

## 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 Popu- lation
	Primary (Upto IV)		Secondary (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 (N-205)	Nepali (N-155)	Muslim (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 rurban 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 Kanchenjungha. 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 Lepch 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 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 (N - 176)	Nepali (N - 93)
1	2	3
Primary (upto IV)	23.30	21.51
Secondary (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.

