

CHAPTER – ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In India Lepchas are found mostly in the state of Sikkim and in the adjoining hilly region of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The Constitution of India has categorised Lepchas as 'Scheduled Tribe'. The expression 'Scheduled Tribe' may mean either of the following two things. First, it may be held to imply that, in India, all tribes are scheduled or listed under the constitutional provisions. Alternatively, it may imply that some of the tribes are scheduled for the purposes of preferential treatment while others are not. The second possibility is further suggested by the analogy with the other important category of 'scheduled castes' where some of the castes, and not all, are scheduled. But, be whatever it may, there can not be any denying of the fact that the scheduled tribes are 'tribes'.

Now, the problem of identification of tribe lies with the problem of its definition. Tribe, as is the case with many other terms, may be broadly defined from two different angles. In an instrumental or purposive definition, much about the properties or characteristics of the 'object' are of secondary importance when compared with the objective or interest of the 'subject' who defines it that way. Looked at the other way, when an essentialist definition of tribe is made, there has to be attributes or characteristics or properties or substance inherent within the community so as to identify them as tribe. The administrators are more likely to be preoccupied with the instrumental or purposive definition of tribe while the

academicians are usually concerned with the essentialistic definition of tribe. Since Indian categorisation of scheduled tribe is more an administrative business than academic one, many a times conflicting results are obtained by the simultaneous application of these two principles. The question of what is 'tribal' (from an academic point of view) about the 'scheduled tribes' (as per administrative decisions) can therefore be taken up for serious consideration.

In India much of the discussion on the subject have been presented against the perspective of a 'tribe-caste continuum'. In the western writings on the subject, the binary classification of 'status and contract', 'community and association' or 'mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity', and the like have offered from time to time useful insights. However, even without entering into the debate of whether the tribes should be viewed as a type of society or a stage of social evolution, one may attempt a serious examination of the social formation of the tribes so called. Without being deterministic in a mechanical sense of the term, it is agreed that the economic activities and organisation of any community play a decisive role in the determination of its social formation. At present the main stream economists appear to be little concerned with the social formation or such kindred questions. Their lack of concern appears justified because the study of comparative economic system have lost their relevance in the face of pervasive homogenising tendencies of capitalism all around. Further, diachronic studies have been handed over to the historians, for, the economists are overburdened with their concern with the present. Also, the classification of economics into micro and macro leaves little space for serious enquiries into the vestiges of earlier formations at the local or regional level.

In the present work, our main objective has been to study the social formation among the Lepchas. In the study of social formation, we start by ignoring people's beliefs and ideas and, instead, look at who produces what and who gets what is produced. "Society viewed as a system for production and distribution, conceived of independently of the actors' representations or justifications of the system, is what has been called the 'social formation'". [Block, 1985: 23]. The social formation is to be understood not by just one 'mode of production' but by an articulation of several. For example, in a colonial situation a communal mode of production may coexist with a capitalist one but the capitalist one will dominate over the communal mode.¹

The study of social formation is, thus, not simply a study of economy² of a particular people isolated from the rest. In fact, in many otherwise laudable efforts at studying the tribal economy, this very perspective of social formation is ignored, thereby making a weak representation of the whole. Also, oftentimes, what passes in the name of 'tribal economy' is nothing more than the preparation of an economic catalogue of a group of people who are officially recognised as 'tribe'. The irony is

¹ The two concepts of mode of production and social formation are so interconnected and interwoven with each other that 'some authors have given a broader meaning to the concept mode of production, confusing it, in a way, with a socio-economic formation [Berdichewsky, 1979 : 9; Bottomore, 1983 : 445]. But *mode of production* is only one component of social formation. Sometimes the social formation may not be in conformity with the particular mode of production. Social formation of other modes beside the dominant mode of production whether as hangover from the past or precursore of the future may be present simultaneously. It has also been emphasized that during the transitional phase of any society, a type of 'hybrid' social formation, combining the attributes of two or more modes of production may be experienced simultaneously.

² Economy, the basic component, along with the socio-cultural components gives a complete shape of any social formation. As the social formation centers around economic activity some writers like Bernardo Berdichewsky, Jozet Witezynski, Torn Bottomore etc. have preferred to call it socio-economic formation giving more emphasis on the economic aspects of social formation. Godelier on his study of the Inca Empire in the sixteenth century have used the term 'social and economic formation'.

that, in the same or adjoining areas, the same type of study may pass under various labels, such as rural economy, peasant economy or tribal economy depending upon the type of people being studied. The present study of the social formation of the Lepchas is intended to be a departure from the established trend. It is not meant in any way that this is absolutely a new idea. Rather, we shall derive in our present exercise useful insights from whatever literature is there on pre-capitalist economics and those offered by some of the classical economists or economic anthropologists.

1.2 TRIBAL SOCIAL FORMATION

'Tribal social formation' as one form of various other types of social formations (like slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism etc.) is supposed to be prevalent among the tribes. There may be as many forms of social formations as the types of society. As most of the academicians in India have accepted constitutional branding of scheduled tribe as tribe, the economy of these scheduled tribes have been widely cited as examples of 'tribal economy' of the respective tribes without judging their correspondence with the concept of tribal social formation. It also poses a conceptual problem where different tribes constitute different types of tribal economy. The good number of other related tribal studies (like tribal culture, tribal demography, tribal history, tribal law and justice, tribal politics, tribal religion etc.) centre around the people recognised as schedule tribe presupposing their tribal attributes on the basis of constitutional recognition.

Literature under the heading 'tribal social formation' are rare either in the field of economics or in the other branches of social science. Even Marx who propounded the concept of social formation did not illustrate the application for the

tribes in his later writings [Marshall, 1998 : 612; Bottomore, 1983 : 444]. The Marxian literature did not specify details about the tribal social formation even 'it does not provide a comprehensive description' of social formation [Bottomore, 1983 : 445].

Even then, it is not difficult to attempt a reformulation combining the existing literature on social formation on the one hand and primitive or tribal economy on the other. Often the concept social formation poses some sort of confusion as 'at all events, in actual usage (social formation) refers to two phenomena which are quite familiar to Marxist, and to sociologists of all persuasions – namely the type of society (e.g. feudal society, bourgeois or capitalist society), and to particular societies (e.g. France or Britain as a society) [Bottomore, 1983 : 445]. But usually by social formation for all practical purposes we mean the type of society.

In the classical Marxian literature economy is characterised by its mode of production³ which again is constituted by forces of production⁴ and relations of

³ The concept mode of production was first introduced by Marx (in A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy) and later on used by his followers like Stalin (in Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR). All the key concepts of Marxian thought center around the concept of mode of production which is constituted by two elements – (i) forces of production and (ii) relations of production. The mode of production, according to Marx, determines the structure of any society which is affected by the superstructure to give the specific socio-economic formation of any society. With the change of society from one mode of production to another, socio-economic formation also got changed. In antagonistic or class formation, socio economic formation may be constituted by more than one mode of production, one mode being dominant. Sometimes socio economic formation may not be in conformity with the particular mode of production. Socio economic formation of other modes beside the dominant mode may co-exist simultaneously.

⁴ The forces of production is one of the two components of mode of production. In Marxian ideology, the means of production (especially the man made instruments of production) and labour power applied in the process of production of material goods are termed as forces of production. It shows how human labour power and natural resources are used for production. The natural resources consist of items such as soil, fertility, water power, stream, petroleum even present day nuclear power alongwith scientific and technical knowledge etc.. Of all the forces of production, the instruments of labour are considered to be the most decisive element in production and the development of these

production⁵. The mode of production determines the base⁶ of the society which together with the superstructure⁷ determines the social formation.

The first (or earliest) and original (or natural) form of social formation, in Marxian ideology, is primitive communism. Social formation under primitive communism can be viewed from production and distributional angles. In the production front, the mode of production is based on communal ownership of land and other means of production while the products are distributed on the basis of need. There may be some private property in the form of tools, weapons and personal effects but it denied the presence of money, price, exchange and market. It

forces are always initiated by improvements in the instruments and also determines the level and character of the society. The Marxian analysis stresses the technical aspects of production which in a sense corresponds roughly to the western concept of factors of production.

⁵ One of the two elements which together with forces of production determines the mode of production is relations of production. It is a social aspect of production which considers the relationship between the owners of means of production and the management on the one hand and the workers on the other. For example, the relationship between master and slave, serf and lord, proletariat and bourgeois etc. are known as relations of production. The three factors which govern relations of production are (i) the form of the ownership of means of production, (ii) the position of different social groups in production and (iii) the pattern of distribution of production and income. The relation affect the distribution and consumption of produced goods and services. Changes in relations of production are conditioned by changes in production forces. In case the two can not match, a violent social revolution may generate which is more acute in antagonistic socio-economic formation. It is claimed that under socialism, where means of production are in the hands of the state, such contradictions are the minimum.

⁶ In the Marxian literature base refers to the economic system with its production relations in the material sphere at a given stage of society's development. It is also alternatively be known as substructure or understructure. The nature and relations of base with superstructure determine the social development and class relations. Being dynamic in character base, over the different stages of development may contradicts with the relations of production. In capitalist society base refers to the private ownership of means of production and exploitation of hired labour. But in socialism base and superstructure operate cordially without any serious disparities between the two.

⁷ The superstructure together with the material base constitute the socio economic formation of any society. This Marxian concept is used to denote the totality of philosophical, ethnical, cultural, political and legal ideas, attitudes and the associated network of institutions and organisations of any society. The attitude and interest of the ruling class is reflected through superstructure. It is directly determined by the base and the society. In a class society the superstructure is guided and maintained as per the interest of the ruling class. Under socialism it is utilised on a planned basis to respond and anticipate desirable change in the base by the state authority.

is a simple type of society where communal ownership, work and living together are attributed by the primitive method of production.

Beside Marx and Engels, some other social scientists particularly economic anthropologists have dealt with the attributes of primitive and tribal economy mainly from distributional angle. The most notable western scholars on the subject are : B. Malinowski, Karl Polanyi, Raymond Firth, Marshall D. Sahlins, Paul Bohannan, George Dalton etc.. Some of the Indian Scholars who worked on tribal economy are: Andre Beteille, K.S. Singh, S.C. Dube, B.K. Roy Burman, Jaganath Pathy, Ajit K. Danda etc..

The views of some of the above leading scholars can be shown in some kind of morphological continuum⁸ :

B. Malinowski (1922) :	Urigubu	Kula	Gimwali
Karl Polanyi (1946, 1957) :	Reciprocal	Redistributive	Exchange
Raymond Firth (1965) :	Primitive	Peasant	Industrial
Marshall D.Sahlins (1965) :	Generalised reciprocity	Balanced reciprocity	Negative reciprocity
George Dalton (1968, 1971) :	Marketless	Peripheral Market	Markets

The initial distributional criteria of the above classifications (like Uriguba and Kula of Malinowski, Reciprocal and Redistributive of Polanyi, Primitive of Firth, Generalised and Balanced reciprocity of Sahlins and Marketless and

⁸ Ours is a revised tabular form of Ronald Frankenberg's (p-83) anthropological classification of society. We have categorised the society economically by including Malinowski and excluding Sahlins's (1958) political classification of band, tribe, chiefdom and state.

Peripheral Market of Dalton) may be reconciled to get the modern day tribal economic attributes.

Malinowski challenged the existing popular economic view that all human being aimed at maximising their gains describing it applicable only for western developed societies.⁹ In primitive societies, on the other hand, products are used to fulfil the moral obligation rather than maximising individual gain. From his experience with the Trobrianders, Malinowski noticed three types of distribution and exchange – Urigubu, Kula and Gimwali. “The first was a form of payment in kind to women and children who had rights in the property of the matrilineage; the second was gift or ceremonial exchange, which might also accompany the third; only the third, simple trade, which was carried on largely with strangers and constituted a very small part of economic activity, could be said to be governed by the motive to maximise gain. Culture, not human nature, conditioned men’s economic conduct.” [Malinowski : 63-65, 81-86, 189-191; Cohen,1967 : 92].

Polanyi introduced the concept of social embeddedness in primitive societies. It has been established that there exists a close relationship between economy and society. “Economy does not determine society; society does not determine economy. They are mutually dependent” [Dalton,1971 : 16]. Economy is embedded in any society and there exists a close relationship of economic activities of individuals with the social institutions to which they belong.

⁹ In spite of differences one can draw a parallel line between Marx and Malinowski on the concept of aim of production. Both have accepted that the concept of individual profit is applicable for the western developed countries where production is more individualistic in nature. Malinowski’s ‘gimwali’ has already been described by Marx as ‘Shopkeepers view of man’..

Polanyi's reciprocity and redistribution (as shown in his famous book *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*) are connected with pre-industrial economy while market exchange to that of industrial economy. By reciprocity, he refers those material gift and counter gift giving induced by social obligations derived typically from kinship. Redistribution refers to the channeling upward of goods or services to socially determined allocative centers (usually king, chief or priest) who after receiving the materials redistribute them to others.

Polanyi's reciprocity and redistribution form the 'socio economic transactional mode' and express the ways in which social organisation relates the economy to its contextual society. The other 'economic mode of market transaction' is purely economic having no social relationship. In pre-capitalist society the first mode is more dominant and the economy is more embedded in the society.

Firth differs from Malinowski and thereby rescued and channalised economics in the same line with Robbins. Malinowski by putting the case of Trobrianders argued that economic activities are not always carried on the basis of maximising profit. Firth, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that all men in all societies are faced with the same economic problem : how to allocate scarce resources between alternative uses, given that some uses are more highly valued than others. Firth argues that most primitive and peasant economies lack specialised economic institutions like factories, banks and commodity exchange but they are guided and carried out by some concepts like family, kinship and community. Without being explicit on the matter we can say that tribals as such are qualitatively

not different from others. They are also of the same kind and apparently the difference is a matter of degree and not of kind.

Firth out of his experience with Tikopia society discussed more about primitive and peasant societies. Regarding primitive societies he wrote that “the term primitive is a relative one. More closely applicable to an economic than to a social system, it has no very precise defining character and is variously used” [Firth, 1965: 17]. “They use simple non mechanical technology with little or no innovation, directed to maintenance rather than increase of capital assets; . payments for services and rates of exchange are fixed by customs and scarcely fluctuate in the short run, though they may alter in the long run with changes in the relative scarcities; and gift giving is the most important form of distribution and exchange. These and other characteristic function as part of a system of moral involvement and familiarity, and notes that there is relatively little economic activity outside of the moral community” [Firth, 1939: 347-361; Cohen, 1967: 94].

In his later book *On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange*, Sahlins moves away from his earlier (1958) political classification of society (in the category of band, tribe, chiefdom and state) to a new classification based on the distribution of material goods. Sahlins rejects the definition of economic conduct given by Lionel Robbins and also accepted by Firth which emphasizes the process of collection of scarce means to alternative uses, and opts for the view that the study of the economy is the study of how men provision their society.

The first two types of reciprocity, generalised and balanced, are the norms of primitive societies while modern industrial societies are dominated by the third type

of negative reciprocity. More explicitly, according to Cohen, "The first (generalised) exists where goods and services are given by one party to another without any demand for a return at a specified time or of a specified kind; the prototype of this is the nurturant relationship between mother and child. The second (balanced) exists where a return is made which is recognised by both parties as the equivalent of what is given; custom or moral principle defines such equivalence and is unquestionable. The third (negative) exists where there is bargaining, no party is morally inhibited from seeking gain at the other's expenses" [Cohen, 1967: 98].

Generalised reciprocity is the norm within the family but negative reciprocity is found almost entirely outside of the moral community. As the society is bounded within the ties of kinship, the degree of distance is minimum in the first two cases than in the last case where relationship establishes outside the family or community ties. In both generalised and balanced reciprocity a sense of rootedness of individuals prevails which in all economic activities reminds the belonging of the individuals in the family or community. In this spectrum, we can put the tribal social formation within the generalised and balanced reciprocity and consider negative reciprocity as a non-tribal attribute where the distance between man and man is more.

Bohannan and Dalton's work on *African Market* is a pioneering work in case of study of primitive markets. In the marketless economy, firstly, there is no market place and secondly, the market principles, if any, are present in a few casual, interpersonal transaction. "Societies without market places are marked by a multicentric economy – a characteristic they share with societies having peripheral

markets. A multicentric economy is one in which there are several distinct transactional spheres. Each sphere is distinguished by different material items and services, and may be distinguished by different principles of exchange and different moral values." [Bohannon & Dalton, 1968 : 3].

In the second category of peripheral market, both the market places and market principles exist but only peripherally. Two distinguishing characters of peripheral market are that (1) the market sales are not the dominant source of material livelihood. Either most people are not engaged in producing for market or selling in the market or those who are so engaged are only part time marketers. Their livelihood comes from non-market spheres of economy; (2) the participants in peripheral markets are sometimes 'target' marketers who engage in marketing sporadically to acquire a specific amount of cash income for a specific expenditure. Beside supply and demand other social factors like kinship, clanship, religion or other status indicators of buyers, traditional norms of just price etc., do effect the price formation.

Reconciliation :

The mode of production and social embeddedness together can specify a complete character of tribal social formation. The major focus of attention has been shifted from relation of man with material goods and services to the relations among man with respect to material goods and services. The relation among men is a social relation while their reaction with material goods and services is economic relation. But the economic relations are guided by the social relations.

Thus, in tribal social formation we consider a little bit more of what Marx had anticipated about reaction between base and superstructure. Alongwith the mode of production which is more an economic aspect, the social embeddedness which is

more social aspect need to be studied for the tribal society. Tribal social formation has two components production and distribution. The formation of production is more economical than social while its distributional part is more social than economical and yet they are inextricably tied up one with the other¹⁰. Their mutual existence and interdependence varies in terms of degree and not in kind. High degree of closeness of social ties in both production and distribution separates tribal social formation from any other formations. In case the social formation is individualistic or self centered, a distance is created between man and man and hence low degree of embeddedness may be the consequences. Embeddedness depends on social formation but not the other way round.

In tribal social formation emphasis has been shifted from the Marxian superstructure to the Polanyi's embeddedness. In the production sector, modes of production prevails while the distributional aspects are dominated by the embeddedness. The modes of production are more external than internal. Embeddedness is more internal than external in the sense that the relation can only be guided and determined by the relations within the internal structure of the society. Tribal social formation is dominated by its characteristic internal structure which is entirely different from the other social formations.

In all the above discussed classification, a society [of Marx, Malinowski, Polanyi, Firth, Sahlins and Dalton] can be grouped under a simple binary classification of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. Capitalist society is composed of three different sectors primary, secondary and tertiary. Agriculture is the basic component of primary sector while industry dominates in the secondary sector. The pre-capitalist society, on the other hand, is dependent on nature and is dominated by agriculture. It can be observed that agriculture appears as the common sector in both

¹⁰ In tribal social formation the production, distribution and consumption are so closely related that it is not only difficult but almost impossible to separate each of the component from the other. Even then, some social scientists for experimental purposes go on trialing and separating production from distribution or consumption. In the present study we have also attempted with a separate discussion just to show whether such type of separation in the water tight text book pattern is possible or not.

capitalist and pre-capitalist society. But agriculture under capitalism is better defined as capitalist farming while it is broadly designated as peasant economy in pre-capitalist economy. The binary classification can ultimately be turned into a new classification of capitalist farming and peasant economy.

Capitalist farming can be characterised by (1) hired labour and (2) market orientation. Guided by profit motive, commodification of agricultural products separates capitalist farming from peasant economy where agriculture operates with (1) non-hired labour and (2) non-market orientation. Capitalism follows division of labour and all the factors are guided by profit motive. Products in capitalist farming may not be used for consumption purposes by any of the factors of production. The producers are hardly the consumers. Labour is used mainly on a hired basis and monetary wage is the reward for involvement in productive activity. Under peasant economy, on the other hand, there is hardly any division of labour and the producers themselves are the consumers of the product. The objective of production shifts from profit motive to consumption requirement. Labour, under peasant economy, is supplied by the family or community and consumption and distribution of products instead of monetary wage emerges as the main motive behind production.

All the non-capitalist societies, particularly those based on agriculture, can be brought under the common category of 'peasant economy'. But each type of peasantry can be differentiated from the other on the basis of their distinct characteristics or differentiating attributes. One broad such differentiating attribute may be their distinct mode of production. Each force of production, particularly labour, is specific to a specific form of peasant society. In agriculture, land is

indispensable and one of the important passive factor of production but the relation of production in respect of owners of land and labour makes one type of society different from the other. For example, the relationship between master and slave, serf and lord, make each type of peasant economy peculiar to itself. However, in each type, the labour, by using land, takes active part in producing agricultural crops but the ownership and management of land alongwith the distributional pattern of agricultural crops varies widely.

The ownership right (viewed either as right of use or right of transfer) of land takes different forms under different types of peasant economy. In tribal peasantry, the community for all practical purposes establishes an absolute right of using even the individual land. The rule of society or convention permits all individuals within the community to enjoy a qualified right of use over all individual lands. The individual ownership eventually turned into a community based mutually interdependent right of use of land. Tribal peasantry, thus, carries the legacy of primitive society where individual ownership could not develop and all natural resources including land belonged to the society or community. The right of transfer, another component of ownership right of land is also distinct under tribal peasantry where right of transfer is established through succession among the nearest blood relations on hereditary basis. The other means of transfer like lease, outright sale or the like are the attributes of non-tribal peasant societies.

The relationship between owner of land and labour over the distribution of agricultural products differs widely in different types of peasant economy. In some society, the producers at the individual or communal level use the products they

produce. Here the producers are the users or consumers. But in other cases one party (i.e. labour, the most active factor of production) engage in productive activities, but the other party (land lord who do not take part in production except supplying land) got the right to use or consume the products. Profit is the basic motive in non-tribal societies as against subsistence in peasant society.

The distribution of agricultural products follow a variety of patterns (as shown by different writers like Malinowski, Polanyi, Firth, Sahlins, Dalton etc.) in case of peasant economy. But in all the cases the distribution of products confined either within the family or community. The first two categories of each of the types of distribution, thus, satisfy the peasant economic characteristics from the viewpoint of distribution of agricultural products. Production for the market is a non-peasant character of agriculture.

The tribal social formation¹¹ or tribal economy because of its pre-capitalistic character can thus be grouped under the broad category of peasant economy. More specifically, we may define tribal social formation as the other name of tribal peasantry which has its own differentiating attributes.

Beside the basic two characteristic features of peasant economy (non-hired labour and non-market orientation), the tribal social formation possesses the following distinguishing economic attributes.

¹¹ Marx and Engels rarely used the terms 'tribe' and 'tribal' and never define or analyse the 'tribal social formation' as a distinct type of society. The concept "tribe should not be used with reference to the various types of static social formations that have emerged historically (Asiatic, ancient, feudal, capitalistic, socialistic) but there is no reason to abandon the term with reference to stateless, or primitive societies..... A tribal society, thus, is a primitive society in its fundamental characteristics" [Bottomore, 1983 : 488-489].

The tribes subsist by exploiting the natural resources. Land, the basic resource, is owned, managed and controlled either by the individual or community who ultimately use it to cater the consumption requirement. Individuals may possess land but each operates in a communal milieu within the network of kinship ties. In the non-producing society (e.g. hunting and food gathering stage) land was under the society's command while individual ownership has established gradually in the later stage of settled cultivation.

Tribal society is non-monetised and the laws of reciprocity among the members of family and community happens to be the main distinguishing attributes. Commodities are exchanged as per need of the community without expecting much return from the other party. A sense of belonging to particular clan of the tribe remain the main differentiating marker of tribal economy which is reflected through the distribution of products among the members. Tribes are more concerned about the present consumption and saving or hoarding for the future is a non-tribal concept. Through reciprocal exchange, the tribal economy is a self sufficient, self contained, self confident small economic organisation without much interaction with the outside world.

Some consider tribal economy as non-producing society which subsists on gleaning, hunting and gathering forest produce. This 'primitive tribes' is a concept of the past and is similar to the category of 'band' (Sahlins, 1958). But in the modern producing society (consists of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors) tribes participate mainly in the agricultural activities. Tribes use indigenous tools in productive activities. They prefer to stick to their traditional method of production

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and try to resist all types of changes in respect of modern implements and techniques. Due to low level of technology, the tribal economy is backward and underdeveloped. Non use of machineries and implements make the tribal agriculture labour intensive where labour is supplied on the basis of mutual co-operation and is done on communal basis. The tribal economy is community confined where all the members of the tribe are mutually interdependent in respect of both production and distribution. Such economic system denies individualism and binds them to live in unity. The tribal villages are autonomous but linked and maintain a sort of internal egalitarianism so they relate to other villages in a non-exploitative framework.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF PRESENT STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the light of what we have discussed so far (particularly about the background of the study and the concept of social formation), the principal objective of the present study is to examine the issue of social formation in the case of the Lepchas from the economic perspective. As the Lepchas are basically dependent on agriculture for their sustenance, we proposed to study its production organization and distributional aspects taking into consideration its economic and social frameworks. The main questions of the present study are :

a) How the Lepchas carry out their agricultural production by combining different forces ? What are the patterns of land ownership among the Lepchas ? Who enjoy the right over the use of land – the owner or the community ? How the lands are transferred ? Are there any system of lease or contract or share cropping ? If so, what are their nature and relations with the land owner ?

b) Who supply labour for agriculture ? What are the modes of labour payment ? Are there any mutual exchange of labour ? If yes, what are their nature and mode of operation ? What types of labour are used in the different stages of agricultural operation ? Are there any difference among labours on the basis of age and sex ?

c) What are the nature and sources of capital used by the Lepchas ? What types of tools and implements are used by them in agricultural operations ? How the animal labours are used and managed ? Is there any exchange of animal labour among the villagers ? What are the conditions of such exchange ? How far the Lepchas adopt the new technology and innovation ?

d) How the produced agricultural crops are distributed for consumption and market or non-market purposes? Are there any social obligations to meet with agricultural crop ? Are there any religious obligations of meet ?

e) What is the nature of Lepcha social formation ? How far they fulfill the essentialist definition of tribe beside their administrative recognition and categorisation of Scheduled Tribe by the Constitution of India ?

1.4 EARLIER ENQUIRIES ON LEPCHAS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Lepchas are little known community and the existing literature on them is neither systematic nor sufficient. Information available are ad hoc and piece meal in nature; occasionally romantic or political or administrative.

Anyway, Lepchas are not totally unknown and untouched by the scholars and writers both from within the country and outside. From the information

available with us so far, the following research studies have been carried out for the award of different degrees from different universities in India and abroad.

The first research study for the award of Ph.D degree was conducted by A.K. Das [1978].¹² Das gives mostly an ethnographic account of socio-economic and cultural condition of the Lepchas of West Bengal particularly of Darjeeling district. In the economic front, the author spared one chapter on the description of agricultural practice alongwith the variety of land and crops used. Beside this by using 1961 census data he briefly discussed about animal husbandry, gathering, fishing, hunting, handicraft among the Lepchas. He grouped Lepchas in five different economic categories – agriculturists, agricultural labour, daily labour, service holder and craftsman. With the aim of constructing a frame of present socio-cultural status of Lepcha society, the study could not devote much on economic aspects of the society. But as a first systematic research work, it is the pioneering study and gives a first hand information about Lepcha society.

The first Lepcha scholar, Sonam Wangdi Lepcha (1979) made a sociological study about the modernisation and change among the Lepchas. Despite the changes, he found that there is a definite persistence of the tribal identity among the Lepchas. Sonam submitted his dissertation for the Ph.D. degree from Bhagalpur University, but his work has remained unpublished till this day, though his supervisor, R.N. Thakur (1988) has brought out a book on the same subject incorporating every thing

¹² A.K. Das was awarded doctoral degree for his work on Lepchas by the Calcutta University and later on published his thesis in book form entitled *The Lepchas of West Bengal* in 1978. A.K. Das co-authored with S.K. Banerjee published their first book *The Lepcha of Darjeeling District* in 1962. The doctoral thesis of A.K. Das is an enlarged and revised form of their joint earlier work on Lepchas of Darjeeling.

in Sonam's thesis. Regarding agricultural operations, it is said that Lepchas are poor agriculturists. They still follow bi-cropping pattern; paddy and maize are the principal crops. Dry lands are used for maize and millet while wet land is meant for paddy cultivation. Although land is important in Lepcha society but on a number of slightest pretext such as marriage, bride price, poverty, religious practices etc., lands are being transferred to the Nepalese. The authors observed that in agriculture Lepchas are less modernised compared to other neighbouring communities. Although some Lepchas do cultivate modern crops like vegetables, fruits and flowers but *Namboon* (Lepcha New Year) and the consequent taboo on agriculture restrict them into two crops a year.

The study is unique in the sense that it is the first attempt to study the types of changes adopted in Lepcha society. It also touches upon some theoretical aspects of modernisation. A number of items like dress, religion, culture, marriage, education, health, political situation, food habit, marriage etc., do occupy some pages in both their studies, naturally, they could not provide enough attention for the changes specifically in agriculture.

Sumit Ghosal (1990) got his doctoral degree from North Bengal University for his work *The Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim : A Study in cultural ecology and social change*. The basic objective of the study was to find the (a) nature of socio-economic, socio-cultural and institutional change, (b) adaptation of change in cultural-ecological situation, (c) inter relationship of productive technology and extend of behaviour pattern entailed in subsistence activities. Surveying two villages (Nassay and Pagong Gumpha Goan) from Kalimpong and Lingdong (of Zongu

reserve) from Sikkim, the scholar discussed elaborately the physical setting, the people and their ethno history, marital culture, economic context particularly agriculture, social organisation, political organisation, religion, cultural ecology and social change.

The study concluded by observing some changes that took place in Lepcha society, Lepchas have transformed from their hunting food gathering to settled plough cultivation. Their animistic religion has been superimposed by lamaism. Through intermarriage Tibetan culture entered in Lepcha society. Later on, the Lepchas could not resist the influence of Nepalis who settled in large number in Lepcha land. The Bhotias who came earlier and fewer in number are more interested in controlling the politics and the trans-Himalayan trade. The Nepalis, on the other hand, established their control over natural resources, particularly land. These immigration changed the ethnic composition, ethnic balance and power structure of the region. In spite of dynamism in economic and religion sphere, the social structure of Lepchas remained static and quite unchanged. In the religion sphere the scholar has noticed the triangulation of *Bangthingism*, Buddhism and Christianity. Neither of the alien religion has ever deep rooted. The scholar observed some effort in revitalising and maintaining Lepcha ethnic and cultural distinctiveness under the leadership of Lepcha Association. Ghosal concluded that unless the core element of their economy, the land, is allowed to be retained by them it will be difficult to achieve the target of regaining their ethnic pride and confidence [Ghosal, 1990:220-227].

Without mentioning either in the objective or entering details about the question, the scholar in his penultimate chapter suddenly raised the question of Lepchas in the tribe-peasant continuum. Under the subheading 'Shifting towards peasantry' (pp 208-219), the scholar attempted to show peasantry (following Redfield) from cultural and economic level. Without entering into the details the thesis hints the interact of Lepcha culture (local tradition) with the Buddhist culture (great tradition of the region). "At the economic level, the presence of market

oriented cash economy and a complex land tenure system along with other peasant features bring them nearer to the peasant pole of the continuum. The transformation from tribe to peasantry, outside the Hindu society, have taken 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" [Ghosal, 1990 : 216]. The thesis deserves some credit in giving for the first time the new dimension of change towards peasantry among the Lepchas. But it could not touch either upon the theoretical discourse of peasant-tribe social formation or their applicability with the Lepcha society.

Based on the first systematic anthropological work among the Lepchas of Lingthem village in Sikkim by John Morris and Geoffrey Gorer (1938),¹³ Roshina Gowloog (1995), another Lepchas scholar, has conducted a diachronic study of the same villages after fifty years of original work to earn her doctoral degree from the Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University. Beside different social and anthropological aspects of Lepcha life, both the authors deal with some aspects of their economic particularly agricultural practices at two different points of time. Gawloog has noticed some changes in the variety of crops and the methods of cultivation as noted by Gorer. Lepchas started using chemical fertiliser during Gawloog's survey period while Gorer's study was silent about such chemical fertilisers. But both of them observed prevalence of labour exchange in case of rice cultivation while hired labour for cardamom and other domestic purposes.

¹³ *Living with the Lepchas* by Morris and *The Himalayan Village* by Gorer have been published in 1938 and are so far richest ethnographic texts of the Lepchas. Both Morris and Gorer, the two British anthropologists, stayed together in Lingthem village of Jongu reserved for the Lepchas in Sikkim. Gorer has used psychological or personalistic categories to understand the Lepcha culture while Morris depicts the life and culture of the village more as a travelogue than a scholarly treatise [Gowloog, 1995 : 9]. Both the authors spend much time in discussing Lepcha family life, sex, festivals, magical practices, religious ceremonies etc. and find little space in elaborating their economic activities and hence are not much relevant for the present study. But as an anthropological study these are the best books and are so important that even after 50 year Roshina Gowloog got her doctoral degree on diachronic study of these books.

Beside the above research work,¹⁴ one can find nearly hundred write ups in the form of books and articles or references by different authors. These works can be found in the form of gazetteers and government reports, travelogues, journals, magazines and newspapers, folk tales and folklore's, ethnic affinity, linguistic and sociological and academic work etc.

However, the worth mentioning writers of Lepcha literature are : A Campbell (1840), J.D. Hooker (1855), Richard Temple (1875), G.B. Mainwaring (1876), H.H. Risley (1891), L.A. Waddell (1899), L.S.S.O'Malley (1907), Maharaja and Maharani Dolma of Sikkim (1908), (C. de Beauvoir Stock (1927), John Morris (1938), Geoffrey Gorer (1938), Rene Von Nebesky-Wajkowitz (1956), R.K. Sprigg (1960, 1997, 1998), A.K. Das and S.K. Banerjee (1962), Chi Nakane (1966), H.R.J. Siiger (1967), Iman Singh Chemzon (1969), K.P. Tamsang (1973, 1980, 1983), G.C. Bagchi (1972), Gangaram Chattopadhyay (1982), A.R. Foning (1981), R.N. Thakur (1988), Tapan Chattopadhyay (1990), Lyangsang Tamsang (1997-2002), and the others.

¹⁴ The above four research studies are to some extent relevant for us. Beside this some scholars carried out their study on Lepcha language, literature and religion for their award of doctoral or other degrees.

Prabhakar Sinha received his doctoral degree from Deccan college in Pune in 1966 for his work on *Descriptive Grammar of Lepcha*. [H. Kloss : 1073]. Helen Plaisier conducted her research work on Lepcha language and literature and collected information during her stay in Kalimpong. Details of Helen's work is not available but the information that she is working on Lepcha literature can be available through internet www.lepcha.com. Paul Lepcha submitted his thesis *A Study of the Scottish Mission work in Kalimpong –Subdivision with special reference to the Lepcha Tribe* to the faculty of the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, Maharashtra for the completion of his degree of Bachelor of Divinity in 1999. The study highlights the Scottish Missionary work among the Lepchas, their contribution to the socio-economic, cultural, religions life and the aspect of future evangelism of non Christian Lepchas. Anthony Lepcha has submitted a dissertation on *The Lepchas and their language and culture in the Darjeeling and Sikkim hills – A Study* for partial fulfillment of his master degree in Nepali under NBU in 2001. The dissertation written in Nepali tries to show the importance of Lepcha language in the region. All these religious or linguistic studies are not directly relevant for the present study.

Lepchas for the first time, from their role of guides to the foreigners travelling in this region, become the subject matter of any writings in the hand of A. Campbell (1940) in his article 'Note on the Lepchas of Sikkim with a Vocabulary of their language'. Although the basic purpose of the study was to describe the unknown country and its people to the outside world but it contains detailed information regarding their life and customs. Campbell's observation became so authentic that a number of later writers like Dalton, Hunter, Risley, Das quoted him in a number of occasions. Campbell observed that Lepchas were 'poor agriculturists, nomadic in their habits' with no settled land to cultivate and basically depended on forest for their food.

In the same line to those of Campbell authors like Hooker, and Temple viewed that they are 'grass eater' and "have no idea of cultivation beyond clearing a spot of virgin soil, and scrapping up its surface with the rudest of agricultural implements." [Temple, 1875 : 19]

G.B. Mainwaring (1876), the first European who took pain in mastering the Lepcha language, developed for the first time a Lepcha grammar based on Latin principles. Before entering into the grammatical part, Mainwaring gave a general description of Lepcha life and their history. He stated about their 'primitive state, living in the midst of the vast, wild magnificent forests'. They usually practise shifting cultivation and 'rice is their staple food.' He also narrated in brief the role of forest on day to day life of Lepchas.

H.H. Risley (1891) deals with the various tribal groups of Bengal and could not devote intensively for any specific tribe. Clan, marriage, religion, panchayat

system, death rituals are some of the sociological aspects of Lepchas where the author depends mainly on Campbell's study. He described Lepchas as 'poor agriculturists' but found rice and vegetables to cultivate in their non-permanent village set up.

In his travelogue *Among the Himalayas* beside describing precisely the history, physical status, religion, house, food items etc. of the Lepchas, Waddell (1899) narrated their economic life with a little bit of description about their agricultural practices. Lepchas 'represent the state of primitive man where they subsist on 'hunting, fishing and digging roots'. Waddell also observed the case of reservation of forest by the British rulers and its impact on the scarcity of food among the Lepchas. For the first time we find a sort of terrace farming among the Lepchas in Waddell's writings. He writes Lepcha hut is "surrounded by a patch of cultivation – a few gourds, turnips and chilies and beyond this a few small crops of maize, barley, millet, for beer and a little terraced land for irrigated rice. This scanty cultivation, if it may be defined by such a term, is usually a mere scratching of the ground, and is done mostly by the woman, while the man did the hunting." [Waddell, 1899 : 95-96]. Waddell also observes a barter system of exchange of some forest produce for salt and other articles but money was not a common medium and was used 'around their necks as an ornament'. Famine was practically unknown to the Lepchas as they depend on forest for food, cloth and housing.

In his gazetteer, O'Malley (1901), observes that Lepchas 'had to give up their old nomadic cultivation' due to reservation of forest. Like Waddell he also observes Lepchas to 'make terraces for rice fields' and giving up 'hoe for the

plough'. Regarding the types of crop, O'Malley observes that "Lepchas mostly cultivate at the lower levels, and are particularly fond of cardamom cultivation at the bottom of the valleys". [O'Malley, 1907 : 65]. They also cultivate wheat and barley.

As against switching over from shifting cultivation to terrace based settled cultivation among the Lepchas in Darjeeling areas, H.H. Maharaja and Maharani Dolma of Sikkim (1908) observed prevalence of shifting cultivation among the Lepchas in Sikkim. The authors for the first time hinted about the system of tax on Lepchas. The paragraph quoted by many on Lepcha agriculture is :

A new patch of jungle would be cleared every year, and when dried set fire to. On the cleared space, paddy, kodo and bhutta, as well as various white and black grains would be sown. Next year another patch of jungle would be cleared. The virgin soil of course yielded a very rich crop, and people used to gain their living very easily, and also enjoyed a good many sorts of fruits and herbs, which they can not get now. As they had not much call on them for free labour contribution nor much of tax to pay, they were very happy [Nakane, 1966 : 216].

Through a large collection of folk tales and folklores, myths and legends, C.de. Beauvoir Stocks (1927) made a departure in her study to present the life, birth, marriage, burial, death, customs, culture and other social and some economical aspects of Lepcha society. Stocks observed settled cultivation during her time and also mentioned in the footnote a system of tax to be paid by the cultivators :

Taxes are very low, though they are on an average to what a peasant earns, amounting roughly to Rs. Thirteen eight annas per annum (about an English Pound) which includes Rs. Three from every 'basti' claiming exemption from Coolie work. [Stocks, 1925 : 476].

Rene Von Nebesky Wajkowitz (1956), the Austrian anthropologist and Tibetologist made an anthropological survey of Lepcha society during his stay in Kalimpong and Sikkim. Although his main concern was that of anthropological study, still he touched upon some agricultural practices like the type of crops and the pattern of cultivation among the Lepchas. His writings on agriculture, perhaps, based on secondary sources as he mentioned about shifting cultivation even during the mid twentieth century.

A somewhat hazy picture of the economic life of Lepchas can also be found from Chi Nakane's (1966) article – 'A Plural Society in Sikkim – A Study of the interrelations of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalis.' This anthropological study based on three villages (Pubyuk, Phodang and Phensang) of eastern Sikkim. In case of anthropological work, Nakane compares her work with Gorer's findings in *Lepchas of Sikkim* while all information regarding agriculture are collected and quoted from *History of Sikkim* by H.H. Maharaja and Maharani Dolma of Sikkim.

Siiger's (1967) anthropological work published in two parts – I and II. Out of his experience with the Lepchas of Kalimpong and Sikkim, Part I describes mainly the socio-cultural and religious life in length while Part II comprises mainly the collection of songs. Regarding Lepcha agriculture, Siiger observes shifting cultivation from the works of Campbell, Hooker, Waddell etc.. But his field survey finds settled terrace cultivation. Now-a-days agriculture, and especially the wet rice cultivation, furnishes the stable food of the Lepchas. The author also marks different varieties of crops like rice, maize, millet, buckwheat, wheat, potato, radish and

various grains and fruits. But his study limits by mentioning the names of the crops Lepchas are cultivating.

Two Indian authors Lal Bahadur Basnet (1974) and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay (1978) as a part of their main works, do mention about the socio-economic life of the Lepchas. Basnet is more interested in mentioning the traditional system of shifting cultivation while Chottopadhyay is more concerned about the variety of crops in their contemporary periods.

Tapan Chattopadhyay's (1990) is a travelogue, in which interesting and faithful description of what he saw among the Lepchas in the course of his sojourn is available. In chapter four while describing Rong life cycle, he narrated some of the agricultural aspects of Lepcha society but no indebt study or any theoretical discourse of agriculture took place in his study.

Apart from these¹⁵ a number of articles have been published on Lepchas in different magazines, newspapers, bulletins etc. but none of them deals with the basic question of the present study and hence they are not reviewed here. That the Lepchas are a tribe is implicit in all the works so far conducted on Lepchas. Not a single author engages in enquiring about their tribal identity. None of them attempt to test any hypothesis about their tribal character either from social, political or economic angle.

¹⁵ Two Lepcha authors describe the past and present account of their own culture, K.P. Tamsong (1983), a Buddhist by religion was well acquainted with the traditional Lepcha culture and customs. He touched upon the language, religion, culture, house etc. of Lepcha society without any single reference to their economic reference, Readers can smell the authors ethnic touch in all his writings. A.R. Foning (1981), who himself is a Christian Lepcha, wrote another insider's account of the social practices of the Lepchas, particularly their rites de passage and religious beliefs. The work gained some popularity among the outside readers but the Lepchas particularly the Buddhist Lepchas outrightly rejected it on grounds of using the word vanishing and also some customs not original for the Lepchas.

All the studies conducted so far on Lepchas may conveniently be folded under one broad category of 'ethnography'. Most of them are descriptive or anthropological account of Lepchas with a little bit of information here and there on their economic life and particularly their agricultural practices.

1.5 METHOD ADOPTED

In this section attempts have been made to give an idea about the methods, tools and techniques adopted, selection of villages, pattern of analysis, period and limitations of present study.

a) **Sources of information** : For the present study both primary and secondary sources of information are used. However, emphasis has been given on first hand information directly collected from the Lepchas engaged in agriculture.

Primary data have been collected personally from three villages with the help of field guide. In our study, village is the unit of enquiry and not the object. It is not a comparative study of Lepchas living in three types of villages. The principal aim is to study the Lepcha economy in the context of three villages. The knowledgeable persons of each village like the village headman, mandal, panchayet member, educated person etc. acted as our key informants in providing first hand information about the village. In the village all the households are listed. All of them are interviewed with the household schedule containing a set of questions on economic activities of the household. The office bearers of Lepcha Association, Head Quarters, Kalimpong have been interviewed to gather some qualitative information about the community.

Secondary data have been used as and when required mainly to show the status of Lepchas and their economic condition. Census documents have been used for demographic details and industrial classification of Lepchas. Ethnographic details have been collected from the available literature. History of the region and

community have critically been examined from the earlier literature, folk tales and hearsay.

b) **Selection of Villages** : Villages for the present study have been selected from Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district. It has been noted that in West Bengal most of the Lepchas are concentrated in the hilly region of Kalimpong. By using different sources (like Census (1991), Rahul Sankrityayana (1941), Lepcha Association etc.) a list¹⁶ of Lepcha inhabited villages was prepared. Considering

¹⁶ The following table shows Sankrityayana's [1950 : 56-57] break up of Lepcha and Bhutia population for 30 villages of Kalimpong *Khas Mahal* area.

Rong, Bhutia Population of Kalimpong *Khas Mahal* – 1941.

Sl. No.	Village	Rong (Lepcha)	Bhutia
1.	North Kalimpong	540	11
2.	Bong	234	10
3.	Dungra	111	317
4.	Bhalukhop	187	27
5.	Sindcpong	194	35
6.	Echhay	96	163
7.	Sangsav	285	51
8.	Dalapchand	85	105
9.	Lolay	339	06
10.	Pala	128	04
11.	Santuk	109	46
12.	Peyong	89	357
13.	Sakyong	284	495
14.	Kagay	120	25
15.	Pedong Bazar	84	243
16.	Kerchang	331	34
17.	Ladong	67	19
18.	Lingsckha	260	26
19.	Lingsey	137	94
20.	Seokbir	155	-
21.	Kangeybong	391	02
22.	Sinjee	238	-
23.	Samalbong	135	-
24.	Samthar	248	-
25.	Suruk	105	-
26.	Yangmakung	281	-
27.	Gitdabling	665	07
28.	Gitbeong	123	28
29.	Nimbong	141	90
30.	Todey Tangta	163	182
31.	Others	384	29
	Total	6609	2406

A perusal of the above table reveals the following :

Lepcha population is 2.75 times more than Bhutia population in Kalimpong *Khas Mahal*.

There is no village without Lepcha but there are at least 7 villages where no single Bhutia is found.

Village-wise Lepchas are dominating over the Bhutia population in all the villages except only 7 such villages.

Bhutia dominated villages are located on both the sides of the main road from Kalimpong to Oodlabari via Lava, Garubathan. These hamlets might have been settled during the Bhutan rule in the area during 1700 – 1865.

Lepcha population is concentrating more in the far flung villages which are lack of any approachable road or any other communication. In search of safety places during the oppression of Tibetan, Bhutan and European reigns, Lepchas might have preferred to corner themselves in these remote areas of Kalimpong *Khas Mahal*.

The highest concentration of Lepchas is found in Gitdabbling village which may be termed as the present day *Mayal Lyang* for the Kalimpong Lepchas. If the government of West Bengal or the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council attempts to reserve any area for the aboriginal Lepchas of Darjeeling district like that of Dzongu in Sikkim, Gitdabbling will be the best choice.

Instead of any village level information regarding any specific tribe like that of Lepcha, the census department has published information regarding the Scheduled Tribe population for the year 1991. Any intensive study of this figure may help in gathering a working knowledge of Lepcha population in different *mausas* of Kalimpong.

A perusal of table reveals the following : Scheduled Tribes are present in all the *mausas* except two which are located near the plains and tea garden areas.

High rate of ST population is inversely related with high rate of total population of different *mausas*. Pembling is having highest (44.35%) of ST population but its total population is as low as 933 only while Dugra processes low population of ST (4.44%) but its total population is one of the highest 4642.

Percentage of ST population are more in those *mausas* which are located in the remote areas, far away from the sub-divisional town. It has been reported that these *mausas* like Pembling, Yangmakung , Sinjee, Kankebong, Kafier etc. are dominated either absolutely or mostly by the Lepchas.

Population of Kalimpong Developmental Block-I as per Census – 1991.

Sl. No.	<i>Mouza</i>	Total population	Total Scheduled Tribe	Scheduled Tribe as percentage of total population
1.	Bong	3303	724	21.92
2.	Dugra	4642	434	4.44
3.	Sindepong	3256	544	16.71
4.	Pundung	1776	100	5.63
5.	Echhey	3200	528	16.5
6.	Bhalukhop	3791	288	7.59
7.	Dr. G. Homes	2656	251	9.45
8.	Tashiding	6720	1254	18.66
9.	Teesta	2203	78	3.54
10.	Rambi Bazer	643	06	0.93
11.	Reyong	204	-	-
12.	Suntaley	212	-	-
13.	Seekbir	1057	216	20.44
14.	Yok printem	914	34	3.72
15.	Kafier	978	314	32.11
16.	Kankebong	867	343	39.56
17.	Samalbong	1884	298	15.99
18.	Lolaygoan	788	44	5.58
19.	Sinjee	1242	460	37.08
20.	Samthar	1682	489	29.07
21.	Suruk	1540	313	20.32
22.	Yongmakum	2548	834	32.73
23.	Nimbong	2860	798	29.90
24.	Pemling	933	411	44.05
25.	Paringtar	1445	60	4.15
26.	Nabgaon	1510	173	11.46
27.	Chunabhati	482	06	1.25
	Total	35166	8985	16.89

Source : Cultural and Information Centre, Kalimpong, Govt. of West Bengal.

distance from the town or market place and religious dominance, three villages have purposively been selected on practical consideration and convenience.

Two villages have been taken from nearby areas but each one is dominated absolutely by either of the two major religious faiths – Christian and Buddhist. The third village located far away from the town is inhabited by the Lepchas belonging to both the religious groups.

c) Tools and Technique : To meet our objectives we have collected both quantitative and qualitative information.

Quantitative information have been gathered from each of the household. As all villages are small, although sparsely populated, we have considered census technique most suitable than sampling. All the villages have been completely enumerated with the help of household schedule. Household level primary data have been obtained by direct interview preferably with the head of the family.

During our conduct of household survey we have used the observation technique for recording certain events, practices, material conditions etc.. Instead of participant observation, close observation seems to be more suitable and feasible for the present study.

Qualitative information which are more important in effecting the social formation among the Lepchas have been obtained through observation. Sometimes we did participate in a variety of socio-cultural, religious and ritual events organised both at the individual and social levels. We, as invitee and non-invitee, never missed any such social, cultural events in any of the three villages. All ethno-cultural

activities on the community level observed and performed under the organisation of Lepcha Association, Kalimpong are also attended and investigated most carefully.

d) **Pattern of analysis** : Data collected both from the primary and secondary sources have been later analysed and presented in simple tabular form. No sophisticated statistical techniques are used for the study. Secondary data collected for demographic profile are used to show the status and position of the Lepchas in the state of West Bengal and Sikkim. Industrial classification of Lepchas of West Bengal collected from Census documents are used to analyse their economic condition.

The qualitative information gathered from the field survey, key informants, linkmen and existing literature are analysed and interpreted mostly to judge their social embeddedness of the Lepcha economy. All information provided by the key informants are put to cross examination and analysed minutely to get the most appropriate result. Observations regarding village or community are being discussed with the field guides and the key informants to get their opinion. The portfolio holders of Lepcha Association are consulted to gather qualitative information and their opinion in a number of cases have been recorded and analysed with due importance.

e) **Period of Study** : We have divided the project in two broad phases collection cum processing of data, and analysis of data. Secondary data have been gathered much before going to the villages for collecting primary data. Existing literature have been reviewed at the initial stage of the study.

In choosing period for the field survey, we have covered a complete agricultural calendar year so as to investigate the total process of agriculture. Both the quantitative and qualitative data have been collected for the agricultural practices during the period February – March 1999 to August – September 2001 and, thus, covers a complete circle of agricultural calendar year.

f) Limitations of the Study : We cannot claim our study to be a complete analysis of Lepcha social formation. No such study can claim perfection and ours' is no exception to that.

In the present study we have tried to identify Lepcha social formation from the economic angle. Any question centering around social formation needs to be examined from multi dimensions taking into consideration their economic, political, social, historical, linguistic, religious angles. Economic dimension is only one aspect of such a concept. As the present study is time bound and individually organised and financed, we could not take into account other aspects of social formation.

As most of the Lepchas are primarily agriculturists, we have explained mainly the role of agrarian economy in social formation of Lepchas. Beside agriculture, the nature and composition of other types of economy have not been discussed with equal weightage.

We have purposively selected three villages only from Kalimpong subdivision. By increasing the number of both villages and people, a more extensive work may help to get a complete picture of Lepcha social formation.

As Lepchas are simple and close to nature no sophisticated technique other than census, in-depth interview and non participant observation seems to be suitable.

Many aspects of social relations and attributes peculiar to the society can only be investigated through direct touch with the community. Many aspects of such society may be very symbolic or happens without any apparent causal relation with other : the best method, we consider for such happenings, is close observation and direct inter action. But we could not do justice because of our certain limitations.

1.6 PLAN OF PRESENTATION

The Chapters of the present study are planned on the basis of the objectives and the questions raised in the earlier section of the present write up. Chapters are arranged and designed in such a manner that each one deals with a set of questions and tries to find the possible answers connected with the Lepcha social formation. However, the broad framework of chapterisation are as follows :

In the introductory chapter, as must have already been noticed by now, we have raised some fundamental problems associated with the recognition of any community as scheduled tribe by the Constitution of India. The study of social formation, we propose, may help in identifying the attributes or characters required for an essentialist definition of tribe. We then discussed the conceptual details, as available, of social formation in general and tribal social formation in particular. Some questions connected with the principal objective of the study are being raised. A brief review of existing literature on Lepchas, is conducted with the purpose of showing the relevance of the present study. We concluded the chapter, by narrating the methods adopted for the study.

The basic aim of the Second Chapter is to introduce the people and the study area. The meanings of the name of the community, geographical boundary, history

of the people, demographic profile are narrated in brief. Using the census data industrial classification of Lepchas has been shown for the state of West Bengal. The section on description of the study area contains the location of the village, population, number of households, religion, education etc.. Involvement of the villagers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities and consideration of agriculture as principal and subsidiary sources of occupation have been discussed in brief.

In our Third Chapter attempts have been made to judge the social formation among the Lepchas with land as the central unit of attention. Land has been focused from a number of angles like types, rent, record, transfer, ownership, genealogy, holding pattern, landscape etc.. Detailed discussion have been carried out on ownership pattern of land. A relation between owner and user of land has been investigated. The case of share cropping or contractual lease has been dealt with. The terms and conditions of share cropping have been explored with due care.

The core item of discussion of the Fourth Chapter is labour connected with Lepcha agriculture. After discussing some items like type of labour, supply of labour etc., we enter into the typical type of mutual exchange of labour as practiced by the Lepchas in both traditional and contemporary agriculture.

Finance, another characteristic feature by which tribal social formation can be identified, has been examined at length in our Fifth Chapter. Beside the major institutional sources of capital, the type and pattern of domestic capital have been analysed. The various types of both traditional and modern tools and implements used in agriculture are narrated and shown with sketch. The management of bullock,

another important capital item of agriculture along with the nature and method of exchange has been discussed. The chapter ends with the description of adoption of new technique and innovation by the Lepchas.

From production we turn to distribution of agricultural produce in our penultimate Sixth Chapter. How the major agricultural produce mainly the food items, beside being utilised for consumption, are distributed to meet the obligations of kinship, seed, payment to exchange labour etc. have been analysed. We have extensively discussed the major two obligations (social and ritual) for which the agricultural products are distributed. Separate discussion have been made for ritual obligations among the Buddhists and the Christians.

Chapter Seven is our concluding chapter where we have jotted down the major findings of all the chapters. We have tried to establish a link among all the chapters so as to identify the type of Lepcha social formation.