

# CHABRUNG: DRUM OF LIMBOO COMMUNITY OF SIKKIM

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## Abstract

*As a rhythmic instrument that links tradition, spirituality, and communal identity, the Chabrung drum is deeply ingrained in the Limboo community's cultural history in Sikkim. An essential part of many Limboo rites, celebrations and rituals, this double-headed, hourglass-shaped drum represents the persistence of traditional customs and beliefs. The Chabrung, which is played at religious events, creates rhythms that are thought to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual realms and promote harmony among attendees. Its beats reflect an oral history that spans centuries, telling tales of bravery, heritage, and the ideals that the Limboo people holds dear. Beyond just music, the Chabrung is significant because it is a cultural symbol that strengthens ties to one another and a sense of shared identity. Limboos maintain and share their history, beliefs, and spirituality through rhythmic expressions, which promotes a feeling of pride and camaraderie. The Chabrung is a monument to the tenacity of native customs and the ability of music to preserve cultural homogeneity in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day. The Chabrung's function as a tool and a symbol of cultural legacy that links the Limboo people's past, present and future is highlighted by efforts to conserve and promote it. For the collection of data the researcher used both primary and secondary sources. The research work is qualitative in nature. The aim of this research paper is to explore the importance of Sikkim's Chabrung Drum of Limboo community in Cultural Unity and Tradition perspective.*

**Keywords:** Chabrung Drum, Limboo Community, Cultural Heritage, Rhythmic Unity

## INTRODUCTION

One of Sikkim's indigenous groups, the Limboo (or Limbu) population is renowned for its unique customs and rich cultural legacy. The Limboo people have a long history in Sikkim and are originally from the Himalayan region, specifically Nepal and northeastern India. Their beliefs include a combination of Buddhism and Animism and some also practise Hinduism. They speak the Limbu language, which is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

The Limbus have long been followers of this religion, known as Yumaism. Limbus, who are Yumaists by faith, referred to themselves as the "Yakthumba" or "Yokthumba," or the chief of the hill tribe. Although they revere their supreme god, Tagera Ningwaphuma, Yuma is the most significant and well-liked of the Limbus and is honoured constantly. The Limboo Tribal Society is a self-governing group of people that practice Yumaism, an ancient religion.

According to A.B. Subba's book "*History, Growth and Development of Limboo Language: A Present Context in Sikkim*" the Limboos have an animistic faith and belief system and worship nature rather than idols. The Limbus, who struggle with their own indigenous culture and religion, have made an imprint on who they are. They were once a hunter-gatherer tribe, but they have effectively adapted to use their primary weaponry and have advanced to their current socioeconomic standing. However, their religion marks them as a repository of their own culture. Their culture, traditions, and customs are unique.

In addition to the conventional forms of entertainment, their festivals also feature mythological narratives and ritual performances. In light of this, the richness of the cultural ideas that are present in the tribe is reflected in the Limbus folk music. It exhibits connections, familial patterns, ceremonial beliefs, creation myths, and the creative role of interactions with both spiritual and physical entities. Thus, the Limbus' folk music is essential to comprehend their cultural aspects, such as their relationships, worldview, customs, roles, and rituals. As a kind of entertainment, music is being used and recreated by the Limbu community today, helping to maintain long-standing customs in the contemporary day.

Traditional music, dances and celebrations of the harvest season, such Chasok Tongnam, are all part of their cultural customs. The distinctive literature and writing of the Limboo community, especially in the Limbu language, are very well-known. Limboo women wear traditional garments called "*meekhlai*" and "*shari*", while men dress in "*pagari*" (traditional headdress) and "*pao*" (traditional shawl). They are renowned for their colourful clothing and elaborate jewellery.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Firstly, secondary data has been gathered from existing literature, theses, articles, reports and databases, providing background and contextual insights into the research topic. The data has been analyzed to identify gaps, trends or patterns in the existing knowledge about the Chabrung percussion musical instrument. For primary data, qualitative methods like surveys and interviews have been employed to gather new, firsthand data directly from participants or observations. The data has been collected systematically to ensure reliability and validity. Both data sets have been compared and contrasted to conclude, with the primary data helping to support or challenge the findings derived from secondary sources. Ultimately, the dual approach aimed to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of the research question. The purposive sampling method has been established in this research work.

## DISCUSSION

The colourful culture of the Limboo population in Sikkim is characterized by a unique language, customs, rituals and forms of expressive art. With an amalgamation of Buddhist and animistic elements, their cultural identity is closely linked to agriculture, the natural world and ancestors' beliefs. The Limbu language, which is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family, is spoken by the Limboo people. In honor of the renowned scholar and figure Sirijunga Hang, who is known for having revived Limbu culture and script in the 18th century, the language has its alphabet, called Sirijunga. The Limboo people celebrate Chasok Tongnam, their most important holiday, as a way to give thanks to the gods for a bountiful harvest. It takes place in December and involves feasting, ceremonies and social gatherings.

Offerings are made to placate and recall ancestors during the tongsing ceremony, which is intended for ancestral worship. It is a fundamental component of the Limboo worldview.

Sewaro is a celebration of significant life events that frequently feature traditional music and dances. Their relationship to nature is reflected in their bamboo clothing. Traditionally, men wear pagari (headgear) and pao (shawl). Meekhlai, also known as sumba, is a traditional garment worn by women that is wrapped around and worn with a shirt. Jewellery made of silver and beads, frequently with elaborate patterns that honor their ancestry, is worn by both men and women.



Fig.1 Chabrung percussion instrument

Often performed at festivals and community events, bamboo music and dance are expressive. Yalang, often known as the "Paddy Dance," is a dance form that symbolizes the communal spirit and agricultural themes. They rely heavily on Chabrung, a traditional percussion musical instrument, which gives their performances more rhythmic depth. Animism and the veneration of nature and ancestor spirits are aspects of bamboo spirituality. Traditional priests known as mangpas or phedangmas conduct religious rites and serve as go-betweens between people and the divine. The Limboo people have also adopted Buddhism and Hinduism over time, incorporating these religions with their own customs.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The Limboo people of Sikkim and the surrounding areas use the Chabrung as a traditional percussion instrument. It is played most frequently at festivals, festivities and rituals and is an essential component of Limboo musical tradition. A long, double-sided drum with deep, resonant tones, the Chabrung is perfect for accompanying Limboo dance acts such as the Yalang (also called the "Paddy Dance"). Made from hollowed-out wood, the Chabrung is usually formed like a barrel or hourglass. Animal hide is placed over both ends, properly stretched and secured with cords or ropes to produce a taut drumming surface. The player can move freely while playing because the instrument is typically worn around their neck and suspended by a strap.



Fig.2 Photos taken during playing of Chabrung

The Chabrung is played by hand, with the drummer striking both sides of the drum with open palms and fingers to produce a variety of tones and rhythms. The player can create a variety of noises by varying the force and location of strikes. Chabrung players frequently use rhythmic steps in Limboo customs and the beats are timed to the dance moves of the performers to provide a seamless and energetic performance. Taals of Chabrung are mostly of 3/3 and 4/4 which improvises with single, double or triple cycle of playing.

The Chabrung, a representation of joy and unity, is a vital component of Limboo community events and is thought to help people connect with nature and ancestral spirits. The beats of drum are believed to call forth blessings and strengthen the bonds of unity among the Limboo people during ceremonies and celebrations.

### Wood use for the hallow section of Chabrung:

Originally Khamari wood (Scientific Name: *Gmelina arborea*) and Simbal Wood (silk cotton tree, Scientific Name: *Ceiba pentandra*).



### **Skin:**

Goat Skin (Medak in Limboo language).

Rope or Tuna is used of Ox skin.

The stick is made up of bamboo it is called Ghero.

The Chabrung is more than just a musical instrument, it is a cultural symbol that demonstrates the rhythmic prowess and strong ties to the Limboo community. Its rhythms are essential to Limboo's cultural expression because they invigorate dances and stabilize the group's collective attitude. As a symbol of solidarity, legacy and unwavering ties to ancestors' customs. The Chabrung are highly valued in the Limboo people of Sikkim. This percussion instrument is an essential part of Limboo culture. It is more than just a musical instrument. The Limboo community's identity is closely linked to the Chabrung, especially when it comes to exhibiting their traditional dance and song. It is a proud cultural symbol that sets Limboo heritage and customs apart in Sikkim's multicultural environment. It is a highly esteemed instrument that represents Limboo ethnicity and community pride due to its use in festivals, dance performances, rituals and ceremonies. In religious ceremonies and rituals conducted by traditional Limboo priests like Phedangmas and Mangpas, the Chabrung is frequently employed. It is thought that the drum beats let participants connect with the spiritual world and invite blessings from their ancestors.



Fig.3 Photos taken during interview with Mr. Hem Bahadur Subba (11.11.2024/ 5:19 pm)

In rituals like Tongsing, a ceremony honouring ancestors, and Chasok Tongnam, the Limboo harvest festival, its rhythmic noises accompany offerings and prayers. The Chabrung's rhythms, which combine spirituality and music, create a hallowed ambiance.

The Chabrung is essential to Yalang, often known as the "*Paddy Dance*", which is one of the most significant and expressive dances performed by the Limboo community. The rhythms of the drums in Yalang direct the dancers' movements and give the performance energy, uniting the neighborhood in a peaceful celebration. In addition to festivals, the Chabrung is played at social events and life-cycle occasions like weddings, where its melody encourages happiness, camaraderie and a sense of shared identity among Limboo people. The Chabrung contributes to the transmission of traditional knowledge. Since many young Limboo gains the abilities and rhythms from seniors, learning to play it is seen as a rite of passage that helps to preserve cultural knowledge and musical tradition.

It promotes continuity throughout generations since each rhythm acts as a living reminder of Limboo ideals, history and culture. Because of this, the Chabrung is a cultural artifact that preserves the stories, feelings and memories of other generations. The Limboo community holds the Chabrung players in high regard. As cultural

guardians, talented drummers are tasked with preserving ancient rhythms and the history that goes along with them. These musicians, who frequently conduct performances, are respected for their capacity to use music to preserve the spirit of the community. Their function is crucial during festivals, and they are highly respected as cultural representatives. A culturally significant instrument, the Chabrung represents the pride, morals and spirituality of the Limboo people of Sikkim. Their social and spiritual lives are anchored by its sounds, which also serve as a powerful statement of Limboo's identity, strengthening the community's ties through shared cultural history.

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