

## **Fluid Boundaries and Fluid Identities- The Study of Limboo Tribe of Sikkim**

Gracy Maria Subba

Research Scholar Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow

---

**Abstract:** Drawing on the theories laid down by several authors, this article examines the continuously re-defined and re-interpreted identity issue of the Limboo tribe of Sikkim. The origin and migration issue of the Sikkimese Limboos is still a matter of debate and controversies and, without relevant documentary sources, has not, nor seems likely to be elucidated by the historians. Straddled between the two countries of Nepal and India, this fringe tribe has sustained fluid identity under the changing history. The flexibility of the geographical boundaries, battles of conquest, conspiracies and acquisition, and the theories of their originality have confused this community and has caused them to search for their identity. The onset of democracy has further marginalized them. The Limboos have been classified as Nepali linking this community with the later Nepali migrants in Sikkim, which the Limboos consider as a threat to their distinct identity

**Key words:** migration, theories, boundaries, aboriginality

---

### **I. Introduction**

Hidden beneath the histories of great Kingdoms, war and conquest is the history of a fringe tribe, and their resistance and survival. Believed to be brave and cruel in battle, putting the old and weak to sword, carrying the younger to the slavery and killing on the march such captives as are unable to proceed<sup>1</sup>; this marginal hill tribe collaborated with the state building processes both in Nepal and Sikkim. Political antagonism has resulted in their land being divided into two, thereby making the Limboos, a community which straddles the two nations of Nepal and India. Great battles were fought, political boundaries changed, old system of Governance was replaced by new ones; this ethnic group, however, has managed to survive despite such sharp changes. Barring the bulk of Limboo population in east Nepal and focusing more on the Limboos of Sikkim, this paper deals with the theories laid down by several authors regarding their origin and migration and it is these theories that shapes their identity.

The origin and migration issue of the Sikkimese Limboos is still a matter of debate and controversies and, without relevant documentary sources, has not, nor seems likely to be elucidated by the historians. Though they are said to be among the earliest settlers of the land of Sikkim, their ancestors do have migrated from somewhere, sometimes back, as their oral tradition makes repeated mention of the migration of their ancestors. Their oral narratives categorized them as Kasi, Lasha and Bhuiphuta gotra<sup>2</sup> on the basis of their migration. Such division amongst the Limboo is highly rejected by this community on the ground that it is a hinduised and a theoretical construct and not a historically accurate one. The history of this tribe rests on the narration of their stories by different agents in different periods of time; and it is these fragmented memories that have gained acceptance in present day. Several authors have alleged their own theories explaining the origin and migration of the Sikkimese Limboos.

### **Theory of Kirata Origin**

The first and the widely accepted theory, is the theory of the Kirata origin which in my view is quite a wider concept as Kirata denotes wide range of ethnic community. According to the Kirata theory, the Limboos are descended from family of Kirat-asura, who once fought against the Aryans. Designating the Limboos as Kirata and varying in the issue of the migration, the authors have put forward different stories to support their theory. Kotturan (1983), quoting from the Rigveda 'drive back the Kirats to the caravans', says that the Limboos are the descendent from the ten brothers who decided to leave their home at the Indo-gangetic plains, due to the onslaught of Aryan invaders and settled down in the mountains of Eastern Himalayas. While Kotturan talks of the migration from Gangetic to the Himalayas, Sanyal (1979), terming them as the inhabitants of the lower Himalayas, talks about their migration from Assam along the river Brahmaputra to India, some period before 1000 B.C. Sinah (1994), supports the view of Sanyal, whereby the migration of this tribe started from north-east

---

<sup>1</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journal vol-I

<sup>2</sup> The non-beef eaters' hinduized ones who migrated to Kasi Beneras and back to Limbuwan are termed as Kasi gotra. The beef eaters who migrated from Limbuwan into Tibet and back are termed as Lasha gotra. The ones who neither migrated to Kasi nor to Tibet but remained in their land of Limbuwan since the time immemorial are termed as Buiphuta gotra.

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

Likewise Subba(1999)<sup>3</sup>, on one hand relates Limboo with the people of Indus Valley Civilization, claiming them to be the off shoot of ancient Indian race, who at the arrival of Aryans migrated to eastern Tibet and back to Limbuwan via Walangchuk and again on the other, he gives a contradictory opinion designating them as the nomads to have wandered in the various places of inner south-Asia. It is quite unsure whether he is trying to explain that the Limboos after the coming of Aryans left their land and became wandering nomads or whether he is referring to something else.

If one goes by the theory put forward by Chemjong (1967) whereby the term Kirata<sup>4</sup> is used to define a race, one cannot talk about the sole identity of the Limboos. Chemjong (1967) is the first author who embarked on such a hypothetical archaeological and etymological synthesis and adopting Chaterjee's terminology, he regroups all mongoloid populations under the category of kirata and perceives them as an essence (Schlemmer: 2003/04). Wherever behavior, attitude, and culture are the topics of discussion, the use of race except as a symbolic marker for other lines of distinction is inappropriate. Race, also differs in culture- not just as a result of different histories, but intrinsically, as part of their very nature.<sup>5</sup> In fact the use of term Kirata to denote the mongoloid group is a constructed one as what Schlemmer writes Kirata indigenist try to write their own attested history by setting themselves up as dignified nation.<sup>6</sup> Chemjong lists various hypothesis which lead him to see a Kirant origin and influence in all the ancient civilizations from the Mediterranean Sea to Mongol or Cambodia...and to him and his numerous followers, the historical anchorage and the guiding thread of their re-written history are confirmed by the word Kirata, thereby offering Kiratas a glorious perspectives (Schlemmer: 2003/04).

The theory of Limboo migration from the plains of India to the Himalayas is not acceptable as the culture, customs, dress, food habits etc of this group is opposite to the Indians. Though the oral tradition demarcates the southern boundary of the Limboos to the plains of India and the Indian Ocean, it never talks about their Indian ancestors. The theory put forward by Subba (1999), regarding their migration via Walungchuk is a common story that runs among this tribe and there are also stories of Walungpa being brought into Limboo fold. Such conversion of people into Limboo fold is supported by their ritual of Chokphung, whereby many people are brought to their ethnic fold, but such ritual is no longer in practice. No doubt the Walungpas recently settled in western part of Sikkim does share close relation with the Limboos and the ones who have recently migrated from Walung to Sikkim speaks fluently in Limboo language; sometimes even translating the word Wa-Lung to be of Limboo origin as Wa in Limboo refers to fowl and Lung-Stone, often rectifying that it refers to hen like stone.

### **The Theory of Chinese Origin**

The second theory, which I shall call the theory of Chinese origin, explains the migration of the Limboos from China. Chemjong (1966) categorizing the Limboos as the Kiratas considers them to be the migrants from the Sichuan Yunan province of China, who left their native place due to the tribal antagonism and settled in a place called Nam Maw in north Burma under the leadership of Pongbo Hang. Further multiplying this group spread to east, west and south. A branch which spread to south-west settled in a place called Mokwan and began to address them as Shan Mokwan. Shan Mokwan, migrated towards the hilly terrain of present East Nepal and came across the land of eight Kirata chiefs. Settled under the sovereignty of Kirat chiefs, they were suppressed which made the war inevitable. The Shan Mokwan emerged victorious, seized the country and fixed its boundaries as Tibet in the North, Jalalgarh near Purnea in the south, River Tista in the east and River Dudkosi in the west. Terming their land as Limbuwan, they divided the conquered land among the ten chiefs and changed their name from Shan Mokwan into Yakha Thumba<sup>7</sup>, meaning the head of hill tribes. Supporting the view of Hooker, Chemjong (1966) also accepts the similarity between the Limboos and the Karen, natives of Arakan and brings out the similarity in their culture, dress and military tactics. Strengthening his theory, he further writes that the compact mass of Limboos settled mostly in the western part of Sikkim

---

<sup>3</sup> Subba (1999) relates Limboos with the people of Indus Civilization on the basis of similarity in their religious belief. For more details see Subba (1999).

<sup>4</sup> In Sikkimese context Kirata comprises many communities such as Rai, Yakkha and many others of mongoloid descent.

<sup>5</sup> Yinger 1997

<sup>6</sup> The term Kirat is also written as Kirata and Kirant. For more detail see Schlemmer 2003/2004

<sup>7</sup> The Limboos call themselves Yakhathumba, meaning the head of the hill tribes.

signifies the existence of their historical kingdom of Limbuwan which later on was jeopardized by various invasions. There is no doubt in the argument that the bulk of Limboos are found in the western part of present day Sikkim and present east Nepal, and that this land at some point of time formed the land of the Limboos, so termed by the Limboos as Limbuwan but it seems quite exaggerated as it is unable for a migrant group to win over the existing authority of the eight chiefs.

Subba (2012) too is of the opinion that the Limboo progenitors were created through the process of biogenesis in the north east Asia during the ice age and started descending downward following Yellow river of north China and Yangtse river of south China. Collecting finger millets and dry paddy seeds on the way, this hunter-gatherer nomadic tribe arrived in the Himalayan region during the archaic period or as early as 25,000 years ago, bringing with them their practice of soyabean cultivation. Subba further says that their Mundhum<sup>8</sup> demarcates their land as China-Tibet (Sinyuk Muden) in the north, the plains of India and Indian Ocean in the south (Teymen Worong), Arun river in the west (Aruna-Baruna) and Brahmaputra in the east (Tusroti Umroti). After occupying the land of Limbuwan, they remain isolated from the rest of the world when finally they came into contact with the people of Sikkim in 1642 and Nepal in 1774. Having no strong monarchical system, this community managed their political, religious and social affairs through the social and religious council of Tumyanghang and Yehang respectively. No wonder that this tribe had come down from China but their isolated sustenance seems quite unacceptable.

### **Theory of Tibetan Origin**

The third and the most accepted theory in Sikkimese context is the theory of Tibetan<sup>9</sup> origin, which upholds the view that the Limboos are the immigrants from the Tsang province of Tibet. This theory has always found favour in the Sikkimese historical writings as the Limboos are known as Gtsong in the local Bhutia dialect<sup>10</sup>, for having been migrated from the Tsang province of Tibet. The designation of Limboos as Gtsong has often been a matter of confusion and controversy, which has contributed to the misleading identity formation of the Limboos, often confusing the writers like Bhattacharya and Joshi<sup>11</sup> (2004). Leaving behind the state of confusion, I go on to explain the theory of the Tibetan origin. Authors like Risley, Sinah, Jones & Jones, Temple, Hooker, Sagant, Balikci, Das, Dutta Roy, Subba, Wangchuk and Zulca etc. have all supported this theory.

Comparing Nahangma, the Limboo goddesses, with God dgra-lha, of the nameless religion of Tibet, Sagant (1996) brings out similarity among the Limboos and the Tibetans. God dgra-lha is named by the word which means chief or a king and the word 'hang' used by the Limboos resembles the Tibetan power, 'dbang'. The Limboo goddesses Nahangma sitting at the top of the mountain resembles the sacred Tibetan mountain war gods. The powers feared by the Tibetans have their seats in all places: in the right shoulder, dgra-lha; in the right armpit, mo-lha; in the heart, zhang-lha. These Tibetan conceptions correspond to those of the Limboos. For Limboos and for Tibetans alike, 'the souls are hardly different from the gods'. And in Tibet, around 1900, the ga-ra butchers slaughtered their pigs in the same way as the Limboos by piercing the heart with the boar-spear (ibid). Not only are the Gods and Goddesses similar among the Limboos and the Tibetans, but Wangchuk and Zulca (2007) also talks about the Limboo ancestral affinity with the Tibetans. They are of the opinion that Uba Hang, who is said to have revived Yuma Samyo and discouraged Buddhism among the Limboos was the one who led the campaign in April 846CE southwards into Limbuwan and carved a new kingdom for himself. Even today the festival of Tong-Sum-Tong-Nam is celebrated in his name. If Wangchuk & Zulca talk about the royal origin of the Limboo ancestor, Sarat Chandra Das (1902) records the popular belief that Tibetan ancestors of Yakthungbas, migrated into present Limbuwan through Kangla pass following the lost Yak and made their first settlement in Yangma valley of Tamar Khola region (Subba: 1999). Jones & Jones (1776) writes that the ten Kingdoms of Limbuwan corresponds to the legendary founding of the Limbuwan by ten brothers who are believed to have migrated from Tibet and India. According to him, there were three brothers namely Khampen Hang, Tokle Hang and Murek Hang. It was the second brother Tokle Hang who travelled to Assam crossing river Teesta and it was his descendants who defeated the Lepchas and ruled over Limbuwan (Fitzpatrick: 2011). Dahal, talks about the religious convulsion that led to the mass migration of Limboos from Tibet to Bhutan and Nepal. According to him, the spread of Buddhism in Tibet led to the conversion of some Limboos into the new Buddhist fold. This led to the religious division among the Limboos, as the Buddhist Limboos got closer to other ethnic Tibetans belonging to the same fold. The dominated non- Buddhist Limboos were forced to migrate

---

<sup>8</sup> Mundhum is the spiritual instruction from the Limboo ancestor which is passed down orally from generation to generation, through the institution of Shamans.

<sup>9</sup> Though Tibet now has become the part of People's Republic of China, in the above context I am talking of an independent Tibetan empire prior to the conquest of Tibet by China.

<sup>10</sup> Limboos are referred as Gtsong by the Bhutias and Chung by the Lepchas, the same way Limboos refer to Bhutias as Mudenba and Lepchas as Emmeypa in their local dialect.

<sup>11</sup> The writing of Bhattacharya and Joshi often creates confusion among the readers as in their work they have separated the Gtsong from the Limboos. It seems that they were quite unsure that the name Gtsong, Limboo, Subba and Yakthungba denotes a single tribe.

to Bhutan and Nepal. Again during 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Guru Padmasambhava arrived in Bhutan and tried to bring Limboos into Buddhist fold, discarded by the Limboos the Guru returned back north. This angered the Tibetan Buddhist who made them attack on the Limboo settlement in Bhutan. They massacred the Limboos and the place in which this incident occurred is named as Tsong sa Dzong by the Dukpas of Bhutan. Then the remaining refugee Limboos moved eastward and settled down in Sikkim, which was under the domain of the Lepcha panu. The theory put forward by Dahal seems quite unacceptable as the Buddhist groups are shown to have travelled too far chasing the Limboos.

When one tradition talks about the migration of Limboos with the pioneer Lama Katog from the Tsang province, the shamans that I met during my field visit narrated me the story about their migration from the Tibetan land along with their Guru Lha tsun Chenpo. According to this narration, Lha tsun Chenpo, during his journey to the hidden land was accompanied by the Limboo followers. On the way, he climbs the mountain of Kangchengjunga (Phoktanglungma) for meditation and conferring with the Sikkimese guardian deities. As he doesn't return for several days, the Limboos believing him to be dead begins to mourn but he finally returns back adding joy to the Limboos, thereby they enter into Sikkim. The Khamdaks (Limboo sub-group), mostly settled in western Sikkim talks of their migration from the Tibetan region following their Guru Lha tsun Chenpo. Even during the Manghenna<sup>12</sup>, the Shamans once used to take their soul to the region of Kham in Tibet<sup>13</sup>. Travelling through the rough road for an hour from Darap towards Rimbi in western Sikkim, two pine trees resembling the pine of the Dubde monastery can be seen from the distance. Having survived for hundreds of years, these trees are about 100ft high and 30ft wide. They believe that those pine seeds were given by their Guru Lha tsun Chenpo to their ancestors Mana and Tojey. The elderly among the Limboos still pronounces Rimbi as Limbith, meaning 'a doubt whether the seed would grow into tree or not'. Below the pine trees is a Buddhist stupa (manay), which is quite surprising to be found among the Yumaist<sup>14</sup> Limboos. I was amazed to see that the Khamdaks, though Yumaist by faith still calls upon the Buddhist monks for their rituals and Buddhist flags could be seen flanking in the front porch of their houses. Not only do they profess Buddhism but even talked of their grandparents who were Buddhist monks by profession. But the presence of such pine trees all over western Sikkim especially at places such as Yuksam, Darap, Pelling and Geyzing creates doubt in such oral stories.

Even their migration with Guru Lha tsun Chenpo seems constructed as on the basis of the evidence it appears that Lha tsun Chenpo departed Tibet in the fifth month of 1646 (Fire dog Year) and arrived in Sikkim in the tenth month of the same year and it was around this time that he met the first Sikkimese Chogyal in Yuksam near Narbugang, where he offered him the ritual ornaments of Chakravatin (Mullard: 2012 p.128). This evidence makes it impossible to accept the theory of Limboo migration following their Guru Lha tsun Chenpo, and if it would have been true then there in fact would have been no need of signing the treaty of Lho Mon Gtsong tsum<sup>15</sup>, which shows that the rule of Phuntsok Namgyal did not remain uncontested but was challenged by the rebellion or war (ibid).

### **The theory of Post-boundary migration**

The fourth theory indeed is of the recent origin and speaks of the migration of the Limboos from the region of modern Nepal to modern Sikkim. Balikci(2008) divides the Limboo population in Sikkim as an early and later migrants. According to her, the Gtsongs of the western Sikkim, belonging mostly to Lasha gotra and Buddhist by faith are the early settlers of Sikkim and has close affinity with the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The later migration took place during the reign of Sir Tashi Namgyal, when in 1938 a dozen of Limboos from Dhankuta in east Nepal who did the construction of Tsuk-La-khang(the royal Chapel) were later granted permission to settle and open fields within the Phodong Estate of Mangshila. They initially worked as labourers for the Tingchim Lhopos in return for food until they had cleared sufficient fields for themselves. They cleared the jungle of dangerous beasts and helped Tingchim villagers carve paddy traces below the lake, and like Nepalese did everywhere in Sikkim, taught them how to plough and practice permanent irrigated agriculture. The most significant changes brought about in Tingchim by the arrival of the Limboo settlers were first in the expansion of methods of cultivation and later in the transformation of the whole economic structure of region. The Limboo population of neighbourhood Mangshila has increased at much faster rate than the Lhopos. Mangshila has close to two thousand Limboo inhabitants while Tingchim's Lhopos population of around two hundred and twenty has barely doubled since the 1920s.

---

<sup>12</sup> It is a Limboo ritual of holding one's head high. During the performance of Manghenna the soul of a person for whom the ritual is being done enters the body of the Shamans. The Shaman in the trance takes his/her soul to the place of the ancestor, often uttering the voice of supernatural.

<sup>13</sup> But these days the Khamdaks claim Rimbi in western Sikkim to be their ancestral homeland. It might be a constructed local narrative, though not historically correct and might reflect other realities.

<sup>14</sup> The Limboos are Yumaist by faith. They believe in their supreme God Tagera Ningwaphuma.

<sup>15</sup> For more detail on the treaty of Lho Mon Gtsong tsum see Mullard (2012)

This view of Balikci is supported by Sagant (1996) who talks about the transformation of the Kipat<sup>16</sup> land in East Nepal and the successive wave of immigration favored by the existing legislation which reduced the land available for farming and forced the Limboos to emigrate to Assam and Sikkim<sup>17</sup>. The plot of land left by the Limboos who emigrated to Assam or Sikkim went with the office of the Subba, who lost no time in selling it in order to avoid trouble, should the emigrant return and challenge the transaction. Each year many people migrate from the village. They go down to Assam or Sikkim for a few months, looking for work to make up the deficit from their inadequate farms. There they join relatives who have been there for several generations. Some migrants settle permanently as there is no longer enough land in Nepal and they are overhead and ears in debt. For poor there was only one solution: flight to Sikkim or Assam.

The case study provided by Fitzpatrick (2011) also talks about the migration of the Limboos from Nepal to Sikkim mostly as cardamom labourers, which enabled and still enables a section of the Limboo society in the villages of east Nepal to become wealthy and either buy a land or pay back the debts that they incurred, thereby reclaiming their land. Apart from the labour migration, Fitzpatrick also discusses the people fleeing away from their villages to abstain from the punishment. The example of a marriage between the eldest daughter of a Jaisi Chettri and a Limboo villager at the village of Mamangkhe, east Nepal goes on to prove the fact. This couple had run away from the village to get married and lived in Sikkim for seven years after which they returned back. If this study talks of temporary migration, there are also studies of Limboo couples who had to leave their village on marrying among the closed ones. Such couples had travelled and worked in Sikkim, often never returning back. Fitzpatrick even writes about the households of Jhapa, Nepal having the longest trend to have members who either worked in the army or in Sikkim. Hard hit by economic or else social problems, the Limboo chose Sikkim as their safest destination, and their choice for Sikkim might be due to cultural similarity as well as the presence of their kin group in that distant land.

Fitzpatrick writes: *'With the abolition of the Kipat land, the Limboo in the region of east Nepal began to turn to the Hindus for financial assistance in forms of loan which would be given in exchange for temporary possession of the Kipat land as mortgage, until the Hindu creditor was repaid in full, with access to kipat land covering the interest in loan. Increased debt led to the increased amount of Kipat land being mortgaged, which in turn led to the increased debt. The Limboos, thus began to lose their land in the hand of the migrant Brahmin-Chettri settlers, whom the Limboos designate as cunning and industrious, and who were historically encouraged by the Gurkha state to settle in the east as a means of extending political and cultural control over unconsolidated territory. Ultimately, this all led to many Limboo becoming landless and obliged to work on other people's land as sharecroppers, find wage labour as agricultural workers, government employees or Gurkha soldiers or migrate else-where'*.

The late migration of Limboos in Sikkim is temporary as well as permanent. During my field work, I came across few households viewed as the later migrants. They had come as the labourers among whom some of them have settled permanently while others returned back to their own homeland. This wave of early and later migrants is often denoted as U-Tsong and Khar-Tsong respectively. It is in fact this wave of continuous migration from the region of modern Nepal that might have made the writers designate them as the Nepalese. Rose (1963) writes that large proportion of Nepali immigrant in Sikkim is Limboos from the eastern most hill district of Nepal, having a long historical relation with the Lepchas of Sikkim. Basnet (1974) clubbing the Limboos with the Nepalese, has claimed that the name 'Sikkim' is of the Nepali origin. Being a politician, it might have been his political move to make the fate of the Nepalese secure in the atmosphere of the then political turmoil. As the accepted fact is that the name Sikkim is of the Limboo origin, 'Su'-'new' and 'him'-'house' and it was named by the Limbooni Queen of the second Chogyal Tensung Namgyal. The Limboos claim present eastern Nepal and western Sikkim to be their ancestral land and that they have been living there from the time immemorial. The elderly Limboos believed that the names given below are those names that were given by their ancestors.

---

<sup>16</sup> Kipat is the communal land ownership issued by the Nepali Government by which individuals had right to the land by the virtue of being members of particular social unit. It was abolished by the Land Reform Act of 1964.

<sup>17</sup> For detail see Sagant (1996) pg. 128

The names of the places in Sikkim believed to be of Limboo origin are as follows:

Names in Limboo dialect	Distorted Name	Meaning
Tumlabong	Tumlebong	Trees with large leaves from where the thread is produced
Mik-moo	Mikmoo <sup>18</sup>	Shape of eyes
Lungak	Lungay	Place where big stone has to be crossed
So-hum	Som Dara	Hills
Si-dengbung	Siddey bong	Place where <i>Rubus ellipticus</i> is grown
Ip-sing	Ip-sing	Hidden Hills
La-khey	Lagay	Merry making land
Yoiksum <sup>19</sup>	Yuksam	Yiok means fort and sum means three in local Limboo dialect
Mang-sa-bung	Mangsabung	Place of Gods
Ting-ting lek lekpa	Ting ting	When one of the branches of the Limboo tribe arrived in this place, they came along a stone which produces sound like the tingling of the bell
Tharpu	Tharpu	Temporary tented place
Wa-jek	Bajek	Drizzling water
Phu Kam den	Daramdin <sup>20</sup>	Making earthen pots
Keray Thangay	Gerethang	Buck wheat cultivation
Chong lang	Chongrang	Place where millet is grown and harvested
La bing	Laring	Full moon
Mang-shela	Mangshila	Place of worship
Terap	Darap	Flat and fertile land
Sing-phereng	Singpheng	Place where log is dissected into two halves
Nambu	Nombu	Warm place to rest (Mana, the ancestor of one of the Limboo sub-group rested on Nambu on his journey from Tibet )

<sup>18</sup> There are some names which are in its original version.

<sup>19</sup> It is quite difficult to put conclusion on some of the names such as Yuksam and Geyzing as Lepchas claim Yuksam to be of their origin meaning three monks in their regional dialect and the Bhutia writes Geyzing as Gyalshing which means Royal field in their local dialect. The Bhutia terminology seems quite appropriate as Gyalshing stands just below Rabdentse, the Sikkim Palace.

<sup>20</sup> The Lepchas refers to this place as Daramdin, the damaged lake.

Saryong	Soreng	Banana Orchard
Chezang	Geyzing	Place where dead bodies are kept
Tendam	Dentam	Place for fair
Hee-ma-phang-phey	Heegoan	Place to roam around
Saray-ba-dem	Siribadam	Scattered village
Chung <sup>21</sup>	Chung (Tsong)	Cold village
Limbith	Rimbik	Doubt whether the pine seeds given by Guru Lha tsun Chenpo would grow or not
Lungsugang	Lunsugoan	Place of stones
Nessa	Nessa	Spiritual cave
Tinglayang	Thingling	Place of throns
Parthang	Bhaluthang	Gifts
Lapchengee	Rabdentse	Place that resembles foot bone
Yangsum	Yangsum	Place for money collection
Mangdokbung	Mantabung	Place for millet cultivation

## II. Conclusion

The fluid and changing boundaries led to the fluidity in the identity of the Limboos of Sikkim, sometimes giving them the indigenous identity and at the same time defining them as a migrant group. Sometimes shifting the village in order to cope up with the ecological constraints does make historians to term their shifting of village as a migration caused by economy or religious-political order. But in the case of Limboo it seems that more than their shifting, their border land has shifted. Mullard (2012) describes the early Sikkimese areas directly and indirectly under the rule of Phuntsok Namgyal with the regions in the modern west Sikkim, small parts of eastern Nepal (namely parts of Limbuwan) and areas just east of Ravangla. It suggests that some of the land of the Limboos was under the authority of the Namgyal Dynasty. The policies of war and conquest has in fact re-defined the boundaries and made the Limboos straddle between the two nations of modern Nepal and India. The Limboos have not migrated but the boundaries of the land within which they lived were shifted. Though it can't be denied that the humans originated in Africa but it can be estimated that the Limboos have been living in the land of what Limboos term as Limbuwan since time immemorial. So, with the division of the land and the fixing up of new boundaries, the Limboos themselves got divided into two as the Sikkimese and the Nepali Limboos.

Apparently, the land of Limboos has been an important juncture of trade in the early times between India-Nepal and Tibet. The trade network that they carried out made them move towards the region of Tibet, often marrying the Tibetans and settling there. It was from Tibet that some of the Limboos migrated to Sikkim in the later years making them designate as Gtsongs. James S. Olson in his 'ethno-historical dictionary of China' writes:

*'Historically there has been a great deal of contact between Tibetans and the Limboos because of their Himalayan passes from Sikkim into Tibet's Chumbi valley...today because of their historical commercial relationship and the current proximity to the Tibetan border and the Himalayan trade routes, it is likely that at any given time hundreds of Limboos are living in the Tibetan region of the People's Republic of China'.*

The word 'Gtsong' might have been used to designate the trader<sup>22</sup> class. The oral narration also talks about Limboos who traded in cattle. The people in western Sikkim narrate about their forefathers who were small agricultural traders. Even Waddel explains that the Limboos came to Sikkim with the cattle trade and became 'the chief cattle merchants and butchers of Sikkim (Risley: 1884). The Limboos might have settled in the eastern Himalayan belt from the time immemorial, and it was their trading business which made them shift their location during those time when boundaries were flexible; mostly settling in the region which now falls under

<sup>21</sup> The name of this place is pronounced as 'Chung' but it is written as 'Tsong'.

<sup>22</sup> In Bhutia dialect trader is referred as Gtsong pen and in Lepchas term traders as Gtsong bun.

East Nepal and western Sikkim. The war of conquest and the fixation of the new boundaries, led to the misleading identity formation of the Limboos.

Thus, the change in the boundaries, shifting of the villages and the process of acculturation made the Limboos gain different identity in the modern era. With the influx of inexpensive Nepalese labour force by the British for raising the state revenues, the Limboos began to get acculturated into their fold, with the abolition of Tsong seat in the state assembly they got politically lumped with the migrant groups, thereby losing their distinct identity and finally got submerged into the Nepalese fold.

#### **Reference:**

- [1]. Balicki, Anna.2008. Lamas, Shamans & Ancestors- Village Religion in Sikkim: Brill Publication
- [2]. Basnet, L.B. 1974. Sikkim- A Short Political History: S. Chand, New Delhi
- [3]. Bhattacharya, Arpana. The Prayer Wheel and Sceptre: Nachiketa Publications Ltd.
- [4]. Choudhury, Maitreyee.2006. Sikkim-Geographical Perspective: Mittal Publication, New Delhi
- [5]. Chemjong, Iman Singh.1966. History and Culture of the Kirat People: 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Publishers- Tumeng Hang Limbuwan East Nepal, Mechi Anchal
- [6]. Dahal, Dharnidhar.1984. Sikkim Ko Rajnaitik Ithihaas: Vol. 1, Subba Prakashan Gangtok
- [7]. Das, B.S.1983. The Sikkim Saga: Vikas Publishing House
- [8]. Dutta Roy, Sunanda K.1984. Smash & Grab-Annexation of Sikkim: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd
- [9]. Fitzpatrick, Ian Carlos.2011. Cardamom & Class- A Limbu Village and its extension In East Nepal: Vajra Publications
- [10]. Gurung, M.M. & R.P. Lama.2004. Sikkim-Study Series, Culture Part I Vol. III; Ed. By M.P. Lama: Information & Public Relations Dept. Govt. of Sikkim
- [11]. Hermanns, Fr. Matthew.1954. The Indo Tibetans: Printed by J.S. Pereira at the Examiner Press, Bombay & Published by K.L. Fernandes Bandra, Bombay
- [12]. Hooker, J.D.1999. Himalayan Journal Vol I: Natraj Publishers Dhera Dun
- [13]. Joshi, H.G. (ed).2004. Sikkim- Past and Present: Mittal Publication
- [14]. Kotturan, George.1983. The Himalayan Gateway- History and Culture of Sikkim: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd
- [15]. Mullard, Saul.2012. Opening of the Hidden Land: Brill Publication
- [16]. Olson, James S.1998. An Ethno-historical Dictionary of China: Greenwood Publishing Group
- [17]. Rose, Leo E.1963. The Himalayan Border States- "Buffer" in Transition: Published by University of California Press; Asian Survey Vol. 3 No.2 pp.116-122
- [18]. Sanyal, Charu Chandra.1979. The Limboos- a South Eastern Himalayan Kirata People: Printed by Dipti Printing & Binding Works 13M, Ariff Road, Calcutta-67
- [19]. Schlemmer, Gregoire. 2003/04. New Past for the sake of Better Future- Re inventing the history of Kirant in East Nepal: European Bulletin of Himalayan Research 25/26: 119-144
- [20]. Subba, J.R.2008. History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim: Gyan Publishing House
- [21]. Subba, J.R.1999. The Limboos of Eastern Himalayas- With Special Reference to Sikkim: Published by Sikkim Yakthung Mundhum Saplopa, Gangtok Sikkim
- [22]. Subba, J.R.2012. Yumaism, the Limboo way of Life- A Philosophical Analysis: Yakthung Mundhum Saplopa, Gangtok Sikkim
- [23]. Subba, T.B.1989. Dynamics of Hill Society- The Nepalis in Darjeeling & Sikkim Himalayas: Mittal Publication
- [24]. Subba, T.B.1999. Limbu Nationalism and Integration; Danda, Ajit K (ed.) in 'Ethnicity, Nationalism & Integration': The Asiatic Society
- [25]. Subba, T.B.1999. Politics of Culture- A Study of Three Kirata Communities in Eastern Himalayas: Orient Longman
- [26]. Wangchuk Pema & Mita Zulca.2007. Khangchendzonga- Sacred Summit: Little kingdom Pvt Ltd, Gangtok
- [27]. Yinger, J. Milton.1997. Source of Strength? Source of Conflict? : Rawat Publications