

DISCUSSION : CULTURAL ECOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Ecology is the study of the inter-relations of populations of living organisms, including human being, with their environment. The environment for any particular human population includes other groups of people as well as non-human organisms and physical features. This inter-group relations is also the essence of cultural ecology. This has been examined against time and space.

Keeping in mind the Julian Steward's concept of cultural ecology, the changing pattern of Lepcha cultural framework has been examined with a special emphasis on its culture core, i.e. the economic or subsistence aspect of the culture. The prime mover of the concept of cultural ecology. With the help of the methodological expertise provided by Steward, we have tried to understand the Lepcha culture from this point of view as well as to examine the nature of changes that have taken place in the economic infrastructure of these people. It has been seen that these changes which have been compatible with their environment have been more readily accepted than the others.

From an ecological point of view we have seen environmental circumstances in combination with group's technology and organisation of labour as of primary importance and perhaps even determining the forms of social organisation, which is seen as superimposed on (or epiphenomena of) technological economic necessity and as reinforcing patterns of economic organisation.

Subsistence economy of a group basically depends upon the

Production ++ *Distribution* ++ *Consumption*

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Organization of labour : How population organise to implement technology to exploit resources for needed or desired usable goods or service.

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Technology : Tools and techniques for extraction, conversion and utilization of resources.

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Subsistence Economy : Resources exploited by population.

nature of resources at its disposal. The resource may be land, forest or even water. The second important factor is the position of the group in the levels or scales of technological development, that is their technological know-how and expertise. Next comes the organizational capabilities of the group to implement their knowledge. The last but not the least factor is how the group is able to manipulate their produces through the phases of distribution and consumption. The situation will be clear from the ecological paradigm shown in Fig.5.

Lepcha subsistence economy is completely based on land, which is the only resource or physical means of production including technology of production and labour. Being the original and first settlers in the region the Lepcha had all the land under their control but now-a-days the Lepcha, except in Zongu where law of the state protect them from losing lands, are gradually losing their lands to the Nepalis and other neighbouring communities.

In Darjeeling occupational mobility is very less among the Lepcha. They are mainly agriculturist and do not opt for other form of occupation. The Nepalis are occupationally most versatile in the region, they never refuse to accept any occupation that comes to them. By this the Nepalis are being able to accumulate cash which they often use to purchase land from the Lepcha. Usually they buy the land in the name of their Lepcha wives, or by forcing the Lepcha to mortgage their land permanently which the Lepcha will never claim.

The size of an average Lepcha holding in Darjeeling district is 6.5 acres and the average size of the family 5.5 persons (1971

census). The size of holding cultivated by a person plays an important role in agricultural production. It is an economic principle that a cultivator must have a minimum size of land to apply scientific methods of agriculture and to have sufficient income to afford a modest living. This unit is called an economic holding. There is an optimum size beyond which the efficiency in production per unit begins to decrease. These are called optimum holdings. The congress of Agrarian Reforms Committee (1961) considered this optimum holding to be three times as large as the economic holding. There is also a basic unit, holding smaller than which would be palpably uneconomic. Of course, the size of each of the above units depend upon the quality of land and irrigation facilities available. Taking into consideration these factors in this area and family size, we could arbitrarily fix that 5 acres should be the basic unit, 10 acres be the economic unit, and 30 acres be the optimum unit.

In Kalimpong most of the Lepcha holding has come very near to the basic unit or at least in between basic and economic unit, which hinder the production ; but in Zongu most of the Lepcha holdings are above or near to the optimum units which again retard the rate of production.

As we know culture is composed of the energy system of a population and its method of exploiting them, of the organization of social, political and economic relations, of language, customs, beliefs, rules and arts of everything that is learned from other people or their works (White, 1949). This view emphasizes the functional importance of culture as an adaptive mechanism, as a

generic term for the sum total of the ways a society organizes its relations to its environment and the way it is internally organized.

It is perhaps permissible to speculate a little on historical development of the Lepcha food getting habits. Primitive economics are usually divided into three categories - food gatherers, cultivators and hunters - herders. Today the Lepcha are cultivators but in the recent past undoubtedly they were members of a food gatherer and hunting tribe.

Lepcha tradition, as has already been stated, places the transition from food - gathering to cultivation within a very short period of time, and again from shifting cultivation to settled terrace agriculture in a still shorter time. Now in Bon ritual animal sacrifice plays an important role and their ceremonies are connected with crops like dry rice and mongmu variety of millet. These are the crops produced by shifting cultivation. Probably only a century ago the Lepcha cultivated only a certain amount of dry rice and millet in shifting method on the lower slopes of the valley. Very likely they did not cultivate enough for all their needs and supplemented the produce from field with hunting and wild forest products. When the tribes from Tibet, and later from Nepal, came into their territory to settle down permanently and had taken the land from them, there was no account of their resisting the Tibetan colonisation because the Lepcha had a symbiotic relationship with the Tibetan - Bhotia. The Bhotia used to give them salt and dress materials in exchange of forest produces and animals supplied by the Lepcha. It was at that period the institution of trading friendship

called ingzong had been established between the Lepcha and Bhotia at the individual level. Every Lepcha family in Zongu was supposed to have an ingzong across the border in Tibet. This was a formal relationship with a religious sanction and the two ingzongs were regarded as brothers and inter-marriage between their descendants was forbidden. The Lepcha used to set up the trading relationship only with the Tibetan Bhotias and Bhutanese but never with the Nepalis. Bhotias were basically traders and transhumants so there was less conflict. The Lepcha and Bhotias co-live in the same niche with mutual exploitation of allocated resources. Moreover the Buddhist Bhotias (the King belonged to this class) converted the animistic Lepcha into Buddhism which helped them to maintain a brotherly relation with them. But the Lepcha fled from the invading Nepalis, whom they considered war-like enemies, representing death and slavery, at the least, loss of their possessions (Morris, 1938). They were unable to compete with the more industries and competent Nepalis. Consequently they developed "a way of life suitable for isolation ; neither in war nor in competition could they stand up to other people" (Gorer, 1938 : 449).

In the reserve of Zongu the introduction of cardamom and terraced cultivation in wet fields in this century bound the Lepcha more securely to the land. They had neither time nor reason for serious hunting. The money producing cardamom crop did away with the necessity which existed in earlier times, of travelling to trade forest produce against cloth and salt. From partial or complete nomadism the Lepcha became almost completely attached to their fields.

But in Kalimpong the situation is very bad and grave for the Lepcha. Alarmingly the Lepcha being less efficient cultivators could not produce sufficient food for their livelihood due to smaller holdings of land here. Moreover, in Kalimpong there is no cash crop of substantial nature like cardamom (as in Zongu) to revive their sick economy. The cultivation of cauliflower, potatoe and ginger are no match for the enormous cash cropping of cardamom in Zongu. This has put their economic condition in Kalimpong in a miserable state and have made them an easy prey to money lenderers and Christian missionaries.

In Kalimpong villages, where the Lepcha held land in the irrigated fields at lower altitude they drew attention of the immigrant (sukumbasi) Nepalis. The Nepalis first entered into the local agrarian class structure merely as a share-cropper but gradually replaced the Lepcha owner by their wits and became the owner.

It is observed that share-cropping is more in the areas of low altitude because lands located at lower altitudes are more productive and well irrigated. Production strategies are shaped and guided by the specific techno-economic condition and adaptive process. In the field of social and agrarian relations we see that a master - servant relation exist between the Lepcha and Nepalis in Zongu, whereas in Kalimpong dominant - subservient relationships exist between these two communities.

The net period of employment in Kalimpong even on an irrigated land of adequate size is not more than 3 to 4 months a year. Thus the villagers, except the Lepcha, move out of agriculture

in search of alternative employment. The inevitable result of this phenomenon is the negligence of agriculture. In the processes of change from primary to secondary or tertiary occupation, the agriculture has suffered instead of being revitalised. The process of agricultural change in the wake of commercialization of economy and demographic pressure had made the condition of the poor even worse (Subba 1984 : 63).

After making a comparison in the production of crops in the land under cultivation by the two communities viz., Lepcha and Nepali, it is observed that the Nepalis are far superior cultivators than the Lepcha. Even in the land of same quality or types, situated side by side, a Nepali can grow about two times what a Lepcha can produce. The Lepcha cultivate their land in a most negligent manner, their pre-sowing operations like ploughing the field etc. are less in number than the Nepalis. They also use comparatively little manure in their fields. Their crop tending and vigilance are also poor. It seemed that this reluctance to agricultural production is inherent in the nature of the Lepcha. Probably it is most likely the situation when a people takes to a new economy or a mode of production.

The above paradox can possibly be explained through the following paradigm. In addition to all the 'knowledge', a given society also has a body of technical processes - application of the knowledge, rules governing the manufacture of tools, rules governing the use of manual labour, which are right at the heart of man's relationship with the material nature surrounding him. This

relationship is governed by a complex body of representation, ideas, values and patterns and their presence and action are essential for any kind of material activity to be able to occur. Godelier (1978 : 764) called this, 'ideel realities'. According to him an 'ideel element' is contained in every material relationship with the material nature surrounding us "all social relations arise and exist simultaneously both in thought and outside of it - that all social relations contain, from the outset, an 'ideel element' which is not a posteriori reflection of it, but a condition for its emergence and ultimately an essential component. The 'ideel element' exists not only in the form of the content of consciousness, but in the form of all those aspects of social relations that make them relations of significance and make their meaning or meanings manifest" (Godelier 1978 : 766).

Social and technological change among the Lepcha of Zongu is less evident but in Kalimpong due to the impact of Christianity and proximity to the stream of modernization flowing in Kalimpong town it is more evident.

The Statutory Village panchayat which is now the custodian of power and authority is an important element of social system. The panchayat regulates the inter-personal and inter-ethnic relations which comprises of settlement of disputes in the village. But there is a constant conflict between the modern statutory panchayat and the older Mondal centred village council. This tension has been minimised by taking Mondal as an ex-officio member of the panchayat in Zongu and other parts of Sikkim. This is indeed a wise decision

to minimise the conflict between traditional and modern political systems. The attachment to religion is much more among the Lepcha of Zongu than that among their Kalimpong counterpart.

It is understood that though the Lepcha subsistence economy has changed from hunter food gatherer type to the terrace agricultural through the intermediate stage of shifting cultivation, but the social structure of the Lepcha society has not changed considerably to accommodate the economic transformation which caused a 'cultural lag' in the Lepcha society. The concept of 'cultural lag' was first introduced by W.F. Ogburn in his book Social Change, which was published in 1922. Since then 'cultural lag' has been discussed from different angles by sociologist and social anthropologist. According to this theory, the culture of any society consists of a pattern of interrelated elements. In modern societies, it is technological change that sets the pace. To him, "Technological progress produces rapid changes in the material aspect of our culture, but the non-material aspects fail to adjust or they do so only after an excessive time lag. As a result many troublesome social problems are created" (Ogburn, 1922).

With the help of this theory we can easily see and explain the situation where all aspects of the Lepcha culture had not changed at the same rate at the same time. Hence, rapid change in the economic or subsistence part of the cultural pattern of the Lepcha society created strains and disturbances in the other closely related parts like social, political and religious. Adjustments between these parts will have to be made eventually to restore the harmony in the

internal structure of the Lepcha society to have an uniform structural change. But there will naturally be a time lag before harmony is restored. This is known as 'cultural lag'.

Until about seventy years ago most of the Zongu Lepcha used to take forest dyes to Lachen, the Tibet border in north Sikkim, which they exchanged for Tibetan salt and wool. They took these to Darjeeling and exchanged it for raw cotton, which their women spun into cloth. At present the Lepcha are dependent upon the cloth purchased from market.

At present the Lepcha of Zongu are very much in the hand of Marwari money lenders. The Lepcha obtain advances in the form of seeds, cloth, salt and kerosene oil etc. and in payment they have to return a certain portion of the cardamom crop, without regard for what the current price rate for that particular year may eventually be. The money lenders do not allow the Lepcha to repay their debts in cash but only in cardamom. This makes the situation of the Lepcha of Zongu quite helpless. A further cause of debt is that the money lenders take every opportunity of imposing unwanted goods upon the Lepcha, who have not the strength of mind to refuse, especially when no payment is demanded at that time. This usually takes the form of cotton material of the very poorest quality, as a result of which most of the people, and particularly the children, are now-a-days clothed in material ill suited to the climate. At one time they used a great deal of wool, but in recent years most of the Tibetan wool (has to be a smuggled good) has been taken down to the market centres of Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Gangtok where it is

sold in bulk at a higher price.

This situation is an indirect effect of the sealing of the Tibetan border by the Chinese which has declined the trans-Himalayan trading. This of course require further probe.

Shifting Toward Peasantry

In the changing situation of the Lepcha economy, it is necessary to go into the paradoxical question of the position of the Lepcha in the tribe-peasant continuum. It is generally observed that the tribal communities in India are shifting from ideal tribal pole towards a peasant pole. Scholars like Risley (1915 : 72), Bose (1941), Ghurye (1959 : 19), Sinha (1965 : 1980) and others have conceived the transformation of tribal society into a peasant one in relation to the Brahmanic Varna-Jati model, as a part of the broad spectrum of Indian Hindu peasantry. Sinha (1980 : 1-3) while reviewing the position of Indian tribes in the context of their articulation with caste based Hindu Civilization states, "these essentially pre-literate groups, which were apparently outside the threshold of Brahmanic hierarchic civilization, were labelled as tribe - in their isolation the tribal societies are sustained by relatively primitive subsistence technology such as shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering and maintain an egalitarian segmentary social system... in Indian contest peasant societies are further characterised specifically by Varna-Jati system of birth ascribed status hierarchy and hereditary division of labour".

But the above paradigms do not help us in understanding

the transformation of tribes into peasants, who belong outside the fold of Varna-Jati based Hindu civilization, such as the Lepcha. Their marked incoherence with the caste based Hindu society is significant. These scholars could not explain what will happen to the tribes who belong outside the threshold of the Varna-Jati based Hindu civilization. How to ascertain the transformation of these tribes towards a peasant pole? The Lepcha a mongolian tribe of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim, are Buddhist in religion and in no way interested in adopting the life style of the hierarchically arranged Hindu Varna Jati civilization as a model despite their close association with the caste oriented Nepali society.

A critical delving of the Lepcha subsistence economy revealed the fact that within a very short period of time it has passed through hunting gathering to shifting cultivation stage and finally to settled agriculture in terraces (Campbell 1840, Gorer 1938). We know that in Zongu area of north Sikkim they simultaneously practise shifting cultivation at the higher altitude and settled agriculture in the wet terraces situated at the low altitude river beds. They practise slash and burn cultivation at the higher altitude field where terracing or plough cultivation is practically impossible due to the high incline of the land and other ecological factors. In a similar situation among the Mizos of Mizoram, Goswami has noted that the Mizos are clinging to shifting cultivation not because of any cultural moorings but because of constraints of nature (1978 : 264). The crops cultivated by the Lepcha in shifting cultivation are dry rice (used mainly in ritual), millet and buckwheat (phaper). But under the changed situation the Lepcha have largely given up their attachment to more primitive form of production technology and have

taken up advanced technology of cultivation which affiliates them with the more prosperous communities living in the neighbourhood. Thus the tribe is no longer self-contained as they happened to be in the olden days. They practise plough cultivation in the glen. The major food crops grown by the Lepcha in wet cultivation are paddy, maize and millet.

The production of cash crops can be taken as an indication of social change. Through the production of cash crop self-contained subsistence economy of the Lepcha came in contact with the market economy. Cardamom is exclusively produced as a cash crop in Zongu and other parts of north Sikkim. As a matter of fact the plantation of cardamom as a cash crop has become a part and parcel of Lepcha life in Zongu, though it is a recent importation from Nepal, always referred to by its Nepali name elainchi. In Zongu almost every family possesses some cardamom fields. It is also found that a few families have started the cultivation of cardamom in rice terraces. Cardamom provides them with a ready cash and there is no government tax on land under cardamom cultivation. The Lepcha of Zongu are not much interested in growing other cash crops like orange, ginger, potatoe because these are perishable products and can not be stored and also need good arrangement for marketing the products. Quick transportation is also necessary.

Since agriculture is the basis of livelihood among the Lepcha of Sikkim, as well as of the Lepcha of Darjeeling, land is of utmost importance in their life. The evolution of the Lepcha subsistence economy can be seen through the evolution of the system

of land tenure. Land tenure is the rules regulating how land is owned and used. It is a combination of land tenancy and land labour management, making allocation of land resources for agricultural purpose a major facet of organisation which people impose on the space around them.

At present, in Zongu area of north Sikkim lands are classified into four categories -

1. Semiforest land for shifting cultivation in the higher altitude fields. This is the oldest type of land in terms of chronology.
2. Sukha-Khet or dry land (un-irrigated and usually untterraced). This is the next type of land in chronological order, it comes after the semi forest land used for shifting cultivation and runs almost parallel in temporal sequence. Dry rice, millet and maize are grown in this type of land but unlike the semi forest land used for shifting cultivation these lands are permanent in nature.
3. Pani-Khet or wet land (irrigated and terraced). This is a recent phenomena in the life of the Lepcha of Zongu introduced by the Nepalis. But in Kalimpong it was in existence for quite some time.
4. Cardamom field - This is a special category of land used only for cardamom cultivation. Since cardamom is a cash crop which fetches a good income to the state, it enjoys some

privilege, no tax is imposed on the land under cardamom cultivation.

As it has already been mentioned that due to their horticulturist tradition the Lepcha themselves prefer to keep the land under shifting cultivation, which they cultivate solely by family labour. In Zongu they retain the cardamom fields because of its monetary value and some wet paddy fields which they cultivate by employing daily labourers, family members and by mutual exchange of labour, but they let out their excess dry and wet lands to the neighbouring Nepalis on share cropping basis, as they are the only land owning community in the region. They have considerable amount of excess land which are given out to other communities (Nepali) on a temporary basis. As a result different types of tennancy systems have emerged in the Zongu area of north Sikkim, as an adaptive mechanism peculiar to this region.

1. Adhiar or pakhure - Production under this system is divided on a fifty fifty basis between the land lord and the tenant after the seeds required for the next crop the next crop are set aside.
2. Kuth - Under this system the tenant enters into a contract with the Lepcha land owner to pay a specified amount of crop no matter what the quantity of crop is ultimately produced.

Besides these there are different agrarian classes like non-cultivating land owner, cultivating land owner, cultivating land owner-cum-share-cropper etc. which have been mentioned earlier.

In Zongu area, as evident from the Lingdong village, no Lepcha family does share-cropping. But in Kalimpong the Lepcha do share cropping. To work as a agricultural labourer is extremely rare among the Lepcha. The cultivating-cum-non-cultivating category i.e. who cultivate some portion of his land with full control over the productive system and let out the rest of it to the share croppers, are most common among the Lepcha. The non-cultivating land owners on the other hand are fully dependent on the share croppers. In Zongu most of the big land holders do have some good irrigated land and cardamom field in higher proportion than other smaller farmers. Obviously these types of land have helped them to become somewhat affluent. As a matter of fact the large land owners among the Lepcha are not as hapless as the small land owners.

In an agrarian society, the ownership and non-ownership of land provides an important basis for social cleavage and conflict (Beteille 1974 : 129). But the dichotomy does not fully explain the complex agrarian class structure as there are some land owners owning small amount of land while others with large amount of land. In the Zongu area of north Sikkim conflict of interests exists between the landless Nepalis and land owning Lepchas on one hand and within the Lepcha society between the large land owners and small landowners on the other.

Redfield defined 'peasant' in terms of his concept of 'great tradition' and 'little tradition' and peasant for Redfield is a cultural status "it is a dimension of the civilization of which it is a part" (1956 : 68). The peasant societies are further characterized by

local oral traditions but have also channels of communication with the specialists (literati) and centres of civilization (ibid : 102). These centres are connected with countrywide networks of cultural communication with other centres as well as with village communities (Marriott and Cohn, 1958). Sinha (1965 : 60) considered stratified land tenure system as a structural features of peasant along with the its extensive territorial affiliations with multiple centres of civilization which dissociates them from an ideal tribal pole. As opposed to this a tribal group is marked with the disconnection from the great traditions of Indian civilization.

Eric Wolf (1965) viewed peasantry from economic point of view. To him peasant is an agricultural producer, a landed proprietor with effective control of the land he works (rather than a dependent tenant, field hand etc.) and a subsistence oriented cultivator who, though he may sell crops, does so in order to meet every day needs. Firth (1966 : 5) included even fishermen into peasantry on the basis of their substantial production for subsistence as well as for the market.

Thus, we can differentiate the basic characteristics of the peasant society into different levels of understanding viz. cultural level and economic level. At the cultural level peasant belong to the local traditions but interact with the great traditions of which it is a perpetual part (Redfield, 1956). At the economic level peasant is a land based subsistence agriculturist with some surplus to sell, though may not be self sufficient and dependent upon market economy.

Culturally whether the tribe is associated with peasantry

can be ascertained on the basis of its cultural participation and institutional incorporation into the civilizational centres. A tribe becomes part of the institutional structure only when it adopts 'great traditions' and thereby losing its own identity (Bhandari 1978 : 246).

The understanding of cultural transformation of the people who are living between two great civilization viz. Indian Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, and aspiring to link themselves with values other than that of the Varna Jati based Hindu great tradition is somewhat different, because India is not under any single 'great tradition', rather two or even more 'great traditions' are operative in the Indian sub-continent. The sub Himalayan regions like Sikkim, Bhutan and a portion of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, like many other regions of India, are under the influence of Buddhist great tradition.

In this way the Buddhist Lepcha have extensive territorial affiliations and diverse network of relationships with multiple centres of civilization like Gangtok, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong with Lhasa being the supreme centre of Lamaist learnings before the Chinese occupation in 1962. Lamas are the specialists (literati) who read the sacred Lamaist texts. The Lepcha of Sikkim and Darjeeling professed to Mahayana Buddhism or Lamaism with a country-wide networks of monasteries (Centres) of different statuses in the towns and villages through which the Lepcha local tradition is connected with a country-wide network of cultural communication with other big centres of civilization and with the great tradition. Christian Missions and Churches perform somewhat similar functions among the Christian

Lepcha of Darjeeling.

At the economic level, the presence of market oriented cash economy and a complex land tenure system along with other peasant features discussed earlier bring them nearer to the peasant pole of the continuum. The transformation from tribe to peasantry, outside the Hindu society, have taken place without caste being a referent group. The Lepcha who happened to be a member of tribal community in all its intent and purpose show definite signs of peasantry.

It may be realised that the time has come to give a re-thinking of the concept of 'Tribe' and 'Peasant' in the light of recent studies and researches. The tribal communities in India (except a few) are seen to be not as sequester, unstratified and egalitarian as they were earlier believed to be. The idea about peasant to whom agriculture is a livelihood and a way of life and not a business for profit (Redfield 1956 : 27) has to be reconsidered in the changing agrarian situation. Because a concept that could be applied twenty five years ago is rather difficult to apply today. Ideal peasants were characterised by small holding, cultivated mainly by family labour. Now-a-days it is not worth to cover all the agrarian classes, non-cultivating land owners at one end and share-cropper and agricultural labourers at the other, with a single blanket term peasant (Beteille 1974 : 25). Because, in Indian situation peasantry suigeneris includes various agrarian classes of different interests.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate the role of Christian Missionaries whether for good or bad but there can be

nothing but praise for the work done by the Church of Scotland among the Lepcha and others in Kalimpong area. In the Kalimpong hills the Missionaries like Dr. Graham Homes gave most importance to raising the standards of health and living, and in most cases conversion only took place at the personal request of the individual concerned. As a matter of fact a good number of the Lepcha in Kalimpong and Darjeeling are Christian, not because there is difference between Buddhism and Christianity, or between the latter and Hinduism, but because the Lepcha have no caste. It is, for instance, possible for one member of a Lepcha family to become a Christian without his relations with the rest of the family becoming in any way estranged, whereas a Nepali who is a Hindu to take most obvious example, becomes completely outcasted on conversion and can no longer even eat with his family. Intermarriage between the Christian and Buddhist Lepcha are very much evident in Darjeeling.

So far occupation is concerned more than ninety per cent of the Lepcha are agriculturist. Only a few of them accepted teaching as a profession in the rural areas of Sikkim, where Lepcha language is being taught at the school level. Otherwise, occupational mobility is very much less among the Lepcha. But the Nepalis do not adhere to any particular occupation. They accept any occupation that is available, agricultural labour, or work in road construction, transport etc. to name a few. The Bhotia on the other hand are gradually shifting towards various white colour jobs.

Formal education is quite high among the Lepcha of Darjeeling, it is very low among the Lepcha of Zongu. Only a few

adults in Zongu are formally educated. Earlier, young people used to go to Gangtok to be educated with the idea that on return they would be of some help to the people in their dealings with the traders and money lenders. But instead they were only taught Tibetan.

Drinking is probably the greatest social evil in the Lepcha life, which might have a bearing on the question of sterility. All the Lepcha, men, women, and children drink chi (millet beer) and in Zongu it is unusual to find an adult completely sober after sunset. During my stay in Lingdong almost every evening my bed at the camp was occupied by some one who was unable to walk back to his house after consuming excessive amount of liquor.

Another consequential cause of poverty among the Lepcha is their sacrifice of cattle, pig and fowl on the advice of their Bonthing priests in times of illness. Until this habit is stopped, by the deliverance of the people from the fear of evil spirits, the condition of the Lepcha will perhaps remain unchanged.

Zongu is now a Lepcha reserve where they are protected and is, to all, intent and purpose an ethnographic museum. This, in view of their many admirable qualities, would be a pity as no one can wish to see them preserved like museum specimens which, in Zongu, is what they are at present. They are lacking any futuristic ambition. All a Lepcha wants is some food, a cosy little home and a few clothes, beyond this he is not interested. Jealousy is unknown to them. "In their social structure they have all the makings of a perfect socialistic pattern of society, but they have no guidance and

leaderhsip. What they require, is a missionary, a non-religious missionary" (Morris, 1938).

