

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 abstraction 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.
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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 venereal 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, yumi 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 otherhand, 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 neighbours 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 been 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 Namchyö, 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

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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	Male	Percentage of Married 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 elopement 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 embarrassment.

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 reason 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 cassette 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.

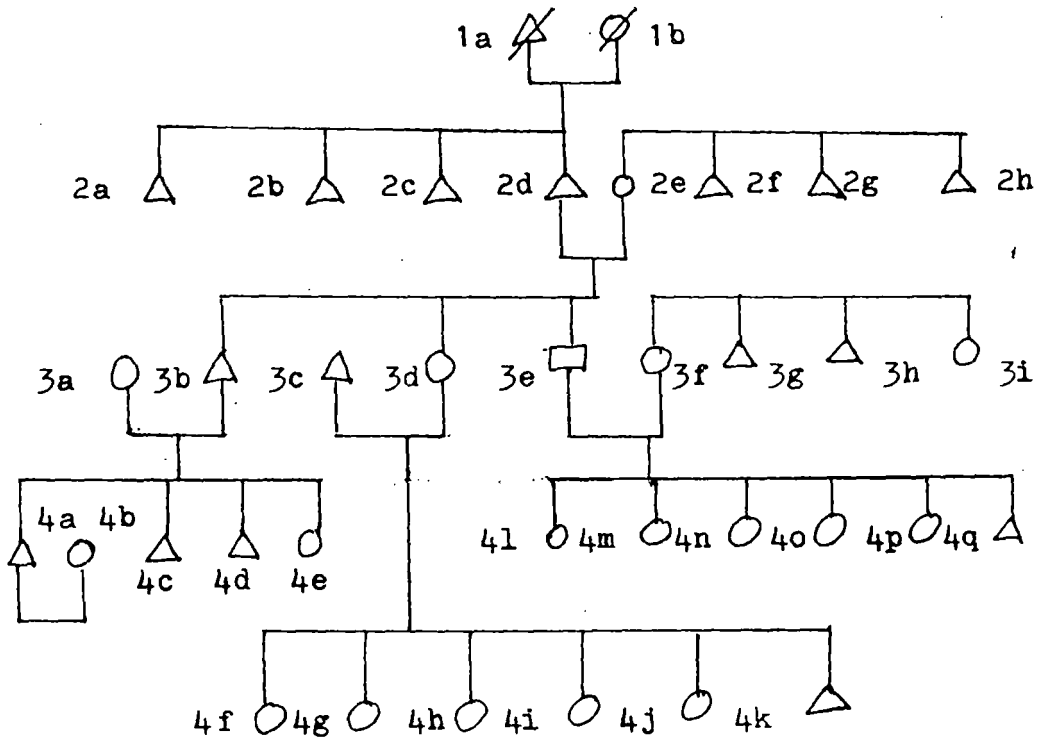
The Lepchas of Lingthem do not only seem to have adopted such alien practices but are also proved to have accepted aliens as spouses also. While Lepchas from outside the village and even outside Dzongu have been reported even in 1937 two of the villagers have even married non-Lepchas. But Athup Lepcha 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 is 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.

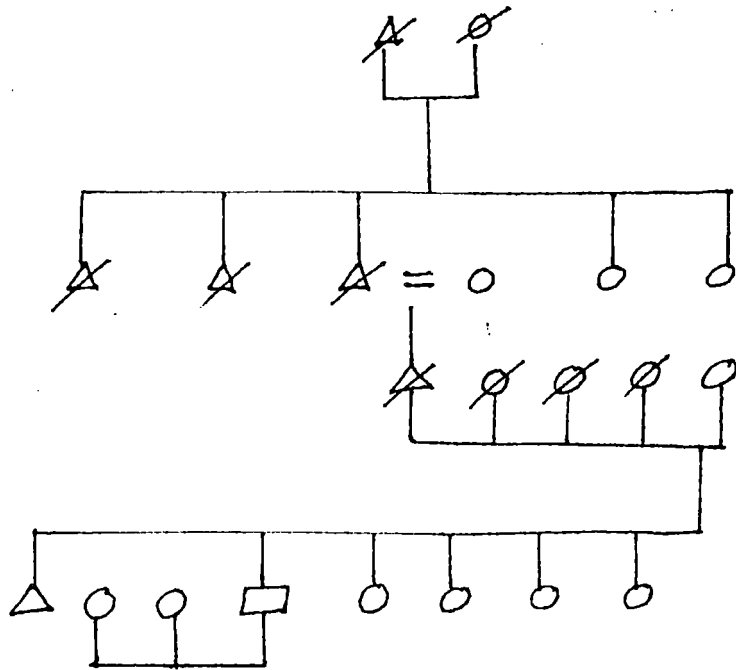


Figure 3: Pichi, Sukmi.

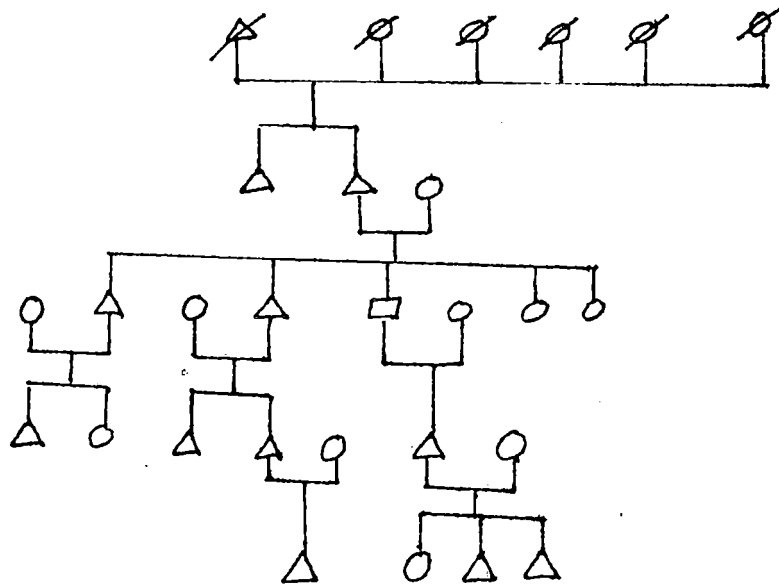
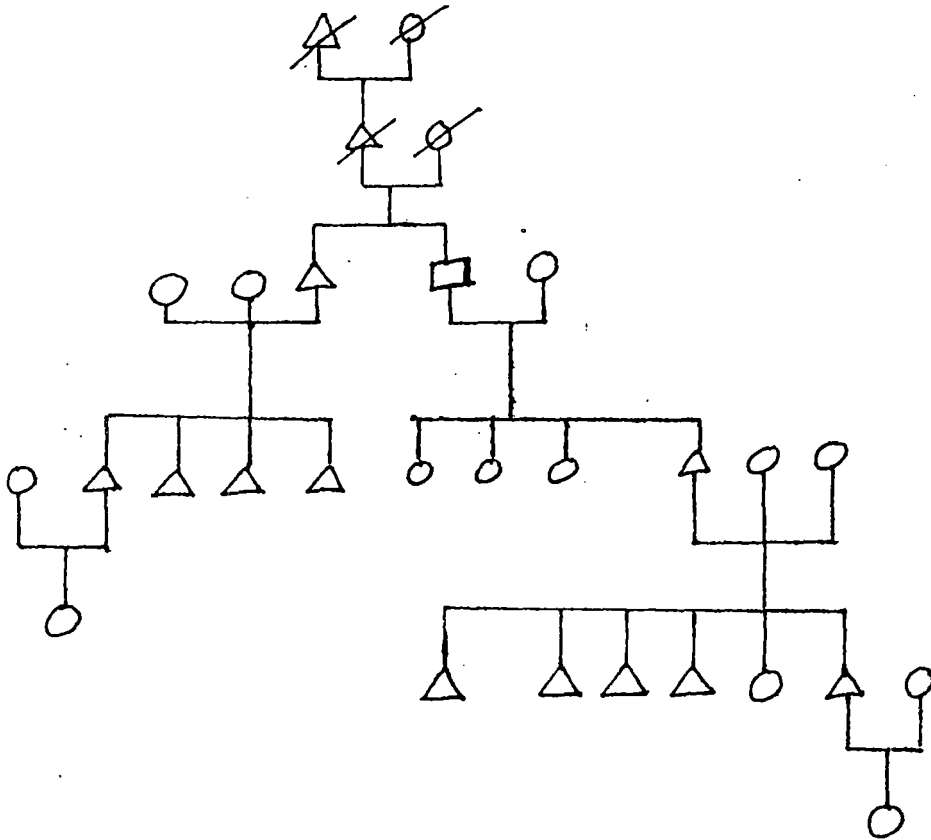


Figure 4: Patek, Aram.

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 yumi. 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 instance, 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 embarrassing 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.