

Appendix I

Social Change in Tingvoong Village, Dzongu

Introduction

The purpose of inserting this appendix here is to see if the major trends of social change witnessed in Lingthem are typical of that village or common to the neighbouring villages also. This is done as per the advice of the Research Board members of the Centre for Himalayan Studies. The choice of the neighbouring village was left to the investigator but a brief account of the changes in the same was obligatory.

For this purpose, I chose to study the Tingvoong village, which is located about 13 kilometres away from Lingthem but very much within Dzongu. The choice of this village was not arbitrary. Tingvoong is, after Lingthem, one of the most thoroughly studied Lepcha villages. This village, also spelt as Tingbung, Tingbong, and Toongvoong (Morris, p. 56), was studied by a very competent anthropologist, Halfdan Siiger in 1949.

The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People, Parts I and II with Jorgen Rischel (1967) were the outcome of mainly Siiger's fieldwork in Kalimpong and Sikkim. Part I of this book, written solely by Siiger, contains detailed anthropological findings in Tingvoong village whereas Part II deals primarily with the linguistic study of the Lepchas.

Hence, Siiger's work carried out in the early months of 1949 and published in 1967 provides me with the 'zero point' of yet another village in Dzongu. The gaps between the first studies of Lingthem and Tingvoong and my re-study are not equal. Even the styles of description adopted by Gorer and Morris on the one hand and Siiger on the other are different. But in line with the work taken up here the obvious choice was the Tingvoong village.

The Village

This village is located on the north-west of the Lingthem village. A jeepable road passes through Lingthem and goes upto this village with Talungchu bridge constructed in 1976 connecting the two villages. Though the distance between Lingthem and this village is not much, as noted

above, it takes about an hour to reach the village on jeep and about two and a half hours on foot, taking the short-cuts. There was no alternative but to walk down upto this village till 1979.

This village comprises of six hamlets, namely, Kusung (Kesong by Siiger), Nampruk, Nung, Linko (Langku by Siiger), Payar (Payel) and Sangbu (Sangvo by Siiger). The name Tingvoong was and is, as in the case of Lingthem, often referred to the centre of the village only but for administrative purposes it includes all the six hamlets mentioned above. Keeping this in mind, the village is surrounded on the north by mountainous forests, on the west by Sankyong Pentong, on the east by Chungthang and on the south by the Talung river.

The total number of households in this village in 1949 was approximately 40 and population 190 persons. A socio-economic survey on the Lepchas of Dzongu conducted in 1981-82 by the Planning and Development Department of the Government of Sikkim shows that the total number of households in that year was 98 and the total population 557.

Siiger has mentioned about the Nepalese infiltration "in the lower Sikkimese Districts" (p. 44) but has not written anything with specific reference to the Tingvoong village. In 1981-82, however, there were as many as 68 non-Lepcha households and 749 persons belonging almost entirely to the Nepalese community. This is an interesting development in all over Dzongu which is officially a reserved area for the Lepchas only.

Material Culture

It is in the material culture that changes seem most natural and extensive. For instance, the Lepcha houses in the nineteenth century were reported to be made entirely of bamboo (Campbell 1869:155). Siiger in 1949 finds bamboo houses as an "exception" and reports about widespread use of timber and thatch roofs. He describes a usual Lepcha house as "a sturdy one-storey wooden building on piles" (p. 63). He has also shown that the Lepcha houses had generally two rooms: the hearthroom and the altar room.

Forty years after, in 1989, a lot of changes were noticed. For instance, the thatched roofs have been replaced by corrugated and galvanized

iron sheets almost in the whole of Tingvoong. It was mainly those houses where the Nepalese labourers were temporarily staying were thatched. In 1981-82 itself only 46 out of the total 98 households were thatched. During the same year Tingvoong had 10.2 percent of the households with tap water facilities. In terms of material the use of cement seemed growing popular and in almost every house living room, which was in 1949 a part of the hearth room, is constructed separately.

Writing about the ornaments of the Lepchas, Siiger had noticed an increasing influence of the market and commented that "although people do keep up some of the ancient customs, several of them have already disappeared" (1967:71). With motorable road constructed a decade back contact with the Mangan town, which has grown into the district headquarters of the North, has strengthened. In 1989, some of the villagers, specially youths, could be seen wearing clothes which were imported and not available even in Mangan.

Agriculture

Siiger's account of agriculture in Tingvoong is based on his fieldwork in Kalimpong and not Tingvoong but claims that the account is valid for this village also.

The chief crops noted in 1949 were rice and maize in addition to subsidiary crops like millet, buckwheat, wheat, potatoes, radishes, and various fruits and vegetables. The cultivation of wet-rice was recent but quite extensive. There is no mention of the high yielding variety seeds, chemical fertilizers and the insecticides.

The cultivation of cardamom was apparently growing popular then because Siiger writes that it was "grown in small clearings all over the lower slopes of the valleys" (p. 84). In 1989, cardamom cultivation was very extensive and it was certainly the most important cash crop in the village. Even the higher elevations of the village had cardamom plantation of a particular variety called Ramsai as noted about in Lingthem.

The use of high yielding variety seeds of rice and maize, and chemical fertilizers like uria, super-phosphate, and Dolomite was reported in 1989 to be popular in the village. Though some of the villagers seemed critical of such innovations, the noticeable increase in production had convinced a lot of them to ignore the grumbings of the old folks.

Animal Husbandry

Siiger says that the Lepchas keep almost all the animals like oxen, goats, pigs, dogs, fowls, and cats. About tending of the domestic animals he writes that generally they were "left to find their own food and pasture where best they can in the grassy jungle in the neighbourhood of the village" (p. 94). There is no mention of hybrid animals by Siiger. But in 1989 it was reported that hybrid variety of pigs, cows and fowls were supplied by the Government of Sikkim through the gram panchayat. Loans were also provided not only for these animals but also for fisheries, though the last mentioned does not seem to be much successful in this village. It was also reported that the animals were better tended with sheds provided by the gram panchayat and one veterinary hospital established by the State.

Social Organization

As far as the social organization of the Tingvoong village is concerned hardly any change was noticed in 1989 from what Siiger had observed in 1949. The forms and relations of the family were more or less the same in 1989, that is, an

admixture of the nuclear, extended, and the joint, with the eldest male member of the family as the head.

The females' right to inheritance of landed property was still very rare in 1989. Most of the daughters could, as in 1949, inherit only the moveable properties of the family.

The patrilineal clan called p'tsho (also spelt as putsho by Siiger and defined as a lineage by him) was considered as one of the most important institutions in 1989 also. This not only defined the membership of the individual in a group but also determined his status and marital relations. To quote Siiger:

When planning a marriage the parents must carefully observe the rules concerning the putsho exogamy, and the idea of a prospective marriage will never occur to a Lepcha until he has examined the relation between the putsho concerned (p. 132).

If the p'tsho was (and is) the most fundamental criterion for the selection of spouses the matching of horoscopes was equally important in

a Lepcha marriage. With regard to a non-negotiated marriage also the first criterion is seldom breached. Most of the Lepchas being not very highly educated and hence not confident to leave the village for good the p'tsho rules seem to have an over-bearing control over them.

Like in Lingthem, the age at marriage for both males and females in Tingvoong seem to be determined not by any tradition but the situation in the family. There never was any fixed age for marriage and it depended entirely on how essential it was for the family to have a spouse for the son. However, late marriage, say after thirty years, has always been rare unless it is a case of remarriage or second marriage. Finally, about the forms of marriage both polygyny and polyandry have been mentioned about the Lepchas in general. In Tingvoong also Siiger has cited two instances of polygyny and one instance of polyandry (p. 134). In both the cases, not having a child has been found to be the most determining factor. Even today polygyny is reported but it is not the same about polyandry. The Lepcha women, though enjoying equal status with the males in many respects, do not seem to be as enterprising as the men in the village.

Religion

It is not possible to discuss meaningfully the changes that have come about in the Lepcha religion on the basis of a short visit to this village. The problem is further compounded by the difficulty of knowing clearly about it from Siiger's account. He discusses religion under a number of related subjects and therefore it is difficult to draw a comprehensive picture of the same. Further, the accounts do not always relate to the Tingvoong village.

Broadly, it is understood from his accounts that the pre-Buddhist form of religion commonly known as Bonism was widely practised in 1949. Siiger discusses the offices of the Lepcha religious persons like Mun and Bongthing in great detail. He also describes their vocation, duties, equipments, etc. In short, Siiger gives the impression that the influence of lamaism was, if anything, insignificant.

The period between 1949 and 1989 seems, if Siiger is to be taken for granted, very important about religious change among the Lepchas. This

period seems to have witnessed considerable disappearance of the traditional Lepcha religious figures like Muns and Bongthings and spread of lamaism among them. This shows that lamaism has travelled along the road from Mangan to the remoter areas of Dzongu. Lingthem being closer to Mangan seems to have adopted lamaism earlier than this village because while in Lingthem there was only one Bongthing in 1989, Tingvoong still had one Mun and a couple of Bongthings.

But it is interesting to note that in Lingthem there was a renewed respect for the Muns and Bongthings among the youths but no such attitude was noticed in Tingvoong. Hence the sense of religious revivalism is gradually returning in villages where lamaism was adopted for quite some time now.

Conclusion

Dzongu, despite being a reserved area for the Lepchas has always been exposed to the changes in the State if not in India as a whole. Many notable changes have come about in Sikkim after its 'merger' with India in 1974. This historical

event has generated all round changes in the whole of Sikkim.

One of the most notable changes that has been witnessed even at the village level is the spread of education. For instance, in 1949, there was not a single school but at present there are as many as 286 students studying in the Tingvoong school. This school was first started by a Christian Lepcha from Gangtok, namely Joseph Lucksom in 1950-51. After two years he was succeeded by one P. T. Lepcha from Kalimpong, who has since remained there. In 1976, it became a Junior High School and in 1986 a high school. In 1989, this school had 26 graduate teachers, who were but all from outside and representing various Sikkimese and non-Sikkimese communities.

Another significant change that had started in 1950s but which accelerated after 1975 is the dependence of the villagers on the migrant labourers from Nepal. In 1981-82, the percentage of such labourers to the total population of the village was as high as 57.0. Though the number of such labourers increases or decreases over the years and even over the months it is very clear that

the Lepchas of Tingvoong have grown used to the services of such people not only for cardamom cultivation but also for the cultivation of other crops like paddy, maize, wheat, and ginger. Even the household chores are often carried out by such people.

The abundance of such labourers from Nepal has, on the one hand, saved the Lepchas from the hardships of carrying out the agricultural works, from the health hazards in cultivating cardamom, and provided them with an opportunity for their children to go to school and even higher studies. On the other hand, they are growing more and more dependent on such people. Above all, it has affected their life-style, language and culture. Though the labourers stay in the village with temporary work permits they seem to leave behind permanent imprints of themselves.

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I. THE TALUNG VALLEY FROM LINGTHEM



2. THE LINGTHEM MONASTERY IN 1987



3. LABOUR SETTLEMENT

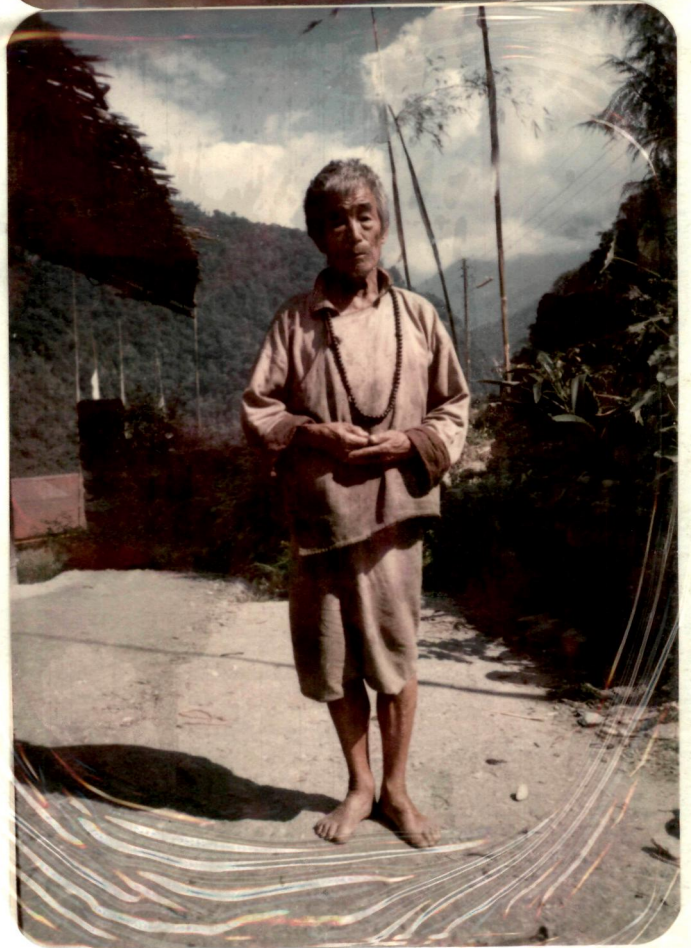


4. PANCHAYAT HOUSE, PASSINGDANG

5. DAWA TSHERING ENGROSSED
IN GORER'S BOOK



6. CHANANG, THE TRADER, AT
80



7. PICHI WITH HISBAN



8. KACHER AND AKHU IN
TRADITIONAL DRESS



9. MOONGLI (DEVIL'S HOUSE) HUNG ABOVE THE DOOR
UNLIKE SEPARATELY BEFORE

