

Constructing Social Identity: The Limbu Tribe in Darjeeling Hills since Independence

Abstract

The Limbus are considered as one of the indigenous inhabitants of the region of Darjeeling and Sikkim. The Limbu and Lepcha people were known as tribal but after the colonial period, unfortunately, Limbu tribal people were not inserted in the scheduled tribe list of the Indian constitution. Finally, on 8th January 2003, and Limbu tribe was included in the Scheduled Tribe list of the Indian constitution. The original homeland of Limbu is 'Limbuwan', which consists of Eastern Nepal and Western Sikkim including Darjeeling. The Limbus people are descendants of Mongolian so their physical features are very similar to the Mongolian race. The Limbu tribe has its own traditional dress and ornaments. Limbu tribe has its own language and script belonging to the Tibeto Burman Group. We found that 38.8% of respondents can speak the Limbu language and 53.6% of Limbus said that they neither understand nor speak Limbu language. 7.6% of respondents are there who can understand the Limbu language but cannot reply. Limbus have their own religion known as "Yuma Samyo" or "Yumaism". Limbus have their own temple, called 'Mangheem' where they worshipped the 'Tagera Nuwangfuma' (Yuma). 95.2% of Limbus followed their own religion and 4.8% of Limbus did not follow Yumaism. The religious priest of the Limbu tribal people is known as 'Phedangba'. In Limbu tribes both the bride and groom make decisions concerning their marriage. A Limbu tribe may marry any girl or boy, he or she likes, provided she or he does not actually belong to his or her own clan (Thar). Economically Limbu people of Darjeeling are mainly dependent on Agriculture and Tea Garden, besides that many Limbu have been recruited in the Indian

Army, Government jobs, and private jobs. In their indigenous health care system, they followed two types of treatment i.e., treatment by religious priest and treatment by Paharay Dabai (indigenous herbal treatment) The Limbus of Darjeeling are not so active in politics only 7% of Limbus are active members in the ethnic movement but 73.4% of Limbus are passive party members. Silam Sakma is an identity symbol of the Limbu community. Limbu people have their own flag. Thus, Limbu culture, language, tradition, and society are the cluster of multi-ethnic, multi-religion, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural heritage of Darjeeling hills.

Key words: Identity, Limbu, Yumaism, Ethnomedicinal, Marginalisation