

A GLANCE AT LIMBU FOLKLORE

—Dhanhang Subba

Scholars and folklorists have given different definitions of folklore, but in substance it is oral literature said and heard from generation to generation. As New Columbia Dictionary has defined, heredity and traditions, myths, beliefs, superstitions, folkdance, folksongs, folk treatment, folktales and folk proverbs are within this definition. Folktales are understood as all kinds of oral artistic expressions including commonly transmitted traditions, myths, festivals, customs, songs, stories etc. Limbus are rich in their distinct folklore and because of their distinct folklore they have their own identity among ethnic and racial diverse groups of the Nepali people. Limbu folklore is the tradition and culture of one of the various ethnic groups that constitute the Nepali nation. Their traditions, life style, eating habits, religious belief, social behaviour and traits differ from other ethnic groups. The legendary Limbus are ever smiling people; their honesty, amiable disposition and habit of hard work are some of the inborn qualities of Limbus. Let us have a glance at their folklore in the following paragraphs:-

SAMLO (folksong)

Limbu ethnic songs are classified as under:

Hakpare Samlo - Usually elders and those who are interested or well versed in Mundum participate in Hakpare samlo. It is recited on the occasion of ceremonial recital of particular god and goddess.

Palam Samlo:- Palam is an improvised song accompanying Yalang (Paddy dance). When young men and women participate in Yalang, they sing a song almost in a form of contest on the theme of love, which requires prompt imagination for repartee. The subject matters of Palam are predominantly the love affairs, factitious romantic relationships, aspirations and frustrations, feeling of melancholy or separation and unsettled longing of life. There are various kinds of flowers which are named as flowers of life, death, love, youthfulness, separation sorrow and so on according to the Limbu beliefs system. At the concluding part of Palam, some discussions are held between the singers as to who should hold the responsibilities to take care of their love. Finally they discuss appropriate place to keep their love alive. The love may be retained on the head, or in the eyes or within the heart, or on their shoulder. Usually they come to the conclusion that they should keep the greater portion of it in the eyes. They believe that it is the eyes that bring the people in contact for the first time; if they had not seen each other, no question of love would have ever arisen between them, and so they have to keep most of their love in their eyes. Keeping love above the head represents the respect of love. Keeping it on the shoulder represents responsibility and in the heart represents the feelings, the sentimental aspect of love.

Sewa Samlo:- It can be understood as a prayer to the God and Goddess just as Bhajan or Bhaktiras gyan.

Khyali Samlo:- This refers to Jokes in poetical language. This song is a duel song between a boy and a girl; they ask and reply the question in poetical language. When this song is sung, the listeners listen with a sincere attention.

Swapma Samlo:- This is a cradle song. In accordance with the Mundum, the first woman on earth Mujingna Kheyangna gave birth to a baby called Lalawehang Susuweyang. She put the leaves of rhododendron and bamboos in a cradle as a blanket and mattress and swung to make him sleep. The child was cried and unhealthy by birth. She sang cradle songs and swung but failed to make the baby son sleep. Niwabhungma appeared in dream and indicated her to sing the following cradle song to make the baby sleep. The lady sung as under:

"You are son of Lhasa-Bhot
You are the son of Terai-Madesh
You are son of sun-set direction
You are the son of wind and cyclone
You are also the son of the God"
After hearing this song the baby son had a sound sleep.

Tamke Samlo:- When the agricultural era commenced, people began to cultivate. A man called Sarokpa started to sing a song while planting paddy and maize. It was called Tamke samlo. This song is sung while planting paddy and maize. This song is also sung while weeding and harvesting. The song indicates that the cultivation should bear good fruit. During planting it is sung as a pray for good harvesting.

Pang Samlo:- This song is sung in remembrance of contemporary friends, or while working alone in a farm, or while collecting wood and grass in a forest. The loneliness (solitude) makes a man charm less (birahi). The beloved one is separated thus to refresh their remembrance this is sung with a tune.

Kesham Samlo:- According to the Mundum, a lady named Tiyojannna gave birth to two twin boys. The elder

one was tiger called Kesami and the younger one was a man called Namsami. Being an animal and a human they were always quarrelling and fighting each other. Jealousy spread day by day. Mother tried her best to keep them peaceful and cooperative, but failed. One day the younger brother decided and planned to kill his tiger brother. At last he killed his tiger brother with an arrow. After killing his brother, he tanned the skin and dried it in the sun. After drying it he fixed it on a hollow tree trunk and made a musical instrument. On striking it with his hand, he made a Hurung Hurung sound. This sound resembles the roaring of tiger Kesami. After hearing this sound the mother told her son Namsami, "I have no regret though you killed your brother. But you invented the musical instrument Ke(Chyabrung) and his name is immortal." An old man called Kasuruppa first sang and dance with Kesam song. This song is sung in happy anniversaries and celebrations. This song is not limited to young boys and girls in romance, but it is vitally important on the occasion of building a new house. Ke is played and Kesam song sung on the constructing a new house. After completing the construction of a new house Ke is played on the house-warming ceremony and sung all round the main pillar of the house. By doing this, it is assured that insects will not eat the pillar and other parts of the new house; and dust out the insects from the pillar. The other significance of Kesam is that the Ke player makes various signs by hands, with indicate the weeding out of flowers. According to Mundum scholars it means, weeding out bad flowers and saving the good ones.

Hamlakwa Samlo :- (Lament song/Mournful song/Melancholy song). Among all songs there is also lament song in Limbu culture. This is called Hamkalwa samlo (lament song). Women cry and burst in to tears much more quickly than men by nature. During mournful hours no one can speak with one's tongue, but the tear will speak out one's words. There are different ways of crying in Limbu culture. If someone has departed, the relatives won't cry, but express his/her sorrow in lament words. In Limbu culture it is called Hamsikwa Maring Makwa (Lament song). According to the Mundum, mother Tiyojongna cried with deep sorrow on the death of her tiger son Kesami. This lament cry took the form of Hamlakwa (Lament song). At a later stage Hamlakwa was classified into various kinds as follows:

Panogen Hamlakwa - It refers to cry of joyous moment. Words cannot express the joy but the tears do, when someone meets a friend or the dearest one after a long absence. It also happens so on unexpected success of a certain work or object. It is called the meeting of joyous moment.

Semmui Hamlakwa It refers to cry on farewell/departure: The moment of departure is so painful. If someone, say a relative, departs from each other, they express good wishes, blessings and hugs to each other. When train, plane or bus departs they wave their hands and say good bye. At the moment of departure they say -"Have a good journey! See we again or so and so. The heart of a person hicks up without bursting into tears or crying. When the heart is full of grief, there is no a single word in the tongue."

Meringen Hamlakwa Samlo (Sympathetic song): After a long illness a person is on the verge of death. It is a sympathetic song to express the hope of life to him. The sick person has lost his speech is attentively looking at the ceiling. His hands and feet are cold as ice. At that time his relatives asks, why are you not speaking? What is the wrong with you? What happened to you? Can not we speak alternatively? We have done your treatment by doctor, hospitalized and even treated by witch doctor. What should we do now? Such lament words are expressed towards the sick person. At this stage there is no alternative except to lose him. This is a lament song.

Sangu Sakma Pama Hamlakawa (cry when a person is on comma or dyeing) - The birth of a man is fixed. But the death is uncertain. It is very difficult to breath last. A man hiccups but his last breath exists. On seeing the struggle between life and death, a man's heart melts. At this stage the relatives express their sorrow saying:

- "What is wrong? Whom is she/he waiting for? What object is needed? Is he/she not willing to leave us?" Such words are expressed in weeping.

Simering Hamlakwa (a lament song after death) - This lament song is sung until the death body is buried or put on funeral pie. The lament songs sung by their relatives are really heartfelt and sorrowful. They express complaints. They touch the death body, hug up, touch the hand and feet and cry. Here is a lament song sung by a daughter for her deceased beloved mother.

Ammau Ammau Ye..Ye..ye.. ye. .
Ke po bhayauni Ama...ye..ye..
(What happened to you, Ama.....ye.. ye..)
Kahajane hola ni Ama ..ye..ye
(Where are you going, Ama ..ye..ye)
Tuhura tuhuri matrai parnu bhayo ni Ama.... ye..ye.
(You left us as orphans, Ama ..ye..ye..)
Yati charhai yasto matra hunchhau bhane nau Ama ...ye...ye...

(You did not tell us that so soon you are being so,..Ama...ye..ye)
 Na pahirine phul haru matra pahiriyau hai Ama ..ye.. ye.
 (You are adorned with unwanted flowers, Ama.. ye... ye..)
 Na laune lugaharu matra lagayau hai Ama ..ye.. ye..
 (You have worn unwanted clothes, Ama... ye...ye....)
 Na jane bato gayau hai Ama ...ye..ye....
 (You have followed the untrodden way, Ama.. ye..ye...)
 Aba ta kahile pani bheta hundainau hai Ama ..ye..ye..
 (We will not meet again, Ama...ye..ye..)
 Sapana ma pani bheta hundaina hai Ama ...ye..ye..
 (We will not even meet in dream, Ama.... ye...ye..)
 Aba Ama bhannu pani tungiyo hai Ama....ye..ye
 (We will no longer have anyone to call, Ama...ye..ye...) etc.

Ningwaso Hamlakwa (weeping in remembrance of a deceased person) -

After the death of a person there are many things that make one weep in his/her remembrance. The deceased has left all his belongings behind. On seeing his/her pictures, books, certificates etc or in the case of a soldier, his **campaign stars and the medals he won, the relatives cry in his sweet memory.**

Laringe (Deusi) Festival Song - This festival song is sung in the night of New Moon in Kartik (October) for two days. It is similar to carol song or Nepali Deusi/Bhailo. The Mundum says the Kirat King Balihang was very popular and he loved his subjects as his own sons and daughters. The subjects too loved him as father. Once he fell grave sick. His prophecy of death was fixed for the night of Aushi day (New Moon) of Kartik. All his subjects prayed to almighty Tagera Niwabhumang for his speedy recovery. Yuma was pleased at the devotions and pray of the people and he ordered the death-God to return and extended the life of Balihang. In other words the king conquered over the death. On this victory and enjoyable occasion the king sent his royal officers and men to convey this news to the people and to get them light lamps in each house and celebrate and play Laringe for three days beginning from Aushi night of Kartik. From that day the Deusi (Laringe) commenced. Deusi and Laringe are similar except that if they perform it in day, they call it Namringe (Sunrise) and if in night they call it Lamringe (Moonrise).

FOLK DANCE

Limbus enjoys various traditional dances. They are based on performance genres are outlined in brief here. Yalang (Paddy dance) - Yalang is the most popular dance among Limbus. People ranging from teen-agers to late adults of both sexes participate enthusiastically in this dance without any hesitation. It is organized at night and is performed to the rhythms of Palam. Foot steps and ways of traversing are taken care of in the dance. Musical instrument is not used. The literal meaning of Yalang is 'paddy dance'. This dance originated with the aim to thrash the grains from dried paddy plants in the past. It is said there was no custom of using oxen to thrash rice grains as is done to day. The young men and women from the villages around had to gather to thrash the grain by trampling over the dried paddy plants. It was a hard job and they had to spend whole day and night. So they used to sing whole night while trampling over the rice plants with grains and their way of trampling turned into a dance while singing. Eventually it developed into the present form of Yalang (paddy dance). The Yalang nowadays may be performed by dance lovers any time irrespective of seasons or occasion, or can be organized at any time (day or night). When, a guest from another village is seen in some Limbu family in the village. Mostly solti-soltini are involved in it. It is the culture of Limbu to entertain among themselves. Usual places and time for Yalang are funfair, marriage and market place.

They will dance gripping hands of each other in a round circle or a line as the ground permits. A few rules must be strictly adhered to in performing Yalang dance. Blood-related brothers and sisters are forbidden to dance together. This should be cleared prior to dancing. This is a sacred dance so filthy words should not be exchanged, and other parts of limbs should not be touched. While dancing in full swing, if a person touches the foot of another person, they both should come out from the circle or line and should bow down and beg pardon for touching by mistake. After compliments to each other they will rejoin the circle or the line.

Kelang (Chyabrun) (Drum) dance:

Kelang or drum dance is another dance among Limbus. Experts of Ke lang say long long ago Laden Hangba and Phungden Hangba danced Ke lang when Lokphedemba and Hangphademba built a house for the first time on earth. The purpose of dance was to save the house from various kinds of insects that may destroy the wooden portions of the house, from evil spirits and ghost and from natural calamities such as wind, storm, earthquake and fire. Besides house-building, Ke lang is also performed around the main pillar on a typical style Mekham kam (marriage ceremony).

FOLK MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS (MUNG)

Ke (Chyapbrung): This is made of a hollow long of soft wood capable of producing deep tone suitable to open air activities. Its mouth, the open portions on two sides, are covered by tightened skin and distinct tones are produced by striking it at different places with a stick and palms on both sides (C. Subba). This was first made by Namsami and played while building a house. This is played mainly on the following occasions:

- while building a new house
- to welcome a distinguished /honorable guest
- on the opening ceremony of a function
- on marriage ceremony

Mikla kom (Binayo): bamboo harp

Finje kom (Machunga): iron/metal harp

Sing fekwa (Pat baja): a tender leaf of a tree, held between two lips and played blowing air to make a tune.

Negara (Nagara): On marriage, to convey death news and to welcome.

Tung gewa (one cord): during pray and bhajan.

Ponge (Bell): this is used by Phedangmas

Chet-thala (brass plate): Long long ago Yuma (almighty goddess) presented a brass plate to Yonghang (culture attendant and protector). But he failed to maintain and protect it, so it vanished. The Phedangmas are using ordinary dinner brass plate at present instead to perform religious or cultural rituals.

FOLK ORNAMENTS (PANGSAMA)

Long-long ago Limbus use to wear different kinds of stones as ornament. Their belief was that the stone would protect them from natural calamities and illness. After the discovery of metal, the Limbu women used metals for different kinds of ornaments. Limbu women are very fond of ornaments. They are now adorned with the following silver/gold ornaments:

Sammyang Fung(Shirful): Head ornament with clip

Nesse (Cheptesun): Hang on both ears

Suthi (Hansuli): Necklace

Thongri (Dhungri) :Nose ring

Nirikma (Kundal): Ear rings

Chholyan/Hukfagi/Hukfeng (Chura): Gold or silver bangles

Lang Pangi (Kalli): Leg rings made of silver.

Swagip (Anguthi): Finger ring

Namlachhi (Chandrahari): Moon shaped neck lace.

Sripech (Head flower): Around the head.

Kang-ichhi (Kantha): Necklace- it is like a garland made of small gold-plated round balls with coin-shaped woolen cloth-pieces fixed between them.

Yang- Ichhi (Paisa ko hari): Head necklace made of coin.

Pangwari/Pangri (Puwalo): Earthen stone necklace.

FOLK MEDICINE/TREATMENT

Herbal medicine was developed together with the development of mankind (human being) Limbus residing on the hills of Eastern Nepal are still using herbal medicine/treatment, and it has become their tradition. Limbu Sambha (Practice) herbal treatment with Singling Mundum to treat patients. The common uses of medicinal plants made by Sambhas (Pharmacist) are given below for example.

Namyoba (titepati) (*Artemisia Absinthium* Linn) - whole plant is used as stimulant, skin, antiseptic, insect repellent.

Kanakapa (Khanakapa) *Evodia Fraxinifolia*. Fruits are used against gastric problems.

Fakki (Chingphing) *Heracleum Nepalense*. Roots and seeds are used to cure aphrodisiac, dysentery, diarrhea, flatulence, etc.

Sagi/SIGwa (Shisnu) *Urtica Paravi* Flora. Root and leaves are used to cure fracture and high blood pressure.

Warekpa Sidimba (Timmur) *Zanthoxylum Armatum*. Fruit, trunk and leaves (powder) are used to counteract stomach pain.

Mif (Bojho) *Acorus calamus*: Rhizome is used against skin disease as nerve tonic and snake bite.

Tetlase (Kera) *Usa* sp: The insects of trunk grind and produce juice, filter and drink to treat

Phenomena. Athiya clan banana for dysentery.

FOLK RITUALS - FAUNA AND FANTA

Religious rituals and social culture of the Limbus are different from those of other ethnic groups. Trees and flowers are used by Limbus in their religious rituals. Phedangma use different kind of tree and grass at the ritual and religious worship to propitiate to various gods and goddesses.

Samsing (Kaulo) (*Persea Adoratissima*): for tong sing. A link between the ancestor and the present generation. (Tong sing is technically the name of small bamboo basket filled with earth, where small sticks are stuck in the centre of the bound yard (Bistha 1967).

Mukto (Ghungring) (*Neyraudia Madagascariensis*): Nahen (jealousy) & tongying.

Mike (Totala ko Phul) (*Oroxylum Indicum*): In the worshipping of god Dungkunge.

Lising Fa (Bans) (*Dendrocalamus Strictus*): Tongying and other worships.

Namyoba (Titepati) (*Artemisia Absinthium* Linn): As a flower in brass vase, joss, peace and purifying the religious and any ritual ceremony.

Selan /Selli bung) (*Thysanolaena Maxima*): Jealousy and Tongying.

Sigap (Katus) (*Castanopsis Species*): As a flower in a brass vase.

Serawafung (Buki Phul) (*Anaphalis Species*): Offering to Yumasammang (supreme goddess) etc.

LIMBU FOLK BELIEF

Limbu believe the voices and sounds of different animals and birds as omens of good or bad events. A few names of animals and birds and the beliefs associated with them are outlined below:

Phattimba (Owl) Regarded as a horse of jungle goddess. It forecasts draughts or famine in the coming year.

Selugwa (Cuckoo): Forecasts the monsoon.

Kakwa (Crow): Different meanings such as a good/bad news or arrival of guests are associated with it.

Warukpa (Green Frog): Forecasts famine or draught.

Limbus believe in different customs, traditions, rituals and superstitions. As a result they:

1. Hang a snail shell on a cradle. It protects a baby from the evil spirits. If a witch or demon attacks a baby, he/she hides inside the snail shell.
2. Stick a fern leaf on a cradle. It protects a baby from the shadow of evil spirits. The fern covers the baby and they can not see.
3. Do not carry a sister while crossing a river.
4. Do not allow the exchange of flower between a brother and his sister. Mundum myth has forbidden.
5. Throw their waste towards south.
6. Do not hit a dog with a broom stick. He will complain to Yuma.

FOLK ART

Limbu women have a distinct role and position as weaver in the Limbu community. They are skilled in fibre art, dyeing and fabric decoration techniques and show their artistry in its execution. Their works range from simple clothes of daily use for men and women to most artistic products. Such as embroidery designs on handkerchief, shawls and even table clothes. Limbu women regard weaving as a symbol of prestige, dignity and progress of them. They have a cultural attachment with the art of weaving and with the skill of using handlooms protected and nourished by long tradition. It is hereditary art of Limbu women. Mothers train their daughters in spinning threads and other techniques of handloom. The Mundum says that Yumasammang taught Limbu women the art of weaving and skills to use handloom. Yuma first of all taught handloom skills and techniques to Chemjong clan women. The stone monument of handloom seat used by Yumasammang still exists at Bodhe village of Dhankuta District in Eastern Nepal (Thakkelung - Limbuwanko Lokkatha P.31-33). Today handloom weaver's products are not only used by family members for garments but also sold commercially. At present Limbu women are weaving Dhaka clothes in export quality for producing Sari, Cholo, kurta-surwal, tea mat, place mat, tie, napkins, table cloth, curtains etc.

Home Decoration. - It is also one of the primitive arts of Limbu women. Long long ago when houses were built of thatched roof and bamboo and stone walls. The Limbu women used to decorate their houses by painting the walls with white and red colored paints. Enamel and chemical paints were not invented. They painted the pictures of moon, star, sun, hexagon and different flowers on the wall with paints locally made from clay and tender leaves. This occurred once a year that is before the Dashain festival. This is entirely done by young women of the family. There are two reasons for decorating the house by young women: firstly to make the house look clean, fantastic and secondly to attract young Limbu boys. If a Limbu boy sees the above art-works painted on the walls, he ensures that a young Limbu girl exists in the house.

Limbu baby daughters are blessed by their parents, Phedangmas and relatives at the naming ceremony as under:

"Thak thak ma khirilo (be skilled in weaving cloth)

Ya akchama khirilo (be skilled in preparing food)".

Him dang wapna khirilo (be skilled in decorating house)". (C.Subba)

FOLKTALES

Oral tradition of Limbus is rich in folktales. Most of the folktales are related to Mundums tradition, custom, origin and migration of Limbus. There are many stories in the form of almost unwritten memories related to certain class of Limbus. The eminent linguist Imansing Chemjong compiled and edited-"Kirati Dantya Katha"(1965)". Presumably this is the pioneer of Kirati (Limbu-Rai) folktales. After Imansing Chemjong the following Kirat (Limbu-Rai) folktales have been compiled and published:

Kirati Lok Kathaharu - Shivakumar Shrestha (BS 2047)
Kirati Lok Katha Sangalo - Shivakumar Shrestha (BS 2051)
Kirat Lok Katha Vol I - Luxmikumar Serma (Papo) (BS 2048)
Kirat Lok Katha - Bartaman (BS 2055)
Hechha Kuppa (Kirat Lok Katha) - Bartaman (BS 2057)
Saypatri (Multi language magazine) - Royal (the then) Nepal Academy, Nepal Limbu Bhasa Lokkatha Anka Vol 6 No. 2 (Kartik-Chait 2057) Guest Editor: Bairagi Kaila.
Kirati Lok Katha Sangraha - Rajesh Rai (BS 2062)
Limbu Folklore -Ms Leelainie Pappadis (AD 1994?)
Katha Dungai Dhunga ko (Kirat Lok Katha) - Shuva Mukarung (BS 2064)
Limbuwan ka Lok Katha - Dhanhang Subba (BS 2065) (Among the above mentioned folktales this is the largest volume containing 61 folktales).

Tulsi Diwas an eminent writer (folklorist?) has classified Nepali folktales into ten types (Mahesh Pradhan, Darjeeling Times dotcom Vol 1 No. 9 (Nov-Dec 08) pg 15). But Kirati (Limbu-Rai) folktales of the following types are also in existence:

Folktales on stones and caves
Folktales on Flora and Fauna
Folktales on Pond River and Fountain.
Folktales on Demon and Demons
Folktales on Ridges and Mountains
Folktales on Roads and Villages
Folktales on Aquatic animals/plants
Folktales related with certain clan of Limbus etc.

RIDDLE

Riddles are also used as a means of entertainment among young boys and girls and they become the constituent part of the competitive duet in Palam. A short example is given below.

After an introduction and exchange of compliments, they start playing riddles in Palam.

Boy: Phulai phulyo sekmari,
Lau khelau jorhi juwari.

Girl: Dhobi le luga dhunchha nai,
Lau hajur naran hunchha ni.
Chan chune paisa gandina,
Juhari khelna po jandina.

The discussion goes on and towards the end the girl wants to be a student of the boy. The boy asks for the tuition fee. The girl asks what the fee is? She further says, I am so poor that I can not offer any monetary fee except my body. The boy says it is not acceptable. The boy asks to bring a thigh of fish as the tuition fee. The girl says there is no thigh of a fish and she has not yet seen it. The boy argues that the thigh of a fish exists there. Here is an example of playing riddle in Palam:

Girl: Phalam ko sikri khiyauane ra,
Kangali le ke po lyaunu ra.
Kalo lai akshar ke hola,
Gurujan bheti ke hola.

Boy : Phalam ko sikri khyauanu hos
Machha ko sapro lyaunu hos.

Girl: Dhobi le luga dhudaina
Machha ko sapro hundaina.
Kalo lai akshar lekhina
Machho ko sapro dekhina.

Boy : Kalo akshar chha hai
Machha ko sapro chha hai.
Phalam ko sikri khiyaunu hos
Machha ko sapro lyaunu hos
Male ra goru ho bichhe
Ma ta guru timi shikchhe
Majjhi le kisti khiyauchha bhane
Machha ko sapro lyauchhau bhane
Dhobile luga dhunchha nai
Timi shishe hunchhau nai.

Again after discussion the girl requests the boy to solve the above riddle without paying any fee. She says, as I am so poor like a beggar, I have not got even a single penny. At the end the boy is compelled to solve the riddle at the humble request of the girl:

Boy: Dhobi le luga dhunchha ni
Lau teso bhae hunchha ni
Chanchune paisa ganchhu hai
Lau teso bhae bhanchhu hai
Ek mukhi mala gannu hola
Lau teso bhae sunnu hola
108 rupe gane hai
Lau aba jorhi bhane hai
Gharai ta turiyo dhuri ma
Machha ko sapro hunchha bhurhi ma
Pani lai paryo rujheau hola
Aba ta jorhi bujheau hola.

Girl: Pani paryo rujhe hai
Machha ko sapro bujhe hai
Dhobi le luga dhudo rahechha
Machha ko sapro hudo rahechha. etc.

The boy solves the riddle saying that the thigh of a fish exists in stomach. The girl says that she understands and agrees that the thigh of a fish exists.

HOSPITALITY OF GUESTS.

Limbu have their own typical way to extend hospitality to guests. They consider that offering good food is not enough, guests should also be respected and mentally entertained. This is their legacy, heredity, culture, tradition and prestige of their society. The following traditional practices illuminate the Limbu's civilization and culture:

1. Phudong
2. Hena Mepma
3. Lam Lakma
4. Lang Pongma

Phudung.

The Phudung is provided to close relatives especially to bride and bride-groom's father and mother or to a son-in-law. They are provided with Phudung by offering a ceremoniously slaughtered animal. Before slaughtering the animal (especially a male goat) should be brought in front of the guests. And a host will say a few words to the guests, the Phedangma and other relatives. After this address, the goat will be slaughtered. The portion from the right foreleg to the head is usually given to the guest at the time of departure. A small piece of heart, lever and intestine each should be stuck in side portion of the animal. The guests should take this offer to the home. The local liquor and Tongba (hot millet beer served in a wooden barrel-shaped vessel imbibed through a bamboo pipe) are served with a pickle immediately after arrival and this is an initial component of hospitality. In the case of close relatives other than the close ones, Phudung will not be offered. However, they are entertained with the best foods that the hosts can provide. When the food stuffs are ready, they are placed in a proper way usually around the the hearth and the guests proceed either in the order of status or that of age to take their food. Drinking-water is placed before the food stuffs. The meal should be served in the order of status or age. When putting the food, two hands should be used and the server pay compliments folding both hands. A single-hand should not be used; it is a mark of insult in the Limbu tradition. If a minor item is being served the right hand alone can be used the left hand should touch the elbow of right hand so that it seems as using both hands. After placing all the foods stuffs the host will address the guests, which is called - Hena Mepma. It is similar to a toast

or cheers. The senior most guest will reply to the host. Hena Mepma reveals that food should be offered to guests with respect and honor.

Hena Mepma:-

An example of Hena Mepma is as under:

With compliment folding both hands

Dear respected guests,

One can not climb up a nettle tree, and poverty can not be hidden. Due to draught the grain product was not enough. All the money has also been exhausted by paying loans. Therefore, we could not offer you good food please take this simple food as if it is delicious.

Reply from a senior most member of the guests:

With compliment folding both hands

Dear respected host,

You are saying that the nettle tree can not be climbed up and poverty can not be hidden. Due to draught food-grain production was limited and money has been exhausted after payment of loans. But we see the food offered here is enough. It was not necessary to offer such delicious food. Thank you, and cheers!

Lam Lakma:

This refers to reception and warm welcome to bride and her mates. Before the marriage the bride is taken away from her parents home accompanied by bride mates or a senior lady specially aunt (father's sister). They will be accorded warm welcome on the way or a ridge of groom's village by Kelangba (Chyabrung players) and other entertainers until arrival at a temporary shelter. The Ke (Chyabrung) will be played on the way and guns are boomed in pair and fired in air. They will be entertained throughout on the way or a ridge and lead them up to temporary shelter. This welcome custom is called Lam Lakma.

Lang Pongma:

This refers to a farewell. After the marriage ceremony the bride mates and aunt who accompanied the bride return to their respective homes. Before they return the groom's parents bid farewell to them offering some liquor and wines as an honor. The wine and liquor will be served there as a farewell drink. They will be escorted by Kelangba (Chyabrung players) and other entertainers on their way back home up to half way or a ridge. Ke will be played in Semmui (farewell) tune throughout the way. This farewell custom is called Lang Pongma

PROVERBS (Mukpan)

"Proverbs are short sentences drawn from the long expressions" - Cervantes.

Limbu endorse on Cervantes' saying. Here we have some:

Libmu proverbs:

Nahem mare khejekpok

Sakmara mamre lunhithaok

Akha lagauda jhagara hunchha

Gali srap garda ashuva Iyauchha.

(Jealousy invites conflicts,

Scolding and curse invite bad luck)

Ningwa hopmare tukkhe aja

Patmellemare samwan adha

Gyan na huda dukha painchha

Bolna na janda sajay painchha

(Ignorance leads to misery,

Offensive words lead to punishment)

Samma ne gar samlingma

Yangwane gar yang chingma

Sato harae sato bolaunu

Rupiya chha bhane ramrari lukaunu etc...etc...

(If you have lost your sense, call it back,

If you have money, hide it safely.)

FOOD AND BREWERY (Chama nu Thi-Sejungwa)

Food (Chama):

Chyankhlako bhat - Maize grain rice
Dhirho - Smashed millet
Papanda - Baked bread of millet powder.
Lungghakcha - Made of green maize (steamed)
Sigolya ra Penagolya - Made from millet and wheat (steamed)
Pena Manda - Millet soup
Khareng - A dried loaf made of rice and wheat

Curry (Sumbak):

Chembikhik (Kinima) Fermented soya bean
Kinimako sumbak - Curry of kinima (Most popular curry among Limbu, Rai and Yakha)
Yangben - Lichen curry mixed with fresh blood of a pig or egg or minced meat
Sargyangma - Sausage (especially of pork)
Sagi/SigwaSumbak - Curry of tender leaves or flowers of nettle
Wamyuk - Mixed with burnt soft feathers of chicken together minced with liver, heart and wings. (Most popular curry among Limbu, Rai and Yakha)
Fakshako kharuwa- Fried pork, ribs and thigh meat.

Pickles and chutneys (Mutchi):

Filinge ko achar: - Dry Chutney of a kind of oil seed.
Phado - Chutney made of bean powder.
Pharshiko biyako achar – Chutney made of the powder of pumpkin seeds
Phesuppa - Pickles of fermented bamboo shoots

Brewery (Thi-Sejungwa):

Khesung - Yeast. Made from five herbal roots medicines
Thi - Liquor
Tongba - Hot millet beer served in a wooden barrel-shaped vessel imbibed through a bamboo pipe.
Sejungwa - Local distilled wine
Chhanuwa jarh - Filtered liquor made from millet, rice or wheat.
Hurre - Liquor made from maize and rice.

Folk Games

Limbus play various games/sports. A few of them are given below:-

PAKLUNG LEPMA= Shot Put
TONG LI APMA = Shooting Arrow
KAK KUMA= Load Carrying Game
LOK LOKKE CIHAT= Race
SINGBUNG LINGHA= Tree Climbing game
CHUNGMA = Children Game

Of all the games PAKLUNG LEPMA is very important and connected with the Limbu religion and culture. This is a tribal game of the Limbus. Even the Phedangma recites the importance of this game in Mundum. The shot put is an old famous game of the Limbus which is continually being played then and now. God Porokmi Yambhami was a primitive and first sportsman. There is a ridge called Menchhayam thegu* (a rock where girls stood with full costumes-jewelries) where the boys and girls used to dance Kelang and sing Palam. Besides singing and dancing the young boys used to show their physical fitness, tight muscles and handsome bodies by throwing shot put. At the bottom of this rock there is a big stone which was thrown as a shot put by Porokmi Yambhami from Chainpur still exists.

Chungma: Wrestling among children (boys). Limbu legend says wrestler must fight twice, if they fight once or single they will be bitten by a Tibetan dog.

* Limbuwanko Lokkatha p.105-108

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Note :- (Mundum is a legend, a folklore or pre historic accounts of serious and moral or philosophical exhortations. in poet's language. It is a scripture living in oral traditions. In all rites either worship or ceremony, Phedangmas verbally perform it without seeing a book or script). (Vol.1 No.1 Magh-Chaitra 2065)

Attention: - Photos of Handloom seat, Dhan nach, Chyabrung and Limbu Girl to follow.



Dhanhang Subba

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