

‘Saato Haraunu’ - a notion of similar to Soul Loss: The glimpses of ethnic revival among the Mangars and Limbus of Darjeeling

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Abstract: *The article highlights the phenomena of Saato Haraunu (soul loss) among the two hill communities of Darjeeling. Saato Haraunu is a kind of sickness prevalent among the children moreover; it also affects shamans during their pre-initiation phase. In spite of similar kind of experiences both in Saato Haraunu and shamanism still one of the under study populations does not hold the scheduled tribe status. The present endeavour has made the exploration unique through the application of auto-ethnographical approach and participant observation of Saato Haraunu and shamanism by the first author which are further conceptually furnished by the second author. It also reveals that soul loss and subsequent shamanic practices remain at the foundational core of both the communities and embedded in the deepest layer of the culture even in the contemporary era and among the formally educated members also. It also emerges as one of the conspicuous factors for retaining and rejuvenating the tribal status for achieving further goals.*

Key words: *Saato Haraunu (soul loss), shamanism, scheduled tribe, auto-ethnography, participant observation, Mangar, Limbu, Darjeeling.*

Introduction : *Saato harako hola yeta uta garnu lanu parxa-* these are the exact words commonly phrased among most Nepali speaking hill communities residing in and

around Darjeeling. It means, soul loss might have occurred, so the person should be taken to a shaman for healing. *Saato haraunu* is considered a common sickness occurring mostly among children and rarely affecting adults. However, it also affects shamans during their pre-initiation phase when malevolent entities try stealing their soul for preventing them from choosing the shamanic path.

The concept of soul loss or *Saato Haraunu* is familiar in various regions of the world. It is known by different terms across cultures with variability in symptoms depending on the concerned socio-cultural and ecological milieu. Clements (1932) states that soul loss results in sickness caused through separation of soul from the body through attack of ghosts, sorcerers or through mishaps occurred during its wanderings while a person is asleep. The concept of *Saato Haraunu* bears similarities to the concept of *Susto* (Spanish term for fright), a culture bound syndrome prevalent in South America. A cultural syndrome will be defined as a complex understanding of illness that is culturally specific (O'Neil and Rubel, 1980; Oths, 1999).

Literature reviews : Since its first description in English by Gillin (1945), substantial research has been devoted to *Susto*, a Latin American folk syndrome that has generally been documented to be related to acute fright (Baer et al. 2003; Bourbonnais-Spear et al. 2007; Klein, 1978; Rubel et al. 1984; Uzzell, 1974; Weller et al. 2002). The notion of soul loss (*Susto*) due to fright is well known from ethnographic accounts throughout Latin America (Lincoln 2001), and Aymara –an Indigenous community residing in the region of Bolivia and Peru believed to be originating from the region of Lake Titica (Forbes, 1870), the notion of *ajayu* loss has been studied by Gerardo Fernández (1999), Andrew Orta (1999), and others. Klein (1978) describes *Susto* as the product of the complex interaction between the individuals' state of (physical) health, the social and cultural system in which they live, and the individuals' personality.

Hooker (1855) during his travels in the regions of Darjeeling, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal had stated Magars as the aborigines of Sikkim who had been pushed towards Western Nepal by the Lepchas to the region of Limbus. O'Malley (1907), Namgyal and Drolma (1908), Chemjong (1966), Bagchi (1972) states the Mangars and Limbus are known to be among the oldest inhabitants of Sikkim. The word 'Mangar' is the endo-ethnonym used by members of community residing in the region of India whereas the same community is referred to as 'Magar' in Nepal. According to Chinese and Burmese language, 'Mang' or 'Mong' meant Mongolians while 'Aar' or 'Aarui' meant child. Therefore, the etymological meaning of the term 'Mangar' was the 'Children of Mongolia'. They are believed to originate from the Shin region of Central Asia (Pulami, 2009).

The word 'Limbu' or 'Limboo' is an exo-ethnonym provided to the community by the British while the community prefers the term '*Yakthumba Pan*'. '*Yakthumba*' refers to the people carrying bow and arrow that conquered the region of Limbuwan. Another variation by Bankoti (1961) states 'yak' to be a place for house building while 'thumba' refers to hard worker implying 'yakthumba' to be 'hardworking person of a particular house'. Subba (2008) states the term Limbus or Limboos emerged after coming in contact with the Gorkhas in 1774 A.D. Limboo surname became post-fixed from 1806 A.D. (Subba, 1999; Shrestha, 1985; Khamtak, 2007). Bhutias refer to them as Tsong or Chang as they are believed to have migrated from the Tsang province in Tibet (Subba, 2008). Mangars, a Hinduised community who have been categorized as caste population are striving towards attaining the status of Scheduled Tribe while Limbus are recognized as Scheduled Tribe in both the states of West Bengal, Sikkim and also by the Central Union of India in 2003.

Material and methods: The present study has been conducted among two communities, the Mangars and Limbus residing in three distinctive habitations of Darjeeling district, West Bengal. It aims to explore the conception of *Saato Haraunu* or soul loss among members of both the communities residing in different localities and the study also intends to understand the role of shaman to get rid of. Stratified sampling has been administered for purpose of the study wherein participant observation, focused-group discussion coupled with key informant, semi-structured and unstructured interview shed light on numerous aspects of the present discourse. Auto-ethnographical approach is applied for shedding light on the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Anthropologist Karl Heider introduced the term 'autoethnography' in 1975 in the context of Dani autoethnography (Chang, 2008).

The concept of layered account within auto-ethnography has been applied for understanding cross-cultural views of soul loss through means of explanatory models (Kleinman, 1980) provided by the traditional healer-cum shaman of both the Mangar and Limbu communities of the studied area as well as through unfolding the personality transformation of the first author through first-hand experience of the same. 'Layered account' (Ronai, 1995) is one that shows connections among 'personal experience, theory, and research practices' as the writer moves 'back and forth between narratives and reflections on those narratives or their content' (Goodall, 2008) and challenges a single telling from just one viewpoint. (Kleinman, 1980) envisages 'Explanatory models' as 'the notions about an episode of sickness and its treatment that are employed by all those engaged in the clinical process'.

The theoretical knowledge and substantive period of research experiences have enabled the second author to formulate the current research topic, moreover continuous interaction with the first author (who is a community member and also a Ph.D. research scholar of the second author) and the transformation of 'basic personality type' (Kardiner, 1945) of the same has insisted the second author to intervene the situation and subsequently conceptualize the research design.

The village of Naspatigaon lying in the forested region of Sittong about 20 kilometers from the sub-divisional town of Kurseong has been selected as it is solely inhabited by Mangars adhering to traditional animistic beliefs and culture. Another region, Latpanchar, the region of Cinchona (*Cinchona officinalis*) plantation has been chosen which is divided into small residential areas based on acres provided by the plantation owners. It is composed of dispersed population of Mangars and Limbus residing parallel to each other. The third area of study is Lamagaon, a village located in the region of Bijanbari adhering strongly to Limbu beliefs and culture.

Discussion : Symptoms of *Saato Haraunu* or soul loss mostly include persistent fever, vomiting, loss in appetite, sudden mood swings, highly intensified fright, shivers followed by pain in body. Children are easily susceptible to the attacks of souls and supernatural entities. *Saato Haraunu* is commonly found among them but sometimes also occurs in adults. The popular notion is that *Saato* of a child can be easily relapsed than that of an adult. Late treatment could be highly fatal. The incident occurred in the village of Lamagaon located in Bijanbari block within the district of Darjeeling where 42 year old Rajen Limbu, the *Samba* (a Limbu shaman) from the nearby village of Kainjaley was summoned to conduct the *Saato Bolauney* (calling of soul) ceremony for a 12 year old boy. The boy was feeling ill for a while so his parents rushed to the Bijanbari hospital. Later he was referred to a private hospital in Siliguri. The parents in desperation finally called for the services of Rajen who stated:

'Pura dhilo bhaie sakey ko thiyo. Tyo keta lai jungle ko deuta
Tamphungnama lageko le chito chot pareko theyo tei bhaera jiudo
manchey haru ko thau ma leunu sakindaina theyo.'

[It was already too late. *Saato* of the boy was already hurt and stolen by the forest hunter-deity Tamphungmana so he could not be brought back to the land of the living].

A few hours later the boy died owing to late treatment. This conception of stealing of soul by the forest hunting deity parallels synchronously to the *Susto* etiology of Trinatario people of Bolivia. The fact that the hunter worldview is reflected in Trinatario *susto* etiology clearly supports the argument that the subjective experience of a traditional illness is shaped both by the cultural and spiritual background of individuals, as well

as by the sociological features of the cosmological setting in which these individuals live (Castro and Eroza,1998; Greenway,1998).

Unlike his predecessors, Rajen refrains to perform animistic sacrifices and alcohol consumptions. Belonging to a family of shamans, he started having symptoms of *Mang utrinu* (possession of tutelary deity) shaking involuntarily, speaking in different tongues, sometimes roaming around in the forest. On being possessed, he started citing the *Mundhum* oral literature of Limbu regarding various facets of the community. He would recite folk stories regarding the Limbu way of life and provide divinations. He received mantras and foresight in dreams through his spirit teacher (*Mang Guru*) and knowledge on conducting various rituals by means of his human teacher (*Hang Guru*) *Satakey Maila* a renowned *Samba* of earlier times.

Being a *Samba* gives him the freedom to perform rituals for both natural and violent deaths. He believes that soul loss or *Saato Haraunu* occurs during sudden fright, evil-eye or *Nahen*, death of a close person, attack of witch-craft and even stealing of soul by *Tamphungnama* (Hunter deity of forest). Above stated symptoms are in close proximity to factors inducing *susto* such as fright, evil eye, bad wind, witchcraft, being grabbed by the earth and even pesticides (Baer and Penzell, 1993; Greenway,1998; Kiev,1972).

60 year old, Nar Bahadur Mangar, *Jhankri* of Latpanchar belonging to the Darlami clan experienced soul loss before being summoned into the generational practice. As a boy, he experienced symptoms of soul loss along with spirit possession. Belonging, to family of shamans it was destined that ancestors (*Pitri*) would choose one individual who would carry forward the generationally ascribed practice of shamanism prevalent among the Mangars. He states:

'Guru thapnu aghi dherai dukha paye. Jungle tira kudinthyo, dara tira kudinthyo, koi bela kata koi bela kata huntheo. Deuta utrinda jiu ma dherai kampa huntheo ani jokhana haru bhanthye harey. Tara malai tyo samay kehi yaad hunthena. Ghar ko manche haru le pani dherai dukha bhognu paryo. Paxi guru thapera puja siknu thalepaxi sabai ramro hudai gayo.'

[Before committing to a human teacher I faced enormous suffering. I ran around carelessly into the forest, cliffs wandering carelessly. During the possession of my spirit guide I faced enormous involuntary body movements. But I cannot recall everything. My family suffered a lot during that time. Later, things started improving after I sought a human shamanic teacher and performed rituals.]

He received predictions and premonitions in his dreams which mostly held true in reality. As time passed, his family and relatives have started to believe that he is chosen by the ancestors to be a *Jhankri*. Divination was sought through the help of another shaman and it was found to be true. He is considered to be an *Aitabarey Jhankri* (a

category of *Jhankri* chosen by the ancestors). It has been nearly thirty-six years since he accepted his fate as a shaman performing divinations along with clan and community rituals.

Unlike the Limbu shaman of Lamagaon, he prefers animistic sacrifices for specific rituals while fruits and flowers for others. 5 year old, Andrick Mangar of Gumbadhura, Latpanchar faced severe fever accompanied by vomiting and chills throughout the body. Feeling helpless his parents rushed towards the house of Nar Bahadur who was retiring to sleep. On seeing the child, he stated that he felt scared while playing and having *Halka Chaya* (weak shadow soul) made it easier for *Saato Haraunu* (soul loss). Keeping the boy upright he performed incantations brushing *Titeypati* (*Artemisia vulgaris*) over a glass of water. This water was sprinkled thrice over the child and few rice grains were given to feed for regaining normalcy.

Offering chopped head of a cock to the hunter deity *Shikari Deuta* is mandatory when soul loss or *Saato Haraunu* occurs near a river. Irregular performance of ritual may hurt the soul of individual ultimately leading to death. This conception is similar to the Limbus who believes soul stolen by the forest deity has to be retrieved soon. Most of the tribal communities have their own beliefs and practices in terms of seeking traditional health care which they acquire through their knowledge and experiences in search of getting psychological support to get rid of ailments (Tarafdar, 2010, 2017). In his theory on disease etiology, George Foster (1974) distinguishes between naturalistic and personalistic etiologies. As opposed to naturalistic systems that largely employ self-diagnosis, personalistic systems typically require curers with supernatural or magical skills, as the primary concern of the patient and his family is not to identify the immediate cause of illness, but instead to find out who is responsible, and why?

Limbus of Latpanchar represent numerous religious factions with few families adhering to traditional animistic beliefs while a growing number participating in religious groups such as Satya Sai Samiti, Manav Dharma and few being embraced to Christianity. The varied groups possess belief in *Saato Haranu* and its associated rituals. The area does not have a *Phedangma* (Traditional male Limbu shaman involves in performing house and health related rituals except rituals involving violent deaths) so Limbu shaman is called from the village of *Tham* located a few kilometers away. During exigency people sometimes resort to services of a local Buddhist medium or *Khandro* (female Buddhist Medium) specializing in solving cases related to spirit attacks. The 31 year old spinster gifted with the ability to see and handling the evil spirits does not have any human teacher. She was taught through dreams and premonitions provided by her spiritual guide. She states:

'Dhyan ma basda sabai kura dekhna thalinx. Kampa chutindaena tara Guru le sabai kura dekhaidinuhunxa'.

[As I meditate everything starts getting envisioned. I do not undergo any involuntary body movements but visions are shown through my tutelary deity/ Guru].

She does not perform any blood sacrifice but offers divinations along with amulets for protection. People from all walks of life visit her and is sought both by the Mangars and Limbus.

At one instance she performed the ritual of soul retrieval for 28 year old Revati Limbu who experienced anger, sleeplessness; loss of appetite accompanied by loss of interest in general activities. An offering of milk and fruits was made to the medium after which divinations were made by her student. The student 27 year old Nilima Limbu had been apprenticing for a year and was given responsibility of divining. She underwent a séance and when her tutelary deity seated upon her she started shaking violently making hand gestures in the form of *Mudras* (Sacred hand gesture expressing inner wisdom Blau and Blau, 2003). She spoke in Tibetan language and later in Nepali.

As she spoke, she stated that the client was facing soul loss and infertility. The reason was due to black magic performed by a sorcerer who had placed a white scarf wrapping a malevolent object angering the household deities resulting in household dispute and soul loss. Infertility had occurred through passing of the client over a cross-road where food offerings were made to *Moch* (spirit of dead child). *Saruwa moch* (spirit of dead child capable of transferring through touch) had entered her body and was causing miscarriages. Later, the client was offered more divinations by the *Khandro* herself who sprayed water from the ritualistic holy water holder or bum offering the client to drink thrice. Amulet was provided to the satisfied client who made offerings as per her wish.

Ram Bahadur Thapa a 63 year old Mangar Jhankri residing in the village of Naspatigaon, Sittong has been a *Jhankri* ever since his days as a young boy of ten. He was chosen as the lineage shaman through the spirit of his ancestors who had expressed the prediction during the ceremonial ritual of *chinta* (household ritual of divination and removal of ailments). He had attained the position after the death of his grandfather who had also been a shaman. He had to undergo through ailments, involuntary body movements and misfortunes before finding a teacher. He states:

'Kul le chaneko vanera matrai hudena. Guru khojnu parxa. Ramro Guru payena vaney bato lagnu saro parxa. Koi bela ta pagla natra pagli pani hunu sakxa.'

[Being chosen by the ancestors is not enough. The right Guru has to be searched. If a proper Guru is not found then it would be difficult to find the right path. Sometimes it may even lead to madness among both males and females.]

He works as a part-time shaman for the village with most of his time occupied as a small-scale farmer. He performs household rituals, forest rituals and healing rituals for the villagers. He states that *Saato Haraunu* is mostly prevalent among children. 11 year old Umang Thapa the only son of Sobha Thapa a 52 year old widow residing in the village was mostly susceptible to *Saato Janu* as he had the presence of *Halka Chaya* (weak shadow soul). When he was just eight months old he fell off the house window. He survived but faces problems due to the head injury caused at a young age. Sobha often had to keep a close eye over him as he easily got frightened which lead to him suffering from *Saato Haraunu*.

Umang mostly played alone but one day being excited by the new toy that Sobha bought he played near the edge of the household late in the evening and laughed along. She was scared that he might face problems later in the night and chided him to keep calm. As was expected, Umang did not accept food and started having rising temperature followed by shivers. She took him and went to Ram Bahadur Thapa or *Jhankri Maila* as he is popularly known. He checked the eyes and pulse of the child and stated:

‘Saato harako cha naniko. Kati palta samjhaunu timro nani ko halka
chaya cha.? Saanjh ma khelnu na dinu.’

[Soul loss of the child has occurred. How many times do I have to tell
you that your child has weak shadow soul? Do not allow him to play
at dusk].

Maila took the child and applied *Kalo tika* (black powder mark) on the forehead from coals of the *Chula* (hearth). He brought a glass of water and using mantras sprayed water seven times on face and body of the child. Sudden jerking of the child during the ritual entailed return of his soul.

I (the first author) belong to Mongar and inhabit in Kurseong town experienced the same phenomenon when as a child I mostly felt sick and sought services of the Limbu shaman known as *Aitu Bajey* working as a staff of the printing press section of Railway department. I was a frail child visiting the shaman and doctor most days of the week. As soon as I felt ill, my grandparents called upon *Aitu Bajey* who mostly asked for a glass of water, some turmeric and few rice grains. Blowing incantations on them through light touch of *Titey Pati* (*Artemesia vulgaris*) and asked me to drink it. By the time we visited the family doctor I would feel better. I always had a weak shadow soul or *Halka Chaya* with susceptibility to soul loss or *Saato Haraunu*. Belonging to a family of shamans chosen through means of ancestors traditionally at least one shaman must be present in our clan. The last shaman in the family was my great-grandfather who ran-off from his ancestral home in Marma tea garden.

Decisions of the spirit to either stay in the *kul* (lineage) as *pitri* (ancestral deity) or

incarnate as animal, bird, flower or reincarnate as human being was taken into account. Food items, beverages and clothing liked by the deceased whilst alive are provided as offerings in front of the altar during *Saato Chutauney* performed for cutting-off ties with the deceased. It ensured that the spirit venture on its soul journey without interfering in the lives of living family members and relatives. The angry *Pitri* (ancestral deity) speaking through the *Jhankri* divined that after the death of a young boy and deaths of several middle-aged men a female of the lineage would either be a *Mata* (medium) or *Jhankrini* (shaman).

The *Jhankri* offered descriptions of the future shaman stating a female had been chosen. If she did not acknowledge the healing tradition herself then the lineage would suffer greatly. It could even cause her early death by means of accident. After serious forethought, an unmarried aunt with long hair was selected by the elders. She did not match all the criteria mentioned but the elders thought that performing rituals for her could prevent the prophecy. I (first author) and two relatives were cut-off from the list as we did not possess long hair at the time of the prophecy. Although the exact person did not undergo the ceremony yet it was a sense of relief to have conducted few precautionary means to avoid the prediction.

After the engagement of a relative, my paternal aunt and her husband went to visit a shaman. Taking a fistful of rice for divinations, I went along with them for knowing the cause of disruptions in my life. The shaman did not wear any special garment or ornament and seemed ordinary. He asked me to keep rice grains on both hands and directly look in his eyes. People stared at me as I sat inside the circle of a huge *Rudraksha Mala* (necklace comprising of the 108 dried seeds of *Rudraksha Elaeocarpus ganitrus* tree considered to be the tears of Lord Shiva, the supreme destructive deity of Hindu pantheon). He cut a lemon into two halves by the knife followed by application of vermillion over the cut pieces symbolic of blood sacrifice to the invoked deity. Sacrifice through lemon, fruit and even egg was made but blood sacrifice of animals was strictly prohibited and completely against his ethics.

The last ritual was *Jhaar Phook* (ritualistic removal of evil entities by reciting and blowing spells) by means of camphor burnt over betel nut leaves. He used 7 betel nut leaves and swayed them over my body while simultaneously uttering *mantras*. The entire phenomenon sent shivers through the body similar to sensations produced while scattering grains in different body parts. The shaman asked me to recall events which had taken after I first took the fistful of rice in my hands. As I was unable to remember, my aunt stated that I cried screaming with rage as I had been possessed unknowingly experiencing soul loss for three years through *Ankhi Dahi* (jealous evil eye) of a *Bokshi* (witch).

The shaman had interrogated the *Bokshi* (witch) asking her to reveal her identity. He had made me catch the burning *Taba Diyo* (copper oil-wick lamp) making the *Bokshi* (witch) promise that she would not bother me. However, the *Bokshi* (witch) remained adamant and continued screaming through my body. The shaman warned that if she did not agree then he would send magical arrows known as Ban upon her. At his repeated threatening, she bowed her head in front of him. The promise was made and later I came back to my senses.

Despite undergoing the healing ritual, visions kept recurring and felt it best to discuss the entire issue with the shaman. I described everything and did not have to state many other details as he could tell everything by just reading my face. He stated, I was destined to be a medium and if it was possible then he could be my teacher. Unlike other shamans he did not make any student and I would be his first student after his 52 years of experience. He wanted to teach his son who refused and if I learnt it then he wanted to transmit his knowledge to ensure his *mantras* lived after his death. He suggested it was best that I did not waste my abilities but nurture them through acceptance and practice.

People from all communities, socio-economic and linguistic groups came for seeking his services. Whenever the need arose, people irrespective of differences believed in the traditional healing practices and resorted to it either as a primary, secondary and even tertiary form of treatment. Most fascinating of all was seeing people suffering from severe body aches, some even arriving in stretchers return home walking unaided. The hospital authorities were also familiar with his healing practices and permitted patients to visit the temple whenever permission was sought for the same.

A month passed by and I was told it was the right time for initiation. The ritual was not elaborate and occurred during the phase of full moon. Offering known as *Pong* consisting of milk, alcohol, *Khada* (traditional silk scarf) sweets, fruits, flowers and cash made accordingly. He stated that a blood relationship was formed between us and I would be his daughter. Period of pollution had to be observed by both if a person dies. He was teaching me all the procedures for performing varied rituals and further teaching would also be provided by means of helping spirits through dreams and visions.

A recently retired railway employee my *Guru*, 63 year old man, never demands any specific form of cash and kind for his services. Initiated at the age of seven and performing healing ceremonies since the age of eleven years he has remained dedicated to the practice for the past 52 years. He had been naturally selected through the past lineage of shamanic ancestors. The art of shamanism was learnt through a master shaman while the knowledge of ethno-medicine and *Tantra* had been handed down

through scriptures of his great grandfather.

Analysis: The belief in Shamanism and its associated rituals lies embedded deep in the cultural fabric of most indigenous groups. Although, modern individualistic modes of life have rendered it superstitious by the present generation of skeptics yet its use as primary means of health care remains uncontested. Divination before being admitted to the hospital still remains popular not only in interior regions but also prevails among the formally educated class of the hill communities. Not education rather enculturation and assimilation of culturally approved structures provides the basis of belief in the cultural trait of soul loss which is encompassed within the pattern of shamanism.

The parabolic evolution of shamanism passing through the religious institutions of encoded religious structures originating through animism becomes widely prevalent. What was rather a bygone cultural trait has retained and reinvigorated itself. This is also true in terms of the present ethnic movement of retribalization (McLuhan, 1964) among the Mangars where the phenomenon of animistic shamanic practices are revived and highlighted for emphasizing the demand to be recognised as one of the Scheduled Tribes in the state of West Bengal through consent of the Central Government of India. Presently, the Mangars of West Bengal are recognised as Other Backward Class (B) and have requested to be placed as Scheduled Tribe. Although, most Mangars have been assimilated into the Hindu social structure but presently they are moving towards the phenomenon of tribalization. From 1994, the recommendations of the Mandal Commission were gradually implemented as follows: 2nd June, 1994, recognition as OBC by the Sikkim government of: the Bhujel, Gurung, Limboo, Mangar, Rai, Sunuwar and Tamangs; added to the central list of OBC on 25th May 1995; 6th December, 1999, addition to the central list of OBC of the: Sanyasi and Thami; Jogi added on 4th April 2000; 134 2000: addition of the Thami, Yogi and Dewan to the list of OBC by: the Sikkim Government (Gazette No.94 dated 11th April, 2001; Vandenhelsken, 2010)

The Limbus have greatly adhered to ancient animistic practices and preserved their folklore and language. The new generation is slowly drifting away from elaborate blood sacrifice which is evident through shamans refraining use of blood and alcohol. This is a huge change owing to the earlier conspicuous use of blood. Being classified as Scheduled Tribe, the Limbus now focuses primarily on enhancing the development of their community and preserving their culture. Bose (1975) has rightly pointed 'fear of loss of identity in several parts of India leads two- pronged processes: one leads the tribes, willy-nilly into greater participation in technological change, and the other, to a re-establishment of their separate identity in contrast with the rest by a search for

certain distinctive elements in their original culture.’

Although, Limbus have been designated as Scheduled Tribes in the Central List of the Constitution but still they also identify themselves as Gorkhas supporting the cause of Gorkhaland. This also holds true for the Mangars who also support the cause of Gorkhaland and are striving towards achieving the status of Scheduled Tribe. Although, Limbus having achieved the status of Scheduled Tribe still cohere with other hill communities for achieving the common pan-Gorkha identity and a separate Gorkhaland. The Mangars are trying to attain tribal status by reviving their traditional culture for carving a separate identity for the community at the same time supporting the wider cause for a separate Gorkhaland. This is comparable to Subba (2003) where situation like that of the Gorkhaland movement brings numerous historically, culturally, linguistically and religious divergent groups under a common identity called ‘Gorkha’.

Like the section of Mangars who accepted the Mangar Development Board (2015) under the Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal a section of the Limbus have also been integrated into the Limbu Development Board (2016) under the Tribal Development Department, Government of West Bengal. The aim of the boards is to look into the micro issues specific to particular community for enhancing their socio-economic development. But despite few housing schemes much has not been able to be achieved. Politics in the eastern Himalaya follows what Chandra (2000) calls the ‘ethnic template’, the principle guideline used by political parties to identify the population and to structure socio-economic grievances or demands on an ethnic basis. As a consequence, ‘ethnic politicking is moving from the margins of the political arena to fight for center-stage’. Chettri 2015 states that ‘the increasing importance of ethnicity as a political identity is facilitated by institutional structures and democratic politics that place emphasis on affirmative action, thereby enabling people to be categorised on the basis of their ethnicity’.

Mangars have put forth the request owing to practice of animism, prevalence of unique language, distinctive kinship structures, shamanic practices and wide ethno-medical knowledge, folk culture, distinctive socio-cultural and food practices. Association with the wider Nepali population caused them to syncretise into the Hindu caste order which led to dissolution of their cultural traits. This happened to such a great extent that after a vast stretch of time they had to think of their own ethnic identity. Although, the demand for tribalization seems to have cultural connotations yet it cannot be denied that the masses support it for gaining privileges associated with reservations provided for tribal groups. There is a wide belief among the communities striving for the status of Scheduled Tribe that revival of animistic practices added to the use of

traditional dresses and material culture enhances the tribal identity of the community. This was made most popular during the demand for statehood from time to time.

Conclusion : Unlike previous conceptions held about soul loss, traditional healing and shamanic practices the scenario is changing through universality of health and healing practices ranging among the people of varied professions and educational levels, the significant involvement of first author as a victim of soul loss and being a shaman is evident in this regard and the eventual transformation of her personality has been noticed and conceptualized by the second author. It helped the former to explore the entire phenomena in the sphere of medical anthropology and identity issues. It can also be concluded that soul loss and subsequent shamanic practices remain at the foundational core of both the communities. The practice has gained renewed importance through the present movement of reviving traditions for ensuring unique identity under a single umbrella. It seems to be the communities under the study want to retain and rejuvenate separate identities rooted towards attaining a common identity to achieve a specific goal of statehood.

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