

**Phedangma among Limboos of Sikkim:
Change and Continuity**

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To

Sikkim University



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Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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Declaration

I, Nisha Thapa, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation entitled “Phedangma among Limboos of Sikkim: Change and continuity” is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any university/ institute.

This is being submitted to Sikkim University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology.

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Phedangma among Limboos of Sikkim: Change and Continuity

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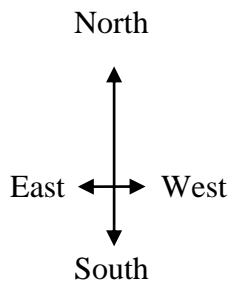
Many thanks to my father and mother for their constant love, support, blessing, guidance, and encouragement.

Most importantly, I thank God for grace, guidance and goodness in my life.

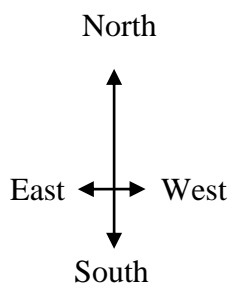
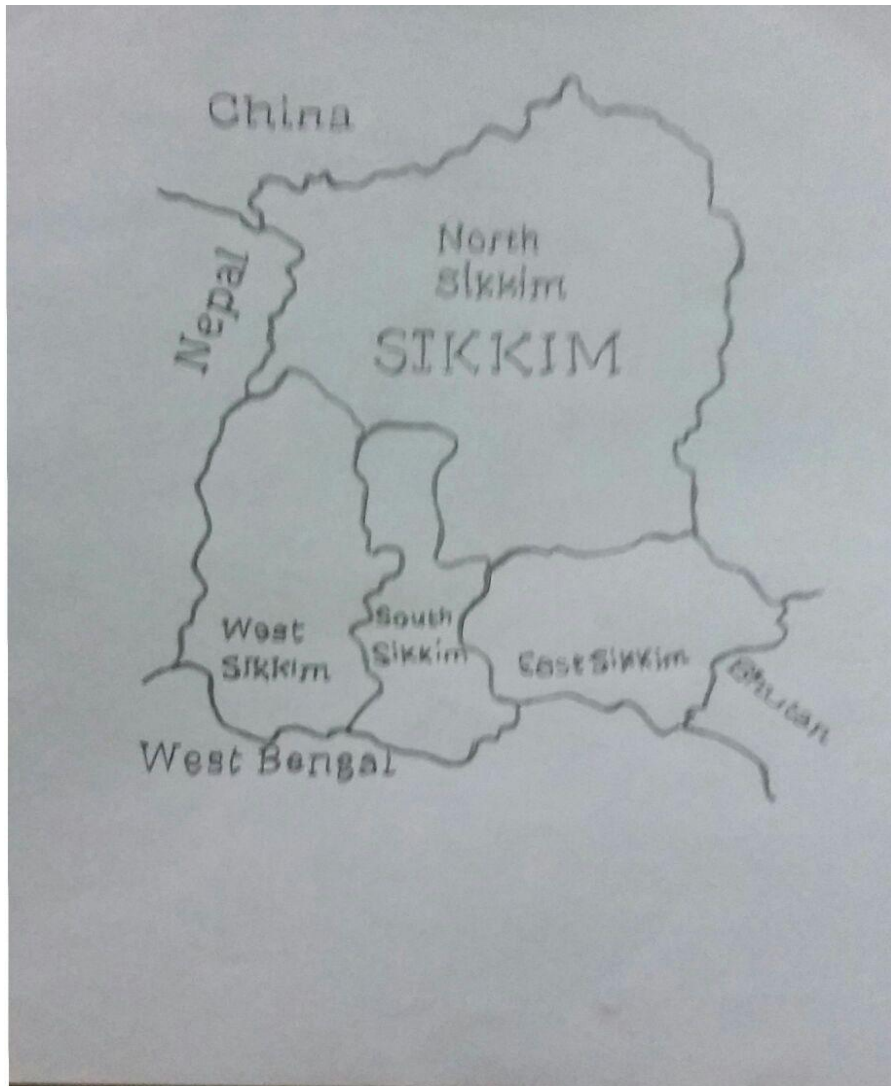
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Map of Sikkim



Map showing all the Districts of Sikkim



Location of Study Area

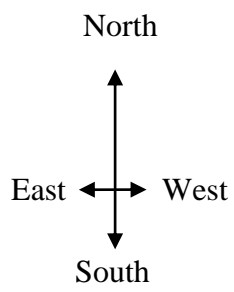


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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

¹One day while I was travelling from Gangtok to my hometown, I met a middle aged man. We exchanged our introduction after which he asked my research topic and explained about Phedangma then he said, “Phedangma tradition in Limboo community is still practiced and the ‘traditional’ practices are being transmitted from one generation to next generation but we need some certain changes in rituals. If we see in ritual practices, sacrifice of animals is being given by offering the blood of animals which should be abandoned. This nature has created birds, animals, human beings and everything that is sustaining in our beautiful world. But people like us are sacrificing rooster for ritual ceremonies which should be abandoned”. He mentioned yes of course, in death ceremonies, sacrifice of pig is vital as to cope with devils. Pig is the only thing which could help Phedangma to fight against evil spirits and forces”. He also said that many scholars have written on ‘traditional’ practices of Limboo community but whatever they have written is not to the point. *Mundhum* (oral literature) is a sacred language of the Phedangma which is orally transmitted and the Phedangma chants the *Mundhum* verbally fast that even the Limboos cannot put it in mind detail. *Mundhum* is recorded and later on written by the scholars. But these lacks the complete information as *Mundhum* are mostly in a classical language of the Limboos which even some of the Limboos cannot understand.

¹*Mundhum* is an oral literature chanted by the Phedangma. It is a typical religious oral narrative of Limboos that keeps their rituals and rites alive. The Phedangma and *Mundhum* are interlinked with each other as all the Limboo Culture is shaped by *Mundhum* and *Mundhum* is shaped by Phedangma. The existence of *Mundhum* entirely depends on Phedangma without Phedangma there will be no *Mundhum* and without *Mundhum* the Culture would have a severe effect as all the core aspects of Culture is related with *Mundhum*.

Later, I came to know that the man I had a conversation with was prominent Limboo Phedangma. I could sense his concern about not wanting the offering of animals to take place further in rituals. It would look like that being Phedangma, he didn't support rooster and animal sacrifices in ritual ceremonies and he needs certain changes in ritual practices. While the cleavage in Limboos dividing "age-old traditions" and purified "reinvented tradition" is a known fact, that Limboos are fragmented within the community. Overlooking the changes brought up in Phedangma and the continuation of ancient "Phedangma traditions" it is only recently that Limboos are striving in fear of apprehension about the Phedangma and Phedangma based 'traditional' belief system.

This research study is ethnography of the Limboos who live in West Sikkim. They call themselves *Yakthumba* a word derived either from "*Susuwa Lilim Yakthumba*". A shorter version by Jash Raj Subba (2008:6-7) shows that the tradition of Limboos reveals that they were known as *Sawa Yethang Sa*, a word derived from *Sawa Yethang* (legendary eight brothers) who were left by their father *Sutsuru Suhang pheba* with their mother *Tetlera Lahadongna* due to their incestuous relationship. After a year with an increasing number they established their homeland into *Thibong* (ten) *Yiok* (region) and 17 *Thums* (sub-regions) to be ruled by *Thibong* chiefs. Later with the establishment of *Tehibong Yioks* they called themselves as *Susuwa Lilim Yakthumba* or in shorter version *Yakthumba*. Tanka Bahadur Subba (2010) an eminent Anthropologist has stated that *Yakthumba* is most likely a combination of three Limboo syllables: *yak* - hill, *thum* - place or district, and *ba* - people or inhabitant. Thus when translated, it together means 'hill men'. Tradition has it that their creator God *Tagera Ningwa phuma* created their progenitors *Menchhamgennam yapmimokma*.

They have no exact migration history, it remain obscure especially in the Himalayan region of Sikkim and claim to have lived in the land of eternal paradise West Sikkim since time perennial. The Limboos are known to be nature worshippers and initially labelled as animists; a deeper investigation of the ‘traditional’ Limboo religion shows them right in line with Tylor’s (1871) evolution of religion from animism to polytheism to the current stage of monotheism. In due time, they were mostly influenced by the Hinduism, and Buddhism religions separating them into different groups. This research study looks into the rhetorical twins of ‘change and continuity’ in the case of Limboos in order to examine the changes in “Phedangma tradition” and the construction of religion based identities and what it means to a Limboo.

Key Concepts

Change

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) states, Culture is the heart of anthropology. Culture is borrowed from German ‘Kultur’ which means “higher values of enlightenment of society”. When academic anthropology beginning its inroads, it was Tylor (1871:1) who was the first anthropologist to establish the word in English language with its anthropological meaning. And for the longest time, anthropologists relied on his definition of culture as ‘ that complex whole which includes art, belief, custom, knowledge, law,morals,and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’. Over the decades, many of people have tried to define culture. In the year 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn in their joint publications even have cited 164 definitions for religion. Ranging from ‘learned behaviour’, ‘ideas in the mind’, ‘a logical construct’, ‘a statistical fiction’, ‘a psychic defence mechanism’, they have preferred to use the definition of culture as ‘an abstraction from behaviour but it is not

itself behaviour'. Indeed, Culture consists of patterns of behaviours acquired from the society they actually belong to. Culture is a way of life of a group of people, which could be taught from one generation to the next generation. It is not inherited but it is transmitted. Culture is seen as the knowledge shared by a particular community. It is constantly changing and evolving. It looks simple while it can be very complex as well. According to the context it varies and there is an infinite list of what culture is all about. Many definitions are available, out of which the following definition leads this research study UNESCO (1989) express that, 'the totality of tradition based creations of a cultural community expressed by a group or an individual and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural identity; its values and standards are orally transmitted, either by imitation or by any other means. Its forms are among others, literature, language, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs handicrafts, architecture etc. Often time's culture is seen to be at its best when it is uninfluenced by an extrinsic force.

Doshi and Jain (2009-[2001]:145) mentions, 'Culture is a way of life of a people while society is organized, interacting, and aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life. In other words, a society is composed of people; and the way people behave is culture. It is in the society that we have social institutions, and economic and political organizations. These organizations provide continuity to society, which is maintained by enculturation and enculturation is a process of adaptation'. Another version by Singh (1986) is that, 'any culture of a community represents the process of change that eventually takes place in the traditions from within. And apart from the landmarks of changes the processes of continuity is alive.

To sum up, change is a universal law. History and science stand testimony to the fact that change is the law of life, Stagnation is death. They tell us stories of human's rise

and growth from the Palaeolithic age to the Neolithic age, then to the Stone Age and next to the copper age etc. Nothing stands still in this world. Change is an inevitable factor that every society must go through, forces at work within the society and different contacts between different factors leads to change in turn leading to cultural change. Since, the beginning the humans have constantly evolved and so has their society, constantly under pressure from different sides, environmental, developmental, economic being some of the aspects exerting pressure on the society and the culture had to change to adapt to these changing aspects within the society. Thus, with everything changing around us it is also important to maintain the continuity of culture this is ensured by preservation of cultural practices and rituals. It is the same with the Limboos. Cultural continuity resists changes, in order to preserve its own survivability. But cultures are constantly changing, whether with diversification of a culture from arrivals of other culture to constant modernization of civilization.

True enough, we can see a lot of change that cultures go through and these are significant for social development and mobility without it the society would be stagnant. This relationship of change and continuity really brings forth the dynamic nature of culture. Will a culture change completely or will it adapt to different ways of change and mould its ways to meet up the contemporary needs of the society? And how much of the original custom still remains? These are some questions that are to be studied thoroughly. The answer varies from society to society. Thus, this study will further reveal the change and the continuity of “traditional” shamanic rituals of Phedangma of the Limboo community.

Continuity

Aspects of the past that remained the same over certain periods of time are referred to as continuities. Continuity and change are evident in any given period of time and concepts such as progress and decline may be used to evaluate change and continuity. Change is an ineluctable process, culture has changed through time due to many factors but this doesn't mean the culture or cultural traits cease to exist. There will always be some remnants of the old cultural traits in existence with the new one. It is important to know how the past can affect the present in the process of change and continuity. There is always the continuum of what was that still goes on today.

Doshi and Jain (2009[-2001]:144) gives the arguments that, 'the trait continues but with time evolves into a stage a little different than of the past but never totally perishes from existence. Therefore, cultural processes and changes go together. Change cannot be brought about by processes. The cultural growth as we have obtained today is through the medium of processes. Growth does not mean that culture gives away its continuity or persistence. When we talk about Indian culture we say that the culture here undergoes transformation but it maintains its continuity. Hence, there is continuity and change. Changes in turn, may consist either of learned traits acquired from outside; or of losses and displacements. Social process actually means direction of cultural change. When there is preservation of culture it keeps the continuity of culture, and when there is change, new traits, complexes and patterns enter into the body of culture configuration. It is also possible that persistence and changes in culture give rise to a new blend of culture. Culture processes take place when one generation handover its culture to the next generation.

While change is inevitable, as many 'traditional' cultures have undergone changes to reinvent or revive their cultures in contemporary scenario. But what keeps a culture alive? This study will go beyond the culture they follow. It will further look at what gives Limboo community a sense of belonging to the particular culture. In addition, today's world is shaped by religion and culture. If religion is seen to be integral part of culture, culture gives a sense of belongings. These two concepts of culture and religion are intermingling with each other at some level and these concepts form the basis of study in Phedangma. It will look at change and continuity of Phedangma in Limboo community. One's religion is always shaped by a particular culture and a culture in turn can be shaped by a particular religion. So, what will happen when the religion foregoes reinvention? Can the "old tradition" and "new tradition" co-exist? It is in these questions that the concepts of change and continuity have taken shape for this research study.

Review of Literature

Most of the extensive research on Limboos has been carried out in Eastern Nepal. And the research can be located within a shaman discourse. Sagants *The Dozing Shaman: The Limbus of Eastern Nepal* (1996[1976]) in the Taplejung district of Nepal delineates a whole chapter discussing the aspects of Shamanism amongst the Limbus of Nepal. Since, Sagants study mainly focuses the religion; it has been a valuable and effective secondary source in the process of writing this dissertation. However, Sagant refers to Iman Singh Chemjong throughout his book without stating his connection with Limboo ethno-political movements in Darjeeling in the year 1920 either he mentions Iman Singh Chemjongs influence on Christianity in his writings. Lionel Caplans *Land and Social Change in East Nepal: A study of Hindu-Tribal Relations* (2000[1970]) is based on fieldwork conducted in the year 1964-65 in the Ilam district of Eastern

Nepal. While the title suggests, Caplan examines Limbu Hindu and Brahmin relationship with regard to caste based study of land ownership, economic and social change. His contribution to Himalayan discourse on 'great' and 'little' traditions does not seem as a fruitful contribute as, he mainly points out to cultural and religious differences between the Limbus and Hindus and Brahmins, and also does not highlight into spotlight of any ritual competition or ritual conflict, which is central in research about 'great' and 'little' traditions in the Himalayas. Rex L. Jones, and Shirley Kurtz Jones and Kurtz, *Himalayan Woman* (1976), provides a different phase, by mainly focusing at the Limbu women roles in the society. However, they did not give much attention on the Limbus ritual traditions but, they have contributed to the Shamanism discourse in *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas* (1976). The foremost recent academic publication among the Limbus is Ian Carlos Fitzpatrick's doctoral thesis *Cardamom and Class* (2011), which is based on fieldwork being carried out within the Limbus in North Eastern Nepal. He have focused on the introduction of cardamom production and the changed distribution of wealth and how the International migrated labour has opened another way towards path to economic and social opportunities. In this research study, He have lack the attention on study of religion.

In addition, the indigenise Sikkimese writer Jash Raj Subba, Kalimpong writer Iman Singh Chemjong and to a less extent an eminent Anthropologist Tanka Bahadur Subba of Kalimpong have a main role in this dissertation as their writings functions as secondary source as its worth that their accounts are helpful sources when it comes in understanding the Limboos, religion, Phedangma, kinship terminology, social institutions etc. They are insiders of Limboo community and being a Limboos themselves does not have to undergo in problematic aspect. They can provide an important insight view of Limboo religion, culture and heritage. However, Iman Singh

Chemjong and Jash Raj Subba's writings seem to be biased on matters of fact that they have been active in Limboo ethnic associations. Their writings have underlying objectives to present a unified Limboo religion, culture and heritage, which according to Jash Raj Subba is a way towards 'developing' Limboo religion and culture. Much of Jash Raj Subba's books as well as re-publications of Iman Singh Chemjong's books are published by *Kirat Yakthung Chumlung* (a Limboo association). It is an undeniable fact that both these writers' common feature is that they have received their education in Christian educational institutions, raised away from ancestral village all their life with educational background and exposure to the world beyond the village Limboo life making it difficult to fit them in "native" sphere. The writers Jash Raj Subba and Iman Singh Chemjong's claims regarding the Limboo ritual traditions also make them leading contributors to the changes brought up in religion, and hence comprised major roles in this research study.

Besides those writers, other Limboo writers have collected and published Limboo mythologies, folk stories, folk songs, etc. *Emeytnasung* (Limboo magazine) is yearly published by the Limboos and non-Limboos of all adjoining regions in collaboration with chief editor Mr. Harka Khamdak. This magazine actually helps readers in understanding Limboo cosmology and is the easiest way to get knowledge as well as share knowledge in an easiest form. There are a growing number of Limboo writers writing about Limboos in general in books, various magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and bulletins. As far as I know the Limboos of Eastern Nepal have been studied extensively by both National and International scholars while the Limboos residing in Sikkim and its adjoining parts have been studied very few lacking in-depth studies or have remained almost untouched.

None of the above review of literature shows publications displaying a deal of what is happening in the Limboo “reinvented religion” either is studied in regions or a community together. It is clear from the above summary that no study has been taken up till date on Phedangma among the Limboos as a whole, as is proposed in the present study. It also hopes to resolve the ongoing trend of examining the “reinvent” tendencies and particularly tends to contribute the Limboo community in spotlight of knowing their “age-old traditions and maintaining their “Phedangma tradition” wholesome.

Significance of the Research Study

Buckser and Glazier (2003: 11) opine that, ‘to change one’s own religion is to change one’s world’. Among the Limboo community, it was mostly Hinduism and Buddhism religions that influenced the change in their traditional religion and culture. This led to an uncalled for divide within the community whose cultural changes have led to the changes in “Phedangma tradition” and also have led to formation of different religious identities. In the case of Limboo community, it has both united and disunited the community at different milieu. The Limboo community is fractionated, and the factions are specially built around religious dissimilarity with one group claiming to be “civilized” to the other, and the other group claiming to be pure Limboo than the other. Indeed, when cultures have more than one religion or a cleavage in same religion dividing into “age old traditional religion” and “reinvented traditional religion”, they have problems claiming one community and constructing and reconstructing cultural and religious identity. Therefore, the exposure of “reivented” religion to a single Limboo tribal community and its acceptance and influence are seen as a danger to the ethnic Limboo identity which is leading factor of fragmentation within the community. But in recent days, Limboos have come to a realization that division along religious

lines will only lead to an eradication of their “age old culture and heritage”. They are in wake of conscious efforts in preserving their “Phedangma tradition”. While the “reinvented religion” has now become a mass movement where a bid Limboo community are on the way to revamp “traditional Limboo religion” into “modern reinvented religion”. This dissertation therefore sets out to examine the contemporary scenario of the Limboo community who are striving for the preservation of “age -old culture and heritage” and also this research study intends to bring these aspects in the limelight.

Objectives of the study

- To reconstruct the religion and culture on the basis of ethnographic data collected from the Limboos who still practice their traditional religion.
- To study the role of Phedangma and their ritual practices among Limboo community.
- To analyze the changes and continuity in ritual practices of Phedangma among Limboo community.

Methodology

Ethnography is an essential tool in unravelling informant experiences in whatever condition one is situated. The research study was empirical in nature and an ethnographic endeavour in doing fieldwork among Limboos and Phedangma of West Sikkim. The overall design of the research study was to know more about qualitative than quantitative aspects.

The three villages namely Darap, Soreng and Daramdin were chosen in geographical locations of Gyalshing West Sikkim. The year 2016 was mainly devoted for conducting fieldwork although shorter visits took place in the year 2015 as well. The traditional Anthropological ethnographic method of participant observation was the main strategy in collecting the data. Both the daily life of Limboos and special rituals

was conducted along with many formal and informal interviews with villagers, Phedangma and key informants. The collected data was analysed using the comparative method, to understand the differences within community with regard to the “traditional Limboo religion” and “reinvented religion”. The same set of schedule was used for all the three villages. I also used photography, both to document events, and to build a healthy conversation starter when journeying between villages because Limboos from Darap were interested in knowing how Limboos from Daramdin and Soreng follow their “Phedangma tradition” or how different their rituals practices were. For that matter which ultimately resulted in discussion about Limboos in general as well. Video recordings also resulted similar outcomes when shown to villagers of Darap, which again produced discussions about Limboos. This usage of audio-visual tool validated to be an efficient methodology in my work. Photographs taken during the fieldwork have also been used in the dissertation to display the text.

Orthography

Limboo and Nepali words are scribbled in italics. A glossary of persistence Limboo words in the research study is provided in the appendice. Most of the Limboo words in English publications often have slightly different spelling. The most frequent spelling will be used throughout the research study, although alternative spellings will be provided in the glossary. In cases, where the definitions may difficult to understand, the deeper clarification will be provided in footnotes. The plurals, for instance, Phedangma’s will be not in use throughout the entire research study but rather Phedangma. The Limboo words used in this research study are mostly a phonetic version of Limboos. Often times, I was able to crosscheck words by asking people around me to spell up the words correctly. However, I will use phonetics in the research study, as long as the Limboo terms will then be clear for the Sikkimese

readers who might not be familiar with linguistic transcription systems. Since, Nepali is the *Lingua Franca* in Sikkim, there appears to be many borrowed words from Nepali. Van Driem (1987:2) have pointed out, “Nepali loan shows the tendency to assimilate the native phoneme system.” Thus, Nepali words are often applied to delineate, for instance; ritual practices, which can indeed explained by most of the informants. Nevertheless, there might be errors and the responsibility is totally mine.

Representing the ‘Other’

Anthropology has always been the study of ‘Other Cultures’ (Beattie 1999). Looking into the inner fabrics of the other culture and observing the cultural importance of how they function and how they react. This research study also comes under the wings of studying the “Other Cultures”. Likewise, mine research observes and studies the Phedangma of the Limboo community looking into their ritual practices and the change they are going through. It also looks into the continuity of “age-old practices” they still pursue.

In the field, belonging to “outside” community was not an easy task to convince the villagers to open up. They needed to know why I have chosen to study on their community. So it was utmost vital to explain them what was the main purpose of studying on their Culture even actively involving in the life of the people, attending special occasions, big rituals, communicating with them, spending a significant period of time among them and participating in 3-4 days long rituals all day all night. As a researcher, I had various experiences, being an “outsider” people often saw a threat as they explained how someone from "outside their community would understand and study them. Some also questioned my research as being too common on studying Limboos by “outside” community and discouraged suggesting there have been many

studies already done among the Limboos. It became my outmost duty to convince them and making them in understanding the true essence of this research study.

Another instance, I faced was mostly on the positive side where people were really happy with someone researching on their community and provided me with all the necessary help. Elderly people were keen to know of my interest and told stories from many decades back which most of them didn't have the knowledge about it anymore. They encouraged me on working more on such topics. As a budding Anthropologist these are examples of the different scenarios that are to be faced and dealt with. Being "outsider" and studying "Other Cultures" gives the pressure of rightfully representing them and highlighting all the important aspects of their social institutions.

In all the three villages it was easy to ask the villagers without using the notebook as people often got conscious when they saw that something that they just said was being noted down. Even it was smooth gathering data through conversation. So, a mental note would be made and the daily activities of villagers would be written in the field diary at the end of the day. Actually, it was best method by participating with them in what they would be doing and get into questions after rapport building. And the camera was a definite array as villagers enjoyed seeing capturing pictures of landscapes, material cultures, rituals, and traditional attires even enjoyed seeing clicking on their pictures as well.

This research study enabled me in better understanding Limboos way of life. Most importantly, fieldwork among Limboos was not only an experience to find answers of questions set for research study or fulfil the degree of M.Phil course but also to find the answers of questions that had been going on in the back of my head trying to know in detail about the Limboos their 'traditional' religion" and "Phedangma tradition".

Hence, it was my heartfelt duty to give a more authentic view of Limboos than the ones provided by other researcher.

To sum up, I met many people gathering and asking when you will be finishing your dissertation. They were interested to know what has been written. Some people even wanted my entire dissertation to get print out for their future references. There is pressure from the community members to give an accurate representation of the Limboo world and having an authentic work on their community.

Organizations of Dissertation

Chapter one introduces the key concepts used in this dissertation and gives a review of literature on various works done on the Limboos. It outlines significance of the study and three objectives. This chapter discusses the methodology and orthography and also defines the “Other”, ending with an outline of the dissertation.

Chapter two provides an overall picture of the Limboos. It discusses the nomenclature of the Limboos and the confusion about using the terms like ‘*Subba*’, ‘*Yakthumba*’, ‘*Chong*’, ‘*Tsong*’, ‘*Limbu*’ and ‘*Limboo*’. It looks at the mythological origin of the Limboos and outlines the various social institutions like clan, marriage, kinship, language, food, and traditional attire. It then introduces the Limboos of West Sikkim with specific references to the three villages Darap, Soreng and Daramdin.

Chapter three gives a thorough account of the “traditional Limboo religion” by referring to secondary sources and cross checking with elderly Limboos and Phedangma to verify the same. It examines the Limboo concept of Gods and Demons, heaven and hell, and the country of ancestors. It also looks at the different worship patterns and the markers of Limboo religion. The final portion looks into the

“traditional” ritual specialists known as the Phedangma, *Samba, Yeba and Yema* and the changes taking place in the same. Finally it looks at the verity of “Darap as transmitting to a Religious sanctum” in the ‘traditional’ belief system.

Chapter four it attempts to clarify the word shaman presenting Phedangma as a “native” Himalayan word used in terms of shaman viewing different types of Ritual Specialists. It also highlights the attires of Ritual Specialists. The third part examines the roles of Phedangma with regard to the rites of passage and ritual importance of Phedangma in relation to the Limboo belief system.

Chapter five it discusses the changes coming of in practices of Phedangma. Thereafter it looks at the factors of changes in the ritual practices resulted by the wake of various developments in the region. It also examines the lifestyle of Phedangma. It then outlines the other religious movements that have undergone massive changes in “Phedangma tradition”. The final part looks at the changes brought up by replacing alternative ritual specialists by *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* while the continuation of “age-old Phedangma tradition” is still prevalent in the Limboo community. It also traces the cleavages brought up in same community religion dividing into “age-old traditional religion” and “reinvented traditional religion” which have resulted in controversies and confusions constructing the community identity and religious identity.

Chapter six concludes by giving a summary of the main arguments and insights looking at the social institutions across the three villages Darap, Soreng and Daramdin. The final part looks at the changing patterns in the practices of the “Phedangma tradition” and how they are still persistent in continuing the “age old traditions” that is vital for the Limboo culture and tradition.

CHAPTER 2

PEOPLE AND STUDY AREA: AN OVERVIEW

Who are the Limboos?

Limboos are a tribal community living in Sikkim, Eastern Nepal, Hill districts of West Bengal and North Eastern States of a Himalayan region. They call themselves as *Yakthumba* a combination of three Limboo syllables: *yak* - hill, *thum* –place or district, and *ba*-people or inhabitant. Thus when translated, it together means ‘hillmen’. Tradition has it their progenitors has been originated at the base of *Phuktanglungma Pemebenlungma- Kumbhakarna* (Mt. Kanchenjunga).The migration issue of Sikkimese Limboos is still a matter of controversies .The Limboos believe on *Mundhum* of their origin in the Himalayan region and those they are the aboriginal tribe of the Himalayas. Jash Raj Subba (2008) mentions, Phedangma repeatedly narrates in *Mundhum thosusaju:cha* (hot spring of the northern higher Himalayas and *yosuchallenghua* (down river Ganga water) as the secret water required for offering to the deities. The *Mundhum* describes all the rivers right from Brahmaputra the east to Arun River in the west. During my fieldwork, what I have heard while Phedangma reciting the *Mundhum* is that they were collecting a holy water from Tamur, Arun, Tsongmo, Ramamm etc. which also proves that they are the habitant of Himalaya region. They have no formal migration history. Some historical records and documents prove that the Limboos were here in Sikkim before the consecration of Namgyal dynasty in Yuksom, west Sikkim in 1642 A.D. Khamdak (1994:225) states, an agreement, historically known as “*lho-mon-tsong-sum*” signed during the time of Phuntsog Namgyal’s consecration by three ethnic communities (Bhutias, Lepchas and Limboos) is another valuable historical document about Limboos presence in Sikkim

since the time of Namgyal dynasty's establishment. This agreement was entered to establish common wealth among them to strengthen the Namgyal rule in Sikkim and was respected by them till 19th century.

In addition, it is also an undeniable fact that the Limboos belonged to the territory of Limbuwan which extended from Arun valley to Tista River, within Sikkim. And during the first Chogyal rule, the boundaries of Sikkim were not properly carved out. Thus a number of Limbuwan villages came under the kingdom of Sikkim and Limboos became the permanent citizens of Sikkim.

Nomenclature

The name *Limbu*/ Limboo is an exonym given by Nepalis; in this case it is commonly believed to have word derived from Nepali literally which is supposed to mean an 'archers' or the bearer of bows and arrows. Limboo on the other hand is how the Sikkimese Limboos is identified. From official documents to common day usage, Limboo/Subba is widely accepted and used among Sikkimese Limboos. Today, there is growing movement in Sikkim to rename their titles Limboo/ Subba. During my fieldwork, people in the village used both Limboo and clan name as their surnames. The Limboo organizations of Sikkim have been bandwagon to change the same because Limboo/Subba was more popularise and they could ²also variant themselves with Limboos elsewhere in the world. This shift was parallel with the growing tendency among Limboos elsewhere to validate their identity as they have began using Limboo/ Subba as their last names. Before, people either used Subba or their clan name for instance; Nembang, Khamdak, for their surnames, but today they use

²Limbu has been anglicized by the Limboo ethnic associations to form the Limboo that is in use today.

Limboo/ Subba. The uniformity in their surnames is an exertion being practiced across the Limboo world to show oneness within the tribe. And to rectify the different title which often creates confusion among the non-Limboo and further would create complication. It is hoped that having a Limboo/ Subba surname instead of the different clan names, as a surnames would club all Limboos together and identify them across the world.

Yakthum is an endonym used by Limboos among themselves. It is commonly understood as ‘hillman’. *Yakthum* is often just the shorter version of what they call themselves to be *Yakthumba*, a word derived either from *Susuwa Lilim Yakthumba*. The tribe has rightly named themselves as this version matches with their belief to be known as *Sawa Yethang Sa*, who were left by their father *Sutsuru Suhangpheba* with their mother *Tetlera Lahadongna*. After decades, with an increasing number they established their homeland in *Thibong Yiok Thum* and they referred to themselves as *Susuwa Lilim Yakthumba* or in shorter version *Yakthumba*. But no one is ever found to have used this as the title. These days however *Yakthum* is gaining popularity as a title and there are those who write *Yakthum* in place of Limboo for their surnames too. *Yakthum* is also used with a suffix depending on the gender of the person. A male would be *Yakthumba* (*ba* refers to male) and a female would be a *Yakthumma* (*ma* refers to female). In Darap, villagers would often ask *khyaeney Yakthum ma ba?* Which can be translated as “Are you a Limboo?”

Many young people have access to facebook today however, *Yakthum* is gaining popularity as a title and there are those who write *Yakthum* in place of Limboo for their surnames too and Limboos have also been found to be active users of facebook. For instances; *Sukhim Yakthung Sapsok Saplon Chumbho* and *All*

Limboo/Limbu/Subba/Yakthung Association are the facebook pages for Limboos on the World Wide Web.

Subba means ‘village chief’ and is commonly used both in Sikkim and Nepal. According to Subba (2012:148) *Subba* is a title derived from Limboo word *Subha* (headman) which was also a title conferred by the Gorkhas after 1774 A.D to the elite class of Limboos in Limbuwan. Another name is *Tsong* which was given by the Bhutias and Lepchas of Sikkim.

Etymology of the title of Limboos have undergone with great changes and interpretations. They are addressed by different titles often times creating confusion to the researcher and the common people belonging to non-Limboo community. So, one must not misinterpret addressing them differently. All the titles identify the same Limboo.

Origin

Although some of scholar speculates, their coming from Tibet, China and Nepal origin. Most of the Limboo community people do not agree on the matter of determining as the origin of those places without briefing complete rigid base information. Childe (2012:11), writes, that despite having large amount of data none of the Himalayan scholar has developed an explanatory framework that rests upon formal theories of migration. Huber and Blackburn (2012:4) argues, that most of the sources available are oral migration narratives and that can hardly be taken as reliable historical data although the memories can reveal much about the aspirations and values of the people. Risley (1989 [1894]:27) separates, “Sikkimese” Limboos who are believed to hail from places in the Tibetan province of *Kham* and Limbuwan Limboos similar to the common narratives today. While Hooker (2011[1854])

emphasize Limboos as a Tibetan origin. Campbell (1869:144) opines as Mongolian origin. Caplan, (2000[1970]:14) writes that the Limboos and Rais are the descendents of the *Kiratis* and are described in the Mahabharatta as dwellers of the Eastern Himalayan regions. These versions are believed to be some of the disagreements. The indigenise writers sometimes seem to be bias while writing on the origin of Limboo community; it might be because they do not want them to be migrant from other country. But the matter of fact is that no one could go back to the ancient times to know the origin. The only evidence through which we could know the origin is the early secondary source through which we could at least, analyse and have knowledge about the origin. Every ethnic community have their own origin and the fact cannot be erased. The origin does not matter but what matters is who lives in contemporary Sikkim and who ³the habitants of Sikkim are.

According to *Yakthum* tradition, the Limboo community were emerged at the base of *Kanchenjunga* on the place named *Muna Kham* and started living there by being nature worshipper in nature and ruling divine power according to the *Yakthum* tradition. Later, with the spread of population around 700 A.D their thoughts did not matched with the *bawdalambi* and started migrating in Nepal's Arun river bank and Bhutan kingdom. And they stayed there till 200-300 years ruling their own kingdom. Today we can see the nomenclature in Bhutan which is commonly known as *Tsongsa Jonkha*. At that time, *lambi* came and started troubling *Tsong* which forced them to flee and *Tsong* started living in a place named Mangsila which is located in North Sikkim. During those days only a few Lepchas were there and they were ruling the kingdom.

³Since there are more than one Subba, I will be using the abbreviation of their names throughout the entire dissertation in order to avoid muddle.

Most of the Limboo population are concentrated in West Sikkim. As in these places starting from Tista river to Arun were emerged in Limbuwan itself. The Limboos of this place started living in this area without moving towards the other place following their own religion and culture practices.

Foremost, the origin is confusing as it has many roots coming from one place, settling in another place and again uniting back to the original place and also, scattering in different parts of the world. It does not matter the roots and who are the migrant habitant but what is important is who the earliest settler is. Perhaps, not only Lepchas and Bhutias are the original habitants of Sikkim but the Limboos and also the Nepalis of different community including all the tribal's of Sikkim are the habitants of Sikkim.⁴

Clans

Limboo community is organized in different clans, which they call *dus* Limboo (10 Limboo) depending on where they are from. According to Lama (2004) The ten Limboos are divided into many clans and sub-clans. For instance; *Angthubo, Angdembey, Dokpa, Isiboo, Khopung, Thebey, Thopra, Nemwong, Fedop, Fagu, Pomu, Hillok, Hna, Lowti, Moden Hang, Chemjong, Sodemba, Liwang, Lotsum / Loksum* etc. Clans are hereditary in nature and follow an intrinsic blood relation either by birth or marriage. Jash Raj Subba (2012:148-158), says it is difficult to distinguish clan and sub-clan from each other, and he have listed 922 clan and sub-clan from each other. Tanka Bahadur Subba (2010:118) states that some of the Limboo and Lepcha clan are interrelated and whether they are considered 'Limboo' or 'Lepcha' it depends largely

⁴None of the book of J.R. Subba mentions from where the entire data on clan has been collected.

upon where a given clan is located. For instance; amongst Limboo 1 clan will be regarded as but amongst Lepcha the same clan will be considered as Lepcha.

Marriage

Limboo marriage is tribe endogamous and clan exogamous. Marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited but marriage within the tribe is widely accepted, since marriage outside the tribe is being practiced today. One cannot marry a member of either the father or the mother's clan and has to practice at least five generation gap respectively. Polyandry is not recognized amongst the Limboos by their customs and traditions. Polygyny on the other hand is allowed rarely to save a clan from extinction. For instance, there might be man marrying additional wives which Morris (1938:263) opines to be "importation, probably through contact with Nepalis, for the language doesn't have certain specific word to denote a second wife, the Nepali word *Kanchi* being used for this purpose". Divorce is rare and is not permissible. It can happen in either case of immorality. However, it is the person wanting divorce who actually pays the penalty.

A Limboo woman can divorce her husband on grounds of cruelty, injustice and misconduct. When husband seeks divorce, he has to pay a very huge penalty. Similarly, if the wife seeks divorce, she has to return all the presents given to her at the time of marriage.

Kinship

Kinship terminology refers to words that describe familial relationships. Different societies classify social relations differently. The Limboo kinship terminology adapt to the Eskimo kinship pattern, where the emphasis is on the nuclear family directly

identifying the father, mother, brother and sister. There is no distinction in the usage of terms between patrilineal and matrilineal relatives as the same terms like uncle, aunt are used for both sides, which is another indication of them practicing parallel descent traditionally. It consists of both classificatory and descriptive terms. Example of classificatory is when a kinship term like *Phu* could mean elder brother, wife's elder brother, wife's elder sister's husband, and husband's elder sister's husband. Example for descriptive could be *Yemba* for husband, which represents only one type of relationship between two people. Listed below are some kinship terminologies.

Limboo terms	English translation
<i>Aboo</i>	Father
<i>Amoo</i>	Mother
<i>Phu</i>	Elder Brother
<i>Nay</i>	Elder Sister
<i>Nusa</i>	Younger Brother
<i>Nusama</i>	Younger Sister
<i>Thoba</i>	Grand Father
<i>Yuma</i>	Grand Mother
<i>Mencha</i>	Grand Son
<i>Mencha</i>	Grand Daughter
<i>Fanga</i>	Father's Younger Brother, Mother's Youngest Sisters Husband
<i>Ingya</i>	Mother's Younger Brothers Wife, Father's Youngest Sister
<i>Suma</i>	Mothers youngest sister, Father's

	Younger Brothers Wife
<i>Kuwah</i>	Mothers elder brother, mothers younger Brother
<i>Ingyadray</i>	Fathers Youngest Sisters Husband
<i>Pangmey</i>	Son in law
<i>Sohmeet</i>	Daughter in law
<i>Phudray</i>	Elder brothers wife,
<i>Panglee</i>	Elder sisters husband

Language

Limboos call their language as *Yakthungpan*, which belongs to *Tibeto-Burman* family and have their own script as *Sirijunga* script. When we see the past, the life of Limboos in Sikkim was dark and oppressive during the time of Namgyal Dynasty. The Limboos were forced to convert to Tibetan Buddhism and were even forced to learn a Tibetan script. The Limboos being enriched with their own culture, traditions and language also were not allowed to conduct their rituals on their ‘traditional’ system and were also not allowed to speak in their own language or to learn their own script. However, Sirijunga Singthebe has succeeded in teaching the Limboo language and the Limboos started learning their own script and speaking their own language. Jash Raj Subba (2004: 17) mentions Sirijunga Singthebe has advised to the Limboo community people regarding Limboo language viz;

“Yakthung Sapla Yoomba Ro

Hensigang Sokma Yaklo

Helle Ani Ahing Loo

Ani Helle Aing Loo

Yakthung Sapla Megegero

Yakthung Suwang Memegero”

When translated in English it means Limboo language is a great thing, it is the life, we live with this, and we become famous with this. If the Limboo languages will disaapear, the Limboo community will disaapear as well.

The Limboo script consists of 28 consonants and 20 vowels.

Consonants

𑌖	𑌗	𑌘	𑌙	𑌚	𑌛	𑌜	𑌝	𑌞	𑌟
ka	kha	ga	gha	ria	ca	cha	ja	jha	yan
𑌠	𑌡	𑌢	𑌣	𑌤	𑌥	𑌦	𑌧	𑌨	𑌩
ta	tha	da	dha	na	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma
𑌪	𑌫	𑌬	𑌭	𑌮	𑌯	𑌰	𑌱		
ya	ra	la	wa	śa	śa	sa	ha		

Vowels

𑌲	𑌳	𑌴	𑌵	𑌶	𑌷	𑌸	𑌹	𑌺	𑌻
vowel carrier	aa	i	u	ee	ai	oo	au	e	o
𑌶	𑌷	𑌴	𑌵	𑌶	𑌷	𑌸	𑌹	𑌺	𑌻
ka	kaa	ki	ku	kee	kai	koo	kau	ke	ko

The fear of loss of Limboo language is a significant concern within the members of community themselves. And it has come true to a possible means as the present generation is also doing its best in keeping the language alive.

Food

The staple food of the Limboos is rice, maize, millet, and barley. Before the introduction of wet rice cultivation, dry paddy was cultivated and consumed. They eat different kinds of seasonal fruits, wild plants, roots and tubers. They are non-vegetarians and indulge in different kinds of meat. They have a taboo on eating chicken, mutton, buff and beef, depending on their *thars*. For instances; belonging to *Khewa thar* do not eat chicken, *Nembang* do not eat mutton, *Mangyung* do not eat buff and *Khamdak* do not eat beef. Their favourite drink is *thiseep* (fermented and sieved beer), the Limboo alcoholic drink usually made of millet, which plays an essential part in all spheres of Limboo life. 'Traditional' ritual specialist uses it for rites of passage, and is especially important during a Limboo marriage ceremony. It is believed that the bride and groom finally becomes a couples only after drinking and sharing 'traditional' alcohol in same cup during the exchange of marriage vows. Likewise, the relatives of both the bride and groom including elders present at the marriage ceremony also drink and share *thiseep* from the same cup and bless the newly married couple for healthy, prosperous and life long relationship.

Dress

In olden days, Limboo used to wear 'traditional' dress made by hand loom which was called as *Tagaba*. Later on with the development coming up, the Limboo community people started weaving by hand with the needle of varieties of bamboo and started wearing the dress often called as "*Lappeda Sumba*". But during 1600, from Bihar Aryan Shah Bongska Chettri entered in Limbuwan and seized the kingdom along with their traditional attire. And around 1704 in Nepal that dress was announced as Nepal's traditional dress. After this the Limboo community people got puzzled and recently only they have invented a different 'traditional' dress.

The 'traditional' dress for the Limboo women is *Seem* or *Phareeya*, it is a soft long fabric of about 5 metres long material which is wrapped and folded around the body by pinning on both the shoulders and held together by a *Phae* (belt) around the waist to tie the *Seem*. The remaining fabric is then brought to the front and folded in pleats. The *Seem* is ankle length and is worn with a *Cholo* (blouse) underneath. It is usually worn in different colours and prints but there is a kind of particular kind made of raw silk. Traditionally, the women used to braid their hair in double plaits and used a *Hakhumya* (headscarf). But today, the usage of scarves to cover the head is rare and hairstyles are varied.

The above mentioned *Seem*, *Cholo* and *Phae* are mostly worn by the elderly Limboo women only. While the younger generation in contemporary days wear a single piece of fabric of 5 meters long with inbuilt *Phae* (belt) in the frontal area and an inbuilt blouse.

As for the Limboo men, their traditional attire is called the *Lappeda Sumba*. *Lappeda* (a kind of shirt to be folded left on top of right and tied on two points or have readymade inbuilt bottom). Underneath, they were *Sumba* (trousers) which falls below the knee and above the ankle. The men folk usually carry their *Khukuri* (knife) and wear a cummerbund to hold *Khukuri* and go along with the attire. The Limboo men wear Turban usually of soft white fabric which is wrapped in round shape.

It has remain the same as it was before, the only change that could be seen was the addition of coats or blazers on top of the traditional dress and a symbolic batch pinned up in blazers which represented the Limboo community.



Image2.1. Ready made ‘traditional’ gear worn by young man and woman

Conclusion

Who then is a Limboo? Elderly members are often heard scolding at the younger generation, “You are not a Limboo, if you do not speak Limboo”. While the younger ones understand the elders’ concern and the youngsters’ negligence in speaking one’s mother tongue, it does not make the young Limboo less of a Limboo because he/she does not speak the language. He/she cannot be denied of his/her Limboo identity just because he/she does not know Limboo language. Likewise, the traditionalists have also heard categorizing Limboo as ‘full Limboos, and ‘half Limboos’ based on when the both parents were Limboos, respectively. Again, there are those who say a Limboo is one who is born to a Limboo family and married to a Limboo, thus retaining Limboo women who marry non-Limboos and certifying non-Limboo wives into the Limboo family. Regardless, discussions about Pure Limboos and mixed Limboos are bound to continue, and the battle over who is more authentic often times becomes superficial in many levels. In this context the Limboos of Darap are often seen to be purer and knowledgeable about Limboo culture as Darap is the only place in the world where Limboos live in cluster wise from other communities.

Limboos of Darap

Heavy rainfall of the monsoon stopped me to start up fieldwork several times, as travelling in monsoon time especially in western parts of Sikkim is extremely risky, roads are often times blocked due to frequent landslides. Although the transport facilities are somewhat effective, the road conditions make journey often an exhausted, bumpy, and dusty experience. During the frustrating monsoon period, I was fortunate to meet couple of reliable informants in Darap including Lingchom and Timbrong areas of Geyzing West Sikkim. A humble gratitude to Hari Narayan Subedi, his established networks helped me point out potentially interesting areas for fieldwork and got appointment to meet immensely important persons of Limboo community.

Darap is located below Pelling and is about 6 kilometres from the Pelling. Pelling which is a popular tourist destination for both the National and International visitors who comes to visit the important Buddhist Monastries of *Pemayangste* (Pelling), *Rapdentse* Palace and *Sanghacholing* and also to adventure the beautiful monotonous scenic views of the world's third highest mountain peak, *Kanchen Junga*. It is made of cluster of villages, which are also identified as wards for administrative purposes. They have five clusters/wards that comprise around a total of 2000 inhabitants of which the Limboos are 90 percent. There is a paved road that passes through this village and connects Darap, Pelling to Gyalshing and Jorethang. There are two jeeps named "*Khamdhak*" and "*Yuma Samyo*" that run a daily service from Darap to Jorethang and back. The driver usually takes a break once in a week that is on Sunday. The last stop for the motorable road in Darap ends at ground of the Darap School. The school in the village is Darap Senior Secondary School and Singpheng Government Junior High school. The Integrated Child Department Services also has its centre in Darap. The people of Darap are also trying in processes to develop their village as a

tourist spot since, households has been made into “traditional home stays” for the visitors. The *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre - Mangheem* and the *Yumaism- Mangheem* are located in border of the market area, and down towards a several number of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee* followers live in. Apart from it, there is a small *Sai Baba Temple* near the *Mangheem* and the Hindu temple and Christians church are located about a half an hour walk down on the hill near the Rimbi river. The name Darap is derived from the Limboo words *Terap*, an amalgam of *ka* meaning flat, and *rap* means fertile land.

The number of households in the village came to 150 families. Table 1, shows the 2 clans with the Khamdak and Nugo in majority, as they were also the first settlers in the village.

<u>Clans</u>	<u>No. of Households</u>
1. Khamdak	82
2. Nugo	68 ⁵

It is noticed that the clans often stick to their own cluster. For instance, underneath road only *Nugo* were residing in that ward while upward road side had majority *Khamdak* families. The lone clans like *Phurumbo* and *Luxom* were a result of marital alliance between Limboos of other parts of West Sikkim. In this case, the sons-in-law had started living with the wife’s families. They lived in sturdy houses.

⁵ Darap is chosen because it is the place where *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* is located which fits with the objective of looking at changes and continuity in ritual practices of Phedangma among Limboo community.



Image.2.2 Typical house in Darap Image2.3.Cardamom plants adding colour to village

Limboos of Soreng

Soreng is located 129 kilometres away from the capital of Gangtok. The village is famous for its ample production of vegetables, oranges and flowers. But, because of steepness of the area where the village is located, it was difficult to get insight overview of the households in the village. During fieldwork, the cardamom crops were about to be harvested and the bright green colour of the cardamom plants dominated the entire village. Cardamom is the main source of income for many people in the village. Unlike, the Darap village which have a heavy Buddhist influences. The existence of Christian influence was seen in Soreng village. Many of the churches and Christians schools are established in Soreng village. Although a leading more “modern lifestyle” amongst the family can be seen as compared to the family in Darap village. The young generation of the Soreng were fluent in English and Nepali, but do not even speak a single word in Limboo, it might be because of their schooling in Christian schools where English is the medium language. The etymology of Soreng is believed to come from Limboo words *Saryong*. It means Banana Orchard. For the purpose of study, only a small part of Soreng has been taken into deliberation but will still refer as Soreng.

There are only a few old ‘traditional’ houses. Otherwise most of the houses are built with cement and bricks having balcony and a terrace. Most of the houses are two storied and have corrugated iron roofs. Usually, the kitchen is separate



Image.2.4.Field revealing outer beauty of the village



Image2.5.Close-up

Limboos of Daramdin

Daramdin where the *Sri Sathya Sai Sarva Dharma Kendra* is located, and is about 120 kilometres from the state capital of Gangtok at 3280 feet altitude, 27.136275 latitude and 88.171996 longitude. This place has a large surface of flat land which is most fascinating. Daramdin takes root in the Lepcha word, Daramdin, an amalgamation of *Da* meaning lake, *ram* means to obliterate and *din* for remove; therefore it means turning the lake into the flat land. This place has an interesting tale, in fact it has happened many centuries back the Lepchas and Limboos of Daramdin had a debate on the topic of distance between their village and the sky. Then, they decided to erect a tower made of earthen pots by arranging it with one after another. The construction started and they piled the earthen pots and had reached quite higher only a pole away from the sky, when they were on the verge in achieving the goal, Lepcha who was on the top asked for a hook. The man at the top shouted, *kok vim yang tale* (hand up the pole with the hook) to the men in the bottom who was Limboo. While, the men

underneath heard the words *Cheptey* (cut it down). Hearing this, men below was surprise and shouted up to ask the man at the top whether he really meant it. They asked the man on top to repeat, this time they heard the words *ak ak* (yes yes). Thus, they cut the tower down and their target to touch the sky unfortunately ended. The presence of potsherds is still in Daramdin. Also, Daramdin is called as *phukamden* from Limboo words which together means making earthen pots.

Likewise, Daramdin is a village famous for its largest production of paddy and rose and often times the village is known as “Rose valley”. Rose has become a main source of income to most of the villagers. The village has five clusters/ wards. The 5 official wards are upper Daramdin, middle Daramdin, lower Daramdin, Ambotey and Thambong. There are total of 200 Limboo households. The village is ethnically heterogeneous. The Limboo population is not the dominant anymore in the village. For the purpose of study, although Daramdin has been taken into consideration but have excluded the two wards Ambotey and Thambong.

The number of households in the village came to 99 families. Table 1 shows the households were distributed into 18 clans with Kurumbang and Tabebung constituting, the majority of households also proving the origin story of their clan in the village.

Table no 1 clan distribution in village

Clans	No. of households
1. Kurumbang	25
2. Tabebung	11
3. Thegim	11
4. Singok	6
5. Pandhak	6

6. Yakha	5
7. Maksihbung	5
8. Lingden	4
9. Luxom	3
10. Sambha	2
11. Tumbapo	2
12. Nembang	2
13. Maboo	2
14. Lebang	2
15. Khamdak	1
16. Lingten	1
17. Khewa	1
18. Syaling	1

It is noticed that the clans stick cluster wise and there are only a few ‘traditional’ houses. Otherwise most of the houses are built with cement and bricks. The ‘traditional’ houses are often thatch- roofed and made of mud walls. The house is usually white washed and decorated with red clay on its borders and window frames. It actually looks like a typical house but one cannot differentiate between Limboo and a non-Limbo house although once you go inside, the fact that one can see is material culture of typical Limboos which would indicate a Limboo home. The kitchen is usually separate. After marriage, most of the Limboo sons gets a piece of land in their father’s property and build their own house to start the family.



Image 2.6.Paddy field and its beauty



Image 2.7.Typical house in Daramdin

Conclusion

The brief introduction of the three villages Darap, Soreng and Daramdin indicates the existence of Limboo in the respective of the villages for long time. Darap still held on the history of origin and the villagers are able to trace their clan origin too. Soreng and Daramdin Limboos do not know the origin of village except the meaning of the village. Secondly, Darap and Daramdin are organized in clusters whereas Soreng households are scattered although those belonging to the same clan are seen to be close in nearness. Thirdly, the houses in all the three villages retain some ‘traditional’ characteristics despite external influences to its appearance and interestingly, the Limboo community flags flutter around the houses in all the three villages which represented a Limboo community identity.

CHAPTER 3

TRADITIONAL LIMBOO RELIGION

It is widely accepted that, the religion of Limboos is seen to be confusing, contradictory, and difficult. Scholars usually describe the early religion of Limboos as animists and nature worshippers which at present is known to be *Yumaism* as their religion. But by the time they studied the Limboos, influences of Buddhism and Hinduism and its practices had already pervaded their everyday life. The search for a pure traditional form of Limboo religion is therefore a fervent task as the introduction of new ideas and practices made way for the acceptance of a modified or a syncretised version of their original religion. Traditional religion is defined as a *Yumaism*, which has not spread as the world religions, but has remained in original socio-cultural environment, as Limboos have an attempt to view the Limboo traditional religion as not just the way things used to be, but as a localized version of it today. This chapter will mostly deal with secondary sources of scholars who collected many of the mythical stories before changes took place in Limboo society. Likewise, knowledgeable elderly people who are able to remember the stories have also been referred to cross check and verify with what has been written by scholars. In this light, it should be reminded that the sources are scattered and altered over a span of many years from people with varied backgrounds and might be both biased and limited.

Some anthropologists opined that to understand religion it is the rites of passage rather than beliefs that needs to be focused, but this chapter reiterates Siiger (1972) idea that the totality of the religious beliefs can be extracted from their cults, cult-prayers, myths, legends, etc. Stocks (1975) opined that a clear idea of what can be called the original religion will probably only be possible with an exhaustive study of all the

stories. Therefore an attempt has been made to examine the myths, which hopefully shades light on re-creating the traditional Limboo religion in a modes manner. Interview inputs have also been included along with observations regarding the recent developments in ‘original’ Limboo religion. The tales are on the danger of extinction with newer narratives replacing the old folklores; this chapter has tried to put together a basic understanding of the belief systems of the Limboos.

The Limboo myths are distinct but share many commonalities with the mythological narratives of indigenous people from around the world. Interestingly, the local version of all these stories also plays a big role in the Limboo cosmology. While the different accounts of the same story in different places create a colourful diversity adding more dimensions to a single story, it often becomes a problematic to have a standard version of the same story in the formation of Limboo belief system.

One story can be taken on the separation of the Goddess *Tagera Ningwa phuma* (*Yuma*) and Human being where the localized versions can be seen two competing narratives of a same story in the same community. Many years ago, relatives of *Yuma* and the husband (referred to human being) of *Yuma* went for hunting together. The bad aspect of human mind was revealed when the husband of *Yuma* was asked if he had killed a boar, he refused in accepting the truth, even though he had killed the boar. The relative of *Yuma* and his dog discovered truth after husband of *Yuma* returned back to *Kashi*. Back in *Kashi*, *Yuma* asked her husband “how my relatives did treated you?” A leg of bird was kept in the pocket of husband which he showed to *Yuma* and said “this is the only thing I got left, they took the boar” and he threw the leg of bird which touched leg of *Yuma* and caused her leg to break into two parts. By this incidence, brother of *Yuma* did not like the happening, so he decided to separate them. In order to separate them, with the help of villagers a wall was built in between them where

husband was asked if he could see *Yuma* through that wall. In reply he said “Yes, I can see her”. Again the same question was asked if he could see her and again he replied the same. They kept on asking him several times, and here he got irritated as they were repeatedly asking the same question so, at one point he answered “No, I cannot see her”- which was actually a lie. This is the reason, which further led in separation between God and human being.

Another tale is, Limboos have a belief that in ancient time *Yuma* got married with human. Once, the brother of *Yuma* and husband of *Yuma* went for hunting where he told his brother-in-law to await in a two-way-road. While waiting there, brother-in-law saw a bird coming in front of him he killed it and hid in his armpit. Meanwhile, brother came there and said that there is a big prey as he could smell and sense it but could not find it. He then asked him whether he have seen it. Hearing it, brother-in-law got surprised and said none of the big prey has come. Indeed, only a small bird has come and that he have killed it. After that he gives the prey to brother which he then chops the head of the bird and takes it giving only leg portion to his brother-in-law. Moreover, brother-in-law takes bird's leg and keeps in *Yuma's* thigh, unfortunately, in doing so; *Yuma's* thigh smashed. And brother did not like the incident that just happened, he felt upset. So, he decided to do something but then he said “we have to play a game”. The game further was planned to be held on *daara* (hill) named *ChabadlungYangwejawog*. In this case, *Yuma* sends a *newapa/neul* (bird) to observe on what actually was going on and what was the purpose of game. The game goes on; the blood which had come out of *Yuma* thigh was kept on both the sides. Bird substitutes the blood which was kept on left side with the blood on the right side. Aftermath husband comes and imbibes blood kept on left side which leads him to his death. Thus, *Yuma* cursed *newapa* for dissimulating and caused this *newapa* to endure.

For this reason, *newapa* proceeds to high altitude in summer and goes to low altitude in winter.

The mythical narratives are socially constructed which in later is subjected to re-interpretation. The localized version are supposed to be more authentic to the folk since, it is believed that tales are passed directly from their forefathers from one generation to the next, but by varying in tales it could pose a challenge in belief system as localized myth represents the community myth. In this regard, it must be analyzed closely to the community with regard to social context. As these differing myth puzzles both the Limboos and the scholars while dealing with Limboo myth. Here, we see two competing narratives of the same tale that have jumbled up creating misconception on the same tale within same community.

Further confusion while trying to understand Limboo cosmology is the usage of same name to the Goddess and deity and the usage of several names to the same Goddess and deities as well. Among the Limboos Almighty Goddess *Tagera Ningwa phuma* is equated with Hindu Goddess *Saraswati* and *Lakshmi* for wealth and God *Bishnu* for providing them with the amenities for comfortable and congenial life. She is also referred to be *Yuma* which is believed to be deity. Thus, the icon gets confusing and difficult to build up a chronicle of the series of events involving certain deity. For instance, Denjongpa (2008:104-180) mentions the deity of Limboo as *Ajo Goka* which is also referred to as *Tsong Goka/ Kame Ajo* as a Limboo deity worshipped by *Lhopos* all over the Sikkim. But, none of the informant mentioned these deities during the fieldwork. Sagant (1996-1997: 371) who immensely follows Iman Singh Chemjong to a greater extent suggests that *Yuma* 'cult' is quite recent and believes that the female deity *Nahangma* belongs to an ancient 'cult', which might have given priority to the cult of *Yuma*. In myth the rivalry is evident between *Yuma* and *Nahangma* which

shows them tearing one another into pieces when they meet each other. In cases, it gets confusing at some point because there is a high possibility of mixing the names of one deity to another deity.

If one attempts to define the religion of Limboos, Iman Singh Chemjong was the first man to use the word *Yumaism* and the followers as *Yumaist*. Indeed, Jash Raj Subba strongly emphasizes the ‘traditional’ religion as *Yumaism* or *Yuma samyo*. While in relation to Iman Singh Chemjong and Jash Raj Subba understanding, *Yuma* is the worldly daughter of *Goddess Tagera Ningwa Phuma*. And *Yuma* fits in setting as a household deity. *Tagera Ningwa phuma* and *Yuma* are central in *Yumaism*. Although, Risley (1989[1894]:153) express that *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* is the highest deity of the Limboos. While Limbu (2011:63) says *Fatanagan* is perceived as the Limboos highest deity. But it should be noted that Limboos do not even had a word for religion before. Today, the word *Yumaism* is often used to mean ‘religion’ although Limboos are believed to be nature worshippers. In other words, Limboos never had a religion as we understand today. Limboos believed in spirits that existed in the environment separating the good spirits and the bad spirits, venerating and propitiating as necessary. Earlier it was not the way we understand presently and the acceptance of this present system into their beliefs makes us question the ‘traditional’ Limboo religion. While nature worshipper could be the simple answer to the ‘traditional’ religion of the Limboos, a deeper examination will disclose that they believed in a wide array of Gods making them polytheists. In a way, they fall in line with the evolution of religion propounded by Tylor (1871), passing through the three stages of animism, polytheism, and ultimately monotheism. This chapter will examine the first two stages while the belief in one single God shall be discussed in the following chapters.

Concept of God

The follower of *Yumaism* believes in existence of one single God *Tagera Ningwa phuma* who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Simultaneously, Limboos believe in the existence of Gods and demons. The God is supposed to take care of the humans. She is the creator of everything. It is believed that she is the mother God of the earth hence, she is symbolized as grandmother and all humans in this world is her grand children, she causes happiness, fortune and good health while, the demons tortures the humans bringing out misfortune . There are multiple Gods and an even wider array of demons that cause illness if unhappy and bring health and fortune if properly appeased. The focus is mostly on pleasing and pampering the demons, as the fear of the demon was seen to be highest than the fear of God. But as much demons needed to be propitiated, the God could also undergo from ‘malice’ if the sacrifices were neglected. Consequently, pleasing both the Goddess and the demons seems to be vital although it can be argued that the religion was subordinated by the terror of the demons.

Who are the Gods?

In the beginning there was nothing at all but *Tagera Ningwa phuma* representing the void. *Tagera Ningwa phuma*, so says the Limboo folklore and she created universe, world, Himalayas, Mountains and many oceans, rivers etc. She created other Gods for helping her in the creation. She created sky, water, air, fire and earth. She then created magnetic stones and led down the foundation of the earth. She gave a blue colour to the sky and variation in nature. She decorated the empty sky with countless stars and she filled the earth with plants, animals, birds and insects. Still the earth did not show all its beauty. So she thought of ornamenting the earth by creating human being. She is

also credited to have created the *Sigera Yaphudin Hang Porokmi Yamphami Hang*. He is known to be faithful messenger of *Tagera Ningwa phuma* through whom she completed her task in creation of universe.

Limboos believes in *Tagera Ningwa phuma* whom they offer their prayers and thanks giving. But there is no single god that one Supreme Being they look up to, as the concentration is directed more towards the many gods to be called upon for different occasions. Gods are believed to answer prayers as local myth narrates different icons praying to different Gods for different things. But it is the creator goddess who created earth and decorated the skies with the stars and the God who has created the humans receives an important position in Limboo cosmology for creating the heavens and the earth. She is a female God and is invoked on most occasions as she is credited to have created the whole universe and the creator who also have ornamented sky with clouds so that the mountains were sometimes shaded. The creation story shows that the Limboo creator is credited to have created other gods too.

According to *Mundhum Tagera Ningwa phuma* have ordered *Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Yambami Mang* for creating human beings. Carrying out this task he started creating the ultimate life form first he made humans out of gold but it did not come alive, failing in his task he threw it away, he tried again this time making the humans out of silver still they did not come alive he threw them again, then he tried it with copper it was still lifeless. Those that he threw away later became the Gods and Deities. In the end he had failed in the task that he was given so he went to meet *Tagera Ningwa phuma*, she asked him to sleep by her side in her lap and ask him to see a dream. In this dream he was given direction to create humans. He saw that he needed *Mundhum oakwamahi* (rooster excreta) *simikla pamikla* (the ashes of different types of bamboos), the rain water that have been collected from a rock, the rainwater

that has been stored on a tree. After mixing all these he had to make a statue and hide it in a house with a thread in it. After doing this he should leave the statue for eight days and on the eighth day he must go and see if the thread moves or not if it moves he was to be sure that the statues would come to life. After seeing the dream he did as he was directed so when he went to see the house on the eighth day he saw that the thread was moving which was on the female statue. And again the next day when he went and saw the thread on the male statue was moving. The two humans came to life *Porok-mi-yam-ba-mi –Mang* spited on them out of frustration saying “I tried of make you humans with gold, silver and copper bronze but you did not waked up but now when I made out of ashes you come to life”. The humans felt ashamed and bowed their head and never lifted their head nor did they wake up again. So *Porok-mi-yam-ba-mi –Mang* went back to *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* and she again asked him to see a dream. In dreams he saw that the reason the humans was not alive was because he had spited on them, they felt shame and their head was bowed. Hence, to bring them to life again he had to do *Phugwachama* (arouse flower in their name then only they will be alive). He also had to do the ritual of *Mangenna* (arouse head -honouring ritual). Ultimately, the humans were made. While, it is a mythology that tells of *Porok-mi-yam-ba-mi –Mang* and his antics on the creation of human beings, he has become a part of the folklores and religious beliefs, revered in Limboos world.

Who is the devil?

Devils are the desolated children of, the first Limboo couple named *Lahadongna* and *Suhangpheba* who threw away the children because of their illicit relationship. Over a century, there was a fight between the brother and sister. *Suhangpheba* went for hunting. They did not know that they are brother and sister but by this time lots of families were already born. The birds and animals and the deities and divinities took

this case to God that they are brother and sister but they never went apart. So, God kept sun and moon for the justification and they suggested that they should be separated because lots of family were taking birth. And they were separated, but there was a great fight regarding the ownership of their children hence, God stepped in and took a goldfilter and said that those who will get stuck in the filter will go to their father and those who will pass through the filter will go to the mother. Those who passed through the filter came on *mrityulog* (land of the dead) and those who got stuck in the filter went to God place. *Mundhum* says that there was one place named *Suhampheba Sodhungden Suhampheba demphey* where the entire child was taken. But one daughter has stuck in middle of the filter both the father and mother quarrel about it arguing who would take her. They kept pulling her she got torn to pieces and threw her torn pieces on their own sides. Having this incident, the shattered daughter goes off in mouth of death and turned to evil spirit. Besides, *Lahadongna* had hid some of her children in her *patuka* (girdle) thinking that she will get more children. She took her children from one place to another, suddenly she got stuck in a thorn she had totally forgotten about those children which she had hid in her *potuka* they fell down, and from there the white bullocks and black bullocks (refers to devils) comes out and starts fighting. The bulls fight furiously fire lights up and turned into the countless number of evil spirits. In simple understanding, the countless number of devils is feared from a very young age, and the children are threatened with devils by their parents whenever they are naughty. Indeed, the image of the devil is described as someone who ate flesh and drank blood. They sound uncontrollable and folk are always fearful of them. Human applies different ways to appease them.

Likewise, People have stories that chronicled on creation of sun which also takes root in the outcome of evil spirits. Having said that, earlier there was nothing but only void

the entire world was dark and empty so says the Limboo folklore. Almighty *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* then created the world out of earth and rock. She decorated the empty *Tarang tangsan* (sky) with countless stars and in the world she filled with numerous plants, grasses, animals and birds. But because of darkness the whole trees was downfallen. As a consequences insects and ants were created, they started making unpleasant noise. So, *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* thought of creating the sun and the moon and she further created *Lageyjok Labohing Sabha* the one to create moon and *Namgejek Nambohing sambha* who would create the sun. The one who was supposed to create the moon made an image of moon in earth and send it in sky but the moon gave vivid light only at night which never succeeded in giving heat to the earth. While the one who was supposed to make sun had received *Mundhum* from *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* to erect the sun as per instruction he made an image of sun but unfortunately he forgets the *Mundhum* he have learned and makes the sun eight times instead. Then, at the time of making last eighth sun all of a sudden he reminds *Mundhum* and chants. After that all of the eight suns comes to life and goes in the sky. All the suns starts giving light in day time in entire earth which further becomes problematic to the entire living and non-living habitants in the earth. Due to the excessive heat of sun ray the earth gets fragmented, water dries all the things starts perishing. The creator Gods were fed up of such bad situation and decided to kill the trouble maker. For killing sun, lots of animals came forward. First of all, a bird came named as *Tinging Sakek* but due to excessive heat of sun the bird fell down and hid in a place where a grass have grown up which was full of water. Likewise, lots of birds and animals comes to kill sun but none succeed in the mission later, porcupine comes which was dangerous in appearance as it has very stiff, sharp parts all over its body. Porcupine took a promise that he will definitely kill sun but as a token he needs something. He then says

Yehang “what will you I get if I kill the sun?” *Yehang* replies “when crops are harvested we will give you, you can eat the amount of crops that are gathered”. As confident porcupine sees he could not come through his assurance and caused him feel ashamed. Thirdly, the rat came saying “I will kill the Sun but then what will I get if succeed in killing the sun?” *Yehang* gives the word that the harvested crops by humankind can be eaten as well. And the rat proceeds by digging hole in *sakphara yepmi ek ti rap ha tip ha ek* amazingly, the rat reached the destination a way towards his target. Although the Sun rays were too strong he made a plan to shoot the Sun in such a way that all of the eight Sun would die at once. Targeting on the last eighth Sun he shoots instantly, when the sun finally got injured and fall down the blood dripped all over. In corollary, the blood which dripped in the eastern side turned to be the Gods and the blood drip in western side turned into hunters. Likewise, the blood which dripped in southern part became evil spirits of the hills while the blood drips in northern part became evil spirits of the forest. Even though it took a long while for the shooters to kill the sun as the sun would confuse his killers but finally the sun was killed as well and the troubles of the excessive heat marked the new start to both the living and non-living things in the earth. It was a time of celebration in one hand as the goal was achieved while on other hand it was awful as again the earth would be full of darkness. Once more, the creator God has to create the sun. The sun was created again disastrous enough, the sun could not come in life lots of creator came and tried to give life to sun but all failed. Lastly, *chiknawa* (bat) goes and hangs in branches of tree. Seeing bats antic face, a hilarious eyes, nose and mouth the sun smiles and comes to life. New beginning which marks the happiness coming in entire earth. A new life in earth started birth chirps, flower blossoms, tree grows, grass goes green an earth looks more or less attractive with full of natures beauty so says the tale. In fact, the tales

further says when the sun sets the *newal* cries and sings addressing to Sun not to set and come again next day the bird's time to time chirps in morning in a melodious tune welcoming the sun. The rooster crows welcoming the sun early morning often time informing the night has gone and the new day have begin.

The existence of so many roots in same story is hard to fathom it would be mysterious if the tale is known incompletely. True enough, this tale not only gave spotlight on creation of evil spirits and creation of sun but also rendered how the habitant would suffer without the sunshine in earth and the hidden meaning in birds chirping and rooster crows.

Concepts of Heaven and Hell

The idea of heaven and hell is indefinite among the Limboos. There is no sure shot answer although folktales tells of a country of Goddess *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* known as *Sangram Pedang Den* and a country of ancestors known as *Samyukna Den*. If the place above the sky is *Sangram Pedang Den*, the place beneath the earth is supposed to be water, fire and wind. Hence, the concept of hell is relatively absent and there is none of the point convincing enough to come to a conclusion that hell exists in Limboo cosmology. Also, hell is the place of suffering where the wicked are punished after death. For the Limboos, they believe in returning the soul of death in the village of their ancestors. So there cannot possibly be a hell for them to go to. To sum it up, Limboos do not believe in hell but they believe in their ancestral place called *Samyukna Den*. There is a strong sense of revere and worship towards the immortal souls of this country of *Samyukna Den* that holds a significant place in Limboos 'traditional' belief system.

Heaven is the country of Gods

Limboos believe in the country of God known as *Sangram Pedang Den*, which is at top above the sky where everything is at plenty. The Gods country is sacred, bright and cheerful place. This is ultimate land of God. Heaven is probably same nice place we all exactly imagine it to be. But this wonderful country of *Sangram Pedang Den* should not be confused with the other enthralling place of *Samyukna Den*, the village of ancestors.

The country of ancestors

It is located somewhere nearest to Mount Kanchenjunga lies the country of *Samyuknaden* known to be the home of their ancestors and lives are immortal. It is much closer to heaven where the idea of immortality plays an important factor. It is believed that they have all the foods they want and the crops in *Samyukna Den* grow a hundred times bigger. There is no disease as well as famine and the people there are immortal. Limboos believe that they will never go hungry because the *Samyukna Den* beings will always provide them plenty food to eat. They believe that the people of *Samyukna Den* will interpose on their behalf with the Gods for enough rainfall and fertility of the soil for their crops. Limboos also believe that when misfortune penetrates the people of *Samyukna Den* will be coming to rescue when calamities struck so the Limboo will never disappear from earthy realm. It is believed that only a “pure Limboos”, one who has Limboo ancestor, fluent in Limboo language and follows Limboo “traditional” belief system is given access to this country. It is also believed that the soul of the Limboos after death are reach in this country by the Limboo ritual priest Phedangma by officiating certain rituals. There is thus a belief of a boundless power in the *Samyukna Den* country. Offerings are made in honour of the

people of *Samyukna Den* every year after the harvest is over. People of *Samyukna Den* are believed to look after the Limboos and save them from famine, drought and any other natural calamities. It is therefore natural to glorify their ‘living ancestors’ as Gods who looked over them and provided for their prosperity with the production of crops and the maintenance of the same.

Worship patterns

Limboos do not have a permanent place of worship. So they worship anywhere their Phedangma considers appropriate. There are no idols. Sacrifices and offerings are done with flowers, fruits, rooster, rice and traditional liquor. It is the responsibility of the Phedangma is to conduct rituals from birth till death.

It can be observed that most of their sermon is directed to mountains, lakes, hills, caves, trees, rivers, streams plants and nature which are in the different form of nature. We can see the priority given to nature in Limboo cosmology as God is sought through nature. Limboos call themselves *Yakthumba*, which is understood as the hillmen. Here too, we can see themselves as the people of nature in a very candid way. There was a time when the several invocations to nature used to be highly anticipated by the community. Everybody in the village, including old men, women, youths and children, used to be present, they are now attended by only a few of the population left behind in the village and at home as well. In a couple of decades since, the participation is still meager and the influence of other well established religions could be blamed for it, but both the Limboo elder and younger generation are trying their best to continue the different rituals and that are still being practiced and will be discussed below.

Kokphekwa Tongnam

In simple understanding it marks the beginning of New Year of Limboos. It usually falls in the month of January and is actually a weeklong celebration. The festivals begin only after offering thanks giving to the *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* for the past year and bribing the devils to leave the people alone in the New Year. The negative energy from the past year is to be left behind. So on the eve of New Year, the member of Limboo community offers varieties of *bantarul*, *ghartarul*, *simal tarul* etc (yams) to *Yumamang* (household deities) to thank her for protecting from famine, landslide, drought, flood etc. On the eve of this festival fare is held at Jorethang where people enjoy various exhibitions where traditional thing are sold out like food, material culture etc. of all the ethnic community of Sikkim.

Sisekpa Tumyen

This festival is observed in the month of July. The Limboos celebrate the day as the end of hardship and famine. They have a believe that *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*, the earthly form or divinity form known as *Yuma Mang* visits every house on that day and bestow upon them with blessing of ample food and bless humans with good fortune, good health and prosperity and also prevent humans from starvation. On this auspicious day, people decorate the main door of the house with freshly harvested cucumber, pumpkin, ginger, fruits, maize, flower, finger millet which are strung up in a sling string and is hung on the main door to welcome *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*. (Subba, 2008:217) reveals on the same day, they lit butter lamp and offer all the newly ripened fruits and vegetables to *YumaMang* in their house. In the evening they feast, drink and enjoy by visiting one house to another house banging plates and winnowing

baskets shouting *Sakmang Pero Hangnam Tyero* (famine has gone prosperity has come).



Image3.1 Vegetables and fruits hung up in front of the main door

Bali Hang Tongnam

Balihang Tongnam falls on the eve of *Tihar* (Diwali) in between the month of October and November which is observed as the greatest festival of Nepali community, while in Limboos it is commonly understood as *Bali Hang Tongnam*. Subba (2008:215) has verbalized that the Limboos celebrates this festival dramatizing *Laringek Namlingek* and playing *Tye Ongsiro* house to house, singing and dancing. The butter lamps are lightened in each and every house to mark the event and the doors are decorated with marigold flowers. There was a time when Bali hang a Limboo King lived in; he was an enlightened King possessing extra ordinary power of fore telling about one's life, longevity and death. At a time, he was highly respected, loved and well cared by his chiefs and citizens of his country. Once when the King was lying on his bed on serious illness, he foresaw his own death. He then immediately summoned the chiefs and citizens and disclosed them that in the coming dark night of new moon day *Yamraj* (God of death) would descend to take his life and there would be no alternative to save him from such a dreadful night. On new moon day the *kakwa* (crow) carried out the

bad news of *Bali Hang* death to his subjects all around his country. The crows are believed to forerunner of bad or good news as well as messengers of *Yamraj* (God of death). The dogs also knew the bad news and informed his subjects by crying at night. It is also believed that the *Yamraj* comes in the form of *sandey*. After receiving the upcoming disaster to be taken place the chiefs and the citizens asked him to find out the solution of death. He told them that there is only one way by which the *Yamraj* would be appeased and allow him to retain his life. His advice before the commencement of the night of new moon day, all the citizens should clean and decorate their houses, take bath, fast, remain pure both physically and mentally and light butter lamps both inside and outside of their houses. When night falls, everyone should keep praying to the *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* for the detainment of his life and save him from death. They should not sleep on that particular night and keep on praying and watch the arrival of *Yamraj* who would appear in the shape of shadow of a man in the middle of the night. When the sight of the shadow of a man appears, the man and women, girls and boys should join their hands in reverence and pray with full faith and single voice in unison. If the *Yamraj* is pleased with devotion and prayer, the life of *Bali Hang* would be spared from the dreadful night. Following the directives from the king, the chiefs immediately passed this instruction to the citizens of his country. When time of new moon came, the chiefs and citizens throughout the country bathed, and lighted butter lamps both outside and inside of their well decorated houses and started praying to *Tagera Ningwa phuma* for the retention of *Bali Hang* life. At midnight when *Yamraj* appeared in the form of shadow of a man to take away *Bali Hang*, the people gathered at the kingdom in the gloomy and pensive mood and kept praying for they love and respected the king. If the king *Bali Hang* passes away our country will be in chaos of darkness. It is believed that the king *Balihang* died at 12 at

night. Seeing the love of people for their king. The *Yamraj* assured them that he would not take away the life of *Bali Hang* but he will try to save him from death. Thereafter the shadow disappeared and the king was also saved from death. When *Bali Hang* came back to life, he was so pleased that he invited all of the citizens for a grand feast, ordered them to eat, drink, enjoy and make merriment on that day and observe that day as the day to rejoice and to spread the news of his coming back from death. The chief and subjects went door to door singing and dancing and spreading the news of *Bali Hang* survival. Saying we came door to door following the order of *Bali Hang*. Since then observation of *Bali Hang Tongnam* among the Limboos on the festival of Diwali dramatizing *Laringek Namlingek* and playing of *Tye-Ongsiro (Dewsurey)* house to house on this particular day started. Lighting of butter lamps in each and every houses and rejoices singing and dancing became an important part of culture. True enough, while playing *bhailey bhaileyni* and *dewsurey*, the girls and boys say *hamitesai aayekohaina* (we have not come just like that by ourselves) *Bali Raja ko hukumai ley* (by the order of Bali Raja).

Yokwa/ Ingman

This ritual is a worship of the ancestral agro festival, marked by prayers to the divinities worshipping day in the involvement of agricultural activities. It is celebrated during the month of February, during this function, all the villagers gathers with their *hukwa langwa* (contribution of rice, egg, hen, rooster, traditional liquor, etc) for favourable weather, rain and bumper crops and to protect cultivators from epidemics, accidents, misfortune, illness etc. and is officiated by Phedangma or *Samba*.



Image3.2.Offerings for ancestor

Image3.3 Rooster brought out by Villagers

Teyongshi Sirijunga Sawan Tongnam

The birth falls on the full moon day of *mangsir* (December) it is the birth anniversary of *Teyongshi Sirijunga*. *Teyongshi Sirijunga* was a great social awakener for the Limboos. Subba (2008: 218) delineates Sirijunga Teyongshi has revived the reading and writing system of the Limboo language. He disseminated the teachings of *Yumaism* (*Yuma samyo*) amongst the Limboos. The *ta-tshang* lamas assassinated him in 1741 at the confluence of *Reshi* and *kalej khola*. On his honour the state government has named the Bermiok to Legship road as *Sirijunga* road. A *Mangheem* (temple) has also been constructed at Martam on his honour. The birth anniversary is celebrated with prayer at *Mangheem* and lighting butter lamp on the photo/statue of *Mahatma Sirijunga*. In this event, the Limboo priest Phedangma blesses the visitors for their long life and prosperity.



Image3.4 Bangingon copper plate

Image3.5. Preparing before invoking guru

Tongsum Tongnam

The name is derived from the Limboo word , *Tongsum Tongnam* , an amalgamation of *tong* meaning crop and *sum* means to gather or collect, therefore it means ‘to gather crops’ and *Tongnam* simply means festival. It is an important ancient ritual ceremony of offering harvested cooked food grains and fermented millet to *Yuma Mang* and other household deities for bestow of favourable weather, rain, bumper crops throughout the year. During this eve, all the villagers gather the crops of different variety, fruits, yams whatever are ripen and harvested during this particular season at particular or sacred place. The altar is built of bamboo poles. On the altar all the crops, fruits, yams or whatever items gathered by the villagers are placed. The Limboo ritual specialist Phedangma while offering the items invokes *Yuma Mang* and other deities like *Tenchamma*, *Toksongba*, *Manghang* etc. They offer thanks giving for favourable weather throughout the year and bumper harvest.

Nuwagi

In Limboo word *Nuwagi* means to “offer harvest to the deities”. *Nuwagi* is a time of prayers and offerings to the household deities. The purpose of the ritual is to offer newly harvested crops to the different *Heem Sammang* which appears to be linked

with the clans to the members of the household invoking the blessings of their household deity. It is important to carry out *Nuwagi* ritual for the protection of both the household and the members from negative force. The most ideal days to conduct the ritual are on *Laoogen* (full moon). *Nuwagi* appears to be important compared to *Nahangma* or *Mangenna* ritual. However, the Phedangma of Darap revealed that he was not familiar with *Nuwagi* ritual as it is associated to Nepali community. Whether *Nuwagi* is associated with only Nepali community is uncertain. *Nuwagi* ritual is observed in Daramdin and Soreng while the Limboos of Darap are really not aware of it. Basically, the ritual takes place in an open field. The deities are offered with *theesok* and rice. The first part of the ritual is performed in one of the rooms of the house. The *lasso* (altars) dedicates to *Yuma Sammang* or *Heem Sammang* (grandmother deity) and *Kappoba*, *Kappotung Dang* or *Thoba Sammang* (grandfather deity). Chanting of *Mundhum* for the specific deities do have different rhythmical qualities and the gestures of Phedangma corresponds to the *Mundhum* content.

At the end of last step of *Nuwagi* ritual the altars are destroyed, removed and piled up then the Phedangmasteps outside from the place where ritual has been taken. Phedangma chants *Mundhum* for the *Piccha Sambok Dangma* (forest deity) by offering rice. After that, Phedangmasteps into the house where the *Murumsitlang* lies and chants *Mundhum* touching it several times and finally dedicates the *Nuwagi* ritual to the fireplace, where Limboos believed the three stones of fireplace as a dwelling place for a deity, that are: *Phen Jeri Phendo Ti Mang*, *Sum Jeri Sum Ha LuMang*, and *Mejeri Mi Ha Lung Mang Musuri Musu Lung Mang*.

Udhauli- Ubhauri

The religious rituals for the household, the member and the crops generally follow bi-annual ritual seasons', which the informants referred to with their Nepali names: *Udhauri* "winter migration" and *Ubhauri* "summer migration", *Udahuli* which occurs during *mangsir* (mid-november-mid-december) according to the Nepali calendar, or *senchereng lalaba*, according to the Limboo calendar. It also marks the start of the winter season. The other season is named as *Ubhauri*, "summer migration" during *Baishakh* or *theyrengnam laba* in mid-April- mid-May. The specific season and its produce determine the offerings to the deities and it is done to please the deities for good growth of livestock. During *Udahuli*, the ritual specialists offer the specific season and its produce determines the offerings to the deities. During the *Udhauri* the ritual specialists Phedangma offer the specific season harvests to the deities for instance: rice, wheat, barley etc. While during *Ubhauri*, jackfruits and honey from the forest are offered to the deities.

Mundhum

Mundhum is commonly understood as the religious oral literature of the Limboos. It covers the different aspects of Limboo culture and is believed to co-exist as a key guide for their life right from birth to death. *Mundhum* is an oral literature containing a sacred legend or some unit of native lore about the creator God. True enough, the *Mundhum* contain original tales based on Limboo subjects, and issues. *Mundhum* is the record of incidents and events thus, implying the documentation of the Limboo tale. Chanting of *Mundhum* is observed in every cultural/ religious ritual of Limboos. From the story of creation of whole universe to the importance of every rituals; various other folk tales, "traditional knowledge" about various items and predictions

of the future are included in these *Mundhum*. Phedangma recites the *Mundhum* in rhythmic tones that accompanies the narration. Mimicking the sound of swinging bamboos, cascading waterfall to the birds chirping, there is both an emotional lament and an appealing sound commanding attention from the listeners. The emphasis on nature, even when it comes to reciting *Mundhum* on ancient tale, is evident here.

Phedangma/Samba/Yeba/Yema

The ‘traditional’ Limboo religion is officiated by Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yeba* and *Yema* who act as a mediator between God, men and spirits. Phedangma is a common name for the Limboo “traditional religion”. The Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yeba* and *Yema* are required to lead various rituals from birth to death rite as they are the ritual specialist whose job is to lead the ritual. They are seen as powerful ritual specialists and can expel demons and appease Gods and deities through sacrifice. The –ma suffix of Phedangma usually indicates a female, but it is believed that only man could become a Phedangma. It is their very titles that derive the name Phedangma for the ‘traditional’ Limboo religion in general. Only male could become Phedangma, *Samba* and *Yeba*, while the *Yema* is always a female. Morris (1938:116) says the road to be a ritual specialist is not by choice but because of some “irresistible compulsion”. During the first few times a senior Phedangma guides the newer one in case of spirit possession. There are only a certain number of Phedangma in every clan. If ones grandfather is a Phedangma but the father is not, then there are high chances of the grandfather’s spirit taking over the grand son to be the next in line to be the one. During the rituals, the ritual specialists do not say their sermons by reading out from any written scriptures but get possessed by an unseen force and chant their *Mundhum* flowing freely from their mouths. The sacrificial offerings include traditional liquor, fruits, egg, flowers,

rooster, pig, etc. It is believed that the spirits of the Phedangma do not always live in their mediums, but stay in another realm and only come when they are summoned.

Who is a Phedangma?

A Phedangma is usually the priest or the male shaman. He is a ritual specialist or the high priest who is regarded as ‘a ritual specialist, a healer or a mediator. Indeed, a Phedangma is a high priest, a healer and a knowledgeable figure needful to Limboo community. The function of the Phedangma is to ward off illness and disaster through offering and communicating with the supernatural. Despite the accessibility of roads and access to health care centres, most villagers first turn to Phedangma for any kind of illness, as a Phedangma from Daramdin tells of a busy day in the village because he has to go from one house to another and conduct rituals. Between Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yeba* and *Yema*, the Phedangma is deemed more powerful than the others. The one distinct task associated with the Phedangma and *Samba* with the *Yeba* and *Yema* is the main task of *Yeba/Yema* is to guide the soul of the dead who has undergone unnatural death, which Phedangma does not do. The rest of the tasks might sound similar but they have their own guardian deities. There is thus, a difference in a way of conducting rituals, using different items as offerings and calling upon different deities. The key players of ‘traditional’ Limboo religion and culture as a whole are the ritual specialist who holds the myths and tales in Limboo community when they invoke and are also the keeper of Limboo tradition.



Image3.6Beating copper plate



Image3.7Rhythmically dancing around the altar

Samba

A Samba is a male ritual specialist. They fall in between Phedangma and *Yeba*. They are more specialized mythological *Mundhum* specialists and their task is similar to Phedangma. They usually perform the complicated rituals such as *tongsing* of one night or three nights which includes several rites with elaborate legends. Limboos believed to be originated Samba from incest, envy, curse, other social anarchy and absence of ethic.

Yeba/Yema

The *Yeba/Yema* is usually the male/female ritual specialist mediating between human being and spirits. They are male/ female shaman and are regarded as a shaman, a medicine man or an exorcist. The function of the *Yeba/Yema* is to ward off illness and deal with evil spirits through sacrifices and communication. Their main task is to guide the soul of the dead who have died of unnatural death. They were sent in the earth to save the living creatures from the demons.

According to the informants, he was sent to relieve the humans from the tortures of the demons, and to be an intermediary between the Gods and the human beings. The

demons however were too many and widespread, but they agreed to negotiate with the *Yeba/Yema*. The demons pledge with *Yeba/Yema* that whenever they torture the human beings with disease and illness, they will resist and leave people in peace but in return *Yeba/Yema* should give something in return for instances; rooster, eggs, pigs, etc. Hence various offerings are required during Limboo rituals. People rely on Phedangma and request his presence for every tiny occasion at their homes.



Image3.8. Yeba and Yema rhythmically dancing Yeba Lang/ Yema lang dance

Phedangma at Chasok Tongnam

In past days, Limboos traditionally celebrated *Chasok Tongnam* at their home by offering and thanks giving the first harvest to *Yuma Sammang* for a successful harvest of the year. Earlier this festival was never seen celebrating in a social group. But in recent days, *Chasok Tongnam* has developed as a community festival among Limboos. During this festival, Phedangma recites the story of the Limboo ancestors who endeavoured hardships leading the life of hunting and gathering, then, they were taught by the spirit of *Yuma Sammang* to plant and harvest various crops. When the crops were harvested Limboos decided to place the little portion of harvest as offerings to their *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* and the ancestor *Yuma Sammang* for giving the knowledge of agriculture and harvest. It is strongly and widely believed that any

harvest eaten without offering to the God is cursed with bad luck and misfortune. It is celebrated in the month of December soon after the rice harvest. Despite the need for 'traditional' ritual specialists, the declining scenario of all the Phedangma, *Samba*, *yeba and yema* is a blow to the 'traditional' Limboo religion. They have since come a long way and are still under threat from various influence not just only about religion but about their roles too. During this festival 2016, Phedangma from Asamlingzey East Sikkim had gathered in *Saramsa*, but one could hardly recognize the kinds of performances put up by these ritual specialists. Though it can be argued that the context was different as this event was held in *saramsa khet*, it was somewhat surprising to see the Phedangma. The following pictures are shown to examine the outward changes taking place in a Limboo Phedangma. In the village, Phedangma are never seen without headgear like the one seen in the pictures above. The closest influence in their attire could have come from Hindu *Dhami* as they are known to wear everyday clothes without headgear in certain rituals. The feathers on the head, the cowries, and the bell on the beads and the noises made from hitting the copper plate are the common look for a Limboo Phedangma which is also missing in the picture. The Limboos from were also taken aback by the kind of performance that they put up as they agreed that they had never seen Phedangma without headgear, cowries and performing ritual without hitting on the copper plate. Likewise, the second picture shows the Phedangma giving us a baffling picture of the changes taking place in their attire and not taking their identity seriously as the indicator of them being Limboo Phedangma was missing as well. The member of the community has well noted the threat to the Phedangma from all aspects and is in process to hold on to what remains and what can be revived. The indigenous Limboo association is on a bid to revive the Phedangma by organizing institution to Phedangma. Sensing a need to fill the dearth

of Phedangma in Limboo community, they are willing to favour Phedangma who can perform such duties. In corollary, the followers of *Yuma Samyo* are also on a bid to revive the Phedangma to be a *Suingneem* by organizing trainings and meditation in the *Yuma Mang Meditation Centre*, they are in favour of anyone who can learn and perform such tasks. They have somewhat broken the “age- old” myth that Phedangma is destiny compulsive as they are trying to increase the number of *Suingneem* through training so as to reinvent the ‘traditional’ culture among the Limboos. Some still argue that a Phedangma cannot be replaced by creating an alternative ritual specialist but has to be destined.



Image3.9Phedangmawithout proper attire and beads at Chasok Tongnam 2016

Darap: A Religious Shrine

For long Darap has been the cultural cental of Limboos in Sikkim. They identify Darap as that one place where Limboo culture is at its richest and unchanged from its ‘traditional’ self. In recent days, Darap has taken a new avatar as the Religious Shrine. It is well known that Darap is the place of Limboos. The ritual specialists in Darap are seen to be much powerful and the Limboos of Darap as most knowledgeable folks about their own culture and heritage in terms of *Mundhum*, cultural practices, and ritual practices. There is an intense attachment of deep culture and heritage among

those Limboos of Darap who are still persistence to ‘Traditional Limboo reigion’ while couple of Limboo folk are following the teachings of *Yuma Mang Meditation* Committe Centre which has been recognized today as the religious shrine for the follower of of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee* Centre. A process of syncretism and anti-syncreticism is seen in the *Yuma Mang Meditation Centre*. The centres’ teachings can be remarked as syncreticism because they draw clear boundaries between their *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* and “Traditional Limboo religion-Yumaism”and “Phedangma tradition”.Their introduction of a new system of ritual specialists is on the basis of perceiving the “Old tradition” as impure and their significance and usage are re-cast. Juxtapose to the practical and constructive dimensions of rituals found in the “Phedangma tradition” for instances; to bring luck to the household, its members and the harvests while the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centres* emphasize a highly individualized religion. ⁶

⁶*Mangheemin* the Limboo word is understood as ‘*Mang* and *heem*’ respectively a term regarded as meaning a ‘house of a deity’. This meaning was further understood as Limboo temples.

CHAPTER 4

ETHNOGRAPHY OF PHEDANGMA:

THE LIMBOO RITUAL SPECIALISTS

Shamanism has a variety of definitions usually used today in a variety of contexts. Flaherty (1992) reveals, the term shaman entered English from “Other Cultures”. It has been originated from the Tungus language of Siberia. But the terminologies that usually is being applied to Himalayan ritual specialist very among scholars, and often time the concept of shaman is not agreed upon. A classical definition of a shaman is provided by Eliade (2004[1951]), who basically argues for a narrow usage of the concept shaman, whereby a central characteristic is that the shaman conducts soul journeys in order to reach other worldly realms through a state of trance.

In addition, Hultkrantz (1973:66) asks where the term originates outside the North-East Asian areas whether it is appropriate to apply the concept of shaman in Himalayan region or not. The terminologies are place-bound. The same word might have different meaning on other society. Thus, Hultkrantz states that such terminologies can lose the adequate meaning if they have similar phenomena elsewhere in the world. Also the term loses its comparative usefulness function. The concept of comparative usefulness is also embraced by Samuel (1993). Likewise, “spirit possession” is another concept which is frequently used. Jones (1996[1976]:1) argues the concept of shaman can be applied to an individual who conducts soul journey and also who goes through a specific type of spirit possession, which he further refers as tutelary possession. Since, Jones specifies a specific type of spirit possession, Jones provides a narrow approach and defines spirit possession as: “an

altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien form with important and spiritual attributes, for instance; the spirit of a superhuman form such as a witch, sorcerer, God, Goddesses, or other religious deity and divinity.

Another foremost characteristic of this specific spirit possession is a periodic and specific possession, but the place where the possession takes place is unspecific and is determined by a situation. The ritual specialist does not depend on a special location to get possessed by the spirit for instance, a temple, monastery or prayer auditorium, etc.

The Limboo ritual specialist Phedangma can fall under the category of shaman since, soul journey; spirit possession and tutelary possession constitute the central elements.

The term shaman seems to be enclosing in anthropology. Therefore, despite of confusing the term in context to Himalayan region I have chosen to use the term Phedangma as amongst the Native Himalayans- the tribal Limboo Community shamans are particularly known as Phedangma in general.

Different types of Ritual Specialists

The –ma suffix of Phedangma usually indicates a female, but it is believed that only male can become a Phedangma. Jash Raj Subba (2012) has listed nine types of ritual specialists, while only Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yeba* and *Yema* were encountered during fieldwork. They are generally considered as incarnations, which mean their specific vocations are inherited, along with their ancestor's *guru* (tutelary deities), from whom the ritual specialist receives power and guides them at the time of undertaking journeys to other worldly realms. Generally, it is believed that *guru* of Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yeba* and *Yema* is inherited through patrilineal lineages, while the *Yema* inherit their *guru* through the maternal side of the family. Many a times, several generations

can pass without any individuals becoming a ritual specialist, but whoever are ritual specialists claimed to have inherited their vocation from either a parent or grandparent. According to Sagant (1996[1976]:87) Similar to other ritual specialists in the Himalayan regions, the Limboo shamans use *sama* 'ritual paraphernalia. Jones (1976:34) states the Common features are the characteristics feathers in their headdress, which resembles a *wasang* (turban) which is believed to protect them from spirits attack. Though the shamans are clearly structured in accordance to their ideal tasks, it was generally agreed upon that swapping occurred in cases where the ideal type of Phedangma is not available. Such swapping was however, not conceived as ideal.



Image4.1 Different Ritual Specialists dancing their own Phedangma lang/ Samba lang/ Yeba lang/Yema lang dance

Phedangma and Samba

Both the Phedangma and *Samba* are associated with household and agricultural rituals. Ideally, Phedangma and *Samba* also carries out birth rituals, marriage rituals, *Mangenna* and *Nahangma* for the prosperity of the lineage and clan and in cases of natural deaths.

According to informants Phedangma are systematized hierarchically by their antiquity, placing the Phedangma on top. It is believed that the Phedangma are the direct creation of Goddess *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*, which is also noted by Jones (1976:32). Even though the Phedangma and samba were generally described similarly, Jash Raj Subba and Rup Lal Limboo, a writer of Limboo underlined that the *Samba* is an expert in *mundhum*.

Yeba and Yema

In simple terms *Yeba* and *Yema* are often termed as *Yea* or *Ya*. They deals with harmful deities that takes place from *sogha* (un-natural deaths), *nahen* (jealousy) and are believed be able to cause illnesses and disorder to the household members. Some of the people perceive the ritual specialists roles as distinct and *Yeba* and *Yema* could not perform the household rituals because they usually deals with dangerous deities.

According to the ritual specialists and the community people, there are no differences between a *Yeba* and a *Yema* in terms of their equipment and roles.

Attire of Phedangma

Phedangma wears white *Daura suruwal* during their religious ritual or simply wears their everyday casual dress and *paga* (small white plain cotton cloth which is wrapped around head as headgear). The important gear of Phedangma is *phengbo* (a garland of a *rudraksa* beads) with additional two to four numbers of *sirpong* (small brass bells) at the lower end of *phengbo*. Likewise, *laphijamudenphe* (long sword) and *yathala* (brass plate) are the only costumes required by a Phedangma.

Attire of Samba

The Samba usually wears white *Daura suruwal* while conducting big rituals but while conducting small rituals they wear their everyday dress. Their entire essential attires are white *daurasuruwal*, *phengbo*, *sanka* (*rudraksa* beads as bandoleers as in between *rudraksh* as small shell is placed in between), *laphija*, *yathala*, *paga* (long piece of white cloth which is wrapped around head). A piece of cloth in chest which is worn in both sides connecting each other that is in X- Shape. Likewise, a small white bag on both side of waist hanging on both the shoulders having red cotton cloth in X-shape, designed on the middle of the white bag of red colour cloth. We can see modification in Samba attire in villages for instances, in headgear feather of rooster, eagle, pheasant could be seen in villages which is additional attire added having influence from *Yeba/Yema* and in waist placing of *Phiwadang* (horn of *chengra*) in one side and leopard's skull while on other side placing of tusk of boar is common looks among *Samba*.

Attire of Yeba/Yema

Yeba and *Yema* are known to wear long white robes pleated and decorated with two wide red horizontal bands, one in the level of thigh while the other at the calves or simple white long robes. And *yaaboto yalokek* (white shirt) during the ritual. Their foremost entire essential attires are *Phengbo* (*rudraksa* beads in addition with *sirpong*, tiger claws, wild boar canine teeth, snake vertebrae etc), *yapho* (wide belt of red cotton cloth worn around the waist: one end falling along the front of the robe down to the feet), *yejeyphey* (headgear made in circular support with circular sections analogous to a crown consisting a cotton cloth covered with different colour for instance, green, red and yellow cloth on which corrie shells are sewn). Wasang

(varieties of feathers are inserted for instances, those of porcupine quills, rooster, buzzard, eagle, *gida*, *garul* etc), *Aplak* (two *rudraksh* necklaces are worn as bandoleers, one on the left and the other on the right arranged in rows and cross rows at the end of each necklaces it is decorated with tigers teeth, wild-hog tusk etc), *yapongey* (consisting of a leather waist belt from the skin of a buck, bear or a tiger, and on the belt is sewn a continuous row of hand bells, small globular bells of brass and other bells hang all along the belt attached to small leather strips, *yethala* (beaten with short rectangular baton).

Role of Phedangma in other Sphere of Life as a Cultural / Ritual Specialist

Today's world is shaped by religion and culture. It is the religion and culture which flowers the traditions and helps in determining the way of life of the Limboos. 'Traditional' religion is defined as religion but has not spread as the world religion but interestingly, has remained in original social cultural environment within the community. And so it is the case with the Limboos. All the rituals are in oral as Limboos are the followers of nature worshipper. All the religious ceremonies are officiated by Phedangma. When we talk about Limboos then the worship and believe on single Goddess *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* and a believe on *Yuma* (deity) plays an important role in the life of Limboos. Being inextricable to culture any study related to culture would be incomplete without showing the various roots of culture. Foremost, one of the medium of culture is ritual of a varied kind. Traditions bound ritual may seem complicated involving varied range of phenomenon but each of the rituals seem to have scientific connotations. In the Limboo community the Phedangma act as a mediator between God, men and spirits. They are required to perform various rituals in regard to religious rituals. Phedangma usually presides over important events of social institution for instances; conducting rituals during religious rituals. The

Phedangma and *Samba* are experts in *Mundhum* and they are always a male. They officiate all the religious ceremonies as they are the one who could disseminate and preserve the traditional culture as a whole. Since, culture is an important element in a society probably if there were no Phedangma in a Limboo community there would be no *Mundhum* as it is an important part of Limboo culture as informed by the informants. So, every community has their own cultural practices and so does the Limboos. They practice their own indigenous ways in accordance to Limboo way of culture. The crucial target of this chapter is to see the ways and means of performing the Limboo religious ritual practices and how they perceive the Phedangma as a preserver of Limboo religion. And also deals about the emerging significance of culture in the life of Limboo community.

Rites of Passage

Basically, the Rites of Passage are comprised of various life cycles of the people. It comprises of various life stages for instances; birth, marriage and ultimately the death passing through various stages of life in physical world and each phase brings an individual closer to death. Every community have adopted different culture and rituals. Rituals are performed in a way that shows how a particular community perceives the world, their view on world and the ways in which a community have adapted to survive their culture. Rituals forms an important part of any community's culture as it builds the basic needs of the culture, rituals helps in various ways for any communities culture to perform their beliefs, and these different belief system in a community is a validation on variation of the culture from one community to other community. Likewise, the persistence of Phedangma in ritual is vital and conspicuous amongst the Limboo community. Phedangma embodies the relevant cultural significance and defines the Limboo way of life. He also enfolds each aspects of social and individual

life in all the rites of passage. He is the central figure with regard to any kind of cultural practices within the Limboo community. Thus, his cheerful role is to perform in the ritual in relation to any kind of rite of passage including all the religious rituals.

Birth Naming Ceremony

Among the Limboo community, when a woman becomes pregnant there is certain taboo that has to be observed by her. She is not allowed to take part in any religious ceremony and she is not allowed to touch the religious offerings. She is also forbidden to see the dead body and even sight the unreal procession, if she mistakenly sees it then she has to wait until the procession returns after the funeral and see it again so as to neutralize the bad omen.

In typical Limboo language the birth naming ceremony is termed as *Yangdang Phongma* which literally means rising of cradle of newly born baby. This ritual ceremony is performed to give a name to a newly born baby. The ritual is supposed to officiate by the Phedangma cultural specialist. In Limboo community, the house in which a baby is born is considered to be impure and polluted hence; worship ceremonies are abandoned in certain cases. *Yangdang Phongma* respectively is performed on the third day in the case of baby girl while in the case of baby boy it is performed in the fourth day. The member of the household invites one of the Phedangma to lead the ritual on the very day. Early in the morning just after the rooster crow, an elderly woman of the same household member carries out the new born baby out of the main door and introduces to the universe showing light of the new day to the baby mumbling the words viz;

Thakpu Kubu Khriklo

Yasa Thukpen Khiriklo

Taktak Pengwa Khiriklo

Lasa Phungpit Khiriklo

Sumdang Ketti Khiriklo

Utta Kendi Khiriklo

The metaphorical expressions when translated in English version explains be flayer as birds be as fast as antelopes, be swift as deer, ve cautions as yak, be strong as rhinoceros, be powerful and intelligent like elephant, and be astute to run sate.

Or

Saksak Nipma Khiriklo

Lengha Chokma Khiriklo

Yangsa Thakma Khiriklo

It means be fast in reading and learning, be astute in business, and be clever enough to earn money.

She then blesses the baby for a healthy and prosperous life. After this ritual she then carries the baby back to the mother. The house should be cleaned thoroughly in the morning. In past days, the houses were supposed to dup with the mixture of cow dung and water or with red clay as a part of decoration in every fourth corners. But, in contemporary Limboo community we could only see a glimpse of old “traditional” house. In some places where people have turned the mud house into cemented house in cases the house is mopped with clean water. The mother and the baby are then

showered. And the baby would place in a clean cradle. The house is purified by sprinkling the twigs of *namyophung* (*Artemisia Vulgarise*) by the head of the family. This ceremony can be conducted only on morning hour and not in the evening. In this ceremony, the things that are needed for the rituals is a pair of banana leaves which later is to be tear , if the baby is female three piece and if the baby is male the leaves is supposed to be torn into four pieces. After these formalities, Phedangma leads the ritual by reciting the *Mundhum* on various aspect of creation of earth, human being etc then after that the rituals are then accompanied by the naming ceremony. The name of a baby child is now announced by Phedangma. And after all these rituals the food are given to all the invitees who have presided in the ceremony as a symbol of purification ritual as well as an end of the ceremony.

Marriage Ceremony

Among the Limboos, the matrimonial system or marriage ceremony is referred to as *Mekhim*. Marriage is seen as one of the important institution within the Limboo community. Since, there are no prescribed age for marriage, the girl is said to be ready when she attains puberty. Marriage within the same clan or the matrimonial connection between boy and girl of the same clan is strictly prohibited. The Limboos are of a patriarchal society. They believe in monogamous marriage. There are two widely accepted marriage practices prevalent in Limboo community these two types of marriages Viz: arranged marriage and marriage by elopement. As a matter of fact, these two types of marriage referred herein are only the means of getting bride before the actual marriage. All the customs of marriage remain the same as stated here under.

In marriage system, Phedangma fixes the auspicious month probably between the months of December to February and also the date and day is fixed. The marriage is

held at the residence of the groom. The actual performance of marriage is held in the evening of wedding day. This ceremony is performed beside the main pillar of the house at an auspicious time fixed before hand. The main pillar is called *Murumsitlang* or *Hangsitlang* where one of the household deities called *Okwanama* (the supporter of the earth) is worshipped. The things required for the actual marriage ceremony are Plantain leaf, 2 sets of *diyo-kalas*, *Sinddor* (vermilion), *Potay* (a kind of necklace that is worn by married woman), *Chakamak* (a kind of knife without its blade to be used for striking a piece of white stone to make fire for and also sharpening *khukuris* etc.), *Yupparung* (1 rupee coin), 1 rooster one hen. These items are placed in *nanglo* (a round tray made of bamboo sleek). The Phedangma wearing a white turban sits beside the bride and groom and conducts the actual marriage in the presence of the family members, relatives and friends. Both the rooster and hen are killed by beating on its back-bone and the blood is dropped on the plantain leaf while the *Mundhum* is recited by the Phedangma who would then predict whether the marriage would be successful or not. The groom puts (vermillion) on the forehead of the bride then after *potey*. The bride would then bow down to the groom and from the very moment they are legally declared as husband and wife. Normally, in marriage a pair of *kalash* (water container) and pair of banana leaves are mandatory. In both the sides of boys and girls *dhungro* (traditional millet beer) and a bowl of milk should be there. A *puja* is to be done on bow and arrow and the bow is use to measure the length of life. And is said astrology after seeing it. In water container the twigs of *Artemisia* is kept on it, one for the boy and the other for girl. It is believed whose *titeypatti* does not withered soon are to be meant of having more length of life.

On the next day of marriage the groom and the party would go to parent of the bride to handover a typical of custom which is called *char kalam* in Limboo language. The

main item of the custom is *hokthoba* which means a full size of carcass of a pig accompanied by other items consisting of rice, wine, fermented millet, some amount of coins, *paringo* with meat in it (a kind of small flat bamboo basket). There is no dowry system in the Limboo community other than small wedding presents. But it's mandatory for the clan members to present a copper plate or copper bowl to the bride as it is the custom prevalent among them since long time. The Limboos maintain a very unique and strict custom called *sai mundri* which is bestowed to the son-in-law after having children from his wife and leading a peaceful conjugal life for a considerable period of time. This custom confers the son-in-law a sole authority upon his wife and the children she has begotten. She becomes a bonafide family member of her husband's family only after the *sai mundri* is granted by her parent. The Limboos never bestow the *saimundri* at the time of marriage as other communities do. Now, the *Tumyanghang* sings the song of a flower. *Yehangsema Mundhum* the origin of flower. The main flowers are *sekmari* (*salari* in Nepali) it indicates human kind and *Angdangphung* (*babari* in Nepali) which indicates tiger flower.

Death Rite

The death pollution took place in Daramdin. Prem Kumar Limboo: Head Limboo Language Teacher accompanied me along with one elderly man who is expert on Limboo mythology who functioned as a translator and informant throughout the ritual. Since, the deceased had a natural death; a Phedangma or Samba would officiate out the rituals. Death rituals have various rituals and funerary practices for instance; preparations of corpse till the last ritual of death rite which I will include in-depth into my analysis. In context, to what I have observed, the household member had chosen one of the *Samba* to lead the entire ritual. On *khauma* ritual I have seen one *Yeba* officiating as a *Tumyanghang* (village elder especially having a very good knowledge

about their own culture and traditions) surprisingly, I could see the same man officiating as disciple in Last death rite that is *Tongsing*. Though, Phedangma carries out their ideal task in accordance to their structured position, it was generally agreed upon swapping. However, such swapping is not conceived as ideal.

Limboo death rite is typically known as *Naeth yukma thim* in Limboo language.

Death rites have a long process. Limboo community though have a little cultural evolution but still we can see a glimpse of the olden 'traditional' practices in death rite till today. According to the customs soon after a person is declared dead *negara* is to be beaten and gun is to be fired in order to let the kin's and villagers know about the mourning, as the sound of the *negara* and gun are the sign of the sorrow and helps the community people to know in a short period of time. In olden days, every Limboo household possessed a gun but due to the imposition of rules from the Government they are not allowed to keep guns anymore. Today if one has to use a gun they have to take permission from the forest department and only they would get it. These things are today being ignored due to the tedious procedures and people taking it only a formality.

Sanyal (1979) has described, if the deceased is a male the period of mourning continues for four days whereas it continues for three days in case of a female member. The death ritual is done so as to purify the family members, and relatives belonging to the same clan from death pollution. The purification ritual for family members and members from the same clan is to be declared by Phedangma and *Tumyanghang* along with villagers. During this period the family members and relatives should not eat any food that are cooked in oil and also should avoid taking salt, chilli, ginger, garlic, onion and meat etc. They also have certain taboos like till the

final rite of the death the family members and relatives should refrain from performing marriage ceremony, celebrating festivals, worshipping deities, visiting temples, taking part in social rejoicing, etc.

Yangmunda (a coin of one rupee) is to be pasted on the forehead of the corpse. A pitcher filled with water and *namyophung* (*Artemisia Vulgarise*) along with *diyo* (earthen lamp) which is to be lit by the members of other community, while the kin's have to offer paddy, maize, coin along with eatables and drinks. Meanwhile, the Phedangma performs *imbhojumma* (ritual) where the dead body is placed in *cheydap* (coffin).

In the Death ritual, *khongsing* (3 green bamboo stick) are kept under the *cheydap* as there is a belief among Limboos that the dead body should not touch the ground so the *khongsing* helps in lifting *cheydap* above the ground. Then after the *khongsing* is built, there is the beating of *Negara*.

Inside the coffin the *khatrakey* (a bamboo stick, made to chase away cats, dogs etc. by producing *thok thok* sound) is kept. A lady sits there to look after this, as her duty is to protect the dead body from the animals. *khatrakey* is used by the female members only.

A square shaped *namdhek* (white stretched cloth) is placed on the deceased head so as to protect from the direct heat of the sun. On the middle of white cloth a three step *samsoke* (sleek) is hung. After preparing all these, the deceased is sprinkled with *namyophung* and is covered with a sheet of white cloth. A white cloth is stitched three times if the deceased is female and four times if the deceased is male on the right side and also left side with a needle made of green bamboo.

Before carrying up the dead body, Phedangma performs a ritual on the *samsoke* which is hung on *wadap* (a place above the fireplace which is usually used to keep woods). On the front side of *cheydap* three pieces of green bamboos *kheydam* (made of sleek used to lift loads) is tied up one on front side and one on back side which is later used to carry the dead body. The *kheydam* is lifted three times and on the third time the son of the deceased carries the *cheydap* using the *kheydam*. Phedangma walks swinging a *khukuri* (traditional knife) to drive away the evil spirits on the way to the graveyard, scattering coin, paddy, maize etc. And after that there is the beating of *negara* again.

A man should carry three piece of burning wood, *dhaja* (white cloth) in front of *cheydap* and also on back side of *cheydap*. After reaching the *yebungden* (graveyard), three sticks are kept above the ground then only the *cheydap* is placed on it. Phedangma goes to the graveyard and keeps three rupees on top, middle and bottom side of the *cheydap*. A cross like position is made with *siru* (thatch grass usually used for making roof in rural village houses), Phedangma chants *Mundhum* and the son lights *kapur* (camphor) and Phedangma starts with the ritual of ‘buying the mud’.

Phedangma chants *Mundhum* addressing to *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* (Limboo Goddess) for granting a place to keep the dead body by thinking his/her as her own children as it is believed by the Limboos that she has created the entire human beings with five elements such as fire, air, water, space and earth. All Limboos are made of it and after death all fades away into these five elements only. By relating in *Mundhum* of how *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* created human beings on this earth, Phedangma finally concludes the ritual of ‘buying the mud’ from the *Khambongba Lungbongba Mang* for the burial of the corpse.

After this ritual, Phedangma starts chanting as well as recites *Mundhum* repeatedly addressing to the soul of the dead, he says “*you have not done anything wrong*”, *death is the ultimate truth of life. Death and birth are the regular process of nature. One who comes to this world by birth has to leave the body by death this way only. Now you are shading your body in this world and leaving with the soul. You have to join your fore-fathers at sangram pedang den (heaven) in the village of your ancestors. You are being fed by your family members and relatives in this world for the last. Now onwards, they will not be able to feed you. You will not be dining together today onwards. And also your family members and relatives will not be by your side. From today onwards you have to travel with your fore-fathers in the soul journey in the field to sam yukna den (the dwelling place for the god goddesses and the soul of the dead). Please do accept the offerings that have been offered by your family members and relatives. After this you will be leaving from this physical world*”.

Negara is beaten three times again producing *gurururu, gurururu, gurururu* sound. Before burial, the dead body is carried making three rounds around the burial place, and then the dead body is buried. A woman is supposed to keep the coin (which was pasted on the deceased forehead) and a small white pouch by the Phedangma. The Phedangma then acts like he is throwing something on the burial ground symbolising that he is placing the deceased’s soul there and then again he acts like he is picking something (which he pretends to keep inside that white pouch) from the burial ground showing that he is praying for the peace of the deceased’s family. The white pouch is then carried by the same lady and takes it safely in the deceased’s house.

Once the burial is complete, Phedangma and all the *cheysaba* (mourner) returns back to the deceased house to witness the *Samsa: ma* ritual. At the time of *Samsa:ma* again *nagara* is beaten.

The death ritual of *Samsa: ma* is to be conducted by Phedangma once *cheysaba* and Phedangma returns back from the burial. For the *Samsa: ma* ritual; cooked rice, eviscerated chicken, or egg and two *tongbas* (bamboo cans filled with fermented millet beer) should be prepared. Now Phedangma performs the *Sam:sa* ma ritual in which he will remember the soul of the deceased ancestors by calling their name and hand the deceased soul to them. But if the deceased soul is refused by the ancestors then the Phedangma will inform the deceased family. After that he tries remembering the second ancestors thereby calling their name and hand the soul to the *hangsam*. There are also cases where the soul is unhappy to go with their ancestors then the Phedangma immediately informs the deceased family and others present there.

The *samsoke* which has been hung in the *cheydhap* is to be cut by a *khukuri* and along with it the *tongba* which is kept in a container made of green bamboo and the *tongba* which is kept in a dried bamboo had been kept behind the dead body is burnt by putting in *mihaplung* (fireplace).

Sam dak khom

Samdak khom is observed till the last day of the death ritual. The person who visits the deceased house brings items such as flour, sugar, tea leaves, etc. These items are placed in an altar made of banana plants placed on either side. The altar consists of several fruits, cooked vegetables and meat, alcohol, biscuits, tobacco, cigarette, sweets, match box, etc. a copper plate filled with raw rice a *diyo* (earthen lamp) and a *kalash* (ritual vase) filled with water and *namyophung* (herbal plant). This ritual is performed as a purifying ritual after which the effected family members of the deceased could continue with their daily routine and eating habits. After the

preparation of all these offerings the *khauma* ritual is started by the Phedangma in an open field outside.

Khauma

The Phedangma starts this ceremony in an open field. Offerings of *thi kundya* (a small silver vase for keeping traditional millet beer), *senjangwa* (liquor), 10 rupees are kept in the middle of the field, cooked rice, vegetables, pulses, chilli, meat and ginger are placed in a *nanglo* (a big plate made of sleek having multiple use), *moinam* (cloth), *nagil piyam* (money), white cap, a shawl and *khukuri* is placed in another *nanglo*. The Phedangma stands before the members of the clan and communicated with the *Tumyanghang* (village elders, usually more than five elders presides the ritual) on behalf of the clan members. Throughout the ritual the Phedangma has to ask permission from *Tumyanghang* for every steps of the ritual.

The Phedangma first asks permission from the *Tumyanghang* by *huk phak ma* (by joining hands) to start the ritual. The *Tumyanghang* grants the permission by saying *oro* (ok). Now the Phedangma again calls out to the *Tumyanghang* by saying *oro* again. Then he starts in *Mundhum* by saying or consoling that death is the ultimate truth of life, the deceased could not be saved despite the utmost trials to save him/her. *Tumyanghang* again grants *oro*.

The Phedangma starts telling the story of *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* (the Limboo Goddess) and the creation of Earth. In the beginning there was only darkness and silence, an element appeared in the form of light it was *Migeyjok Mang* (*mi* means fire, *gejok* means the source of the fire and *mang* means Goddess). *Migeyjok Mang* was later described to be *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* in *Mundhum*. She is known in the Limboo world by different names *Asunimang*, *ItasingMang*, *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*,

Yasakeyni, Thak Thakum, Mamang, Yuma Mang. She created water, cloud, air, wind, and different species of animals, birds and insects everything that is sustaining in this earthy realm.

During the ritual *Tumyanghang* asks “who created this world?” the Phedangma replies by saying that after *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* created all the species the world still did not look perfect, so she felt the necessity to create the humans, so that the Earth would finally be perfect. The Phedangma again asks permission to the *Tumyanghang*, this time from the kin’s of the deceased the *Tumyanghang* replies by saying “Oro, we will grant you everything that is needed for the ritual but not more than that”. Then the *Tumyanghang* grants permission to the kin members of taking the above mentioned offerings thereby ending the *Khauma* ceremony. All the offerings are distributed among the kin members of the deceased.

Sangsoth yen Khauma

Initially this ritual was performed in the period of one year of gap after someone dies, usually in an odd day, but today this ritual is conducted in five to ten minutes of gap after the first *Khauma*. The Phedangma starts by asking permission to the *Tumyanghang* so that the family members of the deceased can shed the mournful practices and be able to continue their normal lives again (e.g : wear ornaments, colourful cloths, worshipping, socialization, etc.) he then familiarises the creation and importance of this ceremony to all present. *Swagen Yukumtemba* the son of *Muginga Kheyongna* (the first lady among humans according to *Yumaism*) died and his death was mourned by his relatives.

The male members of the family have to shave off their hair and beard to complete this ceremony leaving out only a tuft of hair in the centre of the head. The shawls are

then distributed among the female members of the deceased's family and the white cap to the male member, one cap is also given to the Phedangma. To mark as purifying ritual is over the stick which was carried out by Phedangma during the ritual are thrown back claiming that the deceased is dead and gone and from today the family is purified.

System of mutual exchange

Studies on system of mutual exchange or reciprocity make up important part of anthropology. In Mauss's work *The Gift* (1967, 1923) he deals with social implications of gift exchange. In Limboo community, much like other Himalayan communities, it is very expensive to arrange certain big rituals like death, and a death ritual is one of the more costly rituals to arrange for a household. During a break after the *Khauma* ritual, the younger residents of the village, who did not belong to the deceased's clan had prepared and served food to all the guests. In order to arrange this type of ritual, the household is dependent on lots of practical help prior to and during the death, and this help is a task for the households from other clan. The ritual specialist cannot belong to the same clan as the deceased. The roles and forms of exchange are turned around or "repaid" if someone from the other clannies. In addition to practical help, the household also needs financial help, which is given in a systematic manner. The donation system is called *tongyang* and two young adults from a different clan sit by a counter near the food buffet and received money from the guests, which they put in envelopes on which they wrote the amount and the name of the donor. The same information was written in a book. By donating this money, the receiver must help the donor if something happens in his or her household and the household must give an equal amount of money. Ernestine (1985:9) describes similar system of reciprocity

among the Gurungs in Nepal. Also, Denjongpa (2006: 136-137) states that the donations offered during *Lhopo* funerals are called *thug gso*. To sum up in the Himalayan region like Sikkim the system of reciprocity is evident among all the communities as well.

Tong Sing

Tong sing is a ritual that is performed by the Phedangma on the last night of death ceremony. It usually starts at night time and lasts till afternoon. If the deceased person is a female then the ritual is performed on the third day and if male then the ritual is performed on the fourth day. But if the ritual cannot be performed due to some obstacles then it is performed on the eighth and ninth day irrespectively.

Before they start with the ritual, an altar is prepared by the elderly members. They prepare a big plate which is made of bamboo sleek. They keep seven pieces of sliced ginger, *manglum*, *sirpong* (small brass bell), *theesok* (millet beer), *baguwa thisok* (jaar- two bottle), *diyoy*, *phiwataing*, *kalash*, *sailosong* (leaves of *thysanolaena maxima*), erected stone, *sapsing*, *khetsingsey*, *ghungring* (it is pegged down by tying the top with raw cotton thread), fire, *yegising*. They also keep *samsukwa* (rice), *manghim* (*phachyang* in Nepali), ginger piece, *namyophung*, one rupee near the altar. A copper plate is also kept alongside with a *kesarilathi* (wooden stick).

The ritual then begins with chanting *Mundhum* by the Phedangma which is followed by his disciple. They tell about the evolution of the world. During this ritual Phedangma goes in a state of trance in which the soul of the *guru* has entered in Phedangma's body. The Phedangma sprinkles the *samsukwa* at the *lasso* (altar) and then requests the *guru* to stop the ritual for a while. After an hour's break, the

Phedangma briefly tells about how *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* created everything in this world.

The Phedangma starts beating the copper plate and then they chant *Mundhum* side by side to awaken their *guru* (*guru's* powers). The Phedangma then takes the plate of *Samsukwa* to the people around to get blessings so that his *Guru* can be reawakened. Then the Phedangma takes round outside the *lasso* (altar) time to time keeping the plate on ground and then sprinkles the *samsukwa* on the *lasso* and continues with the beating of copper plate again.

After that the Phedangma starts dancing round and round outside *lasso* beating plate, while their disciple sprinkles *theekundya* on the *lasso*. They go in a state of trance and starts dancing in anti- clockwise direction. Interestingly, during this procedure I noticed that Phedangma while beating the plate was gazing at the altar from time to time as if there was something or someone at the altar. After this, Phedangma takes a break for tea and he hangs the copper plate on the *lasso*.

Miwa huwa tekma (washing of altar)⁷

The Phedangma with his power collect sacred water from different rivers like Arun Valley, Tsongmo, Yoksum, Ramam, etc. This sacred water kept in *tham* is only imaginary which has been collected from different rivers around Sikkim though the symbolically there is a bowl of water kept at the altar representing water from the mentioned rivers. His disciples then wash *tham* with this holy water. After this the Phedangma goes in a state of trance wherein his disciple gets blessings from him.

Now the main *tongsing* starts. Two *tongsing* is kept on both the right and left side of the altar. The one *tongsing* identifies a *singtongsing* (basket representing dead soul)

⁷During fieldwork, most of the informants referred to *Yeming* as *Guru*.

while the other *tongsing* identifies *hing* *tongsing* (basket representing the living person). *Ghungring* (*Neyraudia Medagascariensis*) is also placed at the *tongsing* where small piece of red and white cloth is attached. *Sapsing* is placed on the right side of *tongsing*. *Khukuri* is kept on the right side of the *tongsing* which represents the living member of the deceased family while *sickle* is kept on the left side of the *tongsing* which represents the deceased person. These two tools are kept to differentiate the dead soul from the living family members.

Silam Sakma which is cross shaped is kept to close the door of the dead. One piece of red *mala* (collar) is kept in *tongsing*. The disciple washes the *tongsing* with the sacred water because they believe that it will clear the tears of the dead person. *Tongsing* is now kept in a west direction where the sun sets.

After this, the disciple looks into the astronomical signs for good and bad omens for the deceased. Four boys (holding sickle) and four girls (holding traditional knife) from the deceased family takes round of the *lasso* making a tribal 'holululu' sound.

Khema: Ih :Sama

This is the last rite of the death ritual. The things that are used for this ritual are rice and small bell placed in a copper plate. They ring the bell before the start of the ritual and start chanting. The *Phedangma* takes blessings before the *lasso*, and dance round the *lasso*. On the other side, the disciple makes a *sapsing* (which is made of bamboo sleeks) and creates a figure of a person, sun, star, moon, insects which is made of flour, and the outer space is covered with charcoal so as to keep the evil eyes away.

On the other side of the *Sapsing*, *khemahing* is made which is made of hay. They believe that the soul of the deceased cannot find peace, so this *khemahing* is made for the soul of the deceased.

Next to *khemahing* is the *khongsing*. It represents the coffin of dead person (small in size and is made of bamboo sleek). An artificial dead body is also made of sleek which is kept above the box. The family members stay on the left side of the *khongsing*, while Tummyahang stays on the right side. One member from the deceased family takes a seat on the left side of the *khongsing*. A thread is tied from the toe and ear of this member to the *khongsing*. After that the Phedangma cuts the thread which shows that the relationship of the deceased soul and the family member has been separated and is taken in the house where the deceased remains there holding a traditional knife. At the end, the Phedangma destroys the artificial box and the dead body by cutting it and also sets fire to the *khemahing* and the Phedangma says that from today onwards the deceased is gone from the physical world. And after that both the Phedangma and his disciple crushes the burnt house with their legs and throw it away.

A *samsing* which is made up of nine step thread in sleek and leaves is destroyed with a traditional knife. The top of the *samsing* is hit by the traditional knife and after that the thread is also removed. Now, the figure which was made out of flour is sprinkled with paddy, rice, soybean etc.

The male members walks in between the white *rekhi* (line) four times crossing from western side sprinkling the offerings. On the other hand, the Phedangma cuts the hair of those male members with the traditional knife and keeps in the middle after that the Phedangma draws a line with traditional knife on the outer side of the *rekhi*. Same process is done by the female members three times crossing from east side, but at the

last round both the female and male crosses from the same side that is west to east. This ritual is performed for eliminating further misfortune to the family members. After finishing this all the Phedangma destroys all figures and by beating copper plate takes those things in clean and pure place. Now, they return back to the *tham* and worships there by beating copper plate.

After completing all the above rituals, the Phedangma and his disciple enters in the house and starts with the process of *himwa rumma* (purification of the house), *phungwa changma* (lifting the head of the family members and relatives) and *saying wahakpa* (to purify the family member) Phedangma uses the *dubo* (cynodon dactylon: grass used for ritual) water, copper coin, copper utensil which is filled with water. He sprinkles the water among the family members. And the *phungwa chanma* (lifting of head) is done. After this, both the male and female are closed inside a separate room for a minute. People who are inside the room feels that they can't stay this way forever they need to come out so, they ask permission to Phedangma to come out from the room keeping one bottle of alcohol and after this request the Phedangma allows them to come out of the room.

At the end, there is a final purifying ritual which is known to be "*mikwanang wasangma*" (washing of tears), where the Phedangma uses the leaves of *katush* to purify the members of deceased family. And in other hand the Phedangma uses the thorn of nettle leaf and *areri*. Phedangma dip those thorns on water and hits the deceased family with it. It is done so as to drive away the evil spirits.

The ceremony is closed with the *Tumyanghang* and Phedangma thanking each other. All the Phedangma, and his disciples, and others who helped in the ritual were given

alcohol, raw rice and money in an envelope as a token of thanks which they took humbly. By these processes the whole death rite of the Limboo community finishes.

Rituals

Phedangma is a core member in the Limboo community, every ritual and festivals are presided over by the Phedangma. He guides the ritual systematically bringing the uniqueness of the rituals and the festivals to the surface.

Thak Thamma

Houses have been granted much attention in research on Himalayan regions. Sagant (1996[1976]: 90-115) provides a discussion of internal organization of domestic space of Limboo houses and their significance in ritual contexts. Limboos in present lived rarely in “traditional” houses. The entrances of the “traditional houses” are low for this was that people bow down and show respect to the house while entering as houses are believed to be temple for humankind. Limboos regarded their houses as ritually important, mainly because of *Murumsitlang* and the fireplace. The houses are the dwelling place for the deities most rituals take place inside the household dedicated to the *heem Sammang* (numerous deities associated with the household, clan, or Lineage). The main pillar of the house, the *Murumsitlang* plays an important role in rituals conducted in the household. True enough, even though the family in Darap lived in a relatively new house, their main house resembled the inside of older houses as the family had also maintained a “traditional” fireplace and the ritually important *Murumsitlang* which had been painted with bright colours. While constructing a new house, first of all, a small plot of land is dug then a deep hole is made for erecting a pillar typically known as *Murumsitlang*. Before erecting *Murumsitlang* the top, middle and bottom part should be bound with cotton thread and some rice grains are

sprinkled. After that blood of pig is sprinkled, silver coins are kept; earthen lamp is also lit alongside as an offering to the deity that lives in *Sewaklung Okwanama*. Phedangma recites *Mundhum* addressing the deity *Okwanama* the supporter of earth while praying for protection of the members of the household who would reside in the house. The dancers have to dance around the main pillar of the house and invoke to the god *Sewakkum Okwanama*, the household divinity who protects the house. Then, they come out of the house and make several rounds of the house and finally dance at the courtyard. The *Mundhum* reveals that *Saonge Ongehangba* (later changed name as *lokpha temba gangpha temba*, while looking for the crops once saw various types of birds and animals destroying the crops. He then tried to chase and kill them, but he found that they had all run away and hide in their secured shelter. He also thought of building a house for him. While constructing the house his sister *Khappura Mellong Hangma* was killed at the main-pillar and became an evil spirit known as “*Pari nu Kheknu NuKhemyangma*”. The house constructed by him was soon caught by termite and other wood-cutter insects (*Mudhak Thaknam*). With the instruction of Demi-God *Sodhung Lepmuhang*, he brought *Lodenhang* and *Phungdenhang* brothers who with their long cylindrical hollow-log drums (*Niyara Hongsing Ke*) killed the termites, other insects and fungus etc. by their *Ke-lang* ritual. The drum dancers danced in and around the *Murumsitlang* of the new house and made the insects fall on the ground by the power of their ritual dance. Then, they summoned the bird, ‘*Temlana Lakhrek Pu*’ (*Hongrayo*, *Aceros nipalensis*), which came immediately and ate away the insects. They also ward off the evil spirit (*Sogha*) of *Muyek Yeknam* and made the house safe to live in. Thus, originally, following this myth, this dance was performed only on the occasion of opening of a new house known as *Himge* (house warming), a ceremonial function before occupying newly built house. It is also said that *Ke-lang* have their

own way of invoking and propitiating gods, various spirits and avoiding or evading evil spirits or bad days. The expert dancers have a strong faith that they need or do not need to recite *Mundhum* but the hint expressed in the style of dance is enough to serve the purpose. The *Ke-lang* dancers enter banging on drum and dancing round the *Murumsitlang* and also outside courtyard of the new house and invoke the divinity of main *Murumsitlang* of the house known as *Sewakkum Okwanama Sammang* for the protection of the household from evil spirits envy and jealousy, and also provide prosperity to the household.

Another tale that was commonly known by most of the Limboos at the same time is most people also associated the pillar with *Okwanama*, but the deity does not appear in the tale. This specific tale has also not been found in any books of Jash Raj Subba or either other indigenise writers. The tale goes as once there were seven brothers and one sister who resided in a small hut. The seven brothers tried to erect the central pillar in their new house, but they could not manage to do it. The sister helped them and was able to erect the pillar only with a single hand. But just before she raised it, her comb suddenly fell into the hole where the pillar would be. She tried to reach the comb, but fell into the hole and the huge pillar killed her. So, she is believed to be inside the pillar, and therefore the *Murumsitlang* must be worshipped.



Image4.2Murumsitlang in vivid colours

Having said that, Jones and Kurtz (1976) describe a similar practice in traditionalists from what was presented to me during fieldwork. After a new house is constructed, *Okwanama* must be invoked, and blood from a sacrificed pig together with some coins are placed at the bottom of the house's centre pillar, which is believed to connect the house and its residents symbolically to the centre of the world. Chemjong 2003[1967]:67-68) provides similar description. The construction workers during this house warming ritual are fed with pork and the household members will invite a ritual specialist to carry out a ritual for the *heem sammang*. In context, a *Yeba* from Soreng described by Jones and Kurtz Jones was only common in the past. He said, some villages do not practice animal sacrifice anymore. Nowadays, milk, water, vermillion, or fruits are substitutions for the pig. These practices changed about fifteen –twenty years ago and he believed the reasons for why more people became vegetarians now a days, was because they had become more “civilized”. While a *Yeba* from Darap proclaimed, in order to please *Okwanama*, the ritual specialist must present *theesok* to the deity when it is invoked. The *Murumsitlang* is also one of the elements *Yuma*

Mang Meditation Committee Center encourages their followers to remove. The followers of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committe Center* had actively removed the pillar. The centre teachings stress the wrongness of worshipping other deities than *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*, and the pillar is associated with a *heem sammang, Okwanama*.



Image4.3 Young men performing in ther rhythmic *Chyabrung* dance

Mangenna

It is another foremost important ritual of Limboos performed usually once in the year either in the beginning of winter season or summer season as well. *Mangenna* is a ritual ceremony conducted especially for a person who is feeling dejected. *Mangenna* among the Limboos is performed in two ways: one is on *hukchong dhang* and another is on *lasochong dhang*. While performing in *hukchang dang*, beak and feet of rooster is properly washed and placed on the hand of a person for whom the *Mangenna* is being performed on the other in *lasochongda dhang*, suitable place inside house is chosen, properly cleaned and then smeared with mud. Thereafter *changden* is kept over which plantain leaves of banana are placed in the cross direction, *theesok* and *sadumbakwa* kept along with *tumdumseri*, *sangkrungma* and *sukpa*. Usually in *Mangenna*, rooster is sacrificed but it is also observed that some Limboo clans such as

khewa sacrifice pig despite of rooster. After the rooster or pig is sacrificed, the meat is not taken out of the house but eaten by the members of the family. There are number of reasons why Limboos perform *Mangenna*. It is observed firstly for the avoidance of be falling oneself from illness, dejection, misfortune, accidents distresses, difficulties and natural calamities etc. Secondly for bringing delightfulness, calmness, corporation and prosperity for the success of life, thirdly for exorcising evil spirit from one as well as family and fourthly to bestow good luck, better opportunities and prosperity. To pin point, God tried to create humans out of gold, silver, and copper but he could not bring them to life. So, upon seeing this he got disappointed and spitted on that human. Then after, the humans were ashamed upon this and they bowed their head and never lifted their head nor did they wake up again. So, to bring back the humans to life, he had to perform a ritual of *Mangenna* (arousing head honouring ritual), where a pair of hen was kept through which the humans were brought back to life. So, from that day onwards the ritual of *Mangenna* using a hen and rooster was started among the Limboos.



Image4.4Rooster offering in *Mangenna* ritual

Nahen

It is important to make an offering to *Nahen* so as for the peaceful living because *Nahen* is considered to be a negative force which can lead to negativity in the household. This ritual is always performed by the *Yeba/Yema*. It is believed that, the envies and jealousy have started flying on wave of wind and because of envies and jealousy the creation of thorns has been created, the thorns was actually a human only, this has a story; when human beings were collecting honey the envies had put on humans mind. The honey collector was a boy who was expert in climbing trees. Those people who were up, treamed the branch where the boy was sitting. He fell down and dies, the soul of the boy tells that because of jealousy the others had killed him by pushing him down. He then asked his body to be taken to *lekwejing takojing* (swamp) and to be buried there. In doing so he will be born as thorns and thorns and wherever jealousy will be there he will scratch. During fieldwork, a *Nahenlung* was encountered in house of *Yeba* it is necessary in order to carry out a ritual for *Nahen*. The *Nahenlung* consists of a bamboo stick with a small stone next to it on the ground. In the past, when an animal was sacrificed, in most cases a rooster, its head was placed on top of the bamboo stick. The ritual specialist had to chant *Mundhum* in front of the *Nahenlung* while throwing grains and rice nine times into the sunset and says, *our sorrows are thrown into the sunset and now they will disappear together with the sun into the horizon*. The *Yeba* said, nowadays, the ritual is conducted in a different way, because the Limboos these days does not sacrifice animals during rituals, but rather place some kind of fruit on the bamboo stick instead of the head of an animal.

Payanglungma

This ritual is always performed on the month of December performed after 3-5 years gap respectively. This very ritual is performed by Phedangma and Samba. It is performed for the prosperity and good health of the household members where a pig is sacrificed and offered to the deities. The meat is served to the Phedangmas, Samba and also to the family members.



Image4.4Pig Offering

Conclusion

The Limboo community is identified as Hinduised community, it is stated by the experts that many of the sub-groups within this community acquired some Hindu cultural traits from their close acquaintance with the higher social groups of Nepali community. Nevertheless, the Limboo community is daunting the process of recreating and reconstructing their identity. The cultural leaders of the Limboo community have pinned down certain crucial cultural locations to forge a new identity. The transition is

difficult for many people belonging to this community. Some of them do not even realize as to why they have to reform and revise their past their self and age-old cultural belief. The new move has is tilled enthusiasim and positive spirit to welcome the change. Most of them realize that it would be a change for the betterment.

Shamanism is the important thing in introducing the ethnic identity. As shamanism are important in Himalayan religion for instance, Sikkim. Shamanism is taking place as an important field in identifying the tribal people. Origin of the past that is valued in present day as the way to produce the different ethnic identity.

Phedangma is a key player of all spheres of Limboo cosmology. They are the specialist who holds the stories of Limboo people. In this context, they are not only known to be a ritual specialist or healer but preserver of Limboo traditions. The declining scenario of Phedangma is a blow to the Limboo traditional religion. Phedangma cannot be made but has to be destined but with the modern perspective ofthe people the use of Phedangma is diminishing and the values are fading though it is still sruggling to survive nad thrive. With the introduction of the new Limboo religion also adds to the decline of the Traditionalist ritual specialist – Phedangma. This has both effected the Limboo community in a negative way buton the positive side it has also intensified the preservation of this age-old traditions. The Limboos are not only getting conscious about the contemporary issues that needs to be focused on but the Phedangma themselves also have realized about the ongoing issues and they are trying their best as much as they can do for the preservation of what they have and to revive what they had earilier that have blurred with the passes of time.

CHAPTER 5

CONTEXTUALIZING PHEDANGMA IN CONTEMPORARY LIMBOO COMMUNITY

Lifestyle of Phedangma

Along with the change in the ritual practices of the Phedangma the lifestyle has also undergone tremendous massive changes. Initially Phedangma would not be respected by the people of the community though he was an important figure within the community. He was a person who used to work rigorously in the field just like the others and since he would remain aloof from the others he was seen by the people as a drunker that would always in order to maintain his state of trance. Phedangma were also not taken seriously in the social circle since Phedangma were often using foul terms. But this all changed with time and introduction of modernization. They became more aware of the contemporary needs of the society so they gave up on the toxicating alcohol, since they had to maintain social cohesion. They were also careful about the use of foul language in public some even gave up to use this language as it would be inappropriate and abusive in today's scenario.

Phedangma still play an integral part of the Limboo community with modernization also came education and Phedangma today are not the Phedangma who were before. The Phedangma are educated and a lot aware of what needs to be done for the benefit of the community as a whole. Phedangma today wear the proper attire of a Limboo Phedangma while performing any ritual even if it is a small ritual, this was not the case before. Most of the Phedangma have left meat and alcohol consumption and have

turned into vegetarian. They have also started laying much emphasis on the use of fruits and flowers instead of blood sacrifices.

But with the changes that came about they also faced many drawbacks. The greatest drawback is that age old practices, the use of meat and alcohol offering which was once important in the Limboo culture and ritual that initially gave meaning and identity to their culture have undergone massive changes further giving a different identity of Limboos. Likewise, Phedangma today do not use meat and alcohol in ritual offering and this change according to belief makes it hard for them to mediate and negotiates with the spirits and their ancestors. Particularly the evil spirit thus, causing difficulty for them. It also causes rituals ultimately causing Phedangma to go closer to death.

To pin point it is evident in tales of creation of Phedangma which clearly shows a picture of creation of pleasing Gods by offering fruits, flowers, alcohol, meat etc. Within a single creation tales of Phedangma .The tale goes as; over a century back, there were two man named *khalbaley* and *Jaljitey*. *Khalbaley* was chemjong and *Jaljitey* was *Mabohang*. *Mabohang* was also the minister of *Budo Nil Kantha* who was the king of the Rai community. They made a thread out of cotton and made a net. Then they went to the beach to gather fish, on the forth path they met one young girl who was actually *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*. *Khalbaley* saw her and says what a beautiful girl she is and tries to call her. At that time she enters into *Jaljitey* soul and says I am not girl. I am the creator of mortal life on earth. After saying it she disappears and they go back to gather fish, they gathers lots of fish and after that they offers those fish to *Yuma*. *Yuma* visited lots of place thinking whether human being recognizes her or not. She have been visiting giving blessing to human beings. Wandering for years *Yuma*

reached a place named *Gorkha* there she became an evil spirit and troubled human beings. Later when the inhabitant of *Gorkha* asks why you are troubling, she says she is troubling them because they did not recognize her. Being a creator of everything that is sustaining in the world she was sad seeing people not recognizing her. Knowing all these inhabitant of *Gorkha* worshipped her offering flowers and yams.

Yuma again by roaming she has reached the country of *Kirat*. The king of *kirati* has an ego. One day when the *kirati* king was roaming in his garden he saw a beautiful lady roaming in his garden by seeing her he sends *Jaljitey* to tempt her and keep before her a proposal of marriage to which she agreed. After marrying *Yuma* the *Kirati* king and his entire family sends her to work in field. When she took out her sickle it was turned on the opposite side. Afterwards when they went on the next day they took mattock etc they saw that the fields were already ready and the tools were placed opposite on their own so they returned. Again when they went the next day to inseminate crops they could see that the crops have already grown and ripe. They were surprised to see this and ask *khalbaley* and *Jaljitey* to ask *Yuma* about it. They prayed saying “we did not recognized you” and again *Yuma* enters into *Jaljitey*'s body and said “I am the creator of the crops and she says you humans whenever harvest crops you can just offer me a bit and it's enough you don't need to do anything . And this way the offerings started by the offerings given by *khalbaley* and *Kaljitey* and she gives blessing to them. Rai *Raja* not only offered those crops but he also offered alcohol and meat.

Again, the story goes that when they were going on for hunting. They did not think about *Yuma* so *Yuma* decided to unleash troubles upon them, she started knitting a thread. And the needle to knit was of gold and silver. She sat and knitted in a place

named *phaktep* in Nepal. *khalbaley* and *Jaljitey* had hunted down a deer but *Yuma* hits the deer and spread a mat to sit. The deer disappeared *khalbaley* and *Jaljitey* tried to find the deer but they could not find it. The dog came and finds it by the smell. Following the dog *khalbaley* and *Jaljitey* enters into place where *Yuma* was knitting loom, *khalbaley* says “a beautiful lady is knitting loom” but *Jaljitey* doubts and gathers the leaves of forest and offers flowers in it and prays and at this time again the soul of *Yuma* enters into *Jaljitey*'s body and gives them all the detail about their meetings for instance; in stream, *Gorkha* village, Rai rajas place etc. and tells the reason she is giving trouble. And they allocated for *Yuma* and them and offer the meat of the deer to *Yuma*. She then blesses them and gives them a gold coin. She asks them to keep the coin with them always and pray to her anytime anywhere. “Whenever you offer something to me” keep adding more coins on it and the coin will increase more”. *Yuma* also says that wherever the coin circulates her priest will come out there. The coin was an indirect form which could create Phedangma so little did they know that the money was a blessing in disguise. One day they started spending that coin in their times of need and the coins kept on circulating among the people. Anyone who received coins was incarnated as Phedangma. It is said that *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* have created Phedangma and it was her blessing which could incarnate Phedangma.

Change in the ritual practices

The ritual has undertaken several changes. *Theesok* and meat which were central element in rituals have been altered into fruits and flowers. In olden times, the deities were pleased by offering sacrifices of rooster and animals even it is evident in myth that how the entire procession of offering meat, flowers and *theesok* has been started among the Limboos. Somehow, offering of the alcoholic beverages to the deities and in few religious rituals could be seen but offering of rooster and animals are more or

less avoided. Today, meat and *theesok* are served only in wedding rituals. The ritual changes are grounded in economical finances as to offer expensive goods like meat and alcohol was a financial burden for many of the households. Hence, economic perspectives also appear to be important, and are mentioned as one of the reasons why the “Phedangma tradition” is changing. The ritual makes a central in identifying Limboos as the Limboo ritual practices links the Limboo identity.

Suk Prashad Mangyung, the former member of *Yakthung Sapsak Chumbo* Sikkim, explained that they have struggled a lot to abandon the offering of meat and use of alcohol during rituals. In order to bring changes they have threatened the community members in this regard saying that if they still continue using the meat and alcohol during rituals then they will not get help and support in any circumstances. In cases, the old age people didn't agree upon changes coming up and continued with the earlier system. Often times old age people said if there will be restriction in consuming meat and alcohol and found vegetarianism then they will give only 20-30 rupees as a condolence while the former member said that it's their wish to give whatever amount they prefer to give but then if they face with the same problem they will also get the same amount. In addition, to practical help the household member needs financial support which is given in a systematic manner as reciprocity which in turn comes back when the giver pass through such situation the receiver must give probably the equal amount.

S.B Mangyung in his interview also mentioned once in a village a person had died where the member of household denied in bringing changes and to continue with the ritual offering with meat and alcohol also serving plenty of alcohol and meat to the guests. In doing so none came to attend the funeral either Phedangma denied to lead a

ritual hence, a Phedangma was called from another village where he said how could I come to your village to lead the ritual in death ceremony? There is Phedangma in your village in presence of them why you wanted to replace me? He totally denied their proposal. Helplessly, going back to village he agreed in bringing changes in ritual and to conduct death ceremony substituting into vegetarian. With this incident people stopped using meat and alcohol during rituals as it was not compatible to modern lifestyles applied by elite segments in process to purify the Limboo ritual.

In the version of Jash Raj Subba (2005) he have clearly argued in replacing meat and alcohol as well as blood offering of animals into fruits and flowers which shows the tendency of purifying Limboo ritual. However, in villages the informants regarded both alcohol and meat as central element in ritual which further shows the community people including ritual specialist are facing problems with changes brought up by elite segment as offering to the deities have started since time immemorial and it is also believed that pleasing deities and spirits by offering is common which people have followed since ancestral time so as to negotiate with them replacing those offering into fruits and flowers is like deceiving which further harms people. Everything in this worldly realm is based on belief system, people have came pleasing deities and evil spirits with animal sacrifices since the system started and it is the duty of people to please them with system which human kind have started for the betterment of human. Bringing changes all of a sudden in offering is like trying to replace human's food into animal fodder.

In this regard, a Phedangma I met during *Chasok Tongnam* rightly remarks that to bring changes in ritual is like turning it into *Sakali* to *Nakali*. For instance; a Phedangma who have been using alcohol and meat long timeback but these days they

are substituting it with fruits and flowers which he calls as *nakali*. So, he says that what they have practicing since age-old times cannot be changed all of a sudden. It would hamper their culture and heritage in a severe way. He also added that for instance; if Phedangma are by birth vegetarian and every ritual offering are in use of fruits and flowers since beginning then only it can further refer to *sakali*. Therefore, he rightfully said that this age-old culture should be preserved and no new things should be adapted without knowing its roots.

Changes in the practices of Phedangma

Today, the importance of the ritual and the importance of Phedangma are getting extinct in some places due to the carelessness of Phedangma where they do not take their task seriously themselves thereby leading to the loss of “Phedangma tradition”. Some of the community people are also getting involved in new “reinvented religion” where they are replacing the role of Phedangma by and prefer to use *Suingneem* in conducting rituals, which further leads in the decline of the role of Phedangma. Most importantly, the Phedangma are declining in numbers due to the changes the community people have brought in the rituals which have become the foremost factor in declining number of Phedangma and also community people not taking Phedangma practices seriously. Syncretism seems to be useful concept in the analysis of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* which is described as syncretise as it is believed to contain component from other religion. Further it can also be said that not only due to people perception but various cultural syncretism and influence from other religions like Hinduism Buddhism and Christianity the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboos are bringing changes in their “traditional” religion and getting syncretised with other religions.

The Limboos have for long followed their own 'traditional' practices but they are facing problems in transmitting their traditional culture to the younger generation with the changing of time. A community sheds all its traditional practices and adapts to the new ones which then puts them in dilemma about their own cultural traditions. Sometimes the culture of the dominant population affects the culture of the Limboos resulting in loss of the original culture.

Without piling upon stories in regard to the original version of "Phedangma tradition", the community have moulded and remoulded the traditions by bringing changes in ritual which has altered the ritual practices as well as traditional practices that has led to loss of what Phedangma were once in turn altering their whole practice system. Phedangma are having problem because of the mixed practice and alternation in ritual practices. An often time, new type of religious practices makes difficulties in villager's life and Phedangma as well. Elite segments revive the practices which makes villagers and the Phedangma difficulties. Revive takes place in order to make the different identity or to create the different identity and new practice is not accepted by the villagers. It can be added but could not be replaced with the "old tradition". Changes take place in case where the people have totally changed their religion not on reinventing the same "traditional" religion.

Changes in Limboo Culture due to Hinduism

Limboos have always known that Hinduism was not their original religion. They also know that Hinduism was the dominant religion for a tribal like Limboos. Among Limboos however, there is no criterion for Hinduism as they have all been on the receiving end. They practice what has been taught or what they have been practicing. In past days, they owed Hinduism to fit in their culture. While in recent days, Limboos

are owing *Yumaism* as to be the religion of them rather than identifying themselves to be a Hindu. They do not want to be identified as Hindus as they have their own distinct culture and religion. They have not just been transformed from Hinduism to their “traditional” religion - today recognized as *Yumaism*, but are also making efforts to transform *Yumaism* to identify Limboo religion. Despite, the introduction of Hinduism into the Limboo landscape was the key to an easy acceptance of Hinduism in Sikkim. Since then, Limboos are found to be practicing both their “traditional religion” and Hinduism where the *Pandits* of Hinduism and the Phedangma perform side by side and the religious practices are characterized by syncreticism. The *Pandit* and Phedangma do not contradict each other but co-exist as religious, cultural, and ritual specialist due to division of labour in their roles. But there is an unspoken tension between the intertwined religions as Limboos have realized that they have accommodated Hinduism into their ‘traditional’ religion and the various Hinduism festivals and rituals are actually on its way to erode Limboo identity. Nonetheless, Hinduism was the common denominator for majority of population and their dominance in all over Sikkim especially tribal group of Limboo.

Are Phedangma the ‘preserver’ of Limboo Culture and Tradition?

Most of the people were seen participating to a wider scene in the death ritual compared to the other ritual, but still the Phedangma were seen controlling the ritual situation. The lack of curiosity of community people to get involved in rituals may be a reason why utmost of the community people expressed the Limboos ritual tradition as baffle either the community people were not knowledgeable about their own culture and tradition.

Mundhum, is taught to the Phedangma by the senior Phedangma which is then used in order to carry out ritual tasks. It is also a Phedangma who can actually make the *Mundhum* potentially powerful. A *Mundhum* can be yield outside a ritual context, but here the myth will be an account of the folk tales about the creation of the universe. The authority and ritual cognizance of the Phedangma themselves is displayed by the recurrent apt where the informants were ostensibly unfamiliar with the de facto contents of the *Mundhum*.

The *Mundhum* are not scripturalized and do not ‘institutionalized’ religious dimension with a script-based norms tradition. *Mundhum* is regarded as powerful when a Phedangma freely flows from the mouth. The *Mundhum* of the Phedangma have played a central role in the Limboo ritual traditions for a long time, the Phedangma themselves are pivotal components in ritual contexts. But the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committe Centre* Limboos have clearly debated the positions of Phedangma as a ‘preserver of Limboo culture and tradition.

Change in lifestyle of the Limboos

In Darap, one of the household has genesis a process of homesaty, in which a visitor can stay in their house and enjoy the ‘traditional’ food and liquor together with a household member which propagates a family environment. They have exteriorly painted their main house in blue and white with green colour roof which also indicates the colours of Limboo flag. The exterior decorations and patterns around the doors and windows equally show the ‘traditional’ Limboo house. And the usage of certain motif and colours are the brands of symbols which visibly shows of “Limbooness” and could make effective symbols for Limboo community people. Not only, it shows the symbols of a Limboo community but also identifies Limboos and helps them to be

recognized easily and differentiate from other ethnic community of Sikkim. Those crafts work which is visible in this particular homestay could also be seen in several places including Limboo Cultural Centre which is located in Tharpu West Sikkim which is especially constructed for Limboo study centres either the exterior colour painting of the house could also found in maximum numbers of Limboo households.



Image5.1 Typical homestay promoting eco-tourism and is actually
a gateway for visitors

Importantly, the Limboo flag differs from the Nepal which has flag consisting the blue, white and red colour while in Sikkim the flag has blue, white and green colour. The different colour of flag betokens the Sikkimese Limboos distinct from Nepal Limbu and it shows an attempt to have different identity of Sikkimese Limboos from Nepal Limbu.



Image5.2 Sikkimese Limboo Flag Image5.3 Identifying Typical Limbooness

Yumaism Limboos vs. Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboos

In this shared identity, however, it is very likely that one becomes dominant and the other submissive in different contexts. The question of whether the religious surpass the ethnic identity vis-a-vis the *Yumaism Limboo*.

Yumaism Limboo vs. *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboos* will always be there because in recent days, the sole attitude of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboos* prevented *Yumaism Limboo* from continuing many of their “old cultural practices” especially “Phedangma tradition”. *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboos* was blamed for ignoring Limboo culture, forgetting Limboo language and considering themselves too advanced to interact with the *Yumaism* counterparts. On the other hand, *Yumaism Limboos* managed to integrate Limboo culture with Hinduism and kept up with the “traditional” practices. In that, *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboos* have not always felt secure about their ethnic identity because *Yumaism Limboos* would always question their devotedness.

Today, *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* has somehow come to actualization that their religious identity has not been able to do for their ethnic identity. They are making conscious attempt to acknowledge and reaffirm their ethnic identity and *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboos of Darap are showing effective participation in community affairs both within and outside their religious globe. *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre Limboo* is pronouncing their own scripturized book on behalf of their religion, surer of both their religious and cultural identity. There is an acceptance of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboos ignorant role to the “traditional” religion and culture and are willing to fit different ideas. Involved with centre affairs, *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* has blurred the Limboo identity but today *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* is showing tendency about their role in the promotion of their identities. When asked around the village if they were *Yumaism* Limboos or *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboos, the worldplay was only bamboozlement as everybody admitted, “We are Limboos first”.

Limboos Religious Identity to Limboos Ethnic Identity

In the contemporary stage, the flinty dichotomy on the teachings of *Yuma Mang Meditaion Committe Centre* on one hand and “Phedangma tradition” and Hinduism on the other among Limboos are responsible for dividing the Limboo community. The religious division between Hinduism and *Yumaism* is a manifesting discussed topic. But what is not familiar is the factuality of a Darap phenomemon, which have become a generalize conception and subsequently built upon it to deed the same.

In due time, the gap started widening as *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboos got caught up with Centre activities and their lifestyle. They stopped participating in the Limboo activities leading to a clear separation from the *Yumaism* Limboos. But these religious boundaries were socially constructed. It subsisted to set limits that mark social groups off from each other and provided a overlay that separates disunited categories in the mind. But in recent days, because of the boundary crossing behaviour between the *Yumaism and Yuma Mang Mediattion Committee Centre* that have disregard religion as a hindrance for their common purpose. Both *Yumaism* and *Yuma Mang Medittaion Committee Centre* had segregated their religious cloaks as they urge to pray on their own way to God *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*. On one hand, the religious identities were being obuscated while on the other hand they acknowledged the different religious cleavage within the community followed by Limboos trying to balance the required of the community. There is thus an infinite process of construction and reconstruction of the Limboo identity which seems to be taking the form of a secular identity.

Limboo Religious Movement in Sikkim

Apart from the association member and indigenise writer as promoters of religious change, there are also other leading factors seeking to change aspects of Limboo belief system. The *Satya Hangma* movement and the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center* in Darap also claims to be 'Limboo religions and have followers in both the Sikkim and its adjoining parts including Nepal. Historically, the revivalism idea of *Satya Hangma* seems to have influenced the concept of *Yumaism* and changes promoting today. The *Yuma Mang Meditation Committe Center* is clearly contesting the association's version of *Yumaism* by providing their own version of *Yumaism*. The

association member and the members of the Limboo community especially tended to regard the centre as a very confusing and controversial. While the Limboo ritual traditionare “traditionally” based on *Mundhum*, *Yuma Mang Commitee Center* has scriptualized *Mundhum*. The centre claims a 27 years old woman to be *Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang*, who is believed to be the worldly incarnation of Goddess *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*. The woman is often time perceived as the most important deity to the followers of *Yuma Mang Committee Centre*. The centre has reinvented the role and persistence of the Limboo shamanic priest Phedangma by introducing only one ritualist that is *Suingneem*. The centre is leading movement in Sikkim. Both the *Satya Hangma* and *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* seem to have admixture of all the religious concept of Hinduism, Sai Dharma, Buddhism and also partly Christianity.

During an interview with one of the *Suingneem* of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center* in Darap, I was shown the book *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum on Yumaism* which he had received during his training to become a *Suingneem* – a ritual specialist specific to the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center*. *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum on Yumaism* was wrapped in a white cloth and the *Suingneem* handled it with care. The format of the book is horizontal, similar to Tibetan manuscripts, even though it was an ordinary printed book. Most of the text was written in Limboo, but some pages were also in English, which provides us with interesting perspectives regarding the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* position in relation to the “Phedangma tradition”. The opening section of the book is written in the first person narrative where *Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang* addresses directly stating that the *Mundhum* presented in the book are not her own creations, but has been given to her by *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* through meditation. It is also stated that the original tradition passed down by *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* through the ‘Phedangma tradition’ was pure and

undiluted. After hundreds of decades, however, the oral literature began to focus on blood sacrifices in order to please deities and bring peace and prosperity to the households. The bloodshed was wrong, thought *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*, and she therefore granted *Yuma Mang* with her name: *Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang* in order to review and procreate the scriptures of the godly world in a textual form. Next, the book points to a subject that the Limboo Phedangma are gradually ceasing to exist. Therefore, *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* has, as the book says, ‘trans-migrated’ the *Mundhum* from the ‘worlds of *Mundhum*’ on to the devotees of *Yumaism*. According to *Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang*’s communication with *Tagera Ningwaphuma* the existing *Mangheem* and the existing knowledge of *mundhum* must be purified, and in order to strengthen the Religion in a uniform maner, it is necessary to advocate meditation and establish cylindrical shaped mediation centres. Here we see that the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* also criticizes the community *Yumaism* and seeks to reinvent *Mundhum* and the *Mangheem*. The book claims that, if these components are purified, it will bring unity, peace, and prosperity among the adherents and will wash away evil thoughts and actions. Since the “Phedangma tradition” is vanishing, the *suingneem* have been sent by *Tagera Ningwaphuma* to replace the Phedangma, *Samba*, *Yebea*, and *Yema* in order to bring further development of *Yumaism*. Jash Raj Subba and the associations also seek to create an internalized faith; the Limboos can believe in and belong to, as well as purifying the ‘Limboo religion’. Similar to what is written in the *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum on Yumaism*, Jash Raj Subba has also voiced some criticism towards the ritual specialists’ authoritative positions and towards ritual blood sacrifices. While *Yumaism* does not seem to be fully ascribed to Limboos residing in rural areas, the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* attempts and actions in terms of changing and reinventing the Limboo ritual practices

are expressed much more explicitly and they have realized and incorporated their reinvent *Mundhum* and the *Mangheem* as a religious institution into their teachings. Most of the community people discussed about the controversial on *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* they stated that the center was totally false and wrong. The great authority when it comes to defining Limboo culture was clearly demonstrated when Suk Prasad Mangyung expressed his thoughts on why he believed the centre is false: “We have not recognized her. The apex body of the nation have not recognized her as Yuma. We do not believe in her.”, he said rather puzzled when the controversial topic was brought up. His statement demonstrates that his disregard of the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committe Centre* is not necessarily grounded in the different practices the center promotes, but rather that the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* challenges the associations’ definition of *Yumaism* and continues their activities despite the national organization has not recognized them. In essence the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Limboo apex association.

Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center is probably playing crucial roles in the religious change we see in contemporary Sikkim. Due to the above given reason *Yuma Mang Meditattion Center* follower and association members are trying to bring changes in the practices of religious rituals. In addition, this centre are on a bid to revive the Phedangma by organizing trainings to be *Suingneem* (alternative shaman) by doing a meditation and the *Mundhum* are scripturized in a book. The “New tradition” refers to “*Suingneem* tradition”. If we overlook in between “old tradition” and “new tradition”. The new system of replacing Phedangma into *Suingneem* is a challenging matter and is a severe factor with regard to decline of Phedangma.

Change and Continuity in Phedangma tradition

The *Suingneem* is a rising process coming up in Darap which is located in West Sikkim. *Suingneem* has come up as an alternative where people are trained and taught the ways of Phedangma so that the age old practices may not be forgotten.

One of the reasons for the increase of *Suingneem* is because the Limboos want a distinct identity that is shown in their cultural and religious practices. They do not want a syncretized culture or any influence from outside as that would interfere in their cultural identity. They do not want the influence from the dominant religion of Hinduism and most importantly Christianity since converting to any of these would seize their identity forever.

The rapid decline among the Phedangma have also fuelled the increase of *Suingneem* as without Phedangma the Limboos cannot perform any cultural or religious ceremonies so to stop the degradation of their practices they came up with *Suingneem* as means of continuation of their traditions. But the concrete reason of creating *Suingneem* did not seem reconfirming the “Phedangma tradition” instead brought a whole lot of changes seizing not only “Phedangma tradition” but Phedangma as well. Emotions run high, seeing Limboos themselves losing their identity and belief system running after purifying “old tradition” and claiming themselves “civilized” by bringing changes in their culture and tradition. Even though there are flaws in the recent phenomenon of the *Suingneem* being introduced to the Limboo culture people do accept this change since they believe it is the way towards “civilization.”

If Phedangma will vanish away this way then it is sure it will very soon just be a story where old generation will narrate it just like a story of what was it in past

without any evidences. If tribal are no more traditionalists and Shamanism is no more their religion then its no use of being identified themselves as Tribals. Along with the changes coming up some of the traditionalists People still do follow the use of Phedangma as it is in the core of their cultural belief systems. Some even oppose the *Suingneem* that are currently on the rise from West Sikkim claiming them to be artificial and not being authentic and also having *Om Nanda* influence, majority are clinging to the fact that their identity and culture are endangered with the rapid decline in the Phedangma while skeletons are left with the only option to support the rise of *Suingneem* though it has brought about a major change in culture. Along with *Suingneem* the “Phedangma tradition” are also going hand in hand it is the constant longing for a true belief on preserving Phedangma and their traditions.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is obvious to report that all Limboos agreed that “Phedangma tradition” is the foremost “Limboo traditional religion”.

By visiting in villages, the impression we get is extremely positive somewhere while side by side it is extremely negative. It is even melancholic to report that the Limboos never vowed to work together after bringing cleavages within the same “traditional” religion. Somehow, the possible effacing of the religious boundary can be seen as a major turning point for the advancement of a tribe. It would be begin of the thriving Limboo that was preferred by members of the community. But it will not be that easy. It will obviously take time. The silent antipathy between the two lateral and the feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’ will still remain. Their religious identities cannot fade over night yet the constant labor has been made, especially as a fantabulous exhibit of how the Limboos want to be identified in today’s world.

The attempt to change the surname into Limboo from *Limbu*, *Subba*, *Yakthumba* or any clan name, might tell us that there are certain divisions within the Limboo Community, which may challenge the associations’ objective to be recognized as a united and strong community

In this study we have examined the “Phedangma tradition” and “reinvented religion” among the Limboos of three geographical regions. Being exposed to different religions and living in three distinct villages, the inventions of diverse identities was confined to be questionable at the central of Limboo identity. But we know that

identities are never stable within themselves, nor do they come up from nowhere; they are socially constructed and are always intricate in a process of paraphrase. In the case of Limboos, the exposure to this “reinvented religion” means cultural changes and the construction of new identities that has proven both advantageous and disadvantages at different levels and contexts within the community.

The study outlined the traditional religion of the Limboos in the background of the coming of “reinvented” religion that Limboo thought fit to emulate. They were a group of people with no word for religion till they started following Hinduism as their religion and identified themselves with Hindu. The acceptance of their newfound religions altered their lifestyle, worldview and the identity of the tribe. In case of Hinduism Limboo, Limboo were able to withhold the left over from the previous tradition as they practiced both religious side by side promoting syncreticism in not just one religion but in their culture as well. In doing so, they were able to figure an alliance of amenity with the Nepali community with Hinduism as their common ground, which led to the setup of a shared identity. But interestingly, even when Limboos were Hindus the importance of Phedangma in Limboos rites of passage and the ritual importance of Phedangma with regard to Limboo belief system were prominent since ancient times and the persistence of Phedangma and Hindu Pandit co-existed together within a community. While joining to *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* was the beginning of a modern lifestyle for most of the Limboos. The only mistake was the separation from traditional culture that marked them as traitors almost. Their assurance in their Limboo *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* identity was challenged by the traditional limboo religion *Yumaism* who held them responsible for changing traditional culture. A boundary was built between *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* Limboo and *Yumaism* limboo creating religious

identities that differentiated “us” and “them”. For long, they remained in their respective places hallmarked by the religions they had embraced created an unnecessary divide within the community. Today, the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* limboo are trying to embrace their religion and have proven all important to the production of a larger Limboo identity. Hinduism on the other hand was never introduced like Buddhism and Christianity to the Limboos. The existence of Hinduism was hard to ignore as limboos imbibe the Hindu traits that questioned their religious identity. Limboos influenced by Hinduism were also to syncretise not just the culture but the traditional limboo religion as well. Having contoured the fundamental essence of this study where *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* have been characterized by syncretism, reinvention and absorption respectively we sum up the cultural changes that occurred in Limboo social institution per se. Despite the knowledge of shared traits, there were many similarities and differences with regard to social institutions of Limboos living in Darap, Soreng and Daramdin but most importantly, old “traditional” religion practices which gives a sense of belonging was a result people do not wholly accept the new “reinvented” religion either practice the new religion and merely do not replace it with the old tradition.

The limboo families are a very small unit, as they prefer nuclear families in all three regions in contemporary scenario.

Marriage among the Limboos was clan exogamous. Inter-marriage between Darap and Soreng were more popular than Darap and Daramdin. Inter-community marriage on the other hand was popular in Soreng and Daramdin because of growing interaction between people from other communities while the case in Darap was different than the two. It was desirable to find spouses from the same community but they were not that

strict about tribal exogamy. Trends of late marriage and inter marriage were very familiar in all the three villages because of the strict clan system, which restricted selections about marriageable partners. The kinship system was still intact although it was undergoing some linguistic changes because of the Limboo kinship terms being substituted by Nepali terms.

There has been found that the Limboos of all the three villages have proper knowledge about their language as it has witnessed in the field. The birth of Limboo language coaching classes in Darap during vacations shows an attempt to make the child familiar with their mother tongue from the very beginning. The Limboos of Sikkim have been privileged to find the school system recognizing Limboo language up till post graduate level.

One of the strongest boundary markers when it comes to food was the consumption of *theesok* the Limboo alcoholic drink usually made of millet. It is the one thing that separated the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* and *Yumaism* limboos. Because of its alcoholic nature, a boundary is drawn between those who consume *theesok* and those who do not, putting the *Yuma Mang Meditation Coomiitee Centre* Limboos in the latter category. But why was *theesok* an enormous boundary marker? One of the main reasons is the offering of *theesok* to the God, which is done before almost every ritual. Several drops of the alcoholic liquid are sprinkled in the air. It also plays an important part in rites of passage- birth, marriage and death and other rituals too. Most villagers do not know the story of the origin of *theesok*, and the importance of *theesok* which is sometimes medicinal. Indeed, the intake of *theesok* has also been cited as the reason for the downfall of the community and Phedangma as well. But with its mythological origin and the tales attached to *theesok*, the brewing, preparing,

drinking and of offering the *theesok* as an important uniting phenomenon. Crossing the boundary and accepting *theesok* as an integral part of Limboo culture could be a start for those who don't prefer *theesok* to be a part of the 'traditional' medicine.

The study has examined social and religious differences between segments within the Limboo community who are playing crucial roles in the religious change we see in contemporary Sikkim. The senior male association members, have the privilege to define a 'limboo religion'. From interviews with the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Center* followers, we came to know that economic perspectives also appear to be vital and are mentioned as one of the reasons why the age old practice that is "Phedangma tradition" needed to be "reinvented". Central in this dissertation has been the creation or of development of *Yumaism* as the unique and united 'Limboo religion'. By constructing their own Limboo worship places, and creating distinct community flag which in Limboo word itself refers to *Nesha* which means identity. The flag consist of three colours each denoting its significance where blue colour signifies sky, white as air and green as earth and in centre *Silam Sakma* which is in triangular shape which holds the sky, air and earth together. *Silam Sakma* is derived from the three Limboo word *si-* death, *lam-*path, and *sakma-* to block which together means blocking the path of death. The entire community are proving to the setting that the Limboos are not Nepalese Hindus either Nepali but a distinct ethnic community with their own respected religion. *Mangheem*, *Silam sakma*, and community flag in the landscape are potentially potent when affirming a separate Limboo religious identity since; they show a cultural tradition and can provide a sense of belonging which legitimate their claims of belonging to Sikkim. Paradoxically, the community seek to reconstruct a distinct Limboo religion and identity, but we have visualize that by syncretising elements from 'great' religious traditions, *Yumaism* appears more similar

to other “conventional” religions in the state of Sikkim, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and particularly Christianity. The decision-making from elite segments of the community does not seem to be completely ascribed to people residing in rural areas, nor are some of their constructions actively in use for example; the study centres and *Mangheem* as well. We have seen that the *Yuma Mang Mediattaion Committee Center* actively challenges the associations endeavor to create a united Limboo community, as well as their decisions and a definition of a Limboo religion. They also have their own distinct religious flag. Thus, the Limboos religious and cultural engineer is debated.

The Limboo community like any other community are dwelling between the phases of change in their “age- old” cultural practices and the use of Phedangma is among one of the traditions that the Limboos are trying to preserve and continue as the tradition itself is at the core of the culture of the Limboos and also their identity. Phedangma themselves have undergone many changes. Changes in their lifestyle, in their ritual and religious practices have affected them and also the Limboo culture as a whole. The revolution in their culture has also brought about the new practise of the *Suingneem* which challenges the “Phedangma tradition” yet brings the sense of the safeguarding the practises of the Limboos and help in keeping their identity intact.

The changes were ineluctable and it is the continuous gestalts of religion that continually interact with each other which further have reshaped the Limboo traditions too. With the decreasing number of Phedangma and growing number of *Suingnnem* the Limboo themselves and Phedangma as well are responsible for the ungoing cause. The religious divide of the community is a greatest problem as Limboos are seen to be fragmented because of cleavages brought up within the same single community religion. So far Limboos have been successful in recognizing the different religious

traditions followed by the Limboos and in creating a distinct identity from Hindu. But, the gap in same religion by reinventing “traditional” religion and substituting Phedangma to *Suingnnem* has blurred the Limboo identity once again bringing confusion to the world wide. For the integration of the Limboos there is the much needed one-ness of Limboos to be conspicuous in and around the world wide phenomenon and take initiative in preserving “Phedangma tradition”.

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Glossary and Recurrent Terms

Balihang Tongnam: This festival is recently revived Limboo festival. It resembles closely to Hindu festival Diwali, where people visits one house to other house while carrying lamps. *Bali Hang* is believed to have been an ancient Limboo King who had undergone severe illness even though he survived. Thus, people of his kingdom spread the joyful news to entire neighbours singing *Tye ongsiro*.

Cha sot : The offering of the first harvested fruits to the household deity.

Cheydap :coffin.

Cheysaba: Mourner.

Chumlung: Limboo council.

Chyabrung: Limboo instrumental drum.

Den: It is often referred to other worldly realm. Limboos believed to have eighteen upper and lower realms where each one is associated with a deity and are central in the Phedangma ritual journeys.

Dhami: Nepali Shaman.

Diyo: Earthen lamp.

Dubo: *Cynodon dactylon*.

Ghungring:*Neyraudia Medagascariensis*.

Hang pha: A species of bamboo used to make *tongba* or the container in which fermented millet is poured and sipped with the help of a bamboo made pipe.

Hangsam: The main ancestor of a person.

Heem Sammang: Household deities.

Himwa rumma: Purification of the house.

Hing Tongsing: A basket representing the living on the erected bamboo pole.

Huk phak ma: Joining hands.

Hungwa changma: lifting the head of the family members and clans.

Kapur: camphor.

Keba: The tigerspirit that eats the liver and heart of its victim .

Kebo: The spirit of the womb responsible for difficult childbirth.

Kham: Soil.

Kham: The land, soil and earth.

Khatrakey: A bamboo stick, made to chase away cats, dogs etc.

Khauma: Cleansing ritual during death rituals.

Khemading Yongsong Den: A lowest realm, often time considered as hell.

Khongsing :Green bamboo stick.

Kirat Yakthung Chumlung: A Limboo association with other branches in and around the world.

Lao ogen: Full moon.

Lasso: Altar.

Lasso: Temporary altar.

Mangden: It is considered as Godly world, According to the book- *Ninghingse Saywa Mundhum on Yumaism of Suingneem*.

Mangenna: A ritual for the prosperity of the clan or lineage.

Mangheem: A Limboo temple.

Masopa: The practice of leaving a tuft of hair when the head of the deceaseds son is shaved during a death ritual.

Mejiri Mi Ha Lung Mang Mussuri Musu Lung Mang: One of the three deities who dwells in the three stone in the fireplace.

Mendohi Kokenamba: God of the soil who is paid for the burial land.

Migeyjok Mang: *Mi* means fire, *gejok* means the source of the fire and *mang* means Goddesses.

Mihaplung: Fireplace.

Miwa huwa tekma: washing of altar.

Moinam: cloth.

Mundhum: Oral literature which consists myths, history etc. On contrary, the *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre* has scriptualized *Mundhum* and is the words of *Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang*, the worldly incarnation of *Tagera Ningwa Phuma*.

Murumsitlang/ Hangsitlang: Central pillar of Limboo households where *Okwanama* or the household deity, resides and brings luck and prosperity to the household.

Nagil piyam: Money.

Nahangma/Phyngsok Timma: A warrior deity and a beautiful woman armed with a bow, shield, sword and perhaps a helmet that is believed to dwell on a snowy mountain who is worshipped for regaining power. Limboos carries out this ritual for prosperity to the clan as well as “raise the head”.

Nahen: It refers to envies and jealousy spirit which can cause severe harm to the household.

Nahenlung: A small erected bamboo pole which is central in the ritual where the Phedangma get rid of *nahen*. The *nahenlung* consists of a bamboo stick with a small stone next to it on the ground. It is usually a sacrificed rooster’s head placed on the stick. But in recent days, some people have substituted fruit on top of the stick instead of a rooster.

Nam get: Rising sun, east.

Nam tha: Setting sun, west.

Nam: Sun.

Namdhek: White stretched cloth.

Namlinge: Morning.

Namyophung: Artemisia Vulgaris.

Nanglo: A big plate made of sleek having multiple use.

Nisam: Soul associated with the mind.

Nuwagi: As far as I know, the term Nuwagi is often used among Nepalese. However, during fieldwork most of the informant mentioned it as a Limboo word which means 'to offer harvest to the deities'.

Oro: ok.

Pha yet: A bamboo winnower.

Phaktanglung: Kanchenjunga.

Phedangma tradition: The age -old shamanistic ritual traditions of the Limboos where animal sacrifices are practiced in order to appease the deities and evil spirits.

Phedangma: Phedangma is a general term for the entire Ritual Specialists of Limboos. They are required to lead various rituals from birth to death rite as they are the ritual specialist whose job is to lead the ritual.

Phen Jeri Phendo Ti Mang: One of the three deities who dwells in the three stones in the fireplace.

Phung sam: Tree, flower or external soul.

Phungsok/ Gurupuja: A biggest ritual for the Phedangma to maintain and gain power and knowledge.

Piccha Sambok Dangma: Limboo deity associated with forest.

Porob Mang: The creator God who have created human beings and earth.

Pung punge: Spirits of springs and waterfalls.

Sailosong: Leaves of *thysanolaena maxima*.

Samsoke: Sleek.

Samyok hung thim: The evergreen grass and stone used for purification ritual.

Samyukna Den: The country of ancestor.

Sangbhe: The eight stepped pyramid shaped altar inside the *Mangheem*.

Sangram Pedang Den: The country of God where *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* dwells.

Satya Hangma: A socio-religious reform movement founded by Lingden

Phalgunannda in the year 1920. Most of the principles of the movement seem to have influenced the religious changes prompted by the associations.

Saying wahakpa: To purify the family member.

See Tongsing: A small basket representing the dead soul on the erected bamboo pole during Tongsing ritual.

Silam Sakma: Limboo symbolic figure. *Silam Sakma* is derived from the three Limboo word *si*- death, *lam*-path, and *sakma*- to block which together means blocking the path of death.

Sinjogwa: Pure rain water used for certain rituals.

Sirijunga Teyongshi : The second incarnation of the Limboo cultural revivalist hero.

Sirijunga Xin Thebe: The first incarnation of the Limboo cultural hero.

Sirpong: Small brass bell.

Siru: Thatch grass usually used for making roof in rural village houses.

Sisam: A soul that rests by the graveyard.

Sogha: It refers to unnatural deaths spirit.

Sri Sri Srima Yuma Mang: The worldly incarnation of *Tagera Ningwa Phuma* according to the belief system of *Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre*.

Suingneem: *Yuma Mang Mediattaion Committe Centre*'s ritual specialist. Often time known as alternative ritual specialist of Limboos.

Sum Jeri Sum Ha Lu Mang: One of the deities of three stones who dwell in the fireplace.

Tesipina: A small stick which was collected by all the attendies during the death ritual and were given to Phedangma symbolizing that they had witnessed the death pollution.

Theesok: Millet bear. In Sikkim, *theesok* is usually made of fermented millet and wheat and drunk from a wooden or bamboo pot with a straw.

Thi kundya: A small silver vase for keeping traditional millet beer.

Thisleep: A traditional beer made from fermented millet and is often offered to deities during rituals.

Thobba Sammang: A Limboo grandfather deity associated with the household.

Tongba: A bamboo container in which fermented milet or wheat is poured allowed to soak wih hot waater and sipped with the help of a bamboo made pipe with a small slit at the bottom so that when onesips only the alcoholic content comes up.

Tongnam: It is a Limboo word for festival.

Tongsing: A biggest part of death ritual where the soul of the dead is lead to the country of ancestors.

Tongyang: A donation system.

Tumyanghang: Limboo village council who are experts in Limboo culture and heritage as well as village elder especially having a very good knowledge about their own culture and traditions.

Wadap: A place above the fireplace which is usually used to keep woods.

Warok: Lake.

Wasang: A turban worn by Phedangma.

Wobokwa: A copper container replaced instead of *Murumsitlang*.

Yakthumba/ Yakthumma: *Yakthum* refers to Limboo endonym. Ba means male and ma meaning female.

Yakthung Pan: Limboo language.

Yalumpu: A basket where Phedangma keeps their ritual implements during the Tongsing ritual.

Yangmunda : A coin of one rupee.

Yathala: A copper plate used by the Phedangma during rituals to invoke their Guru or to ward evil spirits.

Yeebungden: Graveyard.

Yeming/ Guru: The incarnate Phedangma tutelary deities. They are the protector from whom Phedangma receives their powers while carrying out rituals.

Yuma Mang Meditation Committee Centre: A revivalist movement seeking to redefine and improve *Yumaism* by challenging the *Yumaism* prompted by the associations. The

“Phedangma tradition” is rejected and has instead replaced with alternative ritual specialist as *Suingneem*. The centre has also scripturalized *Mundhum*.

Yumaism: A name given for “traditional Limboo religion” prompted by the Limboo associations. The indigenous Limboos does not reject Phedangma tradition, but is prompted as a ‘great’ tradition, a systematized religion of Limboo community.