
Status of Women in Limbu Society (Feminism)

Su Hangma Limboo

Department of Limbu, Sikkim University

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Abstract:

Limbus are indigenous tribes of Sikkim, India, other states in North Eastern parts of India, and hills of Darjeeling and Kalampong district, West Bengal. They have unique cultures, traditions, faiths, legends, ethics, folklore, languages, moral values, myths, etc. *Mundhum* is their philosophy and way of living. *Mundhum* is ancient oral scripture and is delivered orally. According to *Yakthung Mundhum*, the divine creature of the universe, the Supreme Goddess *Tagera Ningwa? phuma*, in the very beginning of human beings, two genders, male and female, were balanced in *Passangi Teola* (weighting process), the then female were added huge golds, silver, gems, valuable stones and finally gained balanced to male. In Limbu's the equality in gender started when the human beings are created in Earth. Most of the Limbu myths are feminist in Nature, where the mother plays a vital role and sets status in their society as a women legend. Examples, *Mujingna Kheyongna*, *Tigen?jungna* and *Tetlara Lahadongna*.

This abstract is about women of Sikkimese Limbu community context and based on Limbu *Mundhum*. How women have status in their society?

Keyword: Limbu Tribe, Limbu Mundhum/Yakthung, Tagera Ningwaphumang, Phak:sha (Pork), Yumaism, Miktok yan, Kho?sha, Nazong, Sapokchomen, Mangenna,

Methodology: The present paper is a study of the role, status, and position in their society in the field of family, social, political, and educational of Limbu women in Sikkim. And I focus on the socio-cultural area because of their narrative *Mundhum* and history, which tell us about the Limbu women enjoying huge respect, roles, and positions in their society. The paper uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary information is collected through field-based information, and secondary is from the different books and relevant journal articles.

Introduction

Limbu are one of the primitive Tribes of Sikkim, India. And scattered in the Himalayan Regions of Sikkim, North Eastern India Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Nepal, Bhutan and other United Kingdom, Hongkong. Limbu's themselves called 'Yakthung,' males *Yakthung-ba* and females *Yakthung-ma*. In Sikkim, Bhutia and Lepcha

Communities called them '*Tshong*' and others commonly addressed as 'Subba.' They have their own language, religion and beliefs, faith, social systems and ethics, customary laws and practices, traditions, customs, and Scriptures. The script is called "*Sirijunga Script*" and believes the Supreme Goddess '*Tegara Ningwaphu Mang*' (*Alapi Chalapi Mang/Manemendha mang*), who exists in Nature and is the divine maker of this planet Earth. "She is believed to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, and Supreme deity. Feminist Goddess Yuma Mang and their religion is known as *Yumaism*. Limbu didn't have Idol worship or images, statues, etc. They practices Shamanism, they are knowns as "*Pelhiphangsam*" (*Sambokko Samba or Sambhera Samba, Ya:hilli Yeba-Yema, Phedangma, sawara yatcham muksam samba*).

Limbu people follow the Philosophy of *Yakthung Mundhum*. They have a unique ritual which are practices in their day today life. Their rituals are performed by the "*Pelhi-Phangsam*" (*Limbu Shamans*). They are classified in terms of their workload and responsibilities. According to *Limbu Mundhum*, she is a divine creator of Mother Earth, *Semiklung* (Universe), *Iksha Khambek* (Earth), *Tarang Tangsang* (sky), *Medhung khesemik* (Galaxy), *Laa-Nam* (moon and sun), *Poklaa Singbung-Tamhung Yakla* (vegetation and flora), *Thaksa Kubu* (wild animals or fauna), *Sikchen Tha: ba* (ants and insects), *Chabhat Thugwa* (water), *Pongenden wa: hit* (rain), *Surit* (winds), *Ga: Fungi Gnak: Ga* (aquatic lives) and all the creatures of Earth.

After her unpleasant potential She felt something is missing in this world (*Iksha*). And then she creates a creator of human being (*Mencham Yapme*) called *Poorokmiba* and *Yambhamiba*. Finally, after fourth attained they created a finished idol of human being, male and female respectively. Limbu people are very close to Nature. "The Lepchas and Limbus both trace their origin and the origin of on Earth to the Khanchendzonga landscape. The dive deity of the Limbus, *Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Wambhami Mang* was advised by *Tagera Ningwaphuma*, who collected bamboo ash, bird droppings, rainwater and resin from lower hills. With these iteams he riturned toa spot identified as '*Mangjirima Manglodama in Phoktahkungma*' (called Kumbhakarna or Jannu Peak) lying at the western edge of the Khangchendonga moutain range. Here he creates two idols--*Laikkangsa* the male and *Simbummasa* the female, who are the original ancestral couple of the Limbus" (www.iied.org).

Socialization in Limbu Society

Socialization is the process by which people learn to behave in a way that is acceptable to group or society. It is a lifelong process that involves learning social norms, values and behaviors from various sources such as family, society, institutions, peers and media so on. Home is a primary school for children's or primary socialization, and adolescence stage is most important identity development and exposure to public sphere beyond family and personal relationships. In society people learn attitude towards culture, tradition and ethics, psychological traits associated with gender socialization, race socialization, class socialization and respect. Likewise, Limbu society is also socialized according to their social norms, costmary laws, practices, equity. *Tumyanghangs* or are

judiciary body of Limbu's society and has judiciary system. Women's position in Limbu society is not limited, they play vital role and have prominent status.

Other than that today's scenario Limbu women are engaged in Sikkim Government jobs, arm force, forest, teaching areas, medical field, horticulture and agriculture field, political field, and many more fields like tourism, taxi drivers, business, entrepreneurs, private jobs and so on. And in education field they are gaining and improving in higher levels up to PhD, MBBS and on more fields. Moreover, as a tribal woman their traditional *Thaka* (handmade cloths) weaving is also preserving side by side. Many females are engaged in *Thaka fabric* making and set as example of entrepreneur.

Gender in Limbu Tribe

As an Indian citizen, the Indian Constitution's fundamental rights, directive principles, and preamble enshrine the principles of gender equality. The Constitution guarantees equality for all citizens, including women, and also gives the state the power to take positive action to help women.

In Limbu *Mundhum*, men and women are equally treated from the first ever human was created by *Porokme* and *Yambhame*, and in their marriage (1st marriage in Limbu, according to *Mundhum*), weighing ritual (*Nenduri Passangi Tola*) was started. During their wedding *Laikkangsa* stood heavier than *Simbummasa*, for balancing the same weight *Tagera Ningawaphu Mang* puts gold, silver, gems, jewels to bride side and finally she balanced the weight. The than, according to *Limbu/Yakthung Mundhum* right to equality was started. Gender roles in Limbu society have historically with women holding significant respect and agency, while also prompting asymmetrical power relations. In Limbu myth *Ke:pokma Mundhum* (Ke means traditional drum), mother *Tigenjungna* raised two sons *Ke:shami* and *Namshami*, one is human and another tiger. These *mundhums* prove that Limbu society is feminist in Nature.

Some of the examples are like, in *Ya?lang*, women can refuse to participate without permission, if she like dance then she will otherwise she reject. And after marriage she have right to give divorce to her husband and before the *Hingat-Sigat*, *Sak/Saimundri/Mellung* ritual she's not totally belonging to husband side, if she dies then death rituals will do by parent's side not to husband side. Limbu culture asymmetrical power relations between men and women, and between dominant and subordinate men, they are active in market sphere, management of finance, fabric making actively participates in agriculture production. She brings cash into the house hold, the recognition of this productivity by others are key variables ability to accomplish her desires. In society some of the unmarried women run the household as parents. Mostly, unmarried women are eldest one in family and act as the guardian. Most of the cases are based on situation, weather the parents are expired and the eldest daughter has rase the younger ones or parent's health issues. And a women's position in Limbu society is not limited.

Discrimination: In Limbu society there is no such a class system. No hierarchy in clan or in

society. More clans and more sub-clans are there but every clan is equally treated in society. Among them, some people have such a high profile in society. Example, *Tumyehangs* (Judiciary in Limbu), *Pelhiphangsam* (Limbu Shamans) and senior citizens are given respect. In their society, the menstruation is not considered a taboo. There is no such a prevention in social and cultural aspects of life, among women's menstruation is very confidential and natural to them. If any girl or women is bleeding, they never share with the male members of family rather accept husband, and they actively participate in society as well as in traditions. In rituals aspects, there is no strict norms and condition. But women do follow does and don't secretly, some examples are: During *Sangmang Samang* (*Cha:khoba Samang*) puja that women herself make distance and never touch the *Mang chi:gokwa* (puja saman). Another "thishok", for *Paliphangsam's* (*phedangma, Samboko Samba, Yeheli Yeba-Yema*) *Phungshok/Nehangma/Mangeena* whosoever is having mensuration she could not make *Thishok, Phung:tingma, Ya?sheya lokma*. Like as, if male is making *thishok* he should also follow the norms like farting, spiting and never use slang words. If any female *Yema* is having periods during rituals activities, she can take part and sit in the same line to other shamans and she put her *Yemani* dress also. Their respects and position never drop. Because, Limbu people believe that the all the needed rituals things are always make as pure as they can.

Like Constitution, Limbu also has *Tumyehang System* (unwritten constitution). They are also following this to generation to generation, as an ancient discipline not a new law. Limbu's also have their own unwritten fundamental rights. They practice or follows the *Tumyanghang* principles. According to *Yakthung_Mundhum/Limbu Mundhum* a divine creator of universe and first ever human beings (*Mencham yapmi sha*) male and female, she dressed a woman with heavy *Changwa/sim*/dress and jewelry and then she is called *Simbora Yetkappamasa or Simbummasa*. During their wedding *Laikkangsa* stood heavier than *Simbummasa*, for balancing the same weight *Tagera Ningawaphu Mang* puts gold, silver, diamond, gems, jewels to bride side and finally she balanced the weight. The than, according to *Limbu/Yakthung Mundhum* right to equality was started from the beginning of human life started in Earth.

Women's position in Limbu society is not limited, they play vital role and have women's are free to take part in any social activities, like from the good old days men and women both participated independently in *Ya?lang* (*Paddy Dance*) with joining hands among publicly. These *Ya?lang* proved Limbu women's are liberal and independent. There was no restriction in ancient days as modern. But strictly follows clan system. Their forefathers followed the seventh and eight generation and belief that they are cousin and respect each other as blood relation. No marriage is allowed.

Now a days, up to third and fourth generation, they does not marry each other and if they joins hands in *Ya?lang* dances, after introductory part, they stop and for sorry greetings *Sewamoma* is done. If any, they believe that is sin. However, another way is before the *Ya?lang* performance is started dancers have to introduces through *Khyali* (*Dialog*

Song/poetic way of expression introduction), if they are not belong to same clan there is possibility to express and exchange romantic feelings, finally that leads to *Ya?lang*. In *Ya:lang* they sing a song *Palam (Love Song)*. Whoever is interested to take part in *Ya?lang* there is no issues or restriction weather he or she belongs to any community, can take part and any age group.

Changwa-Watti (Dresses and ornaments): Grooming and dressing sense of Limbu women are very natural and extraordinary. They themselves are called ‘Queen’, because the gold and silver ornaments. Well, Limbu women are framed for their use of *Samyang and Yupppa* (gold and silver) jewelers. Most of the Limbu ornaments are natured inspired as *Samyangphung or Namphug* (gold disc worn on forehead which represents sun), *Sesephung* (half-moon, piece of gold worn just below *samyangphung/sun*), *Pang:more* (pure red beads), *Yang etchi* (long silver coin necklace), *Namlo:e* (large silver necklace a design in square or circle with *Silamsakma* and embedded with different coral stones), *Pangwari* (gloden beads necklace), *Huk pang:ge* (a silver bangle with dragon head design in the end), *Chapyang Hukpangi* (is worn by married women), *Lang bang:ge* (a silver bangle worn on leg), *Nay:she* (a big gold disc earrings), *Yarling* (a lotus bud shaped earrings), *thug:li* (a gold nose disc), *mundri* (a long gold nose ring) and *Swagep* (a finger ring).

Changwa/dresses, Limbu women weaved fabric themselves is called *Thaka/Dhaka/Thakmana tet or Thaka* cloths with very unique design and beautiful patterns. Meticulously crafted through nettle threads, suiti, silk. Ancient and tradition of weaving *Thaka* and wearing this generation to generation is rooted deeply in history of Limbu tribe. However, according to *Yakhung Mundhum*, during the wedding ceremony there was one ritual of weighing (measuring) both bride and bridegrooms. The bridegroom stood heavier than bride, so to sought balance/equality them, TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA puts some gold, silver, gems and jewels at bride’s side for balance between two genders.

Customary Laws of Limbu Society

Limbu community is rich in culture, have unique traditions, customs, myth, folklore, ethics and so on. Where freedom and independent society with maintaining high discipline and living in their ethics, which passed down through generations and generations. And practices or follows their own unwritten customary laws. They have rules and regulation, if not *Tumyehang* will take action.

“A custom is a common way of doing things, or a practice that is habitual with an individual or a particular class or place (society). Customs are often passed down from the past and can be considered unwritten law. Laws based own customs are known as customary laws”. Customary Laws of Limbu has significant protection in women’s rights, priorities and status in their society. They are discussed below:

Sappok Chomen (womb protection worship): *Sappok Chomen* is religious practice of womb worship for the protection of the fetus in the womb and the mother. They belief that if this prayer is done then the mother can easily and safely deliver. *Chomen* is perform between 6Th to 8Th months of pregnancy by husband or either by parent side. Usually, pregnant women have does and don’t in physical activities. In Limbu society also has proper protection among

pregnancy period. Like they are not allowed to fetched water, restricted to go jungle for firewood collection, grass, to carry heavy weight, long distance work etc., are the primary cure is practicing in their society from ancient days. These are the physical protection for both mother and unborn child. And other *Sappok Chomen* prayer is believe that womb protection for pregnant women.

Yangdang Phongma: Limbu *Mundhum* is unwritten philosophy, it is living oral form of classical language and knowledge. In Limbu society, after the delivery of baby, *Yangdang Phongma Thim*, ritual is there. For baby girl, her *Yangdang Phongma* will do in after three days of her birth and four days for baby boy. This is kind of celebration for new baby as well as for blessings and protection to both baby and mother. In this ceremony five main sub-ritual will perform. They are *Him Samang Sambang warum mappa Thim*, *Yu Tungu Wa:rak Mang Nungma*, *Manggenna* for both mother and baby, *Mingwan Thim*, *Khirik:lo Inghon/Samlo* and *Yangdang Hakpare*. There is no any bias if the baby is boy or girl. *Yangdang Phongma* is mandatory and all the family accepted the baby as their blood in Limbu culture.

This *Him Samang Sambang Warum Mappa (Yuma Mang bath)*, *Yu Tungu Wa:rak Mang Nungma*, *Manggenna* is perform through chanting *Mundhum* by *Samboko Samba* and remaking details are detailed on the following.

aManggenna: Mangenna (to raise head for individual) is prayer for new baby's blessings as lifelong. It is belief that in *Manggenna Mundhum* after birth in this world, baby's head is always up, good health, wealthy life, prosperous life and protection for evil spirit, jealousy, accidents, disputes, conflicts, war and fights etc., for his/her lifetime.

Mingwan (Naming): In *Mingwan* rituals, name is given to baby as a *Manggenna Ming* and *Phung Ming*. In the presence of *Tutu Tumyehang*, *Sambokko Samba* and family members will decide. *Manggenna Ming* is important for the baby and *Phung Ming* is for official use

Khirik:lo inghong/samlo (blessing or advice message): It is belief that in *Yangdang* day, whatever blessings and message is given to baby is effective. For that elder women his/her granny or aunt will do the *khirik:lo inghong/Samlo* to baby. It is performing early in the morning in main door of the house. Showing the morning sun to baby and blessing advice for activeness in his/her life. Believe sun is the witness.

Yangdang Hakpare: In *Yangdang* day after the all the rituals are completed the *Yangdang Hakpare* song is sing by the *Tutu Tumyehang* and *Peliphangsam* too. They are divided into to two groups and in a song full of blessings is given to new baby. Celebrate the happy day and entertainment in high note. And special maternity assistance is given to mother.

Marital Rituals: In Limbu society women are given high priority, protection and respect as well. Though the patrilineal society, after marriage, from the parent side gives special priorities to their daughter in many fields and husband side also. In good old days Limbu society enjoyed matrilocal also. These is called *Miktok yan* and today also this system is practices but less. Because of the increasing population these is decreasing. And another mother's original ornaments and jewelry is always given to daughters.

The protection and priorities of the respective women are as follows;

Him Ling ma thim: During marriage ceremony first well come of bride in house is called *Him Lingma Thim*, a grant well come ritual. Bride is well come with *Ke:lang* team and in

main door groom side mother in law well come her daughter in law by presenting by *Thaka po:thang* (handmade traditional shawl), and inside the after the *Matkam thim*, they have to dance ke:lang around the *Murum Sit?lang* (main pillar of the house) and outside around the house. It is belief that new family member is introducing with *Him Yuma*, *Akwanama Mang* other deities of the house. And after *Him Ling Ling/Him Lingma Thim*, bride become the part of that particular house.

Chapyang or Yuparung: *Chapyang* or *Yuparung* is a silver coin, which is given to bride by groom during *Matkam/lagan*. In Hindu marriage Sindoor is considered as symbol of matrimony, therefore in Limbu community this *Yuparung* is the simbol of married women. Pure silver coin (*Yangmundra*) is worn by the married women in the form of *Huk:pangi* (bangle). It has a huge value; a coin is sufficient for divorce. In these full rights of women in the matter of divorce, customary divorce. If she decides to end the marriage, she must return the *Yuparung* to her husband and their will be no any offence and considered that divorce is done. Finally, *Sewamoma Thim*, (greeting season) will do, bride and groom is belief that one body one life.

Hingat-Sigat Sak: *Sigat Hingat* means after married women to her husband only after the this *Sigat Hingat* is done, her husband is full responsible for her life to death. In Limbu culture once women got married, she never be totally to her husband. This *Thim/culture* is a final documentation from the bride side. And after the many years bride's *Songwaba* (brother's side, father, mother) let the *Ingmeeba* (mediator between groom and bride) information to the groom side. Usually in primitive Limbu culture, this *Sigat Hingat Sak* is only given after they have grandchildren. And after *Mencha Sung* is needed in *Sigat Hingat Thim*. For that long year is observation year (*Sangwaba* observes the son-in law's character, behavior and waits for grandchildren). This is all only for the protection and safty for their daughter's future. During *Mellung* Ceremony this *Thim/culture* is doing. In this ceremony many items are received from the groom side. Like *Manchasung*, *Netchi Hoktoba*, *khosha*, *Pekkusama*, *Tura etma*, *Fungwatma*, *Nugenpen*, *Nekhoomeek tapma*, *Phudong Yang*, *Yangsingma Yang*, *Lamdhan honma Yang*, *Muya Koma*, *Tambong Takma*, *Yokthakma Yang*, *Thi:sapma Lingdok*, *Pigs/porks*, *Senjungwa* etc., said items are taken to brides home. And from the bride side also gifts items are given like gold items (Kantha, Nesay/ear rings, nose pin etc. and silver items (*Namlo:e*, *Yang etchi*, *Langbangi*/silver anklet etc), brass items (plate, bowl) gift from relatives *Khosa* or *Miktok* are mostly the brass items, *Tongyang* (amount of money collected during marriage), *Khurmi/sickle*, cutleries and crookeries, *Mikton yan*/gifted plot and all the necessary items are handed over by them.

Last but not the list, *Sangwaba*/brother's side (father, mother and brother's) in a good faith and in the name of *Tagera Ningwaphuma Mang* hand over their beloved daughter to son-in-law as the case may be as his wife and expect that he will not illtreat her during their life time and we also hope that son-in law is accepting their daughter as piece of gold and course of time when she became old should not consider as iron and discard her. In *Sigat Hingat Sak* (Lifelong latter of document) announced in the witnesses of *Tutu Tumyehangs*, *Ingmeebas* of both side and *Thibong Yakthung* and signed the document. Finally, they wish them a bright future.

Miktok Yan: Gifted plot to their beloved daughter in *Hingat-Shigat* ceremony from parent side (son and daughter equally treated in Limbu society). Old Limbu society seems matrilocal. Slowly, time has changing and

Kho?sa: *Kho:sa* means fatherless child. In ancient days if mother is differently able and accidentally got pregnant and having child or in case of illegal relationship and after birth father is not found or couldn't identify by mother then child is called *Kho?sa*. People use to called them *Sing:sha-Lung:sha*. Society used to practice *Yapmi-ingma* (Purchased men) father or husband from another clan. This statement is cleared that concerned parents loved their daughter and also maintained social status as well. In this case of matter *Tumyehang* could settled down.

Divorce by women in Limbu Society (*Nazong*)

Nazong: In Limbu customary laws, when wife decided to give divorce to her husband is called *Nazong* and another divorce by husband is called *Khemzong*. Ancient time this kind of divorce system is practice in Limbu society, the Limbu way of customary divorce. It is divorce tendered by wife to her husband on grounds of cruelty, infidelity, long absence of conjugal right and concealment of kinship. She has to return these things to her husband in the presence of *Tumyanghang* and other relatives of the husband. If she wants divorce from her husband. In primitive age, in Limboo society returning or pelting of *Chapyang* to her husband was sufficient to caused *Nazong* divorce. No record or statement was maintained in those days. Of late Limboo, have started to maintain record (*Bal Muringla-Nazong* and *Khemzong*, A Limboo Divorce System).

After this *Nazong* she is totally freedom. If she wants to marry another man, she can marry but her ex-husband has no right to ask for Jari and if they decided to remarry then they also.

Judiciary System in Limbu Society

In Limbu society *Tumyehangs* plays vital role, like judiciary, which is unwritten laws and practices orally. They have higher level/standard than ordinary people. Among all the community *Tutu Tumyehangs* has quality and more knowledge about Limbu *Samjik Mundhum*, Folklore, ethics, culture, tradition, beliefs, so on. And all the senior citizens are not counted as a *Tu-Tu Tumyehangs*. And expert in *Mundhum* is called *Tu Tu Tumyahang*. They are as judge, advocate and institution within community

Tumyehangs are present in community to settle the disputes related to marriages, wedding ceremonies, death rituals mandatorily in all rituals and customs of the Limbus. They are the notables, elders, respected, wise men, and resource people in the Limbu Community (*Yakthung Civilization, Sandhya Subba, Singzango*).

As Limbu customary laws most laws are protection for women's. In that *Tutu Tumyehangs* plays vital role as like judiciary. According to *Tumyehang* system all those laws are applies. Example: Marriage ceremony (*Makkam thim/him Lingma thim, Chapyang*), *Miktok yan, Nazong, Sapok chomen, Yangdang Phongma*(*Mangena, Mingwan*), *Kho:sa*.

From birth to till death, only in the presence of *Tutu Tumyehang* cultural rituals are completed. Without *Tumyehang* nothing is possible or all the rituals, traditions, culture and

society of Limbu community is incomplete. They function the judicial laws and works as well as settle down the each and every dispute in their community.

Conclusion

In every society woman plays an important role and has role in family too. Likewise, women have prominent status, role, priority in Limbu society. Their rights proves that unwritten customary laws and rules is practicing through generations to generation, not new. According to their culture and traditions, Limbu woman's enjoys rights and reflect equality in their society. Likewise, *Mujingna Kheyongna Mundhum*, mother *Mujingna* has a raised his son and another *Ke:pokma Mundhum*, *Tigenjungna* is human and other is tiger and mother of eight kings *Tetlara Lahadongna*, this three mother's played a head of the family and that we analyzed they enjoyed matriarchy, and those myth is also based on matriarchy. During the *Tetlara Lahadongna*, period the patriarchy was also there. And time changes and increasing in population that matriarchy has slowly disappeared. And patrilineal, patriarchy, patriarchal and patrilocal system has rooted and till now.

Although, the Limbu society has its own institution and administration to oversees the social aspects and religious aspects. For that Tumyehang plays a vital role in each and every social disputes, martial rituals and death rituals in society. In that, their unwritten laws and social norms more protects the women is Nature.

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