

**THE LEPCHAS
OF
DARJEELING AND SIKKIM
A STUDY IN CULTURAL ECOLOGY
AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

*Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)
of the
University of North Bengal*

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C O N T E N T S

	Page
List of maps and figures	v
List of tables	v
List of photographs	vii
Preface	viii
CHAPTERS	
1. Introduction	1 - 17
Cultural ecology and social change	1
The objective	11
The methodology	12
The Lepcha in literature	14
2. The Physical Setting	18 - 22
River system	19
Geology	19
Flora	20
Fauna	21
Rainfall	21
Ethnic environment	22
3. The People and Their Ethno-History	23 - 33
Decadal variation	25
Physical traits and character	29
Myth of origin	29
Historical background	30
4. The Villages Under Study	34 - 54
Definition of a village	34
Village Nassey	36

Village Pagang	41
Village Lingdong	46
5. Material Culture	55 - 69
Settlement pattern	55
A Lepcha house	58
House types : traditional and modern	61
Agricultural tools	64
Role of forest	65
Food and drinks	66
Dress and ornaments	68
6. The Economic Context	70 - 143
Agriculture	72
Lepcha agricultural calendar : traditional	73
Lepcha agricultural calendar : contemporary	75
Traditional agricultural system	75
Division of labour in shifting cultivation and its social consequences	84
Contemporary agricultural system	86
Types of land and soils	87
Methods of cultivation	89
Rice cultivation	92
Maize	97
Millet	98
Potatoes	99
Cardamom	100
Orange	103
Cauliflower	104
Agricultural transformation and some related factors	107
Land	110
Nassey village	111
Pagang village	113
Lingdong village	115
Conversion into acreage	116
Land tenure system	119

Agrarian class structure	121
Social organization of production	128
Cropping pattern	129
Occupation	137
Rituals connected with agriculture	138
Animal husbandry	140
7. Social Organisation	144 - 173
Origin of clans	146
Lineage	147
Family	148
Kinship and descent	152
Birth	157
Marriage and sex	159
Marriage ceremony	166
Death	170
8. Political Organisation	174 - 182
Traditional political system	175
Contemporary political system	178
9. The Religion	183 - 196
10. Discussion : Cultural Ecology and Social Change	197 - 219
Shifting towards peasantry	208
11. Summary and Observation	220 - 227
References Cited	228
APPENDIXES	
A. Kinship Terms	234
B. Photographs	238



M A P S

1.	The study area	13
2.	Distribution of the Lepcha	27

F I G U R E S

1.	Sketch of a Lepcha house	57
2.	Ground plan	57
3.	Plough type	63
4.	Inheritance pattern in parallel descent	155
5.	Ecological Paradigm	198

T A B L E S

1.	Lepcha population in different decades in Darjeeling and West Bengal	25	✓
2.	Lepcha population in different decades in Sikkim	26	
3.	Lepcha population Vs. general population in Darjeeling	26	
4.	Distribution of Lepchas in Darjeeling	28	
5.	Community wise population of Nassey	37	
6.	Sex wise distribution of the population of Nassey	38	
7.	Literacy in Nassey	40	
8.	Literacy percentage of Nassey	40	
9.	Community wise population of Pagang	44	
10.	Sex wise population of village Pagang	44	
11.	Literacy of the village Pagang	45	
12.	Literacy percentage of Pagang	45	
13.	Community wise population of Lingdong	50	
14.	Sex wise population of village Lingdong	51	
15.	Literacy of the village Lingdong	52	
16.	Literacy percentage of Lingdong	52	

17.	Labour required in Lingdong and Nassey to cultivate paddy in one acre of land	97
18.	Landholding by communities in Nassey	111
19.	Landholding pattern in Nassey	112
20.	Landholding by communities in Pagang	113
21.	Landholding pattern in Pagang	114
22.	Landholding by communities in Lingdong	117
23.	Landholding pattern in Lingdong	118
24.	Comparative landholding categories	119
25.	Agrarian class structure of Nassey	123
26.	Agrarian class structure of Pagang	124
27.	Agrarian class structure of Lingdong	127
28.	Production of crops among the Lepcha in three villages under study	131
29.	Cropping pattern of village Nassey	132
30.	Cropping pattern of village Pagang	133
31.	Cropping pattern of village Lingdong	134
32.	Livestock population of the villages (among the Lepcha community)	141
33.	Size of the family	149
34.	Types of family	150
35.	Family forms	150
36.	Annual calendar of festivals/rituals	189

P H O T O G R A P H S

1. Panaromic view of Lingdong Village
2. View of a Lepcha traditional house
3. A Lepcha old man
4. A Lepcha mother and her child
5. Plot for shifting cultivation
6. Terrace ploughing
7. Cardamom field
8. A pig house in Kalimpong
9. Bamboo container for chi
10. Preaching of Christianity

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## PREFACE

Most of the ethnographic research of this study was done within the period from 1979 to 1981, and all accounts refer to this period. However, two short visits were paid to Kalimpong and Zongu area of north Sikkim in 1986 and 1989, respectively, to collect a few additional data and photographs.

The bibliographic references are limited to works used directly in the text. The demographic figures used in this study could not be stretched beyond 1971, as 1981 census is not fully available and there is no community wise break up of population in 1981 census. Sikkim being a native kingdom till 1975, no proper census enumeration was carried out and the present study has suffered due to that.

All local words that appear in the text are underlined. The words like Lama, Bonthing etc. begin with capital letters in confirmatory to the special status of the individual, rest of the local words begin with small letters. Each word is explained either directly in the text or within parentheses. Local words include both Lepcha and Nepali words which are used by the Lepcha.

One significant event has taken place in the hills of Darjeeling in the mean time. The Gorkhaland movement. The effect of which on the Lepcha of Darjeeling could not be assessed. The Lepcha of Sikkim remain out of this movement.

Change in the ecological and social system has not yet become definitive. I hope that my use of the works of others, and my own

observations do not misrepresent the Lepcha way of life during this time. Any errors of judgement, observation and facts must remain my responsibility.

The continuing research of anthropologists, geographers, human ecologists and others have greatly enriched our knowledge in the field of cultural ecology and social change. This dissertation has drawn on their works. I am grateful to them.

This work was carried out under the supervision of Professor **N. C. Choudhury**, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal. The constant help, encouragement and able guidance that I received from him is inestimable and is difficult to express in words.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to examine the Lepcha, a mongoloid tribe (Gorer 1938 : 35) of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim, as living and moving entity caught in the maelstrom of modernization in a specific eco-cultural context. The enquiry shall centre around primarily to an understanding of the (1) social and cultural perspective which focuses on the Lepcha socio-cultural traditions in the context of their environment, (2) ecological perspective that demonstrates the fundamental functioning of the Lepcha subsistence agricultural system within an increasingly changing environment, (3) economic perspective that considers the transition of a community from hunting-food-gathering and shifting agricultural stage to settled agriculture consequently leading to a complex production system, such features as forms of land management, cash-cropping, wage labour, migration, effect of education on agricultural development and general course of economic development as provided by government and private agencies, and (4) spatial perspective that explores the relationship between geographical features and cultural and economic changes.

**Cultural Ecology and Social Change**

The theoretical basis of the above framework is derived from the anthropological approach to the study of cultural ecology, which needs some elaboration. Social and cultural anthropologists have long engaged themselves in various ecological studies, i.e. the study of the man-environment relationship. It is clear that both the spread of



knowledge and customs from one people to another, that is diffusion, and the part any element plays in the life of a people, that is its functional relations are extremely important in influencing the final pattern of human life in any one region or among any group.

However, Julian Steward (1955) has added a new dimension to the ecological study through the study of adaptation of specific items of culture to particular environment. This conception reduces ecology to something akin to a research technique. Steward develops a method for recognizing the ways in which culture change is induced by adaptation to environment. The adaptation, an important creative process, is called cultural ecology, a concept which is to be distinguished from the sociological concept, "human ecology" or "social ecology" (Steward 1955 : 5). "Cultural ecology differs from human and social ecology in seeking to explain the origin of particular cultural features and patterns which characterise different areas rather than to derive general principles applicable to any cultural-environmental situation" (Steward 1955 : 36). Social ecology is mainly concerned with the community as its unit of study, not the culture, which rests at least in a secondary position.

Steward's major focus is on social organisation associated with environmental exploitation and its relation to what he calls the "cultural core". The cultural core, a flexible concept, concerns those aspects of culture and social organization that are tied more or less directly to technology and subsistence. Three fundamental procedures of cultural ecology are set forth by Steward. These are analyses of : (1) the relation between environment and exploitative or productive

technology, (2) the behaviour patterns involved in the exploitation of a particular area by means of a particular technology, and (3) the extent to which the behaviour patterns entailed in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of culture (Steward 1955 : 40).

Cultural ecology is, therefore, a conceptual and methodological tool to study the processes by which a society adapts to its environment. It analyses these adaptations, however in conjunction with other processes of change. The field of cultural ecology encompasses a genuinely wholistic approach, as it includes such factors like, settlement pattern, agriculture, land use, and the social arrangements that are required in land exploitation. It also includes other key cultural features like, demography, population structure and composition, territoriality of societies and inter societal relationships, incidence of disease, inter-marriage and warfare (Steward 1955 : 40-42).

A similar view has also been expressed by Edgerton (1965 : 443). To him ecology is both natural environment and the social setting of the surrounding people, warfare, trade and colonial intervention, while relationships between 'ecology' and 'culture' are complicated and reciprocal, at least some economic adjustments generate predictable and pervasive consequences in social organization, cultural content and even in personality patterns.

Roy Rappaport (1968) has successfully correlated ecology with religion and ritualistic activities. He has documented among the Tsembaga maring horticulturist of New Guinea that ritual behaviour

plays an important role in regulating a number of demographic and ecological variables, like the growth in pig population, the necessity of bringing more land under cultivation, scattering of house sites to bring people closer to outlying fields and to reduce interpersonal conflict. The cycle is reversed by the ritual celebration of a pig festival in which large numbers of animals are slaughtered and community nucleation takes place. Among other things he was able to show that the ritual killing of domestic pigs helps to maintain an undegraded environment, limits fighting to frequencies that do not endanger the existence of regional populations, adjusts man-land ratios, distributes local surpluses of pig in the form of pork throughout the regional population, and assures people of high quality protein when they most need it (ibid : 224).

The type and distribution of basic resources comprise only one aspect of an environment - the natural setting. But human populations make up another and no less basic aspects ; every society must adjust to the presence and activities of neighbouring people, just as surely as it must adapt to the quality and distribution of food supplies and raw materials. Thus Barth (1956) attempts a more specific ecological approach to a case study of distribution by utilizing some of the concepts of animal ecology, particularly the concept of niche - the place of a group in the total environment, its relations to resources and competitors. Barth made an elaborate study on the form and distribution of neighbouring ethnic groups in Swat in North Pakistan. Different environmental zones are exploited by sedentary agriculturist Pathans, farmer-herder Kohistanis, and nomadic pastoral Gujars. Pathans are confined to low altitude, where double cropping

can provide the surplus necessary to support a more highly developed economy and political organization. A more secure climate characterises the high mountains, where the Kohistanis practise single crop cultivation and transhumant herding. They were apparently driven into a less desirable area by the militarily stronger Pathans. Gujar nomads mingle symbiotically with both groups, trading milk, meat and manure of food grains and other supplies. They act as a socially subordinate groups using pasture lands that can not for various reasons be made productive by other two groups. Differing political structure, community size and social status characterize each people.

In an other paper Barth (1950 : 338) has stated that cultural change may be described in term of the ecological adaptation towards which it is making since this is a major controlling factor of the change. Barth, in contrast to cultural evolutionists, sees the environment as the controlling rather than limiting factor in change.

Carneiro (1967 : 239) has long emphasized the relationship between complexity and population density, According to him the societies become more complex only by growing larger or that as they grow larger they invariably become more complex. Rather the contention is that if a society does increase significantly in size, and if at the same time it remains unified and integrated, it must elaborate its organization. For Carneiro the elaboration of social structure is a systemic response to stress generated by the multiplication of unit.

Clifford Geertz's agricultural involution was another

milestone in ecological anthropology. His approach is rooted in cultural ecology, but his perspective is based upon the concept of the system (1963 : 14). A system is a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes. Instead of focussing upon "reciprocal causality" between two objects or processes, the system focuses upon a complex network of mutual causality. The methods of system analysis are used, first, to define the boundaries and environment of a system and, second, to model its complexity in such a way that system behaviour can be studied and predicted.

The above mentioned studies are only a few among the ecology oriented studies in anthropology which deserve mentioning. Ecological studies in anthropology have only begun to realise their potential and in every respect is in its infancy. But it is already obvious that these studies arise not from a new dogma but from an attempt to widen existing perspectives in the science of man. As our dependency on the physical environment and the effects of disturbing intricately functioning ecosystems become more critically apparent, we need to know more about the varieties of long-standing and successful human adaptation. It is both possible and necessary to gather empirical data on operating social groups, describing their technology of production and distinguishing what variables are effective in their surroundings, and assembling reliable quantitative profiles of production, labour input, rights to resources and consumption. To be convincing that the findings require not only correlations leading to logical functional explanations, but also cross-cultural comparisons and the evidence of historical change.

An ecological approach to anthropology involves studying society as part of a system in which natural resources and environment, technology, the division and type of labour necessary for human subsistence, culture, and social groupings and relationships all constitute interdependent elements of the system; and they are adapted to the environment and vary according to regional or local circumstances.

Morris Ginsberg (1958 : 205) defined social change as, "a change in the social structure, e.g. the size of a society, the composition or imbalance of its parts or the type of its organization. The term 'social change' must also include changes in attitudes or beliefs, in so far as they sustain institutions and change with them".

The field of enquiry is thus very wide. Examples of such changes are the smallness in the size of the family, or rather the domestic unit, which has occurred and is occurring in many societies. Social change is not a mechanical addition or subtraction but the integration of the new among the old. Every advance, therefore, depends on the pre-existing pattern and must fit into it, and in doing so an intrusive element will probably undergo changes itself.

In his article on social change in International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (Vol. 14, P. 366), Willbert E. Moore states, "social change is the significant alternation of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols".

Social structure, therefore, is to be defined as "the continuing arrangement of persons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions, i.e. socially established norms or patterns of behaviour" (Radcliffe-Brown 1960 : 147). A theoretical framework for the analysis of social change must be concerned largely with what happens to social structures. But to be truly dynamic it must allow for individual action and account the aspects of social organization i.e., the actual behaviour by the members of the society. As a member of society, each separate individual is striving to attain his ends, interacting with other members in the process. All of them are largely governed in their behaviour by the set of established basic relationships of the social structure (Firth 1954 : 83).

So here by social change I mean the overall changes that have taken place in the Lepcha society. But first of all I consider the changes which occurred in their subsistence patterns i.e., the culture core (Steward, 1955). My basic intention is to use the methodological expertise of 'cultural ecology' as a heuristic device for studying social change. Because the main and most obvious effect of environment on a primitive people, is of course upon their economy - on how they gain a livelihood - and it is through the economy the environment most influences social relations (Lienhardt 1964 : 41). Since the non-human environment is always conditional relative to the technology, social organization, and cultural values of human societies (Moore 1978 : 20). The dimension to the study of people and their environment which particularly concerns social anthropologists as distinct from ecologists or geographers is man's adaptation to their environment which greatly influences not only material culture

but also systems of ideas. Again while considering the Lepcha society I have also considered the neighbouring societies like Nepalis and Bhotias because the environment of any one ethnic group is not only defined by natural conditions, but also by the presence and activities of the other ethnic groups with whom it cohabits (Barth 1956 : 1079).

So the social change must be regarded as an epiphenomenon of a great variety of processes in combination. Most of the salient constraints on the course of change will be found to be social and interactional and will derive from the existing social and ecological system within which change is taking place (Barth 1967 : 663).

As far as social change is concerned, the impact of social environment is probably more important than the impact of the non-social environment. For any period likely to be analysed sociologically, the non-social environment of land, water, air, fauna and flora will usually be much the same at the end of the period of change as at the beginning. Therefore, the non-social environment will have had its effect on the social system before social change begins. Moreover, changes due to the non-social environment - for example, the presence or depletion of some resources - are frequently due to social action, to cultural change, or to change in the social environment. Nevertheless, changes in the non-social environment, however, they themselves were caused, do sometimes require adaptive social changes.

A closely related problem is the temporal aspects of



ecological adjustment, the dynamics of the historical processes under which adaptation operates. A people's history takes place within a broader social context of other people ; a most significant element in the environment of a society, is the community of societies of which it is a part (Goldschmidt 1965 : 403).

In the present study, I have tried to take the help of various concepts and methods of ecological studies in anthropology. I have not discarded the historical approach, origin of social and cultural institutions, though of course more emphasis have been given to the economic institutions. Change is often viewed through time perspective.

Though social change refers to changes in the social structure, the explanations have not been kept too rigid to include only the structural or radical changes alone. Organizational changes (changes in ways of doing things) have also been incorporated ; organizational change involves some change in the social relations and hence in social structure.

Again, throughout the study and analysis, no hard and fast differentiation is maintained between social and cultural change because of an intimate relationship between the two. Our discussion implies that a model that explain economic growth must consider non-economic as well as economic aspects of human behaviour. This is seen also from the fact that the economic state of a society is closely related to its social state, and that the forces that bring change in one aspect also bring some sort of change in the other aspects too.

The above mentioned approach has been applied to Lepcha community because the Lepcha community is one which is closely dependent upon the land and the seasons. Primitive communities exist in such a state of dependence ; and in primitive communities we find it possible to describe concurrent regularities of man and nature in such a way as to include much of the life of the people and to describe the unique character of that people (Redfield 1960 : 29).

### The Objective

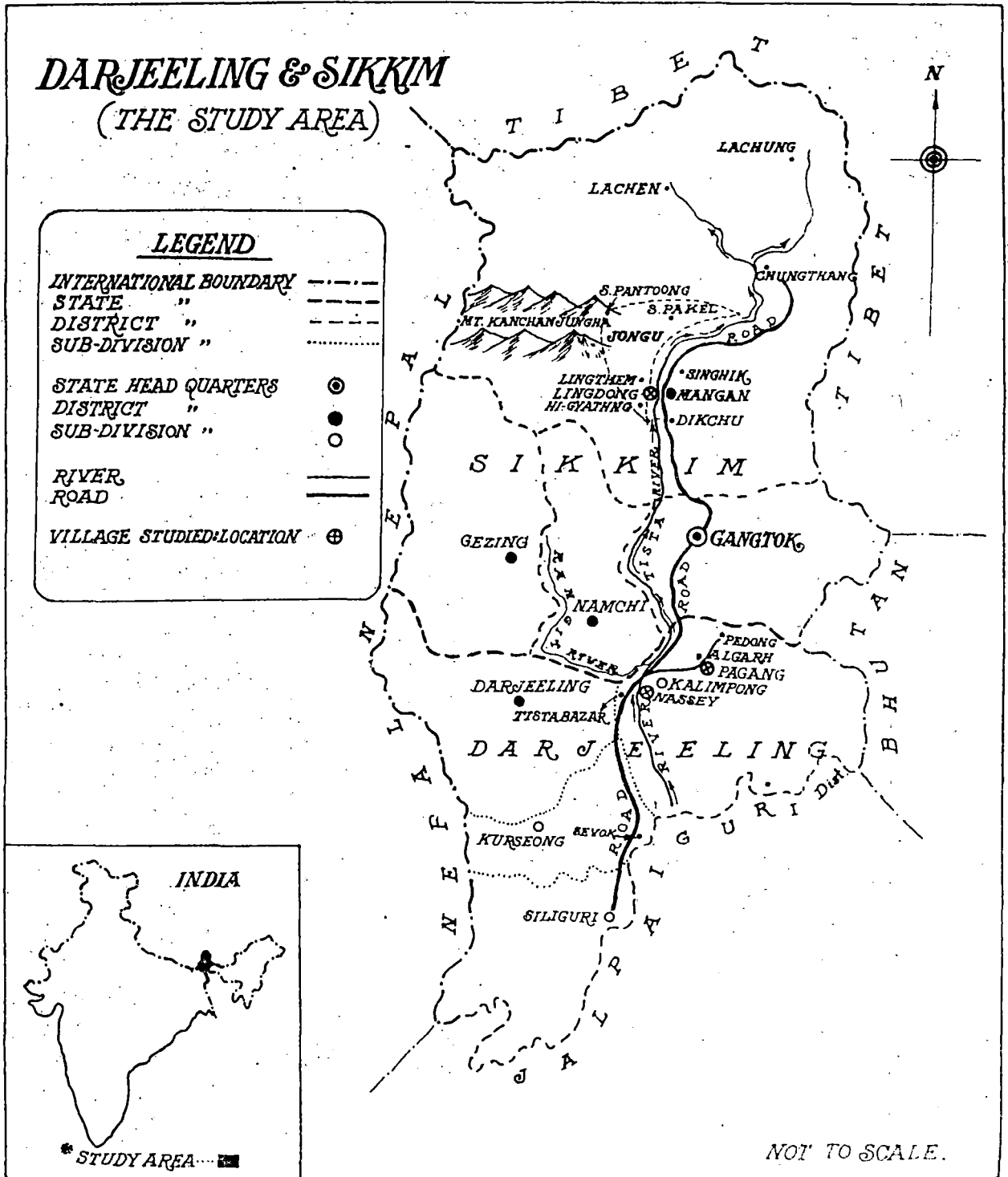
The Lepcha are an indigenous tribe of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal who once held sway over the vast forest and hill areas of this region. With the gradual easterly migration of the Nepalis from eastern Nepal, the Lepcha and to some extent the Bhotia receded in the background, so that the modern socio-political movements in the area is at present almost exclusively dominated by the Nepalis. Their economic backwardness is also considerable. As a society there are signs of the Lepcha disintegrating into numerous groups. Some of them had adopted Christianity while others have been deeply influenced by the Nepali Hindus with whom they maintain a close socio-cultural link. The Lepcha are also loosing their identity as an autochthonous ethnic and cultural group. Intermarriage and various types of interactions at multiple levels with other neighbouring communities, lack of occupational mobility, loss of land to the neighbouring communities, are among many factors contributing to the disintegration of the traditional Lepcha community. In the wake of this traumatic situation it is of considerable interest to find out how the Lepcha are redefining their identity, if at all,

and adapting to the forces of change. The objective of the present study is to know -

- I) the nature of socio-economic and socio-cultural adaptation and institutional changes that have taken place in the traditional Lepcha culture.
- II) the mechanism in which culture change is induced and how it has adapted to the different cultural-ecological situations.
- III) the interrelationship of productive technology i.e. the pattern of subsistence and the environment.
- IV) the extent to which the behaviour patterns entailed in subsistence activities and economic arrangements i.e. culture core (Steward, 1955) affect other aspects of culture such as social, political and religion (idid : 37 - 41).

### **The Methodology**

The study has been conducted in the historical as well as social, economic and religious spheres of the Lepcha. In carrying out field studies, villages, as units, have been selected from different parts of Darjeeling and Sikkim. To get an idea of the traditional Lepcha culture, a relatively isolated village in Sikkim (stated to be original home land of the Lepcha) has been studied. Further, two villages have been selected in Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district, where the Lepcha live in a more exposed to modernization processes, one near the Kalimpong town and the other a little away from the town. In these villages with the help of concrete case histories, two sets of people, i.e. one of the present generation and the other of one or two ascending generations have



MAP : 1

been interviewed. To get an idea of the Lepcha past I have made extensive use of the available old literature on the Lepcha. The standard ethnographic method has been adopted in collecting data through concrete case histories, supplemented by personal observation as well as open end questionnaires and schedules. Many a information were obtained primarily from observation and through informal interviews, both directed and undirected. Interviews were conducted wherever and whenever the occasion arose - in my camp house, at the house of villagers, or in the yard, in the fields or at the water source. I participated in many socio-cultural events - the approach could be called participant observation - but real participation was a virtual impossibility in most situations. Being an outsider my participation was limited largely to informal social situations, and even there I was usually in the role of guest, invited or uninvited.

All studies in social change should have a base line. For my study I have taken the year 1900 A.D. as the base line because most of the writings on these people date from the beginning of this century. Beside the materials collected from old literature and interviewing the old people, to get an idea of temporal changes I have applied a third approach, the spatial one, in which Lepchas living in different villages, one in the traditional spot of Zongu in Sikkim, one near the Kalimpong town and the other in-between the two, have been intensively studied to understand the spatial dimensions in the processes of change.

### The Lepcha in Literature

The literature dealing with the Lepcha are scanty in

number, piecemeal in the nature and excepting a few mostly are travalogue in character.

One of the earliest studies on the Lepcha in English is of Dr. A. Campbell's (1840) - "Note on the Lepchas of Sikkim with a vocabulary of their language". He described them as poor agriculturists, nomadic in nature, who subsisted on wild roots fruits and tubers. He also stated that the Lepcha were Buddhist in religion and bury their dead.

Dalton (1872) has also provided us with some information on the Lepcha of Sikkim and their customs etc.

Risley (1891 : 10) also expressed his views about the Lepcha. According to him most Lepchas of that period professed to be Buddhist, however it was clear that at no very distant time their sole belief was a shamanistic animism. Conspicuous traces of this faith still survive among them, imperfectly hidden by their veil of Buddhistic usage. To him Lepchas were peace loving and indolent in nature.

Waddell (1899) pointed out that Lepchas were rapidly loosing their identity before the tide of the emigrants from the more active and civilised tribes who had lately swept in great waves into their country. He had also stated about the role of environment in the formation of their character and described them as a born naturalist.

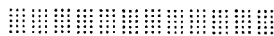
Among the authors of this century the writings of Donaldson (1900), Morris (1938) and Gorer (1938) should be specifically

mentioned. Mrs. Donaldson gave an exciting tale of travel and adventure in Sikkim. Morris's book covers the origin of the Lepcha, Lamaism, magical practices, religious ceremonies, etc.

However, the most authentic study of the Lepcha was done by Geoffrey Gorer - "Himalayan Village - an account of the Lepchas of Sikkim". This is an ethnographic account of the Lepcha of Sikkim as it existed in the village of Lingthem in Zongu area. His study is mainly centred on religion - animistic Bon and Tibetan Buddhism, with special reference to the personality formation of the people. Gorer writes, "As a society, with its unique conglomeration of attitudes, the Lepchas are certainly disappearing, for their culture presupposes a homogeneous interlocking community, and this as well as their complete suppression of competition and aggression, cause an inevitable breakdown of their culture in any mixed community" (1938 : 37).

Nakane's (1966) analysis of the plural society of Sikkim threw light on the interrelations of Lepcha, Bhotia and Nepalis. She observes that the Lepcha population of Sikkim now speaks Bhotia language, wears Bhotia dress and holds annual festivals according to the Buddhist calendar (ibid : 221). The Lepcha and the Bhotia constitute one religious entity and share many cultural traditions, whereas the Nepalis remain outside of this common Lepcha-Bhotia heritage. A. K. Das (1978) of the Cultural Research Institute of the Government of West Bengal has brought out a short hand book on the Lepcha of Darjeeling district only. This book contains a general account of the history, life and culture of the people.

So far all the studies on the Lepcha are basically from general ethnographic point of view. The only exception being the study of Gorer mentioned above. But this again is concerned primarily with religion and personality structure of the people. This study though has adopted ethnographical technique of data collection is nonetheless different from other studies so far done on the Lepcha. It is a purposive ethnography of a people in a changing ecological context. Here the economy in the ecological context has been seen as the mainstay of the culture with social, religious and political aspects of the life geared to it. Besides, in this study the territorial boundary between Darjeeling and Sikkim, so far as the Lepcha are concerned, has been ignored. The Lepcha of the two areas have been considered as one ethnic group.





## THE PHYSICAL SETTING

The Darjeeling district of West Bengal lies between 26°31' and 27°13' north latitude and between 87°59' and 88°53' east longitude. Its total area is about 3108 sq. km.

On the west the district is bounded by Nepal, on the south by Jalpaiguri district, on the north by Sikkim state and on the east by the kingdom of Bhutan. It has four subdivisions, three in the hills - Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong, and one in the plains - Siliguri.

Sikkim, the 22nd state of India, is a small mountainous country bounded by Tibet on the north, Bhutan on the east, Nepal on the west and West Bengal on the south. With an area of 7096 sq. km. it has varying elevations ranging from 800 ft. to 28,000 ft. above sea level. Ninety percent of its 300,000 inhabitants (as per 1971 census) live in villages.

Sikkim derived its name from the word "Sukhim" - means peace and happiness, and the Tibetans refer to it by the name of 'Denjong' - means the hidden valley of rice. Lepcha name for Sikkim is 'Mayel - Lyang', mayel means paradise and lyang means place. Buddhism (previously the state religion of Sikkim) in Sikkim follows the "Red hat" sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The erstwhile state of Sikkim was ruled by a king, popularly known as 'Chogyal'. The capital of Sikkim is Gangtok. Sikkim has got four administrative divisions or districts, viz. north, south, east and west. North district, the place of my study has a population of 13,014 as per 1971

census, and its head quarters is at Mangan. Next to a district is the revenue block or village. There is no subdivision or taluka in Sikkim.

The topography of Sikkim and Darjeeling is more or less similar in nature, undulating and rolled, with the presence of mountains, hills, valleys, gorges, rivers, rivulets and springs.

### River System

The river systems of the district of Darjeeling and Sikkim are in common. Main river of Darjeeling and Sikkim is Tista and its tributaries, it rises in a glacier in north Sikkim and drains the whole of Sikkim. Great Rangit flowing from the west of Sikkim joins with Tista at Rangpo of Sikkim from where it flows almost entirely in Darjeeling district until it leaves it at Sevok.

### Geology

Geological formation of the region can be divided into two distinct types, (1) the terai of Darjeeling and (2) the hill proper of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The terai is only 300 ft. above sea level. Geographically the terai belongs to the plains of India but geologically it is a sort of neutral country ; the greater part of it being composed neither of the alluvium of the plains nor of the rocks of the hills, but of alternating beds of sand, gravel and boulders brought down from the mountain. The geological formation of the hilly portion of Darjeeling

district and Sikkim consist of unaltered sedimentary rocks, confined to the hills on the south of Darjeeling, and different grades of metamorphic rocks over the rest of the area of Darjeeling district and the state of Sikkim.

The soil recognised by the cultivators, in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim, are of three kinds, white, red and black; of these the black soil is the richest, the white the poorest, the red soil occupying an intermediate position, requiring heavy manuring to give as good an outturn as the black. This last type is often found among large rocks and is suitable for dry crops, cultivated in dry land or sukha khet, such as maize and millet (marwa or kodo) owing to the rich vegetable mould it contains. The fertility of the soil depends much on the geological formation of the underlying rocks from which the soil is derived. Generally soils throughout the area are deficient in lime.

### Flora

The configuration of the mountains and hills of the area and the impact upon them of strong moisture-laden monsoon winds from the south greatly influence the character of the vegetation from place to place. Plant communities in the district of Darjeeling and Sikkim mainly consist of ferns and tree ferns; in addition there are mosses, algae, fungi and lichens. The forests of the hills of the region can be classified into three groups - (1) Lower, (2) Middle and (3) Upper. Lower hill forests mainly consist of sal (*shorea robusta*), pacca sag (*terminalia tomentosa*), simul (*salmalia malbarica*), toon (*cedrela toona*) and chikrassi (*chikrassia tabularis*). In the Rangit valley pine (*pinus longifolia*) is found in fair quantity. Tama bamboo

(*dendrocalamus*) forms almost pure bamboo forest in the moisture areas.

The chief species which occur in the middle hill forest are the alder or utis (*alnus nepalensis*), walnut (*juglans regia*), birch or saur (*betula alnoides*), oaks (*quercus*) etc.

The upper hill forests mainly consist of oaks and tite champ (*michelia cathcartii*). The commonest undergrowth are the small bamboo (*arundinaria recemosa*). In the regions over 6,000 ft. altitude occur patches of conifers (*tengre salla*), silver fir. Above this level the ground is almost entirely covered with the maling bamboo; but there are patches of rhododendron forest.

#### Fauna :

The fauna of the region mainly consist of rhesus monkeys (*macaca mulatta*), leopards (*panthera pardus*), jungle cat (*felis chaus affinus*), Himalayan jackal (*canis aureus indicus*), the hill fox (*vulpes bengulensis*), Himalayan black bear (*selenarctos thibatanus*), brown Himalayan goral (*nemorhaedus lodasoni*) and barking deer (*muntiacus uaginalis*), sambhur (*yusa. unicolor*) and Indian wild boar (*sus. cristatus*).

#### Rainfall

In the Darjeeling district rainfall varies considerably from 60 inches per annum in some parts of the Tista valley in the north of the district to over 200 inches on the outer slopes of the hills.

In Sikkim the climate varies between the tropical heat of the valleys and the alpine cold of the snowy ranges. The rainfall is very heavy, averaging 137 inches annually at Gantok, it is much heavier in north Sikkim. The rainy season is a season of disease, particularly malaria, intestinal and skin diseases. But the weather finally gets cooler and healthier, and a dry wintry period from October to March follows.

### **Ethnic Environment**

The Lepcha live in the district of Darjeeling and Sikkim along with other ethnic groups like the Bhotia and Nepalis, with whom they maintain a close socio-economic and political link at the village level. The population from plains of India have also increased steadily since last two decades or so. The Marwari and Behari came in Sikkim and Darjeeling as a business community. Whereas the involvement of Marwaris in trade and commerce is in a comparatively large-scale, who own various shops including those of essential commodities and are the principal buyer of cardamom crop in Sikkim, the Beharis are petty hawkers who roam over the village alleys to sell their things which include articles like cosmetics, biscuits, toys etc. The Bengalis came in the hills as government servants and contractors. Two sets of population are recognised in the area, the hillmen, consisting of the Lepcha, Bhotias and Nepalis and the plainsmen, consisting of Marwari and Behari businessmen and the Bengalis. The successive waves of migration of the Bhotias, Nepalis and the plainsmen have not only influenced the geo-political history of the region but have also altered its socio-economic character. We shall discuss these changes in the subsequent chapters.

## THE PEOPLE AND THEIR ETHNO-HISTORY

The Lepcha though are found in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, eastern Nepal, western Bhutan and in Sikkim, they regard Sikkim as their home land. They are considered as the aboriginal inhabitants of the hilly portion of the Darjeeling district and of Sikkim (Risley, 1891). They call themselves 'Rong'. Lepcha is a derogatory term given to them by the Nepalis meaning non-sense talkers (Lep-Cha). At all events they are the first known occupiers of this tract. The Lepcha call this area as 'Mayal Lyang' or 'Ney Mayel' which means garden of eden or paradise.

According to 1971 census the total population of Lepcha in West Bengal is 14,568 of which 13,373 is rural and 1,195 is urban. Out of 14,568 Lepchas of West Bengal 8,305 are male and 6,263 are female that is for every 1000 males there are 754 females. In comparison to the other tribal populations of the district the Lepcha have a considerable tendency and love for rural living and rural livelihood. Out of 14,568 Lepchas of West Bengal, 13,536 i.e. about 92.92 percent of the total Lepcha population reside in the Darjeeling district. 91 percent of the total Lepcha of Darjeeling reside in rural areas. Within this district, however, the main Lepcha concentration is in the Kalimpong subdivision. At present roughly about 6,085 Lepchas live in the Kalimpong sub-division, the area under Kalimpong police station serves as the main centre of their concentration, where they account for 36.51% of the Lepcha population of the district (Table No. 4).

According to 1951 census there were 13,756 Lepchas in Sikkim. The current census figures of Lepcha population in Sikkim is not

precisely available, it is known that a sizeable population of Lepchas, almost the same as in numbers of their West Bengal counterpart, live in Sikkim with their main concentration in the Zongu area of north Sikkim.

As per 1971 census Lepchas of the Darjeeling district constitute only 1.73% of the total population of the district. Total tribal population of this district is 108,586, out of which 13,536 is Lepcha, that is 12.47% of the tribal population is Lepcha.

In West Bengal 91.79% of the Lepcha population live in rural area and 8.20% in urban area. But the picture is quite different in the neighbouring tribe Bhotia. About 60.83% of the Bhotias live in the rural area and 39.17% in urban area. The Lepcha have considerable preference for rural living. (1971 census).

Out of 14,568 Lepchas of West Bengal 10,795 are illiterate (male 5,450 and female 5,345) and 3,773 literate (male 2,855 and female 918). Literacy percentage among the Lepcha is as high as 25.89%, which is only next to Bhotias (26.06) in West Bengal.

From Tables No. 1, 2 & 3 it is seen that the Lepcha are rapidly being outnumbered by the immigrant Nepalis in terms of their numerical strength. Due to enormous in-migration in the Darjeeling district the percentage of Lepcha population to total population has come down from 4.00 percent in the year 1901 to 1.73 per cent in 1971. Decline or low rate of growth of Lepcha population in Darjeeling district from 14,910 in 1961 to 13,536 in 1971 could be attributed to the fact that a sizeable number of Lepchas must have

been enumerated as Nepalis. Beside this, there has been an increasing trend among the Lepcha girls to marry the Nepalis. All these factors together are perhaps responsible for the decline in the number of Lepcha population. It also indirectly tells us that the Lepcha community is suffering from an identity crisis.

### Decadal Variation

Table No. 1

Lepcha population in different decades in Darjeeling and West Bengal

| Year | Total Lepcha population in West Bengal | Decadal variation | Percentage in decadal variation | Total Lepcha population in Darjeeling | Decadal variation | Percentage in decadal variation |
|------|----------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1    | 2                                      | 3                 | 4                               | 5                                     | 6                 | 7                               |
| 1901 | 10052                                  | -                 | -                               | 9772                                  | -                 | -                               |
| 1911 | 9842                                   | -210              | - 2.09                          | 9706                                  | - 66              | - 0.67                          |
| 1921 | 9669                                   | -173              | - 1.75                          | 9669                                  | - 37              | - 0.38                          |
| 1931 | 12719                                  | +3050             | +31.54                          | 12101                                 | + 2432            | + 25.15                         |
| 1941 | 12468                                  | -251              | - 1.97                          | 12468                                 | + 367             | + 3.03                          |
| 1951 | 13430                                  | +962              | + 7.71                          | 13164                                 | + 696             | + 5.58                          |
| 1961 | 15309                                  | +1879             | +14.00                          | 14910                                 | + 1746            | + 13.26                         |
| 1971 | 14568                                  | -741              | - 4.85                          | 13536                                 | - 1374            | - 9.21                          |



Table No. 2

## Lepcha population in different decades in Sikkim

| Year | Total Lepcha population in Sikkim | Decadal variation | Percentage in decadal variation |
|------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1    | 2                                 | 3                 | 4                               |
| 1901 | 7313                              | -                 | -                               |
| 1911 | 9031                              | + 1718            | + 23.49                         |
| 1921 | 9021                              | - 10              | - 0.11                          |
| 1931 | 13060                             | + 4039            | + 44.77                         |
| 1941 | 12523                             | - 537             | - 4.11                          |
| 1951 | 13756                             | + 1233            | + 9.84                          |
| 1961 | N.A.                              | -                 | -                               |
| 1971 | N.A.                              | -                 | -                               |

Table No. 3

## Lepcha population vs general population in Darjeeling

| Year | Lepcha population of Darjeeling | Total population of Darjeeling | Percentage of Lepcha population to total population |
|------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | 2                               | 3                              | 4                                                   |
| 1901 | 9772                            | 249117                         | 4.00                                                |
| 1911 | 9706                            | 265550                         | 3.65                                                |
| 1921 | 9669                            | 282748                         | 3.41                                                |
| 1931 | 12101                           | 319635                         | 3.78                                                |
| 1941 | 12468                           | 376369                         | 3.31                                                |
| 1951 | 13164                           | 445260                         | 2.95                                                |
| 1961 | 14910                           | 624640                         | 2.38                                                |
| 1971 | 13536                           | 781777                         | 1.73                                                |

# DARJEELING & SIKKIM

## DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEPCHA

**LEGEND**

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY - - - - -
- STATE " - - - - -
- DISTRICT " - - - - -
- SUB-DIVISION " - - - - -
- POLICE STATION . . . . .



NOT TO SCALE.

## Physical Traits and Character

The Lepcha are described by all who have written about them as physically of the true mongolian type. They are short in stature, averaging about 5 feet. The women bear towards them the usual proportion. The face is broad and flat, nose depressed, eye oblique, no beard, but very little moustache, complexion olive, and boys and girls in health have generally a reddish tinge which adds greatly to their good looks.

In disposition they are amiable and obliging, frank, humorous and polite. They are superior in morals to their Bhotia and Nepali neighbours, but they are indolent in nature and deficient in energy (Campbell, 1840). They are poor agriculturist in comparison to the Nepalis. Their traditional method of cultivation was slash and burn or shifting cultivation. Now-a-days they freely intermarry with the Nepali Limbus and Sikkimese Bhotias. The Lepcha have their own language and script. According to Grierson's classification Lepcha language belongs to the Himalayan group of Tibeto-Himalayan branch of Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Tibeto-Chinese family.

## Myth of Origin

The Lepcha trace their origin from the people of Mayel, situated in one of the inaccessible valleys of Mt. Kanchenjunga. Itupumu, the man and Kumsiting the woman, were born from the two peaks of Kanchenjunga. They created the Lepcha. The first man was called Torbongpu ; the first man Naripu and from them the

Lepcha descended.

### Historical Background

Sikkim was colonised by the Tibetans in the seventeenth century, which at that date included the present Darjeeling district. It is said that from Tibet three Red Hat sect Lamas fled to Sikkim due to some internal trouble in Tibet and converted the native Lepchas into Buddhist and created a Sikkimese Tibetan kingdom from which the royal family of Sikkim was descended (Gorer 1938 : 36).

From the time of the establishment of a Sikkimese kingdom, the Lepcha became an inferior subject race, under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhotias, to which society the Maharajah and the big landlords belonged. They drove the Lepcha into the lower valleys and gorges, in Sikkim the best land has been taken by the Bhotias (or Bhutias) and later by the Nepalis who have immigrated into the country in great numbers. In Darjeeling much of the jungle and cultivable land has been turned into tea estates ; in this district too there has been very considerable infiltration of Nepalis, coming from their relatively infertile & over populated country. They are more industrious and better cultivator than the Lepcha, the Nepalis are continuously displacing them everywhere.

In 1706 what is now the Kalimpong sub-division was taken from the Chogyal of Sikkim by the Bhutanese. In 1780 Nepali Gurkhas invaded Sikkim and a considerable part of Sikkim's territory was taken by them. Finally in 1817 by the treaty of Titaliya between Raja of Sikkim and East India Company, the British

recovered some of Sikkim's territory from the Nepalis and guaranteed Sikkim's sovereignty. Under the above treaty the Raja of Sikkim presented the district of Darjeeling to the Governor General of India and the terai region was annexed from Sikkim in 1835. When the British first acquired Darjeeling it was then reported that the Lepcha formed half of the population of Sikkim. The Kalimpong sub-division of the district was annexed from Bhutan in 1865 (Mitra, 1951 ; Census of India : report).

Today the Lepcha culture in its traditional form is found only in the Zongu area of north Sikkim, where they have retained their originality unaltered by the alien influence of Nepali Hindus and missionaries. The ruler of Sikkim had made this part of his personal estate called Zongu into a Lepcha reserve, where he made a law that only pure-blooded Lepchas may become landowners. This area, unlike the rest of Sikkim, was administered by the private estate office of the Maharajah.

In Darjeeling the Lepcha are in an advantageous position only in the Kalimpong sub-division. After Kalimpong was annexed from Bhutan in 1865 the British Government treated it as a private preserve (Khash Mahal) and did not lease any portion of it for tea plantation, and except for special reasons transfer of land from Bhotias and Lepchas to Nepalis was not allowed.

When the district of Darjeeling was first taken over by the British administration, the district was almost entirely under forest. The only method of cultivation was jhuming or burning down the

forest. This was practised in the interior of the hills by the Lepcha and Bhotias, and on the foothills by the Meches and other aboriginal tribes (Mitra, 1951, Census of India).

British colonisation brought in its train the large immigration of Nepalis in the hills, who were more useful as labourers in tea gardens and more efficient and thrifty as cultivators than the aboriginal Lepcha. However in the terai the tribes from Chotanagpur, immigrated as tea plantation labours. As a consequence the Lepcha and the Tibetan influence remained restricted only in the hills. The reservation of the forest by Government and large influx of Nepalis have further cramped their means of livelihood and jeopardised their natural environment.

The Nepalis, who form more than 60 percent of the present day population of the Darjeeling hills, are primarily descended from immigrants from the neighbouring kingdom state of Nepal. They are a hard working race and more prolific than the Lepcha and I am of the opinion that they will in time occupy the whole of Darjeeling district assimilating the indigenous population. The graveness of the Nepali immigration is understood by the present Government of Sikkim. After Sikkim became a part of India in April, 1975 a ban against any fresh Nepali infiltration in Sikkim was imposed.

The Bhotias or Bhutias (not Bhutanese) inhabiting the Darjeeling district and Sikkim are different from Bhutanese who are the resident of Bhutan.

The Bhotias inhabiting Darjeeling district and Sikkim are

of the following types -

- (1) Sikkimese Bhotias, a mixed race descended from Tibetans who settled in Sikkim some centuries ago and intermarried with the Lepcha.
- (2) Sherpa Bhotias or Bhotias of north-east Nepal and are of Tibetan descent.
- (3) Drukpa Bhotias or Bhotias of Bhutanese origin.
- (4) Bhotias of Tibet or Tibetans. 'Bhot' is the name of a province situated in central Tibet.

Bhotias are basically a trading tribe and their economy is in jeopardy because of the closing of Tibetan border by the Chinese in 1962, when they had to stop their trans-Himalayan trading.

The Nepalis is a generic and blanket term used to cover all the different communities come under it. They have a common language 'Nepali'. Starting from the Brahmins, Chettris to Scheduled Caste like Kami, Damai etc. also come under it.

In conclusion to the chapter I would like to mention that one should take into consideration the fact that the Lepcha live at the interstices of two great cultural and social traditions, Indian Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, and between two distinct, ecological and geographical zones, the low sub-tropical valleys and alpine mountain highlands. Their present day economy and culture should be understood in these contrasting eco-cultural milieu..



## THE VILLAGES UNDER STUDY

One of the techniques employed in this study was to carry out a detailed ethnographical survey of three Lepcha villages for a duration of about three months in each village. The villages were Nassey and Pagang gumpha gaon (hereinafter will be referred to as only Pagang), both situated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in the Kalimpong subdivision, and Lingdong situated in the Zongu area of north Sikkim (See map 1). The main consideration in selecting these villages was their differing ecological situations and varying exposure to the modern forces of change including the nature of their proximity to the urban centres. The data collected from these villages, have been utilized to explain the contention of this thesis.

**Definition of a Village**

Oxford University Dictionary (Vol. 12 ; page 204) defines village as a "collection of dwelling houses and other buildings, forming a centre of habitation in a country district and inhabited place larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town or having a simpler organization and administration than the latter.

A village may also be defined in the following way, "as a territorially separate collection of homesteads, which is regarded as a distinct unit, and of such a size that its inhabitants can all be personally acquainted" (Notes and Queries on Anthropology, 1960, p.64).

A village may similarly be defined from political point of view, power relations and factional point of view, from economic point



of view i.e. describing its nature of production, distribution and consumption, from geographical point of view - its area, topography, from administrative point of view that is as convenience body allotting rates, taxes etc., and lastly from cultural point of view, where patterns of habitation are observed for the sake of face to face relation. The local divisions are observed for the sake of an understanding of the pattern of interaction and interrelationships between individual families and caste or ethnic groups.

In the Darjeeling district a village has been equated to a cadastrally surveyed mauza bearing a jurisdiction list number and this is done for the purpose of revenue collection. In census also the revenue collection units or mauzas are taken as equivalent to villages. But in reality there can be ten to fifteen small and actual villages within one revenue village or mauza. One should keep it in mind that in the Darjeeling district only for the advantage of revenue collection, census enumeration and administration, a number of otherwise distinct villages have been grouped together and put under a single Kashmahal village.<sup>1</sup> The hilly tracts of Kalimpong subdivision are divided into Kashmahals where the people live as tenants on the land vested in the Government. There are altogether 51 Kashmahals in Kalimpong sub-division. As per the government decision no part of this land has been leased out for the tea plantation and transfer of land from hillmen to plainsmen are not allowed within these villages. In Kalimpong Kashmahal transfer of the holdings of tribal land even to the Nepalis is not permitted.

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1. A Kashmahal village is the village settled on government owned land.

### Village Nassey

The village Nassey is situated in the Block 1 of the Kalimpong subdivision of the Darjeeling district. It is 5 km. from the Kalimpong town by the side of Siliguri-Kalimpong bus route. The bus route from Siliguri to Kalimpong passes just below the village and thus providing the villagers an easy transportation to Kalimpong town.

The word 'Nassey' or 'Ngnssay' means - 'rest a while'. Here the former Bhutanese administrative officers are stated to have rested for sometime while they were returning to Bhutan after being defeated by the British.

The village Nassey, like several other villages of the district, comes under the general census village Kalimpong Kashmahal (Jurisdiction list no. 52). This latter is a revenue collection unit or mauza, having the following population figures as per 1951, 1961 and 1971 census.

| Year | Population of Kalimpong Kashmahal |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| 1951 | 3,578                             |
| 1961 | 3,036                             |
| 1971 | 5,175                             |

The almost doubling of the population from 1961 to 1971 clearly indicates the sudden influx of Nepali population in the area during the 1961 - 71 decade.

Total area of Kalimpong Kashmahal is 1,860 acres. The following are the constituent villages of Kalimpong Kashmahal.

1. Nassey. 2. Chibo., 3. Peshor. 4. Tashiding., 5. Mungbul., 6. 8th Mile. 7. Purbang, and 8. Tanek.

As it was not possible to study such a vast hilly area with a widely scattered population within a short period, I have intensively studied the Nassey village, which is both a revenue collection unit and a village from social interactional point of view.

Nassey is bounded on the north by Algarah jhora (hill stream) on the south by Pessore jhora, on the east by the development area and on the west by the 5th mile turning on the road between Siliguri and Kalimpong.

Community wise population figure of the village is given below :-

TABLE NO. 5

Community wise population of Nassey

| Community    | Number of families | %             | Population | %             |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2                  | 3             | 4          | 5             |
| Lepcha       | 34                 | 58.62         | 205        | 55.70         |
| Nepali       | 23                 | 39.66         | 155        | 42.12         |
| Muslim       | 1                  | 1.72          | 8          | 2.18          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>58</b>          | <b>100.00</b> | <b>368</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

Out of 58 families living in Nassey 23 (39.66%) belong to Nepali and 34 (58.62%) belong to Lepcha community. Only one Muslim family lives in Nassey. The total population of the village is 368 of which 205 persons (55.70%) Lepcha, 155 persons (42.12%) Nepali and only 8 (2.18%) persons belong to Muslim community.

The Lepcha are the original inhabitants of the village & the Nepalis immigrated later. The Muslim is a Bengali, who had married a Nepali girl many years ago, bought land and had settled in the village.

TABLE NO. 6

Sex wise distribution of the population of Nassey.

| Community    | Male       | %     | Female     | %     | Total      |
|--------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| 1            | 2          | 3     | 4          | 5     | 6          |
| Lepcha       | 99         | 48.30 | 106        | 51.70 | 205        |
| Nepali       | 82         | 52.91 | 73         | 47.09 | 155        |
| Muslim       | 5          | 62.50 | 3          | 37.50 | 8          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>186</b> |       | <b>182</b> |       | <b>368</b> |

Out of the 205 Lepchas 99 (48.30%) are male and 106 (51.70%) are female. Out of 155 Nepalis 82 (52.91%) are male and 73 (47.09%) are female. The Muslim family has 5 males and 3 females.

Literacy is generally supposed to be related to the adoption of modern agricultural practices in Indian villages. That is, the cultivators who were literates also tend to adopt relatively larger number of modern agricultural practices. However, the extent to which literacy influences adoption of modern agricultural practices at the

village level is yet to be definitely determined. For example, it has been found that, although literacy is associated with adoption at the individual level, its effect on adoption at the village level has been found to be negligible (Rajagopalan, 1971 ; Danda, 1971).

Educationally, the Lepcha are quite advanced than most of the tribal communities of West Bengal. The percentage of literacy among the Lepcha is as high as 25 against the average literacy rate of 8.92% among the tribal population of West Bengal. One of the major causes of spread of education among the Lepcha of the Darjeeling district is the impact of Christianity among them. Apart from the various facilities namely, free education, books and aids made available to the Christian Lepcha, the non-Christian Lepcha also get some facilities like free books, stipend, tiffin etc. from the educational institutions established by the Christian missionaries, which has induced education among them.

The Lepcha children are educated through Nepali language - the medium of instruction. They speak in Lepcha language among themselves, that too only within the household. Old Lepcha informants told me that the younger generation of the Lepcha of Darjeeling do not have a good command over their own language. While meeting people of other community and in formal situations they speak in Nepali language, the lingua franca of the area.

TABLE NO. 7

## Literacy in Nassey

| Community    | Level of Literacy    |           |                       |           |           |           |            |            | Total<br>Popu-<br>lation |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------------------|
|              | Primary<br>(Upto IV) |           | Secondary<br>(Upto X) |           | College   |           | Illiterate |            |                          |
|              | M                    | F         | M                     | F         | M         | F         | M          | F          |                          |
| Lepcha       | 29                   | 23        | 22                    | 20        | 12        | 14        | 36         | 49         | 205                      |
| Nepali       | 20                   | 15        | 15                    | 5         | 7         | 3         | 40         | 50         | 155                      |
| Muslim       | 3                    |           | 1                     |           |           |           | 1          | 3          | 8                        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>52</b>            | <b>38</b> | <b>38</b>             | <b>25</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>77</b>  | <b>102</b> | <b>368</b>               |

TABLE NO. 8

## Literacy percentage

| Level of Literacy | Lepcha<br>(N-205) | Nepali<br>(N-155) | Muslim<br>(N-8) |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1                 | 2                 | 3                 | 4               |
| Primary (Upto IV) | 25.36             | 22.58             | 37.50           |
| Secondary (V-X)   | 20.50             | 12.90             | 12.50           |
| College           | 12.68             | 6.45              | -               |
| Illiterate        | 41.46             | 58.06             | 50.00           |
|                   | <b>100.00</b>     | <b>100.00</b>     | <b>100.00</b>   |

From the above table it may be seen that the highest literacy rate is among the Muslim at different levels of education. But as the sample is very small it does not reflect the true picture of literacy among the Muslim in general in this part of the hill area. Moreover, our main focus of enquiry is the Lepcha vis-a-vis the Nepalis, hence we may leave the Muslim from our comparison.

We may see that at all levels of literacy Lepchas are more advanced than the Nepalis. Percentage of illiteracy is also high among the Nepalis (58.06) as against the 41.46 of the Lepcha. The acceptance of various manual unskilled occupations at the school going age of the Nepali children is the main reason for their low literacy rate. Whereas the Lepcha children at their school going age do not accept any paid manual or un-skilled occupation except occasionally helping their parents in agriculture.

Out of 142 acres of cultivable land in the village 108 acres are irrigated and 34 acres non-irrigated. The common water sources are the hill streams (jhora). Water from hill streams in certain places is stored by the Public Health Engineering Department of the Government and supplied to individual houses by pipes. Some houses also bring water from nearby streams to irrigate their land by connecting sections of bamboo poles cut longitudinally and supported by stilts. This is an indigenous version of metal or rubber pipes.

#### Village Pagang

The full name of the village is Pagang gumpha gaon, the

word gumpha is infixed because of the monastery which is adjacent to the village. In the text the shorter name Pagang shall be used. The village is situated about 20 km. north-east of Kalimpong town. It comes under the Development Block II (Algarah) of Kalimpong subdivision. The nearest bazar is at Algarah where the Block office is situated. There is no bus service upto Algarah bazar or to the village, only a few jeeps ply between Kalimpong town and Algarah bazar at irregular intervals.

The altitude of the village is about 6000 ft. above sea level. The temperature is 30°C in summer and 7°C in winter. The area is very much damp and full of moisture, rainy season continues almost six months in a year.

The village Pagang, like many other villages of the district, comes under the general revenue mauza or census village named Paiyong Kashmahal in the jurisdiction list No. 29. The Paiyong Kashmahal have the following population figures as per 1951, 1961 and 1971 census.

| Year | Population of Paiyong <u>Kashmahal</u> |
|------|----------------------------------------|
| 1951 | 2,422                                  |
| 1961 | 3,080                                  |
| 1971 | 3,760                                  |

According to 1971 census the total population of Paiyong Kashmahal is 3,760 of which the males number 1,989 and the females 1,771. Total cultivable land of the Kashmahal is about 2057 acres. It may be noted that unlike Kalimpong Kashmahal the increase in



population in 1961 to 1971 decade is negligible in Paiyong Kashmahal. It is because Nepali immigration has been very little here during this decade. The easy availability of jobs in Kalimpong Kashmahal, which is rural in nature and being situated very near to Kalimpong town, attracted the Nepalis more to settle there.

The Paiyong Kashmahal consists of the following villages -

1. Pagang gumpha gaon.
2. Gairi gaon,
3. Biddyong;
4. Paiyong.

As it was neither possible, nor necessary to study all the four villages of the Kashmahal spread over the hilly tract, I have intensively studied Pagang which is a village with a distinct identity of its own.

The village Pagang is bounded, on the north by Lava Kashmahal, on the south by Rishi road, on the east by Lava forest and on the west by Sukrabary jhora. Rishi gumpha (monastery) is situated by the side of the village and plays an important role in the village life, polity and land tenure system, which shall be discussed later.

Population structure of the village Pagang is as follows :-

TABLE NO. 9

## Community-wise population of Pagang

| Community    | Number of families | %             | Population | %             |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2                  | 3             | 4          | 5             |
| Lepcha       | 50                 | 58.82         | 296        | 54.22         |
| Bhotia       | 19                 | 22.36         | 136        | 24.90         |
| Nepali       | 16                 | 18.82         | 114        | 20.88         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>85</b>          | <b>100.00</b> | <b>546</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

Out of the 85 families in the village 50 (58.82%) belong to the Lepcha with a population of 296 (54.22%) persons. 19 Bhotia families (22.36%) have a population of 136 (24.90%) and 16 (18.82%) Nepali families have a population of 114 (20.88%). Here also the Lepcha are the original inhabitants of the village. Bhotias and Nepalis are the immigrants in the subsequent periods ; the former community came here almost 100 years ago and the latter are recent migrants.

TABLE NO. 10

## Sex wise population of village Pagang

| Community    | Male       | %     | Female     | %     | Total      |
|--------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| 1            | 2          | 3     | 4          | 5     | 6          |
| Lepcha       | 152        | 51.35 | 144        | 48.65 | 296        |
| Bhotia       | 71         | 52.20 | 65         | 47.80 | 136        |
| Nepali       | 59         | 51.76 | 55         | 48.24 | 114        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>282</b> |       | <b>264</b> |       | <b>546</b> |

The Lepcha of this village speak Nepali while communicating with other ethnic groups like Bhotias and Nepalis. The medium of instruction in school is also Nepali. Only at home they speak Lepcha language.

TABLE NO. 11

## Literacy of the village Pagang

| Community    | Level of Literacy |           |                    |           |           |          |            |            | Total Population |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|------------|------------------|
|              | Primary (Upto IV) |           | Secondary (Upto X) |           | College   |          | Illiterate |            |                  |
|              | M                 | F         | M                  | F         | M         | F        | M          | F          |                  |
| Lepcha       | 48                | 47        | 47                 | 31        | 7         | 2        | 51         | 63         | 296              |
| Nepali       | 21                | 11        | 13                 | 6         | 6         | 2        | 20         | 35         | 114              |
| Bhotia       | 25                | 23        | 20                 | 12        | 3         | 1        | 22         | 30         | 136              |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>94</b>         | <b>81</b> | <b>80</b>          | <b>49</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>93</b>  | <b>128</b> | <b>546</b>       |

TABLE NO. 12

## Literacy percentage of Pagang

| Level of Literacy | Lepcha (N - 296) | Nepali (N - 114) | Bhotia (N - 136) |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1                 | 2                | 3                | 4                |
| Primary (Upto IV) | 32.09            | 28.08            | 35.30            |
| Secondary (V-X)   | 26.35            | 16.66            | 23.52            |
| College           | 3.04             | 1.76             | 2.94             |
| Illiterate        | 38.52            | 53.50            | 38.24            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>100.00</b>    | <b>100.00</b>    | <b>100.00</b>    |

In the Pagang village it was found that the percentage of literacy among the Lepcha and Bhotias are higher than that among the Nepalis at all levels of education. Nepalis are more illiterate than the Lepcha-Bhotia. But compared to the state of literacy in Nassey, Pagang shares a higher percentage of literacy at all levels.

Say for instance, the percentage of literacy among the Nepalis in the primary level at Nassey village is 22.58%, whereas at Pagang it is 28.08%. This may be due to the Nassey village's proximity to Kalimpong town where various job opportunities are available which inhibits the urge for education. But in the case of Lepchas the same condition has produced different result. As college is nearer to Nassey a higher proportion of Lepcha students (12.68%) go for college education than that at Pagang (3.04%).

So here we see that the urban influence has worked in two different ways in the spread of education in two communities. The educational opportunities created by the Christian missionaries in the hills of Darjeeling seem to have been better utilised by the Lepcha - Bhotias than the Nepalis.

In Pagang 302 acres of cultivable land is owned by 85 families, in addition to the 16 acres of land owned by the monastery.

#### **Village Lingdong**

The village Lingdong is situated in the Lepcha reserve of Zongu by the side of the river Tista. Administratively it comes under the North District of Sikkim. It is at a distance of 15 km.

from the district headquarter Mangan. A jeepable mountain road runs from Mangan to Lingdong through a narrow suspension bridge on the river Tista, the bridge is the only link between Zongu and the rest of Sikkim.

A little before Dikchu on the right bank of river Tista starts the reserve of Zongu. It is a roughly triangular portion of very mountainous tract. approximately forty miles on each side, bounded on the south-east by river Tista, on the north-east by river Talung and on the third side by the mountains south of Kanchenjunga. Previously Zongu was part of the private estate of Chogyal, the King of Sikkim.

The land is moist but the river valleys are hot. The climate of the Tista valley is excessively wet, even for the Himalayas ; it is only in the autumn months, from the end of September to the end of November, that there is no rain. During the rest of the year it falls intermittently, and in the full monsoon period, June to September, almost continuously. The mean temperature varies between about 4°C in winter to about 30°C in summer.

Except for a few artificially levelled patches there is probably not a hundred square meters of flat ground in the village. Lingdong means flat piece of ground - there is however, a flat piece of tableland up in the village after which the village is named. There are no houses right on the river, the land over there is used for cultivation. Most of the houses and cultivable lands are between 3,500 feet to 7000 feet above sea level and 2,500 feet to 6,000 feet above the river Tista. Above the cultivable land is the forest (now

reserved) in which minor forest produces are gathered, a decreasing amount of hunting done, and where the cattle were sent to pasture not so long ago. Above the forest level, comes first the rhododendron forest, and then the snows, now-a-days only visited by illegal hunters searching for bear or musk deer.

Only Lepchas are allowed to purchase land and build permanent residential houses within the limit of the Zongu reserve. Nepalis, mostly emigrants from Nepal, hold temporary pass and live in the fields of the Lepcha land owner as agricultural labourer and share croppers. These temporary resident Nepalis are called sukumbashi. They are charged Rs. 1/- per annum as licence fee for their temporary settlement. Beside this, the Nepalis have to obtain a temporary working permit to work in the field of a Lepcha landlord.

In Zongu, a village is equated to a revenue block, headed by a Mondal or revenue collector (formerly the village headman) and directly administered by the District Collector. Administratively Zongu is divided into fourteen revenue blocks or villages, which are synonymous to villages in anthropological sense. These are as follows -

1. Sakyong Pantoong.
2. Thingbong.
3. Lingthem,
4. Lingdem.
5. Limza.
6. Salimpakel.
7. Lingdong.
8. Burfock.
9. Hi-Gyathang.
10. Gor Tarayang.
11. Shipbeak.
12. Sangtook
- Sangyong.
13. Mun Sangdong
- and
14. Lumlingtyang.

The first eight villages are in upper Zongu and the rest are in the lower Zongu. Except in the size of population there is hardly

any difference in customs and character among the various villages of the Zongu.

In the village Lingdong the houses are either isolated by the agricultural fields or gathered in small clusters of three or four houses. When three or four houses are grouped together, they are usually given a distinctive name. This grouping does not necessarily correspond to any emotional or kinship ties among near neighbours. People living in adjoining houses may be closely related or they may be complete strangers in terms of kinship and full brothers may live separated by the full distance of the village. Of course the situation is also the same in the case of two earlier villages studied. This type of dispersed settlement is universal in eastern Himalayas. It is clearly due to the ecological characteristics of the hilly region as well as the settlement history of the region. People who have cleared the forest have tended to remain near to their agricultural plots, thus avoiding trekking over hilly terrain for day to day work in their fields.

The village Lingdong is bounded on the north by village Lingthem, on the south by village Burfock, on the east by river Tista and on the west by forest

Lingdong is divided into following nine hamlets, each of which is named after a natural object. These are Sungdu (small source of water), Ravim (jhora), Sankong (ridge), Rebang (a tree), Kurgupung (chest like thing), Diangbong (a tree), Panang (stony place), Dungthung (back side) and Karving (jhora).

The steep precipitous topography and other geo-morphological feature make irrigation extremely difficult in Lingdong. There are few mountainstreams which run down from the hill top to Tista river but the Lepcha do not make use of these streams for irrigation. So a great number of fields in the village remain untterraced and unirrigated which has consequently lead to the low production of crops. Community wise population of the village Lingdong is given below.

TABLE NO. 13

## Community wise population of Lingdong

| Community    | Number of families | %             | Population | %             |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2                  | 3             | 4          | 5             |
| Lepcha       | 29                 | 70.74         | 176        | 65.42         |
| Nepali       | 12                 | 29.26         | 93         | 34.58         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>41</b>          | <b>100.00</b> | <b>269</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

Total number of families in the village is 41, out of which 29 (70.74%) are Lepchas and 12 (29.26%) are Nepalis. Total population of the village is 269, of which 176 (65.42%) are Lepchas and 93 (34.58%) are Nepalis. In Lingdong all its 366 acres of land are owned by the Lepcha.

Here also the Lepcha are the original inhabitant and first settler of the tract. The Nepalis appeared in the scene in the 1930's. They taught the Lepcha the art of plough cultivation and



building of terraces. The Nepalis provided the Lepcha with the necessary labour force required for terrace cultivation and technical know-how. The sex wise population of the village Lingdong is given below.

TABLE NO. 14

## Sex wise population of village Lingdong

| Community    | Male       | %     | Female     | %     | Total      |
|--------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| 1            | 2          | 3     | 4          | 5     | 6          |
| Lepcha       | 92         | 52.28 | 84         | 47.72 | 176        |
| Nepali       | 47         | 50.54 | 46         | 49.46 | 93         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>139</b> |       | <b>130</b> |       | <b>269</b> |

As per the directive of Sikkim government the Lepcha students have their primary education through their mother tongue ; English and Hindi are their second and third language. After the introduction of Lepcha language in school curriculum a new channel has opened for the Lepcha, especially for the Kalimpong Lepcha, who if otherwise qualified can become teacher in Sikkim by virtue of their knowing the Lepcha language.

But even then the Lepcha of Lingdong know Nepali, the lingua franca of the state, specially the men folk who go to the market for selling and buying of commodities. Women of Zongu rarely go outside of Zongu and have little knowledge of any language other than their own.

TABLE NO. 15

## Literacy of the village Lingdong

| Community    | Level of Literacy |           |           |          |          |   |            |            | Total<br>Population |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---|------------|------------|---------------------|
|              | Primary           |           | Secondary |          | College  |   | Illiterate |            |                     |
|              | M                 | F         | M         | F        | M        | F | M          | F          |                     |
| Lepcha       | 32                | 9         | 10        | 4        | 2        | - | 48         | 71         | 176                 |
| Nepali       | 15                | 5         | 5         | 1        | 1        | - | 26         | 40         | 93                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>47</b>         | <b>14</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>3</b> |   | <b>74</b>  | <b>111</b> | <b>269</b>          |

TABLE NO. 16

## Literacy percentage of Lingdong

| Level of Literacy    | Lepcha<br>(N - 176) | Nepali<br>(N - 93) |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1                    | 2                   | 3                  |
| Primary<br>(upto IV) | 23.30               | 21.51              |
| Secondary<br>(V - X) | 7.95                | 6.45               |
| College              | 1.13                | 1.07               |
| Illiterate           | 67.62               | 70.97              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>         | <b>100.00</b>       | <b>100.00</b>      |

From the above table we can see that the percentage of literacy is quite low in Lingdong village which represents the state of education in the Zongu area of north Sikkim. At all levels of literacy, viz. primary, secondary and college, it is evident that very few students go for education. The percentage of illiteracy in Lingdong is 67.62% among the Lepcha and 70.97% among the Nepalis. In Nassey the illiteracy percentage was 41.46% among the Lepcha and 58.06% among the Nepalis. In Pagang the illiteracy percentage was 38.52% among the Lepcha and 53.50% among the Nepalis. So the people are more literate in Kalimpong than in the Zongu area of north Sikkim. Until recently Sikkim was a native Kingdom where spread of education was not possible due to lack of resources and strict restriction imposed by its ruler on the movement of Christian missionaries. Moreover, the Sikkimese Lepcha being primarily Buddhist, their traditional religion did not encourage the development of modern education among them.

In this chapter the data on literacy has been dealt in some detail because in the subsequent chapters on social life and economy we will try to figure out which are the factors responsible due to spread of education and which are independent of it. This will give us an opportunity to understand the role education plays in the innovation and adoption of new technology. In Lingdong the literacy percentage is more encouraging among the Nepalis than among the Nepalis in the other two villages. It is because of the fact that the Nepali children at their school going age do not get as much job as unskilled manual labour as they get in Kalimpong. This has indirectly helped them to raise the rate of literacy among them.

In all the three villages the Lepcha are slightly more advanced so far education is concerned than the Nepalis, yet in reality the Nepalis dominate in every sphere of activities. This is mainly due to the overwhelming numerical dominance of the Nepalis. Though among the Lepcha the percentage of literacy is much higher than that among the Nepalis but in actual competitive job situation they are simply outnumbered by the Nepalis.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

Hutton (1944) defined material culture as "the study of those objects (other than human) and all those artifacts with which man surrounds himself in his attempt to ameliorate his position in his environment".

Material life is a fair index of the general level of the knowledge and of the intellectual attainment of the people. Ecological factors play a great role in the various aspects of culture, specially in the case of material culture. Man utilises his environment to the fullest extent possible with the technology at his disposal. He adapts himself to it and exercises his control over it. As a matter of fact material life of a man is the rendezvous of external environment and socio-cultural representation, a manifestation of ecologic relation.

## Settlement Pattern

Let us begin a study of the Lepcha material culture with a look at their habitation. A house plays an important role in the culture of the people. The habitations of any community at any place are largely influenced by climate and environment. The other factors which influence the habitation are the economic condition and occupational pattern.

The Lepcha villages are situated on the slopes of the hills. Houses are stationed on the top of the hillocks or on the slopes of the hills, in a most scattered way surrounded by terraced paddy fields. Normally the Lepcha houses are east facing to have the first rays of the sun.

In accordance with the regional pattern of settlement in this part of the Himalaya, the Lepcha houses are stretched over a wide area throughout the length and breadth of the hill slopes. It is very difficult to visit all the houses of a Himalayan village of Darjeeling or Sikkim within a day due to the difficult undulating terrain and scattered nature of the houses. The settlement has no pattern in terms of geography, the houses are either isolated in the fields or gathered in small groups of three or four. This grouping does not necessarily correspond to any kinship ties and full brothers may live separated by the full distance of the village. In Lingdong the highest and lowest houses in the village are separated by a distance of three kilometers and a height of about three thousand feet.

It is customary that a Lepcha should build his own house after marriage. In Lingdong and other villages of Zongu this is a trivial problem since the Lepcha are the only land owning community. In Zongu, a Lepcha after marriage gets a piece of land from his father and establishes his own house there. Out in the Darjeeling district the Lepcha now-a-days do not possess sufficient land to be distributed among the sons, where the Nepalis are emerging and in some villages have already emerged as the major land holding group. The scarcity of land disdained the Lepcha of Kalimpong from setting up new households after marriage and compelled the married sons to live with their parents in a joint family. New houses are built less in Kalimpong due to the simple reason that they have less amount of land for this purpose at their disposal.

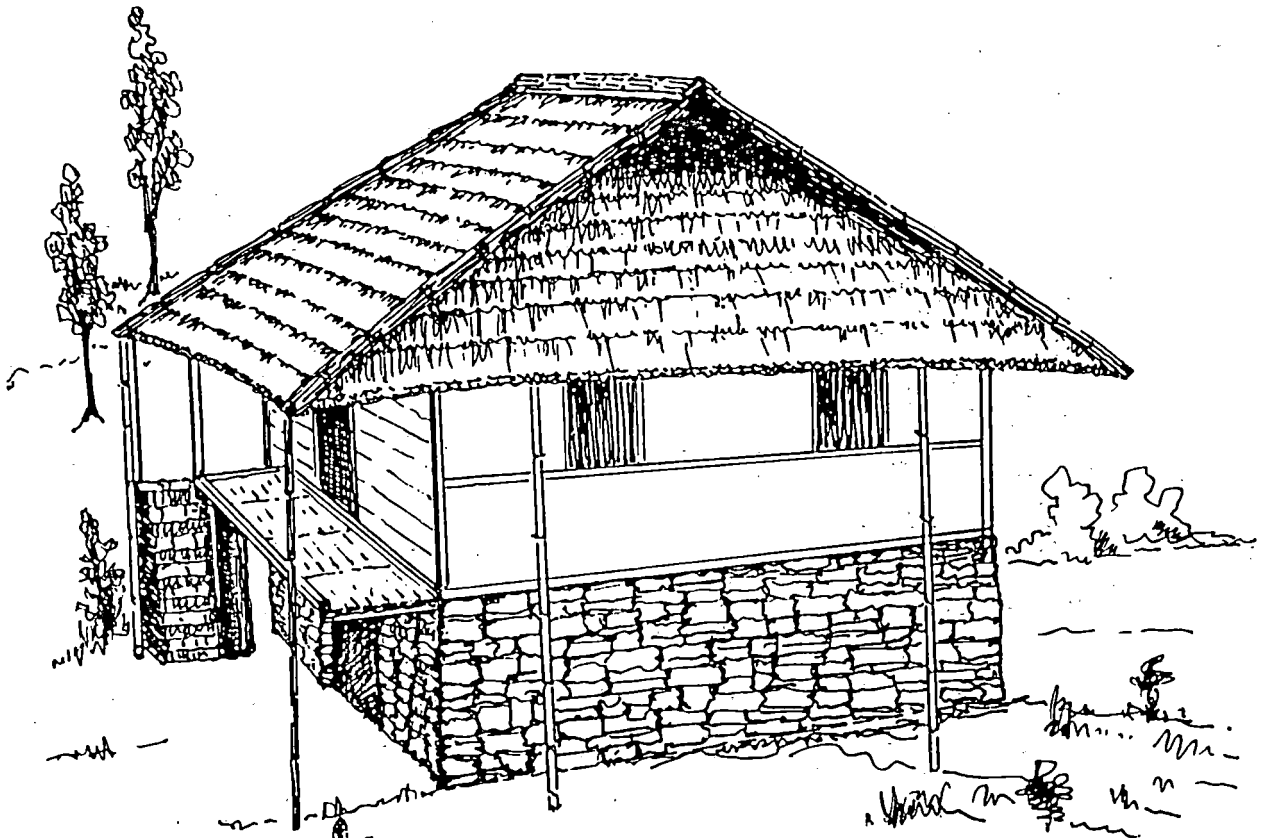


Figure 1.

Sketch of a Lepcha house

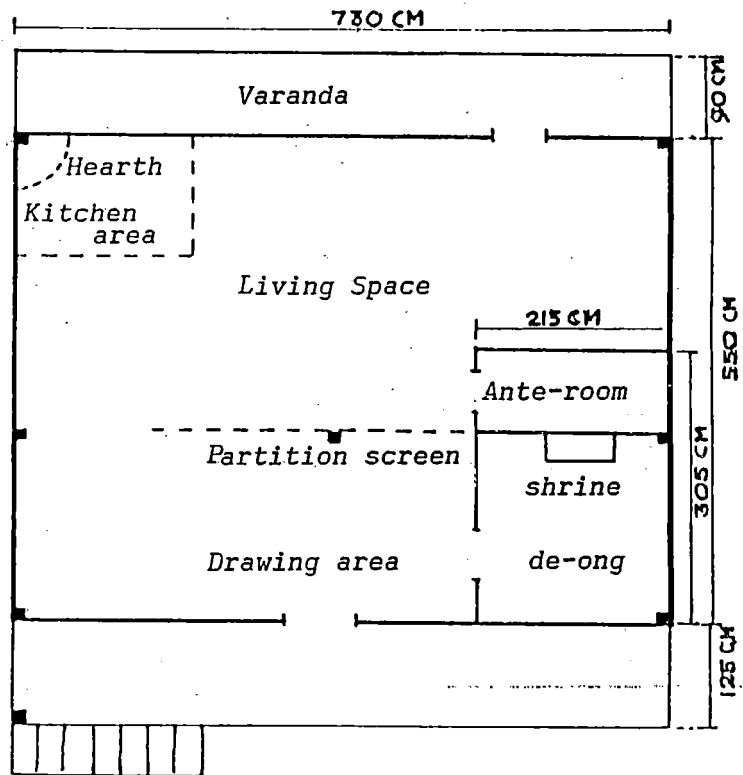


Figure 2.

Main entrance

Ground plan

## A Lepcha House

Lepcha houses, in the hills where temperatures fall below 10°C are built a little above the ground on stilts stone pillars to avoid dampness and ground water falling during the rains. During construction of a house in the hills special care is taken to choose the site which is not normally observed in plains. Steep slope or precipice near the approach of the site is discarded, but a Jhora or other form of water source near the site is a must.

Suitable site for the proposed house (lingur) is selected according to the instruction given in the Lamaist book chu-datoo. The Lepcha also utilise the service of a Bonthing (a native priest of animistic religion) who purifies the land. After the house is finished a Lama comes to read litashi, the sacred book for the house making ritual. Bonthing performs a ceremony called, tashi-chene by sacrificing animals to keep the evil spirits away from the new house.

Traditional Lepcha houses are rectangular in shape and raised about four to six feet off the ground on stone boulders (chukbu) which go round three sides of the house. The east side is left open and the space underneath serves as a shelter at night for domestic animals. This is a measure developed to protect the livestock from cold and rain. (Fig. 1 & 2).

The building itself is made of wood, plaster, bamboo and thatch. The walls (tangdup) are coloured white with a clay dye brought from a considerable distance. The windows, doors (tingvin)



and porch are made out of wood and are quite pleasantly carved in stylistic geometrical patterns.

The first step of construction is to erect upright supports one in the centre and one at each corner. The pillars are called dhokhiyamu and are very strong to withstand the weight of the building. The floor (ligong) is made of smoothened planks (antoo) and rested on a wooden frame (sulin). The walls (chakbu) are of bamboo (molo) covered with plaster. Sometimes by the side of the house hangs a balcony of plaited bamboo. The roof (lichap) is made of reeds hung over bamboos that rest on a wooden frame. But in Kalimpong the roof is thatched with straw. The scarcity of bamboos due to the decline of forest forced them to adapt to this new style which proved to be more expensive in the long run. The two opposite sides of the roof cover the whole space between the roof tree and the top of the wall, but the other two opposite sides are inserted at a slightly lower angle, so that there is an open triangle which is meant to provide ventilation and an escape for the smoke. Below the roof there is a ceiling (Palong).

The most interesting character of the construction of a Lepcha house is that they hardly use any kind of nails or screws to fix the poles. The big wooden beams meant for the support of the roof are generally inserted through one another in a criss-cross way. This non use of iron pegs in house construction is adopted because iron becomes rusty due to excessive rains and shortens the life of the house. There is a difference in the construction of walls between the Lepcha of Kalimpong and Zongu. In Sikkim the Lepcha build thicker

walls than Kalimpong which serves the purpose of keeping the occupants warm in the cold climate of Sikkim.

The majority of the Lepcha houses consist of two rooms and an ante room (buchung). The first room is separated by a bamboo partition into a drawing room (ligong) and living room (bo). The kitchen (thopsong) is situated in the living room, the hearth (pukum) is at the corner of the living room. The second room is called de-ong, it is little used in day to day activities and have a private lamaist household temple. It is more or less a ceremonial room where household rituals are performed and distinguished guests are received. The special purpose of this room is particularly evident in Lingdong. Kalimpong Lepchas have almost forgotten the speciality of this room under the strong Nepali Hindu and Christian influence. The ante-room is mostly used as a store. In Kalimpong most of the Lepcha houses have latrine but in Sikkim only a few houses of rich people have separate latrine.

There has been a great deal of reciprocal behaviour found in house building. When people know that a house is being built or repaired they come to help voluntarily. They are given no wages in cash or kind except a meal at the end of the day, but they know that they in their turn, will receive help when they would need it. This mutually exchangeable system of labour is called 'lobo' in Sikkim and 'parma' in Kalimpong, which is probably an adoption of Nepali word. In Zongu the Lepcha usually do not require the help of a specialised craftsman at the time of housebuilding but in Kalimpong a carpenter is employed for building a house at the rate of Rs.20/- per

day. In each Lepcha house, is a field fenced with bamboo, which serves as their kitchen garden (sing), where they raise those vegetables and root crops which are consumed by the members of the household.

#### House Types : Traditional and Modern

Now a days whenever a Lepcha builds his house he tries to make it a modern house, if he is not very poor. The main difference between the two types of house is the roof. In a modern house the thatched roof has been replaced by corrugated tin sheets. Due to its geographical proximity to Kalimpong town Nassey houses are of modern European bungalow type. The scarcity of raw materials (mainly wood) also contribute towards this change. Stone slabs and bricks are used in the base. In Nassey only a few poor Lepcha live in the traditional type of house. But in Pagang there are more traditional houses. As it is near to the forest areas from where plenty of wood is available, the Lepcha of this village construct their houses with wooden planks and thatched roof. But the picture is somewhat ambiguous in the Zongu where despite easy availability of wood and other raw materials the Lepcha prefer to have a house with corrugated tin roof. The Lepcha of Zongu though a bit traditional in all other aspects of their socio-cultural and religious life prefer non traditional type of house. In Zongu the number of traditional houses are even less than in Kalimpong. The enormous cash-cropping of cardamom has made the Zongu Lepcha quite affluent in comparison to their Kalimpong kinsmen. So they can easily afford the costly modern houses. Moreover the corrugated sheet of galvanised tin sheets can

withstand the prolonged monsoon of Sikkim better. Due to the wet climate of Sikkim the roofs are overhanging, which often projects as much as fifteen feet in front of the walls. It is a feature of all Zongu houses for keeping the walls dry throughout the rainy season. The surrounding natural resources which are available at the disposal of a community shape its material culture to a considerable extent. This has been found to be true in the two Kalimpong villages. But there are exceptions where some other exogenous factors which may be strong and influential enough to alter the nature of traditional material life of the people. In Zongu though nature provides with ample raw materials from the neighbouring forest to build a house the Lepcha here, excepting a few poor ones, mostly has opted for modern houses with corrugated tin roofs.

The Lepcha have a higher standard of living in comparison to other communities living in the village. To some extent most of the people possess copper and brass utensils and glass tumbler, cups, plates and ceramic tea sets. Well to do Lepcha also have furniture like chair, table etc. They prefer to live comfortably rather than to save money to buy other properties.

Bamboo is the most common material used by the Lepcha for making baskets of various shapes and sizes. Bamboo grows in abundance in this part of the Himalayas. The cost is less and containers made of bamboos are convenient in this cold region. But due to the decline of forest in Kalimpong the use of bamboo in the day to day life has become gradually less. Now-a-days the Lepcha use cooking pots of aluminium and stainless steel obtained

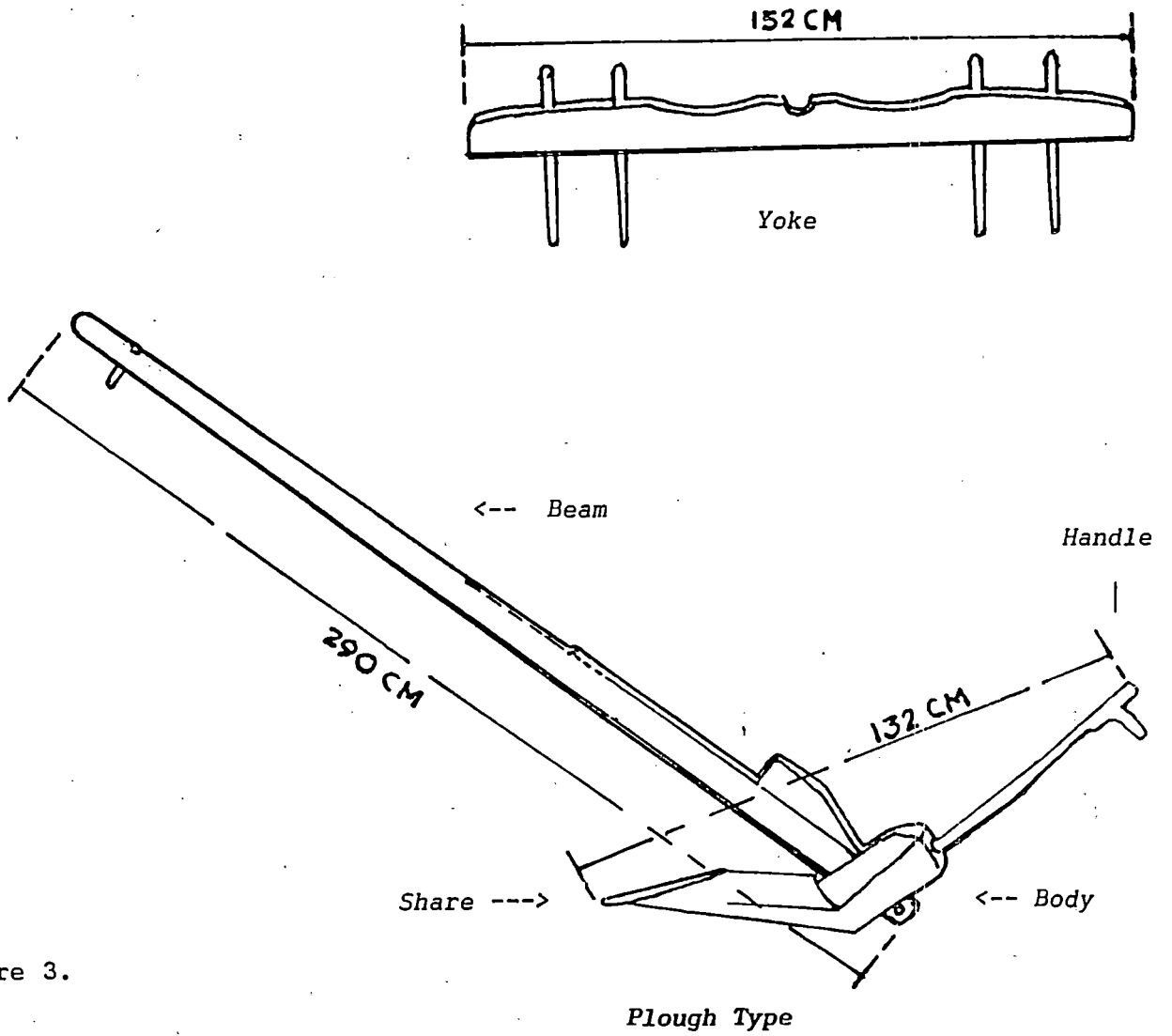


Figure 3.

from local markets. These metallic vessels are brought from the plain and are found in the urban centre of Kalimpong. But the Lepcha in the interior villages of Zongu still depend on bamboo baskets and earthen pots.

### **Agricultural Tools**

In a subsequent chapter devoted to Lepcha economy I have shown that Lepcha agriculture is still primitive. So is their agricultural tools and implements.

The agricultural implements used by the Lepcha are simple, crudely made and few in number. It consist of the following :-

Plough (longkung or halkung) drawn by a pair of oxen or bullocks is the most important one. Due to the hardness of the soils they use a plough much heavier than the one used in the plains of West Bengal. The angle formed in the body of the plough is much more obtuse than that of the ploughs used in the plains. The plough consists of a horn shaped piece of wood (kung), which is tipped by the iron share (Pansing). The wooden beam goes up from the centre and above is the plough handle (acham) to steer the plough. The beam (pathing) is fixed to the wooden yoke (thokbiyal) which is drawn by a pair of animal. The average plough weighs 17 to 18 kilograms and is heavier than that is used in the plains. The beam is tied to the yoke by a leather thong (rope).

Other important agricultural implements are spade (thakchu), pointed hoe (kakthu), sickle (behur), ridge making implement (kanta), levellor (fauri) and mortar and pestle (dhokiamu).

In Zongu area of Sikkim every adult Lepcha man carries a long knife (bumfock), sheathed in a leather case tied to the waist. This typical Lepcha knife, unlike a Napali kukri, is straight and not a curved one. The whole of one side is a cutting edge, the tip is square, not pointed. Which is functionally more like a chopper.

Every Lepcha know a little bit of carpentry. So for making agricultural implements, which do not require fine craftsmanship, the Lepcha usually make their own implements.

#### Role of Forest ✓

Forest Plays an important part in the material life of the Lepcha. Fruit trees present in the forest are of great help to them. Bamboo groves of different types are found in abundance in the Himalayan forests and are of great importance in the life of the Lepcha. It is required in almost every sphere of the material life of the Lepcha, starting from raw materials for house building to hunting implements, domestic baskets and containers, furniture, agricultural tools etc. High altitude areas in the forest are used as pasture where the cattle graze. The Lepcha children, mainly in Zongu become familiar with the forest ecology from their childhood as they spend most of their time in the forest grazing the cattle. They come to know the edible fruits and roots, indentify the medicinal herbs. They collect yeast used for fermentation of millet from the forest. This has been an important forest produce of the Lepcha of Zongu. In Kalimpong they buy it from the market. The Lepcha living in the high hilly villages of Zongu go for hunting in the forest. The forest

provides shelter for their games. They collect honey and firewood from the forest. It was observed that the Lepcha of Zongu because of easy access to the forest fully utilise its resources to supplement their economy, whereas the Lepcha of Kalimpong suffer from the restrictions imposed on the use of forest resource because of the reservation of forest and the rapid depletion of its resources. Handicapped by these factors they are unable to supplement their economy with minor forest produces. Only the Lepcha of Pagang village are partially able to use the forest resources.

#### Food and Drinks ✓

For the Lepcha the most important subject in their lives is perhaps food, which also has an important place in their emotional lives. Love, whether between spouses, friends or parents and children, is considered to be the result of mutual benefits and foremost among these mutual benefits is the production and preparation of food. In comparison to the neighbouring communities like the Nepalis and Bhotias, the Lepcha consume more meat, food and drink more. In every social and religious feast the Lepcha consume large quantity of food and drinks.

The most staple food of the Lepcha is rice. Beside rice they also eat maize (makai), millet (Kudu or marwa), wheat and buck-wheat (phaper). Green vegetables and pulses are also eaten in addition and are regarded as delicacies. Rice and roti (made of makai or kudu and atta of wheat) are eaten every day with vegetable curry, pulses (dal) or meat. They also eat boiled wheat and makai. Roti made of phaper (buck-wheat) is predominantly eaten



by the Lepcha of Zongu because buck-wheat is grown exclusively in this area.

The Lepcha are very fond of drinking chi, a home brewed beer made from fermented millet (*eleusine coracana*). Most of the millet cultivated by the Lepcha are used in making chi. There is hardly any Lepcha who does not have any land under millet cultivation. After fermentation and extracting of the beer the by-product is used as an animal fodder. Perhaps this is the only usefulness of the habit of drinking chi. Even it is seen that the Lepcha grow millet in the land under paddy cultivation. To prepare chi the grain is first separated from the husks and then put in a basket and well washed in a stream. A copper vessel is also well washed. The grain is put in the copper vessel and boiled until all the water is absorbed, stirring the grain all the time with a wooden spoon. The cooked grain then is spread over a mat and mixed with powdered yeast (called marcha) and put into a basket covered with cloth for two or three days; when the smell of fermentation becomes noticeable it is ready for use. The drink is palatable and mild and have a soothing effect. The fermented grain is put into a bamboo container (tungba), then warm water is poured into it and is drunk through a bamboo straw called pipsi.

The chi (millet beer) has little usefulness in the material life of an individual except it controls hunger effectively for some time. Nevertheless, it has a great value in the socio-religious life of the Lepcha. It is needed for making offerings to the super naturals as well as in the monastic and other festivals. A Bonthing (Lepcha

priest) can not think of any ritual or sacrifice without the use of chi. On the occasion of birth, marriage and death ceremonies chi is freely shared and enjoyed. In all sorts of social gatherings the tungbas (bamboo container) filled with fermented millets are exchanged among the participants. The free use of chi has become somewhat a status symbol among the Lepcha and those who want to go up in the estimation of the villagers produce and store millet for such religious and social events. At times they even cultivate millet in the lands where paddy could have been easily grown.

#### Dress and Ornaments ✓

Until the beginning of this century the Lepcha of Zongu used to weave their own cloth. The Lepcha of Kalimpong had quit weaving even much earlier. Traditional Lepcha dresses were more or less similar both for male and female. It consisted of a cotton vesture called thakradam, which is loosely thrown round the body, leaving one or both arms free. It reaches to the knee and is gathered round the waist. In the case of female it is slightly longer and hence called damvum. Its fabric is close and ornamented with longitudinal blue stripes prettily worked with red and white geometrical designs. But actually since long ago women have completely given up the indigenous type of dress in favour of a Tibetan costume called bakhu which consist of a coloured long sleeved under bodice, and a dark sleeveless over dress, reaching halfway down the calves and fastened with buttons. At present the Lepcha men of Lingdong and Zongu wear a three quarter pyjama and over it a long baggy shirt. Tibetan bakhu still continues to be the favourite dress of Lepcha women in Zongu and Kalimpong. The

Lepcha of Kalimpong especially the Christian, usually wear western type of trousers. They also wear shorts, shirts and footwears. In Kalimpong the daily dress of Lepcha women is not much different from Nepali adult women. A cotton blouse known as tugo, provides the upper garment of Lepcha women while the lower garment called daindyam is an unsewn peice of cotton cloth, worn round the waist like a petticoat.

Lepcha hat (rongchambu) is broad and flat with a small hemispherical crown. It is made of leaves and bamboo strips and looks heavy and clumsy. This is used in the rainy weather. In dry season a small conical hat is worn (runchambu). It is made of cane or plaited strips of bamboo. The former type is used in Zongu and the latter is used in Kalimpong. This is due to the differences in the rainfall.

Lepcha women are very fond of ornaments. Lepcha women of Zongu wear necklaces (feruliak) of cornelian, amber and turquoise brought by the clandenstine traders from Tibet. Kalimpong Lepcha wear silver and gold necklaces or armlets and rings.

In earlier days the ancient Lepcha used to move bare foot, but now they use cheap slippers or shoes available from the Bhotia and Behari traders in the weekly market. Now the Lepcha are completely dependent on market for their woolens and warm clothes, which they buy in cash. But in olden days they used to get it in exchange of agricultural and forest produces from Tibetan traders.

## THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

It is generally understood that economic condition in a particular ecological setting determines to a great extent the culture of a people. Gradual changes in economic pursuits bring corresponding changes in the social system and allow the people to interact at varied degrees in the social and economic sphere.

An examination of the Lepcha subsistence economy would reveal that it had undergone a rapid economic transformation from hunting - gathering stage to shifting cultivation and finally to wet rice cultivation on terraces. In the Zongu area of north Sikkim the Lepcha still practise some amount of shifting cultivation in the high hills along with plough cultivation in the lower areas.

As has already been said, as members of a forest tribe, in former times and still today in the less fertile regions of Zongu, the Lepcha relied on hunting as a supplementary means of food supply. In Lingdong village of Zongu at least five Lepcha families even now practise seasonal hunting almost regularly. But it is done more as a sport and a favourite pastime rather than a purposive economic activity. The games consist of Himalayan black bear, deer and wild birds. Whenever one gets some sizeable quantity of meat he throws a communal feast. Now-a-days in Zongu hunting has turned out to be an occasion for community integration which Rappaport (1968) calls community nucleation.

There are a number of reasons for which the Lepcha are gradually giving up hunting in Zongu, in Kalimpong they had given

up regular hunting long ago. The stigma which Lamaism (as interpreted by the Lepcha informants) places on the killing of animals prohibits the Lepcha of Sikkim partially from this pursuit, and even those who are not Lamas feel generally disinclined toward killing of animals. The settled houses, increasing dependence on wet rice cultivation and keeping of herds of cow and buffaloe, have given the Lepcha of the Zongu area adequate economic alternative to hunting so as to make this pursuit unattractive except for occasional hunting for recreation and pleasure. But inspite of these facts hunting has been practised and still continues to be an important economic activity among the Lepcha of Zongu, especially in the high altitude areas of upper Zongu, where the forest provides games in plenty. As a matter of fact the Lepcha are as much attached to Buddhism (or Lamaism, as it is called in the Himalayas) as they are to their traditional Bon religion which is animistic in nature. So the so called stigma, if any, imposed by Lamaism, is overruled by the demand of the Bonthing (pagan priest of the traditional religion) for animal killing because sacrifice is a must for this type of rituals. Poongrum is the main moong (spirit) who is to be propitiated before a hunting expedition. The ritual for the sacrifice is known to the Bonthing who supervises the offerings. The sacrifice consist of buckwheat, chi, fowls, some roots and tubers and flowers ; no woman must be present at the time of the hunting rituals. This ritual is not observed by the Lepcha of Kalimpong, especially of the Nassey Village. The ritual connected with hunting is almost unknown to them. Only a few individuals of Pagang who are old enough to have lived in the ambience of forest ecology in Kalimpong area, have some idea of this ritual connected with hunting. The Lepcha youngmen of Kalimpong also

practise occasional hunting in the nearby semi-forest as a pastime. The games consist of rabbits and birds only, as no other animals are available in the semi-forest areas of Kalimpong, around the villages. As a member of the forest tribe the Lepcha also used to gather various forest products including a dye of red ochre which they exchanged for salt with the Tibetans at the border. This trans-Himalayan trading has ceased to exist after the closing of frontier during the Indo-Chinese War of 1962.

#### AGRICULTURE

Agriculture was the subject of least concern to the anthropologists till recently. There are reasons for anthropology's apathy to the study of agriculture. The universal nature of agricultural practices did not excite the anthropologist enough to go into understanding the social organization of agricultural production and its relation with the social system as a whole. But since the concept of ecology became widely adopted in anthropology (Barth 1956 ; Geertz 1963 ; Rappaport 1968), agriculture is being seen as an adaptive mechanism in a specific environment so as to produce a pattern of relationship which is conducive to the maintenance of the productive organization in that specific ecological setting. In this light it is not sufficient to understand the complex network of social and cultural system as it exists but it becomes imperative to examine the man-nature dimension as a basic coping device for survival of a population through the subsistence techniques and strategies adapted to maximise the yield from the available resources. (Brown 1978 ; Boserup 1965 ; Sorenson 1972).

The account of Lepcha agriculture is two fold, one of traditional agricultural system and another of contemporary agricultural practises. The traditional Lepcha agricultural calendar at Zongu is as follows (after Morris 1938 : 184).

Lepcha Agricultural Calendar : Traditional ✓

- January : Sow buck wheat
- February : Clear ground and sow buck wheat in the lower part of the valley.
- March : Clear ground and sow dry rice, millet, and a little maize.
- April : Clear ground in the higher places and sow more dry rice, millet, barley and wheat ; the last two being sown together as a mixed crop.
- May : Reap buck wheat, and sow more millet and maize.
- June : Plant rice and terraces. Weed dry rice. This is the worst month for food shortage.
- July : Sow more millet and also buck wheat. General weeding.
- August : Reap the first rice terraces, and prepare drying sheds for cardamoms. Sow more buck wheat.
- September : Reap dry rice and cardamoms. This is done mostly by the men, as it is heavy work. At the same time the women reap the millet.
- October : Sow barley and wheat, also onions. Continue reaping the cardamom crop.

- November** : Clear ground for buck wheat. Make arrangements to sell the cardamom harvest.
- December** : Continue to dispose of cardamoms. Women start to prepare the ground for buck wheat. This is the slackest month of the year.

In the present Lepcha agricultural year, cultivation of paddy starts in July/August and continues upto November/December. Wheat cultivation (only in Kalimpong), starts in December and goes upto March/April. Season of makai (maize) cultivation is from February/March to July. Beside wheat and pulses others are mainly monsoon crops. The Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim also cultivate various vegetables in their kitchen garden or sing. The produces include raisak, green chilli, okra (ladies finger), tomato, onion, ginger, potato etc. Whatever they produce in the sing, they never sell but consume as supplementary dishes which add a relish to the cultivated cereals. In Kalimpong ginger, potato and cauliflower are grown separately as cash crops but not in the sing. Dal or pulse, which is the most invariable accompaniment to cooked rice in the greater part of India, can not be grown here properly on account of the cold climate.

The present day Lepcha agricultural calendar for food crops is given below. Some or other forms of agricultural operations is performed during the months mentioned below for the production of that particular crop.



## Lepcha Agricultural Calendar : Contemporary ✓

| <u>Lepcha Months</u> | <u>English Equivalent</u> | <u>Crops Produced</u>        |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Karnith           | December - January        | Wheat                        |
| 2. Karsong           | January - February        | - do -                       |
| 3. Thom              | February - March          | Maize / Millet               |
| 4. Som               | March - April             | - do -                       |
| 5. Thafa             | April - May               | Paddy                        |
| 6. Blung             | May - June                | - do -                       |
| 7. Namkam            | June - July               | Maize / Paddy                |
| 8. Parvim            | July - August             | - do -                       |
| 9. Glu               | August - September        | Paddy                        |
| 10. Ith              | September - October       | Millet / Paddy               |
| 11. Ra               | October - November        | Wheat / harvesting of paddy. |
| 12. Mar              | November - December       | - do -                       |

Beside the temporal reconstruction of the Lepcha subsistence agriculture, a spatial one is also attempted because methodologically my study is extended from an exposed Kalimpong village to a remote comparatively unexposed village in Sikkim where some relics of the traditional Lepcha culture is still in existence. The Lepcha cultural development can also be seen in time perspective as agriculture and technology become distinct and more intensive.

#### Traditional Agricultural System

The phrase "traditional agriculture" will refer to agricultural practices used before the Lepcha came in contact with the Nepalis and Europeans. Traditional agriculture was also by no means

static. As we shall see afterwards that changes, did take place in traditional agriculture as much it has taken place in contemporary agriculture. The longer a people occupy an environment, the more they learn to interpret and use it with greater facility. They continue to cope with and seek solution for the many uncertainties they face - weather, pests and diseases. In addition to the greater understanding that came from interaction of man and environment, contact with other cultures through migration and spread of new crops and ideas brought changes in both the traditional and contemporary agricultural sphere. For example, the cultivation of wet rice and cardamom spread rapidly after their introduction into Sikkim by the Nepalis.

Though the Lepcha still continue shifting cultivation to some extent, most of them have taken to settled agriculture with plough. The process of extending areas of settled agriculture has been intensified during the last 50 years or so.

One of the earliest documents available on the Lepcha traditional economy is of Dr. A. Campbell's 'Note on the Lepchas of Sikkim'. Regarding the olden day Lepcha economy, he writes "they are poor agriculturists. Nomadic in their habits, they form no permanent villages and cultivate barely sufficient for their subsistence. When their stock of grain and pulse falls short, they subsist themselves on wild roots, mountain spinach, fern-tops, fungi and other natural products and the produce of the chase. They seldom remain more than three years in one spot. They have no ploughs, and the implements they employ do no more than scrape and

soften the soil for the reception of seed in the upper layer of vegetable mould" (Campbell, 1840).

The traditional agricultural system of the Lepcha was wasteful and inefficient but it no doubt accounts for their dislike of fixed employment and their interest in jungle life.

Their traditional method of cultivation was a nomadic form of tillage popularly known as shifting hill cultivation. The Lepcha call this slash and burn method of cultivation - "Sadeum Suk" or only "Sadeum". In Lepcha language sadeum means cutting of the jungle and suk means burning up. The main crops cultivated by this method are dry rice, millet, maize and buckwheat (phapar) and some roots and tubers. The venture consists of selecting a spot of virgin soil, clearing it of forest and secondary undergrowth and then burn down the jungle and digging or scraping up the surface with the rudest agricultural implements like digging sticks. They cultivate for a few years. One agricultural year comprising of seasons of cultivation for dry rice, maize or millet and buckwheat in a cyclic order. After the productive powers of the land become exhausted the clearing is abandoned and allowed to lie fallow for seven years before being cultivated again. A new site is chosen again where the same operations are carried on de novo. Now-a-days all suitable land in Lingdong is divided up into private holdings, the landmarks consisting of big trees or streams or stones set up at irregular intervals. The clearing of the land, usually an unterraced hill slope called rongdom, 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 government law forbidding the destruction of big trees and guards of forest department of Sikkim are always after those who violate the rules. When all the debris have 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 fertilizer of the soil. After burning, the ground is cleared of charred wood and the remaining weeds by hand and the sown with the intended crop. This is done in the simplest manner, holes are made in the ground with a pointed stick (thangyal) and seeds are dropped into them. The Lepcha sedeum-suk cultivation again, is not a "shifting cultivation" of the neolithic pattern. The ownership of land of each family in the semi-forest area is defined and it has to confine its agricultural operations to their own lands. In other words the shifting of agricultural plot is not of linear pattern but of "rotational type". This type of cultivation, may aptly be termed as slash and burn type of rotational cultivation.

The main variety of dry rice cultivated and recognised in Zongu is a red one called, 'thakmarzu'. This traditional 'thakmarzu' variety of rice seeds are only suitable for dry cultivation by slash and burn method. In the case of rice cultivation the men go first by making on holes with digginc sticks (thangyal) in both the hands, and the women follow them with seeds putting one each in hole.

After the introduction of wet rice cultivation in terraced paddy field the importance of dry rice as a food crop has ceased to exist. It is required only to perform some religious ceremonies.

Presently cultivation of dry rice is not done in Lingdong, it

had stopped about ten years ago. But it is still being continued in some other villages of Zongu, like Sakyong Pantoong and Limza where people are comparatively in a more primitive stage of technology. Dry rice needed for the ritual in Lingdong is brought from other villages of Zongu.

The crops which are still cultivated in Lingdong by slash and burn method are three varieties of makai (maize), two varieties of kudu (millet) and phaper (buckwheat). In Lingdong the principal crops cultivated in shifting cultivation are kudu and phaper. The cultivation is done by making a hole with digging stick and putting one or two seeds into it.

The Lepcha of Zongu recognised three varieties of makai seeds. These are kuchungdari, kuchungnok and kungchungmu. Even today the traditional variety of makai seed, especially the one called kungchungmu is being regularly cultivated by the Lepcha of Lingdong both by the traditional and contemporary methods. This is an example where a particular variety of crop is grown in the traditional as well as in the contemporary system.

Kudu or millet is a very traditional and indigenous crop of the Lepcha. In Lepcha language it is called mong. Kudu in Lepcha life has multifarious uses which will be discussed in the subsequent pages. Cultivation of kudu by shifting cultivation method starts in April. Small seedlings come out in July when weeding (niothbuk) is done. It ripens in October. In the case of kudu the seeds are sown by direct broadcasting.

The following two varieties of traditional kudu seeds are recognised by the Lepcha. These are mongmu, exclusively for shifting cultivation and mongbri, which ripens quickly and is still used in contemporary agriculture along with the traditional system.

In the autumn, after the rice (not in Lingdong) and millet are gathered, the fields are sown with buckwheat or phaper, which ripens in about five months. When it is harvested the ground is allowed to lie fallow. Usually in most of the cases buckwheat is cultivated simultaneously either with maize or millet as mixed crop.

As it has already been told that though the Lepcha continues shifting cultivation in Zongu area of Sikkim, they abandoned the practice in Darjeeling long ago. The development of Darjeeling district started in 1866, when large areas of forest land were brought under cultivation by the more efficient methods of terracing, ploughing and irrigation replacing the primitive agricultural method of shifting cultivation and by the introduction of new crops like tea, cinchona, potatoes, cardamom and orange. The rapid extension of agriculture in the early days of development resulted in the clearance of large areas of forest at favourable altitudes.

For the Lepcha the reservation of forest by Government has further cramped their traditional means of livelihood and natural environment. They are far less efficient as cultivators than the Nepalis who seem also to be more prolific. The Lepcha do not have a word for plough in their language., they use the Nepali word for it.

The reason for the present existence of shifting cultivation

in Lingdong and few other villages of upper Zongu is mainly ecological. The prevalence of certain ecological conditions enable them to still pursue this type of primitive method of cultivation. The Lepcha of Zongu cling to shifting cultivation not because of any cultural moorings but because of the constraints of nature. They practise slash and burn cultivation in the higher altitude fields where terracing or plough cultivation is practically impossible due to the steep incline of the land and other ecological factors. In Lingdong there are some steep mountain slopes where leaving aside plough cultivation even walking is difficult. Presence of excess land in the form of private forest and abundant rainfall help them to continue with this type of cultivation. Again in shifting cultivation no manure is used but the yield is also good. This is an indication how provocative is the traditional Lepcha agriculture. The only cultural bearing that could perhaps be associated with the shifting cultivation is, there are certain varieties of buck wheat, dry rice and millet which are needed for ritual and could only be grown by shifting cultivation method. But change is even evident in this traditional method of cultivation. The Lepcha of Lingdong now-a-days do not produce dry rice and kuchungdari variety of maize in this method. Beside the above mentioned cereal crops, a great number of root crops are also being cultivated through shifting cultivation. These includes, tubers like sweet potato, yam, artichoke etc. Crop tending is comparatively easier for the root crops because they are left underground and can not be damaged by pigs and other animals.

Presently the scientific assessment of this agricultural type has changed from total condemnation to partial recognition of an

inherent ecological rationality in the system. Shifting cultivation makes agricultural production possible in areas of generally infertile soils subject to rapid depletion of plant nutrients due to low temperature, altitude and moisture (Bartlett 1956 ; Gouran 1956).

Historical study indicates that shifting cultivation has been an early method of agricultural production in virtually all forested areas of the world when subsistence production supported a relatively sparse population. For a better understanding of the system we may consider, how many people can be fed by the food which is and can be produced on the land used and available by a particular technology. Productivity of a system may be made in terms of all the land available, which include land under cultivation and production, land temporarily out of cultivation, all form of grassland, fallow, wasteland, grazing land, forest etc.

But the system of shifting cultivation has some drawback. A certain length of fallow period is required to regenerate sufficient vegetation to maintain a slash and burn system, and given a certain amount of land required to be cultivated per person per year, there exists an equilibrium that represents the maximum population density the system can support. From this, we can suggest that if the population density exceeds the critical value, the fallow period must be shortened. But having shortened the fallow, land is then less productive and the area under cultivation in any one year must increase, which causes a further shortening of the fallow period. Hence, a spiral results that seemingly ends in a total disaster. But the Lepcha of Zongu are lucky in that way. They have developed



and are well adapted to wet cultivation in terraced fields simultaneously with the traditional type of cultivation. The families in Lingdong who are doing shifting cultivation also have permanent fields at their disposal and thus not solely dependent upon shifting cultivation. Due to the less pressure of population on land the pursuit of shifting cultivation is being continued in Zongu area of north Sikkim. In north district of Sikkim (of which Zongu is a part) the population density is 6 persons per sq. km., as per 1981 census. This shows the enormous amount of land available for cultivation in north Sikkim. Moreover, in Zongu, the area of highest concentration of Lepcha population, the Lepcha are the only land holding community under the law of Sikkim. But the Lepcha of Darjeeling, unlike their Sikkim counterpart, are not in a position to afford the luxury of shifting cultivation even on a small scale. In Darjeeling the Lepcha are tied in tough competition with the Nepalis for the ownership of land. In Nassey they possess 59% of the village land and in Pagang it is 50% but in Lingdong 100% of land is owned by the Lepcha. The lands are gradually passing out of their hand to the Nepalis in Darjeeling. The meagre amount of land that they possess are only used in wet cultivation. The situation compels the Lepcha of Darjeeling district to increase their production by developing the method of agricultural techniques. But in Zongu of Sikkim, as it was stated earlier, owing to high elevations and impervious nature of terrain and paucity of population, there is no such demand. The density of population in Zongu is perhaps below the minimum requirement for a proper development of an effective agricultural system.

## Division of Labour in Shifting Cultivation and its Social Consequences

In hunting economy, which involves long distance travel and masculine strength, women cannot participate to the extent of men due to the universal constraints of their being involved in child care. They cannot afford long absences from home and thus become auxiliary to this type of subsistence activity.

But in shifting cultivation women's participation is much more intensive at operational level than that of the men. In Lepcha shifting cultivation women's work is in fact slow and continuous, evenly distributed throughout the agricultural season. The men's share, namely the clearing, lasts a limited time and forms no part of the actual process of cultivation. But in contrast with the more intensive agricultural system, slash and burn agriculture requires high level inputs to crop tending, especially weeding and watching the crop against wild animals. In Lepcha shifting cultivation most of these operations are done by women. These include sowing, weeding and harvesting of crops. According to White et al (1981 : 827), agricultural regimes that require medium labour inputs with no periods of peak demand are more compatible with the childrearing constraints on women's activity than are regimes which require sudden mobilization of large number of people. The root crops cultivated in this method can be left underground and can be harvested at a slow pace, since it remains protected from pests, animals and weather.

Since the women play an important role in Lepcha shifting

cultivation, it can, therefore, be assumed that it will lead to increased degree of polygyny in Lepcha society. In other words the presence of polygyny in the Lepcha society can be predicted as a consequence of its high degree of female participation in shifting cultivation. That is why the incidence of polygyny is still found among the Lepcha of Zongu because they still practise some amount of shifting cultivation even in these days. But in Kalimpong where shifting cultivation cannot be practised polygyny is rarely found. Polygyny, as an institution, had developed among the Lepcha when they were in shifting cultivation stage possibly due to the high degree of women's involvement in the productive system.

In Zongu polygyny is practised by those who have sufficient amount of land, both under shifting cultivation as well as under permanent wet cultivation. This might also be an indirect effect of the Nepali caste system. In N.E. India where shifting cultivation is practised, we do not find polygyny because the influence of Hindu (Nepali) caste system is not there. Whereas in Zongu polyandry in the form of ciccisbeism is present only among those who have lands only under wet cultivation and when the owner can not look after his land and house because he is busy in other preoccupation, away from his fields and house. It is observed that in Lingdong only 16 acres of land is under shifting cultivation. This land is owned by 3 families. Two families possess 5 acres each and one family have 6 acres of land under slash and burn method. Out of these families, two are of polygynous type. First wife of the third family has died a few years back and the women's work in that family is looked after by the grown up daughters. This observation is also supported by

the information received from other villages of Zongu.

### Contemporary Agricultural System

The physical geography of the region makes conditions for agriculture extremely diverse. In the hills, many of the slopes are so stony and precipitous that nothing can thrive except scrub jungle or a occasional tree in the crevices of the rocks. Much of the hill land is unsuitable for cultivation of any kind, but on the more gentle slopes the soil is often of good quality. Altitude and other aspects, as might be expected, have important effects on agriculture. Only a small part of the district of Darjeeling and state of Sikkim lies above tree level but no crops are grown 9,500 feet above sea level owing to the cold. Only potatoes can be grown upto that elevation but the upper limits of height for rice, maize and millet are much lower. Orange is not grown above 8,000 feet. Below 2,500 feet much of the ground is steep and unsuitable for cultivation, the temperature here are too high to suit many of the crops growing in the colder altitudes and the result is that between 1,000 and 2,500 feet there is comparatively little cultivation and most of the areas are under forest. The combination of warmth at lower altitudes and high humidity makes for rapid weed growth, leaching, and poor agricultural soils. The higher altitudes slopes between 2,500 to 5,000 feet are less humid, better drained and at lower temperatures the weeds grow more slowly, humus and weathered rock combine in better soils. The area around 5,000 feet is ideal for intensive agricultural practices.

As it was mentioned earlier that the Lepcha do not have any long experience of settled agriculture in terraces in comparison to their Nepali neighbours. They have started terraced cultivation only in the early part of this century. They learnt the art of terracing from the immigrant Nepalis.

Agriculture among the Lepcha is a family enterprise, among those who share the hearth, share in the work and harvest. The use of high yielding varieties of crop are not very common in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The functional unit of production is the joint family, or may be referred to as the household (persons sharing a common cooking hearth). Goods are produced, distributed and consumed primarily by the household unit, and any relevant economic decisions are made there. The household is ideally a patrilocal family under the leadership of the eldest active male.

The major crops grown by the Lepcha in the area are paddy, maize, millet, potato, ginger and vegetables. The list of crops grown also include phaper (buck-wheat), sugarcane, wheat, pulses and mustard. The wheat and mustard cultivations are, however, limited and are declining. Cash crops are cardamom, in Sikkim and oranges, ginger and cauliflower in Kalimpong.

#### Types of Land and Soils ✓

Due to the undulating nature of the topography there is extreme variation in respect of soil type, altitude and moisture from land to land in the area. But in general in Kalimpong lands are classified into two broad categories, viz., sukha khet or dry land

(unirrigated and usually unterraced) and pani khet or wet land (irrigated and terraced). In Sikkim there is an additional type of land, i.e. cardamom land or cardamom field known as elaichi khet and the land used for shifting cultivation (rongdong). Sukha khet is mainly meant for dry cultivation, pani khet for paddy cultivation and cardamom lands (they may be sukha khet or pani khet) exclusively for cardamom cultivation. Cardamom fields are mainly found as a private enterprise only in Sikkim. No venture to cultivate cardamom in individual land is present in Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

The Lepcha classify soils into the following four classes -

- |             |   |             |
|-------------|---|-------------|
| 1. Farjar   | - | Stony soil  |
| 2. Farnuk   | - | Black soil  |
| 3. Farliang | - | Red soil    |
| 4. Faryear  | - | White soil. |

The above classification is mainly based on colour and quality of the soil. Beside this the Lepcha can identify and recognise a large number of soil types based upon the crop growing pattern, but in practice, circumstances force them to cultivate all sorts of crops in one field. They also colourfully decorate their house with different types of soils. The farnuk is the best type of soil, it is a type of soft alluvial soil where cultivation can be done best. In farliang soil cultivation can also be done, but it requires heavy manuring to give as good a yield as in the former type of soil. Farjar soil is not good for cultivation. Faryear is a 'dyeer type' of soil, used in dyeing the walls of the houses. Basically fertility of the soil depends much on the geological formation of the

underlying rocks from which the soil is derived. Climate and weather conditions are also critical factors constraining productivity in this Himalayan area. Since the ground is almost frozen during winter months, the agricultural cycle is limited to a single (summer-monsoon) crop.

### Methods of Cultivation

Method of cultivation in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim vary with the crops. Land which is not too steep is ploughed, otherwise hoes are used. While terracing (with an inward slope) is a distinctive and important feature of Himalayan cultivation, it is not systematically followed as terraces have to be cut with great labour in the hill sides. It is done to retain a portion of rain water.

As it was stated earlier that the chief food crops in dry cultivation (sukha khet) are maize (bhutta or makai), millet (marwa or kudo) and buck-wheat (phaper), and in wet cultivation is rice. Money producing crops are cardamoms (for which irrigation is needed), potatoes, oranges, ginger and vegetables.

Tilling of land is done by ploughing except, very small terraces are not ploughed. Weeding and harvesting are generally done by the cultivator and his family and with the system of mutual help among the neighbours known as parma. This mutual labour exchange system is called parma in Kalimpong and lobo in Sikkim. Both in Kalimpong and Sikkim hired daily labourers are only employed when absolutely necessary. Daily rates of agricultural labourers at present (1979 - 81) is @ Rs. 5/- per day (with food) for male and

Rs. 8/- per day without food. Throughout the district of Darjeeling and Sikkim the agricultural labourers are mainly Nepalis. It is very rare to find a Lepcha as agricultural daily labour. A recent Government notification (1978) has fixed the minimum wages for agricultural labour in the Darjeeling district @ Rs. 14/- per day, but in practice no one follows it, it is not even known to majority of the villages.

The chief implements used in cultivation are the plough, the hoe or spade, the kanta, the sickle and the crowbar. A wooden harrow and a thick heavy beam are used in paddy fields and sometimes in dry cultivation to break up clode. More intensive and efficient methods of cultivation are becoming popular among the Lepcha. While formerly a single ploughing was thought sufficient and no manuring was applied, now most Lepcha cultivators of Kalimpong in particular and of Sikkim in general plough twice, manure (organic) more freely and use better seeds. In Kalimpong chemical fertilizers are used by the Lepcha particularly in Nassey village, it is also used sporadically by the Lepcha cultivators of Pagang, but it is rarely used by the Lepcha of Lingdong. Weeding, hoeing and earthing are often repeated mainly among the Nepalis and rarely among the Lepcha. Men, women and children all use the hoe where ploughing can not be done, seeds are sometimes sown broadcast or dibbled in with a long stick either pointed or with an iron spike fixed at the end. The Lepcha are to some extent ineffective users of the plough and at some remote places of Zongu are sometimes seen turning over the soil with a rude wooden stick, a small spade or a spike. The comparative seclusion of fields surrounded by jungle is



congenial to their traditional culture and habits. On the other hand the Nepalis are the most assiduous cultivator leaving practically no part of his holding uncultivated, using his plough cattle to the fullest extent possible and terracing skillfully wherever it is feasible. The Bhotia, another ethnic group living in the region, are also casual cultivators like the Lepcha, perhaps because they are descendants of pastoral races more accustomed to grazing; they are for the same reason fond of cultivation at the higher level.

Work in the fields, whether, sowing, weeding or harvesting are nearly always done in large parties. These parties are made up partly of relations by blood or marriage, and partly by friends. Since the Lepcha trace relationship back seven generations on the father's side and at least three on mother's, there are always some relatives at hand to help in agricultural activities. Help in the fields is always repaid with a similar amount of labour; for sowing and weeding the helpers are always given a meal with meat and chi. At harvesting a meal need not be given to people who volunteer their services, but must be given to those who are asked to help. In Sikkim those who help in the preparation of cardamom fields are paid for in money because cardamom is a cash crop and not a food crop. Rupees 20/- is given for carrying a maund (about 40 kg.) of cardamom from Lingdong to Mangan market, a distance of about 15 Km.

Economic relations are ecology based. The Lepcha fully realise it and they have shaped the relationships as part of the adjustment. A relationship of reciprocity and co-operation is specially exhibited among the Lepcha who live in the undulating areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. Agricultural fields, at a higher

elevation gets ready for ploughing and sowing earlier than one at a lower elevation where rain water takes more time to dry up. One man alone, with his pair of bullocks and plough, may not be able to manage ploughing and sowing of his slopy fields which get dry at a rapid speed. Under such a situation, he is joined by cultivators of his neighbourhood or kinship sphere, who bring their respective ploughs and bullock to help in timely ploughing of the field. As a consequence, one would find a number of ploughs operating simultaneously on the same plot of land. The man who is helped in ploughing and sowing of his fields provides food and drinks to all the helpers. With such a joint economic effort, the timely sowing is assured. When the field of the next man get sufficiently dried up, to the extent where ploughing is possible, the same fleet of ploughs would operate there too. The operation continues till the fields of all the men in the group are ploughed and sown. An economic system of this kind grew out of necessity of adjustment to the typical kind of terrain found there. Those involved in an operation are under an obligation to render help to one another. The help remains at the labour level as the produce is not shared which goes as per the ownership of land.

### **Rice Cultivation**

Rice occupy nearly two third of the cultivated area in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim. Indian corn form a valuable staple in Kalimpong and other sub-divisions of Darjeeling and the state of Sikkim, and the area under it amounted to more than three quarters of the net cropped area at the time of this study. Of the different

crops the cultivators concentrate on amon paddy mostly, the soil being most suitable for the same. Irrigation is essential for rice growing in the hills and water has to be brought from nearby jhoras by flumes or pipes of bamboo or galvanised iron. Usually an attempt is made to give an inward slope to the terraces but that is not always possible. It is however required where rice is cultivated, as irrigation water has to stand on the fields. These rice terraces are quite fertile and require less manuring as top soil from higher land is washed down and deposited in the rice fields during irrigation or rainfall. The cultivation of rice in wet terraces is very recent in Lepcha life. Rice terraces for wet paddy was introduced at Lingdong, as well as in other parts of Zongu less than sixty years ago and in Kalimpong at the beginning of the century. Rice terraces demand a certain amount of hard initial labour, after which they acquire as it are, a capital value and once they are made, crop can be raised on them regularly with relatively little effort.

It is evident that Lepchas learnt the cultivation of wet rice in terraced field (thafong) from the Nepalis. In Kalimpong and other parts of the district of Darjeeling the conversion of un-terraced field (rongdom) to terraced one (thafong) was started a little before the beginning of this century. But in Zongu terracing was started in 1920s, and even it is continuing today. In Lingdong and other villages of Zongu the Government of Sikkim has terraced some land free of cost in the year 1979. It was done to make cultivation of wet rice possible in the relatively unused fallow land (lukthukmapanfath) situated high up in the hills. To encourage and facilitate the growth of permanent paddy fields (fathnakjong) the Government has

announced the waiving of land tax up to a period of three years after terracing. By this generous gesture on the part of Government, the amount of terraced lands in Zongu has been increasing annually. These terraces are scattered all over the valley, and it is rare for two contiguous strips to belong to the same owner. In Lingdong at least three persons have converted their uncultivable fallow into terraced fields in the year 1980-81.

Already it has been mentioned earlier (Chapter IV) that the cultivable fields of the Lepcha are situated on the slopes of the hills either in the vicinity of the villages or a little far away. Though the physical geography of the area is not suitable for rice cultivation in general, because in the hills where the Lepcha live many of the slopes are stony and precipitous, but in the gentler slopes and terraces the soil is often fertile. Especially the terraces of the lower region are much more fertile than the upper ones because the minerals and other valuable natural fertilizers of soil accumulate at the lower terraces.

Paddy is best grown from plains level upto the elevation of 2,500 to 5,000 feet. In the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim it is transplanted into irrigated land (pani khet). Seeds are sown in seed beds (1/6th of the area to be planted out) in April or May. Transplantation takes place in July or August and harvesting in November or at the beginning of December. The yield is very low, vary from 240 to 400 kgs. per acre and 320 kgs. may be taken as the average in the hills although in the plains double this figure may be attained. The yield of straw is heavy (1,000 to 1,400 kg. per acre).

The agricultural operation starts in the month of April - May or a little earlier in case of paddy cultivation, with the tilling of the terraced field by means of a plough (halkung). The next operation after ploughing is harrowing which is done with a ladder like frame made of bamboo or wood and at times an wooden plank is also used for this purpose. The whole instrument is called khuakubu and the wooden plank is called danta. After harrowing the field, transplantation (chok-zoothiang) is done. Weeding (buk or zoobuk) is the next procedure followed on. The next operation is harvesting (eak). It is done by sickle. Then the crops are dried in the field. The crops are taken to the threshing ground (lam) where threshing (kuk or zubuck) and winnowing (bee-kuong) are done. They store the grains in a wooden box called baha which is kept at the house.

The manure used by the Lepcha is cowdung and other garbages. Only the people of Nassey use a small amount of chemical fertilizers like phosphate, urea etc. and that too also for cash crops like cauliflower, potato etc. and not for paddy.

Comparisons of the time and labour involved in the cultivation of a particular type of crop has been attempted to account for the variations in yields. Clarke (1921) compared his observations of the Bomagai - Angoiang to those made of Kapauku by Pospisil and concluded that in clearing Kapauku worked 200 man - days per acre in the agricultural system as a whole whereas the Bomagai - Angoiang worked 165 days. Kapauku spend more time in tilling, slashing and fencing and less time in planting, weeding and tending the growing crops. However, the comparison of man-hours per acre does not

reflect the yield of different systems. A partially cleared, irregularly planted, slash and burn (shifting) field of big size may produce large tubers, or thick croppings, but the total harvest weight of a fully tilled and evenly planted permanent field may be much greater. By and large, the involvement of more man-days for a crop which gives more yield is a sign of more intensification of the system with increased production, especially when population pressure is felt, higher labour in-put while reducing the supply of forest products and dependency on animal meat.

The output in the production of paddy in Kalimpong (village Nassey and Pagang) and Lingdong is different. The output of the production of paddy is atleast 80 to 120 kg. less per acre in Sikkim than it is in Kalimpong. This is because of the fact that the Lepcha of Sikkim take less interest in cultivation.

In Lingdong one acre of terraced paddy field is ploughed by two men in one day. To level and watering (hillu) the field 4 to 5 persons are needed for one day. At the time of transplantation 25 to 30 persons are required because it is to be done in one day. Weeding is done by two persons in one day. Three persons are needed for harvesting, it is done in two days. Then the paddy is carried to threshing ground.

The number of man-days required to cultivate paddy in one acre of land in the Zongu area of Sikkim and Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district of West Bengal are given below. Data of Zongu is given from Lingdong and data of Kalimpong is given from Nassey.

Data of these two villages given below will represent the general trend in the respective regions (Table No. 17).

TABLE NO. 17

Labour required in Lingdong and Nassey to  
cultivate paddy in one acre of land.

| Name of the Operation | No. of days required (duration) |        | No. of men required |        | No. of men days required |        |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|
|                       | Lingdong                        | Nassey | Lingdong            | Nassey | Lingdong                 | Nassey |
| 1                     | 2                               | 3      | 4                   | 5      | 6                        | 7      |
| Ploughing             | 1                               | 2      | 2                   | 2      | 2                        | 4      |
| Levelling             | 1                               | 2      | 4                   | 4      | 4                        | 8      |
| Transplanting         | 1                               | 1      | 25                  | 30     | 25                       | 30     |
| Weeding               | 1                               | 2      | 2                   | 4      | 2                        | 8      |
| Harvesting            | 2                               | 2      | 3                   | 3      | 6                        | 6      |
|                       | 6                               | 9      | 36                  | 43     | 39                       | 56     |

Here, we can see that in Nassey to cultivate paddy in 1 acre of land 56 man-days are required whereas in Lingdong of Zongu area it is only 39 man-days. This partially accounts for the low output of paddy in Zongu area.

**Maize (makai or bhutta)**

The next important crop of the Lepcha, after paddy, is definitely makai or maize. This crop grows on almost any soil at altitudes between 1,000 to 7,000 feet above sea level. Black soil

(farnook) suits it best as hill cultivators do not usually manure this crop. It does best at low elevations in sunny areas and grows quite well in places where rocks retain moisture. After rice, it is the second best staple food crop of the Lepcha and is grown on dry land (sukha khet). After the ground has been prepared, the seeds are sown in February to April, either by broadcasting, by sowing in rows (phalis) or by individual planting in holes. It is harvested in July-Aug. After the first ploughing of the ground levelling is done. They use little or no manure for the makai cultivation. The Lepcha usually keep the seeds at their house. Average yield of this crop is six to seven maund (approx. 280 kg.) per acre. This is not a cash crop, they do not sell but consume it themselves. This crop is liable to damage by bears in Zongu where forest exists nearby.

In the villages of Kalimpong the Lepcha mainly use the imported makai seeds from the plains but in Lingdong and other parts of Zongu they use the traditional variety of makai seed, called kungchungmu.

#### Millet (marwa or kudu)

Millet is grown exclusively for fermenting of chi, a type of home brewed liquor and its use as food crop is limited in the Lepcha society. In Lepcha the crop is called mong. At times it is cultivated along with maize as a mixed crop. Kudu is grown in dry field or sukha khet. Land is prepared in March/April. Seeds are sown in May-June. Seedlings are prepared and transplanted to the main field during middle of June, and the crop is harvested in



October-November. It may also be transplanted in July-August so that the crop will be ready for harvesting by second week of December. Average yield of kudu both in Kalimpong and Sikkim, is 280 to 320 kg. per acre.

Actually the Lepcha cultivate this crop (kudu) on some sizeable amount of land. Lands under kudu cultivation is quite unproductive, which has got no food value except for the preparation of chi. The Lepcha have some fixed plots exclusively reserved for kudu cultivation. Sometimes they cultivate kudu in the interim period between two major crops like paddy and wheat. It is felt that had they cultivated food crops instead of kudu or millet, their economic condition would have been much better. This is very much observed from the Nepalis and Christian Lepchas, it is not that the Nepalis or Christian Lepchas do not drink chi but as they have less land under kudu cultivation in comparison to the Buddhist Lepcha, their economic condition is much better. Unlike the Buddhist Lepcha this drinking of chi has not become a part and parcel of life among the Christian Lepcha. This has been discussed under the topic of cropping pattern in the subsequent pages.

#### Potatoes

During the last decade this crop is being increasingly grown as a cash crop in many a Lepcha villages, particularly in the Darjeeling district. It is grown in villages as high as 7,000 feet above sea level. Potato cultivation is quite widespread in all parts of the hill area of Kalimpong. It is grown in dry fields but requires heavy manuring. In some places two crops are harvested, one

planted in October and harvested in January and February and the second planted in January or February and harvested in July. The success of potato cultivation depends to a great deal on the weather. Yields vary from 1200 to 4000 kg. per acre. To cultivate one acre of land 2000 kg. of manure and 400 kg. of seed potatoes are required. In some villages of Darjeeling it is seen that potato and maize are grown together in the same field. Potato seeds are sown in December or January. When the plants attain a height of 6 to 8 inches, maize seeds are sown in between two lines of potato plants. Potato is harvested in the month of June and July, maize stand in the field which is harvested in September and October.

In Nassey cultivation of potato as a major cash crop has been launched recently with the assistance of Comprehensive Area Development Corporation (CADC), and is gradually becoming a popular cash crop. It is observed that in Kalimpong the cultivation of potato as a cash crop has been taken up more by the Christian Lepcha than the Buddhist and it is mainly practised in the areas situated near to Kalimpong town. In Pagang village, as it is located a little far from Kalimpong town, its cultivation is not much popular as a cash crop and is being cultivated in a sporadic manner mainly for self consumption. In Zongu surprisingly potato is not cultivated (as it was in 1981) though the climate and soil are quite suitable for potato cultivation.

#### Cardamom (elaichi)

Cardamom is grown in small clearings all over the lower slopes of the Tista valley in Sikkim. This crop is a valuable one,

doing best at altitude from 1,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level. The crop requires a rich soil, shade, some warmth and a good supply of water. Fields are usually in the beds, or on the sides of streams and are liable to destruction by floods and landslips. This crop is harvested from September onwards. For a new plantation seed is sown in special seed beds and then transplanted in May or June, two to four feet apart. It is a perennial plant and can also be propagated by cuttings from old stemling clusters which are taken out in early spring. The plants need a good deal of care, and have to be hand-weeded thoroughly at least three times a year because buds and fruits come close to the ground. For the first two years the plant yields no crop, the plant reaches its full bearing period within three years and in the third year a half crop is obtained and thereafter for about 8 years a full crop can be expected which amounts to about 240 kg. or more per acre. After the end of tenth year the plants start to decline and become liable to blight or damage by insects and new plantings have to be made ; this can however be done on the same ground as the plant does not exhaust the soil. Cardamom flowers from the middle of April to the end of May, and after September when the crop is harvested the seed pods are dried in a klin and thereby are much reduced in weight. When the fruit is gathered the old growth is cut down and burned. The dried seeds are bagged and sold at prices upward of Rs. 350/- per maund (40 kg. = 1 maund). Prices go up when supply is short and sometimes reach as high as Rs. 700/- per maund in Sikkim. This is for the year 1980-81. It is difficult to calculate the cost of cultivation and consequently the profit, because most of the cost of cultivation is that of labour which is obtained mainly from the family.

Moreover, prices of the finished product vary erratically. It is nonetheless a crop which can give a very high return.

For the Lepcha cardamom is a foreign importation from Nepal, they always refer to it by its Nepali name - elaichi and with the cultivation of the plant has come a whole complex of alien belief and rituals. Presently in no village of Kalimpong cardamom plantation is done at individual level. Only one attempt has been made by the Cardamom Board, Government of West Bengal, for the revival of cardamom Plantation in Darjeeling district at their own nursery. In fact the impact of cardamom as a major cash crop is absent in the life of the Lepcha of Darjeeling district. But the picture is different in Sikkim, where plantation of cardamom as a cash crop has become a part and parcel of Lepcha life. In Zongu almost all families have some cardamom fields. In Lingdong it is even found that a few families have started the cultivation of cardamom in their permanent rice terraces by converting it into a cardamom field, because they found it much more profitable to cultivate cardamom than rice. With the money received from sell of cardamom they can purchase paddy or any other cereals.

The principal factor, which made them switch over to cardamom cultivation in the paddy field is the altitude. Because even at high altitude cardamom gives more or less the same yield but other food crops like paddy, millet, maize etc. give much less yield. This is an example how a natural or physical phenomenon (altitude) influence in determining the production of a crop.

In Lingdong and other villages of Zongu three varieties of

cardamoms are cultivated.

1. Ramna - It is the best and superior in quality than the other two. It is best suited to low altitude fields. In the year 1981 in Zongu one maund (40 kg.) of ramna sold for Rs. 480/-.
2. Ramla - It is the second best to ramna in quality. It can even be grown in the high altitude fields.
3. Ramsey - Qualitatively it is ranked last and always sells twenty rupees per maund less than the previous two varieties.

The Lepcha of Zongu sell their cardamom to the marwari traders and businessmen, locally called kanya. The Lepcha of Zongu do not pay any land tax for the land under cardamom cultivation. But the traders who buy cardamom have to pay a toll of Rs. 20/- per maund at the border when they take the cardamom out of Sikkim. But in fact the shrewd marwari businessmen always deduct this toll tax from the price paid to the cultivator.

### Orange

In Kalimpong about fifty years ago the orange groves began to die out and at present there is practically no orange in Kalimpong. In Darjeeling district orange is grown only in Kurseong and Sadar subdivisions, but not in Kalimpong subdivision where more than 45% of its Lepcha population resides. This destruction of orange groves in Kalimpong subdivision is probably due to some unknown

geo-morphological reasons. At Nassey only about two generations ago orange was profusely grown and a part of Lepcha economy depended upon orange plantation. When all of a sudden orange plants started to decline in Kalimpong, the cash economy of the Lepcha received a jolt.

In Sikkim, the Lepcha of Zongu used to grow orange since time immemorial but the monetary value of the crop was not known to them until recently. Only after 1978 they have started selling oranges. Before that the entire produce was consumed or freely distributed.

The market price of 100 oranges was Rs. 10/- in Sikkim in 1981. Orange plantation is highly profitable and in Zongu it has expanded considerably in the recent years. About 90 percent of the output is exported. Two varieties of local Sikkim orange are grown - one of small tight skinned variety and the other a loose skinned, large and softer kind. Rich black soil is required and an elevation of between 2,000 ft. and 4,000 ft. above sea level. The crop is harvested from November to January. Seedlings, brought from outside of Zongu are transplanted in May and June, 14 to 18 feet apart. About 200 seedlings are required per acre. About 8 years are required before the trees begin to bear fruit and they continue to give a good crop for 25 years or so. The trees grow upto 15 to 20 feet and out turn per tree is from 800 to 1,000 oranges annually.

#### Cauliflower

Cauliflower is a highly profitable cash crop. To cultivate cauliflower (riburu) in one acre land, seeds of Rs. 10/- are needed ;

the outturn is 20 maund and is sold at @ Rs. 80/- per maund (1 maund = 40 kg.). This is a winter crop, which is grown between first week of October to last week of December. The cultivation of cauliflower needs intensive care especially the weeding is of utmost importance. The cauliflower is only grown at Nassey and a few other adjacent villages near Kalimpong town. In Pagang village which is situated far away from the Kalimpong town, cauliflower or any other form of cash crop is not cultivated on commercial basis. It is because of the fact that the market is far away and regular transportation is not available, so that the villagers can not bring their produces to the market.

At Nassey for the cultivation of cash crops, the Lepcha get help from various Government agencies like Comprehensive Area Development Corporation (C.A.D.C.) etc. in the form of cash or in kinds (seeds, manure). It is evident that those who have adopted the cultivation of cash crops, are economically in a better position than the others.

In Zongu though the cultivation of orange has started on a commercial basis but the general picture of the orange plantation in Zongu is not at all encouraging. Except cardamom, the Lepcha of Zongu are not particularly interested in growing other cash crops like orange, ginger etc. because these are perishable products and can not be stored and also need quick transportation to the market in the plains. During the rainy season, the roads are blocked due to landslides.

If we compare the technology of production employed in the

process of cultivation among the Lepcha of Zongu and the Lepcha of Kalimpong, we will see that the agricultural practices are much more intensified in Kalimpong. Most intensification is found in Nassey and least in Lingdong, inbetween stands Pagang. By intensification of agricultural practice I mean the following :

1. Field with defined boundary with fence to keep away livestock.
2. Preparation of ground by intensive tilling, ploughing, ridging as well as rotation of crop and livestock foraging.
3. Irrigating the field by terracing, drainage, trenching, diverting streams and waterways and transplanting.
4. Use of more manure, cowdung for food crops and chemical fertilizers for cash crop, applying organic fertilizers.
5. Proper crop care and tending, weeding, pest control.

The increase of production may result from cultivating more land or from increasing the yield by changing the agricultural techniques to grow more on the same land. There is a close relationship between the density of population - a result of population growth at some time in the past and the intensity of agricultural practices. Obviously more intensified agriculture is being practised in Kalimpong area as population density is more there. The population density of north district of Sikkim of which Zongu is a part is 6 persons per sq. km.



## Agricultural Transformation and Some Related Factors

An examination of the Lepcha agricultural subsistence economy reveals that within a very short period it had undergone a rapid transformation from hunting gathering stage to plough cultivation, in wet terraces, via an interim phase of shifting cultivation, and finally to cash crop economy of cardamom, oranges and cauliflower etc.

Each of these stages has brought, in its train, some social consequences. Conflict of choice in the economic pursuits developed during these interim periods of transformations. All socio-cultural changes are usually initiated by the individuals. The stimulus for a new idea or a new behaviour is consequently always specific to a given individual. Sometimes, however, it is generalised so that it bears upon several individuals, or it becomes more intensive or recurrent so that it affects some individuals more acutely than it does others.

This agricultural transformation in the case of the Lepcha of Kalimpong and other places of Darjeeling district took place long ago and no informant is available to narrate the situation. But in the case of the Lepcha of Zongu, north Sikkim, this transformation occurred not very long back and some information are available.

In Zongu, in 1930's, only two or three families who had land in the lower river valley had begun to cultivate wet rice with plough. At that time settled agriculture did not make much headway and as stated earlier was purely a result of Nepali acculturation.

During the initial phase of change over from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, it was not only learning and relearning of new techniques, but also has meant a triangular conflict in most of the families. A case study is given for illustration. The story was collected from one very old informant of Lingdong village of Zongu. His name is Takdung Lepcha.

In 1938 one Lepcha youngman as he was at that time wanted to extend the area of wet plough cultivation of rice by reducing the area under slash and burn cultivation. But his father was not agreeable. At that time plenty of land was available, the problem was not of space but of capital. Both dry and wet rice cultivation seasons fall almost at the same time. During the cultivation of either types they required to engage outside labour for a few days. As they did not have enough cash to engage labour on wage basis, they decided to engage labour on parma basis (mutual exchange system), but even in that case they required to entertain the labourers with chi (liquor) and food. But they did not have enough kudu (millet) in stock to prepare chi for the workers for both types of crops. Moreover a tremendous amount of labour was necessary to convert the grounds into terraced field. The father did not succumb to the pressure of the son. The mother was also against the son. She was not familiar with the practices associated with settled agriculture and she felt that the extension of the same would render her useless in the family, she was also under impression that dry rice was indispensable for the various ceremonies and rituals. Ultimately, the son borrowed some money from the marwari money-lender on condition that he would repay the debt by cardamom when season comes and

extended the areas of settled cultivation independently with the help of the Nepalis as wage labourers. On seeing his success gradually a few more families in the next year also brought their grounds under wet rice agriculture by building new terraces.

Now-a-days, cardamom has become very important in the life of the Lepcha of Zongu as a major cash crop. The production of cash or money crops are no doubt a definite indication of social change. Through the production of cash crop the self-contained subsistence economy of the Lepcha came in contact with the market economy. As stated earlier, cardamom is a foreign importation from Nepal, a result of Nepali acculturation. Cardamom is exclusively produced as a cash crop in Zongu and other parts of north Sikkim. As an indirect effect of cash cropping, the attribution of some taboos on women's activity attached to cardamom cultivation deteriorated the status of women in Lepcha society. Cardamom, as an effect of a Nepali Hindu acculturation brought many alien belief and practices quite unknown to the Lepcha women which made them less important in the new era of cash economy. Previously there was no ban on menstruating women from participating in agricultural operation. But the essential Nepali Hindu idea that the smell of the menstruating women would spoil the cardamom flowers, prevents the Lepcha women from participating in cardamom production. The very idea of women being essentially unclean was due to acculturation with the Nepalis, otherwise the menstruating women were not segregated in agricultural activities.

After the introduction of cash crops and money economy, the

prevalence of nuclear families is on the rise. Where income is primarily for direct consumption, the joint family stores its produce in one unit and uses it when needed. But when a large part of income is in cash, its joint use becomes complicated, and it is a fact that a number of joint families have divided because of quarrels over the deposition of cash income. This is why the number of nuclear family is more than the joint family among the present day Lepcha.

### Land

Since agriculture is the basis of livelihood among the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim, land is of utmost importance. There is a popular Lepcha song concerning a hero who fought to death rather than to lose the land which was rightfully his. Cultivable land is categorized by the villagers in several ways relevant to its productivity. Probably the most important distinction is between land which is irrigated and that which is not. Most of the land of the village Pagang and Nassey are of irrigated type. Land in lower lying areas is often irrigated. With small exceptions, generally the land is considered to be the property of the householder in whose name the house is registered and who is responsible for the payment of taxes. According to the Lepcha traditional custom, land can only be owned by men, in the event of a woman or a group of women (usually co-wives) being left sole possessors of a property, they must acquire, either by marriage or by adoption, a male who can inherit the property. But today even a woman, who does not have any male member to look after, can have land in her name.

### Nassey Village

Total cultivable land in the village Nassey is 142 acres, of which 34 acres are sukha khet and 108 acres are pani khet. Roughly 84 acres belong to the Lepcha community ; 54 acres to the Nepalis ; 4 acres to a Muslim family. Out of total cultivable land of 142 acres, 59.16 per cent belong to the Lepcha and 38.02 per cent owned by the Nepalis, the rest of the land belong to the Muslim family.

Population and landholdings of various communities of Nassey village is given in the following table.

TABLE NO. 18

Landholding by communities  
in Nassey

| Community    | Family    | Percentage    | Landholding<br>in acre | Percentage    |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2         | 3             | 4                      | 5             |
| Lepcha       | 34        | 58.62         | 84                     | 59.16         |
| Nepali       | 23        | 39.66         | 54                     | 38.02         |
| Muslim       | 1         | 1.72          | 4                      | 2.82          |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>58</b> | <b>100.00</b> | <b>142</b>             | <b>100.00</b> |

The families living in the village Nassey do not own same amount of land, it varies from family to family. The pattern of land holding among the various communities in the Nassey village is given in the following table (No. 19).

TABLE NO. 19

## Landholding pattern in Nassey

| Community    | Number of families and land holdings (in acres) |           |           |          |           |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|              | Land less                                       | Below 1   | 1 to 3    | 3 to 5   | 5 to 8    |
| 1            | 2                                               | 3         | 4         | 5        | 6         |
| Lepcha       | 2                                               | 7         | 9         | 4        | 12        |
| Nepali       | 8                                               | 6         | 5         | 4        | -         |
| Muslim       | -                                               | -         | -         | 1        | -         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>10</b>                                       | <b>13</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>12</b> |

From the above table it is seen that 2 Lepcha (5.8%) and 8 Nepali (34.7%) families do not have any land. 7 Lepcha (20.5%) and 6 Nepali (26%) families possess land below one acre. 9 Lepcha (26.4%) and 5 Nepali (21.7%) families have land between 1 to 3 acre. 4 Lepcha (11.7%), 4 Nepali (17.3%) and 1 Muslim (100%) families possess land between 3 to 5 acre. 12 (36.6%) Lepcha families only own land between 5 to 8 acre. From the table (No. 19) it may be said that among the Lepcha of Nassey, 20 (58.6%) families have land upto 5 acres and may be called small farmers, 12 (36.6%) families have land in the range from 5 to 8 acres and may be called medium farmers, large farmers may be called who have land above 12 acres. This classification of small, medium and large farmers have been made keeping in mind the special condition prevailing in the hill area and level of production.

## Pagang Village

Total cultivable land of the Pagang village is 318 acres, out of which 16 acres belong to the monastery and 302 acres belong to the individual families. Out of these 302 acres of land 52 acres are sukha khet and 250 acres are pani khet. 50.34 percent of the land belong to the Lepcha, 19.86 per cent belong to the Nepalis. 22.36 percent land belong to the Bhotia. Though the Lepcha are the major landholding group but they are gradually loosing their land to the neighbouring communities, especially to the Nepalis. It is interesting to note that the Lepcha lands are being passed out mainly to the Nepalis but not to the Bhotia. The various factors responsible for it will be discussed later.

Population and landholding of various communities of Pagang village is given in table No. 20.

TABLE NO. 20

Landholding by communities  
in Pagang

| Community    | Family    | Percentage    | Landholding<br>in acre | Percentage    |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2         | 3             | 4                      | 5             |
| Lepcha       | 50        | 58.82         | 152                    | 50.34         |
| Nepali       | 16        | 18.82         | 60                     | 19.86         |
| Bhotia       | 19        | 22.36         | 90                     | 29.80         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>85</b> | <b>100.00</b> | <b>302</b>             | <b>100.00</b> |

The pattern of land holding among the various communities in the village Pagang is given in table No. 21. Here also the Lepcha constitute the major landholding community. Next to them are the Bhotia. Nepalis are relatively new comer in this tract and possess much less land than the other two communities.

TABLE NO. 21

## Landholding pattern in Pagang (in acres)

| Community | Number of families and land holdings |         |        |        |        |         |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
|           | Land less                            | Below 1 | 1 to 3 | 3 to 5 | 5 to 8 | 8 to 12 |
| 1         | 2                                    | 3       | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7       |
| Lepcha    | -                                    | 8       | 16     | 19     | 5      | 2       |
| Nepali    | 2                                    | 6       | 4      | 3      | 1      | -       |
| Bhotia    | -                                    | -       | 5      | 8      | 6      | -       |
| Total     | 2                                    | 14      | 25     | 30     | 12     | 2       |

From the above table it is seen that no Lepcha or Bhotia family is landless in the Pagang village. Only 2 Nepali (12.5%) families are landless. 8 Lepcha (16%) and 6 Nepali (37.5%) families have land below one acre. No Bhotia family has land below one acre; 16 Lepcha (32%), 4 Nepali (25%), and 5 Bhotia (26.4%) families possess land between 1 to 3 acres. 19 Lepcha (38%), 3 Nepali (18.7%) and 8 Bhotia (42.2%) families have land between 3 to 5 acre. 5 Lepcha (10%), 1 Nepali (6.2%) and 6 Bhotia (31.5%) families own land between 5 to 8 acre. Only 2 Lepcha (4%) families possess land above 8 acres.



Here in Pagang 43 (86.0%) of the Lepcha families have land upto 5 acres and may be termed as small farmers ; 7 (14.0%) families have land in the range of 5 to 12 acres and may be called medium farmers.

In Pagang, land being the main form of capital is owned by the family units. But besides family, there are about 16 acres of land owned by a monastery, known as 'Rishi Gumpha'. This monastic land is cultivated by the Nepali share-cropper.

#### Lingdong village

In Lingdong and other villages of the Zongu the picture is completely different. The main problem here is the lack of proper measure of land because no proper land survey has been done in Sikkim since it was ruled by a native Prince till 1975. This caused a tremendous methodological problem at the time of collecting data on land. In Zongu upto 1981 the land is measured not in terms of acre or bigha etc. But in the traditional old 'mana-patty' system. It is based on the amount of seed required to cultivate a plot of land. Here again seeds of different crops varies in amount. Again the measurement of cardamom fields depend on its production, and not on the area. Areas of orange gardens also depend on the production of fruits.

While collecting data on land holdings I put a simple question to a Lepcha of Lingdong. How much land do you possess ? The reply was, 5 patty sukha khet, 4 patty pani khet, 6 maund cardamom, 500 oranges and so on. The measurement of land in acre

or bigha is alien to them. In Zongu the Lepcha are the only land holding community, no one other than a pure blooded Lepcha is allowed to buy land in Zongu. It is observed that only the families with small holding and big holding are interested in orange cultivation. Families having meagre amount of land cultivate orange because at the end of the season they run short of food crops and by selling orange they get some cash and purchase cereals. But the big land owners grow orange in their excess land in a most reluctant manner. Orange is grown in dry field.

#### Conversion into Acreage

As said earlier, the Lepcha of Zongu did not have any modern method of land measurement till 1981, they still follow the traditional 'mana patty' system. It is based on the amount of seed required to cultivate a particular stretch of land. In 8 manas become 1 patty, 1 patty is weighed approximately 3 to 4 kgs. of seeds, depending upon the nature of seed. Generally 2 patty seed is required to cultivate one acre of land. This is applicable for paddy and millet cultivation. The situation has become further ambiguous for cardamom cultivation. It is also stated in terms of production, i.e., 2 or 3 maunds of cardamom or so. Cardamom is grown in two or three different types of land, each having its different level of production. Say for instance, 5 maunds (200 kg.) of cardamom can be produced in 3 acres of land if it is good, or in 7, even 8 acres of land, if it is not so good. But on an average to produce 2 maunds (80 kg.) of cardamom, 3 acres of land is required.

However, an attempt has been made to convert this traditional 'mana patty' system into modern acreage. The result of which is given in the following table. In Lingdong the total cultivable land is about 366 acres, out of which 99 acres sukha khet, 167 acres pani khet and 100 acres cardamom field. So in Lingdong about 28% of the total land is under cardamom cultivation. All the land is owned by the Lepcha. Nepalis do not own any land, they cultivate the lands as a tenant. Out of 99 acres of sukha khet only about 16 acres are used for shifting cultivation. Orange trees are planted in the sukha khet skirting the land.

TABLE NO. 22

## Land holding by communities in Lingdong

| Community | Family | Percentage | Landholding<br>in acre | Percentage |
|-----------|--------|------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1         | 2      | 3          | 4                      | 5          |
| Lepcha    | 29     | 70.74      | 366                    | 100.00     |
| Nepali    | 12     | 29.26      | -                      | -          |
| Total     | 41     | 100.00     | 366                    | 100.00     |

From the above table it is seen that all the land of the village Lingdong is owned by the Lepcha. The land temporarily held and cultivated by the Nepalis is not owned by them. Out of 366 acres of arable land in Lingdong only about 16 acres are under slash and burn method of cultivation. This land is owned by 3 families. Two families have 5 acres each and one has 6 acres.

TABLE NO. 23

## Land holding pattern in Lingdong (in acres)

| Community | Number of families and Land holdings |         |        |        |        |         |          |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|----------|
|           | Land less                            | Below 1 | 1 to 3 | 3 to 5 | 5 to 8 | 8 to 12 | above 12 |
| 1         | 2                                    | 3       | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7       | 8        |
| Lepcha    | -                                    | -       | 2      | 2      | 8      | 7       | 10       |
| Nepali    | 12                                   | -       | -      | -      | -      | -       | -        |
| Total     | 12                                   | -       | 2      | 2      | 8      | 7       | 10       |

From the above table it is seen that all the 12 Nepali families are landless. No Lepcha family have land below 1 acre, 2 (6.8%) of the Lepcha families have land between 1 to 3 acre, 2 (6.9%) have land between 3 to 5 acres, 8 (27.6%) of the Lepcha families have land between 5 to 8 acres, 7 (24.2%) of the families have land between 8 to 12 acres and 10 (34.4%) of the Lepcha families have land above 12 acres. In Lingdong the Lepcha own big holdings. Among the Lepcha 4 (13.81%) families have land upto 5 acres and may be called small farmers ; 15 (51.8%) families have land in the range of 5 to 12 acres and may be called medium farmers ; 10 (34.4%) families have land above 12 acres and may be called large farmers. A comparison of the land holding sizes among the Lepcha of the three villages is given below :-

TABLE NO. 24

Comparative land holding categories (in acres)

| Village      | Landless | Small Farmer<br>(upto 5) | Medium Farmer<br>(5 to 12) | Large Farmer<br>(above 12) |
|--------------|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1            | 2        | 3                        | 4                          | 5                          |
| Nassey       | 2        | 20                       | 12                         | -                          |
| Pagang       | -        | 43                       | 7                          | -                          |
| Lingdong     | -        | 4                        | 15                         | 10                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>67</b>                | <b>34</b>                  | <b>10</b>                  |

From the above table it is seen that small farmers are more among the Lepcha in Kalimpong whereas medium and large farmers are more in Zongu.

#### Land Tenure System ✓

Land tenure is the set of rules regulating the use and ownership of land. One of the most important aspects of society's relation to environment is the way in which resources are allocated among the producing units, which has already been discussed in the preceeding pages. Thus, the allocation of land resources for agricultural purposes is a major facet of organization which people impose on the space around them. Land tenure system is a combination of land tenancy, land labour management, taxes and transfer of land etc.

Traditionally the Lepcha had little or no pressure on land and forest resources, access to land depended only upon one's

remaining on good terms with his neighbours.

In most of the cases the later migrants like Nepalis got the land from the Lepcha owner as a share cropper or through some other varieties of tenancy. Subsequently with the help of their multiple choice of occupation they accumulated wealth and ultimately purchased the land from the poor Lepcha owner. At present though there is a law that no tribal land can be transferred to non-tribals, this is insufficient to protect the Lepcha land because, the Bhotia, who are also tribal, can purchase land from the Lepcha. Again the Lepcha girls are getting married to the Nepalis who then purchase land in the name of their tribal wives. But as stated earlier, no other ethnic group other than the Lepcha are allowed to purchase land in Zongu. Even the Bhotia are also not permitted. In Zongu thus no case of the transfer of Lepcha land has been reported. But in Kalimpong and other areas of Darjeeling district a number of cases of transfer of Lepcha land have been reported in the recent years. The transfer of land through means other than inheritance may be effected through sale, mortgage, receiving back mortgaged land and gift. With a few exception of gift most of the transfers were by sale and mortgage.

There are many reasons for sale and mortgage of land ; some of them are ; (i) when the death of one or more of the working members of the family reduces the family to a small size, it may rent out part of its holding. Renting, however, decreases the profits, and through letting out the land a small family may become poor and eventually have to mortgage at least a portion of its land ;

(ii) sometimes the inability of a poor Lepcha family to marry off its sons force selling of lands or at least a part of it and (iii) sometimes to meet up the high demand of rituals connecting with rites of passage, specially the Buddhist Lepchas are mostly affected. To save their last penny from the highly expensive and compulsive Buddhist rituals, many a Lepcha peasants of Nassey and Pagang villages of Kalimpong have converted themselves into Christianity.

Most of the Lepcha inherited their lands from their forefathers. In all the villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim, the official tax collector is Mondal, who collects revenue taxes on behalf of the Government. Though the Mondals are appointed by the Government their names are proposed by the respective village panchayats. In olden days the Mondals used to enjoy some political power and authority in the traditional village panchayat, now they have been reduced to the status of a mere tax collector. In West Bengal the present Left Front Government has made land tax free upto 3 acres for arable land. Those who possess land in excess of 3 acres are to pay tax @ Rs. 5/- per acre. In Zongu of Sikkim the tax is @ Rs. 1/- per patty. Lands under cardamom cultivation is absolutely tax free in Sikkim. The Mondals do not get any fixed salary but get a commission of 5% over the collected tax. In Lingdong and other villages of Zongu the Mondal is also an ex-officio member of the statutory village panchayat.

#### Agrarian Class Structure ✓

The agrarian classes and labour management in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim are of various types depending upon the

situation. These are non-cultivating land owner, owner cultivator, absentee land lord, owner cultivator-cum-share-cropper, share cropper, share cropper-cum-agricultural labourer and agricultural labourer. The classification is done mainly on the basis of the primary occupation of the families.

The agrarian class structure of the village Nassey based on the existing land tenure system is shown in table No. 25 (Next page).

Non-cultivating land owner cultivates his land by hired labour or by share-cropper with full control over the production system but the absentee land lords on the other hand fully depend on the share-cropper; he does not stay in the village.

From table No. 25 it is seen that among the 34 Lepcha families, 2 (5.88%) are non-cultivating land owner, 13 (38.24%) are owner cultivator, 15 (44.12%) are owner cultivator-cum-share cropper, 4 (11.76%) are share cropper. Among the 23 Nepali families, 3 (13.04%) are owner cultivator, 8 (34.79%) are owner cultivator-cum-share-cropper, 6 (26.09%) are share cropper, 3 (13.04%) are share-cropper-cum-agricultural labourer and 3 (13.04%) are agricultural labourer. The only one Muslim family is an owner cultivator. It is interesting to note that no Lepcha family is doing agricultural labour work in Nassey.

Table No. 26 gives the agrarian class structure of Pagang based on the existing land tenure system.



TABLE NO. 25

## Agrarian class structure of Nassey

| Community | Total No. family | Non-cultivating land owner | Owner cultivator | Owner cultivator cum share cropper | Share cropper | Share cropper cum agricultural labourer | Agricultural labourer |
|-----------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1         | 2                | 3                          | 4                | 5                                  | 6             | 7                                       | 8                     |
| Lepcha    | 34               | 2<br>(5.88)                | 13<br>(38.24)    | 15<br>(44.12)                      | 4<br>(11.76)  | -                                       | -                     |
| Nepali    | 23               | -                          | 3<br>(13.04)     | 8<br>(34.79)                       | 6<br>(26.09)  | 3<br>(13.04)                            | 3<br>(13.04)          |
| Muslim    | 1                | -                          | 1<br>(100.00)    | -                                  | -             | -                                       | -                     |

(Figures in the parentheses show percentage)

TABLE NO. 26

## Agrarian class structure of Pagang

| Community | Total No. of families | 1                 | 2                          | 3                | 4                                  | 5             | 6                                | 7                                       | 8 | 9 |
|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---|---|
|           |                       | Absentee landlord | Non-cultivating land owner | Owner cultivator | Owner cultivator cum share cropper | Share cropper | Share cropper cum tural labourer | Share cropper cum Agricultural labourer |   |   |
| Lepcha    | 50                    | 3<br>(6.00)       | 6<br>(12.00)               | 16<br>(32.00)    | 18<br>(36.00)                      | 4<br>(8.00)   | 3<br>(6.00)                      | -                                       |   |   |
| Nepali    | 16                    | -                 | -                          | 2<br>(12.50)     | 4<br>(25.00)                       | 5<br>(31.25)  | 2<br>(12.50)                     | 3<br>(18.75)                            |   |   |
| Bhotia    | 19                    | 2<br>(10.54)      | 3<br>(15.78)               | 8<br>(42.10)     | 6<br>(31.58)                       | -             | -                                | -                                       |   |   |

(Figures in the Parentheses show percentage)

From the table No. 26 it is seen that among the 50 Lepcha families of the village, 3 (6%) are absentee landlord, 6 (12%) are non-cultivating land owner, 16 (32%) are owner cultivator, 18 (36%) families are owner cultivator-cum-share-cropper, 4 (8%) families are share-cropper, 3 (6%) families are share-cropper-cum-agricultural labourer, there is no family which depends on total agricultural labourer in the village Pagang among the Lepcha.

Among the 16 Nepali families, 2 (12.50%) families are owner cultivator, 4 (25%) families are owner cultivator-cum-share-cropper, 5 (31.25%) families are share-cropper, 2 (12.50%) families are share-cropper-cum-agricultural labourer and 3 (18.75%) families are agricultural labourer.

Among the 19 Bhotia families of the village, 2 (10.54%) families are absentee land lord, 3 (15.78%) families are non-cultivating land owner, 8 (42.10%) families are owner cultivator, 6 (31.58%) families are owner-cultivator-cum-share-cropper. No Bhotia family is doing share-cropping or agricultural labour.

In the villages of Nassey and Pagang the reason for the families to become non-cultivating land owner is that, the male member are old aged and some active male members of the family had gone to Sikkim as school teachers and other members of the household are indolent to till the soil. 3 families of Pagang village recently started share-cropping and worked as agricultural labourer because they had lost their arable land in the land slide and soil erosion ; the land they are holding at present are fallow and unsuitable for cultivation.

In the Lingdong village of Zongu it is found that there are only four classes in the agrarian system. These are, (1) non-cultivating land owner ; (2) non-cultivating cum cultivating land owner ; (3) cultivating land owner and (4) share cropper. The Lepcha belong to the first three categories. The Nepalis exclusively belong to the class of share-croppers since they are not permitted to own land in Zongu. The class of agricultural labourer is absent in Lingdong village because the Lepcha either cultivate their own land or they let out their excess land to the Nepalis on share-cropping basis. Here the Nepalis become tenant. While cultivating their own land the Lepcha of Lingdong usually do not employ the Nepalis as agricultural daily labourers instead they seek the help of the fellow Lepchas on lobo basis whenever they require it.

But when the Lepcha feel it necessary to employ agricultural daily labourer in the field, they engage hired labourer brought from outside of Zongu who obtain a daily work permit, come for work and return to Mangan in the evening. They do not live in the village and hence are not included in the agrarian class structure of Lingdong.

As told earlier the cultivable land in Lingdong under contemporary system can be classified into three categories, viz., (1) paddy land ; (2) cardamom fields and (3) orange plantation. The Lepcha, as they possess large amount of land, are only interested to let out the paddy fields to the Nepali tenants on various terms and conditions. But the Lepcha usually do not let out the cardamom fields or orange gardens to any ....

Nepali because cardamom and oranges are readily saleable cash crops. Also cardamom and orange requires less tending once they are planted.

Agrarian class structure of Lingdong village based on the existing land tenure system is given in table No. 27.

TABLE NO. 27

## Agrarian class structure of Lingdong

| Community | Total No. of family | Non Culti- land owner | Non Culti. cum land owner | Culti, land owner | Share cropper  |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1         | 2                   | 3                     | 4                         | 5                 | 6              |
| Lepcha    | 29                  | 7<br>(24.14)          | 18<br>(62.07)             | 4<br>(13.79)      | -              |
| Nepali    | 12                  | -                     | -                         | -                 | 12<br>(100.00) |

(Figures in the parentheses show percentage)

It is seen that among the 29 Lepcha families of the village Lingdong, 7 (24.14%) families are non-cultivating land owner, 18 (62.07%) families are non-cultivating-cum-cultivating land owner, 4 (13.79%) families are cultivating-land owner. In Lingdong there is no share-cropper family among the Lepcha. All the Nepali families of Lingdong are share cropper.

The families that come under the category of non-cultivating cum-cultivating type in Lingdong generally keep within themselves

some portion of their cultivable land, usually the cardamom fields and orange groves and some paddy fields and the remaining portion of their land they let out to the Nepalis on share cropping basis. The Lepcha never let out the land under shifting cultivation. The Nepalis in Sikkim do not practise slash and burn cultivation.

### Social Organization of Production

The organizational forces behind the productive system in the Lepcha villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim are common. There are four types of system prevailing in the area (1) **Self cultivation** - in this system the land is cultivated by the owner himself with the help of his family members ; (2) Adhiar or pakhure (share cropper) - 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 is set aside ; (3) Kuth (contractual system) - under this system the tenant enters into a contract with the Lepcha land lord which obliges him to pay a specified amount of crop irrespective of the amount of yield ; (4) Parma or lobo (system of exchange of labour) - in this system mutual exchange of labour takes place. One has to work in other's field voluntarily, in return he must expect, that the person will also work in his field in return when required. A person while cultivating his field gets physical assistance in the form of labour from his neighbours free of cost, only he has to treat them with food and drinks, in lieu of it he also does work in the neighbours field on similar terms. This is undoubtedly a very effective instrument to decrease the cost of production where the Lepcha do not have to depend on hired labour.

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to show the differential pattern of distribution of the most important resource, the land, in the three villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim under study. Along with the allocation of land, it has also been shown how the utilization of land takes place. In Kalimpong villages where the pressure of land is more, the economic condition of the Lepcha are not good. But in Zongu of Sikkim due to less pressure upon land, the Lepcha are economically better off, this also helps them to maintain their indigenous way of life.

### Cropping Pattern

Yield or productivity of the land is an important phenomenon to understand and evaluate a subsistence agricultural economic system,

One of the ways of measuring the output - how much is produced in a standard area such as per acre - over a specified period of time, usually a year, to correspond the outputs of temperate regions where the annual variation in weather generally results in a variation in yield in single crop season. The yield of a particular crop can be measured in weight when one community grows several crops, the productivity of one may be much more than that of another - more weight, more bulk, more calories and more people fed. In order to understand the interrelations of environment, agricultural practices and land use, we may compare the rate of production in two or more areas where the same crops or at least the same type of crops are grown. The difference in the production of same crop by the same community in two or more places accounts for the variations in the technology involved, manure used, necessity of that crop by

the people, cultural dimensions along with the other factors stated herein. Even in the same location and using the same agricultural technique there might be differences in the out turn of a crop between two communities or within the same community. Because of land, work habits, intensity of the adoption of agricultural practices, one person may produce more food than his neighbours.

The distribution pattern of agricultural produces also determined by geographic factors, e.g. altitude, climate, rainfall, nature of the soil and the facilities of communication. Some more aspects of cultural ecology dealt with now may help to account for the variation in the cropping pattern and its relation with productive mechanism. It is implied that features of vital production of major crops in the local environment come first in an historical sense and method of production developed in the area as a response there to. Certain social, ideological and other factors - even the productive system itself - influence the manner of adaptation to the environment. It is less important to note in this context how one accounts for the method of technological activity. Given the environment and the way in which it is exploited, certain characteristics of production result to which the remaining aspects of culture are to be adjusted. A vital aspect of food production in the villages under study is that there are large difference in the quantities of food raised by different villages under study. In a given village these variations amount to the differences in the quantities of crops raised by different families. Families who own more land for cultivation will naturally produce more crops.



Another feature of production to which attention should be given is the regional variation in the quantities of various types of food produced. In different locales, variations in rainfall and sunlight, and of waters and topography necessary for irrigation, soil condition, generate different potentials for growing different types of crops and plant accordingly. As a result, different villages tend to produce more of certain crops. But to shape the cropping pattern of a region, the social and cultural factors are much more important than non-social factors like environment, rainfall etc. The accompanying table No. 28 indicates the crop production in three different villages under study and describes the nature of regional variation in production.

TABLE NO. 28

**Production of crops among the Lepcha  
in three villages under study.**

| Crops                                     | (in kg.) |        |          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
|                                           | Nassey   | Pagang | Lingdong |
| Paddy                                     | 5120     | 9000   | 6680     |
| <u>Makai</u> (maize)                      | 3640     | 5600   | 5360     |
| <u>Kudu</u> (millet)                      | 560      | 2600   | 5320     |
| Cardamom                                  | Nil      | Nil    | 6000     |
| No. of families<br>engaged in cultivation | 34       | 50     | 29       |

In the following tables (No. 29, 30 & 31) an attempt has been made to show the cropping pattern of the three villages under study in detail. From these tables it will be seen that average

production of different crops in one year (1980-81) is not same in the three villages under study. Some villages produce more Kudu than others. Lingdong grows cardamom profusely, whereas Nassey and Pagang could not grow cash crops on a regular basis only a few individuals occasionally plant ginger, potatoes and cauliflower. The emphasis in the table is more on food crops than on cash crops.

TABLE NO. 29

## Cropping pattern of village Nassey

| Crops                                    | Quantities of major crops produced (In kg.) |                           |                           |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                          | Paddy                                       | Maize<br>( <u>makai</u> ) | Millet<br>( <u>Kudu</u> ) |
| Total Production of crops in the village | 5120                                        | 3640                      | 560                       |
| Total land under cultivation in acreage  | 45                                          | 30                        | 9                         |
| Number of families cultivating           | 34                                          | 34                        | 34                        |
| Average Production per Family            | 150                                         | 107                       | 16.5                      |
| Percentage of land under cultivation     | 53.58                                       | 35.71                     | 10.71                     |
| Average production per acre              | 113                                         | 121                       | 62                        |

Here, as well as in the following table all the families cultivate, either in their own land or in others land. The important thing is the amount of land that is devoted to each crop and not its ownership pattern, though in the ultimate analysis the quantity of

crop obtained from a piece of land by a family depends on the nature of its ownership.

TABLE NO. 30

## Cropping pattern of village Pagang

| Crops                                    | Quantities of major crops produced (In kg.) |                           |                           |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                          | Paddy                                       | Maize<br>( <u>makai</u> ) | Millet<br>( <u>Kudu</u> ) |
| Total production of crops in the village | 9000                                        | 5600                      | 2600                      |
| Total land under cultivation in acreage  | 90                                          | 27                        | 35                        |
| Number of families cultivating           | 50                                          | 50                        | 50                        |
| Average production per family            | 180                                         | 112                       | 52                        |
| Percentage of land under cultivation     | 59.22                                       | 17.76                     | 23.02                     |
| Average production per acre              | 100                                         | 207                       | 74                        |

TABLE NO. 31

## Cropping pattern of village Lingdong

| Crops                                    | Quantities of major crops produced (In kg.) |                           |                           |          |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
|                                          | Paddy                                       | Maize<br>( <u>Makai</u> ) | Millet<br>( <u>Kudu</u> ) | Cardamom |
| Total production of crops in the village | 6680                                        | 5360                      | 4520                      | 6000     |
| Total land under cultivation in acreage  | 109                                         | 75                        | 75                        | 107      |
| Number of families cultivating           | 29                                          | 29                        | 29                        | 29       |
| Average production per family            | 230                                         | 184                       | 155                       | 206      |
| Percentage of land under cultivation     | 29.78                                       | 20.49                     | 20.49                     | 29.24    |
| Average production per acre              | 61.3                                        | 71.4                      | 60.2                      | 56.0     |

From the preceding tables on the cropping pattern of the three villages under study it is seen that three major crops, namely, paddy, maize and millet are grown in all the locations. In addition to that cardamom is produced abundantly in Lingdong village as cash crop.

So far the paddy is concerned, the maximum (59.22%) land under paddy cultivation is found in Pagang, followed by Nassey (53.58%) and Lingdong (29.78%). But Nassey, the village situated near Kalimpong town and well communicated with it, give emphasis

upon makai. 35.71% of its land is under makai cultivation, followed by Lingdong and Pagang, where 20.49 and 17.76 percent of its land, respectively are under makai cultivation.

But the most interesting observation is on kudu (millet) cultivation. As it is said earlier, in the Lepcha life kudu has very little or no significance as a food crop. The main use of kudu in the Lepcha life is to prepare chi, a native beer. In the production of kudu Pagang tops the other two villages. In Pagang 23.02% of its total land is under kudu cultivation. This is followed by Lingdong and Nassey, where 20.49% and 10.71% of the land are under kudu cultivation, respectively. But considering the number of population and number of families it is Lingdong which comes first. In Lingdong the average per family production of kudu is 206 kgs. In Pagang the average per family production of kudu is 52 kgs. and in Nassey the average per family production of kudu is 16.5 kg. which is very meagre. In the total production of kudu, Lingdong produces 4520 kgs. whereas Pagang and Nassey produce 2600 kgs. and 560 kgs. respectively.

It is also observed that average production of crops per acre is quite good in Nassey which reflects the fact that they grow more crops in less area of land, this also indicates the intensiveness of their agricultural practices.

Now comes the question as to why the production (or requirement) of this particular crop, kudu is more in Lingdong and less in Pagang and Nassey. It is due to the following fact.

Lingdong is a traditional Lepcha village situated in the relatively less exposed area of Zongu, north Sikkim. In Lingdong the Lepcha have been able to maintain some of their original characteristics in social and religious sphere. In Lingdong the participation in religious activities is much more intensive than that in Pagang and Nassey, including that of monastic feasts. In rites of passages and other ceremonies the Lepcha of Lingdong throw big parties where food and drinks are generously served. For this they require to produce more kudu since it is their only form of beverage. In Nassey, the Lepcha live in close proximity to the urban centre of Kalimpong. Many of them have accepted Christianity and visit church regularly. Their ceremonies are less elaborate and not prolonged with very little or no use of liquor, because the church does not approve drinking. Besides this, the Buddhist Lepcha who live in close association with the Nepalis and Christians have also taken to less consumption of liquor. Since their requirement of alcoholic beverage is less, they grow kudu only as much as they require. The position of Pagang is just in between Lingdong and Nassey and that in the matter of kudu production it stands in-between Lingdong and Nassey. So kudu production among the Lepcha, is to be seen from this cultural point of view.

Another pertinent observation relating to cropping pattern is that the Lepcha of Lingdong grow cardamom on the same area of land as paddy. The land under cardamom cultivation is 29.24% and the land under paddy cultivation is 29.78%. They do it because cardamom is a cash crop and they can purchase cereals and oil etc. by selling cardamom. Moreover, their population is small and by

bringing only 29% of the land under paddy cultivation they can meet their food requirement. But if required, cash from cardamom could always be used for buying foodgrains.

There are some variations in the average production of various crops produced in the three villages under study. But these variations are more due to difference in soil types, rainfall and other non-social phenomenon than due to any cultural or social factors (unlike the percentage of land under cultivation of crops which reflects the peoples' intention to produce a particular crop, whether the production is more or less, is altogether a different factor).

#### Occupation ✓

As per the occupation is concerned, the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim are primarily dependent upon agriculture as a means of their livelihood. Only a few of them have accepted the profession of teaching in the rural areas of Sikkim, where Lepcha language is being taught at school level. Otherwise they stick to their traditional occupation of agriculture. It is very rare to find a Lepcha working as a labourer in road construction under a contractor. But this is a common feature among the Nepalis. They are always ready to accept any type of job that is available.

From Nassey five individuals, from five different families, all men, have left for Sikkim where they are engaged as teachers. From Pagang two men went to Sikkim also for teaching. From Nassey two persons are employed as Peon in Government offices. In Pagang nobody is engaged in Government offices. In Lingdong most of the

people have agriculture as their occupation. Only one Lepcha youth in Lingdong is in Government service as a village level worker (V.L.W.).

### Rituals Connected with Agriculture ✓

There are numbers of rituals connected with agriculture present in both traditional and contemporary agricultural system. These are usually officiated by the Bonthing in which different types of spirits like moong (evil one) and rum (good one) are propitiated. The rituals associated with temporary shifting cultivation are usually performed before the preparation of field but the ceremonies connected with permanent wet cultivation are generally performed at the time of harvesting to have a good yield. This appears to be a later adoption. Before the forest is burnt to prepare the soil for shifting cultivation, two benevolent spirits, adooyuk and alamyuk who send rice and millet seeds and their wives taleanimes and sangunimes who hold the cultivable lands on their bellies are worshipped. The Lepcha regard se-dyu and sa-dju as the god and goddess of farming and agriculture. The necessary sacrifice is performed by the Bonthing. Apart from this sacrifice to the god of agriculture, performed at the household level, there are also ceremonies performed at community level. These are spring and autumn sacrifices observed mainly by the Lepcha of Kalimpong.

After harvesting of paddy, liram ceremony is performed by the head of the household. Bonthing or mun comes and performs the ceremony. For this purpose small amount of paddy, 5 kg. of chi, 3 hens or cocks are given.



But the Lepcha of Zongu, in addition to this, also perform another ritual after harvesting of paddy towards the people of Mayel. This ritual is called sikeurumfath (worship of the God of foodgrains). Sikeurum is supposed to be the deity of food grains. They prey to the people of Mayel (a hidden and inaccessible valley in the Kanchenjunga, which is no longer possible to reach) to give them a fraction of the treasure which the people of Mayel have in their country. After the Bonthing completes the ritual, all the family members gather and eat meat and dance together. In this ritual a cock is sacrificed. Chi, thackmarzu rice, ginger and eggs are also given. It is believed that agriculture in general was introduced into Lingdong by the mythical inhabitants of Mayel.

Cultivation of cardamom associates a complex whole of alien beliefs and rituals. Nothing is done when the cardmom is planted, but every year at the flowering time a sacrifice is performed in honour of supernatural 'elaij-nyon' whom the Lepcha equate with makuyan moong, the devil of death. It is needless to mention here that elaij-nyon is a Nepali deity. When they first planted cardamom they did no ceremonies, but they got ill, then a Lepcha from outside of Zongu learned the proper ritual from a Nepali Jhankri (a priest somewhat similar to Lepcha Bonthing) and taught it to the Lepcha of Zongu. The rather elaborate ritual of elainchiseufath has two surprising features ; it is only permitted for male priest to officiate and the chickens are hung by their feet while still living and killed by hitting them on head. Both these features are unusual for a Lepcha ritual. In no other Lepcha ritual except in cardamom worship, the sacrificial animals are ill treated or made uncomfortable

before killing and the priestess (Mun) are excluded. It was also from this foreign source that the Lepcha learnt that the presence of menstruating women would blight the plant in flower. This is a completely alien idea, for otherwise menstruating women are paid no attention to and the prevalent pan-Indian (Hindu) idea of women being essentially unclean was not known to the Lepcha.

Every cardamom field has a small erection. It is called mungli (devil's house). It is made for the accommodation of a devil called thyok dum, whose chief joy appears to be the destruction of cardamom plants.

#### Animal Husbandry ✓

The subsistence economy in Nassey, Pagang and Lingdong, as in most hilly villages, is agriculture; of second importance and closely related to agriculture is animal husbandry. Besides cultivation the Lepcha of Kalimpong in most of the cases keep livestock which serves as their subsidiary income. The rearing of milch cow is also a very common practice among the Lepcha and other communities of the village. They also keep hen or cock as a source of egg and meat. They sell their surplus products to the local Kalimpong hat (weekly market) or to the various farms. The Lepcha usually keep pigs. Among the Nepalis only the lower castes like Kami, Damai, Mothey (all are Scheduled Castes) rear pigs but not the higher castes like Brahmins and Chettris.

TABLE NO. 32

**Livestock population of the village  
(among the Lepcha community)**

| Village  | Bullock | Cows | Pig | Goat | Poultry | Total |
|----------|---------|------|-----|------|---------|-------|
| Nassey   | 9       | 39   | 41  | -    | 50      | 139   |
| Pagang   | 12      | 46   | 47  | 23   | 88      | 216   |
| Lingdong | 6       | 70   | 49  | 54   | 206     | 385   |

From the table it is seen that Lingdong has more cattle and poultry than Nassey or Pagang. Lingdong has more livestock because it can provide pastures and good grazing ground for the cattle in the nearby forest.

Although of secondary importance as a source of diet domestic animals play an important role in the life of the Lepcha. Nearly all the ceremonies presided by the Mun and Bonthing demand animal sacrifices. Animals are essential for the socio-religious ceremonies on the occasions of birth, marriage and death. Consequently people with few or no animals who get ill or have children or marry or die are at a considerable disadvantage and have to borrow animals for these ceremonies. Much of the indebtedness to the money lenders has been for the purchase of animals. Though the Lepcha can, and often does, borrow animal from the neighbours, he appears to feel uncomfortable to being indebted to a friend which he does not feel towards a money lender. Goats are raised exclusively for food and sacrifice and are never milked. They are not highly valued animals and people usually have only a few pairs. All goats

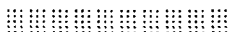
are fed on salt and maize. Kids are never killed for food. Pigs are raised for eating and sacrifice, but their meat is more popular and a large number are kept. They are the only animals which are generally killed for domestic eating. They are fed on the remains of chi after the grain has been three times soused. All pigs are castrated with ceremony at the age of three or four months so that they would not become wild and wander away into the forest.

Among the Lepcha pork is the most favoured meat, an easy source of animal protein and common item of diet ; everywhere the killing of a pig is a matter for feast and celebration. Only wild pigs are killed without a prior plan or purpose. Domestic pigs are part of the household valuable property ; their raising and slaughter is purposeful. Pigs are of some interest to the Lepcha, but they are not an exclusive concern as to the herds of pastoralists. Domestic pigs are attached to their feeders. Many people hand-feed their pigs tubers and the discards from their meals and left over of chi (fermented millet). It is observed that in Kalimpong the pigs are kept in pens whereas in Zongu pigs forage during day time. They sleep in the basement of the house. Pigs are led into the agricultural fields, after the crop is harvested, this is beneficial to the productivity of the land in that pig faeces fertilize the soil, and the movement of the pigs overturn and soften the soils and destroy weeds before it is again prepared for recultivation.

Animals must never on any account be killed by a woman. This is the only complete and absolute sex linked prohibition of any form of activity imposed upon the women. There are some acts which

are more commonly or indeed exclusively practised by men or by women only, but except this there is no sort of prohibition for members of the fairer sex doing them if they feel so inclined. For example, only women transplant the seedlings and only men plough but there is no reason why a man should not transplant if he wants to and similarly a woman can plough, but her relative lack of strength prevents her from doing so.

This chapter though a long one attempts to give a comprehensive view of Lepcha economic life in three villages in three different ecological setting. It is seen that substantial economic differences in subsistence activities exist which are defined not only by ecological conditions but also by cultural parameters.



## SOCIAL ORGANISATION

In the previous chapter an attempt has been made to describe the relationship of the Lepcha to their physical environment and how they exploit it. In this chapter we shall focus on some social aspects of this relationship.

The Lepcha tribe is composed of a number of clans, called ptso (Pu-tso) in Zongu and agith in Kalimpong. Every Lepcha belongs to a clan, which is believed to have originated from some supernatural or legendary ancestor. The chief function of the clan is the regulation of marriage and the prevention of incest; it is an exogamic unit. No one can say how many clans are there for this grouping seems to be a purely local one. As a matter of fact the clans appear to be like the extended families. In Kalimpong the names of over ten different clans have been recorded and in Lingdong there were as many as fourteen, all of them were different from others. Besides these exogamous clans there is no intermediate divisions like moiety.

Lepcha exogamy is of a special kind for it does permit a man to marry relative of his father provided the relationship is removed by five (but some say seven) generations. Such a marriage is of course only possible with a person descended through the father's or more possibly grand father's sisters since she being married, belongs to a different clan. In the case of a marriage between the descendants of two sisters a separation of only three generation is demanded. The Lepcha count descent five generations back on the father's side and at least three on the mother's. In

actual practice all this means is that any two related people who do not belong to the same clan, may marry provided the relationship between them is sufficiently distant as to have been forgotten for all practical purposes

Gorer (1938 :161) suggested that the ptso was possibly earlier a geographical unit; if this were the case, it seems possible that these permissive regulations were evolved to meet the special circumstances. For, with the ptso as the geographical unit, the young men would have had no possible sexual partners except through adultery or incest, and as some examples show, such situations inevitably lead to jealousy and fighting. By their regulations the Lepcha have reduced in-group aggression to the minimum. The potential rivalry between brothers is mitigated by allowing the younger brother's access to his elder brother's wife, but the relationship between an elder brother and his younger sister-in law is considered incestuous.

In earlier days the clans were supposed to have something to do with social integration and economic pursuits like access to forest land etc., but today the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim do not recognise the clan as a group when describing life cycle and other ceremonies; they describe the participants as members of the family, lineage, or community depending upon the nature of participation. The territorial range of a clan or lineage whatever the population, seems to be an area that permits visiting and cooperation in ceremonies and rituals. Kinship ties are concentrated within a convenient visiting range.

The clans are believed to have originated from some supernatural or legendary ancestor. Most people know the story of how their own clan originated, and these myths have probably been reinterpreted many times.

### Origin of Clans

The Lepcha clans are of mythological origin. According to nuliknasong, the history of the Lepcha tribe, there was a demon or monster called rosumung. The monster was perpetually engaged in one sort of perverse activity or another - destruction, thieving, defying authority, playing magical tricks. In short this character was a sociopath of the first order. So the Lepcha had killed him in a battle. The early ancestors of the present day Lepchas participated in that war and according to the role performed by them all the descendants of them have been given the clan names as follows :

- a) Lukshongmu - The man who plucked all the teeth of the demon is called by the above clan name thereafter.
- b) Simickmu - The man who pierced the eye of the monster.
- c) Suthumgm - The man who cut the body of the monster into pieces.
- d) Sandamgm - The man who threw dust at the eyes of the monster during the battle.
- e) Korvom - The man who prepared the swords for the war.



f) Brimu - The man who made the string of the bow.

g) Ademmu - The man who made the necessary sitting arrangements for the fighters during the war.

h) Jaribu - The man who prepared food for the soldiers.

i) Mallamu - The man who prayed to God day and night, for the welfare of the Lepcha during the war

j) Fenthatimu - The man who made the bow and arrow.

Lepcha clans do not change after marriage, even in the case of women. In Kalimpong, clan name is inherited either patrilineally or matrilineally i.e. the son gets the clan name of his father and the daughter gets the clan name of her mother. But in Zongu of Sikkim the clan names are inherited patrilineally i.e. both son and daughter inherit the clan name of their father. Only clans of women remain same even after marriage.

### Lineage

The lineage is a consanguineal kin groups that traces common descent through known ancestors. In the case of unilineal group it would be either patrilineal (through male) or matrilineal (through female). The Lepcha of Zongu are patrilineal, they (sons and daughters) belong to father's lineage. But in the case of the Lepcha of kalimpong the clan name is inherited in both ways (patrilineally in the case of male and matrilineally in the case of female). The main functions of lineage are to maintain marriage alliances and are indications of descent and ancestry. Members of

the families belong to the same lineage help each others in economic pursuits, social and religious ceremonies. It is always an exogamic unit.

### Family

Among the Lepcha the family is patrilocal. Ideally the basic residential, social, religious and economic unit is the patrilocal joint family. This consists of a man, his wife, his sons and their wives and children plus any unmarried daughters. In a Lepcha village this unit is supposed to occupy a house, preferably with a separate sleeping room for each nuclear family consisting of man, wife and children, All members should share in the family occupation and in the product obtained. All should eat from the same hearth.

But in practice, it is the nuclear family of husband, wife and any number of unmarried children actually occupy the households in a Lepcha village. Sometimes an unmarried brother or sister also live in the family.

Every married Lepcha wants to be the head of the family and exert authority over other members. It is also but natural for a Lepcha to set up his own family and household after marriage. Because of this feature joint families break up in to a simple nuclear families. This fact has also been numerically established by the household census. Another customs in the Lepcha society is that every newly married couple takes shelter in the house of the groom's father as long as the young man is unable to build a house for his family and arrange for other necessary household articles. As a

TABLE NO. 34

## Types of family

| Village<br>1 | Nuclear<br>2 | %<br>3 | Nuclear Plus<br>4 | %<br>5 | Joint<br>6 | %<br>7 | Total<br>8 |
|--------------|--------------|--------|-------------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|
| Nassey       | 30           | 88.24  | -                 | -      | 4          | 11.76  | 34         |
| Pagang       | 38           | 76.00  | 2                 | 4.00   | 10         | 20.00  | 50         |
| Lingdong     | 20           | 68.96  | 4                 | 13.80  | 5          | 17.24  | 29         |

In the table No34 nuclear family is composed of husband, wife and any number of unmarried children. In nuclear plus family an additional male member, usually brothers, live in the family. Joint family is composed of husband, wife and their newly married son and son's wife. After some time it is expected that the son would build his own new house and will shift there along with his wife. Horizontally extended families in which two brothers live together with their wives and children are rare among the Lepcha.

TABLE NO. 35

## Family forms

| Village  | Monogamous | %     | Polygynous | %     | Broken | %    | Total |
|----------|------------|-------|------------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Nassey   | 33         | 97.05 | -          | -     | 1      | 2.95 | 34    |
| Pagang   | 45         | 90.00 | 3          | 6.00  | 2      | 4.00 | 50    |
| Lingdong | 20         | 68.96 | 9          | 31.04 | -      | -    | 29    |
| Total    | 98         |       | 12         |       | 3      |      | 113   |

From table No. 35 it is seen that monogamy is the prevalent marriage types among the Lepcha. In Lingdong of Zongu,

the incidence of polygyny is more (31.04%) in comparison to Pagang (6.00) and Nassey (nil). Another feature is this that in Lingdong there is no broken family. It does not signify that separations among the spouses are not there. There is no broken family because after separation a woman is instantly accepted by another man as wife, especially if she had proved her powers in giving birth to a child.

From the tables and analysis on the composition of the Lepcha family it is evident that a family is an institution which emerges primarily through marriage between a male and a female and which initiates a set of social, economic and biological interactions between the couple and then among their relatives. Family in the Lepcha society is again a starting point of determining the sets of relationship of a man or woman with his or her parents-in-laws and their family, with his brothers or sisters and also with his or her own parents. The family to a Lepcha is a network of bilateral relations which sanctions a person to follow a set of kinship usages and pattern of relationships (kinship terms are given in the appendix).

The relationship of the clan, family, lineage and community to one another and to productive or exploitative system are especially significant. Clan, lineage and family as a component part of social structure consists of inter-personal arrangements adopted to the exploitation of resources, satisfaction of sex, child rearing and control of supernatural beings. Nuclear family, as the basis of society, is the ultimate unit of production, distribution and

consumption. But family alone is unable to overcome the demanding situation. In the preparation of land for cultivation, in the construction of houses and in various other social and religious activities, it requires help. Assistance and co-operation is extended by the clan and lineage members.

### Kinship and Descent

Kroeber (1952 : 219) writes, "It is generally accepted that among primitive people society is structured primarily on the basis of kinship and in more civilised nations largely in terms of economic and political factors". The Lepcha Society is also not an exception of this general framework.

According to Leach (1961 : 305) kinship systems have no reality at all except in relation to land and property. He writes that kinship system only provides us with an idealised model which states the correct status relations between groups and social persons.

Among the Lepcha denotative terms are very few in comparison to classificatory terms. The Lepcha have five, namely, Fa, Br, Wi, Wibr, Wisi denotative terms. Some of the terms of the Lepcha is applied to both sexes and even to members of different generations. The Lepcha do not use separate term for agnates and cognates. The agnates are, here, the clan members who are known, as well as those who can be traced in the genealogy. They have distinct term for the affinies. The Lepcha kinship terms are of Hawaiian type. The Lepcha term of reference for Fa, FaBr, MoBr, MoSi, Fasi are bifurcate collateral type. The Lepcha exclude all

the categories 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.

The ties of kinship help people to lay claim to land for cultivation and other properties, to mutual assistance in the pursuit of common interests, to authority over others, and obligations which compliments those claims, and all to co-operate on occasions where the recognition of kinship requires it. In societies of simple technology like the Lepcha most statuses are ascribed.

This is another way of saying that a person's place in society, his rights and duties, his claim to property, largely depend on his genealogical relationship to other members. The primary social groups, the ones to be found in all such societies whatever other principles of organisation, there may be, are all linked by kinship and in many cases their membership is fixed by descent. The term 'kinship' and 'descent' are not identical and they are not always distinguished clearly enough. According to Rivers (1924) kinship is the social recognition of biological ties. All the people who are related by blood in any way to an individual are his cognates. Those who are related to him by marriage are his affinies.

Descent is one of the central concepts of social anthropology, but it has been used in various ways. For example Notes and Querries, definition of the term is that, "Socially, descent is the recognised connection between a person and his ancestors". But Murdock (1949 : 15) states that "a rule of descent affiliates an individual at birth with a particular group of relatives with whom he is especially intimate and from whom he can expect certain kinds of services which he can not demand from any other kinsmen". Overall, the recruitment of members by birth on a recognized principle is called as a descent group.

Here, in this study, I am not particularly interested in kinship terminologies and describing the classificatory system of kinship after Morgan and others. Rather I am interested in seeing the kinship system as a functioning corporate group and to identify corporate groups organised on some principle of kinship. Corporate groups means the continuing property holding groups - based on kinship are recruited by descent, and a clear principle of descent is established by the rule. If it is traceable in one line only either through males (patrilineal) or through females (matrilineal). This is called the principle of unilineal descent. A few societies trace descent in the male line for some purposes like the inheritance of immovable properties (land, house etc.) and in the female line for some other purposes like inheritance of currency, livestock and other movable properties. This is called double unilineal descent or double descent. This is present among the Yako of Nigeria.

The Lepcha of Zongu and the Lepcha of Kalimpong, surprisingly, do not share the same descent system. The descent system of the Lepcha of Zongu is patrilineal in nature. Whereas the Lepcha of Kalimpong as well as the entire district of Darjeeling follow parallel descent system.

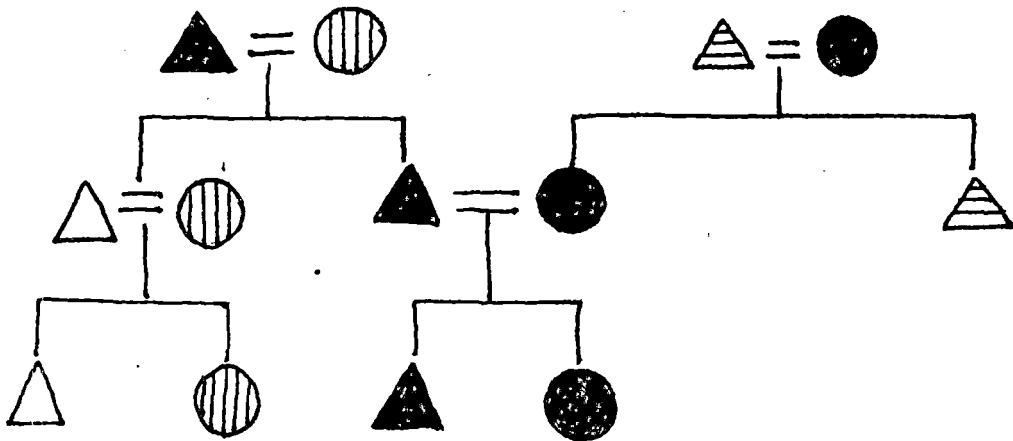


Figure No. 4. *Showing the inheritance pattern in parallel descent*

This parallel descent system is present among the Lepcha of Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Vivello (1978 : 158) defines parallel descent system as "a form of unilineal descent in which women trace descent through females only and men trace descent through males only". Among the Lepcha of Kalimpong full brothers and sisters of the same parent belong to two different clans. Males are the legal owner of their father's property ; descent and act as an instrument of holding and transmitting property. The significance of descent is also that a member's claim of the property does not depend on where he lives, as long as he does not go and stay so far away that people forget him and he can not prove his membership.



In practice there are great differences in the extent to which lineage members live together, though nearly everywhere the ideal is that they should.

So among the Lepcha of the Darjeeling district the males as a member of their father's clan and lineage and descent live together with their father and in father's village. But the females, since the residence is patrilocal live with their husband or father (before marriage) but always belong to different clan and lineage.

The phenomenon of having two different types of descent systems in the same population living in two different region is quite interesting. Since the nature of this study does not permit an indepth probe into the matter, the fact has been stated mainly for informative purpose. Though an attempt has been made to see the kinship and descent as a continuing property holding group. The Lepcha of Zongu, are patrilineal in descent, they rarely establish matrimonial relationship outside Zongu, let aside out side of Sikkim. But both the Lepcha of Zongu and Kalimpong are members of the same Lepcha tribe, they possess similar characteristics, except the descent. The scholars, like Gorer (1938), Morris (1938), who had done work among the Lepcha of Sikkim (Zongu) described them as patrilineal; my personal field work among the Lepcha of Zongu also confirm the fact. No authors, to the best of my knowledge, has described the parallel descent of the Lepcha of Kalimpong in detail. Only Nakane (1966 : 234) writes a small sentence, "among the Lepcha in Gitdabling, sons belong to the father's clan, and daughters to the mother's".

But even among the Lepcha of Kalimpong the inheritance of property is in the male line only. The reason for the presence of two different descent systems in the same population living in two areas is quite obscure - probably the Lepcha had migrated from the North-East where matrilineal descent is present and Kalimpong lies in the course of their way to Zongu. In Zongu close association with the Bhotia might have influenced them to adopt patrilineal descent whereas in Kalimpong due to the proximity to the matrilineal people they somehow had maintained the matrilineal principle for the women folk.

#### Birth

According to Lepcha theory a child's life starts at the moment of conception and is considered as a gift of God. Conception follows with the cessation of the menses. At the fifth month when the baby is considered fully formed, the expectant parents must start observing the numerous prenatal precautions which have to be followed if the child is not to be born malformed. This prenatal rites are much more elaborately observed among the Lepcha of Zongu than their Kalimpong counter part. She is not supposed to fetch water alone from the jhora (hill stream) or the husband is not supposed to kill or join any hunting party.

Among the Lepcha of Zongu entering into this period of prenatal precautions is established by a Mun gently beating both parents with a bunch of elephant grass. The sex of a child is fixed after five months and can be told by the fact that a boy is always higher in the womb. All prenatal rituals and ceremonies are

performed by Mun or Bonthing, the priests of traditional religion and not by the Buddhist Lamas. Buddhist rituals, are started only after the child is born. The Christian Lepcha do not observe any specific ceremony relating to child birth. They only visit the church. But the Buddhist Lepcha perform a series of ceremonies when a child is born. Lama as well as Bonthing and Mun come at the house.

Three days after the child is born the Bonthing comes and worships the house-hold deity Liram. Then he performs the name giving ceremony or thing-bong-fath. For this he needs one bamboo, fruits and flowers. Then after enchanting the mantras, he worships the benevolent spirits of do-chu-bu-lip, i.e. the spirits of mountain, lake and hole. A fowl is also offered to the spirit. The Bonthing gets Rs.4/- and some meat for his service. Final name of the child is given in a Lamaist ceremony according to time and date of birth and after calculating the horoscope with the help of the sacred book Keoncho. Three days after a child is born its head is smeared with a mixture of butter and salt. This remains on the boy's head until it wears away. At the same time snail shells are tied round its neck and wrists and sometimes fastened to its clothing. There is also a ceremony on the third day after birth, called Pa-gong-chi-tong, which means merely chi drinking - an indispensable part of all Lepcha ceremonies. After the ritual is over the village folk come to bless the child. They bring hen, chi, fruits and money which are given to the child's mother. During the first few weeks the baby sleeps in its mother's arms, afterward it is given its own mattress beside its mother with the mother's breast always within reach.

Among the Lepcha of Sikkim it is seen that lactation period continues for an unusually long time, even boys and girls of 5-6 years are seen sucking their mother's breasts. This is supposed to be a natural device of birth control practised by them when they were in hunting - gathering stage. At present this has proved to be an effective measure of population control to keep the balance between available natural resource and human population. The scientific validity of it has also been proved now a-days. (Billewicz, 1979; Wenlock and Wenlock, 1981).

### Marriage and Sex

To the Lepcha sex is as inevitable and natural as hunger, though there are some restrictions on the free mixing of the sexes, but forest ecology and the need for outdoor work by the girls provide opportunity for such action. In Zongu monastic feasts also provide opportunities of free mixing from where many a marriage negotiations have initiated.

Among the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim, the marriage is not only a contract between two individual but also a contract between two groups. Present day Lepchas are monogamous in general. Polygyny, though practised earlier, is declining now-a-days. Polygamous family is rare in Kalimpong. But in Zongu even today polygyny is met with occasionally. There lived a man in Lingdong named Atong Lepcha who had five wives. There are also a few polygynous families in Lingdong. Normally the second wife happens to be a sister (real or classificatory) of the first wife. The idea behind this is that the two sisters will not quarrel and live

under the same roof. Though in practice no Lepcha man from Nassey in Kalimpong possesses two wives, in theory they can.

The Lepcha acquire mate by negotiation. A Lepcha can also marry the wife of his elder brother, after his death. But not the vice-versa. The Lepcha of Zongu still practise the old traditional method of giving service to the father of the wife for some years or months in lieu of cash payment of bride price. This system is completely absent in Kalimpong area because the Lepcha living here do not possess sufficient land or forest at their disposal to engage their prospective son-in-law. Cousin marriage is absent among the Lepcha. Senior levirate is present among the Lepcha of Zongu but the Kalimpong Lepcha rarely do it in practice. Junior levirate is absent among the Lepcha. Senior sorrorate is also absent. The Lepcha of Zongu are also permitted to marry one's father's younger brother's widow. A widow can not perform marriage ritual but she is allowed to get a husband by elopement. In such a case the Lepcha perform a ceremony called khadaw-thick-shet i.e. offering of scarf by the relative of the widow to the man. Rejection or complete divorce is present among the Lepcha but the Lepcha in general are not in favour of divorce because after divorce a man can not claim the refund of the expenditure he made on the occasion of the marriage either from the parents or from the new husband of the divorced wife. Mutual dislike and adultery are the prime causes of divorce. Adultery, if unnoticed by the husband is not at all a problem to the Lepcha of Zongu.

Lepcha marriage is a complicated ceremony with a series of rites. Cost of a Lepcha marriage is quite high. In Kalimpong intermarriage between the Buddhist and Christian Lepcha, though not preferred but tolerated and are frequently practised. In Sikkim the intermarriage with the Lepcha and Bhotia is not uncommon and continued from ancient times by which the ethnic group Sikkimese - Bhotia has formed. But intermarriage with the Nepalis is much looked down upon by the Lepcha community as a whole.

The Lepcha of Darjeeling district do not practise polyandry and contrary to the reports of some earlier travellers, the Lepcha of Zongu also do not practise polyandry in its truest sense, though it is true that their customs permit adelphic polyandry, that is to say the co-husbands should be brothers. This is no doubt an influence from Tibet, and contact with the Tibetans. But in reality there was not a single case of polyandrous marriage.

But in Zongu a distinction must, however be drawn between marriage and sexual relations; while it is unusual for a Lepcha girl in Zongu to be actually married to more than one man, it is common for her occasionally to sleep with all her husband's younger brothers with a certain amount of social sanction. The important point to note, however, is that she is not married to them, whereas in a true polyandrous society each of the man concerned is a legal husband, and takes his place as such at the wedding ceremony. This situation of latent polyandry may properly be termed as cisisbeism, which grants legitimate sexual access of two or more men to the same woman. This is not polyandrous marriage because it

does not confer on cicisbeo the possibility of being recognized as the pater of any of the children the woman bears.

To make the situation clearer it would be better to put the sexual rights of a Lepcha in a tabular form.

A man (Lepcha) may sleep with -

1. The wives of all his elder brothers.
2. The wives of his father's younger brothers.

A man can not sleep with -

1. The wives of all his younger brothers
2. The wives of his father's elder brothers.

The restriction is because of the fact that in the first case the son is supposed to sleep with them and in the second case his father is the potential sleeping partner.

In Kalimpong, the villages where I worked, I had no information of the existence of any sort of this relationship.

In Lingdong I was told that the Lepcha have to tolerate this extramarital sex-relation otherwise the young people would go to the Nepali girls and consequently marry them.

Besides the sexual rights which a man has with his elder brother's wives it is customary for a widow to be inherited by one of the deceased's younger brothers, preferably the next in succession. It makes no difference if the man in question already has a wife of

his own. No marriage ceremony is performed, the woman being simply inherited in the same way as any other piece of property. Dong-op is the term for it, though the woman is at liberty to remarry with any one whom she wishes. This situation of free will is more present in Kalimpong than in Zongu.

The system of widow inheritance is considered very much objectionable and derogatory by the educated Lepcha, and in Kalimpong and other places of the Darjeeling district it has been completely dropped, even among the Buddhist Lepcha who are more traditional than their Christian counterpart. But there is no doubt that it is a satisfactory method of providing for widows in a community which does not permit women to inherit property. Levirate provides an assured supply of labour force to the family. This is quite helpful in Zongu where agricultural land is held in plenty by the Lepcha both under shifting and permanent plough cultivation and cardamom plantation.

With the lead given on 'Lepcha polyandry' in the foregoing pages, we will try to understand its genesis and nature of its persistence in Lepcha society.

Among the Lepcha the sexual rights of the other husbands are exercised, not by virtue of the marriage, but through the individual consent of the first husband as eldest brother and the wife as common partner. On the other hand, ritual of patrilocal marriage - the essence of which is that a man, conducts his bride from her father's house to his own - serves to establish a relation of affinity between the wife's family as a whole and the



husband's family as a whole. The wife's family have no interest in what sexual arrangements pertain unless it is proposed to extend the rights of sexual access beyond the limits of husband's sibling group which amounts to transference of uxorial rights from the wife's group to husband's group. Gorer (1938 : 171) writes on Lepcha polyandry, "it is permissible for a man who feels himself unable to cope with his field work, either on account of physical weakness or because he has other work which takes him a great deal from the neighbourhood, to invite an unmarried younger brother to live with him and to share his fields and wife. The co-husband is co-opted without any sort of ceremony, but thereafter he is no longer free in the choice of a wife of his own; if he desires one; he must make the request for a wife of the same ptso as the shared wife, exactly as if he was taking a second wife in the normal course of events. The co-husbands sleep with their common wife on alternate nights, but all the children are presumed to be begotten by the first husband, and he alone has to observe the prenatal precautions".

As regarding the persistence of this type of polyandry among the Lepcha as well as its genesis, the general notion among the Lepcha of Sikkim that it was an effective custom to keep the property undivided, moreover, a wife of two brothers in possession of a joint property can expect a higher standard of living than the wife of a man with only one share of his paternal property, she will also enjoy the advantages of a comparatively young husband.

Polyandry as an institution might have developed when the Lepcha were in hunting-gathering stage of economy, because there

is a gross correlation between polyandry and a shortage of women (Berreman 1962 : 68). There might have been a shortage of women when the Lepcha were in hunting-gathering stage long ago. Because hunting economy always discourages the growth of female folk.

To become a Lama is considered a most desirable achievement for a Lepcha. The monastic training required to become a Lama has several stages including compulsory staying in the gumpha. A Lama may enter married life but his increasing involvement in catering the needs of the people as a religious specialist and commitments towards the gumpha force prolonged absence from family life and home. If he does not have a brother to look after his field and his family, he will face grave economic crisis. Polyandry as practised by the Lepcha is one of the means best suited to cope with such a situation.

Though it is not uncommon that a young brother who had joined in a polyandrous union, later establishes a separate house hold and takes another wife from the same ptso (clan) of the earlier wife. Usually this is done amicably by the mutual agreement among the brothers. In most of the cases the cause of dissolution of polyandrous unions are due to disagreement in economic matter but never on jealousy over the sexuality of the common wife.

Inevitably the polyandry in Sikkim, as it is in every where throughout the cis and trans Himalayas, had long seen its prime days. Due to the acculturation of alien ideas and values from the plains the institution of polyandry has become inept now-a-days. It has also lost much of its supportive institutional settings.

One of the reasons for the persistence of polyandry is that it helps to check the population growth and thus avoiding rapid increase of the potential claimants to the household property, fragmentation of joint labour and above all, pressure on land. Now with the introduction of high value cash crop of cardamom, the pressure on land has reduced considerably and solved the problem of economic stringency to some extent. To become a Lama is also not considered as desirable as it was earlier. Polyandry and Lamaism are mainly to be seen as an ecological adaptation to the meagre resources and also as a measure of effective control over the resources whatever be its amount held by a family.

Another problem, a methodological one, is to identify the polyandrous union. As a rule monogamy has prevailed at first, the second husband is incorporated at a later period quite informally without any ritual, on the basis of mutual understanding because the system is looked down upon by the neighbouring Nepalis who are monogamous people and the co-husbands find it too much embarrassing to publicly acknowledge the polyandrous relationship. One has to depend completely on guessing by studying the behaviour of the woman with her husband's brother outside the house, mostly at fields or in market place and depend upon secondary sources of information available from the neighbours.

### Marriage Ceremony

When it is wished to arrange a marriage, the parents of the boy concerned must first send for a pi-bu, or go-between to the girl's parents. The parents now prepare a special ceremonial gift

called khachyong, which consists of one maund (40 kg.) of fermented chi, twenty rupees, and a Tibetan ceremonial scarf or khada. The khachyong is taken by the boy's pibu to the house of some nearer relative of the selected girl, usually to a brother who will act as girl's pibu. The girl's pibu keeps the money for himself and takes the chi and scarf (khada) to the girl's parents and discusses the proposed marriage with them. It is the custom for them at first to refuse but the pibu continues to plead with them to gain their consent.

If the girl's parents agree to the marriage proposal they send for a Lama and ask him to work out the auspicious date for the ashyek or formal betrothal to take place, after which the go-between informs the boy that he should come on such-and-such a day. On that day the boy accompanied by his pibu, sets out for the girl's home. They take with them one large copper pot, sufficient cloth to make a dress for the girl's mother and two pig's carcasses. All these presents are taken direct to the girl's home. There is an exchange of compliments, the girl's parents say that they are really willing to marry their daughter to the boy.

This completes the betrothal and the boy then returns to his own house. One week later the boy goes alone to the girl's place, taking with him a gift of one bullock's leg, which he presents to his future parents-in-law. He stays in the house for ten days and during this period he is expected to have sexual relations with his future wife.

At the end of ten days the boy returns to his own home but he is now at liberty to visit the girl whenever he wishes. There is no ceremony in between betrothal and marriage, and the interval between the two is entirely dependent upon the wealth of the bride groom's family, provided that money and food are available for the necessary feasts. The marriage can take place in the next auspicious date after betrothal or may be deferred for years or may even never take place at all.

The betrothal or ashyek is exclusively an affair of the Lepcha of Zongu. Among the Kalimpong Lepcha there is no betrothal before marriage, marriage directly takes place among them.

Probably this is because of the fact that the Kalimpong Lepchas possess less land and they do not have any major cash crops like cardamom. Though they grow some cash crops like potatoe, cauliflower and some ginger on a sporadic manner but these are quite insignificant in comparison to the enormous cash cropping of cardamom in Zongu. So the Kalimpong Lepchas can not support expenses on betrothal immediately before marriage and so gave it up long ago. Besides, the general consumption of food and chi are also less among the Lepcha of Kalimpong.

The majority of the marriages take place in the autumn months after the harvest is gathered. The groom's family usually spends several months in collecting the necessary food and animals before the date of marriage.

The actual day for the marriage is determined by a Lama and a few days previously the groom goes with his pibu, one or other of his paternal uncle, a boy friend known as myok tyol. They take with them the hind leg of a pig, a scarf and some money as gift. On the arrival of the groom the sisters of the bride armed with thorny plants pretend to drive him away; to be allowed to go on, the groom must give them all a present of at least one rupee. When the bride-groom's party arrives they are given a light meal of tea, a special ceremonial parched rice known as sohet set and followed, of course, by the inevitable chi.

After this the bridal procession sets out. The bridal procession consists of the following people; they are, -

|             |                                                         |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Pi-bu       | : Go-between                                            |
| Kegu Numbu  | :: An old and experienced man, the leader of the party. |
| Rum fatbo   | : A sacrificer preferably a <u>Bonthing</u> .           |
| Aku         | : A paternal uncle                                      |
| Ajyong      | : A maternal uncle.                                     |
| Nyom tyol   | : Bride's attendant, usually a sister.                  |
| Nyon faming | : A younger brother.                                    |

and finally a number of men to carry the presents from the bride which consist of a load of chi, a load of popped corn, and a small pig or piglet.

When the bridal party enters the groom's house the girl's pi-bu offers a ceremonial scarf (khada) to the groom's family head.

After this the groom's father is also given some presents. Then the girl's father is given the bride price which varies from Rs.300/- at Kalimpong to Rs.2000/- in Zongu, as it was during the period from 1979-81.

Then, in the presence of Lama and Bonthing the bride and bride groom take the oath that they would live together happily till death. Lama and Bonthing both attend the marriage as priests. Bonthing usually conducts all the functions while the Lama chants hymns and prays for the well being of the couple.

The Lepcha both in Kalimpong and in Zongu have a tendency of selecting mates within a reasonable distance from their residence. In Lingdong they usually do not marry outside Zongu and in Nassey and Pagang it is mainly restricted within the subdivision of Kalimpong, at the most within the district of Darjeeling. Whereas the neighbouring Bhotia are more open in this matter, their network of matrimonial alliances is quite widespread. Bhotia Lamas who are widely travelled, have a good net work of relationship and help in the selection of mates for their brethern. This account for the greater dynamism of the Bhotia society.

### Death

The Lepcha believe that death is nothing but the seperation of soul from the body. The soul comes from a place called rumlyang, situated near Mt. Kanchanjungha and after death the soul returns there. The causes of death are diseases and accidents which are believed to be caused by the influence of evil spirits. Suicide is rare among the Lepcha, mazom moong is an evil spirit who is frequently held

responsible for the death of a person. These moongs (evil spirits) are subdued usually by the offerings of animals to them; and Bonthing performs the ceremonies as per the tradition. For subjugation of evil spirits a good number of animals are necessary and a forest ecology can only provide a steady supply of animals for the persistence of Bonthing rites.

Death is the real enemy of the Lepcha life. Once a person is dead there are two things to be done. The danger of the devil (that has caused his death) finding another victim in the community must be avoided and the dead man must be got rid of thoroughly and as completely as possible. The infection and danger of death is strictly local and therefore if a person dies away from home no sort of ceremony is held for him, the body is just unceremoniously thrown into the river.

The presence of Mun (female Bonthing) is very much essential in the case of death rituals, because it is believed that the Muns are only supposed to know the right rituals for death. While performing death rites a Mun has to be careful not to touch the corpse and she also does not eat anything in front of the dead to prevent her personal illness.

At present burial as well as cremation are practised by the Lepcha of the Darjeeling and Sikkim. The Lepcha who are accustomed to animistic rites to a greater extent are in favour of burial while those who have a greater degree of impact of Buddhism adhere to cremation. The Christian Lepcha of Kalimpong bury the dead and they follow their own Christian religious rites. Nonavaila-



bility of firewood during monsoon and destruction of forest also force the Lepcha, mainly in Kalimpong, to opt for burial.

The Lepcha bury the dead body nine feet underground in case of female and it is 8 feet in case of male. Some part of the death ceremony is performed by Mun. The family members are not supposed to take meat for three days. Lamas are summoned immediately after death to help the soul of the man to find his way to next incarnation. It is mostly at death and the ceremonies which surround death, the belief and rituals of Mun and Lamas clash and contradict each other. Generally the ceremonies of both religions are held simultaneously, the Lamas perform inside the house while the Mun or Bonthing does his ceremonies outside, in the courtyard. Mourning continues for 59 days after which a Mun ceremony is to be performed with fowl and chi. The Buddhist Lepcha display white prayer flags outside the house, as a sign of mourning.

The Lepcha believe that the souls of the Lamas wander for forty nine days, when it qualifies for next incarnation. The souls of Bonthing and Mun go to numlyang to live there permanently. There is no hard and fast rule among the Lepcha in the matter of food during the death pollution period. Usually meat and sexual cohabitation are avoided for a week or so.

From the discussion on the ceremonies followed by the Lepcha it appears that they adhere to the traditional beliefs and practices along with the Buddhistic ideas. Instead of total replacement of one religion by another, the socio-religious life of the people reflects an admixture of Lamaism with the traditional Bon

religion. It may also be noted that many elements of social structure and ceremonies centering around life-cycle rituals have been conditioned by the forest and mountain environment in which the Lepcha live.



## POLITICAL ORGANISATION

It has been said earlier that the Lepcha had neither a tribal nor a clan organisation. But in order to regulate their dealings with the State certain officials were appointed, which constituted their traditional political system. This traditionality of their political organisation persisted in Zongu until recently and perhaps its vestiges can be seen even to-day. But in Kalimpong, since it became a part of British India long ago, it lost its traditional political character soon after this subdivision was annexed from Bhutan. In the following pages traditional as well as modern political system of the Lepcha of Zongu and Kalimpong will be discussed.

Political organisation is a system of regulating relations between groups or members of different groups within the society at large. It is likely that true political organisation begins only with the development of co-operation between distinct and unrelated kinship groups. Ecology and the patterns of culture whereby a people adjust to their environment, undoubtedly plays a large role in the initiation of political systems and in some aspects of their further development. Economic patterns of culture seems also to be linked to political patterns, at least in part (Beals & Hoijer 1965 : 539-62). The political organisation is the set of arrangements by which a public (the public is the persistent social group that forms a unit regulating its common affairs, is a corporate group) regulates its common affairs (Smith 1968 : 194).

### Traditional Political System

Zongu, as part of the Maharajah (Chogyal) of Sikkim's private estate, was administered on his behalf by one of the Kazi or hereditary ministers and landowners. The last one was Rhonock Kazi.

Administratively Zongu was divided into fourteen villages, each with a Mondal as its head. There was also a Mukhtiyar in between Mondal and Kazi. The Mukhtiyar was superior to the Mondals. There was but one Mukhtiyar for the whole of Zongu, and his duty was to supervise and co-ordinate the work of the separate village Mondals or headman. The Mondals collected taxes in their respective villages and used to go once in every year with the actual cash to Gangtok, but since most of them were completely illiterate they delivered their accounts verbally to the Mukhtiyar, who recorded them in writing. The Mukhtiyar received no pay but was entitled to a commission of four annas a year for each house on which taxes were paid. He toured all over his district twice each year, when he assessed the tax to be paid on areas newly brought under cultivation. He also registered birth and death. At the end of each tour he reported to Gangtok and rendered his accounts in person. The office of Mukhtiyar was not necessarily hereditary, since it could only be successfully filled by one who could at least read and write.

The post of village Mondal was previously hereditary. If he had no son the office eventually devolved upon the man who married his daughter, but when a man had children some near paternal relative usually succeeded to the post. In addition to their

work as tax collector Mondals had authority to impose fines upto thirty rupees, but a Mukhtiyar might order a fine of sixty. They were also empowered to settle cases in connection with misappropriation of land but there were no such cases in Lingdong since many years. In Chogyal's time Mondals did not receive any pay from the state, but each household was required to give him three day's free labour (or three men for one day) a year. This system was called kurwa.

Every Mondal had under him several assistants known as Karbari. Karbaris were appointed for a period of three years and with the exception of Lamas every one used to take on the duty in turn. The roster goes on indefinitely, so that if any particular man was not called upon during his lifetime the turn devolved upon his son. There was no pay or any other material advantage attached to the office of Karbari, except a certain amount of authority. When a man had retired from the office of Karbari he was eligible for the appointment of Youmi. Numbers of Youmis to be appointed was at the discretion of the individual headman. Whenever any matter cropped up which could only be decided by reference to customary law, the Mondal called in the Youmis to aid him in giving a decision. They were usually very old man and because of this they could decide such matters as whether there was any reason why a particular couple should not be married or if one man ran off with the wife of another what compensation he should be required to pay and so on. The Youmis also with the help of Gyapon tried to settle quarrels and minor cases without bringing it to the official notice of the Mondal.

The chief work on the administrative side of the village

fell on the Gyapon. Each householder in turn has to hold this office for three years, a sort of rotation was established, and people came to know before hand when their turn of office would fall due. The work was distinctly arduous, it entailed the actual collection of the taxes, the summoning of all citizens of ceremonies or organising collective work for a village like bridge or road repairing or carrying loads to the monastery when required, the collection of grain from each house for communal ceremonies and the prevention of crime and quarrelling. A great deal of the Gyapon's time was taken up in communal business at the cost of their own work and cultivation.

The office of Mukhtiyar and Mondal could be held by the Lamas, the other two offices of Youmi and Gyapon could not, as these offices might entail directly or indirectly the slaughter of animals.

Previously at the time of Chogyal there was no per capita tax of land in Sikkim but every houses paid five rupees a year.

The political organization of the Lepcha of the Darjeeling district was different from that of Sikkim, because the district of Darjeeling was annexed from Sikkim and had been made a part of British India before the beginning of this century. In olden days the Lepcha of the Darjeeling district had a traditional political system i.e. traditional panch headed by the village head man or Mondal. Each village had their own Mondal. The Mondals with the help of other members (selected on the basis of age and experience) of his traditional panch were solely responsible for maintaining law and order and disputes among the villagers. In the Darjeeling district also the posts of Mondals were in most cases hereditary. The

villagers at a gathering selected a person as Mondal or headman and he continued the office for generations. But if he did not have any son or his son was considered unsuitable for the post, the villagers could select any other person as their new Mondal.

### Contemporary Political System

At present the infrastructure of the political systems of Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal have completely changed with the introduction of modern panchayat system.

A panchayat (literally a council of five) is a group of elected members of the body which meets to decide case of disputes, look after the developmental works and judicial cases or problems and general welfare of the people. Panchayats have an indispensable role to play in the rural areas, and are supposed to represent interests of all sections of the community. Many activities such as, framing programmes of production for villages, obtaining and utilising governmental assistance for the betterment of the village such as the construction of roads, bridges etc. to improve the standards of cultivation, organising voluntary labour for community works and general assistance in the implementation of economic and social reforms and to settle down the minor disputes among the villagers.

With the change from traditional to statutory panchayat, the function and power of Mondal has lessened. The Mondal has become, now a days, a mere revenue collector. He gets a commission, 10 percent of the total revenue collected.

The Lingdong village panchayat is formed jointly with the neighbouring village Burfock. The two villages have one panchayat but two different Mondals. The panchayat is composed of one president, one secretary, one vice-president, three members (Mondals are the ex-officio members) one Gyapon (the messenger). The office bearers of the posts are unanimously elected by the villagers at a gathering. There is no tier system in Sikkim panchayat and the panchayats have little or no monetary or other powers in comparison to Darjeeling village panchayats. The panchayats of Lingdong is directly under the control of the District Collector.

In Darjeeling the traditional Mondal was statutorily acknowledged by the British administration as the de facto village - official - in - charge of the land revenue system. The Mondals were appointed as such in succession and as the traditional leader of the village with a quasi-judicial authority and influence, had prestige and area of domination not restricted within the confines of his village but sometimes even transgressing the limits of his area of residence and revenue jurisdiction. The fact that Mondal is an important person is established by the election of the Mondal of Nassey as the member of the gram panchayat. But after independence the traditional panchayats or panch in Darjeeling has been replaced by the new multivillage Statutory panchayat system.

In Sikkim it was replaced after Sikkim had become the 22nd state of Indian union in the year 1975. According to the West Bengal panchayat act of 1957 a three tier system of panchayat raj is operating in the district of Darjeeling including the Kalimpong



subdivision, the lowest level of which is the grampanchayat or gram sabha. Three to four villages together constitute a gram panchayat. Each of its village constitutencies have their representatives in it elected through adult franchise. The seats of the village in the gram sabha depends on population strength. Again two or three grampanchayats constitute an anchal pancahayat. The members of the anchal is elected by the members of the gram panchayat. The last but not the least tier of the panchayat system is the district council or zila parishad, with district magistrate and legislative members of state assembly being the ex-officio members.

Panchayati raj institution has been introduced in the district of Darjeeling in a phased programme. In 1958 gram panchayat and anchal panchayats were introduced in three blocks, viz. Darjeeling, Pulbazar, Jore-Banglow, Sukia Pokhri and Rongli - Rongliat. Then in 1961 two more blocks viz. Kamimpong I and Kalimpong II were added. Finally in 1964, the remaining five blocks, viz. Kurseong, Mirik, Gorubathan, Siliguri, Naxalbari, Karibari - Phansidewa were covered by gram and anchal panchayats. Zilla parishad came into existence in November 1964.

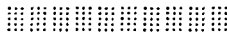
The village Nassey along with its neighbouring village Purbang and Peshore come under Nassey gram panchayat which again with Tashiding gram panchayat form one anchal panchayat.

Within the development block II of Kalimpong, Pagang gram Panchayat along with Santook gram panchayat form one Algarah anchal panchayat.. In the election of 1962 there were 10 Lepchas

out of 15 members in the Pagang gram panchayat. But in the next election, which took place in 1978 the representation of the Lepcha community has come down to 7 from 15, though the Lepcha are the numerically dominant group in that area. In the Nassey gram panchayat also the number of Lepcha members has become less in the last election. This trend shows the decreasing interest shown by the Lepcha in the panchayat raj. Because truly speaking the Lepcha of Zongu and Kalimpong are more faithful to their traditional tribal council at the village level headed by Mondal which runs parallel to the statutory panchayat in most of the villages. It appears that the statutory village panchayat which is supposed to be the custodian of power and authority has failed to become an important element of social control. The traditional tribal council headed by the Mondals regulate the intra-tribal and inter-personnel relations and compromises disputes in the village. Only to settle disputes at inter-ethnic level, the help of statutory panchayat is sought for.

The Lepcha show a certain amount of dislike towards the modern statutory panchayat system. It is evident from the non-representation of the Lepcha in the gram panchayats even in the villages where they are numerically dominant. Elsewhere they could not be elected to the gram panchayats due to lesser population strength. The Lepcha prefer to cling to the traditional political system headed by Mondals both in Darjeeling and Sikkim because their aspirations are not fulfilled by the statutory panchayats. They seem to have expected much more from the panchayati raj to safeguard their interest. They believe that the holy power and influence of the Lamas have not been utilised by the modern gram

panchayat. In Sikkim the Lepcha and the Bhotia jointly enjoy some special privilege in the matter of allotment of the legislative assembly seat. Out of 32 seats in the Sikkim assembly, 14 seats are reserved for the Lepcha - Bhotia, though they constitute only 30% of the total population of the state. Moreover, one seat is exclusively reserved for the Buddhist Lamas. This has recently caused some ethnic tension in the polity and power structure of Sikkim.



## THE RELIGION

Primitive people of all time and ages believe in the existence of superhuman supernatural powers. The inabilities, uncertainties, deprivation from expectations make them believe that there are some supernatural powers who cause all these things. These supernatural powers are conceived in various forms and are categorised or graded with certain specific attributes, which they either try to control or propitiate through offerings including sacrifices to avert danger and natural calamity. This dependence on nature is manifested in the religion of tribal people. According to Geertz (1966 : 4) religion is "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic".

In the preceding chapters on economy and social organization we observed that the activities of the Lepcha were influenced, as believed by the people, along with the other factors, by spirits and supernaturals. During shifting cultivation, cardamom plantation or at the time of house construction or in such other activities of exploitation of nature, the Lepcha make sacrifices in the name of spirits. Here an endeavour has been made to comprehend the ways in which religion is understood by the Lepcha. The Lepcha religion particularly the Bon is viewed as a special adaptive feature of the Himalayan region in which the Lepcha live. The frequent experience of disease and death in the hilly and forested habitat have made the Lepcha dependent upon supernatural and spirit world.

The Lepcha religion is a very complicated one because they practise simultaneously two different types of religions. One is the older Bon religion (called after the name of its priest) and the other one is the Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism which belongs to Mahayana School of Buddhism. The Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism is a later importation in the Lepcha life. The worship of the people of Mayel, was probably an independent one earlier but now it has become a part of Bon religion and can be perceived in a declining form among the Lepcha of Zongu.

The Chief function of the Mun (female Bonthing) or Bonthing is to ward off the misfortunes and illness caused by devils, which is done partly by sacrifices, especially animal sacrifices, and partly by direct communion with the supernaturals. On the contrary, in Lamaism priesthood and sanctity are acquired by learning and not by inspiration, the sacrifice of animals is considered a heinous sin.

In the belief of an average Lepcha, mountain and forest, rock and stream represent ill defined but formidable powers who threaten mankind with a variety of physical ills and require to be constantly appeased through the agency of Bonthing or any other forms of exorcism. "The snow clad giant Mt. Kanchanjungha, chief among the elemental deities of the Lepcha, who vexes men with storm and hail and sends down avalanches and torrents to wreck their fields and sweep away their homes, has been translated to the milder system of Buddhism, where he figures as the tutors of Sakyamuni (Lord Buddha) himself" (Morris : 1938). But the fact that they receive offerings of meat and millet beer(chi) in addition to the flower,

fruit and rice sanctioned by the Buddhist usage, lends some weight to the conjecture that they belong to a more earlier system.

It appears that in the life of the Lepcha the two religions, Lamaism and Bon, has got almost equal influence. Their belief and rituals are being guided by both, Lamaism and Bon religion. It has got some historical bearing also. In 17th century the Tibetan-Bhotias came to Sikkim and converted the native animistic Lepchas into Tibetan-Buddhism and also established monarchy as a centralised theocratic political system. This conversion did not take place at the individual level, rather it was an obligatory mass conversion automatically enforced upon the subject race (Lepcha) by the King while making Buddhism a state religion. As a matter of fact Buddhism was superimposed over the pre-existing infrastructure of animistic Bon religion. Their involvement in Buddhism is not deep rooted and as serious as it should have been. The common Lepchas participate in many a Lamaistic rituals most of the times without knowing their actual meaning as result of pressure of the Tibetan - Bhotias.

That is why when the Christian missionaries started preaching their religion in the hills of Darjeeling, the Lepcha were first to accept Christianity in large numbers. The percentage of Christians is quite high among the Lepcha of Darjeeling whereas it is almost nil among the Bhotia living in the same region. According to 1971 census more than twentyfive percent(25%) Lepchas of Darjeeling are Christians. In Sikkim since it was a princely state the Christian missionaries were not allowed to enter and thus we find almost all the Lepcha are Buddhist in Sikkim.

Within the scope of this thesis it is neither necessary nor possible to discuss Lamaism in its fullest sense. We shall only confine the discussion on this subject only to the extent it is relevant to the life of an average Lepcha. Because Lamaism or Mahayana Buddhism is a subject of great complexity and to the study of which scholars of world-wide repute have devoted their whole lives.

In Darjeeling as well as in Sikkim the monasteries play an important role in the life of the Lepcha, though perhaps the bondage of a Lepcha with monasteries is much more stronger in the Zongu area than in Darjeeling.

In Kalimpong Tibetan Lamas serve the tribe as priests and preside over all Buddhist ceremonies. The Lepcha themselves rarely become Lamas in Kalimpong, but many of them are exorcists (Bonthing). Whereas in Zongu the Lepcha become Lamas and even reach as high as the post of Dorje-Lapoon, highest order of Lama in Sikkim. In fact in Lingdong every third household have a member who is a Lama. In Lingdong a Lama does not necessarily stay in the monastery. He may be a family man, a cultivator. Only at fixed time he has to attend the monastic ceremonies. The people of Lingdong, jointly with Burfock village, have a small monastery. The oldest monastery in Zongu is the Tulung monastery, where all the villagers of Zongu go to pay their respect in alternate years. In their monasteries the religious practices are guided by Buddhist scripture in Tibetan language. In Sikkim the monasteries play an important role in the socio-religious life of the Lepcha, where almost every act of an individual is guided by monateries. Most of the

monasteries have huge amount of land for cultivation. These land are cultivated either through share-cropping basis or through obligatory labours given by the household members.

Hierarchy of Lamas and the religious structure of priesthood in the Lepcha monasteries of Sikkim is as follows :-

- (a) Dorjee-Lapoon (Patriarch, the head of the gumpha).
- (b) Omze - Tipa (Chief celebrant - the manager of the gumpha).
- (c) Ochumpa (Assistant of Omze - Tipa)
- (d) Chutempa (Provost - marshal, in charge of monks).
- (e) Chenjpa (Officiating monk).
- (f) Nyepo (Commissariate manager).
- (g) Chinyel (In charge of Kitchen).
- (h) Konsopa (A monk on duty at a special prayer every evening)
- (i) Kunjel (Lamb care taker, sacrificers).
- (j) Tongpa (Conch - shell blower).

A Lama is a distinguished person in the Lepcha society. There is also a difference in appearance between laymen and Lamas. The Lamas have their heads shaved or keep short hair and wear Tibetan dress whereas the laymen wear Lepcha dress and usually keep long hair. The Lamas are usually cremated but laymen are buried. Children of Lama generally themselves become Lamas. Children of laymen can also become Lama. The vocation to become a Lama is determined by the horoscope of the child and thought to be predestined for it. The boy from an early age is brought to monastery ceremonies to make him accustomed to the atmosphere. When the boy is about twelve years of age he is sent to live with a



teacher who happens to be a Lama. The pupil works for the teacher in day time and receives instructions from Lamaist text in the evening. After two years or so, when he completes the basic learnings he is given his loong (qualification) by the teacher. After this the boy is formally admitted into the monastery through a simple ceremony called ditset in which he drinks tea and chi with the Lamas and is presented with a scarf (khada) by the monastery. From now onwards the trainee boy will have to go through a series of stages in the Lamaist hierarchy and only a few could move up to reach the highest order, in a Lepcha monastery, the post of Dorjee Lapoon. Each rise in grade accompanies a monastery feast in which all villagers are invited and chi (liquor) and food are served. Dance and merrymaking continues throughout the night. During the monastic feasts free mixing of boys and girls are a common phenomenon. Negotiation of marriage also takes place in such feasts.

Lamaism has also got a social organisation. The Lamas are arranged in a disciplined hierarchy. The Lamas perform religious ceremonies on behalf of the whole society. In turn it is the duty of the society to lend them some material support. In Tibet this social organisation was extremely important before 1962, the Lamas as an exploiting class possessed great temporal power and peasants attached to monastic land were virtually monastery serfs (Gorer 1938 : 192). At present in Sikkim the Lamas are not as powerful as they were in Tibet, but even then they do enjoy considerable amount of influence and authority in Sikkim and a little less in Kalimpong in the Darjeeling district. Both in Sikkim and in Kalimpong some gumphas (monastery) own land in their names as 'Legal persons'. The monastery at Pagang, name 'Rishi Gumpha', owns about 16 acres of

land. The land is cultivated under the supervision of monastery (gumpha) committee. A portion of the land is also cultivated on share cropping basis. The income from the monastery land is used for the running of the gumpha. In Sikkim monastery land is tax free.

The religious life of the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim is very much colourful and appear to be similar in nature. Throughout the year they have festivals, special offerings to a host of deities. A brief list of annual rituals, ceremonies, special offerings etc. is given below :-

TABLE NO. 36

## Annual calendar of festivals &amp; rituals

| Sl. No. | Name of the festivals/ rituals | Month of performance |             | Duration |
|---------|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|
|         |                                | Lepcha month         | Eng. Month  |          |
| 1.      | Nam Bun                        | Karnith              | Dec. / Jan  | 1 week   |
| 2.      | Ner-Kakyat                     | Karnith              | Dec. / Jan. | 1 week   |
| 3.      | Loser                          | Karsong              | February    | 1 week   |
| 4.      | Chechu                         | Som                  | April       | 1 day    |
| 5.      | Mane                           | Glu                  | April       | 1 day    |
| 6.      | Ani                            | Parvim               | July        | 2 days.  |
| 7.      | Mong Bree Meno                 | Parvim               | August      | 2 days.  |
| 8.      | Lobsong                        | Glu                  | September   | 1 day    |
| 9.      | Liram                          | Mar                  | November    | 1 day    |
| 10.     | Layan Chin Thing               | Mar                  | November    | 1 day    |
| 11.     | Ongshi                         | Mar                  | December    | 3 days.  |

A short account of the above rituals and festivals are given below :

**Nam Bun :** This is the new year festival and usually performed in the first week of the month "Karnith" (December - January). The Lamas chant hymns in the monastery for a week. The main idea behind the performance of the festival is that no evil befalls on them during the coming new year.

**Ner - Kakyat :** This is also held in the month of Karnith in connection with the new year and the people usually wear new clothes to mark the occasion. This is a part of Nam - Bun ceremony.

**Loser :** This festival is performed during the first week of the Tibetan new year which starts between February and March according to the Tibetan Calendar and continues for a week and generally held for the same purpose as stated above.

**Chechu :** The festival is performed on the full moon days, as Lord Buddha was born on a full moon day. The birth day of Lord Buddha which falls generally in the middle of April (Som) is celebrated most vigorously and gorgeously. From the morning till evening the Lamas chant hymns and pray to Lord Buddha for the well being of the people. On this day the villagers go to monastery and they take with them chi and other religious presentations, which include fruit, flower and animals.

**Mane** : This festival is performed twice in the month of August-September (Parvim - Glu). The Lamas chant hymns in the monastery throughout the day. On the full moon day takbothing, tasething and chuku are worshipped in the monastery. On this occasion some animals ( a cow, or goat or fowl) are sacrificed by the Bonthing priest in the village. In the gumpha Lamas read out prayer to the different gods and evil spirits.

**Mong-Bree-Meno**

: This festival is performed in every house during the day time seeking blessings of Buddha. It consists of sacrificing five chicken (black), and offering chi, eggs etc. to spirits and Bonthing acts as priest over the ceremony.

**Liram** : In the month of Mar i.e. November - December, the household deity Liram is worshipped by the individual household. Water and pathiyuts (thumba) containing chi is offered, Bonthing worships the early ancestor (thikung) and early ancestress (nikung) and narrates the story of creation and the origin of the Lepcha.

**Layan Chin Thing**

: This is performed in November - December and popularly known as esikari Puja. Formerly this ritual was only meant for the hunters but now-a-days it is performed by almost all the families.

**Ani** : This worship is performed in the month of Parvim (July - August) and is meant for avoiding death from snake bites.

**Lobsong** : Lobsong is worshipped for gods and evil spirits of the village and the ritual is performed in Bhadra Purnima day. This is mainly done for the welfare of the villagers.

**Ongshi** : This is also a new year celebration ceremony and is performed on 24th December each year. The Lepcha New Year Day. In this day people play with bow and arrow. These seem to be the main festivals of the Lepcha.

An integral part of all Lamaist ritual is that the Lamas chant hymns and mantras throughout the ritual ceremony. The most famous Lamaist prayer is Om manipadme hum ! which is believed to be of great efficacy. Lord Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche, the great teacher in occultism, is the principal deity of the Lepcha. He introduced the tantric elements into the Tibetan Buddhism, popularly known as Lamaism. The Lamas as well as the laity attach more importance to the esoteric manifestations in Buddhism. Magic and mystic rites are used more freely. Due to this naive character Tibetan Buddhism, as a higher religion, could not totally replace the earlier and traditional Bon religion. The services of Bonthing and Mun are extremely necessary in the life of every Lepcha. They must always be present at birth, marriage and death of an individual as they are the only essential priests. Throughout life they are

required for cleansing from supernatural danger and for expelling devils. Unlike Lamaism the Bon religion does not have any social organisation and religious offices. The Bonthings and Muns are simply individual priests, who through their possession by a spirit carry out religious functions as required from time to time by the Lepcha. The Bonthings are the ceremonial sacrificers of the animals but a Lama, though can eat meat, should on no account kill an animal.

Any layman can become Bonthing or Mun. It is not necessary for him or her to be predestined for it as in the case of Lamas. No systematic training is also necessary from the childhood. Its vocation comes from inner urge and self power and has to be possessed by spirits or moong. He has to learn the procedures of devil worshipping, sacrificing rituals, and other form of exorcism. For the laymen padem is the first step to become Bonthing or Mun. Padems are less powerful than the Bonthings or Muns, they neither drive away evil spirit nor perform death rituals. To become Bonthing one has to undergo a tutelage for about three years from an experienced Bonthing. When he becomes qualified to control the spirit independently he is given the loong or degree. An ox is sacrificed to mark the occasion. A great number of Bonthing and Mun ceremonies are performed in Zongu for the benefit of individuals and to drive away evil spirits (moong). To get rid of illness and misfortune are the main reasons for such ceremonies. The sacrificed animals are always distributed among the villagers. These sacrifices associated with Bon religion play an important role in community fusion and as a source of protein in the cold climate. The controlled slaughtering of animals under the supervision of Bonthing and Lamas, prevent

uneventful and unnecessary killing of animals. Everybody wants to preserve the livestocks for rituals and ceremonies. This attitude helps in maintaining a balance between human and cattle population. Instead of killing fowls at random this ritual control, force them to save the birds for eggs as a constant source of food supply.

The Mun and Bonthing, thus, in a Lepcha village not only wield a powerful influence owing to their supernatural power to cause and cure diseases of the villagers but have some beneficial role too.

The Lepcha pantheon consists of both divine powers and evil one. The supreme divine powers are rather distant, benevolent in nature which the Lepcha equate with Gods. There are minor benevolent powers like rum (good spirits) who help people in various ways. But the negative powers, the moongs (evil spirits) paly an important role in Lepcha imagination for causing considerable harm and destruction to humankind. These moongs must be counteracted by sanguinary sacrifices. Among the Lepcha the ceremonies of averting nature are more than the rituals of invoking type. The Gods and rums (good spirits) need not be propitiated frequently as they are of benevolent nature and do not like animal blood. But the moongs (evil spirit) are malevolent in nature and do harms. These evil spirits are to be satisfied in order to avert their evil influence.

In addition the these the people of Mayel and Mt. Kanchanjungha are also worshipped by the Lepcha as their guardian deity. The land of Mayel is situated in an inaccessible valley, somewhere behind Kanchanjungha which can not be reached now. The people of Mayel

are worshipped by the Lepcha of Zongu in connection with the crops of dry rice (not in Lingdong), millet and maize. A Mun performs the rituals. Kalimpong Lepchas though aware of the existence of Mayel but they do not worship them in any form. From olden days the Lepcha have been associated with the nature and with Mt. Kanchanjungha. This geographical association is reflected in the socio religious structure of the community.

Christianity reached the hills of Darjeeling in the last half of 19th century. In Sikkim it came at a much later date and the inroad there had been sporadic and very much restricted by the strong influence of Tibetan - Buddhism, as also because they did not receive any patronage from the Chogyal (king) of Sikkim. But in Darjeeling and Kalimpong the preaching of Christianity had been overwhelmingly successful. Inconvenience and hardship could not prevent the clergymen from establishing churches even in the remote areas. Christian Lepchas belong to two sects, Roman Catholic and Protestant in nearly equal numbers. There are also a few individuals following the faith of 'Seven Day Adventists'.

On the conversion to Christianity by the Lepcha, Gorer (1938 : 38) writes, "the conversion of individuals to Christianity seems to have modified the converts' character far more profoundly than the earlier group conversion to Buddhism". The Christian Lepcha are found to be much more prolific in nature and prosperous. The rate of adoption of new agricultural techniques, use of chemical fertilizer and cultivation of cash crops, (other than cardamom and orange) are more among the Christian Lepcha. This is quite understandable in Nassey and other villages of Kalimpong.



The religion of the Lepcha, as evident from the brief discussion in the foregoing pages and also in the preceding chapters, exhibits simultaneous presence of three religious beliefs and practices in a balanced manner. Traditional Bon religion, Lamaism and newly adopted Christianity are co-existing side by side peacefully in the Lepcha society. This has been possible due to the nature and character of the Lepcha and their society, which is non aggressive in nature and tolerant in character.



## 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

↑↑

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

↑↑

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

↑↑

*Subsistence Economy* : Resources exploited by population.

Figure No. 5.                    Ecological paradigm

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

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





SUMMARY AND OBSERVATION

To sum up this study on the Lepcha of Darjeeling and Sikkim let us recapitulate the main points of observation.

I did field work in three Lepcha villages, situated in different ecological situations through which I have tried to ascertain the socio-economic changes and adaptations that have taken place among the Lepcha during this century. A revolutionary change has taken place in the subsistence sphere of their life. Within a short span of only hundred years or less, they have transformed their subsistence economy from hunting - food - gathering to settled plough cultivation in permanent terraces, understandably there was an intermediate stage of shifting cultivation. In this period of transformation, particularly from shifting to terrace cultivation their animistic Bon religion has been gradually superimposed by Lamaism. I have tried to see how the structuring of society within each of these levels in turn represents organisations of the people for the purposes of subsistence and patterns of interaction among ecology, culture and society as an interdependent whole.

As far as the records show the Lepcha are the original inhabitants of Sikkim as well as of the district of Darjeeling which was at one time a part of Sikkim. Bhotias of Sikkim had come from Tibet in the 17th Century A.D. and converted the indigenous animistic Lepchas into Tibetan Buddhism and established monarchy as a centralised theocratic political system in Sikkim. These immigrant Bhotias freely

intermarried with the Lepcha and the native population was welded to the wider system of the greater Tibetan civilization. The native Lepcha population started to wear Bhotia dress and hold annual festival according to the Buddhist calendar and today, they and the Bhotia constitute one religious and cultural entity, thus producing one of the distinctive frontier cultures within the Tibetan cultural area (Nakane 1966 : 221). In the early part of the 19th Century the Nepalis migrated to Sikkim in waves from their relatively infertile and overpopulated land of Nepal. They worked as a dependent tenant under the Bhotia or Lepcha land lords and gradually made their entrance into the socio-political scene of Sikkim and Darjeeling, ultimately becoming a major force to reckon with. The trilingual setting of the region has given the native people the advantage of social and economic contacts with Nepali and Tibetan speakers. This helps them to interact with different cultures. In such a social system, interaction does not lead to the liquidation of ethnic differences through acculturation, cultural differences persist inspite of interethnic contact and interdependence (Barth, 1969).

In the beginning, the Lepcha could maintain ecological equilibrium with their environment. They lived in the zones of abundant natural resources to support a relatively small population, which they successfully exploited with a low level technology of hunting and gathering. As the number grew, a primitive form of cultivation like slash and burn or shifting hill cultivation was adopted. In course of time as population further increased and the Nepali immigrants settled in the area in large numbers the land gradually become scarce and the Lepcha were somewhat compelled to

take up settled plough agriculture in the terraces and thus began the era of better use of natural resources with an improved technology. But then they could not compete with the immigrant Bhotia and Nepalis. First the Bhotia and later the Nepalis, as a stronger group had intruded in the region in search of better economic prospects. With a higher level of technology they took control of the better resources and the Lepcha subsisted on poorer and scanty natural resources. In Sikkim outside of Zongu reserve the Lepcha possess very little land and in Darjeeling except a few villages in Kalimpong sub-division their control over the natural resources are being minimised by the Nepalis. However this competition for resources acted in a different way in the case of the immigrant Bhotia who had come earlier than the Nepalis. Bhotias were fewer in number and they did not really compete for land rather they controlled the political structure of the region (Sikkim) till its merger with Indian Union in 1975. In the economic sphere they preferred to work more in trans-Himalayan trade and trans-humance than to settle down in one place and till the soil.

In Darjeeling Lepcha lands are passing out to the Nepalis inspite of the Government law banning such transfer, because the Nepalis are purchasing the land in the name of their Lepcha wives, whom they often intermarry in the hills of Darjeeling district. There were about twelve cases of Nepali Lepcha marriages noted in the two villages studied in Kalimpong. To prevent this clandestine transfer of land, stringent laws should be enacted and their strict enforcement ensured. This will help in the restoration of self confidence among the Lepcha. The tremendous amount of in-migration in the hills of

Darjeeling badly affected the ethnic composition, ethnic balance and power structure of the region. In ten years, from 1951 to 1961 (Census of India : Darjeeling district Handbook) about seventyfive thousand people had come as immigrants in the three hill subdivisions of the Darjeeling district, viz. Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong. Since the confrontation is amongst various ethnic groups, the problem is more difficult. The interest of other ethnic groups, whether acquired legitimately or otherwise, becomes a relevant factor, and compromises have been made in many cases, even by sacrificing the interests of the Lepcha, though there are best intentions to help the affected people.

Though the Lepcha and Nepalis follow the same technology, Nepalis are able to accumulate more wealth than the Lepcha. Given the same population with the same resources the productivity of the Nepalis is much higher and their consumption is much lower than that of the Lepcha (Nakane 1966 : 236). They have taken for granted their low level of production. Lack of competitive zeal among them does not give rise to any conflict or tension which is generally expected in this type of situation.

"In their own land the Lepcha psychologically think themselves inefficient in comparison to others. Their lack of competitive zeal indirectly influences their mentality as a losing community in the struggle for existence" (Das 1978 : 258). Objectively, one can see that the Lepcha have lost ground in almost all spheres of life to the Bhotia and Nepalis. In the recent years despite their dynamism in economic and religious sphere their social

structure has remained static and quite unchanged, which has perhaps caused the lack of adaptive capability to the changing circumstances. This is evident from little occupational mobility among them. Due to this lack of adaptive capability the Lepcha could not compete with the Nepalis who are more versatile in this respect. Their deep attachment to land also prevented them from accepting new types of occupation.

In the economic sphere at Nassey, a village situated near Kalimpong town, the Lepcha cultivators use some chemical fertilizers in addition to organic manure. But in Pagang and Lingdong no chemical fertilizer is used. At Nassey cash croppings of various vegetables like cauliflower, potatoe, ginger etc. are done, but in Pagang no cash crop is produced probably due to non-availability of transport facilities. But in Lingdong cardamom is grown because the traders themselves come over to the village to collect the crop. As a matter of fact the production of cardamom as a cash crop has become a part and parcel of Lepcha life in Sikkim. Due to its lucrative cash value many people have started to convert their rice terraces to cardamom fields. This additional cash money earned from cardamom is used by the Lepcha of Zongu in different rituals. They also use a portion of it to modernise their dwelling houses by replacing the traditional thatched roof with galvanised iron sheet, though in the matter of dresses and other social aspects they still follow the traditional way of life. Indications of social changes is somewhat evident more among the Lepcha of Kalimpong though they have less income from cash crops. but in Zongu...modernization is hurdled as the income from cash crop of cardamom is spent in religious ceremonies.

So from this we can infer that cash cropping may not always bring social change. The Lepcha of Zongu lag behind their Kalimpong brethren in agricultural techniques, gross production of crops and use of fertilizers etc. Occupational mobility is also more among the Lepcha of Kalimpong. The perspective of cultural ecology developed in the preceding chapters consider not only the natural features of habitat but also the relations between cultures ; the super organic setting (Sahlins and Service 1960 : 49).

The Lepcha are mainly monogamous though polygyny is allowed. It is seen that in Lingdong and other villages of Zongu, especially in upper Zongu, the frequency of polygyny is more. Inheritance of elder brother's widow and sharing of elder brother's wife by younger brothers without being married to her is present in Zongu but absolutely absent in Kalimpong and other areas of Darjeeling district. It is mainly due to the fact that surplus land is available in Zongu in plenty. In agriculture (both terrace and shifting, more particularly in shifting) female labour is much required. In the event of a person having opted for monastic training to become a Lama, his wives and un-married(formally) brother are of great help to look after his house, land and cultivation. Nuclear family is more in Nassey because here the people possess less land to support a big joint family.

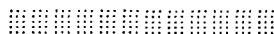
In Kalimpong the Lepcha have more or less accepted the statutory village panchayat but in Zongu the influence of Mondals are still much more than the statutory panchayats.

Tibetan - Bhotia influence helped spreading of Lamaism among the Lepcha and the immigrant Nepalis influenced their economic life to a considerable extent. With the advent of British rule vigorous missionary activities started in this region, particularly in the Darjeeling district and a section of the Lepcha was converted to Christianity. The religious conversion to Buddhism among the Lepcha took place in a different fashion. No individual conversion through inducement or preaching occurred. When Sikkim was taken over by the Buddhist Bhotia king of Tibetan Origin the Lepcha subjects automatically adopted Buddhism, which was the State religion at that time. But this conversion was never very deep rooted that is why it was easy to convert a Lepcha from Buddhism to Christianity. The high expense of Buddhist rituals and Bonthing performances in the form of animal sacrifices accelerated the conversion of Darjeeling Lepchas into Christianity. Rather than either Bonthingism or Buddhism or Christianity, a process of religious triangulation is under way. The indigenous cult, centred on spirits and local deities, has been overlaid with Tibetan Buddhism, and this in turn has been challenged by Nepali Hinduism and Christianity.

Some revitalistic movements have started both, in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim especially among the younger generations. Under the leadership of Darjeeling Lepcha Association the people of Nassey have already partially stopped the sacrifice of animals. In Pagang too it is going to be stopped very soon. Through the revivalistic activities of this nature, the Lepcha of Darjeeling are trying to regain their lost ground, so that they can compete with the Nepalis in various spheres of life. An organisation

named 'Mayel Nyam' in Zongu has been advocating that all Lepchas should cultivate their own land and should send their children to schools.

Present day Lepchas are not to be seen as a primitive isolate, as a frontier tribesmen in an ideal sense but rather as a reactant community in the broader framework of Indian civilization, though they practise slash and burn cultivation in some areas and are deeply engulfed in the religious world of Lamaism and spiritism. Their economy is characterised by a structurally developed land tenure system and cash cropping. Their Lamas culturally interact with different centres of Buddhistic learnings. These are the signs of peasantry, evident among the Lepcha. Whether the Lepcha will ultimately be able to maintain their distinct socio-cultural identity or lose in the battle for survival and get absorbed among the Nepalis or Bhotias is difficult to foresee at the present moment. There is some effort on their part recently to maintain their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. But unless the core element of their economy - the land, is allowed to be retained by them it will be difficult to achieve. Modernization of their agriculture to give them a better sustenance and proper land management may perhaps help them regain their ethnic pride and confidence.





220

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254  
Appendix - A

Kinship Terms

| Description of Relationships            | Terms used<br>by the Lepcha |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1                                       | 2                           |
| <b>TWO GENERATIONS ABOVE</b>            |                             |
| 1. Father' father                       | Theuon                      |
| 2. Father's father's brother            | "                           |
| 3. Mother's father                      | "                           |
| 4. Mother's father's brother            | "                           |
| 5. Father's mother                      | Neuka                       |
| 6. Father's mother's sister             | "                           |
| 7. Mother's mother                      | "                           |
| 8. Mother's mother's sister             | "                           |
| <b>ONE GENERATION ABOVE</b>             |                             |
| 9. Father                               | Abo                         |
| 10. Father's elder brother              | Aku                         |
| 11. Father's younger brother            | Bathim                      |
| 12. Mother's sister's husband           | Ajong                       |
| 13. Mother's brother                    | "                           |
| 14. Father's sister's husband           | "                           |
| 15. Spouse's father                     | Afath                       |
| 16. Brother's or Sister's father in law | "                           |
| 17. Step father                         | Bachum                      |
| 18. Mother                              | Amo                         |
| 19. Mother's sister                     | Anu                         |
| 20. Father's elder brother's wife       | Mathim                      |

|     |                                 |        |
|-----|---------------------------------|--------|
| 21. | Father's younger brother's wife | Anu    |
| 22. | Step mother                     | Machum |
| 23. | Mother's brother's wife         | Anu    |
| 24. | Spouse's mother                 | Amoo   |
| 25. | Father's sister                 | Anu    |

## OWN GENERATION

|     |                                   |           |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 26. | Elder brother                     | Anam      |
| 27. | Younger brother                   | Eng       |
| 28. | Father's brother's son            | "         |
| 29. | Mother's sister's son             | "         |
| 30. | Spouse's sister's husband         | Ajonm     |
| 31. | Husband's elder brother           | Anonm     |
| 32. | Husband's younger brother         | Ajonm     |
| 33. | Wife's elder brother              | Anam      |
| 34. | Wife's younger brother            | Ajonm     |
| 35. | Elder sister's husband            | "         |
| 36. | Younger sister's husband          | "         |
| 37. | Wife                              | Aisu      |
| 38. | Husband                           | Avo       |
| 39. | Father-in-law of son and daughter | Afath/Anu |
| 40. | Elder sister                      | Anom      |
| 41. | Younger sister                    | Eng       |
| 42. | Father's brother's daughter       | Anu       |
| 43. | Mother's sister's daughter        | Eng       |
| 44. | Father's sister's daughter        | "         |
| 45. | Mother's brother's daughter       | "         |
| 46. | Husband's elder brother's wife    | Anom      |
| 47. | Husband's younger brother's wife  | Neom      |



|     |                          |       |
|-----|--------------------------|-------|
| 48. | Husband's elder sister   | Anom  |
| 49. | Husband's younger sister | Ajnom |
| 50. | Wife's younger sister    | Anom  |
| 51. | Wife's elder sister      | "     |
| 52. | Elder brother's wife     | Ajong |
| 53. | Younger brother's wife   | Neom  |

#### GENERATION BELOW

|     |                              |            |
|-----|------------------------------|------------|
| 54. | Son                          | Tadgarikap |
| 55. | Brother's son                | Nankap     |
| 56. | Sister's son                 | "          |
| 57. | Daughter's husband           | Meok       |
| 58. | Brother's daughter's husband | "          |
| 59. | Sister's daughter's husband  | "          |
| 60. | Husband's brother's son      | Anu        |
| 61. | Husband's sister's son       | Namkap     |
| 62. | Wife's brother's son         | "          |
| 63. | Wife's sister's son          | "          |
| 64. | Daughter                     | Taikap     |
| 65. | Brother's daughter           | "          |
| 66. | Sister's daughter            | "          |
| 67. | Son's wife                   | Neom       |
| 68. | Brother's son's wife         | "          |
| 69. | Sister's son's wife          | "          |
| 70. | Husband's brother's daughter | Anamkap    |
| 71. | Husband's sister's daughter  | "          |
| 72. | Wife's brother's daughter    | Namkap     |
| 73. | Wife's sister's daughter     | "          |

## TWO GENERATIONS BELOW

|     |                               |         |
|-----|-------------------------------|---------|
| 74. | Son's son                     | Kabjong |
| 75. | Daughter's son                | "       |
| 76. | Son's daughter's husband      | Meokap  |
| 77. | Daughter's daughter's husband | Beokap  |
| 78. | Son's daughter                | Kabjong |
| 79. | Daughter's daughter           | "       |
| 80. | Son's son's wife              | Neom    |

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**APPENDIX B**

**P H O T O G R A P H S**



PANAROMIC VIEW OF LINGDONG VILLAGE

1



2

VIEW OF A LEPCHA TRADITIONAL HOUSE





A LEPCHA OLD MAN

3

4

A LEPCHA MOTHER AND HER CHILD







5

PLOT FOR SHIFTING CULTIVATION

TERRACE PLOUGHING



6





7

CARDAMOM FIELD

A PIG HOUSE IN KALIMPONG



8



BAMBOO CONTAINER FOR CHI

9

PREACHING OF CHRISTIANITY



10