

CHAPTER-4
UPPER RANGIT BASIN:
ASPECTS OF CULTURAL ECOLOGY

SECTION- I

INTRODUCTION

Geographical Setting

The geographical setting has played a major role in demarcation of the boundaries of nations and states and the cultural regions within them. The geographical setting has also had its profound impact on historical impulses and human ecology of the residents within a cultural region. The geography of Sikkim lends itself to one major cultural region, with three sub cultural regions within its boundaries. While the Dongkiala and Singalila ranges demarcate the Eastern and Western limits of the State, the Chorten Nyima range in the trans- Himalayan region demarcates the Northern boundary.

The traditional trade routes from Tibetan Plateau into Sikkim were either through the Lachen or Lachung valleys in the North Sikkim, or through the Nathu or Jelep passes on the Dongkiala range in East Sikkim. The Kanchendzonga Massif was a major geographical barrier leading to commercial isolation of Southern and Western districts of Sikkim. The Upper Rangit Basin in particular, wedged between Kanchendzonga Massif, Singalila range and Mongbrue watershed supported almost an independent sub cultural region. Thus, the commercial activities, communication path ways, and altitudinal elevations divided Sikkim into following three cultural sub regions:-

- (a) Northern Sikkim sub region North of Mangan where the sparse population adapted to harsh and cold Tibetan type of climatic conditions.
- (b) East Sikkim, which became a commercial trade link between Tibet and main land India.
- (c) South and West Sikkim, where agro-economy and spirituality were more pronounced. Perhaps its geographical isolation presented itself as secure from political and military interference from outside, prompting the first Chogyals to establish their capitals at Yuksom and later Rabdentse in vicinity of the present township of Gyalshing.

Historical Inputs

Historically, Upper Rangit Basin had boundaries with the Limbuana country to the West, and Mongbrue watershed to the East. Culturally, it formed a part of Limbuana (Subba 1999)(1). Accordingly Limbus, Rais and Gurungs form a major part of population in Rathongchu watershed. The Bhutias who arrived later, became the ruling class, the Chogyals being Bhutias themselves. The other Nepali castes, and Lepchas formed the remainder population in the area. The Lepchas, who are regarded as the autochtones of Sikkim, were animists and followers of Mon faith prior to their amalgamation into Mahayana Buddhist faith on arrival of the Bhutias. With the passage of time, cultural diffusion gathered momentum. The cultural diffusion has resulted in: -

- (a) Though the Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu tribes have their own languages, Nepali has become the *Lingua franca* in the regions.
- (b) The Hindu temples have begun to hoist the prayer flags, which are original to the Tibetans Buddhist cultural form. Many gods and goddesses in the Hindu Temples and Buddhist *Gompas* are common. (Sakya 1989) (2)
- (c) Names of all natural features, and human habitats originate from languages of all constituents of the population, mainly forming the Lepcha base. (Thakur 1988)(3).
- (d) Ideas were borrowed from each other for rituals during shamans, and celebrations systems of festivals. (Subba 1999) (4).
- (e) Methodology of food preparation and consumption patterns were learnt from each other, thus modifying the earlier practices of respective ethnic groups.(Tamang 1998) (5).
- (f) The Nepali immigrants, barring the original Limbus, settled collectively as Nepali groups. This is in contrast to the Nepali demographic profile in mainland Nepal, where the various sub groups such as Gurungs, Sherpas, Tamangs, Chettris etc are settled in their respective traditional geographic areas. This has resulted in a mixed Nepali culture, wherein cultural inputs have been borrowed from all constituent sub groups. Intermarriages have further amalgamated the cultural mix.(6).

In the year 1788-89 Nepali Gurkha General Jahar Singh had invaded Sikkim, and captured areas upto the Western banks of Tista river. The area was under Nepali control for 29 years upto 1817, when the Titalaya treaty was signed. The then Chogyal of Sikkim Tenzing Namgyal was forced to abandon his capital Rabdentse and retreated to safety beyond the Eastern banks of river Tista at Tamlong. The captured territories, less the Darjeeling hills sector South of Rangit river were restored to the kingdom of Sikkim, while Darjeeling was merged with British India for good. J.C. White, the political officer chose Gangtok for constructing his residence, and at his instance the Chogyal shifted the capital from Tamlong to Gangtok during 1885-86.

The restoration of lost territories of the Rangit Basin however did not prompt the Chogyal of Sikkim Tsugphud Namgyal to return to his original capital. The new capital city of Gangtok had now come into being and it continues to be the state capital till date. Eastern Sikkim and Kalimpong divisions had enjoyed the historical and traditional commercial bliss till the year 1962, when the Indo-China conflict put a stop to the trade links. The area however housed the capital city of Gangtok, and commercial centres of Rangpo and Singtam, resulting into continued economic, educational and urban development. The National Highway 31 A, which passes through Eastern Sikkim, helped the district authorities in setting up infrastructure for industrial development.

The West and South districts however prospered in spiritual and cultural ecology in isolation. The Upper Rangit Basin, being located in the remote salient, remained untouched by the popular culture. The ethnic and folk culture thrives in this pocket. The present day ethnic and folk culture is pronounced by:-

(a) Folklores. These include tales, songs, lores, beliefs, superstitions and customs that have been passed from generation to generation. The folklore and faith regarding the wishing lake Khechopalri deserves a detailed account. A detailed account of the same is given in a separate section in this chapter. Accounts of certain other folklores appear in the chapter on spiritual ecology.

(b) Shamans and Spirit Possession. Shamans, *Jhakris* and spirit possession are encountered in all parts of the world. The Himalayas and other hill regions however have more cases of these kinds. Small case studies of various types of

Shamans encountered in the study area have been analysed and described in later sections of this chapter.

Cultural Fusion and Identity

For centuries Sikkim continued to maintain its identity as an independent state under the Chogyals. The isolation of the kingdom helped the prospering of culture and spiritual related aspects within and outside the monasteries. Though the population percentage of Nepalese, most of whom are Hindu by religion is larger, the culture of the Mahayana Buddhist Lamaistic faith continued to be the state culture. The merger of Sikkim with India had its direct and indirect affects on the Sikkimese population.

The Sikkimese of today reflect the fusion of three different cultures of respective ethnic groups of Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese in varying proportions creating a kind of united Sikkimese culture. Additionally three new cultural entities cultures, namely, traditional Sikkimese, Indian and Western have now taken roots. Their proportions depend upon the economic status, level of education and exposure to the world at large. The people in high income and higher education bracket may appear highly Westernized in external behaviour but they are very much conservative at heart. They go for Western education but strictly adhere to their religious and ritualistic practices at home. The mass participation of them in Sikkimese festivals, such as, Losoong, Bum Chu, Pang Lhabsol, etc., amply exemplify their adherence to the traditional culture. The upper class Sikkimese hardly show any interest in main land Indian culture. (7).

The middle class Sikkimese is comparatively less conservative. They have accepted both Indian and Western cultures along with their virtues and vices. They are highly influenced by the glitz that reach them via audio-visual devices and glossy magazines. The influences are manifest in their speech, attire and home decor. English being the medium of instruction in educational institutions, the young generation is leaning towards Anglicized life style. (8).

The people who are least educated and have a low economic status are understandably least exposed to the influences – Indian or Western, whatever the case may be. Even when there are less reservations, normally they follow their age-old traditions and practice whatever they have learnt from their ancestors. They are often found to adopt the food habits, clothings, and even means of recreation brought to them by the village

traders who are mostly from the plains. The areas where everything from salt to sari come from India, are bound to have the influence of Indian culture.(9).

However, the villages located at the strongholds of the Kazi landlords have preserved their traditional Sikkimese culture under the strict vigilance of the landlords or the priests. Very recently, there was uproar over the construction of the Rathong Chu Hydel Project in Upper Rangit Basin at Yuksom on the issue of encroachment upon religious sanctity and culture. The protestations were so vehement that the project was scrapped mid-way. There are ample grounds to believe that the project has been scrapped to ward off the plainsmen who were supposed to construct the power plant, and in the process would pave the way for Indianization.

SECTION -II
CONSERVATION THROUGH CULTURAL LEGACY AND
TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE : KHECHEOPALRI
LAKE – CASE STUDY

Sustenance of Ecosystems

Ecosystems sustain themselves in a dynamic balance based on cycles and fluctuations, which are nonlinear processes. Present day science has facilitated the study of these balancing patterns through field and laboratory research methodologies. Ecological awareness however only arises when we combine our rational knowledge with the traditional folk knowledge of the indigenous people. Such intuitive wisdom is characteristic of traditional cultures, such as the Sikkimese ethnic groups, in which life was organized around a highly refined awareness of environment.

The Sikkimese of Upper Rangit Basin residing in the ‘spiritual and cultural pentagon’ formed by the five monasteries of Dubdi, Khecheopalri, Pemayangtse, Tashiding and Ralang have had a symbiotic relationship between their traditional spiritual culture and the environment. This traditional ecological knowledge has been acquired over centuries of trials. In general it differs from current scientific ecological knowledge in a number of ways:- (Inglis 1993) (10).

- (a) Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is mainly qualitative as opposed to quantitative.
- (b) TEK has an intuitive component (as opposed to being purely rational).
- (c) TEK is holistic (as opposed to reductionist).
- (d) In TEK, mind and matter are considered together (as opposed to a separation of mind and matter).
- (e) TEK is moral (as opposed to supposedly value-free).
- (f) TEK is spiritual (as opposed to mechanistic).
- (g) TEK is based on empirical observations and accumulation of facts by trial-and-error (as opposed to experimentation and systematic deliberations for accumulation of facts).

(h) TEK is based on data generated by resource users themselves (as opposed to that by a specialized cadre of researchers).

(j) TEK is based on diachronic data, i.e., long time-series on information on one locality (as opposed to synchronic data, i.e., short time-series over a large area).

In contrast to scientific ecology, TEK does not aim to control nature. The traditional people merge with the nature. The TEK is markedly slower than scientific knowledge, as it is based on human experience rather than scientific knowledge of tool and machines based experiments. The arrival of scientific development has to some extent, already shown signs of environmental degradation in this region. The modern housing techniques, the hydel projects, the electric power etc, have accelerated both – human development, and natures', and cultures' disintegration. The construction of roads and stone quarries have resulted in frequent soil erosion and landslides. The electric power based saw mills have led to faster clearance of the forests. Though, in Rangit Basin the situation is still manageable, but the degeneration needs to be checked.

In social and cultural context, the TEK of the ethnic habitat in Upper Rangit Basin includes:-

(a) Symbolic meanings through history, place names, and spiritual relationships between natural objects. Most rivers, Lakes and mountain tops here have spiritual relationships, Mount Khanchendzongpa being the "Guardian Diety", and "Khecheopalri" being the wish fulfilling lake.

(b) A distinct cosmology of world view based on the 'Wheel of Life' and 'Mandala' add on of their conceptualization of the environment, as opposed to the Western science. (Govinda 1960) (11).

(c) The human and environmental relations of all ethnic groups is based on reciprocity, and obligations towards, both, community members and other beings. This in the wider sense is also the essence of 'deep ecology' which is essentially biocentric.

(d) The 'Four noble Truths' and the 'Middle Path-Madhyamika' or 'Eight Fold Path' essentially seek understanding and provision of means to support the humans alongwith the balance of the biodiversity in the region.

APPLICATION OF CULTURE AND TEK ON KHECHEOPALRI LAKE:
CELEBRATION OF BUM-CHU FESTIVAL

(FROM 12 to 13 MAR 1998)

The Lake Region

Sikkim is a land of lakes situated at elevations ranging from tropical to alpine. The majority of its lake ecosystems are of glacial origin and are located in the North District, while the South District has the least number. All recreational or other activities such as boating, water sports, and irrigation, etc. are restricted in these lacustrine systems, as a result of which the lakes of Sikkim have fared differently from the other lakes in India. Most lakes in Sikkim are considered sacred and are revered due to ancient mythological connections. Lake Khecheopalri is one among them. Although very few studies have been undertaken in general in the lacustrine systems of Sikkim Himalaya, notable reports on the various aspects of Lake Khecheopalri have been published by Venu *et al.*(1990)(12), Roy and Thapa (1996,1997), and Roy *et al* (1998). (13,14,15).

Like other lakes in Sikkim, Lake Khechoepalri has multinomial names among the different ethnic groups of the state. Located within 27° 19'15"N latitude and 88°15'06"E longitude at elevation of 1831m, near Tsozo village in the West District, it has the outline profile of a human right-foot. A cursory observation shows the original area of the lake to have been much larger in the past, and to have been later reduced to about a third of the open water area by the gross encroachment of marginal vegetation and by eutrophication. The lake has two permanent inlets and one outlet. Besides ground sources, water is also fed into the lake through two temporary inlets from surrounding hill-slopes over the monsoon. The rock in the lake area belongs geologically to the Sikkim group of granite-gneiss, schist and phyllites (Raina and Srivastava, 1981, Bose, 1989).(16,17). The photograph on ensuing page reflects the siltation of lake on the Northern side. The cleanliness of lake water is seen in other photo.

Melas and Festivals

Sikkim is a mystic land of extra ordinary beauty where a series of festivals are held and these annual festivals are commonly called " Melas". Some of the remarkable melas are the Khecheopalri mela, Saramsa mela, Rishi mela and Tashiding mela and the like.



KHECHEOPALRI LAKE: SILTED AREA



KHECHEOPALRI LAKE: NEAT, CLEAN WATER TOP

The Khecheopalri mela in the West Sikkim is perhaps the largest and most significant of its kind. It was held near the Khecheopalri lake monastery on the occasion of "Maghe Purne" from Mar 12 to 13, 1998 and attracted pilgrims from all over Sikkim. Not only Indians, but foreigners also attended it. It had a special gravity. The pilgrims worshipped the spiritual power and offered various food-material into the lake to appease God. They used the lake's water as a "Prasad". From an ecological point of view, whether this Khecheopalri mela was also an important contributor to the environmental degradation or depletion of aquatic biodiversity of the lake, is being assessed.

Purpose of the festival:

The Bum Chu festival got initiated at Tashiding monastery which is about 24 km away from the Khecheopalri lake. The festival generally coincides with Maghe Purne every year. There was a holy water-pot in side the monastery filled with water to the brim while prayers continued overnight. In the early hours these pots were uncovered in the presence of the High Lama by the monks. If the water showed ripples, that year could prove to be bad for Sikkim and vice-versa. Since, Khecheopalri lake is the gift of Goddess Tara Jetsum Dolma (according to mythological view), pilgrims assume the lake to be represented by the pot and used the lake's water as "Panchamrith". They pray and offer different products so that the lake will not dry and if it so happended people are doomed.

Pilgrims:

Khecheopalri is an ethereal and venerated lake situated amidst dense temperate forests, with no floating leaf on the its surface. It is rather unbelievable. People of Sikkim believe that Lord Shiva existed in solemn meditation in side the lake. They also believe that the level of lake water increased during the festival which originated from the Head of Lord Shiva. Bearing these feelings pilgrims pay their visits to this holy lake during festival period from different corners of Sikkim and even neighbouring district of West Bengal. They come here to forget their sufferings and return home with the blessing of God. People from all religions Nepalese, Buddhists Bhutias and Lepchas were seen during the occasion.

Description of festival

The Bum Chu (*Bum* means pot; *Chu* means water) festival was celebrated near Khecheopalri lake only for two days namely, from Mar 12 to 13, 1998. People from all over Sikkim and other parts of India including foreigners attended this spiritual festival.

There were about 32 make-shift shops and restaurants including some grocery shops. All the shops were constructed using bamboo and katus (*Castanopsis sp.*) leaves. There were some hotels serving food-items, like; chicken rice, mutton rice along with hot momos, thukpa and kinema (fermented soybeans) (special local food). Liquor (both local and IMFL mode) were up for sale. Beside these, villagers sold their local edibles like, Ghar tarul, Simbal tarul, Squash tarul, Ban tarul (local tubers) and sweet potato. Other vegetables were also being sold.

Most of the pilgrims were piously engaged in their puja. Many pilgrims were in ebriated condition. The shop keepers were busy with preparation of food-items. An unexpected accidental fire in one of the stalls was noticed. These were the pilgrims activities on the first day when the pilgrims number was about 1000.

The second day of the festival was started by Lamas' prayers. Pilgrims reached by all modes of transport. The level of pilgrims increased and some state ministers visited lake accompanied by officials at about 12:30 pm. It was the peak level of pilgrims about 2000 in number.

Pilgrims activities at Prayer station on Wooden Ramp

People of Sikkim believe that the lake Khecheopalri has some divine power to release the people from distress. They appease God by offering some materials. Even the temple offerings in the form of flowers, incense sticks cast into the lake's water every day takes its toll. It was seen that pilgrims offered different types of fruits, milk, raw rice, fried rice, mustared oil, dalda (dehydrogenated oil), biscuits, bread sugar and the like into the lake. And the amount of these religious materials was maximum during the festival.

Moreover, they released many bamboo-boats with burning dalda and khadas (sacred scarves). This is the recent phenomena by the pilgrims. Animals, especially dogs (ferals) were seen relishing the proteinous offerings. Many officials including police and military personnel were also observed tying khadas to the offerings. One scene, very peculiar, was that of some pilgrims offering these materials to the water body and others consuming

lake's water at the same time for their good health at this spot. Some washed hands unnoticed by the pilgrims who consumed the water.

The last day of the festival was a very significant day. Lake Khecheopalri, a renowned water-body of Sikkim has many mythological tales. A team of monks (lamas) reached the wooden ramp to prove the reality of the lake's myths. There was the Khechu-Rinpoche, about 8 years old (believed incarnation) and a Cherechi Rinpoche, about 70 years old among them. The old monk folded few khadas spelling some spiritual words and threw them into the lake. The water of the lake then started bubbling after a few minutes. This was astonishing. Hence it was assumed, that the reality of living God existed in the Khecheopalri lake. It was the early morning feature on the final day.

Activities of Avifauna during the festival:

Nine species of avifauna were observed during the festival. They were little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis*; common merganser-*Mergus merganser*; large cormorant – *Phalacrocorax carbo*; little cormorant – *Phalacrocorax niger*; common teal-*Anas crecca*; tufted duck – *Aythya fuligula*; white breasted water-hen-*Amaurornis phoeniceus*; moorhen-*Gallinula chloropus*; and crane brown-*Amaurornis bicolor*. All these avifauna gathered at the centre of the lake early in the morning and then dispersed due to human activities.

Stall Construction:

There were about 32 stalls constructed using bamboo and katus (*Castanopsis* sp) branches collected from nearby dense forest. Each stall used about 50 kg biomass (total of approximately 1.7 tons of biomass including fuelwood). The tree-branches also served as fuelwood.

Sanitation:

Pilgrims defecated where ever they could (especially in the South and North slopes surrounding the lake). This definitely did not match with the sanctity in which the lake is held by the pilgrims, due to the shortage of proper sanitation facilities.

Waste materials:

About 5 kg of waste paper, plastic and polythene bags was detected after the festival, on Mar 13 1998 by a weigh-balance. The number of pilgrims was about 3000 during the entire festival duration. Each pilgrim carried about 15 gm offering materials. Thus, it was assumed that about 45 kg of materials was deposited into the lake.

Discussion:

Sikkim, is nature's paradise in the lap of the Eastern-Himalaya. Bum Chu is an annual festival held around Khecheopalri lake and it is perhaps the most significant annual festival of Sikkim. Undoubtedly, fairs have great importance in our social life. But the fact was that the pilgrims in the festival helped accelerate the ecological degradation of the lake in the following ways:-

1. *Outwash* : Outwash (mainly triggered by activities of pilgrims) that was produced around the periphery of the lake during festival was observed as a pollutant of the once crystal clear lake. It is being accelerated due to heavy rainfall.
2. *Cattle-grazing*: This is also a detrimental factor polluting the lake's water through excreta and is a common phenomenon surrounding the lake.
3. *Religious offerings*: Addition of offerings to the lake reduces the water-quality as found through the observations and results. This is a constant phenomena, but the highest level was during the festival.
4. *Loss of biomass*: Most of the shop-owners used the tree loppings with leaves from the surrounds for temporary construction which affected the lake's environment indirectly and decimated the biodiversity.
5. *Sanitation and hygiene*: There were no proper toilet facilities. Subsequently pilgrims used the surrounding areas (especially, South and North-East corner) of the lake for human defecation purposes. The pollutants would percolate into the lake's water during the monsoon and alter the ecological balance of the lake.

There is no provision of water-sports, but pilgrims throw several products into the lake's without being noticed which certainly disturbed the biodiversity of the lake.

6. *Water quality*: The pH of lake water showed signs of being more acidic in nature. The possible reason for this could be leachates generated by the decomposition of waste materials.

Pollution and Water Quality Degeneration

The concentration of dissolved oxygen decreased with increase in temperature found after the festival. This is probably by increase in biochemical reactions due to addition of offerings which consume dissolved oxygen at a rapid rate and its concentration tends to decrease just after the festival. This was an important indicator of pollution. Low content of dissolved oxygen just after the festival reflected the presence of organic matter in water offered during festival.

Chlorides are readily soluble in water. Changes in chloride contents between pre and post-period of festival, may be related to salts generated from the surrounding area through the activities of pilgrims. This also was an indicator of pollution levels.

The concentration of iron and ammonia increased and the high concentration of these also support the pollution of water. Some planktons like *protococcus* and *Tetraspora* also supported this.

Therefore, the impact of monitoring of lake water chemistry indicated that the offerings and other activities influenced the water quality by way of pollutants loading of the lake Khecheopalri. Hence, the lake Khecheopalri is faced with slow and certain pollution.

Proposed Remedial measures:

1. Afforestation of areas degraded by forest fires in 1970s should be undertaken.
2. Instead of prayers being offered at the lake proper, pilgrims should be encouraged into conducting prayer ceremonies at the monastery.
3. The management plan for the lake should be implemented through the Khecheopalri Development Authority formed by local people.
4. Education on the importance of lake ecosystems should be initiated, especially for school children.
5. Construction of houses, slash & burn agriculture and grazing in the lake catchment should be stopped.

6. The Festival Committee for the annual Bumchu festival should be authorized to collect and administer funds for proper sanitation, and provision of drinking water, parking facilities and garbage bins.
7. Anthropogenic outwash and agricultural runoff into the lake should be checked, along with landuse practices which contribute to degradation.
8. With the help of local community, mechanical and manual checks should be applied to control invasion of the lake by weeds.

SECTION-III

SPIRIT POSSESSION, SHAMANS AND JHAKRIS

IN UPPER RANGIT BASIN

Introduction

Spirit possession in Sikkim is not unique. Social researchers and anthropologists have encountered it throughout the world. This section of the chapter on cultural ecology is an attempt at understanding some of the sociological and cultural implications of spirit possession within the setting of Upper Rangit Basin. Mystical experiences are common in the Himalayas. Most people believe in spirits, and therefore fear the possession by the spirits.

There is also the religious angle to spirit possession. The concept of Mahayana Buddhism within Sikkim is based on the Tibetan lamaistic rites and the Mun Lepcha animistic rituals. The Limbus and the other Hindu Nepali castes have their faith in the ancient Hindu Tantric order mixed with animistic rites. The diffusion of the Bhutias Lepchas, Limbus and the other Nepali groups have however given an almost uniformly common platform to the phenomenon of spirit possession. Cultural borrowing of shamans is common.

Human Ecology Angle

From the point of view of human ecology, there is a close relationship between spirit possession as an altered form of consciousness and parapsychology. In speaking of the social function of human behaviour and in situations, it is useful to adopt the distinction between 'manifest' and 'latent' function. Manifest function has to do with intent while latent function is frequently unintended. In often used linguistic and anthropological terminology, manifest function is 'emic' while latent function is 'etic'

To those who believe in spirit possession it provides a manifest function of the causes and effects of illness and misfortune. Throughout Sikkim, spirit possession is cited as a source of discontent as well as a means for resolving discontent. Illness and misfortune are attributed to a variety of supernatural forces such as attacks by witches, sorcerers, forest divinities, spirits of deceased individuals and angry gods or goddesses.

People frequently recognize that human neglect is usually at the basis for supernatural discontent. For example, the failure to propitiate household or village gods and goddesses is frequently cited as the source of their anger, or as among the Limbu, human envy and jealousy leaves the individual or family open to attacks by witches or evil spirits. Through human failure and neglect supernatural forces are unleashed and bring chaos, disorder and disaster. These forces are combated, held in check or defeated by individuals who are capable of 'seeing' and identifying them. Such individuals receive their power primarily through successful encounters with supernatural forces in the past. Frequently, these encounters are violent as in the initial possession of the *jhakri*. Invariably, the contact is loaded with danger. The eventual control of this contact imbues the individual with power to diagnose, cure illness and rectify misfortunes that are caused by similar encounters. They become 'living metaphors', through controlled spirit possession, or contact with supernatural power.

The system of cause, effect and cure, is thus a circular and enclosed system of knowledge. The cause is spirit, the effect is spirit possession, and the cure is controlled spirit possession. This system of knowledge provides the manifest function of explanation and control in the face of disorder, chaos and inexplicable circumstances. The social function here described is adaptive. It (spirit possession) is the basis of 'social stability' in potentially unstable and disruptive social circumstances. It has the similar function that witchcraft beliefs, have for many societies. It functions to 'explain unfortunate events' and thus stabilize social relations where doubt serves to disrupt them.

Meanings and Definitions

Shaman . In some of the general dictionaries and anthropological text books, the term 'shaman' is defined so generally that no elements differentiate it from words referring to many other religious practitioners. For example in the *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (Stin1973:1310) '*shaman*' is defined as a *medicine man; one acting as both priest and doctor who works with the supernatural*' Keesing (1958) in a general anthropology textbook, defines 'shaman' as an individual religious 'expert' (Hitchcock and Jones 1994 (18)).

Spirit Possession. The invasion and control of a person by a spirit, demon or god. Spirit possession is characterized by a change of personality and behaviour on the part of the possessed. In some societies illness is regarded as a form of spirit possession.

In Sikkim the common name for all shamans in general is '*Jhakri*'. The shamans in the Sikkim community context are outlined as under :-

(a) **Limbu Shamans** Limbus recognize five kinds of shamans whose names are '*yeba*', '*yema*', '*samba*', '*phedangma*' and '*mangba*'. The differences are minute. All perform at weddings funerals, harvest rites and periodic rituals for the welfare of households. The differences are more pronounced when it comes to the diagnosis and cure of disease and the prevention of misfortunes and other calamities that have supernatural causes. '*Yeba*' is male while '*Yema*' is female '*Samba*' is a specialist in oral literature and mythology. '*Mangba*' is a specialist in dealing with the spirits of those who died through violence.

(b) **Sunuwar.** '*Punimbo*' and '*ngiami*' are the shamans of Sunuwar community. Their numbers in the Upper Rangit Valley are very few though.

(c) **Rai.** The Thulung Rai community belonging to Tibeto-Burman(Kirata) sub group refer to their shamans as '*saleme*', while Nepali speaking Rai community refer to them as '*bijuwa*'.

(d) **Sherpa.** Sherpa shamans are known as '*hal-wa*' meaning 'God one', or 'mindung'. The female shamans are called '*do lo ma*', meaning 'woman who has been to hell and returned back'

(e) **Kami.** The Kami *jhakris* are most numerous. They are some time addressed as '*dange*'. The wife of a *jhakri* is called '*jhakrini*', while a '*jharini*', is a female shaman.

(f) **Tamang.** Tamang '*jhakri*' is called '*bon-po*'. The head dress of Tamang shamans, and other gear has a similarity with other '*jhakri*' groups.

(g) **Gurung.** There are two categories of Gurung shaman, the '*pajyu*' and the '*khepre*'. Both traditions incorporate pre-Buddhist Bon rites. Aspects of Lamaism and Nepali Hinduism are both detected in ritual style and paraphernalia.

(h) **Lepcha**. The chief functionary of their indigenous beliefs is the '*bon-thing*', who is a kind of intercessor. The female is '*mum*'.

Shamans and Caste System. Within Hindu Community the caste system and ethnic pluralism operate to deny many individuals self-respect and prestige in the village setting. This is especially the case with lower castes such as metalworkers, tailors or leatherworkers. Frequently, these castes provide the village shaman or religious specialist who combats disease and misfortune through controlled spirit possession. In respect and prestige. Spirit possession in all its forms is not limited to any particular class or caste. It is a sociologically 'open' system. This is not to say that it occurs with the same frequency among all classes and all castes, but simply that it is open to all. It is a recognized and frequently institutionalized means for social advancement (Field study).(19).

In this fashion, the beliefs and institutions surrounding spirit possession fulfil the function, or providing 'a culturally approved means for the resolution of inner conflict (between personal desires and cultural norms)'. Within the Hindu caste system many people are denied access to goods, wealth and prestige as a result of culturally prescribed norms. The institution of spirit possession within different contexts serves as a means for the satisfaction of personal wants and desires. Thus on one level it provides an explanation for social dissatisfaction and on another it channels it according to prescribed norms.

Female Shamans. The spirit possession in general occurs more frequently among those categories of people who are denied social statuses and traditional means for social advancement in society. This is especially in the case with women, who more frequently than any other social category, find themselves relegated to inferior positions in society with little or no hope of social and institutional advancement. Women of lower castes and tribes would by definition be in relatively inferior social positions to women of higher castes who, through marriage and education, are in positions of respect. Unmarried women, widows and women in servants positions are more likely to become possessed by spirits than married women with children, a family and a successful marriage. Spirit possession, as pointed out by Lewis (1971), provides an oblique aggressive strategy' to such socially deprived categories of people.

Male Shamans. Similarly, men of lower castes, or men without lands, titles or positions of authority seem more inclined to spirit possession than those of higher castes, with wealth and social position. Spirit possession again provides an approved means for 'social protest'.

Distinction between Shamans and Priests. Shamans are generally distinguished from priests by the following attributes:-

- (a) Shamans are part-time professionals and seldom make their living solely through their religious occupation, as does a priest.
- (b) Shamans do not inherit their status or succeed to it, but acquire it by divine intervention, which generally occurs in adolescence as a result of the trance or a state of possession. The priest, on the other hand, lacks the psychodrama of the shaman and generally acquires his position through inheritance, study or other channels of succession.
- (c) Shamans are primarily curers and healers, while priests seldom diagnose disease and misfortune but instead limit their activities to prayer, worship and religious offerings to supernatural beings.
- (d) Shamans generally shy away from set rituals having to do with the life cycle, planting, harvesting or temple worship, while these are the stock in trade of a priest.
- (e) Shamans are controlled ecstatic who assume a trance or become possessed, and in that state they serve as mediums through with supernatural beings, make their wishes known, and display their power in a dramatic style.

Case Studies

Case studies on certain specific shamans, *jhakris* and *'bon-thins'* encountered during field study are enumerated in succeeding sections of this chapter.

SECTION-IV

SHAMANS PRACTICE AMONGST LIMBUS

Introduction

Western district of Sikkim has been historically and culturally very closely to associated with the Limbuana cultural centre of Nepal. Limbus consider themselves to be autochthones of the area. Limbu shamans are common in general area Yuksom, and areas West of Rathong Chu. Various kinds of Limbu shamans have been described in the preceding section of this chapter.

Limbu shamanism rests on firm belief that people's lives are intimately linked to a world of supernatural beings. That world consists of numerous gods, goddesses, ghosts of the dead, and spirits associated with animals, plants, the forest, the home and other animate and inanimate objects of nature. Not every Limbu believes the same way or in the same things, nor as in most other cultures, does every Limbu believe in supernatural forces with the same intensity. I encountered many Limbus who were confirmed agnostics, while other could be classified as 'true believers'. In general, most Limbus accepted the idea that disease, misfortune, crop-failure, death and other unexplainable events had supernatural causes. In order to understand these causes and to rectify unfortunate circumstances, they seem to depend with profound faith on the shamans or '*jhakris*'.

Limbu Shamanic Costumes

The differences between Limbu shamans are also defined in their respective costumes and shamanic paraphernalia. Both the *yeba* and *yema* wear a costume consisting of skirt (*jama*), feather headdress (*wasang*), cowrie shell bandoliers (*aplak*), and garlands of acorn seeds, *rudraksa* beads, bells, and the like. They frequently wear a leather or canvas belt (*peti*) on which are strung a series of bells. The *yeba* and *yema* do not use the traditional shamanic drum found throughout Nepal, but instead during a state of trance or possession they beat a brass plate (*thal*).

In contrast, the garb of the *phedangma* and *samba* is much less dramatic. Noticeably absent are the feather headdress and cowrie shell bandoliers. Only on a rare occasion, depending, on the teachings of one's *guru*, did I see a *phedangma* or *samba*

wear the shaman's skirt (*jama*). The key instrument in the ritual activities of the *phedangma* and *samba* is the two-headed drum, the *dhyarro*, and both wear garlands of *rudraksa* beads and bells in curing ceremonies. It is important to note that shamans of all types seldom use the drum or the brass plate in life-cycle rituals birth, marriage, and death— or harvest rituals. Their activities during such rites parallel those of a priest, while their powers as shamans are used as a means for summoning spirits and tutelary deities, as well as maintaining power over these supernatural beings. These powers are undesirable when making offerings to gods and goddesses who are neither angry nor displeased. The *mangba* uses both the drum and the brass plate, but does not wear the feather headdress, skirt or cowrie shell bandolier.

The costume and instruments of the Limbu shamans indicate a diffusion of all shamanic practices and resemble those of other groups in Sikkim. This is especially evident in the garb of the *yeba*. During the course of field work, I attempted to witness and check a full costume of the *yeba* and *yema*. One Limbu informant took me to a Tamang shaman (*bon-po*) who owned such a costume. He was an old man of about seventy and no longer practicing his art. The headdress was almost identical to the ones seen elsewhere, with the exception that the Tamang headdress (called by the same name, *wasang*) consisted of peacock feathers, while the *yeba*'s headdress included the feathers of a number of other species of birds. Both headdresses displayed a headband decorated with cowrie shells in which the feathers were sewn. During my search, I also encountered a female shaman (*yema*) who owned a similar headdress but refused to wear it. The type of headdress under discussion closely resembles those of the *jhakri* found elsewhere in Sikkim.

The *yeba* told me that the kinds of feathers used were not of extreme importance, although the wild species of birds were preferred to domestic fowls. The feathered headdress of the *yeba* is symbolic of celestial flight, characteristic of classic Nepali and Sikkimese shamanism, which explains the preference for feathers of wild birds, especially wild birds of the high Himalaya.

Other instruments of the Limbu shamans parallel the common tradition. The two-headed drum (*dhyarro*), oval, or occasionally diamond or triangular shaped, resembles many of the drums used by other shamans. Although the hides of goats and water buffalo

are occasionally used in making drumheads. The most preferred skins are of deer and elk. Drum heads are occasionally painted with drawings of the sun and moon, which are symbolic of the shaman's celestial origin and flight during the trance. Similar motifs are frequently carved with images representing helping spirits or Limbu deities, including the Limbu high goddess Yuma Sammang, the earthly counterpart of Tagera Ningwaphuma, the creator. A number of species of animals are carved on drum handles—birds, elk, deer, and snakes are the most frequent. Most of these animals are symbolic of his journeys through the sky during a state of ecstasy. Also, frequent representations of the 'cosmic tree' are either painted on the drum head or carved in the handle.

Drums are used by Limbu shamans to achieve a state of ecstasy and control helping spirits as well as to gain power over those that do harm to the living, or the spirits of those who died by violence. Although the *yeba* does not use the shaman's drum during a séance, preferring the brass plate.

Divination and Curing

During course of field work I spent a day with a Limbu shaman Purna Bahadur. He explained his methodology of divination and curing during shamanic rites.

Limbu shamans divine in a number of ways. The techniques he uses are related to the different situations of illness and misfortune. The most frequent technique used for minor aches and pains is rice divination. The patient or client presents the shaman with a coin, which he places in a brass plate. He then takes a handful of rice, covers the coin, and separates the rice into six small piles. I was told that four of these represented the directions and two of them Limbu deities. In one case, the shaman told me that two of the piles symbolized Yuma and Theba Sammang. The shaman then counts the grains of rice in each pile, even numbers signifying one thing and odd numbers another. In this way, he is able to determine the severity of the illness, its cause, the direction from which it came, and the course of action to be taken.

A second form of divination, used in cases of extreme illness, requires the shaman to take articles of clothing from the patient and place them at an altar erected for Yuma Sammang or other Limbu deities. The shaman then chants the *mundhum* and goes into a trance. He learns the nature of the illness by divination in the presence of the clothes and seeks help from his tutelary spirit. The details of this form of divination were never

explained to me, but it is used in most major séances where the shaman constructs an altar and goes into a trance.

Occasionally he would take the pulse of a patient and determine the illness. At a wedding he attended, one of the guests fainted. Two shamans were present. One held the patient and took his pulse beat. After a few moments, he declared that the man had been attacked by Tamphungma, the jungle spirit. He chanted a few *mantra* to this spirit and gradually the patient revived. He told me this would not free the man from the grasp of Tamphungma, but was only a temporary measure. On returning home, the man would have to call in a shaman who would perform a *puja* to Tamphungma on his behalf.

As stated earlier, all illness and misfortune are thought to have supernatural causes. In extreme cases, the divination and cure require elaborate preparations on the part of the shaman and are expensive for the patient. The patient and his family must feed the shaman while he is in attendance. They should also supply him with liberal quantities of chhang liquor and tobacco. The payment of the shaman follows the cure. I was told that unsuccessful cures required no payment but that a successful cure would sometimes require as much as hundred or more rupees. The amount would be determined according to the time the shaman spent with the patient. Sometimes payment is in cash, but more frequently, it consists of goods such as clothing or grain.

Becoming a Shaman

One becomes a shaman as a result of possession by a deity. The most frequent possession seems to involve Yuma Sammang. At first, possession is involuntary, and the victim seeks a cure by consulting a shaman, who will attempt to pacify the deity with offerings. Should he be unsuccessful, the victim may take this as a sign that he is to learn the art of shamanism in order to eventually control his possession.

Many times, the state of involuntary possession continues for years, or in rare cases, throughout one's life, without the victim becoming a shaman. Simple possession by a deity is not the only sign that one is to become a shaman. One must acquire a teacher, or rather, more accurately, the teacher must discover the patient and learn the will of the deity. Limbu insist this knowledge comes to the teacher as a result of the deity's own wishes, not the patient's or the teacher's. The teacher might learn this in a dream, or in a state of trance, or through some other divine omen. He then pays the

victim a visit, informing him of the wishes of the deity. The teacher, who is himself a practicing shaman, then begins to teach the patient the *mundhum* and the techniques of his art, which include divination, the construction of an altar, and how to make and use the shamanic paraphernalia – the costume, the drum and the various fetishes.

Invariably, the patient rejects the call to become a shaman. Few desire to become shamans but, at least consciously, would rather be cured of their possession than to take on a trade which requires much time and effort and few rewards. I never met a wealthy Limbu shaman. The practicing shaman is frequently taxed both physically and mentally. During major festivals, such as Dasain, he is in great demand and often goes days without sleep. Frequently, his own family is neglected, as well as his fields. The remuneration for his services seldom equals the losses that he suffers as a result of neglecting his own agricultural work. Furthermore, most of the shamans I met had large families. One shaman had eight children. The value of a large family is great, once the children have reached the age where they are able to help in the field, but while they are young, they only represent more mouths to feed.

Spirit possession indicating the call to shamanic apprenticeship usually occurs at an early age. One shaman, a *yeba*, was first possessed at the age of eight by the spirit Samdonogma Yejuli, a household spirit of his mother's brother. His family called a shaman on a number of occasions, with the intention of curing the boy, without success. Finally a *yeba* learned of his plight and visited the boy, telling him that he was to become a *yeba*. He taught him the *mundhum* and how to control the Yejuli spirit. At first he rejected the idea, but after much coaxing from his *guru*, he decided that he would become an apprentice. His apprenticeship was short, not lasting more than two years. He then began to call the spirit at will and have success in curing people who became ill. Occasionally, however, even today, he has difficulty in controlling Yejuli, and sometimes the deity 'comes on him' without being summoned.

Yuma Sammang is frequently the goddess that possesses an individual and forces him or her to become a shaman, but it may also be a spirit of one's mother's brother's patrilineage, or the household deity of one's mother's brother, which are believed to be female deities as well. It may also be the spirit of one's maternal grandfather or

grandmother. There is a widespread idea that the tutelary spirits of Limbu shamans are 'inherited' in the matriline and are feminine.

Being called by a spirit, through possession, does not always mean that the individual will become a shaman. One man who lived near Yuksom would occasionally become possessed by the spirit of his maternal grandfather, but he did not become a shaman. I was told that a *guru* never came to him and he never learned the art. It was emphasized that, if the *guru* did not take up the individual as an apprentice, the individual could never learn to control his helping spirit.

The *guru* is essential to the practice of Limbu shamanism. He is the one who has learned to control his possession. He teaches this art to his apprentice and instils in him the confidence that is needed in dealing with supernatural powers. In this way, the *guru* also teaches his apprentice the causes of illness, the ways to diagnose, divination and the means of curing. Without a *guru*, a person possessed is merely a person that is ill.

Conclusion

Limbu shamanism is not just a matter of teaching and learning the procedures. Without the call through possession by a spirit, a person can never become a shaman, regardless of how much he learns about divination and curing rituals. Possession and teaching are both essential to the profession.

SECTION-V

THE LEPCHA - BON-THIN OF TASHIDING

Introduction

The Lepchas living in general area Tashiding adopted Tibetan Buddhism in 17th century. But this has by no means involved the elimination of their earlier religious traditions. The chief functionary of their indigenous beliefs is the *bon-thin* who is a kind of intercessor. He is chosen by the tutelary god *bon-thin rum* from a family where there have been *bon-thin* for many generations, and he is initiated after a long illness which serves as a kind of preparatory phase. The occupations of the *bon-thin* are the same as those of other villagers. He cultivates his field and looks after his goats, cows and oxen. Because of his religious position, he possesses a high social standing in the village.

The well-intentioned divinities are called *rum* in contrast to the divinities of evil intent, the *mun*, who are the cause of disease, death and disaster. The most important of the propitious divinities is *ta-se tuk-bo-thin*, also called *ta-se-thin*. Many of the propitious divinities take the form of female spirits (*mit*) inhabiting springs and *chus*. The evil divinities, the *mun*, are innumerable, haunting forests, bogs, torrents and rocks. Being very powerful, they are liable to interfere at any time in the life of the Lepchas and obstruct their projects. Only repeated sacrifices can satisfy their greed for flesh and blood.

Case study

A double religious function devolved upon *bon-thin* Phurbu who was my informant. In the role of propitiator he had to attract the attention of the chief god *ta-se-thin* and other well-intentioned divinities by means of offerings; as intercessor he had to appease and drive away the *mun* through blood sacrifices.

Periodically the *bon-thin* burns incense and recites the following prayers :-

‘O great god, protect us from illness, influenza, winds of the South and lightning. Protect us from the evil which can come from those who practise magic against us. You, too, king of demons, restrain your followers’.

Invoking Deities

The most important religious ceremony (*rum-fat*) takes place once a year after the harvest. The *bon-thin* makes an offering to all the divinities with whom he has contact. The villagers bring rice, millet, eggs, butter and fruit of all kinds. These offerings are placed on a stone on a hill-top well in view of *kon-cen cu* (Kanchandzonga), the mountain diety which dominates the whole region.

The *bon-thin* invokes successively the different summits of the mountain, which are identified with the following divinities : *kon-cen cu* and his wife *kon-lo-cu*, *pun-dim* and *pun-zon-cu*, their son and daughter *ra-tat* and *ra-yot*, their grand-son and grand-daughter, *sin-mu* and *ko-lun-mu-cu*, their male and female servants. The offspring and the servants are the lesser summits on either side of *kon-cen cu*.

Next the *bon-thin* addresses the spirits of the earth and the protectors of the village places, *tse-gog* a mountain divinity, *ta-lyan-do* divinity of the heights above the village, *so-mon-pon-di*, spirit of the hamlet. To these divinities, whose role seems altogether rather obscure, he offers rice, millet and oranges. In the third place the *bon-thin* requests the chief of the demons to restrain his followers. Of these *tam-nok-mun* and his partner *lyan-ser* were mentioned as the most powerful. This pair of black demons comes from the plains; having no children they are particularly self-willed and so more difficult to control than the others who are named *tse-dut* and his mate, *tun-kun-mit*, *lun-li*, and his mate *lun-lun-mun*, dwellers in caves, rocks and streams. The *mun* receives offering of chhang and rice.

Sacrifices

In spite of such periodical offerings and sacrifices of cocks, the *mun* still manifest themselves by causing diseases. The *bon-thin* is called upon in these cases to identify the dissatisfied *mun*. By means of divination he determines the kind of sacrifice required by the demon. A serious illness often necessitated a sacrifice of an ox. Before killing the animal invocations were made to the demons *gie-bu-mun*, *co-gye-mun*, *tse-dut* and *me-so-mun*, who takes the life of men. While the animal was being killed, the sick man was attached to it by means of a cord, and he beseeched the demon to accept them, praying that they may cease to cause illness of all kinds: headache, stomachache, pains in the limbs, etc. The sacrifices of the ox are on a wane these days.

Functions on Death

Finally the *bon-thin* has an essential function to play at the death of a man. Since the soul of a man must return to the place of its origin, it has to find its way to the ancestors *ti-kun-tik* and *ni-kun-nal* in the sacred land *rum-lyen*. In order to make the soul take the right path the *bon-thin* has at his disposal suitable spells. If a man is killed in the jungle or eaten by an animal, this causes special difficulties. Great efforts are made to retrieve his body, for if his soul has not been properly dispatched, it will hang around troubling members of the family. My informant also told me that the soul is judged by the god *co-ge pe-no* and is sent either to heaven or hell.

Mun

Mention was also made of the *mun*, the feminine counterpart of the *bon-thin*, but none is to be found now in Tashiding. The *mun* whose office passes from grandmother to granddaughter, is inspired by a tutelary divinity similar to *bon-thin* rum. According to the Tashiding villagers, these *mun* have power over the divinities of streams and mountains. Their supernatural power is characterized by the following stories which are often told in the village.

Folk Tales on 'Mun'

'Two brothers had become enemies after quarreling about a piece of land. The younger one appealed to a *bon-thin* in order to avenge himself on his brother. The elder one fell ill soon afterwards, and so his family called upon a *mun*. By means of divination she discovered the cause of the illness. A pig had been buried in the field which was the cause of the dispute. This pig was still alive, and the *mun* ordered that it should be dug up and placed near the house of the younger brother. Four days later, he died, together with seven members of his family'.

In earlier times, the *mun* shared with the *bon-thin* the power of guiding the souls of the dead to *rum-lyan*. Moreover, they could forestall the future and hold conversation with the dead.

'Three Lepchas went fishing. One of them left his companions and disappeared. His friends looked for him and found his corpse in the river. On returning to the village, the two men, although innocent, were accused of his death. A *mun*, who was consulted, asked the soul of the dead man how he had died. He replied that a *mun*, whom he had offended by cutting bamboos in a forbidden place, had pushed him into the water. Through the mediation of the *mun*, the drowned man asked his father to release his friends and also revealed the place where his savings were hidden. The parents found in fact eleven rupees and some paise in a bamboo near the hearth. The dead man entrusted his child to his parents and requested his wife not to marry again'.

Conclusion

The '*bon-thin*' and the '*mun*' are different from the other '*jhakris*' in the sense that, these also carry out the tasks of the priest hood. Though, since the merger of Lepchas within Mahayana faith, the dependence on the lamas and the monks has become more pronounced, the traditions of the '*bon-thin*' and '*mun*' continue.

SECTION-VI

FOLK LORE RELATING TO JHAKRIS

Introduction

The word folklore - literally, "the learning of the people"- was coined in 1864 by the late Mr. W.J. Thomas to replace the earlier expression "popular antiquities". It has established itself as the generic term under which the traditional beliefs, customs, stories, songs, and sayings current among traditional people or retained by rural ethnic classes of more advanced peoples. It comprises nearly all animistic beliefs about the world of nature, animate and inanimate; about human nature and things made by man; about a spirit world and man's relations with it; about witch craft, spells, charms, amulets, luck omens, disease, and death. It further includes customs and rites as a marriage and inheritance, childhood and adult life, and as to festivals, warfare, hunting, fishing, cattle keeping etc; also myths, legends, folk tales, ballads, songs, proverbs, riddles, and nursery rhymes. In short, it covers everything. (Burne 1914) (20).

The subjects comprehended under the name of folklore may be arranged in three principal groups with sub headings as follows (Burne 1914) (21) :-

(1) Belief and Practice relating to :-

- (a) The Earth and the Sky.
- (b) The Vegetable World.
- (c) The Animal world.
- (d) Human Beings.
- (e) Things made by Man.
- (f) The Soul and Another Life.
- (g) Superhuman Beings, (Gods, Godlings, and Others).
- (h) Omens and Divination.
- (i) The Magic Art.
- (j) Disease and Leechcraft.

(2) Customs.

- (a) Social and Political Institutions.
- (b) Rites of Individual Life.
- (c) Occupations and Industries.
- (d) Calendar Fasts and Festivals.
- (e) Games, Sports, and Pastimes.

(3) Stories, Songs and Sayings.

- (a) Stories: (i) told as true; (ii) told for amusement.
- (b) Songs and Ballads.
- (c) Proverbs and Riddles.
- (d) Proverbial Rhymes and Local Sayings.

Sikkimese Folklore

Stocks (1926) (22) and Kotturan (1989) (23) have given detailed accounts of Sikkimese folklore, most of which are, at least in numbers, dominated by Lepcha folktales. '*Jhakris*', shamans and '*bon-thins*' form an integral subject within the arena of folklore and customs. Almost all subjects described in introductory paragraph above form the vast assemblage of folktales.

The folk tale described here is conspicuous by the fact, that it encompasses within itself the Hindu Gods, and the Buddhist Bhutia Lama. The tale also to a great extent explains the diffusion of the shamanic rites within the region. It relates to the origin of the '*jhakri*' system, and as to, who was the first '*jhakri*'. The ethics to be maintained by the '*jhakris*' are also amply brought out in the tale.

Folktale of First Jhakri

Majority of persons agree that Shankar Mahadev Bhagwan was the first '*jhakri*'. Mahadev and a Bhutia lama met on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas. The two competed to draw forth from the jungle, using nothing but 'Mantra' the following objects :-

- (a) **A 'ghorin'**. A necklace made of beads. This type of necklace is also used in Tantric ceremonies. Each '*jhakri*' possesses several of these.
- (b) **A 'rudraksha Mala'**.
- (c) **Dumsi ko karo**. These are the porcupine quills.

By the same '*mantra*' power they also tried to fill an empty vessel with water and reach the sun. Mahadev produced a '*ghoirin*' and '*mala*'. Mahadev filled the vessel with water. The lama drew a prayer wheel. Mahadev arrived half way to the sun, but everything became dark, and he could no longer follow the path. The Lama arrived at the sun. Mahadev constructed a drum and danced and played with it. Since Lama had reached the sun, it was agreed that Lama would perform '*puja*' during day, whereas Mahadev would perform at night. Mahadev and Lama then separated and each settled down in different parts of Kailash.

The story continues on making of Mahadev's drum. Mahadev sent the porcupine into jungle to bring '*sinaro*' wood from the jungle to make the drum frames. A deer skin was brought for making drum heads. Mahadev closed the drum by attaching a handle. A '*rudraksha mala*' and other articles were placed inside the drum. A hen was brought, which laid an egg. A red dog arrived by itself. The dog irritated the Lama, who killed it. The dog's spirit assumed the role of guardian of the drum and the egg. In Mahadev's absence the dog's spirit protected his gear. Mahadev produced bow and arrows for the dog to function effectively. From that day on the dog became '*Sirin Shikari*'. This was the first '*shikari*'. Today tradition distinguishes 16 '*Shikaris*'. Their names and characteristics are: -

- (a) **Ekle shikari**. the lone hunter. He is the assistant to the others.
- (b) **Lawari shikari**. the colour-bearer. He leads the *shikari* troupe, carrying the seven-coloured flag white, red, blue, green, yellow, light blue and cream. *Lawa* means 'flag'. It is made of a long cherrywood staff, surmounted by an iron spearhead. Various coloured cloths are attached to an iron ring at the base of the tip. The whole thing is called *barcho*.
- (c) **Bagali shikari**. the guardian of the troupe. *Bagalimu* means 'to group together'.
- (d) **Chamung shikari** this one is bad. If seen at the time of a *puja*, he may jeopardize the *puja*'s success. The name is perhaps related to *chamkanu*, 'to be insolent'.
- (e) **Khurma shikari**. throws needles out from the earth. Inflicts illnesses such as sciatica (*khuro* means 'pin').

- (f) **Namrun shikari** found under fruits and flowers. He protects. He is good.
- (g) **Bajra shikari** lightning (*bajra* = lightning).
- (h) **Chalena shikari** makes fun of people. He is at once good and bad. (*chale* (*adj.*) = 'to pretend')
- (j) **Kheluwa Shikari** plays everywhere (*khelmu* = to play).
- (k) **Sarma shikari** bends people by inflicting attacks of paralysis.
- (l) **Sama cherin chatmaghe shikari** if he is not properly worshipped, he inflicts fatal pains of the stomach and heart
- (m) **Raktaban shikari** Causes internal haemorrhage. (*rakta* = blood)
- (n) **Ban shikari** moves about like the wind and knocks people over. The paralysis is said to be caused by jungle spirits who shoot the sufferer. (*ban* = arrow).
- (o) **Kali shikari** black, like a black *bhut* (ghost).
- (p) **Solasarma shikari** if people speak badly of him, he immobilizes them on the spot.

When men are sick, the '*jhakri*' must name the 16 '*shikaris*' and designate the one responsible for sickness. A cock may be sacrificed on such occasions.

Summary

It is noticed that '*jhakri*' though does not fully embrace the same world of relationships as classical Hinduism, the '*jhakri*' and his clientele are more or less Hinduized, but are also influenced by Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, the Mun and the Bon rites. In these accounts of cultural diffusion also, many folk tales are prevalent. The overall integration of cultural diffusive knowledge becomes definitive only when the '*jhakri*' integrally transmits his knowledge to a pupil, an exceptional event for the society as a whole. It seems clear that the pupil in turn interprets and embellishes the material in terms of his own competency and experience, and so it goes from generation to generation.

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