

**BUDDHIST HIMALAYA:
STUDIES IN RELIGION, HISTORY AND CULTURE**

VOLUME II: THE SIKKIM PAPERS



EDITORS

**ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
ALEX MCKAY**

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY · SIKKIM

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NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY · SIKKIM
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INTRODUCTION: PART I THE SIKKIM PAPERS

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

Sikkim Studies is a nascent field of study. In recent years, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has played a leading role in its establishment, bringing together for the first time and supporting a number of students and scholars in an informal yet dynamic way in the course of their varied research projects (see Introduction: Part II). With the view of both highlighting the Institute's role in the establishment of Sikkim Studies and honouring the participation of the students and scholars who in recent years made important contributions to the field under the umbrella of the Institute, we thought it appropriate to publish the Sikkim Papers together in Volume II. Within this volume, the papers are grouped under the headings of History and Culture. Those papers pertaining to the wider region of the Himalayas and Tibet, which over the centuries has no doubt impacted on all aspects of Sikkimese history and culture, are the subject of Volume I. Those written in the Tibetan language are published together in Volume III.

HISTORY

The history section opens with an article by John Ardussi exploring the mythical space the southern Himalayan frontier has occupied in the Tibetan world view since antiquity. The lands on the southern border were imprecisely referred to as Mon in early Tibetan literature and thought to contain Hidden Lands where Tibetan monks would seek refuge from disturbances in central Tibet, and where treasure-texts previously concealed by Guru Rinpoche would be later re-discovered by designated treasure-finders. This perception of a mythical space evolved in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries when serious political conflict arose in the area as Sikkim and Bhutan were establishing their new governments and expanding their borders. As new state entities were being formed in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, the socio-political situation on the southern frontier destabilized along sectarian lines. The various socio-ethnic groups and their minor chieftains living on the frontier had their own complex relationships and conflicts, but as the new governments sought to extend their control, “the combatants could now try to involve the larger state powers, whose own frontiers and sectarian policies became thereby entwined.” This is how the Lepcha chieftain Monpa Achok took his quarrel to Lhasa where he met the Dalai Lama in 1668 and how two months later, Tibet invaded Bhutan on his behalf and that of another lama. The author looks into a number of such political conflicts and crosscurrents in the decades before the rise of British India and the beginning of its influence on the Himalayan frontier.

The history section continues with a contribution by Elliot Sperling discussing the possible Mi nyag origins of the Sikkimese Chogyals. Those interested in the origin of the Namgyal dynasty prior to the establishment of the kingdom in the seventeenth century have long pondered whether the ancestors of the Chogyals in fact migrated to Sikkim from the Mi nyag region of Khams or whether they could trace their origins to the Tangut state of Ga Mi

nyag; also known as the Xixia Kingdom. Using Tibetan and Chinese sources, Sperling points out that it is not simply a question of either/or. While it is well established that people of the Tangut Mi nyag state of Xixia fled south after its destruction by Genghis Khan in 1227, it is not so well known that the refugees were in fact returning home. Centuries earlier, the same Mi nyag people had migrated north and became part of Xixia, only to return to Khams Mi nyag, among other places, after its destruction. The refugees integrated back into their own people who had stayed behind in eastern Tibet, bringing with them their historical memory, traditions and language. In the end, as Sperling concludes, “the integration of the two populations therefore makes somewhat moot the question of whether the further spread of the Mi nyag lineage to Sikkim represented a lineage from the Xixia state or Khams Mi nyag: the link to the state of Xixia became the common historical memory of the Mi nyag population.”

Moving forward to the seventeenth century, Saul Mullard looks into yet another question which has long puzzled those interested in the early history of Sikkim, offering an alternative to the traditional religious narratives relating the formation of the Sikkimese state. Using seventeenth century sources, Mullard describes the likely process of state formation and socio-political situation in the region in the early decades of the state’s history. He describes the presence of various Lepcha, Limbu and Lhopo (Tibeto-Sikkimese) proto-states, the Lepcha and Limbu rebellion, their subsequent alliance and oath of allegiance taken before the first Sikkimese king Phuntshog Namgyal in 1663—locally referred to at the Lho-Men-Tsong sum agreement. The introduction of early state structures, social stratification and taxation are also addressed. The situation during the reigns of subsequent Chogyals is then examined, highlighting the fragility and failures of state structures, with the exception of reforms implemented during the short reign of the third king Chagdor Namgyal. The weakness of the state ultimately led to the empowerment of an independent aristocracy which left the Chogyals at the mercy of the British, who first intervened in the region around 1815. Eventually, with the British domination of Sikkim, nationalist narratives began to emerge “seeking to create historical legitimacy for the existence of the Sikkimese nation and in particular the royal family through the appropriation of religious symbolism”, giving birth to the above mentioned religious narratives, which till today constitute the legitimate and accepted history of Sikkim.

Staying with the question of challenging the accepted historical narratives and views concerned with Sikkim’s history and its protagonists, Pema Wangchuk Dorjee, in his article, makes “a plea for a more nuanced social history of Sikkim which not only builds on, but also challenges the established accounts whose partiality is in many ways the result of its colonial and monarchical provenance”. By providing compelling examples about the history and colonial perceptions of the Magars and the Lepchas, we are made to understand how failing to question these constructions can “continue to influence decisions that impact the social life of communities to this day.” It also fails to celebrate heroes whose exploits were never properly recorded and were eventually erased from local memory, if not replaced outright by narratives better suited to the rulers’ pursuits. Wangchuk also stresses that the received histories, while mostly concerned with the geo-politics of the time, failed to convey the social-history of the common Sikkimese people. However, the author warns us that the results of such research, although scholarly sound, should be made accessible to the common man so that the present void may not be filled by agenda-driven contributions, which he rightly qualifies as “selective pickings that feed the identity-driven politics that sells so well nowadays”.

Returning to early Sikkimese history, Sonam Wangyal addresses the question of the 1706 Bhutanese retreat from Sikkim at the time of the third Chogyal's minority, drawing a parallel with the Mongolian Ögödei Khan's retreat from Europe in 1241. In both cases, so the author argues, though victorious the armies retreated because their leader had passed away and military elites thus needed to return home to select and assert allegiance to the new ruler. In the case of the Bhutanese, it was around 1706 that the death of the founder of Bhutan Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) was made public. The Bhutanese army in Sikkim thus returned home to ensure stability during this vulnerable period of transition. [For an alternative view on the nature of the Bhutanese retreat, see Mullard in this volume.]

Moving on to the British period, John Bray presents a detailed description of the first substantial British engagements with Sikkim during the 1814-1816 Nepal War, focusing on Captain Barré Latter's role as a British Officer with the prime responsibility for frontline diplomatic contacts with Sikkim. In addition to Sikkim's military contribution in the war against the Gorkhas, of particular interest is the successful diplomatic role played by the then Sikkimese Chogyal Tgugphud Namgyal throughout the whole period of negotiations between the British and the Chinese. Eventually, by the Treaty of Titalia in 1817, all the lands which had formerly been occupied by the Gorkhas were returned to Sikkim by the British. British relations with Sikkim had been so mutually fruitful that Tsugphud expressed the wish to be enrolled as 'a dependent on the British Government'. Bray points out, however, that a definitive history of Sikkim's role in this period will require a more detailed comparison of British, Sikkimese, Nepali, Tibetan and Chinese sources.

In his article, T.P. Mishra looks into an episode of Sikkimese history referred to in the article as the Yuklathup episode but generally known in Sikkim as the Kotapa rebellion. This took place in 1826 when the Sikkimese King Tsugphud Namgyal ordered the assassination of his maternal uncle Chagdoz Bolod—referred to by Mishra as Ikunda—and his family. Bolod's brother, Kazi Yuklathup, along with 800 Lepchas took refuge in Nepal and from there they raided into Sikkimese territory. Looking at the nature of Nepal's involvement in the dispute from Nepalese sources, Mishra concludes that following the signing of the treaty of Sugauli with the East India Company in 1816, Nepal had no political interests in supporting Yuklathup in his dispute with the Sikkimese King: on the contrary, it was in Nepal's interest to avoid trouble on the border and any misunderstandings with the East India Company. The author argues that "Nepal's objective was to use the human resources of the fugitives by utilizing them to cultivate the barren lands in the east of the country". In the first section of the article, drawing on secondary sources, the author attempts to describe the events leading up to the assassination of Bolod and the ensuing rebellion. It should be noted that since the Golden Jubilee Conference of 2008, the Sikkim Palace Archive of Documents has become available, finally providing primary source material for this poorly documented episode of Sikkimese history. In an upcoming publication on the history of Sikkim and the Namgyal dynasty, making use of these primary sources, Saul Mullard will argue that the events leading up to the assassination of Bolod had in fact little to do with rivalries between the Bhutia and the Lepcha but rather were a question of rivalry between the king and a predominantly Lepcha aristocracy which cut across both ethnic and family ties. The importance of this issue suggests that further study is needed into the events of the time, including a study of the British sources.

Ngawang Tsering Shakspo's article brings us to the early years of the twentieth century, beginning with an overview of the numerous historical and cultural resemblances between Ladakh and Sikkim pointing out however, that despite these similarities and owing to their

distant geographical positions, the two states did not entertain any trade, political, or other social-cultural relations. This tentatively changed in 1911 when the then Sikkimese Crown Prince Sidkeong Tulku made enquiries about the possibility of marrying a Ladakhi princess. The author takes us through the correspondence between the officers involved in these enquiries centred on Lady Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun daughter of the Raja of Matho. Although unsuccessful, the author suggests that these negotiations reveal the position Ladakh enjoyed in the early twentieth century as a strong bastion of Himalayan Buddhist culture in the eyes of other Himalayan states despite its extreme isolation.

In the concluding paper of the history section, Jackie Hiltz brings us to the final years of Sikkim as a Himalayan kingdom with an overview of the Twelfth Chogyal's efforts to protect and enhance the political status and identity of Sikkim. Hiltz considers Palden Thondup Namgyal's point of view in the context of the political events that unfolded during his years as crown prince, given what he considered his sacred duty to protect the cultural and political identity of the Bhutias and Lepchas communities, now minorities in their homeland. In Hiltz's words "This discussion offers a response to what Namgyal's critics have condemned as his unyielding 'communal' stand privileging the Bhutia-Lepcha community and his unwavering determination to perpetuate the Namgyal dynasty." However, his stand did not call for any drastic measure or the suppression of the majority community, "His overarching vision for the kingdom in the early 1950s embraced equal representation for the main communities, communal harmony, and the measured implementation of democracy in Sikkim."

CULTURE

Mark Turin's contribution to the sociolinguistics of Sikkim provides a suitable introduction to this section. In 2005-6, Turin and his team undertook the first phase of a modern linguistic survey of Sikkim, administering a language-use questionnaire to some 16,500 students in most of the state's secondary schools. This 30 question survey sought to ask much more than the limited language-use questions normally found in national or state surveys; in Turin's own words, "If called upon to encapsulate our whole survey in two questions, they would be: 'who speaks what language to whom, and under what circumstances?'" The first section provides an overview of the history, methods, purposes and limitations of national and Sikkim censuses, stressing the need for additional linguistic surveys the results of which could be used for effective policy planning in education, media and the public sphere. Considering the demographic, educational, and economic changes Sikkim has undergone in recent decades, the "survey aimed to document this moment of transition through the prism of language use." Not surprisingly, the survey revealed that the Nepali language has been the *lingua franca* of Sikkim for at least the last two generations, that English—with the exception of Dzongu—was considered the most important language in Sikkim, that the mother tongues of communities who came from Nepal (Tamang, Newari, etc.) are particularly under threat, and, that the teaching of local languages in school (Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, etc.) helps give symbolic value to the mother tongue, even if this does not necessarily result in any spoken proficiency. As local languages gradually disappear, the author concludes that speaking a language is no longer a marker of ethnic identity or belonging. Rather, in vernacular classes, the students "are learning heritage, culture, history and ancestry through the prism of language. In fact, these students are learning 'belonging'... It is

precisely because these languages now have primarily emotional and symbolic value rather than strategic and practical importance, that the Government of Sikkim can afford to teach them.”

Staying with language, Piotr Klafkowski’s article focuses on the work of Athing Joseph Rongong (1900-1975), a Christian Lepcha of Kalimpong and son of a convert from Ilam in eastern Nepal. Athing Joseph Rongong was a police officer with great love and interest for his mother tongue. In 1965, he opened a Lepcha school in Kalimpong and was an active member of the Kalimpong Lepcha Association. While doing research in Kalimpong in 1978, Klafkowski came across the work of the Lepcha writer in the form of manuscripts which had been divided among the author’s three sons. The share given to Birendra Rong was made available to Klafkowski and is the subject of this paper. Klafkowski divides A.J. Rongong work in four main fields of study: a. the Rong/Lepcha lexicography; b. the traditional Rong religion and the tale of Tashe Thing; c. the New Testament translation into the language; and, d. the family history in the context of the history of the Rong/Lepcha people of Kalimpong, particularly the Christian ones. After providing a detail description of each, Klafkowski concludes that A.J. Rongong was a most unusual policeman, his work adding “to all the specialised fields of interest in Rong studies: lexicography, traditional Rong religion, Bible translations and modern writings in the language, local history, folklore and grammar.”

S.D. Tsering gives us an overview of a unique survey which was undertaken in Sikkim at the end of 2005 by the Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation (DESM&E) and which sought to obtain basic level village data in order to chalk out appropriate programmes to meet the needs of village people. In addition to economic and sociological questions, it was decided that ethnic community level data be generated on Sikkim’s twenty-two major communities, something which had never been attempted in the country before due to its sensitive nature. S.D. Tsering presents some of the preliminary findings concerned with religion as practiced by the state’s main communities, starting with an introduction to the various religions found in Sikkim today. A first observation is the increase in the number of people practicing Buddhism partly due to the Gurungs and the Tamangs converting to Buddhism for socio-political reasons, but also because of the existence of state-sponsored monastic Buddhist schools. Although Hinduism is the religion with the largest number of followers in the state, both Christianity and Islam have grown rapidly in recent years, the latter due to an increase in the number of immigrants from Bengal and Bangladesh. Christianity, which was first introduced by the Church of Scotland missionaries in 1891, has seen a rise in converts among Rais, Lepchas and scheduled castes since various other Christian denominations started evangelical activities in Sikkim in the 1980s. Socio-economic factors are found to be the major factor in conversion to both Buddhism and Christianity to the point that the Nepali Hindu festival of Dasain, which used to be celebrated by all Nepalese communities and bind them together, has lost its sheen in recent years.

Charisma K. Lepcha presents a study of Bom Busty, a Lepcha village located near Kalimpong in the Darjeeling District. We are taken through the history of the village and the different religious, socio-cultural, economic and political changes it has undergone in over one century. Christianity, which was introduced as early as 1882 was undoubtedly the strongest influence, followed by education, and the introduction of the Nepali language as the *lingua franca* of the community together with the settlement of numerous Nepali-speaking people within the Lepcha community. While Lepchas may have gained a great deal through

access to education, jobs and various development schemes, this has come at a cost as they lost much in terms of Lepcha culture, tradition and language use. This loss seems to be further exasperated by the current religious division between Buddhist and Christian Lepchas as many aspects of traditional culture are rooted in a shamanic past which although rejected outright by the Christians, has been integrated in the Lepchas' form of Buddhist worship. What appears to remain as neutral common grounds are a fight to rescue and maintain both the Lepcha language and their traditional Lepcha dress, the latter probably being the strongest silent statement defining themselves as Lepcha in the face of the Hills' politically dominant Nepalese or 'Gorkha' majority. To their credit, Lepcha language classes were for many years successfully organised by volunteers during evenings and holidays and were eventually officially introduced in the government's primary and secondary schools in the Darjeeling Hills in February 2011.

Exploring the perceived consequences of education among the neighbouring Lepchas of Sikkim, Jenny Bentley first presents a short history of formal education in Sikkim including the 1982 introduction of Lepcha language, script and literature in the curriculum of government schools, some three decades before these were introduced in the Darjeeling District. Looking at current Lepcha attitudes towards education, while many villagers living in the more remote areas of North Sikkim may have initially failed to see its benefits, they now agree that higher education has become essential for survival in modern Sikkim. Thus today, a surprisingly large number of children from remote Lepcha villages are sent to secondary schools located in distant villages and towns such as Mangan and Gangtok. In contradiction to this acknowledged necessity, and in spite of the Lepcha language classes offered in government schools, Lepcha villagers consider education negatively as it invariably contributes to the eroding of their culture, especially among those children growing up in hostels far removed from any Lepcha cultural setting, where they are influenced by foreign ideas and interests. Paradoxically, Bentley reveals that it is these same educated Lepchas who have become the cultural and social activists advocating the survival of their language and culture through various associations, schools and NGOs. The educated "have become both the keepers of tradition and culture and at the same time the promoters of change and modernity", thus offering a future to some form of Lepcha culture.

"The German Ernst Schäfer expedition 1938-1939 is mostly famous for its success in reaching Lhasa and it is largely unknown that the expedition spent six months in Sikkim with considerable scientific results." Irsun Engelhardt elaborates on the expedition's sojourn and activities in Sikkim, and the friendly relations its members established with Sir Tashi Namgyal and Barmiok Athing. For much of the success of the expedition, Ernst Schäfer had Kaiser Bahadur Thapa to thank, a Sikkimese who was hired as the expedition interpreter. The expedition was an all round natural history expedition "comprising studies of terrestrial magnetism, ethnology, anthropology, ornithology, mammology and partly botany and of course geography, besides of taking moving pictures of wild life, and the magnification of nature of the Himalayas and the adjacent countries..." While in Gangtok, the members of the expedition witnessed the performance of Pang Lhabsol, Sikkim's annual ritual held at the Tsuglakhang or Palace Chapel in honour of Dzönga, the mountain deity and protector of the land. Schäfer was evidently fascinated by the event; he noted down an interesting explanation of its meaning provided by Barmiok Athing in addition to his own observations. The team also took a number of excellent photos and cinematographic footage of the performance which are probably the best we now have for this period.

The Newars, the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, first migrated to Darjeeling and then Sikkim in the middle of the nineteenth century. In their homeland, the Newars are known for the richness of their ritual culture and traditions. In his study of Newar ritual in Sikkim, Bal Gopal Shrestha examines how the community in the diaspora has faced the challenge of maintaining its language and elaborate ritual traditions, noting that although the ritual calendar was initially simplified, Newars in Sikkim have been busy in recent years reviving and reconstructing their language, culture, rituals and traditions through their national organisation and the activities of their priest at the Newar temple of Gangtok. The daily and annual rituals of the temple are examined together with the persona of Suryavir Tuladar, the chief architect and the patron of the Newar temple in Sikkim. The author concludes that although the temple, its rituals and even its priest lack in legitimacy and authenticity, Suryavir Tuladar has very successfully adapted his rituals to local needs and restrictions, creating an innovative ritual platform which has greatly contributed to asserting the community's original minority identity. I should add that Suryavir Tuladar has done so in true Sikkimese style by showing tolerance and integrating aspects of his numerous neighbours' traditions into his own ritual tradition.

Manjulika Ghosh's article first introduces the concept of Deep Ecology, a theory of the environmental movement which among other things advocates a broader and deeper identification with the 'other' whether it be other human beings, nature or a cultural product; a world view from which care flows naturally from the self towards nature. Moving onto Buddhism and its views on nature and the environment, the author points out that one of the Buddha's basic teachings is to extend good will to all sentient beings. The Buddha's is a life of harmony with nature and the doctrine of rebirth, which includes the possibility of rebirth in the animal realm, "integrates a sense of a shared common condition of all sentient life forms based on moral aspects of their previous lives", thus drawing a parallel with the Deep Ecology philosophy. Asking what a Buddhist environmental ethics would be like, the author suggests that it is more a question of what virtues we must cultivate to be able to actually act in that way. Coming to Sikkim and its Buddhist environment and religious history, the author notes how landscapes are here venerated as sacred and how ritual performances are connected to land, forests, mountains and lakes. In spite of, and in contradiction to these inherent views, uncontrolled tourism and the construction of a series of hydro-electric dams on the river Tista in particular, are likely to seriously affect the unique landscape and fragile ecology of the region. Drawing a parallel with the role Buddhist monks have played in protecting the environment in other regions of the globe, the author highlights the central role played by the Buddhist Sangha of Sikkim, both in opposing the Rathong Chu hydro-electric project in West Sikkim in the mid-1990s and more recently in the protest movement opposing the Panan hydro-project in the Lepcha reservation of Dzongu. In both cases, religion contributed to the protection of nature, the sacred being an antidote to secular materialism.

Swati Sachdeva article is concerned with the marriage tradition of the Sikkimese Bhutias. The author first discusses the different forms of marriage practiced by the Bhutias, including fraternal polyandry which was prevalent until the beginning of the twentieth century and is still practiced to some extent in the Lachen and Lachung valleys. A description of the traditional steps of the complex marriage procedure is given: the initial enquiry, the formal proposal, the engagement, the actual marriage, the bride's going away party ending with the celebration of her arrival at the groom's house. The author stresses the importance of bride

price which must be paid by the groom's family to the father of the girl as compensation for the transfer of the labour and services of the bride from the parents' household to her in-law's. This custom contrasts sharply with the tradition of dowry which is prevalent among a number of the Bhutias' neighbours, concluding that "a Bhutia woman commands a high position in the institution of marriage".

The subject of Brigitte Steinmann's article are the *mdos*, the geometrical cross threat constructions found in numerous domestic and monastic Buddhist rituals across the Himalayan region and Tibet. The author focuses on the *mdos* found among the Nyingmapa of Sikkim and Nepal where they are used together with or without effigies in order to ransom the life of a person and to cure all kinds of disease, as well as in divination, ancestral and funerary rituals. The author presents her analysis of two *mdos* rituals she attended, the first a ransoming ritual in West Sikkim (*to ko bla glud*, ransoming or calling back the *lha*) and a second, the rare Tamang 'Doila', a one week long celebration of ancestors among the Tamangs of the Eastern Kathmandu Valley. The latter is a grand performance involving a twelve meter high *mdos* which must also be considered as an effigy, a real image of the human body. Although acknowledging the varied morphology of the *mdos*, the author points out that all these rituals are built on the idea of exchange and reward. The *mdos* is also "a real piece of art, framing for the people the real core of Buddhist ways of conceptualizing the world: short-lived and embodying the interwoven subjectivities".

Michael Oppitz's article presents a comparative study of the ritual drums of the Tibetan Buddhist lamas and those of the shamans or *jhākri* as generally found in the Himalayas and more specifically in Sikkim. Illustrated with numerous photographs, we are taken through the terminology and manufacturing variations specific to each region and ritual style. Among the shamanic drums, a first division can be established between single and double sided membrane drums, the former found in the western section of the Nepalese Himalayas and the latter in the eastern section including Sikkim. Looking closer at the double sided drums, though belonging to the same basic morphological type, Oppitz points out that those used respectively by the shamans and the lamas have fundamental differences, among these being the shape of the exterior wooden handle. The Buddhist drum handle is carved, representing a stylised lotus, whereas the shamanic drum-handle is meant to represent a ritual dagger, the first signifying the peaceful intention of the instrument while the shamanic handle suggests the intention to kill or rather wage war against harmful spirits. Further, the shaman's drum is an individual piece, made especially for him and will usually be destroyed upon the shaman's death. Contrary to this, the lama's drum is impersonal in character and often mass-produced; the drum is meant as a tool of the lama community of a particular monastery. Looking more closely at double sided drums in Sikkim, while the monastic drums of the main monasteries such as Tashiding and Pemayantse generally conform to the Tibetan model, those found in the smaller monasteries at times display an interesting degree of paganisation. Owing to the immigrant background of the various ethnic groups of Nepalese origin living in Sikkim today, the composition of their shamanic practitioners is quite heterogeneous and the regional peculiarities of their drums have been weakened without however losing their morphological variations.

In her article, Heleen Plaisier explores all the details of *ci*, the drink central to Lepcha culture, ritual and social life. Starting with the word's etymology, details of the necessary ingredients and its manufacturing procedure are explored together with *ci*'s nutritional and medicinal properties. But it is in the field of rituals that *ci* finds its central place as no ritual

is ever held without it being offered, whether to appease offended supernatural beings or to please benevolent gods. *Ci* also holds an important position in Lepcha mythology. According to one such myth, “it is foretold that the use of the divine *ci* as an offering in religious rituals will play an important part in the preservation of mankind.” The myth then goes on to explain how the key ingredient in making *ci* was obtained from the underworld. The article concludes with a quote from Arthur Foning which neatly summarises Lepcha attitude towards the drink; “Our tribal drink chee, is such that without it we cannot please our gods, and cannot appease the dreaded evils and the demons; so much so that without it, we cannot even get wives. Life cannot be imagined without it (Foning 1987: 245).”

Usha Lachungpa’s study brings us to an area of Sikkim known as the ‘cold desert’ located along the Tibetan border in Sikkim’s extreme north-eastern corner in the upper reaches of the Lachen Valley. This area adjoining the Tibetan plateau lies at an altitude of over 5000 meters and is home to some twenty nomadic yak herding families known as *drokpas* who live there year round under extreme weather conditions, tolerating one of the harshest lifestyles known to mankind. Before the closure of the Tibetan border in 1962, these *drokpas* took their herds to Tibet to graze during the winter where they also engaged in trading activities. Sikkim is known as a biodiversity Hot Spot, with this area particularly rich in threatened and endangered flora and fauna. The cold desert’s biodiversity, which remains unprotected to this day, has in recent decades come under the severe treat of development activities and heavy defence deployment. The livelihood of the few remaining *drokpa* families and the health of their animals have been equally threatened by the closure of the Tibetan border and the restrictions imposed on them by the army. Following two studies carried out in the area, the author suggests a conservation strategy where the area be formally recognised and declared a Tso Lhamo Cold Desert Conservation Reserve and pleads for the region and its *drokpa* population to be accorded due protection through joint cooperation between the Army, the State Forest Department and the people of Lachen inhabiting in the lower reaches of the valley.

Staying with the Lachen Valley, Sophie Sabatier-Bourdet’s article (in French) offers a detailed description of the valley’s agro-pastoral production system together with an outline of some of its unique social and religious institutions, based on her two years of fieldwork. The people of Lachen or Lachenpas, together with their neighbours the *drokpas* of the cold desert settled higher up the Lachen Valley, are the only people in Sikkim to follow a pastoral nomadic life-style, still migrating up and down the valley in search of pasture for their animals. In the case of the Lachenpas, some families have up to six houses each built at different altitudes that are each occupied at a particular season, leaving the main house in Lachen empty for the major part of the year. Animal husbandry is supplemented by the cultivation of potatoes, turnips and radishes in the higher reaches of the valley and, before the closure of the border with Tibet in 1962, by a rich trade between Tibet and Sikkim. The community, its territory and its resources are managed by a strict democratic system of local government known as *dzomsa*. Lachen’s traditional political-economy, although still functioning to this day, has encountered numerous challenges in recent years, starting with the closure of the Tibetan border, the end of trading activities, the settlement of the army on its territory, the considerable loss of pasture in the Lachen Valley as well as grazing rights in Tibet, followed by the restrictions imposed by the government on the collection of minor forest products such as juniper (used in the production of incense), the rapid development of tourism and construction of lodges together with the migration of the youth for the purpose

of education and job opportunities to the south. Though till now the Lachenpas have successfully adapted to each situation by finding new sources of income, it is questionable whether they will be able to maintain the life-style dictated by their traditional pastoral-nomadic activities, which are now only a marginal source of income mostly managed by members of Lachen's older generation, once this generation eventually passes away.

INTRODUCTION PART II: SIKKIM STUDIES AND THE NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

When I first arrived in Sikkim as an undergraduate student of anthropology in January 1991, I was naturally eager to read all the books on Sikkim I could lay my hands on. I found two: *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* published in 1894, which one century later was still a best-seller in Gangtok, and the unpublished 1908 typescript with the title *History of Sikkim* attributed to Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his Gyalmo, Yeshe Dolma. Later, in my university library, I found Chie Nakane's article on multi-ethnic relations in Sikkim (1966), a remarkable anthropological study based on two months fieldwork carried out in 1955, as well as the classic Lepcha studies of Geoffrey Gorer (1938), Morris (1938), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1951, 1952), Siiger (1967 based on fieldwork carried out in 1949) and the Lepcha Arthur Foning (1987). However, I could not find any comparable ethnography of the Sikkimese Bhutias.

The diaries, memoirs and studies written by the British officers and scientists who had sojourned in these hills during the time of the British Raj provided interesting insights into the life and socio-politics of Sikkim following British intervention in the region (for example Hooker 1854, Edgar 1874, White, 1909). Also available were more recent publications on Sikkim's administrative changes (Rose 1978, 1990), its socio-politics (A.C. Sinha 1975, 1981) and history (L.B. Basnet 1974), as well as publications by Indian scholars on the political process of annexation (Das 1983, Datta-Ray 1984). A couple years after I arrived in Sikkim, Mahendra Lama edited a volume on Sikkim's socio-economic conditions (1994). However, as a student of anthropology interested in the culture and early history of Sikkim's indigenous Bhutia and Lepcha populations, publications on Sikkim's recent political and economic developments were not, at the time, of immediate interest to me.

One of the major reasons for this lacuna was that Sikkim had been difficult of access and closed to foreign researchers during the turbulent decades of the 1950s throughout the 1980s. Thus, after the classic Lepcha studies of the 1930s and 40s, scholarship on Sikkim's indigenous populations suffered a major 40 year setback. Scholars such as Prof. Lionel Caplan of the University of London, who applied for permits to carry out anthropological fieldwork research in Sikkim in the 1960s, were turned down.¹ As a developing nation, Sikkimese students naturally gravitated to subject such as medicine, engineering, law and economics instead of pursuing careers in history, anthropology or Tibetology. Scholarship concerned with the early history of Sikkim and its indigenous Buddhist cultures thus largely remained the domain of a few Sikkimese lamas who lacked the necessary resources and training to carry out sustained and systematic research on their own cultural heritage.

Contributing to this situation was the fact that, in the Sikkim of the 1960s, the influence of Tibetan and English cultures on the educated elite was such that indigenous cultures and languages were not taken very seriously and were, in fact, generally ignored. The Sikkimese elite's interest in these foreign cultures had deep historical roots. Initially, Sikkim had been a vassal state of Tibet where it sent its monks for the study of Tibetan grammar and Buddhist philosophy and where its kings took refuge in times of political turmoil. The Chogyals

regularly married ladies of the Tibetan aristocracy and Lhasa was considered the fountainhead of high Buddhist and Tibetan culture. Later, as the British gained influence in the region when Sikkim became a protectorate of the British Empire in 1890, the English language and many aspects of its culture gradually became fashionable.² The children of the royal family and the landed nobility were sent to the British schools of Darjeeling or to the United Kingdom for further studies. Then, in the early 1960s, following the take over of Tibet by China, Sikkim saw a renewal of Tibetan influence as Tibetan refugees and high lamas poured into Sikkim. Many lamas found employment at the newly established Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and the neighbouring Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies. With the arrivals of the Sixteenth Karmapa, Dudjum Rinpoche, Dodrupchen Rinpoche and many others, Sikkim underwent a sort of Tibetan cultural revival. Refugees brought thangkhas, statues, manuscripts and other religious treasures which were collected by the Chogyal and eventually formed the main collection of the Namgyal Institute's museum.

This inherent lack of interest for Sikkim's Buddhist history, languages and cultures is reflected in the contents' of the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology*. In its initial 28 years of publication, between 1964 and 1992, only five articles solely focusing on Sikkim were published in the Bulletin, all of which were concerned with Lepcha agriculture, language and culture, Sikkim trade and the history of the Darjeeling land grant. None focused on Buddhism, its establishment and manifestations on Sikkimese soil. A breakthrough took place in 1992 when the Institute's Research Officer, late Dr Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa published two articles in the Institute's Bulletin on the Bumchu ritual of Tashiding (1992) and a biography of Lhatsun Namka Jigme (1994), one of Sikkim's four Patron Saints. The next turning point was a national seminar held at the Institute in March 1995 and the publication of its proceedings in the Bulletin's seminar issue with the double theme: 'Guru Padmasambhava's Contributions to Sikkim' and 'Cultural Aspects of Sikkim'. Following this, Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa continued to regularly contribute articles on Sikkimese religious history and culture to the Bulletin (1996, 1998, 2000, 2003a, 2003b) as well as to local newspapers. Dr Rigzin initial efforts were followed by the publication of two articles in the Institute's Bulletin relating to Buddhism in Sikkim by Khenpo Chowang (1998) and Acharya Sonam Gyatso Dokhambo (1998). Following these initial 1990s publications, studies were later undertaken by Khenpo Lha Tshering and Khenpo Chowang which are mentioned in more details below.

Before 1992, the Bulletin published articles on the Buddhist history, philosophy and culture of all surrounding regions, including Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Central Asia, Baltistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma and Japan, even including a short history of Buddhism in Hungary. It took nearly three decades for the contents of the Bulletin to start reflecting the Buddhist traditions surrounding the Institute. Undoubtedly, this indicates a certain malaise vis-à-vis Sikkimese Buddhist history and culture inherited from the above mentioned circumstances when the elite looked up towards and emulated the cultures of both Tibet and the British at the cost of losing their own. Added to this were political circumstances which did not favour studies focusing on Sikkim's indigenous Buddhist populations. Sikkim Studies had to wait for better times and for Sikkimese researchers such as Dr Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa and Khenpo Lha Tshering to complete their PhDs or Acharya degrees and come forward to research their own cultural heritage.

However, returning to the late 1960s, efforts were made by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal and Gyalmo Hope Namgyal to preserve aspects of Sikkim's cultural heritage.³ For

example, the well known 1969 map of Sikkim by P.P. Karan of the University of Kentucky with the title 'The Kingdom of Sikkim' was the result of the Chogyal's effort to recover names and features and preserve Sikkim's original place names.⁴ Hundreds of villagers came forward to the Palace to offer details of their localities and their toponyms. In the field of ethno-musicology, recordings of Sikkimese folk music were made by Fred Lieberman and recordings of monastic music were made by David Lewis. Another project which recovered aspects of Sikkim's oral history, natural history and social customs resulted in a series of primary school text books known as *Tashi, Mohan and Kipu* which were, for a number of years, used in Sikkim's government schools. An attempt was also made to document the lives of Sikkim's *gomchens* or great practitioners (Silverstone 1973). Other important local personalities such as Barmiok Athing were interested in promoting the study and use of local languages but the times and circumstances were not yet favourable to sustain such activities.

It is only once the political situation calmed down some fifteen years after the merger of Sikkim with India that Sikkim reopened its doors to tourism and research in the early 1990s. I was very fortunate, as the first post-merger foreign student of anthropology to knock at its door and be granted a long term study permit to carry out research in a restricted area of North Sikkim in 1993. Deciding to carry out research in a Sikkimese Bhutia (Lhopo) village was an obvious choice. At the time, while the classic and comprehensive Lepcha ethnographies were available nothing comparable, based on long term field research, had yet been written about the Sikkimese Bhutias. All I could find were brief references made to their history and clan organisation in the 1894 *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, a very brief study of the Bhutias of North Sikkim (Bose 1966), an introduction to the Bhutias of the Lachen and Lachung valleys clubbed together with the Lepchas of Dzongu (Bhasin 1989) and an even more general introduction to the numerous ethnic communities of Sikkim compiled by the Anthropological Survey of India (1993).

Before moving into the village for fieldwork, I stayed a few months at the Namgyal Institute and had numerous inspiring conversations about Sikkimese history and culture with Dr Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa. I eventually completed a PhD thesis in social anthropology at SOAS with the title *Buddhism and Shamanism in Village Sikkim*. This study was based on fieldwork research carried out between 1993 and 1995 in the agricultural Bhutia village of Tingchim in North Sikkim. It is intended as a contribution to the anthropology of Himalayan Buddhist communities and to the discussion concerning the relation between Buddhism and shamanism. The ethnography examines the working relationship between Buddhist lamas and shamans, presenting their interaction within the contexts in which lamas and shamans meet, these being rituals of the sacred land, or the individual and household, and of village and state, taking into consideration the sacred history of the land as well as its more recent political and economic transformation. It was later published as *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* (2008).

In the field of Sikkim's early history, things were not any better in 1991. A number of excellent studies have since been published but in those days, with one notable exception, every publication touching on Sikkim's early history published after the 1894 *Gazetteer of Sikkim* and the 1908 *History of Sikkim* failed to say anything new as none were based on original research making use of primary sources. One exception however was A.K.J. Singh's *Himalayan Triangle: A Historical Survey of British India's Relations with Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan 1765-1950* (1988), which made use of the India Office records held at the British Library.

SIKKIM STUDIES:
THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTE AND WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED IN RECENT YEARS

Since its establishment in 1958, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has sponsored and promoted research on the religion, history, language, art and culture of the people of the Tibetan cultural area. Since the summer of 2002, the Institute's new director Tashi Densapa undertook to expand the Institute, restructure its research wing and open its doors to international collaboration. This is being done through the creation of research, fellowship and publication programs for local researchers, collaboration with foreign scholars and the convening of seminars and conferences. Although not an academic, as he likes to introduce himself, Director Tashi Densapa brought to the Institute a life time of administrative, financial and executive experience and was thus able to modernise, expand and reshape the Institute as well as re-establish its role in Sikkimese society.

Since the Namgyal Institute was founded in 1958, the field of Tibetology has made tremendous progress and is now a well established field both in India and abroad. By 2002, it was time for the Institute to take notice and redefine its role within the discipline. Together with Tashi Tsering (Amnye Machen Institute), the Institute newly appointed Consultant, an important decision was made to partly re-orient the Institute's activities towards Tibetology's sub-field of Sikkim Studies.

Sikkim Studies as a field is still in its infancy and the term has mainly been used in the recent issues of the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology* which has endeavoured to promote Sikkim Studies ever since its second issue of 2002. However, considering the Buddhist nature of the Namgyal Institute, Sikkim Studies at the Institute have focused on the study of Sikkim's Buddhist traditions and history, including the religious practices, ethnography, linguistics and arts of its Buddhist population. Below I list Sikkim Studies research, preservation and publication projects undertaken in recent years by the Institute's staff or in close collaboration with foreign scholars. Since the focus of this paper and indeed this volume is on Sikkim Studies, the research or translation works undertaken by the Institute's staff or by foreign scholars affiliated to the Institute focusing solely on Tibetan Studies are not listed here.

1. *The Sikkimese Palace Archive Project*⁵

The archives of the Sikkimese Royal Palace were transferred in 2008 to the custodianship of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. This collection, of legal documents, letters and internal and international agreements, is a rare source of information for the study of Sikkimese, Tibetan, Bhutanese and British Indian history. This collection covers a range of historical periods, from the time of early Sikkimese state formation in the mid-seventeenth century (the earliest document is dated 1663), the Sikkim-Gorkha war of the 1780s and 1790s, the British period c.1817-1947, to the period prior to the merger of Sikkim with India. The collection also contains documents written in a number of different languages including Tibetan (the majority of material), Lepcha, English, Nepali and Mandarin. Similarly they range in format, from letters, treaties, decrees and land grants to personal note books, receipts and private letters.

The acquisition of the Sikkimese Royal Archives will greatly improve the research work of the Institute and contribute to our knowledge of Sikkimese history and culture. Indeed one of the key problems with conducting historical research in Sikkim in the past was the lack of

accurate and authentic records; however, with the transfer of this collection this problem has been eased greatly.

In order to guide scholars through the documents in this collection, Saul Mullard along with Hissey Wongchuk, have compiled a catalogue of the collection: *Royal Records: The Sikkimese Palace Archives* (2010). In addition to the catalogue the entire collection of documents has now been digitised to allow future scholars access to the material without causing excessive handling of the original documents. A second publication of the Palace Archive Project will include a selection of material from the collection, with translations and commentaries.

2. *The Monastery Project*

The Institute's Research Officers, late Dr Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa and Acharya Samten Gyatso undertook a project to document the history of Sikkim's monasteries. A first book in Tibetan covering the history of some twenty-one monasteries was published by the Namgyal Institute in 2008.

The second phase of the monastery project was initiated in 2006 by a team of three researchers: a historian Saul Mullard, an anthropologist Mélanie Vandenhelsken and a Sikkimese lama-researcher Hissey Wongchuk. Initially, the primary focus of this project was to gather historical information on Sikkimese monasteries, to study the development of the social and religious environment surrounding both the monasteries themselves and their location as a focus for social life. The project was designed to chart the development of such religious and social institutions over the course of history and assess the changes that have taken place from the early seventeenth century up to the present day. Being too ambitious, this project could not be completed as planned. However, some research work was carried out and the publication of some of its findings are either still due or have been included as part of other publications (see Mullard, Vandenhelsken and Wongchuk). Hissey Wongchuk's PhD research particularly benefited from this project. His dissertation on the history, lineages and rituals of Tashiding monastery is due to be completed at Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan, with the title: *The social relevance of spiritual heritage in a secular state, Tashiding Monastery, West Sikkim* (in Tibetan).

3. *Co-publications between the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and the Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala*

A series of publications have been planned for co-publication between the Namgyal Institute and the Amnye Machen Institute. The first two were released in 2008: *Brief Accounts of the Monasteries of Sikkim*, and *Collected Guides of the Sacred Hidden Land of Sikkim* (both in Tibetan). These were compiled, annotated and edited by Tashi Tsering and constitute important contributions to Sikkim Studies as they make a number of rare manuscripts on Sikkimese monasteries and guide books available to researchers working in the field.

4. *Tibetan Lamas' Biographies and their Activities in Sikkim*

Acharya Tsultsem Gyatso researched a number of Tibetan lamas' biographies and their post-1959 activities and contributions to Buddhism in Sikkim. These were published in Tibetan in 2008 and some were translated into English and published in the Institute's Bulletin (Gyatso

2005, 2006). Tsultsem Gyastso is now documenting the lives of the most famous Sikkimese *gomchens* or great practitioners.

5. *Pang Lhabsol and Sikkimese Wedding Procedure*

Kunsang Namgyal is currently documenting the history, rituals and variations in the performance of Sikkim's Pang Lhabsol ritual. This national ritual of the land used to be performed yearly by the Pemayangtse lamas at the Tsuglakhang or Palace Chapel in Gangtok in honour of Kangchendzonga and all the deities of the land. Kunsang Namgyal is also documenting the regional variations of the complex wedding procedure of the Sikkimese Bhutias and is preparing a PhD dissertation at Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan with the title: *Ethnic Identity and Cultural Changes of the Bhutia in Sikkim*.

6. *The Digitization Project*

Under the charge of Tenzin Samphel, the digitisation project undertook the scanning of the Institute's extensive collection of Tibetan manuscripts so they may be preserved and made available on the internet. The project has now entered its second phase and proceeded to do the same with the collections held in Sikkim's monasteries.

7. *The Unesco Project: Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha: Documentation, Education and Training to Revitalize Traditional Decorative Arts and Building Crafts in the Buddhist Temples of Asia*

In 2007, the Institute acted as the implementing institution for this Unesco project which was implemented in three monasteries in Sikkim: the Karma Kagyu Dharma Charka Centre at Rumtek, the Sakyapa Ngor monastery near Gangtok, and the Sikkimese Nyingma monastery of Pemayangtse in West Sikkim. Among other things, the project helped document and revive the *Kagyed* ritual at Pemayangtse, Sikkim's premier or royal monastery.

8. *Visual Sikkim Project*

In 2003, the Institute established the 'Visual Sikkim' project under my supervision with the aim to locate, digitalize and document historic photographs of Sikkim both in India and abroad. The project is gradually reconstructing Sikkim's recent history through the use of historic visual material. A large number of photographs were obtained directly from private and public collections held in Europe and America while local photographic collections were scanned and documented with the assistance of Tenzin C. Tashi and Tshering Penchung. The Institute now houses the most comprehensive digital photographic archive on Sikkim from which the following historic photo exhibitions were realised:

Who is behind the camera? (2005). Spanning nearly one century of Sikkimese history, the exhibition presented work by the following photographers: 1. Tibetologist L.A Waddell (1890s), 2. British Political Officer Sir Charles Bell and his assistant Rabden Lepcha, one of Sikkim's first photographers (1910s-20s), 3. Political Officer Frederick Williamson and his wife Margaret (early 1930s), 4. British mountaineer Richard Nicholson (1936), 5. German Schaefer Expedition, anthropologist Dr Bruno Beger (1938), 6. Chogyal's Private Secretary and court photographer, Yap Tse Ten Tashi (1940s-50s), 7. Private Secretary to the Chogyal and IPR Officer, Paljor Dorji Tashi (Yap Penjorla) (1960s-70s).

The Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim (2006). As stated in a local newspaper “Although the Namgyal dynasty gave Sikkim 12 kings and ruled for 333 years (from 1642 to 1975), the years following the Merger witnessed an almost conscious attempt to deny them their place in Sikkim’s history”.⁶ This exhibition took a modest first step in restoring their place in history by presenting 65 photographs carefully documenting the lives, families and successive residences of the recent kings: Sidkeong Namgyal (1819-1874), Thutob Namgyal (1860-1914), Sidkeong Tulku (1879-1914), Sir Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963), and Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1982).

Druk-Denjong: A historical Perspective—exhibition on Sikkim-Bhutan relations (2007). The exhibition highlighted the friendly relations between the two neighbours both at the governments’ and people’s level following British India’s interventions in the region, a friendly relation which was maintained after 1947.

Permanent Exhibition on the Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim (2008). A permanent high-quality exhibition on Sikkim’s Namgyal dynasty was set-up in the Institute new conference hall in honour of the Institute’s founder president, Palden Thondup Namgyal, the Twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim.

Historical Views: Looking back on Sikkimese Landscapes (2009). A joint exhibition set-up by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and the Department of Environment and Forests on the occasion of the department’s centenary.

North Sikkim: the Lachen and Lachung Valleys (2010). Temporary Exhibition held for the villagers of Lachen on the history of the region.

North Sikkim: History of the Lachung Valley (2010). Permanent exhibition at Yumthang, Lachung, opened on the occasion of the Rhododendron Festival in May 2010.

The historic photo project has now shifted its focus from holding exhibitions to setting up a documented digital image bank that will be made available on the internet.

Nearing completion is a book on the history of Sikkim and the Namgyal dynasty. The book will have an introduction by myself as editor, a first chapter on the early history of Sikkim by Saul Mullard, a second on the British period by Alex McKay, a third on the Indian period by Jackie Hiltz, a fourth on the Tibetan wives of the Chogyals by Alice Travers and a concluding epilogue by Tenzin C. Tashi. The book will be illustrated with 150 plates from the Institute’s collection of historical photographs.

10. *Sikkim Video Archive Project*

In 2003, the Institute established a visual anthropology project under my supervision with the guidance of Prof. Asen Balikci. Using the medium of ethnographic film, together with cinematographers Dawa Tshering Lepcha and Phurba Tshering Bhutia, we have produced a video record of over 500 hours and a series of edited films on Sikkim’s vanishing Buddhist and indigenous ritual cultures (Balikci, 2011). Among the films already produced are:

Tingvong: A Lepcha Village in Sikkim (2005). This film offers a general introduction to the Lepchas of Dzongu, North Sikkim, and the religious and economic changes they have undergone in recent decades. Film Festivals and Awards:

1. Film Festival of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Oxford, Sept. 2005
2. Beeld voor Beeld, Amsterdam 2005

3. North-East Documentary Film Festival, Shillong 2005
 4. Bilan du Film Ethnographique, Paris 2006
 5. Moscow International Ethnographic Film Festival 2006
 6. Belgrade International Ethnographic Film Festival 2006
 7. Himalayan Film Festival, Amsterdam 2007
 8. Himalayan Film Festival, Tokyo, Oct 2008 and New York Oct. 2010
- The film won a prize at the North-East Documentary Film Festival in 2005.

Cham in the Lepcha Village of Lingthem (2007). In the course of this three day village event, the deities who emerge in the period between death and rebirth make their rhythmic appearances followed by the Lord of Death who judges one's good and bad deeds in the after-life. Film festivals:

1. Himalayan Film Festival, Amsterdam, February 2007
2. Film Festival of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Manchester, June 2007
3. Seminar of the Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival, May 2008

Cham in the Sikkimese Village of Phensang (2009). Record of the *Kagyed* and *Sinji* monastic dances from the Sikkimese village of Phensang.

Ongdala: The Initiation of a Young Monk (2010). Ongdala is an eight year old *tulku* or reincarnate lama. The film follows his public examination where Ongdala recites his prayers in the presence of the village assembly and is then initiated and welcomed as a lama of the Lachen monastery. This is followed by Ongdala's first performance as a Black Hat ritual dancer and participation in the village's annual rituals. Screened at the seminar of the Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival, 16 May 2010.

Ritual Journeys (2011) is an intimate portrait of Merayk, an 80 year old Lepcha *bongthing* from Dzongu, North Sikkim. The film is an introduction to the various forms of rituals he is called to perform for the Lepcha villagers of Dzongu. Cinematographer Dawa Lepcha filmed Merayk's daily life and rituals between 2003 and 2010. The film was screened at the Freiburg Film Forum, June 2011, at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, December 2011, and at the 12th RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film, London, June 2011 where it was awarded a special commendation by the panel of jury (Intangible Heritage Prize).

Chap Chu: Sacred Spring Ritual (2011). The film explores the sacred spring ritual held every summer by the lamas of Tashiding monastery in West Sikkim.

Grazing on the Border: The Yak Herders of North Sikkim (nearing completion). Portrait of the last yak and sheep herders of the high altitude Lachen-Tso Lhamo area of north Sikkim, their annual ritual and way of life along the Tibetan border.

10. *The Bulletin of Tibetology*

Following the Institute's decision to partly re-orient its activities towards Sikkim Studies, the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology* was equally re-oriented in order to promote research and interest in the field. The contents of the last nine issues have thus largely been devoted to Sikkim Studies. As editor of the journal, I have sought and encouraged the contributions of local and foreign scholars and presented some of the best recent scholarship on Sikkim's Buddhist history and culture under various thematic issues.

ACADEMIC COLLABORATION WITH FOREIGN SCHOLARS
AT THE NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

In recent years, the Institute has offered affiliation and/or support to a number of PhD students and established scholars focusing on Sikkim Studies. Below are some of the foreign scholars and the projects the Institute has actively collaborated with and/or supported in various ways:

Saul Mullard has been affiliated with the Institute since 2003 and has since completed his doctorate from the University of Oxford (Oriental Institute) in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies. His thesis, soon to be published by Brill, is titled *Opening the Hidden Land: State formation and the construction of Sikkimese history* (2009). He has been associated with the Sikkimese Monasticism Project, has published several articles in the Institute's journal (2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b and article in this volume) and is currently working in collaboration with the Institute on the Palace Archive Project (2010). He is the first western historian with knowledge of Tibetan to work on early Sikkimese history using primary sources.

Alex McKay carried out historical research in Sikkim in the course of his PhD (McKay 1997) and eventually returned for further work on the introduction of biomedicine in the Himalaya (2007b). He contributed articles to the Institute's journal (2003, 2007a) and undertook a project for the Dept of Culture, Govt of Sikkim, aiming to locate and return files pertaining to Sikkim from the India Office at the British Library. He was the Convenor of the 2008 conference held at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture* and the co-editor of the present proceedings.

Mélanie Vandenhelsken. Following her PhD research in West Sikkim (*Le monastère bouddhique de Pemayangtse au Sikkim (Himalaya oriental, Inde): un monastère dans le monde*, 2002), Mélanie Vandenhelsken returned to Sikkim and has since been affiliated to the Institute. She has been associated with the Institute's research project on Sikkimese monasticism (Vandenhelsken 2006, 2008, 2009) and is now carrying out a project on ethnicity in Sikkim as a member of the Centre for Studies in Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology in Vienna.

Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist based at the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in Cambridge and Yale University; he undertook the first modern linguistic survey of Sikkim in collaboration with the Institute and the Department of Human Resources Development (see article in this volume).

Jackie Hiltz carried out independent research on the history of Sikkim (Hiltz 2003 and article in this volume). More recently, she researched the historical 1940-70 period from the viewpoint of the Namgyal dynasty which will be published in the upcoming book on the history of Sikkim as part of the Visual Sikkim Project.

Jenny Bentley has been affiliated with the Institute and completed a master thesis at the University of Zürich with the title *The Lepcha Cause: Lepcha identity and issues in the village communities of Nampathan and Lingthem and the Lepcha associations of Sikkim* (2007, 2008 and article in this volume). She is currently working towards a PhD with the title *Ritual Performance and Collective Identity among the Lepcha of Sikkim and*

Kalimpong (West Bengal). The thesis will contribute to the question how collective cultural identity and belonging is created through rituals defined as social and religious practices. The annual collective rituals of the Lepcha communities are studied in their social, cultural-mythological, historic, economic and political contexts. Thereby attention is given to their adaptations to contextual changes and subsequent possible alterations in ritual practice and meaning.

Heleen Plaisier. Following her study of Lepcha grammar undertaken for her PhD at the University of Leiden (2005, 2007 and article in this volume), Heleen Plaisier recently returned to the region and undertook a survey of Lepcha manuscripts in North Bengal and Sikkim in association with the British Library and the Namgyal Institute.

Sophie Sabatier-Bourdet carried out research on the agro-pastoral economic system of the Lachen Valley in North Sikkim. With a background in human geography, her work also covered some of Lachen's social institutions, particularly that of the *dzumsa*, the valley's traditional political institution (2004 and article in this volume).

Nicolas Tournadre is Professor at the University of Provence, France, where he teaches general linguistics as well as the Tibetan language. He is a specialist of Tibetic Languages and worked extensively in the Tibetic speaking area for nearly three decades. In the summer of 2010, in collaboration with the Institute and the Association for the Development of Bhutia Culture, Nicolas Tournadre undertook the initial stages of a study of Lhoke or Sikkim's Bhutia language. It is hoped that this project will build on earlier studies of the language and produce the first comprehensive Lhoke-English-Lhoke dictionary and grammar.

SIKKIM STUDIES OUTSIDE THE INSTITUTE

Since the 1990s a large number of researches have been carried out in Sikkim by other academic institutions as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations on economic, political, geographical, developmental, botanical and other fields, which are not of direct relevance to the Namgyal Institute's interests and activities. These studies, for the most part, are not mentioned here. However, a number of studies relevant to the Institute's interests have been carried out by other bodies and some of these are mentioned below.

Following Dr Rigzin Dokhampa's initial efforts, the study of Sikkim's Buddhist history and culture received the attention of local scholars with a number of significant contributions published in Tibetan or in the Sikkimese Lhoke language:

Khenpo Lha Tshering (Principal of the Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies) published two volumes in Tibetan on the history of Nyingma Buddhism in Sikkim: *A Saga of Sikkim's supremely revered four pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates and their torchbearers* (2002), and *The Expansion and Institutionalization of the Nang Sok Gong Sum Tradition in Sikkim and the Fifth Dalai Lama's Contribution to the Nyingma Order* (2006).

Khenpo Chowang of the Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies compiled a political history of Sikkim: *A Temporal and Spiritual History of Sikkim* (2003) published in Tibetan by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. It contains an important introduction by Tashi Tsering.

Acharya Sonam Gyatso Dokhambo of the Ecclesiastical Dept, Govt of Sikkim, carried out research on the Buddhist festivals of Sikkim and the state monasteries and has published a volume on marriage customs among the Sikkimese Bhutias (2001).

Tsechutarpa, Baichung, published a booklet on the Sikkimese New Year festival of Losung (1994).

Hisey Wongchuk, although based at the Namgyal Institute, independently published some articles in the Sikkimese Lhoke language on the religious history and culture of Sikkim (2008a, 2008b).

Bhutia, Yeshe Rinzing, prepared a Bhutia (Lhoke) language manual (2008).

Listed below are notable recent contributions to the anthropology and history of Sikkim (completed or underway) which were carried out entirely independently of the Institute or in slim association—in alphabetical order:

Arora, Vibha, wrote a DPhil thesis at Oxford (2004) which analyzes the relationship between ethnic identity and indigenous knowledge and their embodiment in sacred landscapes among the Lepcha and Bhutia tribes in the context of economic development in contemporary Sikkim along with a number of related articles.

Chettri, Mona is working towards a PhD at SOAS, University of London, with the title *Identity Politics in the Eastern Himalaya* focusing on the difference in articulation and manifestation of the Nepalese ethnic identity in the eastern Himalayas.

Chiron, Olivier, submitted a thesis in geography on Buddhist landscapes in West Sikkim (2007).

Ehrhard, Franz-Karl, contributed three articles to the *Bulletin of Tibetology* on incarnate lineages which concentrated their activities in Sikkim: the Kah thog pa (2003), the mNga' bdag pa (2005) and that of Lhatsun Namka Jigme (2008).

Garcia, Julien, completed his anthropological fieldwork study among the Lepchas of Lingthem and is presently writing up his dissertation at the University of Nice, France.

Law Dept, Govt of Sikkim researched and compiled a *Draft Report on Customary Laws and Usages of Bhutia Community of Sikkim* (2002).

Lepcha, Charisma is currently working towards a PhD at NEHU, Shillong, with the title *Religion, Culture and Identity: A Comparative Study on the Lepchas of Dzongu, Kalimpong and Ilam*. The research is based on intensive fieldwork in three Lepcha villages in three geographical locations (Dzongu, Kalimpong and Ilam) where Lepchas are exposed to three different religions—namely Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism respectively. The data collected from these villages will be analyzed using the comparative method to look into the religious influences that have caused cultural changes since they became Buddhists, Christians and Hindus, resulting in the formation of different identities and cleavages based on such identities (see also article in this volume).

Shrestha, Bal Gopal, undertook a study of ritual among the Newars of Sikkim (2005 and article in this volume).

Sinha, A.C. Following his original study of the Sikkim elite and the socio-politics of the state (1975), A.C. Sinha carried out a re-study of Sikkim's feudal and democratic elite and the evolution of ethnic-politics in Sikkim from a sociological viewpoint (2009).

Steinmann, Brigitte, undertook studies of Sikkim's mountain deities, sacred geography and the perception of Lhatsun Namka Jigme (1996, 1998, 2004 and article in this volume).

- Subba, J.R., contributed a volume on the history and culture of the Sikkimese Limbus (1999) and later attempted a study covering all aspects of Sikkim's history, culture and customs for all its ethnic communities (2008).
- Travers, Alice. As part of her dissertation on the Tibetan aristocracy, Alice Travers researched the evolution of matrimonial relations between Sikkim's royal family and Tibet between the thirteenth and the twentieth century (2006).
- Wangchuk, Pema and Mita Zulca researched a book on the historical, cultural and mythological aspects of the mountain Kangchendzonga covering its mountaineering expeditions and even the art and thinkers it inspired (2007). More recently, Pema Wangchuk researched the life of Mahinda Thero, a Sikkimese monk who was sent to study Buddhism in Sri Lanka by Chogyal Sidkeong Tulku before the First World War where he eventually remained and became a national hero (2008, see also article in this volume).

To be noted also are the contributions to Sikkim Studies coming from the faculty and students of the Centre for Himalayan Studies at North Bengal University. The students of the newly established Sikkim University will undoubtedly start publishing quality research on Sikkim in coming years. Naming a few of NBU publications relevant to the Institute's programs are the works of Maitreyee Choudhury and Kamal B. Choudhury on the monastery and crafts of Sikkim (2001), Tanka B. Subba on Tibetan refugees (1990); Rip Roshina Gowloog's restudy of the Lepcha village of Lingthem (1995) where Gorer carried out his fieldwork in 1938; R.R. Dhamala's studies of Pemayangtse monastery (1991); and Swasti Sachdeva on Bhutia marriage (see article in this volume).

THE FUTURE OF SIKKIM STUDIES

While the achievements of recent years are something we can all be proud of, much research and publication work still remains to be done for the field of Sikkim Studies to be securely established.

Sikkim is still to some extent a virgin territory for the historian. While important inroads have been made in recent years by local and foreign researchers, only the initial questions of state formation, seventeenth century religious history and some aspects of the British and Indian periods have been addressed. Much work remains to be done on the period of British influence in the region, using both sources in local languages and British archival materials. For example, Alex McKay mentioned the existence of the East India Company archives in Rangpur, which could cover the period 1750-1850, and which have not yet been looked into by any historian.

Sikkim has certainly remained a virgin territory for the archaeologist. The main initiatives have been from the Archaeological Survey of India whose scientists carried out excavations at the site of the Palace of Rabdentse in West Sikkim. This was subsequently turned into a tourist attraction without however preserving the site in its original form or providing a museum for the artefacts that were retrieved. There are many more such sites in Sikkim that await the arrival of PhD students of archaeology whose studies will hopefully throw light on the early settlements of the region.

However, to progress, Sikkim Studies is also in need of a study of its languages, particularly Bhutia (Lhoke—a southern dialect of Tibetan) which unlike Lepcha, still has no

proper grammar or dictionary. In all practical terms, the language is dying before it ever received the serious and continued attention of linguists. A number of laudable pioneering efforts were undertaken locally by Pema Rinzing and Norden Tshering who introduced the language as a vernacular in government schools as well as by the Central Institute of Indian Languages at Mysore and more recently by Baichung Tsechutarpa (2010). Language being the most important aspect of a people's culture, serious attention should be given to this field if all aspects of Sikkim Studies are to further progress in the coming years.

In the field of anthropology, while a number of studies have been carried out among the Lepchas and to a lesser extent among the Bhutias, much work still remains to be done among Sikkim's numerous Nepali-speaking communities. While some work has been done among the Limbus and the Newars, very little is known for example about the Sikkimese Gurungs, Tamangs, Rais and Mangars, on the history of Nepalese migration to Sikkim or even about Sikkim's well established Indian merchant community whose first members came to Sikkim in the 1890s. No in-dept historical or anthropological study was ever published about the *kazis*—the Bhutia-Lepcha feudal aristocracy—their origins and the functioning of their estates; no complete and systematic study of Bhutia clans, lineages, ancestral gods and related rituals was ever carried out; sustained ethnographic studies of the Lachen and Lachung yak herding communities have yet to be completed; an in-dept study of Sikkim's numerous monastic dances or *chams* and Sikkim specific monastic rituals is required and much of the Lepcha and Bhutia shamanic and oral traditions remain undocumented. Although a political minefield, the subject of inter-ethnic relations in Sikkim is probably one of the most relevant at the moment, as well as the relationship between villages and towns, the recent phenomenon of out-migration, the ever persisting problem of rural debt and the impact of tourism and that of the numerous hydro-electric projects presently being implemented in the state.

While foreign PhD students and researchers often lack in language skills, local student-researchers usually lack training in critical thinking, research methodology and academic writing, and are generally not well-read in the relevant literature. The majority of our young researchers are lama-graduates from the Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies. Although trained in Tibetan grammar and Buddhist philosophy, they all lack training in the above mentioned subjects. It is hoped that these will be made available to them and other local researchers by the newly established Sikkim University and that promising students will also be sent to first class Indian universities or relevant university departments abroad to complete PhDs in Tibetology, history, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and related subjects. Proper research training would also help root out the problems of plagiarism and politically motivated research. Meanwhile, to help bridge the educational gap, the Institute encourages the collaboration between local and foreign scholars so each may benefit and learn from the others' respective skills. We believe that if both join hands and work together on common Buddhist-related research projects under the umbrella of the Institute, this could help promote original research and positively influence the future of Sikkim Studies.

NOTES

- ¹ Instead, Prof. Caplan went to eastern Nepal where he contributed important ethnographies about the Limbus.
- ² I particularly remember here a conversation with late Tashi Tobden who bitterly attributed his lack of knowledge of Sikkimese traditions and language to his British education.
- ³ Personal communication Hope Cooke, London, 2005.
- ⁴ The original place names were all in the Sikkimese Bhutia and Lepcha languages. Since these are often difficult to pronounce for Sikkim's Nepali-speaking populations, many localities have since been renamed with similar sounding Nepali words. For example, Socha Gang, a neighbourhood of Gangtok is now referred to as Sichey.
- ⁵ This section is from Saul Mullard, 'Recent acquisitions to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology holdings and future publications', *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 44 (1&2), 2008.
- ⁶ Now! 20 July 2006.

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SIKKIM AND BHUTAN IN THE CROSSCURRENTS OF SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TIBETAN HISTORY

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The Himalayan region stretching from western Afghanistan to western China comprises a plethora of distinct climate zones, human communities, languages and economic praxis. Most critically, polities within the Himalayan zone played the role of a 'buffer' between cultures of the Indic south, and the Tibetan north. This has been going on for centuries although the term is modern. How did the communities within the Himalayan 'buffer zone' negotiate their relationships between very different cultures on their south and north, generally Indic on the one hand and Tibetan on the other? The question addresses the issue of patterns of adaptation and survival of small communities neighbouring larger, more powerful ones.

Many specialized studies and conference proceedings on the human element of the Himalayan zone have been published in recent years.¹ In this paper, I address a particular historiographical issue that pertains especially to the relationship between central Tibet (Tib. *Dbus – Gtsang*) and the bordering Himalaya lands, i.e. Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The topic stems from my research on Bhutan history, and is based on Tibetan, Sikkimese and Bhutanese written sources that predate the year 1757, when Britain became the paramount governing power in India, changing yet again the dynamics of this zone.

As Tibet evolved from its ancient roots into modernity, the written record shows that Tibet's *perception* of its southern Himalayan frontier evolved also. Social and political relations between the communities within this zone were affected in particular ways by those perceptions. Whereas in Tibetan records pertaining to the earliest period the Himalayas were viewed as a kind of mythic-symbolic frontier, over time it evolved into a zone where serious inter-polity political conflicts were fought out, while at the same time the earlier, mythic-symbolic elements became less relevant or were reinterpreted by communities on both sides of the frontier to suit their particular purpose. In the modern period, inter-polity (and inter-ethnic) issues within the Himalayan zone are often still argued by invoking the symbolism and icons of the early period.

Most of our knowledge of the earliest period of Tibetan and Bhutanese history comes from texts dating from the eleventh century or later, including *gter ma* 'Treasure' literature. Used with caution, such sources can offer valuable insights into the earlier past.

I THE HIMALAYAS AND THE MON FRONTIER OF SOUTHERN TIBET

Since antiquity, Sikkim and Bhutan occupied part of a common mythical space in the Tibetan world view, part of a vague, primordial southern frontier on the border with India.

The term *Mon* more or less imprecisely designated this zone, as we see in the earliest written occurrence of the name on the treaty pillar inscription of 821/22 between Tibet and China. Richardson translates Emperor Trhi Tsugdetsan's dedication on the east face of the inscription as follows:

Thus, India of the borderland in the south [*lho phyogs rgya gar gyi mon*], the *Ta zbig* in the west, the *Dru gu No smel* and so on in the north, all those known as the great kingdoms of the right and left, and every inhabited region without exception did not fail to revere the mighty helmet and excellent customs of the supernaturally wise divinity, the *btsan po*; and on all sides, with happiness, they hearkened to whatever commands he gave.²

Did this mean that Mon was part of India, that India abutted Mon, or as Richardson implies that the word Mon as used here was not a specific country but rather a southern habitat marker. It was borderland wilderness, an 'inhabited region' but not a 'great kingdom of right and left.'

The term also connoted the prehistoric Tibeto-Burman Mon population that populated these areas, as they still do today in ever smaller numbers. Besides their situation in Bhutan,³ many districts along the southern Himalayan fringe once contained communities known as Mon, including Nepal, Ladakh, Sikkim, Chumbi, the Mon Yul tracts of Tibet, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Temples along the Mon Frontier

The first significant event of legend or history affecting the Mon southlands was the construction of border temples by the seventh century Tibetan emperor Songtsan Gampo. One of Songtsan Gampo's most important state acts was the erection of the famous Jokhang Buddhist temple in Lhasa, and a series of lesser temples at strategic points along the frontier. These latter temples, twelve in all, were specifically described as having the purpose of 'subduing the frontier' (Tib. *mtha' 'dul*) and subduing districts 'beyond the frontier' (Tib. *yang 'dul*). The interpretation of their purpose has been given a highly Buddhist flavour by later Tibetan and Bhutanese writers—the same word '*dul*' meaning both 'to subdue' or 'to tame' and by extension 'to convert [to Buddhism].'⁴ In fact, however, their location coincides with specific frontier districts outside central Tibet that were once inhabited by non-Tibetan peoples known as Monpa.

To Tibetans, the Monpa represented primitive, un-enlightened societies, wherever they lived but mostly in lands along the southern border, within or beyond the Himalayan chain. As it happens, two of these frontier temples are located in what is now the Kingdom of Bhutan, namely the temples of Paro Kyichu in the west, and Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang in central Bhutan.⁵ The modern Bhutanese freely acknowledge the Monpa as one element of their pre-Buddhist ancestry, but they have long viewed the temples as purely religious shrines harking back to antiquity (and thus enhancing Bhutan's history and spirituality).

It is quite clear from early *Phyi dar* sources, such as Nyang ral's history (late twelfth century), that the temples' original intent was a blend of both military and magical: military due to their imperial significance, i.e. staking out the limits of the seventh century Tibetan realm, and magical in the sense that protective deities worshipped by Tibetans were part of the temples' iconography, described as intimidating the 'enemies' who would harm Tibet or Buddhism.⁶

Songtsan Gampo was not the only Tibetan ruler who constructed Mon-suppressing temples. In the thirteenth century, the ruler of the kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang *Ngadak* Bumdey Gön (1253-1280) constructed a series of dzongs, several of which were specifically described as having the purpose to suppress the Mon population south of his state that bordered northern Nepal.⁷

Treasure Literature, Treasure Finders, and the Opening of the Mon Frontier

1. *Treasure Literature and Treasure Finders*

According to the received tradition, the eighth–ninth centuries witnessed several interrelated phenomena that affected enduring Tibetan perceptions about the southern frontier. The coming to Tibet of the Indian tantric master Padma Sambhava played a key role in the development of a remarkable religious movement, with an associated literary genre, the so-called Terma (Tib. *gter ma*) or ‘Hidden Texts.’⁸ Various Tibetan traditions tell us that both Bon and Buddhist followers of Padma Sambhava engaged in the systematic concealment of religious texts during the Imperial era, in early Tibetan temples and in ‘Hidden Lands’ or Beyul (Tib. *sbas yul*) located mostly along the southern Tibetan Mon frontier, for safekeeping from the persecutions of non-believer armies, which seem to have foreshadowed the arrival of Mongol marauders in the thirteenth century.

The thesis was amplified in rediscovered treasure biographies of Padma Sambhava, beginning about the late twelfth century with the *Rnam thar Zangs ling ma* biography composed by Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124-1192). Texts of this genre contained lists of hidden lands, caves, and temples where treasure texts were to be discovered. A parallel movement began of inspired Treasure-Finders (Tib. *gter ston*), men who believed it to be their foretold destiny to travel into and ‘open up’ hidden lands in the southern Himalayan zone, men like Nyang ral himself. Like the Explorer of Rudyard Kipling’s poem, they were driven by an inner voice:

Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges;
Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!

By the mid sixteenth century, this movement accomplished most of what I would call the exploration of the Mon Frontier, leaving behind descriptions and guidebooks for others to follow.

Bhutan and Sikkim figured prominently as focal points for this movement. For example, six full chapters of the famous fourteenth century treasure text by Orgyan gling pa, the *Bka’ thang sde lnga*, are devoted to the listing of hidden treasure sites in Bhutan. Both Sikkim & Bhutan are dotted with sacred sites accepted as having been first opened by Padma Sambhava himself or by the later Nyingmapa saints who came to be treated as cultural heroes: Rig ’dzin Rgod ldem (1337-1408), Padma gling pa (1450-1521), Kah thog pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1466-1540), and Lha btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med (1597-1652), their descendants and reincarnations.⁹ For the Bonpo, also, it is a remarkable fact that, judging from the index to the *Katen* canonical collection, more hidden Bon religious texts were recovered from a cave in the Paro Valley than from any other single location.¹⁰

2. *Refugees and Exiles*

A second important quasi-historical theme of Imperial Tibet that impacted the southern Himalayan zone was that of the expulsion or exile of royal figures. Many stories exist throughout the Himalayas of exiled Tibetan princes such as Lha sras Gtsang ma (b. 800) going to the Southern Tibetan frontier, where they founded small principalities and new royal lines.¹¹ These episodes often overlap accounts of treasure-text concealment and re-discovery.

In Nyang ral's version of the Gtsang ma story, this prince was sent into exile from Tibet because he was a committed Buddhist, being therefore 'unfit' to ascend the throne. Heading south to Bhutan, he is said to have brought a mass of royal texts and treasures which he hid in a particular cave north of the Paro Valley.¹² The connection between treasure texts and royal princes of Tibet's imperial age has been noted by other scholars also.¹³

Periods of major regime change in Tibet were almost always accompanied by the discovery of prophecies from Padma Sambhava, a common theme being the foreshadowing of a time for the pious to flee the troubles in Tibet and take refuge in the South. Many examples can be cited from Tibetan history of refugee luminaries, such as the Tibetan Drukpa monk Chos rje 'Ba' ra ba (1310?-1391?), the Nyingmapa savant Klong chen pa (1308-1363), the founder of the Bhutanese state Zhabdrung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651) in 1616, and his Tibetan biographer Gtsang Mkhan chen (1610-1684).

Chos rje 'Ba' ra ba (1310?-1391?) wrote numerous songs lamenting the troubled times in Tibet, the presence of Mongol marauders and robbers, etc., motivating his travel to Bhutan, which he imagined to be a land of tranquility. There, he founded several temples near Paro and Punakha that still exist, and where the wood blocks for printing the first edition of his biography and collected spiritual songs were carved, in 1500 AD.¹⁴

Klong chen pa also took refuge in central Bhutan in the mid fourteenth century to escape persecution from the founder of the Phagmodru dynasty. There he composed a famous *Ode to the Divine, Hidden Land of Bumthang* (1355), which concluded with the verses

In these days, through the maliciousness of men,
The Buddha's teachings are near to decline in Central Tibet;
Demon armies from the borders have raised strife in the centre,
So that enlightenment is best cultivated in places such as this.
But the jewelled doors to the Hidden Lands of the frontier
will not long remain closed;
Soon they will be opened, for the border armies of the Mongols are newly arrived,
A thought which causes me great sorrow.
Before this happens, men of faith, desirous of liberation,
Should renounce any fond attachment for their native lands;
To devote their lives to cultivating true wisdom,
The time has come to travel to the Hidden Lands of the frontier.¹⁵

Several prophecies from the Terma texts discovered by Padma gling pa point directly to the break-up of the Sakya dynasty in 1358 at the hands of the Phagmodru myriarch:

Armies will turn the temples of Sakya into forts,
The Pig [Phagmodru] will reduce all [Tibet] beneath his power.
Men will be enslaved, robbery and banditry will spread.
Murder will be praised and worn as a badge of valour.
Most of central Tibet will flee to Bhutan [Lho Mon], Tsari, and Kongpo....¹⁶

One century later, the overthrow of the Phagmodru dynasty by the Tibetan Rin spungs princes engendered yet another set of prophecies, additional treasure-finders, and more refugees fleeing to the Southlands.¹⁷

Gtsang Mkhan chen (1610-1684) was one of many Karmapa monks who fled Tibet for Bhutan in the wake of the Gelugpa takeover in 1642. The Mongol victories marking the rise

of Yellow Hat supremacy in Tibet were interpreted by him as a sign of the culmination of Padma Sambhava's prophecies, directing true men of religion to take refuge in the Hidden Lands.¹⁸

3. *Fear of the Southlands*

Not all early explorer—saints travelling to Bhutan and Sikkim did so without hesitation. For example, several of their accounts treat the Southlands and Southerners in quite disparaging terms. The people are frequently described as beast-like, irreligious, bellicose, uncultured and thieving. The land itself was viewed as uninviting and wild, and was feared for its marauding animals and rumoured feverish jungles. When, in 1345, the Ralung hierarch 'Jam dbyangs Kun dga' sengge (1314-1347) set out on a teaching mission to the monastery's Drukpa affiliates in Bhutan, his Tibetan disciples recited a typical list of such opinions in an attempt to postpone his departure.¹⁹

The regions of Bhutan are humid, feverish and perilous. There are many wild animals and wild men. You will be weakened by poison and fever; your life will be thus endangered. It is a frightfully awesome and wild country. The place is known for its humidity which debilitates the body. It is a place full of poisonous snakes, bees and leeches; a place where feverish poisons and wild beasts threaten; a place difficult to travel through, it is said.

Evoking similar attitudes, the Tibetan saint and bridge builder Thangtong Gyalpo (1385-1464) considered himself to be a spiritual pioneer of the Himalayas, commanded by an image of the goddess Tārā

To spread the light of the Buddha's teachings in the dark and sinful lands of Bumthang, Laya, Paro, Eastern Mon, to Kāmatā (Cooch Behar) in India and among the Lopas (of Arunachal Pradesh).²⁰

In particular he was told to erect temples and build bridges in order to benefit people and to ward off invading armies of the non-Buddhist Hor (Turkic) peoples.

II STATE FORMATION IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: TIBET, BHUTAN, AND SIKKIM

We possess only scattered Tibetan or local records for pre-sixteenth century society in the Himalayan zone. The biographies of travelling monks are among our best sources, from which we can piece together a picture that, with caution, may be applied somewhat broadly. The communal pattern that emerges is one of small, autonomous village clusters and petty kingdoms often separated by major geographical barriers.

Due to centuries of activity by monks 'opening' these areas (in the Buddhist sense), various schools of Tibetan Buddhism tended to predominate in different areas. In some cases the tie to a Tibetan school or monastery was very loose, whereas in others the bond was closer. For example, we know that religious tithes (if not outright taxes) were collected and returned to the home monastery from western Bhutan and from some monasteries in Chumbi Valley.

In Sikkim and central Bhutan, the Nyingmapa were dominant, based on what we can learn from accounts of the various visiting monks. In western Bhutan many villages were allied with small monasteries founded by Drukpa Kagyudpa monks who had trained at the

home monastery of Ralung in Tibet. A major exception was the ancient cliff-side shrine complex of Taktshang which belonged to the Nyingmapa. Eastern Bhutan and Tibetan Mon Yul were the home of Gelugpa monasteries, while the Chumbi Valley separating Sikkim and Bhutan saw a mixture of Drukpa, Nyingmapa and Lhapa (by then an affiliate of the Gelugpa) sectarian influence.

Although this picture may be somewhat oversimplified, what is clear from the available contemporary literature, spotty though it may be, is that these societies lived in relatively stable (though not necessarily harmonious) relationships. None of them could command extensive resources to seriously threaten another.

The New Sectarian Dynamic

The socio-political situation in these areas became destabilized in the first half of the seventeenth century, following the formation of new state entities in Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet.

The changed dynamic that these polities introduced was that of a dominant sectarian school, harnessed to the will of central state authorities, whose influence could now play out over a wider landscape, including the power to levy armies or local militias in pursuit of broad politico-religious goals. In Sikkim, the central authority of Chogyal Puntsok Namgyal was less unitary in that his authority was constrained by royal alliances with leading families representing the local ethnic communities. In Tibet, after the events of 1642, the Mongol troops of Gushri Khan inserted a forceful military element.

As one reads the literature of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, one can see a distinct change in the tone and style of the inter-polity conversation. Episodes in the relationships between the three new state entities illustrate the fluidity of two distinct modes, one being use of the traditional formulas appealing to the ancient symbols, the ancient temples, the invoking of notions of Lama and Patron relationships, and so forth; the other being a more modern, confrontational dynamic, what I call here the ‘state – strategic,’ involving all of the familiar tools of interstate conflict: espionage, threatening letters, black magic, armed aggression, and territorial conquest.

Tibet and Sikkim

The relationship between Tibet and Sikkim began in the traditional mode. Sikkimese histories, all written by later Buddhist monks and members of royalty, present an elaborate set of founding legends tying the first Chogyal’s advent to Sikkim to prophecies from treasure text literature similar to those from Bhutan. In fact, prophecies from a Bhutanese treasure text discovered by Padma gling pa were also cited in support of the new Sikkim monarchy.

The Dalai Lama and the Sikkim Chogyal were linked by common Nyingmapa spiritual intermediaries, in particular the revered Nyingmapa figure Lha btsun Nam mkha’ ’Jigs med who was an officiant at the Chogyal’s enthronement ceremony. This relationship continued between subsequent Dalai Lamas and Chogyals, who visited the Potala on several occasions. On the other hand, the 1908 *Royal Chronicle of Sikkim* (attributed to the Maharani Yeshe Drolma and the Chogyal Thutob Namgyal) shows vividly how Sikkim’s relations with neighbours Nepal and Bhutan turned much more difficult under pressure from their aggressive state leaders, beginning in the mid seventeenth century and even more so after

1757 when the Sikkim state became caught between its traditional ties to Tibet and pressure from British India. Ultimately, but only after great internal strife, Sikkim became a formal protectorate of British India through a treaty signed between British India and China in 1890.²¹

Tibet and Bhutan

Unlike Sikkim, Bhutan was founded in a state of war with Tibet. As is well known, the Zhabdrung Rinpoche left Tibet in 1616 as a refugee, the exiled Drukpa hierarch of Ralung whose claim to be the legitimate reincarnation of the previous hierarch Padma Karpo (with the right to possess the ancestral Drukpa patrimony) was denied in court by the king of Gtsang. The Zhabdrung formed his new government in Bhutan (1625) after several years of sparring with his Tibetan enemies, at which point there was very little room for dialog based on appeal to the traditional, mythic-symbolic forms.

Right from the beginning in 1625, defence and protection of resources became his uppermost concern. Fortress dzongs were constructed whose scale greatly exceeded anything that had previously existed. Each dzong's innermost temple (Tib. *dgon khang*) contained images and magical devices used to invoke the protective deities against enemies of the state, and its monastery storerooms were sized to store supplies and weapons in a time of war with Tibet.

The intensity of the mutual hatred between Bhutan and Tibet during this era, and its impact on events throughout the Himalayas has, in my view, been insufficiently taken account of by Tibetan historians. On both sides, monks were employed to perform rites of destructive magic, invoking the protective deities against each other, while their soldiers fought on the battlefields.

III BORDER FORMATION AND CONFLICT: TIBET, BHUTAN, SIKKIM AND NEPAL

In the period just before the creation of the Sikkim and Bhutan states, the districts between the two countries, including both upper and lower Chumbi Valley and what are now the Darjeeling and Gorubathang districts of West Bengal, were inhabited by many small communities including Lepchas (referred to as Monpa in Tibetan documents of this period) and settlements of people related to the Bhutanese from nearby Paro and Ha Valleys. Several Bhutanese and Tibetan sources provide a picture of the complex relationships and conflicts between the various socio-ethnic groups living in this frontier area, which becomes increasingly detailed as events of the seventeenth century unfold. During the period 1640-'50, the new government of Bhutan was actively extending its control throughout western Bhutan, including the districts such as Dagana south of the regional dzong of Paro. While most of the local residents offered their gifts and pledges of allegiance, it is reported that some who did not were driven out. A force was sent to Dagana in 1650 specifically to root out recalcitrant locals.²² Further to the SW of Dagana, the Bhutanese border fort of Dalingkha (Tib. *Brda ling kha*) was established, located in the hilly districts near to Lava in West Bengal that stretch westward to the modern Sikkim border. We do not know just when Dalingkha was incorporated into the Bhutan state, but it was probably about this time.

During these same years, refugees belonging to the lesser sects were fleeing southward under pressure from the Tibetan and Mongol forces of central Tibet, while 'five lama factions' (Tib. *bla ma khag lnga*) and their patrons who would not support the Zhabdrung

Rinpoche were also driven out of Bhutan.²³ Among the five was the Tibetan 'Ba' ra ba monk Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1601-1687) and his followers, whose biography provides a vivid account of the social dynamics between Bhutan and Sikkim during the period 1620-1665. Having left Bhutan in 1634 due to sectarian conflict, he founded two new monasteries in Sikkim, including the monastery named *Mon lug* near Damsang (about twenty miles north of modern Kalimpong in W. Bengal). At the time, this hill-top site was apparently controlled by Sikkim, because he received approval from the Chogyal to found it.²⁴ After many years there, *Mon lug* monastery grew in size and local support. But upon returning to Damsang in 1663 after a three-year visit to Tibet, he found that the area had become encroached upon by combating forces consisting of unnamed Drukpa lamas from Bhutan and a local chieftain named Monpa Achok (Tib. *A chog / A mchog*), who had risen to local prominence through depredations against both Drukpa and 'Ba' ra ba patrons. This resulted in a loss of local patronage for the 'Ba' ra ba mission, and so Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan left Damsang forever and returned to Tibet.²⁵

This is the earliest mention that we find of 'Monpa' Achok, a man who is celebrated today in Kalimpong under the name Gyabu (Tib. *rgyal po*) Achok, as a Lepcha cultural hero.²⁶ Monpa Achok was the chief of several villages²⁷ that were notionally included within the territory of Sikkim, but in the context of the times the actual borders were still very fluid. Damsang (Tib. *'Dam sang*) was apparently an old Lepcha hill fort serving as his base, offering excellent vistas over the entire belt of hilly lands stretching between Sikkim and Bhutan.²⁸

This was also the era of the aggressively expansive Third Druk Desi (civil ruler) Mingyur Tenpa (r. 1663-1680), who was actually an expatriate Tibetan who had come to Bhutan as a follower of the Zhabdrung. He was the ruler who in the 1650's pushed Bhutan's territory into the east, and then engineered the expansion of the borders further eastward up to what is now Tawang, at the triangle with Arunachal Pradesh.²⁹ Bhutanese sources are unclear if he actively promoted expansion westward towards Sikkim. In any case, Bhutanese frontiersmen were clearly doing so in this period, and when the pressure became too great to withstand, Monpa Achok turned for assistance to the Dalai Lama.

This is a clear example of how state-formation amplified disputes among the minor chieftains in these Valleys. Whereas once they would have settled their issues locally, the combatants could now try to involve the larger state powers, whose own frontiers and sectarian policies became thereby entwined. In a rather audacious move, Monpa Achok took his quarrel to Lhasa where, in the 9th month of 1668, he met the Dalai Lama.³⁰ Tibet's view at this time was apparently that her Gelugpa patrons and minor lamas were being mistreated all along the southern frontier, by the fledgling Bhutanese state headed by the Zhabdrung Rinpoche and other ex-Tibetan rebels (whose legitimacy they were loath to recognize). It seems unlikely that Monpa Achok's Lepcha villages were strongly of the Gelugpa school, but if they claimed to belong to the new Sikkim state (which is not certain from the sources available), then the Dalai Lama's support for Achok could have been justified by his personal alliance of faith with the Sikkim Chogyal. Thus, two months following Achok's visit to Lhasa, Tibet invaded Bhutan on his behalf and that of another Gelugpa lama driven out of eastern Bhutan by the Zhabdrung's forces, the Merak Lama. The result of this complex battle on several fronts was a treaty of peace signed in 1669 between the various sides, whose *terminus ad quem* was to be the Wood-Hare year of 1675.³¹

Even before 1675, however, the armistice was being violated. The Dalai Lama heard rumours that Bhutan was secretly preparing to launch an army against Monpa Achok and

launched a pre-emptive attack against a Bhutanese fort in lower Chumbi Valley named Steng gdung rdzong.³² This was intended to serve as an example 'from father to son' of what would happen should Bhutanese depredations not cease. Tibetan mediators then met with their Bhutanese counterparts at the regional Tibetan fortress of Phag ri, which was responsible for managing Tibet's southern districts facing Sikkim and Bhutan. After several fruitless months, however, during which Bhutan refused to concede the lands claimed by Monpa Achok, Tibet ordered a halt to the entire southern export trade in salt and wool, and stationed a border patrol at key points along the 300-mile frontier from Mtsho sna (north of Tawang) in the east to Shel dkar north of Nepal.³³ By government order, monasteries in central Tibet performed magical rituals during the 12th month (early 1676) aimed at victory over Bhutan.³⁴

Contrary to the Dalai Lama's account, Bhutanese sources claim that Monpa Achok and his forces were the aggressors, attacking and seizing their frontier outpost at Dalingkha. In reprisal, the Bhutan government ordered the monks of the state monastery at Punakha to perform their own rituals for invoking the protective deities. Soon enough, by the 3rd month of 1676, Bhutanese forces retook Dalingkha. The Lepcha warrior Monpa Achok was captured and put to death.³⁵ Messengers returned to Bhutan reporting that his head and arms had been staked and waved about on a victory pole. Hearing this disturbing news, the Bhutanese monk Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696), nephew of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche and future Fourth Druk Desi, composed a prayer of compassion on behalf of Achok:

Wherever they reside in the six-fold wheel of existence,
There are no beings unworthy of compassion.
Especially must the hearts of monks
Bear even greater love for those who commit great evil.³⁶

The death of the Lepcha warrior-chieftain Monpa Achok in 1676 did not end the border struggles between Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. The Tibetan mediators at Phag ri, frustrated by what they perceived as Bhutanese intransigence, convinced the Dalai Lama to launch another major war against Bhutan. It took place during mid 1676, and was joined by a Bhutanese ex-chieftain from Bumthang in central Bhutan, the Chos 'khor Sde pa, who had been driven out of Bhutan by the Bhutanese Desi for opposing the state.

The full details of this battle are complex and better left to a separate presentation. Columns of Tibetan soldiers invaded Bhutan from five different directions, and monks were engaged by the rulers of both governments to once again perform black rites against each other. In Bhutan, the names and effigies of the enemy leaders were entered into a ritual device and the protective deities summoned to cause their destruction.³⁷ The central Bhutanese dzong of Jakar was captured for a time, and fighting is said to have raged as far south as the Indian border near Dewangiri. But due to a variety of factors, the Tibetan armies were eventually routed and many soldiers were killed or captured. At the end, in early 1679, a peace treaty was signed by many parties settling the frontier between Bhutan and Tibet in the eastern sector. There was also an exchange of captives in the west.³⁸ It was following this defeat that Tibet greatly enlarged the Gelugpa monastery at Tawang, to guard the frontier against further eastward expansion by Bhutan.³⁹

From 1680 to 1694, the Desi of Bhutan was Tenzin Rabgye (r. 1638-1696), a nephew of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche whose ruling style leaned more towards diplomacy than did that of his predecessor. He personally disapproved of state-sponsored encroachments into Sikkim

out of ethical concerns.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, his frontier lieutenants were not as constrained and the land struggles continued. In 1687 another major treaty was negotiated concerning the land disputes between Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet's Chumbi Valley. More than one hundred delegates from the three countries gathering at Phag ri to sign the final document.⁴¹

IV TIBET, BHUTAN, AND SIKKIM DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Frontier confrontations between Tibet, Bhutan, and Sikkim over properties in their shared Himalayan zone endured well into the mid eighteenth century, for which we have numerous sources of information describing the positions of all parties. In particular, a major conflict between Tibet and Bhutan occurred in the 1730's, during which two of the Bhutanese Zhabdrung incarnations were captured and held hostage by Tibet. Again, Sikkim was drawn into these conflicts, which roughly coincided with a Sikkim succession struggle and twenty-year interregnum following the death of the Chogyal 'Gyur med nam rgyal (r. 1717-1733). During this period, Sikkim was temporarily ruled by an able administrator sent from Tibet named Rgyal po 'King' Rab brtan shar pa.⁴²

It was in the aftermath of these disturbances, during the reigns of the Seventh Dalai Lama and more moderate rulers in Bhutan (and under the watchful eye of Manchu officials in Lhasa), that Tibet and Bhutan finally began to take steps to improve relations between their two countries. Interestingly, the primary means resorted to for peace-making belonged once again to the old 'mythic – symbolic' sphere, including religious exchanges and the jointly funded restoration of historic monasteries important to both sides, namely Ralung in Tibet, and Kyichu and Taktshang monasteries in Bhutan.⁴³

During the next several decades, the pressure on Sikkim came more from a resurgent Nepal than from Bhutan, a topic outside the scope of this paper. This was roughly the status of affairs that the British authorities in India perceived after 1757, as they began to assess their situation and develop goals and strategies for dealing with the Himalayan states to their north.

Conclusions

From antiquity, the Himalayan zone has formed a buffer between India and Tibet. The societies of this zone learned to negotiate their existence between these larger states in different ways. Ancient perceptions and mythologies provided a kind of vocabulary of inter-polity dialog that served to define the relationships for many centuries. In the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, however, the establishment of formal states with conflicting boundaries, political goals, and intense sectarian partisanship, rendered such metaphors as the 'Lama – Patron relationship' obsolete. This change marked the intrusion of 'state – strategic' issues and the language of confrontation, the forerunner of what was to come as a consequence of China's and British India's policies along their Himalayan frontier.

NOTES

¹ A sampling of studies focused heavily on the Tibetan milieu include Macdonald (1997); Rustomji & Ramble (1990); Ramble & Gutschow et al (2003); Ramble & Brauen (2003), etc. The buffer zone concept as it relates to Nepal and the Indic relationship was discussed in some detail in Rose (1971: 15-16).

- ² Richardson (1985: 108-111). The inscription (lines 13-18) reads: “*lho phyogs gyi mon rgya gar dang // nub phyogs kyī ta zhig dang / byang phyogs kyī dru gu no smel la stsogs pa // g.ya g.yo’i rgyal po sde chen por bya ba kun kyang // ‘phrul gyi lha btsan po’i dbu rmog brtsan po dang lugs bzang po la // myi phyogs myi gus med de // phan tshun dgyes shing // bka’ stsald to chog nyan pa yin //*.” Wang (1997: 40f) translates the first strophe into modern Chinese as “*nanfang menyū tianzhu (yindu)*,” retaining the ambiguity.
- ³ Pommaret (1994, 1999).
- ⁴ The term ‘dul ba is also the Tibetan for Vinaya, the canonical Buddhist texts on vows. Aris (1979) views the entire network of frontier temples as an implementation of early Chinese geomantic theories, which I think misses the most obvious point of their military significance along critical frontiers, in addition to which the actual arrangement of these temples is highly asymmetrical.
- ⁵ Other texts name the Bumthang temple as Tsilung Lhakhang.
- ⁶ See a brief description of their iconography in the *Chos ‘byung me tog snying po* of the Tibetan historian Nyang ral (1124-1192) pp. 241-244.
- ⁷ The famous poem describing his construction of a set of frontier fortresses is found in several sources, including *Bod rje lha btsan po’i gdung rabs*: 108-109.
- ⁸ There exists now a vast secondary literature on the *gter ma* phenomenon, and many translations. I refer the reader to Davidson (2005: 210-241) and references cited there for analysis of its many facets and ties to Tibetan history.
- ⁹ Khenpo Lha Tshering (2002).
- ¹⁰ Karmay & Nagano - Indices (2001: 311).
- ¹¹ Discussed extensively in Aris (1979: 147ff).
- ¹² Nyang ral: 436-437; Ardussi (2007: 9-10). In other versions of the story he was assassinated in Lhobrak.
- ¹³ Ehrhard (1997: 340-41).
- ¹⁴ See Ardussi (2002) for examples of these songs.
- ¹⁵ *Bum thang lha’i sbas yul gyi bkod pa me tog skyed tshal*, f.25.b; compare this with the prophecy from Padma gling pa’s *Lung bstan kun gsal me long* (f.11.b): *sa skya’i gtsug lag dmag gis so mkhar byed / stod med (read smad) bar gsum phag gis dbang du bsdud / mi mgo bran byed jab dang chom rkun dar / mi gsod pa la mngon bstod dpa’ rtags ‘dogs / dbus gtsang phal cher lho mon tsa kong ‘bros /*
- ¹⁶ Padma gling pa, *Lung bstan kun gsal me long*, a section of the treasure text *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*. (*Collected Works* [Thimphu, 1975], vol. 1, 11.b, 24.a-b).
- ¹⁷ In Ardussi (2007) I discuss the evidence for a famous hilltop castle ruin in eastern Bhutan, Tsenkharla, that may have been founded at this time by a refugee or exiled member of the Phagmogru family.
- ¹⁸ Gtsang Mkhan chen’s account of his harrowing flight through the mountains into Bhutan is found in his autobiography: *Bstan pa ‘dzin pa’i skyes bu thams cad kyī rnam par thar pa la gus shing rjes su ‘jug pa’i rtogs brjod pha rol tu phyin pa dang gzungs dang ting nge ‘dzin gyi sgo mang po rim par phye ba’ gnam*, vol. I: 269.a-272.a. On his impressionistic account of the flood of Tibetan refugees into Bhutan during this time cf. *Ibid*, vol. 2: 284.b-288.b.
- ¹⁹ Bsam rgyal Kha che, ‘*Jam dbyangs kun dga’ seng ge’i rnam par thar pa*, ff-34.a-b (*Rwa lung dkar brgyud gser ‘phreng*, vol. 2, pt. Wa). Cf. also *Rje btsun ‘ba’ ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po’i rnam thar mgrur ‘bum dang bcas pa*, ff.191.a-b, etc.
- ²⁰ *Thang stong rgyal po*: 41.a, 51.a-52.a.
- ²¹ The issue was finally settled by the Convention between Great Britain and China Relating to Sikkim and Tibet, 1890. (Alastair Lamb [1960]): 174-204).
- ²² *SDE-SRID 4*: 115.b.
- ²³ *LNDRR, Nga*: 93.a.
- ²⁴ *Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan*: 15.a-17.b. This would date the founding of Mon-lug to the mid or late 1640’s.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*: 18.b-22.b.
- ²⁶ In addition to the spelling *Mon pa A mchog*, one finds the variants *A lcog*, *A cogs* and *A chog*. Annual rites honoring Gyabu Achok are still performed at the ruins of Damsang. See the Internet blog of the Lepcha cultural historian Azuk Tamsangmoo Lepcha (<http://aachulay.blogspot.com/2010/07/mayel-lyang-lepchas-about-sikkim-and.html>).
- ²⁷ A text available to Shakabpa describes him as the headman of three Mon communities (*mon sde tsho gsum gyi ‘go ‘dzin*) situated between the Rong-chu (Rangeet) and Rtas-gong-la pass (modern pron. Tagongla), the traditional eastern boundary of Sikkim (*Bod kyī srid don rgyal rabs*, vol. 1: 448, fn). These geographical parameters need further investigation.

- ²⁸ In 2008, during a visit with Saul Mullard, I measured the GPS coordinates of the Damsang ruins as N. 27° 08' 25.08 sec. by E. 88° 36' 35.6 sec.
- ²⁹ This expansion is the subject of a small Bhutanese text edited and translated in Aris (2009: 89-120). See also my introduction to this second edition.
- ³⁰ The main Tibetan source on these events is *LSDL*, vol. 2: 66.b, 70.b-71.a.
- ³¹ The treaty date is noted in *AIPC*: 27.a. Shakabpa (*Tibet*: 119) misconstrued the date to mean the Wood-Hare year of 1615. But there was no treaty in that year, and the error is corrected in his revised work (*Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*: vol. 1, pp. 447-48).
- ³² *LSDL*, vol. 2: 239.b.
- ³³ *LSDL*, vol.2: 256.a, 260.a-b, 267.b-268.a.
- ³⁴ *LSDL*, vol. 2: 275.b-276.b.
- ³⁵ *SDE-SRID 4*: 93.b-94.b. This is the most definitive passage describing Monpa Achok's demise.
- ³⁶ *SDE-SRID 4*: 94.b.
- ³⁷ *SDE-SRID 4*: 99.a-101.b.
- ³⁸ *LSDL*, vol.3: 2.b, 12.b, 13.b. The names of all the signatories are found in *SDE-SRID 4*:107.b-108.a. In Bhutan, victory was commemorated by a 5-day festival inaugurated at this time, the so-called "Celebration of total victory against enemies in the four directions" (*Mtha' bzhi'i gyul las rnam par rgyal ba'i gtang rag*).
- ³⁹ *LSDL*, vol. 3: 226.a-227.b. Thus, the strategic monastery of Tawang was established in the context of Tibet's struggles with Bhutan, and had nothing to do with defining the frontier between Tibet and India. Another Tibetan invasion of Bhutan, in 1714, by the forces of Lhazan Khan, was launched because Bhutanese were apparently still pushing into the Tawang area (this will be discussed in a forthcoming paper I am writing).
- ⁴⁰ *SDE SRID 4*: 149.b-150.b.
- ⁴¹ *SDE SRID 4*:191.a-b; *Shākya'i dge slong blo bzang ye shes kyi spyod tshul gsal bar byed pa ngor dkar can gyi 'phreng ba*: 101.b.
- ⁴² These events are the subject of a future paper I am working on dealing with the Sikkim – Bhutan relationships during the 18th century.
- ⁴³ On these events, see Ardussi (1997).

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THE TANGUT/MI NYAG ELEMENT IN THE LINEAGE OF THE SIKKIM CHOS RGYAL

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Although the Mi nyag element in the lineage of the Sikkim *Chos rgyal* has been mentioned and described by several authors, some ambiguity has attached itself to the designation 'Mi nyag,' since the term is used in Tibetan for both the historical Tangut state and one of the easternmost regions of Khams. In Western scholarship the reference to the Mi nyag antecedents of the *Chos rgyal* in Tibetan literature, first signalled by Joseph Rock in a long quote from Kazi Dawa Samdup's unpublished translation of the well-known '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, referred not to the Tangut country or land, but to the 'Mi nyag province,' implying its identity as part of a larger entity:

Some people again ascribe the origin [of the *Chos-rgyal*] to the *Mi-nyag Se-hu-yi rGyalpo*. The story in this case runs thus:—In the northern portion of the Mi-nyag province, there is a chain of Mountains called Mon-shri hills said to be inhabited by a spirit called *Se-hu*, a Naga *Daitya*, a serpent Ogre of malignant character who once assuming the form of seven cavaliers, started northwards where they came across a woman who was a witch; the leader of the troop of cavaliers had sexual connection with this witch and begat a son, who came to be known as *Se-hu rGyalpo* (Sehu king) after his father. This king in time brought the empire of China under his subjugation. The sixth king of his line came to be... called *rGyal-rGod* (heroic King). The time which intervened between *Se-hu rGyalpo* and *rGyal-rGod* was 260 years.¹

This account, which is Kazi Dawa Samdup's translation of a portion of the original, obscures a few elements of the Tibetan text that are worth pointing out with regard to the question of Mi nyag. The original actually reads:

Moreover, some assert [the origin of the *Chos-rgyal*] lies within the lineage of *Se-hu rgyal-po* [the 'Se hu king'] of Mi nyag. With regard to that, [it is said that] on a Mountain called Mun shrī, between the Byang ngos area of Mi nyag and the region of 'Ga', there was a malicious Nāga demon who was called *Se hu ba* and who, emanating into seven horsemen, went to Byang ngos. The commanding horseman thus came to have intercourse with a flesh-eating woman and as a result, a son was born and, bound to [the father's] name, was called *Se hu rgyal po*. During that period he brought the realm of China under his rule. Six generations later there appeared the one called *Rgyal rgod*. The manner in which the predictions of *Se-hu rgyal-po* appeared in the 260 years between *Se hu rgyal po* and *Rgyal rgod* are explained in the *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*.²

Immediately, we may note that the actual text is specific about the connection between the Sikkim royal lineage and the Tanguts. The names which appear in the '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* are unambiguously linked in the Tibetan tradition with the greater Tangut land of Xia (Tib. 'Ga') in several sources.³ Whatever level of historicity one wishes to accord the account, there is no doubt that it does ascribe the origins of the *Chos rgyal* to the ruling clan of the Tangut state. Not only does *Se hu rgyal po* figure prominently in Tibetan accounts of the Tanguts (and in traditions carried from the Tangut State to eastern Tibet), *Rgyal rgod* is also well attested. Indeed, the *Lho rong chos 'byung* gives dates for his reign, 1212/1213-1226,

which overlap with those of two Tangut rulers recorded in Chinese sources: Weiming Zunxu 嵬名遵項 (Shenzong 神宗) and Weiming Dewang 嵬名德旺 (Xianzong 獻宗), who reigned, respectively, from 1211-1223 and 1223-1226.⁴ Finally, the comment about the realm of China being brought under the rule of Se hu can only point to an understanding of Mi nyag as the Tangut State.

Another important source linking Sikkim to Mi nyag points more specifically to Khams Mi nyag and, as a result, necessitates closer scrutiny of the references to 'Ga' Mi nyag (i.e., Xixia 西夏) described in the passage just translated. This is the text translated and studied by Saul Mullard and entitled *Steng phyogs lha nas babs te nang tshan Rgya dkar shar phyogs brgyud nas 'ongs te Khams phyogs Mi nyag A'o Ldong drug spun gsum gyi byung khungs lo rgyus*,⁵ a version of which was generously made available to me by Tashi Tsering in a pre-publication critical edition under the title *La-sogs-du 'brel ba'i rgyal-rabs*. Within this version, there is no mention of the Tangut royal line descending from Se hu *rgyal po*, but there are mentions of Mi nyag by itself or as Khams Mi nyag. Indeed, we may point out that the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* also contains further mentions of Mi nyag that do draw it somewhat away from a simple understanding of the term as equivalent to the Tangut state. Thus, we read in the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* that "it is said that some descendants of the Indian *dharmarāja* Indrabhūti came scattered to Mi-nyag and reigned as the kings of Mi-nyag...."⁶ This conception of the origins of the Mi nyag rulers is quite removed from the traditional account of 'Ga' Mi nyag; its references to a plurality of royal lineages is more in accord with what we know of Khams Mi nyag. The text further discusses the question of which Indrabhūti is intended by this tradition, the greater, intermediate, or minor (a question that frequently attaches itself to mentions of Indrabhūti).⁷ Although Indrabhūti is here connected to Mi nyag and also, it follows, to the lineage of the Sikkim rulers, in general there is a degree of frustration inherent in attempts to establish verifiable historical signposts for the account of the Mi nyag rulers.

There is another text worth bringing into this discussion, *Mi nyag A 'o Ldong gi byung khungs lo rgyus sam 'Bras ljongs rgyal po'i gdung rabs byung khungs*, a text that recounts the origins of the Sikkim ruling line up to the seventeenth century (it ends with *Chos rgyal Phun tshogs nam rgyal*'s erection of the great Byang chub *mchod rten*, which is recounted following a reference to the establishment of the Qing Dynasty in China in 1644⁸). This text opens with its own account of the migration from Mi nyag:

At the time when the King of Mi nyag's sway was very great, when Sa skya paṇ chen was serving as the king's chaplain, the Lama was doing the practice of the tutelary deity called Gu ru drag dmar Ye shes rab 'bar. [The deity himself] appeared and as a treasure, took out from a rock a seal having a *padma rā ga* lotus design with a nine-stingered scorpion which he presented to the king. The lineage from that time on [was one wherein] when the king's sway increased, all [*zhong ser tshang ma?*] in Khams and China came under his rule and dominion. And after a few reigns, at the end of the twenty-five reigns predicted in the prophecy of Gu ru drag dmar Ye shes rab 'bar that "the field of conversion for one line of the Kings of Mi nyag will be the hidden land in the southern part of Tibet, the Land of Snows, 'Bras mo ljongs, one of the twenty-four hidden lands of Guru [Padmasambhava]," one from the A ba lineage of Khams Mi nyag, with his five sons and several close paternal relatives—they of 'five lights'—reached Lhasa on travels that had taken them through Tibet; and they then paid their respects to the two [images of] Jo bo Śākyamuni.⁹

The references herein to the migration through Tibet (ultimately to Sikkim) by the last of the 25 kings of Mi nyag; to the might and sway of these rulers; and to the contemporaneity of Sa

skya paṇḍita and the powerful ruler of Mi nyag: all these point to the Mi nyag in question being the Xixia state. But actual facts alluded to in this passage are questionable and refutable: the patronage of Sa skya paṇḍita by the last of the Tangut rulers, his dynasty's sway over all of China, etc.: these cannot be reconciled with what we know historically about the Tangut state. The same account is largely repeated in the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*,¹⁰ which is of course a work of very late provenance. Nevertheless, to the extent that it attempts to represent received knowledge (as it does with regard to this account), that knowledge is rather garbled as concerns the Tanguts, if indeed that is whom we are supposed to see in this passage. The question of whom our sources intend as the ancestors of the Sikkim *Chos rgyal* seems frustratingly complex, if not intractable, so long as we frame it as one in which we must decide whether the tradition about the royal family places its origins in either Khams Mi nyag or the Tangut state of Xixia. Perhaps it's not simply an either/or question.

In addition to the allusions it makes to the Tangut state, the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* also makes reference to a link between the Mi nyag kings and the A'o Gdong clan of Mi nyag. When it begins discussing the clan, the first reference to Mi nyag is not to the Tangut state but to Khams Mi nyag.¹¹ This account also brings in one of the early figures in historical chronicles dealing with the movement into Sikkim: Gyad 'bum bsags, who has been discussed most recently by Saul Mullard.¹² The text that he studied, the *Steng phyogs lha nas babs te nang tshan Rgya dkar shar phyogs brgyud nas 'ongs te Khams phyogs Mi nyag A'o Ldong drug spun gsum gyi byung khungs lo rgyus* (or *La sogs du 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs*), commonly uses the name Khams Mi nyag when describing this migration into Sikkim and Sikkim's early history. That much is clear simply from the text's title.

Thus, we might ask at this point whether it might be best to limit speculation about the origins of the Sikkim *Chos rgyal* as recorded in the relevant texts to consideration of a migration from Khams and assume that all references to Mi nyag are meant to indicate Khams Mi nyag. This would be convenient; but we cannot simply dispose of a tradition that links the lineage to elements that are clearly part of Tibetan accounts of the Tangut state of Xixia, the state of 'Ga' Mi nyag. Again, we need to think beyond the notion of the *chos rgyal* lineage stemming from either the Tangut state or Khams Mi nyag.

The proposition that refugee remnants of the Tangut population fled the destruction of the Xixia state and wended their way through the southeastern margins of the Tibetan Plateau is by no means new. And it is not really controversial, certainly not in China. Chinese and non-Chinese scholarship on the Tanguts generally accepts that there were Tanguts who survived the destruction of the Tangut State and that modern colloquial descendants of the Tangut language are still to be heard in Eastern Tibet. The question has been studied by several Chinese scholars such as Wang Jingru, Li Fanwen, Deng Shaoqin, and others, some of whom took note of Stuart Wolfenden's notion, put forth in 1931, that the Tangut language was the ancestor of the Rgyal rong language. He was wrong in the specifics, but Wolfenden's observation that Tanguts had come into Khams and that a descendant of their language is spoken in the region is considered correct; and the focus of much of the contemporary research has been—not surprisingly—the area of Khams Mi nyag.¹³ Over several decades a consensus coalesced around the now commonly accepted notion that the Tanguts are to be linked to the Dangxiang Qiang, 党項羌, a people recorded in traditional Chinese dynastic histories as present in the Sino-Tibetan border areas in the pre-Tang period, i.e., well before the creation of a Tangut state. The Tanguts are more specifically tied to a branch of the Dangxiang mentioned in Tang sources under the ethnonym Miyao 弭藥. It is recounted in the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 that after the Tibetans had come to dominate the Dangxiang (who

were previously under the Toba 拓拔 clan) and occupy their lands, with some fleeing to China, the remaining Dangxiang were called Miyao by their Tibetan rulers.¹⁴ That appellation is a transcription of the same name that appears in Tibetan as Mi nyag. 'Dangxiang' itself is generally linked by etymology to the name Tangyud (i.e., our 'Tangut').¹⁵

The contrast with some of what our sources on Sikkim's early history state is clear. At times those working with these sources tend to focus on Khams Mi nyag as the point of origin for the migration that established Sikkim's monarchy. It is therefore necessary to note that researchers working from Chinese sources look upon Khams Mi nyag as one of the important end points in the migration of Tanguts from the destroyed state of Xixia. In most Chinese studies of the post-Xixia Tangut migration to the Tibet borderlands, attention is naturally given to the area and to the people designated as Muya 木雅, understood to be the modern equivalent of Miyao, i.e., 'Mi nyag.' It is understood that while a part of the Dangxiang had eventually come to form the core of the Tangut state elite, other branches remained in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. While the Chinese differentiated between the Miyao in the border areas and the Tanguts of the Tangut state of Xixia, in Tibetan they were both Mi nyag. Thus, when the Tangut state collapsed, there was an influx of refugees from the state into the very areas that still housed the Miyao. And thus an element of ambiguity has arisen in descriptions of the origins of the lineage of the Sikkim *Chos rgyal* that simply trace them back to Mi nyag.

The area of Khams Mi nyag was not the only area into which refugees penetrated at the time of migration from the Tangut state. Either during the time of their original flight or, in some cases, following an original settlement in the Khams Mi nyag area, these peoples could be found in other border regions, a fact that is attested by various Tibetan histories and the spread of the term Mi nyag as a clan name. However, we ought to be quite clear about what this means for the question of descent from the Tangut emperors. While it is indeed the case that refugees from Xixia did migrate into areas on the Tibetan Plateau, most obviously Khams Mi nyag, the attribution of imperial Tangut origins to ruling lineages in Tibet as a result of such migrations can at present only be taken as that: attribution. One might say the same thing with regard to the appearance of lineages elsewhere (e.g., Co ne) in which descent from the Tibetan imperial family is claimed. But to say this is not to negate the Tangut link. Obviously, elements of Tangut lore and history penetrated these regions and this phenomenon cannot be separated from the migration of people from the Tangut state. But the question of local Tibetan and Himalayan rulers claiming descent from the royal refugees who fled the destroyed state is a bit more complex.

The established presence of Miyao/Mi nyag in the Khams Mi nyag area, made it a natural refuge for those coming from Xixia. And as already indicated, we must always keep in mind that we are discussing two populations of 'Miyao/Mi nyag,' Those who remained and those who returned. The refugees from the Tangut state integrated themselves into the lands of those Miyao/Mi nyag who had not been part of the state and had not played an important or even dominating role there. And in spite of their affinities with the Miyao/Mi nyag who had been dwelling in the area of Khams Mi nyag for centuries, the new refugees were a diaspora. As such the refugees came to be important in the region in the way that many diasporas play significant roles in generating wealth and economic growth. Their historical memory, traditions and language integrated with those of the Miyao/Mi nyag already there, leaving a clear impression of imperial Tangut links. In this period of dynamic growth and economic and political change, the very arrival of the refugees carried with it much of the necessary

energy for such developments. The integration of the two populations therefore makes somewhat moot the question of whether the further spread of a Mi nyag lineage to Sikkim represented a lineage from the Xixia state or Khams Mi nyag: the link to the state of Xixia became the common historical memory of the Mi nyag population

The planting of Xixia memories and links among the resident Miyao population of the Khams Mi nyag area is one of the significant points implied in Chinese scholarship on the question. Many of the main lines of that scholarship were laid out by Deng Shaoqin 鄧少琴, in an article published in 1945, wherein he adduced evidence for the flight of refugees from the Tangut state to the west and more importantly took up the question of a figure whom he learned of from the local population during his investigations in Khams Mi nyag in 1944. According to him, the figure in question was called 'Xiwu jia'erbu' 西吴甲尔布. He had ruled over a portion of North China called Muya, and when he came to the region, i.e., Khams, he is said to have brought with him the name Muya. Deng Shaoqin easily identified *jia'erbu* as the Tibetan word for 'king' (i.e., *rgyal po*) and connected the Muya appellation with the Tibetan name of the Xia state.¹⁶ He correctly proposed that the term 'Xiwu' 西吴 was a transcription of the Tibetan *Se hu* but then erroneously asserted that *Se hu* itself was but a rendering into Tibetan of 'Xixia.' This proposition contradicts the consistent Tibetan rendering of 'Xia' 夏 as 'Ga', Sga, etc. Unfortunately the error has been repeated; Li Fanwen has written, on the basis of Deng Shaoqin's assertions, that the name of the district of Rta'u, to the west of Khams Mi nyag, is similarly a transcription of 'Da Xia' 大夏, i.e., 'Great Xia.'¹⁷

The Xiwu jia'erbu that Deng Shaoqin describes as a well-known figure in Khams Mi nyag is, of course, *Se hu rgyal po*, an important early figure in the Tangut royal lineage according to several Tibetan sources,¹⁸ and one who appears as well in the '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*'. Indeed, his presence in the '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*' allows us to consider that work as yet another Tibetan source that makes reference to the Tanguts of Xixia. It also serves as one of the basic pieces of evidence demonstrating that Tibetan traditions concerning the Tanguts—whatever else one may say about Khams Mi nyag specifically—became part of the origins attributed to the Sikkimese rulers. Other elements from Tibetan accounts of the Tanguts appear in the work too. (As already noted, the translation of the '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*' done by Kazi Dawasamdub simply omits or misunderstands the references to 'Ga' and Byang ngos, two important geographical places associated with the Tangut state in Tibetan writings.) But *Se hu rgyal po* has been a figure of continuing interest to Chinese researchers and the tradition of *Se hu rgyal po* remained strong in the area of Khams Mi nyag. Li Fanwen, for instance, recounts a legend about *Se hu rgyal po*, indicating the persistence of oral traditions about him.¹⁹ It has been proposed in an article by Lu Mei 卢梅 and Nie Hongyin 聂鸿音 that *Se hu rgyal po* ought to be identified with the pre-imperial Tangut ruler, Li Jiqian 李繼遷 (963-1004). This is doubtful, as is their suggestion that the Tibetan 'Ga'i rtsu,' also found in Tibetan accounts, should be taken as a transcription of 'Xiazu' 夏祖, a term which they go on to associate with the Tangut emperor Li Yuanhao 李元昊 (r. 1032-1048).²⁰

A good portion of Chinese research on the subject of Tangut migrations into Khams deals with Tangut links to the Miyao and the Dangxiang Qiang, and indicates a general agreement that the Tanguts who fled into Khams generally travelled first to areas in which there were Miyao/Mi nyag peoples who had not been part of the Tangut state. An article by Dai Gang 代刚, suggests that the people who are today designated Muya are ultimately the product of

Tibetanization of the original Miyao/Mi nyag people who inhabited Eastern Khams during the Tibetan imperial era, and who afterwards underwent a period of intimate interaction with the refugees from the Tangut State.²¹ But his views are not shared in their entirety; an article written by one Shangguan Jianbi 上官劍壁 asserts that too much is made of a division between the Miyao and the Muya, rooted in whether the Tibetan empire ruled over them or not. In essence, he states, they were largely the same people. Some migrated north and formed the state of Xixia, others didn't. When the state collapsed, descendants of the migrants returned to the area of Eastern Khams, though indeed, elements of them are found elsewhere in various places in both Khams and Amdo.²² Shangguan Jianbi also notes that they came to constitute important clans—a statement in support of which he cites the Sikkim royal lineage.²³

Another researcher, Huang Zhenhua 黄振华, also notes the diverse places in which Tanguts established themselves following the destruction of the Tangut State and the places in which claims of clan ties to Mi nyag appear, including the Sherpa regions of Nepal as well as Sikkim. However, as concerns Sikkim, he remarks that the historical sources are too few to allow for any judgment about the validity of such claims—though he does comment that given the prevalence of such claims elsewhere, they can't be ignored.²⁴

All of this makes for an interesting phenomenon. The very prevalence of claims to descent from the Tangut rulers is found often enough in Tibet and the Himalayas as to make it impossible to ignore the inevitable conclusion: the Tanguts and the Tangut state must have been a remarkable presence in the Tibetan world and subsequently in Tibetan memory. It must be stressed once more that this is said without regard for the historical validity of the various Tibetan clan traditions asserting some sort of Tangut lineage. We are well aware of the legitimating function of claims of descent from the Tibetan imperial family with regard to the various ruling lines that developed across the Plateau in the centuries following the end of the Tibetan Empire. The claims of descent from the Tanguts were obviously of a similar, albeit lesser, order, particularly in Eastern Tibet. Although the Tangut state looms as a bit of arcane lore for most Tibetanists, its impact on the Tibetan and Himalayan world—and particularly on the way that world imagined itself—was clearly greater than many have long assumed.

NOTES

- ¹ Rock (1953), p. 927, quoting Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Dolma (n.d.), pp. 18-19.
- ² Chos rgyal Mthu tsohs rnam rgyal and Rgyal mo Ye shes sgröl ma (2003), p. 21: */yang la las Mi nyag Se hu rgyal po'i rigs su 'dod pa yod kyang/ de ni Mi nyag Byang ngos yang sa 'Ga'i bar na Mon shri zhes pa'i ri zhig la Se hu ba'i zer ba'i klu bdud gdug pa can zhig yod pa de rta pa bdun du sprul nas Byang ngos phyin pas bud med sha za'i rigs can zhig dang rta pa dpon de 'brel bas bu gcig skyes pa'i ming las gras te Se hu rgyal po zer/ de'dus Rgya'i rgyal khams yang dbang du 'dus/ de nas gdung rabs drug na Rgyal rgod bya ba byung/ Se hu rgyal po nas Rgyal rgod yan lo nyis brgya drug cu'i bar Se hu rgyal po'i lung bstan pa byung tshul Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long nang gsal zhing/* The origins of Se hu rgyal po and the Tangut lineage are described at greater length in the *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, as noted here. See Per K. Sørensen (1994), pp. 84-86. General accounts of the basic Tibetan literature on the Tanguts was provided decades ago by R.A. Stein (1951), pp. 223-265 and (1966), pp. 281-289. Elements of the story also figure in other Tibet sources on the Tanguts, e.g., Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje (1981), pp. 26-27; Dpal 'byor bzang po (1985), pp. 117-120; and Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1986), pp. 1408-1409. We may note too the existence of an as yet inaccessible *Mi nyag chos 'byung*, cited in the bibliography of the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*. See Brag dgon pa Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, (1982), p. 5.

- ³ See Sperling (1994), pp. 801-824; and (1987), pp. 31-50.
- ⁴ Sperling, (2004), p. 23.
- ⁵ Mullard (2005), pp. 55-85.
- ⁶ Chos rgyal Mthu tsobs nam rgyal and Rgyal mo Ye shes sgröl ma (2003), p. 23: *Rgya gar chos rgyal Inḍra bhu ti'i gdung re zhig gnas 'thor ba'i tshul gyi Mi nyag tu phebs te Mi nyag gi rgyal po mdzad ces bshad 'dug...*
- ⁷ Chos rgyal Mthu tsobs nam rgyal and Rgyal mo Ye shes sgröl ma (2003), pp. 23-24.
- ⁸ *Mi nyag A 'o ldong gi byung khungs lo rgyus sam 'Bras ljongs rgyal po'i gdung rabs byung khungs*, p. 56. This text is part of the collection that is slated to be published with the *La sogs du 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs*.
- ⁹ Ibid., pp. 36-37: *Mi nyag rgyal po's mnga' thang shin tu che skabs su Sa skya paṅ chen yang rgyal po'i bla mchod du bzhugs skabs/ bla mas Gu ru drag dmar Ye she rab 'bar zer ba yi dam du bsgrub ste mngon sum du byon nas phyag dam padma ra ga'i ris sdig pa ra dgu yod pa can zhig brag nas gter bzhis te rgyal po la phul/ sku rgyud de nas bzung rgyal po mnga' thang che ru song ba'i skabs Khams dang Rgya nag zhong ser tshang ma mnga' 'og tu 'dus te dbang bsgyur/ yang rgyal thog kha shas kyi rjes su Gu ru drag dmar ye shes rab 'bar gyi lung bstan du/ Mi nyag rgyal po'i sku rgyud gcig gi gdul bya rjes su Bod kha ba can gyi lho phyogs Gu ru'i sbas yul nyi shu rtsa bzhi'i gras nas sbas yul 'Bras mo ljongs zhes bya bar yod ces lung bstan pa'i/ rgyal thog nyi shu rtsa lnga bskyangs mthar Khams Mi nyag A ba'i gdung gi sku rgyud cig sras lnga dang 'od lnga yi pha spun nye rtsa kha shas dang bcas Bod phyogs su chibs phebs bsgyur ba'i Lha ldan du 'byor nas Jo Shāk nam gnyis dang mjal/.*
- ¹⁰ Chos rgyal Mthu tsobs nam rgyal and Rgyal mo Ye shes sgröl ma (2003), p. 26: "At that time, as the sway of the Mi nyag king was very great, the lord Sa paṅ served as his chaplain. When Sa skya paṅḍita was doing the practice of Gur drag Ye shes rab 'bar, [the deity himself] appeared and, as a treasure, took out from a rock a seal having a *padma rā ga* lotus design with a nine-stingered scorpion which he presented to the king. Thus, from that point on the king's sway increased and it is said that at one time most of Khams and China were under his rule. Afterwards, with regard to the king, Gur drag Ye shes rab 'bar said, by way of prediction, 'since there is an [area] ripe for conversion by the lineage of the Mi nyag kings in the southern part of Tibet, the Land of Snows, the hidden land called 'Bras mo ljongs, go there!' Thus, the last of the 25 kings of Mi nyag, with his sons and his subjects, the Eight Seas, went to Tibet and in Lhasa paid their respects to the two Jo bo Śākyamuni." (*de skabs Mi nyag rgyal po mnga' thang shin tu che bas Rje Sa paṅ yang bla mchod du bzhugs skabs/ Sa skya paṅḍitas Gur drag Ye shes rab 'bar sgrub pas mngon sum du byon nas phyag tham padma rā ga'i kha ris sdig pa rwa dgu yod pa zhig brag nas gter bton te rgyal po la phul bas/ de nas bzung rgyal po'i mnga' thang gong 'phel du song nas Khams dang Rgya nag phal cher lan gcig mnga' 'og tu bsdus skad dang/ yang de rjes kyi rgyal thog tu Gur drag Ye shes rab 'bar gyis Mi nyag rgyal po'i sku brgyud gi gdul bya Bod kha ba can gyi lho phyogs sbas yul 'Bras mo ljongs zhes par yod pas der song zhig ces pa'i lung bstan byung nas rgyal thog nyer lnga'i tha ma Mi nyag rgyal po yab sras dang 'bangs mtsho brgyad bcas Bo phyogs phebs te Lha ldan du Jo bo Shākya nam gnyis dang mjal/*). On the Eight Seas, which are in the cardinal and intermediate directions, see Ha'o Wun zhon and Ta'u tshun chi (1987), p. 491 ('*Mtsho chen brgyad*').
- ¹¹ Chos rgyal Mthu tsobs nam rgyal and Rgyal mo Ye shes sgröl ma (2003), p. 25.
- ¹² Mullard (2005), pp. 72-73.
- ¹³ For an idea of how interest in the question developed in China—and its roots in non-Chinese investigations of the question, see Li Fanwen (1984), pp. 191-193.
- ¹⁴ Liu Xu (1975), 198:5292: "Afterwards the Tibetans became strong and powerful and the Toba slowly began to be pressed by them. Thus, they asked to move into China. Their tribes began to be moved to Qingzhou and Jingbian and other prefectures were established for their settlement. Their ancient territory fell to Tibet. Those residing there became their bound servants. The Tibetans called them 'Miyao.'" 其後吐蕃強盛，拓拔氏漸為所逼，遂請內徙，始移其部落於慶州，置靜邊等州以處之。其故地陷于吐蕃，其處者為其役屬，吐蕃謂之「弭藥」。
- ¹⁵ See van Driem (2001), p. 450.
- ¹⁶ Deng Shaoqin (1984), p. 681.
- ¹⁷ Li Fanwen (1984), p. 222. However, Huang Zhenhua (1998), p. 65, expresses doubt about the equation of Xiwu and Xixia, via a Tibetan transcription of 'Xia.'
- ¹⁸ Most familiarly in Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje (1981), p. 28; and Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1986), pp. 1409-1410.
- ¹⁹ Li Fanwen (1983), pp. 205-206.

- ²⁰ Lu Mei and Nie Hongyin (1996), pp. 67-68. The authors work exclusively from Chinese-language translations of their Tibetan sources and not surprisingly their reconstruction of Xiazu from 'Ga'i rtsu has the air of an ersatz grasping at Chinese syllables that sound as if they might fit what we have in Tibetan. Thus they trace Ga'i rtsu back to Xiazu by the dubious step of interposing a Tibetan suffix (*i*) between the two Chinese words that form a single title, one that we have only in Tibetan transcription. I am actually unaware of any attestation of the use of Xiazu as a Tangut title: cf. Dunnell (1996), pp. xvii-xix for a list of Tangut imperial names and titles. It is more likely that 'Ga'i rtsu' is simply a representation of the reign title 'Gaozu' 高祖, which was not unknown to Tibetans in their interactions with dynastic China. The generic or confused use of such titles in Tibetan sources is not unknown. As for the identification of Se hu with Li Jiqian, while it is true that Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje (1981), p. 28, seems to place Se hu in the time of Song Taizu (r. 960-976), the rest of the evidence Lu and Nie Hongyin adduce to support this proposition is tenuous at best. Tibetan accounts of Se hu are of such a legendary nature that it is simply not possible to reconcile them with the known biographies of specific Tangut figures.
- ²¹ Dai Gang (1993), p. 23
- ²² Shangguan Jianbi (1994), pp. 27 and 28.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 24.
- ²⁴ Huang Zhenhua (1998), p. 66 and 67.

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CONSTRUCTING THE MAṄḌALA: THE STATE FORMATION OF SIKKIM AND THE RISE OF A NATIONAL HISTORICAL NARRATIVE¹

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*Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial
factor in the creation of a nation – Ernst Renan 11 March 1882*

INTRODUCTION

Early Sikkimese history, and by this I mean the period up to British involvement in the Himalaya, has not been studied in any depth. Prior to 2003, most western historical works on early Sikkimese history were based on the later secondary historical accounts of *The History of Sikkim* (Translation of 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs, hereafter *BGR*), *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* or local oral accounts.³ For this reason, amongst others, these later histories have become imbued with an authenticity and authority, which runs contrary to information and evidence found in Sikkimese sources (written in Tibetan) from the period of early Sikkimese history. My own research has been directed towards understanding the formation of the Sikkimese state in the seventeenth century and comparing evidence from sources of that period with the later historical accounts, which I have termed as 'later historical narratives' or 'National narratives' in the case of *BGR*. As a result of that approach, I have focussed on understanding the advent of these Sikkimese national narratives. By this I mean the development of a history which locates the birth of the Sikkimese nation in the distant past. As Ernest Gellner has eloquently stated there is nothing natural or primordial about a Nation, being more the product of the transition to modernity than historical continuity.⁴ With that in mind these national narratives fail to illustrate the development of the State in Sikkim in the seventeenth century. Instead these later historical narratives (written from the period 1860 onwards) focus on the theme of the prophecy of *rnal 'byor mched bzhi* (the four yogis who are brothers); in particular, each prophesied yogi, is identified with one of the four gates to the hidden land located in the northern, southern, eastern and western directions, and are said to have met in the centre of the hidden land to organise the administration of the sacred geography by the enthronement of a simple farmer as king who then would rule in accordance with the religio-political order. And from this date, which is almost always the year 1642, the Sikkimese kingdom and nation was formed.

STATE FORMATION

The interpretations of early Sikkimese state formation, mentioned above, resulted from a process of construction especially with regards to the religio-political roles of Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med and Mnga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, which has been the subject of previous articles and a number of books and so I will refrain from discussing that here. It is enough to say that a number of seventeenth century sources show that Phun tshogs rig 'dzin was more influential in Sikkim than Lha btsun Chen po and that this is directly the opposite

of the later national narratives. For my rationale and for evidence please see both chapter three and four of my thesis or 2005b for a sketch of the argument.⁵ The same is also true for the date of 1642 and again I will not be discussing the anomaly of this date here as I have discussed this issue of chronology at length elsewhere (Mullard 2005a, 2005b and 2009).

Thus the focus of this article is to discuss Sikkimese State formation in terms of the State which Weber described as an institution which claims the exclusive right to the legitimate use of force in a given territory.⁶ And so for this legitimate use of force to be exercised a society must possess a formal structure of government apparatus through which the legitimate use of force can be exercised. This definition of the state implies that the power of an individual ruler must be seen as legitimate and having authority and so should be accepted by, if not the majority of the population, than at least by the significant elites within a society.⁷ Assuming this to be the case, it is important to be aware that states cannot simply appear instantaneously, but must be the result of the actions, or the consequences of those actions, by a ruler over time.

So when we talk about State formation we are in fact discussing the process of the creation of tools or systems to manage a population within a territory; to govern and lead. But we should remember the words of Charles Tilly that we should avoid the teleological construction of State formation narratives and recognise that state formation is “a process of state transformation driven largely by extraction, control and coalition formation as parts or by-products of rulers’ efforts not to build states but to make war and survive.”⁸ And so as historians we have to remain acutely aware that when we narrate a history of state formation it is important to distinguish between the actions of a ruler (who is more concerned with extending his power and wealth) and the results of those actions, whether they lead to the formation of states or not.

Taking these ideas into consideration it seems illogical then to assume that, prior to the arrival of Tibetan Lamas, Sikkim was a stateless society and that these Lamas are wholly responsible for introducing state structures by plucking a lowly farmer from Gangtok to rule over a diverse population in western Sikkim. And that the rule of this farmer was unanimously accepted by the subject population he was to rule over.

During the seventeenth century at least until around 1660 the region of what is now southern Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong consisted of a patchwork of minor or, more correctly, proto-states ranging in size and influence.⁹ One of the most famous of these proto-states was Dam bzang rdzong in modern Kalimpong district (figure 1).¹⁰ This was a Lepcha kingdom and was destroyed following the Bhutanese occupation of Kalimpong during the 1650s.¹¹ From archaeological evidence it seems clear that the Bhutanese extended their area of occupation at least as far as the fortifications of central Pendam near modern Rangpo (figure 2). Some later sources locate the Bhutanese even as far north as Sa ljons which is near modern Rumtek,¹² and Ardussi (2000) suggests that Bhutanese officials were still collecting taxes from the Gangtok region as late as 1741. Western Sikkimese sources indicate that there were at least four such states: bKra shis ’dzom, La sogs and bKra shis lding, Yug mthing’s¹³ state around Yog bsam and a state under one Rin chen Lhun grub, though the location of that state is unknown. We know from sources such as *La sogs du ’brel ba’i rgyal rab* (hereafter *LSG*) that there was a decisive shift in the balance of power in the region when Lha dbang bkra shsis and bstan ’dzin (from bKra shis ’dzom) joined forces with Phun tshogs mam rgyal at some point between 1642 and 1646. It is unsure whether this alliance resulted from the defeat of these two figures or some form of alliance but what is known is that they

were instrumental in the defeat of the Lepcha state in Yog bsam and its subjugation by Phun tshogs rNam rgyal.

We are also told that in the late 1650s a Lepcha and Limbu rebellion occurred against the rule of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. References to this rebellion are noted in a number of sources including *LSG*, *PSLG*,¹⁴ and an important document known locally as the Lho mon gtsong agreement (hereafter *LMT*); which refers to the three main ethnic communities of the Lho pa (Tibeto-Sikkimese) the Mon pa (Lepcha) and the gTsong pa (Limbu).

In sources such as *BGR* and Moktan's (1997) *Sikkim and Darjeeling: A Compendium of Documents* (which includes a translation of *LMT* by Ringu Tulku), it is claimed that this document was written in 1641 or the Iron Snake year. However, the designation of this date appears to be the result of an attempt to make the signing of this document precede the date of the formation of the Sikkimese state according to the national narratives, which as mentioned above is given as 1642. This has resulted in the production of a chronology which legitimates the establishment of the rNam rgyal dynasty, as *LMT* is a document which marks the acceptance of the rule of Phun tshogs rNam rgyal by the Lepcha, Limbu and Tibeto-Sikkimese, and conforms with an interpretation of history based on the peaceful establishment of the Sikkimese state in accordance with the prophetic tradition of Guru Rinpoche. Unfortunately, for the writers of the Sikkimese historical narratives, this chronology has been fabricated as the document clearly refers to the date of the Water Hare year which equates to 1663.¹⁵ With this being the case a questions is raised regarding the purpose of *LMT*.

This document is basically an oath of allegiance signed by 24 people to the rule of the Sikkimese Chos rgyal Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. These 24 people were brought to the Sikkimese palace (probably Rab ldan rtse which was built in 1649) where a host of deities were called to bear witness to this oath which is as follows:

ད་ཆ་མི་ཇེ་ཆེན་པོའི་བཀའ་དོན་བཞིན་ཕན་སྐྱོན་སྤེལ་གྱི་ལྷོ་མོན་གཙོང་འདོད་པ་གཅིག་འགྲིལ་གྱི་འཕམ་ནས་ལྷོ་མོན་གཙོང་
 གྲུང་གཞུང་མེད་པར་ངག་བསྐྱོད་དང་ལན་ཕྱེད་རྒྱུའི་སྤྱི་ཐུ་ལན་པའི་སྤིང་པོ་ལགས་¹⁶ ལྷོན་མོན་དམག་སྐབས་སྤྱོད་གས་
 གྱི་རིགས་འགོངས་དུ་ཕྱུད་པ་ཡིན་ཅིང་སེམས་ངེས་བྱེད་ ད་ཆ་རྒྱལ་ལོ་ནས་གཞུང་སྤྱི

Henceforth in according to the command of his majesty, the humble ministers of Lho mon and gtsong have met here with the desire for unification and solidarity and hereby make the statement that there shall not be separate governments of Lho, Mon or Gtsong. During the previous Mon pa war [people] from all the different ethnic groups intentionally rebelled and this has been remembered. Henceforth from [this] year of the Water Hare take hold [of this order].¹⁷

This passage clearly states a number of key points about early Sikkim. Firstly the need to integrate the three communities into a single legitimate government as in the past there was a war lead by the *Mon*¹⁸ against Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, which some of the signatories of this oath supported. That this war/rebellion was defeated and those who fought against Phun tshogs rnam rgyal must now accept a single government and abide by the commands of the Chos rgyal. To add to the severity of this oath, in a later passage, *LMT* lists the penalties for transgressing this oath ranging from slight physical punishment, to torture or death.

This document also tells us about the extent to which the Sikkimese state had formed. Firstly we have 24 signatories to this treaty, many of which represent a region (for example Thar thim the Lepcha leader of Barphung, Tsong Subba [Limbu leader of Namphang]

Tenchos [Lho pa leader of Lingdam] Tapa Agod Limbu leader of Rathang, Thapa Shupang Limbu leader of Rimbi and Dechen Namgyal Lho pa leader of Tritong). It is clear then that these people were leaders of various regions in seventeenth century Sikkim. What we don't know, however, is whether these regions fell under the control of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal and then rebelled or whether they were autonomous proto-states which allied themselves with each other to fight off the mutual threat from Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. Unfortunately with a lack of evidence in this regard we can only speculate.

What we know from other sources is that as the regions under the control of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal expanded, various systems were introduced to manage the population. There was a division of the population into two groups of *g.yog* (servants) and *blon* (ministers), which is almost identical to Goldstein's comment on Tibetan stratification which is divided into *sger pa* and *mi ser* (1971: 522). The servant group was further divided into various groups under higher ranking officials such as *mgo chings* and *las dpon* (headman and work leader). The ministerial group was also divided on the basis of trustworthiness; those least trusted were responsible for trade and tax collection whilst those trusted were given advisory roles.¹⁹

I have also noted earlier that following the Lepcha and Limbu rebellion which occurred at some point before 1657 (and which we find documented six years later in *LMT*) a law of stratification was introduced. This law used the language of generalised Tibetan social customs regarding inheritance and property ownership i.e. the practice of parallel descent whereby the son of a *g.yog* was linked to the *blon* of their father and the daughters of a *g.yog* were linked to the lord of their mother (Goldstein 1971: 522). This gave the effect of introducing a system similar to feudal bondage in which vassals owed allegiance and military obligations to an overlord (in this case the Sikkimese Chos rgyal) in return for land grants. This land was worked by people subservient to and bonded to the vassal (*g.yog*), who also paid other taxes in products and services in exchange for their right to use land. In a previous article (2005a), I hinted at the possibility that this system may have been organised on ethnic lines, a hierarchical structure with the Tibeto-Sikkimese at the top. This seems not to have been the case as other sources, which have recently come to light, suggest an acute awareness of the ethnic plurality of early Sikkim. For example in *Mon pa'i mtho byang* [sic] (*MTB*), a document appended to *LSG* and compiled between 1645 and 1676 (spanning the reign of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal and into the first six years of the reign of bsTan srung rnam rgyal), is significant information on the population of Sikkim, subdivided by clan, region, social position (i.e. *tshong skyel*, *sho khral*, *Yog bsam mon pa*, etc.) and jurisdiction. This text illustrates the subordinating structures of stratification and provides the names of important regional officials (Tibeto-Sikkimese, Lepcha, and Limbu) responsible for the collection of taxes of certain families, clans, or regions. From this source it is possible to identify the introduction of Tibetan ideas of land economy (initially in regions under Phun tshogs rnam rgyal around 1645 and later expanded to the new territories), complete with a systematic administrative structure to implement these policies, uphold justice and collect taxes. This system was most likely introduced as a means of avoiding rebellions from local leaders by giving hereditary rights over land in exchange for military duties and a constant flow of revenue through taxes on produce and services.

THE MAṄḌALA RECEEDS

This state system was not long lived and suffered a major set-back only 33 years after the signing of the Lho Mon gTsong agreement. This was the war of succession. Following the

death of the Second Chos rgyal in 1696 the royal court divided into a Tibetan and a Bhutanese faction, each supporting a rival candidate for the Sikkimese throne. Phyag rdor nam rgyal was the son of the Second Chos rgyal's Tibetan wife and Phan lde dbang mo was the daughter of the Bhutanese wife. Starting as a dispute internal to Sikkim it soon spread when Bhutanese forces invaded Sikkim causing the flight of the crowned prince to Tibet. Whilst in Tibet Phyag rdor nam rgyal gained the support of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and became heavily influenced by gTer bdag gling pa whom he met at the enthronement of the Sixth Dalai Lama.²⁰ To cut a long story short, Phyag rdor nam rgyal became influenced by gTer bdag gling pa and one of his disciples and the third incarnation of Lha btsun chen po: 'Jigs med dpa' bo.

Meanwhile, back in Sikkim, forces loyal to Phyag rdor nam rgyal continued to fight the Bhutanese. They were helped considerably by the arrival of Tibetan forces which gave the upper hand to the Sikkimese eventually leading to the expulsion of Bhutanese forces around 1707. Phyag rdor nam rgyal returned to Sikkim around 1708 followed shortly afterwards by 'Jigs med dpa' bo. Together they started re-organising the Sikkimese state by issuing new land grants to his allies, ennobling new families who had been particularly loyal and giving large estates and endowments to monasteries such as Pemayangtse. In addition they set about reducing the importance of monasteries connected to Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's lineage, on account of Mnga' bdag rin chen mgon's (The grandson of Phun tshogs rig 'dzin) relationship with Phan bde dbang mo, in favour of Lha btsun chen po's (now represented by 'Jigs med dpa' bo), and impoverishing the family of former ministers who supported the Bhutanese and his half-sister.

Unfortunately for Phyag rdor nam rgyal he did not live to see the full implementation of his reforms as he was murdered by supporters of his sister in 1717. In response his sister was executed having her throat stuffed with a silk *kha btags*. The untimely death of Phyag rdor nam rgyal could have precipitated the demise of the Sikkimese state had it not been for the intervention of 'Jigs med dpa' bo and the 'Bar phung clan which jointly acted as Regents during the minority of the Fourth Chos rgyal.

And although Sikkim was seriously weakened by this period of internal conflict and inter-regnum the reforms introduced by 'Jigs med dpa' bo and Phyag rdor nam rgyal managed to limp-on until the arrival of the British. However, State structures were further weakened by wider political problems such as the lack of desire to rule by the Fourth Chos rgyal, the illegitimate and suspect origins of the Fifth Chos rgyal and the Nepal-Tibet war of the 1790s, which resulted in significant loss of Sikkimese territory. All of these developments and especially the arrival of the British had a significant impact on the process of State formation in Sikkim.

Indeed, the period of Sikkimese history from 1700 until the arrival of the British in Himalayan affairs in 1815, was characterised by the fragility and failure of State structures. This was largely because of the way in which Sikkim was organised into semi-independent fiefdoms, where large land holders were responsible for the implementation of law, the organisation of land holdings and localised hierarchies, and could command his own tenants to work his lands, provide services or even fight for him at will. As such ordinary people owed their allegiance to local lords, and not the monarch, much as their European counterparts did during medieval times. So whilst in theory the Chos rgyal had the right to issue or remove land grants from individuals in reality he was also dependent on the local lords for tax collection and for raising armies during times of need. This balance of power caused by mutual dependence on behalf of the Chos rgyal and his vassals meant that the

Chos rgyal could never create for himself independent power bases and through them centralise his power and reduce the autonomy of the Sikkimese landlords.²¹ Indeed he would only remain Chos rgyal as long as landlords agreed that he would be and as long as they felt they would benefit from this state structure.

This idea was challenged with the advent of the British in Sikkimese affairs after the annexation of Darjeeling, which had the effect of radically changing the dynamics of power in the hills, as the British slowly replaced the Chos rgyal as power brokers in Sikkim. One example of this is how the British successfully promoted the settlement of Nepalese people in Sikkim. Indeed there survive a number of royal proclamations from successive Chos rgyal[s] from the period 1860-1900 which prohibited the Nepalese settlement in Sikkim and the fact that these proclamations were never enforced illustrates the power-shift that had taken place in Sikkim during that period i.e. away from the Chos rgyal and towards the British. And although many leading families professed loyalty to the Sikkimese royalty in practice they recognised that the British were the de facto rulers of Sikkim.

It comes then as no surprise to find that it was during this period that a new form of Sikkimese historical literature developed, which began to focus on narratives of royal legitimacy. These histories, the earliest of which was written during the 1860s by the *rdo rje slob dpon* of Rig 'dzin mchog grub gling monastery (sKal bzang chos dbyings), began to look at the origins of the Sikkimese royalty. These writers began to develop religiously inspired national narratives which combined religious motives such as the *sbas yul*, with the maṅḍalisation of sacred and secular geography, through designating three historical Tibetan Lamas active in Sikkim and the first chos rgyal, with the four doors of the *sbas yul*. The narrative of the meeting of these three lamas to enthrone the first Sikkimese King acted to proclaim the rNam rgyal dynasty as religiously ordained leaders over the sacred realm of the *sbas yul*. This of course had the effect of elevating the dynasty above the realm of mere mortals, given the royalty the divine characteristics of the cakravātin (Snellgrove 1959). Of course there was nothing new in this as such themes had been used during the rule of Phun tshogs mam rgyal as we can find in a host of sources from that period. What is important, however, is the use of these themes, not just to act as spiritual legitimacy to a new kingdom, but to define Sikkim as a pre-ordained Nation. Whereas in the past these themes were used to enhance the power and legitimacy of an individual, now they were used to delimit and define the power and legitimacy of a Nation.

With this construction of national narratives came the 'Forgetting' or introduction of 'Historical error' of Renan's quote at the start of this paper. Part of this process was the appropriation by nineteenth century Sikkimese nationalists of Lha btsun chen po, who had become akin to the patron saint of Sikkim since his lineage was heavily promoted by Phyag rdor mam rgyal and Lha btsun chen po's third incarnation 'Jigs med dpa' bo at the expense of other religious traditions. In reality during the seventeenth century Lha btsun chen po's position in Sikkimese politics was a relatively minor one. The prime religious position was held by Phun tshogs rig 'dzin and his son as royal preceptors. We can also say that early Sikkim was characterised by a period of expansion, involving conquest, rebellions and alliances and not by the peaceful assumption of power. There were attempts to integrate the various different ethnic communities, through the use of establishing hereditary rights over land and by allowing Lepcha and Limbu groups to maintain their lands in return for their allegiance to Phun tshogs mam rgyal.

CONCLUSION

The development of state structures was a process that was in a constant state of flux, caused by various factors external to the power of successive Chos rgyal's. In the first instance Phun tshogs nam rgyal introduced State structures, not to build a state, but in order to appease and weaken the various communities within his territory. He gave away total control in exchange for allegiance during conflict and a steady inflow of tax revenue. Such a system was common in the Asian world, with the successive Indian states or the Mughal Empire, whereby previous proto-states could maintain their autonomy in exchange for recognition of the Emperor's authority, co-option into the Mughal bureaucracy as *mansabdars* (rank-holders) and a supply of tax revenues and soldiers.²² During the reigns of the first and second Chos rgyal the personal power of the ruler probably out-weighed the regional aspirations and power of the vassals, similar to the way in which Akbar's heavy handed tactics maintained the dominance of the Mughal Empire. The potential weakness of this structure, however, was exposed by the internal conflict surrounding the enthronement of the Third Chos rgyal Phyag rdor nam rgyal. However, when he finally did succeed he had the power and influence to dramatically alter the balance of power in Sikkim. Ultimately, though, the weakness of this system carried the day as with the political limitations of his two successors and the Nepal-Sikkim war, the state structures he set in place, although survived until the arrival of the British, were subject to the competing aspirations of the Sikkimese aristocracy. However, it should be remembered that these aristocrats also needed the royal family as it was from the rNam rgyal dynasty that their own power and influence originated.

This system of state in Sikkim, thus depended upon both the Chos rgyal and his vassals for its survival. But it was not necessary for the Chos rgyal to act as a supreme ruler as it was only necessary for people to recognise him as such and that this recognition did not rely on the actual political supremacy of the king. Sikkim thus had the potential for political fragmentation and the development of independent political interests by the aristocracy, something the British exploited to its advantage. It was only with the arrival of the British and their domination of Sikkim that nationalist narratives began to be developed. And these narratives sought to create historical legitimacy for the existence of the Sikkimese nation and in particular the royal family through the appropriation of religious symbolism.

NOTES

- ¹ This article was initially written in 2008 prior to the submission of my doctoral thesis and publication of subsequent articles and books, as such this article represents my interpretation of sources and facts at that given time and may have been superseded by articles and books which have been published after 2008. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Tashi Tsering for providing me a copy of *LSG* (see list of abbreviations).
- ² At the time this article was written I was still a student at the University of Oxford.
- ³ For example, see Steinman 1998 and 2004, Rock 1953 and Rose 1990.
- ⁴ He contends that the idea of the nation resulted from the transformation of society from feudalism to capitalism. With this transformation came the need to create context free communication and new skills to cope with the fluidity of the economy. This resulted in the need for widespread education and literacy and the only structure big enough to deal with this was the state. With this came the homogeneousness of culture and language, this then promoted the Nation as the basis for political organization (Gellner, E. 1983). For a critique see Smith 1996.

- 5 I have noted this in a number of articles such as 2005a and b, but this argument is clearly detailed in chapters two and three of my thesis. My argument which has been influenced by the work of Khenpo Lha Tshering, contends that a mchod yon relationship developed between the first Sikkimese Chos rgyal Phun tshogs mam rgyal and Mnga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin prior to the arrival of Lha btsun chen po in Sikkim (he arrived in 1646). There occurred at least three separate 'enthronement' rituals in Sikkim during the 1640s but it is not clear whether these events can be identified as marking the start of Phun tshogs mam rgyal's rule.
- 6 The quote reads "The state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory", Weber 2004: 33
- 7 It is of course true that states exist, where the 'legitimacy' of the force employed is questioned, or at least not universally accepted, such as violent dictatorships. In those states it is the constant use of force and intimidation that 'legitimizes' the existence of the state and not the other way around as in the Weberian model.
- 8 Tilly, 2006: 419. 'Why and How History matters', in *The Oxford Handbook of contextual political analysis*, Goodin, R. E. and Tilly, C. (eds), Oxford, OUP, 2006.
- 9 Throughout this paper and in my doctoral thesis I have used the term 'proto-state' to describe the political formations that existed within Sikkim, Kalimpong, Limbuwana, etc. I have used this term to mean a political formation with some shared characteristics of a state, such as social and economic organisation, but that were also characterised by fluidly defined territory subject to change resulting from conflict, poor leadership or internal rebellions. Thus they were states in formation or potential states, whose legitimacy and so existence was not necessarily secure but subject to the assertion of power and force. Within these proto-states there would have been groups that accepted the use of force as legitimate (perhaps resulting from opportunism rather than heart-felt loyalty) as well as groups who considered the proto-state as illegitimate and oppressive.
- 10 Damzang rdzong was the name given to the Bhutanese complex that was built on the spot of the Lepcha palace. This rdzong was destroyed by British canon fire during the Duars War of 1864-65.
- 11 Full details can be found in Shakabpa 1984, Ardussi 1977: 327 or *lho'i chos 'byung*. See also chapter 5 of Mullard 2009.
- 12 This is actually recounted in 'Jigs med dpa' bo[us] gsung 'bum page 51.
- 13 Yug mthing was probably a Lepcha leader as Yug mthing is clearly a personal name. In *LSG* it notes that Lha dbang bkra shis built a throne in the territory of Yug mthing. The Tibetan passage is a slightly confusing and could be read as 'Yug mthing [and] Lha dbang bkra shis built a throne'. I have concluded that Yug mthing must have been a regional leader in Yog bsam, where the throne was built, for further details of this argument see Mullard 2009, chapter two.
- 14 The full title of this manuscript is *Steng phyogs lha nas babs te nang mtshan rgya kar shar phyogs brgyud nas 'ong te khams mi nyag a'o ldong drug spun gsum gyi byung khungs lo rgyus bzhugs so*
- 15 A glance at a number of Tibetan dictionaries, which include conversion charts for Tibetan dates, shows that the date of 1663 for the composition of *LMT* is, now, indisputable.
- 16 This part of the line is slightly confusing. Though it conveys the meaning that the various ministers and leaders of the three communities have agreed to abide by a single form of government and not pursue separate interests.
- 17 *LMT* lines 11-13.
- 18 This probably refers to both the Lepcha and Limbu.
- 19 Mullard 2005a: 75.
- 20 This is mentioned in *JPKB* and sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama.
- 21 This lasted well into the independence period post 1947. There are a number of petitions to the Chos rgyal by various political groups asking for the destruction of the landlord system.
- 22 For Further details see Keay 2001: 324-5. Here Keay notes that *mansabdars* were given land-holdings and by the end of Akbar's reign 2000 *mansabdars* were responsible for the supply of between 150,000-200,000 cavalymen. During the decline of the Mughal Empire many of these *mansabdars*, which had become hereditary, broke away from the Mughal Empire, asserted greater autonomy though still recognised Mughal supremacy and used Mughal titles of rank.

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List of Abbreviations

BGR:	<i>'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs.</i>
JPKB:	<i>Rig 'dzin 'jigs med dpa' bo'i bka' 'bum/</i>
LMT	<i>Lho mon gtsong gsum agrrement</i>
LSG	<i>La sogs lo rgyus</i>
MTB	<i>Mon pa'i mtho byang</i>
PSLG:	<i>sTeng phyogs lha nas babs te nang mtshan rgya kar shar phyogs brgyud nas 'ong te khams mi nyag a'o ldong drug spun gsum gyi byung khungs lo rgyus bzhugs so</i>

SOME ISSUES IN THE EARLY BRITISH CONSTRUCTION OF SIKKIMESE HISTORY

PEMA WANGCHUK DORJEE

What I set out to achieve with this paper is to make a plea for a more nuanced social history of Sikkim which not only builds on, but also challenges the established accounts whose partiality is in many ways the result of its colonial and monarchical provenance. I will be citing British and Sikkimese sources to highlight how uncritical reliance on these accounts has compromised attitudes and understandings not only of, but also within Sikkim.

Sikkim has an inconsistent tradition of recording history, at least in judging from what is available in the public domain. The system of oral transmission that the region essentially relied on was perhaps adequate when interactions with other people were limited, but as the mountains became the home of more communities and these interactions increased, the effectiveness of oral transmission started declining. In more recent times, with changes to the social structures that supported the transfer of oral knowledge and the almost simultaneous emergence of modern education, stories that had travelled across generations began to fall silent. Even if silenced is too strong a term, the tradition was definitely compromised and accounts became filled with references culled from second-hand records, most often from records left behind by officers of the British East India Company, later British-India, or the anthropologists and subject experts who followed them. This in itself is worrisome but all the more so because these materials are often incomplete and one-sided. Most of the initial colonial accounts—notes taken down in the first interactions with the ‘natives’ before the informers wizened up to their power of directing what was being recorded—probably lie buried in the archives of Rangpur, the town from where British-India choreographed its first forays into the Eastern Himalaya. Situated in present day Bangladesh, Rangpur is beyond convenient access for scholars researching Sikkim. It is possible that the archives at Rangpur are home to raw data on Sikkim, its land and its communities. Because these records predate the arrival of the East India Company in Darjeeling, the Rangpur collection may be untempered by the requirements of colonial classification that influenced the more organized efforts mounted later from Darjeeling. An added challenge for the history of Sikkim is that records of events as they transpired may have been kept, may be scattered, or even destroyed. The fluctuating influence of different families at different times and uncertainty in times of conflict are bad for archival collections and changing loyalties can even lead to destruction of extant records.

In this paper, I suggest that we must stand open to fresh enquiries into the history of Sikkim and its people. The exercise is important because incomplete and unexplained perceptions of how things continue to influence decisions that impact the social life of communities to this day. For instance, while some communities have not received universal recognition as ‘Sikkimese’, others have begun to believe the stereotypical colonial depictions painted about them, even as figures who influenced the trajectory of modern Sikkimese history are regrettably not introduced to a generation which could derive pride and develop a stronger sense of belonging if these icons were more widely recognized. Let me stress that I am not a proponent of glorified pastiches of the past, but rather want to under-score that a great deal of history has either faded away from public memory because the events transpired

before British-India became involved and interested in Sikkim [and thus its recorders had little interest in the details or significance of earlier events], or because the only readily available records are colonial versions of incidents in which the interests of the imperial British authorities were in conflict with those of Sikkim.

The limitation of histories constructed by colonial officials might be common knowledge for scholars, but requires reiteration in Sikkim to better understand how and why stereotypes emerged and how political priorities determined these accounts. In an address delivered to the Ethnological Society of London in 1868, Dr Archibald Campbell, who took charge of Darjeeling [acquired by the British in 1835] as Superintendent in 1839, said:

It is, I think, incumbent on the British Government, wherever its rule extends, to secure the means of knowing the idiosyncrasies of all the tribes with which it is in contact. Without this, the duties of legislation can be but imperfectly performed, and the power of affording protection to life and property in peace and prosperity may be greatly curtailed. It should, therefore, I think, be no small aim of this Society to be instrumental in disseminating this kind of information to the Government, as well as in giving aid to science on more abstruse points connected with classification...¹

The process of ethnic and linguistic classification led to overly generalized and highly stereotypical representation of communities forcing descriptions to fit pigeon holes of identity, character traits and origins. The gray areas of surviving oral histories of shared spaces and beliefs were painted over to enable clearer demarcation. This classification project was a very imperfect science imposed on Sikkim, which although it was not on the British radar until the early nineteenth century, had been, for at least two centuries prior, a site of considerable activity on account of influx, occupation, invasion and squabbles with neighbours. All this activity must have involved a substantial traffic of people and armies, but if one looks at how communities and their presence in and relationship with Sikkim continue to be classified and understood, Sikkim remains portrayed as a secluded, detached domain until the East India Company took an interest and extended its influence over it.

These are bold assertions, but I hope to underpin them with some concrete examples. First, let me illustrate how some oral histories fell out of circulation and favour after they were first recorded.

In a contribution to the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1842, Dr Campbell recorded a conversation with Ilam Singh, the Dewan [Prime Minister] of Sikkim, on the origins of the different communities of Sikkim. Ilam Singh, Dr Campbell tells us, was a Limboo and is introduced as an 'intelligent, old gentleman'. The information shared is representative of the beliefs that were prevalent at that time. This is what the Dewan shared about the Magars:

They are unquestionably a people of this side of the snows, and the original country is Sikkim, from which they were first driven west by the Lepchas across the Mechi and Konki rivers, and thence further west by the Limboos beyond the Arun and Doodkoshi...²

The *History of Sikkim*, translated by Dausamdub in 1908 and commissioned by Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshe Dolma, mentions how the entourage escorting the first king of the Namgyal dynasty to his coronation in 1642 passed through Magar villages. There are more references bearing out that not all Magars were pushed out of their 'original country'. The presence of Magars in Sikkim, accepted in the 1640s and once again reiterated

in 1908, has, however, slipped out of mainstream consciousness, aided in no small measure by the erasure of this ethnic group from contemporary British records. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, published in 1894 for example, does not record Magars as a tribe indigenous to Sikkim.

The Limboos have been through similar fluctuations in terms of how they were situated vis-à-vis their belonging to Sikkim, and their recovery is likely related to their sizeable numbers. Limboos make up about ten per cent of the population of Sikkim. The Magars constitute a little under three per cent. When stories about such minority communities fade out of public consciousness, they rarely make a convincing comeback and resurface, if at all, only in debates and claims made from the fringes by ethnic or activist organisations. This is unfortunate because the ignorance continues to manifest in a way that individual communities, at least in their relationship to Sikkim, continue to be grouped into larger and more recent ethnic categories, and their claims to indigeneity remain denied. This clustering of communities might have been a successful strategy at a time when the subjects of a kingdom found strength in numbers, but the continued denial and sidelining of a reasonably well-documented history can deny a people their right to historical identity, and, in Sikkim's context, special status. For example, at the time of merger, Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese were accepted as ethnic communities of Sikkim. The Bhutias and Lepchas, by virtue of being indigenous to Sikkim, and in minority, were given reserved seats in the State Legislative Assembly. These same arguments helped them claim Scheduled Tribe status. However, claims to similar status for the Limboos and Magars were either not articulated strongly enough at the time, or simply overlooked and no such recognition was accorded to them.

The Chairperson of the Commission for Review of Social and Environmental Sector Policies, Plans and Programmes [CRESP] set up by the State Government of Sikkim, Professor B.K. Roy Burman, in his Executive Report, put this on record: "One can certainly argue, that if early habitation of Sikkim gives a sacred right to political privileges, the Mangars are also entitled to political privileges."³

Such oversights, I believe, happened not because of a conscious effort in Sikkim to sideline anyone, but because of two developments: the invasion of Sikkim by the Gorkha army in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the construction of Darjeeling's history by the British.

The Gorkha army occupied a major portion of Sikkim from the 1780's to 1815. In the first wave of invasion, they sacked Darjeeling and then the Pemayangtse monastery. Until this point, Sikkim's history, as recorded by the Namgyal dynasty, had been preserved at Pemayangtse. Relaying what he had heard of the Gurkha invasion, Dr Joseph Dalton Hooker, travelling through Sikkim in 1840-41, wrote:

During the Nepal war, the Rajah was driven east across the Teesta, whilst the Ghorkas plundered Tassiding, Pemiongchi, Changachelling, and all the other temples and convents to the west of that river. It was then that the famous history of Sikkim,* compiled by the Lamas of Pemiongchi, and kept at this temple, was destroyed, with the exception of a few sheets, with one of which Dr. Campbell and myself were each presented. We were told that the monks of Changachelling and those of this establishment had copied what remained, and were busy compiling the rest from oral information, etc.: whatever value the original may have possessed, however, is irretrievably lost.⁴

In a footnote, he adds,

This remarkable and beautiful manuscript [‘the famous history of Sikkim’], was written on thick oblong sheets of Tibet paper, painted black to resist decay, and the letters were yellow and gold. The Nepalese soldiers wantonly employed the sheets to roof the sheds they erected, as a protection from the weather.

These records, destroyed when Pemayangtse was sacked, it thus transpires, were redrafted in the 1840s. The *History of Sikkim* commissioned in 1908 is a compilation of old documents, which must include the redrafted history of Sikkim, updated with narratives collected from those who still remembered. The exercise of the 1840s, underway with the Gorkha invasion still a fresh memory, could have downplayed the role of communities identified with the dominions of the Gorkha state and the accounts of communities not involved in the redrafting process might have received scant mention. For example, and this is a supposition, the original history of Sikkim must have recorded more details about the kind of challenges mounted by the Limboo and Magar chiefs to the installation of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim, their principal locations and strongholds and the length of the hostilities. The 1908 draft contains none of these details, perhaps because no one remembered them when the records were refreshed.

Then come in the British with their record of the history of Darjeeling published as the *Darjeeling District Gazetteer* in 1907. Darjeeling, referred to in most early accounts as ‘British Sikkim’, might have been out of Sikkim’s control since 1835, but because the area was once part of Sikkim and is contiguous to the State, this paper includes the *Darjeeling Gazetteer* for consideration here.

In this Gazetteer, people, who had thus far been counted and recorded as belonging to individual communities, both in British and Sikkimese accounts, were bracketed as forming part of larger groups. The Limboos and Magars were labelled as Nepalese ‘castes’. This was unfortunate, because the Limboo and Magar presence in Sikkim predates the creation of Nepal and in Sikkim at least, they should be recognized as Limboos and Magars and not as communities belonging to a vague and mixed constellation of ‘Nepalese’.

The *Darjeeling Gazetteer*, when advancing the belief that Darjeeling was populated by immigrants, even underplayed earlier British records which suggested that also inhabiting Darjeeling in substantial numbers were Lepchas and Limboos who had fled to Nepal to escape alleged persecution in Sikkim and returned when the East India Company took over the tract. Dr Campbell, who took charge of Darjeeling in 1839-40, had his first interaction with peoples of these parts in 1829, when he arrived at the Sikkim-Nepal border at Ontoo representing the British Residency in Kathmandu to mediate in the aftermath of a Lepcha insurrection in Sikkim. He struck up a friendship with the Lepchas he met at Ontoo and records that 200 of them joined him in Darjeeling when he arrived there and helped establish the sanatorium.⁵

When later British records suggest that the Darjeeling tract was empty when they took possession in 1835, they must mean what constitutes Darjeeling town, not the district, because the tract has many places of significance for the Lepchas and locations of recorded Lepcha and Buddhist rituals which contradict the claim that the tract was empty. For a long time following the British occupation of Darjeeling, the monks of Pemayangtse and community leaders based in Darjeeling pursued efforts to rebuild the monastery at the Observatory Hill which had been razed by the invading Gorkha army. An important monastery would mean substantial land-holdings and tenants.

In this paper, I also set out to show how uncritical reliance on British accounts deny Sikkim a better understanding of events that transpired before the arrival of British recorders. One consequence of this is that interesting and unusual individuals who made significant contributions to the creation of Sikkimese history have remained uncelebrated.

One thinks, for example, of Chogthup, the Lepcha General who earned the name 'Satrajit' (Nepali for 'seventeen times victorious'), for the seventeen battles he won against the Gorkhas. He is the only Sikkimese general with a consistent track record of martial victories. He led the Lepcha contingent of Sikkim forces from minor skirmishes in 1775 to eventual military victory in 1815. Even after the Gorkha army had occupied all Sikkimese territories south and west of the Teesta in 1788, Chogthup, operating out of his base in Gangtok, continued to mount frequent attacks. He participated in strategic planning with Company officers responsible for the Eastern arm of British retaliation against the Gorkhas. Sikkim relies so heavily on British records that no details are at hand about the seventeen battles that he is reputed to have won or even when he acquired his *nom de guerre*. It is unfortunate that he remains insufficiently known in present day Sikkim. This is perhaps because his 'achievements' predate British interest in Sikkim and also because when he was fighting for Sikkim, the traditional record-keepers, the monks of Pemayangtse for example, were under Gorkha domination and the king was himself in flight.

Chogthup hailed from a family that played a pivotal role in the turn of history over three generations. His father, Changzod Karwang ensured the continuity of the Namgyal dynasty during the turbulence that surrounded the installation of the fifth Chogyal, Namgyal Phuntso, and also prevented the disintegration of the kingdom by quelling Limboo and Magar rebellions. The next king, Tenzing Namgyal, married Karwang's daughter who gave birth to the next Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal, the longest reigning Namgyal king who ruled from 1793 to 1862. Chogthup himself ensured that the long occupation of Sikkim of over two decades by Gorkha forces was contested throughout and the idea of Sikkim kept alive. This is important because the kingdoms of Limbuwan and Magarat were subsumed by the same Gorkha invasion. Chogthup's brother, Bolod, was the Dewan, suggestive of the influence the family commanded in Sikkim, an influence probably envied by many, leading eventually to his execution on Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal's orders. This execution, effected in 1826, triggered what is known as the Kotapa insurrection mounted by the Lepchas followers of the slain Minister (see Mishra in this volume). It was this revolt that brought the British back to Sikkim as mediators between Sikkim and Nepal, because Nepal had been accused of supporting the Kotapa rebels. It was while this situation was being resolved that the British eye fell on Darjeeling which was sought and received in 1835. Much as Chogthup's role in ensuring that Sikkim survived the Gorkha invasion is central to the continued existence of the kingdom, the influence of his family on the unfurling of Sikkimese history requires more specific study, something that has not happened because Chogthup predates British interest in Sikkim. Even the Kotapa rebellion is presented in a confused manner in British records, perhaps to cover up the British failure in resolving the matter to the satisfaction of both sides. That Chogthup's family was important and had substantial influence on Sikkim is borne out by attempts to either give the family a royal bloodline or disclaim this ancestry, depending on the times. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* mentions, as does the *History of Sikkim*, how the second Chogyal, Tensung Namgyal [reign 1670-1700], seduced the wife of his Lepcha Prime Minister, an alliance from which was born Yugthing Arup, Karwang's father and Chogthup's grandfather. The *Gazetteer* also quotes a royal proclamation issued by Tsugphud Namgyal in 1826, perhaps after Bolod and his family were put to death, which states that Changzod

Karwang was a slave whose mother claimed that he was the illegitimate son of the Chogyal [not specified which] who had joined the Limboos and caused the invasion of the Gorkhas!

While dependence on British sources denies Chogthup recognition, in other cases this dependence leads to a paradoxical situation where historical figures are accepted as the caricatures that the British drew of them. Dewan Namgay, for example, is accepted even in Sikkim as the 'Pagla Dewan', the 'Mad Prime Minister', whose misadventures led to substantial loss of territory. Sikkim buys into the British description of this Minister as one with serious character flaws leading him to take on the British. The Gazetteer refers to him as 'the influential monopolist'. He placed Dr Joseph Dalton Hooker and Archibald Campbell under arrest at Tumlong in 1849 and the only accounts of that episode and his motivation for it are either belittling records by Hooker and Campbell, or timid excuses presented in the *History of Sikkim*. It may be that the 'Pagla Dewan' was a megalomaniac, but after sifting through even the existing records it becomes clear that he was perhaps not driven by ego alone. He directly confronted the British by placing Hooker and Campbell under arrest and even though the duo were eventually released without any of Sikkim's demands granted, the British were uncharacteristically slow in responding to what could easily be interpreted as a *causur bellum*. Dewan Namgay, it appears, had taken a well calculated risk—the British did not march on Sikkim immediately. Even the avenging force, dispatched in 1850, returned without confrontation. Perhaps Dewan Namgay's confidence in Sikkim forces was not misplaced, and the British army withdrew in fear. Later developments support this interpretation, because when the British did eventually declare war, a decade later in 1860, the first wave of British forces was repulsed. It was only when a full-blooded Colonel led a 2,600-strong force, backed with artillery, that Sikkim was surmounted. The advanced age of the then Chogyal, 80 at the time, and the vacuum his indisposition created, must have contributed as much to Sikkim's capitulation as the strength of the British forces marching on Sikkim.

My argument is that British accounts of Sikkimese history must be read in the right perspective. The Pagla Dewan, even if the British description of him as being a slave driver and war monger were true, has to be seen as a product of his times, and perhaps as a Sikkimese nationalist.

I would now like to turn to the stereotyping of people in British accounts which have now become so ingrained that communities have come to believe the parodies of themselves even though their histories speak otherwise. The Lepchas were first introduced to the world in English accounts as timid forest dwellers who avoided confrontation and were subservient subjects. The *Darjeeling Gazetteer* contains this about the Lepchas: "For generation past a conquered race, they are a timid people, peaceful and no brawlers..." This itself is a copy and paste job from Dr Hooker's book, *Himalayan Journals* published in 1854. Incidents recorded in the *History of Sikkim*, however, suggest otherwise about the alleged Lepcha timidity, as does the *Darjeeling Gazetteer* itself.

Let us address the suggestion that the Lepchas are a conquered race and have accepted subjugation timidly. The *History of Sikkim* records that the Fourth Chogyal, Gyurmed Namgyal, while perhaps still in his teens [born 1707, ruled from 1717,], came under the influence of five Lepcha Bongthings and through them, became more favourable to the Lepchas. The Lepcha priests in question introduced themselves as incarnations of Tashe-ting [Guru Padmasambhava in Lepcha] and impressed people with some dexterous magic tricks. The *History of Sikkim* states that the five 'imposters' were exposed by the Tasang monks of Pemayangtse. Imposters or not, it is obvious that the Lepchas had not accepted their fate as

'subjects', but were seizing opportunities whenever available to secure more control and influence. The fact that Lepcha leaders held positions of prominence almost throughout Sikkim's history and were invariably in the forefront of every a major event, bears out that they were vigorous, not timid. Had they been a timid race, Lhatsun Chempo would perhaps not have included one of them in the select group, which included the first Chogyal, which he initiated into the mystic rites of Rigzin Sogdup.

The Lepcha's alleged docility stands in contrast to the violence with which Achyuk, suggested in many sources as belonging to the same family as Chogthup, carved out a Lepcha domain in what is the present day Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling, by warding off the Bhutanese and Sikkimese. His rise coincides with the reigns of the third and fourth Chogyals of Sikkim. A.R. Foning, in his book, *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe*, mentions how Achyuk corresponded directly with the Dalai Lama and received Tibetan assistance to keep Bhutan at bay and the Sikkimese chronicle also makes mention of the troubles he caused. He was eventually assassinated by the Bhutanese, but during the time that he was in power, he established a Lepcha bastion in Kalimpong which holds to this day, and from which the most aggressive and consistent displays of Lepcha 'identity' continue to emanate. Chogthup's contribution has already been explained and needs no reiteration here, save to add that he led a committed Lepcha force, likely neither docile nor timid.

British records also portray Lepchas as shy forest-dwellers, uncomfortable with interactions with outsiders. While the *Darjeeling Gazetteer* adds that they are 'indolent', it goes on to contradict itself when it states:

some of them have gone far afield and done excellent entomological work in Burma, the Andamans and Nicobars, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay Archipelago, in the Celebes and New Guinea, where one of them was killed by the savages, and in Central Africa. Here, the European in whose service they were, died far away from civilization, but the Lepcha collectors contrived to get back to Darjeeling with the help of the long arm of the British authority.⁶

In conclusion, the extract admits: "Such a feat goes far to show that they are not such a resourceless people as it is often supposed."

As an aside, there is surely an interesting study to be done on the role of Lepcha collectors in advancing British entomological studies in its colonies. Their selection for these expeditions was likely based on the glowing recommendation given to them by Dr Hooker and goes far to illustrate that even till recent times, the Lepchas were not as indolent, withdrawn and resourceless as they have been made out to be.

The strong sense of Lepcha identity is also reflected in how they undertook the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Lepcha during the reign of the third Chogyal, Chagdor Namgyal. Unfortunately, I do not have the data to flesh out this aspect any further than to share that references have been made by researchers on how the Lepcha translators managed to accommodate their deities into the pantheon of Buddhist gods. If that be the case, then, we have another example of Lepcha refusal to capitulate either their identity or beliefs under duress.

It was the pride of the Lepchas in their Gods and icons that led to the incorporation of their deities, rituals and sacred places into Buddhist practices to facilitate the spread of the Dharma in Sikkim. Had they been a docile and timid people, the subjugation would have been with force rather than reconciliation. In fact, as a tribe, throughout what is recorded of Sikkimese history, the Lepchas have been in the forefront of efforts to protect the territorial

integrity and the very idea of Sikkim. The *History of Sikkim* records the flight of Chogyal Tenzing Namgyal and his entourage when the Gorkha army sacked the Rabdentse palace in 1788. The attack was sudden and the royal family had to flee in the face of the advancing Gorkha army. They were escorted in their flight by their Sapon [royal chef], interestingly named Chagdor. He carried the future king Tsugphud Namgyal on his back. The chef was of Lepcha stock and in the years that the royal family spent in near penury in Tumlong, the new capital, he would collect magenta dye from territories north and east of Teesta still with Sikkim, carry the load on his back to Phari in Tibet and barter it for salt. He would then brave the Gorkha-held territories beyond the Teesta and travel to the Tarai [to a place called Sugar Gola according to the *History of Sikkim*] and fetch rice for the royal kitchen. He was made the Dewan when times improved for the royal family. That was the father. His sons, Khangsa Dewan and the Phodong Lama, had a very different relationship with the royal family which we need to not get into here apart from adding that while it may be true that they were driven by personal ambition and even 'greed' to confront the royal edicts, it is also possible that in their conduct during the reign of Thutob Namgyal, there are elements of Lepcha resurgence.

I would argue that the Lepchas, as a people, have been forward-looking, ambitious and even aggressive throughout what we know of Sikkimese history. Because they know the land and what it can provide, they remained hunter-gatherers because they realized early enough that agriculture and animal husbandry could not sustain them, but only supplement their requirements. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Lepchas was however romanticized by Western writers when they came in contact with the Lepchas and was repeated so often that the image of docile and shy Lepchas became the only moniker that survived. Political correctness precludes making such references directly any more, but it has to be accepted that this generalization underlines even the recent work on Lepchas. Unfortunately, these are generalizations that have now been accepted even by Lepchas who introduce themselves as a backward, primitive and subjugated tribe.

The British colonial records, which are the only easily available references, are obviously tempered to suit their interests. The still unpublished *History of Sikkim*, although it records many important developments, is still a record of how the elite remembers and explains the past. We do not know how the people lived or how they suffered and adjusted to their times. In fact, there is no authoritative social history of Sikkim and the existing partial accounts have come to be accepted as authority and orthodox history.

To cite an example, the only reference to an epidemic in Sikkim is in the Royal Chronicle which mentions how, when an epidemic broke out in Gangtok in 1888, Chogyal Thutob Namgyal moved out and camped in a royal estate beyond Penangla [now known as Tashi View Point to the north of Gangtok]. What I am trying to stress here is that the British records and the *History of Sikkim* chronicle the political shaping of Sikkim, but not the socio-cultural. There are no easily accessible records of what transpired in Sikkim during the influenza outbreak of 1918-19. All we know is that against a population of 87,920 counted in the 1911 Census, there were 81,721 Sikkimese left in 1921, a 7.05 per cent fall in population in ten years due to deaths in one year alone. We know the figures, but not how things changed for lay Sikkimese. What the extant records do not tell us either is how geopolitical changes affected the people. For example, the rush of refugees created by the Gorkha conquest of Eastern Nepal and then of Sikkim led to many settlements in what is now the North district of Sikkim, and yet, the only commonly known result of that invasion is the shifting of the capital from Rabdentse in West Sikkim to Tumlong in North. We get details of the trauma that the royal family suffered, but have no inkling of what happened to the people.

British records are also replete with references of how the acquisition of slaves and control of trade with Tibet were the main reasons behind the frequent wars and skirmishes between Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. But as far as Sikkim is concerned, very little is available by way of either the volume of trade or the prevalence of slave trade, let alone the lives of slaves.

What I have tried to argue here is that there are many reasons, ranging from incompleteness to inconsistency, and even conscious ignorance, on why the British colonial versions of Sikkim's history and its people need to be revisited. The *History of Sikkim*, unfortunately, is still available only as a typed manuscript and awaits publication even a hundred years since it was prepared. Admittedly, none of what I have said or suggested is new and these enquiries are already underway. But these are happening in two extremes—in astute academic ventures not accessible to a lay audience or, in the more dangerous, selective pickings that feed the identity-driven politics that sells so well nowadays. Both processes are already underway and while the academic exercises are evaluated and critiqued by peers, what appears more frequently in the public sphere circulates on the wings of dodgy credentials and incomplete renditions. I realise that even this is not a new trend, but it is still a disturbing one that is developing in these parts. I cannot suggest how this can be addressed, but feel that if scholars and academic institutions do not take up the responsibility of facilitating the process of putting what exists by way of available histories here in the right perspective, the revisiting will become agenda-driven. This will make everything more confused and compromise our understanding of these parts even further.

NOTES

- ¹ 'On the Tribes Around Darjeeling', A. Campbell, *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 7, 1869, pp. 144-59, 333.
- ² 'On the Literature and Origins of Certain Hill Tribes in Sikkim', A. Campbell, Esq. Superintendent of Darjeeling, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XI, Part I, January to June 1842, New Series.
- ³ Executive Summary of the Commission for Review of Environmental and Social Programmes (CRESP) tabled in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly on 20 March, 2008.
- ⁴ Hooker, Joseph Dalton, *Himalayan Journals: Notes on a Naturalist in Bengal, the Sikkim and Nepal Himalayas, the Khasia Mountains, &c.*, Delhi: Today and Tomorrow's, 1987 [1855], p. 309-10.
- ⁵ 'On the Lepchas', A. Campbell, *The Journal of the Ethnological Society of London (1869-1870)*, Vol. 1, No. 2., 1869, pp. 143-57.
- ⁶ L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*, New Delhi: Logus Press, 1999 [1907], p. 44.

A UNIQUE PARALLEL

SONAM B. WANGYAL

INTRODUCTION

One would be surprised and even shocked to hear that a parallel can be drawn between Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal of Bhutan and Ögödei Khan (The Great Khan) of Mongolia: the former was a man of religion and lived and ruled by the law of compassion while the latter was a conqueror who lived and ruled by the blade of his sword. The Zhabdrung forged a country the size of which was no bigger than an average Indian district while Ögödei forayed into Russia, China and Eastern Europe, vastly expanding the empire left to him by his father Ghengis Khan. Nonetheless, one can draw a unique parallel between the two, separated by great distance and time, in two historic events that had a considerable impact on the corresponding nation's history. To unravel one of these two events a prelude to an episode in Sikkim-Bhutan history is necessary.

PRELUDE

Tensung Namgyal, the second Chogyal of Sikkim took three consorts¹ with the possible rationale of obtaining peace and thereby consolidating the foundations of the newly formed kingdom. His first wife came from southern Tibet² and with the marriage he purchased peace from his powerful northern neighbour. The second wife came from Bhutan³ and this marriage bought him peace from his eastern neighbours. The third wife was the daughter of a Limbuwan chief and with that peace was obtained in the western front. The south was basically a thick pristine forestland with small insignificant settlements in the plains. All sides being adequately tied up, the fledgling kingdom enjoyed absolute peace during his reign. Historians too enamoured with wars, conquests, revolts, intrigues and upheavals uniformly describe his reign as 'uneventful' and leave it at that, with one writer in a brief note on the history of Sikkim not even giving him a mention.⁴ They ignore the fact that Tensung brought peace and stability, and thereby possibly prosperity too.

Upon Tensung Namgyal's death, his minor son, Chagdor Namgyal, was put on the throne, much to the displeasure and disapproval of his elder half-sister, Pende Wangmu, the daughter of the first queen who was of Bhutanese birth. After all, her mother was the senior-most queen and she was years older than the child put on the throne. When nothing worked in her favour she sought assistance from Bhutan which came in the form of an army descending on Sikkim and an eventual conquest of that country.⁵ The Bhutanese ruled for about seven years and then very mysteriously withdrew to the east bank of the River Tista, retaining what is today the Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district. Why this unprovoked withdrawal took place has perplexed many and this paper will try to arrive at an answer.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

There are various versions given by different writers but not one of them is convincing. A.R. Foning, a local amateur historian indirectly implies that the Sixth Dalai Lama wrote to the Deb Raja asking him to restore Chagdor's kingdom⁶ but there are no records of the Bhutanese acknowledging the letter or of their acquiescence to the same, if the letter was written at all. The matter looks most unlikely because the Dalai Lama had died a year earlier, in 1706.⁷ Another historian, Dr P.N. Chopra, comments that on "On Chakdor's pleas, the Bhutanese King relented and withdrew his forces from Sikkim which was again taken over by Chakdor with the exception of Kalimpong and adjoining areas".⁸ By citing 'King', if Chopra meant it to mean the Deb Raja then it must be mentioned that the Bhutanese are silent on that matter and alternatively, if it meant the Zhabdrung then the hypothesis falls flat because he had already died, gone to 'retreat' was the term used then, way back in 1651, fifty-six years earlier. The senior diplomat turned writer, Vincent H. Coelho, is a bit closer, but still distant to the truth with his claim that "Chakdor Namgyal was prompted to return to Sikkim" on the demise of the Dalai Lama. But he goes off the mark with the statement that the Bhutanese withdrew upon Chagdor Namgyal arrival.⁹ The argument does not hold water because when Chagdor returned his friend and patron, the Sixth Dalai Lama had already passed away, and so had any hopes of active or passive support, and the returning Chogyal was no victorious king or general coming home heaped with honour and glory. Bhutanese were the conquerors and it just does not stand to reason that the victorious army should withdraw from its conquest simply because a defeated and vanquished king decides to return.

The most unlikely conclusion comes from a man who should have known better. John Claude White, the British Political Officer to Sikkim and Bhutan, twenty-one years in the region, displays his ignorance of local history by writing that: "The Tibetans drove them (the Bhutanese) out and Chador in gratitude founded the great monastery of Pemiongtchi, the largest and wholly Tibetan in character."¹⁰ This claim cannot be substantiated since all historical records are absolutely quiet as far as Tibetan military intervention is concerned simply because such an event never took place.

Dr Aparna Bhattacharya is another historian who also goes off track with the contention that: "on the intervention of Tibet, Deb Raja, or the Gyalpo of Bhutan, withdrew his forces from Sikkim..."¹¹ Firstly, the Deb Raja was never addressed as Gyalpo (monarch) and then she fails to qualify the type of intervention resorted to by Tibet. The only Tibetan intervention that can be verified is found in the faithfully recorded compilation on the history of Sikkim by Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Doma where they let us know, "It is said that the Tibetan General sent a letter to the Bhutan Government, to the effect that the Tibetan Government, should be the father, the Bhutanese the mother and Sikkim State the child. They should bear friendship and love to each other so that they should try to increase the prosperity of each other, as they are one nation."¹² When it comes to the Tibetan involvement even the royal family is careful with their words and they commence the sentence with a hesitant "It is said that...", leaving a hint that it could be just a rumour, a bluff or simply a good piece of propaganda.

It therefore is patent that the various reasons given for the Bhutanese departure cannot be trusted, but what is also equally manifest is that the Bhutanese troops did withdraw to the east bank of River Tista. As to the reason for the withdrawal it will be dealt with shortly.

A PARALLEL IN HISTORY

When Ghengis (Chenggis) Khan died in 1227, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Adriatic Sea.¹³ The main expansionist phase just came to an end as the armies returned home to elect a new Khan.¹⁴ The Mongol army withdrew from wherever they were to elect the new leader. Ögödei Khan was selected as the leader and he took on the title of 'Great Khan' and the empire was divided amongst Ghengis Khan's sons. Ögödei received the khanate¹⁵ of most of Eastern Asia including much of China. He followed his father's footsteps and under him the speed of expansion reached its peak. By April 1241 the Mongols had overcome the joint army of German and Polish troops,¹⁶ and in the span of just a few weeks the victorious Mongols decimated several large armies and killed over 200,000 of Europe's finest warriors, including the famed Teutonic knights.¹⁷ In early December the Mongolian army crossed the Danube River and was all set to conquer Vienna.¹⁸

As news spread of the ferocity of the Mongols, Europe trembled in anticipation of an attack, and all Europe could hope for was a miracle.¹⁹ To the sheer disbelief of the petrified Europeans, a miracle did happen: the Mongolian troops just withdrew and headed home. The Europeans did not know then, and for quite sometime later, why they were spared the wreck of a war and the humiliation of a definite defeat. In Mongolia the Great Khan, Ögödei, had died (11 December) and the Generals along with their troops simply went back to select and assert allegiance to the new ruler.²⁰

CONCLUSIONS

No matter how insignificant the Bhutanese expansion may appear in comparison to the empire built by Ögödei Khan, both the Mongols and the Bhutanese were the conquerors, and both the armies withdrew from their vantage without any provocation or threat of confrontation. To this parallel one can add another and that is to be noted in the reasons for the withdrawal of the troops. As in the death of the Great Khan the troops were required to return to confirm allegiance and protection to the new ruler²¹ and thereby prevent unnecessary power struggle and so it was also with Bhutan for in 1706 the death of the founder of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal, so long kept secret, was made public.

The late Michael Aris evaluates the possible problems faced by the top ranking officers at the death of a leader like Zhabdrung:

No matter how masterful and energetic a character he might be, a ruler is always dependent on his officers. Much of the daily business of the government lies in their hands, but the legitimacy and strength of their authority depend entirely upon that of the ruler. In the event of his death, unless the succession is secure and favours the continued authority of his officers, their position is in real danger.²²

So possibly the leaders in Bhutan needed a secure succession that favoured 'the continued authority' of the senior leaders and this would not have been possible without the strength of the army. In a system where the successor is a mere child who was deemed the reincarnation while the effective governance went to the regent or the Deb Raja endorsed by 'representative' of the deceased Zhabdrung the chance of political disruption was more than real. The army withdrew home either to support the chosen ruler or they came to show allegiance to a candidate of their preference: but their presence was vital all the same. One

must also bear in mind that the declaration of the death of Zhabdrung had the potentiality of, besides internal power struggle and national chaos, the more dangerous, possibly/anticipated, likelihood of external interference. After all, Tibet had invaded Bhutan four times in twenty short years,²³ and with the Zhabdrung gone, the power centre becoming vacant, what less could the Bhutanese expect, especially if a large bulk of its force was doing service in a foreign soil.

NOTES

- 1 Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Doma (translated by Kazi Daosamdub): *History of Sikkim* (typescript); Risley, H.H. *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1989 [1894], pp. 11-12.
- 2 *History of Sikkim*. Several sources say she was a Sikkimese but I have chosen to agree with *History of Sikkim* firstly because it was written at a period closer to the event and secondly the authors would have a better knowledge of the issue basically because it is their family history.
- 3 Although Bhutan as a unified nation did not exist the term is used purposely for convenience sake.
- 4 White, J.C. *Sikkim and Bhutan, Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier 1887 - 1908*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, 1971 [1909].
- 5 Hasrat, Bikrama Jit, *History of Bhutan*, Education Department, Thimphu, 1980, p.64.
- 6 Foning, A.R. *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe*, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, New Delhi, 1987, p. 269.
- 7 *History of Tibet, Conversations with the Dalai Lama*, Thomas Laird, New York: Grove Press, New York, 2006. p. 185.
- 8 Chopra, P.N, *Sikkim*, S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1979, p. 27.
- 9 Coelho, V.H. *Sikkim and Bhutan*, Vikas, Delhi, 1970, p.13; see also, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, p.12.
- 10 White 1971, pp. 16-17; Rao, P. Raghunanda, *Sikkim. The Story of its Integration with India*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p. 3.
- 11 Bhattacharya, Aparna: *The Prayer Wheel and the Sceptre, Sikkim*, Nachiketa Publications Ltd., Bombay, (no year of publication), p. 61.
- 12 *History of Sikkim*.
- 13 Dr Timothy May, Assistant Professor of History, Young Hal, North Georgia College and State University; <http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/empsubl.html>
- 14 www.greenkiwi.co.nz/footprints/mongolia/ghengis-history.htm
- 15 Khanate (or Chanat) is an old Turkish word describing a political entity ruled by a 'Khan'. In Modern Turkish the word used is *hanlık*. This political entity is typical for people from the Eurasian Steppe and it can be equivalent to tribal chiefdom, principality, kingdom, and even empire.
- 16 *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th Edition, 1997, Vol. 8, p. 886.
- 17 'Korea under the eye of the Tiger', Chapter 6, *Koryo Under the Mongols - Expanding the Realm*, <http://www.koreanhistoryproject.org/Ket/C06/E0602.htm>
- 18 <http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm>
- 19 May, Dr Timothy, Assistant Professor of History, Young Hal, North Georgia College and State University; <http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/empsubl.html>[20]
- 20 encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761571469_3/mongol_empire.html; www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96gedei_Khan
- 21 <http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm>
- 22 Aris, Michael, *Bhutan*, Aris and Phillips Ltd., Warminster, 1979, pp. 234-5.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 219, 224, & 227.

CAPTAIN BARRÉ LATTER AND BRITISH ENGAGEMENT WITH SIKKIM DURING THE 1814-1816 NEPAL WAR

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The 1814-1816 war between the East India Company and Nepal led to the first substantive British engagement with the kingdom of Sikkim. The outcomes of the war included the 1816 Treaty of Segauli, which served to define the boundaries of the modern state of Nepal, as well as the 1817 Treaty of Titalia which formally incorporated Sikkim within the diplomatic orbit of British India. The conflict also had important—albeit less significant—repercussions on British relations with Tibet and China.

British policy was formulated in Calcutta by the Governor-General, Francis Rawdon Hastings (1754-1826), who was then known as Lord Moira and from 1817 became the First Marquess of Hastings. In 1825 Henry Thoby Prinsep included an account of the Nepal war in his *History of the Political and Military Transactions in India during the Administration of the Marquess of Hastings*. More recent studies of the diplomatic and military aspects of the war include those by Pemble, Lamb and Singh all of which adopt a broad regional perspective.¹ This paper builds on these authors' earlier work by focusing at a more local level on the role of Captain Barré Latter (1777-1822), the British officer who had the prime responsibility for frontline diplomatic contacts with Sikkim.

The paper is primarily based on two sets of archival sources. The first and most important consists of the official correspondence from the India Office archives, now held at the British Library in London. The second set of sources, which shed light on Latter's religious views, is a series of letters in the Church Missionary Society archive at the University of Birmingham. A definitive history of Sikkim's role in the Nepal war will require a more detailed comparison of British, Sikkimese, Nepalese, Tibetan and Chinese sources: it is hoped that the paper will serve as a step in this direction.

The paper begins by introducing the wider geopolitical context and Latter's personal background, before examining his involvement in the war in greater detail. It has two main themes. The first is Latter's personal contribution to local and regional diplomacy during and after the war. The second concerns his religious views and his indirect contribution to Tibetan linguistic research. Alex McKay's study of the Indian Political Service has highlighted the importance of the 'Frontier Cadre' in twentieth century Tibet.² In a similar vein this paper points to the important role played by a key frontier official on the borders of Sikkim in the early nineteenth century.

HIMALAYAN GEOPOLITICS

In the second half of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, the expansion of the East India Company in northern India was matched by that of another rising regional power: the House of Gorkha. The Gorkha ruler Prithvinarayan (1723-1775) began the process—continued by his successors—whereby the Gorkhas established control first of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769, then of what is now eastern Nepal in the 1770s and 1780s,³ followed by Kumaon, Garhwal, and westward as far as the Sutlej by the early 1800s. In 1825

Prinsep noted that the expansion of the House of Gorkha had been compared—"and not inaptly"—to the policy "which had gained for us the empire of Hindoostan." He concluded that war between the Company and Nepal had been inevitable before Moira had even set foot in India.

British officialdom had two main concerns in relation to Nepal. The first was already apparent during the time of Warren Hastings (1732-1818), who served as Governor-General from 1773-1785. The Gorkha conquest of Kathmandu had cut off what appeared to be a promising trade route from India to Tibet, and possibly ultimately to China: it was in that context that Hastings in 1774 sent George Bogle (1747-1781) via Bhutan to Tibet in order to make contact with the Panchen Lama.⁴ The second concerned the boundaries—which were often overlapping or poorly delineated—between the hill states conquered by the Gorkhas and the Indian plains which were controlled by the British. The immediate cause of the 1814-1816 war was a boundary dispute in northern Bihar.⁵

At the outset of the war, Moira decided on a four-pronged attack on Nepal.⁶ The key military commanders were four Major-Generals: David Ochterlony in the far west; Rollo Gillespie in Dehra Dun and Garhwal; John Sullivan Wood who was to advance north from Gorakhpur; and Bennet Marley who was to capture Makwanpur and ultimately Kathmandu.

At the same time, Moira also had much wider strategic concerns, the most important of which was to avoid giving offence to China. In 1788 and again in 1792 the Gorkhas had invaded Tibet, only to be defeated by military reinforcements from China. The outcomes of these two wars were first that Nepal undertook to send a tribute mission to Beijing every five years, and secondly that the Manchus consolidated their control over Tibet, effectively closing off any British hopes of expanding their economic links or building up stronger diplomatic connections in that quarter. Nevertheless, Moira wanted to avoid antagonising China for fear of jeopardising Britain's growing trading interests in Canton. He wished to make clear to both China and Tibet that the war was solely a response to what he portrayed as Nepalese provocation, and did not presage a further British attack north of the Himalaya.

Moira's combined military and diplomatic interests therefore caused him to look to the north-east as well as to the main theatres of military operations along Nepal's southern border. He did not intend the north-east to be the scene of a major offensive. However, at a minimum, he expected the Company's local forces to protect the frontier and—if possible—to stage diversionary attacks. At the same time, he hoped that it might be possible to send a message to Tibet and ultimately to China—in the first instance via Sikkim or Bhutan—to explain British intentions during the war.

It was in this context that he turned to the two senior British officials in northern Bengal on the spot: Captain Barré Latter, the regional military commander, and David Scott, the magistrate at Rangpur.⁷ Of the two, it was Latter who came to play the more prominent role in British relations with Sikkim.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Barré Richard William Latter—to give him his full name—came from what appears to be a solid English professional background. He was born on 22 July 1777, the son of Thomas Latter of Harley Street, London, and baptized in Marylebone on 5 September.⁸ According to his niece, the family surname may have been of French origin, deriving from 'Laterre'.⁹ This French connection may explain his unusual first name.

In January 1788 Latter was admitted to Rugby School, an establishment which was later to become celebrated as the scene of Thomas Hughes' classic *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). A glance at the school register for his year of entry shows that the majority of his classmates became either clergymen or army officers.¹⁰ Latter himself was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1791, suggesting that he had at first intended to embark on a career in the law. However, in 1795 he signed up as an army cadet, and arrived in India on 12 February 1797, still aged only 19. His older brother Francis (1776-1808), and younger brother Robert James (1780-1850), likewise served in the Bengal Army. Robert James lived longest and achieved the most senior position, retiring with the rank of General.

Barré Latter was promoted to the rank of Captain in November 1805, and served successively in Bundelkhand, Mathura, Rewari and Delhi before being appointed to the command of the Rangpur Local Battalion in September 1813. His headquarters was at Titalia, to the north of Rangpur and close to the boundaries of Gorkha-controlled territory.¹¹ He was to remain in this post until his death in 1822 apart from a short period on leave in Mauritius. It seems that he never returned to Britain after his first arrival in India. In this he was representative of his generation. Between 1796 and 1820 only 201 officers retired to Europe on pension, while 1,243 were killed or died in service.¹²

In January 1814 Latter married Julia Ann Jeffreys, who likewise came from a family of middle class professionals. She was one of 16 children born to Rev. Richard Jeffreys (1762-1830) who between 1803 and 1811 had spent part of his career as an East India Company Chaplain in Calcutta.¹³ Two of her brothers, Edward (1789-1863) and Francis (1809-1839), served in the Bengal Army: Edward was with Latter in the Rangpur Local Battalion between 1814 and 1820.¹⁴

By the outbreak of the Nepal war in late 1814, Latter was therefore 37 years old, an experienced military officer who was ready for further responsibilities.

INSTRUCTIONS FROM CALCUTTA

On 26 November 1814, John Adam (1779-1825), the Secretary to the Government, wrote to Latter and Scott to give them their instructions.¹⁵ Adam was to remain both men's main point of contact in Calcutta, and himself reported directly to Moira. The lines of communication up the hierarchy to the Governor-General were therefore remarkably short.

Adam's instructions are important both as a summary of British strategy in the north-east and for what they reveal about the extent—and the limitations—of British knowledge of the Himalayan border regions. At the outset of the war the lack of precise intelligence even on matters such as alternative routes to Kathmandu was a significant obstacle to British military planning.¹⁶

Latter's prime role was to act as military commander in charge of the frontier regions east of the river Kosi. At a minimum, he was expected to hold the frontier: if possible he was to foment diversionary attacks. With this in mind, Adam instructed Latter to communicate with the Kirantis in eastern Nepal, parts of which had been ruled by the Rajahs of Makwanpur before the Gorkha invasion. His task was "to excite them to exertion in the cause of their ancient line of Princes" so that they would cooperate with the British in the expulsion of the Gorkhas.¹⁷

At the same time, Adam also wrote a more detailed set of instructions to Scott concerning diplomatic relations with Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet.¹⁸ Scott's briefing included an extract from a report on Sikkim prepared for the government by Dr Francis Buchanan Hamilton

(1762-1829).¹⁹ The report was afterwards published in slightly different form in the author's *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (1819), and the information that it contained on Sikkim was itself largely based on a second-hand account from a lama who had fled to Purnea in British India following the Gorkha invasion as well as "natives of the Company's territory, who had visited the lower parts of Sikkim".²⁰ It includes an outline history of Gorkha attacks on Sikkim from 1782 onwards and subsequent Sikkimese resistance with intermittent assistance from Bhutan and Tibet.

At the time when Buchanan was writing, the Rajah of Sikkim (gTsong phud nam rgyal, 1785-1863) was in unchallenged possession of 'Gandhauk' (Gangtok), but had lost much of his territory to the south and west.²¹ These lands were under the overall control of the Gorkhas but administered by a Lepcha "Governor or Collector... called Yukangta, and by the Bengalese, Angriya."²² Scott was therefore instructed to propose that the Rajah ally himself with the British with a view to recovering the "possessions of his ancestors." This approach might create a military diversion, while at the same time serving a wider diplomatic purpose:

The Princes of Siccim, being closely connected with the Lamas of Lassa and Bootan, their restoration to their ancient territory would, no doubt, be highly acceptable to the authorities in those countries, and induce them to regard our proceedings with satisfaction. With respect to Lassa, in particular, it will be advisable to conciliate the Government, as a means of evincing to the Chinese, whose power is predominant there, the moderation of our views, and to shew that they are directed to no objects of aggrandizement in that quarter.²³

With the same diplomatic objectives in mind Adam instructed Scott to "open a channel of communication with the administration of Lassa" as well as with Bhutan. This communication should take the form of "the deputation of a decent person to each court, furnished with the necessary information, and known at the same time to proceed from an English authority" rather than "the parade of a formal mission."²⁴

In the event the Rajah of Sikkim took the initiative to contact Latter direct and, although Scott succeeded in sending a Bengali emissary, Kishen Kant Bose, to Bhutan, he was not allowed to proceed to Tibet.²⁵ It was therefore Latter rather than Scott who was to be the main point of contact with Sikkim as well as the Kirantis and, ultimately, Tibet.

THE ALLIANCE WITH SIKKIM IN THE 1814-1815 CAMPAIGN

Latter's dispatches in the first few weeks of the war reflect a sense of urgency. Major-General Marley, who was supposed to lead the advance on Makwanpur and Kathmandu, proved to be incompetent.²⁶ The result of the stalling of Marley's campaign was that the Gorkhas were able to deploy more troops to the east, and Latter feared that an attack on his own area was imminent.²⁷

In January 1815 Latter gave an initial assessment of the prospects for inciting a rebellion among the Kirantis: he judged that they were unlikely to respond until the British armies had "met with some signal success", and that "any injudicious attempt to excite them to an insurrection until we are prepared to support them, might be attended with the most melancholy consequences."²⁸ The main reason was the "dreadful punishments which the Goorka Government inflicts upon its subjects whose fidelity is doubted." He noted that Subhan Singh, the former Dewan (minister) of one of the states conquered by the Gorkhas, had entered into a correspondence with the Kirantis only a few years previously. According to his account, the Gorkhas had put as many as 500 Kirantis to death by way of reprisal.²⁹

By contrast the prospects for an alliance with Sikkim looked much more favourable. On 8 January Latter wrote to Lt-Colonel Fagan, the Adjutant-General, reporting that the Rajah had already contacted him and that the Sikkimese had agreed in principle to attack the fort of Nagari, to the north of Titalia.³⁰ In early February he received a further letter from the Rajah.³¹ The Rajah was willing to send five Kazis and his Dewan with 1,500 men: "Make yourself master of the Maddies, or low country, and I will conquer the hilly part." The main question was when the Sikkimese were to launch their attack: they were reluctant to do so before the British had begun their offensive on Nepal's southern borders in earnest.

On 4 February Latter wrote to Marley reporting that the Gorkhas had increased the number of troops near Titalia adding that his report was far from being based on mere hearsay:

...our Posts are within Sight of the Enemy so that they see their fires by night and regularly hear them firing at Exercise Morning and Evening.³²

Latter did not know it, but the first exchange of fire had already taken place as he was writing. On the night of 3 February a party of Gorkha troops had launched a surprise night-time attack on a detachment led by one of Latter's junior officers, Lieutenant William Whiting Foord (1790-1849) at Moodwanny.³³ Foord's troops managed to repulse the Gorkhas but, having run out of ammunition, decided to retreat. This incident reinforced Latter's view that it was essential to retain a detachment of troops led by a Lieutenant Cock which otherwise would have been sent to reinforce Marley.³⁴ For the same reason, he at that point felt unable to afford any immediate assistance to the Rajah of Sikkim in his attempt upon Nagari without "eminently endangering the whole of this frontier."³⁵

Latter again justified his decision to detain Cock's detachment in a despatch written the following month, and this is revealing for the insight that it gives to his view of the Company's relationship with Sikkim. The letter refers to the Gorkhas' "barbarous treatment... of those who manifested a disposition to throw off their Yoke", and notes that this reportedly included "the mutilation of the inhabitants of whole villages". Latter argued that a reduction in the number of British troops would leave the Rajah over-exposed to the Gorkha forces, and that this would amount to a breach of promise.

It was with a knowledge of the character of the Gorkha Government that the Sikkim Rajah offered his assistance & cordially entered into our views, but in so doing the most earnest and impressive entreaties were made that they might not be deceived, as the most inevitable destruction would attend them if they were. I assured them that as far as I was individually concerned they never should be, that as long as the negotiation [sic] was entrusted to me, I should be guided in my conduct towards them by the principles which were inherent in the Christian character, and that no British Government would ever require one of its officers to deviate from these principles... I consider myself, as the ostensible agent in the negotiation to have *pledged the faith of the British Government as much as if a regular Treaty had been entered into.*³⁶

Fortunately, Latter was able to regain the military initiative by invading the eastern Morang region and then launching a concerted attack on a Gorkha post at Bansgaon, just north of Titalia: the Gorkhas withdrew without a fight.³⁷ He then encouraged the Rajah of Sikkim to besiege the Gorkha fort at Nagari. However, the Sikkimese were unable to capture it before the summer rains ended the campaign season.

Gorkha troops recaptured part of the Morang shortly after the beginning of the rains, and in early May 1815 Latter withdrew to Calcutta, suffering from an “extreme indisposition”, whereupon he entrusted “all affairs of a civil nature”—including correspondence with Sikkim—to Scott.³⁸ The overall outcome of the 1814-1815 campaign was therefore something of a stalemate.

THE SECOND CAMPAIGN, 1815-1816

Latter returned from Calcutta to Titalia in mid-December 1815. By this time the Treaty of Segauli between the Company and Nepal had been signed, but not yet ratified in Kathmandu. His immediate task was therefore to ensure that his troops and their Sikkimese allies remained on the alert, pending a clarification of the political situation.

Latter summarised the situation in the north-east in two letters to Adam written on 16 and 19 December. The Nepalese had resumed occupation of the Morang, but might be easily dislodged, depending on the outcome of ongoing political negotiations with Kathmandu.³⁹ Meanwhile, there had been a misunderstanding with the Rajah of Sikkim because the Sub-Assistant Commissary-General had sent a message seeking to procure a number of hill porters.⁴⁰ The message had been conveyed in the “Sepahee language” (‘sepoy language’—presumably Urdu): the Rajah’s Kazis (ministers) had understood it to be a call to arms and had sent 250 men to Titalia. At the same time, the Eck Chuckra Kazi,⁴¹ the nephew of the Rajah’s Dewan, had advanced to a place called Selim, south-east of Nagari. Latter explained the misunderstanding and sent the men back together with fifty muskets and a supply of ammunition, as well as Rs 250 for expenses. He also sent letters to the Rajah written in the “Sepahee” and Bengali languages expressing appreciation for his support.

On 30 December, Latter reported a meeting with the Eck Chuckra Kazi where he briefed him on the latest developments concerning the draft Treaty of Segauli.⁴² He noted that the Kazi had:

... expressed great apprehension at being exposed to the implacable enmity of the Goorkhas, which the part they had taken in the present contest would tend to exasperate, and from the notorious disregard which the Nepaulese paid to the faith of all treaties, he was convinced that they would not abide by their engagements.⁴³

Latter assured him that the Sikkim Rajah “was included in the treaty as the friend and ally of the British Government”, and that in future any disputes between him and the Nepal government would be referred to the Governor-General. He added that, once the details were confirmed, he would inform the Rajah about the possible restoration of Sikkimese territory from the Gorkhas. The Kazi was accompanied by about 1,200 armed troops and “several Lama priests”. Latter thought it advisable to give the Kazi Rs 1,000 towards their subsistence: he also gave a small gun to the Kazi himself, while sending a double-barrelled gun as a gift to the Rajah.⁴⁴

In a letter sent on 13 January 1816, Adam approved Latter’s actions.⁴⁵ He noted the continuing doubts as to Nepal’s willingness to ratify the Treaty of Segauli, but confirmed the government’s intention to transfer the forts and territories east of the river Mechi to Sikkim. The government’s provisional plan was to retain control of the lowland territory east of the Mechi as far as the hills, but this was subject to further discussion with Latter and Scott.

In February fighting did resume in the north-east. On 18 February Latter reported that the Eck Chuckra Kazi had surprised a party of 50 Gorkha soldiers at “Phok-Gawn”⁴⁶ in the hills to the west of Nagari and seized the grain stored there.⁴⁷ The following day he reported that the Kazi had been reinforced by 1,500 men under the command of his uncle, and that firing had been heard in the direction of Nagari.

On 25 February, Latter reported his first contact with a new Sikkimese political leader:

I have great satisfaction in stating, that I yesterday received a communication for the first time from Deboo Tucka the Booteah Kajeer who is at present stationed with a detachment of Troops at a place called Manichooka near a mountain named Singitilah six days’ journey north-west of Naggree. It appears that this Kajeer possesses considerable influence, having the entire control of the Booteahs & Limboos in the Siccim Rajah’s service.⁴⁸

Latter expressed the hope that the Bhotia Kazi would be able to instigate a general uprising east of the Kosi. He therefore promised assistance to any of his followers who would take up arms against the Gorkhas and included a present of Rs 500 “to be distributed amongst such Limboos as might be induced to quit the Goorkha army”. He also sent ten stand of arms with the promise of more to come.

In a further meeting with Eck Chuckra Kazi at the end of February Latter reported that he had held out the prospects of the Sikkim Rajah recovering the whole of his dominions as far as the Kosi river, and pointed out the advantages which might be derived by bringing over the different tribes of Kirantis.⁴⁹ The Kazi replied that the Kirantis were not likely to quit the Nepal army as long as the Gorkhas remained in possession of Nagari. He urged on Latter the necessity of attacking Nagari, but Latter pointed out that porters and pack animals had already been discharged, and it was too late in the season to collect them again. Meanwhile, he encouraged the Kazi to advance to “Elam and Phae-Phae, two districts situated in the hills between the Mitchie and the Koose on the route to Cheinpoire”.⁵⁰

In the same despatch Latter reported receiving a letter from “Lama Nadhup, who is the chief superintendent and director of all the monasteries, and has the privilege of using a red seal”.⁵¹ The Lama expressed his enmity against the Gorkhas and trusted that their power “would be completely annihilated”.

Although he had decided it was too late to launch a full-scale assault on Nagari, Latter nevertheless sent two letters to Jayanta Khatri, the Gorkha commander, inviting him to surrender and come over to the British camp.⁵² Jayanta Khatri sent a reply saying that he and his followers were faithful to their sovereign and ready to sacrifice their lives in the discharge of their duty.⁵³ However, on 13 March Latter received a letter from Major General Ochterlony saying that Nepal and the Company had finally agreed to peace terms, and Jayanta Khatri’s sacrifice proved not to be necessary.

Following further negotiations, Jayanta Khatri and his company of about a hundred men finally withdrew from Nagari with their colours and music at the pre-arranged auspicious hour of 11 am on 14 April.⁵⁴ Latter decided to keep a small detachment of Company troops at Nagari for the time being, pending a final decision on the transfer of the surrounding territory to the Rajah of Sikkim.⁵⁵

Under Article 3 of the Treaty of Segauli, Nepal ceded to the Company all the lowland area between the rivers Mechi and Testa (i.e. the eastern Morang) as well as the highland areas east of the river Mechi, including the fort and lands of Nagari. In principle, some or all

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of this territory was to be transferred to the Rajah of Sikkim as a reward for his support during the war. However, the date and details of the transfer had yet to be settled.

Further negotiations were delayed first by the onset of the hot season, when Sikkimese messengers were reluctant to travel to the plains because of the risk of disease, and secondly by a diplomatic alarm over possible Chinese intervention via Tibet. As will be seen, the Rajah of Sikkim—communicating via Latter—was to play a major role in assisting British communication with the Chinese, and in helping defuse the crisis.

DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS VIA SIKKIM WITH CHINA AND TIBET

From the outset, one of Lord Moira's main concerns had been the possibility that the war with Nepal might lead to a dispute with China, thus imperilling Britain's growing trading interests in East Asia.

In October 1814, Ahmed Ali, a Kashmiri merchant based in Patna reported that the Rajah of Nepal had sent a letter to the Emperor of China appealing for "men and treasure to wage war against the Feringees."⁵⁶ During the war itself, there was no further news from China. However, in February 1816 the Emperor decided to send a small military force under the command of Sai-Ch'ung-a, a senior Manchu official based in Sichuan, to report on the latest developments in Tibet and Nepal.⁵⁷

News of Sai-Ch'ung-a's arrival in Tibet first reached the British via Sikkim in June 1816 when the Rajah wrote to Latter reporting forwarding a letter from the 'Chun Maharajah' (i.e. the Emperor).⁵⁸ The letter was written in the name of Sai-Ch'ung-a and the two Manchu Ambans (commissioners) in Lhasa. It reported that the Rajah of Gorkha had written to the Ambans claiming that the British had asked the Nepal and Sikkim Rajahs to grant them free passage through their territories "when it would be seen what would happen".⁵⁹ The British supposedly had also proposed that the two Rajahs of Gorkha and Sikkim "should pay to them the Tribute which they now pay to China." However, the letter from Sai-Ch'ung-a expressed scepticism over the Gorkhas' report:

Such absurd measures as those alluded to appear quite inconsistent with the usual wisdom of the English. It is probable that they never made the declaration imputed to them.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, he requested the Governor-General to send a message as soon as possible "stating whether or not the English really made the absurd propositions imputed to them."⁶¹

Sai-Ch'ung-a's presence in Tibet caused even more concern in Kathmandu than in Calcutta. Having themselves called for the Emperor's assistance, the Gorkhas were afraid that they would face Chinese retribution now that they had already lost the war with the Company. The letters from the Chinese to the Gorkha court, which were intercepted in Kathmandu by Lieutenant Boileau (a member of the British Resident's staff), no doubt reinforced their concerns:

Should the English disprove their having advanced what you have said to have proceeded from them, you will have fabricated falsehoods of importance and have brought down on yourselves the anger of the King. In this case Goorkha beware! You will receive the punishment that would otherwise be inflicted on the English.⁶²

At the same time the Nepalese hoped that the Chinese would use their diplomatic influence in their favour, notably by requesting the British to remove their Resident from Kathmandu, thus mitigating one of the more disagreeable outcomes of the war.

The British considered the possibility of sending an official from the Kathmandu Resident's staff to Tibet to meet Sai-Ch'ung-a in person, but eventually decided against it. Sikkim therefore remained the main channel of communication. In July, Adam confirmed Latter's orders to continue to maintain "a friendly intercourse with the Lama of Lhasa through the Rajah of Sikkim".⁶³ In early August the Governor-General drafted an official reply to the letter from Sai-Ch'ung-a and the Ambans, and asked Latter to forward it via Sikkim.⁶⁴

On 19 August Latter reported that two Chinese officials had arrived at the Rajah of Sikkim's court earlier in the month, together with 17 followers.⁶⁵ The Rajah had "gained over these men to his interest and sent them back to Lassa completely satisfied after giving them various presents." He noted that the Rajah had sent a "confidential person" to Lhasa as soon as he had heard of the approach of a Chinese force, and believed that the fact that Sai-Ch'ung-a's original letter was couched in moderate terms was a result of Sikkimese influence.⁶⁶ Latter requested the Rajah to send further "confidential people" to Lhasa, and furnished him with Rs 1,000 to that purpose.

On 13 September Latter reported further news from Lhasa via Sikkim: it seems that the Gorkha envoys to Sai-ch'ung-a had been put under restraint and were now in close confinement.⁶⁷ He attributed this development to the "Lama at Lassa", and again noted that the "Sikhem Rajah's influence has been most successfully exerted throughout the whole negotiation."

Further news of a similar nature continued to filter through from Tibet over the following two months. On 30 October, Latter received a letter from the Chinese authorities stating that the Vizier was "perfectly satisfied" with the British response.⁶⁸

On 8 November Moira recorded that Sai-ch'ung-a's letter and Latter's accompanying dispatch had just been received in Calcutta.⁶⁹ Sai-ch'ung-a's own knowledge of the "lying character of the Gorkhas disposed him to yield implicit confidence to all we advanced on the subject", and the Rajah of Sikkim "had borne testimony to the manner in which the war was forced upon us. Sai-ch'ung-a now desired it to be understood that "all was well between the Chinese and the English".

In the accompanying letter the Rajah said that he wished to be enrolled as "a dependent on the British Government". Moira was delighted with this outcome. In his diary, he pointed out that it could never have been achieved by force of arms, because of the difficulty of the terrain, and expressed the hope that the British relationship with Sikkim would promote future communications "by way of Thibet with Peking".⁷⁰

THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WITH SIKKIM

Latter was concerned that the proposed transfer to Sikkim of territory surrendered by Nepal under the terms of the Treaty of Segauli should not be seen as a concession to Chinese pressure, and this was one of the sources of delay.⁷¹ A second factor was that the British had yet to decide precisely which territories should be transferred. In the course of 1816 the government secretariat in Calcutta exchanged a series of letters with Latter and Scott discussing this issue.

The government's original view was that the British should annexe the fertile lowland areas of the Eastern Morang as well as "the pass of Nuggercote leading to the Hills".⁷² However, Latter—supported by Scott—took a different view. Latter pointed to the political benefits of supporting the Rajah:

The influence which our connection with the Sikkim Rajah must give us over the other Hill tribes will prove of the utmost importance in the event of any future War with the Nepalese and this influence when properly exerted must tend greatly to the moral improvement of numerous tribes at present scarcely known to us even by name.

At the same time, he reminded Calcutta that the Rajah had supported the British in the war not only out of hatred for the Gorkhas, but also because he hoped to regain lost territory. He needed to be able to control a portion of the much more fertile lowlands if he were to gain the full economic benefits of his acquisitions. As Latter explained:

The Cession of the Hill Country without the annexation of some of the lowland will not accomplish this object and it is very doubtful whether he would be any gainer by the acquisition unless allowed to hold land which will enable him to subsist the Garrisons he must maintain for the protection of the Passes.⁷³

A further factor, as Scott pointed out, was the distance of the lands in question from the main administrative centres of northern Bengal, which in turn would make it harder to govern them and administer justice effectively.⁷⁴ It was therefore decided to grant the whole of the Eastern Morang to the Rajah.⁷⁵ However, whereas the Rajah was to hold the highlands in full sovereignty, Latter argued that he should hold the lowland areas "as a feudatory or tributary of the British government", meaning that the Company's rights to the lands should not be relinquished altogether.⁷⁶

This distinction meant that the transfer took place in two stages. The first stage took place on 10 February 1817 when Latter signed the Treaty of Titalia on behalf of the Company while Nazir Chaina Tenjin (sPyi gnyer bstan 'dzin), Macha Teinbah (Ma chen bstan pa) and Lama Duchim Longdoo (probably bDe chen dbang 'dus) signed on behalf of the Rajah.⁷⁷ Article 1 made over to the Rajah and his heirs "all the hilly or mountainous country situated to the eastward of the Mechi River and to the westward of the Teesta River" which had formerly been occupied by the Gorkhas. Under Article 2, the Rajah engaged to abstain from any acts of aggression or hostility against Nepal or any other state. Article 3 committed the Rajah to refer any disputes with Nepal or any other neighbouring state to British arbitration. The other provisions of the treaty included promises by the Rajah to: join with the British in the case of any military conflict in the hills; refuse permission to any European or North American to reside in Sikkim without the consent of the English government; refuse protection to any "defaulters of revenue or other delinquents" when demanded by the British government; and to "afford protection to merchants and traders from the Company's provinces."

The second stage was completed on 7 April 1817 when the Company granted the Rajah a *sanad* concerning the low land situated east of the Mechi river, and westward of the Mahananda.⁷⁸ The terms of the *sanad* made clear that the Rajah would hold the territory "as a feudatory, or as acknowledging the supremacy of the British Government over such lands." With that, the post-war territorial negotiations were now complete.

LATTE'S SPONSORSHIP OF FCG SCHROETER'S TIBETAN RESEARCH

While Latte was still engaged in the diplomatic negotiations with Sikkim, China and Tibet, he had already begun to turn his attention to religious matters. His correspondence on these issues sheds light both on another facet of his character, and on the early stages of European linguistic research in the Himalayan region.

In his personal beliefs, Latte was a keen Evangelical Christian, and in the summer of 1816 he wrote to the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) pointing to the opportunities for missionary work:

Owing to a particular chain of events it has so occurred that I have obtained an uncommon degree of influence over a number of Tribes hitherto unknown to us, but who possess a degree of knowledge that has surprised me. Now I am desirous that this influence should be directed in affording Facilities to the Spread of the Gospel amongst them...⁷⁹

Latte therefore recommended that the CMS should send a missionary to Titalia, adding that they should do so while he himself was still in post:

It cannot be expected that all Commanding Officers should feel so interested in the Cause as I do, and it is not likely that any one will again be vested with the same authority, for the Duties entrusted to me have been of a military, civil and political nature. It is in this last respect that I have been able to do so much.⁸⁰

He further pointed out the opportunities for linguistic research, guided by divine providence:

The advantages to be expected from having a Missionary here are that he will be enabled to become acquainted with Languages hitherto unknown but current amongst extensive Nations who have Presses for Printing, which alone affords a great facility for circulating the Scriptures. Besides our first communication with them will, in some degree, be sanctified, and we may therefore expect that the Blessing of God will attend an Intercourse with these Nations.⁸¹

The committee duly responded by sending a young German missionary, Frederic Christian Gotthelf Schroeter, who had just arrived in Calcutta. Schroeter reached Titalia in late October 1816, and at once embarked on the study of Tibetan.

Encouraged by Schroeter's initial progress, Latte wrote a further letter to the Calcutta committee in June 1817:

I am in great hopes that a very extensive field will soon be open to us for circulating the Scriptures. If it can once be ascertained that they are *desirous* of receiving them, our supplying them with the Word of God can never be objected to. As printing is known throughout Thibet in the same manner as it is in China, we may hope if the Scriptures are sought after by the inhabitants that they will multiply copies themselves and this ought to be an inducement with us to ascertain as speedily as possible the language in which the version of the Scriptures will be most generally acceptable.⁸²

In October 1817, despite Latte's optimistic assessment, the Calcutta committee decided to withdraw Schroeter from Titalia and post him to Burdwan, some 40 miles north-east of Calcutta. However, Latte felt so strongly about the importance of Schroeter's work that he

arranged for the British authorities to employ him directly at a salary of Rs 200 a month. Schroeter therefore returned to Titalia to resume his work under Latter's direct sponsorship.

Latter provided further assistance by searching for texts that might assist Schroeter in his work, and these included a manuscript Italian-Tibetan dictionary prepared by the Capuchin missionary Orazio della Penna in Tibet during the eighteenth century as well as a number of Tibetan works.⁸³ However, Schroeter died in July 1820 before his work could be completed, and Latter himself died in September 1822.

Since Schroeter had been paid a government salary, the British authorities laid claim to his draft dictionary, and asked the Baptist missionary William Carey (1761-1834) for advice on what to do with the manuscript. Carey and his younger colleague John Clark Marshman (1794-1877) edited and published it in Serampore as the *Dictionary of the Bhotanta, or Boutan Language* in 1826. This was the first Tibetan-English dictionary to be printed. However, it was quickly superseded by Alexander Csoma de Kőrös's Tibetan-English dictionary which appeared only eight years later in 1834. As a result, the Serampore dictionary's status as a landmark in Western studies of Tibetan—and Latter's role as a sponsor of part of the work that went into it—have not achieved the recognition that they deserve.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

Latter's engagement with Sikkim marked both the beginning and a highpoint in Anglo-Sikkimese relations. Arguably this highpoint was primarily due to the geopolitical circumstances: both sides had a shared interest in joining forces against the Gorkhas. British support enabled Sikkim to regain lost territory, and guaranteed the kingdom's survival. Meanwhile, the Company benefited not just by virtue of Sikkim's relatively small-scale military assistance, but also because it gained a valuable intermediary in its sensitive relationship with China and Tibet.

While the political environment may have been favourable in any case, Latter's personal diplomacy played an essential part in building the relationship. Latter was representative of his time and place in that there is nothing in his surviving correspondence to suggest any doubt as to the overall legitimacy of British interests. Nevertheless, he showed more diplomatic sensitivity than many of his contemporaries in that he always sought to understand Sikkimese interests, as well as to promote the British cause.

As has been seen, examples include his insistence in March 1815 on keeping sufficient numbers of British troops in the north-east to protect the Rajah of Sikkim from a possible Gorkha counter-attack, as well as his arguments in 1816 in favour of transferring the Eastern Morang to the Rajah rather than incorporating it within British India. In a similar vein, Latter presented a consistently favourable view of the Sikkimese to his superiors. One instance is his positive—albeit somewhat patronising—observation in a dispatch of December 1815 that his Sikkimese interlocutors had always displayed “ability and sound judgement” that this proved that “their nation, though hitherto scarcely known to Europeans, does not rank low in the scale of intellectual attainment...”⁸⁵

The Sikkimese apparently reciprocated with a high degree of personal trust. For example, in a letter written in early 1816, the Rajah appealed to the Governor-General:

As long as the boundary is not laid down definitely, I pray that the Major Saheb who represents the British Government may not be removed or transferred elsewhere. If this is not done, then

your Excellency is aware of the various subterfuges that the Gurkhas might employ to defraud us.⁸⁶

As noted above, Latter had written in March 1815 that his conduct towards Sikkim would be guided “by the principles which were inherent in the Christian character.”⁸⁷ In his case, it appears that this statement was more than a mere piece of rhetoric. The Evangelical ethos included a strong sense of public duty and humanitarian concern—as expressed in the early nineteenth century campaign against the trans-Atlantic slave trade—which extended beyond narrow personal or even national interests. In retrospect, Latter’s hopes for the spontaneous diffusion of the Christian scriptures through indigenous printing presses may sound naïve. However, they at least reflected a sense of openness and even esteem for his local counterparts. In all these respects, Latter’s diplomacy towards Sikkim presents a favourable contrast with the much sourer and more arrogant approach adopted by his mid-nineteenth century successors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

- 1 See Pemble (1971), Lamb (1986) and Singh (1988).
- 2 McKay (1997).
- 3 On the Gorkha conquest of what is now eastern Nepal, see in particular Pradhan (1991).
- 4 On Bogle, see in particular Lamb (2002).
- 5 For a recent review of the events leading to the war, see Michael (1999).
- 6 For the details of the military campaign see Pemble (1971).
- 7 For Scott’s background and life history, see in particular White (1832) and Barooah (1970).
- 8 Hodson (1946), vol.3, p.18. Except where otherwise stated, Hodson is the source for the following biographical details of Latter and his brothers.
- 9 Baillie (1870), p. 15.
- 10 *Rugby School Register* (1901), p. 101.
- 11 Also spelt ‘Titalya’, and now ‘Tetulia’. Today, it is the northernmost town of Bangladesh.
- 12 Mason (1976), p. 174.
- 13 Hodson (1928), vol.2, p. 548. See also: <http://www.airgale.com.au/jeffreys/d3.htm>. Accessed on 21 February, 2009.
- 14 Hodson (1928), vol.2, p. 548. The India connection continued to the next generation. Captain Thomas Latter (1816-1853), the son of Barré and Julia Ann, was an East India Company army officer and the author of the first Burmese grammar in English.
- 15 Adam to Scott. Bareilly. 26 November 1814; Adam to Latter, 26 November 1814, *Papers Respecting the Nepaul War* [hereafter ‘*PRNW*’], pp. 265-70; OIOC H/646, pp. 733-44; pp. 747-63.; pp. 773-8.
- 16 On this point, see in particular Bayly (1996), pp. 97-113.
- 17 *PRNW*, pp. 269-70; OIOC H/646.
- 18 Adam to Scott. Bareilly. 26 November 1814, *PRNW*, pp. 265-9.
- 19 This was the Scottish doctor and botanist Francis Buchanan Hamilton (1762-1829). He adopted the surname ‘Hamilton’ after inheriting his mother’s estate in 1815.
- 20 Buchanan Hamilton (1819), pp. 2-3.
- 21 Following contemporary British usage in archives, I refer to the ‘Rajah’ rather than the ‘Chos rgyal’.
- 22 Extract from a report from Dr Buchanan, *PRNW*, p. 268.
- 23 Adam to Scott. 26 November 1814, *PRNW*, p. 266.

- 24 Ibid., pp. 266-7.
- 25 Kishen Kant Bose (Krishnakanta Basu) wrote an 'Account of Bengal', which was translated from Bengali into English by David Scott, and eventually published in 1865 in a collection of papers on *Political Missions to Bhutan*. See Bray 2009-2010.
- 26 For the failures of Marley's campaign see Pemble (1971), pp. 210-47. Marley eventually abandoned his command on 10 February and was replaced by Major-General George Wood.
- 27 Letter to Major Gordon, Deputy Adjutant General, Titalia, 2 January 1815. OIOC H/649, pp. 504-6.
- 28 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 11 January 1815. *PRNW*, pp. 408-9.
- 29 Ibid. Pradhan (1991, p.137) notes that a Kiranti uprising against the Gorkhas in 1791-1792 had been repressed with great severity, although Gorkha policy towards the Kirantis had subsequently been more conciliatory.
- 30 Letter to Fagan, Titalia, 8 January 1815. *PRNW*, pp. 406-7.
- 31 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 4 February 1815. *PRNW*, pp. 428-30.
- 32 Letter to Marley, Titalia, 4 May 1815, OIOC H/649, p. 528
- 33 Letter to Gordon, Titalia, 6 February 1815, OIOC H/649, p. 557. For Foord's biographical details see: Hodson Vol 2 (1928), p. 198. I have not been able to identify the modern name of Moodwanny
- 34 Letter to Marley, Titalia, 4 February 1815, OIOC H/649, p. 528.
- 35 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 4 February, *PRNW*, p. 429.
- 36 Memorandum on the Raja of Sikkim. Letter of 19 March 1815. OIOC H/519, pp. 517-18. The italics represent underlining in the original.
- 37 Pemble (1970), pp. 245-47.
- 38 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 16 December 1815. OIOC H/656, p. 295. Reprinted in: *PRNW*, pp. 922-3. Pemble (1971, p. 247) suggests that Latter "had fallen victim to some jungle fever or infection."
- 39 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 16 December 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 922-3.
- 40 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 19 December 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 923-4.
- 41 Saul Mullard suggests that 'Eck Chuckra' may be based on a Nepali or Hindi rendering of this person's name: his precise identity remains uncertain.
- 42 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 30 December 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 924-5.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Adam to Latter, 13 January 1816, *PRNW*, pp. 926-8.
- 46 Pema Wangchuk suggests that this is the place known on present-day maps as 'Phuaka' on the approach to Sikkim from Chiwa Bhanjyang.
- 47 Letter to Adam, Camp at Misacole, 18 February 1816, *PRNW*, p. 958.
- 48 Letter to Adam, Camp near Titalia, 25 February 1816. OIOC H 656, pp. 494-6. *PRNW*, pp. 959-60. 'Singitilah' must be the Singalila pass. The Kazi was probably a member of the Brag dkar pa family of g.Yang thang rdzong, with 'Tucka' a phonetic rendering of 'Brag dkar'. On this family, see Mullard (2003).
- 49 Letter to Adam, Camp near Titalia, 2 March 1816, *PRNW*, pp. 960-1.
- 50 'Elam' must refer to the town and district in western Nepal now known as 'Ilam'.
- 51 Both Pema Wangchuk and Saul Mullard suggest that this lama is likely to have been the head of Pemayangtse. Mullard points out that 'Nadhuep' sounds like 'gNas grub' but that the head lama of the time was bDe chen dbang 'dus.
- 52 Letter to Jayanta Khatri, 7 & 11 March 1816. *PRNW*, p. 962. The commander's name is give as 'Gentikatri' in the British records.
- 53 Jayanta Khatri to Latter, Nagari. *PRNW*, p. 963.
- 54 Letter to Major James Nicol, Acting Adjutant General, 14 April 1816. OIOC F/4/551 13380, pp. 42-3.
- 55 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 24 April 1816. OIOC F/4/551 13380, p. 52,
- 56 William Moorcroft to Adam, Poosah, 8 October 1814. *PRNW*, pp. 91-4. On Ahmed Ali, see Bray (2009).
- 57 Fu (1966), pp. 401-2 and pp. 618-9. This episode is also discussed in Rose (1971), pp. 75-95; Lamb (1986), pp. 34-8; Richardson (1973) and Manandhar (2004), p. 196 ff. British sources refer to Sai-Chung'a variously as 'Sheo Chanchoon', 'Teo Chang Chan' and 'Thee Chanchan'.
- 58 Enclosure in a Dispatch from Captain Latter No. 16 to the Secret Department Dated 10th Received 17 June 1816. F/4/551 13382, p. 118.
- 59 Ibid., p. 123.

- 60 Ibid., p. 124.
- 61 Ibid., p. 125.
- 62 Translation of a letter written in the Bhooteea language, addressed by the three Principal officers of the Chinese Government arrived at Lassa to the Rajah of Nepaul. By command of the King of China. Resident's office Nepaul, 5 July 1816. OIOC F/4/551 13382, pp. 142-3.
- 63 Adam to Latter, 13 July 1816, p. 129.
- 64 Letter from the Governor General to the Chinese Umbahs of Lassa, written 3 August 1816. OIOC F/4/551 13382, p. 156.
- 65 Letter to Adam, 19 August 1816. OIOC F/4/551 13382, pp. 226-30.
- 66 Ibid., p. 229. In this he was probably mistaken. The Emperor's original instructions to Sai-ch'ung-a expressed great scepticism about the Gorkhalis' claims. See Fu (1966), pp. 401-2.
- 67 Letter to Adam, Titalia 13 September 1816, OIOC F/4/552.
- 68 Letter to John Adam, Titalia, 30 October 1816. OIOC, F/4/552, p. 175.
- 69 Hastings (1858), Vol. 1, p. 268.
- 70 Ibid., p. 269.
- 71 Letter to Adam, 12 November 1816, OIOC. F/4/551/13380, pp. 143-4.
- 72 Extract from Political Letter from Bengal, 5 November 1816. OIOC. F/4/551/13380, p.6.
- 73 Letter to Adam, 23 March 1816. OIOC. F/4/551/13380, pp. 82-4.
- 74 Scott to Adam, Rangamati, 31 March 1816. OIOC. F/4/551/13380, pp. 99-105.
- 75 For the history of the Eastern Morang, see Choudhury (1990/1991).
- 76 Letter to Adam, 20 April 1816. OIOC. F/4/551/13380, pp.111-13.
- 77 Aitchison 1933, Vol. XII, pp. 58-9.
- 78 Aitchison 1933, Vol. XII, p. 60.
- 79 Minutes of the Church Missionary Society Calcutta Corresponding Committee, 9 September 1816. CMS archives CMS/B/OMS/C II E1/52. On the background to the CMS's activities in the region, see Bray (2005, 2008).
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Letter to Thomas Thomason, Titalia, 26 June 1817, XCMS/BOMS/II/CE/166B. The italics represent underlining in the original.
- 83 Richard Jeffreys, 20 July 1824. In Felix (1912), pp. 394-395. See also Hough (1839-1840), p. 304. Latter's collection of Tibetan papers were eventually purchased by Rev W.H. Mills for the newly founded Bishop's College Calcutta, the first Anglican seminary in India. Shastri (1915) lists a number of Tibetan works in the College's library, and these may have been from Latter's original collection. Such works were rare in Western collections during the early 19th century, and it must be regretted that they apparently were never put to scholarly use.
- 84 For a more detailed discussion of the history of the dictionary, see Bray (2008).
- 85 Letter to Adam, Titalia, 30 December 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 924-5.
- 86 OIOC, Mss Eur .E. 78. *History of Sikkim*, p. 109. According to Hodson (1946), Latter's formal promotion to Major did not take place until September 1818. However, it is possible that he already held this rank on an acting basis during the war.
- 87 Memorandum on the Raja of Sikkim. Letter of 19 March 1815. OIOC H/519, pp. 517-18.

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NEPAL-SIKKIM RELATIONS: THE YUKLATHUP EPISODE

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Their geographical proximity and similar socio-religious identities were the key factors in initiating relations between Nepal and Sikkim. History witnessed that particularly from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Nepal has shared a common border with Sikkim. The neighbouring people's interaction and contact was established even before the countries were recognized as separate political entities. Apart from legends, myths and folklores, historical documents to trace the relations between Nepal and Sikkim before the eighteenth century are scarce. It is, however, believed that Sikkim had some sort of religious affinities with the Malla Kings of Kathmandu valley specially Siddhi Narsimha Malla of Lalitpur.¹

The political relations between Nepal and Sikkim were not always cordial down from the eighteenth century. Both the trans-Himalayan countries were engaged in hostilities and tried to extend their territory by resorting to force. On many occasions Sikkim captured some portions of what is now eastern Nepal and even extended her influence up to Chainpur.²

However, Sikkim's occupations over these territories generally remained short-lived. The Sena kings of Bijayapur had to struggle hard to encounter the Sikkimese intrusion. With the rise of the Gorkhas, the Gorkha ruler, Prithvi Narayan Shah, in the course of his military campaign marched up to Ilam and his successors even moved further east and captured the area up to the Tista River and were thus able to control some territory of Sikkim. However, the military confrontation and rivalry did not end.³

The presence of Gorkhali, on the border, posed a great threat to the Sikkimese ruler who time and again tried to bring back the lost territory. In retaliation, the Sikkimese army frequently assaulted what was now Nepalese territory. However, all these ventures were not rewarded with success. In the advent of Nepal-Tibet-China crises,⁴ Sikkim openly stood in favour of Tibet and China, anticipating getting back her lost territory. But the cherished desire of Sikkim was again not materialized. Furthermore, during Anglo-Gorkha war, Sikkim supported the East India Company and joined the anti-Nepal camp.⁵ The Sugauli treaty of 1816 ended the war, which besides other clauses obliged Nepal to cede the territories east from Mechi River to the said Company. Later on, as a gesture of goodwill towards Sikkim, the East India Company through the treaty of Titaliya of 1817 ceded those territories to Sikkim.⁶ The rise of British power in the region, which was manifest in the aforesaid treaties, meant that the Company became the arbitrator in frontier disputes between Nepal and Sikkim. From this time onwards both Nepal and Sikkim virtually became satellite states of the Company. However, Sikkim was not satisfied as she wanted all the territories back which were annexed by the Gorkhalis in the recent past. Nepal on the other side was not happy either and tried to regain the entire track which was ceded to Sikkim by the British. All these developments placed both Nepal and Sikkim at logger-heads as both endeavoured to realize their respective desires.

Sikkimese domestic politics were marked by conspiracy and counter-conspiracy. Various elements of the Lepcha and Bhutia aristocracy were engaged in a battle for supremacy and always endeavoured to control power; as Rahul noted:

Security against foreign aggression did not, however, end the old feuds between the Bhotiyas and the Lepchas in Sikkim. The Lepchas, who had formed the vanguard of Sikkimese resistance to the Gorkha invaders, opposed any sort of domination by the Bhotiyas.⁷

It is often charged that Nepal always supported the Lepchas with an ulterior motive of realizing their historic desire. Against this background, this paper aims to analyze the different aspects of Yuklathup's asylum in Nepal.

CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TOWARDS THE FLIGHT OF YUKLATHUP

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the Lepchas and the Bhutias were the main inhabitants of Sikkim and thus they dominated the politics of Sikkim. It is said that the Lepchas were residing there from the remote past whereas the Bhutias entered the country at least from the thirteenth century and established a kingdom there during the seventeenth century. In due course of time the Bhutias were able to control the power which was not a welcome development for the Lepchas. Consequently the Lepchas revolted, which was pacified by assuring them of a space in politics. However, the misunderstanding between the two was not mitigated.⁸

The treaties of Sugauli and Titaliya, to a great extent, safeguarded Sikkim from foreign aggressions. This factor was mainly responsible for the origin of conspiratorial politics in Sikkim and the dispute between the Lepchas and Bhutias resurfaced. The rivalry reached a climax in the year 1826 resulting in an armed conflict. Throughout the year, the two groups fought bitterly attempting to eliminate each other's power. During the crisis, *Kazi Ya Kunta* (Ikunda; also known as Chagdoz Bolod), who was the maternal uncle of King Tsugphud Namgyal, was killed by the order of the King. In addition, members of his family along with Lepchas, Limbus and a few Nepalese supporters were also killed. Consequently, influential Lepchas under the leadership of Yuklathup, who was the brother of Ikunda, fled to Ilam, adjoining territory of Sikkim.⁹ It is worth mentioning that Yuklathup was also an influential Lepcha leader who was also a target for the adversaries.

The origin of the dispute, according to *Kazi Dousandup*, was as follows:

The younger son of Chagzod Karwang named Bolod or Namgyal Phuntso proud of his position as being the maternal uncle of the Maharaja, bore himself with insufferable pride towards the Maharaja and forgot his allegiance so far to presume to use the red seal, and generally misappropriated every income to satisfy his own selfish wants. Things began to assume such a serious aspect by the year 1819, that the Kazis and Lamas had to assemble and make peace between the Raja and the Chagzod. This was disregarded and the next year, they again assembled to bring about an amicable settlement in the next. Again it was dis-regarded by Chagzod Bolod. Again in the year 1824, they assembled a third time, each time making Bolod sign a bond, agreeing to observe his true position and not presume upon the royal prerogatives nor to rebel etc., but this contract bond also shared the same fate as the previous ones. This deeply offended the Raja, who lost a son, and the second lady of the Lamo family. All these laid at his door, as the deaths were alleged to have been the direct result of sorcery employed by Bolod. So in 1826, the Raja ordered the following persons to kill Bolod, which was done. ... So when Bolod was assassinated by the Maharaja Tsugphud Namgyal's order, his nephews the son of Kotapa Khungha named Dathup and Jerung Denon and Kazi Gorok, left Sikkim, taking with them about 800 houses of Lepcha subjects from Chidam and Namgthang and went away towards Ilam and settled down there.¹⁰

The above statement is somehow biased and attempted to justify the action of the Sikkimese King. In fact, it appears that elements of the Bhutias wanted to eliminate the role of the Lepchas in the politics of Sikkim. The contribution of the Lepchas was also significant in building Sikkim as a nation, so they did not want to be ignored in the *Raaj Kaaj* of Sikkim. The Bhutias, as assumed, were supported by the Tibetans which forced Lepchas to come closer to Nepal.

According to another version, due to security reasons particularly a fear of Nepalese aggression, the Sikkimese king planned to move the capital from Rabdentse to Tumlong. The decision was challenged by Bolod, the then chief minister. Consequently, armed struggle broke out resulting in the killings of Bolod and others.¹¹ The chief minister was also charged with misappropriating the national fund and mismanaging all the valuable presents of the king.¹²

There is yet another speculation regarding the assassination of Ikunda and others, as Sharma opined:

But Ikunda doesn't appear to have been murdered without a reason. Nepal may have been entertaining designs for invading Sikkim and the Sikkimese may have suspected Ikunda's collusion with the Gorkhas.¹³

In support of his views, the writer has produced some of the letters exchanged between the Nepalese *Bhardars* and Ikunda without providing the sources of the same. It is also guessed that the British had played a significant role in authoring the tragedy.¹⁴

A critical scrutiny of the different versions clearly reveals that the different Bhutia and Lepcha elements had a long history of mutual distrust and power rivalry. Consequently, various sanguine issues surfaced and were addressed as well. However, the dispute reached a climax and the question of capital transfer became the immediate cause of the massacre of 1826. The flight of Yuklathup to Nepal created furores in the political horizons of Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, China and finally the English East India Company.

NEPAL'S POLICY TOWARDS THE FUGITIVES

Nepal was keenly watching the situation and was well prepared to encounter any sort of danger from Sikkim. The Nepalese documents stated that Yuklathup along with his 800 followers did not enter Nepal for a time. At the outset five Limbus entered Nepal and briefed officials there of the situation and most probably requested political asylum for *Kazi* Yuklathup and others. The local *Subba* of Ilam, at first, deputed his trusted juniors to ascertain the facts. After confirmation, he immediately referred the issue both to the governor of Dhankuta and Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa requesting instructions be given to deal with the case.¹⁵ Bhimsen Thapa instructed the local *Subba* Jayanta Khatri that in keeping with the view of British-Nepal relations and British design over Sikkim they should remain vigilant on the issue and do the needful. However, he warned him not to provide asylum to those offenders who had committed heinous crimes there. So, in the initial stage Nepal did not encourage the rebels to come to Nepal and was prepared to welcome them only if they entered Nepal voluntarily. Part of the instruction runs as follows:

We have treaty with the Firangees (British) and Sikkim has also treaty with the Firangees, hence it is the duty of the Firangees to look after the problem, we have nothing to do in the crisis. Carefully try to defend our territory. If the Sikkimese people happened to come there and asked

for asylum act according to your wisdom. But do not provide asylum to those who come there committing heinous crime and not encourage any person to come there.¹⁶

From the instruction cited above, it is clear that Nepal did not want to bother to intermingle in the domestic crisis of Sikkim as she anticipated that such action might antagonize the British. Furthermore, Nepal thought that it was the problem for the British to look after as both countries had a treaty assigning such issues to British mediation.

The Sikkimese leader along with his 800 Lepchas followers then entered Nepal and *Subba Jayanta Khatri* welcomed and provided asylum to all these fugitives. Nepal not only provided shelter but also granted landed property both in Ilam and Jhapa for their livelihood.¹⁷ It is but natural that Sikkim was annoyed by the policy of Nepal towards the rebels. Consequently, friction developed between the two countries who charged each other with fermenting trouble in the border regions. The Sikkimese charged that Nepal assaulted the Sikkimese province east of Mechi River. However, the Nepalese records do not support the assertion levelled by Sikkim. Likewise, the Nepalese documents referred to state that Sikkim mounted an attack on Changthapu and Islmba, the northern part of Ilam. The same source further asserts that Nepal dispatched two groups of forces which routed the invaders and drove them across the border of Sikkim.¹⁸ Nepalese sources indicate that Sikkim never requested Nepal to extradite Yuklathup and others but rather tried to blame, defame and establish Nepal's active support and responsibility in the conflict that Sikkim witnessed recently.

It is still a matter of debate and controversy among the scholars regarding the objectives of Nepal in granting political asylum to Yuklathup and other Lepchas. It is desirable here to discuss the perception of the different scholars regarding the objectives of Nepal that she wanted to realize from the Sikkim crisis. Dhanabajra Bajracharya and Tek Bahadur Shrestha, on the basis of the contemporary documents in the possession of the descendents of Yuklathup, depicted the following objectives:

- a. Nepal aimed to utilize the fugitives in settling the barren lands and developing the local area.
- b. She wanted to interfere in the politics of Sikkim,¹⁹ with a variety of motives primarily of restoring the tract between Mechi to Tista.

Citing one of the communications to Yuklathup by the Nepalese Prime Minister, the authors remarked that the *Kazi* was in touch with Nepal long before and was in Nepal's good books. That is why Nepal not only welcomed the fugitives but also generously granted landed property for their comfort. They further asserted that the Nepalese also created trouble in the area of Sikkim upon the backing of these fugitives.²⁰

Tri Ratna Manandhar is of the opinion that Nepal had no political or any other objective in her policy towards Yuklathup and granted asylum merely on humanitarian grounds. The scholar contradicted the previous conclusion and asserted that Nepal had no intention of interfering in the politics of Sikkim. Producing the various documents preserved in the foreign ministry the author categorically denied the conclusive remarks of Dhanabajra forwarding the following arguments.

...The fugitives from Sikkim did not enter Nepal at a time merely five Limbus came and approached the local Nepalese *subba* for shelter to Kazi Yuklathup and others. The local *subba* of

Ilam immediately refer the case both at Dhankuta and Kathmandu and solicited instructions in the case. The Nepalese government instructed not to encourage the Lepchas to come there and if happened to enter in the Nepalese territory settle them in the area not close to the border.²¹

The Nepalese government also asked Yuklathup to stay peaceful and warned him not to be involved in any action which might create trouble. Later on, when Nepal suspected that Yuklathup's activities could create problems on the Nepal-Sikkim border, they even threatened to surrender him to Sikkim and curtailed some of the privileges provided earlier. Nepal was cautious to ensure that the fugitives' problems in no way created any misunderstanding with the East India Company and China. At one point, Nepal was even prepared to extradite the *Kazi* to Tibet. On the basis of the above facts Manandhar concludes that Nepal had no political desire in her policy towards Yaklathup and gave shelter only on humanitarian grounds.

Gyan Mani Nepal, while analyzing both schools of thought, argued that Nepal had some political ambitions in chalking out her policy to the Lepchas.²² However, he failed to produce any documents in support of his interpretation.

A careful study of the contemporary political situation and the British presence in the trans-Himalayan politics means one can easily guess that both Nepal and Sikkim would hardly dare to act in any way which would hinder the interests of the British. The East India Company was not in a position to see any friction in the relations among her satellites and had already become arbitrator in the dispute between Nepal and Sikkim. Nepal had well realized that the East India Company would certainly intervene in case of an offensive move from Nepal. Nepal was not in a position to initiate any action which might have antagonized the British. Instead, Nepal tried to restore the territories by appeasing the British and anticipating her favour in realizing that goal.²³

In such circumstances, Nepal had no political interest to be materialized in the issue of Yuklathup. However, Nepal's objective was to use the human resources of fugitives by utilizing them to cultivate the barren lands in the east and this objective was fully materialized, as the fugitives settled in Fikkal, constructed 110 houses there,²⁴ and tilled the area, which is now considered one of the most beautiful sites of Nepal.

BRITISH AND CHINESE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ISSUE

The domestic crisis and the flight of Yuklathup and his followers into Nepalese territory gained momentum in trans-Himalayan politics. The flight of Yuklathup to Nepal created a severe headache to Sikkim as she suspected that Nepal would help the rebels and thus invite problems to Sikkim. Realizing this danger Sikkim referred the case to both the East India Company and China and requested them to intervene in the issue in favour of Sikkim.²⁵ It is worthwhile to mention that the English East India Company had already had an increasing interest in the trans-Himalayan political scenario. Both the treaties of Sugauli and Titaliya had provided the role of the arbitrator to the British in the dispute between Nepal and Sikkim. The British, who were keeping a close eye on the situation, summoned a meeting at Titaliya, where the deputies from both Nepal and Sikkim attended. In the conference the British concluded that Nepal had committed no mistake in granting asylum to Yuklathup and further asserted that Yuklathup was free to stay wherever he likes.²⁶ Thus, the British supported the Nepalese stand, and at the same time endeavoured to prevent any frictions between the two.

Sikkim was disappointed with the British attitude as the conclusion of the Titaliya meeting was against her expectations. The initial response from the Chinese *Ambans* at Lhasa was, however, positive to the Sikkimese. The Chinese *Ambans* asked Nepal to extradite Yuklathup to Lhasa for arbitration. Nepal was actually prepared to send Yuklathup to Lhasa and *Kazi Bir Kishor Pande* was entrusted with the job of escorting the *Kazi* to Lhasa.²⁷ But in the meantime the proposal was dropped and Yuklathup remained in Nepal. Why the extradition was postponed is not clear, as the contemporary documents do not highlight the issue. It is guessed that Nepal convinced China of the correctness of her stand towards the refugees and thus the *Ambans* did not further open the issue. The Nepalese government even provided all the necessary arrangements for Yuklathup's visit to Kathmandu.²⁸ But Nepal's intentions in facilitating this visit are still a mystery.

Sikkim was thus badly frustrated as the attitude of both British and the Chinese *Ambans* was contrary to her anticipation. At this stage, the Sikkim government decided to grant Yuklathup and others a general amnesty. Nepal seemed happy with this conclusion and escorted the team up to the Mechi River.²⁹ However, the Sikkimese, contrary to their announcement, tried to punish the rebels. Following this incident, Yuklathup and his followers again returned to Nepal and stayed on. The descendents of these refugees are still residing at Ilam.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Yuklathup episode was the last crisis between Nepal and Sikkim and the issue dominated trans-Himalayan politics for a couple of years. The British authorities in India not only adopted an indifferent attitude to the crisis but also took advantage from the turmoil. The British also tried to prevent any future hostilities between the two countries by annexing Darjeeling and adjoining territories of Sikkim. Sikkim could not dare to challenge the British move despite being unwilling to cede the track. Now British territory became the border of Nepal and Sikkim and consequently the historic rivalry between the two ended forever. Both Nepal and Sikkim became the losers of the game while the British diplomacy was rewarded with success. The desire of both Nepal and Sikkim to restore their lost territories thus ended in frustration. From this time onwards the British role and domination in trans-Himalayan politics increased rapidly while the presence of China decreased significantly.

Nepal definitely had some motives behind the issue and did try to benefit from the crisis. We can easily guess that without any political motives Nepal would not have provided many facilities to the Sikkimese fugitives. But due to the attitude of both British and China, and realizing the weak position of Yuklathup, Nepal ultimately determined to be neutral in the crisis.

NOTES

- ¹ Bajracharya, Dhanabajracharya and Tek Bahadur Shrestha, 'Sikkim Ka *Kazi* Yuklathupko Nepalma Saran,' (The political asylum of *Kazi* Yuklathup in Nepal) *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 5 (2), June 1978, p.37.
- ² Sharma, Nagendra, *Nepal's Relations with Sikkim and Bhutan*, Kathmandu: Himshikhar Publications, 2002, pp.11-15.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp.19-23.
- ⁴ For details, see, Rose, Leo E., *Nepal's Strategy for Survival*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973.

- ⁵ Acharya, Baburam, *Nepal ko Samkhipta Britanta* (A Short Account of Nepal), Kathmandu: Nir Bikram Pyasi and others, B.S. 2022, p.100.
- ⁶ Sharma, f.n. 2, p.174.
- ⁷ Rahul, Ram, *The Himalaya as a Frontier*, Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi, 1978, p.43.
- ⁸ Sharma Kasyap, Tulasi Ram, *Sikkim Hijo dekhi Aajasamma* (Sikkim: From Yesterday to Today), Ankura Publications: Gangtok, 1996, p.52.
- ⁹ Ibid., p.53.
- ¹⁰ Dousandup, Kaji, *History of Sikkim*, India, not mentioned, n.d., p.58.
- ¹¹ *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, New Delhi, 1972 [1894], p.19.
- ¹² Dhamala, Jaya, *Sikkim ko Itihas*, (History of Sikkim), Darjeeling: Shyam Prakashan, 1983, p.56.
- ¹³ Sharma, f.n. 2. p.69.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p.71.
- ¹⁵ Manandhar, Tri Ratna, 'Kazi Yuklthup Prati Nepalle Liyeko Niti', (Nepalese Policy towards Kazi Yuklathup) *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 10 (1-2), Dec. 1982/June 1983, p.118.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp.118-19.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Sharma, f.n.2, p.71.
- ¹⁹ Bajracharya and Shrestha, f. n.1, pp.37-50.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Manandhar, f.n.15, pp.118-20.
- ²² Nepal, Gyan Mani, *Nepal, Sukhim Sambandha*, (Relation between Nepal and Sikkim), Kathmandu: Nepal Itihas Bikas Samiti, B.S.2041, pp.11-41.
- ²³ Nepal had once requested to the East India Company to restore the formerly ceded tract Mechi to Tista as a gesture of friendship.
- ²⁴ Bajracharya and Shrestha, f. n. 1, pp.37-50.
- ²⁵ Sharma, f. n. 2, p.72.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Manandhar, f. n.15, p.120.
- ²⁸ Sharma, f. n. 2, p.73.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.73

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LADAKH AND OTHER HIMALAYAN
STATES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SIKKIM,
'BRAS LJONS, THE VALLEY OF RICE

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Ladakh, situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, has attracted numerous scholars and explorers in the past. Due to its close cultural, religious, and geographic affinity with Tibet, the region has long been called Western Tibet. Like the gNari region of Tibet, the mountains of Ladakh are bare and dry. Unlike the rest of the Himalayan states, very little vegetation grows there. The people cultivate land and rear livestock depending upon the water coming from the high mountains through the ravines. In the past they produced almost everything for their daily needs except tea, the staple drink to warm the body during long winter months. Similarly, the culture of Ladakh is basically Buddhist. Buddhism reached the region as early as Emperor Ashoka's (273 B.C.-236 B.C.) time through Kashmir.¹ The remains of *stupas* constructed during the Ashoka and Kanishka A.D. 78-101 periods are still preserved and local populations worship the *stupas* by renovating, as well as constructing temples in the vicinity of old ones. Buddhism took firm root in the region with the visit of Guru Padmasambhava in the seventh century.

The present population of the region is an amalgam of three distinct ethnic groups: the Mongoloid or Tibetan, Dogpa or Dard, and Mon races. At present the dominant population of the region is Mongoloid or Tibetan. Here in Ladakh, a number of songs are sung extolling the greatness of the race of the first Tibetan king: he is described as wish-fulfilling tree, whose branches and leaves have spread across a vast land.²

The topic of my paper is the similarities of Ladakh with Sikkim, 'Bras ljons, the valley of rice.

SECTION ONE

A striking similarity has been found in the Buddhist practices of Ladakh and Sikkim. It is said that during the reign of king Khri strong lde bstan, in the seventh century, Guru Padmasambhava blessed the land with a visit.

The follower of Tibetan Buddhism addresses and reveres Padmasambhava as a second Buddha. On a similar line, in both the kingdoms from the fifteenth century onward, the Kagyupa Lamas became root teachers to both of the royal families, who gave patronage to the sect.

The royal families of both Ladakh and Sikkim claim descent from gNya khri btsan po, the first king of Tibet. In Ladakh, dPal gyi mgon, a descendent of gNya khri btsan po became the king of Ladakh in the tenth century. Until the fifteenth century, the kings of the mGon dynasty ruled over Ladakh for over four hundred years. After that the kings with the surname rNam rgyal ascended to the throne. The first king in the series was Rin chen mam rgyal, whose reign lasted over thirty years. All successive kings of Ladakh, till present time, were called rNam rgyal.

Similarly, in the year 1657, Phun tsogs mam rgyal had been proclaimed the first Maharajah of Sikkim. rNam rgyal means 'victorious' in Tibetan. After him all successive kings of Sikkim ('Bras ljons) adopted rNam rgyal as their surname.

Another resemblance between Sikkim and Ladakh is in the male dress. In Ladakh the male dress is called *kos* or *rgya bzo*, while in Sikkim, *kho* or *khos*. The same type of *kho* is the national dress of Mongolia, still worn today. Similarly in the case of Sikkim, I had the privilege to see last ruler of Sikkim, Chos rgyal dPal ldan ton dup mam rgyal, putting on *kho* on several occasions. Since it was the dress of the great Mongolian king Genghis Khan, it must have been originated in Mongolia and China and reached Ladakh and Sikkim at a later time.

Another similarity between the two regions is the celebration of *lo gsar*, the New Year on the first day of the eleventh month, in accordance with the Tibetan calendar. In Ladakh, when the harvesting is over and the grain crop has been stored for the long winter months, the day for the celebration of the New Year approaches. This celebration takes place two months prior to the Tibetan *lo gsar* or king's New Year (*rgyal lo*), which is usually held in February-March.³

Regarding Ladakh's celebration of *lo gsar* prior to the Tibetan celebration, it is said that once a king of Ladakh had to go on a war to a neighboring district, hence he moved the celebration forward by two months so that his soldiers had time to celebrate the New Year with their families. However, the astrologers have a different interpretation about the celebrations of *lo gsar* in Ladakh and Tibet. The astrologers term Ladakh's *lo gsar* as a farmer's New Year (*so nam lo gsar*) that usually takes place at the same time as Christmas or New Year day celebrations in other parts of the world. It may be that these early celebrations in Sikkim and Ladakh had some religious or sectarian significance, both being governed by Drugpa kings instead of Gelukpas, as in Central Tibet in the sixteenth century onwards. On the other hand, it is also found recorded that farmers' New Year is observed in the villages around Shigatse and Ngari, which are the closest entry points to Tibet from both Ladakh and Sikkim.⁴

Similarities are also found in the food habits of the two regions, particularly in the staple drinks such as *chang* and tea. The farmers of upper ridges of Sikkim and Ladakh grow barley and brew *chang* in similar style and consume a lot both at work and at leisure time. In Sikkim, they grow a lot of tea but unfortunately not in Ladakh where the people consume tea with butter and salt in large quantities due to the harsh climatic conditions during the long winter months. The honorific word for tea both in Sikkim and Ladakh is *solja*, while *chang* is *skyem* in Ladakh.

The Kingdom of Sikkim was a protectorate of the British Government from 1890 until 1947 while, in 1834, the Kingdom of Ladakh was annexed to the State of Jammu. Hence both kingdoms allowed easy access to the European explorers of the past. A number of researchers in the field of Tibetan affairs and Buddhism entered Ladakh and carried out extensive research there. And Sikkim, including the surrounding districts such as Kalimpong and Darjeeling, was climatically favorable for those Europeans interested in Tibetan affairs to use as a base point to study trans-Himalayan affairs and Buddhism, as in those days they were not allowed to enter Tibet. Foremost among them was the great Hungarian Csoma de Koros (1784-1842), the pioneer student of Tibetan Studies and national hero of Hungary. Csoma studied the Tibetan language in a petty kingdom of Ladakh called Zanskar. Here he compiled the first scientific Tibetan-English Dictionary and Grammar of Tibetan language,

finally passing away on 11 April 1842 in Darjeeling. After him A.H. Jascke, the compiler of a second Tibetan-English Dictionary, also made Ladakh the base of his studies.

On a similar line, other enthusiastic explorers, Christian missionaries and those generally interested in Tibetan culture and civilization visited Ladakh and left important documents on the history and culture. Prominent among them were the Rev. A. William Heyde, the first missionary to set up a station in Ladakh and later to review the well-known Tibetan-English Dictionary by Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Das who, in 1902, stationed himself in Darjeeling. Chandra Das, however, did not visit Ladakh, but he certainly seems to have been impressed with and benefited from the works of Jascke and seems to have consulted the dictionary to cover Ladakhi terms. Later, A.H. Francke, the author of *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* (1926) and *A History of Western Tibet* (1907), Captain H. Ramsay, the author of *Western Tibet: a practical dictionary of the language and customs of the districts included in the Ladakh Wazarat, Year 1890* and Alexander Cunningham, the author of *Ladak: Physical, Statistical and Historical* (1853) also wrote descriptive information about Ladakh.

Ladakh, being a kingdom in the extreme north of the subcontinent and Sikkim in its eastern side, initially had no direct trade, political or socio-cultural connections, except through the Lamas and pious Buddhists who passed through Sikkim to Lhasa on pilgrimage.⁵

However, it is interesting to note that from the fifteenth century onward, a good number of Lho Drugpa Lamas from the neighboring kingdom of Bhutan reached Ladakh. One of them was Chosje Moszin. According to the Head Lama of Stakna, the Lama visited Ladakh on the advice of none other than Zhabs drung nga dbang mam rgyal, (1594-1651), the Grand Lama and unifier of Bhutan. Upon arrival in Ladakh, the Lama became the root teacher of successive kings and built a temple on the mountain that looked like a Tiger. This *gonpa* was called 'Stagna the Tiger nose'. With that, a tradition of lamas from Bhutan visiting Ladakh was established and the last incarnate lama from Bhutan to act as the abbot of Stakna *gonpa* was Chos rje Jams dbyangs pad dkar who visited Ladakh during the reign of King Nyi ma mam rgyal (1720-1740). A folk song composed in honour of the Lama is very popular.⁶ Also, the present Head Lama of Stakna is the incarnation of Lama Nga dwang rgya mtsan, a celebrated lama from Phunaka. On the political front as well as the religious one, the Ladakhi kings, including Seg gey mam rgyal, supported Bhutan's policy of resistance against the Gelukpa and granted the Ladakhi part of Ngari Skor gsum region to Zhabs drung nga dbang mam rgyal, despite the opposition of the Tibetan Government in Lhasa.

Seg gey mam rgyal sent his brother bTsan 'zin to give military assistance and later rose to become governor (*rzong dpon*) of Wangdu Phodrang in Bhutan. In the eighteenth century, Nyi ma nam rgyal sent his own brother, Nga dwang btsan 'zin Nor bu, to Bhutan and he became Je Khenpo from 1738-44.⁷ But no such religious or political connections between Sikkim and Ladakh have ever come to light.

However, regarding Sikkim's connection with Ladakh, an important document dated 8 June 1911 came to light in the Government archives in Leh. In this the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim expressed his desire to the Government of India in regard to his intention to marry a Buddhist lady of some respectable family from Ladakh.

The letters in question, spanning eleven pages in total, reveal the important status of Sikkim as a British protectorate kingdom in those days. The first letter in the series written by the Chief Minister, Jammu and Kashmir State, to S. Hashmat Ullah, Wazir Wazarat, Ladakh goes as under: (note: the spelling, punctuation, etc. in all the following documents are as in the originals)

Dated Srinagar the 8th June, 1911

Dear Sir,

Maharajah Kumar of Sikkim having expressed his desire to the Government of India in regard to his intention to marry a Buddhist lady of some respectable family from Ladakh, the Govt. of India have asked the Resident to arrange through Darbar to find out some suitable match for the Maharaj Kumar.

The Maharajah Kumar is of 34 years of age and is a devoted Buddhist, and wishes to marry a grown up Buddhist lady, if possible an English speaking one.

I shall be glad if you will please make confidential inquiries about the proposed match from Ladakh, Zanskar, Purik etc. and let me know full particulars about the respectability of the parents, age, etc. of the girl. If possible a photograph of the girl may be obtained and supplied. The inquiries should be conducted in such a manner that the parents of the girl may not come to know about the matter till it is finally settled. Please see the inquiries are made as secretly as possible, and your reply should reach me before the end of the month.

The matter may please be treated strictly confidential.

Yours Sincerely
Dewan
Chief Minister
J&K State

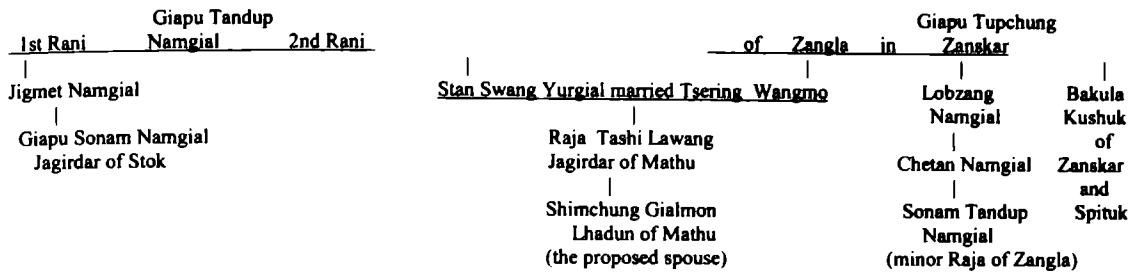
Through the latter it seems that at the time of the enquiry the Maharaj Kumar was already 34 years old, but his identity is not mentioned.

Upon receiving this letter, S. Hashmat Ullah, the Wazir Wazarat, carried out a detailed study of the family situation of the noble families of central Ladakh, Purig and Zanskar. The findings of the Wazir are recorded in confidential D.O. letter No. 427, Kargil, dated 2 July 1911.

To:
Rai Sahib Dewan
Amar Nath Sahib Bahadur
Chief Minister to H.H. the Maharja Sahib Bahadur
Jammu and Kashmir State

Dear Sir,

With reference to your D.NO. 48/c dated June 8th 1911 regarding the desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh, I beg to state that the most respectable family of Buddhists in Ladakh, Zanskar and Purig is that of the *Raja of Stok* whose grandfather Giapu Tandup Namgial was the ruler of Ladakh at the time of conquest. He has no daughter of his own. But his cousin Raja Tashi Lawang of Mathu has a grown up daughter who I should think would be a suitable spouse for the Maharaj Kumar. I therefore sent for the Raja of Stok and Kushok Bakula of Zanskar, who is closely related with the Raja of Mathu, to consult about the desired match. I have discussed the matter with them. They say that the name of the lady is Shimchung Gialmon Lhadun of Matho. The following genealogical tree will show clearly her parentage.



The Gialmon is sixteen years of age and is lady of many refined manners according to Tibetan civilization, and is also said to be good looking. The Buddhist era of her birth is called Mete (Me=fire, te=Monkey). I enclose a slip with full name of the lady and the era of her birth written on it in Buddhist characters. She is illiterate and speaks only her mother tongue the Ladakhi dialect of the Tibetan language. No one from amongst the Ladakhis knows English. Urdu knowing people are also few and far between. She is a lady of unquestionable respectability in Ladakh. But wealth she has not. The only source of her father's income is the small Jagir of Mathu granted to him by the state where Raja Tashi Lhawang is living a peaceful life.

2. The Kushok Bakula and the Raja of Stok say that they knew absolutely nothing of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim nor have they enough means to enter into matrimonial relations with the ruling chiefs. For this reason they don't know how to start the negotiations. In case it is desired by his highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur the marriage should be contracted and His Highness has full reliance on the Maharaj Kumar, the Kushok as well as the Raja of Stok will consider it there good fortune to carry out the wishes of his highness. Even in that case they will not be able to get through the marriage ceremony in a manner becoming to the dignity and position of the proposed bridegroom on their own scanty means and without help from the state. If this is arranged and His Highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur is inclined to think that the proposed marriage is desirable one, the Kushok Bakula and the Raja of Stok undertake to arrange for the same with Raja Tashi Lhawang of Mathu.

3. The Raja of Stok on his return to Leh will have the lady photographed and will send the photo to me which on receipt will be submitted to you. This may be expected within three weeks if a photographer is available otherwise it will take longer time.

4. The Kushok Bakula further asked that if no objection, the full name of the Maharaj Kumar, the Buddhist era of his birth, and particulars about his family and character may kindly be communicated to him.

5. As the Kushok Bakula had to be sent for from Zanskar the reply to your letter could not be sent earlier.

Yours Obediently,
Hashmat Ullah Khan

According to the genealogical tree prepared by the Wazir Wazarat, Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun was the great niece of the 18th successive incarnation of Arhat Bakula the abbot of

Spituk Gonpa born in Zangla palace, and the aunt of the 19th incarnation of Kushok Bakula of Spituk born in the royal family of Matho. The Wazir included the Kushok Bakula, who was only her great uncle by relation, because of the Kushok's position in the Ladakhi administration and his influence in public affairs.

Now the only hurdle to the Wazir securing the Maharaj Kumar's consent was to obtain a photograph of the Shimchung through the Raja of Stok. The Raja had said that this would take three weeks, due to the difficulty in obtaining a camera, and the materials necessary for developing and printing a photograph. The Dewan upon receiving the confidential letter of the Wazir, wrote once again asking for a photo to be supplied quickly.

Confidential NO. 190 C

From: The Chief Minister
Jammu and Kashmir State

To: S. Hashmatullah
Wazir Wazarat, Ladakh

Srinagar 10 October 1911

Dear Sir,

Please refer to your confidential letter No, 427 D.O.

Dated the 2nd July 1911 on the subject of the proposed desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh.

I have read with pleasure the particulars furnished by you in letter concerning Lady Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun daughter of the Raja of Matho, as also the manner in which you conducted the confidential enquiries connected with the matter.

In para 3 of your letter you said that the Raja of Stok would arrange to have the lady photographed, I think you would supply the photo to me within three weeks.

It is expected that the Raja of Stok has already managed to have a photograph prepared of the lady. If however, he has not done so I shall be glad if you will please arrange, if it can be done without offence and without the object becoming known to the lady or to her parents, to secure a photo of the lady and supply the same to me as early as possible for transmission to the government of India as the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim is desirous of the seeing the same.

Yours sincerely,
Dewan, Chief Minister
J&K State

Ladakh, being a cut off region with the rest of the world and educationally backward had no young ladies with proficiency in English. Nor in those days, did a single school of modern science exist in Ladakh. Similarly, no photo studio or professional photographer lived in Leh to make it possible for the resident to obtain the photograph of the nominated lady, Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun of Matho, to send to the Maharaj Kumar. Therefore, it took the local administration almost six months to accomplish the task and by the time the Maharaj Kumar could get the photo, it was already very late.

A reminder to the letter also arrived from Captain R.H. Chenevix Trench, I.A., First Secretary to the Resident in Kashmir addressed to Rai Sahib Diwan Amar Nath, Chief Minister to H.H. the Maharaja from Srinagar Vide No. 159, Dated 5 October 1911 on the subject:-

My dear Sir

You will no doubt recollect Colonel Erskine speaking to you early last June regarding the possibility of finding in Kashmir, Ladakh, and small Buddhist states on the latter frontier a lady who might make a suitable wife for the Maharaja Kumar of Sikkim. You promised to make secret inquiries in the matter but thought it doubtful whether a photograph of any such lady could be secured without a reference to her or to her parents, to whom it was undesirable that any direct reference should be made on the subject.

The inquiries made by you elicited the information contained in letter No. 427, dated the 2nd July 1911, from the Wazir Wazarat Ladakh to your address, which was handed by you to the resident on the 11th idem. A copy of the above letter, which is returned herewith was forwarded to the Government of India who have asked that if possible, a photograph of the lady known as the Shimchung Gialmon of Matho may be obtained, as the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim is desirous of receiving a copy.

It is possible that Maharaja of Stok (vide paragraph 3 of the Wazir Wazarat's above cited letter) has already managed to have the lady photographed. If however, he has not done so I am to request that you will kindly arrange, if it can be done without offence, and without the object becoming known to the lady or the parents, to secure a photo of the former for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim.

Yours sincerely,
P Chevenix Trench

In spite of repeated and personal letters by both the Dewan (chief Minister) and Captain First Assistant to the Resident Captain Trench for the procurement of a photo of Shimchung Gialmon of Matho or any other lady from the region to send Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim took the Wazir Wazarat almost six months to get one. Finally, in the month of November, the photo reached the Wazir, now in Kargil, who forwarded the photo to the Dewan, the Chief Minister, as the letter below explain.

Confidential NO. 950/DO
Ladkh Wazarat
Kargil
November 15th, 1911

Sir,

Will you kindly refer to your confidential letter No. 190-C/DO dated October 19th, 1911 on the subject of the desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh.

I beg to enclose herewith a photograph of Simchung Gialmon Lhadon supplied to me by the Raja of Stok. The photo I am sorry is not a good one. There are no professional photographers in Ladakh and as the matter had to be managed without giving the least opportunity to the lady or to

her parents to suspect the real object no better could be arranged. I however hope that it will serve to give the Maharaj Kumar at least some idea with the Gialmon is like.

With respects
I am, yours obediently,
Hashmatullah Khan

There seems to have been some delay in sending the photograph of Shimchung Lhadun from the Dewan to Captain Trench, and Trench sent the Dewan the following letter:

Confidential No. 193 of 1911

From: Captain P.H. Cheevenix Trench, I.A.
First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir

To: Rai Sahib Dewan Amar Nath
Chief Minister to His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir,
Sialkot

Dated: Sialkot 27th of November 1911

Sir,

I am directed to invite your attention to my letter No. 159 dated the 6th October, 1911, regarding a photograph of a Buddhist lady required for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, and to request the favor of an early reply.

Yours truly,
P. Chevenix Trench, Captain
First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir.

The Dewan now obtained the photograph from the Wazir Wazarat, and posted it under confidential cover to Captain Trench. The Dewan's letter reads as follows:

Confidential No. 228 C.S.
Enclosure: One photograph.

From: The Chief Minister,
Jammu and Kashmir State

To: Captain P. Chevenix Trench,
First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir,
Sialkot.

Sialkot, 28th November, 1911

My dear Sir,

With reference to your confidential letter No. 159, dated the 5th October last I am to forward herewith a photograph of the lady known as Shimchung Gialmon Lhadun daughter of the Raja of Matho for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, a copy of the Wazir Wazarat Ladakh

letter No. 950. Ditto of 15th November 1911 with which the said photograph has been received as also enclosed for information.

Yours sincerely,
Dewan

The decision of the Maharaj Kumar, which was in the negative, reached Captain Trench through the political officer after a gap of six months, and was duly communicated to the Dewan. Trench's letter reads:

Confidential: Sialkot, the 19th. March, 1912

My dear Sir,

With reference to your letter No. 228 C.S. dated the 28th November, 1911, I am desired to inform you that the political Officer in Sikkim has reported that the Maharaj Kumar does not desire marriage with the lady Simchung Gialmon Lhadun of Matho

Yours sincerely,
P Chevenix Trench

This event took place around 1911 and Maharaj Kumar had education in both traditional and modern sciences. As far his education in modern sciences and events are concerned he had been to Oxford, where he must have learnt geo-political scenario of the continent hence may have felt the need to seek an educated spouse. From the letter it makes clear that the 34 years old Maharaj Kumar wanted to marry a good-looking young Buddhist lady belonging to an aristocrat family with proficiency in English and sought her photograph. These demands by the Maharaj Kumar must have posed a daunting task to the Wazir to plead the case.

According to Alex McKay's paper entitled, 'The Education of Maharajah Kumar Sidkeon Namgyal of Sikkim',⁸ it appears that prior to the Maharajah Kumar expressing his desire to marry a Ladakhi lady belonging to a respectful family, he had sought for a Buddhist lady from Japan, Burma and Tibet. It also makes it clear that the Kumar, being a *tulku* or incarnate one, wished to have a Buddhist wife hailing from Buddhist kingdoms of the time to maintain the traditions of his ancestors, instead of marrying a wife who would not be liked by his subjects.

The whole episode raises some interesting points. For instance, why did the proposal not receive the consent of the Maharaj Kumar? Was it due to the inefficiency of the Darbar in tackling the matter? What would have happened if the proposal had been accepted? What is the significance of these letters in the cultural context of Himalayan kingdoms?

The last contact between Ladakh and Sikkim took place when the last ruler of Sikkim, Chos rgyal dPal Ldan ton drup namgyal, paid an official visit in 1972, before he was dethroned and his kingdom became the 20th State of the Indian Union. His visit was a historical one in the sense that no Himalayan king of such high position had ever paid a visit to Ladakh. So, following the tradition a rousing reception was given the King by the people of Ladakh at the centre of Ladakhi Buddhism in Leh popularly known as Cho khang Vihara. Decorated thrones were placed, one for the Ladakhi King, Thin las namgyal, and one for the Sikkimese King Chos rgyal dPal Ldan ton drup namgyal. The latter was offered the first throne in the row, but instead he decided to be seated next to the Ladakhi King.⁹ On an

inquiry, it was learnt that the Sikkimese King had given precedence to the Ladakhi King as the latter was a direct descendent of the Tibetan King gNya khri btsan po.

This episode illustrates the continuing importance of genealogy and historical lineage among the aristocracies of the Himalaya. Among the followers of the Tibetan form of Mahayana Buddhism in the region, there is a profound respect for the Tibetan exponents of the religion, and also for the Tibetan kings. So, to establish their identity, the rulers of various Himalayan kingdoms have emphasized their direct descent from the Tibetan kings. Like Ladakh, aristocrat families of Sikkim, Mustang in Nepal, the Mons (present day Arunachal Pradesh), and other kingdoms, have claimed direct descent from these kings; and it is the provenance and pedigree of these lineages which is an important factors in determining the social hierarchy amongst the aristocracies.

CONCLUSION

These letters are very valuable in helping us understand the socio-economic conditions of Ladakh in the early twentieth century and the external sentiments of Ladakh as a kingdom expressed by outsiders at the time. Ladakh, being cut off from the rest of the world till recent times, is indeed a difficult place to reach. However, its link with the rest of the country was established only in the year 1948 with the landing of an Indian Air force aircraft: the plane brought Indian soldiers to protect the land from Pakistan's aggression. Ladakh's surface link with Srinagar was established only in the year 1962, after the Sino-Indian war, to reinforce the presence of the Indian army in the area. On the other hand, Sikkim had easy access to the rest of the world, even in early times due to its position on the trade roads from the plains of India to Tibet. But the letters give evidence that even in the early twentieth century, Ladakh had a respectable place in the world of Himalayan kingdoms as a strong bastion of Buddhism and Mahayana culture.

NOTES

- * Note that sections of this paper were previously published in 'Ladakh's Relations with other Himalayan Kingdoms', in Ernst Steinkellner (ed.), *Tibetan Studies*, volume II, Wien, 1997, pp.669-76.
- 1 J.N. Ganhar and P.N. Ganhar, *Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh*, New Delhi, 1956.
- 2 Tashi Rabgias, *Mar yul la dwags ki snon rabs kun gsal me lon or the History of Ladakh Called the Mirror Which Illuminates All*; Leh, 1984.
- 3-4 R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, London, 1972.
- 5 *Sheeraza Ladakhi*, Volume 26, No. 3-4, A publication of J&K Academy of art, culture and languages, Leh-Ladakh, 2004.
- 6 Tashi Rabgias (compiler and editor), *Ladakhi Folk Songs*, Leh, 1971.
- 7 John Bray and Chris Butters, 'An Eighteenth Century Bhutanese Lama's Visit to Ladakh', in *Ladakh: Culture, History and Development*, pp. 49-57, edited by Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen and Poul Pedersen. Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 1999. Also refer for more details to Luciano Petech, *The Kingdom of Ladakh*, Rome, 1977.
- 8 See, Alex McKay, "'That he may take due pride in the empire to which he belongs': the education of Maharajah Kumar Sidkeon Namgyal Tulku of Sikkim", in *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 39.2., 2003, pp.27-52.
- 9 I am greatly indebted to Shri Abdul Qayum, ex-information Officer, Leh for this information.

**“I MAY BE BRANDED AS COMMUNAL BUT LOOK AT THINGS FROM MY
ANGLE”: PALDEN THONDUP NAMGYAL AND THE PRESERVATION OF THE
BHUTIA-LEPCHA ETHOS IN THE BUDDHIST KINGDOM OF SIKKIM¹**

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The twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1982), was determined to preserve Sikkim as a Buddhist kingdom with its own traditions and political institutions. His twentieth-century vision for Sikkim was cast in the crucible of the British withdrawal from India in 1947 when the separate political identity and unique culture of the kingdom were threatened. More than any of his predecessors, Palden Thondup Namgyal articulated and acted upon the impulse to protect at all costs what he considered to be the essence of Sikkim—the Namgyal dynasty and the Bhutia-Lepcha ethos.

In a memorandum written in the early 1950s, Crown Prince Namgyal argued in favor of granting the minority Bhutia and Lepcha communities ‘rightful weightage in all forms of public institutions,’ or what became known as ‘parity.’ He acknowledged, “I may be branded as communal,” but asked his audience to “look at things from my angle.”² In this paper I consider Namgyal’s ‘angle’ within the context of what he perceived to be his royal duty and the political events that unfolded during his years as crown prince (1941-1963). I argue that these circumstances shaped his perspective, strengthened his resolve, and spurred him to action, all of which served as the foundation for the agenda he single-mindedly pursued as Chogyal from 1963-1975. This discussion offers a response to what Namgyal’s critics have condemned as his unyielding ‘communal’ stand privileging the Bhutia-Lepcha community³ and his unwavering determination to perpetuate the Namgyal dynasty.

To Palden Thondup Namgyal, two essential and interconnected features distinguished Sikkim from other political states: 1) the institution of the Namgyal dynasty and 2) the Bhutia-Lepcha ethos, or the Mahayana Buddhist cultural and religious traditions and values embodied in the Bhutia and Lepcha communities.⁴ Over the centuries, the survival of both had been threatened not only in 1947 with the end of the British Raj. Since its founding in the 1640s, the Namgyal dynasty faced both internal and external threats to its sovereignty. A rebellious local nobility and more powerful neighbors victimized Chogyal after Chogyal. Infighting among court factions further weakened the Durbar’s tenuous authority. Bhutan and Nepal annexed pieces of the kingdom when Tibet, Sikkim’s historical overlord, failed to intervene. In 1817 the British in India rescued the beleaguered Himalayan principality with promises of peace and restoration of seized territories. In this way the British gained their coveted foothold in the eastern Himalayas. Obsessed with reaching Lhasa, the British courted Sikkimese collaborators, scouted routes from Sikkim to Tibet, blasted roads out of the vertical landscape, and bullied the Chogyal and his courtiers. After the war of 1888-89, British hegemony in Sikkim was formalized in 1890 with the Anglo-Chinese Convention, the deposal of the Ninth Chogyal, Thutob Namgyal (1860-1914), and the banishment of the Namgyal family to Darjeeling district for several years. The 1890 convention gave the British

exclusive control over the domestic affairs and foreign relations of the kingdom, but the Namgyal dynasty persevered. By 1918, the British still controlled foreign affairs, defence, and communications of its protectorate, but the Eleventh Chogyal, Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963), recovered the internal administration of Sikkim.

During their intervention in Sikkim, the British also launched an immigration policy that radically altered the ethnic composition of the kingdom and generated a ripple effect extending far into the future. Beginning in the 1860s and continuing over several decades, the British, together with Sikkimese collaborators, settled Nepalese in the sparsely populated southern and western tracts of Sikkim. This strategy was driven by the British desire to balance the pro-Tibetan Bhutias,⁵ or Sikkimese of Tibetan descent, with pro-British-India Nepalese.⁶ Despite protests from Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and some of the powerful Bhutia-Lepcha kasis, or landlords, this extensive migration persisted virtually unchecked until the last part of the nineteenth century. By 1890, 'Nepalese Sikkimese' outnumbered the earliest Sikkimese subjects, the Lepchas and the Tsongs, considered the first inhabitants of the area, and the Bhutias, or settlers from Tibet who established the kingdom. In this way, Sikkim evolved into a Buddhist monarchy in which a religious king, or Chogyal, and minority Bhutia-Lepcha people dominated a population overwhelmingly Nepalese by ancestry and Hindu by religion. This fundamental reality went unchallenged until the era of Indian Independence.

The first three decades of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal's reign were peaceful. Threats to Sikkim's borders had ebbed, and the landed nobility, while all-powerful on their estates, did not challenge the local authority of the Palace. Nepalese migration continued but on a reduced scale. The British exit from India in 1947, however, triggered a turbulent transition for Sikkim, whose survival as a Buddhist monarchy was now precarious. During this time, Indian bureaucrats pressured the Chogyal to hand over his kingdom to the new Government of India, and inexperienced Sikkimese politicians clamored for democracy, a trend that Crown Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal feared would lead to rule by the Nepalese Sikkimese majority. His capitulation to either demand would have meant the extinction of Sikkim the kingdom and its traditions and values.

This 'period of difficulty and transition,'⁷ as it was later described by Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal, was not only a training ground for the young prince in the tactics of realpolitik. These experiences left their deep imprint on Namgyal who, during this time, framed the core issue of the royal agenda he would pursue as Chogyal—to protect and enhance the political status and identity of Sikkim. Prince Palden Thondup was steeped in the historical trials and tribulations of the kingdom. The wounds of settling the kingdom with immigrants from Nepal, Sikkim's historical enemy, still smarted. The prince's grandfather, Thutob Namgyal, and grandmother, Yeshe Dolma (1867-1910), had endured humiliation and suffering as pawns in the British push north to Lhasa. His father, Tashi Namgyal, had been born in Darjeeling district under British house arrest. For Namgyal, these historical and personal memories were now layered with the urgent business of protecting Sikkim from merger with India.

As the second son of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal and a recognized Buddhist reincarnation, Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal was expected to live in the shadow of his older brother, Crown Prince Paljor (1921-1941), and focus on religious matters.⁸ But when Prince Paljor, who had enlisted in the Royal Indian Air Force during World War II, died while landing his plane on an airfield in present-day Pakistan in 1941, Prince Palden Thondup became heir apparent. Unlike his father, a slight man temperamentally inclined to meditation and artistic

pursuits, Prince Palden Thondup embraced and relished an active role in the administration. He quickly became Sir Tashi's principal advisor and by the late 1940s was acknowledged as *de facto* ruler. Even though he had no legal role in the government, decisions formally issued as those of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal were actually the decisions of Prince Palden Thondup.⁹ From the mid-1940s, the younger Namgyal was the Sikkimese focal point of every significant development in the kingdom. His first major test was to navigate through the minefield of Indian Independence.

Since internal authority had been restored to Tashi Namgyal in 1918, the pre-eminence of the Namgyal dynasty and of the Bhutia and Lepcha communities had been unquestioned. With the end of the British Raj looming, Prince Palden Thondup not only faced the distinct possibility of Sikkim's merger with India. The simultaneous birth of Sikkimese political parties in the wake of the nationalist movement in India also introduced the prospect of democracy in Sikkim, which he interpreted as a euphemism for rule by the Nepalese Sikkimese majority. However, the most pressing issue initially was the immediate fate of the monarchy. No one in Sikkim knew if the kingdom would be absorbed into independent India like the semi-autonomous 'princely states' (where the British ruled indirectly) or continue as a protectorate under the new government in Delhi.

During the nineteenth century, the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim evolved into a buffer zone for the British Raj, a 'Mongolian fringe' of border states separating India from the Chinese and Russian empires.¹⁰ In an arrangement that suited British India, the exact terms of its relationships with the three states were never completely spelled out.¹¹ Because the British chose Sikkim with its accessible Himalayan passes as their stepping stone to Tibet, the kingdom was more closely brought into the British colonial system than either Nepal or Bhutan. The British had controlled the internal affairs of Sikkim from 1890 to 1918 and its foreign affairs for over fifty years. Even so, the international status of Sikkim was far from clear-cut.

As the British prepared to leave India, Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal and his advisers worried that this ambiguity, or the 'Sikkim question,' would be exploited by Home Minister Sardar Vallabhai Patel and his right-hand man, V.P. Menon, secretary of States Ministry, the two Indians appointed to forge a united India from the colonial provinces and hundreds of princely states. In the months before Indian independence, Sardar Patel persuaded, or coerced, rulers of the princely states to sign the 'instrument of accession,' a process that surrendered their sovereignty and identity to democratic India. It was during this time that Namgyal first proposed the idea of a Himalayan federation comprised of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet, the three political states where Mahayana Buddhism prevailed. Never clearly formulated, the concept did not garner much real support, especially in the wake of the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1950. But its articulation reflected the anxiety of Palden Thondup Namgyal as he observed disturbing trends in India and China, and in his own kingdom.¹²

In the spring of 1946, both British officials and members of the Constituent Assembly, soon to become the Indian Parliament, generally acknowledged that Sikkim was in a 'peculiar position,' different from the princely states. But Sikkim's political status as an Indian state under the Government of India Act of 1935 and Sir Tashi's membership in the Chamber of Princes might still be leveraged to force its integration with India.¹³ In a memorandum to the British Government in India, Sir Tashi wrote that "Sikkim is not Indian, except politically." He emphasized his kingdom's link with Tibet, its position as a border

state on the periphery of India, and 1861 treaty relations with the British government.¹⁴ In August 1946 the India Office concluded:

There are good reasons to accord Sikkim a position analogous to that of Bhutan. Sikkim is not India any more than Nepal and Bhutan are; its cultural and ethnological affinities are to its northern and in some ways western neighbours, though it has suited us to absorb it and use it as a window to Lhasa. It can still be a window and will provide a clearer view if in the future it is allowed in the direction of protectorate rather than an integral part of India.¹⁵

While personally agreeing with the conclusion of the India Office, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the future prime minister of India, also recognized that the committee formed to discuss the future of the princely states had no legal basis for considering the fates of Sikkim and Bhutan. In a resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly in January 1947, the committee was authorized to negotiate with 'territories which are not Indian States, specially Bhutan and Sikkim.'¹⁶ One month before India became an independent nation, Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal, Rai Bahadur Tashi Dadhul Densapa, the prince's main adviser, and Roop Narain, an Indian who served as legal adviser to Sikkim, met in New Delhi with V.P. Menon and other Indian officials. Menon agreed that Sir Tashi was in a different class from the rulers of the princely states and would not be pressured to enter into the Indian union.¹⁷ On 27 February 1948, Sikkim and the government in India entered into a standstill agreement, a legal confirmation that India would not insist on Sikkim's full accession. Broadly speaking, the agreement kept alive the old arrangements in place on 15 August 1947, until a new treaty could be negotiated.¹⁸ Nehru's willingness to honour the legal context for Sikkim's unique political status as protectorate and Palden Thondup Namgyal's resolve to keep Sikkim separate from India revived and guaranteed the supremacy of the Namgyal dynasty.

As Namgyal fought to save Sikkim from the fate of the princely states, newly minted political leaders in Sikkim clamoured for sweeping changes.¹⁹ Their demands focused on merger with India, the abolition of the lessee-landlord system, and popular representation in the government.²⁰ On behalf of his father, Palden Thondup Namgyal was already well into a reform program that would end the land tenure system established by the first British political officer, John Claude White. Predictably, he refused to merge the kingdom with India but agreed to begin the process of associating the Sikkim State Congress, the main party formed at the time, with the administration. He appointed three party members, one from each ethnic community, Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepalese, to serve as secretaries to selected departments. However, relations between the secretaries and the party president, Tashi Tsering, quickly deteriorated over how to proceed in reforming their departments. Under pressure from the president, the secretaries were eventually forced to resign. The attempt of President Tashi Tsering to assert party control over the secretaries alarmed Prince Palden Thondup. The Sikkim State Congress had a large enough following to threaten the authority of the Chogyal. Its demand for popular government was widely construed as a strategy for submerging the rights and interests of the minority communities. To counter the threat from politicians whom he believed were not working for the kingdom's best interests, Namgyal wooed away dissatisfied Bhutia and Lepcha members from the State Congress.²¹ Through them he set up a new party, the Sikkim National Party, in April 1948.

Over the next several months, the Sikkim State Congress rallied support and staged two large political demonstrations, a phenomenon unprecedented in Sikkim's history.²² Under pressure from the Indian political officer, the Chogyal agreed to the formation of a 'popular

ministry,' a five-member council of ministers with three State Congress members and two royal nominees. Within less than one month, the Indian government intervened at the 'request' of the Chogyal due to political disagreements that immediately arose between the politicians and the Palace. Political Officer Harishwar Dayal took charge of the Sikkim administration, dismissed the blindsided ministers, and arranged for the dispatch to Gangtok of a company of Indian troops.²³ Behind the scenes with the Chogyal, Dayal had conditionally offered to dissolve the ministry, an offer welcomed by the Palace. But the attached conditions were substantial: First of all, the Chogyal had no choice but to accept new treaty negotiations under what were now less than ideal circumstances. Secondly, an Indian official was to be put in charge of the Sikkim administration until the situation normalized. In early June 1949 the Chogyal handed over the government to Dayal pending the appointment of an Indian dewan, or prime minister.

The Indo-Sikkim Treaty, signed in December 1950, was a bittersweet victory for the Namgyal family. The 1949 demonstrations, the Indian take-over of the Sikkim administration, and Indian anxiety over recent Chinese aggression in Tibet restricted the bargaining powers of Palden Thondup Namgyal who almost single-handedly negotiated the treaty.²⁴ Under the terms of the treaty, Sikkim remained a protectorate with responsibility for its internal affairs, while India looked after its defence, foreign relations, and communications.²⁵ A three-page letter sent by Dayal to the Palace further circumscribed the relationship. The 'Exchange of Letters,' as it was called, ominously stated that the Indian government could intervene in the internal administration of Sikkim 'should a situation arise in which law and order are seriously threatened within the State.'²⁶ At the same time, the treaty symbolized New Delhi's recognition of Sikkimese identity and autonomy, and the legitimacy of the Namgyal dynasty. It implied a commitment to the continuation of the monarchy as the central political institution in Sikkim and provided for conditional support to the palace in the development of Sikkim's political, economic, and social systems.²⁷ For the time being, the treaty also silenced Sikkimese politicians clamouring for accession to India.

The political events of the late 1940s left their deep imprint on Crown Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal and irrevocably shaped his perspective and actions. Under the treaty he negotiated with New Delhi, Sikkim remained a protectorate of India; the Namgyal dynasty recovered the key role in the determination of the kingdom's political and national identity. Yet the Chogyal's authority, already limited by the presence of the political officer, was now further undercut by the appointment of an Indian dewan, or prime minister, to oversee his administration.²⁸ Namgyal spent the next several years consolidating a power base first reduced by the British and then by the Indians, and re-establishing the Chogyal's position as the true nexus of authority in Sikkim. With the birth of political parties and the demand for popular government, Namgyal also identified the need to embed the new political system with safeguards to protect the rights and interests of the indigenous communities—an essential first step in the process of guaranteeing the survival of the country's unique culture and traditions.

Delhi's decision to send an Indian dewan to Gangtok was a serious setback for Namgyal. Both he and the politicians hoped the position would be temporary, but it remained a fixture for the next twenty-five years. Over time, the name of the position was changed, the status was downgraded, and the administrative and executive powers were reduced.²⁹ But the first

dewan, John S. Lall, a commanding ICS officer, enjoyed unusual and unlimited powers. From his perch at Mintokgang, a hilltop bungalow in Gangtok now the official residence of Sikkim's chief minister, Lall directed reforms aimed at reshaping the Sikkim administration, associating the political parties with the government, and spurring economic development in Sikkim.

Lall's correspondence with the Ministry of External Affairs reveals a conflicted relationship between him and the crown prince based in part on their different interpretations of the role of the dewan.³⁰ The 'Exchange of Letters,' a three-page document supplementing the 1950 treaty, broadly described the dewan as "principal adviser and executive officer of the Maharaja."³¹ However, the document did not enumerate the specific powers and functions of the dewan, which in fact were 'still under discussion' at the end of Lall's nearly five-year tenure in Sikkim.³² Namgyal urged the adoption of more detailed provisions but was told 'there was no particular need.' He preferred to see the role of the dewan devolve into a 'kind of Secretary.'³³ The dewan had been sent to Gangtok to 'restore peaceful conditions, set up an administration, and make proposals for a Constitution.'³⁴ In acting vigorously to implement these changes, Lall exercised a sweeping authority over the administration.³⁵ As he emerged as the 'power behind the throne,' or *de facto* ruler of Sikkim, Namgyal naturally resented the interference and the challenge to his authority. In 1951, Namgyal wrote to his friend, Nari K. Rustomji, who succeeded Lall as dewan in 1954: 'Here things are not so good, and the Government of India is pretending that we rule while they rule through a dewan.'³⁶ These developments indicated to Namgyal that New Delhi did not intend to honour the Indo-Sikkim Treaty, which enshrined the kingdom's internal autonomy, but was merely manoeuvring into a position to take over the kingdom.³⁷

After Lall's departure in 1954, Namgyal worked together reasonably well with successive dewans, particularly Nari K. Rustomji who served in Sikkim from 1954-1959 and was the perfect antidote to Lall.³⁸ Highly sensitive to Sikkimese concerns and aspirations, Rustomji tirelessly collaborated with Namgyal to protect and highlight the unique personality of Sikkim and implement the country's first development plan launched in 1954.³⁹ But Namgyal's searing experience with Lall in the wake of Indian Independence, no doubt oriented him in future years as he concentrated on restoring greater authority to the Chogyal's position.

While Namgyal's relationships with subsequent dewans stabilized, his interactions with the political officers, India's representative in Sikkim, were chronically tinged with an undercurrent of anxiety, mistrust, and conflict. After his first tour of Sikkim in 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru criticized the imperious behaviour of Indian officers in Sikkim,⁴⁰ but the tradition of domineering the Sikkimese so perfected by the first British political officer, John Claude White, was not easily shed. From the Residency, a compound carved out of the jungle by White in the 1890s and dominating the hilltop above the Palace, the Indian political officers seamlessly continued the habit of interfering in Sikkimese affairs.⁴¹ The more elevated site of the Residency, and indeed its grandeur, were graphic and rankling reminders of a 'protecting power,' whose officials tended to "throw their weight around as superiors, push in their 'Indian culture,' and generally function in a very expansive way."⁴²

During his years as crown prince, Namgyal's relationship with Apa B. Pant, the third Indian political officer, was especially challenging. Pant, who served in Sikkim from 1955-61, was very overbearing and insensitive to local sentiments. For example, he built two Hindu shrines in Gangtok, one sited near the royal cremations grounds of Lukshyama, which deeply offended the Namgyal family and Buddhist Sikkimese.⁴³ He was also hostile to

Namgyal's agenda, which he labelled 'feudalistic' and 'antiquated.'⁴⁴ Staunchly anti-communist, Pant was inclined, like other political officers, to consider developments in Sikkim from a broader geopolitical perspective, and Sikkim itself as incidental or merely a pawn in a much larger political game.⁴⁵ Needless to say, the agendas of the crown prince and the political officer were often at cross-purposes. Furthermore, the Political Office greatly expanded during this time. The additional facilities and personnel were needed to accommodate the implementation of Sikkim's development plans funded by India and to monitor the Chinese threat to the north. All of this contributed to the consolidation of Pant's formidable power base—which Namgyal wished to counteract.⁴⁶ If not, he would be faced with the prospect of a diminished role as Chogyal in charting the future of the kingdom.

As heir apparent, Namgyal considered it to be his sacred duty to protect the cultural and political identity of the Bhutia and Lepcha communities, now minorities in their homeland. Since the founding of the kingdom in the mid-seventeenth century, the rulers of Sikkim had been entrusted with this duty. His efforts to strengthen the Chogyal's position were directly connected to fulfilling this sacred duty.

At the time of Indian independence, the minority communities still enjoyed a privileged position in Sikkimese society. Bhutias and Lepchas were levied at a lower rate of land taxation than the Nepalese Sikkimese.⁴⁷ Their property, too, was protected from sale to those outside their communities under Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917. A tacit parity, or equal representation among the Bhutias, Lepchas, and Nepalese Sikkimese, was observed in public and social life. This informal practice continued even after the political demonstrations of the late 1940s; the two short-lived ministries were represented by members of the three main communities.⁴⁸ However, Palden Thondup Namgyal recognized that the changed political climate did not bode well for the political and cultural survival of the Bhutias and the Lepchas, who, in addition to the handicap of their minority status, were generally less educated and politically inactive. The demands of Sikkimese politicians for democracy and the persistent immigration of Nepalese into Sikkim⁴⁹ called for more formal protection of the rights and interests of the original inhabitants of the kingdom. Namgyal believed it was absolutely essential to embed the developing political system with protective measures for the Bhutias and Lepchas. It was one step in the direction of guaranteeing the survival of what he considered to be the kingdom's defining ethos.

During the early 1950s, Namgyal devised a legal strategy to offset the demographic imbalance. Initially, he attempted to enshrine the 'parity principle,' or the reservation of seats in elective and nominative bodies in the ratio of one Bhutia to one Lepcha to one Nepalese, in his agreements with India.⁵⁰ When those efforts failed, he and political leaders agreed on a conception of parity that recognized two main ethnic communities in Sikkim, the Bhutias and the Lepchas bracketed together as one group (Bhutia-Lepcha), and the Nepalese Sikkimese. In May 1951, Palden Thondup Namgyal, together with Sikkim State Congress representatives Kashiraj Pradhan, a Nepalese, Dimik Singh, a Lepcha, and National Party representative, Sonam Tsering, a Bhutia, signed an agreement supporting a modified version of the parity principle. The compromise was a legislative parity in which elected seats in the future State Council would be divided equally between the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese Sikkimese communities with an additional five seats to be nominated by the Chogyal.⁵¹ This principle informed the framework for two royal proclamations promulgated by Sir Tashi

Namgyal in 1953. The first set up guidelines for the electoral process; the second, known as the Constitutional Proclamation, defined the rules for the formation of the State Council and its powers and functions. For the next twenty years, it served, with some minor changes, as the formal basis of governance.⁵² Eventually, parity through seat distribution was extended to the entire Sikkim administration. In general, an unofficial policy of equal representation was also followed in other domains such as education, employment, and cultural life.⁵³

Framing Sikkimese society in this way was controversial. In a 'Fortnightly Report' written to the Ministry of External Affairs not long after arriving in Gangtok, John S. Lall, described Namgyal as acting like the 'Galahad of a racial cult,' rather than the crown prince of Sikkim. When Namgyal devised his strategy for Bhutia-Lepcha safeguards, Namgyal knew that he would 'be branded as communal.'⁵⁴ But in light of the historical circumstances, he argued in a memorandum written in the early 1950s, the only just solution was to grant 'the indigenous people their rightful weightage in all forms of public institutions.' As successors to the British perpetrators of the ethnic imbalance, the Indian government had a moral responsibility to 'undo the wrong done to Sikkim' and prevent the submersion of Bhutia-Lepcha interests by the Nepalese Sikkimese majority.⁵⁵ This focus on Bhutia-Lepcha prerogatives did not assume the suppression of the majority community. Namgyal's policy did not call for drastic measures like expelling Nepalese Sikkimese from the kingdom, forcing them to adopt Bhutia-Lepcha habits and culture, or ignoring them in the processes of political and social development. Rather, Namgyal supported an 'equal share' for the Nepalese Sikkimese. His overarching vision for the kingdom in the early 1950s embraced equal representation for the main communities, communal harmony, and the measured implementation of democracy in Sikkim.

Namgyal's goal of political parity was achieved with the first elections for the Sikkim State Council held in May 1953; political power was balanced between the two main communities. Furthermore, his own position was strengthened. With the royal nominees under his influence, he was in effect in charge of the Council just as he was *de facto* ruler.⁵⁶ Yet, the more complicated issue of 'cultural parity' lingered. Nepalese immigration over the generations had not only numerically shifted the ethnic balance in the kingdom. It had also taken its toll on traditional Sikkimese culture, firmly anchored in Bhutia-Lepcha customs, languages, and lifestyles. A tour of north Sikkim in 1958 alerted Namgyal to a disturbing trend; he saw evidence of deep cultural erosion in the kingdom. In the schools of the towns he visited—Mangan, Singhik, Manu, Ship, Chungthang, and Lachung—Namgyal noted the widespread use of 'Gorkhali,' or the national language of Nepal, even though the area was mostly populated by Bhutias and Lepchas. In addition, English was the country's official language and designated as the medium of instruction in schools. His tour observations led him to reflect specifically on the decline of Sikkimese languages and generally on the decline of Sikkimese culture, the Mahayana Buddhist ethos that distinguished Sikkim from the kingdom of Nepal, democratic India, and predominantly Nepalese Darjeeling District.⁵⁷ "I see a very dangerous and undesirable trend of affairs," he concluded in a memorandum written after the tour, "which if allowed to continue within ten years Sikkim will have lost its identity."⁵⁸ This sense of urgency must have consumed Namgyal and, at times, been overwhelming.

In addition to Nepalese inroads, the new relationship with Delhi introduced challenges to the preservation of the Bhutia-Lepcha sensibility from another front. The Chinese aggression in Tibet motivated the Indian government to launch coordinated development plans in Sikkim modelled after those in India. The first, a seven-year plan, was initiated in 1954. Namgyal welcomed the opportunity to modernize Sikkim, but he wrestled with the thorny issues of an appropriate pace and scale of implementation for the changes in his tiny kingdom. He desired self-sustaining projects managed and staffed by Sikkimese experts and workers, but realities in Sikkim dictated otherwise. With meagre sources of revenue and a tiny core of educated, skilled, and experienced Sikkimese to draw from, the Sikkim government had to recruit many Indian technical officers for the posts. Before long, an Indian headed almost every department.⁵⁹ The expansion of the Political Office—the administration for India’s representative in Sikkim—and the stationing of Indian troops in the kingdom further accelerated the Indian influx and its undeniable influence on the Sikkimese way of life.

Pressures generated within Sikkim and by Delhi galvanized Namgyal in his efforts to preserve, enhance, and project the Sikkimese ethos at home and abroad. As the foremost champion of Sikkimese identity, he was further inspired to consolidate his position as the true nexus of authority in Sikkim. He would then be best positioned to protect the essential values and traditions of Sikkim from both self-serving politicians whose main objective was to vest ultimate power in the Nepalese Sikkimese and Indian officials who viewed Sikkim as a mere pawn in a larger geopolitical game.

When his official reign began at age forty-two, Palden Thondup held a position of power unprecedented for a Sikkimese ruler in the previous century.⁶⁰ Geopolitics, historical forces, and pliable personalities had limited the efficacy of his grandfather, Thutob Namgyal, and father, Tashi Namgyal. Faced with the British withdrawal from India and Sino-Indian tension in the 1950s and 1960s, Palden Thondup Namgyal was no less caught up in the maelstrom of geopolitics. Yet, galvanized by the uncertainty of the kingdom’s survival in the late 1940s and anchored by the force of his personality, Namgyal succeeded in gradually restoring greater authority to the position of the Chogyal and embedding the new political system with measures to protect and advance the rights and interests of the Bhutia-Lepcha community. His efforts to preserve what he believed to be the essence of Sikkim peaked during his official reign as twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim beginning in late 1963. During this time, he focused on a revision of the 1950 Indo-Sikkim treaty as a strategy for insuring the continued survival of the kingdom and the Namgyal dynasty. He also led a campaign to construct a Sikkimese national identity that expanded on and reimagined the Bhutia-Lepcha ethos as ‘Tibeto-Burman.’ This was an attempt to acknowledge the common ‘Mongoloid’ and culturally Mahayana Buddhist roots shared by the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim and the immigrants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶¹

Critics of Palden Thondup Namgyal have labelled him as communal, feudal and power-hungry. He certainly had personal interest in preserving the prestige and position of his family’s dynasty and of the Bhutia-Lepcha community that he represented. But an examination of the context for the development of the agenda he formulated in his early years as crown prince suggests a call for resolute measures to protect what was clearly being assaulted from many different fronts. Of course, in the end, Palden Thondup Namgyal failed

in his mission. While the 1975 annexation of Sikkim ushered in an era of material progress for the twenty-second state, in my estimation, something very precious has been lost. Yet, due to the unyielding, even stubborn, vision of Palden Thondup Namgyal, something of the Sikkimese ethos remains. The Bhutia-Lepcha minority continues to have their interests represented through reserved seats in the state's legislative assembly. As well, the year 2008 ushered in the fiftieth anniversary of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology founded by the late Palden Thondup Namgyal. It remains a refuge for the study of the Mahayana Buddhist cultural and religious traditions that formed the bedrock for the distinctive Sikkimese character of the former kingdom.

NOTES

- ¹ I would like to thank the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) for inviting me to present this paper at the 'Buddhist Himalaya' Conference, October 1-5, 2008, organized as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Institute. I am especially grateful to Director Tashi Densapa, Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, and Dr Alex McKay of the Institute, and to Dr Terry Weidner and Dr Steven I. Levine of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at The University of Montana for their encouragement and institutional support. I also very much appreciate the information, support, and kindness I have received over the years in my work on Sikkim from many individuals in Sikkim, Kalimpong, Calcutta, Delhi, and at home in the US.
- ² Baleshwar Prasad Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). Sub File No. 20, pp. 136-7, Undated memorandum by Palden Thondup Namgyal, ND (but most likely written between December 1950 and May 1951). The private papers of Baleshwar Prasad, the third dewan of Sikkim, are housed in the NMML archives and contain several letters and reports written by John S. Lall during his tenure as the first dewan of Sikkim. Presumably, these files were sent as background information to Prasad upon his deputation to Gangtok in 1959.
- ³ In this paper, I focus on the concept of a Bhutia-Lepcha community in Sikkim. Of course, the Bhutia and Lepcha communities were not monolithic; there were in fact substantial class differences within these groups. Here, however, I focus on the larger divisions that in part defined the relationship between the two main ethnic groups, the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese Sikkimese.
- ⁴ The term 'Lho Men Tsong Sum' refers to the three tribes originally settled in Sikkim—the Bhutias, the Lepchas, and the Tsongs. Traditionally, the term 'Lho Men Tsong Sum' had been used to describe the ethnic composition of the kingdom as well as Sikkimese identity. The Tsongs, whose native lands spanned both contemporary eastern Nepal and western Sikkim, and the Lepchas are generally recognized as the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. The Bhutias, later settlers from Tibet, established the kingdom. The first king of Sikkim is said to have signed a 'tripartite treaty' with the three tribes. In the agreement, the tribes pledged 'one destiny and one government.' But over time, the position of the Tsong community declined. For revenue-collecting and electoral purposes, the Tsongs were eventually lumped together with the Nepalese Sikkimese and lost prominence as one of the original tribes of Sikkim. However, the Bhutias and Lepchas retained their special status. For one perspective on the Tsong community, see J.R. Subba, 1999.
- ⁵ Tibetan and Bhutanese migration to the area which became what we now know as Sikkim began in the thirteenth century. In this article I use the label 'Bhutia' to refer to Sikkimese of Tibetan and Bhutanese descent.
- ⁶ H.H. Risley, 1894; reprint, 1989, p. ix.
- ⁷ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 18, January 1954 to December 1954, pp. 16-18 of [undated] file, Crown Prince Palden Thondup to the Government of India, ND (but most likely written toward the end of 1954).
- ⁸ At birth Palden Thondup Namgyal was recognized as the reincarnation of the Tenth Chogyal, Sidkeong Tulku (1879-1914). Sidkeong Tulku was recognized by the Fifteenth Karmapa, Khakhyab as the reincarnation of the Eighth Chogyal, Sidkeong Namgyal (1819-1874). Sidkeong Namgyal was also the reincarnation of Tulku Karma Rinchen Nyedon Tenzin of Palpung Monastery of Kham Derge in eastern Tibet. Palden Thondup Namgyal was known as Gyese Rinpoche, 'prince reincarnate.' [Information,

courtesy of Tina Tashi, Historic Photo Project Researcher, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT), and Lama Tsulterm Gyatso Acharya, Tibetan Library Cataloguer, NIT.]

As a young boy, he received monastic training at Lingbu Monastery in Gyantse, Tibet, and in Sikkim under the guidance of his uncle Lhatsun Rinpoche. In 1933 he was recognized as the spiritual head of Phodang and Rumtek Monasteries in succession to his uncle, Sidkeong Tulku. He also attended the same public schools in Kalimpong, Darjeeling, and Simla as his older brother. Because of his brother's untimely death, he did not study science at the University of Cambridge as planned but instead attended the Indian Civil Service Training Course in Dehra Dun in preparation for his future role. *Sikkim: A Concise Chronicle*, p. 1.

- ⁹ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 18, January 1954 to December 1954, pp. 26-7 of file, 'An account of the first 4.5 years of administration of Sikkim by the Dewan,' Lall to Ministry of External Affairs, January 30, 1954. John S. Lall, the first dewan, wrote: "The Maharaj Kumar [crown prince] was running the State for a few years before I came [1949] and continues to be the 'power behind the throne.'" National Archives of India, External Affairs, File No. 25 (3) – NEF/46, 1946 (Secret), p. 14.
- ¹⁰ Leo E. Rose, 1969, p. 32.
- ¹¹ Different incarnations of a 'Himalayan Federation' emerged from time to time over the next three decades, but the original conception was, partly in response to the very real fear in Sikkim and Bhutan that the Nepalese latecomers, who formed the majority in Sikkim and nearly half the population in Bhutan, would take political control of the kingdoms.
- ¹² Even today, some Indian bureaucrats use Sikkim's political status under the Government of India Act of 1935 and its membership in the Chamber of Princes as justification for the 1975 annexation.
- ¹³ India Office Records, Political Collection, L/PS/13/1449, Letter from Tashi Namgyal to the Rt Hon'ble Baron Pethick-Lawrence, PC, His Majesty's Secretary of State in India, Viceregal Lodge, Simla, 10 May 1946.
- ¹⁴ National Archives of India, Ministry of External Affairs. File No. 25(4)-NEF/46 (Secret), D.O. No. 3-437-NEF/46, 'Re-examination of Government of India's policy regarding the NEF Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan,' letter, 26 August 1946.
- ¹⁵ V.H. Coelho, 1971, pp. 25-6; Amar Kaur Jasbir Singh, 1988, p. 261.
- ¹⁶ Singh, p. 261.
- ¹⁷ The government of India also signed standstill agreements with Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet. While Sikkim's status was raised above that of the princely states, it was still not on equal footing with the two Himalayan kingdoms and Tibet.
- ¹⁸ The following discussion on early political activity in Sikkim is based on: L.B. Basnet, 1974, pp. 71-94; Sunanda Datta-Ray, 1984, pp. 54-9; interviews with C.D. Rai, 8 April 2001, 10 April 2001, 24 April 2001, Gangtok; and Leo E. Rose, unpublished manuscript, ND, pp. 120-30.
- ¹⁹ In 1946 several small political groups formed in the bazaar towns of south and west Sikkim. In December 1947 the three main parties at the time merged and became the Sikkim State Congress. The party was led by President Tashi Tsering, said to be from the Sherpa community, former head clerk of the Political Office, and ex-tutor of Tashi Namgyal, and First Vice-President Sonam Tsering, said to be a non-kazi Bhutia and head clerk in the Judicial Department. Their ethnic backgrounds, however, are unclear. Indian government records list Tashi Tsering as "probably a Sherpa but down in his record as a Tibetan. Held to be a Bhutia domiciled in Sikkim," and Sonam Tsering as "officially a Sikkimese Bhutia, but believed to be a Lepcha." [Baleshwar Prasad Papers, Subject File No. 17, p. 1, 7]. For a time the State Congress enjoyed wide support and a diverse membership, but it gradually devolved into a party representing Nepalese Sikkimese interests.
- ²⁰ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 18, pp. 30-1, 'An account....' Lall to Ministry of External Affairs, 30 January 1954.
- ²¹ It is said that Tashi Tsering and other State Congress leaders frequently visited and sought guidance from the political officer, Harishwar Dayal, at his official residence, known in those days as the Residency.
- ²² India Office Records, L/PS/13/1449. Enclosure to p. 6 (Pol. 487/49), Press Note, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 7 June 1949.
- ²³ In her memoir, *Time Change*, the former *gyalmo*, or queen, of Sikkim, Hope Cooke wrote about her husband's treaty experiences: "And every day," he was fond of repeating, "I'd go alone and face an army of ministers and lawyers. The only good thing was that half of them didn't know I could speak English and would rattle on, giving away their legal arguments...." 1980, p. 125.

- 25 Indo-Sikkim Treaty, 5 December 1950.
- 26 'Exchange of Letters,' paragraph 3, 25 February 1951.
- 27 Rose, ND, pp. 72-3.
- 28 'Dewan' was a title commonly used in the former princely states of India, an association Namgyal wished to avoid.
- 29 At Namgyal's urging, in 1963 the designation 'dewan' was changed to 'principal administrative officer' and then in 1969 to 'Sidlon,' the Tibetan word for prime minister. In 1972, the post was finally eliminated.
- 30 Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML, especially Sub File Nos. 8, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21.
- 31 'Exchange of Letters,' paragraph 1, 25 February 1951. The Government of India was to arbitrate in matters of disagreement between the dewan and the Chogyal.
- 32 NK Rustomji Papers, NMML. Subject File No. 3, July 1953-62. Top Secret, J.S. Lall to N.K. Rustomji, 27 January 1954.
- 33 Baleshwar Prasad, NMML. Sub File No. 18, January 1954 to December 1954, 'An Account...', p. 26, John S. Lall to Ministry of External Affairs, 30 January 1954.
- 34 Ibid., p. 35.
- 35 Nari Rustomji, *Enchanted Frontiers: Sikkim, Bhutan, and India's Northeastern Borderlands* (Bombay: Oxford University Press), p. 142.
- 36 Ibid., p. 34.
- 37 N.K. Rustomji papers, NMML. Sub File No. 3, p. 2. Secret, N.K. Rustomji, Dewan, to T.N. Kaul, Joint Secretary to Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 30 November 1954.
- 38 Even so, in any basic conflict of interest, the dewan, as a citizen of India, was expected to side with the Indian government.
- 39 Born in Lahore and educated in the United Kingdom, Rustomji had served in Assam and the tribal areas of Manipur, Tripura and Cooch Behar prior to his posting in Sikkim.
- 40 Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Subject File No. 8, Secret, No.SP/52/B, pp. 15-16, 'Prime Minister's note on Sikkim affairs,' 29 April 1952.
- 41 At the request of the Chogyal, the Residency was renamed India House in 1968.
- 42 Apa B. Pant Papers, NMML. Subject File No. 6, 1957-61, pp. 23-4, Secret, from Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, 11 November 1960. Nehru noted that this was the impression of Indian officials held by some Sikkimese and by Palden Thondup Namgyal himself.
- 43 The installation of these Hindu shrines caused Nehru to remark 'Why should the images of Ganesha and Hanuman be installed there by our people?' Apa B. Pant Papers, NMML, Ibid.
- 44 Apa B. Pant, NMML. Sub File No. 6, 1957-61, Top Secret, pp. 50-3, Apa B. Pant to S. Dutt, Foreign Secretary, 28 December 1960.
- 45 Leo E. Rose, 1978. 'Modernizing a Traditional Administrative System: Sikkim 1890-1973' in *Himalayan Anthropology*, ed. J. F. Fisher (The Hague, Paris: Mouton), p. 213. Rose also observes that in general political officers were selected from the Indian Foreign Service and had years of experience in international diplomatic posts.
- 46 Rustomji noted that Pant was 'building up a strong power centre,' that Namgyal thought would 'overshadow and overwhelm his own authority unless curbed in time,' *Sikkim*, 1987, p. 59. Rustomji was dewan during Pant's tenure as political officer.
- 47 In 1956, the Sikkim government decided to equalize the taxation rate within ten years with the implementation of five periodical adjustments. 'Proclamation of His Highness Sir Tashi Namgyal, 30 August 1956,' *The Sikkim Code*, Volume II, Part 1, Chapter I-II, pp. 91-2.
- 48 The State Congress was invited to nominate three members to serve as Secretaries. They nominated one Bhutia, one Lepcha, and one Nepalese. In the second ministry nominated by the State Congress, there were two Bhutias, one Lepcha, and two Nepalese. Datta-Ray, 1984, p. 55, 57.
- 49 In the early 1950s, Palden Thondup Namgyal estimated the population of Sikkim to be 133,000 with Nepalese Sikkimese numbering 100,000 and fifty to sixty families from Nepal immigrating to Sikkim each year. While this influx was much reduced from its peak at the end of the nineteenth century, the implications for the continued unrestricted immigration were clear to him: the Bhutia-Lepcha communities would be 'swamped out.' His appeals to the Government of India to limit immigration appear to have gone unheeded. Baleshwar Prasad Papers, Sub File No. 12, p. 42 of file. Top Secret Note, ND (but probably authored by John S. Lall; it appears after a letter dated 29 February 1952).

- ⁵⁰ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 8, March 1948 to March 1960, pp. 111-15, F.D.O.No. 14, Lall to Dayal, 30 June 1950. Apparently, Namgyal was very determined in his early efforts to institutionalize parity. Lall wrote: 'The Maharaj Kumar [Crown Prince] rode this favourite hobby horse of his nearly to death before the Delhi conference, and it took me nearly three months of outflanking to keep it under control.'
- ⁵¹ Basnet, 1974, p. 99. Datta-Ray, 1987, p. 100.
- ⁵² A royal proclamation dated 28 December 1952 delimited constituencies, distributed seats between the communities, and defined election procedures for the first Sikkim Council elections. The 'Constitutional Proclamation,' officially cited as the 'State Council and Executive Proclamation, 1953,' defined the rules for the formation of the State Council and its powers and functions. It also defined the composition, functions, and powers of the Executive Council. *Sikkim Darbar Gazette (Extraordinary)*, 23 March 1953.
- ⁵³ For example, delegates to attend a conference in Manila in 1967 were Gayatri Devi Gurung and Chum Dorji Wongmu who respectively hailed from the Nepalese Sikkimese and Bhutia-Lepcha communities (*Sikkim Herald*, vol. 8, no. 41, 28 July 1967). The Tashi Namgyal Academy in Gangtok, a public high school for boys, offered three scholarships for Bhutia-Lepcha boys and three for 'Sikkimese of Nepali origin' (*Sikkim Herald*, vol. 9, no. 59, 1 May 1968).
- ⁵⁴ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 20, pp. 136-7, Memorandum by Palden Thondup Namgyal, ND (but most likely written between December 1950 and May 1951).
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Baleshwar Prasad, NMML. Sub File No. 18, January 1954 to December 1954, 'An account....,' p. 27, 30 January 1954, John S. Lall to Ministry of External Affairs.
- ⁵⁷ Yet he also acknowledged the common 'Mongoloid' and Mahayana Buddhist roots that three Nepalese tribes settled in Sikkim—the Tamangs, Sherpas, and Gurungs—shared with the earlier inhabitants of Sikkim. This conception marked an early articulation of Namgyal's expanded sense of Sikkimese identity, one that transcended the exclusiveness of 'Lho Men Tsong Sum,' and focused on the culturally Buddhist connections between the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese Sikkimese. For more on Namgyal's later efforts to shape a national identity for the kingdom, see Jackie Hiltz, 2003.
- ⁵⁸ Baleshwar Prasad Papers, NMML. Sub File No. 8, p. 34. Memorandum, 'Education,' Palden Thondup Namgyal, ND (but likely 1958).
- ⁵⁹ In addition, the important posts of Financial Advisor to the Government of Sikkim and Development Commissioner were generally held by Indians. Sonam Wangdi, 1985, p. 15.
- ⁶⁰ Emblematic of this consolidation of power was the reinstatement in 1965 of the traditional titles 'Chogyal' and 'Gyalmo.'
- ⁶¹ See Hiltz, 2003, pp. 72-5.

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RESULTS FROM THE LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF SIKKIM: MOTHER TONGUES IN EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

From September 2005 to November 2006, I directed the first phase of a modern linguistic survey of Sikkim under the auspices of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and in close partnership with the Department of Human Resource Development (formerly Education) of the Government of Sikkim.

My research team and I visited most of the government and private secondary schools across the state to administer an extensive questionnaire to the senior students.¹ The preliminary results of these 16,500 completed survey forms were presented for the first time at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Jubilee Conference in October 2008 and this is the first publication based on the research project.

THE LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF SIKKIM AND THE NEW LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA

When initially planned in 2004, the linguistic survey of Sikkim was designed with four main objectives:

- (i) to compile an inventory of all of the languages spoken in Sikkim;
- (ii) to determine the geographical distribution and genetic affinity of each language spoken as a mother tongue in this Himalayan state;
- (iii) to estimate the numbers of speakers of each language on the basis of disaggregated census data, roof counts and on-site field investigation;
- (iv) to visit all government and private senior secondary schools in the state to distribute a survey questionnaire of 30 questions on language learning, retention and use to students in Classes 8 and above.

We hoped that the analysed survey data would provide the first representative picture of language use and language shift in modern Sikkim, with a particular focus on languages being used in the educational context. Just as the project began to take shape, and pilot funds were being secured, I received the welcome news that the Government of India was launching a much anticipated and sorely overdue *New Linguistic Survey of India*, the first comprehensive survey of Indian languages since independence in 1947.

As noted in the XIth plan (2007-2012) published in the Recommendations of the Working Group on Languages and Book Promotion of the Language Division of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India:

...more than a century has passed since Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (henceforth, LSI) was begun and 80 years have passed since it was last revised, and the need for a fresh linguistic survey of India is being urgently felt, particularly at the official level, as planning documents as

well as Census reports (including 2001 Census reports on language data which is under preparation) still make reference to the LSI Reports, which are nearly a century old. (GOI 2007: 1)

According to the Government, the new survey was of 'national and international significance' (ibid., 2) and the impetus for this initiative:

... springs from the conception of India as a linguistic landscape distinguished by pluralism and inclusiveness, and a definition of linguistic and cultural identity that is both complementary and contested, but nevertheless negotiable. Independent India has, through its literary and cultural agencies and the departments of languages, sought to preserve not only languages but also these enduring principles of diversity and dignity. (GOI 2007: 2)

Correspondent Sharath S. Srivatsa of *The Hindu* noted that the New Linguistic Survey of India was:

... a gigantic exercise involving at least 10,000 language and linguistic experts, the survey ... will be conducted over a period of 10 years at a cost of Rs. 280 crore. The ambitious project will involve nearly 100 universities [and] ... is expected to examine the different speech varieties in the country, their structures, functions, scripts, history and demography as well as their spread, including diasporas, literacy and education, digitaracy, literatures and all the linguistic artefacts and media products that these speech varieties produce. (November 16, 2006)

According to interviews at the time with Udaya Narayana Singh, then Director of the prestigious Mysore-based Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) charged with leading the initiative, the survey would take a decade to complete on account of India's massive population and great linguistic diversity (we would do well to remember that George Abraham Grierson had taken 17 years a century ago). 'Each village in the country will be the basic unit for our study in this project,' Professor Singh told *The Hindu*.

This chronology is salient because with the news that this massive national linguistic initiative was under way, the Linguistic Survey of Sikkim was accordingly scaled back to avoid reduplication of effort and we immediately refocused on a single, unique opportunity outlined in point (iv) above: a targeted survey of language instruction and education in Sikkim's schools. With this aim in mind, the survey team was in place to begin. Only in September 2008, when our fieldwork was complete, did we learn from Tanka Bahadur Subba, Professor of Anthropology and Dean at the North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, that the required funding for the New Linguistic Survey of India had not yet been released, with the result that the whole plan was on indefinite hold. It is essential that work on this national linguistic survey commence soon, as the findings are urgently needed for the formulation of progressive language policies. We hope that the results of our own modest undertaking may be of some use to this much larger initiative.

CENSUSES AND SURVEYS AS CLASSIFICATORY TOOLS

A census is the single most important statistical operation for most nations, even if the techniques used vary widely. Before addressing the methodology used in the survey, and our findings, it is pertinent to reflect for a moment on the process of enumeration itself. For example, while the methodology and motivations for the decadal censuses in Nepal and India

are similar, the questions that are posed are different. The Indian census enumerates for mother tongue but not for ethnicity, while the Nepali census seeks responses in both categories, and has recently added an additional question on bilingualism. For those interested in the Tibetan cultural world, it is relevant to note that the 1990 census of China collected fifteen categories of information for each individual, one of which was 'nationality', but that there was no question on language (Jianfa Shen et al. 1999: 176).

According to census enumerators and statisticians, only a census can provide 'uniform information both about the country as a whole and about individual areas' as the continuity of statistics from census to census 'shows how conditions are changing over time' (Sillitoe and White 1992: 142). A baseline linguistic survey can be a complementary tool for effective policy planning in education, media and the public sphere, particularly as the decadal Indian census returns very little data on monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism, and does not investigate levels of retention of officially recognised minority languages.

Most censuses and surveys rely exclusively on respondent statements and are almost by definition non-ethnographic. The literature on the formulation of census questions indicates a movement towards recognising the virtues of respondent-led classification rather than concealing it as a methodological flaw. As Collins has noted, making a distinction between etic statements and emic experiences is not new: 'interviews fail to get at the difference between peoples' professed and actual behavior' (1988: 304). While organisations, states, census bureaus, politicians and dominant social groups may assign identities, individuals and groups are 'not merely passive recipients in the process' (Croucher 2004: 40), and some consciously choose to subvert classificatory systems that are imposed on them. Permitting, or even encouraging, respondents to classify themselves works to equalise relationships of power and, as the discussion below illustrates, may even generate a more interesting dataset.

In Mauritius, for example, the 'onus of ethnic classification was thus shifted from the enumerator to the individual' making the census far more effective (Christopher 1992: 59), while a report on the configuration of the 1991 census of Great Britain recommended that the form of a question 'should enable people to identify themselves in a way acceptable to them' (Sillitoe and White 1992: 148). Returning to linguistic surveys, Paul Brass endorses such realignment:

I believe that the only fair and honest census of languages is one that accepts what the respondent says and notes it down. My point is simply this: the decisions concerning grouping, classification, recognition, are ultimately political decisions, not scientific linguistic ones. (2004: 367)

Throughout this discussion, we should not lose sight of the hegemonic side of classification through surveying and census taking, described so elegantly by N. Gerald Barrier in his writing on Imperial India:

Thus from its beginning a census acts to reshape the world it will examine and in this way is not simply a passive instrument ... individuals find themselves firmly fixed as members in various groups of a particular dimensions and substance. Thus the census imposes order, and order of a statistical nature. In time the creation of a new ordering of society by the census will act to reshape that which the census sought merely to describe. (1981: 74-75)

As the data below illustrate, the preliminary results of the Linguistic Survey of Sikkim should not be read as objective, scientific evaluations of competence in languages, but rather more as statements of a form of linguistic attachment, heritage and emotional belonging.

SIKKIM'S SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT

Landlocked Sikkim, India's least populous and second smallest state, has a geopolitical significance far beyond its size. Bounded to the north and northeast by the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, to the west by Nepal, to the southeast by Bhutan, and to the south by the Darjeeling district of the Indian state of West Bengal, Sikkim occupies an important niche along one of the oldest Himalayan trade routes. The population census of 2001 records Sikkim as being home to only 540,000 residents, of which the indigenous Lepcha and Bhutia make up only a tenth each. The remainder are mostly of Nepalese ancestry or have migrated from other parts of India for work or service.

Recent improvements in Sino-Indian relations, China's recognition of India's claim over Sikkim in official government maps and the opening of a direct trade route between India and China across Sikkim's Nathu-La pass in 2006 have seen Sikkim's strategic significance further underscored. This erstwhile Buddhist kingdom has entered a period of rapid socio-economic change and cultural transformation. The ethnic tongues of the state, not to mention the communities who speak them, are fast becoming minorities in areas in which they were once dominant. Education, economic opportunities, media and migration all contribute to the transformation of traditional Sikkimese livelihoods and lifestyles. Our survey aimed to document this moment of transition through the prism of language use.

AN OVERVIEW OF SURVEYS AND CENSUSES IN SIKKIM'S HISTORY

Every ten years, the Government of India conducts a detailed census. This decadal Census of India is an increasingly robust and carefully constructed survey, and a massive logistical undertaking. The findings from the 2001 census are being released in stages until the next census takes place in 2011. One of the domains enumerated is language, but only the most basic information on language is collected, through one question about self-ascribed mother tongue and two questions on bilingualism. There is much more to understand about language use in Sikkim. If called upon to encapsulate our whole survey in two questions, they would be: 'who speaks what language to whom, and under what circumstances?'

The first census of Sikkim dates to 1891 when Sikkim was under British colonial rule. The total population of Sikkim was then recorded as 30,458, of which a little over one third was made up of the indigenous Lepcha and Bhutia populations. This early census and some later surveys recorded ethnic affiliation only, and contained no explicit data on which languages were spoken or by how many people. According to the 1931 Census, out of a total population of 109,808, 12% were Lepcha and 11% were Bhutia, the rest mainly Nepalese. The 1961 Census reported that 43 mother tongues were spoken in Sikkim, while the 1971 Census Report gave the percentage of population by language, according to which speakers of the Nepali language constituted about 64%, while the Lepcha and Bhutia languages were each spoken by about 11% of the total population. On October 17, 1977, the Sikkim Official Language Act was passed by the Governor of the State, adopting Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha as 'the languages to be used for the official purposes of the State of Sikkim'.

Two issues become apparent from this cursory overview. First, data on language has not been returned with any consistency in the census; and second, the linguistic reality of the state of Sikkim has been in constant flux over the last 100 years.

Risley's 1894 Gazetteer

First published in 1894, but drawing on the findings of a census conducted in February 1891, H.H. Risley's *Gazetteer* of 'Sikkim' contains some of the first official population statistics for the state and is therefore of historical and comparative interest. Risley's survey enumerated individuals who self-identified as members of ethnic communities, not speech communities. So while 5,762 individuals or 19% of the population self-reported as Lepcha, and 4,894 or 16% of the population as Bhutia, over 60% of the population were classified as 'Nepalese'. While the Nepalese (but not necessarily Nepali-speaking) community were already well settled in Sikkim in the 1890s and also numerically dominant, we would expect that many of them still spoke their mother tongues or ethnic languages at that time, such as Limbu, Tamang [sometimes referred to as Murmi in the gazetteer], Rai and many others. We will never know to what extent Nepali as a language was already widely used as a *lingua franca* in the 1890s for communication between members of different ethnic communities.

1901 Census of India

Ten years later, when the 1901 Census of India enumerated speaker numbers rather than ethnic group membership, the returns were significantly higher. Revealingly, all communities were recorded as having more speakers in Darjeeling than in Sikkim. The census returned 7,945 Lepcha speakers in Sikkim, but 11,252 Lepcha speakers in Darjeeling; 5,910 Limbu speakers in Sikkim, but 14,359 Limbu speakers in Darjeeling; 5,315 Murmi speakers in Sikkim, but 25,165 Murmi speakers in Darjeeling; 912 Sharpa [Sherpa] speakers in Sikkim, but 3,477 Sharpa speakers in Darjeeling and 8,825 speakers of 'Dänjongkä', now more commonly known as Bhutia or Sikkimese, across India. It should be noted that even today, the Indian census classifies a number of distinct and unrelated communities of ethnically Tibetan origin who speak Tibetan or Tibetoid languages from both the eastern and western Indian Himalayas by the collective ethnonym 'Bhutia', leading to terminological as well as statistical confusion.

Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India

Grierson's linguistic survey, published sequentially between 1904 and 1908, offered estimates of the number of speakers, with far higher figures than those recorded in the 1901 census. Reading between the lines in Grierson's notes, it appears that he was sceptical of the accuracy of the 1901 data. He believed that there were far more Lepcha and Bhutia than were recorded in the 1901 and 1891 censuses, about three times the number in fact, although the source of these estimates are not made explicit. Grierson's estimates were as follows: 25,000 Lepcha speakers in Sikkim, but 9,894 Lepcha speakers in Darjeeling; 10,000 Limbu speakers in Sikkim, but 14,045 Limbu speakers in Darjeeling; 15,000 Murmi speakers in Sikkim, but 21,848 Murmi speakers in Darjeeling; 900 Sharpa [Sherpa] speakers in Sikkim and 20,000 speakers of 'Dänjongkä' across India.

1931 Census of India

The 1931 census returned 13,060 Lepchas (11% of the population), 11,955 Bhutias (10% of the population) and 84,793 Nepalese (77% of the population) from Sikkim. While the census of 1931 indicated ethnicity and not language, we may surmise that a fairly close correlation between the two would have existed at that time, at least for the Lepcha and Bhutia

communities. In the 40-years between the 1891 and 1931 census, the proportion of the Nepalese population had increased by 16%.

1961 Census of India

In 1961, the enumerated category reverted to language once again, returning 14,847 Lepcha speakers (or 9% of the population of Sikkim), 36,577 Bhutia speakers (22% of population) and 74,319 Nepali speakers (46% of the population). Comparing the 1931 and 1961 data, we can comfortably suggest that a significant percentage of the population who previously returned themselves as 'Nepalese' (77% of the population in 1931) were not 'Nepali-speaking', as their associated speech community was 20% less thirty years later. Most intriguingly, the Bhutia speech community appear to have bounced back, asserting themselves at nearly one quarter of the total population of Sikkim in 1961.

1991 Census of India

By 1991, the category had changed once again, with respondents this time enumerated for 'mother tongue'. While the reasons behind the flip-flopping between language and ethnicity in the census questions over the decades is unclear, the implications of this methodological irregularity are that robust comparisons remain difficult. Yet by 1991, the number of Lepcha and Bhutia speakers continued to be in decline, Hindi is on the map for the first time and on the up, and Nepali was also gaining ground. In 1991, the returns were as follows: 29,854 mother tongue speakers of Lepcha (or 7% of the population of Sikkim); 32,593 mother tongue speakers of Bhutia (8% of the population); 26,985 mother tongue speakers of Limbu (6% of the population); 19,868 mother tongue speakers of Hindi (5% of the population) and 256,418 mother tongue speakers of Nepali (63% of the population).

Comments on 100 years of census data

There are a few general points worth making about the census statistics for language and ethnicity collected from Sikkim at decadal intervals over the course of a century. First, there is no doubt that many Lepchas and Bhutias, two of Sikkim's Scheduled Tribes (ST), are now speaking ever more Nepali and Hindi. Second, many of those individuals more recently recorded as speaking Nepali as their mother tongue are members of non-caste and non-Hindu ethnic groups of Nepalese origin, i.e. Tamang, Gurung, Rai and others. Third, disaggregated language data from 2001 are expected to confirm the trend towards Nepali, a linguistic shift occurring across other parts of the Indian northeast as well as within Nepal itself. Finally, we may wonder why the Bhutia speech community decreased since the 1960s while the Lepcha speech community remained relatively stable, according to government figures, at least. A working hypothesis is that the difference between the speech patterns and language retention of these communities can be attributed to their different economic statuses and locations. Many Bhutias have had better access to education over the last 40 years, and some of their larger population concentrations are increasingly urban (correlated with a decreased use of their ethnic mother tongue). By contrast, the Lepcha community is still largely rural, providing an ongoing context for the mother tongue to be spoken, particularly in protected or remoter areas such as Dzongu.

METHODOLOGY IN THE LANGUAGE SURVEY OF SIKKIM

Our linguistic survey field team travelled to each of Sikkim's four districts to visit schools and administrative offices. We sought to better understand the complex linguistic reality of the Sikkimese state.

From October 2005 to November 2006, we visited 105 government and private schools and asked the higher classes (VIII-XII) to complete a survey of 29 questions on language use. In total, 16,527 survey forms were completed by 8,662 female (52%) and 7,803 male (47%) students in a period between 15 November 2005 and 21 November 2006. The resulting dataset totals 479,283 completed fields (number of questions multiplied by the number of returns). These survey forms were then numbered, photographed and entered into a FileMakerPro database. The database will be anonymized and returned to the Government of Sikkim and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology once the verification and rechecking is completed.

Included in the survey were questions on which language(s) the respondent speaks with his or her parents, grandparents and siblings; which languages a respondent's kin speak with one another; how many languages the respondent could speak and write, and which ones; questions on the different domains and registers of language use (songs, lists, letters, numbers, TV), and which language the respondent identifies as his or her mother tongue. A survey form is enclosed as an appendix to this paper.

Sikkim's schools and educational curriculum

Our team managed to visit most secondary and senior secondary schools in Sikkim's four districts. As of October 2002, Sikkim was home to 1,949 schools, 1,478 of which were government establishments while the remaining 471 were private institutions. This point is significant because private schools are not required to abide by the government curriculum that includes a provision for vernacular instruction in the mother tongue. The educational pyramid can be broken down into 978 Pre-Primary, 297 Lower Primary, 390 Primary, 153 Junior High Schools, 90 Secondary Schools and 41 Senior Secondary Schools. It should also be noted that Gangtok's schools are a particularly diverse range of institutions, from government schools providing free education to exclusive elite schools that are known across India, with many of Sikkim's ethnolinguistic groups represented.

While there is no space in this preliminary article to address the wider curriculum in detail, I will simply note that English is the medium of instruction in all of Sikkim's state government and private schools. In the government curriculum, three languages are taught up to Class 8, one of which has to be Hindi. Thereafter, the students only have to take two languages, one of which must be national (English, Hindi or Nepali) and one regional (Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia, Subba or Hindi). An important distinction emerges between regional languages, which are included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India (Nepali is now included) and state languages which are non-scheduled languages but which may be recognised by the regional state government, such as Lepcha, Bhutia and Limbu. It will be noted, however, that in Sikkim, the national and regional language schedules and requirements overlap. Text Book Officers (TBOs) in the State Department of Human Resource Development in Gangtok have developed curricular teaching materials for all officially recognised state languages for Classes I-XII. The content is drawn in part from the culture of the community of speakers (myths, oral history, local diet, etc.) and in part from wider Indian culture and history.

PRELIMINARY SURVEY FINDINGS

In the following sections, I outline the principal findings of the survey and draw brief comparative conclusions.

Sikkim's youth are remarkably multilingual, with around 75% of both male and female students responding that they spoke at least three languages. Around 20% of students reported that they spoke four languages, and a handful five or more. While this plurilingualism will be of no surprise to those familiar with the region, the data provide empirical evidence that Sikkim is a linguistically heterogeneous state. Even more students, over 90% in total, reported that they could write in at least three languages. The 15% disparity between speech and writing in favour of writing is indicative that much of the impetus for multilingualism comes from the educational context in which, as noted above, all students are expected to study at least three languages in the lower grades. Education systems around the world routinely emphasise written ability over spoken competence in language, and Sikkim is clearly no exception.

As to which languages students spoke, over 44 different speech forms were returned, not including variations in spelling of commonly known languages. Well over 90% of male and female students reported speaking Nepali, around 75% professed to speak English and around 65% reported speaking Hindi. A noticeable gender gap emerged between male and female respondents for English and Hindi: in both cases female students reported 5% less speech competence than their male counterparts. Sikkim's traditional, tribal languages, such as Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu were spoken by well under 10% of the school-going population surveyed. There is a stark disparity between the clustering of the big three languages above 65% and Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu—Sikkim's ethnic tongues—at under 10%.

In terms of self-professed written competence, while the results for Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu are notably low, the results for Nepali and English are inverted, with close to 90% of students able to write English but only 80% competent in written Nepali. This result, while unremarkable, does reaffirm the status of English as the medium of instruction and illustrates that Nepali, while almost universally spoken, is not so widely used in written form.

Responding to the question of what language respondents spoke with their grandparents, Nepali was unexpectedly high. Over 75% of male and female students returned Nepali as their language of choice to communicate with grandparents, with Hindi, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu hovering under 10% and English almost negligible. This result alone indicates that language shift from indigenous vernaculars and ethnic mother tongues to Nepali did not occur in the grandparents' generation but some time before. As expected, both Nepali and English rose by at least 5% in response to what language students spoke with their parents, with Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu decreasing still further. The similarity in the returns for parents and grandparents' generation was surprising, as we had predicted a greater degree of difference. To be clear, then, these results indicate that already two generations ago, around the time of Indian independence, Nepali was a well established *lingua franca* and widely spoken by members of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Having noted the gender variation in the returns, we asked students about the language(s) they spoke with their mother and father in separate questions, and were interested once again by the near total correspondence in the results. Aside from a minimally higher percentage of students who reported speaking Nepali with the mothers (over 80% for each), the more noticeable difference in the results related to English, which jumped about 5% higher as a language spoken with fathers.

80% of those surveyed returned Nepali as the language that their parents spoke together, with English, Hindi, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu all between 5-10%. The response to the question of what language students' grandparents spoke together was also overwhelmingly Nepali, at 70%, with an increase of about 2% points on the figures returned for parents for Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu. The results in response to the question of what language parents spoke with grandparents were virtually identical to the responses received to the question about what languages students' parents spoke with one another. In short then, there was very little difference between the returns for these two generations.

Well over 80% of boys and girls surveyed reported speaking Nepali with their siblings, while fewer than 40% of males and over 50% of females reported speaking English with their brothers and sisters. This is a marked gender difference of over 10%, and is not immediately attributable to any causal factor other than social prestige. While a little over 10% of students stated speaking Hindi with their siblings, very few spoke Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu with their brothers and sisters.

When asked what languages students spoke with their friends, Nepali came down to under 80% and English increased to almost 60%, indicating that English was more associated with life outside the nuclear family (school, the market place, wider society) while Nepali was perceived more as a language of the home.

While close to 90% of students stated that they would write a letter or a shopping list in English, 35% offered Nepali as a language in which they would write a letter and 20% said that they would use Nepali to write a shopping list. While it would be premature to say with any certainty what lies behind the 15% difference, the presence of many English-termed or Hindi-labelled items in the bazaar may be a contributing factor.

Close to 80% of male and female respondents reported knowing songs in Nepali, with a noticeable gender disparity for English and Hindi: male students reported being more confident with English songs (55% versus 50% for female), while female students were over 10% more likely to know songs in Hindi than their male classmates (80% versus under 70%).

Poems were far better known in English (over 80%) than Nepali (60%) and Hindi (around 38%), while around 40% of students of both genders reported watching TV in Nepali. Television viewing was dramatically gender marked for English and Hindi. Well over 60% of male but closer to 48% of female reporting watching TV in English, but only 80% of males surveyed claimed to watch in Hindi while the female viewing figures were well above 90% for Hindi language programmes.

English was overwhelmingly selected as the most important language by almost 80% of respondents, with Nepali coming second at just under 20% and Hindi at under 10%. The most interesting results related to the question of mother tongue, which generated considerable confusion and disagreement in the answers, as is addressed in detail below.

First conclusions based on the above survey findings

There are five main conclusions that can be drawn from these preliminary findings. First, Nepali is the lingua franca for most people in Sikkim, no matter what their ethnicity, and the language appears to have had this position for at least two generations. Second, despite some creative state government plans that support local mother tongues, the spread and dominance of Nepali shows no sign of slowing down. Third, the mother tongues of the communities whose ancestors came from Nepal are particularly under threat. Most of the descendants now no longer speak any Mangar, Tamang or Newar, but only Nepali. Fourth, in the Lepcha reservation of Dzongu, where Lepcha is still spoken by all generations, Lepcha was often

returned as both the mother tongue and as the most important language. Outside of Dzongu, however, 95% of all students surveyed chose English as the most important language and some Bhutia students even returned English as their mother tongue. Finally, the teaching of local languages as subjects in school is very encouraging and helps to give symbolic value to the mother tongue, even if this does not necessarily ensure or result in any spoken proficiency. Let me now turn to the important issue of mother tongue in more detail.

What is a mother tongue?

Question 7 of the survey asked respondents ‘Which languages can you speak?’ while question 22 asks ‘Which language is your mother tongue?’ The results of these two questions are shown in the below table:

	<i>Can speak the language</i>	<i>Mother tongue</i>
Nepali	94%	67%
English	74%	1%
Hindi	67%	7%
Bhutia	7%	10%
Lepcha	5%	6%
Limbu	3%	4%

The table can be divided into two categories: languages with more speakers than mother tongue claimants, versus languages with more mother tongue claimants than speakers. The first cluster includes Nepali, spoken (to some degree) by nearly all surveyed school-going students in Sikkim, but claimed by only two-thirds as a mother tongue; English, claimed as a mother tongue by only 1% of the school-going population, but spoken by three-quarters; and Hindi, which follows a similar pattern to English, albeit less polarised.

The most interesting results are to be found in the second half of the table in the responses for Bhutia (also known as Denjongke, Lhoke and Sikkimese), Lepcha (also returned as Rongaring) and Limbu (variously spelled as Limboo, but also returned as Subba): all three languages are claimed by more young people as a mother tongue than can speak them. At first glance, this claim appears to be contradictory, at least from the perspective of linguistic competence: How can an individual profess to have as a mother tongue a language in which he or she has no declared proficiency? Are these respondents, particularly the Bhutia students for whom the differential is the greatest (3%), not subverting the survey to bolster their numbers for political gain? Unpacking this apparent inconsistency lies at the heart of understanding the social prestige of heritage languages and linguistic identities in Sikkim.

The autochthonous languages of modern Sikkim—Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu—are at present severely endangered. Aside from a few notable areas (parts of North Sikkim for Bhutia, the Dzongu reservation for Lepcha and West Sikkim for Limbu), these three languages are spoken by an ever-dwindling number of people, and the majority of children from these communities have only basic proficiency at best. As competence in these

traditional mother tongues has declined, however, their status has begun to shift from spoken vernaculars forming a part of a lived ethnic identity, to symbolic markers of an ancestral heritage that contribute to emotional belonging. Yuval-Davis' observation that belonging 'becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way' (2006: 196) is very pertinent to the language shift observed in Sikkim, in which a growing attachment to the 'idea' of a mother tongue is directly related to its decline in use as a speech form.

Alongside these emotional attachments are important political motivations that underlie claims of linguistic belonging. Even though the Lepcha, Bhutia and Limbu languages are on the wane as spoken vernaculars, these speech communities were accorded 'Scheduled Tribe' status: in 1978 for the Lepcha and Bhutia, and in 2002 for the Limbu and even, for the Lepcha, 'Primitive Tribe' status in the state of Sikkim as of November 2006. An integral component of such applications is the existence of a mother tongue. Declining utility and diminishing speaker numbers, then, do not necessarily threaten the perceived connection between a tribe and their traditional language, and their 'right' to have a mother tongue.

From observations during the survey process and analysis of the returns, students answered question 22 on their mother tongue in a number of different ways. Some wrote down what language they spoke at home, others wrote down the name of the language that they thought they should speak at home, some read the question as another way of asking for their ethnicity (mother tongue in lieu of caste or tribe), and some understood it to be a question on heritage and origin. Others simply asked their teacher what to put down. In other words, respondents answered this open-ended question by filling it with whatever meaning they attached to the concept of mother tongue.

Language shift in Sikkim

Language shift has been variously understood by different writers, but is traditionally characterised as a process in which both *langue* and *parole* are systematically simplified. Individuals move from functioning as full speakers with complete grammatical and pragmatic command to being 'semi-speakers' with reduced verbal dexterity. Eventually, all competence drains away, leaving only a residual smattering of specialised vocabulary (food words, kinship terminology or elements of ritual vocabulary), and often a strong sense of attachment to a heritage identity as a former speaker. 'Language shifts are inextricably tied to shifts in the political economy in which speech situations are located' writes Urciuoli (1995: 530), and Sikkim is indeed undergoing a period of profound social, economic and political upheaval.

There are effectively three *linguae francae* in Sikkim—Nepali, English and Hindi—all of which operate in different functional domains of use, yet constantly intersect with one another. The pragmatic utility of all three languages in Sikkim—Nepali in the bazaar, English in school, Hindi on television and in Central government offices—prevents any one of them from becoming overly dominant. In the process of language shift, then, a region like Sikkim can experience an explosion of plurilingualism.² In anything other than abstract models, one language does not give way to another overnight, and a number of speech forms remain in use for long periods of time until the linguistic residue settles. Data from the linguistic survey of Sikkim support this analysis.

The speech of some Sikkimese students would offend the ear of a language purist: young men and women pepper their Lepcha or Bhutia with Nepali verbs, English sentiments and Hindi conjunctions, in much the same way that educated elites in Nepal can be heard to do. The resultant amalgam is a heterogeneous blend of elements joined together through a

performative strategy that is rapidly gaining ground in Sikkim as well as in Nepal's urban centres. Is this but another indication of language shift or a sign of the emergence of a hyphenated linguistic identity? And what do such linguistic fusions mean for identity and belonging?

In Sikkim, language competence and purity do not have primary roles in the maintenance of individual identities and in the construction of a sense of group belonging. But then Sikkim is not one of India's 'linguistic states' in the model of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu or West Bengal, where the 'internal reorganization of much of its territory...has been a deliberate attempt to consolidate populations of speakers of regional languages and concentrate these in administrative units, helping promote the strength of [these] languages' (Simpson 2007: 25). In Sikkim, ethnic and linguistic identities are not oppositional (i.e. 'he is Tamang, but he doesn't speak it'), rather they are more incorporative (i.e. 'although she's Lepcha, she speaks Nepali pretty well').

Additionally, linguistic identities are increasingly understood and expected to be complex. Perhaps as a consequence of massive in-migration, considerable intermarriage between groups, an administration which recognises and rewards diversity, the presence of sufficient resources to avoid intense ethnic competition, or a combination of all of these conditions, there is an acknowledgement of the 'multiple, shifting and, at times, nonsynchronous identities' that are the norm for individuals (May, Modood and Squires 2004: 10). In Sikkim, then, speaking a language—or perhaps more saliently, 'not' speaking a language—is not a diagnostic marker of ethnic identity or belonging. Linguistic belonging increasingly lies not in performance, but in heritage. As one student answered my clearly naive query on the apparent disconnect between his avowed lack of proficiency in a language and his answer to question 22 of the survey: 'Of course we have a mother tongue, I just don't speak it.'

Languages in education: the case for symbolism

If spoken or written competence is not so highly prized, why are so many students learning their ancestral languages in schools across Sikkim? Along with other commentators, I have congratulated the Sikkimese government for offering minority languages as subjects in the school curriculum. To be clear, the medium of instruction across Sikkim remains English, but Bhutia, Lepcha, Limbu, Newar or Rai may be taken as additional subjects by students who hail from these communities. Yet we should not assume that the students who opt for these classes are actually being taught the language in order to use it, or that they are being steeped in the performative skill that true competence entails. Rather, they are learning heritage, culture, history and ancestry through the prism of language. In fact, these students are learning 'belonging', because the utility of such languages to young Sikkimese are now as markers of belonging rather than vernaculars for daily use. It is precisely because these languages now have primarily emotional and symbolic value rather than strategic and practical importance, that the Government of Sikkim can afford to teach them.

We should therefore not be surprised when initiatives to bring Newar teachers from Kathmandu to teach Newari in Sikkim fail, as the aims of the instructors and the students are at times quite different: Newar teachers come to these classes to revive their language among migrant Newars in Sikkim, while the latter attend the classes to learn the symbols and metaphors of heritage.³ In Nepal, by comparison, where minority languages are still spoken, language competence continues to be a core marker of ethnic identity for many individuals.

One notable difference between Nepal and Sikkim is in their experience of migration: Nepal has a tradition of 'sending' migrants, while Sikkim is a state that has 'received' them, even building itself on their labour. Peter Sutton observes that:

As migration increases and monocultural nation-states become obsolete, cultural identity becomes more complex, less tied to a geographical location, more individualized, and less static. (1991: 136)

The different historical experiences of migration may in part account for the different expressions of linguistic belonging that are articulated in Sikkim and Nepal. In Sikkim, the loss of speech forms and the processes of language shift are popularly presented as unavoidable by-products of the juggernaut of global progress and development, while in Nepal, the continued vibrancy of minority mother tongues has been associated with their remote and sequestered status. This opposition, at least in the popular imagination, is fleshed out to the extent that Sikkim is often portrayed in the press as modern, literate, educated and connected, while ethnolinguistic homeland areas in Nepal are widely described as remote, backward and traditional. My point here is not to endorse such descriptions, but to reflect on them for what they tell us about the forms of linguistic belonging that individuals and communities may invoke or be subjected to.

CONCLUSION: ELITES, CLASS AND BELONGING

The results of the Linguistic Survey of Sikkim offer interesting insights into a number of issues, including correlations with gender, region, age and kind of school (government or private), but there is no space to address these here. The full results will be published and provided to the Sikkimese government. For now, I would like to conclude with a few thoughts on elites and their relationship to language.

David Gellner (1997) has noted the incongruity in the positions taken by linguistic and cultural activists in Nepal who promote the use of indigenous languages but pay for their own children's education in Nepali or even English medium schools. As Simpson has noted, this reflects a wider trope across South Asia, and may even hold true for national languages, where one finds 'elite groups in many countries who may function almost fully in English and are perceived as being considerably detached from other members of their ethnic groups and may not be not proficient in the national language of their country' (2007: 16). This inconsistency has not escaped the attention of more grassroots language campaigners, who perceive the urban, ethnic elites to be jealously guarding their proficiency in the languages that have helped further their own advancement (such as English and Nepali) while at the same time wanting the homeland language to be maintained by their rural cousins. For many non-speakers of a language, a sense of emotional belonging is all that can be rescued from the ashes of dwindling linguistic proficiency.

In Nepal, for Tamangs who speak Tamang, or among Newars for whom Nepal Bhasa is still the reality of daily familial interaction, language remains embedded in practice, and the belonging that it indexes continues to be implicit. However, for members of such communities who have little or no competence in their traditional mother tongue, what matters is the existence, ongoing vitality of and even belief in the language rather than their ability to speak it. Language has now become heritage, divorced from any performative competence.

Related to the issue of competence is that of purity, which once again appears to matter more to non-speakers than it does to speakers. How often does one hear a fluent speaker of Bhutia complaining about the pervasiveness of Nepali loan words in his language? Not very often, because the incorporation of loan words from Nepali may not even be noticed, or if it is, then it is promoted as a practical strategy for linguistic survival. In fact, the incorporation of loan words can be viewed as a key adaptation for ensuring the continued vibrancy, relevance and longevity of smaller languages whose lexical inventories were historically modest.

Where does this leave English as it is spoken in Sikkim? The short answer is that English continues to be a language of class and education, its strong position in education being fired by 'pragmatically driven public demand' (Simpson 2007: 15). English is not a language of territorial identity in traditional terms, but is very much a language of globalised access, which makes English almost anti-territorial. English is also a language of belonging and group attachment, but belonging to a class rather than an ethnicity. As the medium of instruction in all schools in Sikkim, English is breaking down elite associations to some degree, although not entirely. The range of aptitude in English is enormous, illustrated by the fact that only 74% of all students surveyed in Sikkim claim to speak English while 88% write it. Which language the remaining 12% write in when their teachers are instructing them in English is up for debate.

While the borders between Nepal and India are very real, they are also very thin, and in some ways the countries are converging in how they approach attachment and linguistic belonging. In Nepal in particular, the identity landscape is fast changing. In his study of Chantyal over a decade ago, Noonan observed that 'knowledge of the language is no longer at the core of ethnic identity, as it once must have been' (1996: 135) and that 'Chantyalness', therefore, does not include the ability to speak Chantyal among its characterizing features' (1996: 133). It is only a small step from this to having a mother tongue in which one has no mastery.

Paul Brass' statement that 'it is probably more often the case that one defends one's mother tongue when one cannot speak at all or well a language of wider communication' (2004: 365-366) is not borne out or supported by the examples I have provided in this paper. To the contrary, I would suggest that it is usually the elites who defend languages—sometimes even languages that need no defence such as English and Nepali—while marginalised monolinguals aspire to bilingualism. Battles for linguistic representation are not primarily fought by the politically weak and linguistically competent, but waged rather by the politically strong (if linguistically incompetent) who invoke the rights of the disenfranchised in order to construct their own sense of belonging to a community of speakers whose language they may not even speak.

NOTES

¹ This research project was in all senses a collaborative effort. Thousands of students gave their time, and hundreds of teachers assisted us. The survey would not have been possible without the support and dedication of a number of individuals, including but not limited to (in alphabetical order of first name): Anna Balikci, Anne Cowan, Arthur Pazo, C.L. Denzongpa, Chopal Lepcha, Christina Lepcha, Deepak Thami, K.P. Adhikari, Kalsang Choden, Karuna Lepcha, Komin Thami, Mélanie Vandenhelsken, Nyima Bhuti Gurung, Pema Wangchuk, Priscilla Lepcha, Ram Thami, Sam Cowan, Sara Shneiderman, Saul Mullard, Tashi Chuki, Rinpoche Tashi Densapa, Tashi Nordzom, Utpal Yongda and Uttam Lepcha. I would like to thank Ong Tsering Lepcha from Dzongu in particular who travelled far and wide, with me and alone, to administer the survey.

- ² I am grateful to Charles Ramble for reminding me that such evocations of multilingualism with different speech forms accorded different domains of use is not new. Charles V, the King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor (1500-1558), is alleged to have remarked 'I speak Spanish to God, Italian to Women, French to Men, and German to my horse.'
- ³ This point grows out of a discussion with Bal Gopal Shrestha who has recently conducted ethnographic research among the Newar communities of Sikkim.

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**Linguistic Survey of Sikkim:
Part I - Language in Education and Schools**

Date: _____

1. What is your full name ? _____ Male / Female
2. What is the name of your school ? _____
3. In what class do you study ? _____ 4. How old are you ? _____
5. How many languages can you speak ? _____ 6. How many languages can you write ? _____
7. Which languages can you speak ? _____
8. Which languages can you write ? _____
9. Which language(s) do you speak with your mother ? _____
10. Which language(s) do you speak with your father ? _____
11. Which language(s) do your parents speak together ? _____
12. Which language(s) do you speak with your grandparents ? _____
13. Which language(s) do your grandparents speak together ? _____
14. Which language(s) do your parents speak with your grandparents ? _____
15. Which language(s) do you speak with your brothers and sisters ? _____
16. Which language(s) do you speak with your school friends in break ? _____
17. If you have to write a letter, which language do you write it in ? _____
18. If you have to write a shopping list, which language do you write it in ? _____
19. If you know any songs, in which language(s) are they ? _____
20. If you know any poems, in which language(s) are they ? _____
21. If you watch TV, in which language(s) are the programmes that you watch ? _____
22. Which language is your mother tongue ? _____
23. Which languages are you now learning in school ? _____
24. Which of these languages is most important to you, and why ? _____

25. If you could study only one language, which one would you choose ? _____
26. What do you want to do when you graduate from school ? _____

27. Where are you from ? _____
28. How many brothers and sisters do you have ? _____
29. What is your religion ? _____

ATHING JOSEPH RONGONG'S RONG/LEPCHA MANUSCRIPTS: THEIR DESCRIPTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

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This paper is respectfully dedicated to Mr Birendra Rongong, Athing Joseph Rongong's son, as a partial fulfilment of a long-standing obligation, P.K.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The manuscripts described in the present paper have been in my hands since 1978, but this is the first time that I have a possibility to present a complete description of them. All but one are the works by Athing Joseph Rongong (1900-1975) of Kalimpong. This is the fourth time I am returning to these papers. I published a brief description of them in my paper of Poznań: 1980. This was intended to be the beginning of a series of studies, but fate decided otherwise. A detailed description of the Rongong MS of the tale of Tashe Thing came out in Zürich: 1980, but I first saw it only in late August 2008. Finally, in my paper of Velm/Wien: 1983 I argued against the common prejudices denying the Rong literature any originality, even its outright existence.

But so it was—thirteen years of exile and unemployment in Norway (1980-1992) successfully cut me off from the academic development of the fields of my interest. Indeed, it proved a No-way period! What is more, I was cut off from the Rongong Manuscripts for the entire period 1980-2007, having recovered them only in November that year. This is the only excuse I can offer to explain why the present work is so late in coming. Acknowledgements are the most pleasant part of any work. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Birendra Rongong, now of Edinburgh, for placing his father's manuscripts in my hands. May this paper really signify a fresh start and a new beginning! I am also very grateful to Dr Heleen Plaisier, that worthy successor to R.K. Sprigg. Her interest in my work has helped me survive many dark moments of isolation and academic loneliness.

II. THE AUTHOR AND THE PAPERS

As I described it in my work of Poznań: 1980, the manuscripts presented here came into my hands in early 1978, when I was in Kalimpong. The Rev. H.D. Subba, who has helped me in many ways, directed me to the Rongong family in Tirpai Town, informing me that the father of the family, the late Athing Joseph Rongong, had for many years been busy with various literary projects in his mother tongue, and that a linguist like myself would certainly find those papers interesting. It turned out that upon the death of their father, the three sons of Mr Rongong had divided the manuscripts and each one took a part. The share that belonged to Mr Birendra Rongong was intact, but unfortunately I had neither funds nor the necessary papers to undertake the search for the remaining parts. I hope they are still extant in the hands of the family.

Athing Joseph Rongong, the author of the papers, was a Christian, son of a Rong convert from Ilam (Nepal). He was a police officer in Kalimpong, where people remembered him

fondly as 'A.J.R.' He was very interested in his language, and he obviously realised that Rong/Lepcha was facing the clear danger of being pushed out by the much stronger Nepali. At that time the only serious materials for the study of the Rong/Lepcha language were G.B. Mainwaring's grammar and dictionary, and secondarily, a number of primers of all kinds that are listed in my paper of Poznań: 1980. The variety of materials prepared by A.J.R.—if I may be excused to refer to him in this way—indicates that he had at least four special interests, and four main fields of study:

- a. the Rong/Lepcha lexicography
- b. the traditional Rong religion and the tale of Tashe Thing
- c. the New Testament translation into the language; and
- d. the family history seen in the context of the history of the Rong/Lepcha people of Kalimpong, particularly the Christian ones

It must be stressed that the world of 1978 was a very different one from the one of 2008. I have already mentioned that the sole academic works on the language were the two books by Mainwaring. Some folk tale and religious texts have been included in the second volume of the Danish expedition (H. Siiger: 1967), but I have not seen that work in any private library in Kalimpong, and the ex cathedra pronouncements by Albert Gruenwedel denying the Rong/Lepcha script and literature any originality were regarded as dogmas, not to be questioned. There was no Rong/Lepcha New Testament, only the 1849—which means rare—translation of Genesis and parts of Exodus, and a more easily available rendering of the Gospel of Luke. The Rong/Lepcha people of Kalimpong were only beginning to get organised, and if there was anything in print of their local history, I have never heard about it.

An additional problem that I have seen in 1978 was the availability of materials in or on the Rong/Lepcha language published elsewhere. The comparative dictionary—in Devanagari script—of fourteen main languages of Nepal, including Rong/Lepcha (Vikram Samvat: 2030), was easily available, but a trilingual dictionary Rong-Nepali-English that many people claimed to have just been published in Nepal proved impossible to even examine, let alone order. It seemed, on the other hand, that several Rongs were involved in various lexicographic projects, which in the long run seemed very promising. The two works I came to know then which have successfully been completed are K.P. Tamsang: 1980, and A.R. Foning: 1987. Just at the time I happened to be in Kalimpong two very different works became available: Father Stolke's magnificent retelling of the Old Testament in Rong/Lepcha and Ashit Chakraborty's small but interesting primer (Stolke: 1977 and Chakraborty: 1978). Although many people knew about R.K. Sprigg's Rong/Lepcha researches, his actual papers did not seem to be available to anyone.

To a small people the oral history is easily the most important record. It seems that A.J.R. realised it, and began writing an autobiography—in English, his sole work in English that I know of—to amend this. However, once he started he was easily distracted, as he wanted to tell all he remembered, and the final text—incomplete—is rather more the story of the Christian Lepchas of Kalimpong than anything else. Of course, it does not in any way diminish its value—but it is a pity that the work is so short, and that so many details A.J.R. had certainly remembered have never been recorded.

I had too little time and no permit to move freely in the area during my fieldwork, so I could not set out to collect materials towards A.J.R.'s biography. Fortunately, in July this year 2008, it turned out that Mr Birendra Rongong is living in Edinburgh, so there is still a chance for gathering more. In Kalimpong, I could see only one very small photograph of the

man, which I took several pictures of with my trusted twin-lens reflex Yashica. The portrait of Athing Joseph Rongong included in this paper has been drawn by an artist on the basis of those photographs. All that I can say at present about A.J.R. is based on the notes taken during my talk with Mr Birendra Rongong in February or March 1978, which I recovered only in November 2007.

Athing Joseph Rongong was born in 1900 in Mongwar near Kalimpong. His father was a Christian convert who came to India from Ilam, Nepal. A.J. was the fourth of ten children. His greatest dream and ambition was to study engineering, but for lack of funds he decided to join the police in 1923. He got married in 1926 and retired in 1954. He and a certain Mr Tamsang spent one year touring all the Rong/Lepcha places in West Bengal and Sikkim, collecting various materials and getting acquainted with the state and the needs of the language. It seems that already at that time A.J.R. was an active member of Kalimpong Lepcha Association, of which he later became the secretary. Once back from the field trip he started a Lepcha school in Kalimpong. He helped several foreign scholars visiting Kalimpong, notably R.K. Sprigg and N.C. Bodman. It seems that it was only in 1965, when his son got married and started encouraging his father to write in their mother tongue, that A.J.R. really started his original work. His greatest dream was to give his people the New Testament in their own language, but as mentioned above, he placed this work in the full philological context. Mr Birendra Rongong was certain that a Rong-Nepali—or, according to some others, Rong-Nepali-English—dictionary that had recently been published in Kathmandu (that is in 1977 or 1978) was either his father's original work or at least was based upon it, but the book proved unavailable and I had no time to try getting it ordered or brought by someone else.

The above is all that I have in my field notebook. It should be added that when Father Stolke examined the manuscripts, he praised the New Testament translations in very high words, and he was certainly the most competent authority to give his opinion about them.

The manuscripts entrusted to me by Mr Birendra Rongong fall into four major topical groups:

- a. lexicographic studies
- b. the Tashe Thing tale
- c. New Testament translations and Christian literature
- d. personal reminiscences, the only text written in English.

Most of the papers are in A.J.R.'s handwriting, but there are some that are obviously much older and written by someone else. All have been examined and preliminarily identified by Father Stolke, but there remains one that is still unidentified—it belongs to the Christian manuscripts. Even if the remaining two-thirds of the A.J.R. papers will not be found, the papers we know are more than sufficient testimony to the scholarship of their author, his care for details and his love of his mother tongue.

I shall now describe all the manuscripts following the above topical division, supplementing it with information I have not yet published or did so in too sketchy a way.

III. ATHING JOSEPH RONGONG'S LEXICOGRAPHIC STUDIES

The manuscript is an English-Rong dictionary written in three school exercise books sized 16 by 20 cms. Each one is labelled "A.J. Rongong". The notebooks are not numbered, and only

one is dated at the end. I shall now describe them following the English alphabetic order of the key words. All the three volumes are written on both sides of the sheets, but it gives no difficulties in reading.

Manuscript I

Contains entries from F to O. The length is 48 pages, all written in two columns per page. Approximate number of entries—960. The cover is labelled “E to O”, but the entries begin from F.

Manuscript II

The cover is labelled “O to R”, which agrees with the text. The length is 42 pages, of which the dictionary covers pages 1 through 12. Pages 10 and 11 are loose. The dictionary ends with the note “A.J. Rongong 23/8/73”. The rest of p.12 and the entire page 14 are filled with words in English and Nepali written in pencil and obviously by a child. This notebook is in the worst state of preservation and it has obviously been through a lot. Two pages are torn out and loose, but the continuity of entries shows that nothing is missing. Between pages 10 and 11 there is a loose piece of paper obviously not as old as the rest, giving about 30 Rong words and their Nepali equivalents. This page is written in a different handwriting. Number of entries—ca. 260 in all.

Manuscript III

The cover is labelled “S to Z”, though this is not correct. This part seems to be the oldest of the three. The length is 96 pages. Inside the front cover there is a note saying “Copy from General Mainwaring and Albert Grunwedel’s Dictionary 1898”. Approximate number of entries is about two thousand. On the inner side of the back cover there is a short text not yet identified. Entries in S through Z fill only the first 20 pages, then there is a blank of 9 lines and suddenly the entries in A through E come in, and this may actually be the first part. Of all the three, this one looks more like a clean copy rather than a draft.

General remarks

All the three volumes are written in blue ink. The English capitals are old-fashioned, but the text is legible. All the Rong/Lepcha entries are written in the original script. Scattered throughout there are some question marks on the margins and a few Nepali words inserted in different places. Some entries are very long and detailed, giving numerous usage examples, while many others are just glosses in both languages. I have not had the time to compare the manuscript with Mainwaring’s dictionary, so I cannot say anything on this subject. Many entries seem to have been extensively revised and enlarged after the given book was finished, but even the insertions in very small letters are clear and legible. The entire work contains between thirty-two and thirty-three hundred words, that is about half the length of the English-Rong index to Mainwaring’s dictionary.

IV. THE TALE OF TASHE THING

This manuscript fills the entire notebook sized 6.5 by 34 cms—the size of actual pages being slightly smaller, 6 by 33 cms, 35 lines to a page. The left-side pages contain the text in Rong, the right-side ones, the English translation. Both are written in the same handwriting, which clearly indicates that the translation comes from the original writer. There are some

corrections in red on the first four pages of the Rong/Lepcha text, otherwise both versions are clean. There are numbers on the left margin of the Rong/Lepcha text, 1 through 90 (more about it below). The number of pages in the notebook is 82, the last two being in Rong/Lepcha only, with no translations, only the English title "Teachings left behind by Tashe". The volume concludes with a short colophon signed "A.J. Rongong 1960".

The exceptional value of this manuscript comes from the fact that what we have here is a complete tale written by a native writer and translated literally into English by the same man. Going through the English text shows that the translation is not only literal, but also line-to-line as far as possible.

In 1979 I wrote a detailed description of this MS and submitted it to *Ethnologische Zeitschrift*, Zürich. Soon afterwards all my life took a rather abrupt turn and I had to concentrate on survival. I had never seen the printed text of that paper until late August 2008, when Heleen Plaisier tracked it down for me. Also, in the mid-1980s, the complete set of photographs of the Rongong MS was submitted to the *Kailash Journal*, but after prolonged silence I requested the photocopy back, so I do not think it was published. I am mentioning this because I may be asked why I repeat myself—and this is all I can say in my defence.

The colophons of the Rongong MS are so interesting that I have decided to repeat them here, in the first complete description of the entire collection. I hope this will signify a new beginning after 30 years!

The tale of Tashe Thing divides into nine chapters, preceded by an *introductory chapter* on the origin of Mahakala and the first colophon.

The first chapter describes the miraculous birth of Tashe and his adoption by the king.

The second chapter tells about Tashe falling in love with the princess Mandara, their wedding, how Tashe has accidentally killed a man and had to go into exile.

The third chapter discusses Tashe's life in exile, how he became learned in all the arts and sciences, how he subdued the demons in the land of Takbo Thing (which the text identifies with Nepal), and finally his fire ordeal.

The fourth chapter tells us how Tashe spread education and learning in the land of Takbo Thing, thus gaining fame for himself and a golden era of prosperity for the country.

The fifth chapter describes how Tashe was invited by the king of Tibet, how he went there and subdued the local demons, and finally how he spread education and learning in Tibet.

The sixth chapter is devoted to Tashe's life in Tibet. When the king who invited him died, Tashe concealed his death for 25 years, waiting until the king's son grew up. Tashe's teachings on death follow. The chapter ends with Tashe deciding to go to the western lands to subdue the demons still causing trouble there.

The seventh chapter begins still in Tibet. The king and his wife urge him not to go to the west, but this does not make him change his mind. Accompanied by numerous miracles he sets out, encounters a mighty demon and subdues him.

The eighth chapter is filled with Tashe's teachings on life, death, and the true nature of things, and concludes with his departure for the heavenly realms.

The ninth chapter gives the story of the MS told by one Ugan Lingpu and the specific purpose of writing it.

The above is followed by a colophon signed by Tagan, an unnumbered chapter titled "Teachings left behind by Tashe" in Rong/Lepcha only, and the final colophon signed "A.J. Rongong 1960", preceded by a short prayer.

Let me add that I have two more Tashe texts. They will be described in the final part of this paper.

As has already been stated, the text includes three colophons, two in both languages and the third one only in Rong. The two bilingual ones are very interesting, as they show that the history of the MS traces back to the end of the nineteenth century. I quoted the bilingual colophons in my papers of 1980 and 1983, but I think they are not out of place here, in the first complete description of the Rongong Manuscripts.

The first colophon, located between the introductory chapter and the first main chapter:

I, Tagan, have written this book, and if there is anything that should be added to, or deleted from it, may the gods not be angry with me but pour out their blessings, so that this story of Tashe is remembered as long as the Himalayas stand in the north, and as long as the twin rivers of Tista and Rungeet are flowing. I request the learned readers to correct whatever mistakes they may find in this book. May the god of learning accept the young age of this writer as the explanation of his errors. The writer took up the pen in the third month of the Horse Year, and completed his task in the fifth month of the same year.

The ninth chapter and the second colophon tell more about the manuscript and the men behind it:

The one who reads or writes the story of Tashe Thing shall meet him at the moment of death. I, Ugen Lingpu, the priest of Tashe Thing, beg to be excused for producing this tale by so miserable a creature of just body and belly. In Tibet, the tales of Tashe are innumerable and of all kinds, and I brought them. I learnt these stories and wrote them down when I was 70 years old. I cannot give all the details.

O Lepcha children, do not dismiss my story because it is not complete but study it respectfully, so that it may bring you peace and guide you, as it will all sentient beings and insects, to the realms of Tashe and Takbo Thing. At the end of your lives you shall be asked whether you had studied, and lived by, the precepts of Tashe. To all those who studied it, read it, understood it, thought about it, and abided by it, shall be given whatever they might desire. Therefore, do everything in order to meet Tashe.

I wrote this story thinking of all the illiterate Lepcha children, and beg to be excused for all my mistakes and weak points. Do not mind them, O King, but let us study more and give us more instructions.

I dedicate this book to you, O God who keeps all Tashe Thing books under your care, and guards the house from the kings of devils. Do not be angry with me, and do not tease me by criticising my work.

O men of the future, when you are in times of trouble or epidemics of diseases, read this story of Tashe and Takbo Thing so that you can be cured. I have shown this book to all people, so that even those who do not read it may know about it.

I, Tagan, pray to the God who is in heaven to pour his blessings on me. Do not become separated from this book, like the bow cannot be separated from its string.

This is the end of the ninth chapter dealing with Tashe Thing's departure from this world.

I am finishing this writing on October 20th, 1894.

I, Tagan, was asked by my maternal nephew Tubjok to write the Tashe Thing story. I started writing in the Horse Year on the 5th of September, and finished on October 20th.

As I have written this story of Tashe and all other kings on my nephew Tubjok's request, may I be forgiven, by the merits of my work, for any killing and swapping insects, trampling and killing ants and insects under my feet, for the evil thoughts in my heart and the evil eye I was

casting ill-wishingly at others, and also for causing harm to my relatives or for biting them with my mouth.

May all those who have died and gone to hell—grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, paternal uncles, maternal uncles, elder brothers, elder sisters, younger brothers and sisters, aunts and children—be allowed to be reborn again in Sungtoperi the Heaven.

Some remarks on the colophons

The above texts pose several questions which I cannot answer at this moment. The year 1894 was the Wood Male Horse Year, the 28th year of the 15th sixty-year cycle. In the first colophon Tagan tells us that he wrote his work in the Horse Year. In the second one, he gives us both the traditional and the Western date. However, the text gives no key as to the writing of the original manuscript by Ugen Lingpu, who introduces himself as the priest of Tashe Thing. Ugen Lingpu is not mentioned in A.J.R.'s biography. However, it seems obvious that it was Ugen Lingpu who had written the original story in Rong, and that Tagan has merely copied it. As the Horse Year repeats every 12 years, the original story might have been written in 1882, 1870, etc. It is a great pity that Ugen Lingpu has not given his readers any details concerning the manuscripts on which he based his story. The only key seems to be the pagination included in the Rong text, clearly seen on the left margin. The pagination, if this is what it is, goes up to 87, and the nearly equal portions of the text indicate that what we have here is the pagination of some unknown original manuscript of which the Rongong MS is a modern copy. The pagination continues in the two pages of the text, only in Rong, and comes to a close with no.90, the apparent end of the original text clearly marked in the MS. The last two sections—the concluding prayer and Athing Joseph Rongong's own colophon—have no pagination.

One point seems sure—the uniformity of handwriting and even the shade of the ink clearly indicate that what we have before us is a holograph copy in Athing Joseph Rongong's own hand.

The one interesting 'hard fact' is that in 1894 there were still men calling themselves the priests of Tashe. This, though indirectly, may support the Rong origin of the tale, for the learned ones of the late nineteenth century must have known the difference between Tashe Thing religion and Buddhism. This apparent trace of the original manuscript, if I am reading it correctly, does not appear in Father Stolke's manuscript, whose pagination is the pagination of the pages of the notebook, not of the copied original text.

One more point, which I just must make. When I first tried to get the Western scholars interested in the Tashe Thing MS, I used to get a uniform reply that it is not original, it is a translation of one of the Tibetan volumes on Padma Sambhava. Well, even if it is so it should not be surprising—but the fact is that nobody has tried to prove or disprove it yet. On the other hand, it was my good fortune to interview many learned Rongs, particularly the elders and the ones considered most learned, and all of them told me in no uncertain terms that the tale of Tashe Thing had existed in the Rong world long before the Tibetans came with their stories of Padma Sambhava. It was and remains my conviction that it is just unfair to claim that the holiest tale of the Rongs is not original if nobody ever bothered to prepare a comparative edition of one complete variant of the tale in both Rong and Tibetan. I have stated this conviction in my paper of Wien: 1983, but I think I ought to stress now, in 2008, that I have not abandoned my confidence in what I heard from the Rong elders, and for the

very same reason. I dare to think they know their own culture better than Herr Albert Gruehnwedel ever did.

I hope that the future edition of the Rongong MS, compared with all the sources now available, shall answer all the numerous questions the text is posing both to those interested in Rong and in Tibetan.

V. THE NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS AND CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

As it has been stated above, one of A.J.R.'s dreams was to give his people the New Testament in their own language. According to both Mr Birendra Rongong and Father Stolke, most of the last few years of his life A.J.R. spent on this project. Let us remember he had not been trained for the task, nor did he have access to the voluminous aids-to-Bible-translation handbooks without which a Western translator would never dare even begin such work. What we have before us, then, is truly the work of love and devotion, love and devotion of one extraordinary man to both his religion and the beauty of his own language.

There are four sets of New Testament texts in the collection, and one coming from the Old Testament. Since I recovered the papers only in November 2007 I have not had time to study them, and therefore I cannot say how complete or incomplete they are. All I can say—repeat, rather—is that when Father Stolke examined them, he had only words of highest praise for the quality of the language.

Let us present the papers in the traditional New Testament order:

Matthew

26 loose pages size 24.5 by 34.5 cms, approximately 40 lines per page, written on both sides. By a quick glance at the numbers of chapters, it appears complete. No pagination other than the NT chapters and verses.

Mark

Chapters 1 through 6, written on 14 loose pages same size as with Matthew. No pagination other than the NT chapters and verses. Written on both sides.

Acts

This manuscript fills about half a school exercise book 5.5 by 19.5 cms and approximately 32 lines to a page. The translation is 44 pages long and seems to end rather abruptly, though I cannot say whether it is complete or not.

Epistles

This MS fills a school exercise book the same size as Acts. The text is 116 pages long, approximately 30 lines to a page. Again, I had no time to study the MS, so I cannot yet say which Epistles are included.

Psalms

14 loose sheets the same size as Matthew, written on both sides. When Father Stolke examined this MS, he was both happy to see it and a bit puzzled as he said it was not obvious to identify some Psalms included. I cannot say anything more about it.

General remarks

It was at one time my idea to make a careful comparative study of the original NT texts and A.J.R.'s translations. I had to give this up, as well as a number of my other projects, thanks to the discrimination I had to survive in the land of No-way. I am no Bible scholar, but I am enough of a philologist and linguist to see treasures when I encounter one. Now that Heleen Plaisier's two major works have opened a new epoch of Rong/Lepcha studies, I do hope there will appear someone more fortunate than myself and one who will steer clear of the land of No-way, who will prepare a scientific edition of A.J.R.'s Bible translations. They remain an unparalleled monument to the man. Some years ago, the Bible Society of India has brought out the Rong/Lepcha New Testament and Psalms, though undated and set in type so small that I think even a 'native reader' may have problems studying it. The state of my eyes being what it is, I could only compare a few random pages with the Rongong translations, and obviously they are two different works. Let the future academic edition decide whose translations are closer to the original—but let us not forget that a retired police officer from Kalimpong achieved a great deal of success entirely on his own, with no help and no financial backing.

Unidentified

A mysterious item in the collection is a school exercise book sized 7 by 20.5 cms, 218 pages long. The 16 centrefold pages are written on a different paper—slightly smaller size, red and unlined—and sewn into the volume. There are between 17 and 18 lines per page. Some captions are written in red ink—reminding one of the red-letter editions of the New Testament. Father Stolke was quite puzzled to see this volume. After a very careful examination—I remember he took more time examining this item than any other ones—he said that what we have here is a translation of a Christian novel he remembered from his own young days, written in the form of 12 letters from Jerusalem to Rome. He could not recall anything more about that novel, and my subsequent attempts at identifying it brought no results. This MS is written in a very clear handwriting that is obviously not Athing Joseph Rongong's. Just a glance at the text makes it clear that what we have before us is a clean copy, not a manuscript draft.

I refer the interested readers to my two papers published in the Wien: 1983 conference volume, where I give more space to both the Rong and the Tibetan Bible translations.

VI. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A very interesting document in a class of its own is Athing Joseph Rongong's autobiographical sketch. It is written in another school exercise-book sized 5.5 by 20 cms, written throughout in English—the only such case among the papers. The narrative fills 38 pages of approximately 28 lines to a page. There are some passages in Hindi but in the Latin script. The last page of the manuscript, of which half has been cut off, contains some genealogical notes.

The narrative begins with the birth of A.J.R.'s father in Nepal in 1850. However, the story is full of digressions on the history and personal matters of the early Christian missionaries, and as a result the very autobiographical part is rather sketchy. I think that the main importance of the manuscript is the fact that the history of the missionaries is written by a convert and a native son, who knew them on daily basis and was aware of their various weaknesses. This part of the manuscript begins with the year 1870 or 1871, the arrival of

Rev. McFarlane from Scotland, who took over the work in Darjeeling from the Baptist Mission. The story includes an account of some serious differences between Dr Graham and a certain Mr Sutherland, and how A.J.R.'s father managed to get them both to agree.

VII. VARIA

Two items do not fall into any of the above classes, yet seem interesting enough to include a brief description of them. One is a collection of nine folk songs, on which Father Stolke commented that some are not so popular today (1978). This collection is a copy made on some duplicating machine, so one may guess the original may have been written for the Kalimpong Lepcha Association or maybe for some visiting researcher. The pages are sized 22 by 5 cms.

The other item is a single sheet of paper 20 by 33 cms, 43 lines to a page. The text is a collection of 80 numbered expressions and sentences in Rong/Lepcha given first in English, then in the original script and finally in Romanisation. The variety and systematic, logical sequence of them gives the clear impression that it is a guide of sorts to the Rong grammar. I feel that even today, a copy of this would be of considerable use to any beginner in Rong, native or a foreigner. I have prepared an edition of that page, together with some other similar data, under the title "Towards a Rong-Tibetan-Comparative Project". This was to come out in the Korosi Csoma Conference 1984 volume, but for certain reasons I had to withdraw the paper, so it remains unpublished.

VIII. THE OTHER MSS OF TASHE THING

When I saw the Rongong MS of Tashe Thing, I obviously became curious to find more. Seeing my interest, Father Stolke showed me what he called one of his treasures. It was another complete Tashe Thing MS, much longer, written specially for the Father by his teacher Kam Sherab in 1925. The MS was written in beautiful handwriting, in rather large letters, and it was both a pleasure to look at and an easy text to read. I have not dared to ask Father Stolke to give or sell me the MS, but he himself suggested that I could get it copied. Father Stolke suggested Mr T. Samling, saying that both his knowledge of the language and his handwriting make him the best possible copyist. The copy of the Kam Sherab MS fills 151 pages sized 19.5 by 31 cms, 16 lines of text to a page.

I was obviously eager to learn more about Kam Sherab, but again—having very little time and no funds proved too much. However, I became aware that Kam Sherab was a well-known name in Kalimpong, though perhaps mostly among the Lepchas. He was once a monk in Tibet, he was well-versed in Tibetan, Rong, Nepali and some other languages, and his disciple Father Stolke called him a great expert on Tashe Thing. I think that trying to follow Kam Sherab's traces might bring out a number of very interesting data.

When I returned to Europe, I was eager to find the original manuscript of Mainwaring's dictionary. The reason was simple—almost all the Rongs who knew the work, as well as Father Stolke, agreed that Gruenwedel's editing both cast off a lot of interesting vocabulary and undermined the value of what was left. Many a time have I heard a comment that Mainwaring knew the language too well to make this or that claim about the given word. Seeing the personal involvement of those whom I asked for opinions, it seemed to me that the dictionary ought to be compared with the original manuscript and, at least, all the entries removed by Gruenwedel should be published in a specialised paper. I have not managed to

find the manuscript, however, but I did obtain a copy of something at least equally interesting.

It was Dr Gunther Groenbold of München who informed me that Albert Gruenwedel had prepared a complete manuscript of the Tashe Thing tale, collated from different original manuscripts and written in Romanisation. Dr Groenbold has provided me with a copy of that manuscript. The Groenbold MS is a voluminous one, coming up to two volumes of loose sheets sized 25 by 37 cms. The first volume is 76 sheets long, the second one, 52 sheets. The volumes contain both the continuous text and footnotes of various kinds. These three Tashe Thing MSS returned into my hands in late 2007, after 27 years.

IX. FATHER STOLKE'S COPY OF MAINWARING-GRUENWEDEL DICTIONARY

One of the many interesting items Father Stolke showed me was his own copy of the Mainwaring-Gruenwedel dictionary. As I clearly remember, almost all the margins were filled with additions and corrections by both Kam Sherab and Father Stolke. Alas! This was simply too large to have it copied, and I had no funds to even try making a photographic copy. When I had my last meeting with the Father, he told me that the precious volume got lost. The book was in bad shape and badly needed a new binding—which I can confirm—so the Father gave it to the binders' and never saw the book again. I hope that the volume has not been damaged or destroyed, and that perhaps someone more fortunate than myself will search Kalimpong for it. I think there is no need to explain the unique value of that book. Though three decades have passed, I still feel helpless anger at my not being able to secure a copy of it when I had the book in my own hands.

It might also be of interest to locate Father Stolke's 1925 manuscript of Tashe Thing written by Kam Sherab, but of this we do have a copy. Father Stolke examined Mr Samling's work and said it was perfect. And one more remark. Although I have not seen the manuscripts of Father Stolke's Rong retelling of the Old Testament—he was only too happy to give me a copy of the just-printed book—I am sure that those papers may exist somewhere, and it would be interesting to see whether they contain any variant readings.

X. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, the Rongong manuscripts deserve attention, and I think the only proper treatment of them ought to be a complete edition, photographic and transcription. They add to all the specialised fields of interest in Rong studies: lexicography, traditional Rong religion, Bible translations and modern writings in the language, local history, folklore and grammar. Indeed, Athing Joseph Rongong was a most unusual policeman. He reminds me of the eighteenth century Cornish antiquarians who set out to collect whatever still remained of their traditional culture and create new ways of developing it.

It is my hope that this paper will create some interest in both the works of Athing Joseph Rongong—and let us not forget, what we have here is only one-third of his manuscript remains—and the contemporary developments in the Rong language. It has always been described as vanishing, but it has not vanished so far. Let us hope it never will.

XI. THE PLATES

I would like to conclude this paper with a set of plates showing some of the manuscripts described. Some of the plates may appear faded, but all the original manuscripts are easily legible. (Editor's note: the author submitted a large number of plates, of which the Editors themselves had to make a selection)



PLATE 1: The portrait of Athing Joseph Rongong

ATHING JOSEPH RONGONG 1900–1975: The above portrait was drawn after a copy of the original photograph in possession of Mr Birendra Rongong. The original picture, of exceptionally small size, has been photographed by me and on the basis of that copy the above portrait was drawn by Mr Andrzej Piertkos to whom I wish to express a debt of thanks.

On the first day. You have just me to keep to the
 you had in the morning and they had to be done.
 This is the end of Chapter I of ~~the~~ the story of
 and the king also flew with them.
 the side of the mountain. ^{to the} ~~to~~ always the king flew
 might be said that he was ^{at the} ~~in the~~ the first day
 the king was strong, but because of keeping things out
 and ~~to~~ a great nothing after each of these things.
 all games in them were ^{to} ~~to~~ finally never did. He
 much more. The king came and said to God. He said
 dropped. The earth, the sea and water all water
 one hundred years living. Then there were also
 were ~~dropped~~ by ~~him~~. They ~~dropped~~ were ~~then~~
 their same ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~. All ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 the king in ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ and above that was ~~the~~ ~~the~~
 on the floor ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ on a blue
 the glass ~~strong~~, ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ on a blue floor, to the wall
 (when the day is ~~strong~~, all ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ only a one day
 the king used to look at them on the 10th day of the wall of Xuynt
 them and yellow in color to be found
 the flowers, one flower were ~~strong~~, white, red, yellow, green
 and ~~strong~~ might ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 there is a ~~strong~~. It had like the king, ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 to that place there was a great king. He ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ of the king
 knowing this to be true I have returned to the first day
 to my father. ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ will come. He will come in the first day
 2. ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 3. ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 On the first day. ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~
 On the first day. ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~ ~~strong~~

1. Tã lyan fat lyan ün gun-nã it de-bú rum
 tã-së tuk-po t'in tím-bú ka-zon kup on ji go.
 nen sa-wé top lun mã sú gum lun pye sú tó.
 sun-rón rýú nui sã lyan-ka sã hor son lun rýú
 fat.ka rip gun-nã lín lun búr-sã sú zon kat plã
 nui sã sã ayak-ka rum san-gye pãri gun-nã
 plã lun fãm-bik fãm. or sã tün ka tsú yam o.
 om ma-ni pi-me hüm hri tuk-bo t'in kün
 lun rum-dar púm-go lot cãn nui sã sun gum
 tuk-bo-t'in go rum lyan ka lot non nui
 gum. sã róng kã su lám ka tã sã t'in t'i b
 sã gum. zon nyin gun-nã sã gun rãn ka t'i.
 sã gum o, o lan va ri tó yet ban rum lyan
 ka li non yam ma o. lyan o-re ka pã-no
 tím-bo kat nyi yam o. pã-no ur sã li jut ka
 dã tím-mu kat nyi yam o. dã ur re pã-no.
 ur sã li jut ka da tím-mú ka nyi yam o.
 dã ur-re pã-nú son sã ün cük ka yam o. dã
 pun-var ru-var rip mã dúk.³ nui nyak ka
 nyi yam mã o. rip nyi sã non ka rip kúm.
 tú sã mã dúk nui sã rip a-dúm a-byur
 luk lok lã sã fun⁴ fin fun fon-sã pã a-
 yor bõ sã rip ham. mat lun nian nyi nui
 re pã-nu-nun riak-lã bam yam o.
 kur-nyit nyom tsã kã-ti ka suk nyi rýú
 nui sã sã hor son sã suk nyi lú nui
 sã sã ayak-ka ta ka rip büm pãri ba lã

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY OF SIKKIM: RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

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The government of Sikkim has embarked on a policy of implementing bottom up planning in contrast to the top down planning which was being followed until now. The change in strategy was initiated in order to assess the need of the people at the village level and chalk out programmes to meet their needs. The government required basic village level data to implement the proposed bottom up planning successfully. Since such data was not available, a socio-economic census was conducted to generate data on all social and economic activities of individuals at the village level of the state. The Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation (DESM&E) was entrusted with this task. Economic aspects like income, housing, drinking water facility, electricity, etc. and sociological aspects such as population, literacy, etc., were included. Taking one step further, it was decided that ethnic community level data be generated, something which had never previously been attempted in the country due to its sensitive nature. Considering the peaceful nature of the Sikkimese state, it was decided that data be collected for the twenty two major communities of the state. In addition, a photo data bank of all citizens was collected during this exercise.

The census commenced from December 2005 and fieldwork was completed in a record time of one month. During this month officers visited over one hundred thousand households and gathered information on more than five hundred thousand individuals; covering yak shepherds grazing their cattle at 19,000 feet above sea level to beggars living in shacks. All of them were interviewed and photographed. However for security reasons, military and para-military personnel of the central government were not covered by the said census. For the first time in the history of our country, a state was able to collect such a variety of data in such a short time. Sikkim is also the only state in India to have a photo data bank of all its citizens.

Today, I would like to present some preliminary findings about the data on religion that was gathered during this census. Though data on religion had previously been collected by various censuses, a breakup of religion data on a community basis was conducted for the first time. This data provides detailed information concerning the religious practices followed by the major communities of the state. Since there was no previous data along similar lines, it was not possible to compare them. However the data provides interesting insights into the religious practices of the state's population.

I would like to begin by providing some historical background about the various religions practiced in Sikkim. According to the conventional historical narrative, before the introduction of Buddhism in Sikkim, most of the people were either animist or nature worshippers. It was only in the eighth century that Guru Padmasambhava introduced Buddhism to Sikkim. After his visit, other Buddhist teachers visited Sikkim but none undertook the construction of monasteries. It was only in 1642, following the visit of three

monks from Tibet and the coronation of the first Sikkimese king that the construction of monasteries was initiated and people were converted to Buddhism.

In recent years, the number of people practicing Buddhism has increased with the Gurungs and other communities converting to Buddhism for socio-political reasons. With the first monasteries being built in the late seventeenth century, Sikkim now has 98 monasteries, 189 *mani lhakangs* (ladies' shrine room), 39 *tsam khangs* (retreat houses) and 87 monastic schools.¹

The religion with the largest followers in Sikkim is Hinduism. Hinduism was practiced in Sikkim in some form in the erstwhile Sikkim kingdom which was much larger than now. The population practicing Hinduism rose sharply during the Gorkha invasion and the British regime in Sikkim when people from Nepal, who were mostly Hindus, were settled in Sikkim by the British government. Sikkim now has over 317 Hindu *mandirs* throughout the state.

Both Christianity and Islam have grown rapidly in the recent years. Christianity was introduced in Sikkim in 1891 by the Rev. Sutherland of the Eastern Himalayan Mission of the Church of Scotland, who established a missionary bungalow in Chidam in south Sikkim. They were followed by the Scandinavian Alliance Mission in 1894. From this humble beginning Sikkim now has 73 churches belonging to different denominations spread all over the state.

One of the first Muslims in the state was Mohamed Sahib who migrated to Sikkim from Tibet in the early twentieth century. From a few followers who used to gather at his house to pray their numbers slowly grew and a mosque was built at Gangtok in 1944. Sikkim now has six mosques in different districts. Other religions present in the state but with very few followers are Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Bahai and Jain. Jain followers who migrated from Rajasthan are mainly confined to the business class, while Sikhs and Zoroastrians followers are also migrants from outside Sikkim. Sikkim has been a fertile ground for various religions because of the peaceful and tolerant nature of its people. We find religious harmony in Sikkim at least till now.

I will now proceed to the data on religion which has been collected by various censuses. The first census was undertaken in 1901 during the British regime (Risley, 1903). The first census recorded 41,772 followers of Buddhism, 77,892 Hindus, 48 followers of Islam, 276 Christians and 252 followers of other religions. With the increase in population there has been a matching increase in followers of various religions over the century. As per the socio-economic census of 2005 the followers of Buddhism has risen to 172,159, which is an increase of 312%, while Hindus have increased to 348,794, an increase of 347%. Followers of Islam have increased to 9,187, an increase of nearly 2000%. Christians have increased to 44,137, an increase of about 1600%. The increase in other religions has been marginal.

As per the socio-economic census Hinduism has the largest number of followers and they comprise 59.98% of the state population. They are followed by Buddhists, who comprise 29.60% of the state population. Christians form 7.64% of the population while Islam comprises 1.59%. The remaining other religions comprise 1.19% of the population. The Eastern district of Sikkim has the largest population of Hindus while the Northern district has the least.

Examining religion distribution among the communities, the results are very interesting. The main communities practicing Buddhism are the Bhutias, Lepchas, Tamangs, Sherpas and Gurungs. Among these communities, the Bhutias have the largest share of followers of

Buddhism with 42.49% followed by the Lepchas with 22.32%, the Tamangs with 19.44 and the Gurungs with 13.36%.

The data of religious practice within each community shows that a large percentage of the Gurung community has recently converted to Buddhism for socio-political reasons with 67.15% of this community now practicing Buddhism. The Tamang community has shown similar trends with 85.01% now practicing Buddhism. Hinduism is practiced by most Nepalese communities with the Chettri community leading with a share of 19.89% followed by Limboo with 13.15% and Bahun with 11.35%. Within the community, Bahun and Chettri have the largest number of followers of Hinduism. Followers of Hinduism are also numerous among the non-Nepalese communities. Christianity is practiced by several communities with the Rai community having the largest percentage of 28.59% Christians followed by the Lepchas with 12.99. However within the community, Sarki has the largest percentage with 19.64% of its members practicing Christianity. Islam has the largest number of followers among non-Sikkimese, particularly among recent immigrants from Bengal and Bangladesh, with a share of 99%.

The introduction of different religions to Sikkim has had various effects on the socio-economic pattern of the people. The way religion was introduced has had diverse impacts on the daily life of the people. Buddhism was successful in converting many people due to the patronship of the Chogyals and to the close relation between Tibet and Sikkim. Being the first religion to be introduced, it encountered less resistance from the local religious practitioners of animism who had no written texts. Lepchas, the aborigines of the land were animist and readily converted, partly due to the fact that several nature worshiping features and the worship of local deities were absorbed in the form of Buddhism practiced in Sikkim.

It has been observed that Buddhist monasteries are built by followers in places convenient for gathering and worship rather than in places conducive to spreading the religion as in the earlier years. This trend has strengthened the monasteries since they are locally supported and sponsored. The spread of Buddhism in Sikkim can also be attributed to the concept of monastic schools which has received active government support. However, if data on religion is taken into consideration, the increase in Buddhist followers is more in line with the increase in community population practicing Buddhism rather than with an increase in new converts. Lack of active preaching has restricted the growth of Buddhism outside the communities which are already following Buddhism.

Hinduism has not increased because of new converts but rather because of the growth of communities following Hinduism. Hinduism saw a spurt of growth from 1774 with the Gorkha invasion of Sikkim. The population of South and West Sikkim which came under Gorkha rule were converted to Hinduism under the policy of 'Char Jat Chattish Varna' (four castes, 36 sub-castes). Under this policy, literature in local language was discouraged and the use of Sanskrit was promoted. During this period, several Hindu festivals were imposed upon the people thus changing the traditions of the local population. However in recent years, people from different communities have converted to other religions from Hinduism for a number of reasons.

Christianity which was introduced by missionaries in the late nineteenth century in the South and North districts and later in the East district, has seen a rise in converts in recent years. Reverend Macfarlane of the Scottish Missions first spread the gospel from Kalimpong and made several visits to Sikkim in 1880. Due to his efforts there were 26 Christians in Sikkim by 1886. But it was only after the opening of the missionary residence in Chidam that

Christianity really took hold in Sikkim. Christianity spread from Chidam where a dispensary managed by a Christian Lepcha compounder was successful in stimulating the introduction of Christianity. By 1923 missionaries had opened eleven dispensaries in Sikkim. However the Scandinavian mission was not successful in converting people in Lachen and Lachung in the North district where both valleys had a well functioning traditional system of governance and a strong presence of Buddhist monks who resisted the Christian influence. In Gangtok, Christianity was successful due to Mary Scott who being a close friend of the then queen, Maharani Kunzang Dechen Tshomo Namgyal (1904-1987), was allowed to open a church. Her initiative in opening a school for girls played an important part in her success. The growth of Christianity was slow until the 1980s which saw a sudden surge when various other Christian denominations started evangelical activities in the state.

The Lepcha were one of the communities which converted to Christianity in the beginning since the early churches and missions were located in Lepcha inhabited areas and the tolerant nature of the Lepchas led to their conversion. Data from the socio-economic census, however, shows that churches located all over Sikkim have not been very successful in converting people in the surrounding areas. Kamerang Church in south Sikkim has been one of the few successful ones. St Thomas Church and school in Gangtok has been the only successful Catholic church in the state which is mainly due to their school. In some cases, such as Gor Sangtok in north Sikkim, which is primarily surrounded by Buddhist dominated areas, Lepcha Christians are flourishing without a church in the vicinity. That Christianity has found favour with the Lepcha and Rai communities could also be due to the large number of pastors and preachers from these communities. Christianity is also favoured among scheduled castes for socio-economic reasons.

Islam has been growing rapidly in Sikkim, however, the census data reveals that most followers are non-locals. Mosques were constructed in areas where there are large migrant labourer populations from Bengal and Bangladesh. Islam has very few followers among Sikkim's local communities.

Other religions like Jains, Sikh, Zoroastrian and Bahai have not grown over the years and though Sikh *gurudawaras* were built, they are mainly supported by the army.

In spite of various religions introduced in the state, old religious practices like nature worship, animism, shamanism and yumanism (the traditional faith of the Limbus, which is currently being revived among the community), continue to have followers all over the state among different communities. It was observed during the census, for example, that Hindus and Buddhists include a large number of believers in shamanism and nature worship.

Among the communities, the Bahun or the Brahmin community has shown the highest resistance to conversion to other religions.

Socio-economic factors are found to have a large role to play in the conversion to other religions. Economic data collected during the census show a strong correlation between income and conversion. The correlation is very strong in the case of Buddhist and Christian converts. Data reveals that the majority of students in monastic schools are from very poor families and entry into these schools is more based on economic reasons than on religious conviction. It would not be wrong to say that the majority of Buddhist monks come from the lowest economic strata. Data on Christianity shows a similar trend. Within the different community groups, Scheduled Castes have the largest percentage of 15.53% Christians. In addition to the strong economic correlation linked to conversion, Scheduled Castes are converting to Christianity for sociological reasons in order to escape the Hindu caste system

which stigmatizes them. Although Hinduism has grown in terms of numbers, the conversion of Gurungs and Tamangs to Buddhism has had an influence. The recent resurgence of religious awareness in the state has had a large impact on the Nepalese community. The conversion of Gurungs and Tamangs, the revival of Yumanism and the spread of Christianity has had a large impact on the local tradition and festivals. Dasai, the one festival which was celebrated by all Nepalese communities has lost its sheen with the Tamangs, the Gurungs and some other communities boycotting it after declaring it as a Hindu festival. Dasai, the most important festival for Sikkim's Nepalese communities and occasion for all family members to get together, is now fast fading away, taking away a tradition which was unique and was the bond that held the Nepalese community together. Conversion of Lepchas to Christianity has also impacted the practice of Shamanism and some traditional festivals.

Interactions with people of various faiths during the census revealed that most Buddhist followers were introduced into the religion by their parents and tend to be unquestioning followers with little awareness of their faith. Hindu followers were found to be a little better with more awareness of their gods, goddesses and festivals but with little knowledge of their religious philosophy. Christians showed better awareness of their religion due to the regular meetings and preaching which were absent among both Buddhists and Hindus. Followers of Islam were also more aware of their religion, which was also due to their regular prayer meetings and preaching.

I would now like to conclude with a quote from Gandhi: "The essence of all religions is one. Only their approaches are different" (1937). This seems to be the principle of all Sikkimese people irrespective of their religion, the belief that truth, compassion and tolerance are more important than knowledge of religious philosophy without practice. It is this philosophy towards life that has meant that Sikkim has been an example of religious harmony and tolerance in the country.

NOTES

- ¹ All information about current religious buildings in Sikkim comes from unpublished internal data from the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Govt of Sikkim.

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BOM BUSTY'S SUBTLE ROUTE TO DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

From building stairways to heaven to the extraordinary architecture required in building a traditional house, Lepchas take pride in the indigenous knowledge prevailing long before 'modernization' was officially launched in the region. Hunting expeditions usually ended by sharing portions of the game with a piece left in the forest to appease the nature they exploited and as a population group they were aware of their surroundings and effective ways to survive. Only when they came in contact with those who looked different and spoke a different language were Lepchas made to feel inferior in their ways of life.

Located only two and a half kilometres away from Kalimpong town, Bom Busty is a typical village found in dictionary definitions—a group of houses, shops, etc., usually with a church and situated in a country district.¹ But many years ago the land it occupies was mostly forest, which extended from Durpin Hill to Relli River.² Features such as rivers and streams all owed their toponyms to the Lepcha language. Bom Busty itself takes root in the Lepcha words *chyom vom* understood as 'book' and 'salt', a term regarded as meaning a 'religious book'. This meaning was further understood as referring to the bud of a religious book, a bud that would bloom to be a beautiful flower and spread its scent just as a salt adds taste to food. In time the exclusively Lepcha population of the village welcomed newcomers and it became a showcase for a plethora of multi-ethnic communities residing there today. Hence, it has been divided into three sub-villages; Tadi Gaon, Gairi Gaon and Salim Bom. Salim Bom (my ancestral village) is the focus of this paper, which will be referred to by its original name, Bom Busty.

After the arrival of the Rev. McFarlane and the Church of Scotland in Kalimpong, Bom Busty received its share of missionary activity and the establishment of a church there dates to 1882. Under the leadership of Sukhman Limbu,³ five of the first six families to be converted were Lepchas.⁴ Together with the church, a night school was opened which soon became a regular six-day schooling centre when a permanent hall was built. On the seventh day, they would all attend church. Hence, education and Christianity grew side by side and as time passed, Lepcha youth were encouraged to continue further studies by government allotted stipends for education. My father, for example, speaks of a time after high school completion when he did not know what next to do. He is grateful to the *prachin*⁵ who would write notes of reference to a 'lepcha kaiiya'⁶ and lend money to students for college education. He would return the amount after receiving the tribal stipend in due time. He was typical of many of his generation of Lepchas who went on to complete both graduate and post graduate studies and to apply for government jobs while appearing for the West Bengal Civil Service exams. The church too had grown in numbers and leadership was transferred to the laid-back Lepcha supervision. Christmas celebrations were always something to look forward to with good food, archery, cock-fights, mini-marathons and a hefty intake of local *ci*.⁷ Elders recall a time when the carollers sang in front of a pig sty because they were all so heavily intoxicated with *ci*. This year, the church celebrated its 125th birthday.⁸

MUN AND BONGTHING

In embracing Christianity as their new found religion, the Lepchas of Bom Busty very easily disowned their traditional *mun* religion.⁹ If the *muns* and *bongthings* were required to perform rituals and sacrifices in order to appease the spirits of the ancestors, or to identify harmful spirits, this was seen as wicked and as an unnecessary obstacle to the adoption of Christian religious beliefs. Sadly enough, there are no *bongthings* in the village today. Nim Tshering Lepcha, a 72-year-old man is the brother of the last *bongthing* in Bom Busty. After the death of his eldest brother, his youngest brother inherited the position but left the village. Thus it is usually the Buddhist lamas who conduct the local rites while the youngest brother is only summoned once in two years or so. Similarly the rites are not as elaborate as before. When asked the reason for this decline in the traditional religion, Nim Tshering is quick to say that many have converted to Christianity. There are only eight Lepcha Buddhist families in the village who are still very strict regarding their older rituals and ceremonies. Interestingly, Nim Tshering also mentioned that it was 'expensive'. With the same amount of money spent on buying sacrificial animals and food varieties, they could go to a dispensary and buy medicine to cure their disease. When asked if the nephew was ready to take over as a *bongthing* upon his brother's death, there was apprehension. Firstly, the nephew was still a bachelor which did not fulfil the requirement of a married man to take over the position. Secondly, the nephew had not shown much interest in continuing his father's duties.

EDUCATION

Fortunately, church also meant school in Bom Busty. "The church and the school have gone together in the hill region of Darjeeling district ever since the advent of the missionaries." (Dewan, 1991: 104) The church-school has been the base-foundation for almost all educated professionals emerging out of Bom Busty. In its turtle's pace however, the Bom-church school has not yet reached the high school level. It is still a primary school with teachers hailing from the village itself. Indeed, primary education is seen as important and necessary as there are three primary schools in the village today. While most people are grateful to the British for their legacy in education, there are some elderly Lepchas who saw fault in the British ways of educating the Lepchas of Bom Busty. Temba Sambukmu is one of the oldest residents of the village and tells of how the brighter Lepcha students were not always encouraged to study beyond the fifth grade. "Sixth grade was a big thing," he remarked as the trend was to separate the smarter children and send them for either pastor or compounder trainings. When a fifth grade educated Lepcha would be told that he should now work and train to be a *lopan*¹⁰ there was a feeling of achievement, something exciting to look forward to and Lepchas fell for this kind of 'call'.

It is recalled that there was one stubborn Lepcha boy who actually completed his matriculation examinations. He was John Karthak, a pioneer who went on to join the Indian army and, after retirement, start a typing school in Kurseong. In 1964, he also established a shorthand typing school at 5th mile, Kalimpong. His venture was continued by his son (residing in Bom Busty today), who added a shorthand course in 1975 which equipped many young aspirants from both the village and outside. The typing school is still functioning today and in 1997, a computer course was also introduced under the membership of the Computer Society of India.

Chena Simick from Bom Busty became the first ever college graduate from Darjeeling district during 1935-1936. He worked as a History and Tibetan language teacher in SUMI for almost all his life. Likewise, Sankyol Tasho is almost a revolutionary figure hailing from Bom Busty. He was a keen advocate of the Lepcha language and would hold night classes in either SUMI or Girls' High School but he was disheartened by the discouraging response from the younger generation. He was also one of the first people to produce a Lepcha primer and sent it to Sikkim during the 1920s. He also received an invitation from the School of Oriental and African Studies (London) for some academic research, but it never materialized. Tasho is also remembered as the person who took Lepcha dance troupes to meet Jawarahalal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. Tasho's picture with Nehru and the Lepcha group is still found in a personal family album of one of his descendants. One of the most important contributions Tasho made was his input in the design of the Lepcha flag in which intricate details and symbols were incorporated. Witnessing the division between Buddhist and Christian Lepchas, Tasho put the symbol of a dove that was to reflect unity amongst fellow brothers under the Lepcha flag.

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

Unfortunately, education did not necessarily produce future Sankyol Tasho's in Bom Busty. It is in fact disheartening to note that education for the Lepcha residents of Bom Busty did not equip them with the reading and writing skills of their rich language. "It is a sorry story as young children were deprived of getting Lepcha education at an early level," said N.T. Tasho, a concerned government officer. Even Lepcha conversation, which was popular at home, ceased to be practiced as Lepcha students took on Nepali as their spoken language. In order to better communicate with their neighbours, they not only learnt the language but used it while conversing with fellow Lepcha families. Lepchas from Bom Busty thus also became fluent in Nepali language, but in mastering a language very different from their own, they were left unable to recognize their own alphabet. Similarly, the common aspiration of educated fathers' for their sons to learn good English is indicated by the growing number of Lepcha children in English medium schools. "In learning a foreign language, we have become modern but have forgotten our language," said Suvan Tasho, school captain of St. Augustine's School.

While other languages like Tibetan, Chinese and Dzongkha are part of the school syllabus, here too the Lepchas do not have mother tongue options. The downfall of their language could be blamed on both the state and central governments' negligence in recognizing the Lepcha language. While some scholars argue that the "language is unquestionably far anterior to Hebrew or Sanskrit," (Thakur, 1988: 26), it has yet to find a place even in the primary school syllabus. Today, Tasho is optimistic because data on the number of Lepcha students studying at both primary and secondary levels has been sent to the Joint Secretary of West Bengal Government of Education. Making their own attempt to improve the situation, the *shezums*¹¹ conducted language classes during the winter breaks for village children. "The youths have taken interest but it is yet to bear fruit," concluded Tasho. A similar interest in the Lepcha language has witnessed a mobile language course that was conducted in January 2007. Bom Busty hosted the fifth Lepcha Conversation Course¹² from January 3-13, 2007. This program is conducted every year at different Lepcha villages to promote the Lepcha language. On this particular occasion, there were altogether 64 students hailing mostly from the village and others from Kalimpong town, Darjeeling and Bhutan.

The course was divided into four sections: Section A for students with no reading and writing skills but who are comfortable with the spoken words, Section B and C for students with no knowledge of the language at all, and Section D for late entrants (*The Telegraph*, 2007).

With news reports in local papers and the encouragement received from well-wishers, there is now a regular Lepcha class being conducted in Bom School. Since the class is a recent addition in the school syllabus, the teachers' salary is being borne by a few Lepcha families who are contributing to the teachers pay.

LANGUAGE

In conjunction with these efforts, the practice of Lepcha language in local homes is increasing as there has recently been a realization that the neglect of their language means losing a part of Lepcha identity. While the advent of education gave rise to literacy among Lepchas, it failed to deliver the number of Lepchas literate in their own mother tongue.

McFarlane grasped the fact that the Nepalese were people of a stronger character than any of the hill tribes, and he soon found that as their language was akin to Hindi he could use many Hindi text books as a means of instruction. He also found that the Lepchas and the Bhutias, from their contact with Hindi and Nepali speaking peoples, were soon able to converse in that language. So he fixed upon it as the *lingua franca* and prepared text books in Hindi, some of which are still in use in the district today (Dewan, 1991: 107).

In losing their ability to speak and write their own language, the Lepchas of Bom Busty lost their 'linguistic boundary'.¹³ The distinction between a Lepcha and a Nepalese had been diluted as Lepchas started conversing fluently in Nepali and linguistic barriers have vanished as Lepcha-speakers were transformed into Nepali-speakers.¹⁴ Lepchas became *littérateurs* in the Nepali language and have even been honored for their contribution to Nepali literature. Nepali thus became the *lingua franca* of the Lepchas in Bom Busty as the cultural dominance of Nepali language became evident. Interestingly, there are some Lepcha families who have been heard saying, "I don't like it when a non-Lepcha speaks my language": i.e., they would rather learn to speak Nepali than teach Lepcha to the Nepalese. Some might view this as being narrow minded but the loss of their own language has been painful; "I feel bad that I am unable to speak my language," said a young Lepcha man in his early thirties. And there are many who would agree with him. But the bright side of this is the growing consciousness among Lepcha youth of the need to learn their own language. Children often blame their parents for not speaking to them in Lepcha and grandparents tend to agree that it was their sons and daughters who made the choice of speaking Nepali as they try to speak to their grandchildren in Lepcha today.

MARRIAGE

The marriage union between Lepchas and their Nepalese neighbours is also seen as a contributing factor to the loss of the Lepcha language in Bom Busty. The intermarriage between communities encouraged the use of Nepali, which was more common and easily understood in the social settings. In a way, the unification of Lepchas and Nepalese resulted in a new generation of Lepchas who often seem unsettled about their Lepcha identity. While nominally Lepcha, they do not know much about their language and culture. This is also one of the main reasons why educated parents still want their children to get married within their own community. Intermarriage was initially frowned upon but it is an open decision today;

“Of course we wish for Lepcha-Lepcha marriages but we don’t hold any restrictions today,” said an elderly gentleman. Interestingly, religion is the first priority when it comes to choosing a bride or a groom for Christian Lepchas. There is also an increase in love marriages, and as long as one’s partner is Christian and they are to be married at the church, there are no objections from both families. In getting married across communities, a bond has been created not only between individuals and families but between communities too.

Ci

One of the integral aspects of a Lepcha marriage ceremony is the intake and usage of *ci*. It is believed that the bride and groom finally become *nambaom*, meaning a couple, only after drinking and sharing *ci* from the same cup during the *Sung Kyo Faat*—the exchange of marriage vows. Likewise, the immediate relatives of both the bride and groom and elders present at the ceremony also drink and share the same *ci* from the same cup and bless the newly married couple (Tamsang, 2001). But the story is different with Christian Lepcha marriage ceremonies. With biblical references warning against drunken behaviour, there is fear of heaven’s wrath as they abstain from *ci*. “We have been taught that taking *ci* is against our religion,” said a young Christian Lepcha although his friend smilingly added, “It is okay to drink *ci*.” Interestingly, Christian Lepchas do recognize that *ci* is an integral part of the union as they have replaced milk in place of *ci* for Lepcha weddings in Bom Busty. In refraining from making *ci* a part of their lifestyle, Christian Lepchas are often blamed for forgetting a key part of their tradition and culture. But this perception seems to be changing as history is witness to many a Lepcha victim due to heavy intake of *ci*. Lepchas themselves have realized that excessive intake has made them economically poorer, weaker in health and the loss of respect and standing in society. “There is an inner struggle for those who are slaves of *ci* to be free from it,” said Loden Sandyang, a government officer. There is an underlying agreement that perhaps *ci* was disadvantageous to Lepcha progress as indicated by the number of Lepchas who have reportedly given up drinking *ci*.

DIET

Ci became a harmful component when it was included in the daily diet. Folk tales warn of a ‘*ci* curse’ if it was consumed excessively. *Ci* was to be used only during different *faats*—festivals and ceremonies—but not as a part of daily consumption. Lepchas of Bom Busty remember the times when food would be gathered from the bountiful forests. Temba Sambukmu recalls the time when the village residents would reap dry paddy a little away from their houses. Men and women would go to particular spots where the women would start gathering fruits and foods while the men would weave cane mats which were used to carry the gathered food stuff. Maize and millet were other popular crops amongst Lepchas. In case of excess food, they would dig holes and store the food products in layers with the maximum amount of grains placed at the bottom. This would be their granary, a store house that could be used when they needed more food. While the different kinds of yams and sweet potatoes were readily available in the forest, fishing in the Relli River usually resulted in a good catch. While there is a myth that Lepchas don’t eat bamboo shoots because bamboo is an important plant for Lepchas and eating bamboo shoot would be like killing a foetus, Sambakmu described three different ways in which Lepchas used bamboo shoots in their meals. One way was to boil it and eat it while another way would be to cut it into small

pieces and to dry the bamboo shoot before eating it. The third way would be to grind the dried pieces into powder and use it in preparation with other foods. It was also mentioned that Lepchas would hardly use oil during food preparation. Instead they would use animal fat. Today, wet paddy harvesting is more popular amongst Lepchas with paddy as their staple food. Maize and millet are still farmed but most of the Bom Busty Lepchas depend on stores nearby or the Kalimpong town to meet their dietary demands. Fish and meat are readily available in the market so hunting and fishing is not a household chore. Fishing in the Relli River however is sometimes an organized event amongst the younger generation as the girls also join in for a picnic by the riverside.

UTENSILS

Bamboo materials were extensively used as kitchen utensils in Lepcha homes. Some homes still have the bamboo water carriers and spoons which were eventually replaced by wooden¹⁵ spatulas and *okhlis* (elongated grinders). While mortars and pestles were visible in Lepcha homes until two decades ago, these days, these tools have either been thrown out or left in a corner of the house because there is a rice mill in the village which sells mechanically ground grain.

DRESS

Until about fifty years ago, *dumprās* and *gadas*, the male and female Lepcha dress, were the dress code for Lepcha residents in the village. Mrs Furmit Lepcha told stories about her grandmother's indigenous ways of using thorns from orange trees as safety pins, which were required to put a *gada* together. She mentioned that in earlier days, there were no blouses worn and the arms would thus be exposed. As a Lepcha woman, she is usually attired in a *gada* but she doesn't blame the younger generation for not wearing the traditional dress when they go out to town. "Parents never force their children [as] to what to wear and what not to wear so, the younger generation opt for what is readily available in the market," said Furmit. True enough, *dumprās* and *gadas* have become mere occasional attires that are extracted from the closet during weddings and festivals. The recent trend among men has been to coordinate a suit and a *dumpra*, transforming the traditional attire to a modern contemporary look.

In recent days however, Lepchas have felt the need to don their *dumprās* and *gadas* more than ever. In September 2008, Bimal Gurung, the leader of Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) issued a diktat 'insisting' that the residents of Darjeeling hills wear the traditional Nepali dress to show solidarity to their demand for Gorkhaland. This was seen as an act of dominance over the local Lepchas, who had not said anything against the movement. In practice, it was culturally genocidal for a population group trying hard to hold on to their already 'vanishing' status. In a hurried plea, members of the Lepcha community visited the party president and it was agreed that Lepchas could wear their own traditional dress as an expression of political solidarity with Gorkhaland. While some Lepchas were satisfied that they could resume wearing their *dumprās* and *gadas*, it certainly triggered a wake up call for the Lepchas, who were increasingly aware that their Lepcha identity was at stake. "Though it was an imposition, it was good because even the Lepchas who weren't fond of wearing the traditional dress now have a reason to wear the same," said N.T. Tasho.

POLITICAL SCENARIO

Lepchas are often perceived of as a demographic group whose vote does not necessarily matter; "No political party can count upon their votes because they are numerically small and politically insignificant." (Thakur, 1988: xii). True enough, there is no political party representing the demands and needs of the Lepchas and there is no political platform for Lepchas to voice their likes and dislikes, wants and desires. While there is truth in the fact that Lepchas are less numerous, it is to be noted that there are quite a number of Lepcha individuals very active in the politics of the Darjeeling hills. They are involved in politics because they have felt the need to represent Lepcha voices too. In the current political scenario, however, we may wonder if the ongoing movement for a separate state called Gorkhaland has anything in it for the Lepchas? "Does Gorkhaland represent Lepchas at all?" "Are Lepchas willing to lose their identity in establishing somebody else's identity?" These are some questions that come to mind, but many Lepchas keep quiet for fear of swimming against the tide even if they speak of it as an unwanted proposal behind close doors. "This land is already ours. We don't need a Gorkhaland," said one elderly voice while working Lepcha professionals opine that a 'separate state' is necessary but not a state named 'Gorkhaland'. Educated Lepcha intellectuals are seeing a definite need for a political forum to speak on behalf of the Lepchas.

LEPCHA ORGANIZATIONS

The *shezum* has long been the primary voice of the Lepcha community. With active participation by the Buddhist Lepchas, it is involved in organizing Lepcha language schools, commemorating yearly festivals, holding archery competitions and representing the community in national events.

Unfortunately, the *shezums* do not have a political voice. They have always refrained from taking political sides because they are 'a social organization'. But with the growing political consciousness in the hills, a Lepcha political forum was established to represent Lepcha voice in politics. It is slowly making their voice heard as monthly meetings continue to bring those interested to work for the betterment of the community.

In December 2008, the Indigenous Lepcha Forum refused to join other minority communities from the hills in supporting the Gorkhaland movement. Paul Simick, President of the forum told reporters from *The Telegraph*; "The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) experience has taught us that our interest is never taken care of. We did not even have a reserved seat in the council. We want constitutional guarantee to protect our interest in future dispensations." Some say that the Lepcha vote is about 9% of the electorate and there are those who believe that this 9% can change the political scenario of the hills; "For long, we have been the salt that is later added while cooking a curry, but now the time has come to be the salt itself," said a Lepcha gentleman from Bom Busty, who added that while for many years Lepchas had felt insecure and helpless, "we should not focus on who we were but on who we are and what will be."

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Development in the village is not just concentrated on the Lepcha population. Various schemes and projects come under village development and it is only in the last few years that

this has been extended to the Lepcha population with programs like Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) and Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana (AMSY). The implementation of Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) caters to those living Below Poverty Line (BPL). A government official from Bom Busty mentioned that there were about 100 Lepcha families out of which more than 50% were living BPL. House construction, free health charges, maternity benefit, family benefit scheme etc., are a few programs implemented but which have not yet had satisfactory results in Bom Busty.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

In slowly developing modern necessities, Bom Busty has greatly benefited from non-governmental organizations such as World Vision¹⁶ and the Glenn Family Foundation.¹⁷ World Vision was the first NGO in the village and promoted rain water harvesting and sanctioned loans for animal husbandry to purchase a hen or a pig. The Glenn Family Foundation, which has existed for about two years, is heavily involved in activities such as building sheds and toilets, painting roofs, sending youth for training, etc. It has also involved villagers in self-help businesses and cottage industry activities. The third NGO working in Bom Busty is the Kalimpong Animal Shelter¹⁸ which was established in 1998 with the Animal Birth Control program. Under the banner of Help In Suffering, "for helping suffering animals and all living things," the organization caters to animals all across the hills. From external surgeries to internal operations, the organization has been a great help when the cow gets sick or the dog goes wild. The manager is a fourth generation Lepcha man from Bom Busty itself.

HEALTH CARE

While the sick animals get taken care of, sick people do not have a nearby health centre. People joke about the two doctors looking after animals while there are no doctors in Bom Busty for those who are sick. In cases of emergency, Bom Busty villagers have no choice but to rush patients to the hospital in town. Fortunately, the number of qualified nurses is increasing as they have done their share of Bom Busty duty by checking blood pressures, giving vaccine shots and aiding pregnant women in times of need. Interestingly, Bom Busty does recall having traditional Lepcha medicine men who were aware of the different medicinal plants and their remedies. But it is unfortunate that their traditional knowledge was never passed on to future generations as all are dead now. They were apprehensive about passing on their knowledge and no-one was interested in probing further. But for minor aches and bruises, most Lepcha households are still able to find and use the necessary medicinal plants.

ROADS, ELECTRICITY AND PHONES

While most villagers walked to town, in the last five years Bom Busty boasts local shuttle vans transporting passengers from one corner of the village to the other. The construction of roads saved people time, and provided employment too. The number of drivers from the village has exploded as families bought Maruti vans, employed local boys as drivers and made travel easier for villagers.

Electricity has been an unofficial Bom Busty luxury for more than a decade. Dim electric bulbs replaced the evening lanterns but they were usually 'stolen' lines. A few houses had television but the antennas would be taken off when there were rumours of spies in the area. Today, electricity is part of the night life in the village as villagers also have access to cable television.

Telephone was the next boom but it did not fare as well as mobile phones spread across India. Mobile phones created a frenzy with more missed calls than actual received calls. But although Bom Busty is home to a Reliance Network tower which has been constructed to facilitate better network activities it is yet to function.

CONCLUSION

From the infrastructure developmental activities to modern luxuries of the twenty-first century, Bom Busty has struck the right chords in proving itself to be a modern-developing village. But for the majority Lepcha population of the village, there has been a cultural price unknowingly paid to enjoy the privileges of modernization. Modernization in the Lepcha community is almost similar to the process of Westernization. Lepcha culture always remained vulnerable to the introduction of different foreign elements such as Buddhism from Tibet or Hinduism from Nepal; yet it was Christianity which influenced them most (Thakur, 1988: 99).

Christianity was the most influential factor in determining the course of Lepcha development in Bom Busty history. Christianity meant not only a new religion but a different lifestyle with the perks of modern education at the forefront. Life got easier and less complicated while knowledge of many things developed enormously. If *ci* was a part of Lepcha culture, its disadvantages were highlighted and Lepchas refrained from drinking, which proved to be a change in lifestyle which produced a stronger economy and better health options. Likewise, the denunciation of *muns* and *bongthings* meant the locals saved money on elaborate ceremonies and cures were found in allopathic treatments. Yet the Lepcha sentiment was evident in the desire to wear their traditional clothes when the *daura surwal* was insisted on. But somewhere along the path to modern education, the Lepcha's mother tongue gradually vanished as part of the acceptance of new neighbours and a new religion. The church did not separate the Lepchas and non-Lepchas, envisaging everyone as part of a Christian community—God's big family. Inter-marriage was soon to follow as 'Christianity' became the first priority in choosing a bride or a groom. This trend further diluted the Lepcha language and a part of Lepcha culture died along with it.

But the situation for Bom Busty Lepchas is changing—in a positive way for those concerned with cultural survival. From hosting Lepcha Conversation Courses to conducting a regular Lepcha class in the Bom church-school, there is a movement—a growing struggle to retain what still exists of the rich Lepcha culture. Perhaps modernization clothed Lepchas in foreign fashion with regards to faith, language, ideas and ideologies, but a Lepcha in Bom Busty is still a Lepcha. They might be a minority. They might have been exploited. They might have been ignored. They might be Christians. They might be Buddhists. But time is the witness to a resurgence of the native Lepchas, who are gaining power and gaining confidence in claiming what they have lost through assimilation, acculturation, and modernization.

On 8th September 2010, the West Bengal Government officially announced the introduction of Lepcha language in the Government Primary and Secondary Education Schools in the Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal for the Lepcha children as an optional subject with effect from the next session, February 2011. Likewise, a dispensary in the Bom church premises with medicines provided by World Vision has also begun functioning from September 2010.

NOTES

- 1 Cowie, A.P., (chief editor), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Indian Edition, Oxford University Press, Calcutta 1992.
- 2 This information was written by M.C. Chemjong in the church souvenir that was published in 1982 during the centenary celebrations. It was written in Nepali.
- 3 One of two of the missionaries sent by the Church of Scotland to study Bible from the Darjeeling Hills.
- 4 They were Aakhon Simick, Kaliman Simick, Sherap Tshering Simick, Lakham Sandong and Tachon Karthak. Tachon Karthak is the author's great grandfather.
- 5 Church deacon.
- 6 Marwari shopkeepers who were fluent in Lepcha.
- 7 This is a traditional alcoholic beverage made of millet, used on almost all social occasions.
- 8 The church turned 125 in 2007 and marked the occasion with the inauguration of its new church building the following year, with a celebration programme from 2nd to 4th January, 2008.
- 9 *Mun* religion is almost extinct in the village. Although there are some Buddhist families in the village, *mun* rituals are now performed by Buddhist lamas.
- 10 Lepcha = 'teacher'.
- 11 Lepcha associations.
- 12 Lepcha Conversation Course (LCC) is an annual language program organized to promote the Lepcha language. It was started in January 2003 in Rongchong and is an ongoing mobile course with qualified Lepcha teachers employed by the Government of Sikkim. It usually involves a 10-day conversation course held at different villages with Lepcha populations.
- 14 Prof. D.C. Roy follows Andre Beteille (in his article, 'Dynamics of Lepcha Language: A Theoretical Discourse' 2001, 2002) in regard to the importance of language to any tribe by quoting his statement that; "Tribe has a linguistic boundary..."
- 15 In his preface to the book, *Himalayan Lepchas* (1998), R.N. Thakur discusses Nepalese cultural dominance numerically and politically as an influence on the Lepchas.
- 15 It is believed that they learnt the usage of wooden utensils through Bhutanese influence.
- 19 World Vision is a USA based NGO working extensively in promoting development activities not just in Bom Busty, but in most Lepcha villages across Kalimpong.
- 17 The Glenn Family Foundation is a family-run NGO based in New Zealand. They have worked especially in three Lepcha villages; Bom Busty, Chibo and Sindebong.
- 18 Kalimpong Animal Shelter's headquarters is in Jaipur and is affiliated with Animaux Secours, Arthaz, France.

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AMBIVALENCE OF CHANGE: EDUCATION, ERODING CULTURE, AND REVIVAL AMONG THE LEPCHA OF SIKKIM

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Many changes have swept the hills of Sikkim over the past centuries and especially in the last 30 years, since the kingdom of Sikkim was merged with the Republic of India. Roads have been built connecting remote villages with more urban areas, electricity has reached most Sikkimese villages and with it television, radio and cell-phones. Administration has been expanded and a new democratic system has increased the need for educated personal. Large-scale development and infrastructural projects are being implemented. Sikkimese people are leaving the state in search for higher education and jobs, whilst other people are entering Sikkim to find employment—this only to mention a few alterations.

These changes have effected the indigenous population of the area in many ways, moulding their lifestyle and inducing modifications in their culture.¹ In this article I will focus on the introduction of formal school education and its various effects on the Lepcha² community, culture and the way youth grows up. I chose this specific change, because the ambivalence of its effect on the Lepcha community and culture gives a nice example on how an alteration can have various different outcomes that are perceived positively and negatively in a community. First I will give a short history of formal education in Sikkim, discuss the integration of Lepcha culture and language in it and then show current data on schooling and literacy in two villages in the Lepcha area in the North District of Sikkim. In a second part I will focus on the effects of formal education on the villagers in North Sikkim and their opinions towards education. Two diverging trends can be noticed. I will show how certain side effects of the education system have caused or at least influenced the eroding of Lepcha culture, and how on the other hand cultural awareness among the educated section of the Lepcha community has grown and influenced the growth of various organisations supporting Lepcha culture.³

HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN SIKKIM

Until the twentieth century the opportunities to receive formal education were marginal, mainly urban and reserved for the Sikkimese elites.⁴ The first school was opened in Gangtok in 1883 by the Scottish missionary Reverend McFarlane. Missionary activities were not liked by the Chogyal, but some schools were allowed, as the need for formal education became apparent. Other schools were founded with support of the *kazis*, the landlords of Sikkim. Not until twenty year later, 1906 and 1907, were the first government schools opened: the Bhutia Boarding School for the sons of Bhutia families and the Nepali Boarding School for Nepalese boys. These two schools, separated by ethnic lines, were later merged into the Sir Tashi Namgyal Higher Secondary School. The Chogyal then took charge of the educational institutions personally in 1944 and ten years later an Education Directorate was established to systemise education in Sikkim. In 1964 the Tashi Namgyal Academy was founded as the first modern public school. This new institution was only used by the Sikkimese elite, while the older institutions continued to take in children from other families. Beforehand, and actually

until today, the Sikkimese ruling elite would often send their children to better schools in India or abroad to study.⁵

An overview over the increasing number of schools in Sikkim gives insight into how formal education was enforced in the twentieth century. In 1920 there were twenty-one schools in Sikkim, six of which were government schools, in 1954 eighty-eight existed and not even ten years later, in 1961, the number had risen to 182.⁶ The increase shows the importance the government started giving to education facilities, as the need for educated people became more apparent with bureaucratisation and emergence of party politics. After the merger this need grew exponentially and education was promoted and implemented with vigour and enthusiasm. The literacy rates of Sikkim give an impression of the efforts made. In the 1971 Census the literacy rate was little less than eighteen percent (17.74 per cent) and thirty year later, in 2001, it had increased up to approximately seventy percent (69.68 per cent). Since 1991 the percentage of literate people in Sikkim has been slightly above the Indian average. The educational infrastructure was expanded and schools were now also systematically introduced in the rural areas of Sikkim. In 2005 there was a total of 740 schools in Sikkim, of which seventy-six are in the North District.⁷ Even taking into account that the north has the least population density in Sikkim, there seems to be fewer schools in that area and the literacy rate in the north of Sikkim was slightly under the Sikkimese average in 2001. I have no exact data about how many of these schools are in the Lepcha reserve Dzongu.

In 2006 I surveyed two villages in North Sikkim, Lingthem and Nampatan, and amongst others collected data on education. In Lingthem in Dzongu approximately half the elder generation was illiterate, some had been to school up to secondary level, but they remained the exception. The situation was the same in Nampatan, a village just outside of Dzongu, southeast of Mangan, the district headquarters of the North. The majority of the younger generation had been to school or were at present still getting their education. Most of the younger Lepcha villagers who had left school accomplished the junior high level (Class 8). At the time of research there were schools in both villages; Lingthem offered formal education up to Class 8, and in Nampatan primary level education up to Class 5 was available.

The nearest secondary or senior secondary schools were and still are in Mangan or in Hee Gyathang in Lower Dzongu. So in both villages the children had to leave their homes for higher education. In Lower Lingthem of thirty inhabited houses twenty-one households had children living outside for education—two thirds of the households. Half of the children were living somewhere in Dzongu. Some stayed as close as Passingdang, which is only half an hour walk from Lingthem and today basically considered a hamlet of Lingthem itself, or Hee Gyathang, which is less than an hour jeep drive from Passingdang. The rest of the children were going to school outside of Dzongu. A few were in Mangan or Phensang, which lies on the way to Gangtok, but the majority of the Lingthem children living outside of Dzongu were based in Gangtok or West Sikkim. In Nampatan not as many children were sent away to school, because the villagers of Nampatan have less income from cardamom fields and government jobs. Here from twenty-four Lepcha households only approximately one third, ten households, had children living outside. The majority of the children away from home lived in Mangan, Ringhem or Singhik, all villages and towns reachable in less than one hour from the village in 2006 and even faster now with the newly built road connection. Only one child went to Gangtok, and a few were in Pelling, West Sikkim, for their education. Most of

the children from both villages went to government schools; only some were enrolled in private schools in Mangan or Pelling.

LEPCHA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN SCHOOLS OF SIKKIM AND KALIMPONG

Since Marx sociological theories on education and culture have addressed that the knowledge passed down to children in educational institutions is always the knowledge of the ruling class and of the hegemonic culture.⁸ Various articles discuss the use of formal education to impose the hegemonic culture of the new nation state on indigenous people and assimilate them to the cultural mainstream.⁹ Therefore, within that context, I want to make a short outline of the position of Lepcha language and culture in the school curriculum in Sikkim and Kalimpong, the area with the majority of Lepcha outside of Sikkim. In both regions the Lepcha are a minority group.

In Sikkim Lepcha language was introduced as an optional subject in primary level in the 1960s. However, no special language teachers were employed and Lepcha language was factually only taught in those schools in which teachers from the Lepcha community employed for other general subjects agreed to take on the responsibility of teaching the Lepcha students reading and writing in their mother tongue. After the merger of Sikkim with India, Lepcha was recognised as an official language by the Sikkim Official Language Act in 1977. With this acknowledgement Lepcha language and script began to be taught in the government schools after 1982.¹⁰ Today it is a compulsory subject for Lepcha children in government schools; private schools vary in their implementation. The language as such is respected in the school system and the Lepcha children learn their script. Slowly more and more elements of Lepcha culture, such as traditional stories, are being included in the school curriculum. As an example the Sikkim Lepcha Literacy Association (Renchong Mutanchi Ringrong Kurzum), an organisation engaged in preserving Lepcha language and cultural heritage such as folksongs and the old scriptures, have published books for schools and colleges:

There are lots of things incorporated in the textbooks, you know, making people know about it ... [Lepcha culture]. Lepcha stories are in the books, Lepcha [language] is taught right up to class 12 so in the textbooks they have included a few things. And at the college level as reference books they have to study Lepcha books.¹¹

The Lepcha in Sikkim are in the fortunate position that language and culture are respected in the school system. By comparison, in Kalimpong where many Lepcha live, the situation is different. Lepcha is not scheduled as an official language in West Bengal, or in the Darjeeling District, so the children do not learn the language at school. The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association of Kalimpong has been campaigning for the introduction of Lepcha language in schools for years, but so far without success. The Lepcha youth do not learn to read or write in their language, but have to learn three different scripts in school anyway (Hindi, Bengali, English). This had a large impact on the proficiency in Lepcha language; even if the youth could still speak it, they were not literate. Increasingly, even the spoken language was used less and less commonly.

In an attempt to counteract the eroding of their language and literary tradition the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association of Kalimpong started night schools for Lepcha children. In 2006 there were forty night schools in the Darjeeling District, thirty of which

were located in the Kalimpong Sub Division. They are run voluntarily by members of the association or other local villagers. The children attend the school almost every day after regular school, except on market day. They are taught the Lepcha script, the traditional ways of reading Lepcha text, as well as Lepcha songs and dance. The association has created its own textbooks, but also traditional Lepcha literature and methods of learning are used in the classes. The aim of the schools is to prevent Lepcha language and culture from becoming extinct and the first successes of the schools can be seen in the village with functioning night schools. The children there can now read and write in Lepcha, and are getting to know their literature.

THE MODERN NECESSITY

Education is not a development forced on the Lepcha in North Sikkim, at least not at present. In the villages formal education is seen as important for the coming generation, because it teaches them skills necessary to be successful in today's world. When education was first introduced this may have been different, as the Sikkim Human Development Report hints.¹² Villagers did not see why they should invest in education, when they and their children were going to spend all their lives on the fields anyway. Practical and traditional knowledge was encouraged. But experiences and opportunities in the modern Sikkim changed these opinions. For example, in the past many Lepcha villagers in North Sikkim had problems with cardamom buyers in Mangan, got paid too little for their yield or became indebted, because they had no overview over the expenditures, mainly due to their illiteracy. Consequently, the benefits of literacy and knowledge of simple mathematics became very apparent in the villagers' everyday life, especially of late because the lack of cardamom yield has enhanced the economic pressure on the village households. Furthermore, some see the additional wider possibilities that education opens up for their children and also could give to their own society. A villager from Lingthem points out that it is essential to send children away to get higher education, because equipped with those abilities they can then get involved in spheres important for village life. So, education does not only allow those children a career but also enables them to obtain jobs in government service and in that way benefit the village community. Therefore, today, most Lepcha in the villages of North Sikkim would agree that education is one of the most important requirements to survive in the modern Sikkimese society and that it is absolutely essential to attain a certain level of education.

In line with this view, one central concern in Lepcha villages is how to provide the best possible education for their children. The quality of education in rural areas is criticised by the villagers and private or more urban based schools are considered better for the future of their children. The Sikkim Human Development Report also mentions this problem and suggests the lack of quality in government education as one reason why private schools are booming in Sikkim.¹³ With the wealth acquired by cultivating cardamom as a cash crop, Lepcha villagers from North Sikkim who can afford it, send their children into more urban areas or even to private schools. It seems however, that this trend could be over in the near future, because the cardamom is now struck severely by various diseases and is barely giving any yield. Besides this, there are many other constraints in the remote areas of Sikkim, especially to obtain higher education.¹⁴ Now, various Lepcha organisation have started to promote education in their community and also actively assist children in their way through school. The Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association (Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shezum) together with the Sikkim Lepcha Literacy Association, has initiated winter coaching classes

for Lepcha students in Class 10 and 12 from remote areas. They are provided food and lodging in Gangtok and taught the essentials to pass the Class 10 or 12 exams. This is an attempt to minimise the drop-out-rate of the Lepcha children and is now supported by the Sikkimese government. The same organisation also offers career coaching to Lepcha students.¹⁵

EDUCATION AND THE ERODING OF LEPCHA CULTURE

In the Lepcha villages in North Sikkim education is wanted and efforts are made within the community to facilitate access to good schooling. Despite this, the attitude of the Lepcha villagers towards education is ambivalent and often negative. They mainly worry, because the education system or at least its side effects are seen as one main factor eroding the Lepcha culture.

Villagers are concerned that many of the children who spend most of their life in hostels in semi-urban or urban areas, away from their families and communities, do not grow up in a Lepcha environment and do not learn Lepcha traditions and lifestyle as part of their daily routine. The children will return home for vacations and help out with numerous tasks, but they will not have the same routine as village children. In those cases, the Lepcha language is no longer often spoken, oral traditions are no longer heard, and there is no opportunity for children who study and live elsewhere to learn the traditional daily agricultural customs. A woman from Dzongu, who grew up in a hostel in Gangtok, describes the situation as being quite drastic and perceives her Lepcha identity as being empty of Lepcha cultural heritage. As she states, she is a Lepcha, but cannot recount anything that would make her a Lepcha, because she never learned any of the Lepcha traditions:

It is a problem nowadays for the Lepcha community that the children grow up in hostels and in that way do not learn the language and culture and do not know anything anymore. Lepcha people are being emptied from cultural content. We don't know our stories anymore. The people ask me about the Lepcha culture and stories and I am ashamed, because I cannot tell them anything, because I do not know anything, because I grew up in a hostel.¹⁶

Another development and cause for concern in the villages is that education changes the interests of the younger generation. Education is thought of as being linked to a modern lifestyle and is often described as the opposite of culture and traditional knowledge. The children who move out of the village are seen by the villagers as prone to losing themselves and their interest in the Lepcha cultural heritage. School and hostel life introduced the Lepcha children to a new reference group, their peers. In a multicultural state such as Sikkim this group includes youth from different ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. The group of peers, their activities, ideas, dreams and visions become important inspirations and guidelines in the life of the adolescent Lepcha villagers, as with most young people around the world.¹⁷ When youths come back to their village homes during school vacations or after completion of their studies, they bring in different ideas and interests.

The main worry of Lepcha villagers is that essential elements of Lepcha culture are slowly being eroded, because young people are no longer interested in keeping the Lepcha culture alive. As an example, the youth have become sceptical about aspects of traditional beliefs such as evil spirits (*mung*) and their impact on human health. They are drawn to the modern medical explanations of illnesses they have learnt in schools and interaction with other people whilst living away from home. A fair number of young Lepcha are more

interested in watching movies or football on television than listening to their elders telling traditional stories next to the kitchen fire whilst sipping local beer. They listen to modern music, play video games and send text messages to their friends in other parts of Sikkim and India. Young people are creating their own culture—a phenomenon noticed and researched all over the world. The question remains how much of their indigenous Lepcha culture will be included in their youth culture. The lack of interest among the young, more educated generation is perceived to be the main reason for the vanishing of the Lepcha culture. If this ‘first educated generation’, a name many of the young, educated Lepcha in Sikkim use to describe their generation, does not show interest in Lepcha cultural heritage, there is little hope for their children and further generations to learn the traditional knowledge, because now only a few elders are left to pass down the oral traditions. Even today most young people have heard the traditional Lepcha stories from their grandparents and not their own parents.

These two effects are intensified by the fact that many Lepcha children, who were educated elsewhere, never permanently return to their villages. Some of them have become too accustomed to their life in more urban areas and have no urge to move back, but others are forced to settle in Mangan and Gangtok, because the employment possibilities in rural areas are limited.

EDUCATION PROMOTING CULTURE

Paradoxically education also has the opposite effect. Some educated Lepcha have become more aware of their vanishing culture and are engaged in activities to protect and revive their culture, and attempt to boost Lepcha identity. Culture is often learned unconsciously, just picked up during childhood and socialisation. Educated young Lepcha, many of whom spent their lives away from their homes in hostels, suddenly realise that they missed out on learning traditions and the specific lifestyle of their own cultural group. Noticing the loss of their roots and the dwindling of their culture as a whole sparks interest in their own cultural heritage. In an interview a Lepcha social activist tells me how he slowly became interested in his native language and then later Lepcha culture:

I guess in a way I don't have a particular point where I just suddenly became aware like that, it just happened in little subconscious moves... After leaving the village school of course there was no Lepcha classes, so I was completely out of it. So after I finished my standard 12, when I was in college, I again started learning Lepcha alphabet and reading and writing. Though I am not fluent still, I can do the basics, of course with some difficulty. You know that interest was like a self-awakening—already there and coming out little by little.¹⁸

In recent years, many Lepcha associations were founded in Sikkim. Most Lepcha associations have their headquarters in the urban capital of Gangtok. Many of the executive members of these associations belong to the educated strata, partly because education gives them the means and human capital to articulate the needs of their community in a more public way.¹⁹ Indeed this is a consequence of education, which has been observed and discussed in other parts of the world. Research on leadership within indigenous movements, such as among the Native Americans, have shown that their leaders come from a new educated generation and often also sidetrack traditional leaders such as village headmen.²⁰ The Lepcha associations are engaged in various activities to enhance the economic situation of the Lepcha, and promote and preserve Lepcha culture. Besides campaigning for political

rights they are involved in organising Lepcha ritual and cultural festivals, collecting Lepcha oral traditions, manuscripts, and other tangible heritage, some of which are displayed in the Lepcha Model House in Nambriktang, Dzongu. Further they promote their language and literature. In this way they have become a leading force behind keeping Lepcha traditional culture and knowledge alive.

The activities of the associations are, however, also contested within the Lepcha community. Firstly, the various associations are not all in accord about certain ideas and issues and there is a debate on Lepcha culture among the more or less educated section of the Lepcha community who are actively involved in preserving their culture. Secondly, the associations have also taken it on themselves to modify Lepcha culture, if they consider traditions harmful for the community. In the constitution of the Sikkim Lepcha Association (Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum) one of its aims listed is to '[e]radicate many social backwardness and differences existing among us'.²¹ The Mutanchi Lom Al Shezum, a Lepcha association based in Dzongu, is even more explicit in its formulation, one of its goals is '[t]o try and eliminate any unhealthy social and cultural practices existing within our social environment'.²² They try and change certain aspects of Lepcha culture and social life.

In Lower Lingthem in Dzongu, for example, members of the Mutanchi Lom Al Shezum and other educated people initiated campaigns to reduce the amount of spending for Lepcha marriages, and the consumption of local beer or the donation of local beer to the monastery. These activities are not always liked in the village area, and have caused criticism and vehement resistance from certain sections of the village community, who want to sustain the traditions contested by the associations. In these issues there are frictions within the Lepcha community along the lines of education and generation. Culture and traditions are perceived in different ways and there is an ongoing debate as to who has the authority to make decisions that influence social changes and which define culture and identity.

In the Lepcha community attempts are being made to combine Lepcha culture and education. Miss Keepu, who first worked as a teacher and later joined the State Institute of Education, started to take Lepcha children from poor families into her household in 1989 and help finance their education. Her initiative and the assistance of many other people has enabled the establishment of an NGO (Human Development Foundation of Sikkim) and a school, where at present over 400 children are studying, most of them from the Lepcha community. One of the main objectives of the school is to "[r]etain, preserve, enhance and integrate sikkimese culture, tradition and life style in the daily lives of children".²³ Over 100 children live in the Lepcha cottage—Miss Keepu's private home. There the Lepcha children grow up speaking only Lepcha and English language and Miss Keepu tries her best to teach them certain awareness about their own cultural heritage. The idea is that if the children become conscious of their culture and speak their own mother tongue fluently, they will also influence their whole families and create awareness in the villages, when they go home on school breaks:

Now with the children going back from here, we are once again reviving it [Lepcha language]. Almost all the families have once again started talking in Lepcha. We are trying to do that. Yes, we are talking to them and making the children conscious. Then it becomes a little automatic also, the child goes back home and he or she starts using Lepcha only, because they are used to using Lepcha in their everyday life here.²⁴

In summary, educated Lepchas and the associations have become both the keepers of tradition and culture and at the same time the promoters of change and modernity. Through their activities they show that the acceptance of certain changes, such as education, which has basically become a necessity in today's Sikkim and leads to economic betterments, does not necessarily have to lead to the eroding of the Lepcha culture. They show various ways of using certain changes to ensure cultural survival, even if many of their activities and ideas are contested.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The culture of an ethnic group builds on shared history and traditions, but has always adapted to changing contexts, incorporated new elements, and altered previous ones. Culture is bound into a dialectic process of change and remembrance, of novelties and traditions. Younger generations are prone to include 'modern' aspects into their lifestyle, which today may be blue jeans, rock music or football, whereas more conservative forces in a community try to preserve traditional elements—sometimes despite strong criticism from within their own community.

The changes in the Lepcha community and in Sikkim over the past centuries have left their traces on Lepcha culture. Formal education is needed, but at the same time feared, because it brings new ideas and values and forces people to leave the villages in search of higher education and employment, thereby causing a loss of access to traditional local culture and knowledge and with this a loss of a sense of belonging. However, despite the fear that their culture is vanishing, a creative potential for dealing with changes and for sustaining their own lifestyle can be observed in the Lepcha community. Education contributes as the main force behind the movement of Lepcha cultural revival, as it is chiefly the educated Lepcha who are active in the promotion of Lepcha culture—regardless of how contested these attempts are.

As discussed here, changes introduced in an ethnic community do not inevitably cause the vanishing of their cultural traditions. I would like to conclude with some thoughts on three requirements that seem vital to halt the eroding of Lepcha culture.

Firstly, a supportive legal framework helps enable people to keep to their own cultural lifestyle. In Sikkim, there are laws to protect the rights of the Lepcha community and help maintain the Lepcha culture, provided they are implemented correctly. As an example, by law Lepcha language is taught in government schools in Sikkim. The case of Kalimpong shows that even without legal framework a community can take steps to protect their culture, but it needs an alternative structure to the state government to take on the funding and organisation of the preventive means, in the case of Kalimpong it is the Lepcha association that provides this network.

Secondly, investment in local infrastructure—a device of change in itself—could also help preserve Lepcha culture; again depending on the way it is implemented. The lack of good schooling and job opportunities for educated people in the rural areas is forcing Lepchas to leave their villages, often with a resultant loss of connection to their culture. Investment in good schooling with well-trained local teachers and locally embedded jobs for educated people in rural areas would prevent the emigration of young Lepcha to urban areas and help sustain Lepcha cultural heritage. Thereby it is thought important to remain sensitive to the needs and requirements of the rural surrounding and respect the local cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. Urban environments and school hostels can be transformed to

surroundings not hostile but fertile for Lepcha culture, as the example of Miss Keepu's activities shows.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the interest of the Lepcha community in their own cultural heritage is vital for its survival. Many Lepcha in the villages are aware of the fact that no one can be blamed for the loss of Lepcha culture other than himself or herself and that it is in the hands of the Lepcha community to keep their language, oral tradition, ritual, and material culture alive.

Lepcha culture is vanishing, in many ways. Like for example, as I tell people, people make a lot of excuses, those days we were suppressed, we didn't get the opportunity and all that. And I ask them, who is suppressing you now? Nobody is suppressing you, and nobody is stopping you from using your own culture and tradition. Why are we not using it? A lot of fault lies on us, instead of blaming other people. As for example, in using dress or language, they find it easier to use the other language, it is easier, every time they go for the easier things, and I think we have to be more and more conscious about. It [Lepcha culture] is beautiful, it is God's gift to us and we have to preserve it.²⁵

Sections of the Lepcha community, especially of the youth, have lost interest in their traditional ways and are leading their lives alternatively—this is probably a fact one could name for many cultures around the world and I believe something inherent in the process of evolving culture. In future the question is how much of the Lepcha cultural heritage will be incorporated into the more urban and maybe even 'Western' culture of Lepcha youth. The growth of Lepcha associations, whose members are often young and educated, and their increasing activities are evidence of the fact that certain sections of the community still give the relevance to a distinct Lepcha culture, are making an effort to revive it, and thereby save it from vanishing. This task is not without tension; different sections of the Lepcha community have different ideas about how their culture should be preserved or modified to adapt to its changed surroundings. But the ongoing process of negotiating cultural meanings shows that the culture is still alive and has not been reduced to static conservation.

NOTES

¹ Culture can be described as "...a matter of meaningful actions and expressions, of utterances, symbols, texts and artefacts of various kinds, and of subjects who express themselves through these artefacts and who seek to understand themselves and others by interpreting the expressions they produce and receive." (Thompson, 1990, p. 122) The culture of an ethnic group such as the Lepcha builds on handed-down knowledge, stories, habits, material items and ideas, and is at the same time produced in interaction between people who consider themselves part of the group or outsiders. Culture is acquired and transmitted through social interaction and shapes the way people perceive the world around them (Hannerz, 1995, p. 68), thereby it is often learned and lived unconsciously, unless faced with differences and contradictions (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12). Culture is integrated in a field of power and struggles over meanings. Therefore, culture is not something static—passed down over centuries unchanged —, but derived in a process of definition and re-definition, changing form and meaning over the course of time. It is debated and negotiated—especially in times when the group's culture seems threatened or possibilities for change become aware. This is the source of cultural and social movements and initiatives (Hannerz, 1995, p. 72). A definition of culture of an ethnic group also has to deal with problematic of making a distinction between groups and individuals. A person is part of different cultural groups at the same time, as an example he or she can be a Lepcha and also part of a vibrant youth culture; he or she can share the religion with one

- group, the preferred music with another and the language with a third group of people (Hannerz, 1995, p. 76; see Eriksen, 1992, 1993 for the idea of multiple identities).
- ² The Lepcha or Mutanchi rong kup rum kup are a Sino-Tibetan ethnic group living on the southern side of the Himalayas in India (Sikkim and the Darjeeling District of West Bengal), Nepal (Ilam) and southwestern Bhutan. Today, the majority of the people living in Sikkim and the state government recognise them as the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim, together with the Bhutia community.
- ³ The data used in this article was collected in Gangtok as well as two villages of North Sikkim that I visited in 2006 whilst conducting field research for my master's thesis in cultural anthropology at the University of Zürich, Switzerland. I was affiliated to the Delhi School of Economics, Department of Sociology, and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, Sikkim. More recent interviews were conducted in Gangtok during a stay in 2008-9. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all my interview partners and friends among the Lepcha community for their assistance and trust in my person and my work.
- ⁴ Sikkim has a long history of monastic education, which I will not include in this article. For further information see Lama (2001), pp. 28-9;
- ⁵ Lama (2001), p. 29; Datta (1991), p. 33.
- ⁶ Lama (2001), p. 29.
- ⁷ Government of Sikkim (2005), p. 127.
- ⁸ See Stevens (2008).
- ⁹ Dyck (1997); Halverson/Puig/Byers (2002); Peacock/Wisuri (2002); Satzewich (1996) as an example.
- ¹⁰ Government of Sikkim (2004), pp. 3, 4.
- ¹¹ Interview, Sikkim Lepcha Literacy Association (Renchong Mutanchi Ringrong Kurzum), General Secretary, Gangtok, January 2009.
- ¹² Lama (2001), p. 28.
- ¹³ Lama (2001), p. 32.
- ¹⁴ The various restraints that prevent youth from getting educated cannot be discussed in this article, for further information see Datta (1991).
- ¹⁵ Interview Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association (Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shezum), Executive members, Gangtok, August 2006.
- ¹⁶ Interview, 5th Mile, Dzongu, May 2006.
- ¹⁷ See Coleman (1961).
- ¹⁸ Interview, Gangtok, January 2009.
- ¹⁹ See Edwards/McCarthy (2004), p. 117; Morris/Staggenborg (2004), pp. 174-5.
- ²⁰ Brown (1993), p. 312; see also Nagata (1987).
- ²¹ Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (1998), p. 2.
- ²² Mutanchi Lom Al Shezum (2006).
- ²³ Human Development Foundation of Sikkim, Brochure.
- ²⁴ Interview, Miss Keepu, Gangtok, January 2009.
- ²⁵ Interview, Miss Keepu, Gangtok, January 2009.

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**PRAISE FOR SIKKIM FROM 1938:
SIKKIM IN ORIGINAL QUOTES FROM THE ERNST SCHÄFER EXPEDITION**

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The German Ernst Schäfer expedition 1938-1939 is mostly famous for its success in reaching Lhasa and it is largely unknown that the expedition spent six months in Sikkim with considerable scientific results. Thus despite the considerable fascination for and focus on its allegedly hidden political objectives and occult aspects, which I have discussed elsewhere,¹ this time I will concentrate not on the expedition itself, but what its members have seen and found. Thanks to extensive archival material remaining from the expedition, it is possible to refer to it mainly by original citations and photos.

In the Calcutta newspaper *The Statesman* on 7 June 1938 we read:

German Scientists for Sikkim, Calcutta Departure

The Himalayan regions in and around Sikkim are once more to be put under the magnifying glass of science. A German expedition of five scientists who are to study the physio-geographical and meteorological conditions in this area left Calcutta for Darjeeling last night.

The party consists of Dr E. Schäfer (leader), Dr K. Wienert, Mr B. Beger, Mr E. Krause and Mr E. Geer.

Interviewed by the Associated Press, Dr Schäfer said, "We already know much about the Himalayan regions through expeditions which have carried out researches in the past. But these expeditions, having specialized in one or two subjects, never came to conclusion concerning the age of the rocks and the evolutionary problems. In modern science we take our start from geography, geology and terrestrial magnetism for our entire work."

"These findings are only a means to an end," continued Dr Schäfer, "and they give us material for the study of the environment and the genetical and evolutionary problems not only of human beings, or animals, or plants, but of all living beings."

In order to study these problems where nature is free, we have to go to these areas, in which the most ecological conditions prevail. In the contact zones, between different climatic areas, we are apt to find the greatest number of very recent and in the geological sense, new genera and species."

The party has chalked out a programme based on a depot line running through the whole of Sikkim, and their object to study one valley every month, slowly working down from the palaeartic to the tropical region.

"We are working from North to South in order to avoid the monsoon rains in the middle of Southern Sikkim," added Dr Schäfer.

Dr Schäfer while in Simla met Sir Aubrey Metcalfe, Secretary External Affairs Department, Government of India. He was also granted an interview by His Excellency the Viceroy.²

Schäfer summarized the results of six months of research in Northern Sikkim in a report for the Indian press in December 1938. The English is his:

The German Scientific Party (Schafer Expedition) under the leadership of Dr E. Schafer has after a six months thorough study now completed the expedition work in Sikkim where permission

was kindly granted by his Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim and B.J. Gould, the Political Officers in Sikkim.

The expedition work is divided into three parts. The first one of which has now found its successful end and the members of the expedition having returned to civilization in order to start the next move which was also sanctioned by the central Government of India and Mr Gould. The 'Ka-shag' of Tibet has kindly invited the entire expedition party to visit the grand capital of the land of the lamas and this is the very first time that Germans or German travellers have ever been allowed to enter Lhasa, though there has been besides of numerous British visitors, an American expedition in Lhasa only a few years ago. Mr Geer, the caravan leader and Mr Krause, the photographer and movie-operator of the expedition, are at present in Calcutta in order to prepare things for an early start which will take place from Gangtok the Capital of Sikkim on the 20th of this month. The expedition hopes to re-enter Sikkim in the spring next year in order to continue work in the western parts of the Himalayas.

The expedition might be called an all round natural history expedition comprising studies of terrestrial magnetism, ethnology, anthropology, ornithology, mammology and partly botany and of course geography, besides of taking moving pictures of wild life, and the magnification of nature of the Himalayas and the adjacent countries...

Dr Schafer, who has been travelling and exploring for four years in China, especially western China and eastern and central Tibet found that most expeditions which entered unknown territories have been nearly in all cases too highly specialized on only one or two subjects. Therefore it is most important to bring scientific results back which influence not only a few super specialists at home but also fructificate a much larger body of scientists as well as a whole people...

This expedition of young scientists is one which sees its greatest aim in following different lines of on different ways in the field of exact and minutive exploration of the causes of biological development and evolutionary facts.

Dr Wienert not only fixed 240 terrestrial magnetic stations in northern Sikkim, which of course for survey mining also aviation and geological conclusions are of greatest importance to the local authorities, (though there might not be advisable advantage at the present time), but he also studied the climatical and geographical conditions in order to lay out the basis for biological work of the other members of the party.

At the first moment it may seem that astronomical positions, inclinations and other terrestrial magnetic factors have nothing much to do with anthropological and zoological or botanical studies but still, as was shown in our work, they are of greatest value in order to come true and unchanging results without unnecessary help of vague speculations which so often are indulged in, if specialists do not find the results, which they expected.

Sikkim, though it is only a very small country, has, due to its geographical position, the greatest advantage of being a country of not less than five entirely, different biological zones and it is a country of the greatest climatical changes imaginable. Ranging from the semi-arctic condition which prevail on the Tibetan steppes north of the snow-covered main range of the Himalayas through palae-arctic, temperate, subtropical to purely tropical areas such as the fever invested Terai. Therefore it is a country *par excellence* to study not only problems of adaptation of climate and altitude but also of development of races and species with human beings as well as animals and plants.

Herr Beger's work as anthropologist and ethnologist confined itself to the studies of the very interesting human races found in a great number in Sikkim such as Bhutias, Lepchas, Tibetans, Nepalais, Hindus, and the most interesting mountain people from Lachung and Lachen who in different valleys have developed not only their different cultures but also seem racially to be very distinct bodies of highly civilised traders and agriculturists, it was most astonishing that with the change of the anthropological aspects in the different zones there was also a great parallelism

observed within the different races and species of animals and birds. Nature having had the same effect or at least the same tendency of development with all living beings in space of time.

Here the anthro-geographer's problem clearly touch those of the biologists: Dr Schafer as a mammologist and ornithologist and Mr Krause as entomologist. The party was specially successful in discovering a big game animal unknown from Sikkim and as far as evidence shows to the present day, also entirely unknown to science. Beginning in the eastern Himalayas and even in the spurs of the Himalayas on the western China border and stretching far westwards along the axis of the Himalayas the most interesting biological zone is to be found in the sub-tropical parts at altitudes between 7,000 and 12,000 feet where most of the endemic species and so-called 'living fossils' can be found. There are species of animals and plants which have survived as relicts forms from the late Tertiary, the Miocene and Pliocene many million years ago, in fact they are the most primitive forms, known to science such as the Giant Panda of western China and the Takin of Szetschwan, Mishmi and Bhutan, the westernmost boundary of the latter animals having been found near Lachung in north eastern Sikkim.

In this very same highly interesting climatic zone however the expedition was able to secure the above-mentioned new animals called the 'Schapi' by the Lepchas being related to the goats family and to the western Himalayan Thar but having been blocked in its distribution by the high snow-covered ranges of Kanchenjunga and therefore being restricted only to a very small area. There were only four or five Lepchas existing who [had heard] about this strange animal which was otherwise unknown to the entire population of Sikkim. Of course most of the scientific researches [will] have to [be] carefully worked over when the expedition is finished but it might be mentioned that Mr Krause also took about, 6,000 metres of 16 mm moving pictures and that nearly 5,000 still pictures were taken until now. The expedition hopes to stay one further year in the field.³

In Gangtok they were very kindly received by Sir Tashi Namgyal, then Chogyal of Sikkim and Schäfer had several talks with him and also met with his daughters and nieces, Princess Cocoola (Pema Tsedeun) and Ashi Tashi (Plates 1, 2, 3).

A few days ago, Tashi Namgyal gave a banquet in our honour and invited the highest dignitaries and closest acquaintances of His Majesty. We had the opportunity to experience and appreciate for ourselves the high degree of artistic taste and exquisite cuisine in the private apartments of the palace. The Prince of Sikkim's living quarters are certainly magnificent and assemble the finest works of art without being overloaded in the Oriental manner; their decoration will be a worthy subject for a short pictorial report.⁴

This party was even reported on the second page of the December 1938 issue of the *Tibet Mirror* (*Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*). The *Tibet Mirror* was the first enduring Tibetan newspaper (1925-1963) issued by Dorje Gergan Tharchin, a Christian living in Kalimpong. This very interesting newspaper, which reported on the fact that Schäfer was invited by Gould and attended parties with the Chogyal and his family, is generally a great source for contemporary Sikkimese history.

However, it appears Schäfer had the longest discussions with the Maharaja's Private Secretary Rai Sahib Tashi Dandul [*bKra shis dgra 'dul*], Barmiok Athing and was invited to stay in his guesthouse (Plate 4).

Rai Bahadur Densapa, born in 1902 is still well known and highly respected. He was even called 'the Metternich of Sikkim.'⁵ In 1960, Turrel V. Wylie wrote about him: "Densapa is probably the most knowledgeable Sikkimese Tibetan scholar in Gangtok."⁶ According to an obituary,

He was not only a literary figure of international stature but was one of the founding fathers who paved the way for a modern welfare state of Sikkim. He will therefore, not only be remembered as an outstanding scholar and an astute statesman, but a staunch Sikkimese and a deeply religious man who will be held in high esteem by posterity. His death in 1988 marks an end of an era.⁷

He was the Founder Member and a Member of the Executive Council of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. Furthermore he is the father of the present director of the Institute.

However, at that time in 1938, on the official photo of that visit, as the Private Secretary, he was not allowed to sit on the couch with them, on the same level, despite Schäfer's insistent request, but had to sit on the floor (Plate 5).

The organization and planning for the expedition had to go on and there was need for an interpreter. Here is the next known Sikkimese to mention, in Schäfer's words:

But one outstanding character was among them, our Nepalese interpreter Kaiser Bahadur Thapa, (Plate 6) who owing to his faithfulness and ability was of the utmost help to the expedition and actually became my friend, as neither in China, Eastern Tibet nor any of these countries, have I ever found a man of such valuable qualities.⁸

The young man in the dark blue suit had introduced himself in Gangtok, offering his services as an interpreter. He had attended secondary school there, he seemed clever and bright, and he spoke English well. He was in the service of the 'Political Officer's Work Department,' where he had received excellent training, but he was willing to quit in order to join the expedition, and for the spirit of adventure. Schäfer agreed to his demand for an unusually high salary because the project was in dire need of an interpreter.

Kaiser quickly became an indispensable advisor to Schäfer, and the others on the expedition also treated him as one of their own. Schäfer had him to thank—most especially his tact, his nerves, and his sensitivity—for much of the success of the expedition.⁹ Oddly, his mastery of the Tibetan language did not seem quite sufficient in Lhasa.¹⁰ Schäfer even wanted to take him back to Germany for advanced education but this was rejected with the reasonable argument that "Kaiser Bahadur Thapa is a Sikkim subject and was supported and educated by the Sikkim Durbar at their expense and at the same time the Durbar strongly object[s] to their subject being sent to the Foreign Country."¹¹ And "the Durbar that had spent so much money and take great interest for his education must have the primary claim to utilize his services."¹²

However, this was evidently good for Kaiser, as Schäfer admitted himself later. He led an extraordinary and eventful life and started the first fortnightly *Sikkim* in 1966. Schäfer visited Kaiser in Sikkim in 1963, who returned the gesture with a visit to Germany in 1980. On 10 May 2000, Kaiser died a highly-respected man in Sikkim.¹³

However, what excited Schäfer the most, except for the scientific research and its results, was a special event held in Gangtok which apparently fascinated Schäfer and on which he gave an extremely enthusiastic report: the Pang Lhabsol (*dpang lha bsol*) dances performed by Nyingmapa priests as an offering to the witness deity, the *pangtö* (*dpang bstod*) victory *cham*, where Dzönga's (*mDzod lnga*) lay warrior dancers praise the witness deity and invoke him as their Buddhist warrior god *dablha* (*dgra lha*), celebrating the subjugation of enemies.¹⁴

For weeks the lamas had been busy and day and night the tubas had been clanging. In the temple of the Chogyal in Gangtok, monastic activities were culminating. Everywhere preparations were made to receive the highest gods of the country with dignity. The great abbot of Pemayangtse had arrived in Gangtok already in the middle of August with fifty monks to personally guide the celebration according to ancient customs. I was told that the aged great lama had not been able to sleep for weeks because of his duty to appease Mahakala, the proud protector of the southern passes and protective deity of Sikkim together with the omnipotent god Kanchenjunga, both reverently, respectfully beseeching them to avert the demons of the terrible monsoon.¹⁵

Rai Bahadur Densapa explained to Schäfer the meaning of the dances:

I'll tell you everything about the war dances, what you would like to know, because they are Sikkimese and you will not find in any other country in the world the same or something similar, even not in Tibet, although we have adopted the ideas of the dances from there.

The war dance of the gods may only be performed by Mahayana Buddhists from the Northern School and is symbolic of Sikkimese lamaism. Its climax pays homage to the spirit of the god Kanchen-Dzod-Nga (Kanchenchunga). The god is depicted in red, brandishing a red spear dripping with blood and riding a white battle horse or white mountain lion. He is Sikkim's god of war, and must be worshipped with regular sacrifices and obeisance by all men of fighting age. The dance is associated with an opulent display of martial pomp to placate the god of war and to enhance and develop to the full the nation's prowess in battle and pride. To prevent the ceremony from being demeaned to a mere religious service or routine demon worship, the lamas also pray to the highest lord of all spirits and demons, the black, bloodthirsty Mahakala, to wave the banner and help Kanchenjunga to protect the Buddhist faith and the state, thus bestowing peace, prosperity and security on the people.

The glorious war dance is designed as a form of physical exercise, to divert the lamas and young noblemen from the nefarious influence of a lazy, sedentary life and to show off and cultivate the dexterity, discipline, energy and stamina of the performers. The war dance is primarily designed to raise the composure and morale of the troops. This traditional form of worship plays a valuable role in the preservation of the state in the skilful way in which it combines promotion of physical strength with religious aspects and unequivocal devotion. To achieve this, the dancers must lead a secluded life devoted to religion during the time they spend in exercising and rehearsing. Debauchery is forbidden, as is alcohol. Each and every dancer is a representative of the state, and must distinguish himself as such in his flawless behaviour. He should be inspired by his belief that he is the joy and pride of his god of war and the executor of the god's all-embracing will—itself inspired by the spirit of Mahakala, the patron of all beings and all spirits.¹⁶

I will give a brief description according to René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who watched the dances in 1952:¹⁷

The dance in honour of the mountain god Kanchenjunga (*Gangs chen mdzod lnga*), whom the Sikkimese regard as the chief local protective deity of their country, is performed annually on the fifteenth day of the seventh Tibetan month. This dance is said to have been established by the third Tibetan king of Sikkim, *Phyag rdor rnam rgyal* 1686-1717.

It takes place in the open on the meadow lying in front of the entrance of the main temple, which lies opposite the residence of the royal family (Plate 7).

The first to enter the scene are two masked *atsaras* female and male (Plate 8).

The actual *cham* starts with the appearance of the temple orchestra which circumambulates the place. The lamas dressed in red robes and wearing high, red, pointed caps, move with a slow step, the dancers turning around their axis and accompanying their movements by the music of the instruments they play.¹⁸

According to Schäfer three different music bands were playing to welcome guests before the dances started (Plates 9, 10, 11).

Next to enter the scene were about 20 dancers dressed as warriors (Plate 12).

They wear the long, traditional costume of the Tibetan nobility made of silk and brocade, high boots, and two sashes in different colours running crosswise over the breast. The sashes served formerly as marks to distinguish the various military units, and they were also used to bandage wounds. Each warrior holds a blank sword in his right hand and a small round shield in left. The head is covered by a helmet adorned with three triangular flags.¹⁹

These warriors represent the retinue of the mountain-god. Their dance, besides its religious meaning ... is also meant as a physical exercise. While the chief dancers representing *Gangs chen mdzod Inga* and *Yab bdud* are priests, the sword dancers are laymen drawn from the noble families of Sikkim. During the time of training and rehearsing the dance they submit to certain restrictions; among other things they must observe sexual abstinence.²⁰

The highlight of the actual war dance was the *rdo rje 'gro*, the 'thunderbolt step', a kind of magic step believed to crush all powers of evil, when five selected dancers, each of them worshipping one of the crests, peaks, pinnacles of Kanchenjunga, whirl around ecstatically to symbolize the victory of truth upon lies and evil. Upon concluding the dance the warriors retire into the temple.

After an interval the dancer representing the mountain god *Dzönga (mDzod Inga)* (Plate 13) enters, together with the sword dancers.

He is dressed in a precious garment, wears an apron with a demoniacal face in the center. The apron's brim is decorated with pictures of thunderbolts and human heads. An ornament of bone, consisting of bone pearls and a wheel, are suspended on his breast. In his right hand he brandishes a short lance with a flag attached to the upper part of its shaft; the left hand holds the symbol of a jewel. The three-eyed mask, showing an angrily contorted demoniacal face is red. The upper part of the mask is a helmet decorated with a miniature human skull in front. The top of the helmet bears a flag similar to a 'banner of victory' (*rgyal mtshan*); the sides of the helmet are adorned with triangular flags bearing tufts of cotton on their points.²¹

After having performed the prescribed dance movements he sits down at the entrance to the hall, in which the lama orchestra has its place. Next enters the dancer representing *Yab bdud* (Plates 14, 18), the main companion who resembles Mahakala.

The iconographic picture of *Yab bdud*, the chief acolyte of *mDzod Inga*..., resembles that of the *dharmapāla Mahākāla* since this mountain god is believed to be an emanation of the latter deity.... He wears a wrathful black mask bearing a diadem of five skulls. His right hand brandishes a spear with a flag; the left hand holds the imitation of a human heart. After turning one and a half circle around the square reserved for the dance, he too sits down at the entrance to the hall.²²

While *mDzod lnga* performs his dance, a saddled and richly decorated white horse is led by the master of the horse (Plate 15) in festive dress at the side of the dancer. This is a mount dedicated to this mountain god. It is kept by six keepers in the royal stables and may never be ridden and not even used for breeding. Similarly, during the dance of *Yab bdud*, a black horse with white heels is led at the side of this dancer.

After the dancers representing *mDzod lnga* and *Yab bdud* have taken their seat, the sword dancers pay homage to these two mountain gods. Then again there follows dances by *mDzod lnga*, *Yab bdud* and the warriors. Finally, Lepcha guards, sacred horses, and dancers, accompanied by a band of the king's bodyguard and attendants carrying banners and leading the horses dedicated to the mountain gods, thrice circumambulate the temple. While marching around the temple the dancers sing victory and war songs (Plates 16, 17).

Only Schäfer refers to a 'snow offering' at the end: he describes how a warrior comes out of the temple, carrying a container with white flour, and paces to the centre of the dance circle where all the warriors quickly surround him. They dip the points of their swords into the flour, which symbolizes holy snow, which they then raise so as to form a cloud of snow. The 'snow' rises towards Kanchenjunga while they joyfully shout *lha rgyal lo!* (victory to the gods!) With this final great offering the Pang Lhabsol comes to an end.

Before leaving after a six-month stay in Sikkim, Schäfer summarised his impressions of the country with the following praise:

Sikkim, a country marked by its varied landscapes, its biological and anthropological diversity, second to none; shrouded in mystery and a surrounding glow of beauty, wedged in between gloomy Bhutan in the east, secret Nepal in the west, wonderful India in the south, hidden and powerful Tibet in the north. All these lands have been of seminal importance to Sikkim; all of them have given their share to ripen this land; nevertheless it always proudly cherished its own character; even more so: Sikkim is a world of its own, Sikkim is a geographical entity; it is home to humans, animals, plants and mountains, indeed particularly the towering mountains are unique, and due to them beings could fully evolve in this special setting; therefore, through our pioneering research, we were able to unravel many secrets from these vast rocky massifs and bare plains.²³

NOTES

¹ Isrun Engelhardt (ed.), *Tibet in 1938-1939: Photographs from the Ernst Schäfer Expedition to Tibet*, Chicago: Serindia 2007; *ibid.*, 'Nazis of Tibet: A Twentieth Century Myth', in *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Monica Esposito (ed.), Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), coll. Études thématiques 22, vol. I, 2008, pp. 63-96.

² *The Statesman* 7 June 1938, Bundesarchiv Berlin, ZM 1457 A5, fol. 55.

³ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 135/30/19.

⁴ Bundesarchiv Berlin, ZM 1457 A 5, fol 24.

⁵ *Sikkim Observer*, 27 February 1988, p. 2.

⁶ Quoted in David P. Jackson, *A Saint in Seattle*, Boston: Wisdom 2003, pp. 644-5, n. 751.

⁷ *Sikkim Herald*, 26 February 1988, p. 1.

⁸ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 135/30/12, fol. 6, 'Lecture to be given on the 25.7.39 by Dr Ernst Schaefer at the Himalaya Club, Calcutta'.

- ⁹ Schäfer, Unpublished Memoirs: 198: Schäfer visited Kaiser in Sikkim in 1963, who returned the gesture with a visit to Germany in 1980.
- ¹⁰ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 135/57, fol. 162 049.
- ¹¹ OIOC, L/P&S/12/4343, fol. 60, Letter from the General Secretary to his Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim to the Political Officer of Sikkim, Gangtok, 16 June 1939.
- ¹² OIOC, L/P&S/12/4343, fol. 36, Letter from Gould to Savidge, 8 July 1939.
- ¹³ See his obituary on his extraordinary life in the Sikkim *Weekend Review*, 19 May 2000, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ Anna Balikci Denjongpa, 'Kangchendzönga: Secular and Buddhist Perceptions of the Mountain Deity of Sikkim among the Lhopos', *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 38 (2), 2002, pp. 5-37.
- ¹⁵ Ernst Schäfer, *Geheimnis Tibet: Erster Bericht der Deutschen Tibet Expedition Ernst Schäfer*, München: Bruckmann, 1943, pp. 33-36.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.
- ¹⁷ René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances*, Hague: Mouton 1975, pp. 19-24; *ibid.*, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, Hague: Mouton 1956, pp. 402-5.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1975, pp. 22.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1975, pp. 22-3.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1956, pp. 403-4.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 1975, pp. 23.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 1975, pp. 20, 22.
- ²³ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 135/38, fols 104-7.



Plate 1. Sir Tashi Namgyal



Plate 2. Schäfer and Sir Tashi Namgyal



Plate 3. Ashi Tashi and Princess Pema Tsedeun (Coocoola)



Plate 4. Rai Sahib Tashi Dandul Densapa,
Barmiok Athing

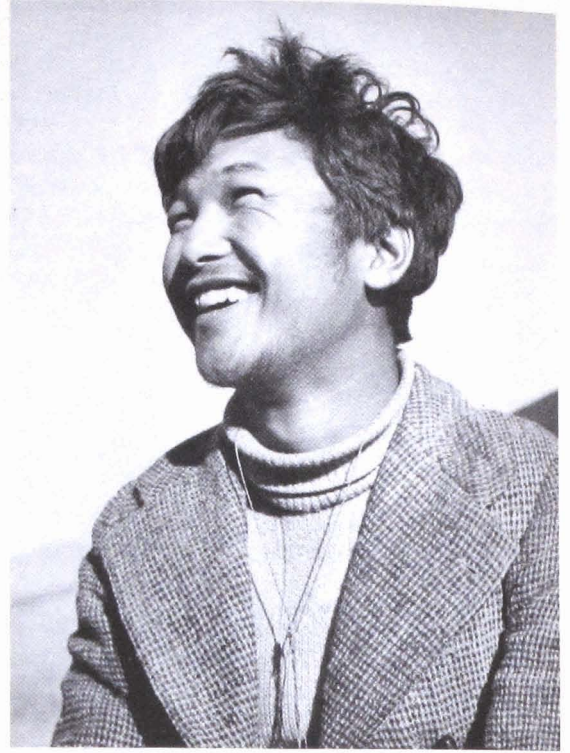


Plate 6. Kaiser Bahadur Thapa



Plate 5. Sir Tashi Namgyal, Densapa, Schäfer



Plate 7. Tsuglakhang, the temple of the Chogyal in Gangtok



Plate 8. Atsaras



Plate 9. Sikkim Guards



Plate 10. Lama with drum



Plate 11. Piper from the police band



Plate 12. Pangtö (*dpang bstod*) dancer



Plate 13. Dzönga (*mDzod lnga*)



Plate 14. Yab dü (*Yab bdud*), an emanation of Mahakala



Plate 15. Master of the horse



Plate 16. Sikkim Guards thrice circumambulate the temple



Plate 17. The horses dedicated to the mountain gods circumambulate the temple



Plate 18. Yab dü (*Yab bdud*), an emanation of Mahakala

REINVENTION OF RELIGION AND RITUALS IN THE DIASPORA:
THE TEMPLE OF SVAYAMBHŪ BHIMĀKĀLĪ AND ITS FOUNDER PRIEST
SURYAVIR TULADHAR IN SIKKIM, INDIA

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INTRODUCTION¹

Migration of the Newars from Nepal to the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim started in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Newars, the native inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, are rich in culture and rituals in their homeland in Nepal. They follow both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions and have a long literary tradition in their language, Nepalbhasa (Nepali 1964; Toffin 1984; Levy 1992; Gellner 1996 and Shrestha 2002). Religions and rituals are indispensable parts of Newar society in Nepal. The Newars in Nepal spend a good deal of their time in prayers, organising feasts and festivals, observing fasts and making pilgrimages to religiously important places. They also perform masked dances of various deities. All these feasts and fasts, festivals and processions of gods and goddesses, rituals and traditions of the Kathmandu Valley are characteristics for Newar culture.

Diffusion of language and culture are the most challenging features for minorities in any multinational, multicultural society; in the case of migrant populations, these challenges are all the more high. It seems, in the early days of their migration, that the Newars in Sikkim tried their best to observe all important feasts and festivals wherever they went and settled, even when they lived in a small group. Nonetheless, with the loss of such generations having firsthand knowledge of Newar rituals and traditions, the new generations are left with little or no knowledge of their rituals and traditions.

Notably, the ritual calendar used in Sikkim is not much different from that of Nepal, but the Newars in Sikkim do not observe all festivals and rituals that the Newars do in Nepal. The Newars in Sikkim feel distinct from other ethnic groups because of their separate culture, language and religious background. However, as migrants, the Newars in Sikkim lost many components of their culture and rituals. In the recent years, however, they have been busy reviving and reconstructing their language, culture, rituals and traditions through their national organisation, the Newāḥ Guthi, which they established in 1993 and has since been renamed as All India Newar Organisation, Sikkim.² At the same time, individual personalities, such as Sri Suryavir Tuladhar, the founder priest of the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī in Gangtok are active on their own way to reinforce Newar culture and rituals. Suryavir Tuladhar, the chief architect of the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī, is one of the most knowledgeable persons in Gangtok on the Newars' life, culture and religion in Sikkim and elsewhere in India. He is widely known as 'Sri Gurujyū' or 'venerable teacher' for the people in Sikkim. He is also renowned as a medium or healer because he treats people for numerous illnesses and problems.³

I witnessed the daily rituals, morning worship (*nitya pūjā*) and evening ritual (*ārati*) performed at the Svayambhū Bhimākālī temple. Certain rituals are repeated everyday, but many occasional rituals are performed at different times of the year. During my fieldwork in 2004, I was also able to observe and video-record the annual Śivarātri worship and the

offering of fire sacrifice for four days during the anniversary of the temple. In October 2008, I had the opportunity to observe the rituals performed in the course of the Dasain festival. In this paper, presenting features of the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī in Gangtok, I examine daily and occasional rituals performed at this temple to show some empirical evidence as to how the processes of reinvention of Newar religions and rituals are going on in Sikkim. In addition, I shall discuss the personality of the priest, Suryavir Tuladhar, the founder of the temple and show, as a Newar, how he is committed in reviving Newar religious rituals in Sikkim. Focus will be given to healing rituals that are performed at the temple to cure patients by Suryavir himself and a possessed lady (*mā*) Gauri Giri.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEMPLE OF SVAYAMBHŪ BHIMĀKĀLĪ

There are various Hindu and Buddhist temples as well as a number of churches in Sikkim. For Hindu religious people, Kālī or Durgā or Bhagavatī is one of the most revered goddesses. Every Hindu settlement in Sikkim includes one or more temples to Kālī, but the centre of my attention is on the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī in Gangtok because of its peculiarity in presenting Newar features. The establishment of the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī is remarkable for incorporating both Hindu and Buddhist religious features.

Suryavir Tuladhar took the initiative in establishing the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī according to the wishes of the goddess Bhimākālī of Himachal, India. According to him, on several occasions she came to him in a dream and ordered him to build a temple to her. It took him years before he could turn his dream into a reality. The Gangtok Municipality provided the necessary land and many devotees donated cash and kind, which enabled him to establish the temple at the present location in Tibet Road in Gangtok in 1996.

Being a Newar, Suryavir was keen to decorate the temple with some Newar architectural components. But while the temple is prominent for presenting Newar religious features, it is also decorated with all sorts of deities including a statue of Sāi Bābā, a modern living god of India,⁴ emblems of Christianity and Islam such as a statue of the Virgin Mary and a crescent moon signifying Islam. However, no Christian religious service or Muslim prayers are performed at the temple, only Hindu and Buddhist ones. Combining of both Hindu and Buddhist religious practices including Tāntric, Vajrayānī and Mahāyānī Tibetan Buddhism in a single temple can be considered unique. Sikkim is not just a place of the Newars, so the devotees from all communities visit in the temple to pay their respect to all the deities that are installed there. Not only the Newars or people of Sikkim but also devotees from various ethnic background and places of India visit this temple, which might have obliged Suryavir to combine components of different religions at the temple.

The external structure of the temple is not precisely made according to a general Nepalese styled pagoda temple but is constructed in the shape of an ordinary building, at most it is comparable to a god house (*dyo chem*) in the Kathmandu Valley. The house is a five-storied one with a three-tiered pagoda roof on the top floor and a pinnacle on the top. Therefore, the temple is able to present a shape of a Nepalese styled pagoda temple. A miniature of the Buddhist Svayambhū Caitya is constructed right below the pagoda styled roof, which again can be considered another innovation (Plate 1). The eyes of the Buddha are painted on the four sides of the *caitya* matching the Svayambhū Caitya of Kathmandu. Each of the four sides of the dome contains a niche facing four different directions. Each of the niches contains a statue of Buddha. Under the dome *aṣṭamangal*, the eight auspicious signs are painted according to Newar Buddhist tradition. In addition, a set of *aṣṭamangal* symbols

according to Tibetan tradition is there. Next to the *caitya* are two chairs; one with a picture of the goddess Hārītī Ajimā and the next is with colour pictures of Kumārī, the living virgin goddess from Kathmandu. It is notable that in the Kathmandu Valley, it is mainly the goddess Hārītī who possesses the women (*dyo mayju*) who perform healing rituals.⁵

On the same floor, to the east of the Svayambhū Caitya in an adjoining room, a metre-tall marble statue of the goddess Kālī is placed in a cupboard covered with a transparent glass. The statue is decorated with a red coloured dress and various ornaments. The room is also a study room for the priest, Suryavir. Sometimes visitors may come here to chat with the priest or get treated for different problems. On the opposite wall is a bookcase where a number of books are kept. No chairs are there but mats are spread over the floor for the visitors to sit down. Some pictures of Sāi Bābā and the priest himself are hung around the walls. Attached is another room, which Suryavir uses to sleep.

Right beneath the Svayambhū Caitya, on the third floor, is the main altar of the temple with a life-size marble statue of Kālī, flanked by a bronze statue of a Vairocana Buddha and a clay image of Sāi Bābā as well as images of Bhimsen, a Newar god of trade, Gaṇesa, Kṛṣṇa, and Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge, which are placed in a showcase made of transparent glass with wooden frames. They are all looking in an easterly direction. Statues of other deities such as Kumārī, Bhimsen and a Śiva phallus are also there. Right above the Śiva phallus, a copper pot with a small hole in its bottom is hung which allows water to fall over the Śiva. Some of these statues are made of stone while other are made of bronze. Just in front of the statue of Kumārī and Bhimsen, a special seat is situated for the priest where he sits to offer prayers to the deities. Masks of various form of Kālī made of papier mâché are attached on the showcase frames and walls surrounding the altar. Some open space is left behind the altar for people to be able to circumambulate it. Interestingly enough, all the images of Kālī installed in the temple do not have a fearsome appearance, which is the general trend, but instead have a compassionate outlook.

The middle of the room is empty and this is where visitors, devotees, and patients may take their seats as they wait for their turn to get treated or engage in praying and singing of devotional songs (*bhajan*). On the opposite side of the altar in an adjoining room again a metre tall marble statue of Kālī is kept in a showcase. Paintings of eight mother goddesses and Kālī and Sāi bābā are also hung there. In the same room, two holy seats are placed: one for the priest Suryavir himself and another for Gauri Giri, the lady who is supposed to be possessed by a *nāga*, the divine serpent. Every morning after the morning prayers, they both take their respective seats and treat patients for an hour or two. Only during the time that they treat people do they sit on their respective seats, otherwise the seats are kept empty. They both bow down to these seats after they conclude their healing sessions. These seats are considered sacred and visitors may also bow down to pay respect as they do to other deities.

A living room of the priest, sleeping rooms for his assistants and a kitchen are made on the second floor of the temple. Some rooms for guests are made on the first and ground floors. In an adjoining room next to the living room, photos of ancestors of the priest are hung. They all receive worship everyday.

The next important spot at the temple is the Yajña bhūmī, the place of fire sacrifice. It is in a separate temple made adjacent to the main temple. Fire sacrifices are performed in this temple during different occasions. Individuals may also visit to offer fire sacrifice or pay a Brahmin priest to perform fire sacrifices on their behalf.

THE PERSONA OF SURYAVIR TULADHAR

Suryavir Tuladhar, the chief architect and the patron of the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī, is broadly known as 'Guruju' or 'venerable teacher' by the people in Sikkim. He was born in 1942 in Darjeeling, a city neighbouring Sikkim in the Indian State of West Bengal. In 1979, he moved to Sikkim and served as a culture expert at the Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department of the Government of Sikkim until he retired in 2003.

He was born to a Tuladhar family, a Buddhist merchant caste in Newar society. By birth he was not a qualified person to perform any priestly duties, but he was able to become a priest because there were no other Newar priests in Sikkim. This change can be seen as a significant departure from the traditional concept of priesthood as practiced in Nepal itself. The change can be seen as an invention of religious identity in a diaspora community. He is among a few Newars in Gangtok who speak the Newar language and the temple was also used as a place to give Newar language lessons to people, while Suryavir himself also taught *caryā* dances according to Newar traditions there.⁶

Suryavir also considered himself a possessed person and acts as a medium. Everyday, he treats patients, soon after the completion of his morning prayer. All his disciples respect him as a teacher (*guru*) or god. On 15 February 2004, I witnessed Suryavir's birthday celebration at the temple. Devotees crowded into the temple to present him with gifts and receive his blessings on this day. When I asked him to define a god, he said 'everyone is a god'. He further stressed that god resides at the core of one's heart, only one needs to have the ability to recognize him. Suryavir, however, said he is a devotee of Sāi bābā. In his sermons, he frequently quotes verses from Buddhist scriptures, Vedas, Bhāgavadgītā, Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. He uses Newar, Nepali, Hindi, Bengali, Tibetan, Sanskrit and English languages.

I had also a chance to talk with one of the elder sisters of Suryavir who visited him from Darjeeling during his birthday celebrations. She told me that he was a religious minded person and loved to spend enormous amount of time in worshipping gods and goddesses from his childhood. She said Suryavir somehow followed the example of his father, who used to spend several hours a day in worshipping gods. Suryavir was only thirteen when he left his home and began exploring the world on his own. His family tried to get him married but failed as he chose a life of celibacy.

During his prayers and healing sessions in the temple, Suryavir usually dresses in an orange, red or a white long shirt and a lower garment (*dhoti*), but when he goes out from the temple he may wear a normal shirt and a trouser. Suryavir says he is on the service of mankind. He said, what he was doing is righteous tasks (*dharma*). He said there are hospitals and nursing homes but they are not accessible for poor and destitute people.⁷ He thinks this is the reason why his service is important. If someone calls him, he may visit people, but that is rare.

During my fieldwork I had a chance to go with Suryavir on a trip to Kalimpong. One of his devotees came with his jeep to take us there. On the way, he was seen praying with mantras in Tibetan. When we arrived in Kalimpong, a Lepcha family invited him to their home to offer a prayer. As he explained it to me, this was to drive away evil spirits from the house. Later, he took me to another site where one family had just begun laying the foundation to construct a new house. Suryavir recited some hymns and threw some coins over the foundation stones. He said it was to ward off obstacles and to ease the construction process.

For his contributions in the field of education and culture in Sikkim, many institutions including the Government of Sikkim and Newar organizations have felicitated him on numerous occasions. In his living room, many certificates of felicitation are displayed around the walls. His affections for Nepal and Nepalese people are immense. He says 'Nepalese in Sikkim is a fragment of Nepal in itself, forgotten in foreign land, but they remember their ancestor's land and culture and their hearts are full of love to Nepal, Nepalese people and culture'.

RITUALS AT THE TEMPLE

Every morning at about eight, soon after taking his morning bath, Suryavir makes himself ready for morning prayer (*nitya pūjā*) (Plate 2). At the outset, he begins his worship at the shrine of Kālī in his study room, then he takes the round of the Svayambhū Caitya situated at the same floor to pay his respect and then goes down to the main altar of the temple to perform the *nitya pūjā*. The *nitya pūjā* is the main ritual performed at the temple everyday. It lasts for nearly two hours. During this worship he evokes numerous names of gods and goddess and recites praise songs and mantras related to various deities which he knows by heart. He is versatile in reciting Sanskrit, Vedic mantras, Buddhist hymns and Tāntric *ślokas* by heart. He pours water mixed with cow milk from a conch shell in the name of various deities, offers flowers, raw rice, red and yellow powder, burns incense and lights wicks soaked in oil to all the gods and goddesses that he can remember. I saw at least four of his pupils busy assisting him during the morning worship. At the end of the worship all his assistants and devotees those present assemble to pray with fan, drum, conch, bells and songs.⁸

People take red and yellow marks (*tikā*) on their foreheads and flowers on their heads as blessings from the gods and goddesses. A Brahmin priest is employed to recite daily Chaṇḍī, verses in praise of the goddess Durgā. The Brahmin is also an astrologer and performs worship for those who wish to drive away misfortunes (*daśā*) or to be liberated from the troubles they encounter from planets (*graha*).

At about six in the evening *bhajan*, mainly dedicated to Sāi Bābā are sang at the temple. At the end, wick lights (*ārati*) are offered to the deities to mark the end of evening worship. Finally, people are given ashes from Sāi bābā as blessings.

In Nepal, among the Newars, blood sacrifice during most festivals and rituals are frequent, particularly at the temple of Kālī. Even during Buddhist festivals and processions of Buddhists deities in the Kathmandu Valley sacrifice of animals is prevalent at different levels.⁹ However, in Sikkim animal sacrifice is rare. No animal sacrifice is permitted at the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī. In many cases, fruits or coconuts substitute for blood sacrifices. As one of my informants told me, the trend of replacing animal sacrifices with vegetarian offering started from the 1960s and has become more common now. At the same time, Indian law also forbids animal sacrifices.

THE ANNUAL FIRE SACRIFICE AT THE YAJÑA BHŪMĪ

Besides daily prayers many instances of occasional worship are also performed at the temple. Among them is the anniversary of the temple itself, which is celebrated in mid-February. It is celebrated with a four days long fire sacrifice. In 2004, I had the chance to witness the anniversary fire sacrifice, which began on 15 February and concluded on 18 February (Plate

3). The fire sacrifice took place at the Yajña Bhūmī, the place of fire sacrifice. In front of the fire pit a temporary seat, facing north is made for the priest Suryavir Tuladhar who presided over the fire sacrifice as the chief sacrificer. For the Hindus, *Agni* (fire) is an important god. Especially in the Vedic tradition, fire is considered to be a means to link the human world with the heaven. Establishing fire implies 'life, wealth, procreation and continuation of family, clan and lineage'.¹⁰ Fire sacrifices by both Tantric Hindu and Buddhists are also very common among the Newars in Nepal.¹¹

According to Suryavir, the fire sacrifice is not just Hindu or Vedic but also Buddhist and Tāntric. He said deities from all the religions were invoked and worshipped with respect to the fire sacrifice. Oblations were made in the names of all the deities from different religions. He said the fire sacrifice was to pray for peace, harmony, health, wealth and happiness for all living beings. Reciting hymns in praise of different deities, oblations were made into the fire. Occasionally, for a short while he fell in trance, mostly when he offered ingredients into the fire. He was moving his palms in different gesture, sometimes with a thunderbolt and a bell or a two-sided small drum (*damaru*) in his hands. From time to time, when he was about to make special offerings into the fire, he wore a crown containing images of five various Buddhas (*pañca* Buddha).

Sesame, barley, rice, and clarified butter (*ghee*) were the main ingredients offered into the fire. Sandalwood, wood, camphor, fruits and coconut were also offered into the fire. Five Hill Brahmins were there to recite the texts of Caṇḍī and Rudrī simultaneously during the fire sacrifice. Interestingly enough, all the five came from Nepal but were residing in Sikkim for priestly work. The eldest among them, Mr. Dilliram Pyakurel (64) said the fire sacrifice performed during the anniversary is to bring peace in the world (*viśva śānti*). According to him, smoke coming out from such a fire sacrifice not only purifies the environment and helps in growing good crops but also helps in spreading peace, happiness and goodwill wherever the smoke reaches. He believes smoke does not rest at one place but travels across the earth.

Everyday the fire sacrifice lasted for five to six hours and was participated in by around 150 men and women. The fire was kept burning day and night on all the four days. Every evening *ārati* or evening offering was carried out at the fire pit in honour of the fire god. The singing of *bhajan*, recitations of mantras, and offering of wick lights took place during the evening worship.

THE WORSHIP DURING THE ŚIVARĀTRĪ

Another annual ritual I observed at the temple was the Śivarātri, the night of the Lord Śiva on 18 February 2004. At about ten in the evening, the worship began with the singing of devotional songs (*bhajan*), dedicated to Śiva and Śāi Bābā in front of the main altar. In between the *bhajan*, the Suryavir offered worship to Śiva. He also joined in singing *bhajan*. About sixty men and women took part in the ceremony. They continued singing *bhajan* until midnight. It is believed that to spend a night worshipping Śiva during Śivarātri is religiously meritorious. A group of devotees from New Delhi also came there to participate in the ceremony.

Suryavir offered mainly water mixed with cow milk, curd, leaves from *bel* fruit tree (*agela marmelos*), and red and yellow powder to Śiva. The climax of the worship was the breaking of two coconuts in front of the statue of Kālī exactly at 12 o'clock midnight. Then, the priest distributed *tikā* and flowers as blessings from Śiva to all the participants. In Nepal, people believe that only *tikā* and *jala* or holy water are to be taken as blessings from the god

Śiva but not flowers, however, this rule is not known in Sikkim. Many participants observed a fast for a whole day until the worship was ended in the late night. Towards the end sacred food (*prasāda*) was served to everybody and the ceremony concluded.

THE FESTIVAL OF DASAIN

The celebration of the divine victory over the demons (*Dasain* or *Dasaharā*) is a widely celebrated festival among the Hindus across the world, as they consider it the most important festival. In Nepal it is celebrated from state level to family level with a great fanfare.¹² Major activities of the festival start from the day of Ghaṭasthāpan, the first day of the bright half of the month of Āsvin (September/October). On this day, the ritual of sowing barley and maize seeds is carried out at the altar of the Svayambhū Bhimākālī temple. It is to grow *jamarā*, the sacred sprouts dedicated to the Goddess Kālī and distributed as *prasāda* on the tenth day. From the first day till the day of full moon, prayers are carried out at the temple to please the goddess Kālī. Phulpātī, on the seventh day, Mahāṣṭamī on the eighth day, Kālṛātrī on the ninth night and Vijayā Daśamī or the day of victory on the tenth day, are the most important days of the festival.

The temple remains extremely busy with ritual activities and visitors during the entire period of the festival. On the seventh day, the procession of Phulpātī is carried out in the premises of the temple. A huge crowd of people from Gangtok, including distinguished personalities such as the elected Member of Parliament from Gangtok area attend the procession. The Kālṛātrī is the most spectacular one from the viewpoint of ritual performed at the temple. On this day, sacrifices are offered at midnight to appease the goddess Kālī. Unlike in Nepal, no animals but various fruit are chopped up in the gesture of sacrifice. Red coloured water is streamed over the temple altar to give an impression of blood sacrifice. On the tenth day, commemorating the victory of the Goddess over the demon king Mahiṣāsūr, Vijayā Daśamī, the day of victory is celebrated. On this day, *jamarā*, the sacred sprouts are harvested and distributed among people as blessings from the goddess Kālī. On this day, Suryavir sits on a specially made seat, first he receives red *ṭikā* and *jamarā* from the nine Brahmins, whom he employed to recite hymns related to the goddess Durgā in the temple for nine days. Then he starts distributing red *ṭikā*, *jamarā*, garland made from pieces of white and red cloth together with fruits and cash money to all devotees who visit the temple. Hundreds of people flock to temple on the same and following few days to receive the *ṭikā*.

MHA PŪJĀ: THE WORSHIP OF THE SELF

The next important event that takes place at the temple is the celebration of Mha pūjā, the worship of the self. It is a part of the festival of Tihār, celebrated in the month of Kārtik (October or November), which is the second most important festival for the Newars and many other Nepalese communities. The Newars observe this festival for five consecutive days by worshipping crow, dog, cow and Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, Mha pūjā, the worship of the self and Kijā pūjā, the sisters' worship their brothers on the first, second, third, fourth and fifth day respectively.¹³ The most important day during this festival for the Newars is the Mha pūjā, the worship of the self. The New Year day according to the lunar-based Nepal era calendar also falls on the same day. The Mha pūjā had become a forgotten tradition in Sikkim for the majority of the Newars. However, in a bid to revive this tradition the Sikkim Newāḥ Guthi has begun to reintroduce it in Sikkim by observing it as a mass

ceremony since the mid 1990s. As a promoter of Newar culture, Suryavir himself also organises it as a public ceremony at his temple, which is participated in by not only the Newars but also people from many other communities without caste or ethnic bias.

The Newar Organization of Sikkim also invites Suryavir Tuladhar to perform priestly tasks during various other Newar festivals. For instance in September, he is invited to perform priestly duties when they erect the Indra pole and worship Kumārī during Indrayātrā festival in Namthang in South Sikkim. It is notable that during such festivals, the Newar Organization of Sikkim also invites people from Nepal to acquire proper knowledge of how to celebrate such festivals.

HEALING RITUALS: THE DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS AT THE TEMPLE

Apart from rituals related to worship of the deities and fire sacrifices the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī is renowned for healing patients. Suryavir and Gauri Giri (32) are supposed personifications of the gods in human forms and they treat people on a daily basis. It is believed that Suryavir acquires his healing power from the goddess Kālī, whereas Gauri derives her power from a *nāga*, the divine serpent who possesses her every morning (Plate 4). Suryavir is believed to be capable of communicating between divine and mundane worlds.

Every morning, as soon as Suryavir completes his morning worship, they both begin treating patients. Every morning, Suryavir spends hours in worshipping gods and goddesses, as if to gain power for his healing rituals. On the other hand, Gauri meditates five to ten minutes with beads in her hands sitting on the right-hand side of the temple altar, and then, she finds herself possessed by the divine serpent. As soon as she gets possessed, she loses her usual consciousness, and crawls on her knees towards her seat where she starts treating patients. Giving respect to the goddess Hārītī Ajimā and her children at the Svayambhū Bhimākālī temple, where healing rituals are carried out on a daily basis, shows that Suryavir and Gauri, both also assume their healing power from the goddess Hārītī Ajimā and her children.

In contrast to Gauri, Suryavir does not lose his usual consciousness during the time he treats people. Suryavir can be chatting, sipping his tea but treating people at the same time. Sometimes, he can be seen in conversation with the goddess Kālī, then he returns to his patients and gives advice. Now and then, he may fall in a trance, shiver a little bit or shake his body or take a deep breath, and murmur or talk to himself while treating people. When I asked why he shivered treating some people but not others, he replied, sometimes, he had to absorb powerful diseases from the people, which made him shiver.

Patients with any disease may visit them for treatment. Once I saw a young man began shivering while Suryavir was treating him. I asked what happened to this man, Suryavir said, the spirits of his ancestors visited him, which made him shiver. His family were suffering because they failed to appease their deceased ancestors. Suryavir said his treatment would nullify the spirits and relieve the family from suffering.

Usually, when Suryavir treats patients, he takes a palm full of raw rice in his left hand and rubs it over by a small bronze thunderbolt (*vajra*), an instrument used by the Vajrācārya priests. Sometimes he blows mantras while treating patients, or throws rice grains and drips water from a holy jar (*kalaśa*) over the patients. Together with blowing mantras, he may sometimes whisk a broom over the patients to drive away evil spirits from them. He also distributes bottles full of water or rice grains or ashes in a piece of paper as medicine later to

be used at their homes. Use of herbal medicines is absent, which is the case in traditional way of healings in Nepal. Suryavir also instructs people to perform prayers to a certain deity or asks them to offer certain materials to a certain deity. He also instructs patients to take rounds of the temple altar for 58 or 108 times on certain days. For certain kind of diseases, he may instruct people to consult a doctor or to go to a hospital. I also saw a medical doctor visiting him for treatment.

Besides regular devotees, 40 to 50 patients visit the temple everyday to get treatment. Especially, the temple is crowded with such visitors on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays for they believe these three are the best days to get treatment. Treatments are carried out free of costs, but those who wish may leave some money, fruits or foodstuffs. Those who are unable to be present in person, or are from a distance, may talk to the priest on his telephone for his advice. At one occasion, I saw Suryavir talking on the telephone to a person from West Bengal, who had lost his truck for weeks in South India. While talking on the telephone, he looked at his own palm and muttered some words, then, he assured the person that his truck was not lost but had broken down on its way back home and assured him it would arrive back within days.

A patient who came to the temple from south Sikkim told me that what Suryavir said about a *nāga* at her home was true. She came there with complaints of having pain in her left leg. Suryavir said their house was erected by encroaching on the abode of the *nāga*, so the *nāga* caused her pain. He advised her not to harm the *nāga* who could be frequently visiting her house.

Suryavir also talks about miraculous events. He said once he lost his silver *nāga* in his office, but eight month later the goddess Kālī returned it back to him in the temple itself while he was offering a prayer. Showing the jewels attached to his crown with Pañca Buddha, he claimed he bought none of them himself, but rather that the goddess Kālī bestowed them upon him. However, he admitted that he bought the crown from Kathmandu. He also claimed that some of the statues in the temple were self-manifested.

However, not everybody believes in his divine power. One person whom I interviewed, told me that he found the priest's healing sessions were theatrical. He found his acting wonderful, but that did not cure his disease. Another person in Gangtok, said he did not go to the temple, because he did not believe that Suryavir possessed any quality of divine power.

As one can see, his treatments are basically psychological ones. When asked about the effectiveness of his treatment, he said one has to trust, if there is doubt, it won't work. Suryavir's divine power is not without challenge either. He said, one time a person attacked him with a knife, but he escape unhurt. He also had to stop the rituals of identifying thieves, because many threatened him with his life.

When Gauri is possessed, she is respected as *mā* or mother and begins treating patients for different physical and mental problems. A wooden structure of a serpent is attached behind her seat. She also wears a silver crown made in the shape of a *nāga*. She speaks in an unusual voice while possessed, mostly in low tone. Her voice is not always clear, sometime patients do not understand her, so need an assistant to explain what she meant. After taking her seat, she may move her beads with both her hands. The patients sit in front of her seat to get treated. She uses different ways in treating patients: sometimes she waves her hands with a small broom or beads or pieces of cloth or wick light over the head or body of the patients. She may also give away some raw rice as blessings to the patients. As does Suryavir, she also instructs people to worship or to take the vow of a particular deity or to offer certain food or materials to certain deities or spirits.

On one occasion, she was treating two children who could not concentrate on their studies. She took their textbooks and pens and brushed them with her broom. Another time I saw a lady was asking her about her deceased mother. She said her mother in the netherworld was passing through a hard time because of her deeds in this world. She said there is no happy life after death in the next world for those who do not do good things in this world.

Once when she was not in possession, I asked her if she did remember any of the things she had said or done when she was possessed. She said that she did not remember anything. During the time of her menstruation she must abstain from her divine service for four days, because the period is considered to be ritually impure. In 1991, she came to the temple as a patient but remained there as she was diagnosed as a person possessed by a *nāga*. Since then she has been staying there permanently to treat patients. Occasionally she visits her home where her parents and two brothers are living. When I asked about her marriage prospects she told me that it all depends on the wishes of the goddess Kālī but she cannot say yes or no herself.

Besides Suryavir Tuladhar and Gauri Giri, four other possessed people were residing there in the temple when I was doing my research. Different deities possess them occasionally but not on a daily basis. One of them is a Lepcha lady who is frequently possessed by a Lepcha god and begins speaking in a strange language, which is not comprehensible to others. Bābā Harbhajan Lal Singh, a soldier who disappeared from the Sikkim Tibetan border during the 1962 war between Indian and China, possesses a young boy. He told me the Bābā came to him in a dream and instructed him to do his bidding. In 2008, I saw one youth possessed by a divine lion who then behaved as a lion.

RITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND RITUAL INVENTIONS

The two hour long *nitya pūjā* or the morning prayers performed at the temple are not totally different from that of the temple rituals in Kathmandu, but Suryavir has added many imaginative ingredients in his performance. The way in which Suryavir performs offerings, recitations of hymns, ringing of bell and fanning with yak tail to the gods and goddesses makes his worship rituals special and dazzling. In a way his performance of rituals is complicated and obscure, but these are his artistic imaginations, which make them powerful and effective. It can be said that by performing such obscure rituals he is determined to turn the temple into a place of divinity. However, for outsiders, or for that matter, for those who are familiar with temple rituals in Kathmandu his performances may appear 'exaggerated' or 'theatrical', but his power of convincing devotees lies exactly in these exaggerated performances. His theatrical performances, in fact, make him successful in gaining devotees not only from Gangtok and vicinities but also from far away places, especially from different places of India and Nepal.

As noted, unlike in Nepal, sacrifice of animal is virtually forbidden at all temples in Sikkim. Vegetarian offerings, and replacing of animal sacrifice with fruits or coconuts have become common among them and no blood sacrifice is permitted at the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī. It was, however, astonishing when the breaking of two shelled coconuts took place in front of the statue of Kālī exactly at 12 o'clock midnight as the climax of the annual Sivarātri worship. Similarly, in the ninth night of the Dasain festival, not only fruits signifying demons are chopped up violently but also red colour symbolizing blood is offered to deities. The violent act of breaking up of coconuts and flooding of red colour

clearly indicate the substitution of animal sacrifice. However, real sacrifice of animals is strikingly missing.

As has been discussed, Suryavir is not an eligible person to perform priestly duties by birth, but he has successfully presented himself as a priest. To legitimise his priesthood, Suryavir also claims that his maternal grandfather was a Vajrācārya, a Buddhist priest. However, among traditional people, his legitimacy of being a priest is not without question. The most interesting aspect of his performance is the blending of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇav, Vedic, Tāntric, Newar Vajrayāna and Tibetan Mahayānī Buddhist traditions in his worship. The combining of Tāntric, Hindu, Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhist religious practices, including Sāi bābā at one temple can be considered not only as unique, but also a necessity in Sikkim. The inclusion of an image of Sāi bābā at the temple seems important to attract the local population, because the publicity received by Sāi bābā in Sikkim is enormous. In this regard, Suryavir's imaginative inventions are necessary to attract devotees from all communities, because Sikkim is not just a place of the Newars, but also the place of many other Nepalese communities as well as those of the original inhabitants: the Bhutias and the Lepchas. However, despite the inventive nature of the temple, Suryavir uses the temple as a promotion centre for the Newar language, culture and traditional dances.

The question of authenticity is there not only about the priest, but also about the temple, because on the one hand Suryavir was not born into the right caste to claim himself a priest, and on the other hand, he was born in Darjeeling. It was not easy for him to gain support from local populations. Therefore, it was necessary for him to create such an ambiance at the temple, which would assert its legitimacy among the local people. In this regard, the daily prayers, annual worship, occasional worship and fire sacrifices performed at the temple can be considered very significant. These can be considered 'reinvention' or 'innovation' of rituals in the diaspora, because none existed, including the temple itself before 1996. In this regard, the structure of the temple with a pagoda styled roof on top of the building, enshrined Svayambhū Caitya and temple altar with the images of Buddhist deities together with Hindu ones, as well as the Virgin Mary and the crescent moon of the Islamic religion can all be considered essentially innovations.

In traditional methods of performing fire sacrifices, mixing up of Vedic, Tantric and Buddhist components in one fire sacrifice would be impossible, but in Sikkim it became reasonable, because Suryavir invented his own method to fulfil local needs. If he were to perform such rituals among orthodox Hindu Brahmins or Tāntric or Buddhist Vajrācārya priests, no doubt he would be ridiculed. However, such creative inventions in rituals are accepted, because the Nepalese migrant populations in Sikkim lack not only appropriate priests, but also traditions of such rituals practices. In fact, it was only in recent years that the Nepalese in Sikkim began to reassert their ethnic identities, which also obliged them to invent rituals of their own. In this context, Suryavir's creative imaginations worked perfectly. Performing these rituals, Suryavir wants to demonstrate not only a separate Newar or Nepalese identity, but also to prove that Nepalese in Sikkim are flexible, tolerant, and ready to adopt elements from all other religions. Although the early migration of the Newars and other Nepalese communities to Sikkim began one and half century ago, they are still an alien community for most original inhabitants, the Lepchas and the Bhutias. In such a situation, to affirm their distinct ritual identity but without hurting others it was necessary for the Newars to be innovative and imaginative. In this respect the temple of Svayambhū Bhimākālī and Suryavir Tuladhar are playing a magnificent role.

NOTES

- ¹ Earlier version of this paper was presented at the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology on *The Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture* held in Gangtok, Sikkim, India (1-5 October 2008). I am grateful to Dr. Alex McKay for inviting me to this Conference and the scholars present at the session for their helpful comments on my paper. This paper is based on the research that the University of Cambridge, UK supported with a Frederick Williamson Memorial Fund. I received further support from the Centro Incontri Umani, Ascona, Switzerland, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Department of History, University of Leiden, the Netherlands. I am indebted to Prof. Dr. L.A.C.J. Lucassen of University of Leiden for his support and valuable comments to an earlier draft of this paper.
- ² See Shrestha (2005) for a brief history of the Newars in Sikkim and their activities.
- ³ Gellner (1994) has extensively discussed priests, healers and mediums in the context of possession in the Kathmandu Valley.
- ⁴ There is abundant literature on Sāi Bābā and his miraculous deeds, but many challenge him as deceptive. Many books on Sāi Bābā can be freely downloaded from the internet sites, such as <http://satya-sai.tripod.com/literature/resources.htm>.
- ⁵ Both Hārītī Ajimā and Kumārī are very popular cults among the Newars in Nepal. See Tuladhar (2007) for myths and history on the goddess Hārītī Ajimā. For more on the cult of Kumārī see Allen (1975), Hoek (2004:37-60) and Shakya and Berry (2005).
- ⁶ *Caryā* dance is prevalent among the Vajrācārya, the Newar Buddhist priests in Nepal. Scholars suggest that many Tibetan dances, such as *chams* are derived from *caryā* (Kohn 2001:55-6).
- ⁷ McKay in his recent work (2007:84-113) presents an interesting history of how western biomedical facilities developed in Sikkim. He, however, noted medical services largely remained free in Sikkim (ibid., 110).
- ⁸ Among the Hindus, a service of worship in five steps (*pañcopacāra-pūjā*) and one in sixteen steps (*ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā*) are most common (Tachikawa 1983:104-186), but Suryavir's method is complex because he has blended elements from different religions including his own imaginations.
- ⁹ Owens (1993) discusses animal sacrifices in conjunction with the procession of the Buddhist deity, Rāto Machendranāth.
- ¹⁰ See Heesterman (1983:76). For more on Vedic fire tradition in Nepal, see van den Hoek (1992).
- ¹¹ Especially, during the festivals and processions of important deities, fire sacrifices are very common (van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992).
- ¹² Many scholars have written on the celebration of the Dasain festival in Nepal (i.e. Pradhan 1986: 268-315; Levi 1992: 523-563; Nepali 1965: 404-411; Bennett 1983: 136-141 & 261-272 and Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996).
- ¹³ Among the Newars the festival is known as Svanti. See Shrestha (2006) for more on this festival.

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Plate 1. Sri Guru Suryavir is worshipping the Svayambhū Caitya (2008)

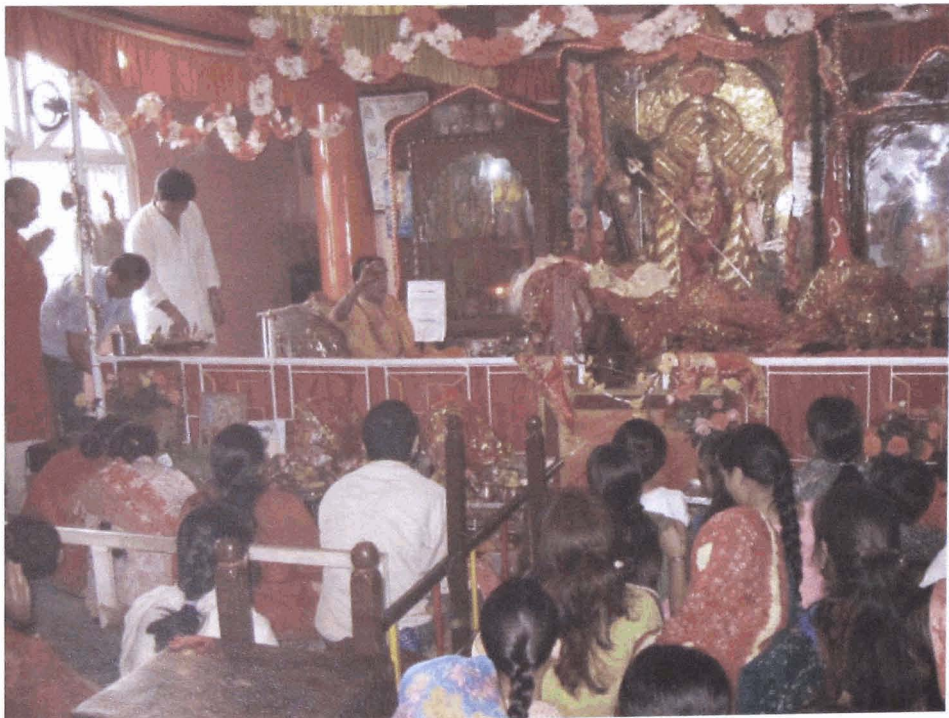


Plate 2. Sri Guru Suryavir and devotees are performing a morning prayer at the temple (2008)



Plate 3. Sri Guru Suryavir presiding over an annual fire sacrifice at the Yajña Bhūmi (2004)



Plate 4. Mā Gauri Giri, possessed by nāga, the divine serpent during a healing session at the Svayambhū Bhimākālī temple (2004)

BUDDHISM AND DEEP ECOLOGY

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I revere those rocky and regal mountains,
The mighty Himalayas.
Jātaka, V.93

Do you wish to go a wandering in the Himalayas?
Jātaka, V.415

Keeping in mind the theme of the conference 'Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture', I propose to preface my presentation by drawing attention to the mention of the Himalaya or Himavat in Buddhist Scriptures. The Himalayas form a giant arch, 2500 kilometres long, between 2-300 kilometres wide—a mountain range of unspeakable beauty and grandeur. The *Jātaka* describes the Himalayas as "a vast region five hundred *yojanas* (one *yojana* is roughly a little over eight miles) high and three hundred in breadth."¹ In the *Sūta-nipāta*, the Buddha calls the Himalayas *Pabbatarājā*, king of mountains. Although more often associated with Hinduism as the abode of Lord Siva and Parvati, the Himalayas are often mentioned in Buddhist literature and were familiar to the Buddha himself. It is not a matter of speculation that he could have seen that snow-capped mountain of Dhavalagiri from the Royal Palace at Kapilavastu before he renounced the world. Perhaps he carried the memory of the mountain with him, and had this particular mountain in mind when he compared the virtuous person to the dazzling, sun-lit snow peaks.² There are numerous references in the *Jātaka*³ when the Buddha with other ascetics went to the Himalayas and lived on wild fruits and grains, and often made friendship with wild animals.

From the records of the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsiang, who came to India in the seventh century A.D., and visited the foothills of the Himalayas comprising today's Kulu and adjoining areas, we come to know that there was a sizeable Buddhist population in that region. There was a time when the whole of the Himalayan region became Buddhist. Even today, Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti, Zaskar, Kinnaur, Mustang, Arunachal, Sikkim and Bhutan remain predominantly Buddhist.

With these prefatory observations I now proceed to the main concern of my paper. It has three sections. In the first, an exposition of the concept of Deep Ecology is attempted. In the second, there is an exposition of Buddhist teachings in the light of Deep Ecology. In the concluding section the role of Sikkimese Buddhist monks and monasteries in the situation of an apparent ecological crisis in Sikkim now is dealt with.

SECTION ONE

The phrase Deep Ecology was coined by the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, and it was formulated in an article titled 'The Shallow and the Deep. Long Range Ecology Movement: A Summary'.⁴ The two terms, 'shallow' and 'deep' need explanation. But before that let us

explain the term 'ecology'. This term was first introduced by the German biologist Ernst Haeckle in 1866, and since then it has been used in diverse contexts. Although Haeckle is generally credited with introducing the term and the evolution of its meaning, it was Hans Reiter (1885) who appears to have been the first to give the etymological meaning of it from the Greek words *oikos* (house) and *logos* (study of). There is, however, consensus that Haeckle gave definition and substance to the term.⁵ Besides its use in biological sciences, the term 'ecology' is also used as a science to study the association between man/society and nature by complex relations of interdependence. Hence, such a study is called social ecology of man, global ecology, etc. This man-nature nexus carries the warning that a rupture in this interconnectedness will have serious consequences not only for nature but also for man. This has been put, long back, in the picturesque words of the English poet John Donne, "...if a clod is washed away by the sea, Europe is less..."⁶

Deep Ecology is the most important holistic theory in the environment movement. 'Deep' is contrasted with 'Shallow' in Naess's vocabulary. Shallow Ecology is the traditional anthropocentric or man-centred approach to nature—man being the sole object of moral considerations. It views humans as superior to nature by virtue of their rationality and being the source of values; any valuation whatever is a human valuation and therefore, must be a valuation for humans. This legitimizes man's right to control, utilize, mutilate and exploit nature even to the point of its extinction. Even when man seeks to preserve and sustain nature it is, in the long run, with an eye to his own interest or for the interest of the future generations. Nature is to be protected for human survival.

The situation is aggravated with the advent of modern science and advanced technology. Both science and technology are the products of human rationality. Advanced technology increasingly mediates the metabolism between man and nature by man-made (technology-assisted) devices and systems, and man finds himself in greater isolation from nature. Hence, the important thing is to look for an idea which would help us feel at home in the world. Etymologically as well, 'ecology' suggests the idea of homeliness. Deep Ecology, naturally, in contrast to the Shallow, rejects the anthropocentric explanation of man's relation to nature. It holds that man is interrelated not only with other humans but with all sentient creatures, inorganic nature, eco-systems, species, etc., and hence, these too should be the objects of moral consideration. The worth of non-human entities is independent of their usefulness for human purposes.

Now, what makes Naess' concerns with the environment Deep? It is not that he rejects our teleological or utilitarian approach to nature and adopts a deontological or obligation-oriented attitude. The basic norm in his thoughts on ecology is the spiritual value of self-realization. 'Spiritual' in this context has nothing to do with God, religion or after life. It means realization toward a comprehensive self, an expansion of one's self (spelt with an upper case S) and not the cultivation of one's ego-sense, built upon the passions of pride, jealousy, hatred and greed. This Self-realization is made possible through a broader and deeper identification with the other. The self-other dialectic has become a central preoccupation of contemporary philosophy and literature. In the context of Deep Ecology, the 'other' might be other human beings, nature, in the form of wilderness, a waterfall, a mountain range or a cultural product such as a monument. Whatever be the other, it is through identification with it that Self-realization is attained. Naess says, "The Self is as comprehensive as the totality of our identification."⁷ It is like seeing the self in everything. However, the spiritual dimension of his thoughts does not make Naess oblivious of the pragmatic considerations of the earth's limited resources and carrying capacities. Indeed, this

forms his hypothesis under which conditions the interdependence between man and nature becomes the norm. Self-realization is self-transcendence, transcendence of the narrow self, and is relational. As such, it is opposite of the state of alienation. The networking in Deep Ecology is a Gaian world-view where care flows naturally from the widened and deepened Self toward nature.

'Nature' ordinarily understood is inert materiality existing in space and continuing through time. It is the subject matter, roughly speaking, of natural sciences. It is the other, an externality; man's relationship to it is the 'I-it' relationship. Deep Ecology conceives the relationship as between 'I-thou', to borrow Martin Buber's expression. Addressing nature is like addressing another self. Naess, however, goes further than that and holds that a true ecological consciousness is brought forth through the identification, not only with items in nature but also with one's friends, neighbours, local committees, tribes, compatriots, communities, races and humanity at large. In other words, it is identification with the cosmos. The identification is not personality-based but trans-personal. The strategy of Self-realization as expansion of the narrow self into the broader Self is what ethical life is about. At the back of the spiritual and mystic connotations of Self-realization, it seems to me, there lurks the pragmatic consideration that man has to bear the burden of so-called development and the consequent ecological disasters, the ecological crisis spawned by forces of modernization.

It is plain that the sort of identification Naess speaks of cannot be just a theoretical preoccupation. It involves active participation in the Deep Ecological movement, to become an active member of it. One mode of participation is not to be mute spectators but asking deep questions about today's industrialization, consumerist life styles and growth economics with the objective to bring about a paradigm shift in our existing attitude to nature.

About ten years after his article Naess drew up the eight principles of Deep Ecology along with George Sessions in Death Valley, California.⁸ In his *Economy, Community and Life Style* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), Naess ushers in the concept of *friluftsliv*, a Norwegian term, meaning 'touching the earth lightly', 'free life', or 'a playful exuberant living in nature'. He formulated five guidelines for ethically and ecologically responsive *friluftsliv*. We may summarize them as follows:

1. Respect for all life.
2. Encouraging the ability to deep, rich and varied interactions in and with nature.
3. Imposing minimal strain upon the natural and cultivating maximal self-reliance.
4. Developing natural lifestyle and elimination of technique and apparatus from outside as far as possible.
5. Allowing time for the sensitivity to nature to develop.

The message of Naess' ideas about man-nature relationship is not constitutive of human nature, that is, inbuilt or inherent in human nature or intrinsic to it. The impartial concern for nature through the transcendence of one's ego identity is a regulative ideal, and as such is corrective of human behavior. Wide identification with non-human forms of life can lead to a concern for their welfare equal to our concern for our own. In this spiritual communion with nature Naess shows a path away from anthropocentrism.

SECTION II

While Buddhism is an ancient and complex belief system, the consciousness of the threat of local and global environmental crisis is relatively new. The task before us, therefore, is how this new consciousness and an ancient wisdom are to be integrated. The Buddha's teachings, it appears, were not explicitly motivated by ecological concerns. He did not formulate an environmental ethics *per se*. He was speaking against the ritual of animal sacrifice and priestcraft. He was speaking of an alternative way of life. Yet there is much within traditional ethical Buddhism that does indeed speak a good deal of the ethical aspects of the environment crisis faced by us today. This has been well-documented by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist environmental ethicists to day. And this is important because the Buddha's *Dhamma* inspires a respect for all things. Things here may be taken to encompass not just sentient beings but every aspect of our natural surrounding in which they participate. Basically, the Buddha's teaching is *pratityasamutpādavāda*, the universal law of causality.

When this is present, that comes to be. From the arising
of this, that arises When this is absent, that does not come
to be. On the cessation of this, that ceases.⁹

Reality or existence is a causally conditioned phenomenon. "He who perceives the causality, perceives the *Dhamma*."¹⁰ This doctrine integrates all aspects of life in a mutual co-dependence on a cause and effect basis.

Translated in ecological terms this means "everything is related to everything else", "you cannot do something to one thing without affecting other things". Nothing is unconditioned—such is the Master's message. And this is brought home by image after image in the great dialogues. If we consult the literature preserving the Buddha's own words about nature, we find that one of his basic teachings was tele-volitional, that is, to extend good will to all sentient beings. It is the direct, dynamic, efficacious exertion of will force at a distance. This is what the Buddhists call the radiation of goodwill or loving kindness, *mettā*.

The Buddha's is a life of harmony with nature. Events in his life reveal that Buddha was born, and he developed in company and protection of a great life form, the forest. It may be recalled that Gautama was born in a forest while his mother stood supporting the branch of a tree. As a youth he meditated under trees, studied under the *banyans* and found enlightenment beneath the *Bodhi* tree. A denizen of the woods for the next forty-five years he entered into *nirvāṇa* lying between two *sal* trees. Elephant and lotus are two timeless symbols of Buddhist art. The murals of Ajanta depict birds, deer, elephant and greenery in epic abundance. In India and Tibet, Buddhist monastery architecture bears the symbol, the *dharmacakra* flanked by two deer, *mṛga*. This is plainly a sign protective of the deer and other animals because *mṛga* stands for any animal whatsoever.

One of the most illustrative influences of Buddhist thoughts on nature conservation is its doctrine of rebirth. This doctrine holds that a human being after dying can be born as an animal, or an animal after dying can be reborn as a human being. This integrates a sense of a shared common condition of all sentient life forms based on moral aspects of their previous lives. In the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, the Buddha observes that in the long course of rebirth there is not one among living beings with form who has not been mother, father, brother, sister,

son or daughter, or some other relative. Being connected with the process of taking birth, one is kin to all wild and domestic animals, birds, and beings born from the womb.

A natural consequence of this is that if you kill an elephant or a deer, you could, in essence, be killing a human relative. The 'green' tendencies of Buddhism responds to the Deep ecological interest in trying to show how the human species arose out of other life forms and hence, contain an argument for our responsibility to ensuring the continuity of all life forms and their habitats, not just human life. To be reborn in another life form seems a powerful argument against anthropocentrism. The *Culla kamma vibhanga sūta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* maintains that a person who kills living creatures and has no compassion for them would, on account of that behaviour, be reborn in an evil state after birth.¹¹ Reverence for special trees is another distinctive feature of Buddhism. In reverence for special trees, Buddhist literature lists twenty-one species of trees under which twenty-five Buddhas attained enlightenment. Veneration and protection of trees is an extension of this belief.

This may sound animistic. And sociologists have accumulated a whole arsenal of objections to animism as an explanatory theory of the world. The sins of animism are not unredeemable. The presupposition of animism that the objects of nature have a will as we have can go a longer way toward a new value orientation. The moral and emotional perception of nature may be an integral part of any morally advanced individual. This forms the core of Buddhist ethics. Interrelatedness of existence is not merely an article of faith or an intellectual inference in Buddhism. Had it been so it would not have impacted the ecological crisis. The Buddha also stresses the development of an increased ethical sensibility and mindful awareness for actually cultivating compassion. He said, "Just as with her own life a mother shields from hurt her only child, let all-embracing thoughts for all that lives be thine."¹² A Buddhist monk's first vow is "I abstain from destroying life", *panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*.¹³

One may here pause to look for a parallel between Buddha's teaching and the theory of Self realization in Deep Ecology. Buddha did not believe in any permanent self. However, while denying the permanent self the Buddha did not deny its continuity by way of causality. The self is a bundle (*kāya*), which for the sake of convenience is given a designated name as Sariputta or Moggallana. The non-substantivity is a synonym for causality. For those, who either in the East or in the West are conditioned to think in terms of immortal soul or are engrossed with its eternity, it is a difficult theory to understand. Since there are no substantive souls, *bhāvanās* transmigrate, being propelled by the will to live. This way, Buddhism can contribute to the humbling of the human arrogance, necessary for ecological ethics. The human form is not sacrosanct. The human forms, plants and animals—all these remain afloat in the process of transmigration. Hence, there is compassion—love for trees, for water, for animals, besides human beings.

Any one who has read, even a very little, of early Buddhist scripture, is aware that from its very beginning Buddhism was concerned with the moral discipline of life. Ethical language abounds in the discourse of the Buddha. Over and over again we see him portraying the good life in terms which are relevant to the Deep Ecological perspective; the avoidance of violence, reduction of the scale of one's desires, restraint of the sense-life, eradication of such evil dispositions as greed and hatred, above all, the positive virtue of cultivation of a serene and benevolent mind capable of compassionating all beings without distinction.¹⁴ Not only so, he also presents in the same passages a systematic methodology of ethical discipline and culture by which one may achieve such virtues. Ethics is not merely a body of precepts

or exhortations but a steady pursuit of a rationally conceived goodness. The ethics of Buddhism may be described in general as an ethics of self development—development of the self in terms of its inherent capacities, a development of the self by the self, so to say. It has significant implication when we ask: What would a Buddhist environmental ethics be like? If the relational dimension secures an ecologically sound vision of what should be our attitude to nature, the question is not one of which specific actions are necessary to preserve environment, but more deeply, what are the virtues we must cultivate to be able to actually act in that way. This is the foundation of what will become a new, environmentally benign conception of the self. A Buddhist environmental ethics is hence a ‘virtue ethics’.

SECTION III

Sikkim has a long tradition of Buddhism. It is practiced by about 25% of the population besides Hinduism and the indigenous religions practiced by the Lepchas and Bhutias. Of the several Buddhist sects, Nyingmapa, the one initiated by Guru Padmasambhava—Sikkim is said to be the stronghold of this sect—is the most important. Guru Padmasambhava, who is known as the saviour of Buddhism in Tibet, is said to have come to Sikkim, blessed the land and sanctified it. There are near about 200 monasteries in Sikkim. These have deeply influenced the cultural heritage and lifestyle of the people of Sikkim.

The Sikkim Himalaya is endowed with biological resources spread over a variety of ecosystem types, both natural (grazing land, hills, forests or rivers) or man-made (agriculture, plantations, orchards) over a range of altitudes; there is a rich wildlife too. Certain regions of Sikkim, such as north Sikkim, are rich in medicinal plants nurtured by the Buddhist monasteries. This unique landscape is highly complex because the ecosystems are interconnected in which human beings are integrated. In Sikkim, there are certain regions where landscape is venerated as sacred. Here ecological considerations cannot be separated from historical, social, cultural and religious dimensions. Ancestral and ritual performances are connected to land, forests, mountains, lakes and nature in general. The river Teesta is not merely the source of water, but the very lifeline of Sikkim.¹⁵ “Sikkimese folklores are aflash with myths and stories about how men settled along it. Many of the myths encode environmental wisdom that has sustained the Sikkimese in this shifting precarious landscape for centuries.”¹⁶

The immediate threats to the region are posed by accelerated growth of human population, and through aggressive tourism. The sudden growth of tourism, Sikkim for years having had the tourism trophy for the best performance, has made experts think about the various environmental impacts it can bring to the state, besides economic and cultural complexities. One cannot just write off the sudden decline of natural rain forests, loss of endangered species, land degradation and global warming. According to the data collected by the Himalayan Nature and Adventure Foundation, Siliguri, Ouglithong and Rathong glaciers are melting rapidly with a reduction in size. The greatest threat to the land and its people is feared from commissioning a series of hydro-electric projects on the Teesta stretching from north Sikkim to North Bengal. The State Government, Sikkim, demanded the status of ‘Environmental and Ecologically Fragile Protected State’ from the Central Government. But this seems to many to be in direct opposition to the green signal given by the Sikkim Government to the construction of several hydro-electric projects on the Teesta. It is feared by all concerned that this will seriously affect the unique landscape and fragile ecology of the region and cause large scale displacement of the people. Sikkim is world’s youngest

mountain range. And many of the hydro power projects on river Teesta are located in earthquake prone zones increasing the possibility of landslides. At the same time the project is intended to bring development and prosperity to Sikkim, and to pull it “out of its economic dependence on grants and loans”.

Interestingly, resistance to the hydro-electric projects has come from the Lepchas, a docile, tribal community of north Sikkim. An account of the protest movement and its different aspects, ebbs and tides, has been ably made by Pema Wangchuk.¹⁷ There has developed a conflict situation in north Sikkim where the Lepchas of Dzongu, the ancient Lepcha reserve, have started agitation, demanding the closure of the Panan hydro-electric project and a review of many of the twenty-four hydro-electric projects. According to Arora,

For the Lepchas the implementation of the Teesta hydel projects and the loss of the Dzongu (the ancient Lepcha reserve) may result in ethnocide, the disappearance of their cultural heritage that is related to their ancestral connections and performance of rituals, connected to the land, forests, mountains, lakes and nature, in general.¹⁸

Indeed, as has been emphasized by researchers in the area several unique features of the land, its ecological and geographical fragility, its indigenous communities, their cultural relation with the river system and landscape pose a challenge to the ambitious projects. In any case, there will be large scale displacement of human population, they being uprooted from their ancestral land. Those who are ensconced in the warmth and security of their home and hearth would not understand the enormous suffering of humanity as a result of war, partition or displacement for developmental activities. When people are disconnected from their past, culture, customs, and habits rehabilitation cannot ensure that they would not be culturally/socially isolated and economically vulnerable. To live in ones natural habitat is based on the concept of the basic freedom. This is true both for society and nature. Rehabilitation packages are paternalistic and involve active intervention so that ecological crises are avoided in the name of being solved. To be sane and responsible human beings we are to act in ways so that the unintended consequences of our intentional acts do not cause human sufferings.

There are different aspects of the Lepcha movement and success and failure of its negotiations with the State Government. What we are interested in is the role of Buddhist monks of Sikkim in the situation of an impending ecological destruction of the region. Inspired by the teachings of Lord Buddha, many monks have protested against the depletion of natural resources in many parts of the globe, particularly in East and South-East Asia. There are Buddhist monks such as Dr. A.T. Ariaratna of Sri Lanka, D.T. Suzuki and Saigyō in Japan, Thai monks like Ajahan Pongsak, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others who have been working to overcome the worsening situations of human interference with nature. According to one monk in Thailand, “When we protect nature, we protect the Buddha’s truth and teachings.”

In Sikkim, too, the Rathong Chhu hydro-electric project in west Sikkim was scraped due to the agitation of Buddhist lamas and Bhutia activists. In the present context of the Teesta projects in north Sikkim, “...the Buddhist Sangha of north Sikkim...decided to support the activist...”.¹⁹ “The lamas warn against large-scale perturbations as this may lead to irreparable loss of hidden treasures and sacred texts concealed by the Padmasambhava...in the eighth century A.D.”²⁰ This has led to *satyāgrahas* (peaceful protests) on Gandhian lines. The agitation started in 2006 and continued through 2007 and was widely publicized in the

media. Agitators also pointed out that some sacred sites would be desecrated by the massive disturbances to the landscape and the large-scale construction activities. The lamas performed sacred rituals at the Bhutia-Lepcha house in Gangtok and this “has a strong potential to galvanize Buddhist sentiment in Sikkim and other parts of India and neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan.”²¹ There is a dimension of the ‘sacred’ brought in too. The Dzongu reserve is projected as a holy land containing sacred sites such as the cave where Guru Padmasambhava meditated, and the Tholung monastery which is revered by all the Buddhists of Sikkim and others. In June 2007, the Buddhist monasteries of north Sikkim decided to establish a separate unit known as the Sangha of Dzongu and a public meeting took place on June 13 at the Bhutia-Lepcha house. At this meeting they resolved to unanimously support the activists’ plan to launch an indefinite hunger strike. The support of the Buddhist monks is not insignificant because religion contributes to the protection of nature, trees, birds and beasts in the name of the sacred. The sacred is antidote to secular materialism. What is sacred is sanctity and inviolable. It may also be noted that the agitators adopted the Gandhian model of *satyāgraha*.

This connects it to Arne Naess’ programme for Deep Ecology. Gandhi had a profound influence on the intellectual development of Arne Naess, although his works on Gandhi and Gandhi’s influence on him has not received due recognition.²²

Much of the interrelationships which are emphasized by the protestors are essential teachings of the Buddha as they relate to Deep Ecology, especially oneness, spiritual orientation, eco-centric, rather than ego-centric mentality, reducing wants and to be ecologically engaged with the natural world and the human kind within it. Combined and integrated, these two areas—Buddhism and Deep Ecology—present a unique, special bridge of understanding, cross-fertilization and consciousness of ideas, values and approaches, which encompass compassion, loving-kindness, friendship and care for all living things. I do believe that the Buddha had great love for inanimate nature too, the Himalaya or the Lake Manasa. It now remains to be seen how the key players of the economic benefit for Sikkim are impacted by the Green Buddhist ideas.

NOTES

- ¹ *Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Birth*, V.415 Eng. trans. by H.T. Francis & R.A. Neil. London: Luzac & Co., 1957.
- ² *Dhammapada* (304), Eng. trans. by S. Radhakrishnan, OUP, 1950, p.155.
- ³ *Jataka, op.cit.*, I. 140, III. 362, 371, 406, V. 516.
- ⁴ *Inquiry* 16, 1973, pp.95-100.
- ⁵ S.N. Egerton, Bibliographic Guide to the History of General Ecology and Population Ecology, *History of Science* 15, 1977, pp.189-215.
- ⁶ *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII, 1624. Source: Literature, Arts and Medicine database, The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia.
- ⁷ Naess quoted in Warwick Fox, ‘Approaching Deep Ecology, A Response to Richard Sylvan’s “Critique of Deep Ecology”’, Occasional Paper 20, *University of Tasmania Environment Studies*, 1986, p.54.
- ⁸ Naess, Arne & George Sessions, ‘Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement’, in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Bill Devall & George Sessions (eds), Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985.
- ⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya*, I., 262off.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.190-91.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, III. p.202.
- ¹² *Sūttanipāta*, mettāsūta, 1.7.

- ¹³ Hammalawa, Saddhaatissa, *Buddhist Ethics: The Path to Nirvana*, London: Wisdom, 1987, p. 73.
- ¹⁴ There is an interesting similarity between Naess' concept of *friluftsliv* and the Buddhist precept that "Even as a bee gathers honey without injuring the flower or its colour or scent, so let a sage dwell in his village." *Dhammapada* IV. 49, Eng. trans. S. Radhakrishnan, OUP, 1950, p.75.
- ¹⁵ In many places in the world, great civilizations grew up on river banks. The Ganga, for example, is not only regarded as *sukhadā*, happiness-producing, but *moksadā*, leading to salvation.
- ¹⁶ Vibha Arora, 'Unheard Voices of Protest in Sikkim', *EPW*, August 25, 2007, p.3453. Also Vibha Arora, 'Gandhigiri in Sikkim', *EPW*, September 20, 2008, pp.27-8. The report of the agitation was also posted in the website of World Prout Assembly on September 29, 2007, and reported in media.
- ¹⁷ Pema Wangchuk, 'Lepchas and Their Hydrel Protest', *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim, Vol. 43, No.1 & 2, 2007, pp.33-57.
- ¹⁸ Vibha Arora, op. cit., p.3453.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Naess, Arne, *Gandhi and the Nuclear Age*, Totowa: NJ: Bedminster, 1965. Also, Arne Naess, *Gandhi and Group Conflict: An Exploration of Satyagraha*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974.

SIKKIMESE BHUTIA MARRIAGE AND CUSTOMS

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The Bhutia community of Sikkim has unique marriage customs, which differ from the other Bhutias of the Himalayas. There are five basic stages necessary for marriage. But what make the marriage ceremony unique are the small variations which are seen in the marriage process in different parts of Sikkim and the practice of bride price.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is regarded as one of the oldest and most basic institutions for the organization and functioning of social life. Marriage is a socially recognized union between a man and a woman that accords legitimate birth status right to their children (Spardley, et al. 1975). In another way, Westermarck (1922: 21) defined marriage

as a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born to it.

Westermarck claims that marriage is an economic institution and not only a means to regulate sexual behaviour. The institution of marriage establishes the family—the smallest social unit of society. However, most functions of marriage and family are interlinked. Majumdar and Madan (1970: 67) stated that:

Marriage and family being two aspects of the same social reality, viz. the bio-psychical-cum-social drives (needs) of a man, are coeval with each other and with culture, because without the family, there could be no preservation of the species and culture, and without marriage there could be no family.

According to the Indological perspective, the union between a man and a woman is not just for sexual gratification but it is a sacred affair. Although marriage is a universal institution, the manner and its mode of solemnization vary from society to society. The institution of marriage has essentially existed in four forms, namely monogamy, polygamy, polyandry and group marriage. Goode (1963) with reference to different societies argues that monogamy as a form of marriage emerged because of industrialization and urbanization which resulted in freedom, liberty and modernization. The transformation of family from polygamy to nuclear is the result of society's social evolution.

ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF SIKKIMESE BHUTIAS

The name Bhutia, sometimes spelt and pronounced as Bhotia, is an exclusive ethnic community different from both Hindus and Tibetans. It is a generic term used to designate several socially unrelated groups inhabiting the Indo-Tibetan borderland. However diverse

they may be, they profess Buddhism in one form or another and speak a language broadly intelligible to each other.

It has evidently been accepted that people from “Kham” province of eastern Tibet first started to come down and settle in Sikkim from about 10-11 centuries, due to various socio-political, economic and religious reasons. Shortly, Sikkim became the colony of the Tibetan Settlers. By the middle of the 17th century, three venerable Lamas of Tibet came to Sikkim and established the Namgyal Dynasty in 1642 (Bhattacharya 1994: 25).

The Bhutias of Sikkim as history says are of Tibetan origin, having similar cultural patterns and scripts as the Tibetans. In Tibetan language, Tibet is called Bod and the people are called *bod pa*. Whether the Tibetan term Bod can be related to the term Bhotia/Bhutia is a complex issue, though it is not improbable.

The ethnic composition of Sikkim’s...inhabitants is extremely varied.... The Anthropological Survey of India has documented twenty five different communities that can be grouped in three main categories: (1) Bhutias (Lhopos) and Lepchas, the original inhabitants of Sikkim who now represent less than 20% of Sikkim’s total population; (2) people of Nepalese origin, namely Limbus and Rai’s, who started migrating to Sikkim in large numbers from the 1870s and who now represents more than 75% of the population; and (3) people from the plains of India mainly Marwaris, Biharis and Bengalis who are a small although rapidly growing minority of merchants and service castes.

Tibetan settlers came to Sikkim from the neighbouring valleys of Chumbi and Ha and regions beyond these southern valleys such as Kham Minyak from the thirteenth century onwards and established the kingdom in 1642. Their descendents call themselves Lhopo (Lhopa-‘People from the south’) but are generally known as Bhutia, Sikkimese or even Denjongpa, the people of Denjong or Demojong (‘Brasmo ljongs—the fruitful valley’, often translated as the ‘valley of rice’) (Balicki 2008: 6).

According to the Indian Constitution, the Bhutias who came to Sikkim from Tibet are referred to as Bhutia as they developed social and cultural patterns different from the Tibetans. The Sikkimese Bhutias are one of the many tribes belonging to the corpus Bhutia. They call themselves Sikkimese or Denjongpa and speak Sikkimese which is a dialect of Tibetan.

FORMS OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE SIKKIMESE BHUTIA

Among the Bhutias of Sikkim, polyandrous, polygamous and monogamous forms of marriage were prevalent. Earlier, Bhutias with more sons and limited resources adopted fraternal polyandry. Although fraternal polyandry functioned to conserve land and labour in the family, it also produced a pool of unmarried females (Bhasin 1989:183). Fraternal polyandry was the norm in Sikkim at the end of the nineteenth century as reported by Risley (1894: 55); “Fraternal polyandry was a common practice in Sikkim until it was abolished by Crown Prince Sidkeong Tulku in 1912 in an effort to raise the Lhopo’s [Bhutias] and the Lepcha’s birth rate in relation to that of the Nepalese immigrants” (Balicki 2008: 247). Traditionally, the fraternal polyandrous form of marriage was accepted and in case of the death of her husband, a woman could marry her brother-in-law and regard him as her husband, and also have children from her second husband. The Bhutias known as

Lachungpas and Lachenpas of North Sikkim were polyandrous and some even still practice it today.

Various methods have been used in Tibet to keep the household undivided...among which fraternal polyandry helped maintain the unity of the household by keeping the land from being divided among brothers from one generation to the next (Goldstein 1971, Levine 1988)... Nakane's data collected in 1955 suggests that marriage between Bhutias and Lepchas at the village level were rare while intermarriage among the aristocracy had taken place to a surprising degree (Nakane 1966: 249; Balikci 2008: 247-252).

Marriage with a Sherpa or other Buddhist highlander of Nepalese origin has now become acceptable when both parties share a Buddhist background but a Bhutia mother never wants her daughter to marry a non-Buddhist Nepalese because she thinks that then her daughter's siblings and especially her mixed grandchildren would lose their chances of a good marriage within the Bhutia community (ibid., 252).

By and large, the Sikkimese Bhutias still observe traditional marriage practices including clan exogamy. However due to various social-cultural changes which are taking place, there is a developing preference for non-traditional or popularly called 'love marriages'. However, these days even where traditional weddings are taking place, the boy quietly sends a message to the girl through his friend to know her opinion (Balikci 2008: 260).

While marriage with a pure Bhutia remains the most desirable choice, alliances with Tibetans and especially Buddhist Lepchas have now become totally acceptable.... Marriage between Lhopos [Bhutias] and Lepchas has always been acceptable in Sikkim and many kaji families are descendents of such alliances, while the Namgyal family has often married ladies of the Tibetan aristocracy (Balikci 2008: 252).

In every society there are certain rituals and customs which are associated with marriage. There are some values attached to these rituals and customs which regulate society. The form of marriage which is practiced among the Bhutias of Sikkim is the bride price form of marriage, in which the parents or guardians of the bride receive a sum of money as compensation from the parents or guardians of the groom, for the transfer of the labour and services of the bride from the parents' household to her in-law's household. Brown (1952: 25) has pointed out three important aspects of the payment of bride price in tribal societies. They are (a) a compensation paid to the bride's kin group, for the breach caused in its solidarity as a consequence of marriage, (b) a transaction to formalize the contractual aspect of marriage to impose some...bondage, (c) an expression of solidarity through a series of wealth exchange between the two kin groups brought together into affined bond. Some ethnographers (Tambiah 1973; Schlegel and Eloul 1988) use the term 'bride wealth' for bride price. However for Schlegel and Eloul (1988) bride wealth carries the same meaning as given for bride price marriage. Payments are linked with a number of issues: most importantly, status and the economic contribution of the brides to the groom's family (Lindenbaum 1981); nature of residence and the inheritance system (Spiro 1975; Yalman 1967); shortages of potential brides and bride grooms (Caldwell, et al. 1983); and tendencies towards egalitarianism or stratification in a given society (Goody 1973). In Sikkim, the bride price is given to value the girl and is linked with the status and economic position of the groom's family.

The girl selected for marriage should have a good character, be respectful of elders, gentle, polite, faithful, honest, sincere, compassionate and good natured. A woman with good character emanates a quasi-religious aura since, through her virtuous behaviour, she emulates that of the celestial female being called *khandro*, a term also applied to the consort of a Rinpoche. Being compared to a *khandro* is probably the greatest compliment a woman can receive (Balikci, 2008: 269 fn29).

There is a wide variation in rituals in terms of culture, linguistic group and communities. A number of studies conducted on India's tribal marriage practices suggest different forms of procuring a bride. Among the Bhutias of Sikkim the way of procuring a bride is through the payment of bride price. Although the monogamous form of marriage is now prevalent, a man can take a second wife if his first wife is barren or he is a widower (Draft Report 2002: 12). Marriage cannot take place among relatives and proper verification of clan and background is important before the finalization of a matrimonial alliance. Patrilineages are strictly exogamous, however a man can marry his cousin on his mother's side if there is a gap of three generations and in very exceptional cases a man can marry his maternal cross-cousin. As per custom, marriage between persons belonging to different ethnic communities and particularly when they profess different faith or religion is not encouraged however, if a boy marries a girl out of his community or religion, it will not lead to the dissolution of marriage because a girl's religion or faith does not affect the boy's religion or faith. The girl, however has to accept the boy's faith (Draft Report 2002: 13).

SIKKIMESE BHUTIA MARRIAGE: CUSTOM AND RITES

The Bhutia or Denjongpa community of Sikkim has a unique marriage custom that differs from the other Bhutias of the Himalayas. There are five basic stages necessary for marriage.¹

1) *Thi chang* (*thi* to ask, *chang* millet beer)

When the parents of a boy decide to get their son married, they look for a girl whom they wish to bring as their daughter-in-law. Once such a girl is identified, they arrange to send one of the boy's uncles, usually his maternal uncle with a bottle of wine and *khada* silk scarf to inquire if the maternal uncle of the girl is willing to have his niece married. If the family of the girl comes to an understanding to have their girl married, the horoscope of the girl is given to the maternal uncle of the boy, who then visits the astrologer. If the horoscope does not match and the results are not favourable then the proposal is dropped.

2) *Kha chang* (*kha* mouth, *chang* millet beer) or the formal proposal

If the horoscope has been found favourable, the boy's uncle now called *pami* (*pami* is the middleman or representative) visits the parents of the girl to seek their consent for their daughter's hand, with a gift of *chang*. The girl's parents accept the girl and give their approval.

3) *Nang chang thung she* (*nang* to ask, *chang thung shed* will drink beer) or *nang chang*

The engagement ceremony is held at the girl's house, usually a week after the formal proposal but sometimes it may be held as much as a year later depending upon the date taken out by the astrologer. On this occasion all the relatives gather at the girl's house to celebrate

the engagement. After having offered away the gifts to the parents and main relatives, the couple will be offered the *khada* scarves along with gifts of money. At this event the parents and relatives duly finalize the *rinzo* or bride price.² The announcement of *rinzo* comprising of gold/cash must be noted by the boy's party (Plate 1 and 2).

4) *Nyen sha sa she* (*nyen* wedding, *sha* meant, *sa she* will eat)

This refers to the actual marriage ceremony and takes place at the girl's house. It may again be held one year after the engagement on a date taken out by the astrologer. It is customary for the groom's family to bear the marriage expenses, and all the gifts of food such as pig and ox would have been sent earlier or on the same day.³ During this event a team of seven persons chiefly led by maternal uncle or *pami* go to the girl's house with bride price and other gifts in kind and cash to attend the marriage ceremony.

As per Sikkimese tradition, the groom's party has to cross through three thorn hurdles on the way when they approach near the girl's house (Plate 3 and 4). Each hurdle succeeds each other at a distance of 21 yards and each one is guarded by two women each carrying a stinging nettle to give a symbolic checking to the groom's party. The first hurdle is made to ask whether the bride price and other relevant articles as per the demand made in the earlier ceremonies have been brought or not. The second hurdle is made to check and ensure that all the items presented to the relatives of the bride are complete in all respects. The third hurdle is made to ask whether the groom's party have brought the *maglok* or fee to the village women folk who are called *am mangpo*. However, these days in urban areas the three thorn hurdles have been substituted by a single one due to the paucity of space. Mock beating of the middleman and the groom's party with stinging nettles is also carried out by the woman guarding the last hurdle. After this, the middleman is given some symbolic ragging by asking him to ride on a wooden horse known as *samshing tapu* (Plate 5).

The Wooden horse was a unique feature of the marriage ceremonies and today it is only seen in the wedding ceremonies performed in South and West Sikkim. The body of the horse is made of a log and the saddle is made from bamboo sheath, which causes itching to the skin. The horse's tail is made of red chillies and charcoal. This is to drive away the negative effects from the couple and their families. The middle man is exempted from this ritual only if he pays some cash as an exemption fee to the women. The groom's party has to make a request with cash, wine and *khada* to the village priest to perform the *khelen*.

The *khelen* is an oath ceremony performed by village priest to make bride and bride groom husband and wife under the observation of local guardian deities and their ancestral deities and also seeks blessings from them before they become a married couple (Plate 6). The couple are asked to sit side by side and a village priest performs the *khelen* ritual in which he seeks the blessings from the girl's ancestral deities (*pho lha mo lha*) and local deities to bless the couple with a long and happy joyful life. He will be assisted by an unmarried woman to offer wine and one male assistant to arrange the ceremonial articles like *chang* in a wooden jar with a net and serving spoon, a plate of cooked rice with a piece of boiled meat, some rice in a saucer, a cup of plain water, and an incense stick burning in a pot. A cup of *chang* is taken out from the ceremonial jar and given to the couple to drink thrice. This signifies that the couple is formally blessed by the deities and thereafter they are pronounced as husband and wife.

The most important event of the wedding is the recitation of *khelen* and the husband and wife gain social recognition only after the *khelen*. The Buddhist lama is also engaged to perform *yang ku* rites to retain the fortunes of the house, as it is believed that otherwise the

fortune of the house may follow the departure of the girl/bride. Upon completion of that ceremony, the girl ceases to belong to her parent's family and becomes the member of the boy's family (Draft Report 2002:11).

5) *Tashi* (auspicious) *chang thung/Tong len kiap she* (*tong* to send, *len* to receive, *kiap she* will do)

This is the last step in the marriage ceremony and is held in both the girl's and the boy's house. A structure called *thabra* (Plate 7) is often made near the gate of the courtyard of the bride groom's house. *Thabra* is a bamboo fence which is made upon three small trees and three bamboo cylinders filled with water are placed beside each shoot. Three fuel piles are kept at the front of the fence. This structure is believed to be a spiritual boundary between the boy's ancestral deities and the girl's guardian deities. The head of the bridal party has to perform a short ritual there by offering water and appeal to the girl's guardians deities to return back and seek a permission from the boy's ancestral deities to enter into the house with the bride. After this he ties a *khada* to each shoot.

At the entrance of the main door, a copper pot or *chabzang/temdey* (Plate 8) is kept which is filled with water. It is installed as an auspicious sign at both the houses, as per Sikkimese tradition. This pot is ornamented with butter paste and *khada*. Any party, who enters the house, puts a coin for the prosperity of the house. This copper pot *chabzang* is also placed at the girl's house for the same purpose.

The ceremony conducted at the bridegrooms' house is called *chang thung*. Festivities are arranged to celebrate the arrival of the bride. A Buddhist lama is engaged to perform a *tashi* ('Good Luck') ceremony to bless the couple's entrance in the house and to bring in prosperity. During the wedding ceremony a special wine called *duetse yarche* is prepared with country liquor. It is made tasty by adding sugar cubes, honey and molasses. This *duetse* (Plate 9) is served to the head lama who officiates at the marriage, heads of the groom's party and bridal party, the father of the bride groom, mother of the bride groom, and the bride groom and bride. The lama performs the *tashi cho* where he places a *tashi tormo* (Plate 10) on the heads of the couple and smears butter on their forehead. This ritual signifies that the husband and wife should be loyal to each other. Thereafter, the *bada* ritual follows in which *khadas* are offered to the couple starting with the head lama followed by the parents and the relatives (Draft Report 2002:47). The bride now wears the *pangden* as a symbol of having entered into wedlock. The *pangden* which is a sanctified form of apron has great significance in the marriage of Sikkimese Buddhists. It signifies the infallibility and indestructibility of the bond of marriage and is not even removed after the husband is dead (Draft Report 2002:65).

It is interesting to note that the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 was extended to Sikkim with effect from 1 May 1989, but that this law is not applicable to the Bhutia-Lepcha community as they have been declared a scheduled tribe. So the marriage and divorce of the Bhutia-Lepcha people of Sikkim are still regulated by pure customary laws. Truly speaking, there is no difference between divorce and desertion and when the couple do not pull on well, they can be separated by mutual consent in the presence of relatives and village elders (Draft Report 2002:14). Bhutia-Lepcha people, even from elite families, hardly ever go to court for either legal separation or divorce.

POSITION OF BHUTIA WOMEN IN MARRIAGE

On the marriage front, women have a choice in selection of their spouses. A noticeable change is seen in the attitude of society towards inter-community marriages, a shift is also seen from traditional form of marriage to love marriages. However, the traditional form of marriage ceremony still remains the first choice. Therefore, a Bhutia women commands a high position in the institution of marriage and her position is also accentuated by the fact that the bride price is paid at the time of marriage to honour the girl. The society is favourable to widow remarriage and divorcees can also remarry but no ceremony is performed. However if a widow remarries her right to her former husband's property ceases (Draft Report 2002:14).

NOTES

Plates 1, 6, 8, 9 and 10 by author; plates 2, 3, 4 and 7 by Anna Balikci; plate 5 reproduced from Dokhangba 2001.

- ¹ The wedding steps, their names and the gifts which are exchanged vary in different areas of Sikkim. These wedding customs have been observed in the Ralang and Barfung-Lingdam areas of South Sikkim. I would like to thank G.S. Dokhangba for his help and comments on my findings following my field research in the Barfung-Lingdam area.
- ² The amount of bride price differs in different areas of Sikkim. Depending upon the economic wealth of the family, demand for bride price will be higher going up to hundred grams of gold. This should not be confused with the gifts, sometimes miscalled 'dowry' (*bag log*), which are given to the couple at a later stage by the girl's relatives and are a way of reciprocating gifts which were earlier received (Balikci 2002: 259 fn 16).
- ³ The gifts given by the boy's family include "meat, *chang*, *chum* (uncooked rice) and *biasu* (rice or maize snacks)—called *jisten* (*bzhi mtshan*) and *sumtsen* (*gsum mtshan*)—which will be individually packed in an aesthetically pleasing manner in cloth bags and banana leaves tied with bamboo strips and brought over by porters.... Immediate relatives of the girl will receive...*jisten* which consists of a chicken, *chum* (uncooked rice), *chang* and *biasu*; secondary relatives will receive *jisten* with pork instead of chicken with *chang*, *chum* and *biasu*; and general guests will receive *sumtsen*, which consists of pork, *chang* and *chum* without *biasu*" (Balikci 2002: 261).

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Plate 1. Couple at the time of engagement (*nang chang*)

Plate 2. Gifts brought by the groom's family



Plate 3. Thorn hurdle

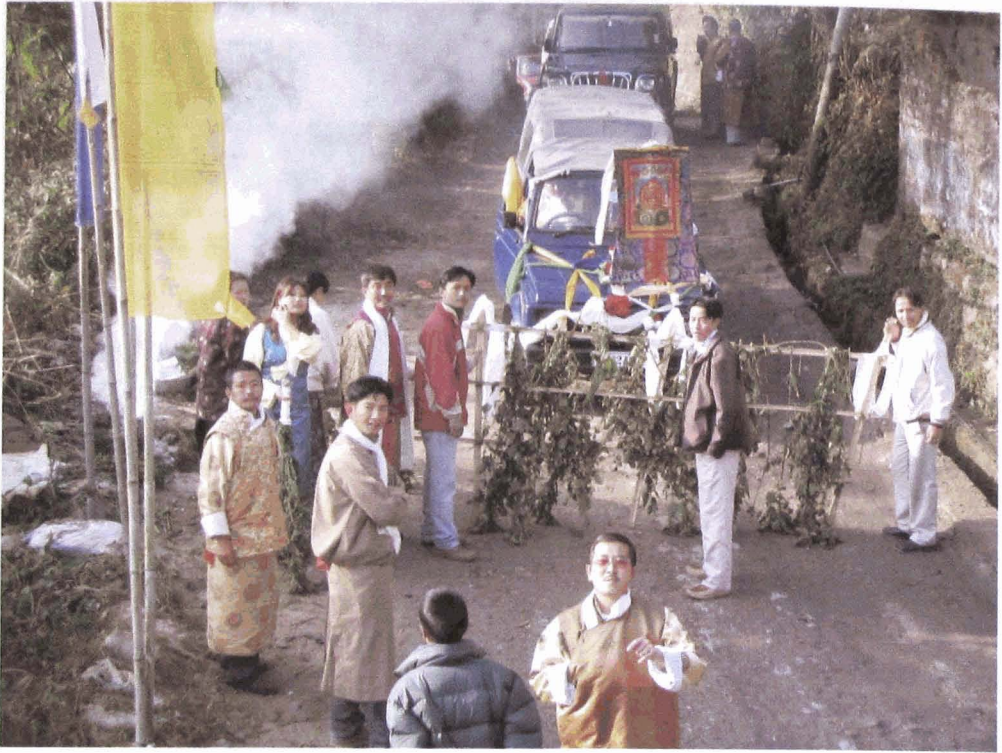


Plate 4. Stinging nettle



Plate 5. Wooden horse
(*samshing tapu*)



Plate 6. Oath rights (*khelen*)



Plate 7. Spiritual boundary (*thabra*)



Plate 8. Copper pot (*chabzang*)



Plate 9. *Tashi tormo*



Plate 10. Special wine (*duetse*)

RNYINGMAPA RITUALS IN SIKKIM AND NEPAL
DIVINING THE FUTURE, WORSHIPING ANCESTORS WITH 'MDOS':
THE SELECTION OF SALIENT FEATURES IN INDIVIDUAL BIOGRAPHIES IN
ORDER TO FRAME THE VICISSITUDES OF SOCIAL LIFE

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The homogeneity and unity of the whole ritual activity of the Buddhist rNyingmapa populations of Sikkim and Nepal could be found in the pervasiveness of the geometrical crossed threads constructions that we can see as ornaments for dough effigies, animals skulls or isolated in space, inside rNyingmapa's domestic as well as tantric monastic rituals. They can be pure ornamental figures to bring luck and chase bad influences away, or complex constructions with different meanings to lure the demons. One of the paradoxes of these crossed threads constructions is that they can be both container and contents: they can shelter or incorporate momentarily the demonic beings which are summoned in order to be deceived and destroyed. The aim of this paper is to re-approach rituals with crossed threads called *mdos* in literary or *nam mkha'*, *zor*, *glud*, *yas* (and eventually, many other local appellations) in Tibetan and non-Tibetan ritual and folk practices. We base our analysis on new and ancient research in Nepal and in Sikkim and we add a comparative perspective, opposing some Sikkimese and less known Nepalese Tamang examples of such rituals with *mdos* and *nam mkha'*: a divinatory ritual in Sikkim and a ritual for ancestors in Nepal.

Questions of terminology

While *mdos* would refer to a whole ritual process, where people represent both some crossed thread constructions associated or not with some figurative dough effigies representing the demonic beings to expel or the donor of the ritual, *nam mkha'* ('space', 'heaven') would be more specifically a construction made with crossed threads. It can be an alternative term for *mdos*. These constructions may bear more or less complex aspects, representing a kind of palace or a house or simply, a geometrical interlace with eventually a figurative aspect (like in the Tamang ancestors' ritual). The *zor*, which is evoked in some Tibetan texts and recitations read by the lamas,¹ is basically a magical instrument, sharp and cutting like a sickle. Finally, *glud* or *yas* is an effigy offered as a substitute for someone's life and soul. It takes generally the shape of a figurative *gtor ma*, made with dough.

A formal approach

This would consist in taking an inventory of the different shapes of the crossed threads: there are polygons with four, five, seven, or eight sides, and polyhedrons limited by a certain number of faces.

- A polygon is a flat face (figure) limited by a succession of stops (arrests). There are for example pentagons, hexagons and tetragons.
- A polyhedron is a face (figure) in the space, limited by a set of faces among which each one is polygonal. The cube, for instance, is a polyhedron limited by square faces; the dodecahedron is a polyhedron formed of twelve pentagonal faces. The faces are not

necessarily regular, consisting of threads fastened to a skeleton of sticks. Each one of these faces appears as either a side of the polyhedron or some chosen axis. Most of these polyhedrons are convex and closed, but in certain cases, some faces are open or empty and in other cases the structure is no more convex and no more closed. For instance, figure 1 is a non convex polyhedron where all faces are open. Figure 2 is a polyhedron where certain faces are closed rectangular and other ones closed triangular. Figure 3 is a set of polygons formed of 4 closed triangular; and figure 4 is a polyhedron where the rectangular faces are closed and the triangular faces are open. Of course, 'open' and 'closed' bear here more symbolic than real formal meaning: a space, a hole, an opening appears or not among the crossed threads.

Anyhow, a common characteristic of each structure is that they are made of threads fastened to bamboo sticks. In certain cases, there are only a series of polygonal faces which close up on themselves in a kind of 'strip', as in the case of the 'demon rGyalpo'. We can also notice that if we consider the *mdos* as a graph,² in all cases it is a non planar graph. It means that there is no way to draw this graph on a plan without introducing new intersections between the different links of the graph.

In the most complex cases, the example of the Tamang *bumpa*, there is a real architecture with internal compartments and a complex system of communication between the different regions of the structure. In a formal approach, there should be also a procedural analysis. By 'procedural', we mean that it is not so much the final figure which is given a name as the whole process of making these complex spatial figures, and the study of their relationships with a whole system of references. As a system,³ this structure organizes the relationships between the human body, the society, the cosmos, and individual's intentions and actions. Furthermore, in a procedural analysis, we would have also to frame how the whole ritual process constitutes the system of references and allows a categorization of the social reality.

A phenomenological approach

According to our experience, to the definitions given by lamas and people in Sikkim and Nepal and to the charts of the rituals, it is necessary to perform rituals with crossed threads and to use effigies in order to ransom the life of a person and to cure all kind of diseases. Human life is full of obstacles and unpredictable events that need to be anticipated and understood by the lamas and the shamans, who then engage in rituals of making reparations. These complex assemblages built according to textual instructions or by memory are made to attract, trap and lure unknown, hostile and undesired guests. Everybody in the society agrees on the efficacy of the entire process and the general idea that there are exchanges with other worlds and a therapeutic effect. As far as the ritual is a crucial moment of the transformation of relationships between social actors, we can rely on a phenomenological approach like Alfred Schütz's,⁴ for instance, who has provided a scientific description of the social reality and common knowledge in everyday life. He analyses particularly the interplay between different subjectivities: therefore, we should be cautious and refrain from judging the efficacy of the ritual according to objective criteria when the transformation of the intersubjective relationships is a real fact; even though the arguments which guide the operations resort to a mythological domain. More generally, A. Schütz criticizes the whole process of objectification by the researcher. We shall conclude with some remarks about the importance of such an approach in our perspective.

I - SOME GENERAL HYPOTHESIS ABOUT RITUALS WITH *MDOS* CONSTRUCTIONS:
OUTLINES OF THE FUNCTIONAL PROCESS

The process can be seen as dual: the making of magical weapons by the lamas and shamans through the *mdos* is effective. It helps people solve individual problems in their daily lives; it is also a collective way of expelling hostile forces which can be nationwide. Metaphorically, we should state that it is a way of writing down individual life-stories.

In certain cases, we have also collective biographies with the creation of a real 'body-universe': a figurative *mdos* displays the cosmological, social and political character of a community. It is intended to relate the people and the group to the inhabited territory and to reassure its links with the whole (the Universe, the nature and the supernatural environment).

But we need to distinguish the originality and the specificity of the *mdos* rituals as constructions with cross threads, in comparison with the ransom rituals with substitute effigies (*glud*, *gto*) where they appear. The pervasiveness of the rituals where *mdos* or *nam mkha'* are built is too complex and ambiguous to allow us to draw any summary or exhaustive description of their variety in Buddhist ritual practices.⁵ The term *mdos* itself remains very ambiguous. I am aware that 'ransom rituals', *glud*, *gto* with *nam mkha'* and *mdos* may take on very different meanings across the Himalayas and I don't want to impose Tibetan scholarly analysis on their popular understanding and usage. For learned Tamang lamas, for instance, *mdos*, or *mdos ris* evoked a *glud* with *nam mkha'*, although Tamang ritual texts could describe *mdos* type activities (like *mamo'i mdos*, *rgyal mdos*, *zor mdos*) without *nam mkha'*; and *glud* with *nam mkha'*; shamans and lay people in turn could ignore completely the meaning of *mdos*, while building and using *nam mkha'* as pure ornaments for the *gtor mas*.

Ritual activities with constructions of substitute effigies (*glud*), surmounted or not with cross threads (*nam mkha'*), isolated or not, figurative or non figurative, have been witnessed and described by many researchers throughout the Himalayan enclaves of Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman culture⁶ (e.g.: Namkhai Norbu, Samten Karmay). They concern important monastic rituals or minor daily life activities; they range from astrological and religious to medical and funerary practices. Yoshiro Imaeda had observed a *mkha' klong gsang mdos* in a monastery in Central Tibet (sMan ri), performed on the 6th month of the Tibetan calendar. The abbot had to collect resources for the ritual among several nomadic communities. Nicolas Sihle has analyzed also some *mdos rgyap* or *gtor rgyap* in the Tantric communities of Kag, North Nepal, engaging the whole ancient kingdom. In the twenties, a great exorcism of the nNa' zhabs Kingdom had been celebrated in the form of a *mdos*. Marceline de Montmollin has shown in 1986 some examples of figurative *mdos* with the image of the person inserted in the threads. Another example is given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz: under the Thirteenth Dalai-Lama, in order to prevent a Gurkha invasion by the Nepalese troops, four great *mdos* were burnt to liberate the demons which had been asked to kill the enemy. The same day, there was an earthquake in Nepal.⁷ *gTor rgyap* or huge *gtor mas* in the form of complex crossed-threads surmounting a mask with open mouth, are the ritual weapons of the tantric ritual priests in Sikkim. Finally, one can cross everyday in the streets these assemblage of effigies and threads, thrown down by the ditch or the gutters, hung behind barber wires, crushed into the dirt or comfortably displayed on the platform of the sewerage systems; half-eaten by dogs, or transformed into biodegradable rubbish.

Three characteristics of the effigies

1. Obstacles or non human being's (enemies/guests) are considered and materialized as elements of nature and the supernatural: dwellers of rocks, waters, underworlds, ghosts, vampires. The effigies symbolizing these elements are most often non figurative: small cones representing the food which is offered to them, animals supposed to be their vehicle. Every single element used bears a symbolic meaning, like the coloured pigments and dyes applied on the cross threads, the quality of the wood and the fibres which tighten the threads. They are defined and classified in literary references through the eight categories of demonic beings *Lha srin sde brgyad*⁸ but the repertoires of written references does not influence the shape of dough effigies, which are made according to people's imagination and which can be very creative and aesthetic: figures with strong anthropomorphic and aggressive aspects are made as the support for the violent actions performed. On the contrary, the effigies of the practitioners are realistic, with benevolent expressions.
2. There is still a deep ambiguity in the hermeneutics. When some people say that the *nam mkha'* which accompanies various anthropomorphic or animal effigies is a simple ornament meant to embellish or to please the gods, other Tamang lamas explain that the constitutive elements of the *nam mkha'* (coloured threads, figures oriented in space and linked with different kind of animals and beings) have a real effect against the supernatural and malevolent beings. They are able to accomplish people's desires thanks to lamas' and shamans' powers (*dbang* and *sngo ba*). The morphological aspect and qualities of cross threads and effigies should reflect some physical characteristics of the demonic beings, being their tent, canvas (*gur, khang*), their palace, and sometimes their body. But *nam mkha'* are also a trap. In other terms, these 'images' can kill in different ways. In the philosophical terms of Spinoza,⁹ they would be both "substance and extension", each attribute being related to a 'soul' in Buddhist terms, a *bla*.
3. We must not forget the important dimension of the "aesthetics of suffering and illness", as it was tentatively defined by R. Desjarlais (1992)¹⁰: "The expressive figures built in the rituals are embodied with hopes, fears, desires, anxieties; they express very physically social fractures and oppositions. Through them, wars are performed and above all, dangerous exchanges and substitutions of lives are done, with effective results within the household and the society".

Individual as well as collective lives are transformed. We could refer here also to the notion of "rebellious narratives", relying on E.P. Thompson's definition of Custom.¹¹ The reactions towards the effigies, once they have been thrown away, are generally disgust or fear, and people display strong resentment against whoever is taking pictures of *nam mkha'* in the streets, inside houses or in the monasteries.

Let us examine two types of rituals with *mdos* that we could witness between 1986 and 1996 among Sikkimese families in Pemayangtse and Yoksum, and among Tamang families in Kabhre Palanchok (Nepal).

II – EXAMPLES OF RITUALS WITH *MDOS*

1 – *A ritual in Sikkim: gTo ko bla glud* (or *bslu*): ransoming or calling back the *bla* through *gto*— 'exorcism'—also called *Thor ko bla glud*

On 12 September 1996, in the Garuda Inn in Pelling, the family performed a *gto kho bla bslu*. This ritual was identified by a monk teaching in Pemayangtse monastery as a *gto* type ritual, performed to 'save the soul in difficult times'. The exact orthography of *bslu* which was given was *glus*.

The social context

The ritual was performed for the elder son of the family, the owner of the inn, who was a physician. He was entering his birth year, the 'rat' according to the astrological cycle: and the ritual was to combat all kinds of possible obstacles which could hinder his career. His father had died recently and the son was now directing the household. He had to ensure his social status outside and inside the family, which comprised 9 persons: the mother, three brothers, two children, two daughters in law and his own spouse.

Ritual periodicity

This action should be performed every ten years or once every time one's own zodiacal sign would come back in the twelve years cycle. This re-appearance of the astral sign called *lo skag* means dangers for the person. All years finishing by the number 9 are also a threat. They are called *dgu mig* (*dgu mig nas thar ro*: 'to liberate oneself from the influence of the *dgu mig*').

The practitioners

Two monks from Pemayangtse monastery came accompanied with a younger one who carried the paraphernalia for the ritual and who executed orders. They were carrying the book to read: *gto bcos kyi dkar chag bzhugs so*.

The making of the mdos

- Four big *mdos* are built, called respectively *rgyal mdos* (white), *btsan mdos* (red), *ma mo'i mdos* or *klu mdos* (black—opinions diverged on the identity of this *mdos*), a *yam mdos* (green). In front of them, various kind of food—cooked rice, meet, fermented beer and tea—was displayed.
- The effigy of the *sbyin bdag* is made, surrounded with coloured arrows oriented in space; one puts a board with five cups filled with rice and water on the altar. The actor is sitting in front of the *mandala* and prostrates.
- The hand of the Buddha, drawn on a piece of paper is displayed with a *mandala* into the palm (*brGya bzhi*).
- *gtor ma* are put around the *mdos* (red, with white paste)
- A big vessel covered with a leaf and several dice (the *bla mtsho*¹² or soul-lake)
- A kind of *mchod rten* on the *mandala* in Buddha's hand is the seat of the *sbyin bdag*'s effigy, with all the offerings for the *dhamapala* and the *bdud bzhi* (*lha'i bdud*, *rgyal po'i bdud*, *btsan kyi bdud*, *ma mo'i bdud*) around.
- Besides the effigy, a plate is filled with a *mdos* with two wooden sticks with red and black lines drawn or painted on the sticks, cotton tips and a dice (a demon *bdud* and a *lha*).

Drawing the divinatory diagram

It is a wide rectangle with nine horizontal lines representing difficult passages of life in the ten years cycle. On each line, there is a small bamboo *gtor ma* surmounted with a flag. At the foot are placed some soil, cereals and offering of water in another bamboo vessel. On the first line, one puts sheep and goats' shoulder blades (scapula), tight together. The dividing lines in the diagram represent also the body's chakras.

Actions

The main actor comes, with a rucksack and a stick in hand. The action consists of crossing the different passes—or *la*, which are represented by the lines—and jumping over the bones which are pulled from line to line. The *gtor mas* are eliminated progressively. Then the actor arrives in front of the altar where he meditates in front of a *thanka*.

Throwing away the mdos and the sbyin bdag's effigy on the roof-terrace

The white *mdos* is eliminated through the door, on a white path made with flour. The same process is repeated for the three other ones, respectively eliminated through the different windows, in different directions. Then comes the preparation of the soul-lake (*bla mtsho*) and offering of the *gtor mas* to the demons.

Last part of the ritual: the divination-game

The last part of the ritual is a divination-game with gods and demons, who answer questions by throwing dice; the collection of auspicious stones and turquoise in the soul-lake and the divination through a sheep in form of a *gtor ma* which is made to float on the 'lake' (a basin filled with water). After being propelled, the mouth of the sheep should turn towards the lama and not towards the door, which would be considered highly inauspicious.

People's interpretations

The lamas and two brothers, commenting on the ritual efficacy gave their conclusions at the end: the ritual was successful. The nine lamps burning on the passes—the 'passes' are both mountain passes, and men's steps in the life: the different ages of man symbolized also through the 12 zodiac cycles—meant light and brightness in the life of the beneficiary. The nine kinds of offerings (cereals, food) had been received by hostile beings and all kind of obstacles should thus have been removed. The whole action was interpreted as a way to 'transforming the pass and the hills into fluidity, into water'; 'smoothing the path', 'flattening the obstacles'. Negative emotions would be transformed into positive ones. Everybody described the ritual as a 'psychological action' where the collective contribution had played a major role. The younger brother said at the end: with the *mdos*, we have done a 'photocopy' of the gods. It appeared clearly that *mdos* and effigies were not considered by people as *placebo*. They acted on the minds as real medicines.

2 – A ritual for the ancestors in Nepal: the Tamang 'Doila' (Tib. 'The bla of the mdos'?)

In the winter of 1988, we witnessed a rare Doila ritual or 'celebration of their ancestors' by the Tamangs of the Eastern Valley of Kathmandu, in Temal (Kabhre Palanchok). The ritual consisted of the elaboration of a huge figurative *mdos* that was twelve meters high. The *mdos*

here must be considered as an effigy, a real image of the human body. The complex assemblage of different *nam mkha'* or cross threads piled up and the whole ritual action performed during seven days and nights is called 'Doila'. We tried a semantic reconstruction of Doila in *mdos kyi lha* or *bla*, although no lama was able to assure us of this meaning.

The books

The Eastern Tamang lamas generally base their textual corpus on the revelations received by Jatson Nyingpo. There are six major cycles of revelation (*gsung 'bum/ 'ja' tshon snying po/ 'ja' tshon pod drug*). The first six of these cycles are known as the *'ja' tshon pod drug*. The texts which the Tamang seemed to refer to are the *dkon mchog spyi 'dus* or the *zhi khro nges don snying po*.¹³ The book used by the *slob dpon lama* of Temal had been compiled six generations ago, 'in the year of the dog, on the sixth day of a lunar month', by a lama called Sherap Tenzin in the village called Mendo Gangyul (two days walking towards the north of Temal). It seemed that the Tamang lamas had condensed together in this ritual a *srid pa spyi mdos* (a general *mdos* of the existence); a *Ma mo 'i mdos* and a *zor mdos*, the *mdos* which acts as a magical weapon; a *rGyal mdos* or a *mdos* destined to the category of the kings *rgyal po*; a *gza' mdos*, designed to chase away the bad influences of the planets *gza'*; and a *mkha' gro grib mdos*, a ritual to purify a place or a person from death-pollution.

The social context

The ritual addressed the whole Bal/Dong clan lineages deities, male and female (*pho mdos*, *mo mdos* in the texts, and *akhe/mam* in ordinary speech) through this 'polysemic body' which is supposed to be both the ancestor's male and female bodies and a divine or demonic image. The whole construction is destroyed at the end but the cotton threads of the figure above or male ancestor's face go back to the sister's side, (father's sister' sons) and those of the female ancestor's body go back to the in-laws (Bal clan's brothers in law or *mha*). This partition and redistribution of the *nam mkha'* reproduces the laws of the exogamic marriage among the Tamangs. It must be noted here the dual classification of the clans, divided between dominant ones, who claim divine ancestry and who are the only ones authorised to celebrate the Doila and the male *pholha* with a *slob dpon bla ma*; and the subaltern' ones, the Muktan, Shangdan, Pakhrin, Lopcan, Nyashur, who celebrate their *pholha* with animal offerings; among them the Thokar have shamans as masters of the lineage (*lhabon*). They celebrate their ancestors with a trance (*lhaptaba*, master of the *lha*). Other names are given to this kind of trance like *sna chigs pa*. The ordinary shamans or *bompo* practise the *tarpa* or *acho*.

Polysemic designations of the nam mkha' and relation to the myth of the origins

The face above or male ancestor's face is called *Nam mkha' zhal*, *Akhe*, *Nam mkha' i rGyal po*, *Ui Tinga zhal*, *Jyoho*, ('Face of the Namkha, Grandfather, King of the Namkha, Face in the Middle of the Heaven, Lord'); the body below or female ancestor's body is usually called *Bumpa*, *Mam*, although in the text, it is called *Mamo 'i mdos*, *sNang srid Mamo*, *Mamo khrag mdos* ('Sacred Vessel, Grandmother, Mamo or Divine Female Figure, Mamo of visible appearances'). The couple is addressed to by the people as: *Shyal/Bumpa*, *Åkhe/Mam*. Sexual jokes around the *Bumpa* made by the Bal clan's brothers are constant. These two bodies are closely related to the myth of the origins of the Tamang: the *srin mo* or

carnivorous female ogre mated with the bodhisattva as a monkey and gave birth to her descendants through the incestuous alliance between her nine daughters and nine sons.

*Ambiguities in a 'Tamang Buddhist' identity: the Doila as reflecting the whole order of a complex society*¹⁴

Whenever it is question of taking place in the monastic rituals and rNyingmapa's hierarchies, the complex identity of this *mdos* is a reflection of the permanent problem arising for the Tamang. The recurrent use of alcohol and meat in the rituals and the constant allusions to eroticism and sex in the rituals always made them suspect in the eyes of the higher classes of Buddhist priests. The Doila is a synthesis of all the different ritual activities of the people's life cycle.

There is the re-creation of a marriage of the household's couple, paralleling the union between the *zhal* (ancestor's face) and the *bumpa* (female ancestor's body). Lamas repeat the cleansing of pollution at birth (*dip sgrib* or *mkon bslogs thap kyi choga* in the texts), the cleansing of major pollution by incest (*sna*) supposed to have taken place in the myth of origins: it is a highly dramatic part in the ritual, performed with a scapegoat chosen among virgin girls (*lhamo*); all kind of ransoms are also offered to the whole Tamang pantheon of deities (*klu, lha, tsen, bdud, gza'* —constellations) with animal offerings (mainly black birds and a wild goat). The rules of alliance and the reception of *yang* or good health and prosperity are at the heart of the process: the male clans' kins' brothers play the central role, by telling lewd jokes and being boisterous. Women and in-laws appear only at the end of the ritual, to bring food offerings and fermented beer. But they play symbolically the most important role in the secret part of the ritual: it is a nubile girl who should show the yeast in front of the eyes of the terrifying ancestor's face: she is supposed to die from this action. In fact, it is a poor Magar man who was finally chosen.

The Tamang territory of the Bal/Dong clan is shaped in a cosmic image: the Mount Rirap of Mipham, which is the name given to the plinth below the construction. This Mountain of the origins is adorned with four *nam mkha'*, which gives its legitimacy to the appellation of a 'Body-Universe' that we want to give to this ritual. The *nam mkha'* represents the four different cosmic directions or 'Orient', together with all the meanings implied: bodhisattvas, four Paradises in which to be reborn and symbolic elements and colours attached to the different guardians of the Universe. Parallel to the couple on the pillar, there are the demonic figures below: *Gyalpo/Mamo*, the underworld replicas of the celestial figures above. I resume now the main parts of the ritual activities.

Meanings of mdos in comparison with ransoming rituals (glud)

Through the ritual texts which are used during the ritual, *mdos* is equivalent to *zor* (*zor 'phang ba*). The Tamangs make a distinction between *gtor zor*, *yung zor*, *mda' zor* and *khrag zor* but the *mdos* is obviously conceived as a vessel, a receptacle for the deities invited to come down. The different parts of the ritual in the texts are divided thus:

- 1st day: *thap gsangs*, purification of the place and asking the permission of the yullha (Konjyo chyoi)
- 2nd day: the *bdud bgegs bsangs*

- 3rd day: the gathering of the necessary objects (*lha sgon*): the making of the different *nam mkha*, the construction of the pillar on the Mount Mipham which is surrounded by the three roots (Lama, Yidam, Khandoma), the main *yullha* and *shibda* or *Zhyal zhi*.
- 4th day: the *choga bipa* or '*lakan garne*': the yeast is shown to the ferocious ancestor's face (*bram phulba* or *bdud rtsi phulba*). This is also the dedication of a young virgin girl or Mahakala puja or *mchod pa'i lhamo*. This phase is divided into *gyang gtor* (the offering of a huge *gtor ma*), and *mdos gtor* (the offering of the yeast): pure rice offering and fermented beer to get the *gyang sku* or *tshe sku* (long life, good luck) or *jiwan, ayu*. This part of the ritual is also the calling back of the whole family's soul or *bla (bla kuba* or '*gug pa*) through the offerings of ransoms.

The *bsngo ba* of the lama plays a key role. Ngowa is exactly the 'reversion of the merits', through which the offerings made by the people can reach their aim. It is a discourse addressed by the *slob dpon lama* to the powerful beings which allows the offerings, especially the living beings (animals) to be transformed in something else. For the practitioner, it is the Yidam who operates this transformation. In the case of the Tamang offering of yeast, if we consider the use of the blood of the goat on the *khram shing*, the red offerings made to the Mamo with the goat's entrails, and the need of a virgin girl to show the yeast, we can conclude that it is the women's periodic blood which is exorcised in front of the pillar and that it is also necessary to sacrifice a young girl for this terrible operation.

- 5th day: the offering of all the *gtor ma* to the demonic beings and the exorcism with the *khram shing*, dipped into the goat's blood. This part is similar in all *gto* rituals. The *slob dpon lama* has to do the *pho ba* of the demons, or separating the *rnam shes* from the physical body before the destruction of the offerings.
- 6th day is the destruction of the effigies or the terrible action of the *zor*.
- 7th day is dedicated to Saturnalia and theatre.

Questions about the mdos: a model for dealing with 'otherness'?

We have tried here to describe only a few of the complex spatial configurations made with cross threads, but the list is far of being complete. A formal analysis would have to go into details in the morphological descriptions of the figures. On the phenomenological side of the analysis, these rituals are obviously built on ideas of exchange and reward. To analyze such practices does not presume an automatic diagnosis of projection or reification. The practitioner of *mdos* is no more naïve a believer in the existence of supernatural entities than the practitioner of psychoanalysis who has faith in the unconscious or the superego. In both cases, the practitioner does not know exactly how to address the 'other'. The *mdos* are the site of a complex elaboration of this 'otherness', in the form of the summoning of the deities and demons which are at stake in the ritual. There seems to be a strong reification of the 'intention to harm', as a kind of 'demonic being'. The enemy must be vilified; he is always more hungry, thirsty, greedy, ignorant and stupid but the making of these images is real relief from the tensions and anxieties of the group.

All these effigies and thread figures constitute an immaterial heritage, doomed to disappear. They are also a real piece of art, framing for the people the real core of Buddhist ways of conceptualizing the world: short-lived and embodying the interwoven subjectivities. There are no royalties to the authors of the constructions, and no future for the *mdos*,

although the figures speak strongly about the past and the present. In the divinatory ritual, the *mdos* remain abstract constructions. They are neutral vessels for the demonic beings. In the Tamang *mdos*, the fusion between human and non human beings is more problematic as the Tamang have made a synthesis between different *mdos*. The construction is both a palace and a person, through a complex system of references, a model that we can find also among many other Himalayan societies. We are confronted to a global Universe whose elements are drawn from the social imagination as well as from high textual traditions which give these rituals their frame and justification. Divination rituals, rituals for ancestors and funerary rituals (*dge ba*) are linked through exorcistic activities of the *gto* type that should be examined also in their social context.¹⁵

Finally the Tamang Doila has a strong political meaning and a subversive character: it refers to ancient periods, when the clans were still autonomous entities controlled by Bon priests and shamans. The Gurkha conquests in Nepal progressively replaced the traditional leaders (Coho) by *mukhiya*. Higher Buddhist hierarchs have also started to take hold of ritual life, starting in the eighteenth century and the transformation of the shamanic rituals with the influence of the unification of the rNyingmapa cycle (Ja tshon Nyingpo). The celebration of the Doila, which required gathering one year of agricultural resources among a very poor society, could be the demonstration of people's resistance to a modernity that they did not control, despite their enrolment into trekking and services; it was also an act of resistance to new modes of consumption and development that they did not share and which started to spread in rural areas in the 80s' with huge migrations abroad in search of a better living.

NOTES

- 1 In the book on the Tamang ritual of Doila (see the description of the ritual in the text), the Lamas evoke the *zor mdos* as a magical weapon, shaped as a sickle. It helps the lama to cut through the obstacles and to expel the demons at the end of the ritual.
- 2 Here, we define a graph according to the following data: 1) a set of points 2) a set of chosen pairs among this set, for instance: {A, B, C, D, E, F}, { {A, B}, {B, C}, {C, D}, {D, A}, {A, E} }. One can represent a graph with a diagram made of links between certain points. From the previous example, one gets the following scheme:

$$\begin{array}{c}
 E - A - B \\
 \quad \quad / \quad / \\
 F \quad \quad D - C
 \end{array}$$
- 3 One calls 'planar' a graph which can be drawn on a plan, with the condition that two distinct edges never cross each other.
- 4 We describe in the conclusion the whole system of references of the Tamang Doila. See also Steinmann (1988).
- 5 See Alfred Shütz (1987), pp.89-101.
- 6 Basing himself on many texts and literature to understand the meaning of the categories of beings which are designed in the crossed threads rituals, Namkhai Norbu (1995), pp.77-86 tries to unify a theory around the meanings of *nam mkha'* with both psychological and Buddhist definitions: "The *nam mkha'* serves to harmonize the energy of the five elements, in which the two crossed wooden sticks symbolize the person's life and the coloured threads wound around them the continuous functioning of the elements (...) The practitioner of the Shen of the phenomenal Universe consider the series of the rites of *glud* as the most important among the four ritual traditions. They explain the expression *mnyam brje* contained in the expression 'series of ransom rites' (*phenyul*) as an 'equal exchange' - considering the actual negotiation engaged between the priest and the class of beings he addresses to, in which the troubling agent liberates its victims in exchange of the ritual effigy substitute, and the resemblance between the victim and his effigy regarding his physical appearance and the quality of his sensorial organs".

- 6 Here I use some examples and notes taken in a seminar directed by Me A. M. Blondeau (Paris, Maison de l'Asie: EFEO, équipe Tibet—UMR 8147—in 2004-5) on the subject of the '*lha srin sde brgyad*'. See the different publications issued from this seminar in the *RET, Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, particularly A. M. Blondeau (2008).
About the *mdos* in general, see N. Wojkowitz (1975), p.369-97 and p. 495 about the earthquake example.
- 8 See A. M. Blondeau, *ibid.*
- 9 G. Deleuze has given an interesting interpretation of the 'soul' in Spinoza's terms: "Everything which appears to us as a body in the space-attribute has for equivalent a soul in the thought-attribute. Therefore, what would be the 'soul' of a particle of hydrogen, of a tree or of the solar system? (...) The Spinoza's soul is nothing more than a power to discern (...) Everything is animated, every particle has a soul, in other terms: every particle can discern"; see G. Deleuze, *Course of the 6th January 1981*, Y. Citton and P. Watts in *Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées*, Paris, juillet-août 2008, p.9.
- 10 Quoted by B. Gerke (2003), p.13; she describes a general mode of 'somatic attention' affecting the transformation that people feel when they lose their *bla*.
- 11 According to E. P. Thompson (1991), who criticizes the reification of the notion of folklore, we must confer to "Customs in common" a meaning *sui generis*. Customs are not "survivals" of so-called "Little Tradition" (p.1) or "post-anything" (p. 2) (...) "They are the rhetoric of legitimation for almost any usage, practice, or demanded right" (p. 6), "a rebellious traditional culture" (p. 9).
- 12 See Françoise Pommaret (2004), p.65.
- 13 We owe to Gene Smith, who we thank here, the complete list of the '*ja' tshon pod drug*' and the identification of the Tamang Doila among them. In 1988, we had taken a photograph of the complete collection of the texts read in the Doila, although it took a long time before getting from the sLob spon lama of Temal (Kabhre Palanchok) the authorization to reproduce and to translate the text. This paper being more programmatic and also due to a lack of space, we shall publish later on a complete translation of the collected text of the Doila ritual.
- 14 We refer here to a first analysis of this ritual (Steinmann, Narita, 5th IATS 1989: pp.751-772); see in particular p.765: "La logique qualitative de l'ancestralité".
- 15 See Shen-yu Lin's analysis of the origin of these rituals in the Sino-Tibetan tradition (2007), p.105: "Kong tse 'phrul gyi gyalpo is a visible figure which frequently appears in the Tibetan texts for the gTo rituals. This name is generally found both in the literature of the Bonpo and Buddhist traditions. Kong tse is regarded as the innovator of the gTo rituals which are performed to solve various problems of daily life. The framework of this ritual resembles the "Stage of Generation of Tantric practices", but the core of the ritual is proven to be related to sorcery. Kong Tse is the equivalent of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. gTo rituals are strongly related to the science of divination".

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Plate 1. Non convex polyhedron with all open faces



Plate 2. Polyhedron with closed rectangular and closed triangular faces

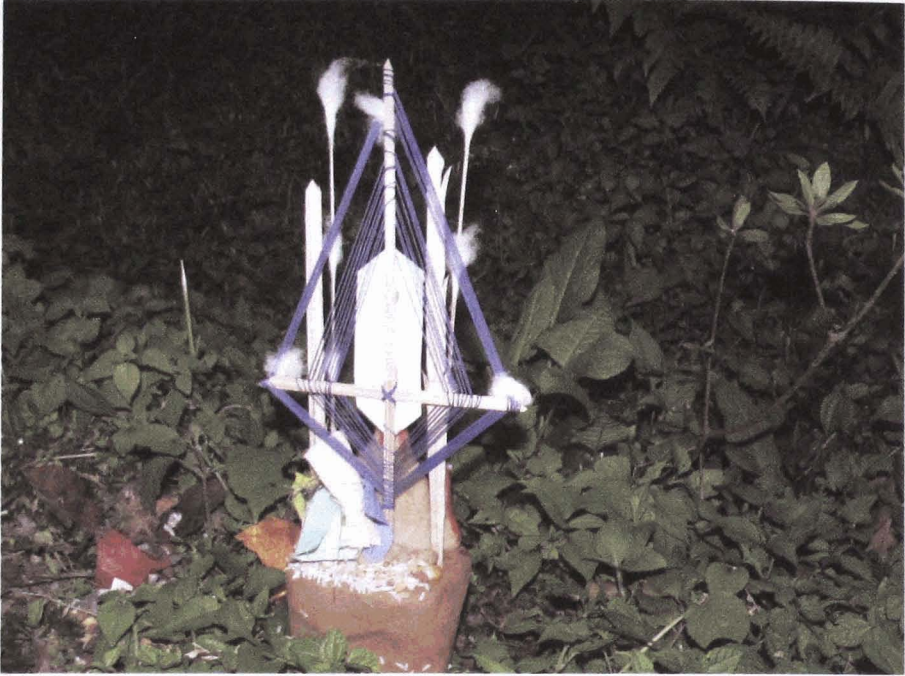


Plate 3. Set of polygons formed with four closed triangular



Plate 4. Polyhedron with closed rectangular faces and open triangular faces

BUDDHIST AND SHAMANIC DRUMS IN SIKKIM AND NEPAL:
NGA AND DHYĀNGRO

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Within the Himalayan regions drums play a considerable role in both Buddhist and shamanic performances. This can be deduced from the simple fact that the beat of a drum is a familiar and daily background sound in every village of the hills. However, the beat heard may come from a mundane drum or from one played at a religious event. The well practiced ear of the villager will, listening to the beat of a distant drum, immediately know what type of instrument has generated it and be able to sort out, what kind of event it should be assigned to.

As a general rule, all local societies of the Himalaya draw a clear line between drums used at mundane occasions and drums employed for transcendental purposes. Drums of religion may be played only at events of a religious character; and mundane drums are sounded, when the occasion is predominantly of a profane nature. For this reason, earthly drums are morphologically different from those with transcending functions and consequently they sound differently one from the other. Yet, this opposition is not the only one.

Within the category of drums for religious purposes, a notable distinction is made—in terms of morphological shape, of mythological origin, and of metaphysical function—between those employed by Buddhists, by spirit media or by shamanic healers. It is the purpose of this article to juxtapose mainly two types of religious drums: the *nga* drum (*nga chen* or *lag nga*) on the one hand, as used regularly in Buddhist temples at monastic events and other ritual occasions conducted by lamas and their entourage; and the *dhyāngro* drum on the other*, as employed by shamanic healers of various ethnic backgrounds who, for the sake of simplicity, may be addressed here collectively as *jhākri*. The focus of attention will be on western Sikkim, as it was here that I made a short investigation recently, in connection with a research project of a larger scale, comparing shamanic drums distributed over the entire range of the Himalaya and North Asia.

In order to comprehend the peculiarities of the Sikkimese findings concerning *nga* and *dhyāngro* it may be appropriate to summarize some of the facts from the larger comparative field. Wherever a certain dichotomy prevails within the wide expanse of the Himalaya between Buddhist and shamanic religious practices, a clear differentiation can be observed regarding the physical objects used in either of the two contexts. This applies to all kinds of regalia and paraphernalia, such as dress and make-up of the religious specialists, their utensils, altar constructions, items and icons, and their various sound instruments, among which the drums occupy a dominant place.

NEPAL

Before I shall present and discuss in detail some standard similarities and differences between Buddhist drums and those of the shamanic healers, it may be stated in general that, while the Buddhist *nga* drums are all of the same basic species, the *dhyāngro* of the local

shamans fall into two elementary kinds: In the western section of the Nepalese Himalaya—among the healers of the northern Magar and Chantel in the Dhaulagiri area [1], the Kami in the Jajarkot and Bhujel Khola regions, the Thakali in the Kali Gandaki valley [2], the Chepang in the Mahabharat and Siwalik jungles [3], and the Gurung south of the Annapurna massif [4]—one encounters a frame drum with one single leather membrane stretched over one side of the wooden hoop; it is held by a handle fastened to the open, interior side of the frame. From the territory of the Ghale Gurung in the Gorkha district eastward [5], all shamanic drums are frame drums with two leather membranes stretched over both of the surface areas of the hoop; all of these double sided *dhyāngro* drums have a handle attached to the bottom of the exterior side of the frame. These drums can be found among the various faith healers of the western, central and eastern Tamang [6], of the Thami [7], the Sherpa [8], the different Rai [9] and Limbu [10] ethnic groups and the various scattered Hindu populations, such as Bahun, Chetri, Kami, Sunar and other occupational caste groups living in the lower and middle hills of central and eastern Nepal and adjacent areas.

The virtual borderline to be drawn on a cis-Himalayan map between single-membrane shamanic frame-drum in the west and double-membrane shamanic frame-drum toward the east would be sharp: The demarcation runs along the easternmost border of Gurung and the westernmost outpost of Tamang habitat, along a small stretch of territory occupied by the Ghale Gurung between the Daraundi Khola and the Buri Gandaki. Waterproof as this typological border actually is, the denominations for both respective drums and the local healers playing them, vary considerably: they are numerous, overlapping and, therefore, less distinctive.

The tabular synopsis which follows may help the reader's orientation. The listed names of caste and tribal groups, the local terms of their corresponding healers and of the prevalent membranophonic instruments are arranged in an eastward sequence.

Single-membrane frame-drum

Double-membrane frame-drum

Population	Healer	Drum	Population	Healer	Drum
Jajarkot-Kami	<i>jhangari</i>	<i>dengro</i>	Ghale	<i>tum, phashyu</i>	<i>nga</i>
Bhujel-Kami	<i>jhākri</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>	Tamang	<i>bombo</i>	<i>nga</i>
Chantel	<i>jhākri</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>	Thami	<i>guru</i>	<i>take, dhyāngro</i>
Magar	<i>ramma</i>	<i>re, regor, dangori</i>	Sherpa	<i>minung</i>	<i>nga</i>
Thakali	<i>drom, aya</i>	<i>na, nga</i>	Sunwar	<i>puimbo, ngiami</i>	<i>ri</i>
Chepang	<i>pande, nidal</i>	<i>ringh</i>	Thulung	<i>seleme</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
Gurung	<i>pajyu, khlebri</i>	<i>nga</i>	Kulung	<i>sele mop, de mop</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Dumi	<i>sele[-dhami]</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Mewahang	<i>makpa, selemi</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Yamphu	<i>mangpa, bijuwa</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Lohorung	<i>mangpa, mangmani</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Limbu	<i>yeba, yuma/mangpa</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Hindu	<i>dhami-jhankri</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>
			Muglani	<i>jhākri</i>	<i>dhyāngro</i>

From this list a number of statements can be made and a conclusion be derived. The most common and most widespread word for the shamanic drum is *dhyāngro*. It can be encountered in the west, in Nepali speaking local societies, just as it is the general term in all

Kiranti tribal groups and in Hindu caste communities in the eastern parts of Nepal. It is a lingua franca word for the drum of the shaman, just as *jhākri* is the lingua franca word for the religious specialist who owns and employs it. Owing to this wide spread, *dhyāngro* may be used for both typological varieties of the Himalayan shaman's drum: the one-sided frame drum (Chantel, Kami, Bhujel) and the double-sided one (Thami, Hindu, Rai and Limbu)—as the colloquial word for either. Its general application in Nepali speaking surroundings is self-evident; in societies whose mother tongue is not Nepali, i.e. the Kiranti groups, it may surprise and lead to assume that, over time, it has replaced more specific local denominations, now forgotten.

The term *dhyāngro*, however, is never employed for the Tibetan Buddhist drum called *nga*, *nga chen* or *lag nga*. This word, in the abbreviated form of *nga* or *na*—meaning, without specification, just 'drum' in Tibetan—can be heard, on the other hand, to signify Buddhist and shamanic drums alike. In the faith healers' context, *nga* is employed for the single-membrane frame drums of the Gurung and Thakali and for the double-membrane frame drums of the Ghale, Tamang and Sherpa; in other words: in local societies with a shamanic background that speak not only a Tibeto-Burman language, but entertain at the same time manifest links with Tibetan Buddhism. And those that do not, i.e. societies such as the Kham speaking Magar in the Dhaulagiri region and the Chepang of the Siwalik jungles, whose mother tongue is a branch of Tibeto-Burman, but who are not linked with Buddhism, use their own terms for the shaman's drum, *re* or *regor* in the Magar case and *ringh* in Chepang. Both these words, denominating one-sided shamanic drums with considerable resemblances to their distant Siberian counter-pieces, are etymologically related; into this linguistic kinship must be included the Sunwar name for the double-sided frame drum, called *ri*, the morphological kinship of which is clearly on the side of the Tamang *nga* and the Kiranti *dhyāngro*. And this warns us, despite linguistic challenge, that relationships of terms do not infer morphological kinship of the objects denoted.

It is time now to compare the double-membrane *nga/dhyāngro* drum of the Himalayan shamans with the *nga* drum (*lag nga* and *nga chen*) of Tibetan Buddhism, as manifested in previously collected data. Both are frame drums, i.e.: membranophones in which the radius of the membrane exceeds the height of the corpus. As such they are to be distinguished from other basic types of percussive instruments such as cylinder-, barrel-, hour-glass-, conus- or kettle-drums. The frame in both cases is made of a bent wooden lath, overlapping, as a rule, at its two bent ends. The resulting hoop will be covered with two leather membranes which seal, each on one side, its two open surfaces. At the bottom of the hoop a straight, longish handle sticks out, also made of wood and carved with ornamental or figurative designs. The handle is applied to the frame by pushing its top end through a square or circular hole drilled into the overlapping ends of the frame lath and fastening it on the interior side of the hoop with the help of a wedge. Strings on the exterior side of the frame may give support to the stability of the handle.

The finished frame drum with two membranes and one exterior handle will be beaten, in both the shamanic and the Buddhist cases, by a separate drumstick, normally curved in an S-shape. The materials used for frame, membrane, stick and handle may vary according to local availability, but a certain preference can be observed, common for both drum varieties, such as *sandhan* wood (*Ougeinia dalbergioides*), *sal* (*shorea robusta*), *dhupi* (*juniperus recurva*) or *khair* (*acacia catechu*) for the frame; and the skin of wild goat (*Nemorhaedus goral*) or *jhara* antelope (*capra jemlaica*) for the membrane. Ox, horse or yak may be used as hide for the Buddhist drum, but not for that of the shamans; they prefer *mirga* or *ratua* deer instead.

Described in this way, the two drums, Buddhist *nga* and shamanic *nga/dhyāngro* of the double-membrane variety, can be classified as belonging to a common basic morphological type. Yet, there are also fundamental differences to be noted between the two, deviations from or transformations to one another, which must be called intentional.

The first—and conceptually foremost—typological difference between the Buddhist and the shamans' double membrane frame drums lies in the shaping of the exterior wooden handles. The Buddhist drum-handle is carved, representing a stylised lotus, whereas the shamanic drum-handle, even in the most abstracted examples, is meant to represent a ritual dagger, a *phurba*-shaped weapon [11]. In the Buddhist case (and so in all existing specimen), the handle signifies peaceful intentions of the instrument it holds [12]; and in the shamanic case (without exception) the handle suggests belligerent aims: the intention to kill. At this point, the two ritual instruments materialise a clash of two opposing world-views: in shamanism, religious practice means war, an unending struggle against harmful and malignant spirits, in which each ritual controversy ends in a bloody sacrificial pact, and consequently, the most important tool, the drum, is an instrument of aggression and defence. In Buddhism, by contrast, the drum serves pacifying, self-liberating and meditative purposes, even if some warlike qualities are not completely lacking.

The bent lath of the shamanic drum frame is left plain and uncovered, exposing all lacings of the membranes and small wooden blocks put under the strings as resonators [13]. The exterior side of the Buddhist drum's frame, on the other hand, is usually furnished with a convex dome which encases and hides all fittings underneath [14]. This convex frame cover is more often than not carved and painted with Buddhist motifs and emblems in permanent oil-based varnish. Nothing of this can ever be seen on the frames of Himalayan shamanic drums. If paint is applied at all, it will be short-lived cosmological motifs drawn by bare fingers, dipped in white liquid chalk, on the screen of the membrane's skin.

The membranes too are treated differently in the two cases. Buddhist drum-skins are completely shaved, no fur hair is left to be seen; the naked surface may be kept as it is; more often it is coated in a green or rarely in a bluish monochrome colouring; in some exceptional cases the membrane may be used as a canvas for additional Buddhist motifs, figurative or geometrical, also done in permanent varnish. The membrane surface of the shamanic drums is normally shaved—but not completely so. In most cases a narrow ring of fur hair is left behind on the outer rim of the membrane—thus reminding the human beneficiaries of the instrument of its wild animal nature and extra-human connections.

Many of the Buddhist *nga*, especially the larger *nga chen*, have an individual stand, a heavy wooden block, sometimes shielded by a metallic cover. The bottom end of the handle can be fitted into this stand, enabling the player of the instrument to keep his right hand free or to park it when it is not played. Shamanic drums have no such stand or resting place—if in use, they are held in the left hand by their singing or dancing players; if put away for storage, they are hung, with the help of a special loop, on the wall in their owner's house or kept hidden in a special basket on the backside of the fireplace.

In regard to the fabrication of the two drums, shamanic and Buddhist, the underlying principles could hardly be more divergent. The shaman's drum is an individual piece, made especially for him and for him alone. His first drum (he may have more than one piece in the course of his vocational career) and the rituals connected with its fabrication, are part and parcel of his initiation process—in a way the crowning event of it: It is for him that experts of his community will assemble the material components and build the drum [15]; it is for him that, once completed, it will be consecrated in a collective séance of his future colleagues.

Henceforth, the shaman and his drum will be coupled by a common biographical fate; and when he dies, his drum is smashed, silenced and hung over his grave. As the shaman's drum is individually tailored for its sole and only owner, no two specimens are ever identical. They may fit the local style and the more general type, but each exemplar can always be identified as the unmistakable piece it is.

Buddhist drums, on the contrary, are not fabricated in view of particular persons to own them. In fact, their production process is, as a rule, intentionally depersonalised. The Buddhist *nga*, especially those for larger monastic customers, are made on a modular, if not mass-productive basis [16]. One piece is identical with the next, if both come from the same manufacturer. Certainly, there are degrees of refinement, and some pieces will be more elaborate than others, more artistic, more valuable. But the impersonal character remains fundamental. The Buddhist drum is a tool of the *sangha*, the religious community and as such an expression of a collective religious faith, not of its individual enactors.

And this leads to the various functions the two kinds of drums may fulfil. Some of the tasks ascribed to the Buddhist *nga* apply—with varying operation techniques and under different conceptual justification—also to the drums employed by shamans. Foremost amongst these is to structure rhythmically the performance of ritual chanting. The drums offer in both cases acoustic support and accentuation to ritual actions, such as calling supernatural helpers and sending off malignant forces and demons. In the Buddhist context, the drum serves as pacemaker in theatrical performances held at special occasions within the confines of monasteries, providing the beat to the choreography of masked dances [17]. It supplies a sound pattern to public religious processions. And it may be employed for divinatory purposes.

What is missing in this sketchy catalogue of functions ascribed to the Buddhist *nga*, is to serve as a vehicle of transcendental transport—an elementary job of the shaman's drum. His instrument brings him, in a mimetic or imaginary journey during the course of his séances, to all realms of the universe. Propelled by the beat of his drum, the shaman can enter at will his various states of trance and possession. It facilitates communication with his professional ancestors and auxiliary spirits. And it fosters his healing functions [18], by providing the necessary tool to diagnose agents of misfortune and illness, to shield off, drive away, nail down and exterminate evil forces, to recuperate and guide back lost souls and to foretell prospects of recovery for his clients. The list of functions for the shaman's drum is longer than that for the Buddhist one.

SIKKIM

With this outline in view, a look at drums in western Sikkim, both Buddhist and shamanic, may now be attempted. Each of the two organological varieties will be examined, first in regard to their expected shapes within their respective groups and then in regard to variation against each other. These comparisons, as recommendable, will be made with concrete examples at hand.

Nga drums (*lag nga* and *nga chen*) of the classical or standard Buddhist make and shape can be encountered in monastic institutions such as Pemayangtse, Tashiding and at the Royal or Palace Chapel Tsuglakhang in Gangtok. The big drum, for instance, positioned in the main hall of the Royal Chapel of the Chogyals in Gangtok [19] fits in its features perfectly those of a Tibetan monastic model: The membrane is completely shaven, the surface of the hide displays a uniform green colouring, the convex sides of the frame are carved and painted

with Buddhist symbols, the wooden handle, set into a solid stand, portrays a stylised lotus, and the instrument will be beaten by an S-shaped wooden drumstick with a cloth-wrapped top.

The various drums at Pemayangtse Monastery that I have seen on display, are all, as one might expect, of a classical Tibetan Buddhist physiology: one (*a nga chen*) with a handle and positioned in a heavy stand, another, larger one, without a handle (*chö nga*), set on a lotus seat [20], and a third one, a smaller hand drum (*lag nga*), laid down, when not in use, horizontally on a four-footed circular stone disc with a diameter of about one third larger than that of the drum corpus itself. This classical appearance in all details is not surprising, if one considers the fact that Pemayangtse may be regarded as the prototype of a Tibetan style monastery on Sikkimese ground. Its first small temple was built in the seventeenth century by the Tibetan visionary lama and chief propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim, Lhatsün Chenpo (Lhatsün Namkha Jigme, 1597-1650). The temple structure was extended nearby by his third reincarnation Jigme Pawo, whose affiliation monastery, his 'mother house' in Tibet, was Mindroling of the Nyingma and Dzogchen orientation. As a celibate monastery and durable institution Pemayangtse was established in 1705 by the third king Chagdor Namgyal, and since then it developed into Sikkim's most important Nyingmapa centre whose lamas were to hold the monopoly for the coronation of its kings and the legitimisation of royal power right until the end of the monarchy in 1975.

Likewise, the two hand drums (*lag nga*) housed in the main temple of Tashiding Monastery, obstructing a closed backdoor, are clearly fabricated in modular fashion, an unmistakable sign of a Buddhist mode of production [21]. Both instruments are rather unadorned, one of them unfinished even with its scraped unpainted membrane surface, while the other one, hanging from the door frame, is provided with a smoother hide painted in green colour. A stand for two S-shaped drumsticks on the floor completes this monastic still-life. Tashiding, the navel of a Sikkimese hidden valley called Demojong, was built as a monastery in the seventeenth century: The first *chörten* construction is attributed to the great Tibetan propagator of Buddhist teaching, the previously mentioned Lhatsün Namkha Jigme, the first *lhakhang*, built in 1641, is considered the work of Ngadak Sempa Chenpo (1591-1654) and the main monastery, finished in 1717 and begun toward the end of Chakdor Namgyal's (1686-1716) reign by his half-sister Pedi Wangmo. Here again the stylistic influence of a Tibetan tradition is perceptible down to the last material detail.

At other Buddhist places, such as Dubdi Monastery, Silnon Monastery and Hongri Gumpa, instead of adhering to the high artistic code imported from Tibet for the fabrication of religious objects and instruments, a certain degree of paganisation can be made out in the construction of *nga* drums. Dubdi, located on a flat hill high above Yuksom (Yoksum)—the village where Phunstsog Namgyal was enthroned in 1642 as the first king of Sikkim by three great Nyingmapa lamas of Tibet, i.e. Lhatsün Chenpo, Kathog Rigzin Chenpo and Ngadak Sempa Chenpo—is also one of the oldest monastic compounds in the regions south of Kangchendzönga. Dubdi was founded in 1701 by Nyingmapa successors of Lhatsün Chenpo. The big drum (*nga chen*) in the main hall of the temple displays some minor deviations from the standard: The exterior surface of the frame is fully wrapped in *katak* silk, thus hiding any ornamentation that might be underneath [22]; the dark wooden handle is less a stylised lotus than an abstract twisted bolt; and the membrane, unpainted, is dotted all over with dark brownish marks—evoking the skin of a leopard. Another drum in the same hall is placed into a yellow wooden scaffold; its voluminous depth makes it look almost like a cylinder drum;

the two membranes are tightened against one another by strings running X-wise across the plain wood of the frame.

In the main temple of Zilnon (Silnon or Sinon) Monastery, founded in 1716 by one of Gyalwa Ngadak Sempa Chenpo's successors and likewise in the Lepcha Gumpa at Hongri one encounters Buddhist *nga* drums which, looked at sideways, resemble closely those made for shamans. This impression arises from the fact that in both cases the techniques for tying the membranes are identical: they are laced up by the help of zigzag strings running from one membrane's rim to that of the other [23]. This alignment between Buddhist *nga* and shamans' *dhyāngro* is reinforced by using small wooden blocks pushed in both cases underneath the laces to serve as resonators. The Lepcha village of Hongri (Humri) and its *gumpa* are located at the foot of a hill top named Pawo Hongri (Humri), where the ruins of Sikkim's first known temple (*lhakhang*) can be visited. It is said that its foundations were laid by the Tibetan treasure revealer Tertön Rigzin Göden (1337-1409), the first in a series of Tibetan sages to visit Sikkim and to discover powerful sacred sites there. The erection of Hongri Monastery is attributed to Gyalwa Ngadak Sempa Chenpo during the reign of the first king Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal in the middle of the seventeenth century.

The *nga* drum at Hongri Gumpa is a good example of a technological compromise between village craftsmanship and higher Buddhist aspirations. The handle, carved from a single trunk of dark wood, displays in its middle section evenly proportioned petals of a lotus, in keeping with the iconographic code of Tibetan Buddhism [24]. The main body of the instrument, however, could easily pass as one of a shamanic *dhyāngro*: the membranes shaved, yet untreated by varnish, are tied over the naked frame with leather laces drawn through cut holes at their rims and running criss-cross over the circular hoop [25]. In connection with the open display of resonatory wedges, this unconcealed mode of manufacture is characteristic for a shamanic drum technology. This cruder form of product finish has been observed, in some rare examples, also in Buddhist surroundings elsewhere: some of the *nga* drums of the Sherpa, belonging to small village *gumpas* and clearly not to larger monasteries, show these same rough features.

A step still further away from Buddhist refinement and in direction of shamanic drum technology has been made with a specimen kept in the Lepcha Gumpa at Lower Bom Busty, Kalimpong. The face of the drum is not circular, as in Buddhist *nga chen* pieces, but pear-shaped, as in many of the *jhākri* drums all over the Himalaya. Some of the shamans refer to this form of drum as 'heart-shaped', in reference to the beat resounding from it and to its vital connection with the religious specialist who owns it. The fur hair of the animal (*ghoral* deer presumably) that provided the skin for the membranes has been removed from them only partially. The two front faces are kept in a semi-natural state, only the beaten, lower central sections of the membranes being shaven [26]. And the peripheral edges of the skin, turned over the frame, have been left completely in their animal state. This gives the drum a partially savage look, as is often intended for the shaman's instrument. Finally, the skins are tied up on the frame in V-shaped lacing, one method among several employed for shamanic pieces [27]. The string used in this particular case is, contrary to what one might expect, of industrial fabric. This prefabricated string seems to be recent, replacing a former one of natural raw material. The Buddhist drum at Bom Busty in all its aspects is a far cry from those refined specimen as found for example in Pemayangtse Monastery [28]. The technological assimilation to shamanic drums notwithstanding, the Buddhist *nga* of Lower Bom Busty Gumpa is never lent to ceremonies to be held by the native Lepcha *bongthing* or *mun* priests, nor to any other shamanic practitioners, such as the tribal healers of immigrated

groups from Nepal; it is reserved exclusively for Buddhist rituals, as people living in the vicinity have unanimously assured.

Just as Buddhist religious practices and with them the relevant ritual objects were introduced into Sikkim from the north, i.e. from Tibet, shamanic healing techniques and the corresponding paraphernalia entered the country mainly from the west, from Nepal. To be exempted from these two elementary historical movements are the Lepcha and their *bongthing* and *mun* local priests, who were native and already there, and the Lhopo (or Bhutia) and their *pawo* and *nejum* spirit mediums, (the latter being the female equivalents to the former, male counterparts), who came in as settlers of Tibetan lineages a long time ago. Immigration from Nepal, starting in dribs and drabs in the late eighteenth century, increased in the late nineteenth century and was accelerated considerably in the last one hundred years by the influx of seasonal workers of various tribal and Hindu caste backgrounds and by tenant workers, particularly Limbu and Rai. These mixed groups of migrants from the western neighbour Nepal constitute today almost 80% of Sikkim's total population. As these various people flooding in imported each their own religious specialists, the present day composition of shamanic practitioners is quite heterogeneous.

The Limbu, who range first amongst Nepalese immigrants, brought their own *yeba*, *yuma* and *phedangma*, the Rai their *mangpa*, *seleme* and *bijuwa*, the Tamang their *bombo*, the Gurung their *pajyu* and *khlebri*, and the Hindu groups their respective *dhami-jhākri*. Over time this patchwork has been complicated by the fact that Nepalese shamans of any tribal or caste origin do not reincarnate or hand down their knowledge exclusively to successors of their own background. Thus, apart from passing on their professional call within their own lineage, tribe or caste, the ethnic and social boundaries are often crossed: A Pradhan *jhākri* may have a Tamang *bombo* as his predecessor and guru; a Chetri *dhami* or a *jhākri* of the Sunar goldsmith caste may follow in the footsteps of a Lepcha *yeba*; a Lepcha *yeba*, whose distant ancestors were native *bongthing*, may be the disciple of a Rai *bijuwa*; and a Rai *mangpa* may be the successor of a Tamang *bombo*. Besides, a Limbu *yeba* may be working exclusively as local healer in a Lepcha village. And, as Anna Balikci tells us, a Lepcha lama may convert into a Lepcha *bongthing*, a Lhopo may be acting as a Limbu *yeba*, a Limbu as a Lepcha traditional shaman, a Lepcha as a Lhopo *nejum*, and a Lhopo may be acting a Nepalese *jhākri* (Balikci 2008:153). This ritual flexibility amongst the Sikkimese tribals has to be taken into consideration when one looks at their respective paraphernalia.

Returning to the lacing methods that were discussed in connection with the irregular, semi-shamanic Buddhist *nga* drums (a criss-cross and a V-shaped one), it can be firmly established that drums of the *dhyāngro* variety always lay bare their ways of tying the membranes on the frame. The methods vary, and so do the materials used.

The strings of the drum belonging to the Lepcha *yeba* Kazi of Limbang village are made of synthetic industrial substance [29]; they tighten the two opposite membrane hides in an X-shaped fashion; the frame itself is cut from hard rubber, as normally used for water-pipes, while the membranes consist of wild goat (*ghoral*) leather.

The circular drum of the Limbu *yeba* of Sirbang village above Khechopalri Lake, small in diameter and broad in depth, has leather strings that tighten the membranes in a Z-shaped manner [30]; both strings and membranes are of the same kind of animal hide.

The drum of the Lunggun Rai *mangpa* Mani Raj of Simebung village in Lower Lasso is oval in shape and very heavy. The extraordinary weight is due to the fact that the frame is not made, as usual, from a thin, bent lath of *koiralo* wood (*Bauhinia variegata*)—it is cut instead from a single segment of a *khorsani* trunk (*Capsium annuum* or pepper tree), while the drum

handle is made of *malagiri* wood (*Cinnamomum cecidophne*). The laces, *tahrbung* in Rai language, tying the two membranes of *thar* goat hide (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), run over the wooden frame (R: *kengero*) in V-formation [31]. Porcupine quills are stuck under the leather strings, in reference to the mythological way of finding the drum's wood (see below).

The drum of D.B. Gurung, a *pajyu* healer of Labdang village, small in diameter, broad in depth and very light, is of recent make. The strings made of bamboo stripes are tied in irregular X-fashion [32]. The drum of his guru, Tika Ram Gurung of the same village, also small in size, is an old piece. The tying is also done in X-formation, but an additional string runs around the frame along the intersections of the Xs [33]. Remarkable for all Gurung shamanic drums of the region is the fact that they are not, as in the Nepalese homeland of the Gurung, pieces of the single-frame variation. This change to the double-membrane *dhyāngro*, the dominant shamanic drum type in Muglan, (as the territories of Nepalese living outside their original homes are called), is clearly a diasporic adaptation—a typological shift in response to a shift in environment.

The drum of the *dhami-jhākri* Tek Bahadur Saniyasi of Rajang village has a frame cut out of tin by a blacksmith. The two membranes of goat hide (in Nepali: *bakara*) are held by a series of iron cramps [34] in parallel distribution over the circular frame (Nepali: *ghero*). The *phurba*-type handle is of *paiyu* wood (*Prunus cerasoides*). Almost identical to this, including the iron cramps, is the drum of Tek Bahadur's teacher Basta Lal Sunar; both had Lepcha *yeba* in their line of predecessors. The use of iron cramps instead of leather strings or cane laces is quite rare, reported only for specimen found amongst the *yuma* and *yeba* healers of the Limbu in eastern Nepal. In fact, Tek Bahadur's and Basta Lal's instruments resemble in size, shape, handle and materials used, those found in the Upper Mewa Khola valley. It is, therefore, a rather safe suggestion that these Hindu *dhami-jhākri* instruments found in West Sikkim are derived from Limbu models from the Taplejung area in eastern Nepal.

All exterior handles of double-membrane *dhyāngro* drums in Nepal are in the shape of ritual daggers. This can be said, without exception, also of those attached to shamanic drums outside Nepal, in Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim (in short, in Muglan). The model is the *phurba*, a ritual instrument well known from Buddhist ceremonies. Unattached, it comes in many shapes and sizes, and in many materials: gold, silver, iron, crystal, stone and wood. As a handle, attached to a drum, it is always made of wood. Curiously, no Buddhist *nga* is ever adorned with such a *phurba*-shaped handle. It is an exclusive identification mark for shamanic drums. The degrees of resemblance to the classical *phurba* vary, depending mainly on the knowledge local experts entertain with the Buddhist material heritage. For instance, drums made for Tamang *bombo* healers, inside and outside Nepal, will always be rich in Buddhist iconographical detail, for in Tamang religious practice Buddhist and shamanic traditions exist side by side.

This may be true even when the contact is an indirect one, as in the case of Man Bahadur Pradhan, a Hindu *jhākri* of Chandrakot, Kalimpong; whose guru was a Tamang *bombo*. As a result of this influence, his drum handle displays many features of a classical *phurba* [35]: a top section with three heads, representing Brahma-Vishnu-Siva; a thunderbolt (*vajra*) middle part; and a three-sided blade at the bottom with various standard symbols such as *phumpa* vases, tridents, a *makara* sea-monster's face, intertwined snakes [36] and the portrait of a *bombo* with a drum in his left hand, a drumstick in his right and a traditional skirt covering his legs.

When the cultural background is further removed from classical iconography, the carver's interpretations may resort to more imaginative or more abstracted forms. On the

blade part, for instance, of Basta Lal Sunar's drum handle the intertwined snakes have turned into a series of rhombic signs set one on top of the other [37]. All three blades of Kazi Lepcha's drum handle present monkey figures standing erect on top of a single snake [38]. Tika Ram Gurung's drum handle ends with an anthropomorphic figure squatting on a life tree [39]. And Mani Raj Rai's handle is covered all over with geometrical carvings where the reminiscence to the *phurba* is just a faint echo [40]. The sun-face at the bottom blade of the same dagger-handle finds its counterpart on that of the Limbu *yeba*'s drum from Khechopalri: Each of the three blades has a single figure carved onto its otherwise blank sides: a sun-face, a half moon and an anthropomorphic figure—all done in modest craftsmanship [41-43].

The drums of the shamans, in contradistinction to those of the lamas, are personal objects and as such closely linked to the professional biographies of their owners. Each specimen has a life of its own and its story is connected with that of its holder. These biographies are highly individualised and, as they are grounded in myth, more general at the same time.

When Man Bahadur Pradhan (78) of Chandralok talked about the fabrication of his own drum—the materials of its composite parts, the places where and circumstances under which he found them—he did so in reference to the origin myth of the first drum in the universe [44]. This, he said, was made by Mahadeo (Shiva) himself, who, consequently, was the very first *jhākri* and patron of all who succeeded him. A reverential trident, sign of Shiva, is painted in chalk on the membrane of many a shaman's drum. According to this genesis myth of the *dhyāngro* drum, Mahadeo, after a lost competition with a Tibetan lama, sent the quills of a porcupine out into the high Himalaya to locate a suitable tree (a chestnut) for the frame, the appropriate stag for the skin, and a hen for the egg to be offered to the completed instrument. In Man Bahadur's own case it was an orchid tree (*koiralo*) and the skin of a domestic goat, as a substitute for a *mirga* deer. This replacement, as the old shaman emphasized, was regrettably due to the rapid disappearance of wild animals, which in turn diminished the efficacy of shamanic instruments. As a proof for the actuality of the myth he took out of his paraphernalia basket a quiver with porcupine quills. Such quills are employed by many shamans in eastern Nepal as magical weapons.

Ram Bahadur Subba, a 72 year old Limbu *yeba* of Pokhari Dara, who was initiated 61 years ago, owns two different types of drum, like other *yeba* of the region. One is a *dhyāngro* of the described type; it is kept, when not used, on an elevated altar in the back corner of his house, next to his *deli*, his paraphernalia basket [45]. The other one is a *dhol*, called *tunggar* in Lepcha language, a longish tubular or cylinder drum with a membrane each over its two open ends; it is placed at the bottom of two wooden poles rising up in the middle of the room [46]. These poles, called *rombong* in Lepcha, constituting a kind of 'world ladder', accommodate above the drum another basket with ritual utensils and above this, twigs of a chestnut tree. Both types of drum are always kept at separate places. Such instrumental dualism between *dhol* and *dhyāngro* within a single category of religious specialist is characteristic for Kiranti shamanic practice, particularly in groups such as Thulung, Kulung, Dumi, Mewahang and Lohorung Rai. Instead of a drum, shamans in many Himalayan communities may employ a metal plate (*thal*) in the course of their rituals. This will be beaten, as demonstrated by the *yeba* Ram Bahadur Subba, with a short and straight wooden stick [47].

When a *jhākri* has died, as in the case of Rup Lal Kharki (81) of Tashiding Bazaar, and his succession has not yet been effected, his drum and paraphernalia basket may be hung for a full year into the timberwork of his son's house [48]. If, on the other hand, the successor

has already been designated, all utensils including the drum may pass on to him. In many local traditions, however, the drum will be burnt at the death of its owner—as a final reminder of their common biographical fate.

In the case of Mani Raj Rai, a 72 year old *mangpa* of Simebung village, the succession is clear: his drum will be handed down to one of his two pupils. It is his first and only drum [49]. He got it, when he was 30 years of age, at the time of his initiation. He was a so-called 'self-born' shaman, a *bhui phutta*. As such he had no master's or co-villager's help to find the right tree for his drum frame. To make the proper choice, he took a porcupine quill and threw it toward a forest across the river. It landed in the trunk of a pepper tree, and from this trunk a carpenter made the oval frame. The hide of a *thar* deer for the membrane was bought in Labdang village, several hours away.

This biographical tale finds its distant echo in a legendary story told many valleys away in a Thulung Rai village. According to this, one ancestor got his drum frame from a tree on the other side of the Dudh Kosi River, on foreign territory belonging to an unfriendly Bangdel (or Sungdel) owner. The felling of the tree gave rise to a serious confrontation, out of which the drum maker and his helpers escaped only by magic, flying away on the newly made drum. In a commentary to this tale it was specified that the drum tree had been identified with the help of a porcupine quill, which, invigorated by a mantric spell, would fly like an arrow into the designated tree and stay stuck there until it was hewn down. Mani Raj Rai's ancestors happened to come from an area not far from the place of this plot. Both accounts, the Thulung ancestor's legendary anecdote and his own life episode, may be connected to the origin myth with Mahadeo as the first shaman. As Mani Raj Rai stated himself: 'We have our drums from Shivaji (Mahadeo), so ultimately we shamans are all Shivaji's pupils'.

CONCLUSION

In this contribution two kinds of ceremonial drums have been examined and juxtaposed: a Buddhist one, generally called *nga* and a shamanic one called *dhyāngro*. In Nepal, the shaman's drum appears in two elementary versions—as a frame drum with a single membrane and an interior handle in the areas west of the Buri Gandaki; and as a frame drum with two membranes and an exterior handle east of this divide.

In their respective homelands both forms of shamanic drum unfold their own range of morphological variation, indicating to which local or ethnic origin each piece should be assigned. In Sikkim, to where Nepalese shamanic practices were introduced in the wake of a continuous flux of individual and collective immigration, the allocational qualities of the drums have been weakened. The one-sided drum of western Nepal was not imported at all, (at least I could not trace a single instance), and the double-sided shamanic drum, due to assimilation in the new environment and to different ethnic composition, diminished its geographic peculiarities, without losing its morphological variation.

The Buddhist *nga*, which shares several basic typological features with the double-sided *dhyāngro* (wooden frame, two separate membranes of animal hide, external handle, curved drumstick), is neither place- nor client-specific: it can be made anywhere, by anyone, for anyone. If the customer is a monastic institution, the impersonal mode of production may be modular, quite in distinction to the individual manufacture of shamanic drums. When it is made in village or tribal surroundings, the Buddhist *nga* may adopt, in regard to lacing, frame and membrane treatment, fabrication techniques otherwise reserved for shamanic drums.

Under such transitional conditions the categorical differences between the two types of religious instrument begin to fade. Yet, whenever the *eidos* of distinction is prominent and the technological skill available, the differences will be stressed. Under all conditions a clear line is drawn for the handle: a stylised lotus in the Buddhist and a ritual dagger of the *phurba* type in the shamanic case. Curiously, the ritual dagger, never attached to the Buddhist drum as a handle, forms, unattached, an elementary ritual object in all kinds of Buddhist ceremonies. So even in this respect the border between Buddhist and shamanic material culture is fluid. Such reciprocal influence is fostered when both creeds are practiced in physical neighbourhood.

All things considered, both drums, the Buddhist *nga* and the shamanic *dhyāngro*, are to be classified as two varieties of a single basic type. This may stimulate speculations about their respective origins. Independent inventions? Or gradual development one out of the other? If one assumed a linear evolution from simple to complicated and from rough to refined, the shaman's drum might be taken as closer to an original prototype. Unfortunately such questions cannot be answered for lack of historical evidence. If one admits, however, that mutual influence is at work, it is methodologically safer to abandon the idea of evolution and to replace it by a transformational viewpoint. Metamorphosis may occur in both ways: from *dhyāngro* to *nga* and vice versa, from one variety to the other and back. This constant morphological flow, as verified from all empirical data, can be accommodated far better with a transformational perspective than with one of historical conjecture.

* One type of drum has been left out in this study: the *damaru*. Prominent in Buddhist rituals, in séances held by Himalayan spirit mediums called *pawo* or *lhapa*, as well as by shamanic religious specialists such as the Naxi *dto mba* and the Qiang *shüpi* in the Sino-Tibetan marches, this instrument might have been included here on the basis of its ceremonial use, even if it is employed in some areas also by street vendors and peddlers. It was excluded mainly for organological reasons: Coming in two basic forms—as an hour-glass and as a frame drum—the sound of the *damaru* is not generated by the beat of a separate drumstick, but by clappers attached to it. These are small pellets fastened by strings to the body of the instrument which, twisted back and forth, is struck by them in a rhythmic fashion. Both varieties of the *damaru* can be classified as pellet drums. They are not, strictly speaking, percussion instruments—as the ones discussed here.

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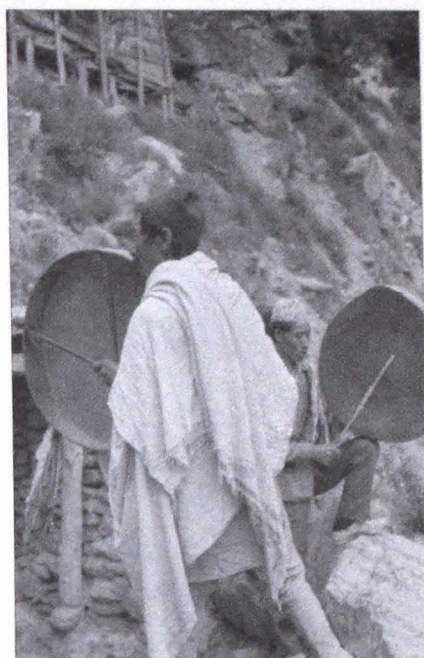
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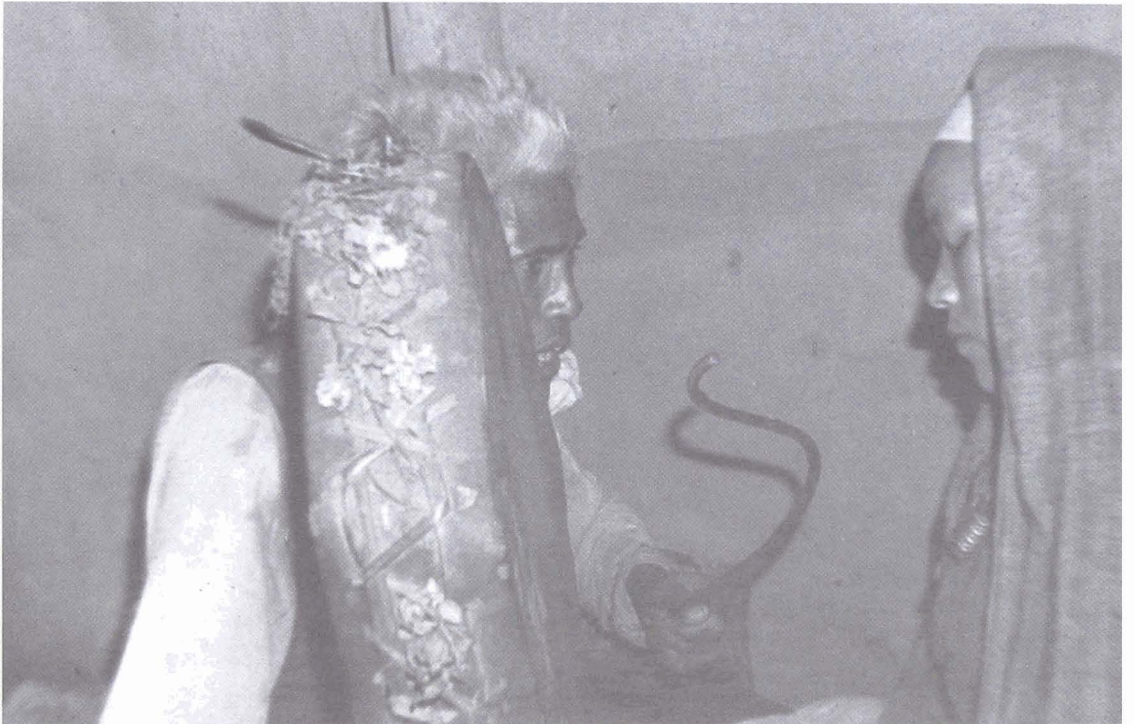
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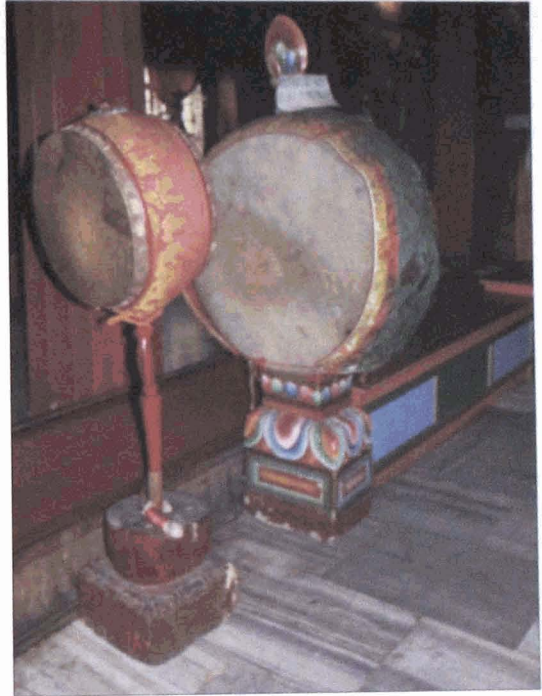
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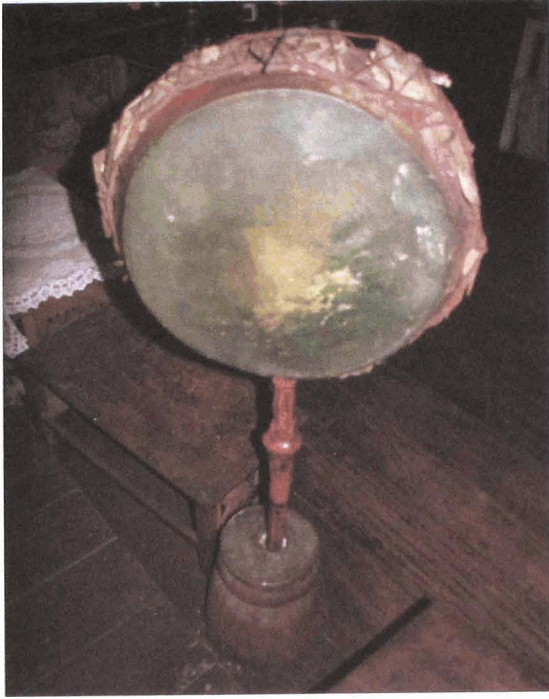
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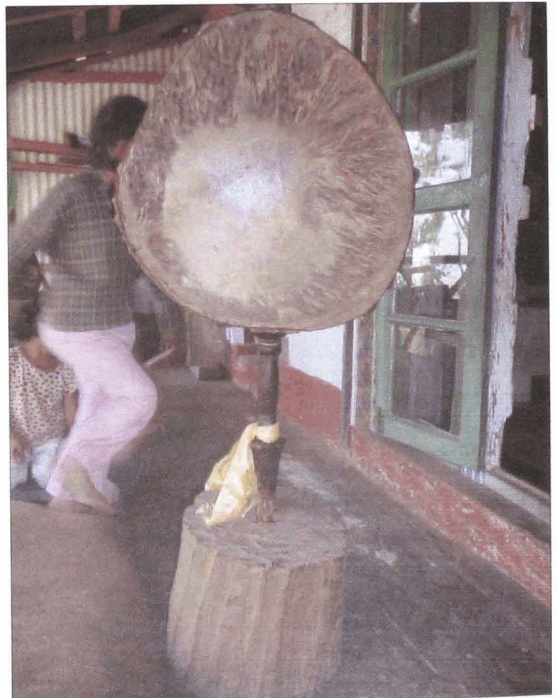
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TALES OF LEPCHA *CÍ*, THE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE FOR LIGHTEARTEDNESS

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Cí is the Lepcha millet beer that plays an essential part in traditional Lepcha life and in all sacred Lepcha rituals. The Lepcha word for millet beer is transcribed here as *cí*, but is also found written as *chee*, *chi* or *ci*. The Lepcha millet beer is also known as *kumyá món*, literally ‘medicine for lightheartedness’. In ceremonial language, *cí* may be designated as *chetshúk*, derived from *chet* ‘power, strength’, or *numfyengmú*, in which we recognize *ʔáfyeng*, a word expressing the particular smell of *cí*.

The drink *cí* is preferably made with millet, but can also be prepared from other grains when millet is not available. Millet beer is sometimes called *móngcí*, to specify that the drink is made with the fermented grains of *móng* ‘finger millet, *Eleusine coracana*’. Siiger claims that at the time of his fieldwork in the 1950s ‘ten different kinds of millet are grown, not for food, but mainly for the making of *cí*’ (Siiger 1967: 83). Other sources indeed mention the words *kumdó* and *kumdák* as indicating varieties of millet (Foning 1987: 245, Stölke 1900: 123), though it is as yet unclear exactly which varieties of millet these words refer to. Since the likeness to the Nepali word *kodo* for finger millet is especially striking in the case of the Lepcha word *kumdó*, the possibility that these particular words are Lepcha representations or corruptions of this Nepali word should be considered. When *cí* is made with rice it may be called *namórcí* ‘rice beer’ or *namórcímúk* ‘fermented rice beer’, an expression containing the words *múk* ‘to ferment’ and *namór* ‘rice’, used for rice in general. Reportedly, the Lepchas used to make *cí* out of the pith of *Caryota urens* or unspecified tree-ferns, which produced a very strong and potentially poisonous drink (Gorer 1938: 96, Siiger 1967: 103). Matthias Hermanns and Phani Bushan Chakraborty mention that besides *cí* the Lepchas used to brew a drink called *dyo* or *dyö*, which was made from fermented tubers, roots or bulbs and herbs (Chakraborty 1975 and 1994, Hermanns 1954: 83, 88, 90, 96), but the present study has not been able to corroborate this claim.

Cí is an alcoholic drink and in order to prepare it the starch in the millet grains must be turned into sugars, which is done by fermenting the millet. The fermentation process is brought along by using mould cakes, which contain various fungi that convert the starch in the grains to sugar (Katz 2003: 141-142). The Lepcha word for such mould or yeast cakes is *bât*, sometimes spelled *but*, which is also used as a main verb ‘to increase’. Nowadays these fermentation starters can be bought commercially and are generally known under the Nepali name *marcha*, but in all the different ethnic communities that use them, yeast cakes are traditionally homemade according to specific family recipes which are passed on from mother to daughter.

To make the fermentation starter *bât*, Lepchas mix finely crushed or ground rice, the root of *Plumbago zeylanica*, flowers of *Vernonia cinerea*, ground ginger and powdered chili together with the juice of the leaves of *Buddleja asiatica* (Naoko 2005: 136). The resulting dough is mixed with some previously prepared yeast and small cakes are formed, which are first rolled through the husks of rice and then wrapped in fronds of ferns. According to Lyangsong Tamsang, two different species of fern are used for this, known in Lepcha as

rukúng tungkrók and *lukship tungkrók*, the latter said by Grünwedel to be *Adiantum capillus-veneris* (Tamsang 2001: 11-12, Grünwedel 1898: 351). The yeast cakes should be dried slowly for about a week, preferably over the kitchen fire in the *panthóp* 'bamboo kitchen rack', which is said to be better than drying them in the sun. Gorer possibly misidentified the *Buddleja asiatica* shrub as a *Gaultheria* shrub, since he gives the following description of *bât*:

The native yeast had six ingredients; the roots of two trees which I could not identify, and the leaves of a gaultheria ground to powder mixed with powdered chili and ginger and powdered millet and water. The whole is made into a cake and left to dry for three days (Gorer 1938: 97).

In his list of ingredients for *bât*, Tamsang leaves out the *Plumbago zeylanica* root and the *Vernonia cinerea* flowers, but specifically mentions that the flowers or fruits of *pandám kúng* '*Buddleja asiatica*' should never be used, since they sour the *cí* (Tamsang 2001: 11-12). The phrase *cíkúng*, literally 'cí tree', does not indicate a species of tree a part of which is used in the preparation of *cí* or *bât*, but refers to the tree also known as *tagláng kúng*, which according to Grünwedel is a kind of *Eugenia* (Grünwedel 1898: 78). According to popular belief, if some of the bark of this tree is cut off before taking a journey and some treesap bleeds from the bark, the person undertaking the journey will obtain some *cí* during his travels.

To prepare *cí*, the millet grains are crushed so that they are separated from the husks, washed and boiled, which in Lepcha is called *cí ngót*. The boiled grains are drained and spread out to cool on a *talyóng* 'mat'. A portion of *bât* is distributed evenly onto the boiled millet grains. A couple of dried chillies and some hot charcoal may be placed on top of the millet and yeast blend before everything is loosely packed in leaves, such as *kundónglóp* 'plantain leaf', *kapherlóp* 'arrowroot leaf' or *kurdúnglóp* 'fig leaf', and covered up for a few days. According to Lyangsong Tamsang, the leaves of arrowroot procure the best results (Tamsang 2001: 12). After this first stage, everything is wrapped again in leaves, more tightly, and transferred to a basket or a bag. The grains are ready to use in about a week, depending on the outside temperature, but they can be left to ferment longer, which will enhance the taste of the *cí*. The fermented millet grains are called *cibep*.

To serve *cí*, a handful of the fermented grains are placed in a container and hot water is poured over, filling the container up to the brim. *Cí* is sometimes referred to as *pathyút*, the Lepcha word for the bamboo vessel in which the beer is served. The *pathyút* may be topped up with hot water three or four times, though the first time produces the strongest drink, called *cí?átsum*. The millet beer is sipped through a bamboo straw called *pahíp*. Alternatively, the fermented grains may be soaked in a small measure of water and strained or squeezed through a cloth or fine basket, which results in a milky drink considerably stronger than plain *cí*, known as *citsók*. When the millet grains are exhausted, they are called *sunggreng*. The exhausted millet grains are given to pigs and cattle to feed on, but the dregs of *namórcí* are appreciated by some Lepchas.

Cí is believed to have nutritional and medicinal properties, hence the compound *cizóm*, which contains the word *?ázóm* 'food, cooked rice'. Mention is made of *cí* being used specifically against chills and to strengthen women after childbirth (Gorer 1938: 96, 98). It is suggested that the high caloric content helps the weak to regain their strength and that the fresh ferns used during the fermentation process provide minerals (Thapa and Tamang 2004:

621). *Ci* given to women after delivery is called *dyámci*, derived from the word *dyám* which expresses the senses ‘soothe’ and ‘profit’.

The offering of *ci* to *rum* ‘gods, benevolent spirits’ is referred to as *cifát* and is firmly established in Lepcha mythology. Whenever immense difficulties are encountered, in traditional narratives it is usually the offering of *ci* that proves to be vital to the appeasement of provoked spirits, which leads to the final solution of the problem. Since the Lepchas offer gifts whenever they approach supernatural beings, practically no sacred rituals take place without offering *ci*. The first *ci* of the season is always offered to the gods and is called *ciphut*.

The simplest form of *cifát* is to sprinkle several drops of the liquid into the air either with the *pahíp* or some other straw or reed, which is often done as part of a prayer. Alternatively, *ci* may be sprinkled on ceremonial objects or objects that are to be sanctified. *Pathyúts* or bottles filled with *ci* may be offered to the *rum*, usually as part of a larger offering. Small packages of fermented millet grains are called *ciprók*, these are used if a social or religious occasion demands a gift of *ci*. In some ritual ceremonies *ci* is drunk by the persons to whose benefit the ceremony is conducted, as is the case in wedding ceremonies when the bride and groom only become a *nabóm* ‘couple’ after drinking out of the same *pathyút*. Newborn babies are fed some drops of *ci* during their naming ceremony. When a person has died, the departed soul is offered a *pathyut*, with the *pahíp* placed the wrong way round. Foning reports that if children laugh because thunder and lightning strike suddenly, some *cibep* are rubbed on their foreheads to protect them (Foning 1987: 239). During the *nambun* ‘new year celebrations’, *cibep* are also sprinkled over groups of people before entering a house as part of a purification ceremony.

Ci is a refreshing and nourishing drink for benevolent spirits, but when it is consumed by *múng* ‘demon, evil spirits’ or by snakes, it has harmful effects on them (Hermanns 1954: 84). The dual or paradoxical nature of *ci* is well-known among Lepchas and is reflected by the popular saying *ci thang yâ gang món, ci thang ma yân gang nyung* (Tamsang 2001: 13), that is ‘If you know how to drink *ci*, it is medicinal. If you don’t know how to drink *ci*, it is poisonous’. De Beauvoir-Stocks records a traditional narrative in which *rumlyáng* ‘heaven, the abode of the gods’, is described as a place where all drink is like *ci*, and she adds that the heavenly *ci* becomes water when it runs down to earth, and that it turns into poison when it finds its way further down to Hell (de Beauvoir-Stocks 1925: 19, footnote 1).

The heavenly origin of *ci* is reflected in various traditional Lepcha narratives, which describe how the fermentation starter used in its preparation was brought up from the underworld. One such narrative was shared with the present author during fieldwork in Ngase Kyóng in Kalimpong in 1996 by Pasang Tshering Simikmú. The narrative is entitled *nyúlik nyúsóng mun sa sung* ‘The story of Nyúlik Nyúsóng Mun’ and the recorded version opens as follows:

ren-do-m nyúlik-mun nyúsóng-mun-sa sung dun-bo-sho
 sir-self-DAT nyúlik-mun nyúsóng-mun-GEN story tell-give-NPR

‘Madam, I will tell you the story of Nyúlik Mun Nyúsóng Mun.’

sung-re ʔore
 story-DEF this

‘The story goes like this.’

ʔá sukdam-ká káyú róng-sang-ká-re
former world-LOC 1P Lepcha-PL.H-LOC-DEF

sukdam lungmíngtám-ʔáre-re lyáng ʔit
world universe-this-DEF land create

úng ʔit rum-nu zúk zónnyín zúk
water create god-ABL make mankind make

‘In the olden days, here with us Lepchas, this world here was created, the waters were created and the gods created mankind.’

zónnyín-do-m zúk-bá-re muzu
mankind-self-DAT make-when-DEF body

chóp-re fát-sá zúk ʔáhret ʔátóp-re lang
water-DEF earth-GEN make bone flesh-DEF stone

kúng-sá ʔán ʔáviʔányú-re ʔúng ʔásómʔábum-re
tree-GEN and blood-DEF water living.being-DEF

sukmut ʔán muzu-sá trát-re satsuk sahór-sá
wind and body-GEN warmth-DEF sun star-GEN

ʔáhrún-sá zúk-nu
heat-GEN make-ABL

‘When creating mankind, bodies were made from water and earth, bones and flesh were made from trees and rocks, the breath to live was taken from the wind, the heat for the body was taken from the sun and the stars.’

zónnyín sukdam lungmíngtám ʔáre-ká zúk-tho
mankind world universe this-LOC make-EXH

‘Mankind, the world and the universe were made like this.’

The full story of Nyúlík Nyúsóng Mun as recorded in this version is based on forty-five minutes of spoken text and the written and annotated version is unfortunately far too lengthy to be included here. The story describes how shortly after the creation of our world, demons arise and start killing and eating living creatures. The gods send the deities Nyúlík Nyúsóng Mun and Jor Bónghing to the earth to function as the first divine healers and bestow certain divine protective powers upon them. However, Nyúlík Nyúsóng Mun and Jor Bónghing cannot stop the demons from performing more destructive acts. The gods convene again and discuss the matter in great detail. After trying several other solutions, such as bestowing divine powers upon certain insects, the gods decide to prognosticate the future by divination.

It is foretold that the use of the divine *cí* as an offering in religious rituals will play an important part in the preservation of mankind. Jor Bónghing finds out that the key element for making *cí*, the *bât*, is held by a sorceress in the depths of the earth. This sorceress is sometimes referred to as Matli Ányú and at other times as Sâmlí Sâmla Ányú. The narrative describes in detail how several creatures try to get hold of a yeast cake, but none of them manage to take it all the way up to the human world. Finally the cockroach succeeds in bringing some *bât* up to the world of the living. The people are now able to prepare *cí* for offerings to the gods, which indeed does stop the killing and disasters. Ever since this time the sacred drink *cí* has been offered as a nectar to the gods so that humans may be able to bear trouble and hardships and be protected from demons. But, when the sorceress from whom the *cí* was stolen realised what happened, she put a curse on the *cí* so that anyone who drinks too much of it would meet with problems, get into fights, quarrel and make enemies. The narrative mentions that if the *cí* is used in a wise way there is no problem, which may serve as the mythological explanation of the dual nature of *cí* mentioned above.

Several versions of this tale have been recorded previously, these link the origin of *cí* to the origin of marriage and partly overlap with the tale of Nyólik Nyúsóng Mun described above (de Beauvoir-Stocks 1925: 26-28, Foning 1987: 91-96, Gorer 1938: 481-484, Hermanns 1954: 83-84, Siiger 1967: 131-132). When Turbongnum met Naripnom, he instantly falls in love with her and wants to court her. Turbongnum's parents realize that they will have to negotiate with Naripnom's parents and find presents for her. One of the presents they wish to acquire is the precious liquid *cí*. In order to prepare it, they need to obtain some *bât* from the inner depths of the earth, where they are kept by a sorceress. Several attempts are made to procure *bât*, and finally the cockroach manages to get hold of some and brings it up to the world of the living, where it has since been included in the traditional wedding ceremony.

Lepcha accounts such as these describe the origin of many traditional beliefs among the Lepchas and offer explanations for many things that form part of the natural surroundings of the Lepcha people. For example, the tale of the origin of *cí* contains the story of *pagó ríp* 'flower and seed of *Oroxylum indicum*', the seed of which is considered by Lepchas to be very pure and is used in many religious and social gatherings. The story explains that the bumblebee, one of the creatures who attempted to procure *bât* from the underworld, had been betrayed by *pagó ríp* and that the two became mortal enemies. The gods decided to protect *pagó ríp* from the wrath of the bumblebee by arranging that she would only flower at night and her seeds should drop down from the tree before the bumblebee awoke, so that her survival would be guaranteed. Moreover, the gods decided that her seeds would be considered extremely pure and valuable.

Another popular tale explains the white patch or necklace of the bird *kahom fo* 'Common Hill-partridge, *Arborophila torqueola*', sometimes called *kahom bâtfó*, who is said to have lead the Lepcha people to a safe place when their land *mayel lyáng* was severely flooded. The bird guided the Lepchas to the top of the mountain Tendong and started offering *cí* to the gods, which appeased them and convinced them to abate the flood. Whilst offering *cí* to the gods, some grains of millet fell on *kahom fo*'s neck, the traces of which can still be recognized in the white mark there.

Traditional Lepcha narratives often occur in different versions, such as the various explanations of the origin of *cí*. These all form part of the living corpus of traditional Lepcha myths and tales, known in Lepcha as *lúngten sung*. Lepchas accept some alternate versions of tales and of names of characters or deities as personal or regional variants and are aware that

any renderings of traditional tales may evolve over time. However, some other alternate versions of traditional narratives are adamantly rejected by other Lepchas, perhaps because they represent a different regional or cultural tradition in which not all Lepchas recognize themselves. Lepcha oral narratives and their different versions should be documented in as much detail as possible while the oldest generation still remembers them. Whilst doing this, attention should be paid to the diversity of the Lepcha community, as the different versions of these traditional tales in some cases reflect interesting and hitherto poorly described cultural, religious and linguistic differences between the Lepchas living in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling district, Nepal and Bhutan.

Whereas the traditional tales of its origin may be rendered in several versions the exact details of which may cause some debate amongst Lepchas, the brewing, preparing, drinking and offering of *ci* remains an important unifying phenomenon for most Lepcha people. In Arthur Foning's words: "Our tribal drink *chee*, is such that without it we cannot please our gods, and cannot appease the dreaded evils and the demons; so much so that without it, we cannot even get wives. Life cannot be imagined without it (Foning 1987: 245)."

NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION

Throughout this article Lepcha words are given in the transliteration favoured by the present author which is described elsewhere (Plaisier 2007: 38-44), except in quotations, where the original transcription of the quoted author is maintained.

ABBREVIATIONS

1P	first person plural suffix
ABL	ablative suffix
DAT	dative suffix
DEF	definite suffix
EXH	exhaustive suffix
GEN	genitive suffix
LOC	locative suffix
NPR	non-preterite suffix
PL.H	human plural suffix

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THE FORGOTTEN DROKPAS OF NORTH SIKKIM

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Sikkim Himalaya, in the world's youngest mountain range, has habitats ranging from c. 300 to 8598 metres, with the northern cold desert adjoining the Tibetan plateau being home to one of the most marginalized and virtually forgotten Drokpas or nomadic Tibetan graziers practicing transhumance with grazing as their main livelihood. Their unique lifestyle of co-existence with wild biodiversity under the harshest of weather conditions is being impacted on by Bhutia tribals living in lower temperate regions who exploit the cold desert as well as temperate habitats for their survival. Hemmed in by the international border with the TAR of China and the Lachen Village, the Drokpas have accepted too many adjustments in the interests of national security as well as the livelihood security of the Lachenpas. Their unique survival strategies against feral dogs, land-mined areas and other biotic interferences are in danger of being permanently lost to humanity at a time when global warming issues put focus on conservation of the water banks on the roof the world. A Conservation Strategy is suggested as a possible solution to the various issues at play in a unique habitat precious to Sikkim.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Sikkim is famous nationally and internationally as a Biodiversity Hotspot as it harbours some of the most threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna, most of which are found in its cold desert and alpine regions. This is especially true in the extreme north of Sikkim where an area comprising at least one seventh of the state along the international border forms the tail end of the great Tibetan Plateau, with remnants of the prehistoric Tethys Sea, in the form of a brackish water lake and oceanic fossils. It is also the place where the great mountain passes form traditional migratory routes for some wildlife species recognized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as globally threatened with extinction. The entire area is an eco-region in itself, with its glaciers, lakes and rivers. Sikkim's lifeline, the river Tista is born here. Such an area occurs nowhere else in the Eastern Himalayas. But it is still unprotected as far as its biodiversity values are concerned.

In recent decades, many developmental activities have been taking place here. These areas are also under heavy defence deployment and resulting defence priorities, some of which are not compatible with the biodiversity conservation initiatives of the state government. The few local people are transhumant tribals largely dependent on the forest land for their survival and are a part and parcel of this exceptional ecosystem. Given the vital issues at stake in this area, it is imperative that this unique area be brought under the protected area umbrella by being formally recognized and accorded due protection. This can only be achieved by joint cooperation between the Border Security Forces, the State Forest Department and the tribals inhabiting the area.

STUDY SITES

As part of a national programme, the years 2000-2003 saw a state-wide initiative called the Sikkim Biodiversity and Strategy Action Plan (SBSAP) as part of a national initiative called the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan or NBSAP to conserve sustainably the wild as well as domestic diversity of plants and animals including micro-organisms of Sikkim. The author, through the Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management of the Government of Sikkim, covered the North and East Districts attempting to reach out to all sections of the population in an effort to formulate the SBSAP in a participatory manner. This involved participation of people from all walks of life, having traditional / scientific knowledge to contribute. The author visited some of the remotest villages as well as those on the peripheries of wildlife protected areas. Besides public meetings at Muguthang (c. 5000m), Thangu, Lachen, Lachung and Tsunthang, a biodiversity festival was held at Tsunthang in North Sikkim. Two state level steering committee meetings resulted in the finalization of the governmental and community action plans called GSAP and CSAPs. Following informal brain storming sessions involving all the stakeholders these were condensed into one holistic SAP the executive summary of which, translated into the four local languages, Nepali, Limbu, Bhutia and Lepcha, was released officially on 29 April 2003. The final document was published in 2004 and released on World Environment Day, 5 June 2005.

Simultaneously, another three-year study covering mainly the summer seasons—with shorter forays during the winters—was underway by the author in Sikkim's cold desert to develop a wildlife conservation strategy for the trans-Himalayan and alpine grasslands of North Sikkim under the Alpine Grassland Ecology Project (GEP) of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). This was expected to lead to a long term management plan for wildlife conservation in this unique cold desert in the Eastern Himalayas.

Through the SBSAP we tried to document the past and existing status of biodiversity as perceived by the local people and their aspirations. The GEP was focused on wildlife conservation interlinked with the intrinsic eco-friendly lifestyles of the Drokpas and other native and non-native human inhabitants of the cold desert, which matched well with the SBSAP process.

Both initiatives SBSAP and Alpine GEP came together in two study sites in Drokpa country:

1. Intensive study site: Tso Lhamo Plateau
2. Short-term study sites: Lhonak, Lashar and Yume Samdong Valleys

Methodology consisted of surveys by vehicle, yak, and pony and on foot, covering most of the study area and involved spending time with the nomads as well as within the other settlements on the plateau including camping in the remote areas attempting to quantify the floral and faunal components of this less studied land.

OUTCOME

We identified a range of biodiversity issues in c. 1000 sq. km. which included species of

- Wildlife: >20 Mammals, >170 Birds, 2 Amphibians, Invertebrate pollinators, Medicinal plants, Wild edibles

- Domestic Livestock: Yak (1000+), Highland Sheep and Pashmina Goats (<1000), few Horses and Dogs
- Pests: Stray and Feral Dogs
- 23 nomadic Drokpa grazier families

Some major problems identified were:

- Lack of formal protection of biodiversity
- Lack of awareness among native and non-native people
- Non-biodegradable and kitchen garbage
- Loosely fenced land-mined areas
- Need for coordination between state government, civil and military authorities in respect of biodiversity concerns which in turn are interrelated with the nomadic lifestyles of the local human inhabitants of the plateau

We recorded some major conservation concerns:

1. Security forces overuse at lakes and wetlands on the international border areas.
2. Accidental introduction of pests and disease through pack animals or import of fodder, e.g. local people reported that snail proliferation wiped out the local population of domestic Tibetan Highland Sheep (due to liverfluke infection) of the Drokpas in Lhonak Valley.
3. Increasing population of stray and feral dogs in and around border areas which directly impacted the remnant indigenous population of Tibetan Mastiff, a valuable livestock guardian breed of dog, also known as the most ancient breed known to man.
4. Urgent need for fencing of minefields to prevent casualties of globally threatened wildlife species as well as domestic livestock like yak.
5. Extensive road network and resultant pollution due to various anthropogenic activities.
6. Poaching / Hunting / Retaliatory poisoning directly impacting globally threatened wildlife like Snow Leopard, Tibetan Argali, Black-necked Crane and endangered species like Eurasian Lynx and other wild predators.
7. Need for collaboration with other government agencies such as military and other security agencies, tourism, animal husbandry (e.g. for protection of vultures, prevention of Avian Influenza), education (need for awareness, alternate livelihoods), agri/horti/floriculture departments and need for serious research inputs in forest management.

During both the SBSAP and GEP studies we observed that a small group of surviving Tibetan nomads locally called Drokpas was being slowly but surely edged out of the only place they call home, the trans-Himalayan and alpine grasslands and pastures in the Tibetan plateau part of Sikkim, due to the issues detailed above.

The high dry grasslands of this unique region of North Sikkim have traditionally been used by generations of these nomadic Tibetans to graze their yak, highland sheep and pashmina-type goats. These Drokpas are perhaps the only humans able to survive and subsist at some of the highest altitudes in the world; tolerating severe climatic conditions and one of the harshest lifestyles known to mankind. As devout Buddhists, they are also one of the rare communities known to practice eco-friendly vulture-aided sky burials.

Today the barren treeless cold desert areas of Tso Lhamo, Lhonak Valley and Lashar Valley in North Sikkim are home to less than twenty Drokpa families. They are responsible

for most of the population of highland livestock of the state. In the past when the borders were open, around twelve to thirteen Drokpa families freely roamed the Tso Lhamo cold desert plateau right into Tibet, while almost as many used the Lhonak Valley and adjoining areas north via passes such as Chorten Nyima La and Naku La. This ancient lifestyle virtually unchanged over the centuries is today experiencing major turbulences.

Sikkim Drokpas grazed their livestock during winters, right up to Khampa Dzong in Tibet when the borders were open. Drokpas from Tibet came in with their livestock right up to Dongkung, Lungma, Kering and Lhechen areas in Sikkim during summers. The Lachenpas of Lachen Valley further below (around 3000 metres) went up to trade oil, food rations, sugar and cloth from Kalimpong into Tibet on yak and pony, bringing back wool (in large bales taken directly to Kalimpong), salt, carpets, blankets, cloth and sheep mutton. Similarly the Lachungpas of Lachung Valley (2900 metres) went via Dongkia La to Tso Lhamo and up to Gyantse in Tibet to trade in similar fashion. Trade also took place at a sort of 'haat' (bazaar) somewhere around the lake Tso Lhamo. The population was small and business was good, unlike at present when meat, cheese, butter, fat of yak and sheep as well as other related products from this region of Sikkim are rare, coveted delicacies.

Then the borders closed and the Indian Army occupied the area, completely changing this timeless lifestyle with no more border crossings for grazing or trade or marriage. Sikkim Drokpas were restricted to a tiny patch of the vast Tibetan Plateau in the Tso Lhamo region, Lhonak and Lashar, now at the mercy of the vagaries of nature, supplementing their pastoral livelihood with odd jobs with the military and husbanding some livestock belonging to the Lachenpas, besides their own.

Earlier, intermarriages in a larger region ensured mixing of people, as also good crossbreeding of the domestic livestock and no dearth of fodder due to trans-border migrations. Today only seven families remain in Lhonak Valley, the famed international flyway for migratory birds and the only breeding ground of the globally threatened Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* in this part of the Himalayas. The highland sheep population of this valley has been wiped out over the last three decades; many Drokpas have sold out their livestock and migrated to Tibetan Refugee settlements in Ravongla, South Sikkim and elsewhere.

One of the major factors influencing this is the authority of the Bhutia tribals of the village of Lachen, whose territory extends to the now permanent frontier village of Thangu all the way up to the Dongkia La pass to the north, and almost down to the Tsunthang junction (at the foot of the mountain ridge separating Lachen and Lachung valleys), and whose livestock grazes together with that of the Drokpas in the Tso Lhamo cold desert and in the Lashar Valley. This community practices the 'dzomsa', their traditional type of village Panchayat system of strict local self-governance, where the Drokpas have only nominal presence. Under this system, all benefits coming to the village are shared equally among the community irrespective of participation. The system works wonderfully for the villagers and instils a sense of equality, but this has yet to be extended to the Drokpas. The system of heavy fines (monetary or material) and community expulsion are significant concerns, as are the right to seasonal collection of medicinal herbs, the sale of livestock and other related products outside the area. Trapped between the international border related restrictions and the inequitable regulations of the dominant community, the Drokpas have no option but to abide by or abandon their lifestyle resigning themselves to re-settlement outside the area forever.

On the Tso Lhamo plateau the same twelve odd families hang on to a tenuous life, now mostly related to each other. The many unmarried ageing males find no partners to share a life where family members get up before dawn to process dairy products, milk the yak and sheep, cook, eat, go herding the animals over several kilometres and return in the evenings back to a transient camp, all in rarefied atmosphere at an altitude of over 5000 metres. Yaks have begun to show defects of inbreeding and livestock guardian dogs, the proud Tibetan mastiffs, mixed with lowland mongrels. Progressive Drokpas whose children were schooled do not expect them to return to a nomadic shepherd life and elders acknowledge that they are the last in their line. They themselves have not changed, still living nomadic lives in yak-hair tents and stone shelters, wearing traditional costumes and speaking their own language, but almost everything else around them has changed.

Today their cold desert land with its fabulous medicinal plants and endangered wildlife is criss-crossed with roads, populated with non-native people, occupied for defence priorities, riddled with landmines and grazed to the ground. It is time we were aware that the day is not too far off when the Drokpas will all quietly die out and the only yak we see will be moth-eaten skins on the ground or a pair of horns adorning a doorway.

During the first meeting of the National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP) in Gangtok in August 2001, two Drokpas from Lhonak addressed the gathering requesting the government to take responsibility for their yak, retaining them as caretakers. At least they could be with their animals till the end.

RESULTANT CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Thus the major issues in focus are key biodiversity conservation concerns and initiatives; livelihood issues; infrastructure development; culture conservation *vis-à-vis* negative outside influences; challenges: feral dogs, snares for wildlife, non-biodegradable garbage; dying/drying 'ocean' Lake *Gyam Tsona*, one of the sources of river Tista; public consultation with traditional system of local administration or Dzomsa of Lachen (including Thangu) and Lachung; historical and present grazing patterns, migratory routes, changing traditions of graziers; animal distribution patterns (wild or domestic animals do not use the same areas); requirement for conservation zonation where protecting critical habitats equates protecting every species, human/domestic/wild.

The evolving conservation strategy was seen to be as diverse as the bio-diversity or diversity of life itself, with there being basically three major stakeholders playing their roles through various possible initiatives:

1. The indigenous nomadic community needs to develop its local capacity
 - Inside the forest areas through institution building of nomads, livelihood improvement and alternative energy issues, culture preservation, protection of sacred landscapes, rehabilitation of livestock guardian dog, the Tibetan Mastiff
 - Outside forest areas through strengthening of Dzomsa, formation of non-governmental organization networks (e.g. Lachung and Lachen Conservation Committees) and trans-Himalayan Joint Forest Management Committee formation
2. Border security authorities role would be
 - Sensitization through biodiversity training booklets and other measures

- Formation of Sikkim Eco Task Force from among the military and paramilitary agencies

3. State Forest Department as the third major stakeholder needs to work jointly with both the indigenous communities as well as the security forces through

- Institutionalizing joint monitoring of the entire area with local security forces
- Formation of Medicinal Plant Conservation Area (MPCA) Network,
- Establishing a Research Station in collaboration with relevant institutions
- Declaration of the area as Tso Lhamo Cold Desert Conservation Reserve under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act for protecting the indigenous biodiversity including the native people, especially the Drokpas

LINGERING QUESTION: ANY HOPE FOR AN AGEING PEOPLE?

The Drokpas have a key role in cultural, religious and traditional safeguarding of Sikkim's wild and domestic biodiversity which includes the humans as well. And these Drokpas are a people well known for peaceful co-existence with their environment in a sacred landscape with amazing seasonal variation responsible for the diversity of life forms in a cold desert ecosystem. It remains to be seen if the current harsh demands cause the entire community to give in and give up its traditional lifestyle and migrate out of the area forever, leaving their last/future generations to seek livelihood alternatives outside their native land. In fact even as we speak the enormous effort put into these studies has been jeopardized by the attitude of the more dominant Lachenpas and the unwillingness of the dwindling Drokpa community to take a more proactive stand and coerce the other stakeholders into ensuring their survival.

CONCLUSION

Sikkim is now a major tourism destination and there is increasing pressure to loosen up present entry restrictions in the study area. With more tourists visiting the study area to see its fabulous glacial lakes and wildlife, a number of lodges have come up in Lachen and Thangu. Some Drokpa families with houses in Thangu have since converted them into hotels. Exposure to the seemingly improved local lifestyles has already caused at least one break-up in a Drokpa marriage; few have sold off their portion of the family livestock to start local taxi services, or moved to Gangtok to pursue a business along the Natu La trade route; at least one now runs a small eatery at Gangtok. In a sense the increasing quantum of tourism has hastened the crumbling of the intricate social fabric of the already dwindling Drokpa community. On the other hand tourism could also be seen as an opportunity that the nomadic Drokpas chose to shift from the stifling situation in their desert homeland and to adjust to a more settled life in a hitherto alien urban surrounding.

Both the SBSAP and Alpine GEP studies lead to the conclusion that if the Government of Sikkim declares the entire area as a Tso Lhamo Cold Desert Conservation Reserve with the consent of the local community as well as other stakeholders and managed *in toto* by the Conservation Reserve Management Committee, the eco-friendly lifestyle of the nomads could be sustained and enhanced (if they so wished). This in turn would ensure the conservation of the threatened wild flora and fauna in a win-win situation, in perhaps the best biodiversity conservation initiative strategized so far.

For epochs to come the peaks will still pierce the lonely vistas, but when the last Snow Leopard has stalked among the crags and the last Markhor has stood on a promontory, his ruff waving in the breeze, a spark of life will have gone, turning the mountains into stones of silence. George B. Schaller in *Stones of Silence*, 1980

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LE SYSTÈME DE PRODUCTION AGRO-PASTORAL DE LACHEN FACE À DE NOUVELLES CONTRAINTES¹

SOPHIE SABATIER-BOURDET

Lachen est situé dans le nord de l'état du Sikkim, au Nord Est de l'Inde, à une altitude avoisinant les 2700 m. La vallée de Lachen constitue une zone de peuplement ancien où les habitants ont développé un système de production particulier, unique (si ce n'est un cas plus ou moins similaire dans la vallée voisine de Lachung), adapté à la situation géographique de la région. Les Lachenpas (habitants de Lachen) constituent depuis toujours une société transhumante, pratiquant comme dans les schémas les plus classiques, des mouvements sud-nord-sud (transhumance directe et inverse) tout au long de l'année. Ils s'établissent, suivant la saison, à différents étages de la vallée où ils possèdent maisons et/ou champs. L'originalité (et c'est là que portera plus précisément notre étude et notre réflexion) réside ici dans le fait que la majeure partie de la population suit les troupeaux dans ses migrations, laissant ainsi le village principal quasiment vide d'habitants une grande partie de l'année.

Depuis la fermeture de la frontière avec le Tibet en 1962, qui ne se situe qu'à une cinquantaine de kilomètres au nord de Lachen, les Lachenpas ont du réorienter leurs activités autrefois axées sur le commerce entre le Tibet et le Sikkim. Cependant, ils sont restés un peuple transhumant pratiquant aujourd'hui encore l'agriculture et l'élevage, soit comme activité principale, soit comme activité secondaire; et continuent leurs déplacements saisonniers, passant avec leur troupeau et leur famille d'un étage à l'autre.

Les activités villageoises y sont encadrées et gérées par un système de gouvernance locale très stricte: le *dzomsa*. En effet, le système des panchayats ne fut pas étendu aux vallées de Lachen et de Lachung où prédomine depuis plusieurs siècles le *dzomsa*, assemblée regroupant un membre de chaque famille et chargée de la gestion et de l'organisation de la communauté. Le *dzomsa* joue donc un rôle prédominant dans cette région excentrée et constitue le pilier de cette société. Il se veut une structure de gestion du territoire et de ses ressources, de cohésion sociale et d'encadrement des activités des résidents.

De nos jours, et essentiellement depuis l'annexion du Sikkim à l'Inde en 1975, le *dzomsa* et l'ensemble de la société lachenpa sont confrontés à une pression extérieure de plus en plus forte. Ses pouvoirs et ses marges de manœuvre sont de plus en plus réduits, notamment en ce qui concerne la gestion du patrimoine et du territoire. Les systèmes de production sont donc, au moment de notre étude, en pleine évolution et on peut aujourd'hui se demander si les schémas classiques et les pratiques traditionnelles vont perdurer ou s'ils sont voués à disparaître.

1. LACHEN: PRÉSENTATION

Situation, localisation, climat, végétation

La vallée de Lachen, puisque l'étude porte d'avantage sur une vallée que sur un village, s'étend sur quatre-vingt kilomètres environ, de Chungthang au Sud à Tso Lhamo au Nord. L'altitude varie de 1900 m à plus de 5000 m, passant ainsi de l'étage tempère à l'étage alpin, où se situent les pâturages d'altitude.

Le sud de la vallée de Lachen, où se situent les hameaux nommés Denga, Latong, Rabum, Selepmu, appartient à la zone dite tempérée et constitue, de par son climat moins rude, la zone d'hivernage des Lachenpas.

Le village de Lachen est situé à 2700 m d'altitude à une quinzaine de kilomètres en amont (à 28 kilomètres de Chungthang) sur le versant est, et est encadré de pentes très abruptes. Le climat y est assez rude, les températures ne dépassent pas 6°C durant les mois d'hiver et 15°C durant les mois les plus chauds. La saison humide est marquée par d'incessantes pluies de mousson, qui s'étendent de mi-mai à fin septembre. Cependant, à cause de vents parfois violents, la vallée constitue une des régions les moins humides du Sikkim. Le village de Lachen reçoit 1600 mm de pluies par an contre 3500 mm à Gangtok, la capitale. La végétation autour de Lachen est assez dense malgré quelques zones de déforestation intense, particulièrement sur le versant de la montagne surplombant le village. Le versant ouest est lui encore intact car plus abrupt et plus difficile d'accès. La forêt est essentiellement composée de conifères avec une prédominance de sapins et de genévriers. La strate arbustive est, elle, essentiellement composée de bambous et de rhododendrons.

À une vingtaine de kilomètres au nord, les hameaux de Yathang, Samdong, Talam, Kalep, se situent à l'étage sub-alpin. Le climat y est plus rude encore et la végétation clairsemée: l'altitude est de 3500 m environ.

La région de Thangu, où se répartissent les hameaux de Toga, Thangu, Biamze, appartient à l'étage alpin. Le climat y est très sec et très froid et la neige y est présente plus de six mois de l'année. La végétation est assez rase et seuls quelques résidus de forêt subsistent.

Le nord de Thangu correspond à la zone d'extension sud du plateau tibétain et c'est là que se situent les villages de Mughutang, Lashar, Lhonak. La végétation y est très rase: cette région constitue la zone de pâturage des troupeaux de yaks et de moutons. C'est là aussi que les Lachenpas et les nomades tibétains (*drokpa*) collectaient les « Small Forest Products » avant que cette activité ne soit interdite par le ministère des forêts en 2000.

Peuplement et population

Les données relatives au peuplement des vallées du nord Sikkim (Lachen et Lachung) sont assez peu précises², les sources dont nous disposons étant principalement orales. Les Lachenpas seraient les descendants d'immigrants venus de la région de Haa, dans l'ouest du Bhoutan. La légende villageoise indique quant à elle que la société lachenpa se serait constituée suite à l'arrivée d'un ménage bhoutanais (de Haa), d'un ménage tibétain (de Chumbi) et d'un ménage Lepcha originaire du Dzongu. Quoi qu'il en soit, la société lachenpa, constituée de 167 ménages en 2003, se divise en clans, qui vénèrent chacun une divinité ancestrale différente.

Selon les dires des anciens du village, les *Khadhabo* et les *Zhakhapa*, qui vénèrent Pho lha Chakpa Mille, seraient les premiers habitants de Lachen, venus de Haa au Bhoutan. Les *Lampimpou*, *Khatsopo* et *Tashigambo* seraient directement originaires du Tibet. Les *Nimdako* et *Khakimbo* seraient quant à eux d'origine lepcha. Les *Tharkimpo* et *Chubabo*, arrivés plus récemment dans le village, sont deux clans originaires de Lachung.

Quelle que soit l'origine exacte de la population, les habitants de Lachen sont aujourd'hui tous appelés Lachenpa, du fait de leur résidence dans le village de Lachen.

Sur 167 ménages au total, on dénombre aujourd'hui 151 « purs » Lachenpas, cinq ménages népalais, une dizaine de ménages tibétains et un ménage lepcha, les derniers ayant été autorisés à s'installer dans la région suite à leur mariage avec une femme lachenpa.

Les réfugiés tibétains présents dans la région sont, pour la majeure partie, implantés plus au sud, à trois kilomètres de Lachen, dans un village nommé Chatten. A leur arrivée, ils se sont d'abord installés à Lachen, dans les maisons des Lachenpas où ils participaient aux tâches de la maisonnée en échange du gîte et du couvert. Peu à peu, ils se sont asservis et ont acheté des terres à Chatten (uniquement de quoi bâtir une maison) où ils résident maintenant depuis plus de 40 ans. Aujourd'hui, on dénombre une quarantaine de ménages à Chatten dont les trois-quarts sont d'origine tibétaine. Ils n'ont généralement aucuns droits sur les terres des Lachenpas et occupent le plus souvent des emplois dans l'armée indienne. Certains d'entre eux ont cependant obtenu un titre de membre du *dzomsa*, à l'époque où celui-ci « recrutait » de nouveaux membres.

Les Népalais arrivés quant à eux plus récemment (depuis une trentaine d'années environ) sont en général assez mal intégrés à la société lachenpa. Ils sont le plus souvent venus dans la région en tant qu'ouvrier du génie civil et sont quasiment tous engagés dans la construction et la remise en état des routes. Aujourd'hui, sur les nombreux ménages établis le long de la vallée, peu sont installés définitivement. C'est le cas pour six ménages de Potsi, hameau situé à 1,5 kilomètre au Nord de Lachen. Mais très peu de népalais sont aujourd'hui membres de l'assemblée du *dzomsa*.

Le « dzomsa » : structure unique de gouvernance locale

Le *dzomsa* constitue une structure locale de gestion du territoire et surtout de ses ressources, ainsi qu'un puissant organe d'encadrement des pratiques villageoises. Le *dzomsa* est une des formes les plus démocratiques de gouvernance. En effet, il s'agit d'une assemblée constituée d'un membre de chaque ménage lachenpa (un homme, généralement l'aîné du ménage) qui représente sa famille lors des réunions du conseil du village.

Dans les premiers temps, tout le monde était accepté en tant que membre et les nouveaux arrivants pouvaient même, en échange de leur adhésion, réclamer des terres. C'est pour cette raison que l'on retrouve aujourd'hui des tibétains membres du *dzomsa*. De nos jours, les règles sont beaucoup plus strictes: seuls les Lachenpas de naissance qui possèdent des terres à Lachen peuvent devenir membres du *dzomsa*. Les quelques « non-Lachenpas » (Tibétains et Népalais) membres doivent respecter les règles à la lettre ou risquent de se voir priver de leurs droits d'adhésion.

Le *dzomsa* de Lachen est, en 2003, composé de 174 membres (deux nouveaux membres sont accueillis chaque année afin de limiter le nombre de nouveaux venus): 164 d'entre eux sont de « purs » Lachenpas, quatre sont népalais et six sont tibétains. Notons que dans les temps anciens, seuls les résidents de Lachen pouvaient devenir membres du *dzomsa* alors que ce n'est plus le cas aujourd'hui: une demi-douzaine environ ne réside pas au village mais à Mangan ou Gangtok.

Le *dzomsa* est dirigé par les *pipons* qui sont l'équivalent de chefs de village. Ils sont élus pour un an par l'assemblée et doivent faire respecter l'ordre et les lois établies par le *dzomsa*. Ce sont des personnes très respectées. Les *gembo*s, au nombre de cinq, sont les conseillers des *pipons*. Ils sont eux aussi élus et sont généralement des ex-*pipons* ou des membres très actifs au sein de la société. Les *pipons* sont également assistés par deux *gyapons*, qu'ils choisissent au début de leur mandat pour être à leur service. Ils sont notamment chargés

d'appeler au rassemblement pour les réunions publiques. Ainsi, lorsque les *gyapons* clament trois fois « *zum niao* » (Joignez-vous à la réunion !), chaque membre du village doit se rendre au plus vite sur le lieu de la réunion, généralement à la maison du *dzomsa*, bâtiment spécialement érigé pour les réunions de l'assemblée. Si l'un d'entre eux manque, est en retard ou bien envoie quelqu'un à sa place, il doit s'acquitter d'une amende allant de 50 à 200 roupies, suivant l'importance de la réunion. Ces amendes sont collectées par les *tsipos* (comptables élus) qui sont aussi chargés de tenir les registres et les comptes du *dzomsa*.

Les *pipons*, *gembos* et *tsipos* sont renouvelés tous les ans: chaque membre dépose le nom de son candidat dans l'urne et celui d'entre eux qui obtient le plus de voix (le dépouillement est effectué par un *pipon* intérimaire, élu pour deux jours par tirage au sort) devient premier *pipon*, le deuxième devient second *pipon*, les troisième à huitième deviennent *gembos* et les neuf et dixième deviennent *tsipos*. L'élection des *pipons* est suivie de l'accueil des nouveaux membres qui doivent payer un quart de yak, un basta (un quintal) de riz, un litre d'alcool et offrir une écharpe religieuse (*khada*) aux *pipons*, puis d'une fête durant laquelle sont partagés le riz et la viande amenés par les nouveaux arrivants.

L'assemblée du *dzomsa* se réunit pour prendre toutes les décisions importantes relatives à la vie et aux pratiques de la communauté. Les plus importantes décisions concernant les stratégies économiques, de gestion du territoire et de ses ressources sont prises par le *lheyne* (*pipons* et *gembos*) pour l'ensemble de la communauté. Le *dzomsa* se réunit notamment lorsqu'il est temps de donner l'ordre pour les migrations vers le bas de la vallée ou pour la mise en culture. Il se réunit pour organiser les fêtes, redistribuer les matériaux et équipements offerts par le gouvernement ou l'argent du fond commun; mais aussi pour parler des problèmes auxquels doit faire face la société. Dans ce genre de cas, les *pipons* se veulent les porte-parole de la communauté auprès des instances gouvernementales. Ils jouent notamment un rôle important en ce qui concerne par exemple, la négociation du montant des indemnités en cas de perte massive de bestiaux, en cas de construction de routes ou d'installation d'un camp militaire sur des terres leur appartenant.

Les *pipons* ont avant tout, le devoir de faire respecter les règles de vie de la communauté et de la représenter. Outre leur rôle d'administrateurs du territoire et de ses ressources, ils se veulent aussi les administrateurs de la société. Dans certains cas, les *pipons* et les *gembos* peuvent être appelés à rendre la justice. Les disputes par exemple, sont, dans la mesure du possible, réglées au niveau du village. Les *pipons* remplissent alors le rôle de juge. Si aucun accord ou compromis ne peut être trouvé entre les deux parties et si les *pipons* se voient incapables de régler l'affaire, celle-ci est envoyée, en derniers lieux, devant la cour de justice de Mangan (le chef-lieu du district Nord) qui statue. Les *pipons* organisent aussi la collecte de nourriture pour les lamas au moment des fêtes ou celle du bois pour les cérémonies funéraires. Les *pipons* ont aussi le rôle de policiers et doivent distribuer des amendes aux personnes qui transgressent les règles établies.

Le *dzomsa* possède donc un fond public essentiellement constitué de l'argent des amendes, des enchères (dont nous parlons plus loin) et des taxes. Ce fond public sert à faire face aux dépenses de la communauté et est redistribué, environ trois fois par an à l'ensemble des ménages. Le *gonpa* reçoit 50 % de la somme pour couvrir ses dépenses puis le solde est réparti de manière égale entre les différents Lamas. Les autres 50 % servent à couvrir les frais divers de la communauté civile. S'il reste de l'argent, il est redistribué, là encore de manière égale, entre les différents membres. Chaque année, chaque ménage reçoit ainsi entre 5 et 6000 roupies.

Pratiques religieuses, rôle et pouvoir des lamas dans la vie publique

Les Lachenpas sont bouddhistes: sur 167 ménages, on recense un seul ménage converti au christianisme. Les Lachenpas ont aussi des croyances animistes et vénèrent certains esprits de la nature. Pour protéger son village et sa famille, chaque ménage organise, tout au long de l'année, divers rituels réalisés par les lamas du monastère de Lachen. Ainsi, dans chaque maison, une chambre (sur les deux généralement existantes) sert de salle de prière (*Lhakhang*) et abrite, depuis plusieurs générations, les statuettes des dieux vénérés par la famille ainsi que les livres à prières (*boums*).

Chaque année, chaque famille réalise au moins une puja: *boum domak*, pour le bien-être, la sécurité et la prospérité des différents membres de la maisonnée. Celle-ci se déroule après *Loshar*, au mois de février mars. Nombreuses autres pujas sont réalisées par la suite mais leur nombre et leur fréquence dépend des moyens financiers des ménages et des événements qui peuvent survenir.

Le village de Lachen comprend deux monastères: un *gonpa* et une chapelle pour les femmes du village (*nyungne lhakhang*).

Le *gonpa* principal, situé au-dessus du village, compte une cinquantaine de membres adultes et une vingtaine d'étudiants. Les lamas sont des membres des ménages de Lachen qui en dehors des cérémonies et de leurs activités au monastère, habitent avec leur famille et cultivent leurs champs, comme les autres habitants du village. A Lachen, les lamas peuvent être mariés et partagent généralement la femme de leur frère aîné. A la tête du *gonpa*, on trouve le *rinpoche*, réincarnation du Gomchen de Lachen; le *dorje lopen*, chef spirituel du monastère; les *omzey* qui sont d'anciens *choe trimpa* et le *choe trimpa* qui, en charge pour deux ans, est élu parmi les plus âgés des lamas et est chargé de faire respecter les règles du *gonpa* (il s'agit de l'équivalent du *pipon* pour le *gonpa*). Le *gonpa* compte également cinq *gembos*, élus parmi les *omzey*, selon le même principe que les représentants des villageois.

La chapelle pour femmes se situe elle aussi sur le flanc de la montagne surplombant Lachen et compte, en 2003, une quarantaine de membres environ. Deviennent membres toutes les femmes dont au moins une des filles est mariée et qui ne sont, elles-mêmes, ni mariées à un lama, ni chamane; mais aussi des hommes qui ont perdu leur épouse alors qu'ils étaient très jeunes.

Le village compte aussi deux femmes (*nyaljorma*) et un homme (*mopokhapo*), chamanes que les villageois consultent en diverses occasions. Par exemple, de nombreux Lachenpas ont, aujourd'hui encore, recours aux chamanes avant d'avoir recours à la médecine moderne.

Outre leur rôle religieux, les lamas ont également un rôle prédominant dans le déroulement des activités de la communauté. Le *gonpa* (entendons par là les lamas) a un fort pouvoir de décision. Chaque lama est membre du conseil du *gonpa*, et ne peut, de ce fait, être à la fois membre du *gonpa* et membre du *dzomsa*. Par contre, au sein d'un même ménage, le frère aîné peut être membre du conseil du village et le cadet, membre de l'assemblée monastique. Le conseil des lamas est consulté pour toutes les affaires relatives à la vie publique. Le *choe trimpa* assiste à toutes les réunions du *dzomsa* et l'ensemble des lamas est convié aux réunions les plus importantes et donne son avis sur les questions d'intérêt public. En cas de reconduction d'un mandat de *pipon* à la demande du public, on consulte d'abord les lamas: leur voix est alors déterminante.

Le *dzomsa* a également des devoirs envers le *gonpa*. C'est lui qui doit, par le biais des *pipons* et de leurs assistants, organiser les fêtes religieuses ou s'occuper de la collecte du

beurre (un kilo par famille) pour les lampes allumées chaque jour au *gonpa*. Le *dzomsa* doit également payer les moines pour leurs services durant les fêtes religieuses.

2. UNE SOCIÉTÉ AUX ACTIVITÉS TRADITIONNELLES

Un cycle transhumant « original » : complémentarité entre agriculture et élevage

De nos jours, et malgré l'évolution constante du système de production et de ses contraintes, l'agriculture et l'élevage représentent encore les activités dominantes, pratiquées par plus de 90 % des ménages, soit comme activité principale, soit comme activité secondaire.

Depuis l'origine, les Lachenpas forment une société transhumante, migrant suivant les saisons, d'une zone écologique vers une autre. L'organisation des activités agricoles et pastorales dépend donc entièrement de ces mouvements verticaux que les habitants pratiquent tout au long de l'année du bas vers le haut de la vallée, et inversement. Par conséquent, il y a une forte imbrication entre ces activités et les lieux où elles s'organisent.

L'originalité de ces pratiques réside dans le fait que les habitants se déplacent avec leur famille toute entière et qu'ils s'établissent aux différents étages plusieurs mois de l'année pour faire paître leur troupeau et cultiver les quelques champs qu'ils possèdent, ayant établi ici et là des maisons en dur. Certains ménages possèdent ainsi jusqu'à six maisons, construites en divers endroits de la vallée. Notons toutefois qu'aujourd'hui les pratiques sont nettement en train d'évoluer car avec la diversification des activités, les jeunes Lachenpas sont de plus en plus nombreux à rester au village durant les périodes de transhumance (pour s'occuper des lodges par exemple) mais en 2003, cette situation était encore marginale et la quasi-totalité de la population déserte le village la majeure partie de l'année. Les maisons, établies de manière permanente mais habitées de manière temporaire, sont construites sur le même modèle que les maisons de Lachen, quoique beaucoup plus simples. Le soubassement, est en pierres et sert le plus souvent d'étable pour les animaux. La partie supérieure de la maison est quant à elle entièrement en bois et on compte généralement une seule et unique pièce qui sert à la fois de cuisine et de chambre. Lorsqu'ils se déplacent d'un étage à un autre (d'une maison à une autre), les Lachenpas emportent avec eux leurs pots et ustensiles de cuisine ainsi que les couvertures, les outils, et la nourriture dont ils ont besoin.

Durant l'hiver, à partir du mois de novembre, les Lachenpas se déplacent avec leurs troupeaux vers les basses régions de la vallée où se situent les hameaux de Pimseka, Chupunpun, Dare, Menshitang, Rabum, Denga, Piubia, Latong. Le plus souvent se sont les aînés de la famille qui se rendent avec le troupeau sur les zones d'hivernage, laissant le soin aux plus jeunes de gérer les affaires de la famille au village.

Au début du mois de mars, lorsque le fourrage commence à se raréfier à l'étage inférieur, certains de ces ménages partent alors vers un étage intermédiaire entre le bas de la vallée et Lachen (Selepmu, Takachung, Chepten) alors que les autres attendent le mois d'avril pour commencer leur estive vers les régions situées aux alentours de Lachen.

Fin mai, c'est le moment de la grande transhumance d'été. La plupart des ménages se mettent alors à migrer, cette fois avec la quasi-totalité de leurs membres, soit directement vers Thangu qui constitue la base principale des Lachenpas en été, soit en s'arrêtant à des étages intermédiaires où ils possèdent aussi maisons et/ou champs.

Après avoir passé près de six mois sur les pâturages d'altitude, à plus de 4000 m, le fourrage commence à se raréfier et il est alors temps pour les Lachenpas de redescendre vers

les étages inférieurs. Chaque ménage s'arrête alors exactement aux mêmes endroits qu'à l'aller pour faire paître son troupeau et récolter les légumes et céréales arrivés à maturité.

Fin octobre, la majeure partie des ménages est de retour à Lachen.

Au mois de novembre, il est à nouveau temps de partir vers les hameaux du bas de la vallée. En descendant, les ménages mettent en culture aux différents étages où ils possèdent des terres et c'est un nouveau cycle qui recommence.

Comme le système l'induit, l'imbrication entre les deux activités que sont l'agriculture et l'élevage est très forte. En effet, comme dans la plupart des régions d'altitude où les activités pastorales prédominent, certains produits de l'élevage sont utilisés pour la production agricole et inversement. Suivant ce même schéma, les paysans éleveurs de Lachen utilisent les déjections des animaux qu'ils récupèrent soit à l'étable soit sur le domaine public pour fumer leurs champs juste avant les labours et la mise en culture. Certains utilisent aussi des engrais chimiques mais ce n'est le cas que pour une minorité d'entre eux. Les animaux sont ponctuellement utilisés pour les labours, notamment à Thangu où la taille des champs permet le passage d'un attelage, ou pour le transport. En retour, les produits obtenus de l'agriculture servent à nourrir le bétail.

De plus, les dates de mise en culture ou de récolte coïncident plus ou moins avec les dates de transhumance directe ou inverse, ce qui renforce ce caractère d'interdépendance entre les deux activités.

Le système de production constitue donc, dans la vallée de Lachen, une économie « traditionnelle » basée sur l'autoconsommation des produits de l'élevage et de l'agriculture et sur la vente des surplus à l'intérieur même de la communauté. Cela explique le fait que, pour éviter la dispersion des biens ainsi que le morcellement des terres et du cheptel, les Lachenpas aient un système de transmission du patrimoine très stricte et très rigide, régie par les mariages polyandriques. En effet, à Lachen (comme à Lachung d'ailleurs), la pratique en vigueur, empruntée aux tibétains, consiste à marier deux frères à une même femme, afin de conserver les biens à l'intérieur d'un même ménage. L'originalité réside ici dans le fait, qu'une femme n'épouse que deux frères, les autres se séparent, le cas échéant, du ménage principal. Cependant, ce système tend aujourd'hui à disparaître, laissant place aux mariages monogamiques que préfèrent les jeunes générations. En cas d'accord entre les fils et les parents, les biens sont divisés également entre les différents fils. En cas de désaccord, le fils qui décide de se séparer du ménage se voit priver de tout héritage. On voit donc de plus en plus les propriétés se morceler. Cela ne se traduit pas ici au niveau du paysage agraire car le partage des terres ne se traduit pas par un morcellement des terrains à chaque étage du territoire, mais par une dispersion et une réduction du patrimoine foncier, certains héritant des terres à un endroit et d'autres à un autre endroit de la vallée.

Aujourd'hui, la majeure partie des ménages est monogamique et ne possède donc maison et champs qu'à un ou deux endroits dans la vallée alors qu'à l'origine, leur famille possédait une demi-douzaine de maisons et de propriétés réparties tout au long de la vallée. On observe de la même manière une réduction du nombre d'animaux par ménage, même si, globalement, la tendance est à l'augmentation de la taille du cheptel. Parallèlement, les jeunes couples qui ne possèdent ni terres ni bêtes, ne pratiquent plus les mouvements nord-sud tels que le faisaient leurs ancêtres, ce qui induit d'importants changements dans les pratiques constatés jusqu'à une période très récente.

Les pratiques agraires

Selon les dires des anciens du village, l'activité agricole serait une introduction relativement récente. En effet, la distribution ou l'attribution des terres en certains endroits, ne daterait que du début du siècle. Si nos données sont exactes, cela correspondrait à la date d'introduction de la culture de la pomme de terre dans la vallée (par des missionnaires finlandais). Le développement de cette nouvelle activité semble traduire une réorientation des activités de production et une adaptation probable des habitants de la région à de nouvelles contraintes économiques. Mais elle est peut-être aussi liée à la perte massive de bêtes ou à l'augmentation de la population.

Les terres situées dans le bas de la vallée, où se situent aujourd'hui les hameaux de Denga, Latong, etc. auraient été octroyées aux Lachenpas à la suite d'une décision de la cour de justice de Gangtok. En effet, ces terres auraient fait l'objet de disputes entre les Lepchas et les Lachenpas et auraient finalement été attribuées aux seconds. Denga constitue donc aujourd'hui la limite inférieure du territoire lachenpa. Les terres du bas de la vallée auraient été, suite à cet événement, distribuées par le *dzomsa* de manière égalitaire aux différents ménages établis depuis plusieurs années dans cette région durant l'hiver. En ce qui concerne la colonisation des terres dans le nord de la vallée, elle aurait été plus aléatoire, chacun était autorisé à défricher et à mettre en culture la superficie qu'il désirait, aux endroits et places qu'il jugeait les meilleurs.

Quelle que soit la date d'introduction des activités agricoles dans la région, ces dernières sont fortement liées aux pratiques pastorales qui ont très tôt induit des migrations saisonnières. Chaque ménage qui possède un troupeau et se déplace avec celui-ci, a défriché des terres et mis en culture des champs à différents étages de la vallée.

Quel que soit le lieu et les variétés cultivées, les opérations agricoles et les outils utilisés sont les mêmes. Partout la taille des champs est assez petite et les paysans utilisent principalement la houe pour retourner la terre, le labour par traction étant inutile et inadéquat. A Thangu, en revanche, les ménages qui possèdent de plus grandes superficies utilisent l'araire, tracté par des bœufs ou des *dzos*³. Les différentes plantes cultivées (pommes de terre, navets et radis essentiellement) nécessitent peu de soins, ce qui limite le nombre et la fréquence des opérations agricoles. Les pommes de terre sont sarclées et buttées trois fois à l'aide d'un « *koti* » (sorte de petite houe) alors que l'orge (*kho*) ne bénéficie d'aucune opération particulière.

Aujourd'hui, plus de 90 % des ménages pratiquent l'agriculture à un ou plusieurs étages de la vallée. La majeure partie d'entre eux est autosuffisante en pommes de terre qui constituent, avec le riz et la viande, la base de l'alimentation des Lachenpas. Une part importante de ces ménages dégage également des surplus qu'ils écoulent soit au sein même de la communauté, soit sur les marches de Mangan ou de Gangtok (en 2003, un sac de pommes de terre de 40 kg est vendu 180 roupies à Lachen, et entre 200 et 220 roupies à Mangan ou Gangtok).

Les pratiques pastorales

L'élevage constituait, à l'origine, l'activité principale et exclusive des Lachenpas. Aujourd'hui, notamment depuis la fermeture de la frontière avec le Tibet et la réorientation des activités qui en a découlé, l'élevage ne constitue plus qu'une activité d'appoint. Seuls les ménages qui possèdent un nombre important de bêtes tirent aujourd'hui quelques revenus de

cette activité: ils vendent un yak et deux trois moutons au moment de *chagyu*, et ponctuellement du beurre et du fromage sur les marches de Mangan ou de Gangtok.

La majeure partie du cheptel est, en 2003, composée de bovins et chaque ménage possède un minimum de deux bêtes. Les Lachenpas élèvent aussi des chèvres, principalement pour la reproduction et pour la vente. On en dénombre deux espèces à Lachen: le type venu des plaines et le type himalayen, à poils longs. Ils élèvent aussi des moutons, des chevaux (principalement utilisés pour le transport des biens durant leurs divers mouvements saisonniers) et quelques *dzos*. Une faible partie de la population, généralement les ménages les plus riches, possède des yaks. Cependant la taille de leurs troupeaux semble avoir considérablement diminué, suite à la fermeture de la frontière (de nombreux animaux étant restés de l'autre côté de la frontière) et à quelques hivers très rudes. Dans ce dernier cas, le rôle du *dzomsa* fut de porter réclamation auprès du gouvernement pour recevoir une indemnisation. Chaque éleveur obtint 200 roupies par bête, ce qui est bien faible compte tenu de la valeur réelle d'un yak qui se situe autour de 15 000 roupies. En 2003, les Lachenpas n'ont toujours pas reconstitué leur cheptel, ce que l'on peut attribuer au manque de pratiques de reproduction, au manque de pâturages d'hiver, conséquence directe de la fermeture de la frontière avec le Tibet ou peut être encore au manque de main d'œuvre.

Les yaks et moutons sont essentiellement élevés pour la viande, le lait et la laine. Au mois d'octobre novembre, les Lachenpas pratiquent *chagyu*: c'est le moment de tuer les bêtes et de stocker la viande pour le reste de l'année. A cette occasion, chaque ménage tue un Yak mâle ou une femelle ici appelée « *no* », ainsi que des moutons. Ceux qui n'en possèdent pas achètent un quart, un demi ou un yak entier et de un à six moutons, suivant leurs capacités financières. Ces animaux sont donc particulièrement importants pour la communauté et les quelques ménages propriétaires de yaks tirent d'importants bénéfices de leur vente à cette époque de l'année. Les *nos* (moins prisées pour *chagyu*) sont principalement élevées pour la reproduction et le lait dont les Lachenpas font du beurre et du fromage sec. La laine des moutons a, elle aussi, un usage local. Elle sert à confectionner les couvertures et différents types de tapis, généralement exclusivement pour l'usage de la famille. Certains ménages tirent aussi quelques revenus de cette activité en vendant ponctuellement une couverture (1200 roupies) ou un tapis.

Contrairement à l'estive qui ne nécessite aucun ordre du *pipon*, l'hivernage obéit à des règles plus strictes que chacun se doit de respecter. En effet, durant l'été, l'herbe a poussé sur les terrains publics du bas de la vallée, et pour donner à chacun les mêmes chances de faire paître son troupeau, les déplacements vers le sud sont ordonnés par le *pipon*. Tous les ménages commencent donc à redescendre le même jour (généralement fin septembre).

Si un des membres ne respecte pas l'ordre et redescend avant les autres, il se voit infliger une amende dont le montant est fixé par le *pipon* et immédiatement déposé dans le fond commun du *dzomsa*. Parallèlement, les ménages dont le troupeau reste à Lachen durant cette période de l'année, doivent payer une taxe à la communauté. Cette redevance les autorise à faire paître leur troupeau au village durant les mois d'été.

La collecte de fourrage pour l'hiver obéit à la même logique. La population doit attendre l'ordre du *pipon* pour aller récolter l'herbe sur le territoire public. La collecte ne dure que quelques jours (parfois un seul) et se déroule généralement fin septembre avant que les familles et leurs troupeaux ne commencent à redescendre.

Typologie des espaces

◆ Espace n°1: la région de Latong (1800-1900 m d'altitude)

Durant l'hiver, à partir du mois de novembre, les Lachenpas migrent, comme on l'a vu, vers les basses régions de la vallée. Au total, cela concerne 70 ménages environ (42 %) repartis dans les différents lieux précités, les plus importants comportant une vingtaine de maisons. Notons tout de même qu'aujourd'hui, à cause du manque de main d'œuvre (la plupart des familles sont aujourd'hui nucléaires), nombre de Lachenpas ne migrent plus vers le bas de la vallée et font paître leurs animaux sur les pâturages proches de Lachen. Du fait du climat moins rude en hiver, la disponibilité en fourrage dans le bas de la vallée est beaucoup plus importante qu'à Lachen et la mise en culture y est possible. Les animaux sont envoyés divaguer dans les zones boisées autour des différents hameaux durant la journée puis sont parqués dans des étables situées près des habitations durant la nuit. A leur arrivée sur ces « basses » terres, les Lachenpas mettent aussitôt leurs champs en culture, et réparent les clôtures pour éviter que les animaux ne les endommagent.

Notons qu'à Pimseka, Chupunpun, Dare et Menshitang, les Lachenpas ne possèdent aucun champ car ils ne sont pas propriétaires des terres sur lesquelles ils se sont installés. En effet, ces villages appartiennent au territoire des Lepchas auxquels le *dzomsa* paye une compensation (7000 Roupies par an) pour les droits de pâturage des animaux des quelques ménages Lachenpas installés là.

A cet étage, les champs sont d'assez petite taille et malgré un climat propice à une mise en culture 2 fois par an, ils ne supportent, qu'une seule culture par an, de novembre à mai. Il y a quelques années, les Lachenpas y cultivaient du maïs, le climat et le terrain étant particulièrement favorables à la culture de cette céréale. Cependant, les paysans l'ont abandonné à cause des singes et des ours qui ravageaient les cultures laissées sans surveillance pendant plusieurs semaines. A Piubia, les deux ménages présents ont arrêté toute culture depuis deux ans à cause de cette même calamité.

Ainsi, les Lachenpas y cultivent aujourd'hui essentiellement des pommes de terre, de l'orge (de cycle cultural plus court que le maïs et donc plus facile à surveiller) et quelques légumes tels que des épinards, des petits pois, de l'ail ou de l'oignon. L'orge y est cultivé en culture unique, sans association alors que la pomme de terre est généralement associée à des épinards (soit mélangés, soit semés sur les bordures comme le sont les pois et autres légumes). La date des semis est la même pour les différentes variétés et correspond plus ou moins à l'arrivée des ménages à cet étage, c'est-à-dire aux environs du 15 novembre. La récolte s'organise sur ordre du *pipon*, autour de fin avril-début mai (troisième mois du calendrier lunaire). Un membre de chaque ménage redescend uniquement pour cette occasion. Selon les dires de la population, la terre y serait assez fertile mais les rendements sont altérés par la présence des animaux sauvages.

◆ Espace n°2: la région de Lachen (2500-2800 m d'altitude)

A la mi-avril (sans aucun ordre des *pipons* puisque l'herbe manque encore sur les pâturages des zones plus élevées), l'ensemble des Lachenpas établis dans le bas de la vallée remonte vers le nord. Ils vont ainsi s'établir dans les hameaux situés à quelques kilomètres au sud ou au nord de Lachen où ils ne restent généralement qu'un mois (jusqu'à la mi-mai). Ils se rendent à cet étage pour faire paître leurs animaux, les quelques champs recensés à cet étage

appartenant à des ménages qui ne migrent pas en hiver (donc mis en culture au mois de mars).

A Lachen et dans les hameaux aux alentours (Niaka, Chopte, Temchi, Chutachu, Nolam, Zeema II, etc.), la mise en culture est plus tardive que dans le bas de la vallée et s'organise généralement autour de la mi-mai. Là aussi, les champs sont d'assez petite taille et peu nombreux. La plupart des paysans en ont arrêté la culture depuis plusieurs années à cause de la faiblesse des rendements et de la perte de production liée à la présence des singes. Les quelques ménages qui persistent, pratiquent deux cultures par an: essentiellement des pommes de terre de mi-mars à mi-juin, suivies par des navets (en association avec de gros radis blancs) de mi-juin à fin septembre.

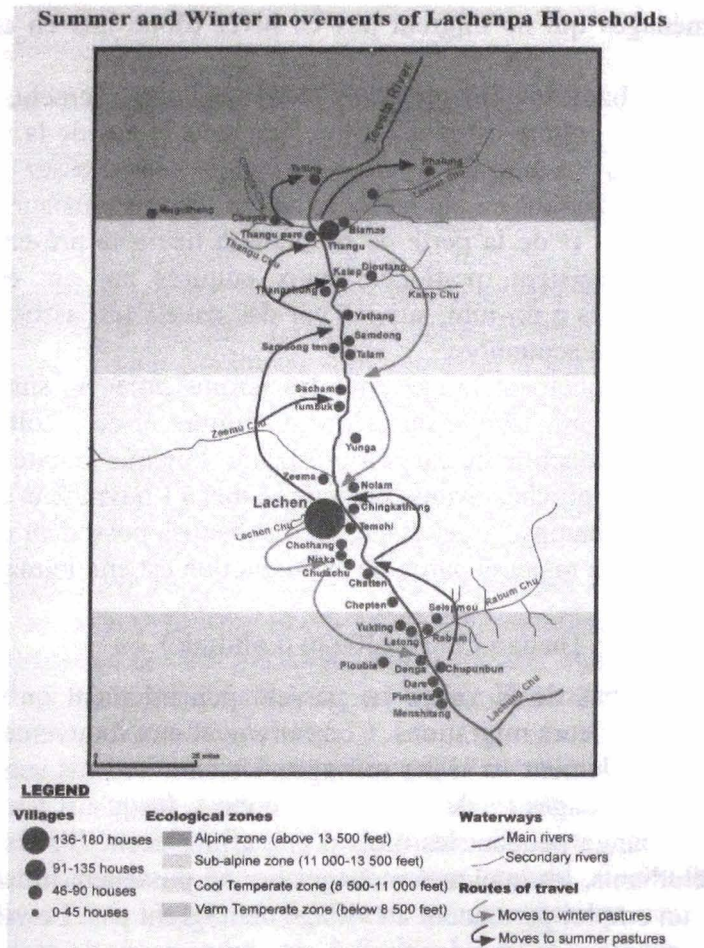
A Lachen, et c'est uniquement le cas pour les jardins potagers situés dans le village, devant ou derrière les maisons, l'ordre de mettre en culture et de récolter est donné par le *pipon* qui fixe les dates en fonction du calendrier lunaire. Lorsque la date de mise en culture, déterminée par le *theyna*, approche, chaque ménage se met à l'ouvrage et dans les deux jours, tous ont ensemencé leurs champs. A cet étage, les Lachenpas possèdent également quelques pommiers, mais là encore, la majeure partie de la production est endommagée par les singes.

◆ Espace n°3: la région de Thangu (3500-4200 m d'altitude)

Les ménages venant du bas de la vallée ne passent généralement qu'un jour ou deux à Lachen avant de continuer leurs migrations. Contrairement aux mouvements vers le bas, qui mobilisent aujourd'hui seulement 40 % des ménages, les mouvements vers le haut sont suivis par la quasi-totalité des ménages (+ de 80 % d'entre eux). Jusqu'à il y a peu de temps, une école était ouverte à Thangu pendant les mois d'été, afin d'accueillir les enfants scolarisés. En 2003, seuls les étudiants, les quelques ménages qui ne possèdent ni terres ni animaux ou encore ceux qui ont un emploi permanent au village ne migrent pas. Le village de Lachen est donc quasiment vide six mois de l'année.

En été, les ménages s'établissent avec leurs troupeaux et leurs familles dans les hameaux de Tumbuk, Nolam, Zeema IIs sont situés à une dizaine de kilomètres au nord de Lachen ou / puis à Samdong, Yathang, Tallam, Kalep un peu plus haut. Les ménages restent là de 15 jours à un mois ou bien tout l'été s'ils ne migrent pas par la suite dans la région de Thangu. Ensuite, la plupart d'entre eux se rendent enfin à Thangu, Toga, Biamze, Talling et la vallée de Chopta où ils passeront la majeure partie de l'été. Les maisons étaient, à l'origine, construites en pierres mais depuis la construction de la route, elles ont été remplacées par des maisons en bois, plus chaudes et plus confortables.

Dans la région de Thangu, les dates de mise en culture et de récolte sont aussi fixées par le *pipon*. La mise en culture se situe généralement aux alentours de la fin avril et puisqu'il n'est pas encore temps de monter avec le troupeau, seuls un ou deux membres par ménage montent pour mettre en culture leurs champs. Ils passent alors près d'une semaine à chaque étage puis redescendent à Lachen avant d'effectuer la migration d'été avec leur famille et leur troupeau. La récolte se fait aux environs de la fin septembre, avant que les ménages ne commencent à redescendre vers Lachen. A cet étage, les Lachenpas n'effectuent qu'une culture par an. Ils cultivent des pommes de terre associées à des betteraves et quelques radis qu'ils sèment sur les bordures, ainsi que quelques légumes tels que des choux pommes, des choux-fleurs et des carottes.



Dans les villages de Kalep, Samdong, Yathang et Tallam, situés à une dizaine de kilomètres au sud de Thangu, les habitants cultivaient, il y a quelques années, uniquement de l'orge dont les rendements étaient assez élevés. Aujourd'hui, la productivité des terres y est si faible que la plupart d'entre eux ont totalement arrêté la culture et leurs champs constituent aujourd'hui une réserve de fourrage pour les mois d'hiver.

Les villages de Thangu, Biamze, Talling et la vallée de Chopta constituent, au contraire, une zone de très forte productivité agricole. La terre y est particulièrement fertile et les rendements y sont assez élevés par rapport au reste de la vallée. C'est là que les Lachenpas possèdent les superficies les plus importantes et c'est d'ailleurs de ces régions que provient la majeure partie de la production annuelle.

◆ Espace n°4: Les régions d'altitude (> a 4200 m d'altitude)

Les régions de Muguthang, Lashar, Donkong, Tso lhamo, Gurudongmar constituent les aires de pâturage des troupeaux lachenpas durant l'été. L'activité agricole y est réduite à son minimum et seuls les Drokpas, réfugiés tibétains autrefois au service des Lachenpas ou propriétaires indépendants, qui se sont aujourd'hui plus ou moins sédentarisés, pratiquent une culture extensive de pommes de terre. Les Lachenpas, ne possèdent pas de champ à cet étage altitudinal. Cet espace constitue donc une zone essentiellement pastorale où de fait, l'interaction entre l'agriculture et l'élevage est très faible.

Ces régions accueillent en été les troupeaux des Lachenpas qui y trouvent une herbe plus abondante que dans le bas de la vallée. Certains ménages ont d'ailleurs établi des maisons en dur alors que les autres utilisent encore les tentes traditionnelles en poils de yaks.

Contrairement au reste du troupeau qui redescend en hiver vers le bas de la vallée, les yaks et les moutons sont gardés toute l'année sur ces pâturages d'altitude au nord de Thangu, par les Drokpas qui s'occupent de les faire pâturer en hiver. En compensation, les Lachenpas leur donnent, en fonction du nombre de bêtes gardées, une certaine quantité de riz, de farine, de vêtements. En été, ce sont le plus souvent les Lachenpas eux-mêmes qui prennent soin de leurs animaux, et les emmènent divaguer sur les aires de pâturage de Muguthang, Lashar, Lhonak, Donkong, Tso lhamo ou Gurudongmar.

3. UNE SOCIÉTÉ EN PLEINE RESTRUCTURATION: LE « DZOMSA » FACE A DE NOUVELLES CONTRAINTES

Les pressions exercées par le gouvernement central ou d'État

La société lachenpa doit faire face aujourd'hui à de nombreux changements, induits en partie par la pression d'un gouvernement de plus en plus présent.

Après la fermeture de la frontière, les Lachenpas ont subi une première phase de restructuration. Les activités, autrefois principalement axées sur le commerce entre le Tibet et l'Inde, se sont brutalement arrêtées, privant la population de sa principale source de revenus. Avant la fermeture de la frontière, la plupart des ménages lachenpa pratiquaient en effet un commerce florissant avec le Tibet. Ils s'approvisionnaient essentiellement en bois (collecte autour de Lachen), en riz et en fruits (oranges de Dzongu) et allaient les échanger au Tibet contre du beurre, des couvertures, de l'huile, des moutons et/ou du sel, qu'ils revendaient au prix fort au Sikkim et dans le bazar indien de Kalimpong. Cela fait aujourd'hui 35 ans que les Lachenpas ne pratiquent plus cette activité qui leur apporta longtemps prospérité et richesse.

Une autre conséquence de la fermeture de la frontière avec le Tibet fut la perte massive de Yaks et d'ovins qui restèrent bloqués du côté chinois et que les Lachenpas ne purent jamais récupérer. Cela a induit, comme on l'a vu plus haut, une forte restructuration du cheptel de Lachen. En effet, avant la fermeture de la frontière, il était essentiellement composé de Yaks et de moutons alors qu'aujourd'hui, il est essentiellement composé de bovins et de caprins.

Parallèlement, la fermeture de la frontière en 1962 a entraîné la perte de zones de pâturage car les Lachenpas envoyaient auparavant, paître leur troupeau au Tibet durant l'hiver et recevaient les troupeaux des Tibétains sur leurs terrains d'altitude (Muguthang, Dongkong, Tso Lhamo) durant l'été.

Une autre phase de restructuration est apparue avec le déploiement d'un important contingent armé dans la région. Suite à la fermeture de la frontière et à divers incidents politiques entre l'Inde et la Chine, la zone passa rapidement sous le contrôle de l'armée qui imposa des restrictions très fortes et réduisit la liberté des populations à se mouvoir sur leur propre territoire. Il faut aujourd'hui une permission aux populations locales pour se rendre dans les régions de Thangu, Biamze, Lashar, etc. Dans un premier temps, la présence de l'armée a apporté une source de revenus de substitution aux activités commerciales que les Lachenpas pratiquaient avant la fermeture de la frontière. En effet, en l'absence de routes carrossables, l'armée utilisait les yaks et chevaux des Lachenpas pour le transport des biens. Aujourd'hui, cette activité est encore pratiquée, en été, pour acheminer les vivres et le

ravitaillement de Thangu à Muguthang (un Yak ou un cheval porte approximativement 50 kg et est loué 130 roupies pour deux jours, frais de nourriture à la charge de l'éleveur). Toutefois, elle est vouée à disparaître du fait de la construction de routes dans la région. Le gouvernement prévoit, à ce propos, d'étendre la route jusqu'à Muguthang ce qui priverait définitivement les Lachenpas des revenus qu'ils dégagent de cette activité saisonnière. Le *pipon* a d'ailleurs plusieurs fois porté réclamation auprès des instances gouvernementales de Gangtok pour que ce projet soit abandonné.

L'annexion du Sikkim par l'Inde en 1975 priva aussi la population lachenpa de libertés dont elle jouissait auparavant. Le gouvernement a notamment imposé une restriction sur la collecte de bois de chauffage qui constitue une ressource indispensable pour les habitants de la région. Les Lachenpas ne sont aujourd'hui plus autorisés à collecter du bois jeune pour le chauffage et la construction et ils sont passibles d'amende s'ils ne respectent pas les règles. La collecte de bois est cependant encore largement pratiquée car le gouvernement n'a pourvu les villageois d'aucune source alternative de chauffage.

Récemment (en 2000), afin de préserver ces espèces fragiles et rares, le gouvernement tente de contrôler la collecte des « Minor Forest Products » qui constituait une importante source de revenu. Les Lachenpas collectaient du genévrier utilisé dans la confection des bâtonnets d'encens et des plantes médicinales en grande quantité et envoyaient de pleins camions chargés de ces précieuses plantes vers Kalimpong pour la production d'encens. Cette activité, marginale avant la fermeture de la frontière, leur procurait depuis une quarantaine d'années des revenus non négligeables qui permettaient à la plupart des ménages d'être autosuffisants. Aujourd'hui, la collecte à grande échelle a été stoppée mais elle n'est pas interdite pour les tribus locales qui sont autorisées à collecter ces espèces dans une proportion beaucoup plus réduite qu'auparavant.

Aujourd'hui, le gouvernement central envisage de mettre en place une nouvelle restriction, relative aux droits de pâturage des yaks sur les terres d'altitude (au nord de Thangu où ils séjournent toute l'année). Une notice informant que tous les yaks seraient taxés de 100 roupies par mois, par bête, pour les droits de pâturage a été publiée en 2001. Pour le moment, elle n'a pas encore été appliquée mais elle induirait la disparition totale du troupeau, les Lachenpas ayant affirmé qu'ils abandonneraient leurs bêtes si cette loi était mise en application.

La réorientation des activités

Pour faire face à cette nouvelle donne économique, les Lachenpas ont dû s'adapter et trouver de nouvelles sources de revenus. L'agriculture et l'élevage, qui constituaient il y a encore quelques années, la principale source de revenus de la population sont devenus, pour la plupart des ménages, marginaux (en terme de bénéfices monétaires) dans l'économie du ménage, même si la majorité les pratique encore.

Les ménages s'orientent aujourd'hui vers de nouvelles activités. Plus de 75 % des ménages ont au moins un de leur membre qui pratique une activité subsidiaire, souvent devenue la principale source de revenus. Les emplois occupés par la population sont principalement des emplois de contacteurs ou des emplois gouvernementaux tels qu'électricien, garde ou employé dans la construction de routes. Le *dzomsa* joue un rôle déterminant dans l'attribution de ces emplois notamment par le biais du système des enchères qui permet à la fois de procurer des fonds au *dzomsa* et de conserver le travail à l'intérieur de la communauté lachenpa. Ainsi, lorsque le gouvernement propose la construction de

bâtiments ou des emplois dans le village, le *pipon* réunit le *dzomsa* et la tâche est attribuée aux enchères. La somme récoltée est aussitôt déposée dans le fond du *dzomsa* et sera redistribuée, par la suite, entre les différents membres du conseil du *gonpa* et du conseil du *dzomsa*.

Certains ménages s'orientent vers de toutes autres activités tel que le commerce et le tourisme. On dénombre, en 2003, six ou sept auberges à Lachen, principalement occupées d'avril à octobre. Cela procure aussi un emploi occasionnel à quelques porteurs, qui pendant 15 à 30 jours durant l'été accompagnent les touristes en trekking contre un salaire de 100-110 roupies par jour (nourriture fournie par l'entrepreneur). Cependant, du fait de la restriction imposée dans le nord du Sikkim et particulièrement dans cette région, le nombre de touristes est encore faible et cette activité est assez marginale.

D'autres ménages possèdent un petit magasin. On en compte une dizaine à Lachen, installés le long de la route. Ils réalisent un profit limité car les prix y sont relativement élevés et les Lachenpas préfèrent se ravitailler à Mangan ou Gangtok. Ces magasins sont taxés par le *dzomsa* qui prélève chaque année entre 300 et 1000 roupies, suivant la taille de l'échoppe. Cette somme est déposée dans le fond du *dzomsa*.

L'arrivée de populations extérieures: Les Népalais à Lachen

Depuis que le Sikkim fait partie de l'union indienne, nombre de ménages népalais sont arrivés dans la région pour travailler à la construction de routes. Ils possèdent uniquement un permis temporaire de séjour dans la région. Cependant, certains d'entre eux ont fini par s'établir de manière définitive le long de la vallée. Pour faire face à cet afflux de populations extérieures, le *dzomsa* a établi des lois très strictes et conservatrices. En effet, aucun ménage non lachenpa n'est autorisé à acheter des terres dans la vallée. Ils ne peuvent pas devenir membre du *dzomsa* et sont considérés comme «étrangers» par le reste de la population. C'est la une manière de se préserver des «attaques» extérieures et de se protéger de tout «envahissement». Les quelques ménages installés dans la région ne le sont généralement pas dans le village de Lachen mais à quelques kilomètres au nord ou au sud. Ils sont tolérés, mais relativement mal intégrés.

La société lachenpa et ses activités sont fortement encadrées et gérées par le *dzomsa* qui apparaît comme une structure forte de gestion du territoire et de ses ressources. Comme on l'a vu, cette structure endogène à un fort pouvoir et un rôle de coordination des activités et de cohésion sociale, sur un territoire préalablement identifié et défini. Il semble que celle-ci fut créée pour répondre à certains besoins, qui n'ont cessé d'évoluer, la forçant à s'adapter. Aujourd'hui, le *dzomsa* et la société lachenpa doivent faire face à de nouvelles contraintes économiques qui les poussent à réorienter leurs activités. Pour nombre de ménages, les activités agro-pastorales sont devenues très marginales et la majeure partie de leurs revenus provient aujourd'hui d'activités nouvelles. On peut donc se demander jusqu'à quand le système tel qu'il existe aujourd'hui pourra se maintenir et dans quelle mesure. Car comme nous l'avons ici démontré, les activités et pratiques traditionnelles tendent peu à peu à disparaître.

NOTES

- ¹ Terrain de thèse de doctorat, réalisé de janvier 2001 à novembre 2003.
² Lachungpa C. Brief History of Lachen and Lachung Dzomsa: Lachen-Lachung, Unpublished Paper, 2000.
³ Hybride issu du croisement entre un yak (mâle) et une vache (femelle).

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