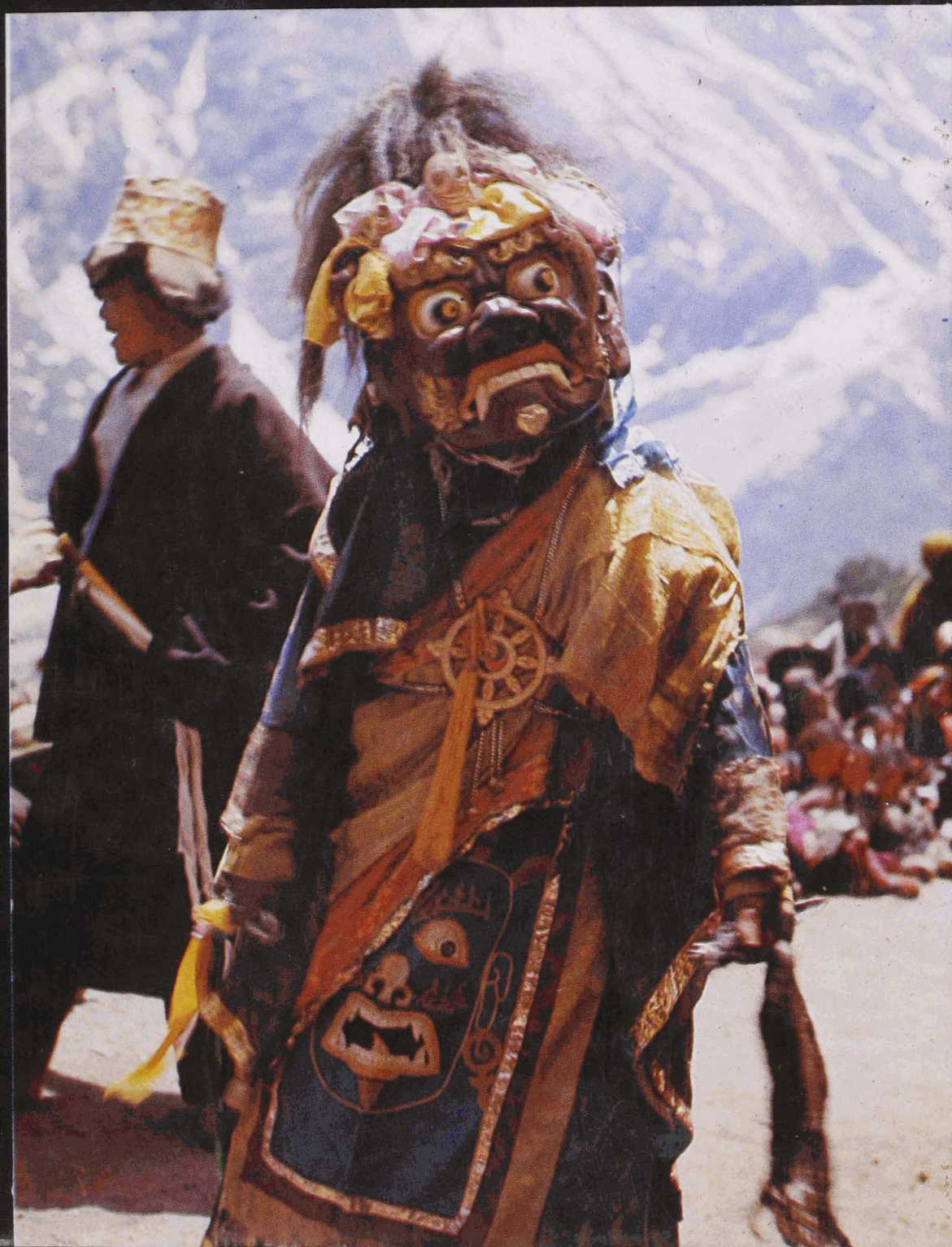


The Sherpas Transformed

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf



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Social Change in a Buddhist Society
of Nepal

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Among the Sherpas we made so many friends that it is not possible to mention them all individually, but my special gratitude for assistance and information is due to Ongcho Lama and his son Kalden, to Konje Chunbi of Khumjung, to Mingma Norbu, then Warden of the Sagarmatha National Park, to Ang Gelbu of Kathmandu and to Phu Dorje, who accompanied me to Khumbu in 1983. A great deal of information of a general nature I owe to Dr Harka Gurung. G.B. Kalikote of the Nepal Research Centre helped me on many occasions with practical problems.

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Introduction

The fame attained by the Sherpas of Nepal is unrivalled among the peoples of the Himalayan countries. Yet the worldwide reputation of this small tribe of mountain dwellers dates only from the beginning of the twentieth century, when individual Sherpas based in the Indian hill-station of Darjeeling began to accompany western mountaineers in their attempts to conquer some of the highest Himalayan peaks. These were usually approached from the Tibetan side, because the Kingdom of Nepal, where the Sherpas' homeland is situated, was then still closed to foreigners, and it was not until 1951 that the British mountaineers first set foot in the Sherpa villages of Khumbu, the territory close to the southern slopes of Mount Everest. These visits were followed by the first successful Mount Everest expedition, led by Lord Hunt, in the course of which Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of the world's highest mountain and achieved thereby international renown in Alpinist circles.

The subsequent years saw growing numbers of mountaineering expeditions aiming at the conquest of many of the major Himalayan peaks, and Sherpas provided for all these enterprises the indispensable logistic support. While some of the expeditions passed through various regions of the Sherpas' homeland, they seldom stayed for any length of time in Sherpa villages. Hence the social and economic life of the Sherpas remained largely undisturbed.

Anthropological research among Sherpas did not begin until 1953 when I undertook a preliminary study of a few high-altitude villages of Khumbu. At that time one could spend several months in that area without meeting a single outsider, and even in 1957, when I stayed from April until November in the village of Khumjung, I encountered no more than three foreign travellers. Though by that time there were already numerous Sherpas who had participated in mountaineering expeditions and had profited in a modest way from the

style which I observed three decades ago. The picture emerging is that of a people in part still rooted in an environment which had moulded their economic system. Many members of the younger generation have now outgrown the framework of this system, but with the older people and the majority of women adhering to traditional values, even the Sherpas who derive the bulk of their livelihood from tourism and mountaineering are not yet completely detached from inherited codes of behaviour. Though their aspirations are different from those of their elders, some aspects of Sherpa culture and particularly ritual practices have changed relatively little.

Since I first studied the Sherpas of Khumbu in 1953 several anthropologists have worked in various other parts of the Sherpa country and their findings will be taken into account, even though a complete review of the entire literature on the Sherpas cannot be accommodated within the framework of this book.

The most substantial contribution to our knowledge of the Sherpas is a series of studies entitled *Khumbu Himal*, which is the result of a comprehensive multi-disciplinary German research project. The first of the volumes dealing with Sherpas is Michael Oppitz's *Geschichte und Sozialordnung der Sherpa* (Innsbruck-München 1968), in which the author investigates the history of the Sherpas and particularly their migrations from Tibet to Nepal on the basis of documents and scriptures obtained in Junbesi, an important Sherpa village of Solu. The second volume, entitled *Religiöses Leben der Sherpa* (Innsbruck-München 1969), is by F.W. Funke, who also acted as editor of the other ethnographic volumes of the series. This detailed description of Sherpa religion and its relation to Tibetan Buddhism and local folk-religion is based mainly on research among the Sherpas of Solu, and so is the third volume *Materielle Kultur und Kunst der Sherpa* (Innsbruck-München 1975) by Marlis Schmidt-Thome and her Tibetan collaborator Tsering T. Thingo. This well illustrated volume covers not only the material possessions of the Sherpas of Solu, but extends its survey also to those of Khumbu.

Of an entirely different nature is the more recent study *Sherpas Through Their Rituals* (Cambridge 1978) by the

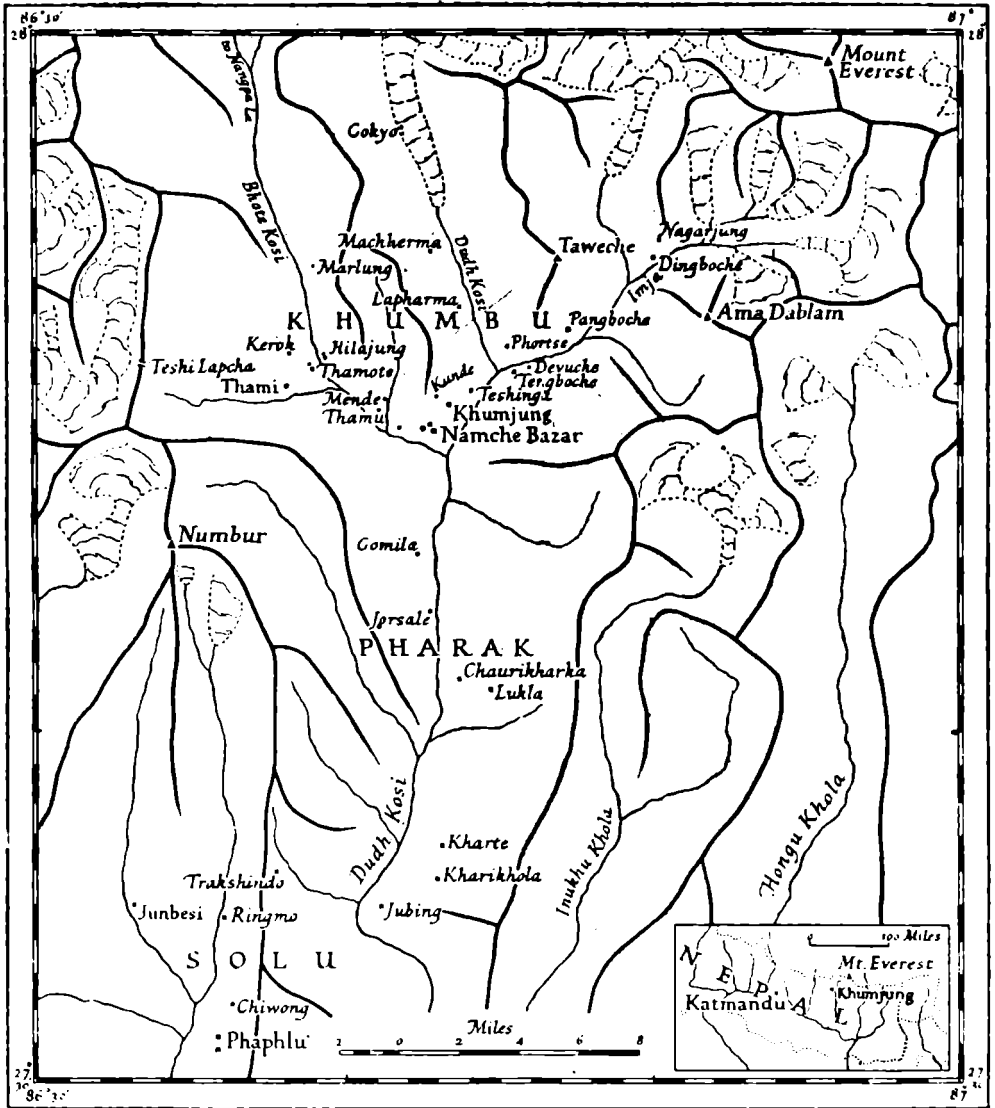
American anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner, who worked for a long time in Solu and acquired a remarkable fluency in Sherpa. Largely on account of this linguistic achievement, her book is characterized by an exceptional intimacy and psychological penetration.

Barbara Nimri Aziz also worked in Solu, but though she published several articles on her experiences among Sherpas, her only book *Tibetan Frontier Families* (New Delhi 1978) deals mainly with Tibetan refugee communities settled among Solu Sherpas.

Among publications concerned exclusively with Sherpas is Luther G. Jerstad's *Mani-Rimdu Sherpa Dance-Drama* (Seattle & London 1969), which contains a detailed account and analysis of the temple festival of Thami, which I described in Chapter 6 of *The Sherpas of Nepal*.

A study of the Sherpas of the Rolwaling Valley was recently undertaken by Janice M. Sacherer, and some of her material has been published in a number of articles (see Bibliography) and as a contribution to *Asian Highland Societies In Anthropological Perspective* (New Delhi 1982).

Rhythms of a Himalayan Village by Hugh R. Downs (San Francisco 1980) is a sensitive account of Sherpa rituals and religious attitudes, amplified by a wealth of photographs of outstanding artistic merit.



The regions of Khumbu, Pharak and Solu

1

Environment and Economy

THE highlands, both north and south of the Himalayan main range, are inhabited by populations of Mongoloid race most of whom speak Tibeto-Burman languages and adhere to various sects of Mahayana Buddhism. In the Eastern Himalayas such populations are found in the northern corners of Arunachal Pradesh as well as in the Tawang region close to Bhutan, the kingdom whose northern zone is inhabited by similar ethnic groups. Sikkim too has a substantial Bhotia population, so called after the geographic term *Bhot* which is the Indian and Nepali name for Tibet. In Nepal, the northern borderlands adjoining Tibet are also inhabited by a variety of similar Bhotia communities, who are the only Nepalese citizens able to stand the harshness of the climate and the arduous living conditions of these high altitude areas. While in regions such as Mustang settlement patterns, architecture and life-style differ only marginally from those of the neighbouring Tibetan district, other areas are inhabited by Bhotia groups with distinct cultural and economic characteristics. Among these are the Sherpas of Eastern Nepal, who have developed a strong sense of ethnic identity and consider themselves superior to most other Bhotia groups.

The name Sherpa is derived from the Tibetan word *shar-pa*, which means 'easterner'. But it is not clear in what circumstances this term came to be associated with this particular population. From the Tibetan point of view, Sherpas dwelling in the highlands of Nepal are southerners rather than easterners, though there is the tradition that before their migration

to their present habitat they had been settled in Eastern Tibet.

Three regions of Nepal contain the main concentration of the Sherpas, even though small splinter groups are also found elsewhere. These regions are Solu, Pharak and Khumbu, and the entire area is known under the collective terms Solu-Khumbu or Shar-Khumbu. Although the Sherpa inhabitants of Solu-Khumbu form a single society in the sense of having the same clan-structure and freely intermarrying, environmental conditions in Khumbu differ greatly from those in Solu. For this reason it is not practical to deal with Solu-Khumbu as a homogeneous unit, characterized by a uniform economy.

Situated at an average altitude of 8,000 feet, Solu has a temperate climate which favours a farming system based on double-cropping. Wide valleys with gentle slopes permit plough-cultivation and the growing of wheat and barley in addition to the cultivation of potatoes, now universal throughout the Sherpa country. Extensive forest-growth comprising conifers as well as rhododendron and various deciduous trees provides ample timber. This has facilitated the building of large and impressive mansions and Buddhist temples.

Pharak is a narrow strip of habitable country on either side of the Dudh Kosi, and hemmed in by steep and rocky mountains sweeping up to ridges and peaks covered with snow and ice for the greater part of the year. Over long stretches, the river rushes through narrow gorges, but where the valley widens alluvial terraces break the steepness of the mountain slopes. It is on these terraces that settlements have been built and the Sherpas have their fields growing barley, buckwheat, maize, potatoes and radishes. The track which winds its way through the narrow corridor of Pharak, switching from one river-bank to the other and crossing the Dudh Kosi by numerous cantilever bridges, used to be part of one of the most important trade-routes crossing the Eastern Himalayas, for it served as the southern approach to the Nangpa La, the 18,000 feet pass linking Nepal with Tibet. Today the track carries a great deal of tourist traffic, for at Lukla, a village close to the centre of Pharak, an airstrip has been constructed on

which, in good weather, light aircraft can land and take off. At its northern end Pharak adjoins Khumbu at the junction of Dudh Kosi and Bhote Kosi. From the confluence of these two rivers a steep ascent leads to Namche Bazar, the major village of Khumbu.

Khumbu is a region of high ground, including a few broad valleys suitable for habitation and cultivation, dissected by deep gorges. Situated at altitudes between 11,000 and 15,000 feet the inhabited parts of Khumbu lie partly above the tree-line, though in sheltered places, rhododendron and juniper cling to steep slopes. But the greater part of Khumbu is an area of pastureland and rocks, where cultivable ground is very limited. Some of the highest Himalayan peaks, including Mount Everest, rise from the Khumbu highlands, and snow and ice cover large parts of the region from October till March.

While Khumbu, Pharak and Solu form the centre of the Sherpa homeland, isolated Sherpa settlements are scattered over a much wider area. Adjoining Khumbu is Rolwaling (described in Chapter 8) and to the west of Solu Sherpas dwell in the valleys of the Likhu Khola and Khimati Khola, and even further west to both sides of the Sun Kosi. A group of Sherpas settled in the Yelmu region, three days' walk northeast of Kathmandu, had contacts with the Newar and Chetri population of that town long before the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu were drawn to the centre of Nepal's political and economic life.

Towards the east the distribution of isolated Sherpa settlements extends across the Inukhu Khola into the hills flanking the Hongu Khola, and some families that emigrated from Solu, are found on both sides of the Arun river, and in the area of Taplejung. The eastward movement of the Sherpas extended across the border of Nepal and into the Darjeeling district of Western Bengal. In the years before 1951 when Nepal was closed to foreigners, it was in Darjeeling that the Sherpas were recruited as high altitude porters for mountaineering ventures in Tibet, Sikkim and India. The prospects of such employment induced many poor but enterprising Sherpas of Khumbu to move to Darjeeling. At the same time

escape to Darjeeling became a recognized way out of disputes and marital tangles. Some Khumbu men also went to Darjeeling for purposes of trade without intending to settle there permanently. Today this drift to Darjeeling has stopped, for Kathmandu offers more attractive prospects to the Sherpas seeking a life-style different from that in their home villages.

Settlements

In Khumbu there are three types of settlements with permanent houses: main villages, winter settlements and summer settlements. The main villages are inhabited throughout the year, but by no means by all householders. There people have their principal houses with most of their household goods, valuable possessions and whatever ritual objects they may own. But now when many families have secondary homes in Kathmandu, even houses in main villages may be locked for part of the year as a novel development. Subsidiary settlements situated at different levels of altitude are much smaller and the houses less spacious and well furnished. Those situated in sheltered valleys below the average level of main villages and known as *gunsa* (*gun*—winter, *sa*—place) are inhabited mainly during the coldest winter months, whereas the settlements in the high pasturelands known as *yersa* (*yer*—summer), are populated mainly during the summer months, when herdsmen must be close to the yak grazing on such pastures.

While numerous subsidiary settlements are scattered over the Khumbu region, the number of main villages is limited. In the triangle enclosed by Dudh Kosi and Bhote Kosi are Namche Bazar, known in Sherpa as Nauje, Khumjung and Kunde. In the upper Dudh Kosi valley is Phortse, and in the valley of the Imja Khola is the ancient village of Pangboche and the more recently founded village Milingbo. The valley of the Bhote Kosi contains the villages of Thamo, Thami and Thamote, collectively known as Thamichok. All these main villages lie in localities with sufficient space for fairly extensive cultivation, the only exception being Namche Bazar, whose inhabitants relied in the past on trade but are now almost exclusively engaged in the tourist industry.

Arable land of sufficient acreage is not the only factor

determining a site's suitability for permanent habitation. There must also be a perennial source of water and an adequate supply of firewood within reach of the village. Settlements such as Dingboche at the foot of Lhotse, which lie at too great a distance from the nearest wood reserves cannot be permanently inhabited even though there is enough arable land and ample water.

A preferred pattern of settlement is apparent in nearly all the main villages of Khumbu. Unlike the arrangement of houses in the more compact village of Solu, such as Junbesi, the houses are usually scattered over a considerable area, with field and kitchen gardens intervening between single homesteads or groups of houses. Though two or three houses may stand in a line, they seldom face each other, and it is usual for all the houses of a village to face in roughly the same direction. A modification of this pattern occurs only in Namche Bazar, where the houses built against the slopes of a natural amphitheatre facing its centre and lowest point stand in a horseshoe-like formation.

In every main village there is either a *gompa*, a Buddhist temple, or failing this, a building referred to as *mani*, which contains a giant prayer-wheel with sufficient space between it and the wall to enable devotees to circumambulate the wheel. The walls of such a building, like those of a *gompa*, are usually decorated with frescoes of a sacred character. Other religious structures found in such villages, but occasionally also in subsidiary settlements, are the stupa-like *chorten*, locally known as *baudha*, and *mani*-walls surmounted by stone-slabs each carved with an inscription of religious nature in Tibetan script. Some villages boast of a free standing village-gate, a square structure whose interior walls and ceiling bear sacred paintings in vivid colours. The state of preservation of such a *kani* is usually indicative of the villagers' general interest in religious matters, because its maintenance is not the responsibility of any individual family. The *kani* of Khumjung, for instance, was in 1983 in such a state that hardly anything of the frescoes was left, and this in a village which included several householders of considerable wealth. We shall see, however, that many of the householders had

commitments in Kathmandu, where they spent far more time than in Khumjung.

Traditionally, there were no secular public buildings in a village, for the Sherpas were accustomed to accommodate travellers and traders in their own houses. Hence there was no need for a rest house or *dharamsula* of the type found in many Hindu villages of Nepal. The growth of tourism has created a need for such rest-houses and the Sherpas, never slow to grasp a commercial chance, have constructed houses specifically designed to serve as inns for foreign travellers. Namche Bazar is full of "lodges" providing dormitory accommodation as well as food. In Khumjung there are now two modest houses, close to the path leading to Tengboche, where tourists can stay.

A main village comprises not only homesteads and the individually owned gardens, fields and meadows, but also the common pastures belonging to the whole village community. Such common land extends from the cultivated area as far as the boundary which divides the land of one village from that of another. According to the traditional system, the rights of a village community extended also to the forest-growth within the boundaries of the village land. We shall see in Chapter 4 that the Sherpas had devised an elaborate procedure to preserve the timber resources of such village forests. Since the nationalization of forests this right has been abolished and with it the local system of safeguarding the scarce resources of wood.

The use of pasture land surrounding a village is open to all villagers, both for grazing their cattle and for cutting grass to be stored as fodder for the winter. Only pastures surrounding the cultivated area from which the village council can banish all cattle during certain times of the year can strictly be called village land. The members of a village community may also graze their cattle on pastures much more distant from the main settlement, but this right is not exclusive, for members of several villages share in the use of such pastures. It is on such pastures that many of the subsidiary settlements known as *yorsa* are situated. These are not mere extensions of the one or other main village, but settlements where members of

several villages may hold property in houses and small cultivated plots, and hence enjoy equal rights. The families congregated in such a settlement at any particular time are not a section of a village-community and disperse again after a few weeks co-residence in the same locality.

The ownership of houses and land in *yorsa* settlements is of value only to breeders of live-stock. In order to be near their yak on the high pastures, cattle-owners have to build or acquire houses in remote hill-regions. The necessity to feed the yak on hay during the winter months leads them to wall-in meadows where hay can be stored for use at a time when the pastures are covered with snow.

The purpose of *gunsas*-settlements is different. In the milder climate of these relatively low-lying and sheltered places, potatoes can be planted earlier and hence ripen sooner than those in the fields of the main villages. This enables the Sherpas to spread the agricultural work over a longer period and to have new supplies of their basic food several weeks before the main harvest. An additional advantage of ownership of houses and land in *gunsas*-settlements is the possibility of keeping cattle and letting it graze on nearby slopes at a time when the main villages with their ripening crops are still closed to all live-stock.

The *yorsa* and *gunsas* settlements serve the most economic use of a family's available labour force, for they make it possible to spread work over a long period and in several localities. This was useful at a time when the Sherpas devoted most of their energies to agriculture and animal husbandry, and arranged their trading journeys so as to remain free for the demands of these two activities. But now many Sherpas engage for the greater part of the year in work connected with tourism and the timing of such work depending on the number of tourists requiring guides and porters is usually beyond their control. Hence there is often not enough labour in the villages, and most families no longer command the necessary manpower needed to utilize most advantageously the economic possibilities of *yorsa* and *gunsas* land-holdings. This became obvious when in 1983 I revisited some of the *gunsas* settlements near Khumjung. Teshinga, the largest of these contained in

1957 twenty-six houses belonging to people of Khumjung and Kunde. By 1983 their numbers had decreased, some were in ruins and much of the land was no longer under cultivation. I was told that the owners no longer had the labour to cultivate in Teshinga as well as in their main villages.

Families owning herds of yak must maintain their houses in *yorsa* settlements, but since few of the men now spend the greater part of the year in Khumbu, it is not usual any more for whole families to move during the monsoon months to one of their *yorsa*, and in many cases women have to look after the yak even when they are on the high pastures.

Distinct from the *yorsa* settlements with their solid stone-built houses are primitive encampments known as *resa*. These structures consist of a crudely built stone wall and a temporary roof of bamboo matting or yak-hair blankets. They serve the herdsmen as shelters in places where they have no solid houses, but where it is convenient to graze the cattle for a few days in a year. Many *resa* are found at fairly low levels close to main villages where young boys can look after the cattle during the day and adults go there only for the night to be near their animals in the event of an attack by wolves or leopards.

House s

All Sherpa houses are constructed solidly of timber and stone. In Khumbu there is little variety in the style and pattern of buildings except for the distinction between the single-storeyed houses of the poorer people and the far more numerous double-storeyed buildings of wealthier families. The percentage of double-storeyed houses has for long been on the increase. In 1953 old men told me that in their childhood the majority of houses had been single-storeyed, but by 1957 only 25 out of the 93 houses of Khumjung were single-storeyed and most of these belonged to poor immigrants from Tibet. By 1971 several of these buildings had been rebuilt as double-storeyed houses. When I revisited the village in 1983 I found only a few single-storeyed houses, all others having two storeys. This change is attributed to the fact that poor landless men, who lived in small single-storeyed houses, can now earn

cash by working for tourists and are hence in a position to rebuild their houses or abandon an old single-storeyed house and build a new double-storeyed one.

All houses consist of a framework of wooden posts and walls built of crudely fashioned stones. The cracks between the stones are filled with mud and the resultant rough surface is white-washed. A framework of strong roughly dressed posts carries the large floor-boards of the upper storey as well as the roof. Sherpa carpenters do not use nails, but they know how to fashion lasting joints. On the wooden rafters of the slightly inclined roof rest broad pine-planks weighed down by large heavy stones in a manner reminiscent of houses in the Swiss and Austrian alps.

All except the smallest single-storeyed houses have two front doors set into strong wooden frames made of several pieces and sometimes decorated with geometric carvings. One of these doors leads into a windowless room unconnected with the rest of the house. Though intended as a store for fire-wood, potatoes and implements, this room may also be occupied by the poor in need of temporary shelter or by recent arrivals. As long as Tibetans could freely cross the border into Khumbu, seasonal labourers often stayed in such ground-floor rooms for the duration of their employment. Many refugees during the exodus from Tibet at the time of the Chinese invasion were sheltered in such rooms.

The main front door gives access to the main part of the house. It leads into the dark ground-floor, where at night and in inclement weather the Sherpas keep *zhum*, the female yak-cow hybrids, retained in the village for milk as well as young calves in need of care. The floor of this space is covered with a thick layer of dry leaves collected in the forest and spread to be saturated and mixed with the dung of cattle and to be ultimately used as valuable manure in potato and buckwheat fields.

From the ground-floor, which usually serves also as a wood-store, steep stairs lead to the first floor and the main room of the house. In the homes of rich families this room is up to fifty feet long and some six feet broad. Here the owners cook, eat, sleep, receive guests and perform most

household chores. Artisans called in to tailor clothes, make boots or weave, often use one of the corners as a work-space. At weddings or other festive gatherings in a big house such a room will accommodate as many as a hundred guests. There is little variety in the furnishings and the placing of the hearth, main bench and bedstead follows a constant pattern.

On the front side of the house there are two or three windows. In the past these could be closed only with wooden shutters and were usually kept open during the day to let in the light, however low the outside temperature. In some houses there were also wooden gratings set into the windows and covered with a strong, parchment-like paper which, though not transparent, let in some light. While in the 1950s window-panes were still unknown in Khumbu, by 1971 some enterprising men had brought small panes from Kathmandu and fitted them into the windows of their houses. This innovation has rapidly spread, for the transport of the glass was facilitated by the numerous flights of Royal Nepal Airlines from Kathmandu to Lukla. Today most houses of Khumjung and Kunde have window-panes and hence the rooms have sufficient light even in the coldest weather.

A constant feature of all Sherpa houses is a long window-bench running along the front wall of the main room. One or more low tables in front of this bench is used to serve food and drink to men of the house and male guests. The traditional seat of the head of the household is the one nearest to the fire-place. When guests are entertained they sit in the order of rank determined by seniority and such criteria as wealth and prominence in village affairs. Women never sit on the window-bench but squat on rugs or skins around the hearth.

The hearth consists of a square of hardened clay let into the wooden floor-boards and an elevated clay-structure built against the front wall where cooking pots can be kept warm. On the open fire-place there used to be one or more iron stands or several stones to support pots or frying pans. As the open fire consumed much wood, which is now in short supply, many families have installed a modified hearth made of a kerosene tin. The sides of the tin are partly cut out and the

fuel is lit inside the remaining frame which has the effect of concentrating the flame on the cooking vessel placed on the tin. While economizing on fire-wood, this contraption deprives those sitting round the hearth of much of the glow of the fire. In Khumjung the scarcity of wood has become very noticeable. Whereas previously fires were kept going whenever people were in the house and in need of warmth, there is now a tendency to light fires only when food has to be cooked and even then people use as little fuel as possible.

Built against the back and side walls of the house are wooden shelves often attractively carved. In the houses of wealthy families these shelves carry long rows of shining copper and brass vessels. Except for two or three large cauldrons required for storing water and normally situated opposite the hearth, these vessels are seldom used and serve mainly as decoration. Wooden chests containing stores stand along the other parts of the walls.

At the end of the room close to the entrance is an alcove containing a large raised bedstead on which the couple owning the house sleep. The other members of the family as well as guests spread their bedding on the floor-boards or on the window-bench.

In many large houses a door, which leads from the far end of the main room into a more or less square room, known as *lha-khang*, god's-room, which serves as a private chapel. Here an altar with one or more statues of Buddha or Bodhisattvas stand opposite the window. Bearing the usual ritual objects, the altar is often flanked by shelves containing collections of sacred scriptures. In the houses of rich men *thanka*, painted scrolls, hang on walls and posts. Many chapels have wood panelling of the walls covered with religious frescoes in no way inferior to the wall paintings in monasteries and village temples.

It is characteristic of the Sherpas' traditional values that men who led a comparatively frugal life and at meals ate little more than potatoes in one or other form, spent several thousand rupees on the decoration of their private chapels. For a first-rate painter, such as Kapa Kalden, took many months to complete the work on the frescoes and the altar, and during

this time he received a daily wage as well as his food. In recent years, however, there has been a decrease in the efforts and resources spent on religious enterprises. Neither in 1971 nor in 1983 did I see any freshly painted frescoes in the houses of laymen, and the only newly decorated chapel was in the residence of the abbot of Tengboche.

Of late there have not been many sales of houses in Khumjung and Kunde, but I was told that houses have become very expensive and that a large house, such as that of Konje Chunbi, which in the 1960s would have cost about Rs 5,000—Rs 8,000, would now cost about Rs 45,000. Big houses in Namche Bazar are being valued at Rs 70,000 to Rs 80,000. Owing to the scarcity of timber in Khumbu, planks and posts have to be brought from Pharak. One plank some eight feet long costs Rs 40 in Jorsale from where it would have to be transported to Khumbu. The wages of craftsmen have also risen and a carpenter charges Rs 50 per day plus food. One of my Sherpa acquaintances, now settled in Kathmandu, stated that houses and land are as expensive in Khumbu as they are in Kathmandu. A medium sized field in Khumjung recently changed hands for Rs 8,000.

Some wealthy Sherpas recently renovated their old houses and in some cases added new wings. Thus the Khumjung house of Ongcho Lama has been given a new roof of iron sheets painted green, and a large room on the first floor has been turned into a chapel with new wood panelling and an elaborately carved altar. The chapel occupying one of the corners of the house has now four windows with panes. Ongcho Lama spoke about employing a painter to paint the altar and decorate the panelled walls with frescoes. The legal owner of this house is Ongcho Lama's son Kalden, who inherited it from his late mother, the first wife of Ongcho Lama. Kalden who runs a tourist agency and has built himself a magnificent modern house at Bodhnath outside Kathmandu, rarely visits Khumjung, but helped financing the improvements in the house now occupied by Ongcho Lama and his second wife.

The houses in *yersa* settlements are relatively cheap, for as the number of Sherpas keeping herds of yak has decreased in recent years there is not much demand for such houses. In

the 1970s houses in such settlements were sold at prices between Rs 600 and Rs 1,600 according to the size of the holdings which went with them. There is at present no market for houses in *gunsa* settlements, where some of the existing houses remain unoccupied or have fallen into decay.

The economic framework

During the past twenty years the economy of the Sherpas has undergone revolutionary changes and for anyone visiting Khumbu today for the first time it would be difficult to envisage the economic climate which prevailed there even one generation ago. Yet present developments cannot be understood unless we know the basis from which they emerged during recent times. In my book *Himalayan Traders* I have given a detailed description of the agriculture and animal husbandry of the Sherpas as I observed them in the 1950s and during a brief visit in 1971. While there had been virtually no change between 1953 and 1957 and the conditions I found in 1971 were still very similar to those prevailing in 1957, the scene in 1983 had dramatically changed.

For the benefit of those readers who have no access to *Himalayan Traders* I propose to combine a brief account of the traditional Sherpa economy with my observation of recent developments. Climatic and certain environmental conditions have remained constant, and it is therefore reasonable to begin with a description of the limitations set by nature to man's economic endeavours at altitudes close on 14,000 feet.

For half of the year the soil of the whole of Khumbu is normally frozen and agricultural operations inevitably remain at a standstill. While the people of Solu and Pharak are able to grow winter crops of wheat and barley in addition to the buckwheat, maize and potatoes grown as summer crops, the people of Khumbu must content themselves with a single cropping season. The choice of crops which can be grown in their valleys is limited to potatoes, buckwheat, radishes and a leafy spinach-like vegetable. Only in the high valley of Dingboche, where irrigation is available, is it possible to grow also a bearded short-stemmed barley.

Potatoes form the mainstay of Sherpa diet and the economy

of Khumbu depends to so great an extent on the cultivation of this one crop that it is difficult to imagine conditions before potatoes found their way into Khumbu. Yet it is certain that the potato was not known in the Himalayas until comparatively recent times. The two most likely sources of its spread into Eastern Nepal are gardens of Europeans in Darjeeling and the garden of the British embassy in Kathmandu. Sir Joseph D. Hooker found potatoes in the region of Yangma on the western side of Kanchenjunga as early as 1848. He remarked that those had only recently been introduced. No documentary evidence regarding the arrival of potatoes in Khumbu exists, and most Sherpas are ignorant of the fact that there was ever a time when no potatoes were grown in Khumbu. In 1953 Sun Tensing of Phortse, then a man in his mid-forties, told me that as a young boy he knew an old man of over ninety of whom it was said that he had been the first to plant potatoes on Phortse land. I was also shown the plot where these first potatoes were supposed to have been grown. As Phortse is the most conservative village in Khumbu, it is not unlikely that in other parts of the region potato cultivation began about the middle of the nineteenth century. This tallies with the statement of an 83-year-old woman of Thami who told me in 1953 that potatoes were brought to her village by people of her father's generation.

Compared with buckwheat, potatoes have obvious advantages. In the light sandy soil of Khumbu they thrive well and a field of potatoes yields much more food than the same acreage sown with buckwheat in a good year. Particularly on marginal land potatoes are the only economic crop, and it is unimaginable that villages such as Khumjung and Kunde could have supported their present population in the absence of the ample and dependable basic food-supply provided by the potato.

The population of Khumbu was a fraction of its present size until the middle of the nineteenth century and it would seem that the great increase of the last hundred years coincided with the introduction and spread of the potato. In 1836 there were in the whole of Khumbu only 169 households compared with the 596 households in 1957. No great imagination

is required to realize that the introduction of a new crop and the spectacular population growth may have been connected. The improved food-supply is likely to have reduced mortality among the Sherpas themselves, and the availability of a surplus of food may have attracted immigrants from Tibet. The usual explanation Khamba settlers gave for their move from Tibet to Khumbu was the ampler food and easier life which they found in the Sherpa country.

In the 1950s potatoes cut into slices and dried were regularly exported to Tibet. Since this export has stopped, the Sherpas of Khumbu have begun to sell potatoes to the people of the middle ranges and even of the Terai. In April 1983 I saw many Sherpas with *zopkiok* heavily laden with bags of potatoes moving southwards on the track from Namche Bazar to Lukla. As rice bought with cash earned from tourism had become the main stay of Sherpa diet, there was a surplus of potatoes available for export.

In Khumjung the agricultural season begins normally at the end of March, or after a particularly severe winter in April. The members of households who owned fields at Teshinga used to go there to dig up the ground in preparation for the planting of potatoes. Now the shortage of labour has limited the use of the fields at Teshingan and when I passed the place at the end of March 1983 I saw few signs of agricultural activities, but one of the houses had been converted into a way-side tea-shop where tourists and presumably also some Sherpa travellers were sold refreshments.

That year there was some snow in late March and the ploughing and digging of fields in Khumjung did not begin until the last days of the month. But before the planting of potatoes can begin, manure has to be carried to the fields. The manure from the part of a house used as a cattle-shed is handled mainly by women. But for the unpleasant work of emptying latrines and carrying the leaves mixed with human excrement special labourers are hired at high wages. As long as Tibetan seasonal workers were available the poorest of these engaged in such work and in 1971 most of it was done by three Khambas whom most of the householders engaged for this task, paying about Rs 30 for the removal of the contents

of one latrine. By 1983 these men were no longer in Khumjung and the villagers employed other outside workers, mainly Magar, for the work none of the Sherpas wanted to do.

The manure is dumped on the fields at regular intervals and then spread as groups of workers dig up the ground with iron hoes. This work as well as the planting of the potatoes was always done by women during the last days of March and April. There is, however, a great difference in the organization of this work in the past and present. As long as Tibetan seasonal workers came to Khumbu, landowners experienced little difficulty in hiring as many workers as they wished by paying them a modest wage plus food. At that time women of good status did no more than supervise the work of hired labourers, but now one can see wives of wealthy men wielding hoes and working in a line with girls organized in *ngalok*, gangs formed on a basis of reciprocal help during the agricultural season. Outsiders are hired whenever possible. Thus in April 1983 Ongcho Lama engaged one Magar and one Rai from Solu to help in the planting of potatoes. They were given food, shelter and Rs 7 per day, and Ongcho Lama told me that Sherpas would have demanded a wage of Rs 15 and food.

When the planting of potatoes is over, the people of Khumjung begin ploughing the fields on which buckwheat is to be sown. The ploughing is done with pairs of yak or *zopkiok*, cross-breeds between yak and cows. But the ploughing with yoked animals is a fairly recent innovation, and until the 1930s all ploughing was done by teams of men. Even in 1957 I saw such teams of four men dragging the ploughs across the fields while one man guided the plough share and a woman walked behind sowing buckwheat.

Potatoes can be planted year after year in the same place and in many of the high summer settlements this is the only crop ever grown. But buckwheat is usually grown alternating with potatoes. The planting of potatoes and the sowing of buckwheat are usually completed in the first half of May, and families who own land in *yorsa* settlements and can find the labour, then set out and plant potatoes in their high-altitude plots. The great advantage of growing potatoes at different

altitudes, is that neither excessive rain nor drought is likely to ruin all the crops growing in different times. But the absence of most men on tourist work during large parts of the agricultural season makes it difficult to exploit this advantage to the full. Already in the 1950s labour was sometimes scarce during rush periods, and now many families have no other choice than to neglect part of the holdings and concentrate on the fields near their houses in the main village. After the harvest potatoes are stored in deep pits dug in the fields where they are better protected against the cold than inside the houses.

The scarcity of men is particularly noticeable at harvest time, for in past years there were usually at least two men in every group of harvesters. As the harvest of buckwheat takes place in October it just coincides with the beginning of the tourist season when most able-bodied men engage in work with groups of tourists.

While the harvest of buckwheat is still in progress most sunny days are used for hay-making. The grass in walled-in privately owned meadows near the village, as well as on nearby common hill slopes has to be cut and dried for storage. For this work hired labourers have to be paid extra wages because it has to be done at peak periods when other agricultural operations make heavy demands on the labour market.

There are considerable variations in the amount of effort devoted by individual families to the cultivation of their land, for not all families cultivate land in subsidiary villages. Most of the agricultural work is done by teams of men or women. Only in exceptional cases do individuals work singly or by twos, one of the exceptions being a man with a team of *zopkiok* ploughing the ground after the harvest or a ploughman drawing furrows ahead of his wife who walks behind and sows the buckwheat. When planting, weeding or harvesting potatoes or when reaping buckwheat or barley Sherpas prefer to work in groups ranging between four and twelve individuals. On such occasions they often sing or gossip and joke. What begins as an economic activity assumes the character of a social entertainment. Even when digging up potatoes which is hard work and may last from morning till dusk, the workers are usually in high spirits, and songs from many groups of

women float all day long through the vally. Young girls who form many of the labour gangs may stop and dance for a few minutes in the field, or play about chasing each other, and amuse themselves and the young men present with all sorts of horseplay.

In the past the time of harvest was an occasion for jollification when in the late evenings there was singing and dancing in the houses. For the people who for many weeks had been in their high *yersa* settlements enjoyed the wider company of the village society. But the absence of most young men on tourist treks or mountaineering expeditions has now dampened the spirit of such times, and one rarely hears the sound of dancing and singing. The hard work, mainly done by women alone, has remained but the accompanying mirth is gone.

While recent years have seen considerable changes in the human resources available for the cultivation of the Sherpas' land, there have been no major shifts in the holdings owned by individual Sherpa families, and the upheavals in the economic system of Khumbu have not modified the distribution of land-holdings. The pattern of land-ownership which I recorded in Khumjung and Kunde in 1957 and outlined in *Himalyan Traders* (pp. 33-36) has largely held good in 1983. Although some land has changed hands through inheritance most remained within the same families, and even men who have established secondary households in Kathmandu did not sell their land in Khumbu but are getting it cultivated by other members of their family. There is in Sherpa tradition some precedent for such a procedure, for a young man who on entering a monastery was given a share in his parental land, retained the title to it but let it out to be tilled by brothers or other kinsmen who undertook to provide him with the supplies he needed to support himself at the monastery.

Animal husbandry

To own a herd of yak used to be the aim of many socially ambitious men, for the prestige value of yak ownership was unparalleled in the Sherpa society. Yet it would be a mistake to regard the Sherpas foremost as a pastoral people. While every Sherpa family engages to some extent in agriculture as

long as at least some of the members live in Khumbu, the breeding of yak was always only one of the several economic choices, and there were wealthy men who preferred to apply their energy to trade rather than to animal husbandry. Some idea of the place of cattle-breeding in the traditional economy of the Khumbu region can be gained from a census which I compiled in 1957. No figures for 1983 are available, but an enumeration of the various types of cattle was undertaken in 1978 and this is contained in an unpublished paper entitled "Impacts on a high mountain ecosystem: Recommendation for action in Sagarmatha National Park" by Inger Marie Bjønness.

Yak (*bos grunniens*) is a long-haired bovine typical of Tibet and other highlands of Central Asia. The Sherpas refer only to the males as *yak* while they call the females *nak*. Yak can be crossed with other cattle such as the Tibetan *bosaunus typicus*, the bulls of which the Sherpas call *lang*. The resulting male cross-breeds are known in Sherpa as *zopkiok* and the female hybrids as *zhum*.

In 1957 I counted in Khumbu a total of 39 *yak* and 2086 *nak*, 387 *zopkiok* and 101 *zhum*. The number of *lang* was 70. The corresponding figures in 1978 were 469 *yak*, 1255 *nak*., 369 *zopkiok* and 369 *zhum*, and 62 *lang*.

The increase in the number of male yak was attributed to the Sherpas' present use of *yak* as well as *zopkiok* for the transport of the luggage of tourists as well as the large number of loads now carried to Namche Bazar to supply the stores of merchants. *Zopkiok* are still being sold to Tibet where they are much in demand as pack animals but never locally bred. The drop in the number of *nak* and the corresponding increase in that of *zhum* is explained by the Sherpas' present preference for these milk-yielding animals which need not be taken to the high pastures, but can be kept for most of the year in the main villages. As *zhum* give more milk than *nak* and can stay at lower altitudes, they are now considered more useful than *nak*.

The inflationary trends in the economy of Nepal have affected also the price of cattle. In the 1950s and 1960s *yak* and *nak* could be bought for a few hundred rupees and traders who went to Tibet could buy there young *nak* for as little as

Rs 120, while a *zapkiok* could be sold in Tibet for about Rs 300. In 1983 the prices of cattle current in Khumbu were approximately as follows:

<i>yak</i>	Rs 2,500—3,000
<i>nak</i>	Rs 2,500
<i>zopkiok</i>	Rs 3,500
<i>zhum</i>	Rs 2,800—4,000
sheep	Rs 200—600
goat	Rs 200—600
horse	Rs 2,000—3,000

There are two types of cross-breeds for different uses. The off-springs of *lang* and *nak* are called *zopkiok dimzi* and *zhum dimzi*. These cross-breeds are used mainly in high altitudes, and are hence more numerous in Khumbu. For journeys to Tibet, which involve crossing the Nangpa La (18,000 feet) only *zopkiok dimzi* are suitable, for they can stand cold weather and snow almost as well as *yak*. The off-spring of *yak* and ordinary cows are called *zopkiok urang* and *zhum urang*. These animals can stand the warm weather of lower zones and are hence suitable for Solu and for carrying loads as far as the Indian border.

Apart from the sale of *zopkiok* and *zhum* calves to Tibet and to people of Solu, the Sherpas derive substantial profits from the sale of butter, large quantities of which are required for domestic as well as ritual use. Butter is consumed as part of all the more highly prized items of their diet, including the salted "Tibetan" tea. It is used as fuel in the butter-lamps lit in the course of Buddhist ceremonies, and is moulded into various shapes for the decoration of *torma*, the sacrificial dough figures. In Khumbu there is seldom a surplus of butter. Most of the butter which in the past was exported to Tibet came from Solu, where the pastures remain free of snow during the greater part of the winter and *zhum* can thus be milked much longer than in Khumbu. In Solu a *zhum* is supposed to yield annually an average of 40-45 lbs of butter, while in Khumbu the yield per *zhum* is no more than 20-25 lbs. A *nak* yields only about 15 lbs of butter per year.

Another major produce of *yak* of both sexes is their long

hair and the fine wool which comes off easily and is plucked at the time when the animals shed their winter coat. The long coarse hair is used for weaving blankets and for making ropes.

As devout Buddhists Sherpas usually do not kill animals, but they eat the meat of those slaughtered by others or dying accidentally. In the past *hyawo* butchers of low social status from Tibet, were employed to slaughter *yak* as well as sheep. But now this task is performed by Magars or members of low Hindu castes who feel no compunction to kill goats and sheep, though not necessarily *yak* which in Hindu eyes count as cows.

The owners of *yak* herds have to move from pasture to pasture. A detailed account of these seasonal migrations, as they occurred in the 1950s, is contained in my *Himalayan Traders* (pp. 52-56). Today these migrations are much less extensive, for in the absence of men free to spend large periods in Khumbu, it is in many families the women who have to take these animals and other cattle to the high pastures, and they cannot spend a great deal of time moving from *yersa* to *yersa* because their fields in the main village need attention.

With the new ways of earning by the Sherpas engaged in the tourist industry cattle breeding, which in the past was the main source of cash earnings of many families, plays no longer a central role in the economy of Khumbu. Yet the need for pack animals has increased rather than diminished, and so it is not likely that within the foreseeable future the Sherpas of Khumbu will give up the breeding of *yak*.

Trade

By agriculture and animal husbandry alone the Sherpas of Khumbu could not have attained the standard of living which they enjoyed long before the first tourists entered Nepal and mountaineering expeditions offered young men well paid employment as high altitude porters. The wealth some Sherpa families had then accumulated stemmed largely from their skill in exploiting their geographical position as middlemen in the trade between Tibet and the lower regions of Nepal south

and southeast of Khumbu and Pharak. Straddling one of the main trade routes across the Central Himalayas, the Sherpas of Namche Bazar and other villages of Khumbu were ideally placed to take a hand in the exchange of agricultural products of the middle ranges of Nepal against Tibetan salt, wool and live-stock. Dwelling normally at altitudes between 11,000 and 15,000 feet and wearing warm woollen clothes, they could easily cross the Nangpa La at 18,000 feet, carrying trade-goods in both directions either on their backs or on *yak* and *zopkiok*. Their monopoly of this trade had been confirmed by orders of the Rana government of Nepal, and in Tibet the Sherpa traders were welcomed with open arms. The commodities they took to Tibet included not only various kinds of food grain, but also clarified butter, dried potatoes, unrefined sugar, vegetable dyes, incense, handmade paper, buffalo hides, and cotton cloth. In exchange they received tea, salt, sheepskins, furs, woollen cloth, carpets, Chinese silks, hats and boots, silver ornaments, porcelain cups, hand-printed religious books, and various ritual objects. Apart from the trade in these goods, there was also a regular exchange of cattle, *zopkiok* being exported to Tibet and *nak* brought in from there. Large sums of money were invested in such transactions.

At that time there was a fundamental difference between the business of the big merchants domiciled in Namche Bazar, with trade as their main occupation, and the ordinary farmers who undertook two or three trading trips a year. The latter went on such expeditions to obtain commodities for their own consumption, even though they always expected to make some profit by the resale of part of their purchases. From Tibet they brought salt and wool, and from the lower regions of Nepal rice, wheat, millet and maize, some of which they needed to supplement their own agricultural production. Such farmers engaging in petty trade did not use pack animals but carried most of the goods on their own backs or employed members of their families for their transport. The big merchants, on the other hand, travelled with large caravans of *yak* or *zopkiok*, and often invested thousands of rupees in a single expedition. Longstanding personal contacts in Tibet and

India provided them with reliable business partners in distant areas, and some Sherpas even had relatives in Dingri, Shigatse and Lhasa.

The standard of living of these merchants was high in the sense that their houses were well built and richly furnished. They employed painters to decorate private chapels and their wives owned expensive jewels and clothes. But their day-to-day life was simple and their diet similar to that of the less well-off families. On their journeys they led as hardy and frugal a life as any other Sherpa traveller.

The commercial system which had existed until 1959 broke down when China occupied Tibet and the border between Nepal and Tibet was closed. The Sherpas' Tibetan trade partners lost their possessions and had to flee their country. After some years the Chinese authorities re-opened the frontier and allowed a limited trade in a few basic commodities. But the Sherpas crossing the Nangpa La were not permitted to trade with Tibetans and had to dispose of their wares at the Chinese trade depot in Dingri where prices were unpredictable with no possibility to bargain. These conditions are still prevailing even though from time to time there are some minor relaxations.

Deprived of their profitable trade with Tibet, the Sherpas would have been in dire straits had it not been for the fact that the decline of trade coincided with the rapid development of tourism and Himalayan mountaineering. The cash paid by tourists for services and provisions, and the wages earned by high altitude porters on expeditions largely made up for the loss of earnings from trade. The merchants of Namche Bazar who had preserved some of their capital invested it in the establishment of tourist lodges and shops, stocking large quantities of tinned food, warm clothing, photographic articles, picture postcards and a variety of locally produced articles likely to be purchased by tourists as souvenirs. The merchants' experience and business acumen enabled them to re-orientate their trading activities towards Kathmandu, and to supply Khumbu with manufactured goods carried from there by porters or transported by air as far as Lukla, and there by porters or *zopkiok* as far as Namche Bazar.

The goods destined for Khumbu are by no means exclusively for consumption by tourists. This can be seen at the weekly market at Namche, where the Sherpas spend large amounts of cash for the purchase of supplies of food brought by Rais and other cultivators from the middle ranges. While in the past rice was eaten by the Sherpas only on feast days, it has now become an ordinary item of diet, and large quantities of rice are now purchased at weekly markets. Wealthy men also buy rice and other grain on speculation, store it in their houses, and sell it to the other Sherpas when prices rise, occasionally making profits of up to 33 per cent within half a year. Some of the traders accustomed to taking risks in their long distance transactions in Tibet, now show their spirit of enterprise by making use of modern means of transport. When in 1971 there was a bad harvest in Eastern Nepal, they chartered planes to transport rice and wheat flour from Kathmandu to Lukla. The price in Kathmandu was then Rs 9 per *pathi*, if bought in bulk. In Namche they sold the rice for Rs 20 per *pathi*, leaving them with a handsome profit after paying for the charter and portorage from Lukla to Namche.

Gradually, the merchants of Namche expanded their commercial contacts with Kathmandu, catering to the needs of the Sherpas cut off from their traditional ties with Tibet. Thus cotton fabrics from Kathmandu had to replace the woollen handwoven materials previously brought from Tibet or could be woven in Khumbu from the imported Tibetan raw wool. Similarly, Indian tea replaced the brick tea imported from Tibet.

The scarcity of Tibetan wool came as a blow to the many Sherpa women who used to weave cloth not only to provide their own family with warm clothes but also to gain an income by working for other families and producing materials for sale in Pharak and Solu. The wool from Nepali sheep is not fine and soft enough to be used for the manufacture of clothes. The efforts of the government to introduce Tibetan sheep have been only moderately successful because the climate of Khumbu is too humid for sheep acclimatized to the arid highlands of Tibet.

In the virtual absence of suitable woollen materials no

more traditional men's clothes are being made and it is only at weddings or on other ceremonial occasions that middle aged and old men wear *bakhu*, the Tibetan style coats conserved as cherished heirlooms. Otherwise, they wear all sorts of western clothes such as short over-coats, often with fur collars, or padded down-feather jackets usually obtained from mountaineers, who at the end of an expedition let the Sherpa porters keep their high altitude equipment. Cotton clothes are ill suited for the cold climate of Khumbu and in the attempt to keep warm some men wear two pairs of trousers, one on top of the other, and a variety of shirts and jerseys. In their traditional woollen clothes tailored in Tibetan style, the Sherpas looked dignified, but now their dress is often ragged and a jumble of local and western styles.

The women tend to retain their traditional dress, but they too lack the woollen material to make their long shifts, and hence use cotton cloth instead. Such Tibetan wool as filters to Khumbu is used in making the striped multi-coloured aprons which form the most characteristic part of the Tibetan and Sherpa female attire.

In the cold of the winter sheep-skin coats with the fleece on the inside used to be widely worn. These are now rarely obtainable and the few that come in the market are extremely expensive.

Most of the changes in the economy of the Khumbu Sherpas have been brought about by the development of tourism. As the Sherpas' social life has been deeply affected by the contact with foreign tourists, the problems resulting from the invasion of Khumbu by thousands of tourists will be discussed in a separate chapter.

2

The Sherpa Society

THE structure and organization of Sherpa society conforms in its basic features to a system characteristic of most of the Buddhist Bhotia populations of Nepal. A Sherpa finding him self in a village in Humla, Dolpo or the Mustang region experiences little difficulty in understanding the conduct and customs of the local population, and similarly a man or woman from any of these areas would feel at home in a Sherpa village.

What then have the Sherpas in common with the Bhotias in distant areas? Above all it is the basic homogeneity of a society which differs from the stratified Hindu caste society of Nepal. With one minor exception, traceable to the immigration of low status Khambas from Tibet, all Sherpas are considered of equal status, and there are no barriers preventing social relations between the individual families of an average Sherpa village. The system of patrilineal exogamous clans is also paralleled in other Bhotia societies, and so is the way in which the administration of village affairs is conducted by elected dignitaries performing their tasks in rotation. The following account of the structure of Khumbu society can thus serve as a paradigm for the description of other Bhotia societies of the Nepal Himalayas.

All Sherpas share the tradition of their ancestors' immigration from Tibet, but the time and circumstances of this migration cannot be established with accuracy. In Khumbu so far no written documents relating to the Sherpa history have been traced, but in Solu several clan genealogies were

found containing references to the early fortunes of the Sherpas and particularly their origin in the Kham region of Eastern Tibet and their migration to their present habitat in Nepal. In his book *Geschichte and Sozialordnung der Sherpa*, Michael Oppitz gives a detailed account of these documents on the basis of which he reconstructs the history of the various Sherpa clans. While the data on the emigration of the Sherpas' ancestors from Kham Salmo Gang in Eastern Tibet are not entirely conclusive, the references to their migration across the Nangpa La and their first settlement in Khumbu have a high degree of credibility and are consistent with traceable oral traditions.

According to Oppitz the first migrants into Khumbu belonged to two proto-clans, known as Minyagpa and Thimmi, which later split into the clans which constitute the present Sherpa society. The early documents describe the region on the southern side of the Nangpa La as devoid of human settlements. It was covered with forests and inhabited by numerous species of animals. There were no paths and no bridges across the torrents flowing through the deep gorges. None of the documents mention any encounter between the immigrant Sherpas and populations already settled in the region in question. The only hint that before the arrival of the Sherpas some Rais used parts of Khumbu as grazing land for their sheep is contained in some obscure oral traditions, but these make no mention of any interaction between such Rais and the Sherpa settlers.

The members of the immigrant Minyagpa clan are reported to have first settled in eastern Khumbu, and founded the villages of Phortse and Pangboche. These are still in existence. The descendants of the first Mingyapa settlers became subsequently the founders of new clans such as are still found in Khumbu.

The analysis and interpretation of the genealogies contained in the documents discovered in Solu suggest that during the initial stages of the colonization of Khumbu and Solu by the early Sherpa immigrants, the first villages were single clan settlements. In Solu several villages, such as Thaktu, retained this character until recent times, and Oppitz suggests

that the Solu-Sherpas represent altogether the 'pure' Sherpa society undiluted by later Tibetan settlers intermarrying with the Sherpas of Khumbu. In the latter region there are indeed no single clan settlements and everywhere there is a mixed population consisting of the members of several inter-marrying clans.

Oppitz postulates that in the beginning Khumbu was divided between the immigrants Minyagpa and Thimmi, the latter settling between 1533 and 1550 in the Bhote Kosi valley, roughly between the present villages of Thami and Namche Bazar. Today no trace of such a separation can be found, and all Khumbu villages are multi-clan settlements. There persists, however, the tradition that Khumjung and Kunde were first inhabited by Paldorje, Chusherwa and Jongdomba people, but any idea that historical claims should be reflected in present-day rights is foreign to the Sherpas of our days.

There is a widespread notion that the number of clans constituting the Sherpa society in Khumbu, Pharak and Solu is eighteen, but a list comprising all the clans existing today in these regions runs to the following twenty-one names: Chiawa, Chusherwa, Gardza, Gole, Goparma, Jongdomba, Khambadze, Lakhshindu, Lama, Lhukpa, Mende, Munming, Nawa, Paldorje, Pankarma, Pinasa, Salaka, Shangup, Shire, Sherwa and Thaktu.

The discrepancy between the traditional figure of eighteen and the actual number of clans found at present may be because several clans, though known by different names in different regions, are identical. Thus the clan known as Paldorje in Khumbu is called Salaka in Solu, and the taboo on clan-endogamy applies to Paldorje and Salaka people because they are regarded as consanguinous kinsfolk. Similarly, the clans Gole, Pinasa and Thaktu are considered 'brother-clans' and do not intermarry. There is no socially relevant rank order among clans, all of which are equal. The importance of clan membership underscores the fact that only the members of the above twenty-one clans count as proper Sherpas. More recent immigrants from Tibet, known as Khamba, and settlers of Gurung, Newar or Chetri origin, though assimilated in habits and speech, remain outside the

core of the Sherpa society which is made up of these clans.

The Sherpa term for clan is *rü*, a Tibetan word spelt also *rus*, which has many meanings and is often translated as 'bone'. The members of the same named clan are believed to be of the same 'bone' and hence equal to siblings. The best analysis of the meaning of the term *rü* is contained in Nancy Levin's essay "The theory of *rü* kinship, descent and status in a Tibetan society."¹ The society with which her essay deals is that of the Nyinba of Humla, but her findings relate equally to the Sherpas. The various meanings of *rü* are based on the role of *rü* in procreation and the belief according to which a substance labelled as bone is passed from father to off-spring during the act of intercourse which triggers conception. The sperm in its whiteness is identified with bone, while the soft fleshy and red parts of the child's body are thought to be derived from the mother's uterine blood. The direct bone-to-bone transmission through the father's sperm is believed to be the principal influence on the child's physical make-up. According to Nancy Levine, "this theory is taken further along in the notion that distant ancestors are connected to their present-day descendants through a series of bone/agnatic ties and that all living clan members have bone from the same basic stock."

If such is the belief in the character of *rü*, it is not surprising that persons who do not belong to a Sherpa clan but trace their parentage to Khambas or the miscegenation between Sherpas and members of other ethnic groups cannot meet pure Sherpas on equal terms, because they do not have the same physical constitution.

As groups of people of pure heredity, the clans appear as distinct units in a number of ritual matters. Thus the members of every clan recognize certain mountain gods as their specific protective deities and clan-members resident in the same village come together on some occasions for the worship of such clan-deities. Two examples of such locality gods may suffice: *Pari-lha-tsen karbu*, associated with a mountain in

1. In *Asian Highland Societies*, ed. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, New Delhi, 1981.

Khumbu, is worshipped by the Paldorje clan. Tonak-lha-tsenkarbu, associated with an area north of Gokyo is worshipped by the Thaktu clan.

All such deities worshipped by specific clans fall into the category of *zidag*, lords of the soil, and as such they occupy an inferior position in the Buddhist rank order of deities. They are the attendants of Khumbu-yülha, the principal locality god of the whole of Khumbu. On occasions when Khumbu-yülha is invoked, the lamas invoke also his twelve attendants, and among them the deities of the clans of Khumbu. The main rites when the clan-deities are worshipped are known as *lhachetu*. On such an occasion the clan-members resident in a village gather in the house of a senior member and participate in the worship. There is, however, no firm organization to arrange for the performance of such clan-rites, for the Sherpa clans have no officials or clan-priests to organize the cooperation of clan-members on a permanent basis. There exists the link of common recognition and worship of the same deity, and hence a vague feeling of solidarity between the members of a clan. While the membership of a Sherpa clan does not involve any definite obligation other than the observance of the rule of exogamy, it is of supreme importance as being the symbol of a person's status within the core of Sherpa society.

Numerous other inhabitants of Khumbu, closely resembling the Sherpas in language and customs, and largely indistinguishable in appearance are referred to as Khamba, a name strictly suggesting an origin in the Tibetan province of Kham, but used, in fact, to describe any immigrant from a region north of the great Himalayan range. Though the Sherpas have the tendency to feel superior to Khambas, for all practical purposes Khambas form part of Sherpa society. They can acquire land and houses, marry into Sherpa families, be elected as village officials, and function as lamas and attain even the position of abbot in one of the local monasteries. Considering that all Sherpas are descended from earlier immigrants from Tibet, the prejudice against Khambas is illogical, but it is an attitude which persists even in the present period of social and economic changes. One of the reasons for the

prejudice against Khambas may be that the majority of the Tibetans reaching Khumbu before 1959, the year of the political upheavals in Tibet, had been poor and of low social status even in Tibetan society. Hence the Sherpas understandably felt superior to these seasonal workers whom they employed for the most menial tasks. It is by no means improbable that with the drying-up of this influx of low-status Tibetans the attitude towards Khambas permanently settled in Khumbu will gradually change. But the fact remains that the Khambas have no *rü*, and when asked for their *rü* most Khambas describe themselves simply as Khambas or, in rare cases, give the name of the village of their origin. Thus several Khamba families are known as 'Nedzunga' and 'Penakpa' after two villages in the Dingri district of Tibet. But such pseudo clan-names are in no way equivalent to the clan-names of the Sherpas. They do not refer to exogamous units, for people stemming from the same Tibetan village may freely intermarry.

The situation in Solu is different from that in Khumbu where there are exceedingly rich Khambas among the merchants of Namche Bazar. For in Solu there are only a few Khamba families and none of them can compare in wealth with the leading Sherpa families of Lama clan. According to Sherry B. Ortner, whose fieldwork was done mainly in Junbesi, "marriage between Sherpas and Khambas is supposedly a serious offence (phrased in terms of polluting the Sherpa individual and his or her clan) involving loss of one's status and rights in the Sherpa community" (op. cit. p. 19). In Khumbu there is certainly no objection to intermarriage between Khambas and Sherpas and the danger of pollution occurs only in sexual unions of the Sherpas with persons of the underprivileged class of *khamendeu* status (see below).

Accretions to the original Sherpa society, the inner core of which is composed of the clans with *rü*-names, were far more numerous in Khumbu than in Solu. They consisted not only of immigrant Tibetans, but also of people of Gurung and Newar origin covered by the blanket term Khamba. Even before the recent invasion of Tibetan refugees, some of whom—and particularly lamas—have remained in Khumbu,

several villages had a high percentage of Khamba households, that is, 49 per cent in Khumjung, 33 per cent in Kunde, 37.5 per cent in Phortse and 39 per cent in Pangboche.

The influx of Newar and Chetri blood into the Sherpa society is almost entirely due to marriages and more often casual intercourse between men of these communities and Sherpa women. The latter's children and grand-children are the Newar—or Chetri Sherpas found in several villages of Pharak and to a lesser extent of Khumbu. It is too early to say whether contacts with western tourists had similar results, but we shall see that there are already several marriages of Sherpa men with western women. Such couples, however, usually do not live in Solu-Khumbu but settle in Kathmandu or go to live in Europe.

In recent years the ethnic structure of the Khumbu population has been changed also by the temporary stationing of many Nepali men in the police, military units and civil government employment. While in 1970 the Nepali population was only 84 it had by 1982 increased to 339, which represents a growth of 303.6 per cent during a period in which the Sherpa population had grown only by 5.7 per cent. But since we are mainly concerned with the structure of Sherpa society, we will ignore the Nepali component.

Ideally Sherpa society, is unstratified, and in this respect it differs both from the Hindu caste society and from Nyinba society subdivided into two status categories (Levine, op. cit. p. 34) and from the Bhotia society of Mustang (cf. *Himalayan Traders*, p. 151-152). As long as the Sherpa clans were the only population of Solu-Khumbu, their society was undoubtedly egalitarians. Status differences developed after the settlement of Khambas, and particularly of people of a class which was regarded inferior even in their Tibetan homeland. The people of this inferior class are referred to as *khamendeu*, those 'not of the same mouth'. Nancy Levine mentions that among the Nyinbas "eating together" involves the sharing of plates and utensils, and hence acts which result in a sharing of oral secretions. Nyinbas say that people who have similar "bone" have similar physical constitutions and thus similar "mouths". She adds that people converse more

often about the qualities of mouth than of bone in the context of daily life. The Sherpa terms *khamendeu* and *khadeu*, that is those of the same mouth, relate to the same concept, and Khambas of *khamendeu* status are comparable to the untouchables of Hindu society, even though the only restriction on commensality is the rule that those of *khamendeu* status may not drink from a cup which in usual Sherpa fashion is passed from mouth to mouth. But they may enter Sherpa houses and people of superior status may eat food cooked and served by people of *khamendeu* status. There is, moreover, a ban on inter-marriage between the two classes, and anyone of superior status who entertains permanent sexual relations with a person of *khamendeu* status loses his or her *khadeu* status and is henceforth treated as *khamendeu* and so are the children from any mixed union.

Another category of people of inferior social status is known as Yemba, a Sherpa term synonymous with the Nepali term Gharti. The Yembas were persons of slave descent. Although slavery in Nepal was officially abolished in 1926, the freed slaves and their children are still considered of very low status. In Khumbu the same restrictions applied to them as to Khambas of *khamendeu* class. There were only a few Yemba families in Khumbu and these intermarried with *khamendeu* Khambas. But members of neither of these inferior classes could become lamas or even study in any religious institution. Yet they were allowed to participate in religious rites like ordinary laymen.

3

Sex, Marriage Patterns and Family Life

IN any discussion of Sherpa marriage and family relations we have to distinguish between the traditional social pattern which I was able to observe in 1953 and 1957, and the developments which have led to the present situation. In the 1950s the social life in Khumbu was still virtually unaffected by outside influences, and it seems reasonable to assume that conduct and attitudes which had persisted until then reflected at least the main principles of the traditional Sherpa code of behaviour. Since then the economic and political conditions of the Sherpas have greatly changed, and the forms of family life have changed with them. While in the remoter villages such as Phortse and Thami the old order still prevails to a considerable degree, in Namche Bazar, Khumjung and Kunde the whole basis of social life has been transformed and is changing continuously even as these lines are written.

Unlike the family life of Nepalese Hindu castes, the social conduct of Sherpas is based on the assumption that every individual has the inherent right to arrange his social life according to his personal inclinations, and that there are no universally recognized principles which may conflict with this right in any particular situation. The Sherpa family is not permanently embedded in a dense web of close kinsfolk whose interest can overrule the wishes and intentions of individuals.

There is among the Sherpas no joint family system, and ideally every married couple should be able to set up an

independent household even if this can be achieved only by vertically partitioning the house of the husband's parents. This general practice is sometimes modified in the case of a youngest son staying on in his parental household in the expectation that he and his wife will ultimately take over the housekeeping and look after a widowed mother or father. In principle, however, the cohabitation of two married couples, even if belonging to different generations, is not considered conducive to domestic peace.

We shall see that the pattern of family life has greatly changed since the involvement of many young and middle aged men in tourist activities is forcing them to leave their villages for long periods. Such men visit their houses in Khumbu perhaps only once or twice a year, and even then stay only for a short time if commitments to trekking agencies compel them to return to Kathmandu and to set out on long journeys to other parts of Nepal. Before dealing in any detail with the consequences of the present tourist boom, it seems advisable to present a sketch of the traditional pattern of Sherpa family life.

Pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations

Even though the Buddhist world view places great emphasis on the ideal of asceticism and numerous Sherpa monks and nuns choose the path of renunciation, there prevails the general opinion that sexual relationships are morally neutral provided those involved are neither bound by vows of celibacy nor by ties of marriage. Hence love-affairs between unmarried boys and girls are common and do not arouse disapproval on the part of their elders.

Girls are free to receive at night the visits of young men and as all the members of a Sherpa family sleep in the one large living room, parents obviously turn a blind eye on their daughters' amorous adventures. A young man will find out the place where a girl usually sleeps and having silently entered the house creep up to her without attracting anyone's attention. Before doing this he will have made sure that his advances will be well received. Work on the fields offers numerous occasions for contacts between young boys and

girls, and at feasts and dances there is little restraint on courtship and a peculiar kind of rough horseplay. Even on ordinary evenings groups of young people of both sexes may be seen chasing one another, wrestling with each other and rolling in heaps of three or four on the ground. The jokes bandied between the young people are very direct and in general no 'shame' attaches to sexual matters. Yet few women are frankly promiscuous, and the average Sherpa girl has probably not more than one or two lovers before she formally accepts a young man as her betrothed. No disgrace is attached to giving birth to an illegitimate child, nor does it materially affect a girl's chances of a satisfactory marriage.

Betrothal

The freedom enjoyed by young people to form attachments naturally results in many marriages which are entirely of the making of the two partners. The parents usually endorse the decision taken by the couple unless there are grave reasons of family prestige to make the proposed match appear unsuitable. Yet there are also parents who forestall any decision of their children and arrange a betrothal which links two important families or is otherwise advantageous. Such a betrothal entered into when the prospective partners are too young to have very definite views of their own is nevertheless unlikely to force an unwilling bride into the arms of a man whom she dislikes. For between the first proposal and the final wedding rite there are several stages when an engagement can be broken off without much loss of face on either side. Parents are unlikely to overrule a daughter's wishes, for according to Buddhist ideas about the nature of sin "to marry a girl who is unwilling is *digba*, sin, for her husband and for the parents who arranged the marriage."

The first formal step in the arrangement of an engagement is a proposal made by the father or a senior kinsman of the prospective bridegroom to the girl's parents. This proposal is called *sodene*, a Sherpa term derived from the Nepali word for 'ask'. It may be made when both bride and bridegroom are still adolescents, or when the two young people have already been lovers for some time. The youth on whose behalf

the proposal is made is usually not present at this formality, even if he has been a frequent visitor to the girl's house. The proposal is accompanied by the presentation of a flask of beer, the acceptance of which signifies a willingness to consider the matter even if a definite answer is delayed until the girl has been consulted. If an informal agreement had already been reached both beer and proposal will be accepted. This gives the young man the right to sleep with the girl and, unless the girl is very young, it is taken for granted that an engaged couple will have sexual relations. The time between the acceptance of a *sodene* proposal and the next formal stage in the conclusion of a marriage may nevertheless extend to several years, though usually it is not more than one year. A child born to a couple betrothed by *sodene* is normally not considered legitimate, and in case of a pregnancy the second major step known as *dem-chang* is speeded up.

Betrothal by *sodene* does not give partners exclusive sexual rights to each other, and a man whose betrothed sleeps with other men has no legal redress. He can, of course, break off the engagement, but few young men take so serious a view of what is little more than an extension of the period of pre-marital sexual freedom, and no one thinks worse of a man who shuts his eyes to casual amorous adventures of his fiancée.

The breaking off of an engagement is not unusual, and in the 1950s there were among the ninety-one households of Khumjung twenty-three cases of formal engagements which did not end in marriage. Now when many young men spend large parts of the year outside Khumbu, with all the opportunities involving affairs with women, both Sherpa and non-Sherpa engagements have become even more unstable.

In the past, proximity of residence played a considerable role in determining the choice of spouses. In the twin settlements of Khumjung and Kunde, of 174 marriages concluded within two generations, 98 were between people of the same cluster and 55 involved men and women of other villages. In Phortse the ratio in the 1950s was 50 marriages within the village against 12 marriages with people of other villages. In 1971 I saw the wedding of a Phortse man and a girl belonging

to one of the wealthiest families of Kunde. For this event a large number of Phortse men and women had come to Kunde. But as Phortse remains one of the most secluded and hence most conservative villages, the preference for endo-village marriages has remained even in the 1980s.

Some of the leading families of Khumbu concluded alliances with members of prominent families of Solu, but there have been very few cases of inter-marriage between Sherpas of Khumbu and Pharak.

Consanguineous kinship links are strong counter indications to the desirability of a marriage. While the rigid rules of clan-exogamy preclude any official union between persons of the same patrilineage, there is also a prejudice against marrying a person of one's mother's lineage (*kalak*). There is no objection, however, to marrying a person of one's mother's clan, as long as common descent cannot be definitely traced.

The marriage of cross-cousins used to be strictly forbidden and is still very rare. But the marriage of a prominent Sherpa of Solu to his father's father's brother's daughter in the 1950s weakened that prohibition. In the genealogies which I recorded there were no marriages between the children of a brother and a sister, and it seems that such a marriage is still regarded unpropitious. The children of two sisters referred to as *mawin*, should not marry either, even if they are of different clans. The reason given for this prohibition is that as a man addresses his mother's sister as *ama* such a union would involve marrying the child of a woman whom he calls 'mother'.

Apart from kinship or affinity which may render a marital union unlawful or undesirable, there is also the artificial link of ritual friendship, which can be a bar to the marriage of people otherwise not related. *Thowu*, ceremonial friends, count as brothers and their children may hence not marry.

Dem-chang

To place the relationship established by the *sodene* procedure on a more solid basis and to give children born to the couple the status of legitimate off-springs, it is necessary to confirm the provisional agreement reached by the two families

involved. This is done by the performance of an elaborate ceremony known as *dem-chang*, beer of tying. This ceremony resembles in many features the final wedding rite and its performance necessitates lengthy preparations and involves the parents of both partners in considerable expenditure. As a large number of guests have to be invited, it means the brewing of much beer and the procurement of vast quantities of rice and other food-stuff.

The festivities take place in the house of the bride's parents, and the groom's kinsmen and friends move there in a solemn procession, both men and women dressed in their best, the men in brocade hats, white shirts, dark blue or brown coats, and coloured boots, and the women in silk blouses of bright colours, long silk or wool dresses, broad silk cummerbunds, and multi-coloured aprons of Tibetan style with gold or silver embroidered corners. The rich women on such occasions wear broad gold head-bands and embossed gold ear-plaques as well as valuable necklaces of beads of coral, turquoise, and semi-precious stone.

If both partners in the proposed marriage live in the same village, the groom's party has only a short way to its destination, but in the case of an inter-village match, there is a lengthy procession to the bride's village and wealthy men and women may ride on ponies. The bridegroom himself is never a member of this party, but if he is on familiar terms with the bride and her parents he later joins the festivities and the dancing, once the ritual part of the proceedings has been concluded.

At a central place of the village, the bride's mother and another woman from the bride's side, both dressed in a special kind of sleeveless multi-coloured Tibetan cloak await the procession holding large flasks of beer. Incense is burnt and a prominent man of the bride's kin then dips a grass-whisk into this beer and sprinkles some offerings, while he recites a blessing. When this blessing has been said, the beer of welcome is poured out for the guests and the groom's party then moves to the bride's house where women offer drinks to all guests before they are allowed to enter.

Inside the bride's house hosts and guests occupy the

appropriate places and the women serve beer, liquor and tea. Shortly afterwards a meal of boiled rice and meat and vegetable stew is served. A lama recites a blessing, sprinkles some drops of beer, and scatters rice grains.

This leads to the central part of the ceremony, namely the presentation of *kata*, white scarves, by members of the groom's party to the parents and relatives of the bride. All those offered scarves at the *dem-chang* are placed under an obligation of giving the bride a present at the time of *zendi*, the wedding. After the presentation of scarves, the bride's father makes a short speech declaring the link between the two families of bride and groom. Following this the groom's father offers the bride's father a bowl of beer and drapes a second scarf round his shoulders. This completes the ceremonial part of the *dem-chang* in which neither the bride nor the groom figure in any way. Shortly after the bride's father has received the second scarf, tables and mats are removed and the members of the groom's party form a semi-circle and begin to dance. More and more beer is served and some of the host's kinsmen are drawn into the circle of dancers. At that stage the groom may join the gathering and even take part in the dance, but it seems that the bride, though present, never dances at her own *dem-chang*. After some hours the party often spills over into other houses, for kinsmen of the bride are expected to entertain the groom's party, and drinking and dancing may last most of the night.

The performance of the *dem-chang* does not make for much change in the day-to-day behaviour of the young couple. Both continue to live in their parents' houses, and remain members of their parents' economic unit. Their legal relationship is changed by the rite, however, for any children born to them are legitimate and neither partner can break the bond without paying fees equal to those paid at a divorce. There is, however, one important difference between the rights of husbands and wives married by *zendi*, full wedding rites, and those who have only undergone the *dem-chang* ceremonies. The former have the right to levy *phijal*, a fine from a person known to have committed adultery with their spouse, whereas

those engaged only by *dem-chang* have no exclusive and enforceable sexual right over their partner.

Zendi—the wedding rite

Several years may elapse after the performance of the *dem-chang* before the parties concerned agree to hold the final wedding rite. This involves even greater expenditure than the *dem-chang* and the reasons for delay are often purely financial. The young man may not be in a position to set up his own independent household, or the bride's parents may not have collected an adequate dowry for their daughter.

The outward form of the wedding rite is similar to that of the *dem-chang*. There is a procession almost identical to that at the *dem-chang*, the only difference being that a lama walking in the procession carries, like a banner, *sipa-kolu*, a painting on cloth which represents calendrical and other symbols. The *sipa-kolu* (*sipa*—whole world, *kolu*—wheel) is believed to ward off evil spirits. In the bride's house there are speeches and the presentation of scarves as well as drinking, eating and dancing. The essential part of the wedding ritual is the *gyen-kutop*, when the groom's father or another prominent man of the groom's party, anoints the bride's head with butter and a kinsman of the bride does the same to the groom. Both spouses are admonished to remain faithful to each other and to ignore any blandishments of those who might try to seduce them.

As soon as the anointing and the speeches are over the men of the groom's party blow conch shells and break into a wild dance in which every dancer turns and swirls round his own axis while several dancers swing white *yak* tails and others clash heavy brass cymbals.

Finally the bride, accompanied by a number of unmarried girls, sets out for the groom's house, where she is welcomed by women of his family. In his house there is more dancing, eating and drinking. On the following days the celebrations may continue in the houses of the groom's kinsmen.

Rit—a substitute wedding rite

After *sodene* and *dem-chang* have been performed there is

the possibility of a shortcut to a valid marriage, by which the expenditure connected with a wedding ceremony can be almost entirely avoided. This shortcut is known as *rit*—a term derived from the Nepali word *rīti*, custom, and consists in a payment of a few rupees by the prospective husband to the bride's parents and the entry of the bride into his house without any ceremony or formality. By making the nominal payment to the bride's parents the husband establishes rights equal to those of a man married by *gyen-kutop*. He suffers, however, a certain loss of prestige by the admission of his inability to afford a proper wedding and also by the diminished prospect of any dowry. In the case of a second marriage even wealthy people sometimes resort to the custom of *rit* and in such circumstances there is no loss of prestige.

The performance of the wedding rite or its substitute adds to the partners' mutual obligations resulting from the *dem-chang*. The new obligations can be summarized as follows:

1. The husband has exclusive sexual rights to his wife, unless the marriage is polyandrous, and the wife has exclusive sexual rights to the husband except in the rare case of a polygynous marriage. A husband can claim a fine from any man caught in adultery with his wife. This fine, known as *phijal*, was traditionally Rs 30 but has now been raised to Rs 1,000. Moreover, the guilty man is now required to sign an undertaking not to repeat the offence. A wife has a similar right to fine any woman known to have had sexual relations with the husband.
2. Husband and wife share for the duration of the marriage all their economic assets. The husband is under an obligation to maintain his wife, and the wife must devote her energies exclusively to the work of the common household and farm.
3. While each spouse retains a latent right to the property contributed by him or her to the common assets at the time of the wedding, any addition to these

assets, be it in the shape of land or livestock, is deemed to have been produced by the joint labours of the spouses and is equally divided between them in the event of a dissolution of the marriage, or for purposes of determining the property of one of the spouses at the time of death.

Maksu—the resident son-in-law

A reversal of the usual residential pattern of spouses occurs when a bride does not move to her husband's house becoming economically and ritually a member of his family, but remains permanently in her parental house while her husband joins her in the household of her parents. Such a resident son-in-law is called *maksu*. It is usually only couples without sons who arrange for a daughter to marry a *maksu*, and to remain with him and their children in the parental house. Similarly, a young widow who has a house and some land may invite a man to stay in her house in a position similar to that of a *maksu*. In the event of a father arranging for his daughter to take a *maksu*, a written agreement is drawn up by which he appoints the *maksu* as his heir and specifies the property he will inherit. The document must be endorsed by the donor's nearest agnatic kinsmen, for it is they who would normally inherit part of the property were it not made over to the *maksu*. The assets enumerated in the document become the property of the *maksu* and not of his wife. If his wife wishes to dissolve the marriage and marry another man, she must leave the house and her second husband must compensate the *maksu*. Only if the *maksu* himself wishes to terminate the marriage or if a divorce is arranged by mutual consent must he withdraw from the house and relinquish the property which he had received. What a *maksu* cannot do is to drive out his wife and remain in enjoyment of the house and land, because this would be contrary to the terms of the written agreement.

By marrying a daughter to a *maksu* a man can assure himself of support in his old age and of the proper performance of the funeral rites. But he cannot prevent the extinction of his lineage, for a *maksu* remains a member of his own

clan, and this clan membership is passed to his children according to the rules of the normal patrilineal succession.

Polyandrous and polygynous marriages

The majority of Sherpa marriages have generally been monogamous, but both polyandry and polygyny are also permissible. Of these polyandry was for long the more frequent type of marriage. Among 236 marriages which in the 1950s I recorded in Khumjung, Kunde and Phortse, there were then 19 polyandrous and only 5 polygynous marriages. Increased contact with outsiders and particularly Nepali officials, who consider polyandry illegal, has led to a reduction in the number of polyandrous marriages and in 1983 there was only one polyandrous household in Kunde, none in Khumjung and three in Phortse. One pair of brothers of Phortse married to one wife had separated and one of them had taken a wife of his own. Polygyny, on the other hand, has become more common, for many Sherpas engaged in tourism have now one wife in Khumbu and a second wife, usually younger than the first, in an establishment in Kathmandu.

In the past and certainly as recently as the 1950s, polyandry was considered the most desirable form of marriage, largely because it prevented the splitting up of a family's property among several sons. As now there are few places where the functioning of polyandry of the Tibetan type can still be observed, it seems reasonable to summarize here the description of polyandrous marriages.

Polyandrous marriages were more frequently the result of parental arrangements than any other type of union. They involved, with the rarest of exceptions, pairs of brothers to be married to one wife, and at least one of the brothers was at the time of *sodene* and *dem-chang* in most cases so young that the proposed match could hardly be of his own choice. Any active role in the arrangement of a polyandrous marriage was usually taken by the elder brother and, as a rule, it was he who first initiated sexual relations with the joint betrothed.

At the *dem-chang* the younger brother's inclusion in the marriage had to be formally confirmed, but it was only at the

wedding that both brothers appeared in the role of bridegroom. Throughout the proceedings they remained next to each other, and at the *gyen-kutop* rite the bride sat in between the two bridegrooms and all three were anointed with butter.

If there were three brothers in a family it was not uncommon for the eldest and youngest to marry one wife, while the middle brother entered a monastery as a novice. Many girls preferred to marry two brothers, because such a marriage improved their economic prospects. I knew a girl who refused to marry her betrothed, even though she had already borne him a child, unless his younger brother, perhaps eight years her junior, was to be included in the marriage. Polyandry was considered a laudable sign of fraternal solidarity and older people sometimes complained about the 'selfishness' of young men who would break up a parental estate because each wanted a wife of his own.

Sherpa men did not find it difficult to manage the sexual side of a polyandrous union. Usually, the wife slept on the only large bedstead of the house and the two husbands, each of whom had a separate sleeping place, consulted as to who should join her there. Jealousy between the joint husbands seems to have been rarely the cause for the dissolution of a polyandrous union. A more frequent reason for separation was disagreement over economic matters, such as the feeling of one brother that the other did not pull his weight in his efforts for the joint household.

In the polyandrous marriages of the Sherpas never more than two men were involved. This may account for the absence of problems such as occurred in Bhotia societies where the number of husbands was often larger, because all the brothers of a family had a claim to the sexual favours of the wife of any of them. Among the Bhotias of the Mustang district such marriages were common. Writing about the Nyinbas of Humla, Nancy Levine remarked that among them "women find it necessary to develop satisfactory relationships with up to seven men (and) they are obliged to treat all the men more or less equally and to try to prevent accusations of favouritism and the consequent jealousy and anger which

unequal conduct brings. Nonetheless women invariably develop preferences and may be more or less successful at being able—or willing—to hide them. Despite these problems most Nyinba women say they prefer polyandry (the ideal being two husbands) because of the economic security it provides.”

Among the Sherpas the women’s attitude to polyandry was largely coloured by the same consideration. In families of long-distance traders the wives of two brothers had moreover the advantage of a more regular sexual life as usually both husbands were never away at the same time on long journeys. It is perhaps unfortunate for the Sherpa women that just now when long absences of husbands from home have become almost the rule in all the families engaged in tourism, polyandry is on the decline. For it would clearly be a remedy for the loneliness of wives virtually abandoned for the greater part of the year.

Divorce

Sherpa marriages are free associations between individuals who have the right to dissolve them when they fail to serve the purpose of providing mutual comfort and happiness. There is no need to argue a case for the termination of the marriage before a judicial body or of convincing kinsmen of the desirability of a divorce. Many marriages are dissolved by mutual consent, and if both partners agree to separate, the husband invites his wife’s kinsmen to his house, entertains them with liquor and beer, and declares that he and his wife have separated and that from now on he is no longer their son—or brother-in-law as the case may be. A thread, held by the husband and one of his wife’s kinsmen, is then broken as a symbol of the breaking off of the relationship established by the marriage.

If a man wishes to marry another man’s wife and she is willing to abandon her husband, the latter can claim damages known as *thojal*. While Rs 105 were the traditional rate, several thousand rupees may now be demanded in compensation.

Husband-wife relationship

A Sherpa marriage is basically a partnership between equals. Though there is a difference between their respective spheres of normal activities, there is nothing to suggest that the husband is in any way superior. The Sherpas do not consider a man's work of greater value or merit than that of a woman. Moreover, certain tasks such as the carrying of loads and the care of the cattle are undertaken by both sexes. Many women are experienced in trade and money-lending and take on considerable commitments when unable to consult their absent husbands. In contradistinction to the traditional meekness of a Hindu wife, a Sherpa woman evinces a sense of self-reliance and assurance in front of outsiders as well as in the privacy of the family circle. She joins freely in the conversation of men, responds with gusto to their jokes however broad and personal, and does not hesitate to restrain her husband in public should intoxication land him in trouble.

Husbands and wives show, on the whole, remarkable 'tolerance towards their spouses' digressions from the path of marital fidelity. Temporary lapses are hardly ever considered sufficient cause for the break-up of a marriage. Though a husband has the right to claim *phijal*, a fine, from his wife's lover, there are many cases of husbands who do not exercise this right and accept an apology and a bottle of beer presented as *yangdzi*. Particularly, if the offender is a lama, an aggrieved husband may be reluctant to insist on the payment of *phijal* on the ground that Sherpas should *give* to lamas and not *take* anything from them. The claim of *phijal* may be dropped also for other reasons. While I stayed in Khumjung in 1957, a young man was caught twice in succession in compromising circumstances with the wife of a prominent man. The first time he had to pay Rs 30, the then customary amount as *phijal*, but the second time he was let off on the grounds that after having been fined so recently a second payment would have been too severe a punishment. It is not unusual to see men who have been fined for adultery drinking and joking with the husbands whom they had wronged and the

wives whose favours they had enjoyed. Seeing them all in such a jovial mood one would never suspect that any serious quarrel had ever marred their friendship. With the offering of *yandzi* beer or the payment of *phijal* a case of adultery is considered closed and it does not seem that a guilty wife or husband is subjected to very serious recrimination on the part of the aggrieved spouse. All this may point to the fact that sexual relations are emotionally not highly charged, and that Sherpas are not prone to jealousy.

A comparison of the Sherpas with another Bhotia society practising polyandry, namely the Nyinbas of Humla, demonstrates that the general sexual permissiveness of such societies varies in its detailed manifestations. According to Nancy Levine, gender and marital conditions play among the Nyinbas an important part in reactions to individual adulterous conduct. Thus an accusation of adultery tends to carry heavier penalties for a woman than for an errant husband, an attitude different from the more lenient view taken by the Sherpas. Yet Nyingba individuals of both sexes are apparently inclined to engage in adulterous affairs and the weighty penalties attendant on disclosure are not an effective deterrent; "people attribute 'getting caught' to the thoughtlessness and lack of self-control engendered by extreme passion, which is similarly condemned." Public censure of those engaged in illicit affairs seems to be much more severe among Nyinbas¹ than it is among the Sherpas, who take little notice of the moral lapses of other villagers as long as their own interests are not affected.

The ease with which cases of adultery are settled must not mislead us into believing that the Sherpas' attitude to extra-marital sex relations is one of complete amorality or indifference. As devout Buddhists they know very well that sexual intercourse with another man's wife is sinful, and that a married man commits a sin even if he sleeps with an unmarried girl. The payment of *phijal* and the offering of *yandzi* remove the sin to some extent, but there is in the

1. Cf Nancy E Levine, "Perspective on Love: Morality and Affect in Nyinba Interpersonal Relationship; *Culture and Morality* ed., A.C. Mayer, Delhi 1981 p. 114-115.

Sherpas' minds no doubt at all that any act of adultery diminishes the merit of those involved and that many deeds of merit are required to expiate the sin and make up for the loss of merit. Sexual intercourse is morally neutral only between unmarried persons, provided neither of the partners has taken vows of celibacy.

Like elsewhere, there is a difference between moral principles and actual conduct, but a feature not met with in many societies is the generous tolerance shown by individual Sherpas towards the failings and weaknesses of their fellow men, and the ease with which a lapse in marital fidelity is forgiven.

4

Village Organisation

WHEREAS only some aspects of the Sherpa family life have changed within the past thirty years, the social system on the level of village and region has undergone revolutionary developments, and the picture of the socio-political order outlined in *The Sherpas of Nepal* corresponds to the present situation only to a very limited extent. The functioning of the traditional social order of Khumbu depended largely on the non-interference of any outside authority, such as the government machinery directed from Kathmandu. While in theory the royal government ruled Solu-Khumbu like any other part of Nepal through a Bara Hakim or Governor residing in Okhaldunga and his staff, in practice the influence of this official on affairs within the villages of Khumbu was minimal. In the absence of communications other than bridle paths, many of which were impassable during the monsoon which regularly swept away the one or other bridge, the Bara Hakim seldom visited the outlying parts of the region under his jurisdiction and the land revenue was collected by the villagers' own representatives and carried to the treasury at Okhaldunga. At that time Khumbu enjoyed a *de facto* though not *de jure* autonomy which enabled the Sherpas to organise their tribal life along traditional lines.

The internal affairs of any of the villages of Khumbu lay in the hands of a number of village dignitaries appointed for terms varying between one year and three years, or holding their position in rotation according to a sequence established once and for all. A system by which authority and the burden

of public office passed in turn from one householder to the other engendered a high sense of civic responsibility and a remarkable degree of discipline regarding matters affecting the common good. The system of wielding authority in rotation is not peculiar to the Sherpas and prevails also among other Bhotia populations, such as for instance those of Nar and Phu in Manang district where certain tasks and responsibilities are allocated to individual householders in rotation.

In every Sherpa village there used to be two men known as *naua* appointed to control the use of the village-land for purposes of agriculture and cattle raising. Their function was to hold a balance between the needs of these two branches of Sherpa economy and to prevent the carelessness of individuals damaging the interests of other members of the community. Thus they had to decide the time at which all the cattle must leave the village to avoid damage to the crops by straying animals. Similarly, they restricted the use of common pastures to prevent overgrazing. Offenders against the rules announced by the *naua* could be fined, and the authority of the *naua* was supported by the other villagers who informed them of any breach of the rules they had laid down. There was no fixed procedure for the selection of *naua*, which was in the hands of a small group of prominent men. Soon after their selection the *naua* called a meeting of the villagers when the dates for the removal of the cattle from the village were agreed and recorded in writing. In this way the *naua* had the backing of the villagers, and when fining offenders they could quote the decisions made by the entire community in an open meeting.

The two *naua*, either on their own authority or in consultation with the leading men of the village, fixed the day when the potato harvest could begin. Until then no one was supposed to enter a field even to pull out weeds. This rule no doubt facilitated the prevention of any pilfering of potatoes from the fields.

The final act of the *naua* was to permit the cattle back into the village after the harvest of both potatoes and buckwheat had been completed. The fines imposed by the *naua*

during the cultivating season were either paid in the form of beer, which was consumed by the *naua*, or in the form of cash. This was used for the up-keep of the village temple or for other public works.

While in Khumjung the *naua* were chosen informally by the heads of four or five leading families, in Phortse dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the *naua* had led the villagers to make a list of all householders suitable for the office of *naua*, and henceforth the men on that list served as *naua* in strict rotation.

Besides the *naua* responsible for controlling the movement of cattle and coordinating agricultural activities, there used to be also village officials in charge of the preservation of forest growth. They were referred to as *shingo naua* (*shing*—wood) and, like the other *naua*, they derived their mandate from an assembly of villagers. Their term of office was unlimited, and *shingo naua* enjoying the confidence of the villagers could hold office as long as ten or twelve years. In Khumjung four *shingo naua* served simultaneously because continuous vigilance was needed to prevent wood-cutters from encroaching on forest growth in the protected areas close to the village where only dry wood was permitted to be collected for burning. It was within the powers of the *shingo naua* to permit limited fellings for special purposes such as house-building or the preparation of funeral pyres. They were entitled to inspect the stocks of wood in people's houses and demand an explanation for any unusual quantity.

The fining of offenders took place annually soon after the Osho-rite when *shingo naua* are re-appointed or new men take office. At that time the *shingo naua* responsible for the past year went round the village collecting fines imposed during their term of office. They then called the villagers to a meeting in the public assembly place, and anyone guilty of a forest offence had to bring a bottle of beer and confess his or her fault.

The effective functioning of the *shingo naua* was of vital importance to the long-term well-being of the Sherpas of Khumbu. We shall see that the abolition of the system in the 1970s had catastrophic results. For in an area which lies

close to the tree-line and in a climate where wood is required not only for house-building and as fuel for cooking, but also for heating, deforestation is endangering the very existence of many village communities.

Two other officials appointed by the villagers for specific purposes were *chorpen* and *chorumba* responsible for the upkeep of the village temple and the administration of temple-funds. Though they were laymen, they had certain ritual functions at temple ceremonies. The *chorumba* had the responsibility of maintaining discipline during the Dumje festival when excessive drinking sometimes led to unruly behaviour even in the temple. Both *chorpen* and *chorumba* could hold their positions for many years. When I returned to Khumjung in 1983 I found that Nima Teshi, who had been *chorpen* in 1953 was still serving in the same post, though by that time he was in his eighties.

The principle of service in rotation was and still is of essential importance in the selection of the Dumje *lawa*, villagers responsible for the organization of the important Dumje festival (see p. 98) and the provision of food and drink for the participants. In Khumjung and Kunde a man's turn to act as *lawa* came about once in fourteen years. The system of rotation operated in such a way that the household and not the individual was considered the unit. The precise duties of the *lawa* as well as recent developments in the celebration of the festival will be described in Chapter 6.

Collectors of land revenue

In the years of Rana rule the Government of Nepal dispensed with a machinery of paid officials for the collection of land revenue, and relied on village headmen to collect the revenue and pay it into the respective district treasury. This system prevailed also among the Sherpas and until recently such village dignitaries paid the revenue into the treasury at Okhaldunga. In the 1950s there were seven revenue collectors known as *pembu* or *misar* in Khumbu. Each of them collected the revenue from a number of *misir*, clients, scattered over several villages. Three of these *pembu* lived then at Namche, two in Khumjung, one in Kunde and one whose original

domicile had been in Thamu had moved to Solu but acted still as one of the Khumbu *pembu*. Succession to a *pembu*-ship had always been partly determined by the principle of heredity and partly by considerations of personal ability. The office seldom remained in one family for more than two generations and there were cases of the incumbents of a *pembu*-ship changing nine times during eighty years.

One of the responsibilities of a *pembu* was the control of the extension of cultivation and of the admittance of new immigrants. Anyone who wanted to cultivate a piece of waste land had to consult his *pembu*, in whose hand it lay to increase his revenue. The newly arrived Khambas had to obtain a *pembu's* permission to trade and cultivate in Khumbu. The clients of a *pembu* usually gave him a certain amount of free labour. The *pembu* had also the right to dispose of any land which had fallen vacant. All these privileges enabled some *pembu* to become rich and influential, but by no means all *pembu* were wealthy and some played no prominent role in the community. Indeed it seemed that by the late 1950s the effectiveness of the system of *pembu* was already declining. Whereas Ang Chunbi (Paldorje), the *pembu* resident in Kunde was in 1957 the undisputed leader of the village, the two *pembu* of Khumjung, Konje Chunbi (Thaktu) and Chopali (Gole), neither wielded great influence in village affairs nor ranked particularly high in the order of precedence observed on ceremonial occasions. Real authority lay then with several men of wealth and long established family prestige, who did not compete for public office but were nevertheless the ultimate power behind the village dignitaries, such as *naua*, responsible for the day-to-day administration of village affairs. Hence it is not surprising that with the establishment of elected panchayats as part of the national system of grass root democracy, the role of *pembu* has lost much of its significance.

By 1983 the formal recognition of the *pembu* of Khumbu had ceased, but in the twin-villages of Khumjung-Kunde four of the villagers were still referred to as *pembu* even though they lacked any effective authority. They were Konje Chunbi, who had held the position of *pembu* as early as 1953, Lhakpa

Tsiri, the son of Ang Chunbi, the once powerful *pembu* of Kunde, the daughter of the late Chopali, who had succeeded her father in the position of *pembu*, and Ongcho Lama, who had married as *maksu* the daughter of a previous *pembu*. Though the old system of *pembu* as headman and revenue collectors had virtually disintegrated, the land-revenue was still collected by members of three families which had previously furnished *pembu* and had subsequently gained positions in the panchayats. They were Ongcho Lama of Khumjung, Ang Tshiring, *pradhan panch* of Khumjung, and Ang Phurba, *pradhan panch* of Namche. The latter two persons collected the land-revenue in their personal capacity, even at times when they did not hold positions in their respective panchayats. Ang Tshiring collected revenue from the people of Kunde, from most of the inhabitants of Khumjung, Phortse and Tengboche, and from half of those of Pangboche. From the rest of the people Ongcho Lama and Ang Phurwa collected the revenue.

The owners of hotels, lodges and teashops as well as shopkeepers and people trading in the weekly market of Namche had to pay taxes to the panchayat. Hence remnants of the old system survived only in the sense that men such as Ongcho Lama, who once held the official position of *pembu*, still acted as tax-collectors although they held no formal appointment.

Panchayats

When the statutory panchayats were introduced throughout Nepal, the Sherpas were invariably drawn into a wider political system, which superseded the old village organization. Khumbu was divided into two wards consisting of:

1. Khumjung, Kunde, Phortse, Tengboche, Pangboche and Dingboche.
2. Namche Bazar and the entire Thami—Thamote area.

Each of these wards has a separate panchayat headed by a chairman (*pradhan panch*). The ordinary panchayat

members, who represent the population of the villages comprised within the ward are elected informally by a show of hands, but a ballot is conducted for the position of chairman.

In 1971 the chairmanship of ward No. 1 was contested by two prominent men of the twin-villages Khumjung-Kunde namely Konje Chunbi and Ongcho Lama. The former won the election. Both he and his wife belong to old established families of Khumjung, and though he occupies one of the best houses, he is not among the richest men of the village. His opponent Ongcho Lama, whose original home was in Solu, had settled in Khumbu as the son-in-law of a wealthy man of great prestige. Ongcho Lama officiates at many ceremonies and rites and his experience in religious matters enhances his status. In the days of party politics in the 1950s and 1960s he played a minor role in the local branch of the Nepal Congress, and for several years he was a member of the panchayat and would have been chosen again if he had not stood for the position of chairman. He and Konje Chunbi remained good friends and visited each others houses. The vice-chairman of the panchayat of ward No 1 was then Doli, the wife of Mingma Tsiring of Kunde, one of the most prominent mountaineering *sirdar* who held a permanent paid position in the organization of Sir Edmund Hillary. The three other Khumjung members were Pemba, the son of Thaktua, one of the richest men of Khumjung, and Droma Chamji, the daughter of the famous painter Kapa Kalden and wife of Ang Tsiring, the son of Mendoa, another rich man of highest social standing. Thus the same prominent families who had controlled the selection of *naua* were represented on the new panchayat. In 1972 there were some changes in the personnel of the panchayat, but these did not affect the balance of the families represented. Konje Chunbi remained chairman, while Mingma Tsiring had taken the place of his wife Doli as vice-chairman, and Ang Tsiring had replaced his wife Droma Chamji. Pemba, who had died on a trading trip to Tibet, was succeeded by his widow Tsing Droma, a childless woman who inhabited the enormous house of the rich Thaktua family.

By 1983 further changes had taken place. Konje Chunbi was no longer chairman and Domai Tsiri had succeeded him.

The latter is wealthy but does not belong to any of the most prominent old established families of Khumjung. The vice-chairman was Lhakba Norbu, member of one of the wealthiest families and son-in-law of Ang Chunbi, former *pembu* of Kunde. Two other men on the panchayat, Nima Norbu and Ang Norbu, came from respectable but not outstandingly rich families. The only woman from Khumjung was Yangle, the daughter-in-law of Kapa Kalden. Kunde was represented by Lhakputi, a daughter-in-law of the former *pembu* Ang Chunbi, and Ang Dawa, a man of average status. A monk, Tenzing Norbu, son of a Namche family, represented Tengboche, and there were two representatives of Pangboche and one of Phortse on the panchayat of ward No 1. The presence of women on the panchayat reflects their enhanced position in Sherpa society, resulting partly from the frequent absence of men on expeditions and trekking business.

The panchayats, which conform in the procedure of elections to the system of basic democracy prevailing throughout the Kingdom of Nepal, function in a manner similar to that of the traditional Sherpa institutions. The manner of reaching decisions and dealing with disputes has changed little, and the panchayat members act like the previous *pembu* and *naua*. In theory, local disputes which defy settlement by the panchayat members of a village, can be referred to a meeting of all the panchayat members of the ward, but in practice this rarely happens and the full panchayat only meets to discuss matters of general interest.

The control of forest resources

While in some respects the panchayats have taken over the function of the traditional system of village government, in others they have been woefully inadequate and the most blatant example of their inability to protect vital interests of the villagers is the destruction of the Sherpas' forest wealth.

With the introduction of government control over the forests and the panchayat system in the 1960s the powers of the *shingo-naua*, who for generations had protected the forests in the vicinity of villages, were virtually abolished and the Sherpas were given to understand that the forests no longer

belonged to them but were the property of the government. Yet no effective machinery was established to replace the function of the *shingo-naua*.

At about the same time huge mountaineering expeditions invaded Khumbu with hundreds of Tamang and other outside porters, who cut fire-wood all along the trail. Moreover, these armies of porters were retained by the expeditions for two or three months at the Everest base-camp, and throughout that period they burnt enormous quantities of fire-wood which they fetched from the forests of Khumbu. The Sherpas had to watch helplessly these devastations by outsiders, and understandably lost all incentive to restrict their own use of fire-wood and timber. Equally disastrous was the arrival of thousands of Tibetan refugees in the years after 1959, who stayed in Khumbu for more than a year and felled innumerable trees as fire-wood.

Another factor in the deforestation of Khumbu was psychological. When the plans for a National Park to cover most of Khumbu were drawn up and discussed, the Sherpas feared that they would be deprived of all their rights to the local forest produce. Consequently, they cut down a large number of trees to build up stores of fire-wood and of timber for the repair of houses and the construction of new buildings.

In 1983 many of the hill-slopes near such villages as Khumjung and Kunde, which in the 1950s had still been covered with juniper forest were almost bare, being merely covered by scrub vegetation consisting of grasses, dwarf juniper and dwarf rhododendron. The only remnant of the original forest is a small grove of high trees, mainly juniper, which surrounds the Khumjung *gompa* and is protected by religious sentiment. The rhododendron forest on the northern slopes at altitudes between 13,000 and 14,000 feet has largely disappeared. Much of the damage done to the forests of Khumbu seems to be irreparable. The remaining forests could still provide the Sherpas with adequate supplies of dry wood for cooking, but they could not in addition provide fuel for trekkers and expeditions.

At present timber for house-building must be obtained

from areas outside the National Park, such as the northern part of Pharak near Jorsale. Anyone requiring timber for such purposes must apply to the office of the *zila*, district, panchayat situated at Salleri in Solu some four days' walk from Khumbu, and any such application must be recommended by the chairman of the ward panchayat before it can be submitted to the district panchayat. The procedure is cumbersome and resented by the Sherpas who had effectively managed their forests without bureaucratic controls.

The Sagarmatha National Park

The history of National Parks in Nepal is fraught with controversial issues. The greatest tragedy caused by the creation of a national park occurred in the Jumla district where two villages overlooking Lake Rara (currently known as Mahendra Tal) were forcibly evacuated and demolished. The larger of these villages had been inhabited by a prosperous community of Thakuris, who had settled there in the 18th century when the Jumla Kingdom had been conquered by the armies of the Gorkha King and the defeated members of the Jumla court sought refuge in the hills to the north. At Rara they believed to be safe and though at an altitude of close on 10,000 feet the climate was harsh compared to that of the Jumla valley, they were successful in making a living by agriculture and animal husbandry. They did not interfere with the wild-life nor encroach inordinately on the resources of the environment. The department responsible for wild-life preservation and national parks nevertheless insisted on their expulsion and they were moved to the Terai where, after several generations spent at high altitude, they experienced great difficulty in surviving in the hot and malarious climate.

Strange as it may seem, the foreign wild-life experts who had pressed for the expulsion of the Rara Thakuris had also drawn up plans for the evacuation and disbandment of several Sherpa villages of Khumbu. Fortunately, the Sherpas, who had been aware of the fate of the Rara villages, resisted the plan most vigorously and their petitions to His Majesty King Birendra achieved the desired result. The plans for any

disbandment of Sherpa villages were dropped and the Sagarmatha National Park notified in 1976 encroaches only marginally on the rights of the Sherpas. The park extends over 480 square miles and benefits the Sherpas by controlling the activities of tourists and protecting the existing forests as well as by the afforestation of some of the denuded hill-slopes.

Most Sherpas accept the need for limiting the cutting of trees for fuel and timber for buildings, but some and particularly conservative elderly men object to the exclusion of cattle and above all of goats from the forests within the National Park. The keeping of goats was, for poor people, an easy way of adding to their income. Hence the restriction on goats affects just those people who are least able to bear a reduction of their earnings.

There are also specific activities of the National Park administration which seem to conflict with the interests of certain groups of Sherpas. Thus the bare slopes above Namche Bazar are liable to develop land-slides which may threaten some of the houses of the village. To avert this danger the park administration rightly endeavours to protect the top soil by the planting of saplings on large plots secured by stone walls. This strategy involves the banishment of all cattle including *zopkiok* from these slopes, much to the chagrin of some of the people of Namche as well as visiting traders who were used to let their pack animals graze on these slopes conveniently near and also easy to watch being in full view of the village.

Another conflict of interests stems from the protection of wild-life. The Sherpas of Khumjung told me that some people had given up cultivating their land in the *gunsa* settlement of Teshinga because pheasants from the nearby forest eat the potato shoots. According to the rules of the National Park, any interference with the pheasants is forbidden, and hence they have multiplied and now endanger the crops in fields adjoining the forest.

Some Sherpas also complain about the number of Chetris and Brahmans now stationed in Khumbu and particularly in Namche Bazar, partly as policemen and military personnel and partly in connection with the administration of the National

Park. The Park has a staff of approximately thirty who maintain trails and bridges, and mount regular patrols to enforce the prohibition to fell trees. These employees are almost exclusively members of Hindu castes speaking Nepali. The Sherpas consider them as outsiders and resent being subjected to their supervision in their own territory where until recently they had been free to do whatever they chose. There is probably no solution to the problem of reconciling the wishes of the more conservative Sherpas with the plans of the park administration which stands for the long-term protection of the environment while the Sherpa cattle owners and agriculturists object to any interference in their short-term needs. Their attitude is perhaps understandable if one considers that by their own efforts the Sherpas had for generations preserved the Khumbu forest and that it was the policy of nationalization which destroyed the indigenous system of controls.

Schools

A novel element in the social development of the Khumbu Sherpas is the availability of school education. Literacy in the past had been confined to those who had received a religious education, either as novices in a monastery or at the feet of a village lama. But such literacy, admirable as it is widespread among the men of Khumbu has remained inevitably confined to the reading and writing of Tibetan. There were very few Sherpas who could read and write Nepali, for at that time contacts with government institutions were minimal, and the Sherpas' commercial as well as their cultural ties were mainly with Tibet. The situation changed however, when involvement in mountaineering expeditions and other aspects of tourism drew many Sherpas to Kathmandu, and the disadvantages of being incapable to read and write Nepali became obvious to those operating within the wider society of modern Nepal.

The general expansion of state education would undoubtedly have reached Khumbu, as it has reached other remote hill-regions, but the first initiative for the establishment of schools in Khumbu came from a private source. In 1961 Sir

Edmund Hillary, the founder of the charitable Himalayan Trust, began an ambitious educational programme for the Sherpas, by building and equipping a primary school at Khumjung, and the success of this enterprise encouraged him to extend the project to Pangboche, Thami and Rolwaling. Subsequently, the Himalayan Trust and the official education authorities cooperated and as late as 1983 teachers working in Sherpa schools received some subsidy from the Himalayan Trust.

The original idea that Sherpa schools should be staffed with Sherpa teachers did not fully materialize, for the young men who would have been qualified to teach preferred better paid jobs in occupations like tourism. The few Sherpas who had received higher education in Kathmandu aspired to careers in fields such as medicine or law.

By 1983 the school at Khumjung had been raised to the level of a secondary school, and the headmaster was a Chetri married to a Sherpa woman of Khumjung. The buildings had been enlarged and improved, and it was attended not only by children of Khumjung and Kunde, but surprisingly also from Namche Bazar and distant Thami, most of whom walked every day the long way to school and back home. The total number of students in all classes was 307. Of these 213 were boys and 94 girls. There were fourteen boarders. Free education was provided by government from standard 1 to 5, and free books issued for standard 1 to 3. From standard 4 to 9 free books were provided by the Himalayan Trust. It was expected that in 1984 free books would be given by the Trust also for the 10th standard, to be then taught for the first time. From the 6th standard onwards the students received stipends of Rs 100 per month, and those in the 8th standard received Rs 200 per month if their homes were in distant villages.

The medium of instruction was Nepali, but English was also being taught. Despite the attractive conditions in the Khumjung school, many children dropped out before reaching the higher standards. The headmaster attributed this to the lure of high earnings in tourist jobs open even to very young boys.

Although there are not many Sherpas who have made full

use of the educational facilities provided by the cooperation between public and private agencies, there are some examples of young men who have risen to positions of considerable responsibility. One of these is Mingma Norbu of Khumjung, who discharged the difficult duties of Warden of the National Park with tact and dedication.

5

The Impact of Tourism and Social Change

FROM the list of households of Khumjung covering the period 1953 to 1983 given in the Appendix it will be seen that in 1983 more than half of the families of the village were involved in activities connected with tourism in one or the other form. This development had not occurred suddenly, however, and though in the Himalayas mass tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon, the interest of westerners in the Himalayan region goes back to the first quarter of the twentieth century, when mountaineers began to plan the assault on some of the major peaks. At the time of my first visit to Khumbu in 1953 the Sherpas had already earned a reputation as intrepid high altitude porters and skilled mountaineers. Until 1952 when Nepal was opened to mountaineers from foreign countries, the recruiting ground for Sherpa guides and porters was mainly Darjeeling. Not only major mountaineering expeditions, but also tourists trekking in Sikkim employed Sherpas in considerable numbers. How Sherpas came to settle in Darjeeling is not known in detail, but it is likely that at first it was the prospect of trade which drew them to Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The association with mountaineering enterprises occurred at a time when they had already established themselves in the Darjeeling district. According to contemporary census reports, there were 6,929 Sherpas in that district in 1947, but owing to a change in the system of census operations the figures for more recent years are not available.

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WHEREAS only some aspects of the Sherpa family life have changed within the past thirty years, the social system on the level of village and region has undergone revolutionary developments, and the picture of the socio-political order outlined in *The Sherpas of Nepal* corresponds to the present situation only to a very limited extent. The functioning of the traditional social order of Khumbu depended largely on the non-interference of any outside authority, such as the government machinery directed from Kathmandu. While in theory the royal government ruled Solu-Khumbu like any other part of Nepal through a Bara Hakim or Governor residing in Okhaldunga and his staff, in practice the influence of this official on affairs within the villages of Khumbu was minimal. In the absence of communications other than bridle paths, many of which were impassable during the monsoon which regularly swept away the one or other bridge, the Bara Hakim seldom visited the outlying parts of the region under his jurisdiction and the land revenue was collected by the villagers' own representatives and carried to the treasury at Okhaldunga. At that time Khumbu enjoyed a *de facto* though not *de jure* autonomy which enabled the Sherpas to organise their tribal life along traditional lines.

The internal affairs of any of the villages of Khumbu lay in the hands of a number of village dignitaries appointed for terms varying between one year and three years, or holding their position in rotation according to a sequence established once and for all. A system by which authority and the burden

of public office passed in turn from one householder to the other engendered a high sense of civic responsibility and a remarkable degree of discipline regarding matters affecting the common good. The system of wielding authority in rotation is not peculiar to the Sherpas and prevails also among other Bhotia populations, such as for instance those of Nar and Phu in Manang district where certain tasks and responsibilities are allocated to individual householders in rotation.

In every Sherpa village there used to be two men known as *naua* appointed to control the use of the village-land for purposes of agriculture and cattle raising. Their function was to hold a balance between the needs of these two branches of Sherpa economy and to prevent the carelessness of individuals damaging the interests of other members of the community. Thus they had to decide the time at which all the cattle must leave the village to avoid damage to the crops by straying animals. Similarly, they restricted the use of common pastures to prevent overgrazing. Offenders against the rules announced by the *naua* could be fined, and the authority of the *naua* was supported by the other villagers who informed them of any breach of the rules they had laid down. There was no fixed procedure for the selection of *naua*, which was in the hands of a small group of prominent men. Soon after their selection the *naua* called a meeting of the villagers when the dates for the removal of the cattle from the village were agreed and recorded in writing. In this way the *naua* had the backing of the villagers, and when fining offenders they could quote the decisions made by the entire community in an open meeting.

The two *naua*, either on their own authority or in consultation with the leading men of the village, fixed the day when the potato harvest could begin. Until then no one was supposed to enter a field even to pull out weeds. This rule no doubt facilitated the prevention of any pilfering of potatoes from the fields.

The final act of the *naua* was to permit the cattle back into the village after the harvest of both potatoes and buckwheat had been completed. The fines imposed by the *naua*

during the cultivating season were either paid in the form of beer, which was consumed by the *naua*, or in the form of cash. This was used for the up-keep of the village temple or for other public works.

While in Khumjung the *naua* were chosen informally by the heads of four or five leading families, in Phortse dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the *naua* had led the villagers to make a list of all householders suitable for the office of *naua*, and henceforth the men on that list served as *naua* in strict rotation.

Besides the *naua* responsible for controlling the movement of cattle and coordinating agricultural activities, there used to be also village officials in charge of the preservation of forest growth. They were referred to as *shingo naua* (*shing*—wood) and, like the other *naua*, they derived their mandate from an assembly of villagers. Their term of office was unlimited, and *shingo naua* enjoying the confidence of the villagers could hold office as long as ten or twelve years. In Khumjung four *shingo naua* served simultaneously because continuous vigilance was needed to prevent wood-cutters from encroaching on forest growth in the protected areas close to the village where only dry wood was permitted to be collected for burning. It was within the powers of the *shingo naua* to permit limited fellings for special purposes such as house-building or the preparation of funeral pyres. They were entitled to inspect the stocks of wood in people's houses and demand an explanation for any unusual quantity.

The fining of offenders took place annually soon after the Osho-rite when *shingo naua* are re-appointed or new men take office. At that time the *shingo naua* responsible for the past year went round the village collecting fines imposed during their term of office. They then called the villagers to a meeting in the public assembly place, and anyone guilty of a forest offence had to bring a bottle of beer and confess his or her fault.

The effective functioning of the *shingo naua* was of vital importance to the long-term well-being of the Sherpas of Khumbu. We shall see that the abolition of the system in the 1970s had catastrophic results. For in an area which lies

close to the tree-line and in a climate where wood is required not only for house-building and as fuel for cooking, but also for heating, deforestation is endangering the very existence of many village communities.

Two other officials appointed by the villagers for specific purposes were *chorpen* and *chorumba* responsible for the upkeep of the village temple and the administration of temple-funds. Though they were laymen, they had certain ritual functions at temple ceremonies. The *chorumba* had the responsibility of maintaining discipline during the Dumje festival when excessive drinking sometimes led to unruly behaviour even in the temple. Both *chorpen* and *chorumba* could hold their positions for many years. When I returned to Khumjung in 1983 I found that Nima Teshi, who had been *chorpen* in 1953 was still serving in the same post, though by that time he was in his eighties.

The principle of service in rotation was and still is of essential importance in the selection of the Dumje *lawa*, villagers responsible for the organization of the important Dumje festival (see p. 98) and the provision of food and drink for the participants. In Khumjung and Kunde a man's turn to act as *lawa* came about once in fourteen years. The system of rotation operated in such a way that the household and not the individual was considered the unit. The precise duties of the *lawa* as well as recent developments in the celebration of the festival will be described in Chapter 6.

Collectors of land revenue

In the years of Rana rule the Government of Nepal dispensed with a machinery of paid officials for the collection of land revenue, and relied on village headmen to collect the revenue and pay it into the respective district treasury. This system prevailed also among the Sherpas and until recently such village dignitaries paid the revenue into the treasury at Okhaldunga. In the 1950s there were seven revenue collectors known as *pembu* or *misar* in Khumbu. Each of them collected the revenue from a number of *misir*, clients, scattered over several villages. Three of these *pembu* lived then at Namche, two in Khumjung, one in Kunde and one whose original

The Impact of Tourism and Social Change

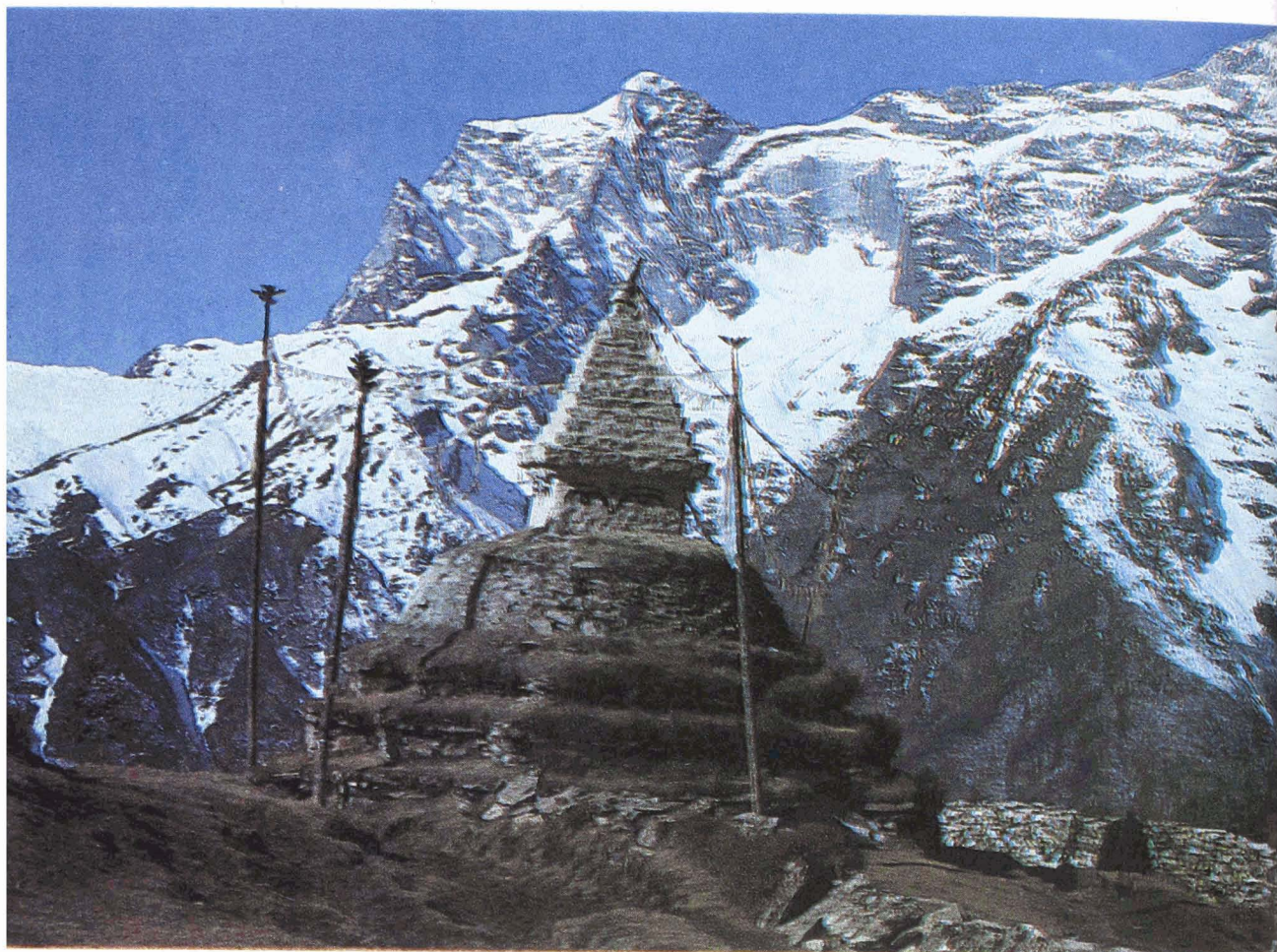
FROM the list of households of Khumjung covering the period 1953 to 1983 given in the Appendix it will be seen that in 1983 more than half of the families of the village were involved in activities connected with tourism in one or the other form. This development had not occurred suddenly, however, and though in the Himalayas mass tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon, the interest of westerners in the Himalayan region goes back to the first quarter of the twentieth century, when mountaineers began to plan the assault on some of the major peaks. At the time of my first visit to Khumbu in 1953 the Sherpas had already earned a reputation as intrepid high altitude porters and skilled mountaineers. Until 1952 when Nepal was opened to mountaineers from foreign countries, the recruiting ground for Sherpa guides and porters was mainly Darjeeling. Not only major mountaineering expeditions, but also tourists trekking in Sikkim employed Sherpas in considerable numbers. How Sherpas came to settle in Darjeeling is not known in detail, but it is likely that at first it was the prospect of trade which drew them to Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The association with mountaineering enterprises occurred at a time when they had already established themselves in the Darjeeling district. According to contemporary census reports, there were 6,929 Sherpas in that district in 1947, but owing to a change in the system of census operations the figures for more recent years are not available.



Procession at the Osho rite in Khumjung

Arrival of a Wedding Party in Khumjung

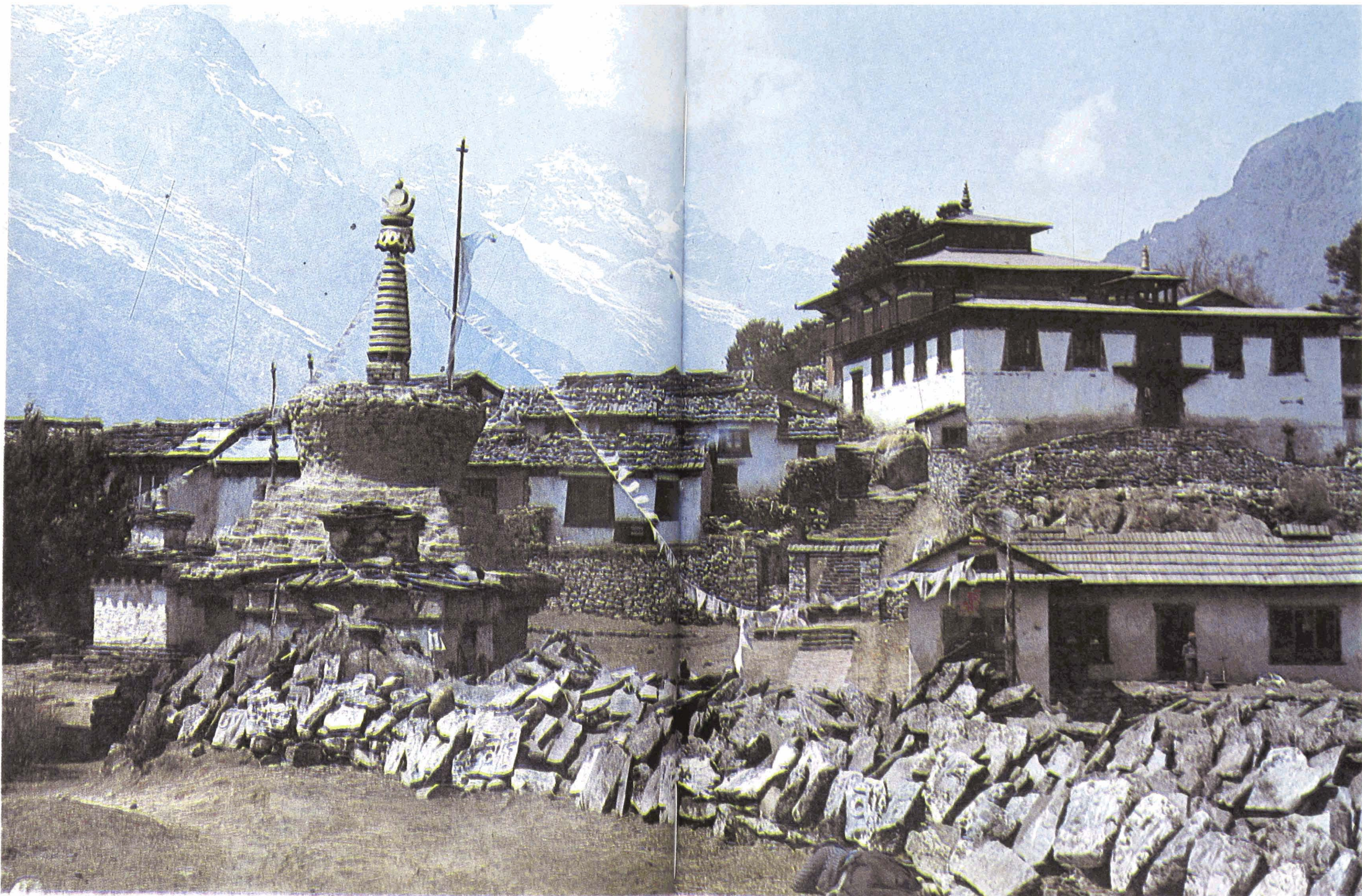




Chorten above Namche Bazar



Ongcho Lama and his Wife in 1983

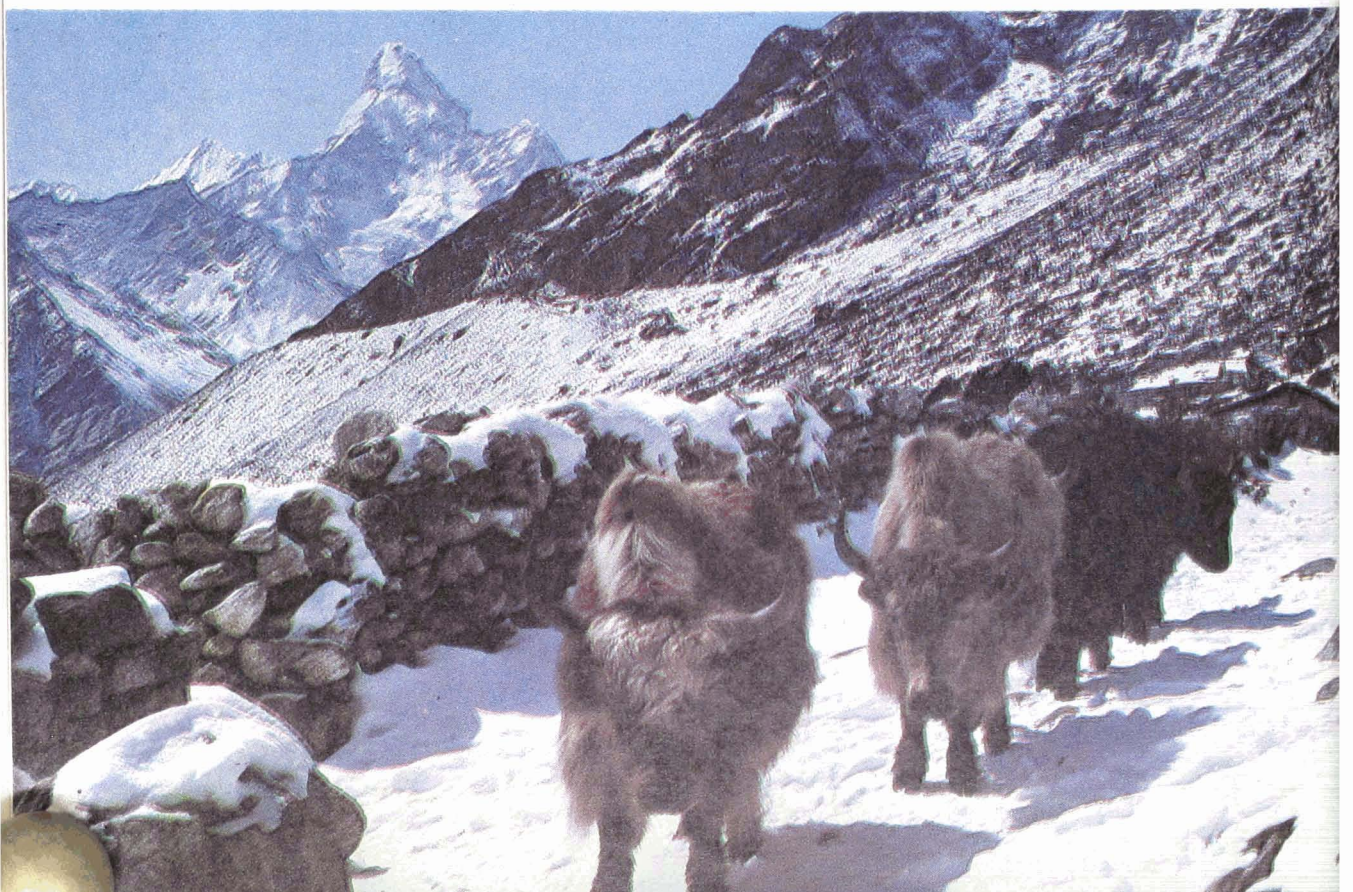


Tengboche Gomba in 1983



House in Khumjung Village

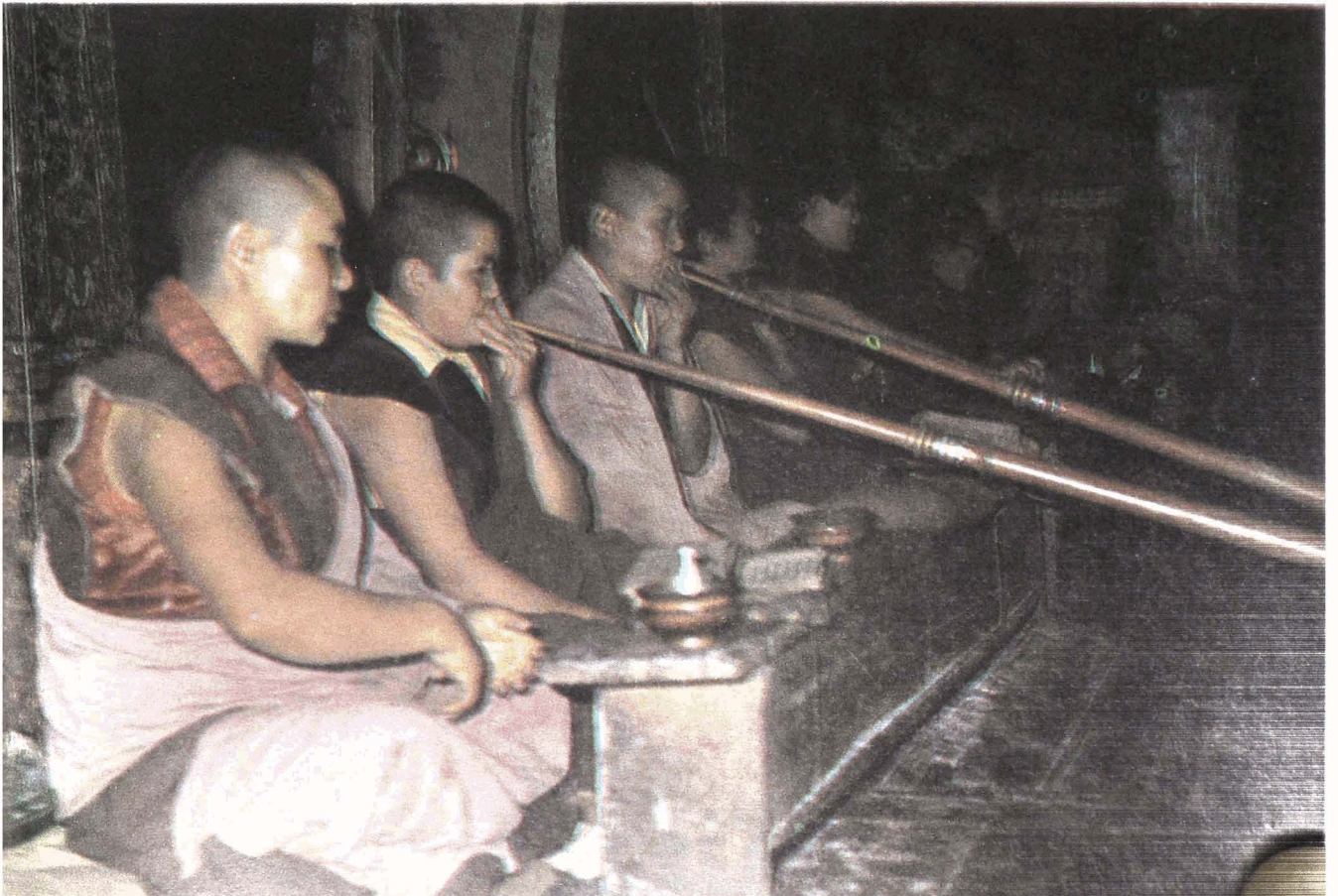
Yak with Amadablam in the background

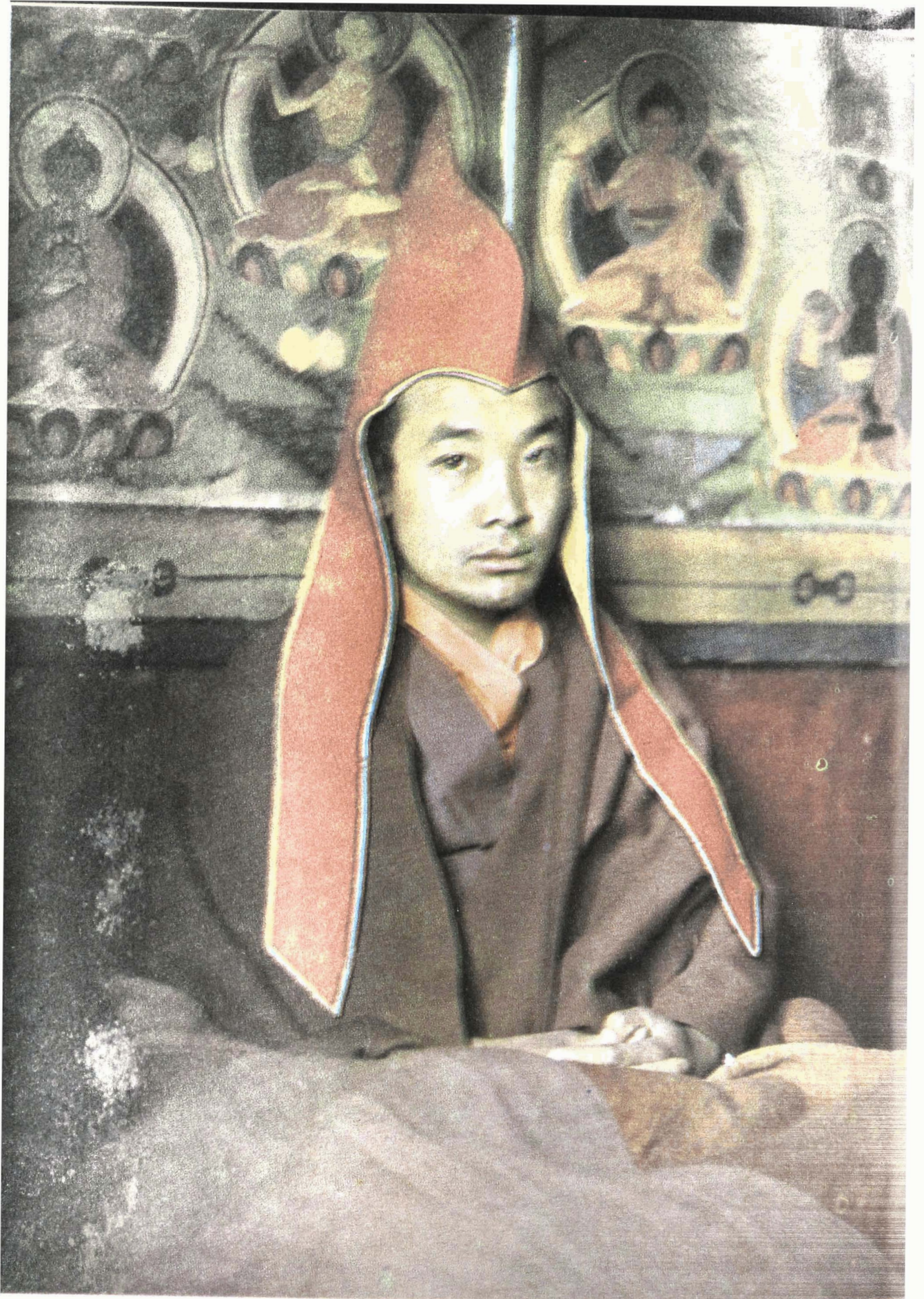




Men of Khumjung in Festive dress

Nuns of Tashi Gompa blowing telescopic horns





The reincarnate abbot of Thami Gompa

Today Sherpa guides and porters are no longer recruited in Darjeeling but in Khumbu and Kathmandu. An important role in the organization of expedition labour has always been played by the so-called *sirdar*, men of exceptional ability to control and lead other porters. Such foremen, once engaged by a group of mountaineers usually insist on being entrusted with the recruiting of the other Sherpas. By so doing they built up a position of influence and economic power.

For the poor but energetic and adventurous young men, expedition work offered unique possibilities. Previously, a Sherpa without land or capital could not hope to attain more than modest prosperity even by a life-time's hard work. The whole structure of Sherpa economics favoured the entrepreneur rather than the wage-earner, and impecunious men had to work many years in the pay of others before they could acquire land or cattle, or venture out as independent traders. But a successful high-altitude porter could, in a single season, earn sufficient cash to engage in some modest trade deals or buy his first plot of land. The sudden affluence of successful porters brought to the fore men of a class which used to live in the shadow of the rich families of inherited wealth. Several well-known high-altitude porters were Khambas of humble origin. Tenzing Norgay of Mount Everest fame is an outstanding example of landless men who owe their fortunes solely to mountaineering success. Tenzing was born in Tibet, came to Khumbu as a young boy, and worked for several years for the rich Thaktua family of Khumjung.

During the past two decades there has been a rapid development of tourism, and while previously only organized mountaineering expeditions and a few scholars ventured into the remoter mountain regions of Nepal, trekking has become a sport attracting increasing numbers of foreign tourists. Being experienced in work with foreigners and used to long distance travel, the Sherpas proved excellent guides and camp servants. Today they are employed not only for tours to the Sherpa country but also for climbing and trekking in Western Nepal.

In Khumbu, above all, the number of tourists has steadily increased. In the twelve months between July 1969 and June

1970 there were 642 tourists with trekking permits checking in at the police station of Namche Bazar and in the nine months from July 1970 and the beginning of 1971 their number was 533. Neither of these figures includes the members of organized mountaineering expeditions. In the spring of 1971 three major expeditions were operating in the Khumbu area: an International Mount Everest expedition, a South Korean Lhotse expedition and a Japanese expedition climbing a minor peak. The Mount Everest expedition alone employed sixty Sherpas, including three *sirdar*, high altitude climbers, cooks, kitchen boys and wood carriers.

At present, tourists entering the National Park at Jorsale have to register and pay a fee of Rs 60 per head. Hence I was able to obtain the following figures for tourists who had passed through Jorsale between October 1982 and March 1983 :

October 1982 : 1415; November 1982 : 854; December 1982 : 471.

January 1983 : 376; February 1983 : 283; March 1983 : 370.

Figures for the main touring period of April-May were not available, but according to official estimates about 5,000 tourists visit the Sagarmatha National Park in an average year. Considering that the Sherpa population of Khumbu was not more than 2,711 in 1982, this influx of tourists means that in the places mainly frequented by tourists, such as Namche Bazar and Tengboche, the local Sherpa residents are at times in a minority.

The main tourist centre of Khumbu is Namche Bazar, for most tourists visiting Khumbu must pass through it, and many stay there for a few days. Namche has greatly changed since the 1950s and even since 1971 when the flow of tourists was only beginning to reach Khumbu. The sudden increase in the number of tourists visiting Khumbu was largely due to the construction of an airstrip at Lukla in Pharak, which is 30-45 minutes flying time from Kathmandu and enables planes of the Twin Otter type to land and take off. From Lukla it is two days walk to Namche Bazar.

In Namche there are now many new houses and some of

the old houses have been reconstructed to serve as "hotels". By 1983 the number of such hotels had grown to fifteen. Most of them had no single rooms, but tourists slept in large dormitories, which provided wooden cots but little else, for tourists were supposed to bring their own sleeping sacks and mattresses. There was usually a large room with tables and chairs where meals were served. The food consisted of a mixture of Sherpa and international dishes and could be ordered *à la carte*. It was by no means meant only for foreign tourists, for Sherpa guides ate with them and had learnt to order the most expensive dishes and often also a good many drinks.

The existence of such "hotels" and less pretentious lodges on the trails have brought about a fundamental change in the style of touring. Earlier, westerners accompanied by the Sherpas usually took tents and camped wherever water and fire-wood could be found. The Sherpas prepared food on an open fire and cooked the same simple dishes for their employers and for themselves. Hence the expenditure on food was usually modest, rice, chapattis, dhal, potatoes, some local vegetables if available, and only very rarely chicken or meat constituted the standard diet. But now the whole party often stays in a lodge or hotel with the charge for food and lodging being the same for the tourists and the Sherpas. A tourist who pays a guide perhaps Rs 40 per day must reckon that in many places his Sherpa's food and drink may cost him as much or more.

The rates of pay commanded by Sherpas working for mountaineering expeditions are high by Nepalese standards. While in 1971-72 *sirdar* were paid an average daily wage of Rs 25, and cooks and porters Rs 15, these rates had more than doubled by 1983. Even trekkers who did not undertake any climbing ventures had to pay daily wages of Rs 40-50 for *sirdar* and cooks, and Rs 30 for ordinary porters. These wages do not represent the entire income of *sirdar* and other men, for they usually buy all local produce such as potatoes, fresh meat, eggs, vegetables and rice and make handsome profits from such transactions.

The Sherpa *sirdar* conducting a group of tourists on a trek of several weeks consider such an expedition as a trading

venture similar to the journeys to Tibet they used to undertake. I was told that a profit of Rs 10,000 on a month's trek is not unusual if the group is large and its members are unfamiliar with conditions in Nepal. Such profits can be made not only by overcharging tourists on the price of provisions, but also by taking a commission on the wages of non-Sherpa porters.

The change in the attitude of Sherpas, who used to be renowned for their honesty and loyalty to their employers, is largely explicable by the altered relationship between the Sherpas and foreign travellers. Previously, western visitors to Nepal, whether they were mountaineers, explorers or anthropologists, lived for months at close quarters with individual Sherpas, and often maintained a relationship which extended over a number of journeys and even several years. Hence close ties of friendship were established and neither partner considered their cooperation as a mere business relationship. Now the Sherpas employed by a trekking agency or working freelance from bases in Kathmandu, accompany one anonymous group of tourists after the other, and there is no time for the growth of any feeling of mutual understanding or loyalty. The position is different on mountaineering expeditions on which the climbers and the Sherpas share dangers and triumphs, and, of course, in the case of western girls who consider an affair with a Sherpa guide as part of the adventure of a Himalayan trek.

It cannot be denied that the expansion of tourism has brought about a change in attitude not only among the Sherpas but also among other populations who have to deal with foreign travellers. They all believe that most Europeans and Americans must be exceedingly rich if they can afford to spend large amounts of money on air-fares in order to enjoy themselves for a few weeks wandering through Nepal. They also realize that many tourists have little understanding of the local population and culture. In this view they are confirmed by the insensitivity of many tourists vis-à-vis the feelings of the people of the host country. One example will suffice to demonstrate this attitude: One of the places most sacred to the Sherpas of Khumbu is the monastery of Tengboche. Yet in March 1983 I saw how some trekkers were not satisfied

with pitching their tents immediately next to the *gompa*, but without spending any time on visiting the main temple and contemplating the beautiful frescoes on its walls, began a noisy game of hand-ball on the lawn between the great *chorten* and the buildings of the monastery, including the residence of the re-incarnate abbot. It is perhaps understandable that the Sherpas who watch such irreverent behaviour on the part of tourists blind to the cultural treasures of their country, feel no compunction in extracting from their untutored visitors as much money as the latter are willing to pay for services and supplies. On the other hand the Sherpas appreciate any sign of informed interest on the part of visitors as much as they have always done. Indeed in 1983 both at Tengboche and in the Thami monastery the reincarnate abbots overwhelmed me with their hospitality and gave me a great deal of their time.

The tradition of hospitality among the Sherpas initially made it easy for tourists to find shelter and food in their houses. What began as casual *ad hoc* arrangements is in the process of being developed as a regular business. *Sirdar* in charge of groups of tourists often take them to the houses of friends and relatives, who expect payment for the shelter they provide, as well as for any food they are able to prepare. During the main tourist season such frequent intrusions of whole groups of tourists certainly disturb the peace of the domestic atmosphere, and it would seem that the Sherpas are now less inclined to visit each other casually for a chat and a drink of beer than they used to be in the past. For if they arrive unannounced they are quite likely to find the house-owner surrounded by foreign guests.

Even though the presence of numerous tourists in Khumbu has brought about considerable changes in the social atmosphere, the frequent absence of the majority of able-bodied Sherpas on mountaineering expeditions and tourist treks has affected family life far more deeply. There are now few households in villages such as Khumjung, Kunde and Namche Bazar whose members' spend the greater part of the year in Khumbu.

From the houselist of Khumjung (see Appendix), which I revised in March 1983, it can be seen that 44 men and a few

women were living in Kathmandu, which the men used as a base for trekking or mountaineering activities while the women engaged in the petty trade or inn-keeping. The number of those who spent only half the year in Kathmandu was eleven, 35 men were still based in Khumjung but engaged frequently in trekking or mountaineering or worked in other capacities for tourists. Three men, each assisted by a wife or a daughter, kept inns in villages other than Khumjung. Nine men and women were living in various parts of India, such as Darjeeling. Only one of the men, who had settled in Kathmandu had sold his house in Khumjung. It seems that even those spending the greater part of the year in Kathmandu were still contemplating an ultimate return to Khumjung, where they hoped to spend their old age. The time of the year when many Sherpas established in Kathmandu visit Khumbu for a longer or shorter stay is the monsoon and particularly August when the Dumje festival is celebrated in Khumjung. In the monsoon months few tourists come to Nepal, as the weather is unsuitable for climbing expeditions and there are no flights to Lukla.

The number of Sherpas to be found in Kathmandu varies from year to year and also from season to season. In the winter many come to Kathmandu for the sake of its milder climate, even if they have no permanent business interests there. Particularly Bodhnath is a place where the Sherpas and also some other Bhotias gather during the winter and combine religious activities with the search for commercial opportunities. In 1983 there were 47 Sherpas who owned houses in and around Kathmandu, and many more had purchased land with the intention of building as soon as they had sufficient funds. The most luxurious Sherpa houses are at Bodhnath. Some of these owned partly by Solu families compare favourably with the houses of many middle class Newars and Chetris.

The standard of living of well-off Sherpas in Kathmandu is altogether high. On festive occasions, such as the Nepali New Year, they give parties attended by many relatives and friends, the latter not necessarily Sherpa. At such parties foreign liquor is in ample supply and Sherpa, Tibetan, Indian and European dishes are served in western style. Judging from the unusually

full figures of the ladies at such parties, one must assume that culinary pleasures are a regular feature of middle class Sherpa life in Kathmandu. Some Sherpa friends of mine commented critically on the fact that women of wealthy families settled there did not do any work whatsoever and spent their time playing cards and entertaining each other, and that their children did not learn how to work and grew up in a way totally different from the traditional Sherpa life in Khumbu. On the other hand, many of the less affluent Sherpa families of Kathmandu live in the squalor of the crowded quarters rented from Newars and one wonders how people used to the wide views of Khumbu villages with their substantial houses spaced out between fields and meadows can bear the congestion of the narrow dark alleys of a Newar town.

Most of the Kathmandu Sherpas are in some way or other involved in tourism and spend at least part of the year on treks or expeditions. During the seasons when there are few tourists they make ends meet by petty shop-keeping or restaurant or tea stall business. Unlike Thakalis, the trading community of western Nepal and now represented also in Kathmandu, the Sherpas are only exceptionally engaged in major business or industrial enterprises. They do not have the skill to compete successfully with the Marwaris, Thakalis and Tibetans, and the latter surpass them even in the restaurant business.

Some of the most farsighted Sherpas and particularly men who have been to Europe and seen western tourist facilities consider it a mistake of the Sherpas to put all their cards on the development of tourism, largely because of the danger of fluctuations caused by political events outside Nepal, such as economic recessions or fears of war. They also realize the flaws in the Sherpas' qualifications as tourist guides. To be truly efficient by international standards, they would have to be fluent at least in English, which only a few Sherpas speak adequately though many engaged in trekking have a smattering of the language. Yet, the very attraction of earnings from tourism prevents Sherpa boys from acquiring better qualifications, for at the age of 14 to 15 many of them drop out of

the schools because by working as porters they can earn up to Rs 30 a day.

The lack of educational qualifications has prevented the Sherpas from attaining influential positions in government service. While Thakalis, Gurungs and even some Bhotias of Walongchung are found in such positions, with the exception of a few members of the politically prominent Lama family of Phaphlu, there are few Sherpas in superior government posts. So far there is no great pressure on Sherpas to strive for such positions, for the financial rewards in the tourist industry are greater than those of public service. The total monthly income, that is, salary plus maintenance on tour and perks of a senior *sirdar* can easily rise to Rs 3,000 and this approximates the income of a senior civil servant in one of the ministries or the palace secretariat.

Some Sherpas have also been successful in contract work, not only in the construction of roads in Nepal, but also in some of the mountainous regions of India, including Sikkim and Assam. This is hardly surprising for *sirdar* experienced in recruiting and controlling large numbers of porters on major expeditions can utilize their skills and their experience also in providing and organizing labour for construction works, and their adaptability to the climate in high altitude enables them to operate in areas where Indian contractors from the plains dare not venture.

The newest enterprise of a few Khumbu Sherpas is the acquisition of building sites at Jiri and the construction of houses intended to serve as tourist lodges and restaurants. Jiri lies on the route to Solu-Khumbu and the building of a motor road linking it with the so-called China road from Kathmandu to Barabise near the Tibetan border has already been sanctioned by the government. As soon as this road is completed, the journey to Solu-Khumbu will be shortened by several days, and at times when there are no air services to Lukla and tourists have to take the land route most of them will go by bus or car as far as Jiri and start walking from there. Jiri will then be as important a staging post as Lukla in Pharak has become since the construction of an airstrip.

The presence of large numbers of Sherpas in and around Kathmandu and their involvement with tourism and various activities distinct from the traditional farming and herding economy, have resulted in the establishment of an association of Sherpas known as Sagarmatha Sherpa Seva Kendra. A group of Sherpas based in Kathmandu formed the association as a political and social organization for the representation of Sherpa interests. The initial organizers proposed that there should be a membership fee of Rs 100, and by collecting such a fee it was intended to build up a fund to assist members in distress and to bear the funeral expenses of members who died in places where they had no close kinsmen. In practice, most members did not derive much benefit from the association while the office bearers profited. Later, the membership fee was reduced to Rs 50, and in 1983 two-thirds of the Kathmandu Sherpa community had joined the association. At that time the number of members contained in the official list of the association was 285. Of these 31 were from Khumjung, 24 from Kunde, 41 from Namche Bazar, 1 from Phortse, 11 from Pangboche, 12 from Tengboche, 19 from the Thami area, 108 from various villages of Solu, 29 from Pharak, 6 from Walongchung Gola, 15 from Kharikhola, 2 from Kam-balung, 23 from Kulung, 13 from Jiri, 22 from Yelmu and 1 from Rolwaling.

The original idea for the association was to organize the work of the Sherpas in the tourist industry, but this aim was not achieved and was indeed superseded by the establishment of various trekking agencies. The largest of these—Sherpa Cooperative Trekking Ltd., and Mountain Travel—are run as commercial enterprises with a permanent staff and organise tourist treks at flat rates, providing not only guides and porters but also provisions, tents and other camping equipment. A few *sirdar* are permanently employed and paid a retaining fee, while other Sherpas are taken *ad hoc* whenever an expedition or trekking tour has to be organized. Apart from these two large organizations, there are numerous smaller trekking agencies, each run by a few Sherpas, some of whom may themselves act as guides.

In 1983 the majority of the members of the Sagarmatha

Sherpa Seva Kendra who were from Khumbu and Pharak, engaged in tourism, while of the members from Solu only 25 per cent worked in tourism the rest being mainly students. Those from the Sherpa colonies in places such as Walongchung, Kharikhola, Jiri and Yelmu usually did not work as tourist guides or trekking servants but invested in enterprises such as inn-keeping.

There are two aspects of the Sherpas' involvement in mountaineering and tourism which have received little attention in the literature even though they have had a devastating impact on many families. One is the high casualty rate of Sherpas employed in mountaineering expeditions and the other is the liaison of young Sherpa men with foreign women.

There exist no general statistics of fatal accidents involving the Sherpas on mountaineering expeditions, but by adding up the remembered casualties from individual villages we can gain an impression of the magnitude of the problem. Since 1953, of a total of 116 men from Solu-Khumbu who are believed to have perished on mountains, 28 hailed from Khumjung and Kunde, 14 from Namche Bazar, 16 from the Thami-chok area, 7 from Phortse and 6 from Pangboche.

Some of the families of Khumjung were particularly severely hit by the death of men on expeditions. Thus Anglamu (Paldorje) first married Pemba Dorje (Mende), house 52. He was killed on a Dhaulagiri expedition. She then married her first husband's father's brother's son Ang Tsiri (Mende) who soon afterwards was killed on an expedition on Kanchenjunga. Similarly, of the five sons of Kunga Chosa (Paldorje), house 59, Penuri was killed on a Mount Everest expedition to Pumori. The first husband of Penuri's wife, Tenzing Gyelju, had also died on Mount Everest. Earlier, Kunga Chosa's brother's son Mingma, house 10, was killed on an expedition, and lastly Kunga Chosa's younger brother Anulu fell to his death on a minor expedition. The family of Nima Teshi (Thaktu) suffered similar losses. His son Phu Dorje, one of the outstanding young men of Khumjung was killed in 1970 on a Japanese Everest expedition. In 1977 his sister's husband also died on Mount Everest. In 1983 Nima Teshi, then in his eighties, lived in his large house with his wife, his widowed

daughter and two unmarried daughters, but there were no young men to look after the farmwork and the cattle. Such cases of families being decimated by the death of young men on mountaineering expeditions could be demonstrated also by examples from other villages. The loss to Sherpa society is all the greater because often the most enterprising men, who could have become the leaders of future generations, perish in this manner. It would seem that the death rate among foreign mountaineers is relatively smaller, for it is the Sherpas who have to negotiate such hazardous stretches as the Everest ice-fall several times in the course of an expedition carrying supplies and equipment to the higher camps, whereas the foreign mountaineers, who have to pass the most dangerous spots only twice, that is, on the ascent and the descent, are saved comparable risks.

This situation raises also a moral problem. For one may well ask whether it is justifiable to endanger the lives of so many Sherpas in enterprises which—with a few exceptions—have no other purpose than to give pleasure and satisfaction to a few foreign mountaineers. Anyone who has experienced the shock and distress engulfing a Sherpa village when the news of a major accident reaches the families of the victims must wish that European, American and Japanese mountaineers could find ways of proving their courage and endurance without unnecessarily putting at risk so many Sherpas in the prime of their life.

A threat to Sherpa family life of quite a different nature results from sexual adventures of tourist guides with some of their female clients. It is well known that some of the young ski-instructors in the Austrian and Swiss Alps are not impervious to the advances of attractive girls from other countries, but such fleeting affairs between men and women from similar cultural backgrounds do little harm to either partner. But the Sherpas are easily captivated by girls more sophisticated than the women of their own community, and young women from America and the Continent of Europe—though surprisingly not from Great Britain—seem to be inclined to seek adventures in the romantic atmosphere of the Himalayas. It is obvious that a detailed study of the relationships between the Sherpas

and western women would be a difficult undertaking, but from the admittedly fragmentary information I have been able to gather, it would seem that the initiative in such affairs comes usually from the side of the western party. Indeed I observed in Tengboche an attractive French girl making quite openly the most suggestive advances to a young and apparently embarrassed Sherpa boy.

There is concrete evidence that a number of Sherpa women have lost their husbands or fiancés to foreign women. Such evidence relates of course, only to affairs which led to a permanent relationship, for fleeting adventures are clearly not on record. The first Sherpa to marry a foreign girl was Ang Gyele Lama of Phaphlu. She was an American and the couple went to live in the United States, but were killed in an air-crash when they returned to Nepal on a visit. Ang Gyele's brother was married to an American from whom he had three children. But the couple split up, and he was reported living in America working for a motor company. Pasang Dawa of Kunde married a German girl and lived with her in Patan. Both husband and wife worked in the tourist industry, organizing trekking parties. Pasang Dawa has also built a large house in Lukla and sometimes comes there with his German wife who dresses in Sherpa style. Similarly, Dawa Gyeljen of Pharak works in partnership with his Swiss wife running a tourist agency. They normally live in Kathmandu but in the off-season go to Switzerland and then bring Swiss tourists to Nepal. Somewhat different is the situation of Dawa Norbu of Khumjung who married a French ground hostess of Air France and lives with her in Paris where he works in a sports shop specializing in trekking equipment.

Recently, Ang Tsiring the son of Konje Chunbi, one of the prominent elderly men of Khumjung, fell in love with a European girl who had come with a trekking group of which Ang Tsiring was the *sirdar*. To the distress of his family he left his wife and lived in Kathmandu with the foreign girl who had a child from him. It is said that his wife went to Kathmandu and tried in vain to persuade her husband to give up his mistress and to return to Khumjung. Konje Chunbi then asked his younger and unmarried son to take over Ang

Tsiring's discarded wife, but the young man was not keen to do so and died in tragic circumstances.

These are only some examples of marriages between Sherpa men and western women, but according to one of my Sherpa informants some forty Sherpas have married foreigners. The number of Sherpa girls married to western men is relatively small. One is the wife of a British doctor working in the Kosi development project. A girl of Phaphlu, who had originally come from Tibet, married an American Peace Corps volunteer and went to live with him in the United States. There do not seem to have been any marriages between Japanese tourists and Sherpas, but three young girls of *Kami*, blacksmith, caste of Namche Bazar, who in the eyes of Hindus are untouchables, linked up with Japanese and are believed to be living in Tokyo, where one of them runs a Nepalese restaurant.

Since Sherpas began to settle in Kathmandu, there have been some unions with Newar and even Chetri girls. Such couples remain usually in Kathmandu, though the men may occasionally visit Solu-Khumbu, particularly if they engage in trekking work. Those Sherpas who have a Newar or Chetri wife in Kathmandu or even live there with a Sherpa woman whom they acquired in addition to their first wife, are generally becoming alienated from Khumbu society. There is little meeting ground between their children from their first wife who stays in their home village and any children from a second wife who grow up in the Nepali and Newari speaking urban society of the Kathmandu valley and never experience the hardships of life at high altitudes.

The only marriage of a Chetri and a Sherpa woman which led to the couple's permanent residence in Khumbu is that of Shyam Krishna Pradhan, the Chetri headmaster of the Khumjung Secondary School, first established by Sir Edmund Hillary and supported by the Himalayan Trust. Shyam Krishna Pradhan lives in the house of his wife Dha Lamu, the daughter of Danurbu Lama, and has been integrated into Khumjung society so successfully that he was selected as *Dumje Ihawa* for 1983 on the strength of the fact that it was the turn of the occupant of the house in which he lived to

take on the responsibility of *lawa*. He told me that in the capacity of *lawa* he would have to spend about Rs 15,000 for the entertainment of the villagers participating in the festival, and that he would have to borrow that sum. There is now much competition among the *lawas*, and those who are rich to offer not only *chang* and *rakshi*, which can be made by the Sherpas at a moderate cost, but also rum and Indian made whisky. The headmaster deplored this trend and said that he was doing his best to stem it. He also commented with regret on the Sherpas' reluctance to accept posts as teachers in their own schools because they can earn more as trekking guides. The boys he was teaching were not even keen on learning English because they thought that in trekking jobs they could manage with just a few words.

It is significant that these remarks by an educated Chetri dedicated to the welfare of the Sherpas with whom he has identified himself by his marriage were almost exactly identical with the opinion of one of the most successful and affluent of the Sherpas engaged in the management of a tourist agency. Both men complained that the young Sherpas ignored their advice because they experienced no difficulties in making money without having to take the trouble of acquiring additional qualifications. Yet it would seem that their position is not as secure as they are inclined to believe. Some touring agencies are already recruiting Tamangs and even Rais and training them to do the same work which the Sherpas are doing on treks. Such Tamangs tend to describe themselves as "Sherpas", using the name to define an occupation rather than an ethnic group. With tourist activities expanding into western Nepal, there are also plans for the recruiting and training of Gurungs and Magars as guides and camp servants. For in the western regions Sherpas have few local contacts and know little about the country and population. In the face of competition by men more familiar with local conditions they may well lose the monopoly they have enjoyed for so long in the care of tourists going on guided treks.

Solu-Khumbu will, of course, remain a preserve of the Sherpas working for tourists, in one or the other capacity. It is likely that more 'hotels' will spring up in the region and

provide employment for the local Sherpas. Apart from a well equipped guest house close to the Lukla air-strip, there are only two hotels providing reasonable comfort, namely one in Phaphlu built with French help, and the Everest View Hotel established in 1971 on a hill above Khumjung by a Japanese and Nepalese consortium. The latter was designed to cater to affluent tourists. Both these hotels depend on the availability of light planes capable of landing on the nearby airstrips. In recent years there has been a scarcity of such aircraft and hardly any flights were undertaken to Syamboche, the landing strip below the Everest View Hotel. Consequently, this hotel has had very few visitors, its prices being beyond the means of ordinary trekkers.

Once regular flights to Syamboche are arranged and plans for the electrification of Namche Bazar and neighbouring villages materialize, an affluent class of tourists may frequent Khumbu and stay for some time in the comfort of hotels such as Everest View. A change in the types of tourists may benefit the Sherpas of Khumbu, for at present there are many trekkers who carry their own packs and sometimes even some food and do not employ Sherpa guides and porters, and hence leave little money in Khumbu, though they add to the overcrowding of the places of greatest attraction. Improved employment opportunities in Khumbu itself might diminish the drift of young Sherpa men to Kathmandu which might help to restore the balance of Khumbu society at present suffering from a surplus of women and also of old people whose sons have settled in Kathmandu. If increased numbers of wealthy tourists could be attracted to Khumbu, some of the traditional craftsmen might benefit from the sale of their products. Thus Sherpa painters could probably sell their *thanka* at high prices. Kapa Kalden, for example, who used to obtain commissions for the painting of frescoes in monasteries, village-gompa and private chapels, concentrated in the last years of his life on painting pictures for tourists. His son, who spends half of the year in Khumjung and the other half in Kathmandu, has developed painting as a full time occupation and earns in this way enough to support himself and his family.

Tourism—advantages and disadvantages

It is difficult to weigh up the advantages and draw-backs of the Sherpas' exposure to tourism, but before even trying to strike a balance between the pros and cons of the new developments one has to remember that the disruption of the Sherpas' trade with Tibet through the Chinese occupation of that country made the continuation of the traditional economic pattern impossible, and that change, even if not beneficial to all the Sherpas, had to come in the aftermath of the events beyond Nepal's northern border. For though in recent years trade along the Nangpa La route has revived to some extent, it has lost its role as the third pillar of the Sherpa economy, farming and cattle breeding being the two other mainstays. Hence whatever the merits of the Sherpas' involvement with tourism may be, they had no other choice than to develop that source of income when their elaborate structure of trading relations with Tibet was suddenly destroyed.

Apart from facilitating the survival of the majority of the Sherpas in their traditional habitat, the growth of tourism in Nepal brought them a number of advantages. The material standard of living of the people of Khumjung has undoubtedly improved. The introduction of window panes alone has made their houses more comfortable, and the availability of iron sheets as roofing material has made the construction and renovation of houses much easier.

The Sherpas' diet has also improved, especially of families with at least one resident member earning cash by working occasionally for tourists. Thirty years ago even wealthy families lived mainly on potatoes, buckwheat, dairy products and a minimal amount of vegetables, while rice was eaten only on feast days. Today rice has become part of everyday diet, sugar, earlier unobtainable in Khumbu, is in common use, and at every weekly market in Namche Bazar fresh meat, usually of buffaloes, is being sold by Rais coming from the low country and is purchased by many Sherpas. A great deal of cash changes hands on such market days, and in many Sherpa homes there are various manufactured goods which in the old days were never found in Khumbu.

The type of clothes worn by the Sherpas has also changed, but this does not necessarily signify improvements. Down padded jackets, such as mountaineers wear, are in the possession of many Sherpas and certainly keep the owners warm, but these are not more useful than sheep-skin coats and not half as durable. The scarcity of wool compels women to wear cotton clothes, which are a poor substitute for the traditional woollen garments.

The comfortable, and in some cases truly luxurious, houses which the most successful Sherpa businessmen and tour operators were able to build for themselves in Kathmandu must undoubtedly be counted on the credit side, but the owners' and their families' alienation from traditional life in their homeland must be regarded as a minus point in the overall picture.

The most serious aspect of the development of Sherpa society in recent years is the disturbance of the balance between the sexes and the break-up of many families. As the men working in tourist jobs gained by increasing their income, the women left in Khumbu and burdened not only with the bringing up of their children but also with nearly the entire responsibility of the farm-work, were largely the losers, being deprived of security, companionship of their husbands and a diminished social position. For in a society placing as high a value on hospitality and the entertainment of friends as Sherpa society does, the woman without a husband to act as host is clearly at a disadvantage. A wife's deprivation is all the greater when it is known that her husband has an establishment in Kathmandu with a younger woman, even if he has no intention of divorcing the first wife. While a Sherpa co-wife can be absorbed into a family and a husband may arrange for the senior wife to join him and her co-wife occasionally in their Kathmandu home, this is not practicable if a Sherpa lives with a European partner who demands his undivided loyalty and attention.

Not only the married women are disadvantaged by the present involvement of a majority of men in tourist activities, but also the young girls who live in Khumbu in villages depleted of young men. While in the past these same villages

were characterized by an exuberant social life with frequent parties and dances, the present social atmosphere during the greater part of the year remains on a low key and brightens up only during the monsoon when the young men return to their villages for the celebration of the Dumje festival. The existence of a surplus of unmarried young women in Khumbu, which is demonstrated by the data in the houselist (see Appendix) seems to result from the conditions established by the demographic survey summarized in the following section.

Demographic change

During 1982 a research team consisting of Ivan G. Pawson, Dennyse D. Stanford and Vincanne A. Adams of the University of California undertook a demographic survey of the population of Khumbu, the results of which have appeared in the *Journal of Mountain Research and Development* (1983, November-December issue). According to this study there has been a fall in the fertility among the Sherpa population between 1970 and 1982. It was found that women have fewer children than they had before, and that more women are remaining childless than they were in the past. The investigators attributed this situation partly to the extended time spent away from home by married men engaged on expeditions or working with trekking groups. Moreover, substantial cash wages earned by female porters have had the effect of involving many women in work for tourists and of interfering thereby with child bearing. There appears to be now a virtual absence of children born to women who are neither betrothed nor married. This tallies with the investigators' impression that sexual activity outside marriage or betrothal is now less common than it used to be in the late 50s. This may be due to the simple fact that few young men are in Khumbu during the greater part of the year. The investigators also found that the majority of conceptions occurred during the monsoon months when trekking is impossible and men remain mainly in Khumbu.

The authors of this demographic study also emphasize the continued annual mortality of young Sherpa males in mountaineering accidents, such as the occasion when six Sherpas

lost their lives during the filming of 'The Man who Skied down Everest'. Summarizing their findings, the investigators forecast that the Sherpa population of Khumbu will continue to decline. For births are outnumbered by deaths and migration out of Khumbu, while continued mortality on climbing expeditions and the declining economic importance of children are likely to cause this trend to persist in the foreseeable future.

Buddhist Institutions and Practices

LIKE most Bhotias of Northern Nepal, the Sherpas are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism. Though there are few written records of early links with Tibetan religious centres, oral tradition establishes beyond doubt the Tibetan roots of the Buddhist institutions found today among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. According to A.W. Macdonald¹ who has analysed the welter of stories about the early phases in the establishment of Buddhism in Khumbu, the ancestors of the Sherpas crossed the Nangpa La from Tibet over four hundred years ago, and with them was Lama Sanga Dorje, a legendary figure now associated with the oldest centres of Buddhist worship in Khumbu. He was regarded as the sixth re-incarnation of Chag-na Dorje (Vajrapani), whose subsequent re-incarnations furnished the abbots of the famous Tibetan monastery of Rongphu below the north slopes of Mount Everest. Lama Sanga Dorje is supposed to have been born at Mohang, a place between Khumjung and Phortse and is reputed to have spent some time at the present site of Tengboche, where he built a small *gompa*. But he did not stay there for long but moved to Pangboche in the valley of the Imja Khola and there collected several monks around him and founded the first great *gompa* in the whole of Khumbu. His teaching is believed to have laid the foundation of Buddhist learning in Khumbu and the Sherpas point to many landmarks as the products of Sanga Dorje's miraculous feats. His death too is believed to have been accompanied by miracles, for when he died near Rongphu his body evaporated in the form of a rainbow and

1. "The Coming of Buddhism to the Sherpa area of Nepal", *Acta orientalia*, Budapest, 1980, Vol. xxxiv, (1-3) pp. 139-146.

only his eyes, tongue and heart remained. These precious relics are now enshrined in a silver casket, which occupies the central place in the first floor hall of Pangboche *gompa*.

Lama Sanga Dorje was claimed also as founder and patron of the *gompa* of Thami. It is believed that he installed one of his disciples as lama in charge of the *gompa*, and that the latter's descendants, who were not celibate monks but married lamas, remained attached to that *gompa* ever since.

Even though the establishment of the first Buddhist temples in the villages of Khumbu may have occurred as early as the seventeenth century, the development of monastic institutions with communities of celibate monks or nuns seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were the three ancient *gompa* of Pangboche, Thami and Kyerok, and the more recently founded *gompa* of Khumjung and Namche Bazar. Attached to each of these *gompa* were several lamas, but all of them were married men, and there were, as it seems, no *thawa*, monks who had taken vows of permanent celibacy.

It was only in 1923 that Lama Gulu, the member of a prominent family of Khumjung inspired the people of his village to support him in the foundation of a *gompa* on the model of Tibetan monasteries. He had been to study in Tibet, and had subsequently retired to Chamgaon, a small settlement on the slopes of Khumbu-yulha where convenient rock-shelters easily convertible into cave-dwellings had sometimes served hermits and religious inclined women as temporary retreat from village life. It was there that he secluded himself for the traditional period of three years, three months and three days. His exemplary act gradually led other men and women, to seek peace and spiritual advancement in the vicinity of such an inspired teacher. More and more people settled at Chamgaon, until it became a regular settlement of twelve to thirteen houses where people of Khumjung devoted themselves to religious practices.

Yet these men and women who lived there without formal organisation and discipline, did not form a proper monastic community. It was only in his old age that Lama Gulu began to contemplate the founding of a monastery on the site

of the present Tengboche. In connection with the founding of Tengboche *gompa* the abbot of Rongphu recognised Lama Gulu as a reincarnation of Lama Bundachendzen, believed to have been the father of Lama Sanga Dorje.

The site, which has a magnificent view of Mount Everest, was far enough from any village to ensure the peace and seclusion of the monks. The cost of constructing the *gompa* at Tengboche was borne mainly by four rich men of Khumjung, Junbesi, Namche Bazar and Gole, and to pay for the wall-paintings and other items of interior decoration Lama Gulu collected subscriptions from all the villages of Khumbu. So great is the Sherpas' generosity for religious purposes that an impressive three-storeyed building with a large paved courtyard surrounded by galleries arose within two months. For all the villagers of Khumjung, Kunde, Phortse, Pangboche and Namche came to help with the work, giving their labour free of charge.

As soon as the *gompa* was completed, Lama Gulu built a house for himself. Other men attracted by the prospects of an organised religious life built small houses around the main temple. These houses were and still are individually owned, and may be sold by one monk to another.

Within the first decade the number of monks in Tengboche grew to twenty-five and the monastery rapidly became the focal point of religious activities within a wide area. But in the great earthquake of 1933 the main temple collapsed and Lama Gulu, then eighty-five years old, died shortly afterwards of shock. He was cremated in the ruins of the monastery, on the very site where the great *duang* hall, had stood.

The villagers of Khumbu again came to the help of the monastery and giving money and free labour they rebuilt the *gompa*, making it even bigger than it had been before the earthquake. After just three years it was found that Lama Gulu was reincarnated in the son of a Khamba couple of Namche. The child's utterances about his home in Tengboche had aroused the parents' and other people's attention, and when monks of Tengboche placed some of Lama Gulu's clothes and other personal possessions, together with similar

articles of different origin, before the child, the little boy, then four years old, picked out all the genuine articles, saying that they belonged to him.

Satisfied with this proof the monks brought the child to Tengboche, and one of the senior monastery officials, the *umse* Gyaljen, who was Lama Gulu's brother's son, took the boy into his own house and devoted himself to his education. As the first *tulku*, reincarnate lama of Tengboche, the Khamba boy was regarded with veneration from the very beginning. At the age of sixteen he was taken to Rongphu for further studies and when in 1956 he returned to Tengboche he was ready to assume—or in the Sherpas' view to reassume—his position as head of the monastery, a position which he still holds.

In 1957 Tengboche had not only a young man as its head lama, but the average age of the monks was not more than thirty. Since its foundation thirty-four years earlier many boys and young men of the villages of Khumbu had come to the monastery to learn and to be initiated into a religious life. Not all were temperamentally suited to the contemplative existence of a monk. Some left the monastery to return to secular occupations, some married and settled down as village lamas, but others remained true to their vows, content to make Tengboche their permanent home.

Even the monks who had no intention of returning to a secular life did not permanently live in an ivory tower. Many were the occasions when they were called to one or the other village to recite from sacred scriptures for the benefit of a sick person, to participate in funeral ceremonies and memorial services, to conduct a rite in a village temple, and to help with the annual reading of the Kangyur. On these occasions they were in close contact with the lay villagers, and they freely visited their families and kinsmen, staying for some days in their houses and advising them on practical as well as religious problems.

Similarly, lay folk from all villages of Khumbu as well as some parts of Pharak and Solu occasionally visited Tengboche, anxious to obtain the reincarnate lama's blessing or intent on commissioning the performance of a sacred rite, be it to gain

payin, merit, or to honour the memory of a deceased kinsman and smooth his path in the world beyond.

In this manner there was a continuous two way traffic between the monastery and the lay world, and the learning of the monks was a source of inspiration to the village lamas as well as to the more educated among the laymen. The great monastery festival, known as Mani-Rimdu placed even before the most simple of villagers some basic notions of Buddhist doctrine in the form of dramatic representations.

Four years before his death, Lama Gulu had agreed to the foundation of a nunnery in a pleasant valley less than half an hour's walk from Tengboche. Some of the wealthy families of Khumjung, Kunde and Namche built small houses there for daughters or sisters attracted by the prospect of a religious life close to the revered abbot of Tengboche. This nunnery was known as Devuje, and subsequently a *gompa* was added in which the nuns performed ceremonies similar to those conducted in the great hall of Tengboche.

A development in some respects similar to that at Tengboche occurred around the same time in the valley of the Bhote Kosi. At Thami a family of married lamas had for many generations—fourteen according to their own estimate—been in charge of a small *gompa* traced to Lama Sanga Dorje. But there were no celibate monks and it was only when in the 1920s a large building was constructed on a site providing room for dwelling houses, that young men desirous of becoming monks joined the community. Most of them came from the villages of Thamichok. Soon small houses, built into the rocks of the steep mountain slope, began to spring up round the new *gompa*. By 1957 Thami *gompa* had grown into a monastery comprising married lamas as well as celibate monks with a full complement of monastery officials, and the facilities for staging the great Mani-Rimdu dance festival.

Monastery organisation

One of the principal factors determining the composition of a community of monks as well as that of a nunnery, is the general rule that monks and nuns must provide for their own

maintenance and their own lodgings. Unlike the members of religious institutions in some other societies, the monks in a Sherpa monastery, though provided with tea during the daily services, have each their own household shared sometimes with another monk of similar age. The parents of a novice either buy or build him a house, and they provide him with food and other necessities. When it seems probable that he will persist in a monastic career they give him a share in their property similar to that given to an elder son at the time of his marriage and separation from the parental household. A monk usually sells the immovable property received as his share, investing the money in such a way as to give him a steady income of agricultural produce. This system allows only the sons of fairly wealthy people to enter a monastery as a *thawa*, and the same applies to nuns wishing to settle in a nunnery.

In Tengboche there were in 1957 thirty-two monks as well as the reincarnate abbot. Eight of these had come from Namche, and only three of the monks resident at that time had come from Khumjung. Kunde was the home-village of seven *thawa*, two of whom were brothers, and Pangboche, a village with a high percentage of lamas, was represented only by three monks, and Phortse, though at no great distance from Tengboche only by one *thawa*.

The picture of the composition of the monk community of Tengboche gains in depth if we extend our analysis over the thirty-three years between the foundation of the monastery and the year 1957. In that period 91 *thawa* had been admitted to the *gompa*; 8 died there, one founded a monastery of his own at Trakshindo, and 44 *thawa* either voluntarily left Tengboche to return to secular life and marry, or were compelled to leave on account of clandestine associations with women brought to the *gompa* officials' notice.

The majority of the *thawa* of Tengboche came from the wealthier and more prominent families of the three villages Namche, Khumjung and Kunde, but it is noteworthy that the reincarnation of Tengboche's founder Lama Gulu, who belonged to one of the leading Khumjung families, occurred not

within the same circle, but in a family of Khambas recently immigrated from Tibet.

The abbot of a monastery is either a *tulku* lama, reincarnate lama, and never referred to by his name, or a *lama che*, head lama, such as in the past the hereditary lama of the Thami *gompa* used to be. An abbot usually does not concern himself with the day-to-day administration of monastery affairs, but spends his time in studying religious scriptures, teaching some monks, receiving pilgrims and presiding at major rites and festivals.

Next in rank to the abbot is an official known as *loben*. He has no definite function, but advises other monks in matters of ritual, and sits at ceremonies above the other monks without being directly in charge of the proceedings. In the absence of the abbot the *loben* officiates as the head of the monastery. Immediately below the *loben* ranks the *umse*, who conducts all the services in the *gompa*, leads the recitation and is generally in charge of the ritual. His appointment is usually for three years. The official next in rank to the *umse* is known as *gerku*. He is responsible for the maintenance of discipline and has the right to punish offenders against monastery rules. He is usually elected for one year, but may be re-elected if the abbot and the other monks are satisfied with his conduct of affairs. Officials known as *nierwa* are in charge of the trading and other economic affairs of the monastery and may be described as managers or stewards. There may be two or three *nierwa*, but in small monasteries there is usually just one. The *nierwa* hold the cash, but have to show accounts to the *gerku*. Apart from the higher ranks connected with administrative responsibilities, there are ranks of lower order through which the younger *thawa* have to pass before they become eligible for one of the responsible posts. These ranks are named after the parts played by the various monks at *gompa* services, such as pouring out tea and playing the different instruments which accompany the chanting.

The organisation of nunneries is modelled on that of monasteries, but communal activities and services are fewer, and the discipline is on the whole less strict. There is no

figure corresponding to a reincarnate lama or permanent abbot, but the head nun, known as *loben*, is elected from time to time.

Developments in Tengboche and Thami

In the 1960s the monastery of Tengboche under the leadership of a young and enthusiastic reincarnate abbot was well set to develop as one of the prime Buddhist institutions of the Nepal Himalayas. But the changes in the general climate of Khumbu caused by the growth of tourism brought this promising development to a sudden halt. By 1971 the number of monks had dropped to fourteen, and there were only two small boys in the early stages of their training for a monastic life. Three monks had died and nine had returned to secular life. One of the incentives to do so was the attraction of high wages paid by mountaineering expeditions to any one capable of carrying a load to high altitudes. The reincarnate abbot complained at that time about the difficulty of restraining his monks from leaving the *gompa*. He told me that two of them had enlisted among the porters of an expedition without even informing him. He spoke also about a decline in religious dedication and scholarship. His words were borne out by the outward appearances of the monastery; whose buildings showed unmistakable signs of neglect.

On a visit to Tengboche, twelve years later I found that the tide had visibly turned. For in 1983 the monastery was again flourishing and including the abbot there were 18 adult monks, 12 adolescents who had already taken the *rabodzung* vow and 15 boys attending the boarding school of the *gompa*. There was also a new spirit among the monks, and the restoration of the buildings was partly completed.

The abbot had plans for the expansion of the library and the establishment of a centre attached to the monastery where scholars of Mahayana Buddhism could find major literary sources in Tibetan as well as some books in Nepali and western languages. It is too early to say whether these plans will materialise, but they are undoubtedly inspiring local monks as well as monks from other *gompa*.

It is unfortunate that this renewed efflorescence of Buddhist

monasticism has coincided with a rush of tourists who pass through the grounds of Tengboche monastery in their hundreds. What stood once in a peaceful expanse of pasture land surrounded by rhododendron woods has been transformed into a fair ground where innumerable trekkers pitch their tents and, when this task has been completed, amuse themselves with ball games.

The National Park organisation has put up a lodge where for a small fee tourists can get a bedstead in a crowded dormitory. Mountain Travel has opened a more comfortable rest-house. Just in front of the *gompa* is a house built in Sherpa style which contains a kind of a restaurant run on behalf of the monastery by one of the *nierwa* released from most ritual duties to be able to devote himself to the management of this establishment.

As much as one may regret the disruption of the atmosphere of tranquillity which used to prevail all around the *gompa* purposely constructed in a locality which seemed to guarantee solitude and peace, it cannot be denied that the affluence brought to the Sherpas by tourism may largely be responsible for having provided the funds facilitating the restoration and expansion of the monastery buildings. For only a wealthy Sherpa community can support large religious institutions, and in the same way as two generations ago rich traders financed the original foundation of the Tengboche *gompa*, donations from Sherpas enriched by their involvement in tourist activities have helped the abbot to carry out recent improvements and the support of wealthy families has enabled young men to join Tengboche as monks dependent on their own funds.

A similar development has taken place in Thami. There the old regime of married lamas and an abbot descended in the male line from the founder of the *gompa* came to an end with the death of the son and chosen successor of the head-lama whom I observed presiding over the ceremonies of the Mani-Rimdu in 1957. When the original line of head-lamas became extinct the remaining monks invited a reincarnate lama of Rolwaling to become the abbot of their monastery. He accepted the position determined to turn

the monastery into a community of celibate monks comparable to Tengboche. At that time there were still a few of the old married lamas living with their wives in their own houses, and these old couples remained undisturbed. But the personality and enthusiasm of the reincarnate abbot attracted a fair number of young men who joined the monastery as celibate monks.

In April 1983 there was great activity in the monastery, for the *gompa* was in need of restoration, and the abbot had also decided to enlarge the courtyard where the dances of the Mani-Rimdu were to be performed. Already on the trail leading from Namche Bazar through the Bhote Kosi valley to Thami I had seen several teams of monks carrying heavy beams to be used as pillars in the abbot's new house, which was to be built as part of the project of enlarging the monastery. Great efforts were required to carry the heavy and cumbersome tree trunks along the winding path and finally up the steep ascent to the *gompa*. I marvelled at the dedication of men who, in addition to making a living in the harsh climate of Khumbu, undertook such exhausting tasks in the service of religion. Though in the courtyard several craftsmen were busy shaping boards and posts, it seemed unlikely that the work could be completed within the six weeks before the performance of the Mani-Rimdu. But the monks had no doubt that the courtyard would be ready in time for the festival.

The monastery built into the rocks high above the village of Thami is not the only religious institution in the area. Not far to the north lies the Kyerok *gompa*, known also as Sanga Choli *gompa*. This too has been renovated. When I first visited Kyerok in 1953 only married lamas were attached to that *gompa*, but now the general trend of reform in Khumbu has also reached Kyerok. The present head, Lama Tenzing, had been thinking for some time of transforming Sanga Choli *gompa* into a monastery with celibate monks and after some time four such young *thawa* joined the community. In 1983 there were twelve lamas and *thawa* resident at Kyerok and the *gompa* had recently obtained many new books. I was told that some years earlier H.M. King Birendra visited the *gompa*

and seeing the roof leaking and the frescoes being spoilt, had made a donation which enabled Lama Tenzing to renovate the *gompa*. Kyerok is an important ritual centre for the Thamichok area and at the time of the Dumje festival as many as eighty lamas are said to participate in the rites performed in the *gompa*.

There are no monastic institutions and village *gompa* in Pharak comparable to those of Khumbu. But at a place called Gomila in Nepali and Tekacholi in Sherpa is a *gompa* which in the past was of some importance. It is situated on an isolated hill-side above the right bank of the Dudh Kosi, and is reported to have been established by Thienba Dorje. But in 1983 there was only one resident lama who acted as *konier*, care-taker.

Whenever a major ceremony has to be held in Pharak, lamas from distant *gompa* are invited to perform the rites. Such an occasion occurred in April 1983 in Lukla when Pasang, a rich householder, organised in his own new house a *kurim* rite and a *Tshe-wong*, a rite of blessing. The old Lama Tenzing from Kyerok had come all the way accompanied by some of his *thawa* and there were six lamas who played the instruments prescribed by the liturgy of a *Tshe-wong* rite. The house was crowded with men, women and children. The women wore colourful Sherpa clothes but the men were without exception in mountaineering attire or western style clothes.

In Lukla there are no performances of the Dumje festival, but Nyungne and Tsho are performed in a small *gompa*.

Village lamas

While the monasteries are the main focal points of the Sherpas' religious life, the performance of seasonal and domestic ritual is mainly the responsibility of the lamas resident in the villages. The standing of such a village lama must not be confused with that of a priest who is the hereditary or appointed representative of the community in the religious sphere. A village lama is simply a person who has received religious instruction that enables him to perform certain rites

and is resident in the village as a householder. He may have been taught by another village lama or may have spent some years as novice or monk in a monastery before returning to secular life.

Virtually all village lamas are married and in many cases it is the desire to legalise an irregular union which induces a monk to give up his monastic career and settle down as a married householder. Some such ex-monks became highly respected village lamas, whose services were much in demand even outside their own village.

Village lamas are not village dignitaries, but act as private practitioners providing their priestly services wherever they are required. At times a village community comprises several eminent lamas, and others when the same village depends for all important rites on the ministrations of lamas from neighbouring villages or monasteries. The position in Khumjung underwent in the past thirty years several such changes.

In 1953 there were in Khumjung the following lamas: Kusho Kapkye, a Khamba, who had immigrated from Tibet some thirty years previously, Lama Kiu of Gardze clan, then eighty years old, Sharap Lama, a Khamba, who had immigrated from Tibet some twenty-five years earlier, Lama Karma of Thaktu clan, who was the son of a lama of Kunde, and Ongcho Lama, a man of Solu and son-in-law of Sange Lama, who had retired to Tengboche. Kusho Kapkye died in 1953, Lama Kiu in 1957, and Sharap Lama in 1957. This left Khumjung with Lama Karma and Ongcho Lama and at major rituals lamas from Tengboche or other villages were invited.

In 1983 Ongcho Lama and Lama Danurbu were the only lamas residing in Khumjung, but in Kunde there were several Tibetan lamas, who had come as refugees and were available for the performance of rituals. Thus on the occasion of the celebration of the birthday of the Buddha, when parts of the Tengyur were recited in the village *gompa*, the ceremony was performed by ten lamas, of whom four were originally from Khumjung, two from Kunde and the rest from Tibet though living in Kunde.

With several boys receiving instruction in the boarding

school of Tengboche village lamas will always be at hand in the foreseeable future. But there is the question whether opportunities in Kathmandu will not deflect some of the young men from a religious career.

The practice of religion

In my book *The Sherpas of Nepal* I have described in some detail the various ceremonies and rites through which the Sherpas give expression to their belief in the interaction between men and the supernatural powers constituting the Buddhist pantheon. With a few exceptions these ceremonies and rites are basically the same as those performed by other Bhotia groups adhering to Mahayana Buddhism. In recent years I have had the opportunity to observe such rites in the *gompa* of Humla, Mustang, Manang and the high altitude villages of Nar and Phu. Everywhere I was reminded of the proceedings with which I had become familiar during the many hours I had spent in the *gompa* and chapels of Khumbu. Hence I realized that many of the rituals I had recorded there were not specifically characteristic of the Sherpas, but were part of the common religious heritage of a large number of communities inhabiting the Himalayan highlands. Changes in the way such rituals are being performed are hence not likely to spring from any substantial modification in beliefs and attitudes. This presumption is borne out by my recent experiences in Khumbu where I could not discover any noticeable diversions from the familiar pattern. Had I been able to observe such major ceremonies as the Dumje or the Mani-Rimdu I might have found changes in the social framework within which they were performed, but the limited time I could spend among the Sherpas in 1983 did not permit participation in events spaced out over several months.

As the present study is intended as a record of changes in the Sherpas' social and cultural life, there is no point in repeating the description of ritual activities contained in *The Sherpas of Nepal*, and I propose therefore to restrict myself to a brief enumeration of several rites and ceremonies which continue to be performed in Sherpa villages of Khumbu.

A rite designed to protect the village land and performed

at the beginning of the agricultural season is known as Osho. It includes the circumambulation of the village and its fields by a procession of lamas, notables and villagers. In the past this rite was connected with the appointment and inauguration of new *naua*, and for this reason the latter were known as *Osho naua*. With the decline in the importance of these dignitaries, the rite itself has lost some of its social importance. In Chaurikharka, the major village of Pharak, there were *naua* until 1978, but since then their appointment has been given up because they have been replaced by the panchayat system.

A ritual universal in Buddhist Bhotia societies is the Nyungne, which in Khumbu is performed usually in May or June. Its purpose is cleansing the worshippers of sin and the corresponding gain of *payin*, merit. Participation in the Nyungne is not obligatory, but in Khumjung it used to be observed by the majority of middle-aged and elderly villagers. Sherry Ortner, who observed the Nyungne in Junbesi reports* that in this large village only eight villagers and a few mendicant religious widows attended the ceremonies in the *gompa*, though all the villagers abstained from work throughout the day. In Khumjung the performance of the Nyungne used to be a village responsibility and three *lawa* were appointed to organize the rite, provide ritual accessories and butter lamps, invite lamas from other villages and prepare food and drink to be served inside the *gompa*. On the first day of the rite the participants ate of that food, but subsequently they had to fast for two days. An essential element of the rite is the circumambulation of *chorten*; *mani*-walls, and the *gompa* itself done barefoot to emphasize the character of the Nyungne as an act of penance. Abstention from food and drink is one of the symbols of renunciation. The prayers recited by lamas and laymen are mainly addressed to Pawa Cherenzi (Avalokitesvara), but worshippers pray also to other divinities, to demons and to the *lu*, serpent deities.

The greatest of all Sherpa festivals and the one of most concern to the whole village community is the Dumje. In

* *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 35.

Khumbu this should be celebrated not later than the first half of July, that is, at a time when the monsoon has already begun. The timing facilitates the participations of men engaged in tourist treks, as the monsoon is the off-season for tourism. According to S. Ortner, Junbesi celebrates Dumje in April, but the nature of the festival as a rite of exorcism is the same as that of the celebration in Khumbu villages.

The most characteristic feature of the Dumje is the selection by rotation of *lawa*, villagers responsible for the management of the festival, and above all the provision and preparation of food and drink for all the participants. All those who are not *lawa* in any one year can eat and drink as much as they like, and the days of the Dumje are hence a time of general gaiety and merry-making, and they enjoy a special licence for amorous adventures.

However, the purpose of the Dumje is not only the bringing together of all the villagers for a period of conviviality but above all the confrontation of the forces of evil and the eventual driving out of hostile spirits. There is an elaborate liturgy which has to be recited and chanted at the time of the Dumje.

There has always been competition between *lawa*, each trying to outdo the other in the provision of food and drink. Yet it was recognized that poor householders who had to act as *lawa* according to the system of rotation could not be lavish, even though they may have saved for the occasion for a long time, and their modest offerings were accepted with good grace. With the change over to a cash economy competition has become fiercer, and while previously home-brewed *chang* was the normal drink provided by rich and poor alike the affluent Sherpas of today try to make a splash by serving large quantities of commercially manufactured spirits such as rum, whisky and gin. Several thousand rupees are easily spent by a Dumje *lawa*. We have seen that the Chetri head master of the Khumjung school, the first non-Sherpa to act as Dumje *lawa*, expected the feat of integration into Sherpa society by discharging the duty of *lawa* to cost him up to Rs 15,000.

The purpose of dispensing lavish hospitality is by no means

solely the wish to gain prestige, but the dispensing of hospitality is believed to be also a source of religious merit. Not only charity given to the poor or to eminent lamas produces *payin*, merit, but also the hospitality dispensed by a *lawa* even though the recipients are not really in need of such charity. It stands to reason that if stinginess and greed are *digba*, sins, the opposite of these attitudes must produce *payin*. For this reason the Sherpas feel obliged to accept gifts and even excessive offerings of food and drink, because by accepting them they give the donors a reason for gaining merit while their refusal would deprive the donor of such a chance. Hence occasions such as the Dumje are regarded important because the game of giving and accepting is a fundamental means of gaining religious merit as well as status in the eyes of the community.

Whereas various rites such as *tsho*, *kurim* or *lhachetu* can be performed in private houses the Dumje can only be held in a public temple. The earliest Dumje celebrations in Khumbu were held in Pangboche and Thami. Just as the people of Phortse, who still have no village *gompa* of their own, attend the Dumje in Pangboche, so the people of Khumjung and Kunde used to join the Dumje celebration in Thami. Because of a quarrel over the arrangements, the people of Khumjung and Kunde decided to build a *gompa* of their own on a site in Khumjung and to celebrate in this the Dumje independently. Ever since Khumjung and Kunde have acted as a single unit for the Dumje celebration and the *lawa* have been chosen from a combined list of householders in both villages.

The Sherpas who live permanently in Kathmandu have as yet no ritual centre where they can celebrate the Dumje and many of them try, therefore, to return to their own villages and join in the festivities which are important for securing the cohesion of the community. Yet there are plans under way for the creation of religious centre in which major rituals could be celebrated. An association of Sherpas under the chairmanship of the reincarnate Lama of Tengboche has purchased a large building site at Bodhnath about half a mile east of the great stupa, and the intention is to build there a large *gompa* as well as houses for monks and a big rest-house for pilgrims. Some preliminary work for this was begun in 1982, but the

greater part of the project is still in the planning stage. The Sherpa community of Kathmandu is certainly anxious to retain traditional religious practices, perhaps as a kind of compensation for the loss of so many aspects of the Sherpa culture in the process of urbanisation. It is too early to predict whether in the future there will be celebrations of the Dumje in the new *gompa*.

After the performance of the Dumje in Khumjung all cattle owners leave the village and move with their herds to one or the other high altitude settlements where they have houses and plots of land. In such *yorsa*—settlements groups of families perform a ritual known as *yer-chang* which is closely connected with their pastoral activities and includes the re-dedication of *yak* which have been dedicated to one of the mountain deities. Usually, a lama is invited to minister at this rite, which continues to be celebrated in the traditional way.

The most spectacular rite, the Mani-Rimdu, a festival of ritual dances and incantations, is performed in the monasteries of Thami and Tengboche, but in none of the other *gompa* of Khumbu. In Thami it is celebrated in May, while in Tengboche it is performed in November, at a time when the monastery courtyard may already be covered with snow. The Mani-Rimdu is not a rite peculiar to the Sherpas but is performed also in the *gompa* of Marpha and Tserok in Thak Khola. The liturgy as well as the costumes and masks are similar in all these performances and there can be no doubt that they follow Tibetan models. This is borne out by the history of the introduction of the Mani-Rimdu into Khumbu. Until the establishment of monastic communities in the early twentieth century, the Mani-Rimdu has never been celebrated in Khumbu, but many Sherpas had seen performances in the Tibetan monastery of Rongphu. It was there that the monks of Khumbu learnt the ritual dances. Already in the life-time of Gulu Lama, the founder of Tengboche, performances of the Mani-Rimdu were staged there on a grand scale, but in Thami *gompa* part of the ritual was first performed in 1940, but the enactment of the dances was begun only in 1950.

The whole festival which extends over four days is described in my book *The Sherpas of Nepal*, but a much more detailed

analysis of the entire ritual is contained in Luther G. Jerstad's *Mani-Rimdu, Sherpa Dance Drama*. The Mani-Rimdu is undoubtedly a development of the Cham dances which constitute an important part of Tibetan ritual, and in the description of these dances in René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz's *Tibetan Religious Dances* we notice many features reminiscent of the Mani-Rimdu.

The dances of the Mani-Rimdu performed by monks wearing masks, depict the subjugation of the ancient Bon religion by Buddhism, but beyond that the drama enacts the fight of good over evil, and among the figures represented are demons as well as deities. Sherry Ortner suggests that the ritual fights between gods and demons, "are about the struggle and would-be triumph of Buddhism against these demons, not long ago, but today. The religion must annually reassert its claims to people's allegiance and dependence, reconquer its "foes", and reestablish its hegemony." (op. cit., pp. 168-9). For the Sherpas attendance at the Mani-Rimdu is an act of worship even though some aspects of the drama serve to entertain the spectators. Among the traditional scenes enacted is a comedy in which one of the characters parodies the hospitality etiquette and is greeted invariably by shouts of laughter on the part of the audience.

The sacred texts recited at the Mani-Rimdu are largely the same as those forming the liturgical background of the Dumje. Several features such as the symbolic destruction of the effigy of an evil spirit and the offering of burnt sacrifices on a temporary altar form part of both these rites.

In recent years the presence of scores of tourists at the performance at Tengboche, more than at that in Thami *gompa*, has blurred the religious aspect of the Mani-Rimdu, for during the four days of its duration a good deal of cash is spent on food and accommodation. In this respect the Mani-Rimdu with its colourful and dramatic dances differs from the Dumje, which is a village festival to be enjoyed almost exclusively by the members of the community and does not attract many tourists.

Rites of exorcism

Twice a year, once in April at the beginning of the cultivating season, and again in October, when the harvest has been brought in and the herds and herdsman returned from the high pastures, a rite known as Tsirim is performed in the village *gompa* of Khumjung. The purpose of this rite is to drive off all evil spirits which may threaten the community. The organization of this rite lies with two *lawa* appointed from among the householders in rotation. Their main task is the collection of grain from all the villagers and the preparation of food and tea for the lamas ministering at the rite.

With the public performance of the Tsirim rite twice a year the village community as a whole wages a preventive war against evil spirits. In a similar rite witnessed in the Bhotia village of Nar in Manang district the purpose was the exorcism of demons believed to have caused an epidemic which had afflicted the village and had resulted in the death of several children. As in Khumbu, a representation of the forces of evil was moulded of *tsampa* and butter, and after being kept for a day in the *gompa* this sculptured image was expelled from the *gompa* and finally cut into pieces. Both the intention and the symbolism were the same in Khumjung and in Nar, the two villages which are hundreds of miles apart but share the tradition of the Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism. In both areas the struggle against demonic forces is not only a public concern, but is waged in numerous private rites performed in individual houses and following a similar pattern.

Like other Mahayana Buddhists, the Sherpas believe in a great number of malignant spirits, known by the generic term *shrindi*. Their number is legion, and in the eternal fight against these forces of evil man can never relax, but relies on the efficacy of well established ritual and the aid of two types of ritual practitioners—the lamas and the spirit-media. The latter known as *lhawa*, a term derived from the Tibetan *lhapa* and not to be confused with the *lawa*, organizers of such rituals as the Dumje, resemble shamans, and in a state of trance can see and hear spirits who possess their bodies and speak through their mouths. A *lhawa* may have been

chosen by supernatural visitations and pressed into the role of medium irrespective of his own inclination, but the powers of a medium may also be inherited, and in Khumbu there were families several members of which had the gift of acting as media. Unlike the shamans of other Himalayan tribes the Sherpa *lhawa* do not travel to the world of spirits, but induce the spirits and gods to come to them and having possessed them answer through their mouths questions asked by persons attending the sceance. In this way it is possible to discover the cause of an illness and learn also about ways of curing it.

Witches

The practitioners who aided the Sherpas in their struggle with the invisible malignant forces often came up against the baneful influence of witches and there was the widespread belief that much illness and other misfortune was caused by their activities. A witch is known as *pem* or *sondim*, and usually only women are attributed with the urge and power to harm other villagers through the invisible influence of their minds. Yet it is believed that no one is ever born as a witch, and that the condition of a *pem* is more an affliction comparable to the evil eye than a wilful manipulation of malignant forces.

The same phenomenon is widespread among other Bhotia populations. In Nar, a village of high altitude dwellers in Manang district, I was given more detailed information on the problem of witches than I had ever been able to obtain from the Sherpas. The people of Nar and the neighbouring village of Phu call female witches *mang-mu* and male witches *mang*, two terms which are used also by the Thakalis of Thak Khola. In Nar it is believed that all men and women have a *gyaptak*, a spirit, attached to them. Such a *gyaptak* may be the malignant ghost of an ancestor who had died in anger or pain. A bad *gyaptak* is considered capable of turning a person into a witch. A *mang-mu* or *mang* can be recognized from the physiognomy and the general character. Those harbouring feelings such as envy and hatred, and bad intentions towards others are likely to become witches and inflict harm on villagers through an invisible emanation.

Unlike the Sherpas who consider the condition of *pem* an individual affliction, the Bhotias of Nar believe that there are whole (*gyupa*) lineages, in which the condition of *mang* and *mang-mu* is hereditary. While members of 'good' *gyupa* do not become witches, 'bad' *gyupa* produce many witches. The condition is believed to be also contagious, and a young man of good *gyupa* who marries a *mang-mu* girl will himself become a witch, and the couple's children will all be witches. The head lama of Nar told me that previously there were only a few bad *gyupa* in Nar and hence only a few witches. But by mixing with people of bad *gyupa* many members of good *gyupa* became witches, and now nearly half of the village population were *mang* and *mang-mu*. While a strong lama could control the evil doings of one or two witches, he cannot counteract the wickedness of scores of witches. With the help of *mantra*, charms, he could protect individuals, but he lacked the power to destroy the evil of a host of witches.

Because of the fear of contagion, people of good *gyupa* tried to marry their children at an early age to boys and girls of equally unblemished *gyupa*. For they were apprehensive of their older sons attaching themselves to girls of bad *gyupa* and thereby running the risk of becoming themselves *mang* and developing the characteristics of envy and greed.

A *mang* cannot purify himself in this life, but by doing meritorious deeds and particularly by acts of charity, the building of *mani*-walls and *chorten*, he could provide for his next reincarnation in which he may be free of the taint of being a witch.

The comparison of the attitude to witches in the Sherpa and Nar society is interesting because it shows that a phenomenon which is basically common to both societies can assume different forms. While in the course of many months spent among the Sherpas, I had personal contact only with one *pem*, during a few weeks' stay in Nar numerous women were pointed out to me as *mang-mu*. I was told that most of the illegitimate children in Nar were the off-spring of *mang-mu*, a situation resulting from the fact that girls known to be witches cannot find men prepared to marry them even though they may have lovers.

The Sherpas' as well as the Nar people's attitude to witches is very different from the treatment meted out to witches by many Indian populations. While among these it is not unusual to banish a person recognized as a witch from the village, the Sherpas as well as Nar Bhotias leave witches unharmed though they may avoid accepting food and drink from their hands because of the fear of being poisoned.

Witches are not the only malignant beings threatening the well-being of the Sherpas. Quite apart from demonic forces known as *shrindi* are the *norpa*, ghosts, of dead men whose evil nature is ascribed to the manner of their death. The mortuary rites, and particularly the recitation of certain scriptures, aim at preventing the *sem*, spirit, of a man or woman to become a *norpa*, but sometimes they are of no avail and the probing of *lhawa*, spirit-media, may reveal that a man or woman suffered the fate of becoming a malignant earth-bound ghost barred from reincarnation in human shape. Notwithstanding such mishaps, the Sherpas are confident that the forces of evil, in whatever form they may be manifested, can be neutralized by the performance of rituals and the exertion of spiritual powers by lamas endowed with special gifts.

Morality and Social Values

The Sherpas' ideology is rooted in Mahayana Buddhism in its Tibetan form and their basic moral concepts are similar to those of other Buddhist populations inhabiting the northern borderlands of Nepal. This similarity is due to the fact that wherever Tibetan cultural influence prevails the same religious scriptures mould the ideas of the local lamas and percolate through to the laity. Hence the values determining the Sherpas' social attitudes cannot be explained solely as an outcome of the prevailing economic conditions and the structure of Sherpa society.

The entire moral system is dominated by the belief in merit and sin, as the two elements shaping their ultimate fate. Like other Buddhists, the Sherpas believe that every act of virtue adds to an individual's store of merit, whereas every sinful act diminishes this valuable store. The addition and subtraction of merit are thought of in more or less mechanical terms, and the Sherpas believe that throughout a person's life appropriate points result from good or bad deeds. After death the account is made and the balance of good and bad marks determine a man's fate imagined in good or undesirable reincarnations.

Only knowledgeable lamas are aware of the various eschatological theories concerning the phenomena facing man after death, but even ordinary laymen are convinced that there is some kind of life in the spheres entered by the departed and that the nature of that life depends for every individual on the balance between merit and demerit accumulated

during his or her life-time. Hence references to sin occur often in ordinary conversation, such as remarks that smoking or the killing of even the smallest animal is sin (*digba*).

Unlike monotheistic religions Buddhist ideology as understood by the Sherpas does not link moral conduct with deference to the commands of any personal deity. 'Sin' is to them not an act which offends any particular god but an offence against a universal moral order which is independent of supernatural personal beings.

Meritorious acts include all behaviour which benefits other people. Hence charity of every kind is the supreme source of merit and the Sherpas prize it more than any other virtue. Gifts to lamas as well as alms to the poor result in the gain of merit by the donor. Even the distribution of food to people not actually in need is considered charitable, and on the occasion of religious festivals wealthy people provide food and drink to all, gaining thereby social prestige as well as merit. Similarly, at memorial feasts held after a person's death, food and sometimes also money is distributed to all the villagers and often also to people from neighbouring villages. The merit derived from such an act of charity can be diverted to persons recently deceased. It is believed that the man in whose name the memorial rite is performed is helped on his way through the regions of the netherworld by the distribution of such charity. The Sherpas also believe that merit flows from activities which benefit the general public and even complete strangers. Thus the construction of bridges and rest-houses on lonely tracks is considered highly meritorious, and people contribute to such enterprises for the express purpose of gaining merit. Even more meritorious is the construction or repair of religious buildings such as temples, monasteries, *chorten* and prayer-walls. In the past, it was a common practice to carve religious texts into rock-faces and large boulders along a path. The merit gained from these inscriptions is reaped by the person who paid for the work and not by the artisan who did the carving. In recent years the carving of new inscriptions has become rare, which seems to indicate a diminishing religious fervour, for there is no lack of Sherpas who have become wealthy by work for tourists and mountaineering expeditions.

It is also possible, however, that such men prefer to appear as benefactors by giving donations to an abbot for the support of a monastery, rather than engage in the more impersonal exercise of commissioning the carving of inscriptions on rock-faces.

Kindness to men and animals has always been a quality appreciated by the Sherpas, and judging from their folk-lore their ideal is not the heroic personality but the wise, restrained and mild man who finds satisfaction in acting a peace-maker.

The sensitivity of the Sherpas to moral problems becomes apparent when one asks them about matters such as merit and sin. While in my research among Indian tribal populations I often experienced difficulties in finding out what precisely the societies investigated considered right and wrong, the more articulate Sherpas were easily persuaded to describe sinful acts as well as meritorious conduct.

Among the sins the killing of humans and animals usually headed the list. It was taken for granted that murder was the supreme sin. But even the infliction of pain on man or animal is considered sinful.

To slaughter yak or sheep is sinful for the butcher, but not for those who eat the meat.

To quarrel is sin, whatever the cause may be.

To threaten children or to make them cry is sin.

To speak ill of a person behind his back is sin, particularly if the accusations are unfounded.

To marry a girl against her will is sin, both for her husband and for the parents who arranged the marriage.

To have sexual relations with another person's spouse is sin.

To have sexual relations with a monk or nun is sin, because the person involved contributes to the monk's or nun's sin.

To steal is sin.

To cheat in trade is sin.

To get drunk is sin for monks but not for laymen.

To fell trees is sin, though in certain circumstances it is unavoidable.

To cause a spirit long associated with a locality to be

driven out is sin for the person commissioning the exorcism, but not for the lama who executes the rite.

A typical feature of Sherpa morality is the idea that certain sins cannot be avoided, and that those who commit them must make up for the loss of merit by undertaking meritorious works and thereby redress the balance. Thus trees have to be felled to build houses even though plant-life cannot be destroyed without some sin being committed. Similarly, *yak*-breeders castrate bulls, although they know well that it is sinful to inflict pain on animals. The Sherpa overcomes the discrepancy between the desirable and the practicable by comforting himself with the thought that good works can outweigh minor sins. This emphasis on the possibility of setting off evil actions by meritorious deeds may also lessen the gravity of remorse for such avoidable sins as adultery. For if all sins are capable of being cancelled out by good works there is no overwhelming incentive to avoid some of the more pleasurable sins.

There is no belief that certain offences expose the perpetrators or even the whole community to any specific danger. The idea widespread among both tribal and Hindu populations of India, that certain breaches of the moral code automatically draw disaster upon the offenders as well as to the community to which they belong is foreign to the Sherpas. Sins diminish the individual's store of merit, but they have no polluting effect and hence contact with the perpetrators of sins does not pollute others. Indeed contagious pollution which is so important a concept in the Hindu thinking and social relations plays no role in Sherpa interpersonal relations. This becomes clear in the Sherpas' attitude to death. Whereas Hindu Nepalis have the strong conviction that a case of death pollutes the deceased's family and agnatic kinsmen, who according to the degree of their relationship have to observe the rules of mourning for a stipulated number of days, the Sherpas do not think that the death of a close kinsman and the contact with the corpse has any harmful effect on the survivors. I realized this when in Khumjung the funeral of an important member of the village community coincided with the celebration of a *dem-chang*, the pre-wedding rite. On that occasion the

deceased's youngest son, in whose house the death and part of the funerary rites had taken place and who had made all the preparations for the funeral, participated immediately after the cremation in the *dem-chang* celebrations, a situation which would have been unthinkable in any Hindu community in Nepal or elsewhere.

Sherry Ortner who deals at length with the Sherpas' attitude to death, describes death as "one of the situations of great pollution for the living...because the deceased as a person, a self, has disintegrated, modeling and prefiguring the disintegration of the living." She emphasizes the belief in attacks by demons during the performance of the funeral, attacks which have to be warded off by exorcism. But although this task falls to the lamas conducting the funerary rites, I have found no indication that either they or the kinsmen attending the cremation and handling the corpse become polluted in a way similar to the Hindus becoming subject to contagious pollution.

The problem lies here in the interpretation of "pollution". The Hindu societies, in which the fear of pollution plays so large a role, consider pollution as lowering a person's or a group's ritual and social status, and as being contagious. From Sherry Ortner's interpretation pollution is an emotional state which makes people either dull and lethargic or aggressive and prone to violence, both states being caused by demonic forces.

According to Hindu belief pollution can be caused also by purely natural conditions free of any demonic involvement. Examples for these are birth and menstruation pollution, concepts entirely absent in Sherpa thinking. Similarly, there is no idea that the acceptance of food cooked by persons of low status may pollute a man or woman of high status, and we have seen that only the sharing of a drinking cup with low status persons is avoided.

Sherry Ortner has suggested that food as such, and particularly meat and beer, may have a morally corrupting effect, because food arouses sensuous greed, which is sinful in itself. But this concept is very different from the Hindu idea that members of a clean caste can become irremediably polluted

simply by eating beef or rice cooked by an untouchable, or even by sharing a meal with a person of low status. Such idea is entirely foreign to the Sherpas, who have the advantage of being able to travel through regions inhabited by other ethnic groups, to partake of their food and sleep in their houses without fear of pollution. This freedom from petty restrictions has greatly worked to the advantage of the Sherpa traders who could freely mix with people of all religious and ethnic groups. Even their early contacts with the Europeans were facilitated by their tolerance and exuberant nature which differ so fundamentally from the withdrawn and suspicious attitude of caste Hindus vis-à-vis the first western visitors to Nepal.

In the establishment of good relations with trade-partners and even with strangers, the Sherpas were helped also by their customary courtesy and easy manners, which are the outward expression of a spirit of tolerance and consideration for the interests and feelings of others. Great emphasis has always been placed on the graces of conduct, and every visit to a Sherpa house is an occasion for the display of an elaborate etiquette. While the Sherpas are very free in verbal expressions, and a male visitor may joke with his hostess in a manner which in many other societies would be considered outrageous, both hostess and visitor will seldom fail to maintain the strictest etiquette in the serving and acceptance of drink. It is essential that the hostess should refill the guest's cup at least twice, and the latter accepts this with only faint gestures of refusal. But when she tries to fill his cup again, he has to protest vigorously and the game of pressing tea or liquor on an ostensibly reluctant guest, who seems to yield only under pressure, is continued for a long time.

The warmth and cordiality which pervades the relations between friends and fellow villagers is intensified among close kinsmen, and the atmosphere in the average Sherpa home is one of relaxed cheerfulness. Relations between husbands and wives are usually amicable and based on mutual tolerance, for those of incompatible temperaments have little incentive to stay together. The ideal of the good marriage is not a unique relationship emotionally so highly charged that its persistence

stands and falls with the preservation of absolute exclusiveness, but rather a stable and secure union based on affection and common interests, and this disinterest in exclusiveness in sexual relations provides an explanation for the success of polyandrous marriages.

The moral values which characterized the traditional Sherpa society undoubtedly developed in small communities whose well-being depended on the peaceful and willing cooperation of all the families inhabiting a village. There was little competition for sparse resources, for pastures were adequate for as many *yak* as the inhabitants of a village were able to look after, and it seems that land-disputes were also extremely rare. Success in trade resulted from individual skill and energy, and the magnitude of the volume of trade with Tibet of one merchant did not affect the chances of other traders. Hence there was little scope for rivalry in the sphere of economic enterprises. The system of village government by rotation served also the smooth conduct of public affairs and apart from the occasional drunken brawl when *chang* had flowed all too amply, there were few occasions for acrimonious disputes disrupting the peace of village life.

This situation changed with the growth of tourism. Today the Sherpas are no longer alone in Khumbu and the old values of a society virtually free of competition and rivalry no longer fit an economic system which encourages individuals to consider acquisition of money their first priority. Previously, a congenial domestic atmosphere was regarded an essential element of the good life, and wealth was not desired for its own sake, but as a means of running a household in which all members were provided with adequate food and clothing, and there was sufficient surplus to entertain guests as often and lavishly as possible. Wealth was valued also because it enabled a man or woman to dispense charity and give donations to religious institutions, and thereby acquire merit.

Though many men frequently went on trading trips, they normally spent the greater part of their time with their family. The present absence of the majority of young and middle-aged men on tourist-treks and mountaineering expeditions places the traditional ideal of the good life out of reach of many

families, particularly if the husband has a second establishment in Kathmandu. While the successful *yak*-breeder and agriculturist did not have to sacrifice any part of his domestic life to these activities, a mountaineering or trekking *sirdar* can only sustain the competition of the other Sherpas in the same business if he gives his professional duties priority over his family life.

The competition for lucrative jobs comes also into the picture. The system of *sirdar* who command the loyalty of other Sherpas and control the allocation of jobs on expeditions and tours inevitably leads to the emergence of factions. Thus in Khumjung the usual harmony of the community was disrupted when an influential *sirdar* in the service of a consortium building the Mount Everest View Hotel advocated the diversion of village-resources, such as the limited supply of spring-water, to be used by the hotel in opposition to a conservative faction critical of excessive involvement of the community in the hotel project. Two factions crystallized around the leaders of the opposing groups, and though the conflict had long been resolved, criticism continued to be levelled against the *sirdar* in question even as late as 1983.

The adjustment of the Sherpas' value system to modern conditions becomes comprehensible when one considers the changes in the occupations of the majority of Khumbu people. According to statistics collected by S.D. Lang for 1970 and by I.G. Pawson's team in 1982, the distribution of main occupations among the Sherpas and Khambas of Khumbu was as follows:

<i>Nature of occupation</i>	1970 (per cent)	1982 (per cent)
Expedition and trekking work	9.7	14.9
Farming	21.5	8.8
Wage labour	1.1	4.0
Trade	2.2	0.0
Shopkeeping	0.0	4.0
Religious occupation as monk or nun	6.7	11.6

These data based on the replies of individuals asked about their 'main occupation' cannot give an exact picture, because few Sherpas follow only one occupation. Thus men who gave their principal occupation as work for expeditions and tourists also do some agricultural work when they are in Khumbu, and though none of those interviewed in 1982 gave 'trade' as their main occupation, we know that by 1983 a limited amount of trade with Tibet had been resumed and many men were engaged in some business deals with Kathmandu.

The shift from farming as the main occupation suggested by the figures is important, particularly as far as the male population is concerned. It also stands to reason that a man engaged almost entirely in the cultivation of his own land and confining his social contacts mainly to the circle of his co-villagers and some visitors from neighbouring villages develops a value system different from that of a trekking guide who interacts in the course of a year with innumerable tourists from a variety of cultural backgrounds and relies for his subsistence almost entirely on a cash-income and whatever perks he can extract from his clients. The generosity and hospitality so characteristic of the settled farmer is unlikely to survive in the peripatetic existence of a tourist guide or mountaineering porter.

Similarly, the generalizations on moral attitudes can hardly apply equally to monks and nuns living in the calm atmosphere of a monastery or nunnery, and the laymen involved in the struggle for existence in a monetary economy extending over persons of different ethnic groups. In judging the pros and cons of recent developments in Khumbu, one must never forget that two generations ago Sherpa social life was comparable to that of mediaeval Europe while today a village such as Namche Bazar resembles in many respects minor tourist resorts in the Austrian or Swiss Alps.

Social and Economic Change Among the Rolwaling Sherpas

There are several regions inhabited by substantial Sherpa communities outside Solu-Khumbu, the principal centre of Sherpa population. A comparison of the fortunes of such relatively little known groups with those of the people of Khumbu reveals the inevitability of some of the developments resulting from the impact of westerners on the economic and social life of hitherto isolated highland populations. The Sherpas of Rolwaling, who in 1974 numbered 200, represent such a group. They have recently been studied by Dr Janice Sacherer and the following description is largely based on her study, "The recent social and economic impact of tourism on the Sherpa community" in *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*.

While I have no first hand knowledge of Rolwaling, I have met people from that region while I was living in Khumbu and also during a stay at Tashi Gompa, which I shall describe in the next chapter. Rolwaling is a narrow east-west running valley close to the Tibetan border surrounded on three sides by high mountains including Gauri Shankar (21,584 feet). The valley is connected with Khumbu by a difficult pass at about 18,750 feet and by a somewhat easier pass with Tibet. The altitude of the inhabited area is similar to that of the corresponding parts of Khumbu, the main settlements lying at about 11,800 feet and the highest *yak*-pastures at about 16,440 feet.

According to oral tradition, the ancestors of the Sherpas of Rolwaling came some 110 years ago from Khumbu and it is believed that their main crop, the potato, was obtained from the same region. Previously, some barley was grown, but now only raddish, garlic and a kind of spinach are cultivated in addition to potatoes. Like the Khumbu people, the Sherpas of Rolwaling have spread their economic activities over locations at different altitudes, but because of the scarcity of flat land their seasonal moves between the settlements are even more frequent than those of the Khumbu Sherpas. They have built three large villages and three *yorsa*-settlements at high altitude. Their stay in one place is seldom for more than three and a half months. Potatoes are cultivated at different heights and until recently a large part of the potato crop was bartered for maize, millet, barley, rice and wheat brought by people from low lying villages. The main source of cash was the sale of *zopkiok* and *zhum*, cross-breeds which were in demand in villages south of Rolwaling.

The political system of Rolwaling was similar but not identical to that of Khumbu. There was an elected headman, elected *gompa* officials, and two dignitaries comparable to the *naua* of Khumbu, who were entrusted with the maintenance of the protective walls around the growing potato crops. The cutting of fire-wood and timber for buildings was strictly controlled and so was the use of water needed for driving mills. Labour for community projects such as the construction of bridges was provided in rotation by all the households, including those headed by single women.

The most remarkable divergence from the social pattern of Khumbu was the very large number of young celibate monks. In the 1970s the local *gompa* of Beding was headed by a dynamic and highly respected lama, and the impetus he gave to the religious life may have been partly responsible for the dedication of many young men to a celibate life. As the Rolwaling community was not large and rich enough to maintain a monastery, the young monks stayed in their parental houses. Janice Sacherer investigating the unusual phenomenon of 45 per cent of the young men taking vows of chastity, discovered that almost all of them came from very large

families. In one of these there were five sons, four of whom had become monks. Far from devoting all their time to religious tasks, many of these monks enrolled in recent years as tourist porters of high altitude expedition workers.

The first western mountaineers to visit Rolwaling were members of the 1951 Mount Everest Reconnaissance who had entered the valley from Khumbu by way of the Trashi Labtsa pass. Subsequently, several groups of mountaineers visited Rolwaling and because some of them illegally crossed into Tibet, embarrassing thereby the government of Nepal, the area was closed to all westerners until 1972. On account of this ban on tourists, Rolwaling remained for years much more traditional than Khumbu.

From 1974 onwards numerous tourists came to Rolwaling and at the height of the tourist season they sometimes outnumbered the local residents. Many of them wanted to undertake the hazardous five-day trip across the Trashi Labtsa to Khumbu, and were prepared to pay expedition rates for the three days spent above the snow line. The Rolwaling men, who alone knew the difficult route, had a virtual monopoly on this profitable employment. In 1977 some young men could easily earn Rs 1,500 to 2,000 in one season by crossing the Trashi Labtsa pass six to eight times. Even women and adolescents worked for tourists within their home area and thereby saved themselves the trouble of going to Kathmandu and searching there for employment.

The cash the Sherpas of Rolwaling earn now by working for tourists is being largely used to raise the standard of living and to make up for the decline of trade with Tibet. Feather jackets and sleeping bags replace to some extent the woollen cloth previously made from Tibetan wool. Transistor radios have reached Rolwaling and serve to familiarize children and women with Nepali, the national language of which they used to be ignorant.

Above all, the possibility of cash earnings improved the economic position of the poorer families, many of whom can now rival people rich in *yak* and land. Part of the newly found wealth has been used to support performances of religious rites, and young expedition Sherpas now sponsor *gompa*

festivals which depended previously on the contributions of old established rich families.

Political power too has shifted from the older generation to younger men with tourist and mountaineering experience and the income derived from these novel activities. The older men, on the other hand, have now more time to devote themselves to the religious life. There is, however, a slight erosion of tradition and many people have begun to absent themselves from certain festivals which coincide with the peak of the tourist season. Janice Sacherer mentions that already in 1974 one major religious festival had been shifted from winter to summer when all the monks involved in expedition work are in Rolwaling and free to celebrate it. At other times people do not have the leisure for the enjoyment of festivals and the relaxed socializing that goes with them.

As in Khumjung, interest in education has been a casualty of the concentration on tourist activities. With the help of the Himalayan Trust a primary school was built and staffed in 1972. In 1977 it was greatly improved with free text-books supplied by the government. While for some years it had been well attended by both boys and girls, in recent years most girls were taken out of school because of novel employment opportunities connected with tourism and the boys lost interest in the standard Nepali curriculum, which they considered irrelevant to their ambitions to make a career in tourism.

The result of this development in demographic terms is an increased growth rate which contrasts sharply with the present decrease in the Sherpa population of Khumbu. The explanation for this phenomenon may be the virtual absence of large scale outmigration. For it would seem that the Sherpas of Rolwaling who are in the first phase of adjustment to a tourist dominated economy, have not yet begun to establish households in Kathmandu and to spend the greater part of the year outside Rolwaling.

The Buddhist Community of Tashi Gompa

Some four days' walk to the south-west of Rolwaling, in an area with a mixed population of Sherpas, Tamangs, Thamis, Magars and Chetris lies a cluster of settlements grouped round a *gompa* described on the map and in the parlance of the people of more distant villages as Bigu *gompa*, but locally known as Tashi *gompa*, its full name being Tashichime-ga-tsel-bikung (Pleasure garden of deathless good fortune). The administrative unit in which it lies is the Bigu panchayat, of the Dolakha district. From Barabise on the motor-road linking Kathmandu with Tibet, Bigu can be reached on foot in three days walk involving the crossing of the Tinsang La, a pass at some 11,000 feet.

The Bigu panchayat comprises a total of about 337 households, and in 1974 the ethnic composition of the settlements topographically closest to Tashi *gompa* was as follows: 64 Sherpa households, 6 Thami households, 3 Magar households, 1 Drukpa household, 1 Kami household. The Sherpa clans represented in these households were Gonba, Khambachen, Salaka, Gardza and Chaba, but none of the clans dominant in Khumbu were represented.

The Sherpas of the Bigu area are basically hill-farmers who divide their energies between agriculture and animal husbandry. Living at altitudes between 8,000 and 8,250 feet, they cultivate wheat, barley, millet and potatoes as their main crops. The climate of Bigu, which is similar to that of Solu,

permits the cultivation of winter as well as monsoon crops. *Yak* and *zhum* are kept for most of the year on pastures at varying altitude. On the lower pastures the herdsmen live in temporary shelters of wooden posts and mats. But at higher altitudes they have houses built of stone and roofed with wooden planks like those of Khumbu. The number of *yak*, *nak*, *zopkiok* and *zhum* owned by the Sherpas of Bigu was in 1974 approximately 250. The high price of *ghi*, clarified butter, and the improvement of communications thanks to the construction of the motor-road leading from Barabise to Kathmandu, had increased the profitability of dairy-herds, and cattle owners derived most of their cash income from the sale of *ghi*. The change of the political situation in Tibet, on the other hand, had created difficulties for the movements of herds across the border. Before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Sherpas of Bigu freely used pastures on the Tibetan side of the border, but at the time of my visit in 1974 the use of such pastures was restricted, and the Sherpas had to pay grazing fees to an office in the Chinese border town of Khasa.

Before the Chinese intervention in 1959, the headman of Bigu and other wealthy Sherpas traded widely in Tibet, going as far as Kuti, Dingri and Shigatse, and travelling via Tibet to Gangtok. In those days some of the Sherpas concentrated mainly on trade and dairy-farming while other devoted themselves mainly to agriculture. In recent years the nature of the trade changed, because people from Nepal could go only as far as the Chinese trading post close to the border. While in the old days the Tibetans were mainly in need of grain, and bought also Nepalese handmade paper, dyes, sugar and hides, the Chinese controlling the trade are mainly interested in obtaining fruit, vegetables, and fowls as well as rice and wheat. Oranges, which the Sherpas obtain from the lower regions, are now an important item of trade, and in 1974 the Chinese paid four *pathi* salt for 100 oranges. At that time the Chinese seldom paid in cash, but for commodities they wanted for their own consumption they paid relatively high prices in salt. Thus one chicken was bartered for six *pathi* salt, and good prices were paid for pumpkins and other vegetables.

Long before Tashi *gompa* was founded, Bigu had already a village *gompa* situated several hundred feet further down in the settlement of Jagat. This *gompa*, which is surrounded by a profusion of ancient *chorten* and *mani*-walls, retains its function as the focal point of village rites, and its care is in the hands of a set of *gompa* officials entirely distinct from the personnel of Tashi *gompa*.

The village *gompa* is a small rectangular building painted white like all the dwelling houses, for the widespread custom of painting religious buildings pink does not extend to this area. The decorations in the interior are simple but comprise some quite competent frescoes painted by a Drukpa painter living in the vicinity. As the village *gompa* is of the Nyingmapa sect, a statue of Guru Rimpoche occupies the central place of the altar.

A Sherpa living in a nearby house serves as *konier*, sacristan, and two lamas, married men who otherwise lead the life of ordinary householders, preside at the seasonal rites. The most important of these rites, known as Narak, resembles in many ways the Dumje festival of Khumbu. The arrangements for this rite are made by five villagers, referred to as *jintak*, who correspond to the *lawa* of Khumbu. But unlike the *lawa* of Khumbu they are not appointed in strict rotation from among all the householders. The *jintak* are villagers who have volunteered to provide the food and the materials for the celebration, and to pay the fee of the ministering lamas. Unlike the Dumje, which is held during the monsoon, the Narak is celebrated in the autumn at about the same time as the Hindu Dassain festival and according to one of the lamas, in conscious opposition to the Dassain ritual of other ethnic groups which involves the sacrifice of goats and sheep objectionable to the Buddhist Sherpas. The nuns of Tashi *gompa* are not in the habit of attending the whole of the Narak rites, but on the last days of the festival the organizers usually ask the nuns to play *geling*, flageolets, because there are not sufficient lamas in the village to provide the full complement of musical instruments required for the ritual.

The History of Tashi Gompa

The Tashi *gompa*, like many monastic institutions in Nepal, is a relatively recent foundation. The circumstances of its establishment were hence well known to people whom I met in 1974, and while I was unable to obtain any documentary evidence, I gathered much information from villagers and nuns who had been personally involved in the construction of the *gompa*.

The story goes that in 1933, the year of a great earthquake remembered throughout Nepal, a Drukpa lama from Bhutan passed through Bigu in the course of a pilgrimage. His name was Ngawang Paldzen, but he was also known as Geshe Sherap Dorje. He was believed to have been reborn after his death, and in his new reincarnation he continued to head four *gompa*, including Tashi *gompa*, which he had founded in his earlier life.

When Ngawang Paldzen first came to Bigu, he met the headman Nim Pasang who had travelled in Tibet visiting many monasteries and convents. Greatly impressed by their role as centres of religious and artistic activities, he had conceived the idea of promoting in his own village the foundation of a *gompa* similar to those of Tibet. Once when Nim Pasang stayed with one of his sons whose house was close to the present site of the *gompa*, he had an auspicious dream in which he had seen gods and temples. This had given him the idea that the place was a suitable site for a *gompa*. The Drukpa lama Ngawang Paldzen, whose charismatic personality had aroused his admiration, seemed to him the right man to further that project. He, therefore, set out to find him and finally traced him in Yelmu where he had established the *gompa* of Bagan. Nim Pasang requested Ngawang Paldzen to preside over the foundation of a *gompa* for nuns, where women anxious to lead a religious life, and widows or deserted wives in need of a place of refuge, could find shelter and inspiration. Ngawang Paldzen accepted the invitation and promised to raise some funds required for the construction of a *gompa*. Nim Pasang on his part provided a suitable site and as much land as would annually yield 3 *muri*, circa 202 kg, of wheat.

He also contributed substantial funds and persuaded the villagers to give their labour free of charge for the construction of the *gompa*.

The resources of the village of Bigu in men and skills were insufficient for building a *gompa* such as Ngawang Paldzen and Nim Pasang envisaged. Hence they recruited helpers and craftsmen drawn from Lapche, a village north of Lamabagar close to the Tibetan border. Ngawang Paldzen had stayed there for some time before coming to Bigu, and it must have been his influence which moved men from that relatively distant village to cooperate in the construction of a *gompa* at Bigu. The news of the proposed foundation of a *gompa* had also attracted a large number of monks and nuns, and they all helped in the collection of building materials. The first year was spent with the gathering of timber which was obtained from the forest on the hill-slopes surrounding Bigu.

When the construction began, there arose the need for skilled carpenters and later of painters capable of painting the frescoes in the interior of the *gompa*. The carpenters, who produced the carved doors and door-frames came mainly from Tibet, but painters were called from Bhutan as well as from the Solu region of Nepal, and from Khasa, a nearby Tibetan market-place often visited by the people of Bigu. The greater part of the painting work was done by two Bhutanese artists, the younger of whom later settled in Bigu, where in 1974 he was still living with his Sherpa wife, who had been a nun in Tashi *gompa* but had given up the religious life to marry the Bhutanese painter.

The older nuns, who witnessed those early stages in the *gompa's* history, told me of the hardships they then suffered. There were as yet no quarters to house them. Ngawang Paldzen and some of the nuns were given shelter in the houses of villagers, but did not stay in any house for more than a few days at a time. Other nuns lived in temporary sheds roofed with mats such as herdsmen use in their camps at high pastures. Monks and nuns laboured side by side with the villagers carrying stones and dragging heavy beams to the building site.

At first many laymen too gave their labour freely without

expecting payment. But skilled craftsmen had to be paid, and when it came to the construction of the roof of the *gompa*, the headman Nim Pasang and the Drukpa lama ran out of funds. Determined that the project should not come to a standstill, Nim Pasang sold a large portion of his land and his entire herd of *yak* and *dzo* cross-breeds. The Drukpa lama also helped in the raising of funds by touring the surrounding villages and asking for contributions.

Thus the construction of the main building could be completed and the Bhutanese painters paid wages for decorating the interior and the porch of the *gompa* with frescoes. The *gompa* is a rectangular building to which access is gained by a flight of stone-steps. This leads into an open porch, 32 feet long and 11 feet deep, which can be protected against rain by heavy *yak*-hair curtains. The three walls of the porch are decorated with frescoes including pictures of the "guardians of the four quarters" and a wheel of life. A heavy, richly carved double door, usually kept locked, leads to the *duang*, the great hall, the roof of which rests on two rows of stout wooden pillars, painted in several colours. The arrangement of the seats for the nuns along the two rows of pillars is conventional. At the far end of the left row of seats, there is a raised carved and painted throne for the founder of the *gompa* and his reincarnation, which in the Tulku's absence remains vacant. Opposite this throne is a lower, but also raised seat for the Guru Lama.

The centrepiece of the altar is a statue of Pawa Cheresi. To the right of this is a small wooden case containing a sculpture of Srungma Chudin, and three alcoves with statues of Opame, Tsepame, and Chitin Drolma, while a statue of Milarepa is free standing.

On an altar to the left of the main altar there are statues of Temba Rimpoche, Guru Rimpoche and Pawa Cheresi, each standing in a carved alcove of its own. There is also a closed *Srungma* shrine, and a shrine containing the books of Bum. Tashi *gompa* is not rich in ritual scriptures and possesses neither the Kangyur nor the Tengyur.

There are extensive frescoes of good quality on the wall to both sides of the entrance door, but the side walls are devoid

of frescoes and painted in a reddish brown. Compared to the decoration of some of the monastery halls of Khumbu and Solu, the frescoes are modest in extent and quality, but the general impression of the *duang* is dignified and pleasing, and thanks to the effort of the present *konier* sacristan, the hall and its furnishings are still kept in excellent state.

At the time of the foundation of the *gompa* only a small house was built for the Drukpa lama. The quarters of the nuns and a double-storeyed house used as store and cook-house were constructed in later years, and the paving of the courtyard was also done more recently. Indeed the extension of the paved area surrounding the *gompa* continued for some time and in August 1974 I saw some young nuns fetching stone slabs suitable for paving and laying them.

There were about sixty nuns and several monks in residence when the Drukpa lama stayed at Tashi *gompa*. After his death some five years after the completion of the main building the nuns who had come from Yelmu, Lapche and Lapthang returned to the places of their origin, and in subsequent years the number of permanently resident nuns steadied at a figure of about 35.

Originally the *gompa* had a roof of wooden planks but when this began to leak, it was decided to replace it by another of tin sheets ultimately to be painted red. Again funds were collected in the villages of an area extending as far south as Risingo, and when sufficient funds had been gathered tin sheets were purchased in Kathmandu. The transport of these heavy sheets was undertaken by the nuns themselves. In the absence of the motorable road to Barabise, the nuns carried the sheets from Kathmandu to Bigu, each nun carrying three sheets at a time, and making two or three journeys. The older nuns reminisce about the arduous work they had to do during the development of the *gompa* when nuns had little leisure to read books and meditate, but had to carry heavy loads and give a hand to the workmen constructing the various buildings.

Three years after the arrival of Ngawang Paldzen and the foundation of Tashi *gompa*, he was joined by three youths who were the sons of his elder brother referred to by the people

of Bigu simply as a "Drukpa Lama", his personal name having been forgotten. All the three youths were *thawa*, and their names were Kusho Tendzen, Kusho Pema and Kusho Tsetsu. Ngawang Paldzen did not take on the day-to-day direction of the new *gompa*, but installed a lama from Kyirong as head of the community. It would seem that he intended to put his nephew Kusho Pema in charge of Tashi *gompa*, just as later he appointed Kusho Tendzen as head of Mu *gompa* at Tsum and Kusho Tsetsu as head of the monastery at Bagan. But at that time Kusho Pema was still too young for such a post and hence the lama from Kyirong was invited to take charge of Tashi *gompa*. The latter left after a few years and Ngawang Paldzen, who had retained the overall control over the four *gompa* he had founded, selected one of the numerous Drukpa lamas who had come with him from Bhutan to be the new head of Tashi *gompa*. He must have been an old man for he is remembered as Drukpa Meme — *Meme* being the word for grandfather. Though he stayed for eleven years, he was not popular with the nuns and the villagers. He was addicted to drinking liquor and used to beat the nuns if they talked during rites in the *gompa*. By that time Kusho Pema had taken over the management of the accounts and business affairs of the *gompa* and held a position of considerable influence and power. But he had no vocation for a celibate life and got involved with a nun, who bore him three children. According to monastic rules he had to leave the *gompa* precincts and moved to a nearby house where he lived with his family. He still had a say in the management of the *gompa* and participated in the performance of the major rituals. He died in early middle age and one of his two daughters is now a nun in Tashi *gompa*, while his son became a lama and joined the establishment of the Dalai Lama in India. Kusho Pema's elder brother Kusho Tendzen also had an affair with a nun, and their daughter is now a nun at the *gompa*. Subsequently, he went to Tsum and is said to hold a high position in Mu *gompa*. Kusho Tsetsu, the youngest and most gifted of the three brothers retains close contact with Tashi *gompa*. He lives at present at Maharajgunj in Kathmandu and is co-ordinating the practical affairs of the four *gompa* founded by

Ngawang Paldzen until such a time when the latter's reincarnation, the young Tulku, will be experienced enough to take over their management.

Ngawang Paldzen spent his last two years at Phuma, a hermitage in the mountains above Deodunga. He had one attendant with him, and when in 1941 he died his corpse was carried to Tashi *gompa* and cremated nearby and a large *chorten* was built in his memory in the courtyard. Some six years after his death a boy born to Tibetan parents in Tarkartasso near the village of Shak, in the Dzongka district of Tibet not far from Kyirong, evinced signs of being a reincarnation and spoke of a *gompa* in Nepal where he had lived in his previous life. The news reached the lamas in Tsum and ultimately Kusho Tsetso. The child was exposed to the usual tests of having to identify some of the possessions of the late lama, and unhesitatingly picked out the correct objects rejecting all others with which they had been mixed up. Kusho Tsetso provided the young Tulku, who is known as Tshutul Rimpoche, with a horse and good clothes, and when he was eleven years old, he visited Tashi *gompa*. Later, he stayed at Bagan *gompa* and studied under Geshi Rimpoche. In 1974 he was invited to Bhutan, and spent there a number of months. It is expected that ultimately he will take over the position now held by Kusho Tsetso.

The abbot in charge of Tashi *gompa* at the time of my visit in 1974 had then held the position for 18 years. He was referred to only as Guru Lama and no one revealed his name. But it was said that he had been born in Kham, and that for some years he had been a monk in the Sera monastery in Tibet. When he came on a pilgrimage to Nepal, he heard of Ngawang Paldzen, and as he was looking for a spiritual guide, he sought him out at Tashi *gompa*. Impressed by his personality he then settled at no great distance at Changdze Mendok, a hermitage above the village of Bulugpa. When some years later the Drukpa lama in charge of Tashi *gompa* received an invitation from a monastery in Bhutan and, much to the relief of the nuns, decided to leave Tashi *gompa*, the villagers of Bigu suggested that the lama from Sera might be offered the headship of Tashi *gompa*. They had been impressed

by his piety and seriousness of purpose, and approaching him with gifts of *kata*, ceremonial scarves, invited him to take charge of the *gompa*.

The fact that the Guru Lama had been trained in the Gelugpa monastery of Sera was apparently no obstacle in the way of his appointment to the headship of a Kargyupa *gompa*. He had neither difficulties nor conscientious objection to conduct the ceremonies according to the Kargyupa ritual traditional in Tashi *gompa*. When he took over the position of abbot, Kusho Pema was still alive, and continued to look after the accounts and the business side of the *gompa* administration.

The economic base

Tashi *gompa* is not well endowed, and most of the nuns depend for their maintenance largely on their own resources. The land donated by the headman of Bigu provides the nuns with kitchen gardens and small orchards, a few plots on which they grow maize, and pasture for a few cows. In addition, the *gompa* owns land which was donated by a wealthy Thakuri, that is, the member of a high Hindu caste, who held the rank of a captain in the Nepalese army. The Thakuri's wife was childless and he hoped to be blessed with a son by dispensing charity. Though his efforts were in vain, he remained in close touch with the nuns, and when his wife died, the inmates of the *gompa* performed *gyewa*, a memorial rite, which was attended by the deceased woman's relatives. The land donated is in the villages of Latu, Budipara and Marsekarka, all of which are in the Sunkosi valley some two days' journey from Bigu. In Latu and in Marsekarka the *gompa* owns also small houses in which the nuns can stay when they come to collect their share of the crops. In Budipara they have only rice-fields, and these they let out on rent. Among their tenants are Brahmans, Tamangs and Thamis, and the tenancy is of a type known as *kot*, according to which the quantity of produce to be delivered as the owner's share is fixed, however good or bad the harvest may have been. If in a bad year the tenant is unable to deliver the agreed amount of paddy, the deficiency has to be made up in the next year.

In Latu and Marsekarka mainly maize and wheat are grown, and in these villages the land is hired out on the understanding that whatever the yield may be, the owners receive half of the crops harvested. When the maize ripens, two or three nuns supervise the division and strip the grain from the cobs. One of them then goes to Tashi *gompa* and calls the other nuns to fetch the maize.

The grain produced on the *gompa* land is divided between the Guru Lama and the nuns who fully participate in the activities of the *gompa* and are known as *thiba*. The Guru Lama gets two shares, and the 23 nuns are given one share each. There are seven nuns, who although living within the *gompa* precincts, do not hold any of the posts connected with the *gompa* ritual, and do not participate in the common work of the community. Such nuns, described as *surba*, do not receive shares of the *gompa* income in grain. If a *surba* wishes to join or rejoin the active body of nuns, she must entertain the other nuns at *mang-se*, a tea ceremony, and promise to accept the work discipline of the *gompa*. The Guru Lama then gives her a *kata*, a ceremonial scarf, and admits her to *thiba*, the community of active nuns.

The grain yield of *gompa* lands lasts the nuns only about two months a year according to the nature of the harvest. For the rest of the year they depend for their subsistence on the contributions of their families and the charitable offerings of devotees.

The basic yearly needs of a nun are approximately as follows:

4-6 *muri* of grain, one *muri* being the equivalent of 67.5 Kg; 10-15 *dharni* of clarified butter, one *dharni* equalling 21½ Kg; 3 *pathi* of potatoes, one *pathi* equalling 31½ Kg; 3-4 bricks of Tibetan tea, each worth about Rs 20, and Rs 100 worth of clothes.

Each of the 23 *thiba* nuns gets normally one *muri* of grain from the *gompa* land at Latu. In 1974 the net income of unhusked rice from the Latu fields was 18 *muri*. Until some years ago the tenants gave the *gompa* 30 *muri* of rice, but since the tax payable to the government has increased, the share due to the *gompa* has diminished. The yields of maize

and millet (*Eleusine coracana*) are 8 *muri* and 4-5 *muri* respectively.

Another source of *gompa*-income are the donations of devotees who come to Tashi *gompa* to commission ceremonies for specific purposes or for consulting the Guru Lama about personal problems. They then usually bring gifts of grain, butter or money, and the maintenance of the *gompa* ritual depends to a large extent on such donations. Laymen make such donations either to acquire religious merit or to benefit deceased kinsmen. If the Guru Lama is not in residence, *umse*, the senior nun, notes the requests of devotees arriving at the *gompa* and receives their donations. On his return the Guru Lama says prayers for the intended purposes or performs the required rites. In some cases commissioned rites may also be performed in the Guru Lama's absence. Small donations are usually pooled and used to hold a ritual benefiting several devotees.

A system of loans given to villagers from *gompa*-funds is an important means of securing regular support for the ritual performances in the *gompa*. The *gompa* has built up a fund derived from cash gifts by devotees from which the Guru Lama gives loans of up to Rs 1,000 to trusted villagers. In lieu of interest they provide the wherewithall for the performance of certain seasonal rites. A borrower who takes a loan of Rs 200 may have to contribute 10 *pathi* rice, 3 *dharni* butter, and 6 *pathi* wheat for a specific rite. The value of these commodities is much greater than the interest. Borrowing from a *gompa* is not only a convenient way of obtaining cash at short notice but has also the purpose of gaining merit by the sponsorship of ritual performances.

The capital at the disposal of the *gompa* for such purposes is divided into a number of funds described as *guthi* in Nepali and *ten-ma* in Sherpa. There is a fund known as Nyungne *guthi*. Another fund is known as Bum *guthi*. The purpose of this *guthi* is to finance the performance of a *tsho* known as *Dukpa tsetsu* (which is centred on the recitation of the volumes of Bum, one of the canonical books). There is still another fund known as *Diksha guthi*. There is a separate fund, the yield of which is used to provide butter for the four lamps

burning continuously in the main *gompa*, the *mani*-building, housing the great prayer wheel, and the Guru Lama's house. The Rs 800 of that *guthi* were distributed to equal parts among eight cattle owners, each of whom provided annually one quarter of a *dharni* of butter.

Whenever a devotee visiting the *gompa* makes a donation either in cash or in kind, the Guru Lama enquires for what specific purpose it is to be used, and the donor may indicate that it is to be utilized for the performance of a *tsho*, a *diksha* rite or a *nyungne*.

The system of loans given to laymen who undertake the responsibility of providing the materials required for ritual performances is not confined to Tashi *gompa*. The village *gompa* of Bigu has two similar *guthi*, the funds of which are lent out to members of the village-community. These persons make the arrangements for the celebrations of the Narak rite (which corresponds to the Dumje of the Khumbu Sherpas) and provide butter to be used as fuel of lamps burning at certain *gompa* rites. These funds of the village *gompa* were set up long ago by two wealthy men, and later increased by further donations.

Casual contributions to Tashi *gompa* are offered for a variety of reasons. People approach the Guru Lama or individual nuns with the request to say prayers for the cure of sick kinsmen or for other intentions of a personal nature. Thus during my stay in Tashi *gompa* a young Sherpa brought a small pot of butter for the burning of lamps. The *gompa* hall was specially opened and the young man prostrated himself in the aisle and then bowed before all the statues and the seats of the founder and the Guru Lama. He and two companions then filled some of the lamps with the butter he had brought. He explained that some 20 years ago his father had lent Rs 250 to a Sherpa of Lapthang, a village in Tibet, but that after his father's death the debtor had disclaimed any knowledge of the loan. The offering to the *gompa* was done for the benefit of his mother with the express intention that *in her next life* she should get repayment of the loan. Even Hindus sometimes give offerings to the *gompa* for the purpose of redressing a grievance. Those who have been wronged by someone in

this life believe that by giving a donation to the *gompa* they may be able to obtain satisfaction in the next world where the roles will be reversed and their adversary will be in their power.

Occasionally, the *gompa* also receives donations from persons who do not link any special request with their gift. Thus during my presence a Sherpa of Laduk village presented to the *gompa* a whole tin of butter, containing eight *dharni* without commissioning any specific rite. He had lost some money in gambling and his father had reproached him and pointed out that as he lived near the *gompa*, instead of gambling it would profit him more if he gave an offering to the *gompa* and thereby acquired merit and gained some benefit for his next life.

Besides the income from their land and the charitable donations of devotees, the *gompa* community receives a small annual government grant. Many religious institutions in Nepal enjoy such support, which in the days of the Rana regime was fixed at Rs 300. Even though it has been raised to Rs 550 its real value is being eroded by inflation. At one time this grant was distributed among the nuns, but it seems that it is being used for the upkeep of the *gompa* or other purposes decided upon by the Guru Lama.

Until some years ago the *gompa* owned a herd of 13 *zhum*. They had been reared for butter needed for burning in the lamps of the *gompa*, but as such animals have to be kept in the high pastures the nuns could not look after them permanently. Hence paid herdsmen had to be entrusted with the *zhum*, and owing to their negligence several animals died. As the arrangement was altogether unsatisfactory and the herdsmen were dilatory in the delivery of butter, the Guru Lama decided to sell the *zhum* in 1974. Now the *gompa* owned a few cows. Two of these were looked after and milked by the nuns, but some others had been left in the care of a Thami neighbour, who gave the *gompa* part of the manure and half the number of calves born, but kept the milk for himself.

The *gompa's* sources of income were clearly not sufficient to maintain the Guru Lama and the nuns resident at Tashi

gompa for more than part of the year. While the Guru Lama had no personal income other than the gifts of devotees, most of the nuns were largely maintained by their natal families, or owned some land which they let out on rent. Among the Sherpas and Tamangs a family whose daughter has entered a nunnery is expected to contribute substantially to her maintenance. If a nun's parental home is within one or two days' walking distance, she visits her parents frequently and is furnished with provisions and usually also with clothes. If her parental home is far from Tashi *gompa* she may visit it only once a year when her family contributes to her upkeep in cash rather than with provisions. When her parents grow old or die, her brothers or other close relatives are supposed to take over the responsibility of supporting her. However, there are cases of nuns who have no more living kinsmen able or willing to contribute to their maintenance. Such nuns, usually old, have to resort to begging for alms in the villages within reasonably easy reach of Tashi *gompa*.

Nuns have the opportunity of adding occasionally to their income by rendering ritual services to laymen. Such services include the performance of *kurim*, the reading of appropriate sacred scriptures, in the house of a sick person for the purpose of effecting a cure. Similarly, *kurim* may be performed for the benefit of a man setting out on a long or supposedly dangerous journey. In such cases the nun or nuns reciting from the books are fed on the day or days of the performance and in addition given a small honorarium.

While fully established nuns, capable of performing rituals, have such subsidiary sources of income, for the first two or three years a newly recruited nun is neither entitled to support from *gompa* funds nor is she likely to be asked to perform ritual services. During this initial period such a nun has to rely entirely on parental contributions or the income from such land as she may have inherited.

The Structure of the Gompa Community

Buddhist monastic communities are basically egalitarian but this does not mean that they are unstructured. Though all monks in a monastery and all nuns in a nunnery have

equal chances of attaining positions of responsibility, there is a long and arduous way from the status of novice to that of the major *gompa* officials. In chapter 5 I have outlined the organisation of Tengboche, a monastery in Khumbu, and familiarity with the structure of that community made it easy to understand the structure of the small community of nuns in Tashi *gompa*. So far the leading position in that community has always been occupied by a lama selected and appointed by the founder of the *gompa*, and as this pattern is now firmly established, it is unlikely that one of the nuns could rise to the substantive headship of the *gompa*. In this respect Tashi *gompa* differs from nunneries such as Devuche in Khumbu where there is no resident lama, and the nuns elect from time to time a headnun, known as *loben* (literally: 'teacher') from among their own numbers.

In Tashi *gompa* there was in 1974 no *loben*, and the Guru Lama, though the spiritual head of the community, was never described as *loben*, but as *kempu*. Until 1968 there was a nun who held the position of *loben*, but was nevertheless subject to the authority of the Guru Lama. Her name was Tsiring Yangdzum, a native of Tsum in Western Nepal. She started her religious career in Tsum *gompa*, and at one time came to Tashi *gompa* in the company of the Tulku, but then returned to Tsum. However, Kusho Tsetso as over-all controller of the four linked *gompa*, realized how learned and potentially useful she was and persuaded her to join Tashi *gompa* where she was entrusted with the special task of teaching the nuns. She lived there for a long time and acquired a high reputation and great popularity. When the Guru Lama asked the nuns whether he should appoint a *loben*, the majority supported Tsiring Yangdzum, and welcomed her promotion. The story goes that in the course of the years she performed one thousand *nyungne* rites, but this is obviously a vast exaggeration. When Tsiring Yangdzum died the other nuns performed in her memory seven *melam* rites spaced over seven weeks.

Ever since the death of Tsiring Yangdzum, there has been no *loben* in Tashi *gompa*, and the senior-most position among the nuns is held by the *umse* whose main function is to lead

the chanting and recitations of the nuns at *gompa* services. To discharge this function she must possess a good knowledge of the scriptures used in the liturgy and should also have a good voice and diction. In the absence of the Guru Lama, the *umse* presides over all ritual performances and decides matters regarding the performance of *gompa* ritual. She is also responsible for teaching younger nuns the meaning of ritual texts, for while the Guru Lama occasionally expounds to the nuns problems of doctrine, he does no routine teaching. Apart from the prestige inherent in the position of *umse*, the incumbent has few concrete advantages. The only traditional privilege of the *umse* is the right to have her meal of rice served on a brass plate when she and other nuns sit together during *tsam*, a retreat. The other nuns get their rice served in a cloth on such an occasion.

Unlike most other *gompa* offices, the one of *umse* is not filled according to the principle of seniority. However, the manner of selection seems to vary from time to time. Normally, the *umse* is chosen by the nuns in an informal meeting where each nun is free to express her preference and there is no resort to written ballot papers. But when Hishi Droma (House 26) was appointed *umse* for seven years from 1967 till 1973 there were three candidates of about equal seniority and accomplishments, namely Hishi Droma, Dorje Droma (House 7) and Sange Gyelmu (House 25). As there was no consensus among the nuns, the Tulku, who had come to Tashi *gompa* for the occasion, arranged for each of the three names to be written on a piece of paper. He then made each slip into a ball and placed the three paper balls on a dish which he half covered with a *kata*. Raising the dish, he prayed to the gods and then moved it in such a way that one paper ball after the other fell out. The nun whose name was on the paper ball emerging first was to be *umse*. Hishi Droma's name came first, and I was told that the two other candidates wept from disappointment.

After Hishi Droma's seven-year period of office, neither Sange Gyelmu nor Dorje Droma wanted to become *umse*, and the latter canvassed the name of Sherpa Omu (House 3), relatively junior but extremely gifted and popular. The Tulku

who had come to Tashi *gompa* consulted all the nuns, and they unanimously recommended the appointment of Sherpa Omu as *umse*. But the Tulku was not convinced of the wisdom of appointing so junior a nun and proposed that two *umse* should be chosen and the senior one take over the position first. He argued that as Hishi Droma had often been ill of late and could conduct the *gompa* services only with difficulty, it was advisable to have two *umse* so that the junior one could deputize for the senior one in times of need. As Dorje Droma and Sherpa Omu were the favourite candidates, he decided that Dorje Droma should be appointed *umse*, and Sherpa Omu be regarded as *umse*-elect, to succeed Dorje Droma after seven years and meanwhile act as *umse* in the event of Dorje Droma's absence.

Next in rank to the *umse* is a *gompa* official known as *kutum* or *gerku*. This post is held only for one year and is usually filled according to seniority. The *kutum* is responsible for discipline and has authority to punish nuns for breaches of the *gompa* rules. For a minor offence a nun may be suspended, that is, excluded from *gompa*-services and communal activities for a limited time. To be re-admitted she must prostrate herself 108 times, offer *mang-se*, the ceremonial serving of tea in the *gompa*, to all nuns, and present the Guru Lama with a *kata*. Causing dissension among the nuns by telling tales is an example of such a minor offence. For serious offences, such as theft, a nun may be expelled permanently. If a nun is caught in a love-affair with a man, the *kutum* will force her to wear a torn cap and circumambulate the *mani* and *gompa* three times. The torn cap is called *tsapani* and is donned in such a way as to hide the face like a mask. After having been shamed publicly the guilty nun may be fined as much as Rs 1,000 and expelled from the *gompa*. She may run away without paying, but unpaid fines are sometimes recovered even after two or three years. Most fines are not as high but many ex-nuns who have married and live in the vicinity of Bigu have paid a fine to the *gompa*. The *kutum* has also the responsibility of ringing every morning a bell and in this capacity she is known as *tilbu*.

The third *gompa* official in the order of seniority is the

niermu, whose position is equivalent to that of *nierwa* in the communities of monks. But whereas the *nierwa* of a monastery such as Tengboche deals not only with domestic affairs but manages also the trading activities of the *gompa*, the *nierma* of a convent deals mainly with the management of the household, the farm-work and the maintenance of buildings. Her daily duties include the supervision of the kitchen and pouring out of tea at *gompa*-services. After having been *niermu* the incumbent automatically advances to the position of *kutum*. Normally, a *niermu* serves only for one year, but at the time when the *gompa* was still under construction and continuity was desirable there were exceptions. Thus Tsangdzum Sangmu (House 19) served for 17 years as *niermu* and supervised many of the building operations.

The *niermu* has an assistant known as *nieryok* who serves in this capacity for one year.

There is no one *gompa*-official solely responsible for the supervision of the communal grain stores. *Nierma* as well as *umse* and *kutum* must be present when grain is to be taken out from the store and transferred to the kitchen for current consumption.

Another post held in rotation is that of *chorpen*. There is a *chorpen* in every *gompa*, whether part of a monastery or belonging to a village. The incumbent is responsible for the organisation of ritual performances during which the person acting as *chorpen* has certain priestly functions.

The remaining ranks through which all nuns have to proceed to the higher offices are named according to the instrument a nun plays at *gompa*-rituals. Thus the players of *geling* are called *gelingba*, the players of conch-shells, *tungba*, and the players of telescopic horns, *sangdungba*.

A position of some importance which stands outside the rank-order of nuns is that of the *konier*, the sacristan responsible for keeping *gompa*-hall and altars clean and in good order. The *konier* is appointed for an unspecified number of years. As the work is burdensome and without specific rewards there is little competition for this position. The *konier* keeps the keys to the *gompa*-hall, opens it in the early morning and replaces all the water in the many bowls on the altar. This

necessitates several trips to the spring. There the *konier* fills a large narrow-necked brass or copper pot with water and then carries it on her back to the *gompa*. Altogether 56 bowls standing on the altar have to be filled every morning and emptied in the evening. Of them 28 are large and take a considerable amount of water. Behind this daily filling and emptying of bowls lies the idea that the water offered at the altar symbolizes offerings which according to Buddhist belief are the dues of the deities worshipped in the *gompa*. For the post of *konier* the nuns usually choose a woman of no great intellectual ability, but strong and dependable, and above all willing to take on what is undoubtedly the most onerous task in the maintenance of the *gompa* as a tidy and dignified place of worship.

The integration of a girl or older woman into the community of nuns is a fairly lengthy process. Except for nuns who have taken vows in other *gompas* and come to Tashi *gompa* with recognized credentials, every candidate has to go through a period of training and testing before she can attain the status of a fully privileged nun.

Anyone seeking acceptance as a novice has to approach the Guru Lama. Usually she offers him a ceremonial scarf and perhaps a token gift of money. The candidate and any of her relatives accompanying her also visit the *gompa*, bow before the images and place a small offering on the altar or bring butter to be burnt in the lamps.

The next step is the cutting of the candidate's hair as a symbol of renouncing secular life. The hair cutting and shaving of the head must be done by a lama, and in Tashi *gompa* it is normally done by the Guru Lama. The hair is thrown away or burnt and may not be used for any purpose.

For a period of about one year the novice is considered a probationer during which period she can withdraw without attracting any opprobrium or becoming liable to a fine such as nuns have to pay who leave in order to marry.

Candidates are taught reading and writing in Tibetan. They also have to learn basic religious texts by heart before they can attain the status of *gyengi*, living by virtue. There is no

fixed period for the preparation leading to this step in a nun's career. The admission to *gyengi* status is a simple ceremony. The Guru Lama recites some sacred formulae and the candidate undertakes to abide by the rules of the *gompa*.

The next step is the taking of the *rabdzung* vow which signifies total commitment to the religious life. To be allowed to take this vow a nun should normally have an adequate knowledge of the scriptures recited in liturgical performances. It seems, however, that in Tashi *gompa* exceptions are sometimes made in the case of dedicated older women who became nuns in middle age and though unable to master the reading of scriptures are allowed to take the *rabdzung* vow. Such a waiving of rules seems to have occurred in the case of Chiangchup Droma (House 1). The requirement of adequate scriptural knowledge can be waived also in relation to very young girls who entered the *gompa* as children and are living with an older nun responsible for their upbringing. Tashitsiring (House 5), for instance, who after her mother's death came to Tashi-*gompa* to live with her father's sister, was allowed to take the *rabdzung* vow at the age of 10, when she had been for 3 years at the *gompa*. Several lamas of the rank of *gelung* are required to administer the *rabdzung* vow, and there is the possibility of repeating the vow if a lama of particularly high status becomes available to preside over the ceremony.

The rank of *gelung* is attained by many monks of learning but such advancement is denied to nuns. There is a tradition that in the early stages of Buddhism women too could become *gelung*, but in the present age women are not ordained as *gelung* however learned and devout they may be.

Several nuns of Tashi *gompa* mentioned that they were hoping for a reincarnation as men, because as monks they could attain more responsible and prestigious positions than of nuns, and more specifically could become *gelung*.

The advancement of a nun from probationary novice to *gyengi*, and from *gyengi* to the stage marked by the taking of the *rabdzung* vow, is not subject to a rigid time-table. Some nuns take the *rabdzung* vow early in their career while others take many years to acquire the necessary qualifications. There is no definite correlation between the position of *surba* and

thiba on the one hand and the attainment of scholarly and spiritual status signified by the admission to the *rabdzung* vow. Nuns such as Sange Chirgin (House 20) have not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow but enjoy the status of *thiba*, whereas some of the *surba* living outside the *gompa* precincts have taken the *rabdzung* vow.

The composition of the community of nuns living at Tashi *gompa* is fluid. As nuns die or leave the *gompa* because they lack vocation or get involved in a love affair, which will usually lead to marriage, others apply for admission, and if accepted, join the *gompa* in the first instance as novices and ultimately as fully privileged nuns. The motivation and circumstances of the individual nuns vary widely, and rather than attempting any generalizations I propose to give brief case-histories of all the nuns who were resident at the time of my stay in Tashi *gompa*. Most of them were very willing to talk, but a few proved reticent, and this accounts for the uneven character of the following notes. The information is arranged according to the situation of the nuns' small houses which stand in two lines, enclosing a fruit and vegetable garden. While most of the nuns have individual households, a few share houses with a close friend or kinswoman.

Houses 1-13 stand in a line, broken only by the covered entrance which leads from the *gompa* courtyard to the nuns' quadrangle. They are built wall to wall with the doors facing the garden in which the nuns have small individual plots. Houses 14-27 form an unbroken line at the lower end of the vegetable garden, and their doors and small verandas face the garden and the upper line of houses.

Each house consists of a single room in which the occupant or occupants sleep, cook, study and receive guests. The ages and circumstances of the nuns described in the following list relate to 1974.

House 1

Inhabited by Chiangchup Droma, known also as Karma Dzolpa, the name she adopted at the time of taking the *rabdzung* vow, a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Dolongsa. Age 40 years. She shares her small quarter with her daughter

Teshi Chuti (alias Chiamu Karma Chopal Droma), age 20 years.

Chiangchup Droma was married in Dolongsa, and some 6-7 years after her husband's death she entered Tashi *gompa* as *surba*. Her avowed purpose of becoming a nun was the gaining of merit. She cannot read the liturgical texts, but her daughter has learnt to read. Neither mother nor daughter have the status of *thiba*, but when the Tulku next comes to Tashi *gompa*, they both intend to become *thiba*, fully committed nuns.

Mother and daughter get all the supplies required for their maintenance from Dolongsa. Chiangchup Droma's husband had no brothers, and when he died his land passed to her and she has let it out, receiving as rent a share of the maize, wheat and millet grown on it. Her share of the crop is carried to Tashi *gompa* partly by her and her daughter, and partly by hired porters.

One of her brother's daughters is also a nun at Tashi *gompa* and lives in House 15.

House 2

Tashi Droma, a Sherpa of Salaka clan, age 51, came from Changku, and is the father's brother's daughter of Tashi Droma (House 11). She was married and was pregnant when her husband died. Ten years later, when she was 35 years old, she came to Tashi *gompa*, and brought her daughter, then 10 years old, with her. The daughter did not become a novice and died in the year of her arrival at Tashi *gompa*.

House 3

Sherpa Omu, also known as Hishi Omu, age 31, is the daughter of a Drukpa father and a Sherpa mother. Her father was Kusho Tendzen, one of the three nephews of the founder of Tashi *gompa*. He did not marry her mother and left her when Sherpa Omu was six months old. Her mother subsequently married a Sherpa of Choitang, a village near Bigu, but he too left her and was supposed to live in India.

Sherpa Omu entered Tashi *gompa* at the age of 18, and has since acquired a good knowledge of Tibetan scriptures and

gompa ritual. Her mother's mother's sister was also a nun, and is believed to have been reborn as a man and to be now a monk at Bagan.

Sherpa Omu who had a hard childhood, and met her own father only once when she was 18, became a nun by her own volition. She received material support from her mother, who was a daughter of the younger brother of the *misar*, headman, of Bigu village.

Thanks to her experience in ritual performances and outstanding personality she was put forward as candidate for the position of *umse*, and as the result of a compromise was chosen as *umse*-elect and deputy of the *umse*.

House 4

Tserap Sangmu, age 32, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Lhonsa near Dunge. At the age of 18 she came to Tashi *gompa*, where her father's sister Sange Gyelmu (House 25) was a nun. Once when Sange Gyelmu visited her natal village, she followed her to Tashi *gompa*, and decided to become a nun. By that time her parents had died and she was living in the house of her father's younger brother. She twiced took the *rabdzung* vow; once it was administered by a lama of Sun *gompa* and the second time by the Tulku of Tashi *gompa*. Ever since she become a nun her mother's brothers, who live in Dunge, have supported her. Once a year she goes to Dunge, and is given money and *ghi*.

House 5

Ngawang Chutin, age 61, one of the two seniormost nuns of Tashi *gompa*, is a Tamang from Choitang village in the Charikot area. She came to Tashi *gompa* at the age of about 30, and before that had spent many years as a maid in the royal palace of Kathmandu. Her brother was a friend of the present Guru Lama, and from him she heard of Tashi *gompa*, which was then in the process of construction. She became interested and requested the king's premission to leave the royal service and to become a nun. Her request was granted and after spending two months in her home village she came to Tashi *gompa*. There she learnt to read but never mastered

the art of writing. In 1973 she went on pilgrimage to Badogarai and there met the Dalai Lama.

Ngawang Chutin shares her house with her brother's daughter Tashi Tsiring, aged 17, whom she had brought to *gompa* at the age of seven after the death of the child's mother. Tashi Tsiring took the *rabdzung* vow at the age of 10. Ngawang Chutin's two brothers live in Choitang, and they send her cash, grain and butter. She has two sisters, one in Choitang and one living in Calcutta.

House 6

Urken Droma, age 36, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Jiri village, came to Tashi *gompa* at the age of 20. She had no relatives among the nuns but came with a friend on her own initiative. Her friend abandoned the idea of becoming a nun, even before she had cut her hair, but Urken Droma stayed on, and after two years took the *rabdzung* vow, administered by a lama of Sun *gompa*. Six years ago a reincarnated lama of Thimphu in Bhutan administered the *rabdzung* vow once more. She has a mother, an elder brother, and an elder as well as a younger sister. Once a year she visits her family in Jiri, and her brother gives her money as well as *ghi*. She never asks for alms from other people, and does not even beg food when travelling. Her sister's husband, who owns some 20 *yak* cattle cross breeds, rents a high pasture near Bigu and she sometimes goes to see him there.

Urken Droma has held the *gompa* positions of both *chorpen* and *niermu*.

House 7

Dorje Droma, age 40, is a Sherpa of Salaka clan. Her parents lived in the Maising settlement of Bigu, and both died within 15 days when she was 13 years old, her sister 9, and her brother 5. Earlier, her parents had lived in Darjeeling, where her father worked in a bakery, and where both she and her sister were born. They had returned to Maising five years before their death, and had farmed the land they owned there. After their death Dorje Droma let out their land and stayed in their house with a Thami servant, living on the

income from her land. She never married and at the age of 18 she entered Tashi *gompa* and became a nun. Her younger brother now lives in Bhutan and her younger sister is married in Garlate near Choitang.

She held the *gompa*-post of *umse* and was expected to remain in this position for seven years. Dorje Droma has landed property of her own and lets her house and fields on share to Thamis.

House 8

Sangesomu, age 63, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Thibutang near Chautara. She has been at Tashi *gompa* ever since its foundation. Before that she was married, and had four children, two of whom died. Her husband went to India and died there. Leaving her small son, then five years old, with her parents-in-law, she came to Tashi *gompa* taking her daughter with her. Both she and her daughter became nuns. Sangesomu applied herself to the study of Tibetan scriptures, and rising rapidly in the rankorder of nuns, ultimately became *umse*, a position she held for the usual seven year period. But her daughter, who is now 40 years old, left the nunnery and went to India, where she disappeared without trace.

Sangesomu had some land, but it was registered in her husband's name, and when she became a nun she gave it to her parents-in-law to preserve it for her son. When that son also went to India and her parents-in-law died, kinsmen of her late husband took over the land. Since then she has no income of her own and depends entirely on alms. Every two days she goes to one of the houses of Bigu to beg, and sometimes she also goes to neighbouring villages, such as Bulung, Arampur and Dolongsa to collect food. When she is on one of those extended begging tours, she stays away for four to six days. She also used to go to Barabise to exchange grain for salt, which no doubt had come from Tibet. Previously she also visited Sun *gompa* in Tibet.

Though Sangesomu is materially less well off than many of the younger nuns who receive regular support from their families, she enjoys a respected position in the monastic community, is often to be found in the general kitchen drinking



Weekly market in Namche Bazar in 1983

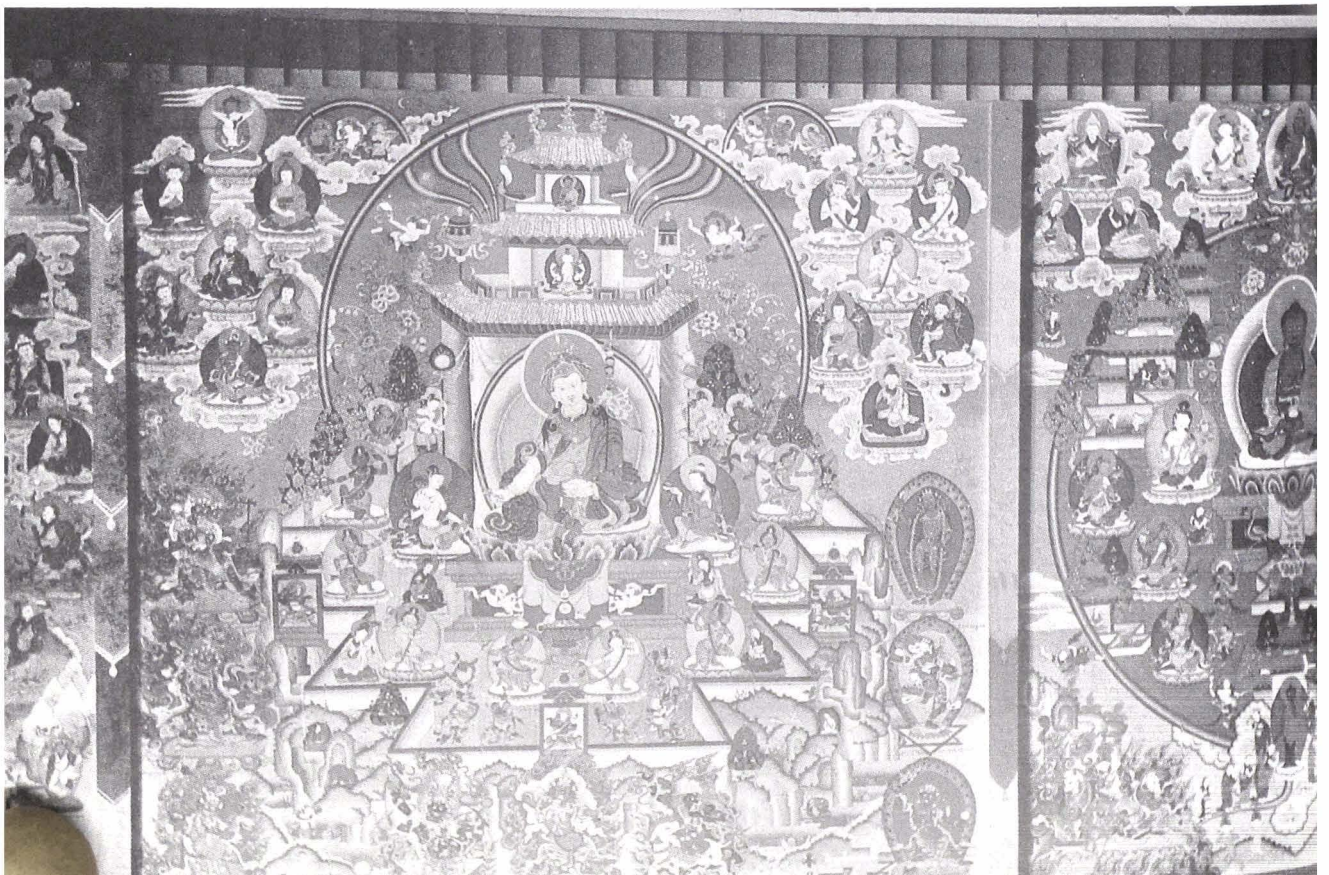
Sherpa couple in festive dress in 1957





The painter Kalden in his house in Khumjung in 1957

Fresco depicting Guru Rimpoche painted by Kapa Kalden





Welcoming a wedding party in 1957

The arrival of a wedding party in front of the bride's house in Kunde in 1971





A funeral rite in Tengboche in 1971

Lamas at a funeral in Khumjung in 1957



*The re-incarnated abbot of
Tengboche in his youth (1957)*



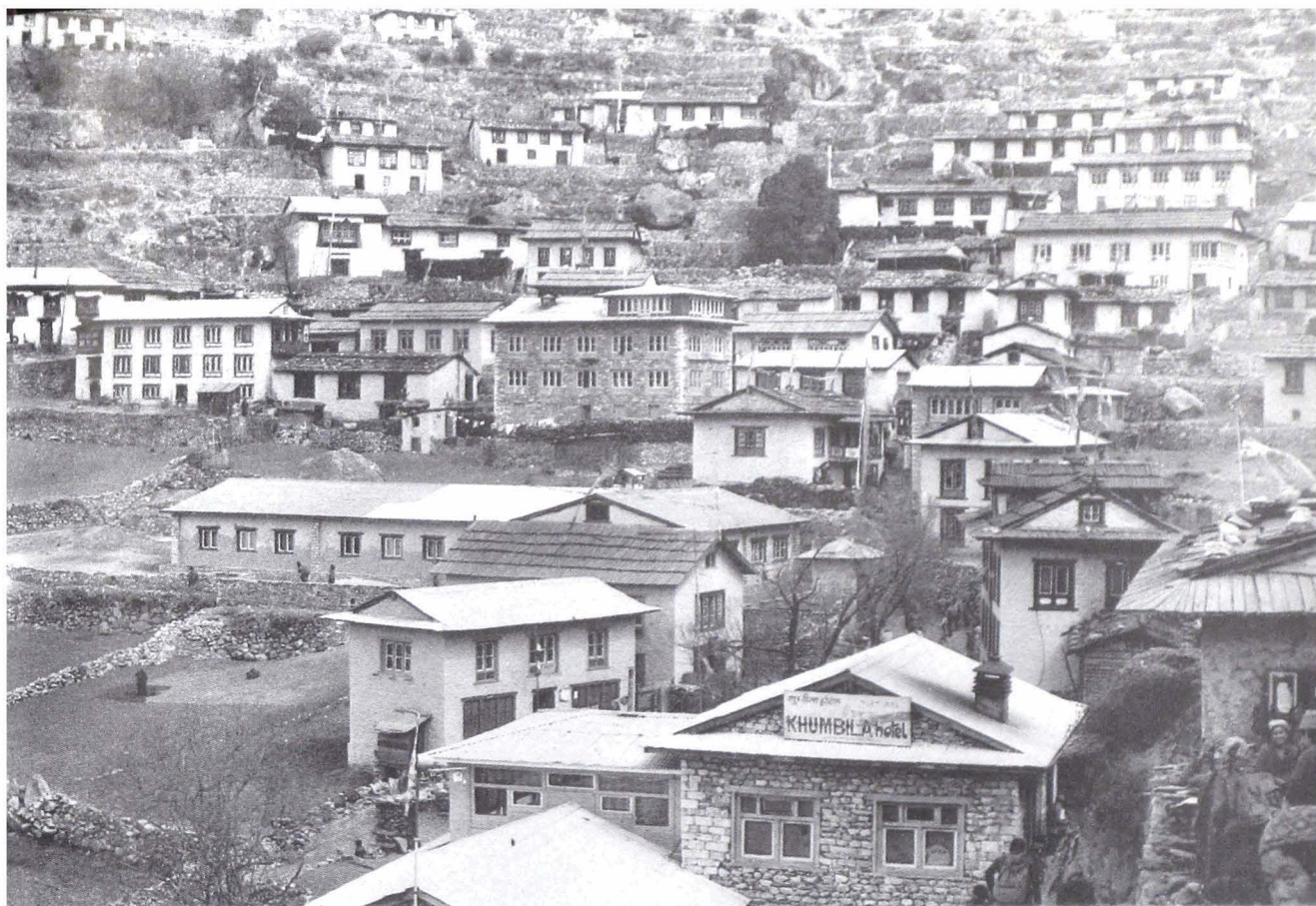
The entry to Tengboche gomba in 1983



*Masked dancer at the Mani Rimdu
festival in Thami monastery*

The abbot and nuns of Tashi Gompa in 1974





The village of Namche Bazar in 1983

The central part of Khumjung in 1953





Sherpa of Khumjung ploughing and a woman sowing buckwheat

Sherpa girls harvesting potatoes



tea and eating with the nuns who look after the bodily needs of the Guru Lama. It is obvious that the other nuns would not allow her to suffer any hardship even if the frailty of old age should prevent her from going on her begging rounds.

House 9

Sange Droma, age 25, is a Tamang from Temal village near Balauti. She came to Tashi *gompa* eight years ago, when she was 17 years old and unmarried. In her home village there is a small *gompa* and she had already become a nun when in the company of some older nuns from Temal she first visited Tashi *gompa*. Her companions occasionally came there and stayed from one to two months with friends in their quarters. Some time after that first visit Sange Droma came alone to Tashi *gompa* and asked to be admitted as a regular nun.

Her parents are still alive and she has one elder brother and four elder sisters, none of whom is a nun. The decision to come to Tashi *gompa* was her own, but she had the consent of her parents who continue to support her. At least once a year she visits her home and stays for some time with her family.

House 10

Lobsang Droma, age 36, is a Sherpa of Kambadze clan from Bigu, and a younger sister of the mother of Sherpa Omu (House 3). Her father, who died when she was an infant, was Kusho Lama, the younger brother of the *misar* Nim Pasang. She never married and entered the *gompa* at the age of about 20. Her mother died some four years ago, but she has three elder brothers, who support her; and two sisters.

House 11

Tuchi Droma, age 52, is a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Changku (near Ulag) some three days' walk from Bigu. For the past 12 years she has held the post of *konier*. Before she became a nun she was married and has one daughter. But when her husband died she became a nun, and 21 years ago took the *rabdzung* vow at Tashi *gompa* through the person of its founder. All the nuns who took the *rabdzung* vow at that

ceremony repeated it some seven years later when the Tulku came to Tashi *gompa*. The ostensible reason for this repetition was the fact that on their own admittance they had eaten pork and onions and drunk rakshi when being entertained on their travels.

House 12

Chembal Chindu (alias Tsiring Llamu), age 20, is the illegitimate daughter of Kusho Pema, a Drukpa Lama from Bhutan, and a Sherpa woman of Salaka clan of Bigu. Kushi Pema was a brother's son of Ngawang Paldzen, the founder of Tashi *gompa*; Chembal Chindu's mother, Nim Droma, who is still alive, was a nun, but had to leave the *gompa* because of her association with Kusho Pema. She later married a Sherpa and now lives with a younger daughter in a house of her own not far from the *gompa*. Chembal Chindu entered the nunnery when she was nine years old, and at first stayed with her mother's elder sister who was a nun. The latter died some years ago. Chembal Chindu now receives grain and clothes, but no money, from her mother. Her elder brother is in the service of the Dalai Lama, and said to be currently in Malaya.

House 13

Genden Droma, age 22, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Sailung, and the elder sister of Lobsang Chundu, one of the two monks acting as attendants to the Guru Lama. Genden Droma entered Tashi *gompa* five years ago together with Tamjen Droma (House 24) and has already taken the *rabdzung* vow. Her parents are alive and supporting her, and she has also three younger brothers, and one younger sister.

House 14

Urken Palmu, age 29, a Sherpa of Kambadzen clan, from Dolongsa, shares the house with Pem Droma, age 16, of Chia-wa clan, also from Dolongsa. Urken Palmu came to Tashi *gompa* 10 years ago. She was friendly with Sangesomu (House 8) and had been there on visits before becoming a nun. Her parents are alive and support her. As Dolongsa is near she

goes there about once a month and fetches supplies from her home. She has one younger brother, two elder sisters, both of whom are married in Dolongsa, and one younger sister, Pem Droma, who is not yet a fully privileged nun, but has the status of *surba*. Her mother died when she was about six years old, and her father suggested to her to become a nun at Tashi *gompa*, where she has a kinswoman, Chiangchup Droma (House 1), who stands to her in the relationship of father's sister. She has one elder and one younger sister, but her only brother died. She visits her father about once a month and gets from him grain and clothes.

House 15

Sange Chensum, age 22, a Sherpa of Gardz clan from the Jagat settlement of Bigu, entered the *gompa* one year ago of her own free will to acquire merit; there is no kinswoman of her among the nuns. She is still a *gyengi* and is being taught by Sherap Omu (House 3) whom she regards as her guru. Her father died but her mother, four elder sisters, all married, and two elder brothers, support her. Sometimes she goes to help her family with the work on their fields. When the Tulku next visits Tashi *gompa* she will take the *rabdzung* vow.

House 16

Karsang Droma, age 35, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Dunge (east of Jiri), came about 16 years ago. She was never married and came by herself and had no friends or kinswomen among the nuns. At that time her mother was still alive, but she has neither brother nor sister. Her father went to India after she was born, and was never heard of again. Till her death her mother stayed with her own brothers. Karsang Droma's only relatives are her father's brother's sons, and she sometimes stays with them at their *goth*, herdsmen's settlement, at Rali, but they do not support her and apart from her share in the *gompa* income, she depends on alms and fees for ritual services.

House 17

Chembal Sangmu, age 22, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan

from Choitang (near Bigu), holds the important *gompa* post of *chorpen*. She was sent to Tashi *gompa* by her father 14 years ago, to join her mother's sister who was a nun there and whose quarters she shared until her death three years ago. At the age of 13 Chembal Sangmu took the *rabdzung* vow. Her parents are still alive, and she has two younger sisters, and one elder and one younger brother. From her parents she gets necessary supplies of food and occasionally also cash. Her home is only one hour's walk from Tashi *gompa* and she often goes there.

Chembal Sangmu now shares her quarters with a novice, Tensing Droma, a Sherpa girl, 20 years old, from Dolongsa, who came only recently and is still *surba*. She has no kinswomen among the nuns, but was acquainted with several of the nuns whose home-village is also Dolongsa. Tensing Droma's parents are alive and support her; she also has one elder and one younger sister as well as a younger brother.

House 18

Pema, age 32, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Dunge. She was married and came to Tashi *gompa* one and a half years ago after her husband's death. She had two children, but both of them had died. As she joined the *gompa* only recently she had not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow and has still the status of *surba*. She has no relatives among the nuns of the *gompa*, and arrived accompanied by her elder brother. Her parents are still alive and support her. She has one elder and four younger brothers as well as four younger sisters.

House 19

Tsangdzum Sangmu, age 55, a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Jiri, is one of the oldest residents. She came 40 years ago and remembers the time when the Guru Lama's house was being built. She has never been married and after first coming to Tashi *gompa* and having her hair shaved off, she returned for some time to Jiri and lived there as a nun. Even after finally settling in Tashi *gompa* she remained for several years *surba* and was given the status of *thiba* on the same day as Sange Gyelmu (House 25) and Hishi Droma (House 26). Her

seniority in the *gompa* counts only from that day. For 17 years she held the position of *niermu* and for some years she was *kutum*. She receives support from her relatives. She has many brothers' daughters who are very wealthy.

House 20

Sange Chiring, age 26, a Sherpa of Kambadzen clan from Kartele Dulugpa (near Bigu). Her father is a village-lama and her brother is a monk staying at present in Thimpu (Bhutan) with the Tulku, the reincarnation of the founder of Tashi *gompa*. Sange Chiring was never married and has been in Tashi *gompa* for the past four years. Although she has not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow she has the status of *thiba*. Her parents are alive and support her. She has an elder and a younger sister.

House 21

Da Droma, age 32, a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Chongku (near Ladu), holds the position of *niermu*, and as such manages the kitchen and general household affairs of the *gompa*. She is the elder brother's daughter of Tuchi Droma (House 11) and is also related to Tashi Droma (House 3). She was never married and came at the age of 19. Her two cousins were already at Tashi *gompa*; they had come there four years earlier, and when she saw them becoming nuns and being happy at the *gompa*, she joined them of her own free will. Her parents are still alive, and she visits them at least once a year; they supply her with grain and also give her some money.

House 22

Kerab Droma (alias Tames Dzangmu), age 23, is a Tamang from Sailung. She came to Tashi *gompa* five years ago. The Guru Lama and Kusho Testu had visited her village and had accepted her as a nun, cutting off her hair then and there, and bringing her with them to Tashi *gompa*. Her father's sister, Samden Droma (House 23) came at the same time. Kerab Droma has already taken the *rabdzung* vow. She has three brothers, who support her, and one elder and three younger sisters.

House 23

Samden Droma, (alias Damje Omu), age 42, is a Tamang from Dorumba in the Sailung area, and related to Kerab Droma (House 22). Eight years ago she came to Tashi *gompa* of her own accord. She has been married and has one son. Her husband died and when subsequently her son, aged eight also died, she sold all her property and brought the money with her. She has neither parents, nor brothers or sisters. But her father's younger brother and her father's sister support her, and she visits them once a year. As her home-village is five days' journey from Tashi *gompa*, her relatives give her money rather than grain. Only after coming to Tashi *gompa* did she learn to read and when she had progressed sufficiently she took the *rabdzung* vow.

House 24

Tamjen Droma, age 30, is a Tamang from the Sailung area. She was never married and six years ago she came to Tashi *gompa* with the Guru Lama, who had visited Sailung. Three years later she took the *rabdzung* vow. Her mother is alive and she has an elder brother who supports her. Once a year she visits her home and stays there for one month. Her brother gives her grain and hires porters to help carry the grain to Tashi *gompa*.

House 25

Sange Gyelmu, age 38, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan, from Lungsamba (near Jiri). When she was about 16 she and two of her sisters came to Tashi *gompa*. While her sisters, who had no desire to become nuns, returned home, she decided to stay and seek admission to the *gompa* community. In this decision she was not influenced by her parents, who are alive and give her material support. She has one brother and six sisters, all of whom are married. Once a year she visits her home, and returns with gifts of grain, butter and cash.

House 26

Hishi Droma, aged 49, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Tarkegyang in Yelmu, had become a nun before she had even

heard of Tashi *gompa*. When she was a young girl, Lama Ngawang, who became the founder of Tashi *gompa*, came to Gerung above Tarkegyang. She went to visit the place and was so impressed by his personality that she became a nun without even telling her parents. Later she went back to her village and her parents provided her with clothes and provisions. Then she went on pilgrimage to several *gompa* in Tibet. On her return Lama Ngawang Pladzen advised her not to continue going on pilgrimage but to join the nuns at Tashi *gompa*. By the time she did so she was about 25 years old, and there were only about 12 nuns at Tashi *gompa*, all much older than Hishi Droma. She had learnt some reading and writing in Yelmu and continued her studies at Tashi *gompa*. Finally, she went to take the *rabdzung* vow at Bagan; it was administered by Kusho Testsu and eight *gelung*. For seven years she held the position of *umse*, and whenever the Guru Lama went on tour she was the effective head of the *gompa*. She held this post until 1973. Her family always supported her and when she had a serious illness her sister sent her money via Lama Kusho Testsu. She has one brother and three younger sisters, and her mother, aged 79, is still alive.

House 27

Sange Chegi (alias Bakti Ama), age 20, is the only Thami in the nunnery, and is the daughter of a local *jankri*. As a young girl Sange Chegi was ill for a long time and her father thought that her illness might be caused by his work as a shaman which involved the sacrificing of animals. He approached the Guru Lama, vowed to follow Buddhist teaching, went to meditate in a hermitage, and sent his daughter to the *gompa* to become a nun. The Guru Lama accepted her and when the reincarnate lama came to Bigu he ceremoniously cut her hair. Sange Chegi's health improved, but even now she is not strong. Her father relapsed into his practice as a shaman, but the girl continues to live as a nun in Tashi *gompa*. The quarters in which she lives has been empty ever since the death of the previous occupant three years ago. Sange Chegi

often visits her parents' house close to the *gompa* and gets from them all necessary supplies.

The data contained in the above house-list demonstrate clearly that the great majority of nuns entered Tashi *gompa* as young unmarried girls. While 23 of the nuns have never been married only six nuns are widows who came to Tashi *gompa* after their husbands' death. The numbers of those who have or had relatives among the nuns are equally balanced; 14 of the nuns have kinswomen among the members of the community and 15 came to Tashi *gompa* without finding a relative among the nuns. The latter category, however, contains nuns who have co-villagers among the other inmates of Tashi *gompa*. The information obtained in the course of the compilation of the house-list also shows that with the exception of five nuns who came as children or adolescents to stay with older kinswomen, all the nuns entered the *gompa* on their own initiative, or at least of their own free will.

It is difficult to determine what causes a young Sherpa or Tamang girl to leave her own village and renounce all prospects of marriage and motherhood and accept the many restrictions of a nun's life. One of the basic motivations for such a decision is undoubtedly the conviction deeply ingrained in Buddhist ideology that the attainment of religious merit is a path to future good fortune through favourable reincarnations as well as to peace and contentment in this life. There is, moreover, the fact that in Sherpa and perhaps to a lesser degree Tamang society the status of those associated with a major *gompa* is still surrounded with prestige and a certain glamour. This stems at least partly from the impressive splendour and artistic sophistication of *gompa* services which form the main focal points for cultural creativeness. One can well imagine that the more sensitive among young people of both sexes are attracted to the participation in rituals, the performance of which arouses the awe and admiration of laymen used to the simplicity of daily life in their small mountain villages. Though nuns as well as monks live under a discipline which imposes stringent sanctions on lapses from the chosen path of celibacy, most Buddhist clerics are neither

puritanical nor unduly sanctimonious. Inmates of a monastery or nunnery are not cut off from the life and normal pleasures of lay-society. Nuns are free to accept hospitality in village houses and may pay extended visits to their families. They are allowed to attend weddings and other domestic celebrations, and though the drinking of alcoholic beverages by monks and nuns is frowned upon in practice many nuns partake of beer and occasionally even distilled liquor in modest quantities.

Watching nuns at their domestic tasks and communal activities such as work on the fields one cannot help being impressed by their amiability and good humour. Particularly among groups of young nuns there is always laughter and hilarity and one feels that the girls really enjoy life in the *gompa*-community and do not pine for the even freer life in their home-villages.

Some of the more articulate nuns voiced the opinion that it was better to become a nun than to marry. "If one marries," said an old nun who had been married and was widowed, "one is happy at first, but later many troubles arise, and one is likely to become unhappy. In the long run nuns have a better life than married women. The worst a nun can do is to leave the *gompa* and get married. Such a breach of one's vows inevitably results in a painful fate in one's next reincarnation." The latter view is by no means generally held, and married women, who had been nuns, believe that they can gain merit by good works and are clearly not in fear of a bad incarnation.

Sherpa Omu (House 3), one of the most intelligent of the younger nuns suggested that the nuns who came from a difficult family background and had experienced hardship as children appreciated the peaceful life in a *gompa*, whereas young nuns who had happy memories of home often craved for family life and were more likely to leave the *gompa* to get married. Sherpa Omu nevertheless thought that it was preferable to be a nun rather than a wife: "As a married woman, one has to worry about one's husband, one's children and one's parents, and whether they all had enough food. As a nun one may have to care for one's old mother but when

she dies one is quite free." Her hope is to be reincarnated as a god or at least as a human, preferably as a man. "As a woman one is always inferior," she argued, "however much one learns one is never given as much respect as a lama. Even corrupt lamas are still treated with some respect; a man can lead a sinful life, and yet later become a lama and be considered superior to any woman."

Despite the rule that nuns leaving the *gompa* have to pay a fine, no great obstacles are placed in the way of those wanting to get married. However, Sangesomu (House 8), who has been at Tashi *gompa* ever since its foundation remembered only three cases of nuns being expelled because of love-affairs and all three married the man with whom they had associated. In addition to paying fines into the *gompa* funds they had to offer tea to all the nuns, burn butterlamps, and bow 108 times to the nuns "because they had left the *dharma*." One of these ex-nuns is the wife of the Bhutanese painter Teshi Ongdi who lives in a house close to the *gompa*, and she told me that in her case the fine for leaving the *gompa* was only Rs 70. She is in excellent terms with the nuns and is not made to feel guilty about her defection.

This attitude towards nuns who return to secular life coincides entirely with the treatment of ex-nuns and ex-monks in the Sherpa society of Khumbu.

Future alone will show whether Tashi *gompa* can survive as a centre of religious devotion and culture, but for the time being it certainly offers the opportunity of observing the functioning of a small Buddhist community unshaken in the faith which inspired countless generations of Tibetans and Sherpa and is now gaining rather than losing ground among the Tamangs of a region extending as far as Risingo and Sailung. There are indeed indications that the influence of Kusho Tsetu and the dedicated nuns of Tashi *gompa* has been instrumental in the establishment of a new monastic centre at Sailung right in the heart of the Tamang country. There used to be an old *gompa* inside Dorumba village, and some years ago a Tamang donated a site on a nearby hill in the name of Kusho Tsetu, who provided the inspiration and initiative for the plan of establishing a larger *gompa*. The local Tamangs of the Sailung

area collected funds for the construction of the new *gompa*, and some people gave as much as Rs 200-230 or substantial quantities of rice to feed the construction workers. In 1972 Sange Gyelmu of Tashi *gompa* went to Sailung, but at that time the *gompa* was not yet completed. Sange Gyelmu and Genden Droma stayed for a year at Sailung, and other nuns of Tashi *gompa* went there for some months at a time to help with the establishment of the new *gompa*. Now that the images have been transferred from the old to the new *gompa*, it is essential that at the very least one nun is permanently there to care for the images and also the small garden which has been laid out. There was the intention that the *gompa* should ultimately be staffed by monks, but as it taken time to collect sufficient monks for the establishment of a new monastery, nuns from Tashi *gompa* have taken it on themselves to look after the new religious centre. If successful it might come to play among the Tamangs a role similar to that of Tashi *gompa* in the Bigu area.

As far as one can judge from fragmentary documents and local traditions, Buddhism has experienced various periods of expansion as well as of contraction all along the southern fringe of the Tibetan culture sphere. In regions such as the upper Arun valley or some parts of the Gurung country it would seem to have had a short-lived efflorescence and is on the decline, whereas in Khumbu and Solu several new monasteries were established within the past half century. Tashi *gompa* provides an example of the recent foundation of a new religious centre, and the history, structure and operation of the small community of nuns therefore seemed worth recording.

Appendix

Data on social change in Khumjung

Throughout Khumbu so many changes in the life-style of the Sherpa population have occurred in recent years that it is difficult to draw a satisfactory generalized picture of these developments. Hence I have tried to document in the following pages the changing fortunes of the individual families of the village of Khumjung by comparing the composition of the various households as I found it in 1953 and 1957 with the situation prevailing in 1983. This compilation should enable future observers to trace the development of a Sherpa village community over a span of several generations. Such a procedure, tedious as it may appear to the general reader, can perhaps be compared with the methods of archaeologists who record in detail the contents of a early strata of a site in order to understand the emergence of a later civilization. The numbering of the houses has been done topographically, beginning at the eastern end of the village and ending at the western end. Clan-names, when known are given in brackets following the personal name.

House 1

1953—Kinsum, a Khamba woman recently immigrated from Tibet, lived there and worked as a daily labourer. She was the widow of the elder brother of Tenzing Norgay of Everest fame, and her one son Ngawang Topke, lived in Darjeeling with Tenzing. She had then neither land nor cattle. In 1957 she bought a plot of land, but went to Darjeeling and gave the land on rent to two neighbours who were Khambas like herself.

1983—Kinsum and her son were no longer in Khumjung. Kinsum had gone to Ladakh and Ngawang Topke was a teacher in a school in Darjeeling. He had a son, who was in the mountaineering school in Darjeeling of which Tenzing Norgay was the official head.

House 2

1953—Yakba Phu, a poor Khamba, worked as yak herdsman for wealthy Sherpas. His eldest son went to Darjeeling and died there. Yakba Phu's second son Pasang married Phudroma, a Khamba girl, in 1957.

1983—Pasang was living in Kathmandu, where he had been since 1975. While his first wife Phudroma still stayed in his house in Khumjung, he lived in Kathmandu with a second wife, a Sherpa woman from Sidowa in the Arun valley. In Kathmandu Pasang had become very rich and was believed to have a fortune of Rs 500,000, and it was said that a Japanese had given him Rs 100,000 to buy land in Bodnath. In 1983 he was in the process of building a house there close to that of Kalden, the son of Ongcho Lama. Pasang worked as a tourist guide and also organized transport for mountaineering expeditions.

House 3

1953—The house was occupied by Urken, a Khamba, well known for his prowess as a mountaineer. In 1957 he moved to a house belonging to Pasang Diki, a Khamba woman and subsequently married her and lived in her house as *maksu*. As high altitude porter and skilled tourist guide, he became wealthy and set up an establishment in Kathmandu where he installed Kami Droma as a second wife.

1983—Urken and Kami Droma had fallen out. Yet she continued to live in Kathmandu, but complained that Urken neglected her and gave her no money even though he was rich. He had built a good house at Kele, a *yorsa* settlement not far from Khumjung, and stayed there most of the time. At that time he owned two *yak*, 14 *nak*, four *zhum* and five *zopkiok* bought with earnings from work for tourists and mountaineers.

House 4

1953—The house belonged to a poor family of Yemba, ex-slaves. Its members intermarried with low status Khambas, and one of them landed in jail after committing several thefts.

1983—The Yemba family had dispersed and the house had collapsed.

House 5

1953—A large and well appointed house belonging to Konje Chunbi (Thaktu), one of the *pembu*. He owned a good deal of land but was never truly rich. Though he did not involve himself in tourist business, he travelled to USA and Europe with Sir Edmund Hillary when a piece of fur, mistakenly believed to be the scalp of a *yeti*, was taken to these countries to be examined by zoologists.

1983—Konje Chunbi and his wife still lived in the house with one of their unmarried daughters. Their eldest son was living with a European woman in Kathmandu, their younger son had died in an accident. Konje Chunbi often visited Kathmandu and also worked sometimes as contractor for road-works and other public enterprises.

House 6

1953—The house belonged to Lhakba Choti (Thaktu) whose wife was of Mende clan of Khumjung. Their eldest son was married to a Khamba girl of Khumjung. Three younger sons and two daughters were unmarried. In 1957 Lhakba Choti owned 12 *nak*.

1983—Lhakba Choti and his wife had died. Only one son, Ang Teshi, was alive and living in the house. He had been married but was divorced. He had inherited the father's substantial land holding, and owned one *zopkiok* and two *zhum*, but no *yak*. His main occupation was to act as trekking guide.

House 7

1953—The house was inhabited by Pemba Kitar (Paldorje),

who owned much land. In 1957 he had 18 *nak* some of which he had bought in Tibet.

1983—Pemba Kitar had died. Two of his three sons were alive, Kami Pasang owned 28 *yak* and *nak* and also did some tourist work, the other son worked mainly as tourist guide.

House 8

1953—The house was occupied by A-Sonam, a Tibetan who had come from the vicinity of Dingri. He had married Yangji, a Tibetan girl who had come to Khumjung before him. The couple owned no cattle but had bought one field.

1983—A-Sonam lived in another house and had married another wife. Yangji had returned to Tibet and taken another husband.

House 9

1953.—The house was occupied by An Kamin, whose parents had come from Tibet; he had married a Tibetan girl who had recently immigrated. They acquired two fields.

1983—An Kamin and his wife were alive: one son worked as herdsman for Sherpa cattle owners.

House 10

1953—The house was occupied by Da Tenzing (Paldorje), a famous mountaineering *sirdar* and his wife. In 1957 his youngest son Mingma was killed on a mountaineering expedition. His eldest son, Nima Chotr was then in India where he stayed several years doing various jobs.

1983—Nima Chotr had returned to Khumjung and had married the daughter of a prominent Sherpa family. In March 1983 they were both killed in a motoring accident, in which Da Tenzing, by that time in his eighties, was injured. Two unmarried daughters of Nima Chotr were expected to inherit the house and the family's land.

House 11

1953—Attached to House 10 and belonged also to Da Tenzing. It was occupied by a recently immigrated Tibetan family. In 1957 it was vacant.

1983—The house had collapsed.

House 12

1953—The house had been inherited but never occupied by Da Tenzing's wife. In 1957 it was in ruins.

House 13

1953—The house was occupied by Kushang Tikbe and his wife, both low status immigrants from Tibet. They acquired some land and one *yak* and six cows. They had three daughters who also married low status Tibetans. Their two sons, Lopsang and Lhakpa Tendu married one wife, the daughter of a Tibetan immigrant.

1983—The polyandrous marriage of Lopsang and Lhakpa Tendu had broken up, for the wife took a dislike to Lopsang. So the brothers divided the house and Lopsang married a Khamba girl of Namche Bazar. Both brothers worked as porters for tourists.

House 14

1953—One of the largest and finest houses of Khumjung belonging to Kapa Kalden of Gurung descent, a famous painter, who had painted the frescoes of many *gompa* and the chapel in his own house. He lived in it with his wife, four sons and two daughters.

1983—Kapa Kalden had died in 1982. Pasang, his eldest son, who was also a painter, spent four months of the year in Kathmandu, where he rented a room in a Newar house. The second son, who worked as tourist guide, lived partly in Kathmandu and partly in Khumjung; his wife and children lived in Khumjung; the third son was also married and spent most of the year in Khumjung. The fourth son managed a tourist agency called Trans-Himalayan Trekking; both he and his wife lived in Kathmandu, where he had bought some land.

House 15

1953—The house was owned by Pemba Tenzing, a Khamba born in Khumjung who lived in it with his Sherpa wife Pali (Chusherwa). In 1957 they owned five fields and ten *nak*.

1983—The couple still stayed most of the time in Khumjung, but had no *nak* and instead kept sheep. Their eldest surviving son also lived there but often went to Kathmandu and worked as trekking guide. The second son had an establishment in Kathmandu and lived there with his wife. The third son also lived in Kathmandu and worked with his brother; they kept a shop in which they sold provisions for trekkers.

House 16

1953—The house was occupied by A-Tutu, a recent immigrant from Tibet, who was a well-known shaman and healer; he was married to a local Khamba girl.

1983—A-Tutu had built a new house. His two sons lived in Kathmandu and worked as trekking guides.

House 17

1953—The house was occupied by a Tibetan couple who had come to Khumjung three years earlier; they had two sons.

1983—None of the members of the family were in Khumjung, and their whereabouts were unknown.

Houses 18-30

1953-1957—These houses were occupied by several Khamba families most of whom were recent immigrants from Tibet. Some returned to Tibet while others stayed on in Khumjung and intermarried with local Khambas. They had only small holdings and hardly any cattle, and lived largely on wage labour.

1983—Most of the original immigrants had died or left Khumjung; none had acquired substantial land-holdings. One of the men had established himself at Dingboche, where he kept a tea-stall for trekkers; he also worked as a tourist guide. Three of the younger men stayed most of the time in Kathmandu and worked for tourists. The wife of one of them kept a shop in Kathmandu. Another young man worked as a builder in Kathmandu, and had bought some land there.

House 31

1953—The house was occupied by Namga, a Khamba of a

family long established in Khumjung, and his wife Nimputi, the daughter of Kapa Kalden (House 14).

1983—The couple still lived in Khumjung. Namga engaged in trade, selling blankets in Solu and buying *zopkiok* there and selling them in Tibet. Numputi made carpets for sale. Thus this couple continued with activities not different from those they might have engaged in before tourism had led many other families to change their life style. Their elder son had read up to the tenth standard in Kathmandu, and a younger son went to school in Khumjung.

House 32

1953—The house was occupied by Sonam Topgye and his wife Purwa Diki, the daughter of a local Khamba and a Sherpa mother of Paldorje clan. The couple had one daughter and three sons.

1983—The Sonam Topgye had died in 1956, and Purwa Diki had moved to Milingbo, a settlement near the nunnery of Devuje, where several elderly Sherpas lived in retirement. One of the three sons had moved into a separate house and maintained himself by taking trekking jobs. The two other sons, both married, had divided the parental house vertically and each had established himself with his wife in one part. Both went occasionally to Kathmandu and took jobs as tourist guides while their wives remained in Khumjung and farmed their land.

House 33

1953—The house was occupied by Dzimi, a Khamba born in Khumjung and his Khamba wife who had come from Kutu, close to the Tibetan border. Their daughter Droma Diki married Nanga Dorje (Paldorje) as *maksu*.

1983—Dzimi and his wife had died. The land inherited by Droma Diki and Nanga Dorje was farmed mainly by Droma Diki. Nanga Dorje had rented a house at Jorsale and he and his daughter used it as a tea shop. Nanga Dorje also often went to Kathmandu for trekking jobs. His son was also engaged in work for tourists.

House 34

1953—The house was occupied by Ringsing, a local Khamba, and his Khamba wife Pasangputi. They had two sons.

1983—Ringsing had died, but Pasangputi lived in the house and cultivated their small holding. Their two sons were married. The elder son built a separate house in Khumjung, while the younger son and his wife stayed in the parental house with Pasangputi. Both sons engaged in trekking and mountaineering work, and one of them was employed as cook by Mountain Travel and spent much time in Kathmandu. The wives of both sons remained in Khumjung.

House 35

1953—The house was owned by Lama Kiu (Gardza), then 81 and the senior lama of Khumjung, and his wife Kipum (Thaktu). The couple had been married for 60 years, and had one son, Tenzing Tauwa, and four daughters. Tenzing Tauwa, who was a lama, had gone to Darjeeling; and died there. The eldest daughter, Sangi Droma, went to Darjeeling and worked for several Europeans; the second daughter Dalamu went to Kalimpong and married a Chinese the third daughter Thate became a nun in Tibet, and the youngest daughter Pasang Diki married Lama Dhanaru, a Khamba of Kunde, who came as *maksu* into Lama Kiu's house.

1983—Lama Kiu and his wife had died. Sangi Droma had returned from Darjeeling and lived in Khumjung as a nun, spending most of her time in the nunnery at Chamgaon. Dalamu had died and there was no news of Thate. Pasang Diki lived with her husband Lama Dhanaru in the house. They had three sons; the eldest had died during an expedition to Everest and his body was never found. The two younger sons went to school in Khumjung.

House 36

1953—The house belonged to Ai-Tenzing, a widow and older sister of the painter Kapa Kalden. Her daughter Tsingputi married Changjup, a Tibetan, as *maksu*. He became a prominent high altitude mountaineer and once visited Europe with his British employers.

1983—Changjup had died and the house had collapsed, but the site still belonged to Tsingputi, who lived with relatives.

House 37

1953—The house was occupied by Phu Tare (Paldorje), originally from Phortse, and his wife who was a Khamba of Khumjung.

1983—Phu Tare lived alone in the house, his wife having died. He had two sons: Ang Tsiri, who lived in Kathmandu and worked as porter for trekking parties. Nurju had married a girl of Kunde and inhabited half of the house. He engaged in business and kept a way-side inn at Lobuche. In February 1983 he was killed by a Rai, with whom he had a fight in Namche Bazar. His widow continued keeping the inn at Lobuche.

House 38

1953—The house was occupied by Sungdare (Mende) and his wife Dawa Puti (Thaktu) of Kunde. They had four sons and owned 14 *nak* and two fields; by 1957 their herd had increased to 17 *nak*.

1983—Sungdare had died. Dawa Puti spent the winters in Kathmandu with her daughter and the latter's Tamang husband, who had bought a house there. In the spring all three used to come to Khumjung to plant potatoes and spend the summer there.

Dawa Puti had five sons. Pasang Temba, who was married to a daughter of Anulu (Paldorje), a prominent mountaineer of Khumjung, and lived in Kathmandu maintaining himself by doing trekking jobs.

Pasang Tsiri, lived in Khumjung as *maksu* of Da Puti, daughter of Ang Nima (Mende) a rich man of Khumjung. He owned a large flock of sheep and also worked for tourists.

Ang Tarkia was a monk at Tengboche, then left the monastery, married a girl of Khumjung and did trekking jobs. After about two years he left his wife and in 1981 he returned to Tengboche and in 1983 was still there.

Pasang Sona married a girl of Kunde and built a new house in Khumjung; at the "house-warming" he got drunk and

falling down hit his head on a stone and died. His widow supported herself by casual labour.

Nima Norbu lived in Khumjung in part of his brother Pasang Sona's enlarged house. His wife was a step-daughter of Anulu (Paldorje). Nima Norbu worked as watchman for the Everest View Hotel and also did local trekking jobs for hotel clients.

Sungdare's land had been divided between his sons.

House 39

1953—The house, which belonged to Au Tendin (Mende) was taken on rent by Dongaba, who lived in it with his wife Teshi Droma, a Khamba from Thami. The rent was discharged by Teshi Droma occasionally working for Au Tendin. Their daughter Pasi was then in Darjeeling.

1983—Dongaba, Teshi Droma and Pasi had died. Pasi's daughter Pembu Lhamu was working for Urken (House 3).

House 40

1953—The house was occupied by Angche (Mende). His wife Anima had been polyandrously married also to his brother Angnima. She had entered the nunnery of Devuje, but came occasionally to Khumjung to stay in turn with the one or other of her husbands. Anima and Angche had two sons; Ngawang Tundu and Kirkia. Ngawang Tundu became a monk at Tengboche, but later married Naua Samden of Phortse. They had four daughters and one son, Lhakba Dorje.

1983—Ngawang Tundu had died; two of his daughters had become nuns in Devuje. Lhakba Dorje lived in Khumjung and worked occasionally for trekking parties. He had been betrothed by *sodene* to a girl of Kunde, and had lived with her without performing *dem-chang* for three years. They had no child and parted company.

House 41

1953—The house belonged to Pasang Diki and Urken (House 3) came to live with her as *maksu*. They had eight sons but four died in childhood; there were also two daughters. Later,

Urken married Kami Droma as second wife and installed her in Kathmandu.

1983—Urken had earned a great deal as a mountaineering *sirdar* and had moved to Kele, a *yorsa* settlement where he had built a house. Pasang Diki had remained in the house at Khumjung. One of her daughters lived in Kathmandu, while the other stayed in Lukla and hired out *zopkiok* to carry the luggage of tourists.

One son had become a monk in Tengboche, one was in the Ananda Kuti boarding school at Swayambunath in Kathmandu, and two sons went to school in Khumjung.

House 42

1953—The house was occupied by Droma Sunjo (Pankarma) of Khumjung. She was not formally married and had two children from different men, both of whom were married to other women and did not care for the children. Her daughter Lhakba Droma married Atenu as *maksu*.

1982—Lhakba Droma had died and Atenu had married Angpuli, the daughter of Sungdare (House 38). He supported himself by working as builder and as cook for trekking parties.

House 43

1953—The house was occupied by Teshi (Mende) of Khumjung, and his wife Nang Droma, a Khamba of Khumjung. They had two sons: Kami Nuru and Temba, and three daughters. The eldest daughter married Dhome Tsiri (House 88).

1983—Teshi and Nang Droma had settled in Kathmandu, where Teshi was employed by the Swiss Aid Mission. In 1982 Teshi had sold his house in Khumjung to a daughter of Sungdare and her Tamang husband (House 38). Teshi's son Kamin Nuru had died and Temba had gone to India, where he worked in the borderlands organization. His parents had not heard from him for 15 years.

House 44

1953—The house was occupied by Ang Nuru (Mende) of

Khumjung and his wife Ang Sirki (Thaktu). They had two sons and one daughter.

1983—Ang Nuru and his wife were still living in the house. Their eldest son, who was unmarried, had gone to Kathmandu where he worked as trekking guide. The younger son, Tsuldim, was also unmarried, lived with his parents and looked after the family's *zopkiok* and sheep.

House 45

1953—The house was occupied by Nima Tsiri, a Khamba of Khumjung and his wife Bhuti, who was the daughter of an old established Thaktu family of Khumjung.

1983—Nima Tsiri had died and Bhuti lived with two daughters cultivating the family's land. A third daughter was in Kathmandu learning carpet making.

House 46

1953—The house was occupied by Pelu (Paldorje), the widow of a Khamba long settled in Khumjung. Their daughter Ankami was married to Lama Karma (Thaktu) who lived in the house as *maksu*.

1983—Pelu, Ankami and Lama Karma had died; the latter had three daughters and two sons. Mingma Norbu lived in Khumjung and worked occasionally as trekking guide; Pasang had gone to live in Kathmandu where he worked in the Mount Everest Hotel and also organized trekking tours. One of the daughters had died in Kathmandu. the other two lived in Khumjung.

House 47

1957—This small house was built by A-Tutu, a Tibetan shaman, who had previously lived in House 16.

1983—A-Tutu and his wife had three sons and three daughters. The eldest son, who was married to a girl of Thami, lived in Kathmandu and worked as a tourist guide. The second son was unmarried and also worked for tourists.

House 48

1953—The house was occupied by Kusho Kapkyo, a

Khamba lama, who 30 years previously had come from Tibet. He had married two sisters who were of a Khumjung family of Paldorje clan.

1983—Kusho Kapkyo and his wives had died. The only son from the younger wife, Ang Tsiri, lived in Kathmandu and did trekking jobs.

House 49

1953—The house was occupied by Dawa, a recently arrived Tibetan and his Tibetan wife. They had two daughters and two sons; one of the sons subsequently died on an expedition on Dhaulagiri.

1983—Dawa, his wife and two daughters and the remaining son had all died. The house was inhabited by the widow of the man killed on Dhaulagiri and their son and daughter.

House 50

1953—The house was occupied by Anima, a Lama born in Tibet, and his wife Pasang, born in Khumjung of Tibetan parents.

1983—Anima and his wife had died, but five sons and one daughter were alive. The latter lived in Khumjung and looked after the house and the land. The eldest son, Pemba Tenzing, married to Pali, had acquired House 16 from A-Tutu. Three of his sons lived in Kathmandu and had become wealthy by keeping shops specializing on provisions for trekkers.

House 51

1953—The house was occupied by Angdroma, a Khamba woman of Khumjung, who was the widow of Pasang Norbu (Pankarma), and her son Ang Chotr and daughter Nimputi.

1983—Angdroma had died. Ang Chotr lived in Khumjung with his wife Yangdzim Bombe, who was from Phortse. Nimputi had married a Tibetan and gone with him to Tibet. Ang Chotr and his wife had young children.

House 52

1953—The house was occupied by Yülhacheri (Mende) of Khumjung, and his two wives, one of Khumjung and one of

Phortse. They had one son, Pemba Dorje, and three daughters.

1983—Yülhacheri was alive, but both his wives had died. Pemba Dorje, who had married Anglamu (Paldorje) of Khumjung, had been killed on a Kanchenjunga expedition. His widow Anglamu had married Ang Tsiri, who soon afterwards was killed on a Dhaulagiri expedition. Of Yülhacheri's daughters the eldest went to Darjeeling and there married a Ladakhi with whom she lived in Ladakh; the second daughter, Ang Sonam, lived in Khumjung with her *maksu* husband who was from Namche Bazar; the third daughter Ang Chamdzi, married a Tibetan with whom she lived in Manauli where he had an instructor's job.

House 53

1983—The house was occupied by Pasang Cheri, a Khamba of Khamendeu status born in Khumjung and his Tibetan wife.

1983—Pasang Cheri and his wife were alive and lived mainly in Khumjung, though occasionally they went to Kathmandu. Their elder son Tsiring Ongdzin lived most of the time in Khumjung but took trekking jobs. The younger son Pemba Tundu lived in Kathmandu and worked for Mountain Travel as trekking servant. He was married to a Khamba girl from Khumjung and had four daughters and two sons. A daughter of Pasang Cheri was married to a Sunwar, who lived with her in Khumjung.

House 54

1953—The house was occupied by Ai-Tenu (Thaktu), the widow of Ondi, a Khamba of Khumjung. They had no children.

1983—The house was used by Nima Tenzing, who had rented it from Ondi's heirs.

House 55

1953—The house was occupied by Aniye (Paldorje) of Khumjung and his Khamba wife, who was also born in Khumjung. They had four children.

1983—Aniye was still alive but his wife had died. Their eldest daughter Datoma had been married to Nima Dorje of

Kunde; he died in 1977 on the Everest icefall in the course of a Japanese expedition; seven Sherpas from Namche Bazar, Kunde, Khumjung, Phortse and Thami were killed at the same time; also a Solu Sherpa and one of the Japanese died.

House 56

1953—The house was occupied by Namgia, a Khamba of Khumjung, his wife Doma (Paldorje) and one daughter and two sons.

1983—Namgia and Doma had died; their daughter Lhakba had a son, but never married. A younger daughter, Pemba Droma had married a Tamang and worked in the house of Ang Pasang (Thaktu). Namgia's son Kirkia was not married; he occasionally worked as porter or bringing fire-wood.

House 57

1953—The house was occupied by Sharap Lama, originally from Kham, and his wife Yangjima (Paldorje). They had two daughters, Kami Droma and Ang Pamu; other children had died in infancy.

1983—Sharap Lama and Yangjima had died. The house belonged to Kami Droma and her *maksu* husband Lhakba Norou (Thaktu). The latter had for some time a job as cook in the Everest View Hotel at Khumjung and later worked for Sherpa Cooperative Trekking in Lukla. Ang Pamu was married to a man in Darjeeling, who was not a Sherpa.

House 58

1953—The house was occupied by Kirkia (Mende) of Khumjung, who died in 1955. He had four wives: Ang Puti (Paldorje), who went to live as a nun in Devuje; Ang Diki (Shangup), who went to live in Lhasa with a Chinese; Ang Droma (Paldorje), daughter of Ang Chunbi, the *pembu* of Kunde, who lived only one year with Kirkia; and Dadroma (Paldorje) of Phortse, who had one son, Nima Tenzing, and one daughter Dalhamu.

1983—Dadroma was still in Khumjung; she had two sons and two daughters. Her eldest son was married and lived in Khumjung; the second son, about 15 also lived in Khumjung.

Her daughter lived in Khumjung with her husband Lhakba Gyelbu. For about three years a Khamba, Phu Tundu, rented a portion of the house.

House 59

1953—The house was occupied by Kunga Chosa (Paldorje) of Khumjung and his wife Phum Diki (Thaktu) of Khumjung. They had five sons.

1983—Kunga Chosa and Phum Diki had died. Their eldest son Atenu was married to Lhakba Droma (Mende) and lived as *maksu* in her house in Khumjung; the second son Danamgya was a monk in Tengboche; the third son Penuri who had a joint wife with his younger brother Chamba Tsiri, died on an Everest expedition; the fourth son, Kami Nuri, had died on an expedition to Pumori; he had been married and had one son and two daughters, one of whom was in Kathmandu. The fifth son Chamba Tsiri had the old parental house, was married and worked in the Mount Everest View Hotel in Khumjung. His two sons were attending school in Kathmandu. The property of Kunga Chosa had gone to Atenu and Chamba Tsiri.

House 60

1953—The house was occupied by Lhakba Puti (Paldorje) of Khumjung, widow of Yukya (Thaktu). Her son Ngawang Gombu, who had been a monk in Tengboche, lived then in Milingbo with Lhangnamu, an ex-nun, who was the sister of the *pembu* of Namche.

1983—Ngawang Gombu had returned to Khumjung and taken over the parental house. Lhangnamu was alive, but had married Pasang Temba of Namche. When he died she continued to live in Namche. A daughter of Ngawang Gombu lived with her father in Khumjung.

House 61

1953—The house belonged to Ongcho Lama, but was vacant; in 1957 it was rented by Atashi, a local Khamba, who moved in with his mother and younger sister.

1983—Atashi had moved out again and the house was vacant.

House 62

1953—The house was occupied by Kami Norbu, a local Khamba, who lived there with his wife Ang Chamji (Mende) of Khumjung.

1983—Kami Norbu still lived there and worked for tourists. Ang Chamji had left him and had become a nun in Devuje. His second wife Pendo (Thaktu), one son and two daughters lived in the house. The son was unmarried and worked as teacher in the Khumjung school.

House 63

1953—The house was occupied by Dorje Ngungdu (Thaktu) and his wife Puti, a Khamba of Khumjung. They had two sons, Pasang Gelje and Kamin Tsiri, and two daughters, Tsing Droma and Ang Chamji.

1983—Dorje Ngungdu, Puti and Kamin Tsiri had died. Pasang Gelje was married to Tem Puti, daughter of Pemba Kitar and occasionally worked as porter. He had three sons; the eldest worked in the Everest View Hotel and the two younger ones as watchmen in the Khumjung school. Pasang Gelje's sister Tsing Droma was married to Kami Pasang, son of Pemba Kitar. His second sister had married a man of Phortse, who built a new house in Khumjung, near to Pasang Gelje's house.

House 64

1953—The house was occupied by Ang Nuru (Thaktu), brother of Dorje Ngungdu (House 63) and his wife Nimi, daughter of a Tibetan lama in Darjeeling. They had three sons and three daughters.

1983—Ang Nuru and Nimi were still alive. The eldest son had married but in 1981 died of an illness. The second son Phinjo lived in the house and did trekking jobs. The youngest son had died of an illness. The eldest daughter was married in Darjeeling; the second was married to Kami Norbu (House 62); the third daughter, Ang Diki, was unmarried and lived in the house.

House 65

1953—The house was occupied by Pemba Dorje (Mende) and his wife Anglamu (Paldorje), whose two sons were Pemba Tundu and Phurte. In 1957 Pemba Dorje was killed on the Kanchenjunga; his widow Anglamu thereafter married Ang Tsiri, but he was killed in 1974 on a Dhaulagiri expedition.

1983—Anglamu died in 1979. Pembu Tundu had become blind and Phurte, who was unmarried, stayed in the house and looked after his blind brother.

House 66

1953—The house was occupied by Nima Diki, a Gharti, who had been a slave in the house of Kushang Thaktu (House 70). She had three children from three different men: one Gharti and two low status Khambas.

1983—Nima Diki and two of her children had died. Only one daughter, Dachiki, lived in the house with one son whose father was from Namche.

House 67

1953—The house was occupied by Jangbu (Thaktu), son of Kushang (House 70), his wife Droma Lhamu of Namche, and their daughter Tsingputi.

1983—Jangbu had died; Droma Lhamu was alive, and Tsingputi, who lived in House 68 had married Tenzing Gyelju (Paldorje) and had two children. Tenzing Gyelju died in 1977 on Mount Everest. After his death Tsingputi lived with Penuri (Paldorje) and they had one daughter; but Penuri was also killed on an Everest expedition.

House 68

1953—The house which belonged to Chopali (House 82) was delapidated. In 1957 it was bought by Jangbu (Thaktu) of (House 67) who restored it.

1983—Jangbu's daughter Tsingbuti lived in the house with two adolescent children.

House 69

1953—The house which belonged to Ngawang Tundu

(Mende) (House 40) was vacant. Ngawang Tundu subsequently sold it to Pemba Tundu (Thaktu), son of Kushang (House 70), but Pemba Tundu died in 1959 in Tibet before he could move in. After Pemba Tundu's death his elder brother's son Ang Pasang, who had lived in Namche Bazar, used the house, but later gave it to his younger brother Tenzing Sangbo, who had been a monk in Shigatse and later in Tengboche.

1983—Tenzing Sangbo had married Doli, daughter of Dai Yandzim; they lived in the house and had one son and one daughter.

House 70

1953—The house was the largest in Khumjung and its owner Kushang (Thaktu) was one of the leading men of Khumjung. Kushang's sons Nima Tundu, Jangu, and Pemba Tundu all died during his life-time.

1983—The house was occupied by Pa Temba (House 90) the son of Kushang's daughter Daku and her husband Pasang Sona (Mende). Kushang's grandson Ang Pasang, who should have inherited the house, lived in Namche Bazar and had also a house in Kathmandu. He had become very rich by trading with Tibet, where he had sold many *dimzi-zophiok* reared in Solu-Khumbu. Tsing Droma, the widow of Kushang's son Pemba Tundu, also lived in the house.

House 71

1953—The house belonged to Teshi (Thaktu), a deaf woman who had never married. She was the sister of Gelung Ngawang, who had been *loben* of Tengboche *gompa* and highly revered throughout Khumbu.

1983—Teshi had died. The house was occasionally used by Ngawang Gombu (Thaktu) of House 60.

House 72

1953—The house was occupied by Nima Teshi (Thaktu), the *chorpen* of the Khumjung *gompa* and his wife Shita, a Khamba of Namche Bazar; their eldest son Chang Chumbi had a separate House 91. One married son, Phu Dorje, lived in the house with his wife Lhamudroma; four married daughters of Nima Teshi also lived in the house.

1983—Nima Teshi, in his late eighties, was alive and active; his son Chang Chumbi had died, and in 1970 his son Phu Dorje had been killed on—Everest during a Japanese ski expedition. The husband of Nima Teshi's daughter Ai-Yandzi had died on Everest in 1977. Before marrying Lhamudroma Phu Dorje had an affair with Pemadroma, a Tibetan, and had one son from her; this son, aged 14, was living in Nima Teshi's house. Two unmarried daughters of Nima Teshi also lived in his house.

House 73

1953—The house was occupied by Mingma Kamdang, a Khamba who had come from Tibet with his Khamba wife. The couple had 15 children, of whom 12 died young.

1983—Mingma Kamdang had died, but his widow lived in the house. One daughter was married to Lhakba, a Khamba of Khumjung and lived there. Another daughter, Tsinglhamu married a Tibetan tailor and lived in Kathmandu. Mingma Kamdang's only surviving son, Kami Sirki, lived half of the year in Kathmandu and worked as trekking guide.

House 74

The house was occupied by Ang Tenzing (Paldorje) of Khumjung and his son Anulu, the latter's two wives and their children.

1983—Ang Tenzing had long been dead and Anulu had fallen to his death on a mountaineering expedition. Anulu's first wife was alive and lived in Kathmandu. His second and third wife had died. Anulu's son Lhakba Gyelbu lived in the house. His second son, Lhakba Norbu was a monk in Tengboche.

House 75

1953—The house was occupied by Ongcho Lama (Paldorje), originally from Ringmo in Solu, and his wife Kangputi (Chusherwa), who had inherited the house from her father Sange Lama. They had one son, Kalden, and one daughter Ang Purwa.

1983—Ongcho Lama still lived in the house, but his wife Kangputi had died, and their son Kalden lived in Kathmandu,

where he ran a tourist agency and had built for himself a large modern house luxuriously furnished. After his first wife's death Ongcho Lama had gone to live with Angputi of Kunde and had stayed for some years in her house in Kunde. Her son Ang Gyelsem was a monk in Tengboche. By 1983 Ongcho Lama and Angputi had established themselves in the house in Khumjung, and had improved it by adding a large panelled chapel. During the winter Ongcho Lama and Angputi stayed usually in Kathmandu. Ongcho Lama's daughter Ang Purwa was married to a Tamang policeman who lived in Jiri.

House 76

1953—The house was occupied by Gelje (Thaktu) and his wife Taskche, a Khamba. They had two daughters and one son who was dumb.

1983—Gelje had long been dead. Taskche had married twice again, first Atashi, and then Tenzing, who worked as cook for trekking parties.

House 77

1953—The house was occupied by Tsing Norbu, a Khamba who had recently arrived from Tibet, and his wife Tsingdu.

1983—Tsing Norbu was still alive, but his wife had died. His wife's sister's daughter lived in the house. Tsing Norbu maintained himself by doing casual labour for Sherpas, but he did not work for tourists.

House 78

1953—The house was one of the largest in Khumjung. The owner Ang Tandin (Paldorje) was known as Sundokpa. He and his younger brother Aila had jointly married two sisters of Shire clan from Phortse. Only the elder wife had children: two sons and four daughters.

1983—Ang Tandin, Aila and their two wives had all died. Their two sons had also died, but there were two grandsons: Pasang Temba and Ang Tsiri and three unmarried grand daughters in the house. The family was rich in land and cattle, and only one of the young men, Pasang Temba,

sometimes took trekking and mountaineering jobs. He owned about 40 *yak* and *nak*. Ang Tsiri was a monk at Tengboche.

House 79

1953—The house was occupied by Pemba Kitar (Thaktu), his two legal wives and one concubine, who had come to the house as a servant. Pemba Kitar had one married son, Aila, who himself had three sons.

1983—Pemba Kitar and his son Aila had died, and so had Aila's wife Tsiring Droma, who died in 1981. Her eldest son, Nima Tashi and her third son Lhakba Norbu had jointly married Nima Yandzing, the daughter of Ang Chunbi, the *pembu* of Kunde. This polyandrous marriage lasted only a few years for Nima Tashi was killed in a mountaineering accident. Before his death Nima Yandzing had given birth to four children, and after his death to one more son. Dhawa Norbu, the middle one of the three brothers was a monk in Tengboche and had been given the name Zangbu Ringbo. The family was still rich in land and cattle. Lhakba Norbu owned about 30 *yak* and *nak*.

House 80

1953—The house was occupied by Ang Pasang, a low status Khamba born in Khumjung and his Khamba wife Urken Droma.

1983—Ang Pasang had died; Urken Droma was alive and married to Ang Kami of Garok village. Her only son Tenzing worked for Mountain Travel; he was unmarried and commuted between Khumjung and Kathmandu.

House 81

1953—The house was occupied by Urken, a local Khamba, who was the elder brother of Ang Pasang (House 80), and his Khamba wife Dhawa.

1983—Urken had died and Dhawa lived in the house with Ang Purwa, the unmarried daughter of Ang Pasang (House 80).

House 82

1953—The house was occupied by Chopali (Gole) from Solu,

who had come to Khumjung as *maksu*, and his wife Lhakba Droma (Mende) of Khumjung. Her father Kibi had been *pembu* and Chopali had inherited the *pembu* ship from him. They had one son, Nang Chopal and one daughter, Dijing Pamu.

1983—Chopali, Lhakba Droma and Nang Chopal had died. After Lhakba Droma's death Chopali, who had survived her married Tsundil Lhamu, who later became a nun and in her old age married Da Tenzing (House 10). Dijing Pamu married Lhakba Tsiri and inherited most of Chopali's property. The house was sold to Ang Temba (House 89) and his wife Sirki (Paldorje), the daughter of Da Tenzing.

House 83

1953—The house was occupied by Phur Temba (Paldorje) of Khumjung and his wife Pemba Droma (Thaktu). They had four sons and two daughters.

1983—Phur Temba and Pemba Droma were alive. Their daughter Ang Dolu was married in Phortse. Their first son Kicheri was a monk, named Jabkang Molam, in Tengboche and managed the tourist restaurant belonging to the monastery. The second son Ang Purwa was a mountaineering *sirdar* and married a girl from Thami. The third son Pasang Sona was living in the house and had also married a girl of Thami. At times he worked as cook for Mountain Travel trekking parties. The fourth son Pemba Tsiri was a monk in Tengboche; the fifth son Da Gelje had died.

House 84

1953—The house was occupied by Ang Pemba (Paldorje) of Khumjung and his wife Pasi (Lama) of Phaphlu in Solu. They had three sons and three daughters.

1983—Ang Pemba and Pasi had died. Their first son Rinsing had enlisted in the Indian Army and died; the second son, Nanga Dorje married Droma Diki as *maksu* (House 33) and kept an inn at Jorsale. The third son, Da Tsiri lived in Kathmandu; he had studied electrical engineering in Germany but did not have a steady job; he worked for trekking parties. He was married to a Sherpa girl of Yelmu and lived with her in Kathmandu.

House 85

1953—The house was occupied by Tsing Tarkia (Mende) and his wife Ang Chamji (Thaktu) of Khumjung. They had one son who died in infancy and one daughter, Nima Yandzing.

1983—Tsing Tarkia was alive; his wife had died. Nima Yandzing was married in Phortse and had three sons, two of whom worked for trekking parties.

House 86

1953—The house was occupied by Dorje Tikbi (Mende) of Khumjung and his wife Ang Chokki (Sherwa) of Phortse. They had two sons and three daughters.

1983—Dorje Tikbi had died but Ang Chokki was alive and stayed in the house. Her first son, Ang Tsiri, who had married Anglamu (Paldorje) was killed on Dhaulagiri. The first daughter married the Khamba Pasang (House 30); Ang Purwa married a man of Phortse; Ang Chamji married two brothers Penuri and Chamba Tsiri (Paldorje) (House 59) and lived with them in house 86 until Penuri was killed on Mount Everest.

House 87

1953—The house built by Anulu (House 74) two years previously was unoccupied.

1983—Anulu's son Kachiri lived in the house.

House 88

1953—The house which belonged to Dhome Tsiri (Paldorje), then 16 years old, was vacant after his father had died several years previously.

1983—Dhome Tsiri, who had been elected panchayat chairman, had restored and enlarged the house. He was married to Phurwa Sonu (Mende) and had also a second wife Ang Shrita. He lived mainly in Khumjung but Phurwa Sonu was often in Kathmandu. Their one son, Ang Temba, served in the British Gurkhas and in 1983 was stationed at Aldershot in the U.K.; their daughter Ang Chullin, was a nurse and was working then in Austria.

Dhome Tsiri's younger brother Tenzing had been killed on a Dhaulagiri expedition.

House 89

1953—The house was occupied by two Khamba brothers, Lhakba Sona and Nima Tenzing, who were jointly married to Nima Yandzi (Chusherwa) of Kunde. Lhakba Sona had earlier had a wife of his own, Nimputi (Sherwa), who bore him two sons, Ang Temba and Gyalsen, and one daughter Pendo. But Nimputi had left him after a quarrel.

1983—Lhakba Sona had died, but Nima Tenzing and Nima Yandzi were alive and staying in the house. They owned 32 *yak*, *nak*, *zopkiok* and *zhum*. Their son Ang Temba had married Sirki (Paldorje), the daughter of Da Tenzing (House 10) and had bought house 82. He worked regularly as a tourist guide. Gyalsen was a monk and lived in Kunde. Two sons of Nima Yandzi were Nuru Jangu, who worked mainly as a herdsman, and Tsiri who went to school in Khumjung. Three daughters lived in Khumjung.

House 90

1953—The house was occupied by Au Tandi (Mende) of Khumjung and his wife Sanye (Sherwa) of Phortse. Their first son Pasang Sona was married to Daku (Thaktu), the daughter of Kushang (House 70). They had four sons: Ang Tsiri, Pasang Tendi, Pa Tembu and Kami Tsiri.

1983—Au Tandi, Sanye and Pasang Sona had died. The house had been vertically divided into three parts. Ang Tsiri and his wife Droma Chamji, had one part, but he was often in Kathmandu and worked as trekking guide. Their daughter was betrothed to Mingma Norbu and gave birth to a girl in March 1983; she then still lived in Ang Tsiri's house. In the autumn 1983 she travelled with Mingma Norbu to Canada. Pasang Tendi and his wife Ang Lhakba lived in another part of the house; they owned about 30 *yak* and *nak*, and some *zopkiok* and *zhum*. Pa Temba stayed for some time in the house of Kushang (Thaktu) (House 70), his mother's father; he married a Khamba girl of Namche Bazar, and both moved to Kathmandu where he organized trekking and mountaineering business. Kamin Tsiri had married a daughter of Ang Chumbi,—*pembu* of Kunde; they stayed with his mother Daku in the third part of the house.

House 91

1953—The house was occupied by Chang Chumbi (Thaktu), son of Nima Teshi (House 72) and his wife Tsimbuti (Mende) of Khumjung. They had four small children.

1983—Chang Chumbi had died in 1979; his wife and two children had died already in 1956.

Chang Chumbi's son Ang Temba married a girl of Kunde and lived in the house. He had learnt cooking in the Everest View Hotel and worked as cook for trekking parties. Chang Chumbi's daughter Nimputi had married a Ladakhi and had died in Ladakh.

House 92

1953—The house was occupied by Nima Gyalsen (Thaktu) of Khumjung and his wife Tsilhamu (Paldorje), the elder brother's daughter of Ang Tandin (House 78). Nima Gyaljen's mother Yangdzum (Chsherwa) and his unmarried sister also lived in the house.

1983—Nima Gyaljen had died; his widow Tsilhamu lived in the house; occasionally also their eldest son Pemba Tsiri, who owned 15 *yak* and *nak*, and also worked as cook for Mountain Travel; a younger son went to school.

House 93

1953—The house was occupied by Pasang Chotr (Lama Sherwa) of Khumjung and his wife Mingma Chamji, a Khamba of Namche Bazar. They had three sons and two daughters.

1983—Pasang Chotr and his wife had both died. Their eldest son Phu Chotr and his wife lived in the house. He worked for trekking parties and also otherwise as porter. Their second son Ang Kami was married to Urken Droma, daughter of Kusang Tikbi of Khumjung, but stayed for long periods in Kathmandu and engaged in tourist jobs. The third son Ang Lhakba lived with his wife in Kathmandu, and worked as cook for trekking parties. Phu Chotr's first daughter Kami Droma married Urken (House 3) as his second wife; she lived in Kathmandu with her son, and Urken sometimes visited them, but they were not on good terms.

The houses listed above are those which existed in 1953

and 1957, and as late as 1971 they had changed little. But by 1983 many of them had been improved and partly enlarged, and most of them had painted doors and window panes. Only some 20 houses had remained unchanged.

In addition to those standing on their original sites, there were in 1983 eighteen newly built houses, most of them not very large but designed as extra accommodation for married sons. Two houses had been built for the purpose of accommodating tourists, and these were referred to as "hotels" even though they provided no more comforts than average Sherpa houses.

Epilogue

This book was already in the press when in March and April 1984 I visited Nepal and met some of my Sherpa friends including the reincarnate abbot of Tengboche Monastery. What they told me of events in Khumbu throws some new light on problems discussed in the foregoing chapters and deserves to be briefly recorded.

The most significant development is the establishment of a cultural centre attached to the Tengboche Gumpa. In April 1983 the abbot had told me of his plans for the creation of such a centre (see Chapter 6), and these plans have now materialized. With the help of the efforts and donations of many Sherpas and generous grants of the government and some foreign agencies, two substantial buildings have been constructed at the rear of the monastery. They have been built in Sherpa style of local materials and the larger of them is a double-storeyed house 15 by 11 meters, which serves the two fold function of museum and library. The museum will contain two sections: one in which objects relating to domestic life, dress, agriculture, animal husbandry and other secular aspects of Sherpa culture are to be displayed, and the other devoted to articles of ritual and religious nature, and particularly those relevant to monastic life. On the second floor there is a traditionally styled altar cum library niche made by a skilled Tibetan wood-carver. The main emphasis of the library is placed on Tibetan scriptures, and these are stored along the entire length of one of the walls of the second floor. The abbot hopes that the cultural centre will assist the monks to broaden their scholastic education, and with this purpose in mind he is merging his private collection of books with those of the library. There will also be a section of books in western languages dealing with Mahayana Buddhism and general Himalayan culture, and this is intended to cater for the interests of foreign visitors, and in the more distant future

perhaps also for those of Sherpas with a reading knowledge of English.

The second building serves as accommodation for novices and junior monks, and can house up to thirty youths. The traditional practice—common also in some Tibetan monasteries—of constructing separate dwellings for young monks at the expense of their families had been a bar to the entry of poor boys to the monastery, and the new hostel is intended to open the *gompa* to Sherpa youths desirous of religious instruction irrespective of their families' economic position.

In 1984 the number of monks and novices had risen to forty and the abbot told me that recently he had to refuse admittance to some boys because even after the construction of the hostel there was not sufficient space to accommodate them. He spoke also of his concern about future developments when monks now engaged in advanced studies at Bodhnath will return to Tengboche. For he realizes that such scholarly monks will require a measure of privacy not found in hostel-type accommodation. He plans therefore to build an elongated block of single rooms, in which scholars can work free from distraction.

The reincarnate abbot's concern is not limited to the future of Tengboche, however, but is involved also in a scheme for establishing a centre of reflection and instruction for lamas from the many outlying *gompa* in the northern regions of Nepal. Many of these are in a state of decay, and the few monks and married lamas still living there have little contact with Buddhist learning and current aspirations. He advocates therefore the creation of a multi-denominational centre on a site outside Kathmandu, where Gelugpa, Nyingmapa, Kargyupa, Sakyapa and possibly also Bönpo lamas can find accommodation and maintenance for extended periods of study and meditation. Though the project is approved by the Nepal Buddhist Association it is only in the planning stage. But the Tengboche Tulku often comes to Kathmandu to assist in discussions and the raising of funds.

The Cultural Centre Project at Tengboche, in the meantime is intended as a beginning of the strengthening of the traditional educational role of monasteries. The Tengboche *gompa*

has for long been the focal point of Khumbu's religious, cultural and educational life, and in recognition of this role and the potential impact of the new project, Sherpa leaders established a Tengboche Cultural Centre Management Committee to supervise the initial steps in the creation of the centre. Inspired by the visible progress of the enterprise the wider Sherpa community now wants to extend its activities over the whole of Khumbu and for this purpose a new voluntary association called the Khumbu Cultural Conservation Committee has recently been established. The reincarnate abbot of Tengboche is the chairman and the *pradhan panchas* of Namche Bazar, Khumjung and Chaurikharka as well as the Tengboche ward chairman and the warden of the National Park are members of the committee. A constitution has been drawn up and a bank account has been opened in the name of the Committee.

The enterprises envisaged by the members of this committee will not be concerned exclusively with cultural matters, but will include also model projects in environmental improvement, sanitation and re-forestation. In Tengboche a beginning with these activities has already been made. five thousand seedlings have been made available free of cost by the local Community Forestry Nursery, and these are now being planted by young monks in places where the forest surrounding the monastery was damaged by porters of mountaineering expeditions.

The Sherpas' sustained interest in Buddhist religion and culture is manifested also in activities outside Khumbu and Solu. Recently a group of Sherpas under the leadership of the Tengboche abbot acquired a building-site at Bodhnath and began the construction of a large rest-house for pilgrims and a *gompa* to serve the religious needs of Sherpas visiting the sacred places of the Kathmandu valley as well as to provide a ritual centre for Sherpas now domiciled in the valley. The ground floor walls of these buildings are already standing, and it is expected that the whole complex will be completed in 1985. The building costs are borne exclusively by Sherpas, and the maintenance of the *gompa* will also be a responsibility of the Sherpa community.

Another example of the generosity of Sherpas in furthering

religious aims is the provision of funds to enable novices from Tengboche to study at Bodhnath under the renowned Nyingmapa scholar Ketsun Zangbo, who has settled there after a long stay at Buddhist centres in Japan. For a period of four years the expenses of four novices receiving advanced instruction by Ketsun Zangbo and other Nyingmapa scholars will be borne by Kalden, the enterprising son of Ongcho Lama of Khumjung (House 75). His initiative has stimulated another patron to guarantee for the same period the expenses of four more novices from Tengboche during their studies at Bodhnath. This action promises that by 1988 eight monks well educated in Nyingmapa scriptures and philosophy will join the monastic community of Tengboche. The abbot hopes that their presence will give a new impetus to the scholarly activities of the cultural centre recently established at the monastery.

The Sherpas' support for Buddhist institutions apparent now at Bodhnath as well as at Tengboche is part of the remarkable efflorescence of Tibetan Buddhism in exile, which finds its most striking expression within the square mile around the ancient stupa of Bodhnath. In that locality there was as late as 1953 apart from the private *lha-kang* of the Chini Lama only one *gompa*, established by a Gelugpa lama from Mongolia and in part decorated by the famous Sherpa painter Kapa Kalden of Khumjung (House 14). Recent years have now seen the construction of two Sakyapa *gompa*, one large Nyingmapa *gompa*, one Kargyupa *gompa* and an enormous monastery known as Urgyen *gompa*, which combines Nyingmapa and Kargyupa features and ritual performances, and houses at present two reincarnations (*tulku*) one Nyingmapa and one Kargyupa, who are the sons of the founder of the *gompa* and born by the same mother.

Altogether eight reincarnations reside permanently in this new complex of monasteries, and other *tulku*, such as those of Tengboche and Thami frequently visit the place.

Numerous monks both from Tibet and from the northern border regions of Nepal form the entourage of these reincarnate abbots and minister at the innumerable rituals performed in the various *gompa*.

As a postscript to this account of the inspiring revival of Buddhist culture outside Tibet, an elaboration of a point made in Chapter 2 may find place here. In that chapter I mentioned that the Khambas of Khumbu have no *rü* (exogamous clans), a fact which distinguishes them from the Sherpas characterized by their named hereditary clans. Since the time when I had come to this conclusion on the basis of my field research in Khumbu, I have undertaken some work among Tibetan refugees from Kham, now resident in the vicinity of Swayambhunath at Kathmandu. There I found to my surprise that virtually all people of Kham have *rü* and that these named exogamous units are of considerable importance to their social life. My informants from Kham mentioned that many Tibetans of Central Tibet do not have *rü* but insisted that all indigenous inhabitants of Kham have *rü*-names. The absence of *rü*-names among the Khambas of Khumbu remains a mystery, but one explanation may be that most of those so-called "Khambas" had immigrated from parts of Tibet other than Kham, or at least had stayed long enough in Central Tibet to have abandoned the use of their original clan-names. My purely incidental discovery of *rü*-names among people from Kham now settled in Kathmandu may serve as a reminder of the limitations of anthropological research in one single area, if it is not supported by comparative studies extending over a wider region.

The necessity of adding this epilogue during the production of the present book moreover suggests that the anthropological study of a society is an ongoing process which can never be regarded as finally completed.

Kathmandu, April 1984.

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