

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In Europe and the Americas, ethnic movements unexpectedly surfaced from the 1960s and 1970s; in Africa and Asia they have been gaining force since the 1950s. In the context of Nepal, it is of arrival that is more recent. It is not that the issue of ethnicity was not felt as important in the past but the emergence of the ethnic identity as a major social and political issue in Nepal is a relatively new phenomenon.

But the Movement of 1990 has reflected on the changing nature of cultural identity for various ethnic groups in Nepal. Before and after 1990, the dominant political discourse marks the English word 'Nationalism' as entirely positive and the term 'tribe' and 'communalism' as negative. In contrast, there are studies which attempt to show that the ethnic groups in Nepal are more, interrelated than divided and that the totality of social order in Nepal must be understood in terms of cultural pluralism. The process of synthesis and acculturation has been going on between peoples for centuries (Sharma 2004). Both the studies of nationalism and ethnicity are relevant for the present research in order to understand the emerging needs felt among the Limbu to preserve and reconstruct their identity.

It was in late seventies and early eighties that the growing self-consciousness of the ethnic elites led to the formation of ethnic organizations. The turning points were the students' riots of 1979 and the National Referendum of 1980, which led to constitutional changes undermining the conservative basis of the Monarchy system. These organizations started informal talk and in 1986 it led to the formation of the *Sarvajati Adhikar Manc* (Forum for the Rights of All Nationalities). In the People's Movement of 1990, the ethnic organizations made active participation under the name of *Vividh Dharma, Bhasa, Jati तथा Janajati Sangharsha Samiti*.). Since the year 1990, various ethnic activists in Nepal have been publicly challenging the cultural and religious forms of the dominant Hindu groups.

First, it is the changed climate within which scientific research occurs. Until the end of 1980's, the authorities had actively discouraged any hints at potential social conflict by (foreign) scholars. Second, it is the actual increase of overt conflict situations in the aftermath of the 1990- 'Revolution. While ethnic conflicts occurred long before the 1990-awareness, its success has opened up various old grievances and resistance in the forms of assertion of their various social, cultural symbols likes language dress. It also witnessed birth of several ethnic organizations. In 1990, Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Nationalities or NEFEN) was founded as a federation of seven different organizations. Together with other interested parties, in March 1994 NEFEN formed a committee in response to the UN Resolution of December 1993 calling for a Decade of Indigenous Peoples. The definitions offered by NEFEN for indigenous Peoples in Nepal are discussed below. Indigenous

community referred to those communities;

- 1 Who possess their own distinct and original linguistic and cultural traditions and religion based on the ancient animism or those who do not claim “The Hinduism” enforced by the state, as their traditional and original religion.
- 2 The existing descendants, whose ancestors have established themselves as the first settlers, people who have their own history (written or oral) and historical continuity.
- 3 People who have been displaced or disadvantaged of their traditional right to own the natural resources like the Kipat —communal land, water, minerals, etc.
- 4 Who have been subjugated in the state’s political power set-up (decision-making process) and whose culture, language and religion are in non-dominant state and their social values neglected by the State.
- 5 Whose society is traditionally erected on the principle of egalitarianism-(social equality) rather than the hierarchy of the caste system.
- 6 Which formally or informally admit or claim to be ‘the Indigenous People of Nepal’ on the basis of the aforementioned characteristics.

Limbu are among the many Janajati communities, working to re-establish themselves as a distinct identity within Nepal. Compared to many other Janajati communities, the Limbu maintain a strong sense of their ethnic traditions, exterior of the Hindu national, cultural preservation. They have their own script called Sirijunga and possess their own oral scripture called *Mundhum*. The Limbus, like many other Janajatis are in the process of deconstruction of the ‘Hinduization’ that has occurred (Tierney, 2002:3-2). Limbu are one of the Nepali Janajati communities, the people with their own history who came to be known as ‘The Kirat’. The ‘Kirat people’ consists of four different indigenous groups Limbu, Rai, Yakkha and Sunuwar. Even today each of them practice and preserve their distinct culture and social heritage. According to Richard English, the three Kiratas communities (Limbu, Rai and Yakkha) “share common racial and linguistic origins as well as a body of oral tradition which traces common ancestry and identifies the eastern hills as their ancestral homeland” and further that complementary elements of custom, belief and social organization reinforce a collective identity that is distinct from other ethnic groups, especially the Hindu castes, which have settled in the region in large numbers.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

Like many countries of Asia, Nepal, too, is culturally and ethnically, a multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual society. The predominant group in Nepal today both numerically and in political terms, is that of Hindus, with the many smaller ethnic groups of various sizes and geographical provenance forming its minorities. The Hindu and the various cultural groups in the hills and the Tarai have co-existed for centuries (Sharma, 2004:204) but simultaneously the numerous ethnic groups and the lower Hindu castes were marginalised and prevented

from active political participation. Such status was codified by the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, which presented a four-fold classification, whereby different ethnic groups were each given a caste name and a definite rank within a hierarchy, no matter how divergent such groups may look or be in their social or cultural making. This code became the most important instrument for regulating the social and cultural process and the interaction among the people and bring about social control in the country. The political changes of 1990 have opened up broader scopes for Nepal's numerous ethnic groups, many of them formed organizations to preserve their cultural identity and to fight for equal rights and equal participation in Nepali State.

Until 1990, the Nepali State had disregarded the multi ethnic nature of its society. It was during the formation phase of the new constitution that ethnic demands were presented in public but without the participation of ethnic groups in the decision- making bodies. The Nepali State disregarded the multi ethnicity of society but refused to introduce institutions and regulations for a broader participation of the disadvantaged sections of society (Tilouine and Dollfus 2003:228). The ethnic elites are trying to reconcile groups with their cultural values but at the same time, to look for new ways of interpreting tradition, starting with criteria like language, culture, religion and territory. They have detected the importance of history of their respective groups as a part of the modern Nepal and in shaping their culture how symbolic ethnicity plays an important role. Identity cannot exist apart from a group and those symbols are themselves part of a culture and in that sense, symbolic ethnicity. However, it does not require functioning groups or networks; feeling of identity can be developed by allegiances to symbolic group that never meet or meet only occasionally (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 149). The Janajati of Nepal is trying to revive their ethnic identity and in that process use their cultural symbols to maintain their uniqueness. All the cultural patterns that are transformed into symbols are themselves guided by a common pragmatic imperative. They must be visible and clear in meaning to large numbers of third generation ethnics, and they must be easily expressed and felt, without requiring undue interference in other aspects of life (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:146). For example, in Nepal, major Hindu festivals like Dashain and Tihar are declared as national holidays, symbolic to begin with and equally important, they do not upset the everyday routine and become an occasion for family reunions especially for those members who rarely meet on regular basis. Thus, we find ethnicity ensuring continuation of cultures.

Today, the Kiratas are suffering from lack of national symbols, which would represent them and simultaneously differentiate them from the Tagadharis and other groups. They are aware of some cultural and linguistic differences between them and other ethnic groups but they also know that their similarities exist with the other Tibeto-Burmese group. Hence, the Kiratas are unable to clearly decide whether to give primacy to similarities or differences with other categories. The symbols of differences between the Kiratas and the Tagadharis are not as powerful as the Kirata leaders would like them to be. Interaction between these two categories

for over two hundred years now has made the symbols of differences less powerful than either category would perhaps like. The search for the past to construct the symbols of difference is not an easy task (Subba 1999:106) especially within the process of Hinduization and cultural homogenization of people.

The Limbu community is making effort to build its ethnic identity. To begin with, the abolition of the Kipat system and influence of Hinduism, their identity symbols may have lost their strength considerably. Since the *Tagera Nyimgaphurna* (the supreme power which is believed to have created this earth and the lives) is often personified as Shiva, who is also one of the Hindu pantheons, he cannot be claimed by the Kiratas as their exclusive god. Similarly, with regards to its linguistic status, Keith Sprigg, an authority on Tibeto-Burman languages writes that the Sirijanga script has some resemblance to Devanagari “but in general the resemblance seems closest to a Tibetan cursive (*khyug-yig*) and Lepcha” (Sprigg as quoted in Subba 1999:107). Many Limbus have stopped using the service of the Brahman priests to officiate the naming ceremony and have started giving names to their children in their own language rather than in Nepali. Some Kiratas have more or less resolved that *Dashain* which they had celebrated couple of years ago with enthusiasms, is not a Kirata festival.

Thus, the *Dashain* celebration of the Kiratas may be considered functionally and symbolically different from the *Dashain* of the Tagadharis for whom it is more of a religious occasion whereas for the Kiratas it is primarily an occasion for get together for families. Whether such enthusiastic practices of maintaining one’s own cultural practices will sustain or not but such effort, however small, have the potential to become strong symbols of their differences. But at the same time, it may contribute to the cultural differences among the Kiratas themselves. Further, the celebration of *Tihar*, except for the singing of eulogies (carol) of Bali Hang or Bali Raja (Bali King) there is nothing specific that can be described as being of Kirata content. The festival, which may be described more accurately called ‘Kirata’, is *Maghe Sankranti*, though the name of the festival is of Indo-Anyan origin, it is necessary to observe it in detail. Every year, on this day, blood sacrifices are made in the fulfillment of the promises made to some deities when someone in the family had taken ill. Whereas the Tagadharis set a pair of pigeons free. All this shows that the festival is of tribal origin but now all Hindus Nepalese celebrate it (Subba, 1999:109)

Thus various factors have to be analyzed to understand such process like what the Limbu do for promoting their culture and cultural identities aspects? How and in what ways do they maintain their ethnic solidarity? And how do they establish relationship with other caste and ethnic groups?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The general objective of this research is access to describe and analyze the processes by which the Limbu in Kathmadu construct their distinct identity and how they assert their social

and cultural symbols in the preservation of their distinctness.

The specific objectives are as the followings:

- 1 To analyzes the cultural practices and how they construct the boundaries for distinguishing themselves from other communities;
- 2 To analyzes how the Limbu people negotiate and integrate with others while legitimizes their own sphere of identity.

## **1.4 Rationale of the Research**

The study is expected to contribute significantly to the studies of ethnic identity among the ethnicity groups settled in the urban area of Nepal. This study attempts to show how ethnic identity among the Limbu is constructed and reinforced time and again through the means of various cultural mediums whose meanings are reinterpreted to construct powerful symbols of distinction and differences with other caste or ethnic groups and at the same time for adapting with the other groups. It attempts to understand the factors behind the emerging need among the Limbus to preserve their identity on the basis of historical as well as cultural roots. There has been a relative neglect of the deeper historical roots of ethnicity and the role of ethnicity as a regulative cultural principle.

This study will also be relevant to those interested in the field of identity and its various aspects, especially in relation to the National identity. How the Limbu in their effort to integrate with the national community, have compromised some of their own cultural convictions but such involvement does not extent beyond the level of their (Limbu) legitimization of their own identity. The Limbus at the same time defends and asserts their ethnic identity. By balancing the various spheres of identities the Limbus attempt to maintain a collectively recognized entity.

## **1.5 Organization of the Study**

This Report is made eight chapter. **First chapter** has divided into five sub-chapters such as background of the study, statement of the research problem, objectives of the study, rationale of the study and organization of the study. In the **Second chapter**, different literatures have been reviewed in sub- title such as conceptual review the concept of ethnic identity ethnic identity and minorities ethnic identity and nationalism similar characteristics of ethnicity and nationalism, Empirical studies limbus and findings, spiritual belief, limbus and their administration. **Chapter third** gives in depth knowledge about methodology It explains about rationale of selection of the study area, the research design, nature and sources of data, study universe and sampling procedure, data collection tools and techniques, data analysis and limitation of the study. **Fourth chapter** presents the setting of the study area. In this chapter physical setting of the study area, socio-cultural setting, Profile of the informants, educational status, occupation, language preferences, marriage trends has been described **Chapter Fifth**

describes about rituals It is divided into sub chapter such as introduction of rituals, sappok chaumen, yangdang phongma, marriage ceremony, death rituals, death rituals .**chapter Six** explains about the feasts and festival such as limbu and their festival,dashain and Tihar practice of celebrating Dashain and Tihar and indigenou manner of Dashain and Tihar.**Seventh chapter** explains limbus and their opinion, It is related with such title debate of emerging arguments and practices, rituals, festivalsand culture. **Eight chapter** is concerned with findings, summary and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

The titled presents the relative literature and sources .it contains different factors to support the thesis. The furthermore way to study, to analyze and to conclude needed varieties of Ethnographers or writers documents, their views and concepts related to area.The term

'ethnicity' itself is of recent origin. It appeared in the 1950s in the English language. It was first recorded in a dictionary in the 'English Dictionary of 1953. The meaning of the term is equally uncertain. It can mean the 'essence of an ethnic group' or 'the quality of belonging to an ethnic group. Generally in the context of (opposed) other ethnic groups. The term 'ethnicity' is quite clearly a derivation of the much older term and more commonly used adjective 'ethnic', which in the English language goes back to the Middle Ages. The English adjective 'ethnic' in turn derives from the ancient Greek term *ethos*; it was used as a synonym of *gentile* that is non-Christian and non-Jewish pagan in New Testament (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:4). It was used in this sense in English from the mid- nineteenth century, when it gradually began to refer to 'racial' characteristics. In the United states, 'ethics' came to be used around the Second World War as a polite term referring to Jews, Italian, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 28).

The term 'ethnicity' maybe of recent development but the sense of common culture, language, feeling of group solidarity, kinship, worship of common ancestors to which the concept of ethnicity refers to, is as old as any historical record. The ethnic groups have been present in every period and it continues to play an important role in every society. Though their features and impact have varied considerably, they have always constituted one of the basic modes of human association and community. Though more elusive, ethnic identity has remained to this day the major focus of identification by individuals. In spite of many years of confident reasoning by Liberals and Socialist expecting demise of ethnic ties and global unification through trade and mass communication, ethnicity far from fading away has emerged as a central issue in the socio-political arena across the globe.

### **2.1.1 The concept of Ethnic Identity**

Smith's list of six characteristics or "dimensions" is a useful definition of what makes an ethnic category (Smith quoted in Hutchinson and Smith 1996:6).

- A *collective name*, to identify and express the essence of the community.
- A *common myth of descent*, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an 'ethnic a sense of fictive kinship.
- A *shared history* shared memories of a common past, including heroes, events and their commemoration.
- *Distinctive shared cultures*, which need not be specified but normally, include religion, wisdom, customs, or language.
- A *link with homeland*, an association with a specific territory, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnic, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land,
- A *sense of Solidarity*, on the part of at least some sections of the ethnic's population.

The above mentioned ethnic categories were in the past named as 'tribes' or 'race' and even

'nation'. 'Ethnic group' was often used as a synonym for the term, 'race', which has been morally and politically disallowed in many areas perhaps because of a sense of revulsion at the historical events like the racial doctrine of Nazism brought about in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. It was in the post-war period that the term 'ethnic group' came into practice. It is important to understand the concept of race while referring to the concept of ethnicity. Racism was obviously built on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ systematically between 'races' and in this way race may assume sociological importance even if it has no objective existence (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:26). Social scientists who study race relations need not themselves believe in the existence of race, since their object of study is the social and cultural relevance of the notion that race exists. Then should the study of race be distinguished from the study of ethnicity? Pierre van den Berghe (1983) regards 'race' relations as a special case of ethnicity. While others like Michael Banton (1967) have argued the need to distinguish between race and ethnicity. In Banton's view, race refers to the categorization of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification. He argues that ethnicity is more about 'us', while racism is more about 'them'. However, ethnicity can assume many forms and since ethnic ideologies tend to stress common descent, the distinction between race and ethnicity is a problematic one. Ideas of 'race' may or may not form part of ethnic ideologies and their presence or absence does not seem to be a decisive factor in the interethnic relations (Eriksen 1996:3-4).

Beside the term ethnicity and *ethnie*, there are many other concepts relating to 'ethnicity' such as the concept of 'ethnic identity' which refers to the individual level of identification with the biological and cultural collectivity, the sense of belongingness on part of the individual to a particular community.' Ethnic origin likewise refers to the sense of ancestry and nativity on the part of the individual through his or her parent and grandparents but the concept may also include the usually diverse cultural groups and migration origin of *ethnies* who share the common ancestry. ethnocentrism is often used in social psychology. It is a synonym for disdain felt by an individual of a certain community for strangers or for others who do not share the same characteristics but it also refers to the sense of uniqueness, centrality and virtue of an *ethnie* in its relations with other ethnics.

A more rarely used term is 'ethnicism', which refers to movements of protest and resistance by and on behalf of ethnicism against oppressive or exploitative outsiders. While each of these concepts maybe used on both individual and collective levels, it is important to understand the distinction between their meanings and avoid the problem of reading off individual ethnic behaviour from the collective character of *ethnies* and vice versa ethnic

### **2.1.2 Ethnic Identity and Minority Groups**

It is important not to confuse the term minority with ethnic groups. Ethnic groups may be a minority or a majority in a population. Whether a group is a minority or a majority also is not



an absolute fact but depends on the perspective. By majority, it means an ethnic group that has the largest population and usually the greatest economic and political power in a society. And by minority, it means ethnic groups that have smaller population than the controlling group in a society. Minority groups may also be based on shared gender, age-disabilities, political views etc (anthro.palomar.edu/ethnicity/glossary)

The serious study of ethnicity owes much to the insights of Max Weber whose reflections highlighting the definition of ethnic groups as mass status groups (*stände*). He combines these subjective and objective aspects, and balances their cultural and political bases. He oscillates between according primacy to political factors and historical memories in the shaping of a sense of common ethnicity and the prevailing preoccupation with cultural and biological differences in limiting ethnic affiliations (Weber quoted in Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:32).

The concept of ethnicity has been applied in a variety of ways in the study of cultural differences and social interaction. On the one hand, there are those who believe that ethnicity is primordial and natural. On the other hand, ethnicity is viewed as being historically contingent, relational and shaped by the material and social forces of the time (Gunaratne, 2002:14). The idea of primordiality may be defined by the metaphor of blood and whose biological unity is expressed in a common culture and primordiality may be understood, as cultures are not immutable. The culture change and become the basis for the creation of different social formation-which may under certain circumstances become ethnic groups. The primordial approach fails to explain the fluidity and ability of ethnic identity to metaphor into something new. What is primordial about ethnicity is not particular cultural content or a particular label but the fact that human beings have always organized themselves into groups defined in opposition to other groups

From the above view, we can observe that the phenomena of 'ethnicity or 'ethnic identity' vary empirically and holds a characterized paradox. One of the reasons in confusion and conflict surrounding 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic phenomena' has been failure of finding any measure of agreement about what the concepts of ethnicity signifies or how they should be used. Beside this there are other factors contributing to the confusion. One is the assumption that ethnic groups or community are necessarily parts of a larger society. Another difficulty is in the changes caused in the etymology of the terms, 'ethnic' and 'ethnic community' or *ethnie* and the novelty of the term 'ethnicity' (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 15). It is important to understand that ethnicity is an outcome of specific historical processes and like any other cultural phenomenon it must be understood in its historical context.

### **2.1.3 Ethnic Identity and Nationalism**

In the ancient world, ethnicity was widespread and the nationality in the political sense was rare. It can be found in various periods of Japan's history. After the dissolution of the Heian Empire and the rise of the Kamakura Shogunate in 1192. Japan experiences long periods of

political disunity matched by a strong sense of common Japanese ethnicity and culture, despite the arrival of Buddhism. The roots of Japanese cultural unity, according to Jean-Pierre Lehman, (cited in Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:116-120) lies in the superimposition of language, territory, race and to some extent to religion. Likewise, John Armstrong (cited in Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:120-127) talks about 'archetypal Diasporas' who played a crucial role in the long-term development of ethnicity. The Jews and the Armenian, who were forced to leave their homeland but their ethnicity persistence, continued for nearly two millennia because of the role of their texts, sacred myths, sacred language and religious organizations in the development of ethnicity.

Another concept with which ethnicity is often closely observed is the concept of nationalism. Ethnicity is taken as more of a practical problem for the government and the unity of the nation is often believed to be threatened by ethnicity. The fact derives from its essential political nature. Generally, it is believed that the '*minority Elites*' within the minority group and the '*ruling Elites*', reinterpret the value and the aspects of the group culture and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interest in order to justify their power and strengthen their social or political position.

Besides the political elements, other factors like globalization; discarding of old concepts for new ones, claim of equal rights, and all such phenomenon have given rise to the concept of Melting Pot and Multiculturalism. By melting Pot, it means a society in which immigration and native ethnic minorities are assimilated into the dominant national culture in order to reinforce national unity. Similarly, multiculturalism is a society where the permanent existence of unassimilated and partially assimilated ethnic minorities is accepted and encouraged providing special attention to the underrepresented minorities. ([anthro.palomar.edu/ethnicity/glossary](http://anthro.palomar.edu/ethnicity/glossary)).

In order to understand 'Ethnicity' and 'Nationalism', it is important to analyze both the phenomena in relation to one another. That is, by not emphasizing too much in their resistance nature but understanding the reinforcing elements complementing one and the other facilitating their existences. With the evolution of ethnic issues as one of the major problems faced by many nations in the modern times cultural diversity has suddenly become the center of attraction. Earlier many liberals and socialists had expected the demise of ethnic, racial ties and unification of the world through modern communication and trade but instead a series of ethnic revivals are being witnessed the world over. There has been attempt to understand the past and the various aspects and development of ethnicity whether its the concepts or theories, especially its relationship with Nationalism. (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996).

Ethnicity and nationalism are both related phenomenon though at times they may have complex understanding. Both are forms of **collective identity formation**. (Foster 1999) In the first case such group identity formation refers to relationship between groups above the family

levels which consider themselves, or are considered, as culturally distinctive from other groups. Whereas by nationalism, we are concerned with social processes involving groups (ethnic or otherwise) relate to the creation, strengthening to defense of a territory which they regard as a state according to their own definition. (Erikson 1993).

In one of its article, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* by U. Kievelitz (1996) it describe about the Phenomena of ethnicity and nationalism as well as its growth and impact with examples of some nations of Europe such as Germany where the ideas of common descent (blood) is still visible but yet this boundary in practice does not hold any truth. Many foreigners live in Germany which has resulted in the construct of a 'multi-cultural' democracy. Similiarly in Spain where a strong appeal to nationalism was counter balanced by ethnic movements in some regions. In Yugoslavia, ethnic identity between Serbs and Croats and other ethnic groups were of low importance in the context of Socialist nation-building.

Though none of these nations are comparable to Nepal where one finds multiplicity of ethnic groups but the article points out that some cases might be an illustrative of the problems Nepal is yet to face. It further analyzes options of either a multicultural democracy based on pluralism or a political concentration of all major forces on issues like alleviation of poverty rather than on the issues of nationalism or ethnicity. The ethnic identity might go beyond the purely symbolic level and try to enter more strongly in the political arena in the context for claims on the limited resources; such phenomena can be seen especially after the 1990, where many ethnic groups have started to form various organizations to put forward their claims (Kievelitz 1996:1-13).

No country is entirely homogenous. Managing diversity and respecting cultural identities have become a great challenge for forging national unity amidst this diversity. It is therefore not surprising to find a great deal of literature focused on ethnicity. (Tilouine and Dollfus (2002) assert how an ethnic group defines and uses their identity to build a collective identity, distinct from other caste groups. There is a shift in meanings of established symbols and even attempt of cultural revivals in the construction of ethnic identity. The fact that specific symbols have been associated with former power arrangements can induce social actors to challenge them publicly". Most symbols are taken for granted in everyday life but those signs organize the requirement of differentiation and of distantiation form of a kind of hidden agenda in inter-ethnic and inter- caste encounters (Tilouine and Dollfüs 2003).

Ethnicity has some form of shared symbols as a sine qua non for the development of ethnic consciousness and ethnicity is the outcome of specific historical processes that has shaped the society's experience. Like the Tharus of Nepal whose identity if not received from its past but has emerged from the condition of modernity, economic and educational development of participatory politics and awareness to develop a sense of people hood to situate themselves in Nepal's polity (Gunaratne 2002).

### 2.1.4 Characteristics of Ethnicity and Nationalism

- 1 their understanding as social process and relations rather than as static cultural phenomena.
- 2 the idea of fictive kinship between the members of the respective group (ethnic group or nation).
- 3 the postulate of unity and homogeneity and the common belief in shared culture and origins as the basis for the collectivity.
- 4 the relational concept, including the drawing of clear boundaries, a cognitive division between a homogenous 'us' and a differentiated 'them'.
- 5 both phenomena draw on a combination between an 'altruistic' or symbolic and an instrumental aspect: the creation of 'meaning' or identity formation, on the one and the utilization for political legitization and political action in view of the limited resources, on the other hand they "simultaneously provide agents with meaning and with organizational channels for pursuing culturally defined interests" (Erikson as quoted in Bhattachan ed.1996:2)

Greertz (1973) deals with the need to look for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not for substantive identities among similar ones, integrating different types of theories and concepts in such a way that one can formulate meaningful propositions embodying findings now sequestered in separate fields of study. He claims that every values, emotions of the men are all the product of the culture- manufactured out of our capacities and tendencies. His study on the Balinese cockfight where the cock fight symbolizes more than animal fight meant for entertainment. For the Balinese, attending and participating in such cockfight means a kind of sentimental education. The various kinds of emotions such as the thrill of risks, the despair of losses and the satisfaction and pleasure one experiences when a cockfight is won. The cocks are a symbolic expression of their owner's self. The Balinese compare and draws on every aspects of the cockfight with their own life from ones' status, rivalry to the stage of male narcissism to the extend that they even compare a man's behaviors/ character with that of a cock.

Ortner (1977) is also a helpful study to understand the cultural and religious life through the symbolic approach. A contradiction can be seen in the Sherpas actual belief of Buddhism and their rituals observation in practice or in other words - Buddhism of social bonding and communal solidarity seems a contradiction in terms. Comparing it with monasticism in Thailand where it is a lifetime commitment, preoccupied with merit making and the systematic transfer of merits to families and even to deceased and spirits whereas the whole Sherpas religion is different in actions.

Though every young men may receive ordination as a monk, very few men actually take vows to stay for lifetime as monk. Sherpas do engaged themselves in merit making but in more

social ways like spinning a prayer wheel, chanting mantras and the merit are not transferred whoever accrues, one keeps. There is also strategy for building social closure and resistance to exchange through *Yangdzi*, (traditional beer) to gain cooperation. It operates at the level of individual, overcoming their closure to one's appeals for goods or assistance. *Yangdzi* leaves individuals independent after the fulfillment of the contract (marriage). The Sherpas perceive their religion as antagonistic and struggle against it in their rituals. It may be partly a struggle with those aspects of their own society that make them good Buddhists. Here religion is more than a symbolic language for social problems: it is the force itself which generate to sustain those problems and from time to time also comes under attack. The Sherpas try to balance and maintain their religious beliefs as well as culturally defined and induced tendencies towards individualism.

In a book edited by Tilouine and Dollus (2002) there are various papers on ethnicity and identity within Nepal, India and Pakistan. The papers have defined how an ethnic group defines and uses their identity to build a collective identity, distinct from other caste groups. There is a shift in meanings of established symbols and even attempt of cultural revivals in the construction of ethnic identity. The fact that specific symbols have been associated with former power arrangements can induce social actors to challenge them publicly.

In one of the study by David N.Geller (cited in Tilouine and Dollus 2002: 73- 131) on the identity of the Newar community in Nepal. The Newars are usually Buddhist or Hindu, the coexistence of both these two religion within the community might be seen as a 'religious harmony'. Geller describes it as *multivalent symbols* (the sharing of cults and practices while naming and evaluating them differently) and *parallelism* (the existence of different but formally equivalent cults and practices). Both these religion may be in competition with one another but at the same time may share the same fundamental assumption on religious salvation. Such solidarity or exclusion may be stressed according to the need of some groups. Mostly they do not assess each item of their culture whether it is Hindu or Buddhisms. The study talks about the important caste cleavages within the Newars and the differences between Newars within the capital and its surrounding areas. It further talks about the challenge among the Newars on the question of how to define a Newar as they do not have their own distinct religion, they do have typical rituals and festivals and a language but they are not observed universally among themselves outside the Kathmandu valley.

The minorities in Nepal have been continuously striving to draw the world attention towards what they perceive as a long history of systematic domination, repression and discrimination by the ruling class, a result of feelings they had acquired over a long period of time. The very word minority is hard to define as there is no universally accepted definition of minorities. Such attempt to define minorities has been complicated on the account of tremendous pluralism and diversity in the nature and characteristics of the minorities and ethnic groups themselves. This weakness has made the task of protection of the minorities difficult resulting

in their exploitation by either the State or the political parties.

In general the practice has been to include those who are in need of protection and promotion, those non dominant ethnic, religious and linguistic communities, whether or not they are numerical minorities. In Nepal it is one issue that is hardly acknowledge by the members of the ruling elites besides the political parties. Such issues are simply dismissed as “communal” “inconsequential” one, portraying its advocates as “communal” or “anti-democratic” elements (Kumar 2000: 197-236).

Similarly Mahendra Lawati (2005) describes exclusion as an element contributing to the possibility of an ethnic conflict in Nepal. Such exclusion by the State led to significant support to the Maoist from the excluded groups such as the ethnic communities. One of the reasons is that the Maoist have raised socio-cultural issues more forcefully than any other mainstream political parties even to the extent of forming several ethnic/ caste and regional fronts such as Magarant National Liberation Front, Tamuwan National Liberation Front, Dalit Liberation Front and so on. Ethnic political parties did emerged since 1990 like the Rastriya Janamukti Party (RJP). However, such parties working explicitly for the ethnic groups were not much successful. Lawati has highlighted various factors like historical, external and internal factors (Lawati 2005). However the present environment of increasing awareness towards one’s ethnicity will encourage more ethnic political parties’ role. The lack of ethnic awareness will no longer constrain them, as growth of the social justice will produce more ethnically aware people.

## **2.2 The Empirical Studies**

### **2.2.1 Limbus and Findings**

For the Limbus, emergence of ethnic issues has assumed two forms. The first is the Limbu Janajati, which include all the Limbus and second, is all the Kirat Janajati. By defining themselves as Janajati the Limbus seek to establish themselves as more ancient than any other ethnic groups or the Tagadharis. They lay claim to ancestral land as a means of legitimization of their collective (Tierney, 2002:25). Such legitimization not only distinguishes the Limbu Janajati from others but it also defines who is and who is not within the circle of Limbu Janajati. But at the same time the Limbus do attempt to involve themselves in the National Nepali community but such involvement does not extent so far as to the level of legitimization (Tierney, 2002:30).

The Limbus, like any other Janajatis of Nepal are confronted by two contradictory pressures of preserving and promoting their own culture while at the same time to integrate with the norms and values of the Nation State. Hence the cultural symbols of the Limbus will be seen as a medium in preservation of their ethnic identity. With the emerging ethnic issues in Nepal,

its effect could also be seen among the Limbu Janajati. With the passing years a need has been felt to maintain and preserve their history and culture. Not much written materials can be found on Limbu identity.

Chemjong (2003) asserts that in the beginning the Kirat people were rationalistic idolaters, they had neither temples nor any images. They worshipped those spirits, believed to be residents of fire and Sun and later during the process of integration of Nepal, the Limbuwan was gradually incorporated into Prithvi Narayan Shah's rapidly expanding empire through a negotiated settlement between Prithvi Narayan Shah and the local chiefs rather than by outright conquest. Chemjong (ibid) also deal in depth with the religious, cultural life.

In a similar manner, T. B. Subba (1999) present in depth study about the various cultural and religious rituals of the Limbus, which helps us to understand the early history of the Limbus. Subba has traced the cultural similarity between the Limbus and other Kiratas belonging to Nepal as well as those in Sikkim (northeastern region of India). It presents the process of various organizations (family, kinship, political, socio-economic, religion, linguistic, culture) and their role in bringing together the Kiratas. The gradual socio-cultural degradation of these communities explains their need to reconstruct their identity. These studies will help my research to identify the backgrounds upon which the need for identity was felt among the Limbus.

Tierney (2002), through the religious approach has tried to look into the multiple spheres of the Limbu identity, religion, myth, history, national identity and the preservation movement within Limbu culture. Tierney shows the need among the Limbus to integrate in the National identity at the same time to preserve their own identity.

### **2.2.2 Spiritual Belief**

Subba (1998) describe about the belief system and philosophical doctrines of Yuma Samyo (Samyo = religion) or Yumanism of Limbus. *Yuma Samyo* is a way of life for the Limbus, the belief system is traditionally handed over to the descendants, generations to generations through *Thungsap Iam* (oral *Mundhum* or Scripture). It provides brief account of the creation of the Universe and the human race by Goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma. It further describe the eighteen Dens (loks) of the Universe in which the highest, sacred place is Sangram Pedang den where Tagera Ningwaphuma resides (top of the Universe) to Khemading Yongsong den (bottom of the Universe) surrounded by flames of fire (hell). Thus, according to this study, the Limbus believes that there are nine worlds (loks) above the earth (inclusive) and nine worlds (loks) below the earth in this universe. The earth is between the two worlds.

*Yumanism* believes that there are two supernatural powers –Malevolent and Benevolent to reattribute and reward the vicious and virtuous deeds of human beings. This study describes the origin of religious priests, their ranking, their heredity and vocation. The *Phedangmas*, *Sambas*, *Yebas*, *Sattehangmas* and *Yuma* are the Limbus religious practitioners who fulfill both the role of a religious priest as well as local healers. The heredity linkage is important

because if the individual cannot indicate his heredity, he is not recognized; both patrilineal and matrilineal affiliation is recognized. It shows four kinds of different religious priests and their functional differences and their gears.

Subba (1998) has focus on the development of Limbu language especially in Sikkim (India). The script of the Limbu is called *Sirijunga* script. It was devised and developed by King Sirijunga Hang (882-925 A.D). It explains the changes in the script along with the time to suit its phonetics. It also shows the influence of “Deo-nagari” and Nepali script along with the development of Limbu script and language. With time various awareness activities began to take place in many ways, an attempt for the preservation of its continuity. In other words, it was an attempt for the survival of its identity.

Subba (1999) has tried to reconstruct the social and cultural life of the three communities of Kirata-the Limbus, the Rais and the Yakkha living in the eastern himalayan on the basis of various historical and well as ethnographic data. His work describes about the present situation of active process of reinventing linkages not only within one's own groups but also at the level of cognate concepts like 'Kirata', 'Janajati', and 'Mongol'. The groups constituting the Kiratas are in every way trying to crystallize their ideology and culture and 'inventing' their national consciousness not only within themselves but with the other cognate groups

Subba further explains that the Kiratas of the eastern Himalayan are suffering from a lack of national symbols which would represent them and simultaneously differentiate them from the Tagadharis. They are in the situation unable to clearly decide whether they should give primacy to similarities or differences with other categories. On the other hand, the differences of symbols between the Kiratas and the Tagadharis are not as powerful as most of the Kirat Leadership would like them to be because of their interaction over two hundred years. The efforts of reconstructing their past history have begun to construct the symbols of differences which is always a challenging task. The study briefly looks into the origin and the Kirata Dynasty and also into the relationship with other communities. It discusses the controversy among historian on the origin of the Kipat system, the Kipat system in Limbuwan and the gradual transformation of Kipat into Raiker through various State policies. The Limbus in the east and the Newars in the valley have been largely successful in keeping their language alive as compared to the Yakkhas. In India Limbu language was recognized as the State Language of Sikkim in 1980.

### **2.2.3 Limbus and their Administration**

‘Subba’ deals into the political and economic organizations of the Kiratas, though the various state-sponsored titles given to them like 'Subba', 'Dewan'. 'Jimi', 'Majya' referred to administrative office, they have continued over the years as surnames and created a lot of confusion. The Kipat was for a long time the central of their economic organization, there were also many Limbus who owned non-Kipat land. The economic organization was closely



interwoven with their political organization like the Chumlung would decide who would inherit how much land, the primary heir etc. It further explains the relationship of the Kiratas with other groups like Tagadharis, Mongoloid, the untouchables. Such relationships varied from one place to the other. Here, the cultural differences seem to be more significant than the socio-economic difference.

Subba has describes the culture of the Kiratas from birth to the death rituals in relation to the Tagadharis. The language and the religion is another aspect shown here, like the dialectical variations across the different places and regions are more pronounced among the Rais than among the Limbu and Yakkha. Binding all the Kiratas groups together by one Kirat Language is not easy as imposing one language over the other had always proved to be counter-productive but rather it is the common sense of having lost their respective language over the one Nepali language that binds these groups. The study further states that the Kiratas cannot afford to ignore those Tagadharis elements which have over the time fused with their own culture as it could also affect their own culture but this will not certainly help the process of internal homogenizations and external differentiation at National and State levels.

Subba's literature has overall traced the similarities between the Limbus and other Kiratas belonging to Nepal as well as those in Sikkim (northeastern region of India). It presents the process of various organizations (family, kinship, political, socio-economic, religion, linguistic, culture) and their role in bringing together the Kiratas. The gradual socio-cultural degradation of these communities explains their need to reconstruct their identity. These studies will help my research to identify the backgrounds upon which the need for identity was felt among the Limbus.

Caplan (1970) helps to widen the understanding of relationships between the Hindus and the Limbus through materialistic way. The various economic and political institutions which interconnect both these groups at different points in time and the factors that brought about changes not only in their institutions but in their socio-cultural relationships. This study has concentrated on the struggle for Land (Kipat). Here, I would like to add that the Kipat (communal land holding) for the Limbus means more than an economic importance. It is fused in their culture and their origin. It is symbolic of the Limbus, as an exclusive community different from other groups. This study has tried to examine the interrelations between the Limbus and the Bahuns in east Nepal.

Caplan (1970) further examines the relationship between the land and culture and of cultural politics. The Limbu have strived to maintain a distinct identity through emphasizing their cultural exclusiveness in defense of Kipat Land. When emphasizing on cultural exclusiveness the myths play an important role (repeated again and again). Sense of identity is encouraged; the links are strengthened and expanded through various norms of kinship. Various rituals like marriage, death and others not just help to strengthen the ties but also provide appropriate context for rehearsing customs, relating myths and legends and in other words ways

demonstrating shared cultural background (Caplan 1970:185). The various economic and political institutions which inter connected both these groups at different points in time and the factors that brought about changes not only in their institutions but in their socio-cultural relationships. This study has concentrated on the struggle for Land (Kipat). Here, I would like to argue that the Kipat (communal land holding) for the Limbus means more than an economic importance. It is fused in their culture and their origin. It is symbolic of the Limbus, as an exclusive community different from other groups.

The Limbu primarily reside in 'Limbuwan'- an area that lies between the Arun River to the west, Sikkim- India border to the east, the Tibet, China border to the north and the northern parts of Morang, Sunsari and Jhapa districts to the south (Tierney, 2002:2). In Nepal their population is dominated is most in the district of Taplejung (40.9), Panchthar (39.5), Terhathum (34.7) (Gurung, et.all 2004: 28). By defining themselves as Janajati, the Limbu seek to establish themselves as more ancient than any other ethnic groups do. They claim their ancestral land 'Kipat' as a means of legitimization of their collective solidarity and egalitarianism.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Rationale of the site selection**

Research has included those Limbus whose place of origin is in districts populated mostly by Limbus community and who have settled permanently in urban areas for the past years two/ three generation and how they still try to maintain their Ethnicity and in what ways they identify their multi identities that of a Limbu, a Kirat, a Janajati and a Nepali. The two research area will be especially selected keeping in view that in both the areas most of the Limbus in the Kathmandu districts reside both temporarily as well as permanent.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The research has followed primary descriptive ethnographic research approaches. Descriptive in the sense that, disserting will carefully tried to record all the observed events from the study area and described as possible.

### **3.3 Sampling procedure**

The study area is homogenous. So it is difficult to define the universe. Non probability sampling has used to collect data and information required in the study. The visit participant method has also focused the study area. There is no exact data of households because of sensitivity of the subject. Out of the total households 21 households were selected for research study.

### **3.4 Nature and sources of the data**

Primary data: From the direct field work/visit-participant observation, interview, questionnaire and focus group discussion.

Secondary data: Relevant literatures such as VDC , District, Region and Central level as well as library published articles, documents ,books, CD-ROM internet research agencies CBS reports and other publication of different organization, such as Janjati mahasangh, KYC, ILO-169 reports etc. The nature of data will be predominantly qualitative.

### **3.5 Data Collection Tools and Techniques**

Different data collection tools and techniques have been used to collect the primary data.

#### **3.5.1 Questionnaire**

This method is very famous and its validity may be acquired by cross verification and so it frequently used in social research as faithful method. The samples have been counted and format of question has been prepared. Through this method, the information of ethnic background, .age, educational status, marital status, occupation, demographic status, relationship with the family etc. factors has been involved in information gathered. To collect information questionnaires has been used. Question model is given in Annex 1.

#### **3.5.2 key Informants Interview**

This method is very useful for reliability of data. Key informants have been interviewed during the fieldwork. Formal Interview has been taken at different times with key informants. Through this method, about the identity has been discussed with different organization, the interview of renowned person has been taken. such as Janjati mahasangh, KYC,etc.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data were tried to classified and tabulated as possible. The quantitative are organized and

according to the conceptual model of the research, study from the descriptive ethnography. The qualitative has been interpreted and analyzed in a descriptive manner based on their numerical characteristics.

### **3.7 Limitation of the Study**

- The field of ethnicity and ethnic identity is very varied and far more diffused. It will be not be possible to keep up with the all literature on every aspect of ethnicity. Hence, only those aspects of ethnicity, which would serve the limited purpose of the research, will be considered.
- Many important phenomenons like ‘ethnocentrism’ ‘ethnicism’etc., closely related to ethnicity will not be discussed in detail as the research will be more focused on the interpretation of cultural symbols in the formation and adaptation of ethnic identity.
- This study concerns the different process involved in generating and maintaining ethnic identity among one ethnic group. It may not confirmed similarities for all the ethnic communities of Nepal. But it will definitely represent as a background study for other similar ethnic minorities in Nepal.
- The study has been concentrated only within a small area in the Kathmandu valley. The study cannot completely represent the Limbus in other areas/places in Nepal.

## **CHAPTER: FOUR STUDY AREA AND DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Physical Setting**

Kathmandu lies in the centre of Nepal. It is also capital city of Nepal. *Sammang* and *Manghim* lie five kilometres from the Kathmandu Municipality in the Lalitpur District of Bagmati zone which lies in the central development regions. It is located in about 5 kilometres south - east of Kathmandu. It is one of the three major cities (third largest) located inside the Kathmandu valley. It is above 1350 m. above sea level. The city is divided into 32 ward. The Limbus are found mostly in eastern regions of Nepal and is dominated particularly in the districts of Taplejung, Panchthar and Terhathum.

### **4.2 Socio- Cultural setting**

In the research areas the total populations of the Limbu households were about 52 and 41 respectively for *Sammang* and *Manghim*. However, the total number of Limbu population in these two areas could not be as certain as there were no data in this regard. Both these research areas were adjoining to one another. Out of the total households 21 households were selected for research study from this two research areas. The selection was made carefully to represent the Limbus whose place of origin are in districts populated mostly by the Limbu community and who have settled permanently or have been living in the urban areas for the

past two/ three or more generation. The two research areas had one of the highest concentrations of Limbu population within the Kathmandu valley. In the research areas the total number of people were 154, numbers of male were 78 and female

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of the Population of Limbu found in Nepal by Region**

<b>District</b>	<b>Far- west region</b>	<b>Mid- west region</b>	<b>Central region</b>	<b>Eastern region</b>	<b>Total</b>
Moutain	0.01	0.01	0.00	17.77	17.80
Hill	0.05	0.02	0.15	51.71	54.39
Tarai	0.08	0.10	0.75	26.52	27.81
Total	0.13	0.12	0.90	96.01	100.00

**(Source: Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups, 2006)**

The above table has recognized the whole population of limbu in percentage. Which table has clarified the regional population percentage of Limbu of Nepal.

**Table 2**  
**Population Distribution in the Sample Households by Age Group**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
0 - 9	11	7	18
10 - 19	13	14	27
20 - 29	15	16	31
30 - 39	15	11	26
40 - 49	13	12	25
50 - 59	6	9	15
60 +	5	7	12
Total	78	76	154

**Total Population = 154, No. of Male = 78, No. of Female = 76**

**(Source: Fieldwork October 2009)**

Except for three households which had been settled for the last one, three and four years respectively, the other households had been living for the past seven to four generation. In the table below the number of households have been compared with the years of settlement.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of Households by Place of Origin**

Districts	No. of Households
Taplejung	15
Terathum	10
Panchthar	8
Dhankuta	2

(Source: Fieldwork October 2009)

The above table has shown the origin status of Limbu. Specially, the migration of Limbus has shown in the urban area. In average, the household data has been given above table of the study area.

### 4.3 Profile of the Informants

#### 4.3.1 Occupation

To buy lands and home in the urban areas once they were able to earn handsome salaries from recruitment in the British and Singapore Army. No doubt most of informants (11) were either ex- British or ex- Singapore armies as compared to only two in the ex- Nepal Army. Besides, the recruitment in the Army, many of the children of the informants were working abroad especially in Hongkong (HK) after they were able to get I.D for settlement in Hong Kong. 19 of them were working abroad (informants as were as their children, almost all the informants hesitated to share the profession/ country where their spouses/ children were working in abroad); very few could be found working in the civil service.

#### 4.3.2 Educational Status

The Limbus of the *Sammang* and *Maghim* like any other communities emphasized a lot in providing proper education to their children. The Limbus in terms of education were/ are backward, one of the reasons is attraction towards the British/ Singapore army recruitment but this is slowly changing, though recruitment in the British army is still considered as a great career, during my field work I found many ex- armies who expressed that they want their children to receive good education and become doctors, engineers, hold important positions in various institutions as compared to becoming a '*Lahure*' (Army) but they were also quick to admit that being a '*Lahure*' is also a good option. As compared to the head households (mostly of them had not completed high school) their children were much educated and two of them were actually pursuing their Doctorate degree. In this regard, the children had different views they felt that though their parents insist on getting a good degree education but their parents would still prefer if they would at least try once (or twice/ thrice) for the British Army. They feel that having a son in the British Army would also mean a great prestige. In one of the household where all the three sons were in the British Army, the parents very

proudly showed me the framed pictures (in uniforms) placed on the walls and had nothing but praises for his well settled sons.

**Table 4**  
**Educational Qualification of the Household Members**

<b>Education</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Doctorate	2
Master Degree	9
Bachelor Degree	25
Intermediate	23
SLC (High School)	30
Under SLC	23
Primary Level	19
Can read and write	27
Illiterate	11

**(Source: Fieldwork October 2009)**

Note: 11 were children who had yet to attend the school. 2 of them attended a Kindergarten. 167 total household members were found in the study area. I had success only to study in that category which has exposed the educational qualification of urban area.

### **4.3.3 Language Preferences**

In terms of the use of the mother tongue or Limbu language, mostly the elderly member of the household used Limbu dialects with their spouses and children at home and with other Limbus during gatherings like marriages; which is not surprising, considering that many of the younger generation don't speak the Limbu language. There is no doubt that awareness towards ones identity and culture has reached to a new heights in the past few years (especially after 1990 Peoples Movement) but proving oneself in the ever changing modernized time and at the same time holding to one's roots is forever a challenging balancing act. During conversation the younger members of the family, even if they could speak Limbu, they casually used both Limbu and Nepali language interchangeably – borrowing words from Nepali language, where they found it difficult to grasp the needed words/ tense from the Limbu language. Most of the younger members said that since there was less use of the language outside the home, not only because Nepali is a common language in day to day life but also because it is needed for every government related works especially in government offices, ignorance of Nepali language can be troublesome. Beside Nepali language the influence of English language was more equally strong (it is also required for written exam during the British Army recruitment). Many of the younger members of the households felt that they would be left out in modern competitive world if they don't know English language.

**Table 5**  
**Use of Language at home by the Household Members**

<b>AGE GROUP</b>	<b>LIMBU</b>	<b>NEPALI</b>	<b>BOTH</b>
0 – 9	0	20	3
10 – 19	1	16	1
20 – 29	5	15	5
30 – 39	8	11	7
40 – 49	6	7	3
50 – 59	7	3	2
60 +	10	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>22</b>

**(Source: Fieldwork October 2009)**

The table 5 has focused the status of the use of language. According to age groups there has found 42 speak Limbu 72 Nepali and 22 can speak English and Nepali

**Table 6**  
**Use of Language outside their Community by the Household Members.**

<b>S.N</b>	<b>AGE GROUP</b>	<b>LIMBU</b>	<b>NEPALI</b>	<b>BOTH including ENGLISH</b>
1	0 – 9	0	21	0
2	10 – 19	0	15	26
3	20 – 29	0	30	19
4	30 – 39	0	33	11
5	40 – 49	0	30	2
6	50 – 59	0	16	3
7	60 +	0	15	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>61</b>

**(Source: Fieldwork October 2009)**

In the study area, the use of language status has been exposed outside their community by the household. 61 outside their community household members use Nepali and English both language, and 160 outside household members don't use limbu only Nepali.

#### **4.3.4 Marriage Trends**

Among the Limbus in the research areas (I would like to mention it that marriage trend included only among the head household), most of them had marriages within the Limbu community. Only some of them had married outside their caste, they had married women from Rai community (they were quick to comment that Rai community was as same as the Limbu and marriages between them were hardly considered as intercaste). Marriages within the same clans (paternal/ maternal side) are strictly prohibited. Such restriction can be found to seventh line of paternal and fourth line from maternal sides. Before the marriages are fixed,



parties from both sides (the groom and the bride) discuss in dept the clan relationship from the paternal and maternal sides and if its found that they (the boy and the girl families) are related in someway. Then the boy's party seeks forgiveness saying that it was mistake and was not intentional and offer wine to the girl's family. Most of them had arranged marriages but they were given the liberty to make their choice.

## **CHAPTER: FIVE**

### **CULTURE AND PRACTICES**

#### **5.1 Rituals**

The rituals of the Limbus from life to death have distinct religious rituals, in practice the ceremonies may appear to be influenced by Hindu rituals. Except for *Sappok Chomen* (worm worship) the rituals thereafter like *Nauran* (naming ceremony) seem to be influenced by Hindu practices especially while making horoscope generally the Hindu priests are assigned. During My field research, I found that most of the households used either a Kirat priest or Hindu priest or both. Use of a Kirat priest or a Hindu priest depended on individual preferences or due to the availability of the priests. The informants openly shared their experiences about using either of the Priests. Though I found some households did actually use a Hindu priest while at the same time they followed Limbu rituals, they insisted that they actually follow the Limbu way during rituals and that they try to find a Kirat priest as far as possible. There seems to be a contradiction in their statements. Apparently there is an attempt to strike a balance between who they think they actually are and what they have becomes after "different" culture traits they have adopted over time.

##### **5.1.1 Sappok Chomen**

*Sappok Chomen* is a rite of womb worship for the protection of a child in the uterus. It is also a rite of propitiating gods for the good health of the mother and the baby in the womb as well as successful delivery of the baby. It is unique in the sense that no one in the vicinity solemnizes such rituals except Limbus. It is held during the pregnancy but in case it is not done due to unavoidable reasons then it can be observed even after birth; but it must not be missed (quoted by Kainla in Subba1998:93).. It is an important ceremony among the Limbus

and each of the performance in the rituals is found to be purely Limbu ritual.

In my research out of the 21 informants, 7 of them had neither any idea about this ritual nor had performed it in their household all. While 14 of the households used animal sacrifice and instead used flowers and fruits to propitiate Goddess Yuma (usually there is a custom of sacrificing animals and birds in the propitiation rite of Yuma). Yuma literary means grandmother and is revered as the Goddess of all the divinities, source of power, wealth, health, pleasure, happiness and also of religion, ethics and ideals (Subba1998:96). Usually a pig if not possible a chicken is sacrificed and its blood is offered along with locally brewed liquor.

18 informants could explain the importance of this animal sacrifice ceremony, i.e., to protect both the child and mother, for the safe delivery of the child. According to Tenchhama (age 25/F), “it is done before the birth of the baby, it is to protect the baby and its friend (placenta)”...and for safe delivery, its for both the mother and the child...it takes a good and learned Phedangma to recite the Mundhum, it’s done outside the house.” 33 years Sumnima (F) further explained its importance “it is done so that evil spirit doesn’t harm the baby...to avoid miscarriage and so that it won’t cause infertility in the coming years.” It is considered an important ritual, which must be done before the birth of the child, It was not possible to perform the ceremony, as there was no Phedangas. So, we asked back home in Nepal, to perform the ceremony for our child, we also send his clothes as a symbolic representation of the child I will briefly explain the ceremony of *Sappok Chomen*. Altars for each of the divinities (believed to cause infliction of pain and suffering to mankind) is constructed on a clean elevated floor and covered with banana leaves. A stone is erected along with two small sticks poles on the altar for *Wajangma* (one of the divinities). One pair of bamboo sticks filled with water and fermented gains representing *Tongbas* (containers of millet beer) are placed in the altar decorated for each divinities. Chickens, ducks, eggs, pigs, fishes, pigeons etc. are kept ready for sacrifice to different divinities. Usually chicken or if possible a pig, is used. The ritual takes three days to complete (two days outside and the rest of the rituals inside the house). There are variations in the Mundhum of Yuma Sammang (Yuma is propitiated in this ritual) from one region to another and among the Phedangmas with emphasis on their own geographical context and myth of the clans who perform the ritual. The Phedangmaalso make the *Mundhum* of Yuma short according to his/her convenience (Subba1998:95-96). Nowadays this ritual is completed within one day instead of three long days.

It was found that seven households had stopped animal sacrifice during this ceremony. Overall the performance in the ritual is not different from animal sacrifice except that flowers, fruits and vegetables are used in place of animals or birds. All the eight informants told me that they use to offer animal sacrifice earlier but later after four of the households took up Sattedhangma they stopped animal sacrifice. (Sattedhangma is a form of Kirat religion which prohibits animal sacrifice)

### 5.1.2 Yangdang Phongma

*Yangdang Phongma* is the naming ceremony of the child. Its literal meaning is 'hang cradles' and it is the ritual of purification of both the mother and child, the house and the close relatives giving name to the baby and showing the baby the light of the day. Usually, the Phedangma officiate the naming ceremony. It is a kind of announcement that a new person has descended on earth; the Goddess Tagera Ninwaphuma is worshipped for the bestowal of safe, prosperous and happy long life to the new born baby (Subba 1998:103). When the child is born the house and its members including close relatives becomes impure, no worship or ceremonies are observed. This ceremony takes place on the fourth day for a boy and third day for a girl amongst the Limbus and Yakkhas, amongst the Rai the sixth and the fifth day. This naming ceremony is found to be observed by all Kiratas groups except for *Sappok Chomen* (ritual before the birth for the protection of mother and child). Such a rite is not reported from other two Kiratas groups-Yakkha and Rais, which included that foetal or infantile deaths were perhaps more frequent among the Limbus (Subba 2001:85).

However, the naming ceremonies are very much similar among all the Kiratas groups with variation in the number of days for purification. On this day, in the morning the house is purified by daubing it with either a mixture of clay and cow dung (usually in village) or simply with water. Both the mother and the child have to take bath with warm water. If the Phedangmahas been used to officiate the birth ceremonies; he performs the ritual of purification with the aspersion of holy water (water in which gold has been washed) in and outside the house with a small bunch of *Samyok* (*Cynodon dactylon*). The Phedangma recites the Mundhum seeking the blessing of the household and clan deities. Here, Mangenna of the new born baby is also conducted for the first time and a name is given to the baby. The names are usually given considering the time, date, month or year of the birth or after the names of legendary heroes, popular figures, names of Gods, etc. After this ritual the baby is carried outside the house by an aunt or elderly women to show the light. The baby is carried in and out of the house three- four times and around the house mumbling words of blessings like to be intelligent, be a great man and travel across the seas, be clever to earn money and run business.

In the ancient times expressions like be flyer as birds, powerful as elephant, swift as deer and so on were used. Similar ceremony is also found among the Tagadharis the naming ceremony is called *Nauran*. On the eleventh day of the birth this ceremony is conducted. The name is given by the priest derived on the basis of the exact time of birth and the position of the stars. One common feature is the daubing of the house and cleansing of the 'impure' mother and child, followed by feast for relatives and friends. The naming ceremony among the Limbus is followed by another ceremony of the rice-feeding ceremony usually after six months. In this ceremony, the ceremonial cleansing of the mother, the child and the house is essential before

the rituals. The presence of relatives, both paternal and especially the maternal are ensured. The priest in such ceremony worships the Goddess to ensure the child a health and long life. The child is essentially given some rice, milk and cereals. The final birth ceremony is the hair cutting ceremony after three to five years. The cutting of the hair is usually done by a maternal uncle or even a classificatory uncle can do it. The ceremony also includes the prerequisite of cleaning the house, presence of a priest, followed by feast.

The Tagadharis also have similar ceremonies of feeding the rice called *pasni* and hair cutting ceremony called *chewar*. In the former ceremony a priest officiate such ceremony. Here, similarity can be seen with the Limbu practice of rice feeding. The latter ceremony of hair cutting takes place when the child is five to seven years of age. A maternal uncle or a classificatory maternal uncle cut the hair of the child. Once the head is shaved, a turf of hair is essential to retain at the back as a sign of being a Hindu. Except for the turf of the hair, this ceremony also shares similarity with that of Limbu practice. Unlike the Hindus, the absence of a priest in the Limbus is more common. In my research, I found that most of the households performed the ceremony of naming their child without a Phedangma or a Hindu priest. They simply invited elderly women or aunt of the child to pray for his/ her health and to feed rice and milk to the child.

Out of the 40 households, half of them had performed this ceremony without a priest; only 13 households had used a Phedangma and four households used a Hindu priest whereas only one household did not perform any such rituals for their children. All the informants said it was done for cleansing ceremony on their own, most of them could explain the basic performance involved in it. Pangphok in her late 60's tried to explain it, "at dawn the child is taken outside of the house and is shown towards the sky. The child is blessed with expressions like - May you become a great person, may you travel across the seas and so on. It is usually done by elderly women or the aunt; it is not necessary to have a Phedangma to perform this ceremony, the family members and relatives can perform the cleansing ceremony and name the child." Similarly, 28 years old Chonlung shared his experience "in this ceremony our child was taken out of the house by grandmother at dawn and shown towards the sky and stars and blessed. The name was also suggested by her but we used a Hindu pundit to make his horoscope". Half of the household under the study who had performed the ceremony by themselves, had used a Hindu priest to make horoscope for their children and whereas one of them had used a *Sattahangma* priest, I found that there were very few (only three households) who did not make horoscope for their children at all. As one informant, Sambahang (40/F) explained, "I have observed all the ritual while naming our child. The child was carried outside the house at dawn, they were blessed and named him but I didn't feel it was necessary to use a priest".

But most of the informants felt it was necessary to prepare horoscope for their children as it might be useful in their future. (As it is believed that the situation of a person his/ her status,

health, present and future can be generally predicted through the reading of the horoscope). Surprisingly only 10 household used Phedangma to officiate this ceremony, the overall ritual performance is same as above, the Phedangma facilitating the ceremony by sprinkling a small bunch of *Samyok* (*Cynodon dactylon*) with water washed with gold in and outside the house and to the family members followed by worship of Supreme Goddess *Yama* and other deities. After the birth of the new child, the ritual of *Mangenna* is also conducted. Either the Phedangma or the family members (relatives) name the child. Paruhang (40) said, “It is one’s wish either to conduct this ceremony by the family members themselves or to use a Phedangma. In our case, we used a Phedangma because we wanted to observe the ritual properly with *Mangenna* which can only be done by Phedangmas.”

One household who had taken up the Sattchangma religion used their own Sattahangma Priest instead of Phedangmas, as Khanjama (age 58/F) shared, “After 9 days our Sattahangma priest came and sprinkle the holy water (same as the one use above by our Kiratis), We also follow the same ritual as Kiratis except we don’t offer animal sacrifice, the horoscope is also prepared by Sattchangma Priest.”

It was found that those families who were abroad in army service had used a Hindu priest for the naming ceremony because there were no Phedangmas, “When we were in villages (Nepal), we used Phedangmabut in other countries, we had to use Hindu priest as there were no Phedangmas”, explains Bajbir (age 55/M). Many Limbus also call upon Hindu Priest as well as Phedangmas. There were many Limbus who followed / used both the Hindu as well as the Kirat Priests for many ceremonies from birth to that of preparing the horoscopes. For them such practice with Hindu influences is just a matter of detail and is not taken seriously. In the research areas many Limbus said that they used Hindu priest because the Kirat priests are simply not easily available (because for certain rituals it is important that the *Phedangmas* should be good and a learned one) while in the villages the same informant try to use a *Phedangma* to conduct the ceremony.

### **5.1.3 Marriage Ceremony**

In Limbu culture, there are two kinds of marriages: (1) arranged marriage (*Naksingma Mekkhim*) and (2) Love marriage or marriage by one’s free choice (*Nanumna Khemma Mekkhim*). In an arranged marriage, initiation of preliminary negotiation for the betrothal is taken by the bridegroom’s family through a team of matchmakers. The leader of the matchmaker team should be experienced in the oblique use of imagery to conduct with the bride’s parents or guardians. The responsible member or the representative of the family either accepts the proposal after due consideration or avoids by a skilful parry. After the consent of both the parties the arranged marriage precedes. Whereas the chosen marriage occurs either by elopement or without prior knowledge or consent of the parents (Subba1995:119).

Whatever may be the forms of marriage there is an unavoidable aspect of matrimonial negotiation (*Yupparung*). In Nepali it is often known as “*Baina*.” It is a small amount of money that is presented to the bride as a token of courting and pledge of leading a life together and it is assumed that that if she accepts it then it means she is willing to accept the proposal and if she rejects it then it means that she has refused the proposal. Such token sometimes turns into precious gifts of ornaments or to an increased amount of money and in an arranged marriage, such negotiation is initiated by some senior female members of the household like the mother or elder sisters or female representative. The marriage ceremony takes place in the bridegroom’s house.

The marriage ceremony is described in brief with attention paid especially to important rituals in the marriage. The bridegroom along with his team (some family members, relatives, elderly and friends) go to the bride’s house to bring her and the bride is accompanied by her friends or/and groups of ladies. They are called “*Mekesama*” (*Lokandi*). Before the house of the bridegroom is reached on the way the bride and her team are given warm welcome and provided with refreshment. The bridegroom’s team has to place some money and request them to sit down for refreshments and again repeat the ritual when they have to continue their journey. This custom is known as “*Lam Lakma*”. The bridegroom again has to pay money to remove the guns placed on their ways. Then the guns are fired twice in pair. The *Damais* (traditional musician and artiste) play the traditional instruments such as *Narasinga* and *Sanai* and lead the team to a temporary shelter near the groom’s house. Once the shelter is reached, the bride’s team is offered a wooden jar of liquor, fried meat and one rupee coin. This custom is known as “*Langlphenwa Chimma*” or “*Langhiwa*”- for the relaxation from their long distance walk. The dinner is served with pork or mutton along with *Tongba* and *Sijongwa* (*rakshi*-home brewed liquor). They are entertained with *Ke Lang* (*Chyabrung* or Drum dance) and *Yalang* (*dhan nach* or Paddy dance) is performed throughout the night participated by all the guest and hosts of all the ages (Subba 1998:124-125).

The next day the marriage ceremony takes place, The bride is given new clothes and jewellery to change and the bridegroom along with two *kumari* (virgin) girls usually his sisters - consanguineous/fictitious sisters, walk ahead of him. The girls carry *kalash* filled with water and flowers. Once they reach the place where the bride has been kept, the bridegroom puts a mark of curd and rice on her forehead. The bride then salutes the groom on his feet and put a garland around his neck. Then she is brought back to the groom’s house. When the procession reaches near the courtyard, people of the procession is besprinkled with curd and rice (mixed together). The senior member of the family put auspicious mark on the groom and bride’s forehead and the bride is covered with a new shawl and taken inside the house by her mother-in-law or senior sister-in-law. The bride has to enter inside by stepping on the red/white long cloth. The day is passed in enjoying the marriage, by eating and merrymaking.

In the late evening, after dinner, the most important ritual of the marriage ceremony begins

which is officiated by the *Phedangma*. Leaves of bananas are spread in a tray, two water pots decorated with flowers, small lamps and besides two *Tongbas* (millet beer) and two leaf-plates of fried meat are placed. Both the groom and the bride are seated in a cross-legged position with the groom on the right side and the bride in the left side. Both the groom and the bride is accompanied by one friend of both (male for the groom and female for the bride) to assist them to go through the rituals of *Yupparung Yang Chepma*, *Mekkhim Mangenna* and others. Both the groom and the bride are covered with one shawl and the right thigh of the bride is kept under the left thigh of the groom while the left palm of the groom is placed on the right palm of the bride. During the "*Metkamma Mangena*" a pair of chicken male and female is sacrificed for the groom and the bride, it is hit by a rod and some of its blood is let to flow on the leaves. The *Phedangma* may observe the blood and foretell the future of their conjugal life together.

During the ritual the *Phedangma* emphasis on the union of two souls, love, respects and support for each other. Both the groom and the bride commit for conjugal fidelity, love, respect and understanding for each other. After this ritual, the *Phedangma* ask the guests to remain as witness and ask the father and mother of the groom if they will behave properly with their daughter-in-law, after their assurance for proper behavior and affectionate relations with their new daughter-in-law, the *Phedangma* declare them to be husband and wife. The *Phedangma* also invokes the Gods, the Sun, the Moon and the Fire, etc., to become the divine witness of the marriage union. The groom put red lead powder on the bride's forehead and the bride in return bow down on the groom's feet. The *Phedangma* declares the end of the ritual with closing slogans of well wishers. After this the guns are fired and the guest, hosts rejoice and come out of the house and the *Kelang* (*dhan nach* or Paddy dance) is performed by all. There maybe slight variations in the performance of the marriage ceremony from one place to another but they are insignificant, as the theme of the rituals remains the same (Subba19981:127-129). When the marriage is done by elopement, the bridegroom and his team goes to the bride's home to link both the families by following the tradition and complete the various formalities for making the marriage socially acceptable and legitimate.

In my research area where there were four household who followed the *Sattehangma*, as mentioned above it is a form of Kirat religion, which forbids animal sacrifice. (Like some Hindus who do not practice animal sacrifice). During their marriage ceremony usually conducted in the Kirat temple by a *Sattehangma* priest, the marriage is much alike when compared to the way the *Mundhum* is read in marriage rituals among those Limbus those who offer animal sacrifice. When I asked a woman (Numa age 28/F) who followed the *Sattehangma* path, about their marriage influenced by Hindu rituals, she replied it was a Kirat religion indeed but only the sacrifice and offering of wine part is excluded. "...at the marriage, *bibuti* – a kind of white powder is used as a mark in the forehead of the bride and groom. We do build altar and offer ghee, fruits, flowers etc. to the fire. This may look like Hindu but in

real history, we Limbus did conducted marriages before the fire as a witness of our conjugal life together." But those Limbu who did not follow this Path, denied of having any knowledge of performing marriages in front of the altar. As Dacchu in his late 40s shared that "...I don't think building altar or blowing conch (practiced by the Sattedhangma) during marriage ceremony are part of Limbu culture. We never did that nor have I seen that in my youth days".

Within my research area, out of the 21 informants, most of them had a traditional Limbu marriage, only eight couples had a simple marriage, i.e., by marrying in a temple or by simply receiving *Tika* and seeking the senior members blessings (*tiko-talo*) mostly it was the case of elopement than any other reasons. Usually marriages are not conducted in elaborated ceremonies in the cases of elopement. Besides this, expenses were also another reason for not having a traditional marriage which often incurs lots of expenses as Khahuns (age 30/M) shared his feelings, "since it was quite expensive to conduct a traditional marriage, we eloped and later we had a simple reception at home of tiko-talo.". Such marriages are also preferred by the younger generation but at the same time they also wanted to fulfill their parents wish for a traditional marriage. Nisang in his late 20's said, "I wanted a simple wedding but my parents wanted to observe all the Limbu ritual ceremonies." arguing further, "I know it is important to maintain our dharma (customs) but at the same time I think it is important to move with times, everything is expensive and difficult. So I like simple marriage ceremony of course, they can also be conducted with a Phedangma and simple Limbu rituals and just avoid other elaborate rituals."

Marriage as social institutions among the Limbus has undergone tremendous changes. It seems to be influenced by Hinduism or modernism. Like the rituals of giving away daughters is similar to *Kanyadan* (Hindu ritual of giving away daughter's hand in marriage), making nuptial fire and other activities similar to Hindu. These days, high payment in arranged marriage is falling out of vogue. But this custom is still prevailing in modest form as a part or just a formality of matrimonial negotiation. Among the Limbus, such practices can be found more in the villages than in the towns or cities with some exceptions. The marriage among the consanguineous relations or in the same clan is strictly prohibited. During the talks of marriages, the system of consanguinity and affinity is closely scrutinized.

An integral part of Limbu ceremony or rituals is the *Raksi* (liquor distilled from millet) and *thongba* (millet beer). Both these liquor constitute an important part of the Limbu culture from birth to death and in many ritual observation. They are an integral part of it. Any observation is considered to be incomplete without them. Obeisance to headman is expressed with presentation of liquor, when seeking the hand of a girl for marriage. During and after the various marriage ceremonies, the settlement of any dispute is symbolized by the sharing of liquor and the funeral rites are characterized by the consumption of vast quantities of millet beer (*Tongbas*). The importance of the liquor is especially evident during rituals which bring



together large numbers of people. The norms of hospitality also demand the serving of millet beer (Caplan 2000: 65). I found that though the informants did use *Raksi* in their day to day Limbu rituals and ceremonies but among the younger informant it's use was for fulfilling the obligation of certain part of rituals because they would indirectly express that drinking *Raksi* as part of the culture is not good but *Raksi* should be used only for fulfilling the rituals obligations as it is an important part of any ritual ceremonies and that drinking should not be justified in the name of culture.

There is no doubt that the Limbu marriage system has been much influenced by Hindu system but still a Limbu marriages practices are also different. Limbu marriages are performed by rituals specialists and required a blood sacrifice. Costs of the marriage are borne by the bridegroom's family, and the ceremony itself takes place in the groom's house and a series of payment before and after the marriage is transferred from the bridegroom's house to the bride's family. The Brahmin couples are in contrast married at their natal home. The cost of the marriage is born by the bride's family. The Limbu widow is married in the same way as a new bride whereas among the Brahmins the widows are not remarried.

One interesting aspect of the Limbu marriage is *Saimundri*, unfortunately I could not find literature on Limbu which might have dealt with it in detail. Most of the literature deals with the bride price which is quite different from the *Saimundri*, *Saimundri* is more or less similar to the Hindu ritual of *Kanyadan* (kanya = girl; dan = gift) during the marriage. It is a ritual by which the bride's father entrust his daughter to the groom. It is a symbolic ritual which means that the bride no longer belongs to her natal home and that her real home is that of her husband and she gets a new identity. *Kanyadan* is an important ritual in a Hindu marriage. However I have found that in the Limbu marriages, the family of the brides politely but firmly refuses to offer *Saimundri* to the groom's family making excuses that they will do it later. Such delay of denial may extent even when the children are born. In my own village I had seen an incident, when one woman had died but the husband and his family could not perform any death rituals because the ritual of *Saimundri* had not been done till date. Only after the women's family gave away *Saimundri*, then the husband's family carried on with the death rituals. If the ritual of *Saimundri* is not performed it means that the women is still a part of her natal family though she had been married to another family and in such cases, even after her death its her natal family who has right over her death body and to perform the rituals because her real identity remain still with her natal family. In case a *Saimundri* is performed then the bride no longer has any connection with her natal home. Such rituals reflect the higher status of a Limbu woman in her family as compared with a Hindu woman. As the denial of *Saimundri* or the ritual of offering of the daughter to the groom symbolically means that the daughter is still a part of her natal home even if she is married off.

#### **5.1.4 Death Rituals**

Funeral ceremonies differ in its rituals the way the particular person has died. If someone has died natural death, there are several rites of various stages. People who die natural death are buried while people who die unnatural death in accidents or by suicide are cremated. If a woman dies without completing the *Nusephuma* or *Mellungphuma* rite, the final ritual of marriage through which the burden of performing the funeral ceremonies are shifted from near kin of natal home to the husband or near kin of the married home; her husband or sons and daughters or close relatives can ask to the responsible member to the natal home who is attending the funeral, to complete it in simple formalities even at the graveyard or cremation spot and thus become eligible to perform the funeral rites.

Mourning is observed for four days for men and three days for women. There are some differences in observing the mourning period from place to place. During the mourning period salt, oil, ginger and chili are not taken by the family members and the relatives. They should take simple food and should not talk with outsiders whose mother tongue or ethnicity differs. They should not salute (join hands for greetings) anyone. They should not wear colorful clothes and the women should not comb their hair or wear ornaments. On the last day of the ritual the purification ceremony is conducted, in this rituals, meat, garlic, ginger, pepper, onion, some vegetables are fried and kept in separate small leaf plates. Two bottles of milled beer (*tongba*) and locally made liquor are kept. The *Phedangma* chants the *Mundhum* indicating the end of the funeral ceremony.

Death rituals of the Limbus are different from that of the Hindus but some of the Limbus observe rituals similarity with Hindus like giving *Dana* (donation) to the Brahman priest or observing the mourning period for more than three or four days. Limbu mourning practice differs from those of the Brahmins. To mention only two features; the Limbus bury their dead whereas the Brahmins cremate theirs. Limbus observe a period of three or four days of pollution (depending on whether the deceased is female or male), while Brahmins consider pollution to extent for thirteen days after death. The process of Sanskritization, in terms of changing the customs, rituals, ideology and way of life of a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group in the direction of a high and frequently born "twice born" caste (Srinivas, 1972) has begun to influence the life of some Limbus. Except for two households the entire household said that they buried their deceased or according to the wishes of the dead that is if the deceased before his/ her death wished to be cremated then the family cremates the deceased. It is done according to their wish. I have discussed about it more in my finding and discussion part.

### **5.1.5 Mangenna**

*Mangenna* is an important ceremony among the Limbus. It means an act of worship to raise one's head, a ritual ceremony for a person feeling dejected and suffering in hardship in order to encourage him. It is also done to protect oneself from accident, disputes, envy and jealousy

and to succeed in the desired attempts (Subba1998: 107). It is performed every six months at the beginning of the winter and summer month or at least once a year. The time of performing this ritual may vary from one place to another and from one Phedangmato another. *Mangenna* is done in various forms in different ceremonies like *Sappok Chomen*, at the time of marriage, etc. The Goddess *Tagera Ninwaphoo* is worship in this ritual.

Those Phedangma who performs this ritual should know the mythical accounts of the particular clan for whom this ceremony is conducted. Hence, it is difficult to perform this ritual by any Phedangma, one has to be well experienced to chant the *Mundhum* concerning this ritual. Most probably, the *Mundhum* is related to the nomadic life, based on hunting and food gathering economy, of early *Limbus* and it provides the glimpse of how they got a settled life through centuries. The *Mundhum* of *Mangenna* begins with the stories of creation, relationship of Gods and human beings and the development of human habitats (Subba1998:116-117).

The *Mangenna* is performed either by sacrificing animals and birds or by offering flowers and fruits. In both the practices, the ceremony of the ritual is similar, the only difference is that those who do not offer sacrifice, use flowers and fruits instead. To perform *Mangenna*, firstly, the floor is cleaned with water or smeared with mud, lamps with ghee or oil is lighted, the numbers of lamps are placed according to the number of persons for whom the *Mangenna* is to be performed. Almost all the informants claimed that they observed these rituals as it is an important part of any Limbu rituals and it was believed that if it was not conducted then the rituals would not be completed. Once again, this ritual can be performed with animal sacrifice or with flowers or fruits.

## CHAPTER SIX FEASTS AND FESTIVALS

### 6.1 Limbu and their Festivals

There are many Hindu rituals practices that Limbus have consciously or unconsciously incorporated into their own cultural practices. The process of adapting to the national identity among the Limbus religious practices have at some point led to acculturation, practices of other community becoming a part of ones own. Where it becomes to an extent ambiguous and difficult to differentiate whose ritual belongs to whom and such changes have been difficult to challenge or change. Mostly there have been found various rituals and practices of the Hindus ( in few cases even Buddhism like using Lamas for certain rituals such as rituals for the protection of household) from celebrating Dashain, Tihar or in other rituals from birth, Nauran (naming ceremony of the baby) marriage to death.

In the modern times there have been influence of western culture but such influences is not just limited to Limbu culture but can be seen in other communities too. But since the concern of my study is within the ethnic and National identities, I would focus solely on the relation between them.

#### 6.1.1 Dashain and Tihar

Firstly I would like to focus on *Dashain*. *Dashain* is the major festival of Hindus; it is celebrated with great variety rituals and ceremonies. The different forms of Goddess Durga are worshipped for nine consecutive days, the tenth day an auspicious day when *Tika* is received from the elders (*Tika* is a mark placed upon the forehead made of uncooked rice and red powder, the red colour is traditionally and religiously understood as a Hindu symbol). On this day the blessings is received in the form of *Tika*, money and flowers and in turn, the younger person touch the feet of the elder with in respect; it is followed by feasting. The Limbus has also adopted this act of receiving *Tika*.

At present many Limbus who had been observing *Dashain* have started to use the White *Tika* (the colour white is symbolically and culturally important to Limbu culture). In other words it seems that they have neither adopted Hinduism nor have they given up it completely. Most of the informants agreed that *Dashain* is not their festival but on the other hand they do not reject it completely, as Teyongshi (age39/M) expressed " we celebrate both *Dashain* as well as other Limbu festival like *ubholi udholi*...we use both white and red Tika we have been celebrating it for a long time...it is one of the festival of our country." Some also associate the celebration of *Dashain* with National festival more than that of religious importance. Birman (29/M) said, "We celebrate Dashain because it is our National festival...this is our National tradition." During Dashain there is usually 15 days government holiday (one month for government schools and colleges). The convenience of time also creates the environment for the people to

visit their native town or village.

Very few could actually define the significance of this celebration as Chinary (age 25/F) said "we pray to God to protect us from evil" sharing the same view an informant said "It's the victory of truth over evil. Moreover we (Limbus) don't have such festive celebration or time. We accept this celebration like our other festivals." Some believed that *Dashain* should be celebrated like any other Nepalese festivals as such celebration helps to bind the families and also the common people together. "In Limbu culture we don't have any festival with the convenience of time (holiday) when we can seek the blessing to meet our relatives. I think we should accept the Tika practice for good as it helps to bind us together, whether on this day you worship Goddess Durga or Yuma (Kirat female deity) that's one's personal thing", Sinam (36) shared his feeling of observing *Tika* with good feelings.

Out of the 40 households 13 households have been celebrating *Dashain* in the traditional Hindu rituals, by visiting temples and worshipping the different forms of Goddess Durga. They observe *Tika* with equal enthusiasm; the portrait of Goddess Durga is kept at home and worshipped with Hindu rituals. Makarhang (age 40/M) said "this is one of our festivals like other Limbu festivals. It's true that many of our relatives and other Limbus say it was imposed upon us by the Hindu but we really don't know about it. We celebrate it because we grew up watching our parents do it." Lainhangma (34/F) added, "Most of our relatives have stopped it (observing) but we continue it as we have been doing so since years"

*Tihar*, the festival of Lights, the Goddess of wealth Laxmi is worshipped for wealth and prosperity. The Limbus may observe this festival with or without worshipping of domestic animals like the cow, ox or dog. Interestingly fieldwork observation revealed that compared to *Dashain*, *Tihar* is widely celebrated by the Limbus. One of the reasons found was the celebration of *Bhai Tika* (which was followed by 33 Household). On this day the sisters both consanguineous and fictitious - wish their brothers success and long life by putting *Tika* on their forehead (a mark made out of seven colours in vertical shape) and garlanding them. The brothers in return touch their sister's feet and offer gifts and money.

Most of the informants could tell the importance of this ritual and how it is performed. Ubahang (33/F) said "we pray for protecting our Maiti (brothers) from Yamraj (messenger of Dead). This is also our custom and it helps us to strengthen the relation between brothers and sisters." The long public holiday also provides time and opportunity for the women to visit their natal home and celebrate it with their families. I would like to mention it here that there is also a similar kind of ritual among the Limbus called *Mangenna*, which means an act of worship to raise one's head, a ritual ceremony for a person feeling dejected and suffering in hardship in order to encourage him. One of its literal meanings is "sister" also, which denotes the celebration of sisters to commemorate their invaluable supports for the success and prosperity of their brothers. (Subba1998:107)

### 6.1.2 Practice of Celebrating Dashain and Tihar

After the peoples Movement in April 1990, Nepal was able to form a democratic Government. This new political structure provided a platform for free expression and public debates on various issues. Various ethnic organizations started promoting actively their cultural identity and a new level of political consciousness was seen leading to process of construction of identity more indigenous and distinct.

My research showed that most of the Limbus (informants) stopped celebrating *Dashain* for the past two to 20 years, most of them after 1990, a period of new democratic construction. When I questioned them why they stopped celebrating *Dashain*, most of the replies were more or less similar. Yodowahang (age 50/M) said "we use to observe it earlier like any other Nepalese but later we came to know through other Limbus that it was imposed upon us by the earlier Hindu rulers and this was not our religious practice. Everyone said we should stop it. So, we gradually stop it." There were also other informants who had stopped observing but could not give clear explanation as to why they did so. Mabohang (40/M) said "It has been two/four years we have stopped it because all others (Limbus) have done so. Why? I don't know exactly the reason. I was told it was not our festival."

Though most of them have stop celebrating *Dashain* but for many of them the transition has been slow and awkward as one of the informant, Lalshor (age 39/M) shared his experience "we had been celebrating it for a long time so when we stop it the first few years seem odd but now it's fine."

It seem that most of the Households had stopped following *Dashain* either because of their relatives, friends or at the call of other Limbus to give up such celebration. What is interesting is that there has never been a strong opposition or dislike against those who still continue such Hindu practices or observing it in a more indigenous manner. (I have written about it in the next topic) by other Limbus and also the fact that the senior members of the Household, though themselves did not observe any rituals related to *Dashain* but seem to be quiet easy concerning their young children as Mangbo (31/F) shared "since our young children sees other children wearing Tika and wants the same, we just put on them white Tika and give them money, it makes them happy...they will understand once they grow up."

Though they may not be celebrating this festival in ritualistic or in any other ways but have taken it as a part of the occasion induced due to convenience of time and the week long public holiday is used for relaxing and mostly visiting their native towns and villages. Out of the 40 Households, 23 of them have stopped celebrating *Dashain* but in case of *Tihar*, 33 Households still observe this festival. Earlier I have already discussed the reasons behind continuity of this festival compared to *Dashain*.

Those households that observed *Tihar* were found following both Hindus as well as Kirata rituals together, they freely used both the rituals during worship. Only four household had completely stopped celebrating *Tihar* as well as *BhaiTika*. While 10 household observe the

*Laxmi Puja* by observing Goddess Yuma, Hingshing (age 35/F) said, “We don’t worship any Goddess picture, we place kalash, gold, silver and remember Yuma...because this day we have to worship devi (female deity)” The informant who don’t celebrate *Tika* or *Bhaitika* had stopped it along with the *Dashain* celebration.

Some shared their experiences about the changes, Yalambar in his late fifties said, “I knew *Dashain* was not a Limbu festival but I had no idea about *Tihar* so when I was young I used to go with my friends to sing *Deusire* (carol)... Later when I was abroad in army service, I was under pressure to put *Tika* from my friends. We use to have a Nepali Pandit (priest) in our service. I never used him for any religious rituals. Later when I stopped all these practices my sisters from related kins question me why I don’t receive Bhai Tika anymore...during my service days I was compelled to follow all such rituals”.

### **6.1.3. Indigenous Manner of Dashain and Tihar**

Most of the informants had once celebrated *Dashain* like any other Limbus festival while at present they have virtually stopped observing *Dashain*, terming it as 'not a Kirat festival.' Only six households celebrated both *Dashain* and *Tihar* in their own Indigenous way while some Households celebrated either *Dashain* or *Tihar* with both Hindu and Limbus rituals together. There was difference between the ways the informant celebrated *Dashain* from Hindus. For them the important day was the tenth day of *Dashain* or *Vijayadashami* most of them did not follow the elaborate rituals followed widely by others that is, worshipping the different forms of Goddess Durga for nine consecutive days at home and by visiting temples.

The informants mostly kept the portraits of Goddess Durga and at the same time either prepare a different altar for Goddess Yuma (Limbu deity) or worshipped her at the same altar, as one women (Puma, age 29) explained how she worships, “we worship the picture of Goddess Durga and in a separate altar we worship Goddess Yuma...while praying to Goddess Durga I use the usual incense, lamp, flowers, fruits and red Tika...while for Goddess Yuma like other Limbus I also keep Kalash (metal pots filled with water) with white flowers in it, light lamps and use incense, fruits.” while some informants said that they worship both Goddess Durga and Yuma together. Those Limbus who observe *Tika*, on this day like Hindus receive blessing from their elders in the form of white *Tika*, money and flowers. In return the younger ones touch the feet of their elders in respect followed by feasting and gatherings. It seems the only difference was absence of the traditional red *Tika* and using the name of Limbu deity in the blessing uttered by the Limbus.

There had also been indirect pressure from relatives and other Limbus who have stopped such celebration. Thindang (33/M) explained "we have been putting Tika since we were in the village, our relatives and others do tell us that we should not celebrate it but they don't explain us which festivals should we follow" most of them agreed that it was a time for get together of families and friends more than of religious importance. The *Dashain* of the Kiratas may be

considered to be functionally and symbolically different from the Tagadharis for whom it is more a religious occasion whereas for the former it is primarily a get together of relatives or a social occasion (Subba 2001:108).

In two household I found that the husbands did not follow any of the festivals but their wives worshipped Goddess *Laxmi* on the day of *Laxmi puja*. “I don’t observe it at all for the last two/ three years especially after I took up Sattedhangma (a form of Kirat religion) but my wife does worship Goddess Laxmi I don’t mind, it’s her wish.” 55 years old Hondenhang explains. Though 33 households observed Tihar but most of them did not observe the festivals prior to the day of Laxmi puja- the *kag tihar*, *kukur tihar* or *goru tihar* (the festivals of the crow, dog and ox respectively) whereas six households observed it the usual Hindu way. During the *Dipawali/ Diwali*, the informants would clean and decorate their houses with flowers and lamps; some would also make the footprints of Goddess Laxmi with hands starting from their corridor to the altar where they worship. The footprints are the symbolic meaning of the belief that on this day Goddess *Laxmi* would enter the home through the footprints.

Some of the informants tried to justify the celebration of this festival. Few informants shared their view that the eulogies sung by young men and women on the night of *Diwali* mentions the name of king “*Bali*” who is believed to have been a Kirata. A line of the song mentions that the young men and women were sent by king Bali to their doorsteps to celebrate. Dhungyal (age 40/M) said “this day also belongs to Limbu it was started by king Bali hang. So, we also observe it.” Simring (35/F) added, “This celebration is related with king Bali it is believed that king Bali used to celebrate it...our ancestors also celebrated it. Hence we also follow it.” But except for the mention of king Bali name the eulogies contains nothing that could clearly describe it as being a Kirata festival.

Those household who observed Dipawali in Hindu or more indigenous way also celebrated *Bhaitika*, it falls on the fifth day of *Tihar*. On this day the sisters pray for their brother’s long life by putting *Tika* on their fore head and garlanding them, the brothers in return touch their sister’s feet and offer them gifts of money followed by feasting. Lalita (age 32/F) said “this is our custom, it is to protect our brothers from Yamraj (messenger of death) and wish them long life and prosperity.” While another informant said “we don’t follow the long rituals unlike Hindu. We observe it because we have been doing it for a long time.”

I would like to mention here that the rituals followed in *Bhaitika* was more similar to that of Hindus as compared to worshipping the female deity on the night of *Deepawali* (worshipping Goddess Laxmi and Yuma separately).

## **CHAPTER: SEVEN**

### **LIMBU THEIR OPINIONS**

#### **7.1 Debate of Emerging Arguments and Practices**

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 for the first time tried to recognize the social



diversity of the country by defining Nepal as multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual. But it failed in guaranteeing equality in terms of language, religion and representation in the policy making front. Various reasons can be found for the backwardness and suppression of ethnic groups in Nepal. Some experts have identified some of the reasons like Constitutional provisions, sectarian State policy, inadequate representation, denial of rights, lack of protection/promotion, lack of coordination among ethnics to name some of them. Definition of the ethnic group so far given has not been acceptable to all though in some way or the other such definition may be found in small or great degree among the ethnic groups in Nepal. This has been difficult for ethnic groups to identify themselves to non-ethnic groups, though 61 have been recognized by the government so far (Gurung et al 2004:8-25). With the turn of events in recent months, after the King gave up power in April 2006 and the signing of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoist, there can be seen an attempt on the part of the political parties to accommodate the forces of ethnicity into some political arrangement by balancing the various caste and ethnic groups as well as women in their party and representations. The various ethnic groups have been demanding for their right to equal proportional representations as well as right to self determination in their various claimed regions.

The restoration of democracy in April 2006 has prompted Nepal's plethora of ethnic, regional and linguistic groups to press for self-determination and autonomy- a federal structure demarcated along ethnic lines or by regions. Such ethnicity are time again reconstructed into more powerful symbols as it is the standards by which one can be distinct and hence all cultural patterns are transformed into symbols as cultural symbols are more clear and understandable to more people. Such symbols should be easily expressed and felt without requiring undue interference in other aspects of life. This will ensure more longevity of the culture. The meanings of such cultural medium are reinterpreted with times to construct powerful symbols of distinction and differences with other caste and ethnic groups. Cultural symbols have been associated with various power arrangements especially social and political. It can induce the social actors to challenge them once there is change in power. Here, the cultural symbols become a strong form of distinction for any cultural groups who seek to maintain their unique identity. The various indigenous and tribal communities are trying to reviving their cultural importance or in other words their own revival whether it is by forming local groups to national organizations like NEFIN at the same time by bringing out their cultural differences in more symbolic ways. Such groups may be the Janajatis, Kirat or to narrow further - the Limbu communities. In my research, the Limbus called themselves Nepalese but at the same time they were proud to be a Limbu. I found there was always an attempt to balance both these important aspects together. Within the community the sense of mutual feelings for one another could be easily seen. Everyone shared the need to appreciate and respect one's ancestral customs and rituals without much influence from outside culture

but such influences could be felt if not in words but in day to day life.

In my research, most of the informants were ex-British (10) or Singapore Army (2) men. They could speak Limbu language and preferred to speak it with their wives (Most of whom could speak Limbu) and within their community. But their children mostly spoke in Nepali (English too). There were cases where they could understand little or most of the Limbu language but could not speak. The obvious reason was that the children according to their parents did not showed interest and consciously or unconsciously just use the Nepali language. Many of them said that their religion was Kirat even those who still observed the *Dashain* as a traditional festival.

Even though most of the informant observed almost every rituals or festivals they knew about, they mostly followed it because it had been traditionally done and followed by their ancestors. Most of them did not know the real reason why they are observed but seen to be a strong urge to preserve their culture and be a part of the community with whom their identity is related. They try to maintain as much as possible, a close contact with anything that is a Limbu practice showing keen interest in such practices even though they may not have the required idea about how a certain ritual, festivals is observed they try their best to make the ritual feel complete. They may not know the reasons behind such observation but they do believe in their significance and feel obliged to observe them as their ancestors did.

Most of the informant said that they started to write or call themselves as Kirati only after they gradually realized that most of the festivals or rituals which they had been observing did not belong to their culture but that of Hindu. The Mass Movement of 2046 created an environment where by there were open debates and discussions on almost all the issues which were forbidden before. With the promulgation of the Constitution of 2047 the right to freedom of expression was guaranteed. It provided a fertile ground for the emergence of various indigenous organizations who actively worked for preservation and promotion of the culture and tradition. It is not that such indigenous issues were not raised before.

## **7.2 Festivals**

Most of the informants agreed that the Nepali New Year (1<sup>st</sup> of Baishak ) was not a Limbu festival . They celebrated it for fun and refreshment. It is a national festival and a day of public holiday. Hence, most of them enjoy the day with gatherings of family or friends or by just passing the day.

The other important festival of Limbu is the *Ubholi* and *Udholi (Chasok)*. It is the festival of offering new ripe food grains and other agriculture products – fruits and vegetables to the Goddess Yuma. Chasum (25/F) explains that "It is our festival our ancestors use to observe this festival. If this is not observed it is believed that some bad omen will strike." In the capital (Kathmandu) it is usually observed as a festival, people gather in the Hattiban temple

in Lalitpur and offer their prayers (In Hattiban animal sacrifice is not allowed the prayers are done by offering flower, fruits. In all the rituals of Limbu the *diyo* (lamp) and *kalash* (metal pots) is an important part of any rituals.) According to some, this festival is observed so that there would be good harvest in the coming years as this year. In the village animals are sacrificed to worship Goddess Yuma and the natural divinities. It is also observed at home, ancestral deity is worshipped to ward off sickness, famine. Those who don't sacrifice animals use other things like flowers, fruits, and flour.

The women who follow the *Sattehangma* (a form of Kirat religion, which forbids animal sacrifice) said that they use round dumpling made of flour in place of egg, apple or coconut in place of pig, goat or buffalo and for chicken small beetle nuts are used. 40 years old Minma (F) also said that prior to 2046 B.S animal sacrifice use to take place in Hattiban but after 2046 B.S a realization came that in reality the Mudhum has not mention about animal sacrifice and so in Hattiban animal sacrifice stopped.

*Dashain* and *Tihar* are other important festivals in Nepal among the Hindus. It is widely celebrated all over Nepal. The *Dashain* festival marks the victory of truth over evil and for nine consecutive days the different form of Goddess Durga is worshipped. On the tenth day of *Dashain*, *Tika* begins which is an important part of *Dashain* festival receiving *Tika* (mark placed upon the forehead made of uncooked rice and red powder) and blessing from the elders. Like any other Hindu many Limbus observe this day mostly using white *Tika* and they may avoid the elaborate Hindu rituals. At the same time many Limbus have stopped this celebration.

When inquired why they have stopped the celebration most of them gave same explanation that "it is not our cultural festival but was imposed upon us by the rulers". More than festive celebration, it was an imposition of one culture upon the other. There were even common myths circulating the celebration like the one that the *Dashain* was celebrated as a victory after the Kirat king (?) was defeated by the Aryan King(?). When inquired in detail about such myths no one really seemed to know how or when they came in to existence. But the continuous existences of such myths have in a way defined and shape the feeling of "we" and "they" among the Limbus.

Though many of the Limbus have started to stop celebrating *Dashain* but for many of them the tradition have been slow and awkward as many of the informant shared their experiences. Some of them have been wearing red *Tika* but most of them use the white *Tika* instead of the traditional red, though they don't follow the elaborate rituals of worshipping Goddess Durga for nine days visiting temples or fasting but they do keep the portraits of Durga and worship her. At the same time they also make a different altar (or in a separate place) and worship *Yuma*. Most of them agreed that this was not Limbu festival but since they have been following it for a long time it seem a bit awkward to stop it completely. "The hangover is still there and it's hard to just stop it suddenly" Mabohang in his late 30's explained. The parents

may themselves not wear *Tika* but they do put *Tika* to their children since they show interest and insist on it. The parents believe that once the children grow up they will come to understand about the situation but it is also upto their children if they wish to continue it.

Most of them conceive the celebration of *Dashain* as a national festival and a time to wear *Tika* and seek blessing. Since it is also a week long public holiday, the convenience of time creates the environment for the people to visit their native town or villages. This adds more importance to this festival. Very few could actually define the significance of this celebration though some believe that *Dashain* should be celebrated like any other festivals of Nepalese as such celebration helps to bind the families and common people together. Whether on this day you worship Goddess Durga or Goddess *Yuma*, that is one's personal choice. But it is interesting to note here that there maybe differences in perceptions about observing such festivals. The Limbus still try to maintain their culture as distinct from others whether directly by completely giving up others cultural celebration or indirectly, observing such celebration in their more indigenous manners.

*Tihar*, the other important national festival, a festival of lights, the Hindu Goddess of wealth Laxmi is worshipped for wealth and prosperity. Interestingly, compared to *Dashain* this festival is widely celebrated by the Limbus. One of the reasons could be the celebration of *Bhai Tika* (the sister place *Tika* on their brother's forehead praying for his success and long life). It is also a public holiday so it provides time and opportunity for women to visit their natal home and also helps to bind the relationship between brothers and sisters. I would like to mention here again, that there is a similar kind of ritual among the Limbus- *Mangenna* which means an act of worship to raise one's head, a ritual ceremony for a person feeling dejected and suffering in hardship in order to encourage him. One of its literal meaning is "sister" also, which denotes the celebration of sisters to commemorate their invaluable supports to the success and prosperity of their brother . It is usually done every six months or if not possible at least once in a year but in the modern times it is done according to the time and convenience. The *Bhai Tika* is observed as it has been continued for a long time.

On the third day of *Tihar*, the Goddess of wealth Laxmi is worshipped, the Limbus too worship her with her portrait or they may also worship Goddess *Yuma* with simple rituals like use of mostly white flowers and fruits. They also place money and gold on the altar and worship them. Some of the Limbus have tried to reason this celebration by the Limbu, they explained that the carol (traditional song of *Tihar*) sung by young girls on the night of Laxmi Puja, mentions the name of the king "Bali" who was a Kirat king .A stanza of the carol mentions that the young maiden were sent by king Bali to their doorsteps to celebrate.

### **7.3 Culture**

Similarly except for *Sappok Chomen* (worship), the rituals thereafter like *Nauran* (naming ceremony) seemed to be influenced by the Hindu practices. Though the *Nauran* ceremonies

were conducted in Limbu Rituals while making horoscope, the Hindu priest were generally assigned. The research showed that using either a Limbu Priest or Hindu Priest depended entirely on individual preferences or also because the Limbu Priest were not available at times. In the households where they used both the Limbu and Hindu Priest turn wise according to preferences or easy availability, they never forget to mention that they tried as far as possible to search for a real Phedangma and at the same time, it is “ok” to use a Hindu Priest. There seems to be a contradiction in their statements or in other words an attempt to strike a balance between who they actually are and those different cultural traits that they have adopted over the times. As compared to other ceremony it's the marriage ceremony where many changes can be witnessed. Limbu marriages have undergone lots of changes but at the same time there are still marriages performed in traditional ways even though they are fewer in numbers. Even in the earlier times the marriages were not conducted in elaborate ceremonies in the cases of elopement. Besides this, expenses were also another reason for not having a traditional marriage which often incurs lots of expenses. In my research the younger informants prefer to have simple marriage but at the same time they want to include those important rituals in a traditional marriage without much hassle or expenses. The reason one would prefer to go to temple (usually a Hindu Temple) and get married is not only because they are influenced by the Hindu but also because it seem to be much easier as compared to the elaborate rituals of Limbu. Along with the time modifications in the rituals can be seen which are not clearly a Limbu customs such as having engagement and exchanging rings, garlands or completing the rituals like *Laagan* within a few hours (it usually takes the whole night ending at early next morning).

The death ceremony in most cases is done in traditional way as compared to other ceremonies like marriage which is much influenced by other factors. The Limbu usually bury their deceased; it is only in the case of unnatural death like suicide that the deceased is cremated or unless the deceased had made wish to be cremated. But surprisingly I found two household who actually cremated their deceased because in their villages there were not enough lands to bury. But at present many Limbus have also started to cremate their deceased as there are no lands to bury. At the time of my field research, one of my key informant told me that they were trying to arrange lands for burial (for one particular clan) by contribution from Limbus belonging to that particular clan. The scarcity of the land seems to have forced Limbus to bring changes in their tradition.

These various changes whether its because of the pressure of modernity or influence from Hinduism, it will always remain a challenge on the part of this community to maintain their cultural identity on one hand and that of integration with the other groups whether it is the Kirat- who are more similar in terms of culture and religions or to the Janajatis who still are a part of their representation with certain similarities and historical background as compared to the higher caste Hindus but above all maintaining and balancing the national identity without

compromising their own ethnic identity will be challenging.

## **CHAPTER: EIGHT**

### **FINDING, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 Findings**

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 for the first time tried to recognize the social diversity of the country by defining Nepal as multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual. But it failed in guaranteeing equality in terms of language, religion and representation in the policy making front.

The restoration of democracy in April 2006 has prompted Nepal's plethora of ethnic, regional and linguistic groups to press for self-determination and autonomy- a federal structure demarcated along ethnic lines or by regions. Such ethnicity are time again reconstructed into

more powerful symbols as it is the standards by which one can be distinct and hence all cultural patterns are transformed into symbols as cultural symbols are more clear and understandable to more people. Such symbols should be easily expressed and felt without requiring undue interference in other aspects of life. This will ensure more longevity of the culture. The meanings of such cultural medium are reinterpreted with times to construct powerful symbols of distinction and differences with other caste and ethnic groups. Cultural symbols have been associated with various power arrangements especially social and political. It can induce the social actors to challenge them once there is change in power. Here, the cultural symbols become a strong form of distinction for any cultural groups who seek to maintain their unique identity. The various indigenous and tribal communities are trying to reviving their cultural importance.

The Limbu community has always maintained a strong sense of their cultural identity through various rituals and festivals. Along with the wake of ethnic movement, the Limbus today struggle to negotiate their cultural preservation with the reality of modern Nepali State. The contemporary Limbu are both rediscovering and reinventing what is meant to be a Limbu. “Such ‘invented tradition’ are set of practices, normally governed by overtly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition and which automatically implies continuity with the Past. The Limbus identity has encountered considerable changes over history very often in contact of the Hindus and other ethnic groups. Such encounters have proved to be both forceful as well as peaceful in co-habitation. Nevertheless, the Limbus have like any other ethnic groups have try to balance and adapt to the different aspects of identities.

## **8.2 Summary**

The Limbus has indeed tried hard to strengthen their identity whether it was during the times of revolt against the historical assimilations during the times of King Pritvi Narayan Shah or during the *Panchayati* era. Later with the establishment of multi party democratic system and constitutional guarantee of fundamental freedoms, the Limbu community along with the various other indigenous communities participated actively in reinventing, promoting and protecting their language, culture and history.

The Limbu identity was and continues to be constructed by the Limbus themselves. At times they have reacted to various situations politically and socially and have responded and adjusted to such changes but nevertheless, they still possessed primary control over their identity formation.

## **8.3 Conclusion**

The Limbus like any other Janajati or groups in Nepal frequently refer to the conception of ‘we’ and ‘they’; generally ‘we’ includes the group which share the same sense of commonly

held belief, traditions, rituals, attitudes and sometimes 'they' are those who remain outside their accepted groups. The 'we' may also include the other communities together known as the 'Kirat' and largely the other Janajati. Everyone seeks legitimation in one way or the other. Such legitimation occurs not only within the Limbu or Kirat but at different levels, distinguishing not only the Janajati from others but also defining who is within their certain group sphere.

By defining themselves as one of the indigenous people or Janajati, they seek to establish themselves as more aboriginal than any other ethnic.. Frequently used term is 'Limbuwan.' and most Limbus today has a general conception of Limbuwan. They lay claim to ancestral land as a means of legitimation of their collective Anderson's conception of 'imagined communities' is an embody of assumptions, attributes and localities that is the people conceive of the community, the various attributes that form it beliefs, places of origin and then embody it into their identity. Anderson's assumption clearly applies to all Janajatis.

The Limbus attempt to negotiate the spheres of their identity with the national identity at the same time they try to maintain their distinct identity. In this way, the development of the Nepali National identity appears as an innate contradiction of the very strength the Limbu create within their collective, perhaps, invoking a sense of alienation for the Limbus. The reorganization and emphasis of the Nepali State for commonalities of the Nepali People in Nationalism may threaten the very distinct identity of the Limbus which may itself dissolve in the whole. They struggle with their relationship with the State and chose to participate and attempt to integrate the national community into their configuration of identity. The Limbus do indeed attempt to participate and involve as the National communities but not to the extent as far as the level of legitimation of their own identity.

As the Limbus continually attempt to assert their identity and defend their strength as a smaller community, the Limbus have tried to balance their various identities whether it was Limbu or Kirat or Janajati or a Nepali, which largely revolves around the self, community or the others, it is often a matter of great interest how a Limbu would prioritize such different identities but it is clear that components of identity may not be placed into a hierarchy due to the very nature of identity itself which is a ongoing process of unity. Such identities may at times mould together into another entity. Over the years the Limbus have experienced much change in their geographical settings, political, socio-cultural context as well as in their rituals and economic subsistence. The Limbu identity was and continues to be constructed by the Limbus themselves. At times they have reacted to various situations politically and socially and have responded and adjusted to such changes but nevertheless, they still possessed primary control over their identity formation. During the ceremonies and festivals, various rituals are performed and the rituals themselves are the community. They are all participating, seeing and believing and creating their emerging identities.

The Limbus also tried to balance the issue of national identity. If the Nepali State, nation and



identity revolve around the Hindu value system, history and ritual life in order to participate simply within the economic framework, the Limbu must compromise some of their ancestral convictions. Such compromises are result of either forced integration through the nationalization of Hindu culture as the one identity and the second could be also voluntary involvement by the Limbus in the nation but the level of compromise are difficult to differentiate clearly.

Another issue of negotiation involves the individual and the community. Individualism accompanies nationalism, in that "society is a constituted of autonomous equal units and equally, the individual is a constituent unit of society" within such a nation-state, each person is a citizens hence, the importance of the individual's conception of individual identification with the nation. The Limbus on the other hand identify with the state of Janajati or Kirat.

Much of the changes adopted in the policies of the government since 1990 was resulted by the demands and revolt of the citizen such as the policies of common representation. The Constitution of kingdom of Nepal 1990 guaranteed fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, expression, right to form organization for promotion of one's culture and religion etc. It provided the opportunity to individuals to emerge as an citizen rather than subjects.

## REFERENCES

- Adhikari, Ganesh P. 2003. **Social Research for Thesis Writers**. Investigation Nepal, Subidhanagar. Kathmandu
- Anthropology Tutorial.**Cultural Anthropology Topics**. Ethnicity and Race. Glossary of Terms.
- Bhattachan, Krishna B. "Ethnopolitics and Ethnodevelopment"; An Emerging Paradigm in Nepal, In Dhruba Kumar, Ed. **State, Leadership and Politics in Nepal**, Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies.
- Bista, Dor Bahadur. 1999. **Fatalism and Development**. Calcutta: Orient Longman

Limited.

Caplan, Lionel 1970 **Land and social change in East Nepal:** A study of Hindu-Tribal Relation (second edition) published by Himal Books, Nepal.

Chettri, Ram B, Om P. Gurung (Ed), 1999. **Anthropology and Sociology of Nepal-Cultures, Societies, Ecology and Development.**

SASON, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Chhetri, Ram B and Om P Gurung (Ed) 1999, "*Ethnic Identity and Politics of Ethno-Museum in Nepal*" **In Anthropology and Sociology of Nepal-cultures, Societies, Ecology and Development.** SASON, Nepal.

Chemjong, Iman Singh, 2003. **History and Culture of Kirat People.** Kirat Yakthung Chumlung. Central Office, Lalitpur. Nepal.

Chumlung Bulletin, Volume 2, Issue 3 Oct. 2003. "*Kipat Revisted- Limbu Land Rights*" and "*Pluralism in Nepal*". 2003: 1-11.

Chumlung Bulletin, Issu 4, "*A brief insight- Kirat, Limbu and Nepal.*" Oct. 2004: 13-14.

Chumlung Bulletin, Vol.1, Issue 1 "*Constitution Amendment: does it incorporate the spirit of Janajati?*" April 2002: 6-7

.Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups 2006

Commentary on Preliminary Working Paper on Indigenous People and their relationship to Land. By Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, Kathmandu. Nepal.

Dahal, Dilli R. **Interface of Cultural Identity Development.** Cultural Pluralism and National Cultural Identity- The case of Nepal. <[http:// ignca.nic.in](http://ignca.nic.in)>

Eriksen, Thomas H (1993) '*Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation*', **Ethnicity and Nationalism** (3-7) London: Pluto Press.

Foster, R (1991) "*Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene*", Annual Review of Anthropology, 20, pp. 235- 260.

- Geertz, Clifford 1973. **The Interpretation of Cultures**. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers. New York.
- Geller, David N et al 1996. **Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World's only Hindu State**: The politics of culture in contemporary Nepal. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publisher.
- Gunaratne, A. 2002 **Many Tongue One People**. Oxford.
- Gurung, Harka et al, 2006 **Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups**. NFDIN
- Gurung, Harka. Sundar, Malla K. Bhattachan, Krishna B. and Gurung, O. 2004. **Development of Nationalities**: A Strategy Paper. Nationalities Development and Coordination Center (NDCC) Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Gurung, Savitree Thapa, August 2 2006, "**The Marginalized Population**". South Asia Media Net. A News and Views Website of South Asian Free Media Association- SAFMA
- Hutchinson. John and Smith, Anthony D. 1996 (Ed) **Ethnicity** Oxford. New York. Oxford University Press 1996.
- Kievelitz Uwe (1996), '*Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Nepali Context*' (1- 16) **Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology**. Central Dept of Sociology and Anthropology. Tribhuvan University.
- Lawati, Mahendra 2005. **Towards a Democratic Nepal**. Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd..
- Banton, M. (1967). **Race Relations**. Tavistock Publication.
- Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) Organizational Pamphlet. Reg. No.769 SWC Reg. No.13679
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1977. **Sherpas through their Rituals** Cambridge Studies. Cambridge University Press.

Pamphlet of Nepal (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities)

Population Census 2001. "**Caste/ Ethnicity Group for VDC/ Municipality by District.**

**National Planning Commission Secretariat.**" Central Bureau of Statistics.

Nov. 2002

Poudel, Keshav March 2 2007, "**Question of Identity**" Nepalnew.com/Spotlight

Pun, J.B. October 28 2006. "**Race for Identity**" South Asia Media Net. A News and

Views Website of South Asian Free Media Association- SAFMA

van den Berghe, P. (1983) '*Class, race and Ethnicity in Africa*', Ethnic and Racial

Studies, 6:2 (221-36)

Regmi, Mahesh C. Regmi 1963. "**Forms of Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal**".

Sharma, P.R. 2004. **The State and Society in Nepal**: Historical Foundations and

Contemporary trends Himal Books Publication.

Subba, T B. 1999. **Politics of Culture: A study of Three Kirata Communities** in the

**Eastern Himalaya.**Published by Orient Longman Limited, Chennai, India

Subba. Chaitanya. 1998. **Culture and Religion of the Limbus. Kathmandu:** KB.

Subba..

Subba, J. R. 2004. Mahatma Sirijunga Singthebe; The Great Social Awakener..

The Constitution of the Nepal, 1990.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007.

Tierney, Meghan Elizabeth Watkins.2002 Reconstructing the Janajati: **Limbu Religious**

**Life in Nepal's** Hindu Kingdom An unpublished Honors Paper Submitted to the Department of Religion Bowdoin College

Tilouine, Marie Lecomte-and Dollfus. Pascale. (Ed) 2002. **Ethnic Revival and**

**Religious Turmoil:Identities and Representations** in the Himalayas. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India.

ANNRX-1

Questionnaire for key informants

1 age:

2 marital status:

Married.....Unmarried..... Divorced  
Separated.....

3 Education:

Primary..... Lower secondary..... Secondary  
Higher Secondary..... Illiterate..... Intermediate.....  
Bachelor ..... Master..... Master above ..... Illiterate.....

4 Language:

Limbu..... Nepali..... Both.....

5 Occupation:

Agriculture..... Employment..... Others

6 Household Size.....

Male.....Female

- 7 Caste..... Religion.....
- 8 Do you about migration?  
Yes..... No.....
- 9 How do you feel about migration?  
Easy..... Uneasy..... Difficult.....
- 10 Do you know about from which generation are you migrate?  
1 generation..... 2/3generation..... Others.....
- 11 Do you know about your origin?  
Yes..... No .....
- 12 Do you know what is identity?  
Yes..... No.....
- 13 Do you know about ancestral?  
Yes ..... No.....

## **Annex-2**

### **Guideline for Interview with Key Informants**

1. What do you know about your origin?
2. What do you know about culture?
3. Which language is use in your house?
4. Does other caste also use limbu language?
5. What is the outside people perception about Limbu language?
6. What do you know about migration?
7. Why the migration effect on Limbu culture,language?
8. What is the identity of limbu?
9. Why the limbu need Identity?

10. What do you know about Limbu?
11. What do you know about education?
12. How does Education help to preserve identity?
13. Could you please favor me by giving the following?

About education: .....

Marital status: .....

About the language: .....

About your age: .....

**DEFINING ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE LIMBUS**

**– Laxmi Sambhangphe 2009**

**DEFINING ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE LIMBUS**

**– Laxmi Sambhangphe 2009**