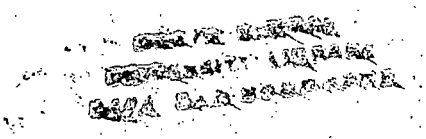
LINGTHEM AFTER FIFTY YEARS
A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF A LEPCHA VILLAGE IN DZONGU, NORTH SIKKIM

Dissertation Submitted to
the University of North Bengal
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)



By

Mrs. Roshina Gowloog, M.A

Centre for Himalayan Studies

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Centre for Himalayan Studies
Dated: November 30th 1991

Roshina Gowloog 2/12/91

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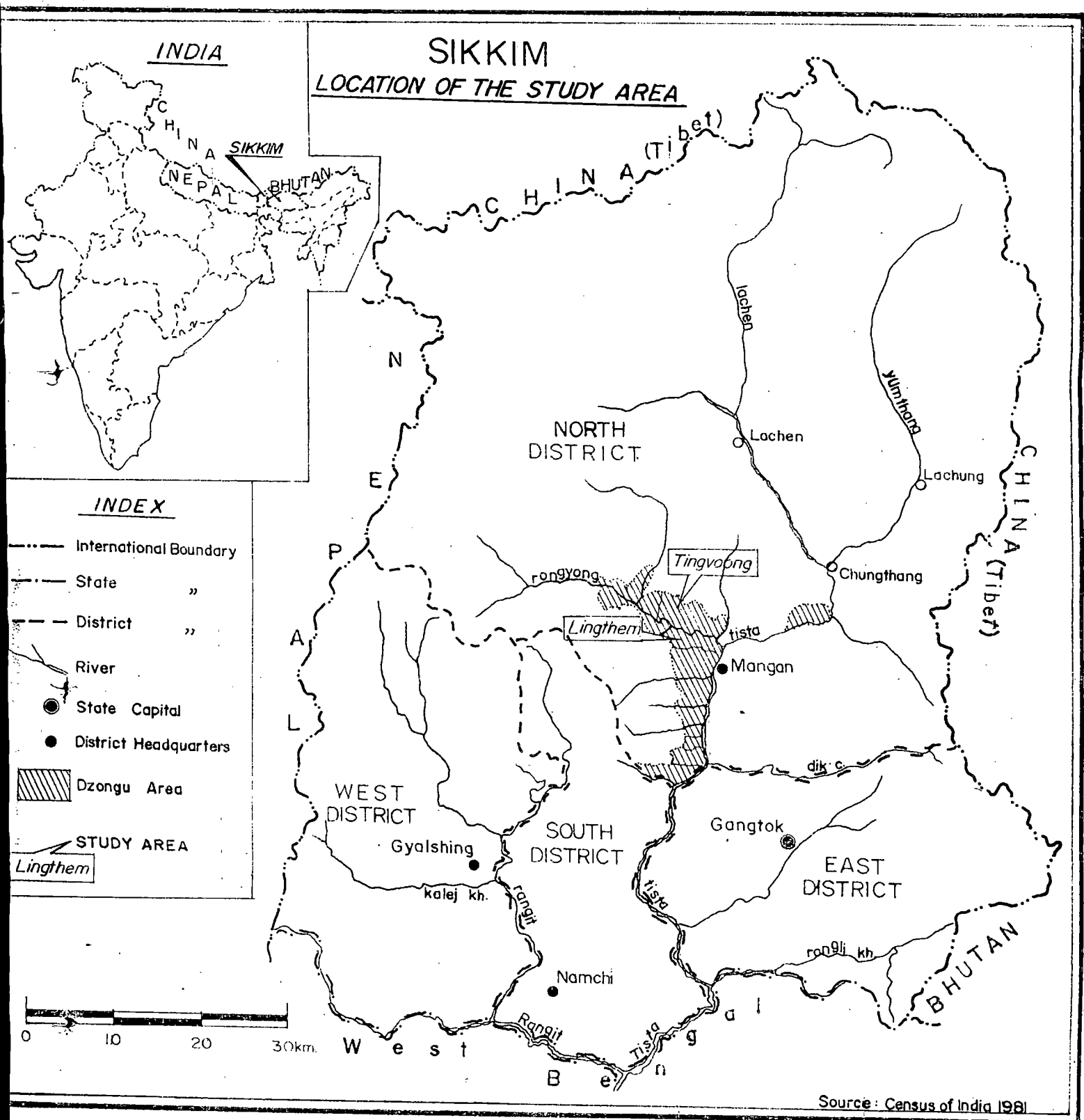


Source : Census of India 1981

Chapter I

Introduction

In early 1937, a remote village called Lingthem (also spelt as Lingtem, see Morris 1938), which was the private estate of the Maharani of Sikkim turned into a "Lepcha Reserve", was chosen for anthropological study by two British anthropologists. Geoffrey Gorer, the first, had taken anthropological orientation from the celebrities like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and John Dollard. John Morris, the other, was also offered studentship in social anthropology by the William Wyse Foundation at the University of Cambridge for carrying out this research.

They stayed in Lingthem for three months - March to May. Morris was actually called back to join the British army after two months. During their stay in Lingthem they made the local monastery their home, where the villagers dropped by to have a sight of the two white men. They did most of their interviewing at the monastery itself though once in a while they walked around the village too. They rewarded the villagers with silver coins and even donated handsomely for the rejuvenation of the monastery

before they left.

One of the feats that still amazes many anthropologists today is the depth as well as the volume of data they could gather in so short a time: Gorer generated over 500 pages and Morris about 300 pages in print. The former has often used psychological tools to understand the Lepcha culture while the latter's account, though claiming to be meant for lay readers, bears some scholarly observations.

The Himalayan Village, reprinted under the title The Lepchas of Sikkim in 1984, by Gorer and Living with the Lepchas (now out of print) by Morris were both published in 1938. The Second World War caused a gap between the publication of these books and the reviews of the same. From 1950 onwards they have been extensively quoted, corroborated, and also criticized severely by many scholars including the Lepchas. Yet no later scholar has been able to bring out equally rich ethnographic treatise on the Lepchas.

Lingthem, the village with 33 households and 176 persons (179 persons according to Morris, p. 24), has since been known throughout the world. Most of our knowledge about the economy, social organization, sexual behaviour, socialization, etc. of the Lepchas are largely based on the informations culled out from this tiny village. A few Lepcha scholars like

K. P. Tamsang and A. R. Foning revisited this village later in order to refute some of the earlier contentions about the Lepchas. But despite their command over the language lack of anthropological orientation in them was a big handicap.

In Himalayan Village Gorer has discussed the various aspects of the Lepcha society like house, food, economy, religion, social organization, sex, and life cycle. In addition to all this we find scattered throughout the book several life histories of the Lepchas of Lingthem. Chapter XVI in particular deals with four such interesting life histories. The book ends with a note on the Lepcha language and a short vocabulary of the Lepcha words.

Living with the Lepchas by Morris is a different book from Himalayan Village. He also uses anthropological methods of data collection and fieldwork but the narrative style is that of a travelogue rather than a serious academic piece of work. He does not hope many people to read the kind of book that he has written but the lay will certainly find his book enjoyable.

The subjects dealt with in this book include their magic and spells, family life, sex, festivals, etc. He has also provided a comprehensive bibliography which is useful not only to the professional

but also to those who are interested in travelling and mountaineering in that part of the country.

Gorer had published a number of books before his Himalayan Village but it is considered to be one of the most important contributions to anthropological literature (Hutton 1938:28).

Gorer and Morris came to India in the very end of 1936. They spent about two months in Kalimpong struggling with the intricacies of the Lepcha language. After that they left for Gangtok on foot so that Gorer could have "a chance to see something of the country, which was new to him" (Morris, p. 14). Morris was an experienced traveller and had seen the Talung Valley (where the Lingthem village is located) in the spring of 1936, on his way to Mount Everest. The permission to work in Sikkim had initially appeared impossible but the Maharaja finally granted the permission. Even the selection of Dzongu as a site for their fieldwork was suggested by the Maharaja himself though with a lot of warnings. Reaching Dzongu it was primarily the presence of a monastery in Lingthem and the absence of the same in Lingdem that made them choose the former village and not the latter. They had a working knowledge of the Lepcha language but they thought it wise to take interpreters. Sukra Singh

and Dawa who interpreted for Gorer and Morris respectively were both Christian Lepchas from Kalimpong with a rather low opinion about their brethren in Dzongu.

Objectives

The objective of this study is not to challenge the contentions made by Gorer and Morris: the scope of doing so is not there any more. But here is a golden opportunity for making a diachronic study of the Lingthem village. Hence, keeping 1937 as the base year, this study seeks to see what changes have taken place over the last fifty years or so. How are the changes taking place and what factors are responsible for the same? What are the trends towards the future?

The present study seeks to limit itself to three primary aspects of this village. They are: economy, social organization and religion. Though these three aspects do not fully exhaust the contents of the books by Gorer and Morris other diachronic studies show that it is not essential to touch upon each and every aspect in doing a re-study.

My principal aim here is to study social change among the Lepchas of Lingthem. But secondarily I have also discussed the changes outside this village - in Tingvoong, for instance - and in the Lepcha

society as a whole.

Survey of Literature

The Lepchas owe their publicity largely to the European scholars. Some of the well known European writers on them are: Herbert, Campbell, Hooker, Dalton, Mainwaring, Faulmann, Avery, Waddell, Grunwedel, Gorer, Morris, Droiun, White, Mackean, Scherman, Stocks, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Sprigg, Shafer, Nakane, Siiger, and Hermanns. Professionally, they belonged to various groups like administrators, travellers, botanists, linguists, soldiers, and so on but racially almost all of them were Europeans.

Of the various writers mentioned above Halfdan Siiger in particular has provided a comprehensive survey of literature on the Lepchas right upto 1962 on pages from 17 to 22 of his book. The present survey is largely based on his compilation but it excludes some less important literature mentioned by him and includes others which are not included by him, specially those published after 1962.

According to Siiger, the earliest European reference to Sikkim is that of Ippolito Desideri, who has referred to the existence of Bree-me-jong (or Sikkim) as a province of Tibet. But it was only after J. D. Herbert published "Particulars of a Visit to the Siccim Hills" in 1830 that the world

came to know about Sikkim and its inhabitants.

A. Campbell, a noted administrator and a keen observer of the Himalayan culture and people, has published three important articles which deal mainly with the Lepchas: "Note on the Lepchas of Sikhim with a Vocabulary of their Language" (1840), "A Journal of a quick Trip to Sikhim 1849" (1849), and "Diary of a Journey through Sikhim to the Frontiers of Tibet" (1852). During the same period Joseph Hooker, the famous botanist, published his Himalayan Journals, Vols I and II (1854), which are now the classic travelogues not only on the flora and fauna but also on the people of that region.

The interest to know more about the Lepchas living in Darjeeling and Sikkim was unabated. Thus, E. T. Dalton devoted a whole chapter to the Lepchas in his Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal (1872).

Of the various European scholars it is perhaps General G. B. Mainwaring who took the strongest fancy to the Lepchas. He devoted many years of his life to teaching the Lepchas, which in turn made him one of the most competent European authorities on the Lepcha language. This is clearly proved by his Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language as It Exists in the Dorjeling and Sikim Hills (1876). In this book, he has used the structural grammatical

principles of Latin as the foundation for his analysis, which was of course impossible and for which he had to bear a lot of ridicule. However, this book is useful not only as a collection of Lepcha phrases and sentences but also as a historical document. The publication of this was followed by B. N. Shaha's A Grammar of the Lepcha Language (1884).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, L. A. Waddell published an important article entitled "Place and River-Names in the Darjiling District and Sikhim" (1892). In the same year appeared H. H. Risley's Tribes and Castes of Bengal (2 Vols.). Volume II of this book contains an excellent account of the life and customs of the Lepchas. Yet another book that appeared in that year was A. Grunwedel's A Rong-English Glossary. Besides these books a number of articles were also published on the Lepchas.

In 1894, Risley's Gazetteer of Sikkim was published. This was followed by K. K. Das's article entitled "The Lepcha People and their Notions of Heaven and Hell" (1896).

In 1898, A Dictionary of the Lepcha Language compiled by Mainwaring and revised by Grunwedel was published. After this not much work has been done on the Lepcha language as such. With the exception by R. K. Sprigg, who has been carrying out research

on this language there is hardly any one else.

The twentieth century began with the publication of Among the Himalayas (1900) by L. A. Waddell. This book gives an account of his long experience with the Lepchas. In 1927, C. De Beavoir Stocks' Folk-lore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikhim was published. This is a collection of the Lepcha myths and legends. A few songs in the Lepcha language are also included.

Rene De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, an Austrian anthropologist, conducted his fieldwork in Kalimpong and published some valuable papers like "The Use of Thread-Crosses in Lepcha Lamaist Ceremonies" (1951 with Gorer), "Ancient Feudal Ceremonies of the Lepchas" (1952), and "Hunting and Fishing among the Lepchas" (1953).

The Indo-Tibetans (1954) by Fr. Mathias Hermanns has also devoted a considerable part to the Lepchas of the Darjeeling hills. With this ends the list of important writings on the Lepchas by Europeans. Some of the literature cited above are written by eminent scholars but in a style typical of the nineteenth century writers.

The first major work by an Indian anthropologist on the Lepchas is The Lepchas of Darjeeling District (1962) by A. K. Das with the help of S. K. Banerjee.

This book was later revised by Das alone and published under the title The Lepchas of West Bengal (1978). This book deals mainly with the socio-economic life of the Lepchas of Kalimpong. Das still keeps a keen interest in the study of the Lepchas; his latest contribution being an article in M. K. Raha edited book, The Himalayan Heritage (1987).

One of the latest additions in Lepcha literature is Himalayan Lepchas (1988) by R. N. Thakur. It seeks to explore the socio-cultural aspects of the Lepchas of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Sikkim. Another recent work is Veena Bhasin's Ecology, Culture and Change: Tribals of Sikkim Himalayas (1989). This book is written mainly from the cultural-ecological point of view and shows the relationship between man and nature, how and where eco-system and socio-cultural system are interconnected. The study is based on two tribes of North Sikkim: Lepcha and Bhutia.

Some of the Lepcha scholars have also contributed to the already rich volume of literature. Some of them like G. Tshering and La Tshering Lepcha have written in the Nepali language while others like Sonam Wangdi Lepcha, K. P. Tamsang, and A. R. Foning have written in English. Sonam Wangdi, probably the first Lepcha to have done a doctorate on the Lepchas,

is not found academically active after writing (with Thakur) an article for The Eastern Anthropologist (1981) and has instead accepted a civil judge's post in Sikkim. His elder brother, La Tshering Lepcha, is one of the most knowledgeable Lepchas today though he is also busy with a translator's post he holds in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. K. P. Tamsang is very widely known among the Lepchas but he lacks historical and anthropological orientation in his writings. Foning who recently passed away was a competent historian but could not remain alive even to see how his book Lepchas: My Vanishing Tribe (1987) was received by the readers.

The only local but a non-Lepcha scholar who has written on the Lepchas is T. B. Subba. Mention may be made of his "Lepchas: From Legends to the Present Day" (1985) and "Dynamics of a Hill Society: Case Study of the Lepchas" (1989).

The Lepchas have otherwise arrested the attention of any writer who visited Darjeeling or Sikkim. Stray and journalistic articles on them are indeed numerous but writings based on systematically collected and verified data are very few.

One of the most criticized contentions made by Gorer and Morris, though outside the scope of the present study, is the Lepchas' over indulgence in

sexual activities. The Lepcha scholars like Tamsang and Foning have counter-argued over this as they thought that such contentions would tarnish the image of the Lepchas as a civilized community.

The two British scholars might have dramatised the sexual behaviour of the Lepchas to a large extent, but a closer reading of their works makes one feel that they had written as objectively as it was expected of them. But what they seem to have lacked and other succeeding writers missed is the explanation for this behaviour. In fact, the explanation is to be found in the socio-economic environment of the Lepchas so neatly described by Gorer and Morris: what they should perhaps have done is to link these two. However, it is possible that having come from the society they have in Europe they saw no need to rationalize the sexual over-indulgence of the Lepchas but none other than themselves owed and could provide a better explanation to this.

Diachronic Studies: A Brief Survey

The study of social change has been a major obsession of the anthropologists all over the world for the past one century. A large number of them have considered diachronic studies useful for understanding the complexity of social change. Hence, numerous diachronic studies have been conducted by

anthropologists some of whom are forerunners in the field. A brief survey of some notable studies of this kind is made here.

We, the Tikopia (1936) by Raymond Firth is one of the classics of anthropological research. The study was done in a Polynesian island of the Western Pacific from July 1928 to July 1929. In this book the author deals with the social organization of the Tikopeans, more specifically with their kinship system. His is an empirical study conducted in the native language but the presentation of data has been within a broad theoretical framework.

Firth conducted a re-study ("dual-synchronic" in his own word) of the Tikopeans during 1952-53 with the help of a research assistant called James Spillius, a Canadian anthropologist who had some field experience in the north-west coast of the United States. Spillius stayed in Tikopia for seventeen months and Firth for five months (March to July 1952). The result of this book was published in 1959 and was titled as Social Change in Tikopia: Restudy of a Polynesian Community after a Generation (1959). In this restudy Firth mainly deals with social changes due to external contact and ecological changes. His major contention in this book is that changes are more organizational

than structural in character. In his restudy he found that new opportunities had cropped up but the choices of the Tikopeans were limited by their environment as well as the values and symbols of their society.

In the concluding part of the book, the author points out that apart from being an analysis of a sector of Tikopia's social history, the book may have certain predictive value in understanding the directions of future changes. It may help to foresee what may happen to other small oceanic societies when they are exposed to the Western influence.

Another important anthropological work re-studied is that of Robert Redfield. His Tepotzlan: A Mexican Village: A Study of Folk Life (1930) is based on the author's fieldwork conducted in 1926-27. This book tries to understand the Mexican folk society through Tepotzlan, a simple Mexican village.

Tepotzlan was later restudied twice by Oscar Lewis, thereby qualifying for the term "trichronic" rather than diachronic study. First he went there in 1943 and published his Life in a Mexican Village: Tepotzlan Re-Studied in 1951. In 1956-57, he went there once again to see what changes had occurred since his last visit in 1943. This work was published in the year 1960 under the title, Tepotzlan: Village

in Mexico.

In this book a wide range of changes in Tepotzlan have been chronologically discussed. The period of change discussed starts from the tenth century A.D. and the Toltec Empire to the present. The main focus of the book is on the life of the Mexican peasants. He mainly deals with economy, social organization and the life cycle, though he has also analyzed their feelings, motivations and values. In the last chapter he gives an account of the change as Tepotzlan is introduced to electricity, motorable roads, buses and even formulae for bottle babies.

Death of a Witch (1983) by G. M. Carstairs is the study of change in a small village of Rajasthan between 1950 and 1951. It shows how a small, tightly knit but not always harmonius community of Rajput farmers in Sujarupa has reacted to the pressures of modernization.

Carstairs first went to the Sujarupa village in search of material for a research project in the first half of 1950. But the village and its inhabitants later meant far more to him than just that. he was adopted as a dharam bhai or ritual brother by two women of the village and was thus uniquely

placed to watch its progress. It was he who in 1967 introduced the radio to the villagers, thereby enabling them to listen to broadcast about agriculture. Since then the farmers have adopted new methods of cultivation, which have gone a long way in raising living standards of the people there.

The villagers were however suspicious about modern medicine and are considered by the author as slow to accept modern education also. Even in 1981 many men and all women were still illiterates.

Vilyatpur 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village (1974) by Tom G. Kessinger is a diachronic study of Vilyatpur, a village in Punjab. This study combines the perspectives and methods of the historian and the anthropologist in an attempt to reconstruct the social and economic history of this village. Kessinger has selected a single village to study the processes of migration, commercialization, occupational differentiation, population dynamics, etc. by using the sources of information like records of census, tax and land ownership.

The unit of analysis is the family and the behaviour and decisions of the families constituting the village during the 128 years are his principal concern. He has followed the course of development

over an extended period taking into consideration factors responsible for particular events.

Kessinger has derived historical data on the village from the permanent records maintained in every district in north India for official reference and use in the courts. The principal ones among them were: Jamabandi, Shajra Nasib, Lalkitab, Khanna Shumari, and Pilgrimmage records (p. 6). He took interviews with the heads of each family in 1968-69.

He stayed in the village for ten months and spent about 4 to 8 hours with each family, collecting biographical information on each person tracing the genealogy as far back as possible.

The Toda of South India: A New Look (1986) by Anthony R. Walker is yet another important diachronic study. He first visited the Todas in 1960, while he was a Commonwealth Universities scholar from England studying in Osmania University of Hyderabad. But his first fieldwork was actually done in 1962-63 for his B. Litt. thesis. Then he made several trips to the Nilgiris: in 1969-70, 1974, 1976-77, 1978, 1981, and finally in October 1984. Hence, though not intended so his study in itself could be called a longitudinal study. But

since the benchmark of his study was provided by the classic work on the Todas by W. H. R. Rivers his study is more accurately considered as a diachronic study.

Walker has clearly stated that this book is not a substitute for River's The Todas but the utilization of modern anthropological perspective for a new look at the Todas, revealing them as a section of the Hindu world. He has dealt with the matrix of their society, physical and social environment, social organization, the sacred dairy cult, their passage through life and finally a detailed social history of the community.

Rivers had examined the Toda society as an essentially closed system but Walker not only studied them in historical perspective but also in relation to wider Hindu society - the context, which he believed made much more sense in understanding their old institutions.

After a Century and a Quarter (1960) by G. S. Ghurye is also an important diachronic study. Major Coats had described the picture of Lonikand, a village near Poona, as he found in 1819. He had dealt with, among others, the village structure and functions, the role of various groups and sections

in the society, etc. Keeping his description as the basis, Ghurye offers a refreshing contrast.

A fresh picture of the structure of the village community, its social organization and the changes through more than a century in the social, socio-economic, and religious life of the villagers are competently dealt with by him.

Behind the Mud Walls (1971) by William and Charlotte Wiser is also one of the classic studies in this tradition. The first edition of this book published in 1930 was based on a joint work the couple did in Karimpur, near Agra. Though they were basically missionaries their work was complimented by American Anthropologist as "a classic description of village India". William Wiser died in 1961. So it was Charlotte who wrote down the changes observed in 1960 and visited Karimpur once again in 1970 to see if any further changes had occurred.

According to her, the village had changed negligibly in a span of 30 to 40 years with regard to social institutions like family, caste and religion but the changes in material culture were remarkable. They had begun to make brick houses, grow new crops and even market them. The live-

stock was improved and so were their farming techniques. There was better medical care and so on. In all these matters the role of the developing agencies and the government has been highly appreciated by her.

To the above list of diachronic studies one can add many more. Some such diachronic studies are found listed by G. M. Carstairs in Appendix I of his book. The important point to note is not how many such studies have been published but appreciate the realization by many anthropologists that change is better understood with the help of diachronic rather than synchronic studies.

The seven studies surveyed here not only differ in terms of who conducted the re-study and after how many years but also in the number of trips made in the re-study. The details of change discussed or analysed also vary significantly. There is no uniform method followed in the re-study, whether by the original investigator or by a new one except that fieldwork is an essential part of them. Contact with outsiders has been considered by one and all as one of the most important sources of change. It is also clear that structural and functional changes have preoccupied most of them.

Methodology

It is desirable here to briefly dwell upon the methodology of studying social change. There is hardly any sociological or social anthropological study that does not deal with some aspect of social change but most studies of change are found made without proper methodological considerations. There seems however no consensus on any appropriate method for this purpose.

In this context Studies in Social Change (1973) based on a seminar organized by the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society of Lucknow in July 1971 provides some useful methods of studying social change. T. N. Madan, for instance, argues that social change is such a complex phenomenon that it cannot be grasped without communicating with a number of related disciplines. In other words, only an interdisciplinary method can bring about meaningful results in this regard.

In the same book, Gopala Sarana considers a diachronic study as one of the best ways of studying change and adds that the functional approach, which is often alleged to be incapable of understanding change, can significantly contribute to

the same. J. S. Yadava also considers the reconstruction of "zero point" as important in any study of change and argues strongly in favour of the historical approach. Yet another noted contributor, Yogesh Atal, argues that the case study method can combine both the historical and inductive approaches to the study of social change.

The present study being essentially a diachronic study of a village it is desirable here that the pros and cons of such a study pointed out by T. Scarlett Epstein are briefly discussed. In her essay published in Biplab Dasgupta edited Village Studies in the Third World (1978) she brings out, among others, certain important cons of a re-study by a different scholar as in my case. She believes that "wherever possible it is desirable to have the same researcher conduct the later restudy" (pp. 128-29). To her, a new investigator takes time "to develop full empathy for the society he studies" and is not expected to enjoy the trust and respect enjoyed by the first investigator.

These disadvantages of a re-study by a new investigator are fortunately not of much application in my case. I was not only familiar with the Lepcha society but being myself a Lepcha and a

female at that, there was no problem for me to build the rapport and win their trust. And this was unshaken even after they came to know that I was a Christian.

Epstein further notes that in case of a new investigator doing the re-study he/she should contact the original investigator. Much though I would love to do it, my resources would not permit me to contact them in England even if they were still alive. Again, she notes that the new investigator should have access to the unpublished materials, field notes, etc. of the original investigator. This was not possible but the published books by the two original investigators have described every aspect of the Lepchas of Lingthem in such details that looking for further informations was really not necessary.

Identification of the earlier informants is also considered important by her. This was not difficult for me. Some of the earlier informants and almost all of their descendants could be easily contacted as the villagers had shown little spatial mobility.

Finally, she talks of the change in research focus. The previous investigators were interested

in almost everything they saw but I am not so though there is nothing in this thesis which has not been dealt in detail by the previous investigators. As a matter of fact it was essential for the purpose of my re-study to make a reconstruction of the village in 1937. It should also be pointed out that the qualitative style of discussing the change in my thesis is because of the style followed by the previous investigators.

In this regard, it is also important to note the suggestion made by Fredrik Barth in 1967. According to him, the conventional anthropological approaches to the study of social change "do not adequately portray change", whether such studies are synchronic or diachronic. Drawing evidences from Leuriston Sharp's study among the Australians and his own in Northern Norway, Barth argues that social change can be best understood if one looks at social behaviour as "allocation of time and resources". According to him, one should look for "events" of change rather than go for deduction or extra-polation. By studying the "allocation of time and resources" we can observe events generating several significant changes. And he contends that this conceptual tool is helpful not only in describing

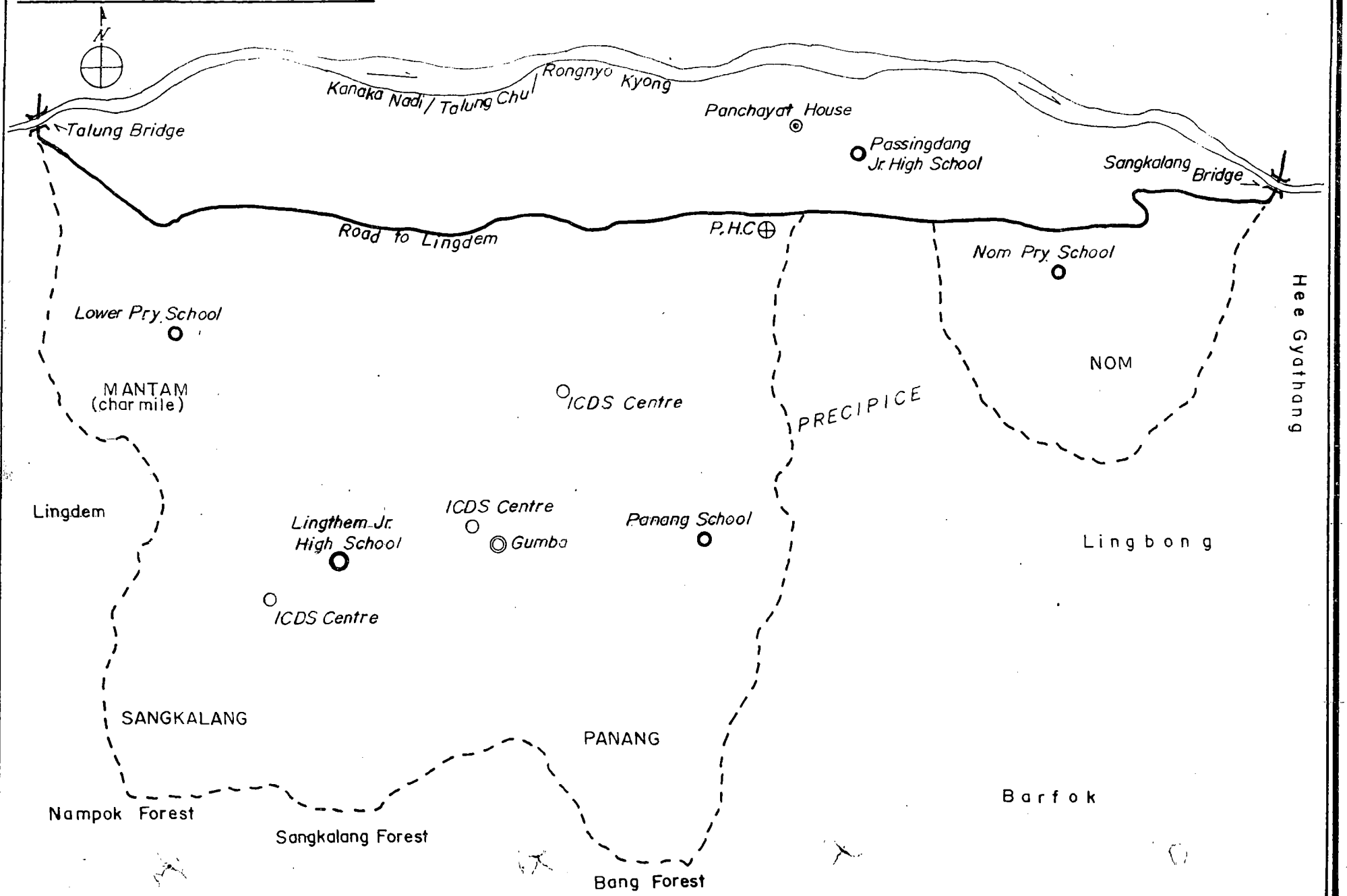
change in the economic sector but in "the whole field of social organization" (1967:662).

For reasons best known to the Indian anthropologists, they do not seem to have taken the lead from Barth. The only social anthropologist who has made an attempt to use Barth's conceptual tool discussed above is perhaps T. B. Subba, in his study of agrarian change in Sikkim (1989c).

In the present study, I do not claim to have used Barth's conceptual tool but I have certainly tried to do so whenever I found it possible. This work is primarily based on fieldwork, taking house to house census, genealogical and biographical notes. As regard to language, I used the Lepcha and Nepali languages interchangeably depending on convenience.

My first visit to Lingthem took place in October 1987. I made several trips to this village between 1988 and 1990. In one of these trips a short stay in the Tingvoong village (See Appendix I) was also possible. None of my visits was however longer than a month for various extra-academic liabilities.

SKETCH MAP OF LINGTHEM



Chapter II

The Village

Before introducing the Lingthem village, it is desirable that the Lepcha reserve called Dzongu, the North District of Sikkim where it is located, and Sikkim in general are briefly introduced. This would help the readers to understand the village better.

On the map of India, Sikkim appears as a small rectangular spot bounded by Tibet on the north, Bhutan on the east, Nepal on the west, and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal on the south. Though it is written that Sikkim had a much larger territory before, by 1890, following about two centuries of intermittent wars with Nepal on the west and Bhutan on the east, its territory had shrunk to its present size.

It lies between 27° and 28° North latitudes and 88° and 89° East longitudes. Stretched from north to south is about 113 kilometres and east to west is 64 kilometres. The total area of the State is 7299 square kilometres. Being a mountaineous terrain, its elevation ranges from 1200 to 2,800 feet above sea level. It is divided into

four districts: East, West, North and South. Each district is further divided into sub-divisions which in turn are divided into revenue blocks.

Sikkim has a chequered history. Until 1641, when Phuntsog Namgyal was consecreted as the Chogyal or "king of righteousness", the Lepcha king called Turve Pano is known to have ruled over the country. Even during that time the whole of Sikkim was but probably not populated entirely by the Lepchas. The Chumbi Valley and other areas in North Sikkim did probably have some Tibetan population and on the west, the eastern Nepal which until then was a part of Sikkim, was populated by the Kirantis. But it was certainly the Lepchas who were in control of the affairs in Sikkim as a whole. This is clear from the following line of Mainwaring:

> The Lepcha language which had, hitherto, been the language of the whole country of Sikim, which all Tibetans, Butias, or others who entered the country acquired and spoke, in which under the role of Colonel Lloyd, business was carried on, and justice in the English Courts administered, in the character of which, decrees and documents were written and recorded (1876: XIII-IV).

But after 1861, the Lepchas began to lose everything one after another. Their language came under heavy influence of the Tibetans (Sprigg 1982:16-31). And this remained so even after the immigration of the Nepalese from the west. This was because the Lepchas were concentrated in the North district of Sikkim where the Nepalese were not permitted to settle. Those who were outside this district were affected by the rapid spread of the Nepali language though culturally they were largely tied to the Tibetans.

A major reason for all this is perhaps the lack of political power in their hands from 1641 onwards. Under the long rule of the hereditary, theocratic rule of the Namgyals, the Lepchas could seldom raise themselves to the level of kahlons or ministers. Even among the kazis (landlords) there were very few from the Lepcha community. On the top of that such Lepcha aristocrats having often married Bhutia women took pride in identifying themselves with the Bhutias. There are, of course, instances in which the Bhutias also pressurized on the Lepchas to be identified with them. In this regard, the instance of Sonam Tshering Lepcha, the ex-speaker of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, may

be cited.

Under the Chogyals, lamas enjoyed considerable privileges and influence but the Lepchas were never allowed to become the top-ranking monks in Sikkim. Instead the lamaist training of the Lepchas was imparted through the Tibetan language and this continues even today though some of the Lepchas have now begun to resent this imposition on their culture and language.

From twentieth century onwards the Lepcha-Bhutia alliance in Sikkim and the neighbouring Darjeeling hills became prominent due to a common threat they perceived in the wake of the large-scale Nepalese immigration. The cultural proximity between the Lepchas and the Bhutias had already developed by then. This was the rallying point for these two communities but the loser in the tussle between the Lepcha-Bhutias on the one hand and the Nepalis on the other was obviously the Lepchas. The Lepcha land was not only alienated to the Nepalis but also to the Bhutias. And with land the very existence of the Lepcha culture and identity was threatened.

Dzongu: The Lepcha Reserve

Dzongu is the only place where the Lepcha land has not been alienated to another community. Though the Lepchas of Dzongu have come under the spell of the Nepali language particularly after the 1950s it is the only area where the Lepcha language is still actively used in every Lepcha family. The influence of the Tibetan language and culture is also perceptible there yet this is the only area where the traditional Lepcha life and culture are still alive.

It is not known exactly when Dzongu was created as a Lepcha reserve though it is quite probable that this was created towards the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century when it was clear that unless given special protection the Lepchas would completely wither away. The experience in the Darjeeling hills must have enlightened the British political officers serving in Sikkim to propose the Dzongu area to be reserved for the Lepchas.

"Dzongu" is a name given by the Bhutias meaning a place with "nine districts". It falls in the North district of Sikkim, which is the largest of the four districts, covering an area of 4226 square kilometres or 59.6 percent of the total geographical area of Sikkim. This district is

strategically located with Nepal to its west, Tibet to the north and the other three districts of Sikkim to the south. This district is also very sparsely populated with a density of 7 persons per square kilometres according to the Census of 1991 (Provisional). Towards the northern border the population is even more sparse due to geographical and climatic conditions. The average altitude is more than six thousand feet. Human habitation is thus confined to about 25 percent of this district.

Dzongu consists of 13 out of the total 45 revenue blocks under the North district. There is no town, police station or fire station located within Dzongu. The total area covered by this Reserve is 15,845 hectares. The total population according to the Census of 1981 is 7745 including 3414 seasonal labourers from Nepal.

Administratively, Dzongu is divided into Upper and Lower with Barfok forming the boundary of the Upper Dzongu and Heegyathang of the Lower Dzongu. Lingthem, the village chosen here for re-study falls in the Upper Dzongu.

Lingthem in 1937

It is unavoidable here to reconstruct the Lingthem village situated in the northern slope

of the Talung Valley on the basis of the accounts given by Gorer and Morris. The present description of the village is therefore guided by the kind of informations provided by these two anthropologists.

The meaning of the term Lingthem, according to the Lepcha dictionary referred to by Morris, is "a mixture of slope and level, to be out of the perpendicular, to incline, to have bearing outwards" (p. 24). But the village neither has any flat land nor really a gentle slope, which would justify its name. But it is quite probable that its physical features changed over years due to erosion, landslides, etc.

In 1937, Lingthem with 33 households and 176 persons (179 according to Morris, p. 24) was "the biggest village on the Talung side of Zongu, and the second biggest in the reserve" (Gorer, p. 54). Of the 33 houses 14 were above the village monastery and the rest below it, 14 on the east of the same and the rest to the west. There were five groups of four households each, one of three households and the remaining either isolated or in pairs (Gorer, p. 62).

The grouping of the households, according to Gorer, did not "necessarily correspond to any

emotional or kinship ties" (p. 54) and according to Morris, it was "entirely haphazard and in no way based upon relationships" (p. 24). The selection of the sites for making houses was therefore not determined by the proximity of relations: it was instead guided by their belief that such a site must be free from evil influences.

A great deal of the description of Lingthem is devoted to the monastery by both Gorer and Morris. I shall not reproduce the lengthy description here but some of the striking features of this monastery should perhaps be mentioned. For instance, it is interesting to note that unlike the monasteries in Tibet the Lingthem monastery had "no permanent inmates" (Morris, p. 23). Morris further notes that, in appearance, "it is almost identical to the ordinary Lepcha house, except for its greater size, and the broad band of red ochre round its walls, which denotes that it is a sacred building" (p. 19).

About the Lepcha houses, it is noted that they generally consisted of two rooms and an attic though the poor had only one room (Gorer, p. 63). Elsewhere it is noted that the Lepcha houses were all thatched and walls or the floor were made of

either bamboo or timber. The houses used to be constructed on raised platforms supported by huge wooden pillars resting on stone slabs. The vacant space below the platform used to be a multipurpose place: it used to be storing place for firewoods during the rainy season and for shelter to the domestic animals at night.

Morris records that there were "no shops in Lingtem, no doctor, and no school" (p. 25). The articles which the villagers needed but could not produce themselves, such as cotton, oil, and salt were obtained from Mangan. But it seems that the villagers of Lingthem went to the Mangan town for some other purposes also. This is indicated by Morris's own observation that "they are constantly in and out of Mangen" (p. 17).

It is clear therefore that though a remote and reserved area Lingthem was by no means isolated even in 1937. The narrow and extremely precipitous road connecting the village with the Mangan town was apparently no obstacle to the villagers. It was only a little before 1937 that the bamboo bridge was replaced by a plank bridge with steel supports (Gorer, p. 46).

Gorer and Morris have not written about the Nepalese labourers in the village but the latter has mentioned about one Tempa Lepcha in the village, who knew the Nepali language and was "a man of some position in the village" (p. 17). Tempa, though a Lepcha was actually an outsider settled in the village after marrying a girl of the village.

It is indeed difficult to think that the Lingthem people were once completely isolated. In fact, it is reported by some knowledgeable informants that even before the Mangan town was established people from Dzongu moved out in search of certain articles like salt, cotton and potteries. On the other hand, there used to be visitors from Tibet carrying various articles including ornaments.

The very fact that they were practising lamaism, no matter to what extent, is enough to indicate that the villagers of Lingthem were open to the Tibetan influence, which could have taken place only through physical interaction. Even otherwise it is quite clear from their language and culture that they must have interacted with the Bhutias living outside Dzongu.

It may be added here that both Gorer and Morris refer to a number of Nepali terms as used by the villagers. This indicates that though the Nepalis had not reached Lingthem the Nepali language had. But in this context a precaution is necessary. It may be remembered here that the two interpreters for them were both fluent in Nepali. This may have influenced their interpretations and given the above impression about the village. Gorer himself was aware that "the (Lepcha) children around Kalimpong at any rate can speak anything except Nepali" (p. 37).

Now the dress of the Lepchas may be briefly described. The original Lepcha dress was a thick piece of woven cloth fastened over one shoulder and tied at the waist with a sash hanging upto the knees. But Gorer had noted that the Lepcha women had "completely given up this indigeneous type of dress in favour of the Tibetan costume, which consists of a coloured, long-sleeved under-bodice, and a dark sleeveless overdress, reaching half-way down the calves and fastened with buttons" (p. 52). About the Lepcha men he found them wearing their traditional dress but their traditional hat was "almost completely abandoned in favour of the birette-like Tibetan hat decorated with coral beads" (p. 53).

Gorer had also observed that only a few women used to weave as most of the villagers wore clothes bought in the Mangan town. The weaving of clothes were almost abandoned but the weaving of mats and baskets out of bamboo barks and reeds, mainly by men, was common in 1937 (Gorer, p. 67). Such articles were mostly for domestic use.

The common food of the Lepchas of Lingthem was rice. They also ate buckwheat after grinding and mixing it with water and baking on the cooking stoves. Millet was generally used for making chi, the local beer. Fish was also occasionally caught in the Talung river and eaten boiled as a relish. But meat was a luxury as they did not kill animals, except at the time of sacrifices or when giving a feast.

There is no end to describing the village as it was in 1937. An attempt has been made in this chapter to deal only with those aspects of the village which have not been discussed in the subsequent chapters of my thesis. In fact, the village will have to be reconstructed again and again throughout the thesis because of the nature of my work.

Lingthem in 1987

Fifty years after, Lingthem is not certainly the same village that was studied by Gorer and Morris. The changes that have occurred so far have been really significant. But in this section I shall devote myself to some of the apparent changes that would strike Gorer and Morris if they had revisited this village after such a long time. The changes in the village and an analysis of the factors contributing to or inhabiting the changes shall be discussed in chapters III, IV, and V.

Let me begin with the boundaries of the village, which were not clear fifty years ago. Lingthem is today surrounded on the north by river Rongnyo Kyong which is also called Kanaka nadi by the Nepalis and Tolungchu by the Tibetans. On the south are the Keem, Bong and Sankalangrum forests. On the east lies the Sankalang river and the Heegyathang village and on the west lies the Lingdem village.

There are six hamlets in the village, namely, Lingthem proper, Noom, Panung, Sankalang, Passingdang, and Mantham (also called Char Mile). Of these hamlets Passingdang is the latest and comprises of the largest number of households.

The main connection with the outside world is still the road that starts from Mangan, crosses the Sankalang bridge and goes across Lingthem. This road was made motorable in 1984 but even today only the stretch from Mangan to the Sankalang bridge is pitched. The stretch of road from this bridge to Lingthem was actually constructed in 1979 but being close to the Talung river was completely washed away by landslides and flash floods. It had to be shifted a little above the river in 1984. The Sikkim Nationalized Transport extended its services to this village from July 10, 1986. There is another road linking Lingthem with the rest of Sikkim. This road passes through Dikchu and Heegyathang village but the road after Dikchu being unpitched and at places highly risky only jeeps and ambassadors ply. This road being longer is used for motorable purposes only when the road via Mangan is damaged or blocked due to natural catastrophe.

One of the most striking changes that have taken place in Lingthem in the recent past is the emergence of the Passingdang hamlet as a semi-urban place with rows of shops, school, primary health centre, panchayat office, post office, etc. Some of the shop-keepers there get their supplies from

as far as Gangtok but most of the small shop-keepers get them from the Marwaris of Mangan only. Along with such private shops there is a government subsidised multipurpose cooperative store.

Most of the houses in this hamlet were constructed after 1984 and most of the owners of the houses there have their ancestral houses in other hamlets, which are less accessible. Even before the emergence of Passingdang as a small hat the villagers had to walk down upto this hamlet for going to Mangan. Today the villagers' need to visit this hamlet is more because this hamlet not only serves as a resting place after returning from Mangan but also because the Panchayat President, C. D. Lepcha, lives in this hamlet.

The census of the village taken by me in October 1987 recorded a total number of Lepcha households in the village as 117 and the total population as 732. The total number of males was 356 and that of the females 376. I did not take the census of the non-Lepcha households because of the temporary nature of their settlement.

As far as the settlement pattern of the village is concerned the most remarkable change that has

been noticed is shifting of the houses towards the bank of the Talung river. This has been true not only of the Passingdang hamlet but also Mantham and Sankalang hamlets. The major reason for this is obviously the long stretch of busable road a little above but alongside the Talung river.

Another settlement which still looks alive is Lingthem proper. This hamlet has been able to retain the people largely because of two reasons: the Lingthem school which admits students upto Class VIII and is one of the oldest schools in Dzongu, and the Lingthem monastery, which is the centre of their religious and cultural world. Another major attraction of this hamlet is the annual fete held at the school ground during October.

The increase in the number of households in Noom and Panung has been almost nil. The few new houses seen in these two hamlets are either field houses occupied by the Nepali labourers or those which have come up due to splitting of the joint families.

In none of the six hamlets mentioned above was there any principle of kinship or clan working behind the clustering of the houses. Every hamlet,

which is practically a cluster of some houses, represents a number of p'tshos (clans). In some of the hamlets, the number of households roughly corresponds to the number of p'tshos. But it must be noted that the traditional belief about the selection of sites for making houses does not seem to be very strictly followed particularly in the hamlets like Passingdang and Sankalang. This may be due to a general decline in the belief in their traditional beliefs and an increased acceptance of lamaism. But more important than that is perhaps the business considerations in the selection of sites.

Along such changes, the very symbol of their religious life, that is, the monastery has changed quite a lot. It no longer looks like an ordinary Lepcha house, with its huge structure (though it was bigger than normal Lepcha house even in 1937) and most importantly the stone boundary walls and the gate at the entrance. The killing of animals for sacrificial purposes within the premises of the monastery has long been abandoned under pressure from some awakened youths like C. D. Lepcha, Y. T. Lepcha, and Athup Lepcha who was once a cabinet minister in Sikkim. The roof is no longer thatched and it is difficult to trace out rats today as the

monastery is much better maintained today. A partial credit for this goes to the Ecclesiastical Department of the Government of Sikkim.

Some of the Lepcha houses, particularly in Lingthem proper and Noom, are as traditional as they are described by Gorer and Morris. Most houses however are semi-traditional in the sense that they are neither as in 1937 nor are they modernized completely. True, electricity and drinking water taps can be seen in almost every house but the structure of the house - internal as well as external - are not completely changed. Externally, there are corrugated roofs, glass panes in the windows, panel doors, wooden floors, etc. But the ground floor is still very often used for the same purposes as they used to be before fifty years. Internally also the traditional structure with bedroom and kitchen together is still largely seen. Wooden cots are normally seen but they are meant for the male heads of the households. The use of aluminium utensils is widespread but the traditional bamboo utensils are also seen in many houses.

The traditional ovens made of stone and mud and sometimes with only three pieces of stones are not very frequently seen today. Such ovens are

generally fixed outside their houses and used for cooking fodder for cattle or boiling huge quantities of grain for making chi. Some people have built elevated hearths made of bricks and mud or cement and even iron. There are some households where kerosene stoves and electric heaters are also used. Use of charcoal is common too.

If the dress of the Lepchas of Lingthem was highly Tibetanized in 1937, it is considerably westernized today. It is indeed difficult to see any one below the age of thirty wearing even the Tibetanized dress. The educated boys and girls are as a fact completely westernized in terms of dress. Even the male members of the older generation are often found wearing shirts and trousers while some of them wear western dress above the waist and the traditional below it.

It is however to be noted that it is the same western influence which has made the use of the Lepcha upper garment called Thago very popular among the youths. The youths of the village being exposed to video films shown at Mangan and martial arts films being popular Thago, which resembles the upper garment in Korea or Hongkong, found a renewed acceptance.

A major credit for the spread of education in this village goes to the seasonal labourers from Nepal, who have taken up the works which would otherwise have to be done by the Lepcha children also. But this has its ill-consequences also. For instance, the presence of a large number of Nepali speakers in the village has not only proved to be detrimental to the growth of the Lepcha language but has threatened the very survival of it. The situation is further worsened due to the medium of instruction in the schools, which is the Nepali language. Even the few Lepcha teachers are reported to teach in Nepali rather than in Lepcha.

Under the circumstances, the initiatives taken by the Government of Sikkim to teach the Lepcha language upto Class XII throughout the State is welcome. But with the decrease in the use of this language in day to day life it is difficult to expect and ensure encouraging results. The only hope towards the success of this venture of the government is the Lepchas' own initiative and awareness about it.

With the establishment of the Gram Panchayat in 1965, the changes in the village are occurring more rapidly than before. The funds for development

works like the construction of roads, houses, bridges, playing grounds, etc. are now smoothly channelized through the gram panchayat. The panchayat has also been active in bringing about certain reforms in marriage and funeral ceremonies. Such ceremonies are today much less lavish and pompous than it used to be even twenty years back. It is also through the gram panchayat that the villagers have acquired high yielding variety seeds, chemical fertilizers, hybrid animals and loans for making cow sheds, pig styes or other such works. The corrugated and galvanized iron sheets for the roofs are are also distributed through the panchayat only.

With regard to health it is difficult to say whether or not the Lepchas of this village are healthier today than what they were in 1937. But it is certainly true that the dangerous veneral disease, which the Lepchas called tanji and which has been casually mentioned by Gorer and Morris, is no more there. The Lepchas had caught this disease during the end of the nineteenth century when they had to render free labour to the Maharaja for carrying loads across the Indo-Tibetan border. Prostitution had evidently grown and flourished along the trade route, causing and spreading veneral

diseases to such free but innocent labourers.

The growth of the population in the village was considerably hampered due to widespread sterility caused by such diseases. On the top of that the villagers of Lingthem suffered from a massive attack of blood dysentry in 1932. Some villagers reported that at least 55 persons died due to this within a period of two months. The death of the children was not counted in it. Some of the families had been completely wiped off by the time one compounder from Singhik reached the village and cured the affected persons. Chano (Chanang by Gorer) Lepcha, 80 years, told me how he went around the whole village with the compounder and how he remembered odour coming out from each house.

The blood dysentry was cured soon but the veneral disease was not. The villagers kept suffering from this disease until 1959. It was in this year, between 3 and 13 February, that a medical team led by Dr. Shanti Gopal Sinha and sponsored by the Government of India camped in the village to treat all men and women in the village. It was only after that the sterility is reported to be completely removed and the villagers gradually started bearing children.

This story is perhaps responsible for the low population of this village even after fifty years. It is understandable that the population of the village would be much higher if they had not suffered from this infectious disease for almost about seventy years in total and about twenty years after the visit by Gorer and Morris.

Today the village is growing not only in terms of population but also changing with the world outside. Two of the villagers have even acquired television sets now. Radios are common and so are wrist watches and jeans trousers. The villagers are aware of what goes on in the political corridors of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly at Gangtok and some even in the Parliament. Few of them were also found discussing the merits and demerits of declaring cardamom as an industrial crop. If anything has not changed in the last few centuries it is perhaps their sense of hospitality.

Chapter III

The Economy of Lingthem

Introduction

This chapter deals with the economic changes that have come about in the Lingthem village during the last fifty years. An attempt has been made here to go beyond a mere description of the change and continuity: to depict the processes of change and the factors responsible for the same.

The major aspects of economy dealt with here are agriculture, animal husbandry, and non-agricultural economy. Since the original investigators of this village have not dealt with these facets of economy under specific sub-headings it is inevitable that I first reconstruct the picture as it stood in 1937. This is also required because the two books on this village do not necessarily carry the same details, in the same vein, and to the same degree. Gorer has discussed the economy of Lingthem in chapters III and IV, and Morris in chapters IX and XIII of their books.

In this context it may be mentioned that trade has not received much attention in their books. This is the reason why I have not devoted any separate sub-heading to trade. However, the section on non-agricultural occupations shall touch upon the subject of trade also. Hunting and food gathering, on the other hand, occupied a major role in the traditional economy of this village. But these activities having grown economically obsolete and survived only as a form of recreation today no separate section has been devoted to this once important economic pursuit.

Agriculture

The Lepchas have been often described as "poor agriculturists" but the land has always been considered as the most precious possession of them. They are also alleged not to have made the best use of land. But it did not mean that the land meant anything less than their own life.

It is important to know the traditional status of agriculture as practised by the Lepchas not only to understand the bases of such allegations but also to understand the continuity and change that we observe today. This has been done here mainly on the basis of the book by Gorer because Morris does not specifically deal with this subject.

Now let me describe the agricultural state of affairs in Lingthem in 1937. Both Gorer and Morris assert that the Lepchas were never prepared to produce more than what they required and they subscribe this to their (Lepchas') "indolence". They also state that the Lepchas produced whatever they needed. What they seem to have missed to point out, however, is the fact that there was no motivation to produce surplus. The difficult terrain, the precipitous road, and the poorly developed market with no or little demand for food grains obviously created the lack of motivation for them to produce surplus.

The chief crops grown in and around Lingthem in 1937 were wet-rice, dry-rice, buckwheat, maize, cardamom and different varieties of millet (Gorer, p. 90). Of these crops, the cultivation of wet-rice and cardamom had started only in the beginning of the twentieth century. On wet-rice cultivation, the following lines of Gorer may be illuminating:

> When the Mandal first learned about this crop (wet-rice) he had experimental terraces made for three years; it was then gradually adopted by the other villagers, as they became convinced of the superior yield of this crop, and the

> amount of terrace ground is increased annually (p. 90).

Like wet-rice cultivation the cultivation of cardamom is supposed to be an importation from Nepal (Gorer, p. 91). But Morris does not agree with this view of Gorer. According to Morris, cardamom was not cultivated in Nepal nor did it exist at least in the eastern Nepal where he had visited (p. 185). But the fact that there is no Lepcha term for cardamom and they use the term alainchi only indicates that this crop is not indigeneous to the Lepchas. So far as the introduction of this crop in the village is concerned it was confirmed that some of the villagers, who had to provide free labour to the Maharaja at his palace had brought a few seedlings from the palace garden. The seedlings were gradually multiplied and cultivation began to take a larger scale.

It is clear from the accounts of both Gorer and Morris that while settled cultivation had begun shifting cultivation was also practised. The latter was practised in the upper part of the village or in higher altitudes while the lower part of the village was reserved for settled cultivation. As

a result of the shifting nature of cultivation, Gorer notes that, some of the fields were located as far away as three to four miles from the village (p. 76). Such fields were looked after by one or two members of the family, who lived in the field houses almost permanently. This shows that in the case of Dzongu only the site of cultivation kept shifting but the settlement remained fixed. The way the villagers carried out shifting cultivation may be described here in the words of Gorer:

> The clearing of the land is started in the early spring; the women cut down the lower growths with their sickles, while the men climb and lop the bigger trees and saplings. Until recently the trees used to be cut down if possible, but now there is a court order forbidding the destruction of trees. When all the debris has been collected the straight sticks are sorted out and the rest is put into heaps and set fire to, the ashes acting as a loosener and fertiliser of the soil. After burning, the ground is cleared of charred wood and the remaining weeds by hand and is then sown with the main crop. This is done in the simplest manner possible; holes are made in

> the ground with a pointed stick and the seed dropped into and round them (p. 93).

On the method of sowing, Morris adds that several grains used to be dropped into each hole without properly covering them with earth. Instead of covering them with earth so that the birds do not pick them away, a ceremony used to be arranged in the evening of the sowing day to prevent the birds from eating the seeds (p. 181).

It may be added that those who owned adjacent plots of forests always cultivated them in the same year. In other words, the sites of forest to be cultivated could be different but the group of people cultivating them would remain the same. The boundary between plots were roughly demarcated with stones and the whole group worked as a team to cultivate the entire area. They were not paid in any form but food was provided (Morris, p. 180).

This account is not fully corroborated by Gorer who says that payment was made in kind at the harvest time. An adult worker was paid about twenty kilograms of rice, a big basket of millet or maize and about twenty kilograms of buckwheat. Besides the first to harvest the dry-rice or the last to

harvest the wet-rice had to make small presents of rice to all the villagers (p. 95).

With regard to weeding, Morris writes that it did not often take place at least in the case of dry-rice cultivation. Nor such cultivation, which took place in distant places, was manured (p. 181). The forests being highly fertile manuring was actually not required.

Now let me describe briefly the nature of cardamom cultivation as narrated by Gorer and Morris. It is interesting to note at the very outset that though recently introduced this crop had, by 1937, attained an important place in the socio-cultural life of the villagers. A deity was already assigned by them to look after the welfare of this crop. This deity, known as Elaiji-nyou was supposed to dislike the presence of menstruating women (Gorer, p. 238). Morris adds that "the cardamom fields should never be used as latrines" (p. 185). Such beliefs being common in Nepal, he guesses that these must have been brought by Tempa who had lived among the Nepalese for years (pp. 185-86). In this regard, it is also to be added that each cardamom field had an erection called Mung-li or devil's house which looked like a square house standing on

bamboo legs. This house was erected for accommodating a devil called Thyâk-Dum which was known for causing damage to the cardamom plants (Morris, p. 186).

The cardamom seedlings were planted during March to April and started bearing fruits from the third year. Morris notes that after the sixth year such plants were rooted up (p. 185). This plant was weeded during March or when it flowered, April when the cardamom fruits started taking form, and finally in October when its harvesting started (Gorer, p. 94).

Even in 1937 cardamom was essentially a cash crop. The villagers sold this crop to the Marwari traders living in Mangan, who had been given the monopoly of this trade by the Maharaja. In this context, Gorer has deplored the presence of the Marwari traders in Mangan. To quote him:

> Since the kanya (Marwari) have the cardamum (sic) monopoly and collect the selling tax the Lepchas cannot take their produce elsewhere; and it is questionable if it would pay them to do so, for against the higher prices obtainable in Gangtok and Kalimpong must be set the cost of porterage. As with many such crops the price is often higher at the end of the season than at the beginning but the kanya will not

> let them wait on the market; at the beginning of the season they send representatives to their debtors claiming immediate payment, and threatening court proceedings if the cardamum is not forthwith handed over (p. 114).

In fact, Gorer has devoted about ten pages (113-22) of his book to illustrating the plight of the cardamom growers in Dzongu.

From the above account it is clear that the transition from shifting to settled cultivation had set in and so was the transition from consumption oriented agriculture to cash crops. This is quite significant and speaks of their innovativeness in view of the fact that the role of the state with regard to agriculture was confined to levying taxes. It was the same indifference of the state to develop its people that was responsible for the vulnerability of the Lepchas vis-a-vis the Marwari traders.

Let me now discuss the changes that have come about in the field of agriculture in Lingthem since it was last studied by Gorer and Morris.

To take up the crops first it may be pointed out that certain crops like dry-rice and buckwheat have almost completely vanished while other crop like wet-rice has witnessed a remarkable disappearance

of varieties. It is said that there were about twentysix varieties of wet-rice earlier but now they do not grow more than a couple of varieties. The dry-rice also had at least five major varieties but now it has been completely abandoned.

The wet-rice cultivation is no doubt a major preoccupation of the villagers even today with 81.6 acres or 21.4 percent of the total cultivable land under it. (The unirrigated area in the village is 244.5 acres or 64.2 percent of the total cultivated area. The fallow/waste land is only 55 acres or 14.4 percent of the total land owned.) But even those few traditional varieties of this rice are being threatened to be obliterated by the high yielding variety seeds. The villagers are aware of the superior taste and flavour of the traditional varieties but the high yield of the hybrid seeds has not remained unnoticed. The better-off Lepchas in the village, however, seem to have preferred to continue growing the traditional varieties even today. Many of them do use chemical fertilizers but they have preferred to continue with the seeds they had inherited. Similarly, very few villagers have been found to be growing new varieties of maize seeds.

However, there has been a remarkable change in the methods of sowing and cultivating the various crops from what prevailed in 1937. Of all the major crops it is only maize that is sown. But today the maize seeds are not dropped into the holes made by the dibbler but dropped along the furrows made by the plough. Such seeds cannot be picked up by the birds because when another furrow is made alongside the displaced earth automatically covers the seeds dropped in the earlier furrow. Thus, not only are the seeds protected from the wild birds but they grow in rows allowing better share of air and sunlight. The spacing of the maize seedlings is done during its weeding at the height of about six to eight inches.

The seeds of other crops like wet-rice and millet are first sown in nurseries and transplanted when they are of adequate height. The optimum height for the transplantation of rice seedlings is about eight to ten inches and that of millet about four inches.

Except the terraced fields other fields previously required extensive preparation before sowing the seeds. The clearing of forests and shrubs is not required today because the cultivable land is not left unused for more than three months

in a year. But except for maize and millet cultivation the preparation of land, particularly for wet-rice cultivation, is rather costly.

For maize cultivation, the clean ground is first ploughed and manured, followed by pulverization of the earthen boulders with the help of forks. After this they sow the seeds in the furrows made by the plough.

For the cultivation of millet the maize stumps are first uprooted and the top soil upturned. The millet seedlings are immediately planted into the soil at a space of about three inches. The weeding is done after the seedlings attain a height of about six inches. The harvest takes place in the month of November or December depending on the altitude.

It is the wet-rice cultivation which requires elaborate preparation of land. After the maize stumps are uprooted in the month of July the terrace edges and walls are sliced off with the help of spades. After this, ploughing is done, which is immediately followed by the raising and repairing of the terrace edges so that water is possible to retain on the terraces. The sliced off grass is let to decompose for about a week after

which the transplantation of the rice seedlings takes place in a festive manner. On the transplantation day a pair of oxen are engaged to pull the rake on the terrace and spades to clean the sides. This is followed by the levelling of the terraces with the help of a wooden piece fixed with a long bamboo handle. Once this is done the transplantation, which is normally done by the females, takes place.

It is obvious from the above that the plough is an essential implement for maize and paddy cultivation whereas for millet, wheat and other crops one can do without the plough. Though the plough is normally used only for maize cultivation in the dry fields such cultivation is very much a settled cultivation. The dry fields are not necessarily terraced and in many places terracing does not appear feasible. But since they go on cultivating the same plot of land over and over again such a cultivation may be called settled.

An essential part of the settled cultivation, whether in terraced or unterraced fields, is the mandatory manuring. This always takes place at the time of preparation of the land for maize cultivation though nowadays some chemical fertilizers are

spread in the wet-rice fields when the seedlings are fully grown.

With the settled cultivation the forms of labour exchange have also been institutionalized. The traditional practice of working in groups has been found effective even today and the payment is still made at the time of harvest. The amount of wage paid has obviously increased but the system has continued. It is important to note that in 1937 labourers were hired only for the purpose of carrying cardamom to the Mangan town but today they are hired frequently and for very many purposes, such as for repairing and construction of terraces and houses, ploughing, porterage, and so on.

With settled cultivation, the most remarkable change that has taken place is perhaps the emergence of tenurial relations. It may be recalled here that the Lingthem village in 1937 had no tenurial forms worth mentioning. Each Lepcha family had lands and the whole village worked in the fields as a group. Today, more than 60 percent of the irrigated land is cultivated by the sharecroppers from Nepal on adhia basis in which the produce is divided into equal halves between the landlord and the tenant whereas the former contributes nothing but half of the seeds required for the next season. Even the

cardamom fields are mostly leased out on adhia system to the same stock of seasonal immigrants from Nepal.

The immigrants from Nepal not only constitute the prominent sharecroppers' class but they have also given rise to the class of agricultural labourers and gothalas or cowherds. In fact, they form a menial class which is left with almost any work from cultivation to the household chores.

On the other hand, the Lepchas of the village have emerged as a class of petty landlords or non-cultivating owners, no matter how much land they own. They have almost completely abandoned the work in the fields to the Nepali immigrants. Exceptions to this rule are to be found only in the Noom and Panung hamlets, where most of the households are still self-reliant in these matters.

Let me now discuss the changes that have come about in the cardamom cultivation. The first thing that must be pointed out in this connection is the multiplication in the acreage under this crop. In 1937, its cultivation was by no means extensive and it was confined to the altitude below five thousand. But now it is cultivated upto the height of about nine thousand feet. The cardamom plants

can be seen almost everywhere; in the forests, along the streamlets, and all areas which are moist but not terraced. A lot of area which was originally used for dry-rice cultivation has now been brought under cardamom plantation.

Unlike in 1937, there are two varieties of cardamom grown today. The altitudes below about five thousand feet usually have a variety called Golsai, which is bigger and rounder in shape, which fetches better price than the second variety and the bushes of which bear fruits for a longer duration. In the higher altitudes the other variety called Ramsai is grown. Compared to the former, its fruits are smaller, fetches less price, and the bushes do not bear fruits after ten to twelve years. But the advantage of this variety is that re-planting can be possible on the same spot where the old bush was as this variety is not supposed to exhaust the fertility of the soil. On the other hand, Golsai seedlings must be planted on a fresh spot.

The weeding of this crop is done thrice in a year as before: when the shoots strike up, at the time of flowering, and during the harvest. Both weeding and harvesting begin from the lowest altitude moving gradually up. No artificial manuring

is done for this crop: the decomposed shrubs and weeded out cardamom leaves serve as the manure for this crop.

On the socio-cultural front also the changes are significant. While Mung-li was an essential part of each cardamom field in 1937 it is a rare sight today. It is also reported that the restriction on urinating in the cardamom fields is no longer adhered to. But the belief that the menstruating women should not approach the cardamom fields is still there.

A major reason behind the erosion in some of the earlier beliefs of the Lepchas about cardamom is perhaps the fact that this crop is taken care of by the labourers from Nepal whether on sharecropping or otherwise. The spread of Buddhism at the cost of their traditional religion could also be partly responsible for this.

There are certain pros and cons of leaving their cardamom fields entirely to the immigrant Nepalese. Let me recount the pros first. One of the most signficant advantages of this is that the Lepchas of Lingthem do not incur the hazards of its cultivation. It is well known that cardamom plantations are infested by snakes, leeches and small

flies besides the fact that the cardamom gas causes asthma. Snake bites are not frequent but whenever they occur the consequence is certain death unless they can reach Sankalang where a Marwari is reputed in the act of devenomization. Leeches are never a botheration and the villagers happily state that the leeches take away the dirty blood and never cause any harm to the body. But the cardamom flies create a lot of skin problems.

The cardamom gas emulsion particularly at the time of smoking it to dry is a sure cause of asthma. This disease is reportedly common, particularly among males who do this work. The problem is perhaps aggravated by the smoking habit of the Nepali labourers, which has been recently rubbed off to the local Lepchas also. This disease almost incapacitates the victims because of the lack of proper medicine and the air pressure in the higher altitudes.

Another major advantage of not cultivating cardamom by themselves is that they have been able to take advantage of the spread of education and modernization. Establishing small shops, going for service sector, sending their children to schools and colleges, etc. would certainly not have been

possible if they were engaged in cardamom cultivation. The cash earning of the villagers from cardamom sale and without ever visiting the fields is rather sufficient. The price of cardamom per maund (37 kilograms) varied from Rs.1450 to Rs.1800 in 1987. Though price fluctuation is a normal course the variation is not too great. And since almost every owner of the cardamom field can sell at least about 20 maunds the income should ideally see them through all their expenses. In fact, there are five households which sell about five hundred maunds of cardamom every year.

The cardamom cultivation is so lucrative that even an ordinary labourer from Nepal earns about 25 thousand rupees annually. It is reported that one Limbu sardar from Nepal returns home every year with a sum of over one lakh rupees. It is commonly joked that the labourers reach the village on foot and return on hired taxis all the way upto Kankarvita, a bordering town in Nepal.

But the cultivation of this crop entirely by the Nepalese has some demerits also. The most important demerit of this is their dependence on such seasonal labourers from Nepal. The plight of the Lepchas vis-a-vis the Marwari traders is not as

deplorable today as it is described by Gorer. But still most of the heads of the households in the village being illiterates they are highly vulnerable to the designs of those businessmen. Of course, a growing competition within the Marwari traders has been reported but they still control the market of this valuable crop.

The dependence on the Nepalese labourers is equally unfortunate. In 1987, the Government of Sikkim had envisaged a plan to send back all such labourers from Nepal by the end of December that year but no action followed. If the government had pursued this matter it would have lost a lot of revenue and probably faced resentment from the owners of this crop. Because, it is almost unthinkable today that Sikkim grows this crop without the immigrant labourers.

In Lingthem in particular there was an incidence of driving away some such labourers from Nepal. This occurred in 1975-76, during the regime of the Janata Party led by Kazi Lhendup Dorjee. There was reportedly a demand of the Nepalese in Lingthem for citizenship and right to live in Dzongu permanently. The youths of Lingthem united and first put a curb on the grazing by the cattle belonging to the Nepalese

labourers. They also caught many cattle, killed them, and consumed half of the animals by themselves and left the other half hanging in the field for their owners.

This incident was preceded by a number of conflicts between some Chhetri sharecroppers and the local owners and the latter believed that it was the former who were instigating others to join them in the demand for citizenship. On further exploration, it was revealed that the anger of the Lepcha youths was not against all labourers from Nepal but only against a particular Nepali group called the Chhetris. The villagers are not reported to have any conflict with other Nepali groups like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, and Mangar.

One of the major reasons why the Lepchas of Dzongu have chosen to suspend the demand for recognizing the cardamom as an industrial crop is their dependence on the outside people. If the crop is recognized so they fear that the labourers from outside may get a lot of security while they may only have to bear the burden of tax on them.

Animal Husbandry

The importance of animal husbandry in the economy of Lingthem and even outside is next only

to agriculture. The value of animals increased along with the increase in the land under settled cultivation which is not possible without manuring. The introduction of chemical fertilizers has not in any case undermined the utility of cowdung or animals per se. The White Revolution sweeping over the Darjeeling and Sikkim hills has further enhanced the economic value of animal husbandry.

Even in 1937 Gorer has written that "domestic animals play a considerable role in the life of the Lepchas" (p. 100). The socio-religious ceremonies related to birth, marriage, and death would not be complete without the animals. A major factor for indebtedness of the Lepchas in 1937 is considered by Gorer to be the purchase of animals for such purposes (p. 100).

Gorer writes that ox was the most important animal and a symbol of wealth. Its meat was most esteemed in any feast. It was used for ploughing and only the savage ones were castrated. The milch cows were valued for milk and butter but not mated and no pedigrees were kept (p. 100).

The animals were normally left free to graze in the common forest surrounding the village. But

tethering of animals and feeding them with leaves, salt and powdered grain has been mentioned by Gorer (p. 101). He further writes that each animal had its name and unless it spoilt crops it was not beaten. In the winter, the villagers sent their cattle to graze on their own in the forest a little away from the village. Such animals were not tended but if the owners wanted them they could go to the forest and bring them back without any problem (Gorer, p. 101).

Gorer makes an attempt to explain the lack of confidence among the Lepcha boys in terms of the way they herd their animals. The Lepcha boys, according to him, were never left to their own and were always accompanied by elders whenever they went for tending their animals (p. 101). This observation does not sound very convincing and it is likely that he was pre-occupied with the problem of explaining the lack of confidence in the Lepcha youths. But there is perhaps little that can be done about disposing with the above line of argument. It is nonetheless clear that tending of animals was in any case a rare activity. It is also quite probable that, having suffered a lot due to rampant sterility in the village for about fifty years before Gorer and Morris reached there, they did not

want the few boys in the village to risk their lives specially when they knew that the risk was high.

Gorer writes that the number of animals owned by the villagers varied considerably from one household to another. The average number of animals held was about six or seven (p. 101).

Goats were raised for food and sacrifices. The pigs were also raised for the same purpose. But the meat of the latter was more popular and the number was also larger. The breed of pig they raised was a variety of Himalayan wild pig. The males were castrated at the age of three or four months. Gorer mentions two major reasons for castrating them: to make them less vigorous and secondly, the belief that eating the meat of uncastrated pig would result in sodomy. This belief was governed by the notion of Tamtoom, which represents an inevitable connection between two events (p. 102).

Sodomy was highly dreaded and repulsed. This was believed to result in disaster and was equated with incest. Such an act required ceremonial cleansing by a Mun. But this rarely got known to people because they did not talk about it. Gorer also writes that the Tamtoom affected only to the Lepchas and never to other communities (pp. 102-03).

The pigs were known to eat human excreta. Gorer has written about the pigs following the children to the jungle and the need for the elders to accompany them in order to drive away the pigs (p. 103).

The Lepchas also raised dogs, cats, fowls, etc. but these did not occupy a very important position in their economic life.

Gorer has written about the prohibition on both men and women, more particularly on women, to kill an animal. The lamas also could not kill animals nor could they eat them on the same day they were killed. The lay members of the monk's family were, however, free from this restriction (pp. 104-05). If any household had all its members as monks or nuns a butcher would be called to the house and he would be given as free about six kilograms of beef, a smaller amount of pork or mutton, and simply chi in the case of chicken (p. 105).

The ownership of animals by any Lepcha household was interesting too. Like land, animals were ideally the property of the head of the household. But usually the children were given a chicken or a piglet each. They looked after the animals and if

sold the money was supposed to be spent on their clothes but if their private animals were to be eaten or sacrificed the parents needed to replace them (Gorer, pp. 107-08).

Gorer also mentions that such privately owned animals were not set apart from the rest but if the owner was a girl marrying out she was entitled to take her animals along with her. He further writes that "everybody except the very poorest have a few private animals" (p. 108). The examples of Mrs. Datoop and Mrs. Pembu, how they had brought their private animals from their natal families, etc. have been described by Gorer. It is clear from his description of other case studies that both male and female children used to keep some private animals (pp. 108-09).

Gorer has explained the keeping of private animals by the Lepcha children as a mechanism of the Lepcha society to make their children self-reliant. But there were some practical advantages of this system. For instance, this would motivate their children to look after the animals of the household as a whole because, as earlier mentioned, they were never set apart. Secondly, this would

put a check on the parents to sell or eat all the animals of the household. But since this practice was encouraged by the parents the first factor was probably more important than the second. The children who had no schools to attend and no major responsibility on their shoulders were better disciplined in that way. Since fodder was plentily available in the field and forest around the private animals of the children were in no way a burden on the parents.

It is passingly mentioned in the beginning of this section that the animals were a must in the Lepcha ceremonies related to the birth, marriage, and death. The dependence of their socio-cultural system on the domestic animals may now be briefly discussed here.

Several months before the marriage the groom's family started preparing for food and animals. The groom must take the hind leg of a pig while going to the bride's house with the bek-bu or go-between. The bridal procession also necessarily consisted of, among other things, a pig (pp. 332-33).

The morning after the arrival of the bridal party two oxen are kept ready. The head, right

foreleg, left hind leg, etc. of the first ox was preserved for the bride's family whereas the second ox was meant for the groom. A sort of altar was made by tethering the second ox on which the Mun placed, among others, a scarf, a rupee, and a big bowl of strained chi, and dedicated the ox to all the gods and recited the story of the origin of marriage. After this narration was over the bride and the groom along with their parties were called near the altar and told that the ox was being sacrificed for love and not quarrel and for blessing children (pp. 334-35).

The second ox was killed after this ceremony was over. The ox was killed with a bow and arrow necessarily by the wife's younger brother or her classificatory younger brother. In case there is no such person to kill the ox and someone else was to do it a fine of Rs.5 had to be paid to the groom's family. After the ox was killed the bride's younger brother poured water over its muzzle and the same was cut up. The meat of this was not consumed at the feast: the head and one of the hind legs would be taken by the bride's family and the rest given away as presents (p. 335).

In short, domestication of animals was more of a socio-cultural activity than an economic one. The degree of attention given by Gorer to the former aspect was probably not accidental but based on the situation as it obtained in 1937. Gorer does mention about the purchase of animals and the indebtedness due to it but the purpose has been mentioned to be religious. In any case it was not a part of the monetised economy as cardamom was.

Despite the fact that the rearing of animals had a socio-religious purpose, the economic consequences of the need to purchase them was significant even in 1937. The owning of a large number of animals was not only a status symbol but also a stable source of income.

With these words, let me now take up the changes that have occurred in the value and practice of animal husbandry. As stated earlier, the increase in the animal husbandry is closely associated with the spread of settled cultivation. Let me briefly dwell upon this relationship here.

With settled cultivation the most important change was the need to manure the fields at least once in a year. Under shifting cultivation the cultivated area used to be abandoned for about eight years in 1937, during which the soil got

enough time for recuperation. But under settled cultivation the land does not get any scope to recuperate naturally and has to be therefore fertilized regularly. And chemical fertilizers being unknown to the villagers till early 70s, cowdung was the only source of manure.

The extension of settled cultivation not only enhanced the value of the oxen, for there was more land to be ploughed, but also the value of milch cow. While oxen are essential for pulling the plough the volume of cowdung produced by the milch cows is many times more. This is perhaps why the number of cows is much higher (69 or 25.2 percent) compared to 55 oxen or 20.9 percent of the total livestock. (The total number of goats is 70 or 26.6 percent and that of pigs is 69 or 26.2 percent. The man-animal ratio in the village is therefore about 1:2 which is quite significant.) Hence, for mere fertilizing the fields if not anything else the rearing of cows and oxen has proved to be essential to the villagers.

More of land under settled cultivation has also meant less of land for grazing. Today grazing is confined to a few patches of forest in and around the village, though even cultivable lands are grazed after the harvest. But this did not pose any

problem to the villagers. In fact, it is more a boon than a bane because the cowdung needed to be collected at one place, which was possible only when the cattle were stallfed. The cowdung thus collected near the cow-shed are taken to the fields with the help of bamboo baskets.

A large number of villagers have at least a couple of plots lying far away from the village. Such plots are however either under cardamom cultivation or under dry cultivation. The cardamom cultivation need not be manured with cowdung but the dry fields are to be manured. In such cases the villagers are found to have kept at least a pair of oxen in the field houses made on such far-flung fields. Such animals are either looked after by the gothalas or by some member of the family. In most cases, it is the latter who also performed the role of the gothalas.

The above changes in the domestication of animals have not, however, resulted in the extinction of the traditional Lepcha practice of giving each animal a name. Here it should be noted that it is only the cows or the oxen which are named: goats, pigs and fowls are generally not named. Another domesticated animal which always carries a name is the watch dog.

The socio-economic value of the named animals is apparently more than that of unnamed animals. Here a question may be raised about the dog. The dog may have less social value but its economic value cannot be undermined.

The Nepali neighbourers often jocularly comment that the Lepchas use the highest form of honorifics for the dogs and the lowest for their own parents, particularly when they are speaking in the Nepali language. It is also observed that the Lepchas often share the same food with the dogs. While this reflects a close association between the man and the animal in the Lepcha society the dependence of the former on the latter need to be brought out.

In the first place, dogs are a company to them wherever they go. The various hamlets are often a cluster of households but the distance between two houses is often made to appear more by the forests and bamboo grooves. The dogs also look after the fowls and piglets, which normally roam around the house, from the foxes and jackels so abundant in the vicinity. They not only thus protect the domestic animals but also protect the agricultural crops around by chasing away the monkeys which too are profuse. Besides, they take care of the houses

when the owners leave them unlocked and go to the fields or forests. And they are a sure guarantee against burglary.

These are only some of the advantages of domesticating the dogs by feeding the leftovers in the kitchen. But these are enough to explain why dogs are so much cared and loved by the Lepchas.

The cats are also given special care and are allowed to sleep with themselves or their children. The cats are not as useful as the dogs but there are certain works which only the cats can do like catching the mice and rats creating havoc for the granary and the fields respectively. The Lepchas are expert in making traps for mice or rats but it is often said that the very presence of cats at home is enough to keep them away.

The traditional taboo on the killing of animals, particularly by women and monks, is still strongly respected. In fact, even among the lay Lepcha males there are very few who indulge in the killing of animals. Killing of birds and catching of the fishes are however not included within the realm of animal killing. Nowadays the killing of goats and pigs, except for ceremonial purposes, is done by the Nepalese tenants. But the killing of oxen is their

prerogative as they have no religious inhibition as the Nepali Hindus have.

The traditional system of keeping private animals by the children and other members of the family has continued. Today, most of the children go to schools and the expenses towards the purchase of their dress and stationaries are met by selling their private animals. Here, a case may be briefly reported. Nima Lepcha, 14 years, the eldest daughter of C. D. Lepcha, the Panchayat President, had a number of fowls as her private property. A student of Class VI in the Passingdang High School, she once broke into tears when she found out that one of her hens was sold out to me. The money received by her mother was handed over to her but she was not happy at all. After that incident I used to negotiate with her directly for buying eggs, to which her parents did not at all object.

Finally, it may be noted that the ceremonial value of oxen and pigs narrated above has not in any case dwindled. Even in the cases of elopement or love marriage the formal ceremony follows though with less vigour. The only change that is reported in the case of marriage in the recent past is that

the calf has replaced the ox though some well-to-do families take pride in sacrificing the oxen only.

Now it may be added that the animals they breed today are of superior type. The Department of Animal Husbandry collects hundreds and thousands of hybrid cows from the neighbouring hills of Darjeeling and other parts of Northeast India. Such animals are redistributed to the villagers on the basis of recommendations made by the gram panchayats. This practice has been going on for more than fifteen years now.

The Department of Animal Husbandry also provides hybrid piglets. There is also a well coordinated network of veterinary services which have brought under its purview almost every village even in the remotest part of Sikkim. The veterinary centres not only provide medical facilities but also inseminate the cows, castrate the bulls, goats and boars, and even provide feed for the cattle.

Despite such elaborate veterinary infrastructural back up the mere distance from one village to another has made it difficult, at least in Dzongu, to streamline the production of milk. The villagers of Lingthem, for instance, do not sell their milk

but prepare butter out of it and sell it in the Mangan town and sometimes within the village also. In other words, the Lingthem village, though laden with livestock resources, has not been able to reap the fruit of the White Revolution. But if they did not earn enough from the cardamom they would certainly reach out to reap this fruit.

Non-Agricultural Economy

It is a little difficult to write about the non-agricultural economy of a village which was highly dependent on agriculture. It is even more difficult to separate the non-agricultural economic activities from the agricultural in many circumstances. Lingthem, with very limited division of labour in 1937, did not have clear differences between agricultural and non-agricultural economies. Separating the non-agricultural from the agricultural economy might even look deliberate and artificial.

The objective of this section is not to make a deliberate distinction between the two. But both Gorer and Morris have devoted a considerable number of pages to those economic activities which are not directly related to agriculture. Among such activities hunting, weaving, carpentry, and trade may be mentioned. The status of each of these activities

in 1937 may now be briefly described.

a) Hunting. It appears from the following words of Gorer that hunting was an important activity of the Lepchas. To quote Gorer:

> (I)n former times and still today in the less fertile regions, Lepchas relied on hunting for a great deal of their food; but in Lingthem and most of the other villages of Zongu game is hunted less and less (p. 84).

He cites two major and one supplementary reasons for the declining popularity of this activity. According to him, the influence of lamaism which made killing of animals a stigma was one of the important reasons while the increased demand for labour in the spreading settled cultivation was another such reason. The cash they received from selling the cardamom also made hunting and selling of skins less profitable (pp. 84-86).

Morris's account on the hunting by the Lepchas of Lingthem and Dzongu is not as analytical as Gorer's. Instead of observing this as a declining activity he writes that the dense forests of Dzongu were full of deers and pheasants by hunting which people could "vary and supplement their ordinary

diet" (p. 192). He makes an exciting and detailed narration of the courses of becoming a hunter too. This may be briefly reproduced here.

Normally a boy starts hunting at the age of fifteen but would not acquire the bow and arrows of his own until he accompanied an experienced hunter a couple of times. He was not in any case expected to get them from his father nor was he supposed to eat the meat of the prey until he killed one hundred animals (pp. 192-93).

Pong-Rum, the god of animals and the patron-deity of hunters, needed to be propitiated with sacrifices in October every year. If this was not done he would have no luck for the whole following year. In addition to this, every time he killed an animal or bird he was supposed to offer the entrails to Pong-Rum. He was also supposed to take care that on his return home no woman saw its head otherwise it would be unlucky next time he went for hunting (p. 193).

There is a detailed account of how the huntings were actually carried out but these are not of my immediate interest here. There are also a number of hunting stories narrated by Morris but they need

not be repeated here. Suffice it to note here that the hunting of smaller animals and for consumption was very much practised by the villagers of Lingthem in 1937.

Today, hunting is a rare activity not because the Lepchas feel less excited about it but simply because the animals have more or less vanished with the trees and forests around. There are some young men in the village who still go for hunting occasionally but it is reported that they have to go much farther and often return bare handed. They acknowledge the fact that they often miss their prey due to lack of skill which in turn is a result of lack of regular practice.

Hunting today is, if anything, a source of recreation only. It will not be an exaggeration to state that no matter how poor the villagers are they did not hunt just to satisfy their desire for meat. There is not a single household today which does not have a couple of pigs, some goats and some fowls, if not an ox or cow as well. Most of them domesticate these animals for consumption though at times they may be forced to sell them too.

b) Weaving. This was not only an art but also a craft in the sense that it was a profession for men

and women of Lingthem. But by 1937, this craft had already begun to disappear. For instance, Gorer writes:

> Until the beginning of this century Lepchas used to weave all their own cloth, but nowadays only a couple of women bother to weave; people wear instead ready-made and fairly shoddy clothes (p. 53).

Gorer also points out that the ready-made clothes were of poor and thin material rendering the children susceptible to colds and bronchitis. To him, this is one of the probable causes of infant mortality. Three young children of the village had died of bronchial trouble during his three months' stay (p. 53). But the weaving of mats and baskets was very much in practice. To quote him:

> Lepchas weave strong and regular mats and baskets out of the bark of bamboo and various reeds, which they employ for a variety of purposes (p. 67).

This work was ideally supposed to be the men's work but even females were engaged in doing this. The females were in fact reported to be better weavers of mats (tuk in Lepcha, p. 67). Weaving baskets was however done mostly by males and during leisure

hours particularly during the rainy season.

Even today, weaving of clothes, mats, and baskets has continued but the weaving of cloths in particular is done for commercial purposes. Two women were found to have continued weaving cloth but the purpose was not to make a dress out of it but to make bags, and belts for their dress. The making of mats and baskets are also continued.

Despite this apparent continuity there are certain differences between weaving earlier and now. For instance, earlier the threads were not easily available but now readymade threads of varying thickness are readily available for weaving. Second, the threads used to be dyed indigeneously before and only a couple of colour combinations was possible but now threads of every possible colour and shade are available. Therefore, attractive colour combinations and designs can be made today.

The Lepcha women seemed to have a natural flair for weaving but the Department of Industries of the Government of Sikkim has not been able to exploit this resource. Instead the Tibetan women settled in Ravangla, Gangtok, and other parts of Sikkim have monopolized this craft completely.

Given the opportunity, training and incentives the women of Lingthem could very well compete with the women from the "roof of the world".

c) Carpentry. With regard to carpentry as a profession Morris makes no mention while Gorer has devoted about two pages to those carpenters who were requisitioned to work in the Palace. Though they also made the houses in the village with simple tools like ban (a long straight sword) and the hand axe, they were apparently not included in the category of carpenters. It is difficult to exclude them but in the absence of any record by either Gorer or Morris there is little scope to discuss about them.

It is well known that it was obligatory on the subjects of Sikkim to supply and to serve as the servants at the Palace but Gorer adds that young men were also trained as carpenters. After receiving the order the Mandal decided which boys to send but consulted their parents for the sake of formality (pp. 120-21). The boys so requisitioned received training at the State Carpentry School and received free lodging and food in lieu of their commitment to go anywhere the state wanted. Gorer cites the cases of two young men of Lingthem, namely Pichi and Bahada, who had returned to the village after comple-

tion of their training (p. 121).

Apart from such carpenters serving the state, it was really not a full time job for the village carpenters. Since the use of timber in making traditional Lepcha houses did not require any special training or tools even those who often did carpentry were not formally recognized as so. Their identity as someone's father or brother predominated their identity as carpenters too.

Carpentry is still not developed as full time occupation for any one in the village. Though many Lepcha houses today require finer jobs and hence special tools, there is no whole time professional carpenter in the village. There are but a number of them (three) who assume the duties of a carpenter in the winter and that of a peasant during summer.

d) Trade. Compared to the previous three occupations trade was apparently much more significant going by the attention paid by both Gorer and Morris to this occupation. The kind of trade they were engaged in has been described by Gorer in the following words:

> Before the beginning of this century when money was introduced and shops set up in the neighbourhood, Lepchas had to travel abroad

> to obtain cloth and thread, salt and metal goods. They used to collect in the forest the red dye-wood called Vyim ... and take that and whatever surplus crops they had upto the Tibetan border, where they would exchange it for salt and wool. Some of the salt they would then take to Darjeeling to exchange for thread and cloth (p. 118).

For security and hospitality in such foreign areas the Lepchas had developed an institution called ingzong which meant a brother relationship. For establishing this relationship a pig had to be killed and its intestines offered to the Lepcha patron-saint called Kumsithing and a feast to be held in which the ingzongs took oath to love and help one another, never think ill of the other, etc. This is to be followed by a rite of Sakyou-faat - the sacrifice of butter (p. 118).

There were a total of 11 ingzongs in the Talung Valley out of which 3 were in Lingthem in 1937. Around that time their relationship with the Nepalese traders was apparently not cordial and they had ingzong relationship only with "Sikkimese and Tibetans, for the exchange of crops and dye-wood for salt, carpets, and metal vessels" (p. 119).

The case study of Chano, 80 years, may provide some further details on the nature and articles of trade during 1930s. He had reached Darjeeling two times and Kalimpong three times and Gangtok several times with eggs. He used to collect eggs in the village at the rate of three annas (18 paise) per dozen and sold them at the rate of 6 annas at Gangtok and 12 annas at Darjeeling. In Darjeeling, he used to get a much higher price during the gatherings at Lebong race course (Lebong was then known as Alibong.) He used to carry as many as 65 dozens of eggs at a time. He also carried some wax (honeycomb) and Vyim (Majito in Nepali) but the police did not allow him to carry these later. He then began to carry butter which he brought for about 25 paise per seer (a little less than a kilogram) in the village and sold at the rate of Rs.5 per seer in Darjeeling. He also had begun to sell garlic at the rate of 24 paise per pot. He recalls how he used to travel all the way upto Kalimpong and Darjeeling eating fruits and berries, and how he used to be pestered by a Sherpa trade agent of the British government.

Let me now state that trading in the real sense has disappeared completely. What they do now

is better termed as petty business. There are 5 households in the village who have established regular shops in the Passingdang hamlet and sell various articles from groceries to betel leaves. The number of households taking vegetables, fruits and some domesticated animals and their products to the Mangan town is never stable and keeps fluctuating from season to season. But whenever they do so they sell their articles by themselves and return home with articles which they require such as cooking oil, kerosene, foodstuff, and sometimes even beer.

The way cardamom and some oranges are sold to the Biharis and Marwaris of Mangan also cannot be strictly termed as trade. In many cases such businessmen make advance payments at a time when the producers are in dire need of cash and the produce is collected by the labourers hired by the businessmen at the time of harvest.

The four non-agricultural occupations discussed above did not exhaust the sources of their non-agricultural income. A large number of villagers were engaged in the construction of roads and buildings within and near the village.

Conclusion

By way of summing up of this chapter some of

the outstanding changes in the course of last fifty years may be recapitulated. First, it is clear from the foregoing discussion that the form of cultivation has completely transformed from shifting to settled. With no scope for further land reclamation the inevitable choice for intensive cultivation and commercialization of crops have been witnessed. The establishment of various forms of tenure also shows the growing strain on land.

With regard to animal husbandry, it is clearly evident that its economic value has considerably increased with the spread of settled cultivation. Its social significance seems to have been slightly diminished due to the spread of lamaism on the one hand and disappearance of the Muns and Bongthings on the other. But this has been compensated by the disinclination instilled by Buddhism about the killing of animals.

Finally, about the non-agricultural economy it should be mentioned that it is expanding fast. There is a growing urge to go for business and service sectors. The percentage of service holders out of the total workers in the village in 1987 was 11.9 and that of businessmen 1.1. Hence, the trend to hold a government service is not mistaken.

Given the hardships of carrying out agricultural works and the sheer dependence on nature for the harvest, agriculture is being increasingly abandoned by the villagers. The total percentage of workers engaged in agriculture has already come down to 12.1. The land which are being cultivated by the seasonal labourers may be either left fallow or poorly cultivated in case the present flow of them is stopped. On the other hand, the clean clothes of the servicemen, the fixed salary, medical and other allowances, and retirement benefits, are known to all. Above all there is the question of status attached to the service occupation.

Unless the income from the increasingly popular non-agricultural sector is reinvested on agriculture this traditional mainstay of the Lepchas of Lingthem and other villages may be a liability rather than an asset. The villagers have already begun to develop a pessimistic outlook towards the future of their agriculture.

Chapter IV

Social Organization

Introduction

The concept of 'social organization' in social anthropology stands as an addition to the concept of 'social structure' rather than an alternative to or improvement upon it. While 'social structure' gives the impression of staticity 'social organization' emerges as a dynamic process of social relations. The former is used as a model for understanding of the pattern of social relations and the latter as a study of how actually the social relations take place.

In his presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute delivered in 1954, Raymond Firth brings out the various difficulties with the concept of social structure. While he does not deny the existence of structure in society he feels that the ways in which the concept has been appropriated by social anthropologists since A. R. Radcliffe Brown defined it as a network of actually existing relations have revealed significant

differences. The differences in its appropriations by scholars like Evans Pritchard, Talcott Parsons, Edmund Leach, and Levi-Strauss are clear not only about the scope of this concept but also about its content and degree of abstruction it entails (Firth 1954: 1-6).

But Firth is aware that even social organization is understood in at least three senses: one, as social groups and institutions (Seligman, Rivers, etc.); two, as relating to coordination or orientation of activities (Spencer, Weber, etc.); and, three, as a system of obligations-relations among individuals and groups (Radcliffe Brown, Barnett, etc.) (Firth 1954: 8-9). Thus he has reasons to hesitate in providing a neat definition of this concept and instead describes it as an "ordered action", "the working arrangements of society", etc.

In his presidential address delivered a year later at the same Institute, Firth explores further into the concept of social organization and its applicability (1955: 1-18). He reaffirms the importance of the concept of social structure but calls upon fellow members to appreciate the need to emphasize on its dynamic aspect, that is, the social organization. He lays down four spheres of its

operation: (1) allocation of rights and duties on persons, (2) range of social recognition, (3) resolution of conflict, and (4) social control (1955: 15-17). He also illustrates how these operate with examples of the role of the mediator, sibling, and succession.

In other words, family, marriage, and kinship provide the best possible scope to explore the dynamics of the social relations. The present study being a diachronic study of a village Firth's concept of social organization should perhaps assume primacy over the concept of social structure which would otherwise require a higher level of abstraction than what has been attempted in this chapter.

Family

It is the most important unit of social organization in any society. It is in the family that a child is born, looked after, and socialized to become a member of the society. It is also the basic institution that gives birth to and nurtures other social institutions in the interest of its own social and cultural needs. Thus it is not only an economic group but also a social and cultural institution.

The functions and socio-cultural obligations of the family members vary from society to society and even from one region to another. This happens because the society of which the family is only a unit puts certain constraints on the members of the family. Such constraints are normally based on the norms and values that a society upholds but these may also be conditioned by the ecological factors. Therefore, the family often reflects the society as a whole.

It is also to be confessed that it is indeed difficult to discuss family without reference to kinship and marriage. In fact, family, marriage, and kinship are so closely interrelated that separating one from the other two becomes more conceptual than real. However, for the sake of certain exclusive parameters of these three basic units of social organization these have been discussed here separately.

With these words, let me discuss the family in the Lepcha society of Lingthem in 1937. There is no exclusive treatment of this important institution of the Lepchas by Morris and Gorer. But they do deal with this in their discussions on related subjects like kinship, marriage, children, and sex. Therefore, it is necessary to do some sifting of

available data in their books.

In 1937, Morris notes that the Lepchas of Lingthem had a joint family system. It was only the girls who left the parental home on marriage. The brothers did sometimes separate from the parental family but since the land was not divided they worked as members of the same family (p. 199).

Because of the classificatory system of kinship, which will be discussed in the course of this chapter, it was indeed difficult to separate the biological members of the family from the social members. But since the village was small with only 33 households the members of one family were well known to the members of another family. In any case, the distinction between actual and fictitious members of the family was for the anthropologists to make: the Lepchas themselves gave no particular attention to this.

However, the distinction between male and female babies was clearly maintained in 1937. For instance, on the fourth day of the child's birth a ceremony called Pa-gong Chi-tong used to take place in which if the child was a boy, particularly the first born, an ox, pig or goat was sacrificed but if the child was a girl no such sacrifices took

place. The few well-off Lepchas however bought some meat and gave each guest a piece as a sort of present. Again, if the child was a boy, the guest brought one rupee and a ceremonial scarf whereas in the case of a girl child no scarf was brought and the amount was six annas or a chicken (Morris, p. 201).

It may be further pointed out that the Lepchas of Lingthem also offered a chicken to Nazong Nyu (also spelt as Narzong Nyou by Gorer, p. 290) which means the progenitor of human race, on the same day. After this two rings made of elephant grass were given to the child's mother to assure that the next child born was a boy (Morris, p. 202). However, there is no evidence in either Gorer or Morris's book to show that the male and the female children were given differential love and care by their parents.

The Lepcha parents did not interfere much in the activities of the children once they were big enough to look after themselves. The parents did not even bother to give their children proper training in what they were expected to do afterwards. For instance, Morris notes:

> Once a child is big enough to look after itself - that is when it reaches the age of four or five - it is left more or less to its own devices; ... Nor is a girl taught how to cook, but by watching her mother and doing odd jobs about the house she gradually acquires the necessary skills (p. 218).

In other words, the Lepcha children were allowed to play about on their own and no specific responsibility was entrusted on them. Had there been a school the situation would probably be different but in the absence of the same the children had practically nothing to do except play around. Even a boy who was to become a lama received no formal training in the family (Morris, p. 218).

About the size of the family it is written that the average family in Lingthem was extremely small and a number of couples were childless (Morris, p. 218). The smallness of the family was obviously due to the widespread sterility. But this in turn seems to have reinforced the joint family system that Morris has talked about.

It appears that sterility had a lot to do about not only the size of the family but also the various

structures of it. It was sterility that made the break-away families to actually live as a part of the parental home. It was also this which made polygyny inevitable. The few cases of polygynous families described by Gorer reveal that sterility was the main factor behind this. It was again this that made adoption of children and the equal treatment of own and adopted children possible.

Thus, the very core of the Lepcha social organization, that is the Lepcha family, was severely affected by sterility caused by the veneral disease called tanji.

Excluding some private animals and even land as noted in Chapter III the land and other properties of the family were considered to be the property of the head of the family, in whose name land was registered or who paid the taxes. In the words of Gorer he was "usually the oldest man in the prime of life in the family" (p. 105). He was usually the grandfather who would pass on the control to his eldest son. Theoretically, the property was to pass on from elder to younger brother and when that generation was too old or dead, to the sons of the elder brother. But Gorer writes that there was "more than one family of each genera-

tion in one household" (p. 105).

From Gorer's account it appears that extended families were virtually non-existent. He writes that when the family became large the sons would set up their own family and would be provided with proportionate land by the head in consultation with the headman or Mandal and Youmi (village official). If the head of the family died before the property was divided the division of the land would be made by the mandal, youmi or the gyapon (village official). In such cases, the eldest son would get the ancestral house and the privilege to choose the land first. The landed property would be otherwise divided equally and so would the animals (p. 105).

A typical example of how a Lepcha joint family worked has been described by Gorer taking Tafoor's case in the following words:

> This, the biggest in the village, consists of fifteen people: the second Dorje Lapoon, the elder brother of the Muktair, Tafoor's dead father, and his newly-married wife Pumri who was formerly his aunt: Tafoor, his wife and four children; Chudo, Tafoor's younger brother, with his wife and three children; Prumtu, a

> fifteen-year-old half-sister of Tafoor; and
> a distantly related celibate lama (p. 106).

Gorer adds:

> Tafoor and Chudo have separate rice and cardamum fields and animals; but the produce, though kept separate, is taken in approximately equal quantities for household consumption. They share in the payment of the taxes and the liquidation of the debt left by their dead father (p. 106).

These lines not only give an idea of the working of the Lepcha joint family but also throw some light on the Lepcha kinship organization, which will be discussed in the course of this chapter. It should be mentioned here however that the social arrangements in all joint families did not necessarily follow the above example.

In 1937, the land could be owned only by men. Gorer writes that "in the event of a woman or group of women being left sole possessors of a property they must acquire, either by marriage or adoption, a male who can inherit the property" (p. 106). It was quite usual to adopt a son (kuptsop) who would look after his foster parents in their old age and finally become their heir. Such adopted sons were

usually the children of their near relatives. In case no such heir was appointed before the death of a person the mandal would find someone as the kuptsop. If there was a young male heir the kuptsop would look after the child until he became an adult. In other words, the adopted son could be the inheritor only if the actual male heir was not there (Gorer, pp. 106-07).

A girl could possess land as she possessed animals but on being married she could only take her animals and make no claims on the land. Till her marriage, the harvest from her land would be kept separately and utilised for buying her jewels and other things but this arrangement would discontinue as soon as she was married.

The above discussion shows that the Lepcha family system had a strong patrilineal base. And there was enough indication to show that it was also patriarchal. With the headman interfering in a lot of family matters the importance of women at least in the political field was probably not significant. There never was a female headman, youmi or gyapon, nor did they generally consult the female adults in the village matters. It was always the male heads of the family who were called upon to do things by the headman.

Conflicts within the family have not been adequately dealt with either by Gorer or Morris. In one place Gorer has mentioned about "a certain amount of intrigue" (p. 107) in case of inheriting the property of rich and childless couple. In such cases, lot of relatives would compete to get their sons adopted by such a couple. However, elsewhere, Gorer has pointed out that "it would be shameless for parents to offer their own children for adoption" (p. 107).

Let me describe what changes have come about in the Lepcha family and the possible reasons behind the same. Those aspects of the family which have exhibited a lack of change have also been attempted to explain.

In order of things, it may be first pointed out that the total number of joint families in 1987 was only seven or 6.0 percent of the total number of families in the village. The fact that the nuclear families constituted 94.0 percent seems to run counter to the fact that whereas the number of families has increased 3.5 times the number of population has increased only 4.2 percent. The major explanation behind this paradox is that despite a lower percentage of increase in the number of

households the lack of sterility from 1959 onwards has bloated the size of nuclear families. Today, there is hardly any nuclear family without at least three children whereas even the joint families were known to be fairly small in 1937.

Another major reason for the small size of joint families in 1937 was the high infant mortality. But with the disappearance of sterility and virtual absence of infant mortality after 1960s the size of the families has increased from 5.3 to 6.3 despite the fact that only 6.0 percent of the families today are of joint type.

Today the children are not left to the whims and caprices of the mungs or devils nor are there experts to drive away or propitiate the devils. On the other hand, immunization of the children has been accepted as a duty by almost every parent. The water they drink is also cleaner because of the pipes and the taps provided to them. The house where they eat and sleep is also cleaner and healthier and in case of emergency they can take their children to the Mangan hospital without much of difficulty.

It is essential to note that no sacrifice of animals takes place today to celebrate the birth of

male child on the fourth day. It is a simple ceremony in which a monk is invited to find a name for the child and grace the occasion. A few neighbourers and relatives are also invited to participate in chi drinking and sometimes with meat brought from the market. But the celebration of the birth of a male child is made with slightly more enthusiasm than in the case of a female child.

The propitiation of Nazong nyu for a male child, which was common in 1937, is not reported to be practised today except by a couple of families. It may be noted that the total number of families without a single male child in 1987 was eight or 6.8 percent of the total number of families in the village.

The introduction of modern education system in the early 50s and the subsequent increase in the value of education is perhaps one of the most important agents of change in the life of Lepcha children in Lingthem. This meant a whole-sale shift in their allocation of time and resources. This may be briefly elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The children start going to the schools around the age of six. Before that age they are treated as infants and no responsibilities are vested on

them. Once they start going to school they are, however, expected that they at least complete their school education. But in case they fail to do so the parents do not persuade them to complete their education. This apparently applies to both male and female children more or less equally.

During their school time they are not expected to do any household chores but before going to school and after coming back they have to perform a number of chores especially if they are females. During holidays and vacations they are treated as any ordinary members of the family and given no particular incentive to pursue their studies.

Going to school means a drastic change in the children's allocation of time and resources. They are not to go to the fields for cultivation nor to the forests for collecting fodder or firewood. They are rebuffed if they return home late from school but they are not expected to do many things if they are going to schools. Going to school does not bring about any special status to the children or to the parents but not going to school is also not approved.

Going to school further means wearing the secular school dress, cleaning up themselves and doing some home work which takes away some of their time which they would otherwise spend in playing or doing some household chores. It is also an experience in learning new languages like Hindi, Nepali and English; learning to read and write in their own Lepcha script; and comprehending other subjects like mathematics, geography, and history. It is also a new form of disciplining quite different from the traditional one in which each parent trained the children in their own way.

It is perhaps largely because the children spend most of the day in schools that the traditional system of keeping private lands could not continue. Unless they can allocate some time to the cultivation they could not retain the rights to hold the private lands. Of course, land itself has become a scarce commodity today with the growth of households on the one hand and the lack of opportunities for further reclamation of land. Further, land being mostly leased out to the seasonal immigrants from Nepal there is no necessity of motivating the children to participate in agricultural works.

But the holding of private animals has continued. This has neen possible probably because the animals can be taken care of before and after school hours. The parents can also afford to give time to the care of such domestic animals. It was however observed that the animals thus privately owned are mostly fowls and goats and belong to the female children more often than the male ones.

After marriage both females and males start living separately today. The sons remain with the parents or sometime until they construct separate houses and move out once the houses are ready and their share of land is divided. But in case the father is not alive or there are no hands to cultivate the land belonging to the family, or if there are no other brothers and sisters to look after the old parent(s), the married sons do not move out. If there is no son and the only child is a daughter the husband stays with her only and such husbands are called komok Myok. However, such cases are rather rare. In 1987, only one such case represented by Namchyo, 28 years, was reported.

It is still common on the part of the Lepchas of Lingthem to adopt children whether or not the couples are childless. This is despite the fact that

there has been a relaxation in the traditional rule that only men can hold land. Today it is observed that specially those females who do not get married for some reason or other are given some land and animals if she wants to stay separately. The necessity of separating lands for such daughters does not normally arise because they live with the parents only. Only in rare cases do they find it impossible to adjust with other members of the family and want to live separately. In such cases, they are provided with land but the amount of it is not proportionate to the amount given to the sons. Further, such daughters receive land not as a matter of right but is given to them on compassionate grounds.

Finally, it is observed that age is no longer the sole criterion of status in the family. Like in the society outside Dzongu so in the family of Lingthem the service holders occupy the most privileged position. The educated member of the family earns the privileged position but only after he/she proves himself or herself worthy of the education, which is when he/she gets a government job.

In short, with the spread of education leasing of lands to outsiders, a growing urge for service

and business sector works, and the over-all change in the society the family is being more and more autonomous.

Marriage

In this section, I shall first discuss marriage as it was in 1937 and show the continuity and change that I observed in 1987-90. The subject of marriage has been rather enthusiastically discussed by both Gorer and Morris. However, I shall base my discussion primarily on Gorer's book which I find more systematic and academic than that of Morris.

As early as in 1937 Gorer has noted the difficulty of acquiring a spouse from within the village. This, according to him, was due to the strict application of incest taboo. As a consequence, he found 47 out of 60 married women to be from outside the village. Of the remaining 13, 4 had married newcomers to the village and the remaining 9 represented small p'tshos (patrilineal clans) (p. 153).

According to Gorer, the Lepchas married rather early and according to Morris (p. 220) between 15 and 20 years of age. In 1937 Gorer found just one

girl of over 14 years unmarried and the reasons for this were her bad squint, laziness and unpleasant character (p. 153). Whether male or female, it was only those who had some physical or mental defects remained unmarried even at an advanced age.

The traditional Lepcha marriage is believed to have seven stages (Foning 1987: 203) but Gorer has mentioned only two stages in 1937, namely, Asek and Bree (Bri by Gorer). The former meant betrothal and the latter was bringing the bride home. The bride-wealth was paid at the time of asek after which the groom had full right over the bride and any children conceived or born during the period between asek and bree were fully legitimate. But until the bree was concluded with feasting the bride was not allowed to go and stay at her husband's place though the groom could visit and stay at the bride's place. The groom in such circumstances was to act as the household servant and often bear humiliation quietly (Gorer, p. 154).

Marriages were always arranged by the go-between called bek-bu in the Lepcha language. Any senior person who could speak in a flowery language could be a bek-bu though in the case of Lingthem it

was often the mandal who performed this role. About the role of biological parents in negotiating an alliance, Gorer writes:

> In theory the biological parents should have nothing at all to do with their children's marriages; were they to do so either the children would die young or the marriage would break up (p. 154).

Though the negotiations for a marriage were made by uncles (more often maternal ones) they as a matter of fact did consult the parents.

Gorer writes that after the boy's bek-bu proposed a girl, someone from the girl's side would be sent to the boy's village to enquire about his character and property. His appearance and age did not matter much (p. 155).

There was a clear tendency for members of two families, neighbourhoods, or villages to exchange the spouses. Once a girl of the village was married out she would establish contacts (for other marriages) between her natal village and the village she was married into (Gorer, p. 155).

The length of period between asek and bree

varied from a few weeks to a few years depending on the wealth of the bride-groom's family which had to provide the feast. There was also a leniency in the Lepcha marriage system about the gifts to be provided at the time of asek. The poor could, for instance, present a piece of roast meat (akut in Lepcha) as a symbolic gift instead of a proper asek gift. The headman was also found in such cases to have asked all the neighbourers to contribute to the marriage feast (p. 156). The boy could also avoid paying expensive gifts and arranging feasts by agreeing to live with the girl's family as resident son-in-law called komok myok in Lepcha.

There was enough flexibility in the Lepcha marriage system to accommodate any possible deviances. For instance, the marriages were arranged without the consent of the boy and the girl but if the couple did not find each other compatible physically or emotionally the asek would be cancelled. Though attempts to force the couple to accept each other were reportedly made it was not pushed too far. It was probably because of this that once consummated the Lepcha marriage was usually stable and separation was rare. There was also a strong

sanction against any possible divorce. For instance, if a man wanted a divorce he had to pay a fine of Rs.88 to the girl's father and divide his land, animals and children with the wife. If it was the wife running away her parents would have to return the marriage expenses or pay compensation "in the form of the head and two legs of an ox and a scarf and rupee" (Gorer, pp. 157-58).

The Lepcha marriage was "not only a contract between two individuals but also a contract between two groups". Such a contract was continued even if one of the spouses died. The mechanism through which it was continued was sororate or levirate marriage depending on the situation. According to Gorer, the levirate claims were much more strongly emphasized (pp. 158-59).

Once the bride-wealth was paid the groom's family assumed a superior position in the contract. If her husband died the girl could not refuse the next husband provided to her (Gorer, p. 159). While apparently this shows a subordinate position of the girl the arrangement also reflects the paramount concern for the wives of deceased husbands. Instead of leaving her to her fate she was provided with a husband. After all the choice of a husband

was not her privilege even in the first marriage.

A Lepcha could inherit the wives of all elder brothers, real or classificatory, all paternal and maternal uncles younger than himself and all younger sisters of his wife. On the other hand, the wife could be inherited by all the younger brothers of her husband, sons of his uncles and husbands of her elder sisters. Gorer notes that such rights were fully enjoyed whenever possible. Since the younger brothers of the husband had the right to sleep with her they also shared the bride-wealth to be paid at the time of asek. Even the use of force, in case the girl refused, was legitimized though such a necessity did not arise because, according to Gorer, the casual sexual relationship was emotionally not important for the Lepcha women (p. 160).

In case of sterility for a long period of time the husband could demand a second wife from the wife's family. But Gorer writes:

> In theory it is only permissible to take a second wife from the first wife's ptso, and ideally this second wife should be the first wife's real or classificatory younger sister (p. 166).

But in Lingthem, only 3 cases out of 7 with 2 wives each were because the first wife was sterile (Gorer, p. 166).

Finally, it may be pointed out that the Lepcha marriages generally took place during the autumn months when the harvesting would have completed though some of the marriages took place in other seasons also. But it was necessary to find an auspicious day for the marriage depending on the birth years of the boy and the girl (Gorer, p. 332).

Once a marriage was fixed the groom's family started preparing for the feast several months before. The bridal procession consisted of at least the following: bek-bu, an old and experienced man, a sacrificer, a paternal uncle, a maternal uncle, elder brother, elder sister or aunt, younger sister, younger brother, and a few males to carry the presents which consisted of a load of chi, a load of popped corn, and a pig. The relatives mentioned above could be real or classificatory (Gorer, pp. 332-33). There used to be an elaborate ritual activity once the bridal procession reached the groom's house. The details of such an activity have been skipped here for the sake of brevity. There are also other details on the Lepcha marriage

described by Gorer and Morris but the salient points have been incorporated here.

Even after fifty years the difficulty of acquiring a spouse from within the village has not been overcome. The p'tsho exogamy is still one of the most strictly adhered marriage rules in Lingthem. The increase in the number of p'tshos and households belonging to each p'tsho has contributed almost nothing to the solution of this problem. A comparative picture of the distribution of the p'tshos in 1937 and 1987 may be briefly presented in the following table.

Table 1: P'tsho Distribution in Lingthem, 1937-87

P'tsho	No. of Households 1937	1987
Zemyoungmu (Jamyong)	11	21
Zumchyong	5	13
Tamsang	3	3
Paki	2	7
Sukmi (Sakmi)	2	7
Aram	2	6
Aram Pandjet	2	0
Demik	1	4
Kalong Kandang	1	0
Lukthom (Lubdong Rabji)	1	3

Contd. in p. 124

Table 1 contd.

P'tshos	No. of Households 1937	1987
Takpo	2	0
Tselterim	1	2
Adombu	0	3
Athimbu	0	9
Bakalingay	0	6
Heyoumi	0	3
Lucksom	0	5
Simick	0	2
Solungbu	0	4
Sompumu	0	2
Sungchungbu	0	6
Tarambu	0	6
Tongden	0	5
Total	33	117

Note: Spelling given in the brackets are those used by Gorer on pages 460 and 461.

The above table shows that there are 11 new p'tshos in 1987 while 3 of the total 12 p'tshos recorded in 1937 are missing in 1987. Despite the phenomenal growth in the number of p'tshos in the village the number of married women from outside

the village is still as high as 89 or 70.6 percent. This shows only a minor change from the situation in 1937 when the percentage of women from outside the village was a little higher - 78.3. It should however be pointed out that from outside the village here largely means from within Dzongu. The married women from outside Dzongu like Kalimpong, Mangan, Gangtok, and Chungthang, however show that the network of kinship has broadened over a larger geographical area in the last fifty years.

In 1937, the Lepchas got married by the time they attained the age of 15 to 20 unless they suffered from some physical or mental abnormality. The age of marriage was found considerably increased in 1987 as shown by the following table.

Table 2: Age at Marriage, 1987

Age	Percentage of Married Male	Female
- 15	13.5	24.1
15 - 20	51.0	42.2
20 - 25	19.8	21.6
25 - 30	7.3	9.5
30 +	8.3	2.6

Source: Fieldwork.

From the above table it is clear that more than 60.0 percent of the persons had married below the age of 20. But this table also shows that the percentage of persons, males as well as females, marrying after reaching the age of 20 is not insignificant. Further it is seen that while almost all females got married by the age of 30 the percentage of males not married even after 30 is 3.2 times higher (8.3) than the percentage of females (2.6).

It may be further pointed out that there is not a single separatee or divorcee in Lingthem now. There are only six spinsters above the age of 30 and the chances of their getting married are zero. The number of widows and widowers is however quite high (25). But the widowers are mostly old people with very little chances of remarrying.

On the stages of marriage, it is still ideally a two stage marriage. A negotiated marriage must be asek'd before the bride is brought home by the groom. Until the marriage is concluded the girl is not expected to either visit or live in the boy's house but it is reported that the young Lepchas do not follow this two stage marriage. In most cases,

the boy and the girl first elope and start living together. On the third day of elopment someone from the boy's side goes to the girl's family, informs her parents about her whereabouts, and begs for pardon with a bottle of liquor or some gifts. A formal marriage feast takes place after that depending on the boy's convenience. In such marriage feasts it is usually the close relatives and neighbourers who are invited and their sanction received.

In a way the change noted above still has two stages but the expenses involved in such a marriage are far lesser than in a formal negotiated marriage. As long as the rule of clan exogamy is maintained the villagers make no fuss about it. In fact, it is reported that even the parents often encourage elopement for obvious reasons. It is but reported that the expenses on negotiated marriage have also come down considerably after 1980. According to C. D. Lepcha, the tentative amount of expenditure to be incurred in a negotiated marriage was about Rs.12 thousand but from 1980 onwards the expenses have been brought down to a maximum of Rs.5 thousand.

With the growing popularity of marriage by arranged-elopement the role of bek-bu as the nego-

tiator of marriage has almost totally lost ground. His role is now confined to leading the proceedings at the time of bree only. And with the introduction of the panchayati system, the Panchayat President or Secretary often relieved him of this role. It should also be noted that the abolition of the institution of mandal in Sikkim in 1987 has further vitiated his position and prestige in the village in general and political matters in particular.

Another important change about marriage is the growing emphasis given to age and appearance though in a negotiated marriage the character and property are also taken into consideration. In all the marriages that were consummated in the recent past with the exception of Namgyal's the wives were either of the same age as that of their husbands or slightly younger.

Nowadays, the gap between asek and bree has also been considerably reduced. In most cases bree follows asek within a month or two. The gifts taken at the time of asek are largely as they used to be though symbolic gifts are also allowed now. It is also rare that asek is cancelled before marriage. However, the children are consulted

before asek and the negotiation follows only if they are willing. It is needless to point out that persuasion and cajoling of the girl by her aunts or sister-in-laws, real or classificatory, do take place.

The cases of the husband marrying a second wife or the wife running away from the husband seem to be really a thing of the past because the villagers could only answer about what happened in such cases and could not say what happens today.

The sororate and levirate relationships are still found though it is more common, as Gorer pointed out in 1937, to emphasize the levirate claims rather than sororate ones. Two such cases from the village in 1987 may be briefly described here. In the first case, Songmu, a widow of 21 years living in the hamlet of Panang, was forced to marry her late husband's younger brother, Nyethup, aged 14 years. He seemed too young to accept her as his wife and used to remain as far away from her as possible. His wife used to tease him and enjoy the way he would express his embarassment.

In the second case, Nimu, aged 45 years, living in the hamlet of Noom, was handed over along with her four children to her late husband's younger

brother, Dugay, aged 30 years. He was a bachelor when his elder brother died but he would have to shoulder the responsibility of his elder brother's family in any case. He expressed his dissatisfaction at his fate whenever he was drunk. He even equated his wife with an "old rag".

Marrying second wife is still observed, though the total number of men having married second wives is only 17 or 13.5 percent of the total married couples. Out of the total 17 such cases only 2 were actually polygynous; 6 of them had married because the first wives were deceased; 1 because the first wife had deserted him; 4 because the first wives were sterile; and finally 4 of them had remarried because their sterile wives had died. It should be pointed out here that in all cases of sterility the women had attained the age of at least ten years by 1959. In other words, sterility as a reson for marrying a second wife is not significant in the recent days. But, as Gorer had observed in 1937, the second wives are always the sisters of the first wives.

One may add a few developments about the Lepcha marriage, which have no reference to the

situation in 1937. One such change is the use of grammophones and casette players during the marriage ceremony. They may not invite any Mun or Bongthing nor any lama but the grammophones blaring Hindi and Nepali songs are a must.

The erection of gates to welcome the invitees is another common practice today. Such gates are made of bamboo frame and filled with pine leaves. Writing of "Welcome" and "Thank You" on such gates is also reported.

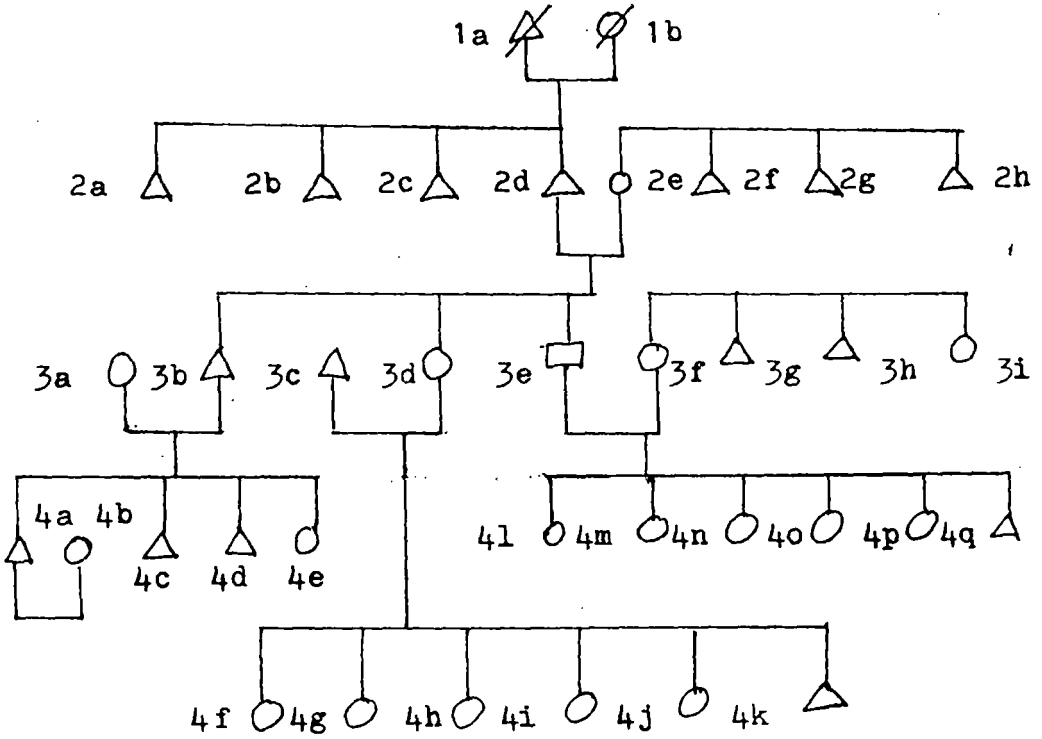
The Lepchas of Lingthem do not only seem to have adopted such alien practices but are also proved to have accepted aliens as spouses also. While Lepchas from outside the village and even outside Dzongu have been reported even in 1937 two of the villagers have even married non-Lepchas. But Athup Lepcha would not have married a Bhutia woman so easily if his first wife was not deceased and if he did not have influential status in the village. Kinga Lepcha also married a Bhutia women after his first wife had expired.

Finally, it has to be noted that there is a strong feeling among the Lepchas of Lingthem in favour of monogamy. Both males and females alike

strongly condemn polygamy unless they are convinced of the lack of alternatives. While pre-marital sex is not so much given attention to, marrying again, particularly if the first wife is living, is denounced. The sterility argument is brushed aside by many women today, who say that the males too could be sterile.

A typical case of monogamous marriage for the four consecutive generations id drawn below.

Figure 1: Choden Lepcha, Zemyoungmu



Index:

1a = Ongden, Zemyoungmu, b?

1b = ?

2d = Kinchuk, Zemyoungmu, b. 1918, d. 1978, agriculture.

2c = Chukmu, Lucksom, b. 1911, d. 1972, housewife.

2a = Bahado, b. 1919, d. 1984, agriculture.

2b = Atyok, b. 1910, d. 1979, agriculture.

2c = Thiptuk, b. 1911, d. 1981, agriculture.

2f, g, h = ?

3e = Choden, Zemyoungmu, b. 1954, business. [Ego]

3f = Chuni, Rigibu, b. 1954, housewife.

3g & h = ?

3i = b ?, d. 1984.

3b = Tendup, b. 1941, agriculture.

3a = Khayli, Tasho, b. 1942, housewife.

3d = Latit, b. 1950, housewife.

3c = Gyatuk, Sukmi, b. 1947, lama.

4a = Cheemi, Sukmi, b. 1971, II passed.

4b = Tashi, b. 1969, X passed.

4c = Sofah, b. 1971, VIII student.

4d = Norday Pintsho, b. 1980, lama.

4c = Ongmu, b. 1978, IV student.

4f = Dawa Lhamu, b. 1970, II passed.

4g = Diki Choden, b. 1972, VII passed.

4h = Nima Lhamu, b. 1978, IV student.

4i = Nyarip, b. 1980.

4j = Pursong, b. 1983.

4k = Sonam, b. 1987.

4l = Nima, b. 1975, VI student.

4m = Kursong, b. 1980, IV student.

4n = Laximit, b. 1984, I student.

4o = Babymit, b. 1986.

4p = Dawa Dzonpu, b. 1974, VI student.

4q = Zorden, b. 1982, II student.

In fact, both monogamous and polygynous marriages can be seen among the members of the same lineage also and are seen to have occurred in the same generation too. Though most lineages are gradually switching over to monogamous unions, polygynous unions are still observed as illustrated by the following three figures (Figures 2, 3 and 4). These figures, in fact, reveal many more details of change than simply the one in the form of marriage. They, for instance, show the changes with respect to education and occupation also.

Figure 2: Ading Lepcha, Paki.

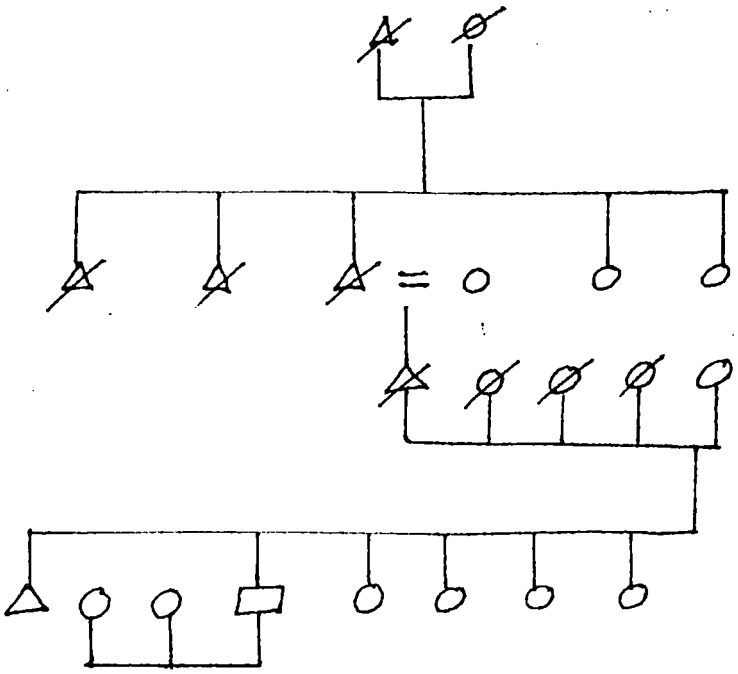


Figure 3: Pichi, Sukmi.

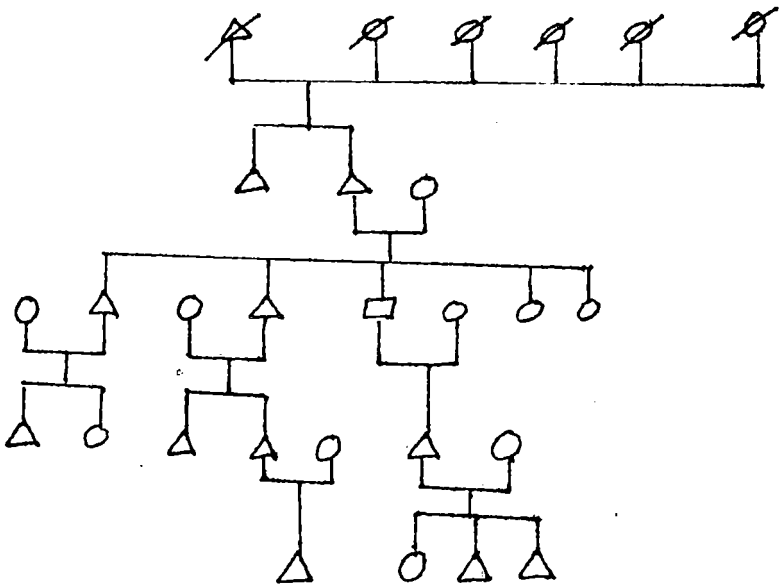
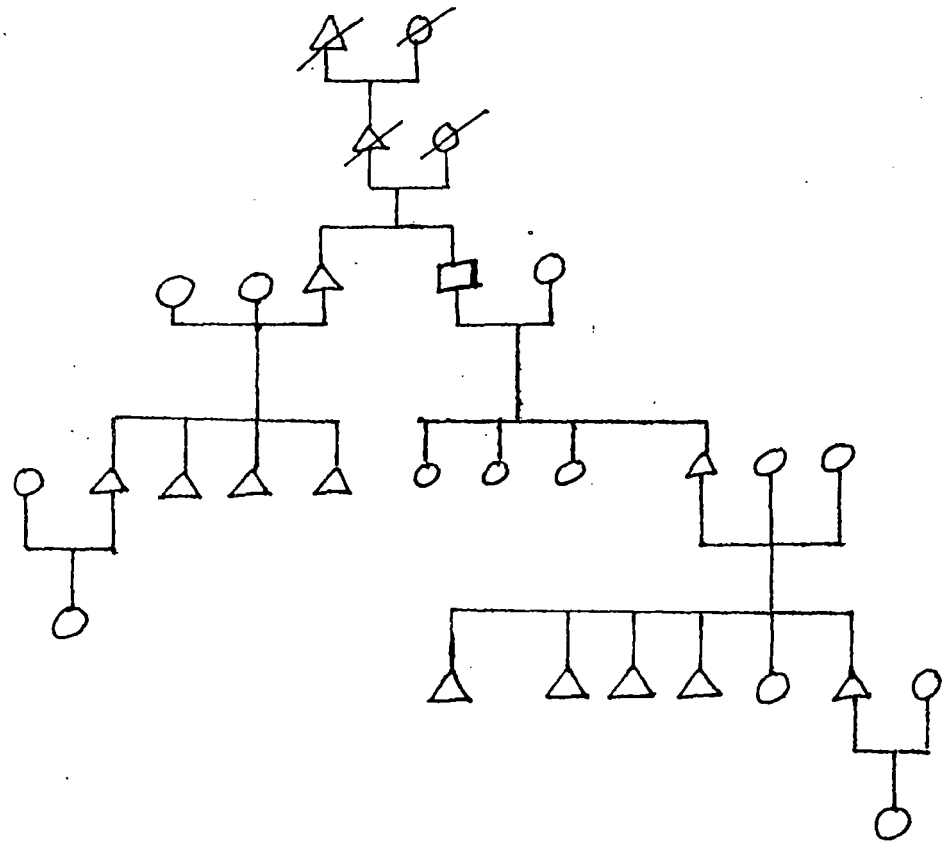


Figure 4: Patek, Aram.



Kinship

In any tribal society the study of kinship has always assumed an important aspect. Anthropologists generally seem to agree that in such societies the social organization is based on the kinship organization or in other words the latter constitutes the core of the society. This is largely true because of the close relationship

between man and land in such societies. The alliances based on other factors such as religion, caste, class or politics are indeed recent development in such societies.

The study of kinship in a village like Lingthem is meaningful because of the fact that kinship has a close bearing on the inheritance of landed property, marital alliances, political offices such as mandal, muktiar, gyapon and youmi. Being rather closed with little interaction with outsiders kinship plays an important role in determining the very pattern of relationships between individuals and households. At times, when group conflicts take place, it may even serve as a rallying point.

Let me now discuss the nature of kinship relationships in Lingthem as described by Gorer. It appears that Morris did not find the subject interesting enough for description because he has chosen not to deal with it. On the other hand, Gorer has shown great enthusiasm in dealing with this subject.

It is a fairly common fact that the Lepcha kinship system was what is termed as 'classificatory'. In order to illustrate this a few examples

may be placed first. The Lepcha word Thikung, meaning grandfather, was used to refer to all the brothers of grandfather and grandmother, to all maternal and paternal uncles of one's father as well as mother, to all grandfathers of the spouse, etc. Similarly, Apa, meaning father, was used to refer to one's own father, spouse's father, all the husbands of the mother, etc. Again, Aku, which means uncle, was used to refer to all the younger brothers of the father, any man whom father called brother, father's sisters' husbands, etc.

It may also be noted that the same kinship term meant different relations depending on whether a man or a woman was addressing. For instnace, Azong meant wife of elder brother, father's younger sister's husband and if addressed by a woman, to husband's younger brother, elder sister's husband, etc. In this context, the following observation of Gorer is worth reproducing:

> (T)he Lepchas have a very small number of kinship terms; fewer even than we have, for they exclude all the category of cousins, and, except for the mother's brothers, make no distinction between the paternal and maternal lines. For people younger than the speaker,

> too, they do not make any distinction of sex; the same word is used for a younger brother or a younger sister, for a son or a daughter, for a nephew or a niece. Only in the case of children's spouses are different words used for son-in-law and daughter-in-law (p.143).

This citation is largely true except for the fact that there did exist separate kinship terms for a son (tadi) and daughter (tayu). It should also be noted that the list of kinship terms provided by Gorer on pages 463 to 466 are not fully accepted by most Lepcha scholars and informants.

Gorer writes that the Lepchas counted nine generations back on the father's side and four generations on the mother's side (p. 144). He further writes that everybody except the very young ones was always addressed with proper kinship terms. The women in particular were never named after marriage and were always addressed as someone's wife, daughter-in-law or mother (p. 144).

It is also noted that personal names given by the lamas had practically no importance among the Lepchas of Dzongu. People used either kinship terms or some nicknames given by the villagers after a person's physical features or characteristics.

For instance, Thyak Thimbu got his name because he had a big head. In certain cases use of personal names was even regarded as ill-mannered and it was specifically banned while addressing the parents, parents-in-law, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, etc. (pp. 145-46).

An interesting part of the Lepcha kinship system was that different kinship terms were used and different relationships occurred depending on the situation. For instance, if a man lived in the same house where his father's younger brother's wife lived he would address her as amu and behave with her as a son. But if he lived in a different house he would address her as azong and she could be a potential spouse for him (Gorer, p. 146). It is difficult to readily agree with what has been stated above but Gorer claims that there were 6 such young men who lived together with the uncles' wives.

Gorer has further noted that a Lepcha paid the highest respect to his parents-in-law, more than even his own parents. And the tensest relationship was between a man and his wife's mother and a woman and her husband's father. The man was exploited of this situation particularly during the

period between betrothal and actual marriage (p. 147). The use of obscene language with the relatives of the opposite sex was considered as undesirable but in actual practice such a restriction was seldom maintained (pp. 147-48).

The p'tsho was perhaps the most important constituent of the Lepcha kinship organization. Every Lepcha was a member of some p'tsho. The main function of it, according to Gorer, was "the regulation of marriage and prevention of incest" (p. 148). Theoretically, members of the same p'tsho could marry each other after nine generations but Gorer writes that he neither came across nor heard of a single such instance (p. 148).

Similarly, marrying with a member of mother's p'tsho upto four generations was also permissible but such marriages were not taken favourably. For instance, the first Dorje Lapoon's second wife was his anyou or aunt but this marriage was embarassing even after sixty years (p. 148).

In material terms, there was no particular advantage in belonging to a numerous p'tsho but in terms of marriage the size of the p'tsho was sometimes taken into consideration because this meant

more chances of obtaining a second spouse in case the first one was proved sterile or expired (p. 149).

Any sexual relationship with the blood relatives on father's side upto nine generations and mother's side upto four was not only considered as disastrous for the whole community but also taken as anti-social. It was also considered incestuous to sleep with mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, real or classificatory, and, for a woman, to sleep with fathers-in-law and sons-in-law (p. 151).

It was also considered "wicked" for the father and son to sleep with the same woman or the mother and daughter with the same man. Gorer has cited two such examples, one from Pentong and another from Liklyang (both outside Lingthem) and notes that such acts were not considered as disgraceful as the true incestuous acts (p. 152).

The role of kinship in agriculture has been briefly discussed by Gorer. This is expressed in the following words:

> Work in the fields, whether sowing, weeding or harvesting is nearly always done in large parties. These parties are made up partly of relations by blood or marriage, and partly by friends (p. 95).

The relationship between kinship and inheritance of land and livestock has not been explored by either Gorer or Morris beyond the family. As a result, we do not have a proper idea about this in 1937. It is however noted that the childless couples often adopted children belonging to close relatives, who would in the long run prove to be the virtual inheritors of land. The adopted children were called kup tsop and the foster father and mother as jiut-bo and jiut-mo respectively. But in actual addressing there was no difference between the actual and adopted children who also addressed their foster-parents as father and mother only. To quote Gorer:

> (I)f there are not other heirs and if the child does not quarrel with his adopting parents he will normally inherit the property. Formally adopted children are treated in every way as the real heirs of their parents (p. 178).

This is the overall picture of the Lepcha kinship organization as it was seen by Gorer in 1937. The functioning of a kinship system in any society, no matter how small, requires a longer period of observation than it was possible for Gorer. Therefore, it is likely that he missed some of the vital

roles of kinship in the Lepcha village of Lingthem. However, the above informations provide a fairly adequate picture of the same.

As far as kinship is concerned it may be stated at the outset that there is more of continuity than change to be brought out here. It appears that kinship is really the core of the Lepcha social organization because like the cores of all entities changes seem to have almost failed to affect the Lepcha kinship organization.

Let me cite the example of the kinship terminology to begin with. This is very much classificatory even today. The ramifications of the Lepcha kinship terms like thikung, abo, aku, anom, and azong have remained unchanged. It is only when the Lepchas use the Nepali language that they do not use the classificatory kinship terms. But it is rarely that they use the kinship terms in any language other than their own. They may carry on with the conversation in the Nepali language but the kinship terms are in the Lepcha language only.

It is very difficult to explain why and how do the kinship terms exhibit such stubbornness. This is observed among the Lepchas outside the

village and places like Gangtok and Kalimpong also. Further, this is largely true of many other Himalayan tribes like Rai, Limbu and Sherpa, who have forgotten their language almost totally but not their kinship terms. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that using the kinship terms in a language which is not their own does not evoke the same sentiment and emotion as in the native language. The use of classificatory kinship terms in particular could be a symbolic remnant of the early division of tribal societies into age-sets and age-groups in which being a member of a particular generation was more important than the individual or sex status of a person.

It is also to be noted that counting nine generations back on the father's side and four generations on the mother's is still in vogue. Any sexual or marital relations between the members of the above mentioned generation are still not tolerated as it is considered as incestuous.

About personal names mentioned earlier it is observed that these have found a safe niche. It is not uncommon even today to find people being referred to by nicknames. But the first name of an individual or his initials are often added to the kinship

terms, for example, "C. D. Anom", "Aku Athup", and the like or simply addressed with their first names like Namgyal, Kinga and Choeda. The kinship terms may be prefixed or suffixed with an individual's initials, actual names, or nicknames.

Paying respect to parents-in-law more than the parents themselves is still observed. There has also been no change in the relationship between a man and his mother-in-law or between a woman and her father-in-law. This relationship is characterized by avoidance if not tension. But it is part of their culture to pay respect to all old man and woman irrespective of the specific kinship relationships. An old man is addressed and respected as thikung and if a woman as nikung by all young persons and children who are not directly related to them.

The p'tsho is considered highly important even today. This is not only true of the villagers in Lingthem but also in Dzongu as a whole. Writing about its importance in the Lepcha society of Tingvoong, Siiger has noted:

> The putsho institution is not only important for the individual lineage groups, but it exerts its influence also on the major functions of society. This influence may have been

> greater in former days, but it is still noticeable (p. 116).

This observation is made about twenty five years before but its relevance has not diminished. That p'tsho is really one of the most important institutions of the Lepcha society can be deduced from the fact that any adult man or woman can easily state not only the name of his or her own p'tsho but also those of other villagers. They can also recount the story of how the various patrilineal clans originated and take real interest in narrating the same.

If anything about kinship has changed it is its relationship with agriculture. Most of the immigrant labourers from Nepal being engaged in cultivation the need for approaching the kin members for labour is not there any more. Those agricultural works which can be done by the family members themselves have continued but they do not require the help of kins or neighbourers.

By all accounts the role of kinship today seems really confined to the regulation of marriage and avoidance of incest. The members of p'tsho take pride if they could strictly implement the p'tsho rules about marriage and sex and they jeer at the members of the p'tsho which fails to fulfill

the same. They take great care in protecting the clan or p'tsho image because if they fail to do so it means disgrace to the whole clan and makes it difficult for the same to acquire spouses even from outside the village. Needless to add that in times of crises, social or material, the help is always expected and extended by the members of one's own p'tsho. Such a help is often obligatory.

Conclusion

The above discussion has shown that there has been rather limited change in the family and marriage and almost no change in the kinship organization among the Lepchas of Lingthem. Changes in these spheres of society have been found to be rather limited even outside the village, particularly in the villages of Dzongu. But in the more urbanized areas like Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling, significant changes have been noticed in these regards too.

A sure reason why there has been little change about family, marriage or kinship in Lingthem or in Dzongu as a whole is the legal restriction on outsiders to visit the areas of Dzongu. Obtaining permission to go there is a discretion of the

District Collector or the Sub-Divisional Magistrate at Mangan.

There are mainly two categories of people for whom entering into Dzongu is permitted: (1) teachers from various parts of India serving there, and (2) labourers from Nepal with work permits. The first category of people interact with the villagers to a very limited extent and in no way interfere in their social organization. The second category of people interact with the Lepchas much more closely but having a subordinate socio-economic position they have not been able to influence the Lepcha social organization. This category of people have certainly affected the linguistic fabric of the area, but hardly anything else. The very interaction may be branded as economic, for, despite their interaction for the last forty years or so there has been virtually no exchange of spouses and no adoption of the Nepali children by the Lepchas. Of course, it is not always the same set of people living in the village: each year new families may join and old ones may not turn up any more.

The kinship and marital linkages have certainly widened over the last fifty years but these changes are still insignificant compared to the changes that

have come about in these respects among the Lepchas outside Dzongu. The most important fact that distinguishes the Lepchas of Dzongu from those living outside it is the absence of proselytisation into Christianity. Christianity among the Lepchas is just not a change of religion: it also means higher literacy, higher education, higher level of modernization and westernization, and the like. This also means new rules of marriage and endogamy. For instance, instead of a Mun or a lama guiding a marriage ceremony (or funeral) it is a pastor or a Father conducting the same. The Christian Lepchas even seem to have grown as a clan apart, partly because of the cleavage between the Buddhists and Christians among them (Subba 1989: 127) and partly because of the drastic change in the Lepcha social organization brought about by Christianity. This aspect of the present study shall be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter V

Religion

Introduction

It is generally agreed that the religion(s) of simple societies has received inadequate attention of the scholars working on such societies. Because of this and the possible bias of earlier the Europeans and later the Indian anthropologists the understanding of the religion of tribal and peripheral societies has not been satisfactory. Indigenous scholarship has not developed everywhere and wherever it has developed it is also influenced heavily by the scholarship of non-indigeneous writers.

Of the very few attempts to explain the intricacies of the religion of simple societies, Gorer's is perhaps one of the most successful. He is aware of his limitations but the insight which he shares with Morris is really valuable. It is quite natural that one often encounters traces of their bias towards the Lepcha religion but these do not belittle the value of their works on this subject.

Gorer writes that "(t)he discussion on the Lepchas' religion is rendered extremely difficult by the fact that they practise simultaneously, and without any feeling of theoretical discomfort, two (or probably three) mutually contradictory religions ..." (p. 181). This contradiction shows only when a scholar tries to delineate the fundamentals of a religion from those of another. But the way the Lepchas look at their religion(s) is as a means to various ends, such as prosperity, health, fertility, productivity, peace, etc. To them, the means are not really as important as the ends they want to achieve.

This is not to impress that the Lepcha view of religion is purely utilitarian. They do have a system of beliefs and faith which cannot always be explained in terms of their social, economic or material needs. In fact, they worship many gods and goddesses without being able to explain why they do so. They are but clear about the results if they do and if they do not worship them. More often than not, it is the fear of some ill-consequence rather than the prospect of a brighter future that makes them worship this or that god or goddess.

Gorer has divided his discussion on the Lepcha religion into three parts: the first is dominated by lamaism, the second by the Mun and the third by the worship of the "people of Mayel". Morris has made no such classification but has discussed lamaism separately in Chapter V and the latter two under "Exorcism and other Magical Practices" in Chapter VII.

In this chapter, I have little choice in sticking to the classification made by Gorer but I have chosen to reverse the order of discussion. While Gorer discusses the above three aspects of the Lepcha religion progressively in Chapters VII, VIII and IX I shall like to discuss lamaism towards the end instead of in the beginning as Gorer and Morris have done. This modification is desired because from the Lepcha point of view lamaism is a later addition to their religious order.

Before proceeding further it should be pointed out that there is a problematic here, which is the difficulty in treating the three divisions of the Lepcha religion as three different aspects of the Lepcha religion. Because, in many ways, they represent three different stages of the religion

of the Lepchas. But taking them as three stages would not only suffer from the problem related to the evolutionary model of social change but also not properly be authenticated by the situation in the village. All the three divisions of the Lepcha religion are still observed to be very much alive.

As a solution to this, I have kept in mind the historicity of the introduction of these religions in the Lepcha society. But I have felt it more meaningful to treat them as different aspects of the Lepcha religion, no matter how contradictory they may otherwise appear between themselves.

Ancestor Worship

Gorer has discussed ancestor worship under the heading "The People of Mayel" in Chapter IX. This is because the Lepchas considered themselves to have originated from the "land of Mayel" or, in other words, they treated the "people of Mayel" as their ancestors. The worshipping took place mainly at the time of harvest and hunting. This worshipping, although made by the Muns and Bongthings, was different from the religious order

associated with Mun and Bongthing. According to Gorer:

> The most outstanding differences with other Mun ritual, and indeed with ordinary Lepcha life, is, first, a discrimination against women, secondly, an insistence on virginity for some of the celebrants, and thirdly a suggestion of the danger of menstruating women. Women may perform the sacrifice to the people of Mayel, but if they do so the ceremony is curtailed and fewer objects employed; they not only cannot sacrifice to Pongrum but must not even be aware when the sacrifice takes place; and the popped corn and chi which are employed in it, if not made by a man, which is preferable, must be made by a virgin girl. The chief offerings to the people of Mayel are the lafet sacrifice and sakyoufaat; the small bird for the lafet must be killed by a virgin boy, and the strained chi poured into the buttered cup by a virgin girl (p. 235).

This is the gist of the religious order associated with the "people of Mayel". According to Gorer, the insistence on virginity was there but usually

young children were deputed to perform the acts hoping that they were virgins (p. 236).

Let me now briefly describe the character of their ancestors as described by Gorer on pages 236 and 237. The narration is made here in the past tense though the belief in the "people of Mayel" is still a part of the present. Only a few Lepchas took the vocation of monkhood and knew how to read and write in Tibetan but the story of the Mayel people was kept alive. Not every living Lepcha today can recount the story of the Mayel people properly. There are also a number of sceptics, as there were in 1937 too, but such people do not threaten the existing belief system of the villagers.

The ancestors of the Lepchas were seven brothers, each being the guardian-deity of some crop. They lived in seven separate huts. They were immortal: they were babies in the morning, youths during the day and old in the evening. They had each a huge goitre, wore traditional Lepcha clothes made of nettle fibre and hats made of bamboo strips. On the road to Mayel, there were three brothers as guardian-spirits. Their names were Mayel Yookrum (or Pongrum to the hunters), Mi-tik and Tom-tik.

The younger two brothers were cruel deities.

The dry-rice, maize and millet were believed to have originated from the "land of Mayel". Birds called Mayelfo were sent to them by their ancestors to indicate the seasons for various agricultural works.

The people of Mayel had no wives except the oldest two. Their wives were two sisters called Talyeu-Nimu and Sangvo-Nimu. These two women were worshipped as spirits of the earth because their bellies were taken as cultivable lands on which the seeds of rice, millet and maize sown by their husbands got fertilized and bore fruits.

This in short is the description of the people of Mayel, their ancestors or progenitors. Though none of the Lepchas living in Lingthem today has ever seen them nor been to the land of Mayel most believe that it is located somewhere near Mount Kanchanjangha.

Let me now describe the various ceremonies related to the people of Mayel on the basis of Gorer's account given on pages 238 to 246. Here the details have been cut short and only the salient features have been retained.

The "people of Mayel" were worshipped exclusively in connection with dry-rice, millet, and maize, while crops like barley, wheat, buck-wheat and wet-rice were not considered to be directly connected with them and thus no important ceremonies took place for those crops. Everybody worshipped them on two occasions, after sowing and after harvesting the dry-rice (p. 238).

The offerings at the time of sowing consisted of lafet and sakyou faat. The former sacrifice contained of food arranged in three lines, the central being for the "people of Mayel", the right line for men's patron-gods and the left for women's patron-gods. The lafet food contained the flesh of a tiny bird killed by a virgin boy. If the bird was big or the boy not virgin, the gods would refuse the food and there would be bad harvest. Before the ceremony began, a song was sung in honour of the Mayel people and then a Mun offered sakyou faat to them. A virgin girl would stand by to constantly fill the buttered cup with chi which was finally drunk by the Mun in the name of the "people of Mayel".

The harvesting ceremony was more complicated. It was necessary to keep the spleen (tafoot in Lepcha) of a pig, smoked and ready along with chi made of ripe new dry-rice. These were taken to the field on the day of reaping along with two burning brands and placed on where the crop was heaped or at zo-lam. Then an old and experienced man but not related to the owner would be chosen to represent a man of Mayel and offer the gifts laid on the heap of rice.

In that ceremony, a woman not directly related to the owner of the land would be chosen to represent Talyeu Nimu who helped the Mayel-bu or the man chosen to represent a man of Mayel in carrying out rest of the ceremony which included dancing round the zo-lam, opening the baskets of rice, etc. After the ceremony was over the charcoal and tafoot would would be taken away and the measuring of grains would start. And eating of the new rice would thus begin.

Until everybody in the neighbourhood finished performing the sacrifice, the rice could not be dried in the sun. If they did so the "people of Mayel" would see and get angry. They could also

not see the rice being dried in the sun for if they did so that would bring ill-luck to them too.

The Lepchas outside Dzongu were reported not to be very serious about observing the above prohibition but in Dzongu it was very much observed.

The annual sacrifice for the Pongrum required popped corn and chi prepared either by a man or a virgin girl but if possible all the ingredients for this sacrifice were prepared by a man and no woman witnessed the sacrifice. Whenever an animal was killed in the forest it would be cut up and sacrificed to the Pongrum. Learning this was not arbitrary: the novice required to take chi, a ceremonial scarf and a rupee to the person from whom he wanted to learn this. Then followed a number of instructions which needed to be carefully observed by the learner.

This in brief was the Lepcha religion associated with the "people of Mayel". From the above account it is difficult to understand why they worshipped the people of Mayel. Did they worship them because of the tribal obsession with ancestor worship? Was it the uncertainty of harvest that made them do it? Or was it because they really believed in the power

of their ancestors to rescue or ruin them? There can probably be no definite answer about these questions. The most reasonable answer is that because of the impossibility of acquiring food from outside when no one produced surplus, when there was no market for the distribution of surplus food, and when there was no infrastructure to facilitate the same, they were entirely dependent on their environmental resources. Under the circumstances they would be ready to propitiate any god or goddess. But when they had a living belief in their 'living' ancestors it was only natural that they received the veneration of their descendants.

The belief in the "people of Mayel" has not eroded much but due to the changes in their agricultural crops discussed in Chapter III the patron-deities of those crops which are not sown any more are not worshipped either. Here a special mention must be made of the dry-rice which is no longer cultivated but which occupied the most important place in the religious order discussed in this section. With the introduction of wet-rice cultivation the ceremonies associated with the dry-rice

such as lafet and sakyou faat have become virtually extinct. There are a few rituals associated with wet-rice but these are simple and can be carried out by the householder only.

Similarly, Pongrum has lost its relevance after hunting became only a pastime. This deity is worshipped once in a while when someone in the village suffers from acute chest pain and the Mun or Bongthing diagnoses the reason to be an attack by the Pongrum. In such a case, preferably a red cock is sacrificed to please this god of hunters.

It should be added that the worshipping of the "people of Mayel" has on the whole lost its valour. While maize and millet are still cultivated they are (and were) never as important as the rice. Furthermore, the cardamom has assumed such an important place in their economy that other agricultural crops have lost their economic value considerably. And with the entire agricultural sector in the hands of the immigrant labourers from Nepal the "people of Mayel" do not seem to matter as much today as they did in and before 1937.

Mun-Bongthingism

At the very outset it may be pointed out that Mun and Bongthing are considered as priest and priestess only outside Dzongu. In Dzongu, the difference between Mun and Bongthing never seems to be drawn though the word Padem (Padim by Morris) for a lesser Mun is common. As a matter of fact, the word Bongthing is rarely used inside Dzongu. This is clear from the following words of Gorer:

> Both men and women can be Mun, but only men can be Padem (or Bumthing as they are called outside Zongu); these are both pure Lepcha spirits and are essentially similar, save that the Padem are far less powerful, and that instruction by an already qualified Padem is optional, whereas for Mun a three year course of instruction is obligatory. Padem are weaker than Mun and capable of exorcising far fewer devils; they cannot prophesy nor perform the death ceremony. For many men Padem is the first step to becoming Mun (p. 215).

This was also true of Tingvoong as illustrated by Siiger:

> It was the custom in Tingbung to use the word mun for both priests and priestesses, sometimes

> supplemented by the word "male" or "female"; but the word bongthing for the male mun also occurred, although only rarely (p. 161).

The Padem is considered by Gorer to be a lesser Mun but according to Morris:

> The difference between the two is not at all clear, nor are their powers strictly defined; but whereas both men and women may become Mun, it is impossible for a woman to be a Padim (p. 115).

Gorer has also mentioned about Yaba (Yama for women) and Pau (Nandjemu for women). The former is supposed to be possessed by Limbu spirits and the latter by Bhutia spirits (p. 216).

The above citations do not provide a very clear picture of the Lepcha priest or priestess. If the Lepchas of Dzongu had different words for male and female priests and priestesses like Yaba and Yama or Pau and Nandjemu it is difficult to understand why the word 'Mun' was used to refer to both priest and priestess. It is quite likely that the male-female difference about Yaba-Yama and Pau-Nandjemu has been retained by the Lepcha society of

Dzongu because these offices were later introduced in their society. But the contact with the Limbus on the west and the Bhutias on the north is rather old. Despite this, the importations of these offices by the Lepchas may have taken after the offices of Mun or Bongthing were well established. In any case, the actual Lepcha priest and priestess are considered to be Mun and Bongthing only. The other priests are not much known to have existed outside Dzongu and even in Tingvoong Siiger could not find any.

Inspite of the confusions inherent in the definitions of various Lepcha priests and priestesses I have chosen to use Mun for priestess and Bongthing for priest. Hence the subheading "Mun Bongthingism". This is the most acceptable name in the Lepcha society as a whole and even in Dzongu this seems fairly acceptable. However, in the context of Lingthem in 1937, I have not stressed to show if a Mun was a male or a female.

Having laid the premise it is in the fitness of things now to show the difference between "Mun Bongthingism" and lamaism. In this regard, the following words of Gorer are illuminating:

> As opposed to lamaism the Mun religion carries with it no social organization; the Mun and their parallel priests are simply individuals who, through their possession by a spirit, have certain gifts and duties; unlike the lamas and the civil officers their position carries with it no sort of title in ordinary life (p. 215).

This opposition was however not reflected in the way the two orders existed in the village. By 1937, a number of the functions of Mun were taken over by the lamas but, according to Morris, the two worked "side by side in perfect amity" and there was "not the slightest rivalry between them" (p. 116).

Let me now briefly describe the office of Mun. The spirit of Mun was attached to family lines and was often hereditary. In other words, it descended from the grandfather to the grandson and from grandmother to the granddaughter though it could also pass on to any man and sex. After a Mun died the spirit would not necessarily choose another person immediately and could wait for a number of years also (p. 215).

In Lingthem, there were as many as 8 Muns of which 4 were men and 4 women. 3 of the men were actually Padem only. Of those who would be possessed by non-Lepcha spirits there was only one case, which was a Nandjemu (Gorer, pp. 215-16).

The Muns were believed to be of two types: benevolent called Tang-li-Mun and malevolent called Mun-mook-Mun. The difference between the two was similar to the difference between black and white magicians (Gorer, p. 216).

On the possession and functions of the Mun, Gorer has not provided any general description but has cited the case of Gongyop, the most highly rated Mun in the village, in great detail covering six pages from 217 to 222. From this case, it appears that the initial possession took place with the help of another Mun who would identify a person to be ready for being possessed. For some days such possessed persons would fall sick and behave like a mad man. Then training under a senior Mun of the same or different sex would begin until the novice received the loong or ceremonial qualification.

Once a person was qualified as a Mun, he or she could not touch a human corpse. Such a person

would have the power to see devils, communicate with supernaturals, etc. (p. 222).

The chief supernaturals of the Mun were Itpomu (Itpumu by Morris) and Narzong-nyou. Before discussing why and how they were worshipped the confusion about the sex of these supernaturals may be cleared first. Itpomu is considered by Gorer as a female deity but Morris has mentioned it to be a male (p. 63). Komsithing, on the other hand, has been mentioned as a woman by him but Gorer and others (for instance, Kotturan 1983: 38) have identified it as a man. It does not seem to matter much to the Lepchas whether a deity was a male or female but all other works on the Lepchas and my own fieldwork show that Itpomu is a female and Komsithing a male deity.

Narzong-nyou, according to Gorer, was the most important Lepcha goddess who was responsible for the geography, flora and fauna of the Lepchas. Komsithing, her husband, was also an important deity but not usually worshipped for he was considered as a foreigner. Another important supernatural was Tak-bo-thing, who was confused with Tasheything or Guru Rimpoche after their conversion into lamaism (p. 225).

Most of the Mun ceremonies were performed for the benefit of individuals, households or neighbourhood. The Cherim ceremony, held twice in a year, for instance, was observed for protecting the community from illness. This ceremony included three separate rituals out of which the first two were performed by the Mun and the last by a lama. At least one individuals from each household had to be present and each household had to contribute some grains. The first ceremony was performed to propitiate the devils, the second to please the gods of Kanchanjangha and the plains, and the third to mollify the ghost-devil called Dayom (Gorer, pp. 228-29).

The services of Mun would be required by every Lepcha family at the time of birth, marriage, and particularly death. In this context, Gorer writes:

> Throughout life they are necessary for cleansing from supernatural danger, for blessing and solemnising different undertakings, and, above all, for expelling devils (p. 230).

Gorer has made a commendable attempt to delineate the major functions of the Mun in Lepcha society.

According to him, they are the following three:

1. "to get rid of Sor moong (violent death) or Apang moong (genito-urinary diseases)";
2. "to drive away the ghost of a dead child, called Num-een moong, which kills young children by infantile diarrhoea"; and
3. "to get rid of Chyom moong (that is the devil who causes people to die by falling from a tree or cliff) or Rot moong (that is the devil who causes people to commit suicide" (pp. 232-34).

These three functions may now be briefly elaborated. In the first, the Mun asked all the members of the afflicted family to touch a rope with three knots, which was used to tether a goat to be sacrificed consequently. The Mun called upon the devils to be contented with the blood of the sacrifice and not harm the sick. Then the goat would be killed and elaborate offerings with rice, a rupee, ceremonial scarf, chi and the sick person's clothes or ornaments, were made by the Mun.

With regard to the second function, the ceremony took place near a stream. The Mun held a bundle of rashberries, nettles and other thorny or prickly plants in both hands, dipped them in

water and sprinkled on the sick child several times. Then offerings of chi, blood and meat of the sacrificed animal and some rice would be allowed to flow on the stream through a gate made of elephant grasses. This would be followed by the release of the bunches of thorny plants. Such gates were made in two more places, one above and another below the original one.

Finally, the third ceremony was performed if someone in the family committed suicide or met with an accidental death. In this ceremony, a dead goat was skinned upto its knees and was laid on its back facing opposite to the bowman. A ditch would be dug ready and above that a shelter of bamboo thatched with reeds. The dead goat's heart would be hung a little away, with the blood dripping on the banana flower placed below. Then the Mun would start shivering uncontrollably and summon the devil. Meanwhile, some insect would climb up the pole towards the heart. The bowman would shoot at the insect before it reached the heart. Once the insect was killed the goat would be chopped and buried along with the insect into the ditch kept ready.

From the above account of Gorer on the traditional Lepcha religion epitomized by Mun and Bongthing it appears that around 1937 they had almost an absolute control not only over the religious sphere of the Lepchas of Lingthem but also over their social and cultural activities. It is also clear that the lamas had a secondary position vis-a-vis the Muns or Bongthings. The Lepchas could do without a lama but it was impossible without the former. The monastery was very much there and so were some officiating lamas but the villagers still turned towards the Muns rather than the lamas.

If one admits that the picture given above by Gorer is true, some of the changes that have taken place in the last fifty years have been quite drastic. The basic principles of acquiring Munhood or Bongthinghood have not changed. The way they get possessed or their expected functions have not changed either. But almost all Muns seem to have eventually died along with their spirits. Because, as expected, the spirits did not choose new persons even after so many years now.

There is only one Mun in Lingthem today. Though referred to as a Padem, Tagyap, aged 58 years and belonging to the Paki p'tsho, is the only living sample of the traditional Lepcha priest. But he, despite being the only priest, is not much in demand and is rarely invited by the villagers. He depends on the income from the 3 acres of his cardamom field which is leased out to a Nepalese labourer on sharecropping. But he seems to earn enough for the unlimited amount of country liquor and chi that he takes every day.

The disappearance of Muns and Bongthings not only from Lingthem but also from the surrounding villages and elsewhere is a well known fact today. But the Lepchas do not seem to be much bothered about this phenomenon. It is only recently that some Lepchas have begun to speak favourably and nostalgically of what they term as "our original lamas". But they understand it well that being a Mun or Bongthing is not under their control. He or she must show signs of becoming so such as trembling vigorously, behaving in rather abnormal ways and other such symtoms.

According to the lay Lepchas of Lingthem and outside the explanations for the disappearance of Muns and Bongthings are like this. The Muns were required basically for driving out the devils but due to the denudation of forest and the increase of human population all over the area the devils have "run away". The devils, as also gods and goddesses, lived in the forests and grooves but with the clearing of such habitats the supernatural beings have disappeared too. Therefore, the Muns and Bongthings, who served as the link persons between the lay and the supernaturals, disappeared.

The spirit of lamaism is not generally accepted as a factor for this. Though today we see that most of the functions of the Mun have been taken over by the lamas, the latter are not held responsible for this. They are correct to a large extent because the spread of lamaism in the village was more than hundred years, the monastery being established there in 1855 itself. But there were, as seen above, quite a large number of Muns till 1937. Why did they disappear in the last fifty years when they could withhold the spell of lamaism for almost eighty years before that?

This is the most important question that is always asked about the traditional Lepcha religion in Sikkim and the surrounding hill areas. But there is a problem in trying to answer this question, that is, whether there can be secular, rationalist answers to a supernatural phenomenon. Or whether there is adequate understanding of this phenomenon so as to enable someone to term it as secular or supernatural.

It appears that under the Buddhist regime of the Chogyals in Sikkim a strong pro-lamaist, if not anti-Mun, discourse was prevailing there for a very long time. This discourse was translated in various forms. One of the common instances of this was that the legendary story about the test of supremacy between a Mun and a lama from Tibet identified as Guru Rimpoche or Padmasambhava, in which the latter had emerged victorious, had spread among the Lepchas and Bhutias of Sikkim and Darjeeling for a very long time. This story is recounted by them even today.

Another aspect of this discourse was the spread of the belief that the Muns or Bongthings of later years were not as powerful as their predecessors. They often told that the later Muns were of no use as their "power" had diminished.

Such a discourse was supported by various developments that took place after 1940s. For instance, the spread of education ran directly counter to the interest of the traditional priests. Some educated youths began to ask for explanations to many of the acts of such priests but there could be no satisfactory answer to them. As a result, they began to dissociate themselves more and more from this order of their religion.

The eradication of blood dysentry, veneral diseases and gradual improvement of the health of infants due to immunization and other medical cares, was a major bolt to the authority of the Muns and Bongthings. They worshipped a number of deities and devils so that infant mortality, which was high, could be avoided and they did not suffer from sterility, dysentry and other such diseases. But when the villagers stopped suffering from such diseases the need to go for a Mun or Bongthing was not there any more.

The uncertainty of harvest in particular has also been seen above as an important factor behind the popularity of the Mun-Bongthingism. But with the gradual settling of the Nepalese in Dzongu

after 1950s there were significant changes in the above relationship. With the terracing of the fields, introduction of wet-rice cultivation and with the spread of cardamom cultivation apart from the high yielding variety seeds and chemical fertilizers there were far-reaching consequences. The dependence on the supernaturals for an assured harvest was no longer there. Even if the harvest failed they could easily get the supply of food stuff from Mangan and still later within the village itself. If any deity or devil associated with agricultural crops need to be propitiated the Nepalese cultivators would take care of that with the help of their Jhankris and Bijuwas, which are the Nepalese counterparts of the Muns and Bongthings.

With the growing monetization of the village economy after 1950s the domestic animals proved to be an important source of cash instead of remaining simply as objects of sacrifice. Making sacrifices was also a part of lamaism, as we shall see in the next section. But this change in the value of the domesticated animals seems to have affected their traditional religious order more than the lamaist system.

One of the most important developments that boosted lamaism in Sikkim and relegated the traditional order to further oblivion was the coming of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. His coming to India has been acknowledged by all observers to be responsible for the rejuvenation of the lamaist order, not only in Sikkim but in the whole of India (Ling 1991). The lamas who were not very different from the Muns and Bongthings until then began to receive more respect and attention.

The introduction of the panchayati raj further contributed to the obliteration of the Mun-Bongthingism. The panchayat leaders, though officially Buddhists, were not against their traditional religion but they were certainly keen to bring about certain reforms in their socio-cultural system. They wanted to, for instance, stop the use of liquor and malt, which they thought was a major factor behind their backwardness. They tried to ban this but could not succeed. However, they succeeded in reducing the standard size of the bamboo container for malt as early as 1967-68. And by 1982 the sacrifice of animals on the death of a person was stopped. (The details of these shall be given in Chapter VI.)

These reforms directly affected their traditional religious order which was unthinkable without chi and animal sacrifices. Though chi is still prepared in most houses the villagers buy meat from outside for sacrificial purpose.

There was, according to many informants, also a major indigenous reason behind the disappearance of the Muns and Bongthings. Such people believed that they should not pass on their knowledge of the mantras to any one otherwise their power would be affected. In other words, the traditional Lepcha knowledge of communicating with the supernaturals was not a cultural or community resource but the privilege of a handful of individuals who guarded them as secretly as possible. As a result when the individuals possessing such special knowledge expired no one could inherit such knowledge.

As a result of all this, the Lepchas have almost completely lost a religion about which there are a lot of misgivings without adequate scientific understanding. Instead of acquiring knowledge about this religion the scienticism has proved to be anti-thetical to the Mun-Bongthingism.

Today, some elderly persons in the village have assumed the pseudo role of Muns and Bongthings but all indications are there for its total extinction even from Dzongu.

Lamaism

If any Lepcha today is asked about his or her religion the answer is either Buddhist or, rarely at least in Sikkim, Christian. Christian Lepchas are indeed very few in Sikkim and still fewer in Dzongu. There are only two Christian Lepchas in Lingthem, namely, S. B. Lepcha and Jewel Lepcha, but both of them are outsiders who have settled there because of their profession as teachers in Passingdang High School. Both of them have married local women and acquired some land through their wives. But they do not visit any church, nor is it possible to do so because of the absence of any church in the vicinity. That they are Christians was also not reported by themselves but discovered in the process of investigation. They do not bear any Christian names and except for the faith they are very much like the rest of the villagers.

Besides these two persons every other Lepcha in the village is a Buddhist. But there are strong reasons for entitling this section as "lamaism" and not as Buddhism. The first and foremost reason for not taking the latter title is that both Gorer and Morris have used the term "lamaism" and not "Buddhism". The former expression is probably more appropriate because of the following reasons. One, the particular form of Buddhism they worship, consciously or unconsciously, is Mahayana Buddhism of Nyingmapa Sect and not Hinayana or Vajrayana. Two, whatever connection they have with Buddhism is through the Mahayana Buddhist texts. And finally, the lamaism they have has been considered as "un-Buddhistic" by L. A. Waddell (1934).

The expression "lamaism" is considered as derogatory by many Buddhist scholars. It was not probably so when Gorer and Morris wrote. I have also written "lamaism" not because I was bound to do it but because of the ecological and ethnic adaptation that Buddhism has taken in Lingthem or Dzongu as a whole. This adaptation is such that it calls for a qualification, failing which, it would amount fo denigrating the religion called Buddhism. Thus "lamaism" is used here to represent

that special breed of Buddhism nurtured in Dzongu and not to insult the Buddhists. The chief characteristics of lamaism, according to Gorer, are thus:

> In lamaism ... priesthood and sanctity are acquired by learning and not by inspiration; the sacrifice of animals is a heinous sin; the future can be learned by calculations from the holy books and not by inspiration; the soul of the dead wanders for a short time in a sort of purgatory, before being reincarnated either in another form on this earth, or going to some heaven or hell, as different as imagination can make them from anything experienced on earth. Most important of all, lamaist ethics are founded on a belief in individual destiny and a sense of sin, lamaism contains a long, explicit and detailed list of sins which can be performed by human beings, and which are visited on the evil-doer, first by feelings of remorse and secondly by punishment either in this life or in future reincarnations (p. 182).

The Lepchas had a word for sin (<u>layo</u>), which was borrowed from the Tibetan. But the only act which

was sinful to them was the killing of animals. Excepting a few who had accepted lamaism, others did not use this term but used Nam-toak which meant actions not approved by the supernatural sanctions. Some such actions did not even affect the evil-doer (Gorer, pp. 182-83).

In certain respects lamaism did not differ from Mun-Bongthingism. For instance, in both religions the supernaturals were either benevolent, neutral or malevolent. In both religions again the same gods would be benevolent when pleased and malevolent when angry. Moreover, both the religions differed on the causes of dreams but both considered these to be meaningful and prophetic (Gorer, p. 183). Both Gorer and Morris discuss elaborately on what dreams mean to the Lepchas but I will not go into those details here. Even mythologically, the patron-saint of lamas, Tasheything, was considered as the husband of the Mun (Gorer, p. 188). But Gorer rightly doubts that this mythology itself was a part of the lamaist discourse mentioned in the beginning of this section. It was on this basis that the lamaist deity was considered stronger but the Mun does have her husband in Padem or Bongthing and

as far as the Lepcha metaphysics was concerned the male deities, whether as husbands, father or brother, were less powerful than their female counterparts (Gorer, p. 188).

Lamaism is believed to have been introduced in Sikkim around 1641 but the exact date of the Lepchas' conversion into it is not known. There are indications to show that many Lepchas were converted into lamaism by the beginning of the eighteenth century but Gorer writes that even around 1937 the Lepchas or non-Bhutias were not accepted for training as lamas. Since the lay persons had no place in lamaism the Lepchas' conversion into it was, according to Gorer, "a sort of voluntary tax" (pp. 188-89).

No matter when the Lepchas were converted they had "sterilised and ignored those aspects of the alien religion which were sharply opposed to their major existing attitudes" (Gorer, p. 193). Lamaism had in fact quite a few traits familiar with the Lepchas. For instance, the mythology, the idea of priesthood, the belief in dreams and horoscopes, the power of mystic contemplation, etc. were all there in the Lepcha religious system (p. 193). What was alien to them was the social

organization of the lamas but even this was internalised by the Lepchas by equating it with the family and thereby treating sexual relationships between senior and junior lamas as incestuous (p. 193).

The emergence of a number of lamas in their society meant some new titles like Umzet, Dorje Lapoon, and Chitembu, and a new appearance but that was all. Only death gave them a distinction for while the laymen were usually buried they were always cremated (Gorer, p. 194).

It has also been pointed out that the Lepchas accepted most aspects of lamaism but not its individualist ethics. The Lepcha ethic was always social or communal. They also could not accept the lamaist idea of reincarnation based on personal deeds: it was to be decided by the horoscopes and the time of birth and death. Similarly, the lamaist idea of sin and the merit of asceticism were not fully acceptable even to the accomplished Lepcha lamas (Gorer, p. 194). Thus Gorer suggests the following axiom:

> Fully integrated cultures will only accept in an imported complex those elements which are congruent to the existing major attitudes, or which are felt to fill a want; those elements which are violently opposed to existing attitudes will either be excluded or so modified as to bring them into congruence with existing attitudes (p. 195).

It was the horoscope cast on the third day after birth that determined whether or not a child would become a lama though in practice all the eldest sons of the lamas would automatically become lamas. Hence, the horoscope was mainly for the children of the lay. Such destined children would be presented with a yellow sash and taken to the monastery ceremonies for familiarizing them with the same. A teacher would be chosen between the age of ten and fifteen but one's own biological father could never be the teacher. The teacher once selected would be presented with a huge pig, a load of chi, a ceremonial scarf and a rupee. The child would live with the teacher for three years, serving him during the day and receiving instruction in the evening. Such a child was allowed to visit his home from time to time (Gorer, pp. 195-96).

The child was taught to read in the beginning though he was occasionally taught also to say prayers and play instruments. The first degree that he received was called Chapti-bu. After that there were six more grades which he could achieve by increasing his knowledge and validating feasts. Each higher grade was given after three years and with feasts accompanied by prayers and readings from the scriptures. The different grades of lamas are presented below in a hierarchical order:

1. Dorje Lapoon
2. Omzet
3. Chitem-bu
4. Chene
5. Kane
6. Tongpeum-bu
7. Chapti-bu

(Gorer, pp. 196-200)

The duties and privileges of each office mentioned above were clearly laid down by the tradition and so were the formalities to be completed for acquiring a higher office.

In 1937, there were 20 lamas attached to the monastery of Lingthem out of whom 11 lived permanently in the village, 2 were semi-permanent

and the remaining 7 lived in the neighbouring villages. There also were 4 boys studying to become lamas (Gorer, p. 199).

The nuns (inebu) also had a hierarchy corresponding to the hierarchy of lamas. The titles were similar but they could not "conduct ceremonies or perform exorcisms". There was no compulsion nor the need for appropriate horoscope for a woman to become a nun. Out of 9 nuns in Lingthem in 1937, 6 were wives or daughters of lamas, which showed that taking to nunnery depended on the father or the husband. A woman could choose to be a nun any time between marriage and old age and choose as a teacher either a lama or an accomplished nun. Even their literacy was not insisted upon (Gorer, pp. 199-200).

The nuns were to spend three days every month at the monastery and observe strict prohibitions such as fasting in the evening during the monastery visit, avoiding meat and chi and copulation with their husbands. Most of the nuns were incidentally old women (Gorer, p. 200).

The lamas had primarily three duties and devotions, namely, personal devotions, monthly

and calendrical services, and minstering to the sick. The details of these duties and devotions are given by Gorer on pages 201 to 204. I have not felt it necessary to reproduce the details here because such devotions and duties are described as they are expected of the lamas and not as they are observed of them.

The employment of lamas by the common Lepchas depended on the "personal inclination and beliefs of the layman in question" (Gorer, p. 211). Most of the lamaist ceremonies were less expensive than the ceremonies by nun. But if any Lepcha erected a lamaist altar in his house with lamaist scriptures in it, the scriptures needed to be taken out at least four times a year and read by the lamas. Thus, the expenses on hiring, feeding and paying fees to the lamas at least four times in a year would come to quite a lot (Gorer, p. 211).

This is an extremely condensed version of lamaism as it was practised in 1937. Gorer himself has confined himself to what he calls "a generalised account of the impact of lamaism on the Lepchas of Zongu" (p. 181) and has not given the details, which he hoped to publish with Morris in a separate

volume. It is clear, however, that lamaism has received a much wider coverage in their books than the other two forms of Lepcha religion.

With regard to lamaism in particular and religion in general I have reconstructed the picture of 1937 almost entirely from Gorer's book. This was done not only because I found Gorer more accurate than Morris but also because of his more academic narrative style. It was also thought redundant to refer to Morris frequently because the contents, and even the sequence of presentation, are largely same as Gorer's. The language is different and the proper nouns are often spelt differently but the cases described are same and the aspects explored are often very much identical. On can also feel a greater air of confidence in the writings of Gorer but Morris' is certainly more smooth to read.

In fact, it would be interesting to study how the two British scholars have spelt the Lepcha words differently in view of the fact that their informants were same and the notings were made together. But this is outside the scope of the present study.

After this brief digression, let me now discuss the changes that have come about in the ways the Lepchas practise lamaism in Lingthem today. The change that has been taking shape in the last fifty years or so is indeed interesting and even paradoxical in certain senses. With ancestor worship and Mun-Bongthingism losing their functionality in the changed Lepcha society, one would certainly expect that lamaism is having its sway over the Lepchas. But it will be seen in the course of discussion here that despite the apparent popularity of this religion the vertical spread has not been as expected.

Let me now begin the discussion on continuity and change about lamaism. Elementary statistical figures on the lamas show certain interesting features. For instance, in 1937, there were 6 nuns but in 1987, there was none. The percentage of lamas to the total population of the village was 6.3 if taken only the permanent lamas and 7.4 if the semi-permanent lamas were also included. But in 1987, the percentage of lamas to the total population of the village had gone down to 4.4. The total number of hereditary lamas in 1987 was

9 out of 32 in total. The age distribution of these 32 lamas may be presented in the following table.

Table 3: Age distribution of the lamas of Lingthem, 1987

Age-group	No. of lamas
5 - 15	15
15 - 25	1
25 - 35	1
35 - 45	4
45 +	11
Total	32

Source: Fieldwork

The above table shows that a greater number of lamas are either below 15 or above 45 years. No conclusive explanation to this picture can perhaps be provided. It appears however that the vocation of a lama was not followed for the last couple of decades and only very recently there is a revival of interest in lamaism. The lack of interest for a couple of decades, as indicated by the above table seems to have a lot

to do with the vitiated image of the head lamas in the village during 60s and 70s. The reform measures initiated by some Lepcha youths of the village described in the course of this discussion below will provide a plausible answer to why only few lamas were recruited for a couple of decades.

Contrary to the picture provided by the statistical figures above it is observed that Buddhism has spread considerably in the village. I could notice an altar or choesum (which is a Tibetan word) in almost every house. A small idol of Gautam Buddha with a ceremonial scarf called khadah (which is also a Tibetan import) on it is seen in almost every house. The well-off Lepchas are seen to have kept such idols in a glass case with a row of silver or brass cups filled with water in front of it. One of the villagers, namely, Kinga Lepcha, had the photograph of the XIVth Dalai Lama also placed on the altar. This was however possibly because his wife was a Bhutia though the Dalai Lama is considered by most Buddhists to be a living god.

It is also interesting to recall that the houses of Chuket and Nyermo had Tashi-Delek written

in Tibetan script on the main door. Tashi-Delek is a typical Tibetan term for salutation which is not commonly used by the Lepchas. The Lepchas traditionally have no custom of salutation but the Lepcha word for this is khamrimo, which could have been a later development. Similar examples are known to have existed among other tribal societies of the Nepal Himalayas.

The various rules and regulations governing the monkhood, their duties, and their ritual relationships with the lay Lepchas have shown considerable stability. As a matter of fact, the dependence on the lamas has considerably increased due to the disappearance of the Muns and Bongthings. In short, the functional value of lamaism has risen considerably in the last fifty years or so. There is as yet no sign of resistence or resentment against the spread of lamaism.

But the lay Lepchas particularly those who are educated and who are holding responsible positions in their society such as Y. T. Lepcha, Athup Lepcha, Nyezi Lepcha and C. D. Lepcha have rebelled against the lamas though not against lamaism as such. They are however unhappy about

the teaching of lamaism in the Tibetan language and script. This indicates a growing consciousness about their separate identity from the Buddhist Bhutias.

These educated youths started mobilizing the villagers for various reforms related to the monastery and the monks heading it from as early as 1968. But they could achieve success only after about ten years of struggle with the powerful lamas of the village. Their main argument was directed against unwanted expenses related to the monastery.

In any feast at the monastery, every household of the village had to contribute a fixed amount of grain or chi and the entire responsibility of organizing the feast used to be vested on one family. The contribution of each family, no matter how poor, was 3 to 4 basketful of chi as minimum. As a result, the monastery had assumed the image of a monster that sapped the life out of the common Lepchas.

This practice was finally stopped. Now the villagers can contribute according to their wish and ability. The responsibility of organizing the

feast is now given to any two houses in a cyclical order. Further, the feasts earlier used to continue for three to four days or until the stock was exhausted but nowadays it hardly continues for more than 24 hours.

It was also reported that earlier oxen used to be sacrificed within the premises of the monastery in every feast. The sacrificing act could not be stopped immediately but the leaders were successful in shifting the site of sacrifice a little farther from the monastery. They could ban the sacrifice of animals for religious purposes only in 1976-77.

Y. T. Lepcha, one of the leaders there, seems to have taken the most enthusiastic step towards stopping the sacrifice of animals on the premises of the monastery. People still recount the dramatic act of this leader in this regard. He had tied his father's (Chanang's) hands with a rope and dragged him upto the monastery, which was symbolic of an animal, and challenged the Khanang Lama to accept his father as a sacrifice. This did the trick but the trick would not have worked had it not been Chanang acting as the animal to be sacrificed. He was one of the most enlightened

and widely travelled Lepchas as evident from his case history described in Chapter III.

The leaders also eventually succeeded in reducing the size of patyoot or the bamboo container for malt by half. This was strongly resented by the lamas but there were many villagers who supported it. As a compromise, the patyoot of the head lama was left to its original size. The samples of reduced bamboo container for the lay were distributed to all the villagers and a strict sanction was levied on any household not complying with it.

The same leaders also raised the question of the alleged misuse of the Gumba (monastery) fund which used to be about Rs.500 annually. The head lama was in charge of the collection but the accounts of the same were never made public. As a result of their movement a bank account was opened and the credit-debit accounts read out in the annual meetings. They were also not happy about the sanction of Rs.11 lakhs for the rejuvenation of the village monastery. But Nachyo, the present head lama, seems to have convinced the leaders about it because in my last visit in 1990

the construction had already begun. I am not clear about the reason behind their reservation against the sanctioning of the money by the government. The only reason I can think of is possibly the fact that these leaders being strong supporters of the Congress(I) and opponents of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (the ruling party in the State) found it as a slap on their face. Otherwise, they should have no reason why they should grumble about it.

The reforms narrated above apparently do not show any resentment against lamaism. The expressed views of the leaders initiating those reforms are in fact such that they wanted a purer form of lamaism, free from the sin of killing animals and corruption. In other words, they wanted to clean up the dirt gathered around the lamaist institution.

But a closer reading of their actions indicates a sub-conscious rebellion against lamaism itself. It has been pointed out above that lamaism as a system of belief did not matter to the Lepchas. It was the lamas with whom they were concerned and in their view the lamas were not much different from their traditional Muns or Bongthings. This being so, differentiating between the lamas and the

lamaism would perhaps be more conceptual than real. In other words, to conclude that they fought against the lamas and not their institution would perhaps be not too realistic.

Such a development may have taken place as a result of the changes outside the village. The value of education was being increasingly appreciated all over Sikkim and lamaism as a vocation had not proved lucrative even to the highest order lamas. Nor being a lama gave a person any special prestige. Being a lama was only one of the identities of a person and this identity was seldom dominant except in the cases of Omzet and Dorje Lapoon.

It was reported during my fieldwork that lot of boys joined the vocation of a lama but they eventually gave up. The cases of drop-out novices were reportedly many because no boy took up this vocation out of his own choice. The sending of the eldest son for monkhood is no longer compulsory even for a lama's family and a boy would be normally sent for training as a lama only when his parents had promised to do so before he was born or when he had fallen ill at his infancy.

Conclusion

The challenge by the forces of Hinduism and Christianity has not been effective at all in Dzongu because of its reserved status. Lot of Hindus do enter into this reserved area every year but their low status in the village makes them unable to influence their landlords. It is also true that the Lepchas of Dzongu, whether male or female, are found drinking chi most of the free time when they could be preached and converted to some other religion.

Thus lamaism in a way has found a safe niche in the reserved area of Dzongu. There are strong chances of this religion further prospering if the basic scriptures are translated into the Lepcha language. Because Buddhism is by all means much more respectable-sounding than their Mun-Bongthingism.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusions

The objectives of this chapter are to present a resume of the preceeding chapters and to compare the situation in Lingthem with the situations elsewhere in Sikkim and the district of Darjeeling. An attempt has also been made in this chapter to raise some issues related to tribal society in general and the Lepchas in particular.

The first two chapters do not naturally contain any findings for summarization here. The main body of this thesis is constituted by the three subsequent chapters dealing with economy, social organization, and religion. Therefore, the summarization here relates to these three chapters only. The second chapter also contains a number of informations on the past and the present of the Lingthem village but they are not important enough to be recapitulated here.

The third chapter deals primarily with agriculture, animal husbandry, and non-agricultural

occupations. With regard to the first, the major changes that have occurred in the last fifty years or so may be discussed here. First, there has been a transformation of agriculture from shifting to settled and terraced cultivation, for which credit is given mainly to the immigrant Nepalese. There is also a significant shift from consumption-oriented crops to cash crops like cardamom and ginger. The agrarian character has also changed due to the emergence of new forms of tenure like sharecropping and new social relations of production in which the Lepchas have emerged as landlords and immigrant Nepalese as tenants.

With regard to animal husbandry, the perceptible rise in its economic significance is noted. The animals are no longer the objects of sacrifice only: they are also an important source of income.

On the non-agricultural economy, the most important trend to be mentioned here is the growing popularity of the business and service sectors. However, their business is still confined to shop-keeping with a turnover of hardly one hundred rupees per day and their educational achievement is not enough to make them white-collar employees.

The fourth chapter has dealt with social organization and its three major aspects considered here are family, marriage and kinship. With regard to the first it may be noted that the joint families are disappearing but only in form and not in spirit. However, each Lepcha family today is much more autonomous than the family of fifty years ago.

Regarding marriage, it is found that early marriage is still practised but late marriages, mainly after twentyfive, are growing popular and being accepted as a normal feature. Levirate and sororate marriages are still practised but with the obliteration of sterility from Lingthem and the surrounding villages polygyny is gradually giving way to monogamy. Finally, about acquiring spouses, negotiated elopement, which means elopement with the consent of parents, is found to be rather popular today.

About kinship, not much change is observed. The traditional rules of marriage based on the patrilineal clan membership upto nine generations and matrilineal descent upto three generations are still observed. The relationships of avoidance

and joking have also continued as before. The overall changes in the economy of the village have an effect on the kinship relations but the kinship structure has not changed much.

The fifth chapter on religion has discussed ancestor-worship, Mun-Bongthingism, and lamaism. The first has been found to be affected severely due to the change of crops as well as the cultivators. This form of religion being associated with crops and hunting had to suffer when there was a change with respect to these. For instance, when hunting became obsolete, Pongrum, an important Lepcha deity, was no longer worshipped.

The form of Lepcha religion described here as Mun-Bongthingism, has also been almost wiped out from the realm of their religion. One of the most important factors responsible for this is found to be the spread of lamaism under royal patronage of the Namgyals till as late as 1974. A pro-lamaist discourse had also taken place resulting in the weaning of respect for their traditional priest and priestess. But, most importantly, the form of lamaism which was introduced among the Lepchas was almost identical with Mun-Bongthingism and hence easily accepted by them.

Finally, it may be pointed out that lamaism has almost completely replaced Mun-Bongthingism in Lingthem. There are certain traits of lamaism, which may be compared with the lamas of other Buddhist sects but from the perspective of the villagers they are no more than literate Muns or Bongthings. It is also found that the aspects of lamaism like individualism and the sense of sin were not accepted by the Lepchas without opposing other aspects of it which were compatible with their own traditional religious system.

It is important that these findings based on a remote village of a reserved area called Dzongu are compared with the situation elsewhere in Dzongu and outside it. But it must be confessed that there is a limited scope for that because of the insufficiency of comparable data. Some of the books or articles published on the Lepchas living outside Dzongu or within it are based on works done much earlier, in the 40s, 60s or 70s. Besides, the objectives have been often completely different from those of the present work. However, whatever informations are available have neen

incorporated here. These informations are not and cannot be used for comparative purposes in true sense. Nevertheless, they give some idea of the Lepchas living elsewhere from Lingthem.

A major contribution to the study of the Lepchas was made by A. R. Foning, a Lepcha himself. His objective was to reconstruct the tradition of the Lepchas on the basis of scripts, personal interviews, and autobiographical notes. He had visited the Lingthem village in the summer of 1946 and found the Lepchas there "of the same mental make-up, of the same physical and intellectual standards, and following the same set of tribal maxims as my other kinsmen outside the 'reserve'" (1987:254). He of course ignored the external changes taking place outside Dzongu due to westernization and education.

There were two important studies on the Lepchas in the 60s, one within Dzongu and another in the district of Darjeeling. As in the case of Foning, the purpose of Siiger's study of Tingvoong in Dzongu was "to collect as much as possible of what remains of the ancient Lepcha culture before it becomes too late" (1967:35). On the

same page, he writes:

> As the similarities between the culture of the Jongu Lepchas and that of the Kalimpong Lepchas are more conspicuous than the differences, I have not hesitated to treat them under the same headings.

The other study conducted by A. K. Das in Darjeeling also draws no difference between the Lepchas of Darjeeling and those of Sikkim. This is clearly evident from frequent and extensive references to the works of Gorer, Morris, and Siiger in his discussion. As a matter of fact, Das not only fuses Darjeeling and Sikkim together but also neutralizes the time by referring to the works of Gorer and Morris in the present tense. The only difference that he seems to have observed between the Lepchas of Sikkim and Darjeeling is the absence of the concept of "vanishing" in Darjeeling. For instance, he writes:

> (M)y field study in Darjeeling reveals that the Lepchas are neither conscious of any sort of decaying population like Sikkim Lepchas, nor are aware of any sort of chronic sterility among them (1987:104).

A recent study conducted on the Lepchas of North Sikkim by Veena Bhasin (1989) also shows no specific difference between the Lepchas of Dzongu and the Lepchas of Lachen and Lachung valleys. Her objective was of course to study the Lepchas and Bhutias in their own ecological milieu. Ecologically, there are some differences between the Lepchas within and outside Dzongu but socially and culturally the differences are hard to point out.

Finally, the works of Subba may be briefly mentioned. In his earlier work (1985) he has discussed the widening cleavage between the Buddhist and Christian Lepchas outside Dzongu. Such a cleavage is yet to emerge in Dzongu due to the virtual absence of the Christian Lepchas. In another work (1989a) he discusses the Lepcha society and change and deals with economy, social organization, language, and religion. With regard to economy, the phenomenon which distinguishes the Lepchas outside Dzongu from those within it is the alienation of land from the Lepchas to the Nepalis and the Bhutias. Such a phenomenon could probably be repeated in Dzongu also but for its reserved status it has been averted.

With regard to their social organization, Subba observes that there has been a large number of marriages not only with the Bhutias and the Nepalis but also with Bengalis, South-Indians, and Europeans. Such inter-community marriages, on the other hand, are still rare in Dzongu. Subba also notes the change from parallel descent to patrilineal descent and analyses the situation leading to such a transformation. This could not be dealt with in Chapter IV of this thesis because neither Gorer nor Morris have mentioned about this aspect of the Lepcha kinship system. The growing popularity of nuclear families noted by him is, however, observed in Lingthem also.

About language, Subba refers to Mainwaring and Sprigg and shows how the status of the Lepcha language has fallen from a national language to a dialect of a few people. He has also discussed how this language is being revived in Sikkim under the government patronage whereas in Kalimpong the effort to revive this language has been confined to a few villages and individuals. It is agreed by each and every author that the Nepali language has completely dominated the Lepcha language. The situation in Dzongu is not so bad but if the immi-

grant labourers from Nepal remain there for another couple of decades Dzongu may not be much different from Darjeeling in this respect.

Finally, Subba's observation that the spread of lamaism is more horizontal than vertical seems to be true of Dzongu also. Had the vertical spread been significant the Lepchas would not probably embrace Christianity so easily outside Dzongu.

Let me now take up some issues which concern the Lepchas in particular and the tribes in general. One of the most important issues that engulf the Lepchas in particular and the tribes in general is detribalization. There are profuse studies on the tribes of India showing how the tribes have been losing their tribal character under the influence of their Hindu or Christian neighbourers. There are also a number of studies arguing how the Hindus have also been tribalized to some extent. The consensus in this regard is that it is a two-way process. However my concern here is detribalization and not dehinduisation.

From Chapter V it is evident that the tribal religion of the Lepchas has been considerably affected by the spread of lamaism. Though lamaism

itself is today a major tribal religion there is enough proof to show that lamaism or Buddhism was a later importation by the tribes. The lamaisation or Christianization of the tribes has not found a respectable attention of those engaged in tribal studies. Detribalization in the religious context still largely refers to the picking up of Hindu traits by the tribes.

Even in the latter context the Lepchas have been detribalized to some extent. Many of them take cognizance of the hierarchical structure of the Nepali castes and often look at the scheduled castes from the point of view of the upper caste Nepalis. They liken themselves with the "brass pot" which can be used for any purpose, thereby signifying that they are casteless and they treat all castes equally. But they are often observed to be conscious of the "untouchable" status of the Nepali castes like Kami, Sarki, and Damai.

In this respect, the three major geographical distribution of the Lepchas - Kalimpong, Sikkim, and Illam (Nepal) - should be borne in mind. For various reasons the Lepchas of these three regions have received different influences. For instance, the Lepchas of Kalimpong have been considerably

Christianized and westernized; those of Sikkim have been greatly Tibetanized; and those in Nepal Hinduized or Nepalized. These influences have been noted in terms of language, dress, and customs. Therefore, the detribalization of the Lepchas is multilinear due to the differences in the socio-cultural and political environments of these three major concentrations of the Lepchas.

The second issue that is desired to be taken up here for discussion is whether or not the Lepchas are "vanishing". The word "vanishing" has been used by a large number of writers on the Lepchas. It has an alarming connotation and has considerable appeal in political platforms. The Lepcha leaders, however, have not been found to have capitalised on the power of this word.

It is not very easy to discuss this issue objectively. There are a lot of Lepchas who sincerely believe that they are "vanishing" and something must be done urgently to save this tribe. The past is often glorified beyond its proportions and sought to be repeated now. It may be difficult to change the subjectivity of the people but it is essential that this issue is

examined here as objectively as possible.

With regard to their religion it has already been seen that the traditional religion of the Lepchas characterized by ancestor-worship and Mun-Bongthingism has almost disappeared even from a remote area like Dzongu. Culturally, they are either Hinduized, Christianized or Tibetanized. Though it is difficult to pin point the essential characteristics of the Lepcha culture at any stage of their history, the scholars and lay alike agree that they have lost their 'traditional culture'. Linguistically also it has been found that the Nepali language has replaced the Lepcha language in areas outside Dzongu and even the language of the Dzongu Lepchas has been considerably influenced by the Tibetan and Nepali languages.

Demographically, though their absolute number has been increasing their relative population strength has been decreasing over time. For instance, in Sikkim the Lepchas constituted 18.9 percent of the total population in 1891 but in 1931 their percentage had come down to 11.9 and in 1951 it was further slumped to 9.9 percent (Subba 1989b:127-28). Similarly, in Darjeeling

district the percentage of the Lepcha population to the total population was 4.4 in 1891 but it came down to 3.8 percent in 1931, 3.0 percent in 1951 and 1.7 percent in 1971 (Das 1978:35).

But the socio-economic position of the Lepchas seems to be better than that of the non-Lepchas in the rural areas. A study by Subba on the basis of 41 Lepcha and 193 non-Lepcha households of Tanek village in Kalimpong shows that the position of the former vis-a-vis education, landholding, and income is relatively better than that of the non-Lepchas (1985:67-70). This picture may well be taken as isolated but until further research is done in comparative perspective no conclusive answer can be given in this regard.

The period between 1890s and 1960s was indeed a cursed period for the Lepchas of Sikkim. The veneral diseases had caused widespread sterility and thus affected the growth of population severely. The problem was aggravated due to free sex and community endogamy. On the top of that water-borne diseases like dysentry took the lives of many Lepchas. The situation seemed so alarming that unless it was improved they would have really

vanished from the face of this earth. The Lepchas outside Dzongu were free from such diseases and certainly did not face the threat of physical extinction.

That the Lepchas are gradually losing their community feeling and becoming more and more individualistic is another important issue. It has been discussed in the previous chapters that individualism was lacking in 1937. Community feeling was reassured by the forms of address, the religious system and the need for labourers but due to changes in the economy if not equally so in terms of religion and kinship the corporate feeling is affected to some extent. But this is not really a serious problem of the Lepcha society. The feeling for fellow Lepchas, no matter what their economic status or religious affiliation, is clearly there. I could experience this personally at Lingthem. The enthusiasm and cooperation of the Lepchas whose help I sought was unparalleled. They could perhaps not be equally enthusiastic about helping me in my research if I were not a Lepcha.

Finally, the policy of extending certain institutional privileges to the Lepchas in general

and the policy of reserving Dzongu specifically for the Lepchas may be discussed. The first policy pertains to the scheduled tribes all over India. Hence, no specific remarks are perhaps called for. But reserving a defined geographical area for a particular tribe or a number of tribes is not followed every where in India. The peninsular tribes, for instance, have no such reserved geographical areas and coincidentally suffered much more than the tribes in the northeast India.

A comparison between the Lepchas of Dzongu and those in Arunachal Pradesh may be made. The reservation policy of tribal areas is associated with Verrier Elwin who has written extensively on it. But it should be borne in mind here that Dzongu was reserved much before Elwin ever set his foot on India.

His A Philosophy for NEFA (1959) was a bible for tribal administrators for a very long time. He has been severely criticized for his policy of reservation but what he actually advocated was not to "preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens" (1959:59) but to allow only limited interaction with the outsiders. He thought that the tribes

should not be exposed to the exploitation by the more advanced people from the plains.

This policy of Elwin was supported by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and executed by the renowned administrator-scholar, Nari Rustomji. Rustomji not only carried out the above policy but also wrote extensively on it (1971, 1983, 1988). Furer Haimendorf, another famous anthropologist, has also argued in favour of the continuation of the policy of protecting the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh (1980: 217-18).

Coming to the Lepchas of Dzongu, the reservation policy seems to have benefitted them considerably. Without this policy the land of Dzongu would have definitely passed on to the hands of Sherpas and Bhutias, if not to other Nepalis also. The highly lucrative cardamom fields of this reserve would be the first target of the non-Lepchas. The degree of change would be considerably accelerated but very few Lepchas would gain in this process.

It may be pointed out that even when the area is reserved the outsiders like the Marwaris and

the Nepalis have controlled the economy of Dzongu. While the marketing of cardamom - their major source of cash income - is completely monopolised by the Marwari traders settled in the Mangan town, the labourers from Nepal have made the Lepchas of Dzongu completely dependent on their labour. Without the existing legal arrangements in favour of the Lepchas the situation would certainly be worse.

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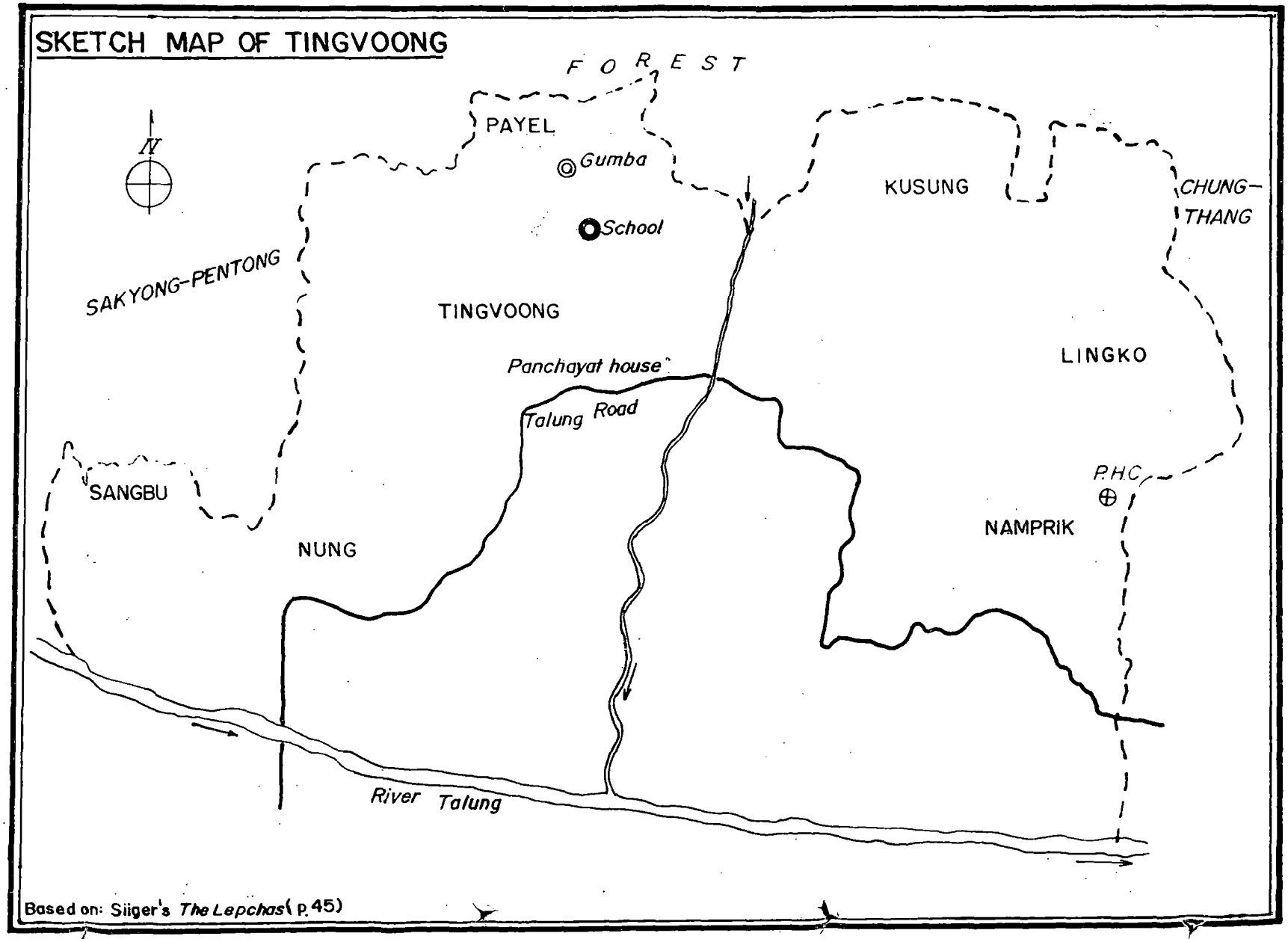

SKETCH MAP OF TINGVOONG
FOREST
PAYEL
Gumba
School
KUSUNG
CHUNG-THANG
SAKYONG-PENTONG
TINGVOONG
LINGKO
Panchayat house
Talung Road
SANGBU
P.H.C.
NUNG
NAMPRIK
River Talung
Based on: Siiger's The Lepchas (p. 45)

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 though 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), Namprik, 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 Dolamite 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 grumblings 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.

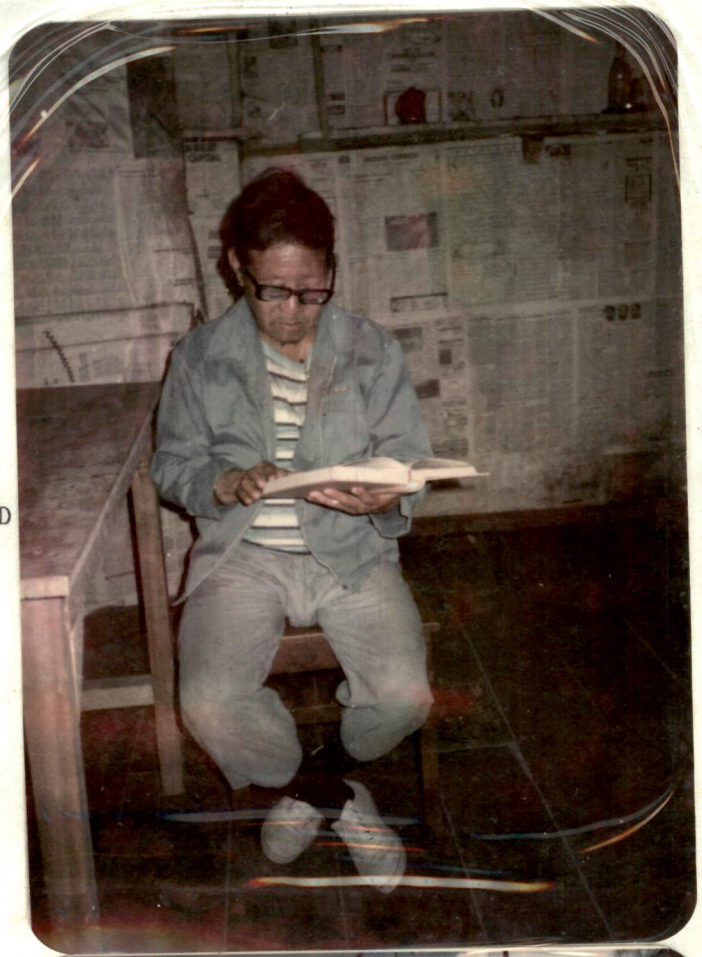
The abundance of such labourers from Nepal has, on the one hand, saved the Lepchas from the hardships of carrying out the agricultural works, from the health hazards in cultivating cardamom, and provided them with an opportunity for their children to go to school and even higher studies. On the other 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.

I. THE TALUNG VALLEY FROM LINGTHEM

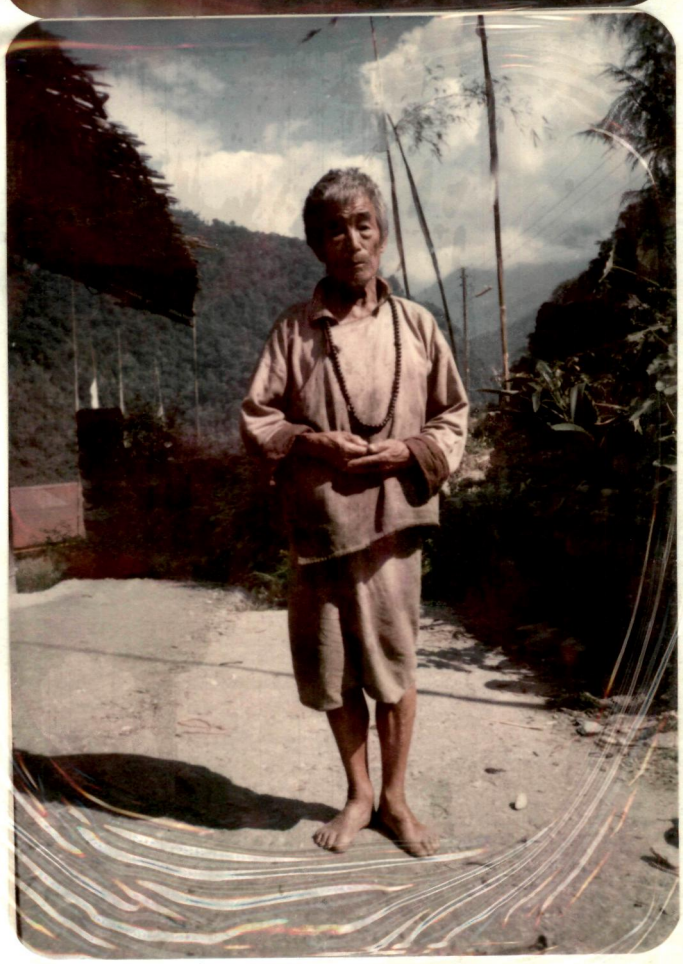
2. THE LINGTHEM MONASTERY IN 1987

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