tsong and Khar-Tsong respectively. It is in fact this wave of continuous migration from the region of modern Nepal that might have made the writers designate them as the Nepalese. The Limboos claim present eastern Nepal and western Sikkim to be their ancestral land and that they have been living there since the time immemorial. The elderly Limboos believed that the names of places given below are those names that were given by their ancestors.

The name of the places in Sikkim believed to be of Limboo origin are as follows:
Table 1: The name of the places in Sikkim believed to be of Limboo origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limboo Name</th>
<th>Distorted Name</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tumlabong</td>
<td>Tumlebong</td>
<td>Trees with large leaves from where the thread is produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mik-moo</td>
<td>Mikmoo(^{71})</td>
<td>Shape of eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungak</td>
<td>Lungay</td>
<td>Place where big stone has to be crossed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So-hum</td>
<td>Som Dara</td>
<td>Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si-dengbung</td>
<td>Siddey bong</td>
<td>Place where <em>Rubus ellipticus</em> is grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ip-sing</td>
<td>Ip-sing</td>
<td>Hidden Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La-khey</td>
<td>Lagay</td>
<td>Merry making land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoiksum(^{72})</td>
<td>Yuksam</td>
<td>Yiok means fort and sum means three in local Limboo dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mang-sa-bung</td>
<td>Mangsabung</td>
<td>Place of Gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ting-ting lek lekpa</td>
<td>Ting ting</td>
<td>When one of the branches of the Limboo tribe arrived in this place, they came along a stone which produces sound like the tingling of the bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tharpu</td>
<td>Tharpu</td>
<td>Temporary tented place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa-jek</td>
<td>Bajek</td>
<td>Drizzling water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phu Kam den</td>
<td>Daramdin(^{73})</td>
<td>Making earthen pots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keray Thangay</td>
<td>Gerethang</td>
<td>Buck wheat cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong lang</td>
<td>Chongrang</td>
<td>Place where millet is grown and harvested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La bing</td>
<td>Laring</td>
<td>Full moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mang-shela</td>
<td>Mangshila</td>
<td>Place of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terap</td>
<td>Darap</td>
<td>Flat and fertile land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing-phereng</td>
<td>Singpheng</td>
<td>Place where log is dissected into two halves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nambu</td>
<td>Nombu</td>
<td>Warm place to rest (Mana, the ancestor of one of the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{71}\) There are some names which are in its original version.

\(^{72}\) It is quite difficult to put conclusion on some of the names such as Yuksam and Geyzing as Lepchas claim Yuksam to be of their origin meaning three monks in their regional dialect and the Bhutia writes Geyzing as Gyalshing which means Royal field in their local dialect. The Bhutia terminology seems quite appropriate as Gyalshing stands just below Rabdentse, the Sikkim Palace.

\(^{73}\) The Lepchas refers to this place as Daramdin, the damaged lake.
Limboo sub-group is believed to have rested on Nambu on his journey from Tibet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saryong</td>
<td>Soreng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chezing</td>
<td>Geyzing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendam</td>
<td>Dentam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hee-ma-phang-</td>
<td>Heegoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saray-ba-dem</td>
<td>Siribadam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung⁷⁴</td>
<td>Chung (Tsong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limbith</td>
<td>Rimbik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungsugang</td>
<td>Lunsugoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nessa</td>
<td>Nessa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinglayang</td>
<td>Thingling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parthang</td>
<td>Bhaluthang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapchengee</td>
<td>Rabdentse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangsum</td>
<td>Yangsum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangdokbung</td>
<td>Mantabung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungyam</td>
<td>Lungyam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**THE CHANGING IDENTITY – FROM LIMBOO TO NEPALESE**

If in Limbuwan, east Nepal, the Gurkha state attached major importance to invite immigration to the hills and settle down in uninhabited country for helping it economically,

⁷⁴ The name of this place is pronounced as ‘Chung’ but it is written as ‘Tsong’.
socially and politically; the influx of what Bhasin\textsuperscript{75} puts up as invasive Nepalese into Sikkim was greatly accelerated by the British for raising the state revenues and strengthening their position. White writes \textit{`the coffers were empty and the first thing to be done was to devise some means by which we could raise the revenue’}. John C. White on being the Political Officer at Gangtok seriously took up the job of economic development for which he took up the Nepalese under his wing at the cost of alienating even the royal couple. This appears to have been part of the British ethnic policy in the eastern Himalayas in the 1890s. The sturdy and hard working class might have attracted the attention of the British for they were ready to take up any role that was provided to them. The Nepalese not only turned out to be a strongly ally and mercenary force but also became pioneers of the British penetration into the eastern Himalayas\textsuperscript{76}. They were considered as an inexpensive labour force for the economic development of the eastern Himalayan marches\textsuperscript{77}. O’Malley writes \textit{`the Nepalese are capable, cheerful and alert people, and are essentially a virile race. Though quick tempered and keen to resent an injustice, they are remarkably willing and loyal, if treated with consideration...Though small in stature, these Nepaleses have big hearts...Naturally vigorous, excitable and aggressive, they are law abiding’\textsuperscript{78}. The Nepalese were meant to support the British and thereby support their colonial interest. These hard working cultivators settled down on and cultivate any land he may find unoccupied without going through any


\textsuperscript{77}Sinah, A.C. (2007). “Communities in Search of Identities in Sikkim”. In Problems of Ethnicity in North-East India. edited by Dr. B.B. Kumar: Concept Publishing Company.

formality whatever, and once he occupied the land, and it was no one but only the Raja who could turn them out. The expansionist British also granted to the Sikkim ruler, Sidkeong Namgyal, the salute of fifteen guns and it was he who agreed to the first lease of land to the Nepalese settlement in Sikkim. Nepalese immigrants into the state of Sikkim began in the later half of the 19th century, and reached such proportions that laws were promulgated by the Sikkimese authorities to check the flow.

Hutt writes that the whole of Nepalese ‘diaspora’ community is descended from emigrants from Nepal in Sikkim, for before the immigration of Nepalese into Sikkim there were probably villages inhabited by Limboos and Mangars (people now being classified as Nepalese), as well as the autochthonous Lepchas, during the seventeenth century. With the exception of Lepchas, Limboos and to some extend Bhutias, all the communities in Sikkim are the migrants from Nepal during the last two hundred years or so. Some of them have moved to Sikkim during the Gurkha invasion in 1770s. Thus, none of them can claim distinct territory in Sikkim.

If in Limbuwan, modern east Nepal, the relationship between the Limboos and the migrant Hindu neighbours can be understood in the context of the confortation over the land.

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as narrated by the Limboos themselves, the relationship between the Nepalese and Limboos in Sikkim were of mutual trust. The Limboos mingled with the so called Nepalese section of Sikkimese citizenry over the period of time testifying their openness and high degree of tolerance, living side by side, unable to keep themselves largely to themselves. It seems that the preponderent Nepalese culture against the Limboos never worried them until they submerged strongly within the Nepalese fold where their own ethnic markers faded in the process. They intermingled to such an extent that made authors like Basnet\(^84\) to believe that the very name ‘Sikkim’ was the gift of the Nepalese. The history of Limboos seems to be misinterpreted for political ends.

They have adopted a new way of life influenced especially by the Hindu caste members, subjected to the process of Hinduization. The Hindu religion replaced their tribal faith whose oral tradition could not legitimize their tribal religion of Yumaism. Here, one can agree with Nari Rustomji’s view that puts up ‘tribal population is thinly spread. The influx, therefore, of even a handful of alien culture has an immediate impact, psychological as much as physical on indigenous population\(^85\).

Not only have the Limboos adopted the ways of Nepalese but even the Nepalese seems to have adopted some of the Limboo practices. One can view in some villages that the Nepalese have adopted the Limboo way of life to such an extent that they have become an inseparable part of the Limboo community. The researcher was quite amazed to see a Chettri village having accepted Yuma, the Limboo pantheon as their saviour. These Nepalese with a great capacity of acculturation have even adopted the language of the Limboos. Such people


are more Limboo in their way of life than those Limboos who have converted themselves to Christianity, thereby forgetting their ancestral belief. The ones converted to Christianity have gradually started forgetting their traditional social and cultural traits as what Phukon\textsuperscript{86} rightly puts it that cultural crisis is accentuated together with the increasing acceptance of the concept of ‘modernity’.

The Limboos have disowned their traditional dress, often perceived as a marker of identity, and have been greatly influenced by western tradition. The influence of modernisation is clearly visible among this ethnic group. It is only recently while struggling for their rights and resources that they have started specifying their culture and religion as a dagger in fighting their distinct identity. They have started rejecting the Hindu notions, reformed their religion and have even erected new religious structures. Marginalisation of Limboos has perhaps sharpened their ethnic identities and now they are trying to protect their identity from the onslaught of other culture.

It seems that with the passage of time, their attachment of being Nepalese moved them away from the Namgyals ruling over them. Thus, the attachment between the ruler and the ruled also widened making the Limboos feel neglected and suppressed politically, culturally, and economically as well as linguistically making poverty a part of their life. Some young Limboo generation of today even think that had the Chogyal been able to win the heart of the majority of the Limboos, he could have prevented the merger of Sikkim. However, it remains doubtful as majority of the Limboos at that time was poverty stricken, uneducated and lacked nationalistic sentiment. Change in government would have made little or no difference to them. Infact, in the eyes of Palden Thendup Namgyal, the last Namgyal ruler of Sikkim, the Limboos were the aboriginals of Sikkim having a distinct identity and had close


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affinity with the Bhutias and Lepchas. And when the power began to shift from the hands of Chogyal to the Indian government, the Limboos politically merged in the Nepalese group when their Tsong seat in the State Assembly was abolished, thinking them to be the part of Nepalese. Limboos thus, lost their last hope of having distinct identity when Sikkim became a part of the Indian Union making Palden Thendup Namgyal, the last Chogyal of Sikkim stand up alone in his battle for holding up Sikkim’s identity.

Migration is defined as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, usually across some type of administrative boundary. Unlike the singular demographic events of birth and death, a person can migrate many times, for varied durations, and across numerous territorial divisions. The inherent complexity of most migrations-especially those within and between poor countries hinders our understanding of the ways migration affects and is affected by economic development and international relations. In the large, migration studies range from micro scale psychological analyses of migrant decision-making to macro scale economic models of labor flows between the periphery and the core of the world economy. Although most migration theories accent economic factors at the expense of coercive elements, some theorists are taking into account cultural, ethnic, and political influences. Of the many who have limited opportunities or who are oppressed in their home communities, only a fraction will actually decide to relocate, and an even smaller fraction will have the means to do so. Sometimes environmental factors or socio-economic as well as political conditions which are so brutal to threaten one’s life may also lead to the population dislocations. Such brutal conditions force people to migrate for survival. If some migrations are caused by life threatening problems, there are migrations which are caused by the desire of the people to lead a better life or say for the material gain. Wars, revolutions, the

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rapid development of an international economy, desolate political and economic conditions in many countries, perceived opportunities abroad, and threatened population decline or shortage of workers in several developed countries are among the forces that have sent tens of millions of immigrants, guest workers, refugees, and illegal migrants across state lines. Some have moved willingly, even gladly; others reluctantly; and still others under threat of violence\textsuperscript{88}. For the Limboos, they began to be viewed as migrants because the boundaries of the place within which they lived shifted.

The migration is based on the decisions of individual families responding to basic human needs, and consequent disruptions have to be balanced against these families' (and villages') existing hopelessness and marginality. With migration, families of these regions are often able to improve their income positions vis a vis those of more economically advanced regions. Furthermore, unlike other inter-national flows into such regions, remittances reach the hands of thousands of migrant families, rather than families of a few entrepreneurs or social leaders. The decision-making power behind migration and behind the spending of remittance earnings is similarly dispersed. Contrast this with the concentration of decision making in other matters that profoundly affect the lives of rural poor in developing nations, such as agricultural credit and infrastructural improvements by national and state government officials, establishment of local industry and commerce by entrepreneurs, provision of adequate city services by local government officials, social and political leadership by local elites, and so forth. It follows that for the poor international migration may be more certain and secure pathway to economic and social mobility than local opportunities within the existing system\textsuperscript{89}.


The fluid and changing boundaries led to the fluidity in the identity of the Limboos of Sikkim, sometimes giving them the indigenous identity and at the same time defining them as a migrant group. Sometimes shifting the village in order to cope up with the ecological constraints does make historians to term their shifting of village as a migration caused by economic or religious-political order. But in the case of Limboo it seems that more than their shifting, their border land has shifted. Mullard describes the early Sikkimese areas directly and indirectly under the rule of Phuntsok Namgyal with the regions in the modern west Sikkim, small parts of eastern Nepal (namely parts of Limbuwan) and areas just east of Ravangla. There are number of documents in the palace archives, which details the taxes collected by Sikkim in what is now eastern Nepal\(^{90}\). It suggests that some of the land of the Limboos was under the authority of the Namgyal Dynasty. The policies of war and conquest has in fact re-defined the boundaries and made the Limboos straddle between the two nations of modern Nepal and India. The Limboos have not migrated but the boundaries of the land within which they lived have shifted. Hermanns writes ‘Tradition holds that, after the Lepchas, the Limboos are the oldest inhabitants of the place having settled there even before the Tibetans and the Nepalese came to settle in the land’ \(^{91}\). Though it can’t be denied that the humans originated in Africa but it can be estimated that the Limboos have been living in the land of what Limboos term as Limbuwan since time immemorial. So, with the division of the land and the fixing up of new boundaries, the Limboos themselves got divided into two as the Sikkimese and the Nepali Limboos. So what is called migration appears to be the change in borderland caused by various reasons. But such change in the boundary has been in the later

\(^{90}\) Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication

years interpreted differently, thereby terming the Limoos as immigrants into the areas of Sikkim. Limboos has therefore been made the victims of such historical writings.

Apparently, the land of Limboos has been an important juncture of trade in the early times between India-Nepal and Tibet. The trade network that they carried out made them move towards the region of Tibet, often marrying the Tibetans and settling there. It was from Tibet that some of the Limboos migrated to Sikkim in the later years making them designate as Tsongs. James S. Olson in his ‘ethno-historical dictionary of China’ writes: ‘Historically there has been a great deal of contact between Tibetans and the Limboos because of their Himalayan passes from Sikkim into Tibet’s Chumbi valley...today because of their historical commercial relationship and the current proximity to the Tibetan border and the Himalayan trade routes, it is likely that at any given time hundreds of Limboos are living in the Tibetan region of the People’s Republic of China’.

The word ‘Tsong’ might have also been used to designate the trader class. The oral narration also talks about Limboos who traded in cattle. The people in western Sikkim narrate that their forefathers were small agricultural traders. Even Waddel explains that the Limboos came to Sikkim with the cattle trade and became ‘the chief cattle merchants and butchers of Sikkim’. The Limboos might have settled in the eastern Himalayan belt from the time immemorial, and it was their trading business which made them shift their location during those time when boundaries were flexible; mostly settling in the region which now falls under East Nepal and western Sikkim. The war of conquest and the fixation of the new boundaries,
led to the misleading identity formation of the Limboos. It seems misleading to view such change in the demarcation from the context of migration.

Thus, the change in the boundaries, trading occupation, shifting of the villages, scarcity of food and resources and the process of acculturation made the Limboos gain different identity in the modern era. With the influx of inexpensive Nepalese labour force by the British for raising the state revenues, the Limboos began to get acculturated into their fold, with the abolition of Tsong seat in the State Assembly they began to lose their distinct identity and finally got submerged into the Nepalese fold. Though they are acknowledged to be one of the earliest settlers of the Sikkim along with the Lepchas but the colonial administrative discourse progressively classified them as Nepalese when the land revenue rates were finalized. It was only a small proportion of Limboos who migrated to Sikkim in the 19th century 95 but this later migration of the Limboos in small amount also to some extent changed the fate of the Limboos from being indigenous to migrant.

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