

## CHAPTER – SIX

### DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE

“Exchange is a surface phenomenon of economic life, reflecting the underlying economic and social organization of production. Consequently, exchange relations are not general, but specific to each mode of economic organization that shapes them.” [Bhaduri.1984 : 1]. In all standard economic theory ‘exchange’ is a market-based concept where market has taken as a precondition for all exchange relations. But in an ideal agriculture based tribal economy ‘distribution’ rather than exchange may be the most appropriate term to be used where the crops are produced not for sale in the market but to distribute among different user groups to fulfil different obligations.

Lepchas produce both food and cash crops. The cash crops are made available for sale in the nearby market while the food crops are used for following purposes : i) to fulfill food requirements of household consumption, ii) to meet the requirement of seed etc. for agricultural purposes, iii) to meet the payment of exchange of labour, iv) to fulfill social obligations, v) to fulfill ritual obligations, vi) to meet miscellaneous obligations.

Let us discuss each of these obligations in brief.

#### 6.1 FOOD FOR CONSUMPTION

“We live and work for food. We do not think much for the future. Whatever we earn or produce, we enjoy by consuming together with the family members” - said Gyanthop Lepcha of 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon. Food comprises an important

component of domestic life of Lepchas. They are very hospitable. Hospitality to the guests and care for the household members are depend on supply of food available domestically.

Rice is the staple food for the Lepchas. They also consume maize, millet and wheat. The two principal meals (at around 11-12 noon and 7-8 pm) comprise of rice along with green vegetables, pulses and occasionally meat. The morning breakfast comprises of *roti* made of maize, millet and wheat. *Chi*, home made liquor made from fermented millet, is widely used by the Lepchas in different rituals, daily consumption in agricultural field and entertaining the guests.

Lepchas cultivate and select the crops as per their different requirements. They cultivate paddy solely for domestic consumption and never sell it in the market. Budhimaya Lepcha, a 80 year old lady of Mani Gumpa humorously remarked "we cultivate paddy in the plains."

Almost entire production of maize, millet, and wheat are also used for domestic consumption. The maize and wheat are consumed by all household members irrespective of age and sex. Millet is consumed mainly by the elderly male members by preparing *chi*. The Buddhist Lepchas consider *chi* as a symbol of their identity and they prepare it at their home. However, the Christians have some reservation in preparing and consuming *chi*. In Mani Gumpa, eight households prepare *chi* for sale. In spite of religious restrictions seven households (two UCNI and five RC) in 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon prepare *chi* for their domestic consumption. There is no restriction on preparing and consuming *chi* in Pochaok. On the question of millet, Ong Tshering Lepcha of Mani Gumpa informed, "no household

can ever sell millet, on the contrary all have to buy it, because we are using millet widely in a number of occasions like daily consumption, rituals, entertaining guests, agricultural labours. Production of millet is always less than our requirement.”

Vegetables are grown both for domestic consumption as well as sale. Most of the households grow vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, radish, beans, cucumber, pumpkin, lady's-finger, chilli, *raisak* for domestic consumption. Some Lepchas, mainly in 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon, cultivate vegetables on a large scale and for market. Lepchas prefer fresh green vegetables for their kitchen and grow them on small patches of lands wherever are available.

The cash crops of the Lepchas include cardamom, ginger (in Pochaok), vegetables (in 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon) and gladioli (in Mani Gumpa). The entire production of cardamom, ginger, gladioli and a major part of vegetables are made available for sale.

Table 6.1 shows the participation of Lepcha households in the production of cash crop, food crop and both cash and food crops.

Table – 6.1

Village-wise Distribution of households in the production of food crop and cash crop.

Name of the village	Food Crop	Cash crop	Engagement in both food and cash crop			Non cultivator	Total
			Food crop as main crop	Cash crop as main crop	Total		
Mani Gumpa	5 (22.73)	-	12 (54.54)	3 (13.64)	15 (68.18)	2 (9.09)	22 (100.00)
5 <sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon	9 (42.86)	-	11 (52.38)	-	11 (52.38)	1 (4.76)	21 (100.00)
Pochaok	54 (71.05)	1 (1.32)	12 (15.78)	8 (10.53)	20 (26.31)	1 (1.32)	76 (100.00)
Total	68 (57.15)	1 (0.84)	35 (29.41)	11 (9.24)	46 (38.65)	4 (3.36)	119 (100.00)

(Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentages)

The table reveals that larger proportion of households (57.15) are engaged in the cultivation of food crop and only one household in Pochaok is engaged in the production of cash crop. A sizeable section is engaged in the production of both cash and food crops. As food crops are not available for sale so the Lepchas are primarily concerned about those crops necessary to feed their household members.

Village-wise data show that largest percentage of households (71.05) in Pochaok are engaged in producing food crops, another 15.78 per cent consider food crop as their main crop. Lepchas of 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon considered food crops as their main crop and which is consumed by the household members. The picture is slightly different the case of in Mani Gumpa where 13.64 per cent household produce cash crop as a main crop. The others are engaged in cultivation of food crops necessary for distribution and consumption.

The food crop and cash crop can further be classified as principal and subsidiary crops. Those crops, which cover more than 50 per cent of the available cultivable area, are identified as principal crop. The need of the household is the prime consideration for the choice of principal and subsidiary crops. Table. 6.2 reveals that the three traditional food crops – paddy, maize and millet are considered as principal and most preferred crops by the Lepchas. They prefer the modern cash crops like gladioli, vegetable and cardamom as subsidiary crop. In spite of a move from traditional to modern crops, Lepchas still consider food crops as their principal crop.

Table -6.2

Cropping Pattern : Principal and Subsidiary Crop.

Village	Total household	Total cultivator	Paddy		Maize		Millet		Gladioli		Cardamom		Ginger		Vegetables		No Crop	
			Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary	Principal	Subsidiary
Mani Gumpa	22 (18.49)	20 (17.39)	14 (33.33)	2 (10.00)	10 (10.42)	5 (20.00)	4 (5.71)	3 (12.00)	10 (100.00)	9 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	2 (20.00)	7 (17.07)	-	2 (6.06)
5 <sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon	21 (17.65)	20 (17.39)	18 (42.86)	2 (10.00)	11 (11.46)	8 (32.00)	3 (4.29)	10 (40.00)	-	-	-	-	-	-	8 (80.00)	10 (24.39)	-	-
Pochaok	76 (63.86)	75 (65.22)	10 (23.81)	16 (80.00)	75 (78.12)	12 (48.00)	63 (90.00)	12 (48.00)	-	-	1 (100.00)	28 (100.00)	-	22 (100.00)	-	24 (58.54)	-	31 (93.94)
Total	119 (100.00)	115 (100.00)	42 (100.00)	20 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	9 (100.00)	1 (100.00)	28 (100.00)	-	22 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	41 (100.00)	-	23 (100.00)

(Figures in the parentheses show percentage)

The most preferred principal crop among the Lepchas is maize. It is used both as food as well as fodder. The percentage of household cultivating maize is the highest in Pochaok (78.12) followed by 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon (11.46) and Mani Gumpa (10.42). The second preferred principal crop is millet. It is traditional crop among the Lepchas. Millet is mainly used for preparing *chi*, ( indigenous liquor) and used widely for domestic consumption and ritual purposes. Millet is also used as fodder for pig, hen, goat. It has observed that 90 per cent of millet is produced in Pochaok. Lepchas of Pochaok are still stick to their old agricultural practice while in other two villages they have recorded a shift from traditional millet to modern crops.

Paddy is another preferred principal crop among the Lepchas. The Lepchas are rice eaters. But paddy can only grow in wet fields and whose availability is somewhat limited. Higher percentage of paddy field is found is 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon followed by Mani Gumpa and Pochaok. In Mani Gumpa some portion of wet fields which were earlier used for paddy cultivation have been later converted to dry field for gladioli cultivation.

Among the non-traditional crops, vegetable is important both as principal and subsidiary crop. In 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon majority (80 per cent) of Lepchas consider it as principal crop. Lepchas of Pochaok (58.54 per cent) rated it as an important subsidiary crop. Vegetables are identified as main cash crop by the Lepchas of 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon. In other two villages they are used mainly for domestic consumption.

Lepchas, thus, still retained their traditional outlook in cultivating the days old food crops – maize, millet and paddy. But no Lepchas consider all the three

crops as unprofitable nor they have stopped cultivating them. They consider the use value of all these crops rather than their monetary value. No part of production of these three crops are meant for the market; rather to meet the deficit in consumption, which is most common, Lepchas very often buy them from the market. The entire cultivable amounts of all the three crops are used for household consumption. Obligation towards the kins is the basis of Lepcha cultivation.

Some of agricultural produce particularly fruits and vegetables are sent to the married girls and boys who settled elsewhere. The nearest relatives, neighbours and even visitors are also honoured with the crops available in the field at times of their visit.

## 6.2 SEED FOR AGRICULTURE

After harvesting, Lepchas preserve a portion of produce of better quality as seed for the next year. Food crops like paddy, maize and millet grown exclusively from seeds available domestically. Lepchas are aware that at times of sowing the price of seeds gone up. In order to avoid risk and higher cost of seed, they preserve the healthy seeds properly and at times even by curtailing their consumption needs at domestic front. Lepchas prefer to purchase the crop from market for consumption but not the seed. Budha Sing Lepcha of Pochaok told "We do purchase rice for daily consumption but we never consume paddy seeds kept at home. As we take special care for our seed, they are more productive than the seeds available in the market".

Ginger seeds are also preserved under the earth with special care (discussed in details in section 5.2.11). The ginger seeds are costly and most Lepchas of Pochaok prefer to use domestic seeds.

Those Lepchas who cultivate potato normally store only a small portion of produce for domestic consumption and sell the major part to the market. They prefer to purchase the potato seed as per their requirement from the local market.

For gladioli, Lepchas preserve both the cormlet and bulb as seeds for next year. The Lepchas cultivating gladioli in Mani Gumpa do not sell the bulb of gladioli. They take special care in storing bulb and cormlet. The Lepchas sell only the gladioli sticks not its bulb.

Seeds for the variety of vegetables are mostly available domestically. The households with excess seeds help the neighbours on request without any return. Lepchas allow plants to remain in the field and grow so long the seeds get matured.

Seeds of all the major crops are domestically supplied. Lepchas do not like to take any risk in the matter of seeds. So the harvested crops are sharply divided in two parts: one part they use for domestic consumption and the other part they preserve as seeds.

### **6.3 PAYMENT TO EXCHANGE LABOUR**

As no cash/kind payment is made to the exchanged labour, Lepchas take special care to feed them. The breakfast consists of *roti*, vegetable, tea while rice, dal, vegetable, meat, *chi* are some of the essential items of lunch. Lepchas prefer to entertain the exchange labours with the home made food items. A part of the agricultural produce is, thus utilized as meal of labours employed in agricultural works. In addition, the user often needs to supply fodder to the bullocks employed for ploughing or levelling the field. That includes paddy or millet straw, grass, paste

maize, rice water, and salt. The by-products like paddy straw are often exchanged against cowdung manure.

If the recipient households can not reciprocate labour in exchange, they are supposed to pay labour charge in terms of paddy immediately after harvesting. Labour per manday is usually paid one *tungfri* (4 kg) of paddy. The rate is same for male, female, child or even bullock. Those Lepchas who do not have wet land prefer to exchange their labour against payment in paddy. In case of other crops labour is exchanged either against labour or cash.

Labour, employed during the harvesting of food crops (other than paddy), receive a handful of harvested crop as gift after the work is over. This is customarily practised during the harvesting of potato or maize when each labour gets a bag (approximately 5 kg) of potato or 8-10 of maize sticks at the end of the work.

Labours engaged in cash crops are generally paid in money. But they are entertained with tea, tiffin, and *chi* and for which millet is widely used. Some prepare liquor from the fermented wheat, maize or millet for those who do arduous work like ploughing.

#### **6.4 SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS**

Among the Lepchas agricultural produces are used to meet different types of social obligations. It has been noticed that most of the social activities including marriage take place after the harvesting of paddy. The contributions, whatever meager that may be, are met from the agricultural produce. In each Lepcha village there is a *Kyong Shezeom* (village level unit) who looks after the social activities.

Individual household problems of Lepchas are also handled by the *Kyong Shezeom* and their payment in produced is shared by all.

Some of the important social functions where Lepchas contribute their agricultural produce are :

a) **Funeral Ceremony (*Sung-lyeon*)** : Death of any individual is considered as a loss to the whole village and all take part in helping the grief stricken family according to their capacity. All agricultural operations remain suspended at any death in the village. All assemble to the deceased house to extend both sympathy and help to the mourning household. As an immediate help sugar, tea leaf, ghee, incense, flour or cash are made available. The Buddhist Lepchas burn the dead body while the Christian bury them. The firewood etc. required for burning are supplied by the villagers free of cost.

Buddhists Lepchas observe the funeral ceremony (*Sung-Lyaon*) on the 49<sup>th</sup> day of death. Recently some perform the *Sung-Lyaon* on 21<sup>st</sup> day and a small function after one year. Beside lighting the lamp on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> days, full plate of rice containing all favourable items of the deceased are to be served in the name of the dead person. Burning of incense throughout the 49 days in the morning and evening is a symbol that somebody has expired in the family.

On the day of funeral ceremony each household in Mani Gumpa contributes Rs.50/- and in Pochaok Rs.40/-to the deceased family. In addition they supply rice, ghee, firewood, flour etc.. Earlier the custom was to supply millet compulsorily. Due to low productivity of millet Lepchas have replaced it by supplying cash. *Sung-Lyaon* is one such social function where the Lepchas spend huge money in feeding

and performing the rituals. In Mani Gumpa, the villagers at the *Keyong Shezeong* level decided for vegetable meal, which has obviously reduced the cost of the ritual. Lepchas of Pochaok entertain the guests by killing domestic ox or cow.

*Sung-Lyaon* consists of the followings :

- a) *Tomugen* and *Mithup* – the reading of Tibetan holy scriptures by the Lamas.
- b) *Rong Chyo* – reading of Lepcha religious scriptures by the Lepcha Lama.
- c) *Torgen* – raising of Tibetan prayer flags.

The nearest relatives belonging to the same *moo* usually bear the different expenses connected with *Sung-lyaon* and which varies between Rs.500/- and Rs.700/- per item. The relatives in some cases meet up this obligation by selling their agricultural produces.

b) **Marriage (*bri*)** : Marriage is another function where the Lepchas share the burden collectively. The young Lepchas of the village extend physical labour in the ceremony. In Mani Gumpa 20 out of 22 households jointly came forward in arranging Nima's marriage on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1999. In this marriage each household supplied one *saptuj* of *chi* (packed dry *chi*), made out of 8-10 kg. of millet, one day advance of the marriage. Villagers also supplied other materials like bamboo, wood required for necessary repair works and in decorating the marriage pandal.

c) **New Year Festival (*Naam-bun*)** : Another social function popular among the Lepchas of Mani Gumpa and Pochaok is *Naam-bun*, Lepcha new year day. It is celebrated in the no moon day of *Maar – labo* (December – January). The young Lepchas collect money by singing and dancing from door to door popularly known

as *Lasso* dance. After the 7<sup>th</sup> day of *Naam-bun*, Mani Gumpa arranges a picnic in the village popularly known as *Chongay* where each household needs to contribute millet (3 kg), rice (as required for each family), vegetables (as per availability at home), hen, egg (as per domestic supply) and some cash (Rs.50 – Rs.100 as per capability) for grocery items. The Lepchas of other two villages have organized no such social picnic.

d) **Birth day of Punu Gaeboo Achyok** : Lepchas celebrate the birth anniversary of king Gaeboo Achyok each year at Bong Busty on 20<sup>th</sup> December. The function is organized centrally by the Lepcha Association, Kalimpong. King Gaeboo Achyok is considered the legendary personality of Kalimpong who fought against the Bhutanese and dedicated his life for the upliftment of his loyal followers. Lepchas from far flung villages assemble at Associations head quarters by contributing cash through the *Kyong – Shezeom* towards conveyance and food. Many contribute rice and vegetables for arranging the lunch party. Although there is no compulsion on such payment but Lepchas voluntarily bear the burden of arranging the function. The Buddhist Lepchas are more keen in attending this function than the Christians.

e) ***Muk-Zik-Ding Rum Faat*** : Another social function organized centrally by the Lepcha Association is *Muk-Zik-Ding Rum-Faat*. It is like that of *Tendong Lho-Rum-Faat* of Sikkim. Usually Lepchas of Kalimpong celebrate *Muk-Zik-Ding-Rum-Faat* on 21<sup>st</sup> February each year while in Sikkim they celebrate *Tondong-Lho-Rum-Faat* on 8<sup>th</sup> August. In this occasion the Lepchas pay homage to the ‘mother nature’ for her blessings towards favourable natural environment for the human habitat.

Lepchas offer different fruits of their orchards or kitchen gardens to nature. Along with fruits they also voluntarily carry with them rice, vegetables, and cash necessary for arranging lunch. This celebration is more popular among the Buddhist Lepchas than the Christians.

f) *Lyaang-Run-Faat* : It is another type of offering to 'nature' to satisfy her in favour of good and timely rain for agricultural purposes. Lepchas assemble near any river or rivulet and offer prayer to nature as per *Bongthing* tradition. In this community offering the Lepchas need to offer hen, egg, *chi*, fruits to the deity. It is a community picnic where each participant household needs to contribute one hen, two eggs, millet (3 kg.), rice (as per requirement), vegetables (as available) and little cash. The Lepchas assemble for prayer, contribute collectively, cook and eat together and enjoy the day by singing and dancing. As the celebration follow the traditional Lepcha style, the Buddhists are the main followers while the Christians remain off the picture.

## 6.5 RITUAL OBLIGATIONS

Lepchas belong to two religious faiths – Buddhists and Christians. Followings are the important ritual obligations which the Buddhist Lepchas are found to discharge:

a) *Mane* : In connection with Buddha Jayanti, the villagers of Mani Gumpa assemble in the *Gumpa* for worship and prayer in the month of April - May. They also join the prayer function on full moon day in the month of December – January. The *Gumpa*, out of its income from agriculture bears the costs of organizing the prayer and feeding all the member of 68 households belong to Buddhist faith. The

cultivated crops on Gumpa land are used for the purpose. The villagers on their own bring oil for lighting, and some token money.

b) *Chu chu* : On 22<sup>nd</sup> day of each *Mane*, the Buddhist Lepchas of Mani Gumpa observe *chu chu* in the *Gumpa* twice a year (in May – June and December – January). During *chu chu* each household needs to pay Rs.5/- as interest for the loan given by the *Gumpa* to all its members in early days. Tshering Lepcha who possesses the list of members and collects *chu chu* opined “during the initial stage of establishment of this village the *Gumpa* helped all its members by lending them Rs.20/-. Now we are settled and paying Rs.5/- on each *chu chu* to run the expenditure of our *Gumpa*.”

c) *Rum-Chi-Faat* : Buddhist Lepchas offer *chi* to *Rum* (God) during sowing and harvesting of paddy (*zo*). Early in the morning before transplanting the paddy seedlings, *Bongthing* offers *chi* to the almighty praying for good crop. After harvesting *Bongthing* again offers *chi* to God, thanking him for good yield. Traditionally Lepchas used to offer *chi* after the harvest of both wheat (*Kakyo*) and millet (*Moong*). But at present a short cut method has been followed where *chi* is prepared from the first crop and made available to the *Bongthing* for his consumption. *Rum-Chi-Faat* is popular among the Buddhist Lepchas. It requires eggs (3 pieces), *chi* (4 barrels), rice (handful), incense and Rs.10/- (remuneration to *Bongthing*). *Chi* also offered to *Rum* by *Bongthing* during construction of new house or for curing from diseases.

d) *Lirum-Faat* : It is a household ritual performed once in a year individually by Buddhist Lepchas with the help of *Bongthing* as priest. *Lirum* is the

deity who protects and guards the household members and cattle from all evils. Buddhist Lepchas in the month of April-May (*Tafaa*) offer *chi*, hen, egg, fish, incense, *forma* (made for maize) to household deity.

e) ***Sekeor-Rum-Faat*** : Buddhist Lepchas praise the spirit who looks after and guards the grains stored in the house, and also protects the kitchen garden or orchard from animals and human beings. The ginger cultivators of Pochaok take special interest in observing *Sekeor-Rum* to protect the field from evil eyes of spirits. Lepcha orchards are kept unfenced but no outsider dare to encroach the field out of the fear of Lepcha spirit. In the worship of *Sekeor-Rum*, *Bongthing* asks for cock, egg, *chi*, fruits, incense, rice as offering and gets Rs.10/- as his personal remuneration.

f) ***Intensurup*** : The Buddhist Lepchas offer their first fruits and vegetables to Lord Buddha. Lepchas never consume or sale fruits or vegetables without offering them at first to the *Gumpa*. Now-a-days by keeping some fruits or sale money in the name of God, the villagers consume or sell the rest before *Intensurup*.

The Christian Lepchas distribute their agricultural produce for the following ritual purposes :

a) **Sunday donation** : On every Sunday at least one member from each household attends on the prayer at Church. He/she donates some money for the service rendered by the Church which ranges between Rs. 1/- and Rs.5/- per visit.

b) **Tithe** : As per Bible each Christian is supposed to pay ten per cent of his/her income for the cause of Lord. Tithing Christians of both 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon and Pochaok however do not follow any specific rule in this regard. Here

someone can pay any amount in the form of *Dhanyavadi*, (thanks giving) while the Lepcha cultivators normally contribute in the form of *Muthidan*, (a handful of anything) in the second week of each month. Any amount in the form of cash or kind is accepted and recorded by the Church.

c) **Katni** : After harvesting of paddy, Lepchas send some produce to Church. Lepchas of 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Lepcha Gaon offer their fruits and vegetables at first to the Church before they consume or sale those. Lepchas of Pochaok supply maize to Church each year on 15<sup>th</sup> August. *Katni* payment is made in terms of agricultural produce and applicable to both the major food crops (paddy, maize, millet, wheat) and fruits or vegetables. Often *Katni* is paid in cash after selling the crops.

d) **Membership** : Each adult Christian needs to pay his membership fee (Rs.36/-) to Church in monthly, quarterly or yearly terms. All new born babies or after marriage bride/groom needs to visit Church and get membership. As the Lepchas are mostly agriculturists, they pay the membership fees in cash by selling their agricultural produce.

e) **Death Relief Fund** : After any death, Church normally helps the deceased family by offering it a sum of Rs.600/- from the Death Relief Fund created out of collection from its members regularly. Beside this help received from Church each Lepcha in his individual capacity helps the deceased family by providing daily necessities like sugar, tea leaf, wheat flour, milk.

f) **Prayer Class** : Villagers at individual capacity often arrange prayer class at home. The elderly persons from Church also attend this prayer. In such an

occasion the hosted household needs to provide tea and snacks to the assembled guests who attend prayer.

## 6.6 MISCELLANEOUS OBLIGATIONS

Lack of alternative source of income compels the Lepchas to meet up all sorts of expenses or obligations from agricultural income only. Sometimes they directly pay in produce but often they meet up these expenses in cash by selling their crops in market. Followings are some of the prevailing arrangements of obligation management :

- Lepchas procure the grocery items like salt, sugar, oil either by selling or exchanging, the agricultural produce with the grocers (particularly in Pochaok).
- Clothes for the family members are purchased in cash from the money earned from agricultural produces.
- Expenditure on education, whatever meager the amount may be, is adjusted with the agricultural produces.
- Medical expenses, although negligible an amount, share some part of agricultural produces.
- Construction, repair of household, cattle shed are carried out of the agricultural income.