

## CHAPTER II

### LA-CHEN AND LA-CHUNG VALLEYS OF NORTH SIKKIM: AN INTRODUCTION

North Sikkim the most prominent district of Sikkim occupies an area of 4226 sq.km.; about one third of the total geographical area of the state. Sikkim is surrounded by Nepal on the west and by a horse-shoe shaped boundary of Tibet on the north and east and other districts touching the southern boundary<sup>(1)</sup>. Because of the three international boundaries on the north, west and east and military encampment in the higher regions of North Sikkim starting from Chungthang, North Sikkim has a great strategic position. The district has two sub-divisions — one is Chungthang situated at an elevation of 5150 ft. and another Mangan, which is also the district headquarter with an elevation of 3960 ft.<sup>(2)</sup>.

#### La-chen and La-chung : Location and Physical features

Further up, northwards, on the east, 51 kilometres away from Chungthang lies the valley of La-chung at an elevation of 8610 ft. Similarly, northwards, on the west of Chungthang at an elevation of 8960 ft.<sup>(3)</sup> is situated the valley of La-chen. The great river Tista originating from a lake Khangchung Chho beyond Chho-Lhamu and flowing through the entire length of Sikkim from north to south separates the valley of La-chen from La-chung. While flowing through La-chen the river is known as La-chenchu and is joined by a number of small tributaries such as Zemachu,

Geychu, Brumchu, Kalepchu etc. While traversing a distance of 58 kilometres from Chungthang to the valley of La-chen, the following forest pastures and arable lands have to be passed through -

- 1) Munshithang
- 2) Peubiya
- 3) Lattong
- 4) Jelep
- 5) Daramchu
- 6) Jorepoal
- 7) Bonsai
- 8) Chhapel
- 9) Chhatten

From La-chen upwards, further north, one came across the following pastures and arable land -

- 1) Zema
- 2) Thimkaru
- 3) Gumpara
- 4) Thambook
- 5) Tallum
- 6) Yathang
- 7) Thanggu
- 8) Chhopta
- 9) Chhibook
- 10) Yangri
- 11) Lukhrip
- 12) Geigong

On La-chung side, the valley opens upto the pastures of Yumthang and Yume Samdong. Here the important river La-chungchu with its tributary Yumthangchu flowing southwards drains the La-chung valley. A few arable plots of land and pastures situated below La-chung are the following-

- 1) Maltin
- 2) Bitchu
- 3) Beumnalla
- 4) Khedum

Both the rivers La-chenchu and La-chungchu flowing southwards join together at Chungthang and there it is called the Tista river<sup>(4)</sup>. The entire area of the two valleys is covered with steep hills, deep ravines and terrains<sup>(5)</sup>.

In North Sikkim about three quarters of the entire area is uninhabited. Human habitation in North Sikkim is confined to the valleys of La-chen and La-chung only. Dense coniferous forests followed by Alpine wilderness of undulating pastures greet the eyes beyond these two valleys. However, just recently, on the La-chen side human habitation has been extended beyond La-chen at a place called Thangu. Tibetan refugees have settled down here and have built their houses. These houses are made of wood and corrugated tin sheet is used for the roofing<sup>(6)</sup>.

### People and their history

The descendants of Tibetans are called Sikkimese Bhuteas, or Bhotas to distinguish themselves from the Tibetans who are simply called Bhuteas or Bhotas in Sikkim. The inhabitants of La-chen and La-chung are tribals whom J.S. Lall has called the northern communities in the book "The Himalayas : Aspects of Change". Culturally and socially the people of La-chen and La-chung, though very akin

to the Tibetans, do not call themselves Sikkimese Bhotes. Instead they call themselves La-Chenpas and La-chungpas.

The reason for the La-chenpas and La-chungpas distinguishing themselves from the Sikkimese Bhuteas, lies in their claim to have been descended from the immigrants of a tract called "Ha" in the north of Bhutan. In the past, they were therefore called Ha-Pa (North People), whereas the Bhuteas of Sikkim were called Hlo-Pa (South People) <sup>(7)</sup>.

The exact date of their immigration from Bhutan though not known, it might be during the 17th century when Bhutan was consolidating its territory by invading neighbouring areas. It was in 1700 A.D., at the death of Tensung Namgyal the king of Sikkim, his son Chador Namgyal by his Tibetan wife succeeded to the throne. However, Pedi Wangmoo, the daughter of Tensung Namgyal by his Bhutanese wife also claimed her right to the throne, being senior to her half-brother. Enraged she invited the king of Bhutan to invade Sikkim. The Deb Raja of Bhutan sent his forces into Sikkim and captured and occupied the Sikkimese capital at Rabdentse till 1706. It was during this period that the invaders had heavily colonised the eastern part of Sikkim contiguous to Bhutan. This territory which included modern Kalimpong and adjoining areas was taken from the Raja of Sikkim by the Bhutanese in 1706 <sup>(8)</sup>. Evidently the people from Ha in the north of Bhutan might have migrated into Sikkim during this colonisation period. Remote and isolated the people of these two valleys led a secluded life in the past developing their own dialect and a system of local self government.

## Social and Community Life

There are 260 houses in La-chen and 300 houses in La-chung. The present total population of North Sikkim is 31,143, out of which the population figures of La-chen and La-chung are 2500 and 2950<sup>(9)</sup>.

On the La-chen side, human habitation is found only upto a place called Thanggu. It can also boast to have a Government Forest Dak Bungalow. Beyond it, as one goes higher and higher up, just vast stretches of wilderness of rocks and boulders and in between undulating pastures greet the eye. With the gradual rise in elevation, vegetation also changes into stunted plants and bushes. Still higher up at places such as Lukherip, Goichoong and Beigong, at elevations ranging from 15,000 ft and above, nothing but undulating pastures extend endlessly toward the horizon. A few yak herders' tents are found here, miles apart from each other.

On the side of La-chung valley, human habitation is confined within La-chung itself. There is hardly any human habitation to speak of in the higher reaches of the La-chung valley. There are, at best, a few graziers' huts. In days gone by, when herdsmen took their animals to Tibet, they took their yak-hair tents with them and camped with their animals in the wilderness<sup>(10)</sup>.

La-chen and La-chung are the two main village headquarters. They thus constitute important socio-political units and play a dominant role in their life and activities. People's houses in the two valleys are built on the slopes of hills clustered together,

Lanes and by lanes are hardly visible in these villages, except main road coming upwards towards the valleys from Chungthang, dividing the clustered housing areas into upper part and lower.

In both the villages some of the houses are built after the Tibetan style with stone walls plastered with mud. The house has a small window and a wooden door which opens with a latch. The wooden beams and planks used for roofing and ceiling purposes are jointed without using a single nail. The roof is covered with shingles pressed down by big stones so that they cannot be blown away by the gusty wind. These Tibetan style houses are all very old. Presently quite a number of houses are newly built. As elsewhere, in Sikkim, all the newly built houses of La-chen and La-chung have corrugated tin sheets used for roofing and have larger windows with glass panes. These new houses are either purely wooden or made of cement. The ground floor of most of the houses is walled with stones on the three sides, the front remaining open and it is usually used either for keeping animals or stacking firewood, hay etc.

Each of the village has a place of worship, a Gomba, or a monastery which serves the purpose of an assembly place. All ceremonial functions and festivals are generally held here. In the monastery compound, long bamboo poles with flags are found stuck on the ground. These flags are inscribed with the teachings of Lord Buddha in Tibetan script. The monastery compound also has a sort of furnace like erection, where the Lamas and other people visiting the Gomba burn incense, which is indigenously produced.

The Gomba is the focus of the community life to a greater extent than elsewhere in Sikkim. In this respect its importance resembles that of Tawang monastery in Arunachal Pradesh. The Lamas perform suitable "Poojas" on all important occasions. The people of these two valleys profess Mahayana Buddhism, popularly known as Lamaism since Lamas are their religious leaders and play an important role in their religious life. The people have a great veneration for the Lamas. Their religious practice is such that families having more than one son must send one son as a novice for monkhood. They give donations liberally to the monastery for the performance of "poojas" and maintenance of Gomba and monks.

In recent years the influence of the monasteries has been diminishing, while fewer young boys are being sent by their parents as novices for the priesthood. The last Chhogyal was greatly concerned at this loss of interest. He, therefore, set up a training school or Cheda at Gangtok where about 40 novices and monks are being given new insight into the philosophy and practice of Buddhism.

In their social life an important aspect is the prevalence of polyandry, though presently its percentage has plummeted. Apparently polyandry is the social adaptation of La-chenpas and La-chungpas to save their property of livestock and arable land from fragmentation. It is a fact that monasteries and polyandry have helped to transmit household and landed property undivided in the two valleys<sup>(11)</sup>.

### The local self-government

In the past geographical barriers accentuated the isolation of the two valleys. Within such isolation, they, therefore, developed their own system of local self government. Under this system they have their own assembly called "Dzumsha" composed of the head of each household. Mother must hold the membership of "Dzumsha" if father is dead. Their assembly house is called "Dzumsha Khyim", where the assembly meets every year to elect two headmen. (In their dialect "khyim" means house). The headman in their dialect is called "Schi-pdon" (pronounced <sup>Pipdon</sup> Phipun). The two headmen are called senior headman and junior headman. The other office-bearers elected by the assembly are "gnapons" or constables - two in number and a number of "Gymbos" or Elders and a "Marpa".

It is known from travellers' accounts that in olden days the office of the Schi-pdon was not elective. It was hereditary first and thereafter the Raja of Sikkim was the appointing authority. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the office of the Schi-pdon was hereditary for seven generations<sup>(12)</sup>. During Macaulay's visit to La-chung the fact that the Raja of La-chung used to appoint the Schi-pdon of that place is known when Macaulay writes, "The Raja appoints a man every year. The present man was appointed three years ago. The Phi-pun has no allowance but great authority"<sup>(13)</sup>.

Anyone belonging to the tribal community is eligible for the post of the Schi-pdon if he is able, intelligent and has a good family background. As in the past, so also at the present moment,

the Schi-pdon, on the expiry of one-year term, is eligible for re-election if the public is satisfied with his performance. On the death of a Schi-pdon, his son could also be elected to the post.

### Functions of the Schi-pdon (Pipon)

In both La-chen and La-chung it is the function of the Schi-pdon to administer the day to day affairs within the valleys. The Schi-pdon convenes the assembly meeting to conduct public business. Before executing any public business, the Schi-pdon in consultation with the "Gymbos" or the body of Elders fixes the date of the meeting. They have developed their own peculiar method of informing the Dzumsha members about such meeting. An office-bearer known as "Marpa" goes atop a hillock and from there shouting at the top of his voice, informs them about the date of such meeting. The houses in La-chen and La-chung being clustered and people living in close proximity what the Marpa shouts can be clearly heard by all the inhabitants. They accordingly go to attend to the meeting. Anyone absent from the meeting will be fined by the Schi-pdon. Important decisions are taken in the Dzumsha meeting, such as cultivation programmes of sowing, harvesting, cutting of hay from community pastures etc. Grazing and seasonal migrations and disbursement of government assistance are also discussed in such meetings.

In ecclesiastical matter the Schi-pdon decides and fixes the amount of donations in cash, or in kind, to be given by each household to the monastery. Such public donations are required for the

performance of "poojas" and maintenance of lamas and "Gompas" or monasteries.

This system of local self government has been so popular and successful that when the Panchayat system was introduced in 1965 in the rest of the state these two valleys have been excluded from the introduction of the system. Revenue collection at the village-level is done by the village Level Workers, or V.L.W. in the rest of the state, but in La-chen and La-chung, it is the Schi-pdon, who assisted by the "Gnapons" collect government taxes, such as land revenue and forest tax on minor forest produces, graxing tax etc. The Schi-pdon also represents the community while dealing with the government.

The Schi-pdon also exercises juducial power. All disputes within the locality will be settled by the Schi-pdon with the assistance of "Gymbos". Only in the case of a murder, or a serious offence will the matter be referred to the respective higher authorities by the Schi-pdon himself. Macaulay has also written that "if a murder, or a very serious offence were committed the culprit would be taken to the Maharaja, either at Tumlong, or Choombi. Never knew a murder to be committed. Cases of theft were investigated by the body of Elders headed by the Phi-pun. If found guilty the culprit is flogged by the Marpa" (14). Now-a-days those found guilty are, either fined, or punished. The nature of punishment, or the rate of fine will be decided by the Schi-pdon in the assembly.

It has been recorded that till today neither a case of disobedience has been occurred, nor that of opposition to the Schi-pdon's office. An ideal example of obedience set by the tribal people is reflected in transhumance. The dates fixed by the Schi-pdon for seasonal migrations, either going upland in summer, or descending to lower regions in winter, are ritualistically observed by the people<sup>(15)</sup>. So well developed system of local self-government is not found anywhere among other tribes of the state. The manner of functioning of the Schi-pdon and the "Dzumsha" demonstrates the most perfect form of democratic government anywhere in the country<sup>(16)</sup>.

Isolated as they were in the past, they learnt for survival to live not in a spirit of competition and confrontation but in co-operation and harmony. Had their path been one of confrontation, they might would have been disintegrated and destroyed and wiped out from the map of North Sikkim long ago. Instead the wise people of La-chen and La-chung have created institutions and developed practices based on sharing, but not on competition. It has kept their society intact through centuries. So much so that they have succeeded in resisting the implementation of the Sikkim Panchayat Act of 1965<sup>(17)</sup>. This Panchayat Act was formulated with the objective of good village administration and implementation of development programmes ensuring participation of all communities at the village level.

#### Economic Life — (1) Pastoralism and Trans-border trade

The economy of La-chen and La-chung can be studied in two separate periods. The first beginning from ancient time till 1959

Photo 2.1

Yaks on the trail

Photo 2.2

Horses on the trail



2.1



2.2

when China occupied Tibet and the second period of study starts after 1959. Till 1959, the economy of La-chen and La-chung based on transhumance, involving a great degree of seasonal mobility comprised of pastoralism and trans border trade specially with Tibet in the past. It was a complicated barter trade. The people of these highland communities ranged freely in this vast territory. Upto 1959, movement in the neighbouring areas of Tibet was unrestricted. Before the snow-fall they moved their yaks and sheep to safe pastures and came and went freely to such trade marts as Yatung in the Chhumbi valley Gyantse, Shekkhardzong and Tingkye Dzong in Tibet. This free movement helped them a great deal to pursue their traditional occupations in trade and animal husbandry<sup>(18)</sup>. Trans-border trade was their mainstay. They carried with them such items as textiles, planks, beams, bamboo, butter, rice and dye-stuff for exchange. They brought back with them from Tibet such goods as wool, Tibetan blankets, tea, salt, sheep and pottery etc<sup>(19)</sup>. Whatever they were able to procure from trans-border trade was supplemented by their breeding of yaks and other cattle which provided them with the much needed protein to their diet.

## (2) Agriculture-cum-Pastoralism

After 1959, economic life of the highland communities was immensely affected by such cataclysmic political changes as the Sino-Indian hostilities leading to the Chinese aggression of 1962 and consequently to the closure of the border passes which still remain closed. Trade has, therefore, lost its importance in their economic life. Pastoralism is still in existence, but people adopting

Photo 2.3

Potato fields at Thanggu, 12,800 ft. situated  
on the north of La-chen

Photo 2.4

Arable plots of land in La-chung



2.3



2.4

themselves to the changed circumstances have now switched to the more settled life of cultivators<sup>(20)</sup>. In fact their present economy comprises of mixed farming. Mixed farming means keeping livestock as a subsidiary enterprise along with crop farming. The purpose behind keeping livestock as a subsidiary enterprise is to augment meagre income in the event of crop failure due to unprecedented natural calamities<sup>(21)</sup>.

The life of highland communities as cultivators differs from cultivators in other parts of Sikkim. The sole reason being large compact areas of cultivable land are lacking in La-chen and La-chung. They have to utilise a number of scattered plots situated at different elevations, to extract maximum yield from a basically unpromising land. Their mode of cultivation is different. In La-chen most of cultivable plots of land are in higher regions, northwards, upto the valley of Thanggu. On the other hand, in the La-chung valley the cultivable plots of land are all at lower elevations.

During seasonal migrations, they move from one arable land or pasture to others, staying at one place till such time as it is required to undertake agricultural operations within the time-bound frame. While they are engaged in agricultural activities, their yaks and cattle graze in the pastures, or on the banks of streams close by and their children gather faggots in the jungle. At Thanggu, the main crops grown are potatoes, besides barley to a limited extent and some raddish and mustard. Above Thanggu, barley can be grown upto an elevation of about 14,000 ft, but here due to cold, it does not get ripe. People, therefore, cut it down while

still green and get it dried into hay to be used as fodder later on in winter when snow falls heavily.

La-chung has its arable plots of land at lower elevations. Tilling of land in the two valleys is not done by ploughshare drawn by bullocks, because the terrains do not permit it. The implements used by them are mainly meant for scratching the earth's surface for reception of seeds. In the valley of Thanggu, the wooden hoe is sometimes drawn by a yak. The traditional type of implements that have been in use for farming is the wide shovel like hoe and it is used for loosening the earth and clearing of weeds. The next operation after ploughing is harrowing which is done with a ladder like frame made of bamboo. In the vicinity of La-chung cultivators use iron sickle, forks and spades as well as they are commonly used in other parts of Sikkim. They apply cow-dung manure in their vegetable fields. Just recently they have started applying fertilisers as well.

As regards division of labour in their agricultural operations, it may be said that tilling of land is done by male members, while women participate in putting seeds. They also assist male members at the time of harvesting of potatoes. Even children do the harvesting of potatoes. Preparing of harvested vegetables in bamboo-baskets for marketing is usually done by male members, but females also participate. In arable plots of land situated at higher elevations males do the repairing of stone-walls, if they have been breached to provide short-cuts through the fields after harvest.

The agricultural products of La-chen and La-chung are more or less the same. In lower elevations, wheat and maize are grown. In Alpine Zones upto about 14,000 ft barley is grown, but it does not get ripe due to cold. The people, therefore, cut it while still green, get it dried to be used as fodder for yaks and cattle in winter when snow falls heavily. The important cash crops of La-chen and La-chung are potatoes, apples and quite recently they have started growing summer vegetables. It may be mentioned that in La-chen and La-chung and in other parts of Sikkim, potatoes are grown mainly for seed purpose. Sikkim potato is famous for seed, because it can be used also in the plains in the same year, whereas potato seeds grown in Himachal Pradesh can be used in the next sowing season only, after having kept it in cold storage for at least sixty days. La-chen has its potato seed farm at La-chen Sub-Regional Centre and that of La-chung at La-chung Regional Centre (22). In La-chen upto an elevation of 13,000 ft. potatoes are grown. In the higher places of La-chen such as Thanggu, Byamjey, Chhopta and Tsheguk potatoes are cultivated in June and harvested in early part of October, whereas in lower regions, July is the harvesting season for potatoes. Among summer vegetables La-chen does not produce as much of red coloured radishes and cabbages as they are grown in La-chung. Since the growing of seasonal vegetables is intensive cultivation demanding constant care and attention such vegetables are grown in small plots of land round about La-chung. Recently in these two valleys, horticulture is gaining importance (23). It was J.C. White who first introduced fruit cultivation and planted English fruit trees in La-chung. During his

time apple trees did extremely well<sup>(24)</sup>. Apple grows better in La-chung than in La-chen. The varieties of apples available in Sikkim are mostly the old European type which are inferior in quality, although a number of delicious varieties have also been introduced now. Vegetables mainly off-season cabbages and among fruits apples from La-chung are transported to Gangtok for sale. In Sikkim, apples are marketed without grading and fetches a low price due to its inferior quality. Cabbages of La-chung are famous and exported outside Sikkim and to the plains<sup>(25)</sup>. The Agricultural Department has marketed 12000 metric tonnes of off-season cabbages during the Seventh Five Year Plan<sup>(26)</sup>.

Under the present pastoral economy, the products made are more or less the same as they were in the past before 1959. The main products of pastoral economy today are milk, meat, butter, curd, cheese, both raw and hardened, wool and blankets made of sheep-wool and yak-hair. Tents from yak hair and garments of sheep-wool and sheep skin and shoes are also made. Other important items made out of yak hair and very useful in herding and packing loads on animals, are the following —

- 1) "Hurto" - It is a sling made of yak-hair and is used by herders while herding yaks in wilderness.
- 2) Mee - It is a thick rope made from yak-hair. It is sort of a belt tied to yak's tail when the animal is fully packed and the caravan of yaks is ready to move on the trail.
- 3) Lho- It is also a rope made from yak-hair and tied on yak's body, going down from one side of the saddle around the body and then going up to the saddle on the other side. This rope is tied only when the animal is fully packed.

Photo 2.5

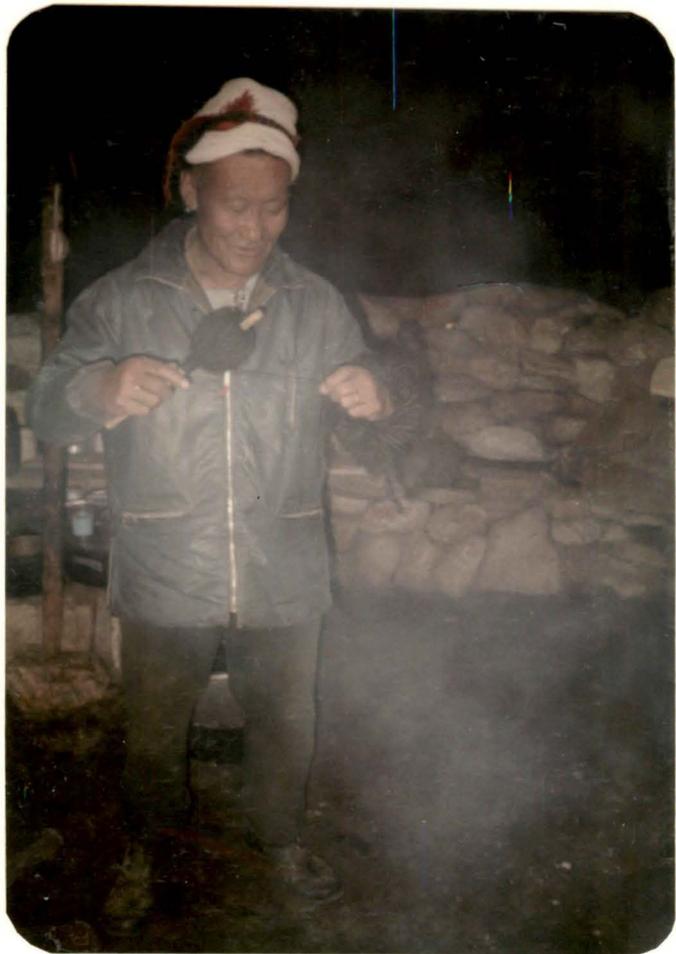
Items that are useful in herding yaks and packing loads on them before they are taken out on the trail

Photo 2.6

A yak herder making rope out of yak hair



2.5



2.6

- 4) Gaten - It is a cushion made from chengra's fur or wool and is placed on yak's back. On this cushion will be adjusted a wooden frame called "Gaa" in their dialect. On this wooden frame the load will be packed.
- 5) Thermo - It is a decorative rope made of yak's fur and used by the tribal women as one of their accessories while dressing up.
- 6) Thakpo - It is a very strong black rope made of yak-hair used in lassoing yaks which have turned wild and uncontrollable.

It may be mentioned that all these products listed above are useful for yak-herders only. Each family of yak herders makes these items by themselves and so they are not meant for sale.

Among other products of pastoral economy, dried yak meat, "chhurpee", i.e. dried and hardened cheese made out of yak-milk, yak-tail and butter are exported from La-chen and La-chung to Gangtok and Darjeeling for sale. One kg. of dried yak meat is sold at Rs. 100/-, one kg. of "chhurpee" fetches price ranging between Rs. 120/- - Rs. 150/-, one yak-tail could be sold between Rs. 300/- - Rs. 600/- depending on its quality and colour, and one kg. of butter Rs. 80/-. Yak-meat and yak-butter are available only on rare occasions, whereas "chhurpee" is available throughout the year. La-chen and La-chung being remote valleys, still isolated, no provisions have yet been made for transporting milk from there to other parts of the state. Milk available there, is, therefore used mainly for making "chhurpee" by the people and selling it to earn money<sup>(27)</sup>.

Hiring of yaks and using them as pack animals by the Army personnel is another source of earning money for yak owners. A healthy grown up yak can carry loads upto 100 lbs. The hiring charge of a yak, a few years ago, was between Rs. 40/- - Rs. 50/-. Nowadays the prospect of earning money by using yaks for transportation has been much reduced since the Army has bulldozed roads upto Geigong from La-chen and upto Yimi Samdong from La-chung side. These two places are close to the Tibetan border (28).

### 3) Handicrafts

The main handicrafts of these two valleys are carpet weaving and blanket making. To create opportunities for self-employment the State Government has started a Government Cottage Industry Training Centre in La-chen in 1982. It has two sections - one for carpet weaving and another for blanket making. In La-chung such Cottage Industry Training Centre has been in existence since 1976. It has one supervisor and three instructors. It has been set up for both carpet and blanket weaving. Originally it was J.C. White, the first Political Officer of Sikkim who had started Weaving Training Centre between the years 1897-1908 in La-chung, appointing Miss Jhenson, a Scandanavian Missionary as its supervisor. Under her, the village girls came regularly for work, collected dyes from the jungle and followed the pattern taught by her. With her assistance, the La-chung school used to turn out excellent tweeds (29).

In La-chen and La-chung one way of supplementing family's meagre income is by womenfolk weaving blankets and carpets, either at the Training Institutes, at a fixed wage-rate system, or by working on their own independently at home in their own looms and

earning money by selling their products.

#### 4) Gathering

During seasonal migration when they are not engaged in agricultural activities, numbers of both the sexes occasionally go out for gathering herbal plants and dhup. From the nearby jungle they gather medicinal plants such as "Jethamashi", "Kutki" and small stunted variety of rhododendrons out of which they produce indigenously their own "dhup". Only the Tibetans, Sikkimese Bhutesas and La-chenpas and La-chungpas burn this type of "dhup". Jethamashi has a very strong aroma. Both Jethamashi and Kutki grow in the jungle and are available during June, July and August. They are exported to other cities of the country.

People from the lowest social rung in La-chen and La-chung earn their bread by working as labourers in laying out of roads under the G.R.E.F.

A few of the La-chenpas and La-chungpas from well off families have migrated to Gangtok where some of them run business and others hold top positions in Government Departments. Still some of the La-chungpas have even contested in Assembly elections. One of them becoming a Minister in the mid eighties<sup>(30)</sup>.

What is obvious about the economy of La-chen and La-chung is that once based on pastoralism and trans-border trade, it has, now been changed by cataclymic changes into an economy based on mixed farming. With the wind of changes blowing rapidly after Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union, the inhabitants of La-chen

and La-chung have been performing economic activities as diverse as weaving of blankets and carpets, working as road-labourers, businessmen, bureaucrats and even Minister. It is indeed a major change in the basic structure of the economy of La-chen and La-chung.

If environmental constraints make them still practise transhumance within these two valleys, it is the political changes from 1959 onward till 1975 that changed the life style and economy of the La-chenpas and La-chungpas, who in olden days rough and tough, used to freely roam in the wilderness of the northernmost valleys of La-chen and La-chung of North Sikkim. Their remarkable resilience in adjusting themselves to the cataclysmic changes that adversely affected their economic life and their survival amidst niggardliness of nature and hostile environment sets an excellent example to be emulated by the world at large.

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