

# The Paradigms of Indigenous life fold in Sikkim after Post-Independence

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## Abstract

Using the case of the Bhutias, the Lepchas, the Limboos and the Nepalese who are defined as tribes in contemporary Sikkim, this article discusses about being indigenous. The cultural politics transforming a group into a tribe and a 'Scheduled Tribe' reflects its political strength and power to influence the regime of representation in order to appropriate preferential entitlements and resources.

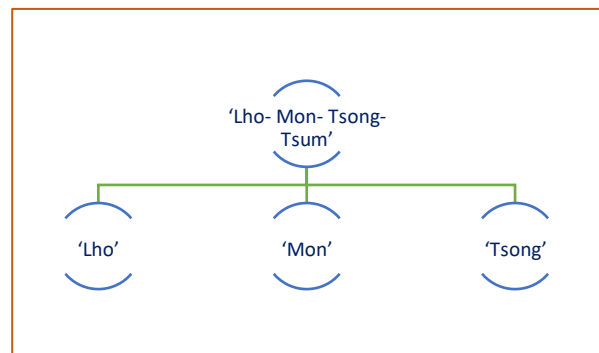
**Keywords:** Bhutia, Indigenous, Lepchas, Limboos, Nepalese, Sikkim, etc.

## INTRODUCTION

B Sikkim is a state in North-Eastern India; it borders Tibet in (china) in the North, Bhutan in the East, Nepal in the West, West Bengal (India) in the South and a part of the Himalayas too. It is a second smallest state among all states of India. On the other hand, it is also notable for its vast biodiversity including Alpine meadows and varieties of wildflowers and sub- tropical climate. It is also notable that Sikkim also have a dramatic landscape which includes has a highest peak in India and 3rd highest on earth known as Kanchenjunga (8,586m) and glacier etc. Sikkim also has an oldest Buddhist Monastery Pemayantse which date back to 1700s.

Sikkim is a home of majorities ethnic like Nepali (Gorkhali) who inhabited the state from 19th century, Bhutias who migrated from the Kham district of Tibet in the 14th century, and the Lepcha, who are believed to pre-date the Bhutias and are the oldest known inhabitants, Limboo (Subba), Chettri, Gurung, Thakuri, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Newar, Kirat, Kami, Sarki, Sunuwar, Damai, Hyolmo, Shrestha, and

Sherpa. Sikkimese is the people who inhabit the state of Sikkim. The Ethnic diversity of the state is represented by 'Lho- Mon- Tsong-Tsum' which identifies the three races since 17th century.



Lho refers to Bhutia also known as Lhapo because they migrated from Southern Tibet.



Mon refers to Lepchas who are also known as Rong, the origin of the Lepcha is still unknown ,it is believed that they might have migrated from Tibet or Myanmar but the Lepcha people themselves firmly believe that they did not migrate to the current location from

anywhere and are indigenous to the region and lived in lower Eastern Himalayas.

☐ Tsong refers to the Limboo who migrated from Himalayan region of Eastern Nepal and Western Bhutan.

The following paragraph will describe about each Indigenous:

**Indigenous:** Indigenous people are also known as the 1st people, they are the original settlers of a particular region and for a very long time maintained and followed their old traditions, culture associated with a particular region in contrast to group that have settled, occupied and colonized the area more recently. The Indigenous people of Sikkim include the Bhutia, Lepchas, Limboo and, Nepalese Bhutia:

Since 8th century Bhutia people migrated from Tibet to Sikkim in a small number but during the 13th Century many clan came along. The Bhutias immigrated to Sikkim claimed descent from common ancestors; a Khampa Prince of chief named Khye-bum-sar and was divided into 14 main families and thereafter series of lama

Bhutia speaks Sikkimese language which is also referred to as Dranjongke written in Tibetan scripts. On the whole, Bhutia follows Nyingma School which is followed by Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. Bhutias practice local form of Buddhism, in corporation of Bon religion and the main festivals are Losar and loosong. Monasteries of Bhutias are spot in various places of India but the most notable are Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim and the Bhutia Busty which is also known as Karma Dorjee Chyoling Monastery in Darjeeling (Oldest Monastery).

The Bhutia in Sikkim are employed in Government sector, in agriculture and mostly in business arena.

On the other hand, Bhutias have very rich traditional dances, songs, as well as folktales and the most popular among all are the Denzang-Neh- Na, Ta-Shi-Yang-ku, Tashi Shabdo, Guru-Chenlap, Singhi Chham and Yak Chham and musical instrument are flute, drum, yangjei and yarka are used.

Both Men and Women wear Bakhus in which only women along with the bakhus wear hongu(



Figure: 1.1 Bhutia Couples in traditional attire.

Bhutias on the other hand practices follow a very hierarchical system of bride and intermarriage within their own clan and also groom selection. Clan discrimination is also started visiting South wards

blouse) and tie a woolen cloth around their waist called pangden if they are married, khada( scarf) are wore only on special occasion but it has

become a common features in Sikkimese society and culture even among the Nepali of Sikkim.

widespread, and marriage outside the community is looked down upon. Bhutias practice polyandry and sharing wives among male siblings was practiced before the 19th century. Late marriages and divorce are not practice among the Bhutias.

Traditionally, the Bhutia eat rice with animal's fat- fried vegetables and meat which includes pork and beef, the well-known foods are momo, noodles in broth and thukpa. Chaang (Local beer) is the favorite drink among the Bhutias and it is made up of fermented barley or millet, and it is served in a bamboo container called the tongba. Tea with milk and sugar, and butter tea, are also served on religious or social occasions.

Lastly, within the domain of India, the Bhutias are recognized as Scheduled Tribe in the state of Sikkim, Tripura and West Bengal.

Lepchas:

The Lepchas is believed to be the earliest ethnic group and the original inhabitants of Sikkim, historically, the people themselves have no traditional records of past migration but place the home of their ancestors near Mount Kanchenjunga, since there is no record of their migration it is believed that they may have originated in Myanmar, Tibet or Mongolia but the Lepcha people themselves firmly believe that they did not migrate to the current location from anywhere and are indigenous to the region.

Lepchas which are also known as Vanishing Tribe have their own language and they also speak in their own language which is known as Lepcha belonging to the Bodish-Himalayish group of Tibeto Burman language which is written in their own script called Rong derived from Tibetan Script. Lepchas started following Buddhism from 18th Century but many people follows Animism and Shamanistic religion which is also called Mun in their language is also is practice by Lepchas, but as time passes many Lepchas are converted into Christianity. Tendong Lho Rum Faat is one of the oldest and main festivals of Lepchas which is even celebrate till today.

Lepchas are mostly engaged in agricultural sector, they grow oranges, cardamom, rice and etc. They are also known for their weaving and basketry skills.

They have also very rich traditional dances, songs, as well as folktales. The popular folkdances are Zo-Mal-Lok, Chu- Faat, Tendong Lo Rum Faat and Kinchum- Chu-Bomsa and the musical instruments are Sanga (Drum), Yangjey (string instrument), Cymbal, Markha, Flute and Tungbuk and famous one is four- string lute which is played with a bow.

Both men wear knee- length drawers and undershirt, the coarse home woven outer garment is fastened at the shoulder by a brooch and is belted at the waist by a sash., hat (thaktop), is wore by men is loaf- shaped and made of leaves attached to a bamboo frame and decorated with feather, men carries a long knife slung from the belt in a bamboo scabbard. Women have different dresses and ornaments like silver hoops or earrings, gold, silver, and semi-precious stones necklaces are also worn by them.

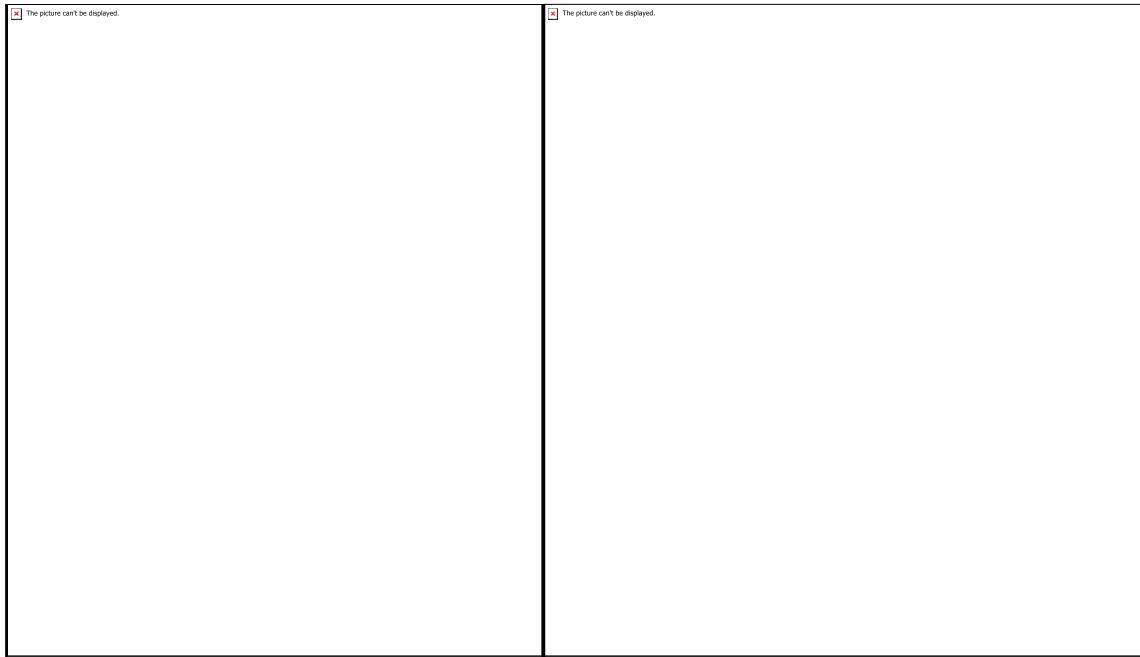


Figure: 1.2 *Lepcha couple in traditional attire*

On the other hand, marriage within the same clan is permitted, divorce and separation is very rare, and widow remarriage is also allowed.

Traditionally Rice is the staple food of Lepchas including maize, wheat and buckwheat, fruits and vegetables are also used, Khuzom is the traditional bread which is made of buck wheat, millets and wheat flour. Chi or Chaang (Local beer) is made up of fermented Millets. Chi has a religious significance and it is offers to God during religious ceremony.

#### Limboos:

The Limboos/ Tsong are refers to indigenous people of hills and mountain region of Nepal, Southern Tibet and Bhutan, it is believed that the Limboo tribe are said to have migrated from the district of Tsang/ Tsong in Tibet under the leadership of their Guru Matog Lama to Sikkim. It is believed that Limboo have settled much before the consolidation as a kingdom by Chogyals Dynasty.

Limboos speaks Sino-Tibetan language of Central Himalayas and follows Buddhism, Shamanist and Bon- aspects. Limboos on the other hand, follows the social rules and regulation of Mundhum oral scripture and a religious book, Tagera Ningwaphuma is the supreme God of Limboos as they believed that Tagera Ningwaphuma is the forceful power and the creator of life on earth, they have their own

clergy known as Phedangma, but as time passes, they follow kirat religion also, the main festivals is Chasok Tangnam but slowly and gradually they are converting into Christianity as well as Hinduism but their main religion is Mundhum .

Limboos are mostly engaged in both agricultural and silk farming, whereas rice and maize are the `principal crops among all, women are mostly engaged in weaving Dhaka fabrication.

Limboos people have a variety of folk songs and they are Khyali, traditional love songs such as Sakpa Palam, Kemba Palam and Domke Akma Palam, Hakpare Samlo, Nisammang and agricultural dances such as Yea Kakma and lastly war dance known as Nahangma and musical instruments are Chyabrunge, yalambar baja, Chethya/Yethala, Mephrama, Miklakom, Niyari Hongsing Ke, Negra, Phakwa (The Phamuk is a melody instrument of Limbus which includes three bamboo pipes each about 4 cm thick are attached together side by side), Phenjekom, Puttungey, Simikla, Taa is made of brass, and it is mostly played by unmarried

Men wore Paga (headwear that is pointed and ties at the back with long strips), Ningkheng (muffler), Phaoee (waist belt), Sandokpa (upper body dress), Sungrehba (coat), Lapetta and pagappa (upper body dress), and Hangchang (upper body dress for royal family). Hangpen (lower body dress for royal family). Whereas

women wear Mekhli (long dress worn with a horizontal strip of cloth with collars crossing over or in a V-neck style), Chunglokek/sunghamba (blouse.)Chaubandhi

Limboos generally marry within their own community and they are not allowed to marry within their own clan up to 3 generations back to ensure that they are not related. Crosscousin marriage is not allowed in Limbu culture. Marriage between a man and a woman outside the clan is also possible either by arrangement or by mutual consent of the man and woman in question. Being matriarchal tribe, females are given due respect. Usually Limboos marry within their own community.

Alcohol is significantly the most important, they usually made homegrown domesticated

Cholo- (blouse with collars overlapping one another).Sim 'gunyo' (long strip of cloth wrapped around like a skirt) and Phaoee (waist belt) and are also very much fond of gold, silver, glass stone, corals and turquoise.

population of Nepalese Sikkimese is 80 percent till date.

Nepali is the Lingua- Franca of Sikkim and it belongs to the Indo-Aryan and SinoTibetan language and uses the Devagri scripts and about 61 percent of people belong to Nepali community in whole Sikkim has been recorded following Hinduism and Dashain (Bijaya Dashami) is the main festival among all the festivals.

Nepali community were mostly engaged in agriculture and they were the 1st community who introduce terraced cultivation in the hilly



Figure: 1.3 *Limboo couple in traditional attire*

livestock meats like beef, lamb, mutton, pork, fish and yak, the famous cuisine of Limboos is Phedza (meat- making). Tongba (traditional beverage made up of millet beer), Raksi (traditional alcohol), Lassi (made up of yogurt) water and homemade fruit juices.

Nepalese:

Nepalese started migrating to Sikkim since 19th century onwards; the 18th century saw the settlement of Nepalese communities through conquest and migration. Probably the

terrains of Sikkim which led to the cultivation of rice, maize and other cash crops like cardamom and ginger which in turn brings good amount of revenue to the State.

Being a rich culture, it has many folk dances, songs such as Maruni Nritya and it is one of the oldest and popular group dance form of the Nepali community and musical instruments is Sarangi (Chordophone) .



Traditionally, Men wear long double breast garments flowing below the waist and a trouser known as Daura Suruwal, whereas the women wear double breast garments with strings to tie

participation in politics is still far more better than other tribe of Sikkim and there should be reflection of this development in the content of Sikkim Government of Sikkim is taking

and chow bandi cholo (blouse) and both men Nepali engagement ceremony is called and women wear gold and silver ornaments. Tika Talo and both arrange marriage as well as love marriage is allowed.

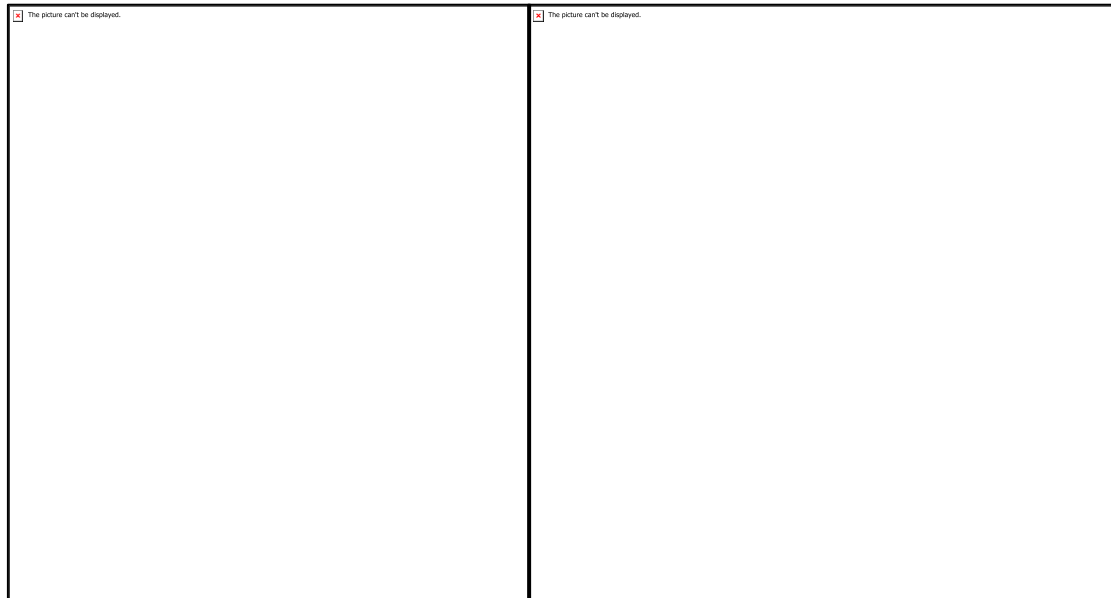


Figure: 1.4 *Nepali couple in traditional attire*

on both the sides, majetro (shawl) Dhido (made up of millet or barley and cooked dough), potato curry, momo (dumplings), yak or goat or sheep meat, milk, chicken pulses, chapattis etc. Alcohol such as tongba (millet juice) jaard (rice beer) a regular diet and most common and famous is dal bhat and tarkari (pulses, rice and vegetables).

### Conclusion:

The paper concludes and found that the various oral, as well as historical references and remnants of history provide enough evidence that Bhutias, Limboos, Lepchas and Nepalese are one of the aboriginal communities of Sikkim. On the other hand, these indigenous people have many similarities like physical appearance and their identity like languages, culture, traditional practices etc and all their customs, rituals, practices which they follows till date is a prove that they are the aboriginal or the indigenous people of Sikkim and on the other hand, they are politically active and their

tremendous steps for the overall development and provides justice to the Indigenous community and also preservation of heritages is also taking under consideration.

In this paper, the politics of tribal identity has been analyzed in conjunction with the historical epoch and economic changes as well as economic development of the eastern Himalayas in the last two centuries. Discourses indicate that tribal identities depend on exclusions and inclusions, expressions of territoriality, Indigeneity and belonging in the landscape, and their recognition by the state. It is only recently that they have succeeded in gaining the Scheduled Tribe status as well as one of the indigenous people of Sikkim and they are campaigning for rights and entitlements associated with it. The tribal people as well 'indigenous have appropriated the essentialisms of being 'primitive', 'shy innocent and otherworldly', 'nature-worshippers', 'indigenous', 'hunters and gatherers', and 'politically marginalized groups', in order to reconstruct identity.

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