CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

This research work is an attempt to examine the forces that are playing decisive role in making the Limboo tribesmen search for their distinct identity. As there are various factors that play vital role in ethnic formation, what we need to investigate in this thesis is the interplay of various forces such as religion, culture, society, polity, economy etc. that has led to the marginalization of this tribe. This marginal hill tribe is now asserting distinctiveness through various processes, which is making them revive their past culture and tradition that helps them create distinctiveness from other communities living in Sikkim. It is also important to understand the reason behind the emergence of various Limboo associations that are busy working for the preservation of their culture, tradition, language etc. In order to understand the formation of such associations, it becomes necessary to understand the socio-religious as well as political factors and their traditional values that have been sustained through time, the rise of Buddhism as well as Hinduism and their influence, policies of the various Governments and lastly the emergence of Limboo identity consciousness.

History is present in all the communities, even powerless and unknown group have their histories. Such little known is the history of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim. Though it is difficult to start the ethno-history of this fringe tribe without presenting their detailed history, we would like to first discuss on the concept of ethnicity and its importance felt in the globalised World of today before addressing the narratives of this community. It is not that the issue of ethnicity was not felt as important in the past but the emergence of the ethnic

identity as a major social and political issue in Sikkim is leading to the emergence of various ethnic groupings trying to revive their old forgotten tradition. There are stories which attempt to show that the ethnic groups in Sikkim are more interrelated than divided. The process of synthesis and acculturation has been going on between people for centuries. The study of ethnicity and identity becomes relevant for understanding the emerging need felt among the Limboo tribe to preserve and reconstruct their identity.

Scholars have given variety of approach to ethnicity. Ethnicity is a recent concept in social sciences, even though the word ‘ethnic’ has been used in the English language since the mid 14th century. Its meaning have changed radically throughout history; originally referring to the heathens, pagans or gentiles, it acquired radical characteristics in the 19th century and was used in the 20th century U.S. as a way to refer to those immigrants of non northern or Western Europe descent. It first grew in importance in the social sciences as anthropologists tried to make sense of the emergent social and cultural formations within Africa and other parts of the Third World in the 1960. Hence ethnic group took a new meaning, namely the idea of tribe, formerly used to refer to socio-political units whose members are related by kinship ties. This shift in meaning took place as many social scientists attempted to critique Eurocentric discourse in which the people of the developing world were referred to as ‘tribes’ while those in the developed world remained ‘peoples’ or even ‘nations’. This latest incarnation of ethnicity meant that, for the first time in the history of the word, it was and continues to be applied universally across the globe.

Ethnic group can be defined as “a segment of larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others to have a common origin, to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participates in shared activities in which the
common origin and culture are significant ingredients. The so-called primordial school of ethnicity holds that ethnicity is so deeply engrained in human history and experience that it cannot be denied that it exists, objectively and subjectively, and that it should, therefore, be considered a fact of life in relations between individuals and groups, who all have an ethnic identity. The instrumentalist’s school of ethnicity argues that ethnicity is by no means an indisputable historical fact. Rather, instrumentalists suggest that ethnicity is first and foremost a resource in hands of leaders to mobilize followers in pursuit of other interest such as physical security, economic gain or political power. The circumstantialists on the other hand stress the voluntary nature of ethnicity, and define it as ‘an identity based on social acceptance and subjective identification of internal and external social conditions; and is thus defined by circumstances and constructed to achieve specific goals specially in situation of ethnic competition’. For Rosaldo, ethnicity is neither completely expressive (and primodial) nor completely instrumental (and situational); rather, it ‘usually is both instrumental and expressive, and theories that opposes the two perspectives have posed a false dichotomy’. On occasions of cultural ‘get-together’, ethnic identity ‘thickens’ while the traditions are selectively re-enacted, not simply repeated. Ethnicity enables an individual to define his sense of belongingness and helps him to acquire a measure of self-esteem; its persistence is explicable.

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Ethnicity is also a term used to classify groups. However, rather than being based on colour or rooted in biological notions, although genetic inheritance and certain traits are characteristics of ethnic groups, the term ethnicity relates more to a group’s cultural traditions, geographical ties, common language and other commonalities. It is used as a means to better understand the experience of assorted groups across the globe. Ethnicity has in fact become core and central issue in the socio-political life of the people in the world today. It has been held responsible for virtually everything, from the break-up of nations to the outcome of elections. In the modern scenario, we see lot of ethnic awareness, ethnic sentiment, and ethnic talk; despite the fact that it was supposed to wither away with the rise of modernity. It was believed in the western democracies that the spread of education, industrialization, mass struggles and the economic demands over the length of time would erode ethnic consciousness. But this did not happen. Universal literacy and massive industrialization did not prevent the genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany and the ethnic upsurge of the Khazaks in USSR etc. Not only is ethnicity felt as primordial sentiment, an emotional attachment to ‘my people’, a valuable tool for protection or enhancement of the status. It is in addition, a way of trying to deal with the experience of anomie and feeling of alienation. The process of modernization, introduction of modern education, competition for jobs, growing awareness of social, political and economic disparity, the growing consciousness among the people for the need to preserve their culture and heritage etc. have all contributed towards the growth of ethnic consciousness. Instead of disappearance,

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8 Sabharwal, Gopal (2006). Ethnicity and Class- Social Division in an Indian City: Oxford University Press.


modernization is further helping in making ethnicity one of the major elements of the society. Modernization and nation-building with all its emphasis on materialism, technology and industrialization and too much urbanization have been responsible for alienation among workers of the world. In developed societies, in particular, this becomes so acute that it gives rise to a search for identity. The revival to ethnicism is a by-product of the reaction against this alienation born out of modern civilization\textsuperscript{11}.

A common assumption of ‘developmentalism’ as modernizing project and ideology has been that ethnicity is destined to wither away as an anachronism, to give way to a totally secular social order where particularism of colour, creed and language will not impede full social participation. This assumption of post ethnic consciousness in the developmental paradigm sees ethnic distinction as losing force either to a working class consciousness (as in Marxism), or to an emphasis on ‘nation-building’ as a norm in which the state and the market come to replace older ethnic identities. Yet history does not seem to be following this developmental path to secular identities. The more rapid the development of a region, the more modernized its infrastructure, the ethnic identities seem to deepen, and ethnic conflicts seem to intensify. The usual explanation for the ethnic conflicts is to assume that difference breeds conflict, and to go into the history of regions, linguistic and regional clashes and communal tension in the past\textsuperscript{12}.

Ethnicity is related to man’s quest for belonging. This quest has been intensified in the context of the contemporary crisis of civilization, which for sometime put competitiveness rather than reciprocity, profit rather than satisfaction, contract rather than


\textsuperscript{12} Kothari writes that the scholars in Srilanka studies Tamil-Sinhala differences and the scholars in India studies Hindu-Muslim tensions as conveyors of past. For more details see Kothari, Rajni (1989). Ethnicity; in Identity, conflict & Crisis ed by Kumar David and Santasilan Kudirgamar: Arena press Hong Kong.
companionate relation at the highest pedestal, and which has created a condition, wherein survival of life on the planet has become a doubtful proposition\textsuperscript{13}. Ethnicity has become one of the several factors in determining identity and it develops as people mobilize their social and cultural resources as their defense. It is a readily definable way of expressing a real sense of group identity that links the member of ‘we’ because it emphasizes their difference from ‘them’\textsuperscript{14}.

Kashyap\textsuperscript{15} is of the opinion that under the system of representative democracy, in fact, ethnic group survives as a potent force in political processes simply because they are able to extract benefits from the state on grounds of their ethnic organization. The competitive electoral politics the natural clamour for building vote banks dictate a search for narrower identities. Religion, language, caste or tribe all comes handy for building group loyalties as means of power. Ethnicity becomes a cohesive force for political power ends. It is said that even in Sikkim the formation of political parties based on ethnic grounds basically led to the involvement of ethnicity\textsuperscript{16}. But if seen, ethno-politics alone does not prepare a ground for the birth of ethnicity. Political discourse constitutes only one element in the overall process of ethnic identity production\textsuperscript{17}. In fact, ethnicity does not occur in vacuum but even socio-


\textsuperscript{14} Jha, Shasikant. eds. (1998). Ethnicity and Nation Building in Eastern Europe: Radiant Publisher.


\textsuperscript{16} Sankrityayana says that that the involvement of ethnicity in the political parties started only after the formation of Sikkim National Party on 30\textsuperscript{th} April, 1948, supported by the then Maharaja of Sikkim. For details see Sankrityayana, Jeta (1994). “Development without Shocks: A Himalayan Experience”. In Sikkim - Society, Polity, Economy/Environment. edited by Mahendra P. Lama: Indus Publishing Company, ND.

economic, cultural, religious issues etc. are held responsible for its outburst. The threat of minorization, the problem of migration, issue of economic insecurity, religious and cultural issues, growing awareness and the ideas of equal rights and man’s quest for belongings might also lead to the rise of ethnic consciousness. The ethnic groupings in Sikkim which once was class based has been turned into caste based, where caste groups are divided on the basis of deep rooted history and cultural division. One can see the formation of numerous caste based associations who seem busy reviving their old forgotten tradition and culture. Such ethnic groupings have always been the way of bargaining with the State. Ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain subjective belief in the common descent because of similarities of physical type of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exist. If in the past, religion has played an important role thereby dividing the people into numerous groups, at present caste seems to surpass the importance religion had played in the past. Looking closely one can say that there are various factors that give rise to ethnicity. It may be due to differential treatment given by the State, inequality imposed by the society, revival of primordialism, ambition of the elite of the minority group for political power, manipulation by the leadership of the state, external support, nationalism itself, uneven distribution of power and resources and neglect of the ethnic group. Not one factor can be singled out as the primary factor. It is the interplay of all these factors, which may be held responsible for the rise of ethno-nationalism and thereby, ethnic conflicts. Economic issues like underdevelopment, deteriorating economic

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19 If seen in a wider perspective, the people of Sikkim are divided castewise, but no doubt the Limboos are being seen divided among themselves by the religious factors.

conditions, over population, land alienation, competition for scarce resources, growth of
poverty, problem of unemployment etc are usually cited as a factors contributing to ethnic
tensions. Other problems like denial of opportunity for state building, policy of assimilation,
and political discrimination, violation of human rights, etc. also generate ethnic feelings
among the marginalized communities against the oppressors\textsuperscript{21}. Ethnicity is an excluvist
product of the modern nation-state emerging only within clearly demarcated national
boundaries, on the other hand, the narrative of ‘de-territorialization’ suggests that due to
constant border-crossing movements including transnational labour migration, conflict
induced displacement, and cosmopolitan jet-setting, locality and national borders are no
longer the primary factors in shaping ethnic identity. Ethnicity is at once shaped strongly by
country specific concepts, yet also dependent on a dialogue across state borders\textsuperscript{22}.

Time has, in fact, played a crucial role in changing the mode of ethnicity. Recent
history shows how in 1947, in the Indian sub-continent ethnicity based on religion seemed to
be most important and even led to the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan,
but few years later identities based on language and different culture lessened the tie of
religion and led to the partition of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh\textsuperscript{23}. Writing in early
1990s, the then Director General of the Anthropological Survey of India K.S. Singh found
ethnicity in India generally being interpreted as recognition of rights of the community to
maintain its identity, of pluralism, a return to the roots of life and culture, for participative

\textsuperscript{21}Srikanth, H. (2005). “Resolving Ethnic Conflicts in the Northeast: Need for Radical Civil Forums”. In Inter-
Ethnic Conflict in North East India. edited by Girin Phukon: South East Asia Publication.

\textsuperscript{22}Shneiderman writes about the rise of ethnic identity among the Thangami community of Nepal and India,
where ethnicity is shaped by country-specific concepts. For details see Shneiderman, Sara (2009). “Ethnic (P)
reservations- Comparing Thangami Ethnic Activism in Nepal and India”. In Governance, Conflict and Civil

\textsuperscript{23}Narayanan, Leila.1989. Ethnicity in Urban Context- The Gujaratis in Madras City; Rawat Publication.
democracy, and for genuine federal and decentralized polity. Furthermore, he noted that ‘ethnicity in India generally means tribal ethnicity, which is largely concerned with articulation of tribal aspirations for political power through creation of autonomous areas or separate state’ 24. Brass defines the concept in terms of cultural markers such as language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or custom, religion or race 25. It has nothing to do with nation, state, majority or minority. Any individual can belong to more than one ethnic group, depending upon the interest with which an individual wants to identify himself. But in India, as Varma notes, there is clear distinction between ethnic and minority communities. Punjabis and Gujaritis, for example, are ethnic groups that are distinguished by language, dress and diet. Schedule castes and Muslim or Christians, on the other hand, are minority groups that have either been discriminated against or believed themselves to be the objects of discrimination 26. The rise of ethnic consciousness and the growth of ethnic groupings have led to distortion rather than protection sometimes even creating the feeling of negative communalism based on exclusivist identity and in fact tearing apart societies.

The spectre of ethnicity is variously expressed as assertion of cultures, communal upsurges, and revivalism of religions, voices and movements of marginalized peoples, regions and nationalities. It represents the affirmation of diversity, of indigenous authenticity, of organic as against televised or museumised cultures- or classicized cultures as found in ancient texts. But it takes others and quite opposite forms too. In its defiance of the modern nation-state and Western technology, it too takes a homonised and monotheistic forms, destroys diverse boundaries and identities that come in a way of its messianic sweep, gets militarized, and stresses revenge and martyrdom in the cause of ‘victory’ rather than

sublimation and transcendence of the immediate. In doing so it undermines the finer qualities of the sacred and the mystical and emphasized hard ‘fundamentalist’ notions of religiosity, culture and ethnicity. At the present juncture of world history ethnicity takes on centralizing and decentralizing, dominating and liberating forms. Its more humane version respects plurality and ‘includes’ other identities. It’s more angry and defiant version is monotheistic and excludes others. What is more, the two are found to be caught in a strange partnership against the more secular and scientific drives of the modern state and the modern capitalism. So long as this happens to be the case, the future of ethnicity as a mode of shaping human prospects will remain unclear. Equally unclear is how ferocious and aggrandizing or temperate and compassionate it will turn out to be.\textsuperscript{27}

The rise of ethnic consciousness is visible among almost all the communities residing in Sikkim. In fact, the issue of gaining tribal status has made their cultural revival of utmost importance, and it serves as a means of economic gain. In this process culture is changed rather than preserved in the name of attaining indigenous rights.\textsuperscript{28} The post-democracy in Sikkim has helped the rise of ethnic groupings rather than help it wither away, which in future may cause ethnic conflict. Each group is trying to revive and retain their culture and tradition, encouraged by their strong desire to improve their status as De Vos defines ethnicity as ‘consisting of the subjective symbolic or emblematic use by a group of

\textsuperscript{27}Kothari, Rajni (1989). Ethnicity; in Identity, Conflict & Crisis. edited by Kumar David and Santasilan Kudirgamar: Arena press Hong Kong.

people…of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups\textsuperscript{29}. Basically, there are two criteria that influence the makeup of ethnic groups. The first criterion is objective and non-political in nature and secondly, the subjective criterion which is cultivated for the sake of group formation and politicization of ethnic groups\textsuperscript{30}.

Ethnic attachments are variously seen as ways to preserve a precious cultural heritage; to soften class lines; to protect or to win economic and political advantages for disadvantaged groups, to furnish a more intimate and flavourful connection with large, impersonal societies; and to retard the shift of overwhelming power to the State. It would sometimes appear, however, that in social sciences as in the physical world, for every action there is equal and opposite reaction. The strong emphasis in the last twenty years on the importance of ethnicity has been countered- although by a relatively small number of persons- on both evidential and ideological ground. Sociologically, a more powerful argument is the contention that the current stress on ethnicity is divisive and inegalitarian in its effects. Current attention to ethnicity, Stienberg argues (1981), tends to bind us to the structures of discrimination. It leads to cultural rather than to ‘opportunity’ explanations of inequality. Orlando Patterson argues that emphasis on ethnicity is inherently conservative, even though its proponents may believe it to be liberal. At its worst, he says, it is ‘vulgar chauvinistic polemics’, and even at its best it is “a sophisticated attack on the modern industrial civilization”\textsuperscript{31}.

The Limboo tribe of Sikkim too, is working to re-establish their distinct identity within Sikkim. Though an aboriginal indigenous of Sikkim, they have been treated as


migrants, which is further intensifying their creed for distinctiveness. The Limboos have been living in Sikkim from the time immemorial, and have played great roles in the formation of Sikkimese Kingdom, often occupying high position in the Namgyal court\textsuperscript{32}. But with time, they began to lose their distinct identity through the process of acculturation which was further intensified by their political lumping with the so-called migrant Nepalese\textsuperscript{33}. Historical writing has no way helped them gain back their lost identity as most of the writers have either tagged them with the migrant Nepali group or have confused the readers by making distinction between the Tsongs\textsuperscript{34} and the Limboos. Historical writings too, have rather given them fluid identity. The Limboos are no where identified, either it be tourist pamphlets or paintings and posters that represent the ethnic communities of Sikkim. Thus, the marginalization of this community is making them want for the revival of history, culture, tradition and to get back their unique identity and position that they believe to have enjoyed in the past; for which this tribe has been using their ethnic symbols such as language, dress, ornaments, food, musical instruments etc. during cultural programmes as well as tourism festivals to preserve their unique identity; consciously or unconsciously highlighting their difference from the other communities living in Sikkim.

The obligations of satisfying primordial and universal needs of security, identity, recognition and development for the establishment of stable politics are some of the reasons

\textsuperscript{32} Mullard (2011) writes about the Lepchas and Limboos occupying high position such as Limboo Yong Lim and Lepcha A’dengs. Even during his presentation held at Rachana book House, Gangtok on 12\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 2012, he discussed on the Sikkimese class based society during the Namgyal dynasty providing examples of high level Limboo individuals. Mullard, Saul (2011). Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History: Brill Publication.

\textsuperscript{33} I have used the term Nepali/Nepalese to designate all the caste groups residing in Sikkim except plainsmen, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo. The caste groups like Chettri, Bahun, Newar, Rai, Mangar, Gurung, Tamang, Bhujel, schedule caste etc. are designated as Nepalese.

\textsuperscript{34} The Bhutia tribe of Sikkim refers to the Limboos as Tsongs/ Gtsong as they believe that the Limboos in some period of time had migrated to Sikkim from the Tsang province of Tibet.
for the formation of the ethnic groupings. Ethnic identity is necessarily an elusive and complex concept. The term often involves a variety of objective and subjective realities. Ethnic variations bring richness to the society and to individuals if it occurs in a context that also brings unity to a society and to humankind and allows freedom of choice to individuals. Culture contains many glorious elements, but they may also be encumbered with the flotsam and jetsam of the historical passage. If the ethnic structure freezes each group in “the good old ways”- ethnocentric at best; sexist; racist, and chauvinistic at worst- we shall certainly not be able to adapt to life on this small and crowded planet.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Scholars differ in their view regarding the history of Limboo tribe in the Himalayan state of Sikkim, India and adjoining areas. Here are the excerpts on the Limboo tribe presented by some of the eminent authors.

**Risley, H.H. (1894)** is said to be an authentic account on the history of the Sikkim Himalayan kingdom. It provides valuable information on the Namgyal dynasty and later interference of the British Government in the affairs of Sikkim and even brings out the purpose of British involvement in Sikkim. Risley writes that race and religion would play an important role in Sikkim. Here, Limboo indignity is based on their gotra. This work is also blamed for distorting the history of Limboos.

**Chie Nakane (1966)** with two months of field work in the eastern part of Sikkim has written exclusively on Lepchas, where they are termed as autochthonous inhabitant of Sikkim, and the migrant Bhutias and the Nepalese. While writing on the role played by the

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migrant Bhutias on the formation of Sikkim kingdom and the process of Tibetanization, Nakane fails to mention the treaty of Lho-Mon-Tsong sum and the role played by the Limboos in the formation of Sikkimese Kingdom. The limited period of two months might have kept the author aloof from the Limboo community who are found in majority in the western part of Sikkim.

Chemjong (1967) has divided his work into two parts. The first part contains the history of the Kirat people, their religion, culture and various dance forms. This work then goes on to discuss the coming of the Limboos, the birth of their name and the establishment of Limbuwan i.e. the land of the Limboos. The second part deals with various Kirat Kings and the achievements of the Kirats as well as the Gurkha invasion. Chemjong claims Phuntsok Namgyal to be the Kirat King of Northern Limbuwan. He asserts that in the beginning the Kirat people were rationalistic idolaters who had neither temples nor any images. They worshipped those spirits, believed to be residents of fire and sun and later during the integration of Nepal; the land of Limbuwan was gradually incorporated into Prithive Narayan Shah’s fold through a negotiation settlement between Prithivi Narayan Shah and local chiefs rather than by outright conquest.

Basnet, L.B. (1974) has divided the book into two parts. The first part deals with the geography and the inhabitants of Sikkim, the Gurkha immigration and the British yoke in Sikkim. The second part deals with the interplay of political parties, the Sikkim Durbar and the Government of India on the political stage of Sikkim, since 1947 till the May agreement of 1973. Basnet further writes that the emergence of the Sikkim National Party in 1948 led to the rise of ethnic symbols for political purpose. The author here claims that the name Sikkim itself is the gift of Nepalese and that this name was given by Limboo bride who was married to a Lepcha chief; he further writes that Limboos also known as Tsongs were the migrants from Tsangpo valley who migrated to Sikkim and Limbuwan in eastern Nepal.
Dahal, Dharnidhar’s (1984) work deals with the political aspect of Sikkim. According to this work, the Tsongs (Limboos) were the inhabitants of south east Tibet and were the followers of Yuma (nature God). It was the religious convulsion that led to the migration of the Tsongs via Bhutan towards western Sikkim. He further writes that at present majority of Tsongs follow Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism with a little proportion of population who still follows their own traditional religion called ‘Mundhum’.

Sanyal, Charu Chandra (1979) studies one of the kirat communities i.e. the Limboos. Moving into the ancient period, Sanyal describes the migration of the Kirats into India before 1000 B.C. and their settlement in the lower Himalayas moving forward to be the first ruling dynasty of the Kingdom of Nepal. Through this work Sanyal brings us to the present status of the Limboos, who have discarded their old Yumaist faith and have accepted Buddhism, though their customs are more inclined towards Brahmanism and Shamanism. This work studies their domestic life and their language.

Singh, K.S. (1993) has given different meanings to the titles of Limboos. Considering them to be an offshoot of Kirats who emigrated from Tsang province of Tibet to eastern Nepal and finally to Sikkim, the author defines Limboos to be the earliest settlers of Sikkim. The tradition, culture and the Limboo way of life have been focused.

Subba, Cahitanya (1998) deals with the language, literature, customs, religion, cultural conservation and changing aspects of the Limboos. This work also emphasizes on the theory of Hinduization but is limited to the study of the Limboos of Nepal.

Subba, J.R. (1998) describes the belief system and the philosophical doctrines of Yuma Samyo, where a belief system is traditionally handed over to the descendents through Mundhum (Oral Tradition). It provides brief account of the creation of the Universe and the human race by Goddesses Tagera Ningwaphuma. It further describes the eight dens (layers)
of the Universe. According to this study, the Limboo believes that there are nine worlds above the earth and nine below in this Universe. Yumaism believes that there are two supernatural powers—malevolent and benevolent—to reattribute and reward the vicious and the virtuous deeds of human being. This work also describes the Limboo religious priests who fulfill both the role of religious priests as well as local healers.

**Subba, J.R. (1999)** has written comprehensively on account of the custom, culture and tradition of the Limboos. Most part of the writing is devoted to the Limboo religion and its underlying philosophy and teaching. Going back to the year 1642 and talking about the unified treaty of Lho-Men-Tsong sum, this work claims that this treaty remained only in papers. The Limboo subjects faced harassment during the long reign of later Chogyals further helping them get marginalized with the advent of British protectorate and the influx of the Nepalese and lastly the merger of the Sikkimese kingdom with the Indian Union.

**Subba, T.B. (1999)** explicitly deals with the three Kirat communities i.e. Limboo, Rai & Yakkhas of the Eastern Himalayas; their language, religion, polity, culture, economy and society. Subba further discusses as how the Limboos have suffered domination and finally got assimilated with the dominant groups, thus losing their identity while trying to adjust themselves to the new environment. This work focuses more on eastern Nepal than Sikkim.

**Arora, Vibha (2007)** studies the tribes of contemporary Sikkim i.e. the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Limboos. It discusses the identity politics of being and becoming tribal in India. According to the author, tribalism reflects empowerment and political assertion in Sikkim. Arora discusses at length, the marginalization of the Limboos and argues that it was not the 333 years of Namgyal rule but the Hinduisation of the Limboos and the policies of the Colonial Government that led to their marginalization. Lastly, the author displays that how at present the Limboos are citing their myths and legends and trying to assert their indigeneity.
Wanchuk & Zulca (2007) researched on the historical, mythological and cultural aspects of the mountain Khangchendzonga. It reminds us of the attachment of the Limboos with Jannu i.e. an important western outliner of Khangchendzonga, showing the mistake made by Risley (1894) while writing ‘Gazetter of Sikkim’. It deals with the introduction, spread and suppression of the Limboo language and script and great pioneering leaders associated with it. In the concluding portion of one of the chapters, the author discusses as how the Limboos in spite of being an aboriginal community of Sikkim has been marginalized to a great extend.

Balikci, Anna (2008) studies the ritual within the Bhutia community of the agricultural Tinchim village in North Sikkim. Though her work explicitly explores the rituals and relationship between the Buddhist and Shamanistic priests, this work also divides the Limboos into two groups i.e. the early and the later migrants, thereby giving important information about the aboriginal Tsongs and the later migrant Limboos of Sikkim.

Sinah, A.C. (2008) deals with the long history of theocratic & feudal rule and also studies the socio-political change that has occurred during the last three decades in Sikkim. Sinah denotes Limboos to be the marginalized aboriginal indigenous community of Sikkim whose marginality was recognized by the last Chogyal of Sikkim, who granted Limboos the Tsong seat in the State assembly which was later on abolished with the signing of May 8th Agreement.

Mullard, Saul (2011) describes the process of State formation and the socio-political situation in the region during the early days of Sikkim’s history. He describes the presence of Lepcha, Bhutia and the Limboo chiefs ruling the proto-states and the oath of allegiance taken before the consecration of Phuntsok Namgyal as the first Chogyal of Sikkim. He rejects the year 1642 to be the year of the formation of the Sikkimese Kingdom as it is impossible to
establish and consolidate a state within a year. The formation of a state or kingdom takes place through a gradual process. The introduction of early state structure, social stratification and taxation are also addressed.

**Fitzpatrick (2011)** has reconstructed the history of class formation in the traditional Limboo village of Mamangkhe. It discusses about the introduction of cardamom production, change in wealth distribution in the village and the migration of non-Limboos that made the Limboo population lose their land in the hand of the non-Limboo population. This work gives an account of the cardamom cultivation and the emergence of economic differentiation. This work, thus, gives an account of socio-cultural and economic life of the Limboos in the village of eastern Nepal.

**Mullard, Saul (2012)** though characterizing Sikkimese history to be interwined with the history of its neighbours, brings forth the uniqueness of Sikkim in itself. Focus is made on the documentary evidence, thereby denying the historiography of Sikkim based on supernaturalism. The chronological difference within texts written during 17th cen. has been focused bringing forth the narratives, whereby Sikkimese historical writing was re-interpreted, enhancing the position of Lha tsun Chenpo and diminishing the position of Nadag Phuntsok Rinzing. He also describes the treaty of Lho-Mon-Tsong sum, showing that the rule of Phuntsok Namgyal did not remain uncontested but was challenged by the rebellion of the Lepchas and the Limboos.

**Subba, J.R. (2012)** explicitly explains the concept of Yumaism. Explaining the Yumaist concept, he brings out the similarity between the Christian and Yumaist theory of Trinitarianism, while bringing out the difference in the Yumaist and the Hindu concept of soul existence in animate and inanimate objects. He explains the existence of seven sheaths of sub-soul which surrounds the human soul. He has even documented the food and
livelihood bio-resource of Limboo tribe, the cultural symbol, which seems to be disappearing with the process of modernization as well as the increase in the population caused by the migration of people in large number from the neighbouring areas.

**Bhattarcharya, Arpana** focuses on the society and polity of Sikkim, the rise of Buddhism and its impact on the political aspects of Sikkim and the traditional system of administration. This work also contain few lines on the Limboos where the author on one hand writes that the Limboo migration took place during the reign of Maharaja Sidkeyong Namgyal and on the other writes that Tsong are the aboriginal people of Sikkim. This reveals that the author is unaware of the fact that Tsong was the name given to the Limboos by the Bhutias.

Closely observing the earlier works, it seems that not much effort is made regarding the study of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim in particular. Earlier studies were done taking into account the history, society, geography, economy and politics of Sikkim, thereby giving little or no emphasis to the history of the Limboos. Even if little is written on the Limboos, they have treated Limboos as the later migrants there by distorting their history. For instance, authors like Rose 37 has written that large proportion of Nepali immigrants in Sikkim are Limboos from the eastern most hill district of Nepal who have had a long historical relationship with the Lepchas of Sikkim and whose assimilation in the Sikkimese society and polity was more easily achieved than other Nepali ethnic groups. Likewise, writers like Joshi 38 has gone to an extend of writing that the Limboos are original settlers of Tsangpo valley (Tibet) which once formed the Limbuwan district of present Nepal and the then

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western Sikkim. He further writes that the Limboo community at present is equally divided between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. He has used the name Tsong in two ways. Firstly, to denote a community from the Tsangpo valley in Tibet and secondly, as a substitute for the word ‘Nepali’, saying that the term Tsong was used to denote the Nepalese citizenry of Sikkim for the political purpose. Some writers have even designated them as a low caste Nepalese. In addition, the division of the land of the Limboos between two countries of Nepal and India (Sikkim) has made most of the writers quote them as immigrants from east Nepal. The avowed task of distinguishing between the true and untrue has remained undone. Thus, the voice of the Sikkimese Limboo is left unheard. No in-depth historical work has been published on their origin, society, polity of Limboos during the Namgyal era and after the merger with the Indian Union. A long history of their marginalization has in fact remained undocumented.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sikkim is culturally and ethnically, a multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual society. The predominant group in Sikkim today, both numerically and in political terms, is that of Nepalese, with the smaller ethnic aboriginal groups of Lepchas and Bhutias. Here, it is important to note that in spite of being an aboriginal indigenous group of Sikkim, the Limboos have been merged with the later Nepalese migrants. The appointment of J.C. White as the political officer of Sikkim led to the large scale migration of the Nepalese. As the country was sparsely populated he encouraged the hard working and cheap labour force Nepalese to immigrate and put more land under cultivation. The Limboos thus began to lose their land in the hands of migrant Nepalese and along with their land they were drawn into Hindu society through the process of Hinduization and Sanskritization.
To begin with, the abolition of Tsong seat in the State Assembly during the May 8th Agreement of 1973, the influence of Hinduism, introduction of Nepali language as the lingua franca of Sikkim etc., have led to considerable loss of their identity symbols and their political lumping with the migrant groups made them almost invisible to the outsiders. The Limboo society has also experienced religious disintegration in the past years. The use of Brahmin priests and the Buddhist monk while performing their religious ceremonies has not been completely excluded. Though at present while trying to revive their culture they have started using their own priest namely Phedangba, Yeba etc. and have started giving Limboo name to their children. Some Limboos have even resolved that the celebration of Dusshera, which they had been celebrating couple of years ago with enthusiasm, doesnot belong to the Limboos. Dusshera for the Limboos is viewed by them primarily as an occasion for family get together. If on one hand, Dusshera is said to be a time for the family get together on the other hand, Diwali is celebrated with the singing of carol proclaiming the name of their great King Bali Hang.

Today, Limboos are suffering from lack of cultural symbols, which would represent them and simultaneously differentiate them from the migrant Nepalese. Interaction between these two groups for over hundreds of years now has made the symbol of differences less powerful. Long years of Buddhist domination and Hindu migration have made them lose their distinct identity and gradually get marginalized. Limboo identity is on the verge of extinction. Even during the celebration of Diwali, apart from the singing of carol in the name of Bali Hang there is nothing as such which distinguishes their Diwali celebration from the Diwali celebration of Nepali Hindus. Another important festival of the Limboo is Kokphekwa Tumyen (Limboo New Year) but it is also no less different from Maghi Sakranti of the Hindus and even falls on the same day. It is only the celebration of the birthday of
Sirijonga Tyeongsi in the month of December that seems to mark the Limboo identity in the state of Sikkim.

In spite of all such problems, Limboo community is making an effort to build their distinct identity. The search for the past to construct the symbols of difference is not an easy task with long years of assimilation and acculturation. Thus, various factors have to be analyzed to understand such process, like, what the Limboos should do and are doing for promoting their cultural aspects? How and in what ways are they maintaining their ethnic solidarity? The dead history of Limboo community is to be brought into living memory. This work thus deals with the Limboo community who through their little voice is seeking a distinct identity in present day. This way such repressed little voice and their fragmented memories is inserted in a wider mainstream history. It has been investigated as how the Limboos in Sikkim has been using memory history in order to make claims and assert their identity. But it should be kept in mind that the memory histories are sometimes fluid and constantly changing. Identity formation is ongoing process that variously interprets the meaning of being ‘Limboo’. Limboo identity has become fluid and flexible as they now begin to depend on the memories which could be reshaped at any time by various agents.

**AREA OF STUDY**

Limboos are one of the aboriginal indigenous people of Sikkim. Their historical kingdom of Limbuwan, through the processes of time got divided into two making the Limboos straddle between the two countries of modern Nepal and India (Sikkim). Though the Limboo population is found scattered in both the lands of Nepal and India, my research work completely focuses on the Limboos of Sikkim. Sikkim lies between 27 degree 5’ and 28 degree 10’ north latitude and 88 degree 4’ and 88 degree 58’ east longitude. It has a total area of 7096 sq.km. The physical shape is somewhat rectangular about 113 kilometers long and 64...
kilometers wide. It is squeezed between Nepal on the west, Bhutan in the east, West Bengal in the south and People’s Republic of China in the north. It was once an independent kingdom ruled by the Namgyal dynasty but was merged with the Indian Union as the 22nd state of India, with effect from 26th April 1975 by the thirty-six amendment act of the constitution, thereby enacting Article 371 F with a view to make special provision to the administration.

My research area includes those places in Sikkim in which Limboos are found in majority such as west Sikkim, some areas of south, east and north Sikkim. Efforts have been made to visit both the places where Limboos are found in majority as well as in minority in order to see the variation in their tradition and cultural change. Few names of the area and the informants have been changed to protect their identity.

METHODOLOGY

This research work intends to historicise the settlement of Limboos in the Himalayan state of Sikkim. In various histories written on Limboos, there is lot of debate regarding their migration and settlement in the state of Sikkim. Thus the prime focus of this work is to address various theories that talks about their settlement. Throughout the work different events and themes will be brought to limelight which relates to the changing identity of the Limboos along with the change from the Kingdom of Sikkim to the state under the Indian Government. The changing identity of the Limboo, their assimilation as well as acculturation with different communities residing in Sikkim and their recent assertion for distinct identity will be the main foci of this work.

The research work thus studies the ethno-history of the Limboos of Sikkim, their migration stories, their life and development under the Namgyal rule and the democratic Indian Government, the problems they had and have and the issues raised by them, their
process of marginalization and the various symbolic forces which the Limboos of Sikkim possessed as well as adopted in their march for maintaining a distinct identity different from other communities residing in Sikkim and especially the Nepalese. Here, culture has been viewed as symbols used by the Limboos to make themselves similar or different from the other communities. Their myths as well as their oral tradition have been taken into account.

The Archives has been visited. The Proceedings, memorandums, minutes as well as letters have been collected from both the Government as well as private archives. The prominent books as well as journals, Gazetteers and Government orders from various departments of Government of Sikkim, Reports of committees constituted by Government of Sikkim, Royal Decrees issued by the Chogyals of Namgyal Dynasty and census has been accessed. Interviews have been conducted, mostly unstructured interviews. Oral history was supplemented by archival sources.

The Limboo villages as well as their historic places have been visited; ceremonial functions have been attended, religious priests as well as Tumyanghangs (Limboo elderly men) have been interviewed. For making the study effective, those Limboo populated areas have been selected where Limboos are found in majority and the data collected in these areas were compared to the data collected from the areas where Limboos are found in minority. Those areas have been frequently visited where people were prepared to share their feelings and opinions. All category of Limboo religious priests were interviewed, the family members of those Limboo headmen (mandals) who used to be in high administrative position during the reign of Namgyal dynasty were visited and interviewed. Leaders and founders of various associations, past and present political leaders belonging to various communities of Sikkim were interviewed and their interviews were supplemented by the documentary sources. Those individuals who were the contemporaries of the Namgyal dynasty were interviewed as it helps in showing the fate of ordinary people during the time of merger. This helps in understanding
the opinion of the ordinary which had remained silent for many years. Apart from the interviews, even folksongs have been taken into account as it contributes to our understanding of culture, geography, history of injustice as well as exploitation etc.

The secondary sources for the study were chiefly consulted from the Libraries of Nehru Museum and Library at Teen Murti Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University at New Delhi, the Central Library of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, various District Libraries of the State of Sikkim, National Institute of Tibetology and various other academic and public libraries of the state as well as centre. Some primary sources have been accessed through internet as in case of the online resources of JStore etc.

Thus, this work involves the use of both the primary and secondary data. The qualitative and quantitative data were collected through documents, participant observation, case studies etc.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the research will be to describe the historical settlement of the Limboos in the present areas of Sikkim, their condition during the rise and fall of Namgyal dynasty, the loss of their distinct identity and the processes by which the Limboos of Sikkim are trying to construct distinct identity thereby using various symbols for preserving their distinctiveness.

*The main objectives of the study will be:*

- To historicise the settlement of the Limboo tribe in the Himalayan state of Sikkim.
- To investigate into the condition of the Limboos during the reign of Namgyal dynasty and after Sikkim’s merger with India.
- To examine the interplay of various forces such as religion, society, culture and polity on the marginalization of the Limboos.
To describe both forceful as well as peaceful encounter of the Limboos with various community and diverse religion.

To analyze the assertion of Limboo cultural and social symbols for preserving their distinctness.

To understand the factors behind the emerging need felt among the Limboos to preserve their identity on the basis of historical as well as cultural roots.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Limboos are the indigenous community of Sikkim and they have played a vital role in the formation of the Sikkimese Kingdom.
- Their land, Limbuwan, was divided between Nepal and Sikkim during 16th century.
- Later on, some Limboos immigrated permanently or temporarily into Sikkim, from modern Nepal in search of their livelihood.
- Their historical memory is fragmented in the absence of proper historical account.
- They are neither Hindus nor Buddhist but are Yumaist by faith.
- Various processes were at work to marginalize the Limboos.

CHAPTERISATION

- Chapter I: Introduction.
- Chapter II: Theories of Migration.
- Chapter III: Perspective of Limboos towards the Namgyal Dynasty.
- Chapter IV: The Dawn of Democracy.
- Chapter V: Limboo way of Life, Getting Marginalised.
- Chapter VI: It will deal with the summary of the finding.
Organization of the study has a vital role to play in research work. This work is thus divided into six parts. The first chapter ‘Introduction’ deals with the introduction where it deals with the basic concept of ethnicity, the factors that contribute to the rise of ethnic awareness among the Limboo populants of Sikkim.

The second chapter ‘Theories of Immigration’ examines different theories laid down by several authors regarding the origin and migration issues. The first part is the narration of the stories regarding the original homeland of the Limboos which has been told by various historians and writers and their writing has now become a dominant story. Here, it can be noted that some of the stories seems to be construed over time and might continue to be constructed in the future. Such narratives made by various agents form the base of who the Limboos really are. It also examines the continuously re-defined and re-interpreted identity issue of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim. The researcher have argued that none of the explanation seems to be definitive and it seems that number of explanation that has been put forward doesnot seem appropriate. 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. The name of places in Sikkim have been collected which in some way authenticate the presence of Limboos in the land of Sikkim from time immemorial.

The third chapter ‘Perspective of Limboos towards Namgyal Dynasty’ is intented to provide an account of the Limboo contemporaries of the Namgyal era and their opinion about monarchical form of Government and Democratic form of Government. The voice of illiterate as well as semi literate people who could only convey their experience orally is brought to the surface. Silent experiences are brought out through this chapter. The main objective of this chapter is to find out the status of Limboos during the pre-merger period and their opinion regarding the rule of the Namgyal dynasty. It also helps in understanding the
Perspective of Limboos towards the monarchy and their support or rejection towards the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union.

The fourth chapter ‘The Dawn of Democracy’ critically examines whether the Sikkim’s merger with Indian Union was boon or curse on the Limboo populants of Sikkim. Here, the researcher have explored as how the Indian Government has led to the destruction of the Limboo identity in the state of Sikkim and the reason that has led to the rise of separate identity awareness among the Limboos of Sikkim. Identity production, here, seems a political process. It also focuses on the steps that are being taken by various Limboo organizations in order to preserve their identity and cultural heritage, the problem that has crept into the Tsong society and the programmes made by the Tsong association for relieving their community from such kind of problems. Limboo identity also involves imaginations as well as expectations of their so termed local leaders who seem busy working on various agendas of their associations.

The fifth chapter ‘Limboo Way of Life, Getting Marginalised’, is an attempt to study the Limboo past culture and tradition, the process of disintegration as well as their division due to the outcome of different religious philosophy. The Limboos like other tribes and communities are very rich in their culture and tradition, but their ancestral tradition is beginning to withered away perhaps due to various processes such as acculturation, modernization etc. The fear of disintegration has made them revive their past tradition which in turn has further started disintegrating their society. So, this chapter focuses on their religion and the reason behind the process of their assimilation and the outcome of their assimilation process. It discusses in length the effect of modernization on the Limboos.

Lastly, the sixth chapter ‘Conclusion’ deals with the summary of the findings. Through this work the unknown history of the Limboos would be brought into living memory.