



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF LIMBUIN SIKKIM

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 19th May, 2016
Received in revised form
15th June, 2016
Accepted 27th July, 2016
Published online 31st August, 2016

Key words:

Sikkim,
Limbu,
Chyabrung,
Negra,
Murchunga,
Chethya,
Binayo.

ABSTRACT

Sikkim is a part of inner mountain ranges of Himalayas and it is the 22nd state of India which came into existence with effect from 26th April, 1975. Sikkim is more colorful musically with the ritual culture of Nepali, Sikkimese, Lepcha, Bhutiya Tamang, Limbu, Newar, Rai, Gurung, Manger, Sunwar etc. We can know the history, folk cultures and folklore through the songs and musical instruments of a particular community. Traditional music is very valuable culture due to the historical and cultural significance, but the modern musical forms and cultures are constructive and attractive, where the old forms of music are getting unattractive and unfashionable for thinking of general people. Traditional culture is the mirror of any community in the world. Through the music of any ethnic community we can get a particular identity of how the particular community is shaped. Limbus has many folk musical instruments and used in their own life cycle rituals, occasions, like -“Ke” or “Chyabrung”, “Negra”, “Penjekom”, “Murchunga”, “Chethya”, “Miklakom”, “Binayo” etc. Today their traditional music and musical instruments has been on the verge of extinction from our society. So it is the right time to feel to safeguard, promote and preserve the folk musical instruments for gift a strong history and heritage to the next generation. A preliminary introduction of the above mentioned instruments have been provided with.

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Citation: Jayanta Kumar Barman, 2016. “Musical instruments of Limbuin Sikkim”, *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (08), 37419-37423.

INTRODUCTION

Limbu is one of the indigenous people called Kirati, living in Nepal on the eastern most section of the Himalayas between the Arun River and the border of Sikkim state, India. Limbu's have their own script called Kirat-Sirijonga. Portions of the Limbu population are also located in the east and west districts of Sikkim. A smaller number are scattered throughout the cities of Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal, Assam, Nagaland and in North and South Sikkim. Today technology has helped to create musical forms which are very convenient and fresh sounding. Electronic instruments have shaped the music of today like keyboards, guitars, sequencers, computers in have a leading edge over traditional instruments. Thus traditional musical instruments cannot compete to run with the modern form of music because of unavailability of folk musical instruments manufacturer in the country. The traditional music of any community is an important part of its culture.

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Through the music of any ethnic community we can get a particular identity of how one community is shaped. We can gain the knowledge about the history, folk cultures, folklore by attending and perhaps listening to the songs and musical instruments of a particular community. Since such traditions have been passed down from generations, the traditional music makes it very valuable culture wise due to the historical and cultural significance. The old forms of music as it may get unattractive and unfashionable as far as the general people nowadays can think. The irritating part is that the younger generation doesn't even try to realize it, but the fact is the traditional music also had very attractive and fashionable elements historically. Globalization has transformed every country from the perspective of economy, culture and distance being remote and restricted to integrated, inter related global system. Globalization is the process in which the world becomes a 'global village' and it assimilates economy and communities through the spread of information technologies and people across different countries. Hence affects country from both economic and cultural aspects along with different sectors of life such as tradition, cultural food items, and people's way of thinking, traditional occupation, and structure of a family and so on. Hence, globalization has also effected in various ways in the communities and inevitably the Limbu community too (Lama, 2012)

Sikkim

Sikkim came into existence, as 'The Greater Sikkim' in 1642 AD with distinct identity of its own as a Himalayan Kingdom after signing the tripartite treaty of "Loh-Mon-Tsong-Sum". Since then, the Namgyal Dynasty ruled the country till 1975. Sikkim was much larger in the time of the first Chogyal than it is these days. The frontier of the Kingdom was "Dibdala in the North, Shinsa Dag-pay, Walung, Yangmag Khangchen, Yarlung and Tamar Chorten in the West, down along the Arun and Dudhkoshi rivers, down to the Maha Nodi, Naxalbari and Tatalia in the South, on the East Tagong La and Tang La on the North. The present area of Sikkim is 7096 sq. km. lying between 27°04'46" and 28°07'48" N latitude and 88°00'58" and 88°55'25" E longitude in the Eastern Himalayas. It extends approximately 114 km from North to South and 64 km from East to West with altitude ranging from 250 m to 8,598 m to its North lay the vast stretches of Tibetan plateau, with Nepal on the West, Bhutan and Chumbi valley of China (Tibet) on the East and Darjeeling district of West Bengal in the South (Subba, 2011).

The Limbus

The Limbu are of Mongolian stock and speak a language belonging to the Kirati group of Tibeto-Burman languages. Limbu villages are found 2,500 to 4,000 ft. (800 to 1,200 m) above sea level and consist of 30-100 stone houses surrounded by dry-cultivated fields. A brief history of the ethnic Limbu tribe has been rewritten for re-looking and better understanding in the present context. The Limbu has many ritual cultures like the dance festivals of Kelang popularly known Chyabrung (two-sided drum) and Yarak (Paddy dance) as major events.

Origin and History

The Limboos, Limbus, Yakthumbas, Yakthungbas, Yakthunhangs or Subbas, one of the Native Himalayans are the Mongoloid or East Asian human race, who has its own history, belief system or religion called Yumaism way of life. Limboo/Limbu language has its own diction and its Sirijunga Script is a distinct Limbu/Limboo culture and their archaic traditions, are spread throughout the world but they are mostly concentrated in the Eastern Himalayan region of Eastern Nepal, Lower valleys of Bhutan, India (West Bengal, Sikkim, and other North-Eastern states), United Kingdom (Kent area), Hong Kong, Singapore etc.

METHODOLOGY

A field study was organized by Sikkim University under the flagship programme called as Winter Sojourn. Our group "Musical Instruments" conducted its field survey at Timburbung, West Sikkim. It was for 10 days. The reason for choosing these areas is because Timburbung is mostly dominated by the Limbu community. Our team comprised of 14 members among whom 12 were students from different departments of Sikkim University and 2 faculty members. An open end questionnaire was prepared and was used to collect the information. Focused Group Study and Questionnaire Based Survey methodologies were used.

A total of 100 sample size was obtained and the data was qualitatively analyzed and was compiled for writing the field observations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Folk Musical Instruments of Limbu

The Limbu musical instruments are as follows:-

- "Ke" or "Chyabrung" (a cylindrical hollow log – "Drum")
- "Negra" – A pair of kettle drum
- "Penjekom" – iron or metal harp called "Murchunga"
- "Chethya" (Brass plate)
- "Miklakom" (Bamboo harp of Simikla bamboo- called "Binayo")

Musical instruments played a very much important part in uniting people of various communities or people within the communities. Each community has its own musical instrument which helps in the identification of a particular community and its richness. These are described in the following manner:-

Chyabrung

It is a percussion instrument (Figure No. 1) generally used and is an important component of Folk Culture of Limbu Community. It is mostly played in happy occasions with 'Ke Lang' in marriage ceremonies, cultural programs and other special functions or occasions etc. They use two hands to play. They hold drumsticks by left hand then they start striking Chyabrung in timing and in different styles. They carry this instrument and start striking and dancing.



Fig. 1. Chyabrungra

Procedures to make Chyabrung are

First a piece of Kasari wood about 2 ½ feet of length was taken and it can be in different sizes. After that they make a big hole by using Rambo (long pointed knife), and gives a cylindrical look. Then leather is kept in water for 2 days in a bowl and is kept covered. Then after 2 days the leather is scratched with a pointed knife to remove that fur. Then Beth (Tei) is cut into pieces which are known as Choya.

Then two ends of hollow log is covered by that leather and that covered leather is wrapped up by a bamboo's ring which is made up of leather and bamboo for tightening the leather. And for more tightness, the small piece of wood about 6 inches are used and for good quality of sound alcohol. In Timburbong, Mr. Bisnu Subba, a teacher of a primary school teaches the students how to play *Chyabrung* along with the dance. *Chyabrungr Nach* is also a most special and famous culture in Limbu (Figure 2). It is used in many special festival of Limbu. It is one of the oldest cultures of Limbu.



Fig. 2. *ChyabrungrNach*



Fig. 3. *Negra*

Negra

It is a traditional percussion instrument of Limbu community (Figure 3). It has no implements on song. It is played in marriage, funeral and other such type of occasions. It has two parts male and female. *Kumba* is male and *Kumma* is female. *Kumba* is bigger than *Kumma*. And *Negra* is accompanied by a bell. It dates back to the history and is considered to be the gift of the Chogyal Kingdom to the Limbu people.

Procedures to make *Negra* are

Materials used to make this instrument –Copper pot, Leather (Goat and Buffalo), small piece of wood, bamboo piece, Drum sticks are made of *Asharey* wood.



Fig. 4. Playing *Negra*



Fig. 5. *Murchunga*

Whorled/flat leather of about 205 cm is set on the copper pot and with the help of starched leather, that flat leather will be tied on the copper pot and has to be stretched tightly. And then small piece of bamboo or the wood is to be loaded or kept on the string leather for a good quality of sound and have to make a small hole at the bottom of the pot. Piece of *Asharey* wood is used for drumstick, which is decorated by ring at top and bottom of the stick.

Uses of *Negra*

- This instrument is played with the drumstick. Two persons are required to play the *Negra* and person plays the bell. It is played with the types of beats as *Kusakrakpa*, *Chumjum*, *DhyapDhyape* etc. The beating of the bell is followed by *Negra*.
- In Timburbung, the *Negra* is kept as the community instrument. A responsible member of the community is given the task of keeping this instrument. The community contributes in the buying and maintenance of the instruments.
- Training is given in this instrument as the *Negra* is only allowed to play in death and marriage ceremonies. *Negra* is compulsorily played in deaths and marriages. But the technique of playing is different in both.
- It is said by the local people that whenever they play *Negra* in death ceremonies, the sound automatically makes them cry. This given an understanding of how emotionally this instrument touches people's heart.

- *Negra* comprises of three parts male, female and a bell (Figure No. 4). The male is played first, followed by the female drum and then by the bell. In marriages *Negra* are hanged on bamboo poles and played whereas during deaths *Negra* are carried by two people and the other two people play it and the other one has to play the bell.

Murchunga

This instrument was very much famous during earlier times (Figure No. 5). It symbolizes love. *Murchunga* was played to exchange the feelings of love among the youngest. The technique to play this instrument is by holding it by the teeth and plugging it by one finger at the end point of the instrument (Figure No. 6). *Murchunga* was used to be carried by the young people in the pocket of their shirts or jackets with attractive designs in the covers. *Murchunga* made by iron stick of umbrella. The *Murchunga* was very important in earlier days but now the importance of these instruments endangered as the young generation has no more interest in it.



Fig. 6. Artist playing *Murchunga*

Bell or “Chethya”

Bell is the solid musical instrument of Limbu (Figure No. 7). It is the accompanying instrument of *Negra*. It is played with rhythm of *Negra*. It is played by the hammer of iron in one hand and the other hand holds the brass bell.

“Binayo” or “Miklakom”

Binayo (Figure No. 8) is made by *Simikhla* bamboo. It's a harp made up of bamboo. It is played by men and women like *Murchunga*. The technique to play this instrument is by holding it by the teeth and plugging it by one finger at the end point of the instrument.



Fig. 7. Bell or *Chethya*



Fig. 8. *Binayo*



Fig. 9. Our Survey Group

Role of these Instruments in the Social and Cultural Lives of the Limbus

- *Negra*: It is played in death as well as marriage ceremonies but the rhythm sections are different.
- *Chyabrun*: It is played only on happy occasions such as birth or marriage.
- *Machunga*: Were earlier played mainly by the youngsters.
- *Negra* and *Chyabrun* are the two most important instruments of the limbu people, whereas the *Machunga* is losing its importance and *Binayo* has already become extinct.

Conclusion

In the time of Globalization we can merge the music made by origin of traditional musical instruments easily along with modern musical instruments. By the nature it is already in shape, sound, rhythm and colorful individuality. In order to safeguard and preserve the old lineage of folklore and customs, the traditional folk musical instruments in Himalayan region, their documentation and practice is necessary. And to bring the success – we have to arrange seminar, workshop, festivals, and courses in academic institutions and establish type of research institutions for promoting and saving the valuable folk music and musical instruments of Limbu.

Future Implications

- Workshop should be opened to teach the process of making the instruments.

- Govt. Institutes should be established to teach these folk instruments to the youngsters along with the children for free of cost.
- Groups should be organized in order to collect those instruments which are on the verge of extinction.
- Museums should be opened up to preserve these instruments.
- Financial assistance should be given to encourage the people who can make these folk instruments.
- To identify and honor the folk musicians and give them a chance to perform on the stage.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to Sikkim University for providing this kind of opportunity and platform for field survey and research activity.

Specially Sayak Das, PhD Scholar Department of Microbiology, School of Life Sciences, Sikkim University and All the members of the group are acknowledged and their efforts are being applauded.

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