

## Social Organization, Continuity and Change: The Case of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung of North Sikkim

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**ABSTRACT** All societies are involved in the process of social change. The study of socio-cultural change is the systematic study of variation in social and cultural change. However, in societies there are structures and processes which are more prone to change while there are others that are resilient to change. The structures which do not change are social continuities. The efforts to improve or bring development cannot ignore culture. The very process of socialisation is one in which cultural knowledge is constantly transmitted, acquired, and produced. Cultural beliefs and values shape what occurs within formal education systems. Economic and political changes are often expressed in cultural terms. Meanwhile, culture also works as a force to reshape the environment and therefore influences economic and political systems. Anthropological perspectives on cultural continuity and change can thus make critical contributions to more informed and enlightened policies and practices in the new millennium. The study centres on the two prominent groups of the Bhutias- the Lachenpas and Lachungpas who are settled in two river valleys of Lachen and Lachung of North Sikkim. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung practiced marginal agriculture and yak, sheep and goat rearing as a part of their subsistence. Maintenance of such herds was possible only through a skillful organisation of the migratory movements to avail pastures in certain niche or at certain times in the particular environment of the region. High up on the northern borders, marginal agriculture and animal husbandry was not sufficient to sustain the population, so the people of Lachen and Lachung indulged in marginal trading activities with Tibetans across the borders. The barter of timber, wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of that region for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. The people of Lachen and Lachung pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with their pastoral activities. Thus, as long as trade was unhampered by political restrictions, it enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the Tibetan border in 1962, social life changed for these people. Since the closure of the trans-border trade they are facing several problems. The Bhutias have tried to solve these problems with their traditional social organisation. The key aspects of social organisation, transhumant production system, continuity and change among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have been discussed in this study. Units such as the household, the village or *busti*, encampments, and *dzumsha* defined by predominantly local interaction patterns between kinsmen and friends are the most important institutions which anchored these Bhutias to a specific community and territory. This traditional organisation (*dzumsha*) has a formal set up to show an example of social cohesion between the people with range of activities. *Dzumsha*, which has been under operation for over 600 years, controls resources and looks after conservation of resources, pasture management for grazing, conflict resolution, social and community mobilisation, traditions and local governance.

### INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the social organisation, continuity and change among the transhumant Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung of North Sikkim. Transhumants present not only different living lifestyles and means of subsistence but also various types of social organisation.

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All transhumant societies have strong social organisation to solve the consistent problems of articulating herds with their sustaining resources of pastures and water. The specialised socio-economic niche of transhumance requires adaptation through complex practices and distributed practical knowledge specialties. The task and knowledge structures of transhumance require a high degree of network integration, not only internally but externally as well (Barth 1972). Along with the practical knowledge, the transhumant society must have management and utilisation of herds by different members of society, which requires social mechanisms-division of labour, economic transactions, rule of trans-

ference and inheritance. In all agro pastoral societies, a range of redistributive mechanism and institutions exists through which resource flows between households are managed and maintained. During periods of relative stability or prosperity households are likely to invest in these institutions (through gift giving etc.) as a means of confirming social status and determine their right to make claim against them in times of crises or needs (Swift 1989).

All societies are involved in the process of social change. The study of socio-cultural change is the systematic study of variation in social and cultural change. Things do not remain the same. Social continuity cannot be defined as absence of change. However, in societies there are structures and processes which are more prone to change while there are others that are resilient to change. The structures which do not change are social continuities. It happens that social continuities like family, religion and law also undergo changes. The family has always been the basic foundation of society, its structure and composition may vary or go under change. The efforts to improve or bring development cannot ignore culture. The very process of socialisation is one in which cultural knowledge is constantly transmitted, acquired, and produced. Cultural beliefs and values shape what occurs within formal education systems. Economic and political changes are often expressed in cultural terms. Meanwhile, culture also works as a force to reshape the environment and therefore influences economic and political systems. Anthropological perspectives on cultural continuity and change can thus make critical contributions to more informed and enlightened policies and practices in the new millennium. The paper will discuss the key aspects of social organisation, transhumant production system, continuity and change among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung.

The study centres on the two prominent groups of the Bhutias- the Lachenpas and Lachungpas, who are settled in two river valleys of Lachen and Lachung of North Sikkim. Each valley has mountain passes to Tibet and provided the main link to the trade route till 1962. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung practiced marginal agriculture and yak, sheep and goat rearing as a part of their subsistence. Maintenance of such herds was possible only through

a skillful organisation of the migratory movements to avail pastures in certain niche or at certain times in the particular environment of the region. High up on the northern borders, marginal agriculture and animal husbandry was not sufficient to sustain the population, so the people of Lachen and Lachung indulged in marginal trading activities with Tibetans across the borders. The barter of timber, wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of that region for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. The people of Lachen and Lachung pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with their pastoral activities. Thus, as long as trade was unhampered by political restrictions, it enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the Tibetan border in 1962, social life changed for these people. Since the closure of the trans-border trade they have been facing several problems. It deprived Bhutias of their livelihood and had an adverse effect on their traditional crafts. As long as Tibetan wool was imported in large quantities, weaving flourished and they produced a variety of woven articles. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung were sufferers in another way because of the closure of the border. The Chinese seized many of their yak and sheep herds in 1962 during their seasonal migration under the traditional trans-border pasturage usage arrangements. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, were among the isolated Buddhist colonies whose traditional links with Tibet, were severed by recent political events. This region saw number of changes with major consequences for the Lachenpas and Lachungpas, the transhumants of the area. In North Sikkim, the Dzongu area was declared a Lepcha reserve and has remained isolated for many years. This political isolation (intended to maintain ethnic balance) was accentuated by the geographical position of the area. No such reserve was declared for the Bhutias of Lachen-Lachung inhabiting two river valleys that dominate North Sikkim. However, these areas are especially 'reserved' ones where the right to settle or own land is not allowed to outsiders, irrespective of their ethnic origin. The inhabitants of these valleys do not conform to the general pattern prevalent in Sikkim, even among Bhutia communities in other parts of Sikkim. The Lachen and Lachung have a special status with regard to settlement, land revenue and local administration.

### SIKKIM STATE

Sikkim, a small mountainous state has witnessed great changes in its political structure, social structure, economic life and cultural values during the past hundred years. The process of change was quickened from four different directions, resulting in multiform ethnic mix. Sikkim is bordering Nepal, China and Bhutan in the Indian Himalayas with stridently defined and exceptionally steep watersheds. Sikkim, situated in the inner Himalayan mountain range, however has varying altitudes ranging from 300 to 8,400 meters (Fig. 1). Sikkim is a former Himalayan mountain kingdom, that was, until recently, geographically and culturally isolated. It was annexed by India in 1975, becoming India's 22<sup>nd</sup> state. Before its assimilation into the Indian Union, it was ruled by a hereditary *Maharajah*, who was assisted by large landowners, *kajis*, in the administration of the State. Sikkim has been strongly influenced by Tibet in its religious and cultural life. *Maharajah* was Buddhist and Buddhism flourished during that time. By virtue of being a protectorate of India until 26 April, 1975, it has been politically and economically inclined towards India.

Sikkim with its total geographical area of 7096km<sup>2</sup>, lying within 27° 04' to 28° 07' 48" N latitude and 88° 00' 58" to 88° 55' 25" E longitudes, is administratively divided into districts: North, East, West and South. North district is the largest in area and least populated. It is a completely land-locked upland area that opens towards the West Bengal at the end of the Teesta river basin, with variations in latitude ranging from 300 to 8586 metres amsl. Sikkim is the drainage basin of the river Teesta, which is fed by numerous tributaries. The brown and red hill soils are fine loam, acidic and low to medium in fertility.

The field work was carried out from September 1981 to December 1983 in Dzongu and Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim. No anthropological studies had been carried out in Sikkim after its integration with India. An effort was made to record the complex pattern of the Bhutia culture in North Sikkim. Until that time, no ethnographic accounts were available and few narratives that were available were generally travelers' accounts. Negotiations between the British government and Tibet were started (1889-1907) for the construction of a road through this area to facilitate trade. But the terms were unacceptable

to the Tibetans, so the project never materialised. However, after the occupation of Tibet by China in 1962, this sensitive frontier area became highly important. Invasion of northern regions by Chinese forces induced the Government of India to improve transport and communication in this area. Army station units were established in Lachung valley. A fair weather road joining the State capital Gangtok with Lachen-Lachung was built. The development of defense establishment brought about significant changes in the economic and social environment of the area. The stationing of many civil servants as well as military units has also increased the demands on the natural resources of the area.

Environmental conditions impose effective limits on mode of livelihood, which in turn determine the dominant values of the people and strongly influence the social organisation. The Bhutias have a subsistence economy with a rudimentary differentiation of productive labour and with no machinery for the accumulation of wealth in the form of commercial capital. If wealth is accrued, it is in the form of consumable goods and amenities or is used for the support of additional dependents. Geographically separate, both Lachen and Lachung have separate social identities. The permanent residents identify themselves and are identified by outsiders. The distinctiveness of the *busti* is fostered by the ethnocentric prejudice and preserved by the high rates of local marriages.

### STUDY AREA AND SETTLEMENT

Lachen and Lachung are located in the southern slopes of western half of the eastern Himalayas across 27° and 28° N latitude and 88° and 89° E longitude, within the temperate zone not far from the tropics, yet the climate is influenced by the high Himalayas to the north and the Gangetic plain to the south (Fig. 2). Sikkim itself lies within the watershed of the river Teesta. Plants grow perennially as there is ample water. There are two seasons, a short dry season lasting from January through April, and a long wet season from May through December.

The temperature varies with altitude and slope aspect (generally 6 to 10p c per km). The temperature decreases with an increase in the altitude. Lachen valley in the west is wider whereas Lachung valley in the east is rather short.

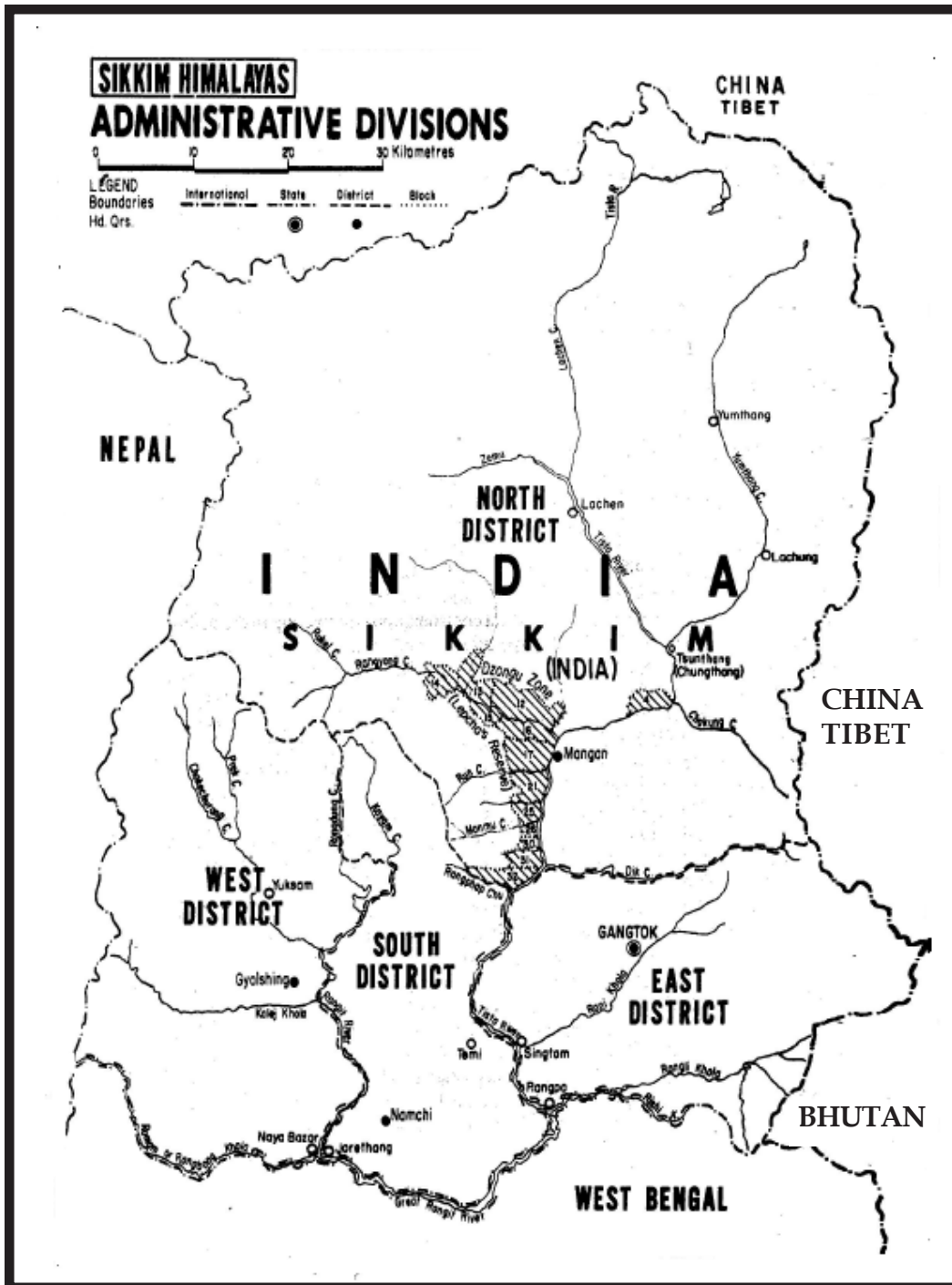


Fig. 1. Sikkim - Administrative divisions

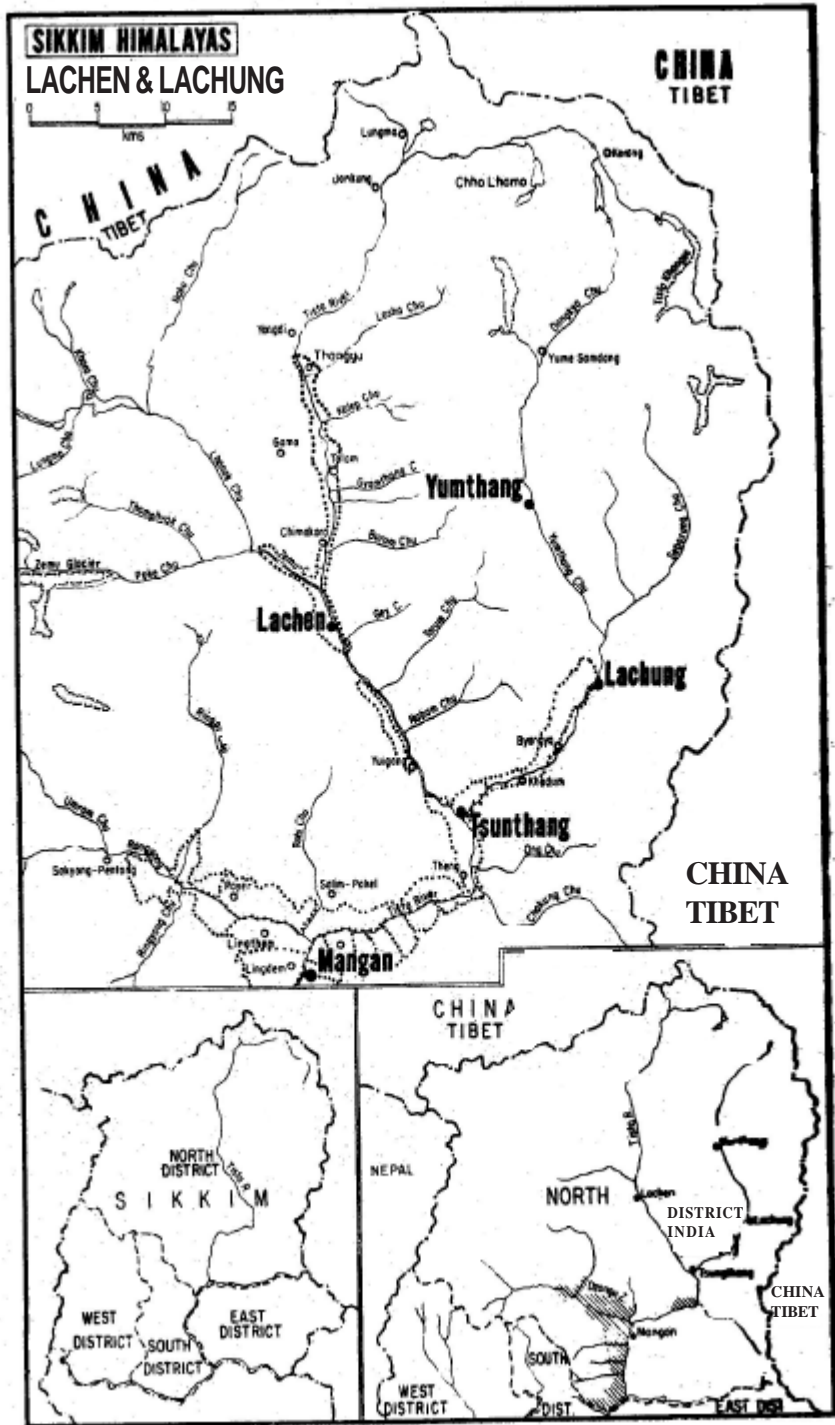


Fig. 2. Sikkim - Lachen and Lachung



Due to inhospitable climatic conditions and terrain, the area is sparsely populated.

In the Lachen (Big pass) and Lachung (Little pass) valleys, the climate is cold and comparatively dry. The annual precipitation regime is characterised by heavy rains during the summer. Annual temperature and relative humidity in Lachen is 13.1 (maximum) and 2.3 (minimum) and 76 at 8.30 in the morning respectively.

Two streams Lachen-chu and Lachung-chu are the sources of water in Lachen and Lachung, respectively. These two streams join Teesta at Chungthang which arises from Zemu Glacier. The Lachenчу has many tributaries of its own, and the Zemu in the west is a combination of many small streams. The area comprising these two river valleys is comparatively dry, and is in many ways different from the rest of the State. The slopes here are gradual and valleys are broader compared to other valleys. The terrain being hilly, with frequent occurrences of land slides, major irrigation projects cannot be undertaken easily. There has been minimal exploitation of surface water. Apart from this, there is drainage problem in Lachen as the village is so situated that considerable amount of slush accumulates, in rainy season and when it snows. These conditions cause hygiene problems and pollute the otherwise healthy environment.

The region is covered under the trans-axial belt and had not been properly investigated. Geologically, it has mobile belts and weak structural features which are known to be the cause of thermal springs, present in this region. Important hot springs are at Lachen (Tarun hot spring), Lachung and Yumthang.

The valleys of Lachen and Lachung were the private estate of the Queen at the time of Campbell's visit, but later it was reported by Das (1896) year that these were assigned to the Dewan. In the administrative reports of 1911-12, it has been mentioned that these valleys were put under the charge of Jerung Dewan of Chakung by the British political officer. As the people of the Lachen and Lachung were not happy with his administration the valleys were returned under the rule of Maharaja Kumar of Sikkim (Sikkim 1912: 2).

#### LAND USE AND VEGETATION AT LACHEN AND LACHUNG

On account of high altitude and extreme weather conditions, land use is restricted. The

climate of the area is suitable for horticultural development. Cultivation is restricted to limited regions which are either below the village or much above the residential area. People grow small quantities of barley, wheat, maize and buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*). They raise yaks and sheep to supplement their subsistence economy. The vast open spaces between 4,483 and 5,824 metres altitude are used for raising yak (*Phoepagusgrunniens*)-robust animal that require little care and are perfectly adapted to high altitudes. The yak provides its owner with milk, meat and wool (for saddle padding, blanket making) and transportation.

There are different types of land belts in arable areas attached to Lachen and Lachung:-

*Leezshieng* (apple belt); *Kenchongshieng* (maize field); *Tshowshieng* (wheat field); *Gnawshieng* (barley); *Keeshieng* (potato field); *Lapshieng* (raddish field); *Pyoshieng* (buckwheat field); and *Yugshieng* (turnip field). Apart from these there is a common land *mangsa*.

The vegetation of the area consists of fodder plants, oaks, firewood and dye yielding plants. The oaks are used for house building, though people have no right to cut them. Around Lachen village, there is abundance of *panisej* (*T. mynocarpa*) a plant used for firewood. The Lachenpas do not have to walk for long distances in search of firewood as the people of Lachung have to do. Dye yielding plants in the vicinity provide other sources of income to the local people. They collect the plants and sell them to cottage industry authorities at the rate of Rs. 3 to 4 per kilogram. The Lachen forests mainly consist of trees, shrubs, herbs and ornamental plants. The mountain side are clothes with eight to ten species of brilliantly coloured rhododendrons. The area abounds in Sea buckthorn (*Hippophae salicifolia*), a species that has great potential for improving ecological and economic development in this area. The plant is found naturally in altitude ranging from 2,337 and 3,093 metres on riverside area where geophysio-chemical parameters like aerial temperature, aerial moisture, soil ph, soil, soil moisture varies significantly (Basistha et al. 2009).

The Lachung forest consists of both temperate and tropical plants. Some very wild grasses grow there. The Lachung forest abounds in dye-yielding plants; important ones are *Juglana regia* (Walnut), *Rubio cardifolia*, *Rumux crispus*, "chucha" which yield dyes of different

colours. People collect leaves and sell it to officials. Many medicinal plants like *Acanthum ferox*, *Acorus calamus*, *Butea monosperma* are also found in the region. People collect them while pasturing their animals and sell them at Mangan market. Besides these, this area harbours many endemic and threatened species like *Acer hookeri*, *Anaphalis hookeri* and *Cypripedium himalaicum*.

The ecological milieu of these people is determined by high altitude, comparatively less rainfall (than in other areas of Sikkim) and violent local winter winds. The steppe vegetation is characterised by small shrubs. The Teesta cuts across North Sikkim with its tributaries, namely the Lachungchu, Lachenchu and Lhanak etc. and divided the region into separate valleys. On the Lachung side, the valley opens up to the pasture of Momo-Samdong and Yume-Samdong. Lachungpas follow a reverse cycle, they move upstream for grazing only and come to Khedum (below Lachung) for cultivation to their summer quarters.

The Lachen area has not been surveyed. In Lachung though cadastral survey has been done, the results have not been finalized. The figures provided are only estimates. Forest areas for Lachen and Lachung are not surveyed, so no details are available. The Lachung valley is rich in ground flora such as primulas, potentillas, larch, junipers and maple as well. Forty-three square kilometre area at the altitude between 3,048-4,575 metres has been declared as Singba Rhododendron Sanctuary in Lachung valley. The sanctuary is bounded on its southern periphery by the Yumthang valley known for its alpine meadows and hot spring. The Yumthang River flows through the sanctuary, which is known for its unique abundance of Rhododendron trees and shrubs, 40 species of which are recorded for Sikkim alone.

Floriculture has a tremendous potential but the State has yet to seek breakthrough. Flowers are perishable and need special arrangements for transport and marketing as the consumer centres are located in far off places. The State does not have quality planting materials for large scale production. Multiplication through conventional methods is slow due to limited resources, and tissue culture laboratories in both public and private sectors are still unable to meet the requirements.

In 1892, the Scandinavian Alliance Mission which was founded in America in 1890 established three mission stations, one at Lachung, the other at Mangan and third at Lachen. In 1894, two Swedish women were sent to Lachung by the authorities of the Mission. They brought apple saplings and Christianity. Apple plants flourished here but due to Buddhist societal and familial pressure the Christianity could not flourish in Lachen and Lachung and the Missions had to move to other areas.

### BHUTIAS OF LACHEN AND LACHUNG

The two high valleys of North Sikkim-Lachen and Lachung that form part of this study are inhabited by the Bhutias who are referred to as Lachenpas and Lachungpas respectively. The families sharing the same family name are not necessarily relatives. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are called Ha-Pa. Like the people of Chumbi Valley in Tibet they claim descent from immigrants from Ha in Bhutan and follow a mixed agro pastoral and trade economy. They claim themselves to be of the Lupon Lhumdrub caste. They are more like Tibetans than the Hlopa (south people of Bhutan) or other Bhutias of Sikkim. The exact date of their arrival in Sikkim is not known; though it must have been during one of the many invasions by the Bhutanese. In 1676, the Bhutanese invaded the Chumbi valley, Sikkim and the area south of Sikkim. The Lepcha chief was killed, and in retaliation and the Tibetan Government arranged the invasion of Bhutan, perhaps the most powerful undertaken during the reign of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. At one time the Ha-pa were amongst the richest people in Bhutan, but, as Eden relates, they took to evil ways and fell on bad times. They were living in robber caves- Pyak che and Au-pyale-and used it as a base from which to issue orders to rob and terrorise peaceful merchants (c.f. White 1887-1908: 113).

The language of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung is *den-jong-ke*. It is a Tibetan dialect and is spoken in Ha valley of Bhutan. It belongs to Tibeto-Burman family. However, nowadays, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung also speak Hindi, English and Nepali.

The traditional dress of the Bhutias is “*ba-khu*” which is a loose cloak type garment with full sleeves. It is fastened at the neck on one side and near the waist with a cotton belt. Male

Bhutias put *bakhu* with a loose trouser. The ladies use *bakhu* with a silken full sleeve blouse called "*honju*" a loose gown type garment fastened near the waist tightly with a belt. In the front portion they tie a loose sheet of multi coloured woolen cloth made of special design. This is called "*pangdin*" and is a symbol of a married woman. The ladies are very fond of heavy jewelry made of pure gold. Many Bhutias still wear traditional dress but youngsters put on jeans, pullovers and jackets.

The villages of Lachen and Lachung are the headquarters of their respective valleys. As the two valleys are separated by high mountain features, they lead a more or less independent existence. The presence of lush meadows in the vicinity of Lachen, facilitates pastoral activities. They rely on common property resource (pastures, forests and natural waters). The productivity of this region is both marginable and variable, and therefore has a benefit-cost ratio that discourages investment in exclusionary, private mechanisms. Livestock mobility is one of the major ways in which the Bhutias have managed uncertainty and risk in such environments. The mobility of the animals provides transhumant with effective ways to meet many needs. Mobility can take care of socio-economic objectives, such as access to a diverse range of markets, symbiotic interaction with the farming communities (for example exchange of manure for left over fodder in the fields) and culturing gatherings where livestock are part of the socio-political transactions, but in Lachen and Lachung the mobility is necessitated for growing crops at different altitudes besides taking their herds for grazing in different season. Though the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are found at a height of nearly 3,000 meters, but as these people lead a transhumant type of existence they travel from one ecological zone to another. They inhabit different climate zones varying from temperate (2,000-2,700 metres) to sub-Alpine (2,700-4,000 metres) to Alpine (4,000-5,000 metres) and very high hills with Alpine climate above 5,000 metres.

The Bhutias live in houses of stone and wood. The rooms in the Bhutia households are usually spacious since they prefer to have their hearth, altar, and lounge, dining and sleeping areas in one big room. They prefer to live in two-storied houses built on stone foundations and keep their domestic animals on the ground floor

instead of a separate animal shed. Kitchen is the epicentre of the Bhutia's household. It acts as their hall, dining room, a place where families socialise and entertain guests. They have a really large kitchen completely encircled with pots, pans, kettles, cutlery of all shapes and sizes. There are many vessels of all shapes and sizes.

Lachen and Lachung have their own traditional local government system. The provision of the 1965 Panchayat Act does not extend to this area. For centuries they had grazed their herds in Khama Dzong section of the Pahari district in Tibet during the summer and fall months. Marginal agriculture and animal husbandry was not sufficient to sustain a large population, so the people of Lachen and Lachung indulged in marginal trading activities with Tibetans across the borders. Thus, as long as trade was unhampered by political restrictions, it enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the Tibetan border in 1962, social life changed for these people. It deprived the Lachenpas and Lachungpas of their livelihood and had an adverse effect on their traditional crafts. Such partial transformations of economy have led to many changes in the Bhutia society. The situation of the Bhutias is unlike that of other ethnic minorities and it does not conform to the usual pattern of integration into larger economic and political systems. Political events beyond their control have led to the transformation of their traditional economic system, forcing them to reorient it. Variation in economic strategies of Lachenpas and Lachungpas emerge from several factors, showing interrelations of ecology, technology and social organisation. Limiting factors operating in the subsistence economy of the region are elements of the physical environment.

### **Lachen**

Lichen village is located at 2,700 m above main sea level on the right bank of the Lachen *Chu*, the main feeder of the river Teesta. Village Lachen with an area of 3,635.75 ha. is inhabited by 2,923 persons (Census of India 2001). The density of population is less than 1 person per ha. Though Lachen is a scheduled tribe village, the scheduled tribes account for a less than half (49.2 percent) of the total population (Census of India 2001). It is largely due to the presence of Refugee Tibetans and the government servants.



The number of scheduled castes in the village is negligible. Lachen revenue block is connected to Mangan headquarters by a 58 kilometre long metallic road along the Lachenchu. Lachenchu is a gusty torrent and turbid from the vast amount of silt which it carries along has to be crossed by three bridges to reach Lachen from Chungthang. Motorable road beyond Lachen extends up to Thanggu via Zema. Jeeps and trucks are the chief modes of transportation in the area. Mules and yaks are also used to maintain communication with areas where motor vehicles cannot reach. Due to bad weather, the road remains blocked sometimes, for days together. At such times Lachen can be reached through a hill track.

Lachen is a rectangular shaped place, surrounded by giant ridges- which protect it from high winds and give a feeling of security. The Bhutia houses called *khin* are usually rectangular in shape. The houses are clustered but are not adjoining. Sometimes, it rains for 7-15 days continuously, causing landslides. In times of calamity, people need each other and this justifies their clustering of houses. There is a small courtyard in front of each house. There are no lanes but only *shringa* (foot path). Surrounding the house is a small kitchen-garden and a few apple trees. During 1982-83, Lachen revenue block with 234 houses was inhabited by 919 Lachenpas, out of which 474 were males and 445 females (Fig. 3). It was the headquarters of the Lachenpas who moved up and down the stream for their agricultural and pastoral activities. The total length of their migratory route was about 25 kilometres. Families of the Lachenpas accompanied in these migrations. They locked and sealed their doors. One member of the family would return after one month to check the property.

Water comes from two springs-one on the northern boundary of the village and other on the south-eastern boundary. Two *kholas* run through the village. Water is brought to individual households by polythene pipes. It is not used for drinking but only for household work. Houses in Lamteng (Lachen) village which stands on a grassy and bushy flat are surrounded by a little cultivation of buckwheat, radishes, turnips and mustard. There is drainage problem in Lachen as the village is so situated that a considerable amount of slush accumulates during the rainy season, and also when it snows. The houses are ten to twenty feet high and forty

to eighty feet long. All are built of upright strong pine-planks, the interstices between which are filled with yak-dung. The only window is a slit closed by a shutter. On account of damp climate, they are raised above the ground, and are tied with shingles; the roofs are either of wood or bark, held together by large stones.

For conducting religious ceremonies, there are two gompas. One is the main gompa and the other is *manilhakhang* or Nyama Laghang. Nyama Laghang has big water driven prayer wheel. The prayer wheel has a hollow cylinder about three metres in height and one and a half metres in diameter filled with about four tons of written prayers. It is fixed to a perpendicular shaft of wood, to the lower end of which horizontal flappers are attached, against which water is directed from a shoot; the end is shod with iron, and revolves in an iron socket driven by the force of the stream. With each revolution the prayers are believed to be performed for the benefit of the builder of that particular wheel. Women and old men come here to pray. The main gompa was re-roofed in 1923-24 with corrugated sheets and additions and alterations were made.

Since 1922-23, two state village schools were functioning, one at Lachen and the other at Lachung. The students were taught only Tibetan reading and writing at Lachen School while pupils at Lachung were taught English, Hindi and Tibetan.

Though, Lachen is far off from the district headquarters, and has difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions, the winds of change had reached the area even in 1980s. There were two primary schools and one adult education centre and one primary health sub-centre. People were also availing the postal facilities. At that time there was no electricity in the Lachen revenue block. Few poles had been erected, but the connections were yet to be given. At present, the area is electrified and village has regular electric supply. Lachen Micro Hydel project with an installed capacity of 0.10 (MW) was started in 1989-1980. Another Lachen Hydroelectric dam is being constructed on the confluence of Zemu Chu and Teesta. The new power house near village Bonsoi shall have installed capacity of 210 MW to generate 865.94 MU of energy. The Government has started one Cottage Industries Training Centre to encourage the arts and crafts of Lachenpas. Telecommunication facilities are available at the army post at Chhaten, located at

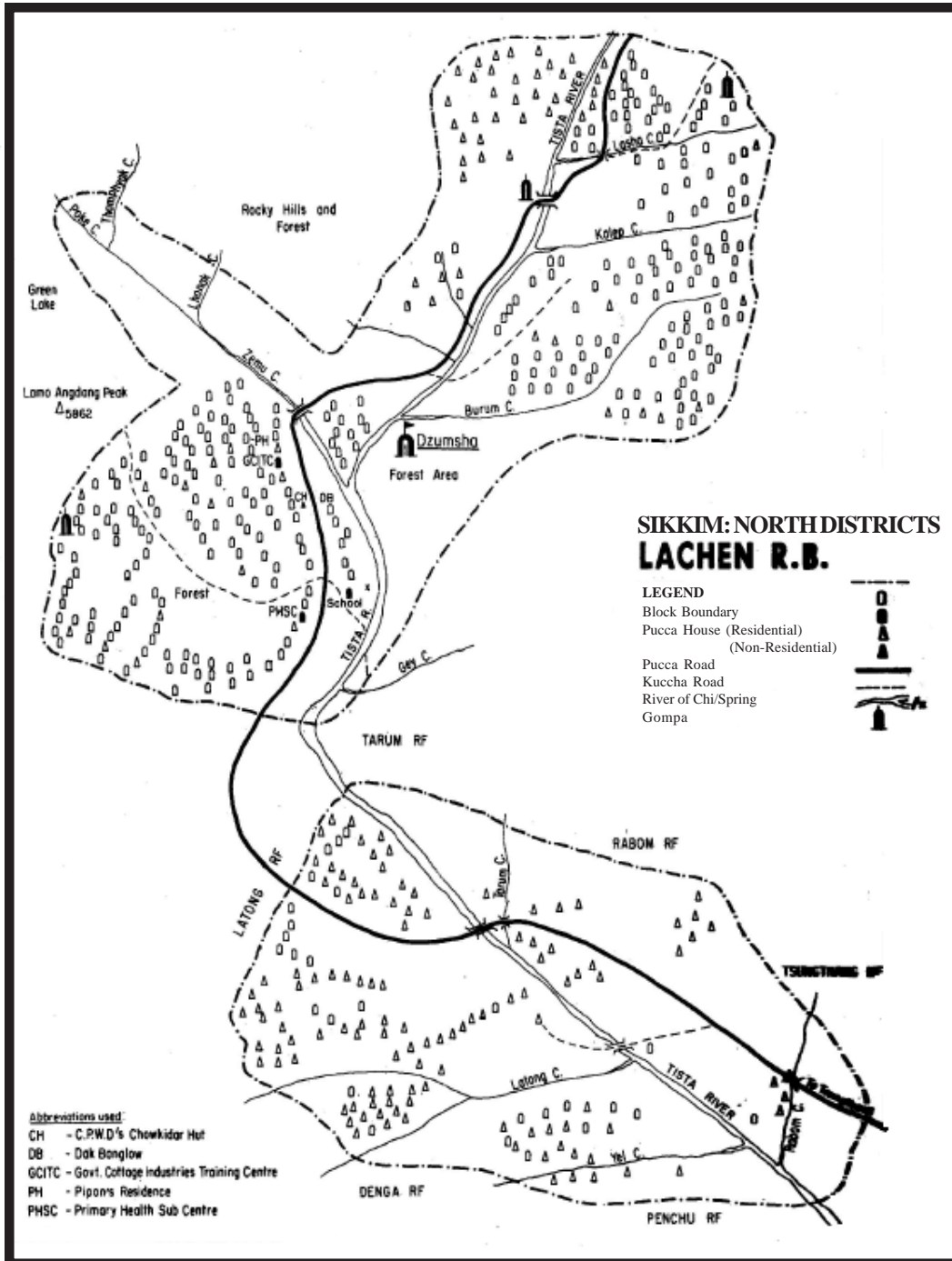


Fig. 3. Sikkim – North District - Lachen Revenue Block

a distance of about 5km from the village. Lachen has post office, police check post and an old PWD inspection bungalow. Besides, there is a hall for *dzumsha* (local self governing body) meetings and a government handicraft centre. Lachen has advantage of certain amenities due to its location near the army headquarters of Mountain Brigade 112.

Lachen has moderately shallow, excessively drained, coarse loamy soils on moderate steep slope with gravelly loamy surface and slight stoniness. Cultivable land at Lachen is almost negligible. Neither is there much land for cattle grazing. However, stall-fed cattle are reared in almost every household. There is no apple belt as such, though a few apple trees can be seen. At Latong, all the land has been distributed equally for a long time. There is no temporary land for future generations in Lachen. In this case, public land beside roads is allotted to landless needy people at nominal rates. The money from the sale of land goes to a *mongngu* (Public fund) maintained by the *phipun*. This fund is used at the time of some V.I.P. visit or any other general purpose. There is an area of two hectares of public common land-*mangsha* beyond the Dak Bungalow, but it is useless and used only as waste land. The Lachenpas have less fertile land at the places of migration also. It has been cultivated for the last 30-40 years without the addition of manure or other fertilizers. Nowadays yield is much less than what it used to be. The Lachenpas are less enthusiastic about cultivation here. As such, the land is divided by the *phipun* and council members according to people's needs. Childless couples receive much less than couples with children. There is no demand for more land at the places of migration because it does not yield good crops without the application of manure. People prefer local manure (*mal*) and do not use government provided fertilizers. The land here is used for grazing. Cultivation is around the houses in Lachen, and in the maize belt in Latong.

The Lachenpas are transhumant. The villagers leave Lachen during the rainy season and move to Thanggu (3,900m above mean sea level) where they have their agricultural and pasture lands. For at least four months in a year (June-September) the Lachenpas live in farmhouses or yak-tents in the plateau. Most of the Lachenpas own extensive farmlands in and around Thanggu. These days some of the fami-

lies, owing to fixed jobs at Lachen do not cultivate their fields. As a result, vast stretches of land lie uncultivated. The transhumant villagers move back to Lachen after the harvest of crops, mainly potato, radish and cabbage, and some of them make a second move to warmer places down south, viz. to Chungthang, Mangan or even Gangtok to avoid the uncomfortable winter months at Lachen and to sell the crops and dairy products. The people of Lachen are hard working and many of them pursue multiple occupations as farmer-cum-trader-cum-transport operator. The main and marginal workers of Lachen account for 60.35percent and 7.53percent respectively, while the non-workers account for 32.12 percent of the total population. Unlike Lachung, Lachen does not attract many tourists, but some of the adventure tourists and pilgrims make a stopover at Lachen on their way to the plateau, glaciers and sacred lakes located further north. The village wears somewhat dilapidated look, as most of the villagers do not live in the village continuously. Of late, a few prosperous villagers have introduced modern living in private houses, lodges and hotels at Lachen and Thanggu. In spite of economic prosperity of the villagers, the quality of life at Lachen is apparently not stress-free due to harsh climate. The place requires energy resources and judicious planning to make it a more habitable place round the year.

They grow potatoes, turnips, radishes, cauliflower and buckwheat. The cultivation of barley, maize and buckwheat is restricted in Lachen up to 2,745 metres but root crops like reddish and potato are grown well up to 3,660 metres as a summer crop. Till 1903, agriculture was practically unknown, and the people devoted themselves to their yaks and cattle. In 1903, there were 400 yaks, 40 cows, 100 ponies and 30 goats. However, they grew potatoes, turnips and a little buck wheat (Freshfield 1903: 94). While a few houses have been erected here, rest of the Lachenpas stay in their tents. The mean temperature of Thanggu in July is little above 9° C. The Lachenpas gradually descend to their own valley as the winter season advances to Denga, grazing their flocks on the way at Tallum, Samdong, Lachen or Lamteng and Latong.

There is no social hierarchy among Lachenpas. They do not have artisan class. There were 15 *sichepa* (Tibetan refugee) who substituted

for artisans. Previously, the some *sichepas* were making utensils and agricultural implements for Lachenpas with raw material exported from Tibet. These *sichepa* were paid in kind and given food. Nowadays, utensils and agricultural implements are available in Mangan market. Now they are attached to some wealth Lachenpas. They reside near their houses and work for their benefactors. These *sichepas* also worked for General Road Engineer Force as labourers. One *sichepa* was working as *tsemzopa* (cobbler). At that time, he was 80 years old and was too old to work. For the last 7 to 8 years, a Nepali carpenter had been living in Lachen. He had come for the construction of gompa, and decided to stay in Lachen till the completion of the work. He was making and repairing shoes for the Lachenpas. Later on the Lachenpas started buying shoes from Mangan market. The cobbler started making *bakhus* of yak hair and thus serves as tailor also. Otherwise Lachenpas weave and sew their own clothes.

Previously, Lachenpas refrained from butchering animals as it was looked down upon<sup>1</sup>. One *sichepa* worked as *shempa* (butcher). He was paid Rs.5 for slaughtering a sheep and Rs.30 for a yak. The *shempa* stayed with his family at Menshithang. None of his family members have become *shempa*. The Lachenpas could visit his house, but could not take food etc. at his place. The *shempa* is not allowed in the houses of Lachenpa; he can come only up to the door. The *shempa* never cuts pork, which only young boys do. He was not welcome at social events. If he was invited, he would sit separately.

Every three years, the Lachenpas have to present a healthy yak for sacrifice to the Mandal of Chungthang as a customary gift for grazing yaks in and around Menshithang area. This custom is known as *Chareen* or payment of grass. The yak is sacrificed and divided equally among the villagers of Chungthang (Tsunghang).

The Lachenpas have not been able to take full advantage of education programmes because of their migratory habits. From June to November the Lachen area is totally deserted. Government started migratory school, that is teachers were also migrating with the Lachenpa families. Open air classes were held without any black-board etc.

Likewise these people have not been able to avail of the facility of the Primary Health Centre situated in Lachen. They have their own system of looking after the sick and treating illness.

Postal facilities are also available but are not used much.

The Rural Management and Development Department (RMDD), Government of Sikkim is shortly initiating the installation of Solar Water Heaters at Lachen in North Sikkim. Sikkim Renewable Energy Development Agency (SREDA) will be implementing this programme in the conformity of *dzumsha*.

In this pilot project, 100 water solar heaters will be installed at Lachen. The objective of the proposed project is to reduce wood use and improve the quality of live of the Lachenpas. Lachenpas have high fuel wood consumption at household level and the farm level production of fuel wood is negligible as compared to the other nearby villages.

### Lachung

The Lachung revenue block is situated on east bank of Lachngchu at 2,745 metres. It is connected to Mangan town by a 51 kilometre metalled road. Lachungchu is neither deep nor rapid and is only 13 metres broad. The average altitude of the village is 2,600 m above mean sea level. 2,805.82 ha. of village area is inhabited by 2,800 persons. The density of population is only 1 person per ha. About 50 percent of the residents of Lachung is scheduled tribes. The number of scheduled castes in the village is negligible. Approach to the village is by metalled road although bus service is suspended for months (as of May, 2002). However, there is regular taxi (jeep) service to and fro Lachung-Chungthang, Lachung-Mangan, Lachung-Gangtok and if weather permits, Lachung-Yumthang. The village has one primary health sub-centre, two schools of which one is secondary and the other primary, a post office, a forest range office and a forest bungalow. The village monastery is located on a spur across the Lachung Chhu. The village extends on either side of Lachung Chhu and the part of the village on the other side of the river is known as Shertchu. Both the sides of the village are connected by bridge. The village gets electricity for a limited period of time but has no access to telephone. There is no supply line of drinking water but potable water is available from natural springs. Village has a video parlour.

Lachung is muddy, filthy and intersected by small streams whose beds make shift the roads



and at the same time the common sewers of the people. The Lachung revenue block is divided into three *busties* Shertchu, Singring and Beechchu. About thirty years ago it was struck by a terrible flood and afterwards the area was divided into three parts-Shertchu-the highest area; Singring-the middle area which is a flat piece of land two kilometers below Shertchu; and Beechchu which is the lowest.

The settlement pattern is controlled by the physiography of the area. Out of three *busties*, Singring and Beechchu are situated on road-river side and Shertchu is across the river on a small hillock. Houses are clustered in *busties*, but are not adjoin. There are no lanes. Houses are connected by *shringa* (footpath) (Fig. 4). Recently a road has been built in Beechchu, for the military trucks. Production land is limited to clearings in the narrow, rugged mountain valleys at different places at lower altitudes. At the time of field work Lachung revenue block with an area of 2814.22 hectares was inhabited by 328 households having 1,508 people of whom 787 were males and 721 females. This population included institutional and household population. Out of these only 647 males and 673 females were Lachungpas, 6 males and 3 females were Nepalis scheduled castes, and the rest were government officials.

### Land Use in Lachung

Exact statistics of land use for these regions were not available. People have houses and house gardens in the revenue village. In Lachung there were small fields and some apple orchards. The apple orchards were spread over 115.28 hectares. Some statistics for Lachung were available. These are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Land use in Lachung**

Type of land	Area in hectares
Total dry fields	593.86
Banjo (Fallow)	69.50
Total area of Bustiwala	663.36
Total Government uncultivable land in Lachung	2150.86
Bustiwala + Government Land	= Total area in Lachung
663.36 + 2150.86	= 2814.82 hectares

Out of the total area of 2814.82 hectares, only 593.86 hectares are cultivable without irrigation. The Bhutias have adopted culturally to diverse natural landscapes and have established settlement patterns and production activities tailored to the limitations imposed by the region. Three major biogeographical provinces of human land can be identified in Lachung:

- (i) Fields and pastures at higher altitudes (5173 metres to 5824 metres).
- (ii) The houses and small gardens in front of houses at Lachen and Lachung.
- (iii) The valley floor, peripheral valley bottom at lower altitudes.

Cultivation is restricted to limited regions which are either below the village or much above the residential area.

Conditions in the Lachen and Lachung are suitable for the best quality apples. There is large crop every year particularly in Lachung at an elevation of 8,610 feet. Apples are one of the main sources of cash income. Large quantities are taken to the markets in India. Previously, the apples were taken to the markets of Tibet in Shigatse and Yatung along with butter.

The main cultivation area of seed potato is at higher elevation above 1800 metres. It is planted in February- March using previous crop seeds and harvested in August-September. They prepare the compost by using collected forest litter, animal bedding and animal excreta. The compost is applied at the time of seed planting on furrows or pits. Pea is intercropped with it and harvested in May-June. Cabbage is cultivated at higher altitude as off-season vegetable.

The Lachungpas live in two-storied wooden houses with four to five rooms. The main room of the house serves as kitchen-cum-family room. For daily cooking the family normally uses gas but firewood is also used occasionally. During winter months, firewood is used both for cooking and heating purpose. Although they have electricity connection, they cannot use it for heating, as the voltage is too low. The Lachungpas use traditional pit toilet as flush toilets are considered luxury.

Settlements of the Bhutias are threatened by landslides, avalanches, and rock fall due to the nature of local slopes, climate, and geology<sup>2</sup>. The danger of the natural calamities has been accentuated by deforestation and grazing. Seismic activity, mountain torrents, glacial lake out-



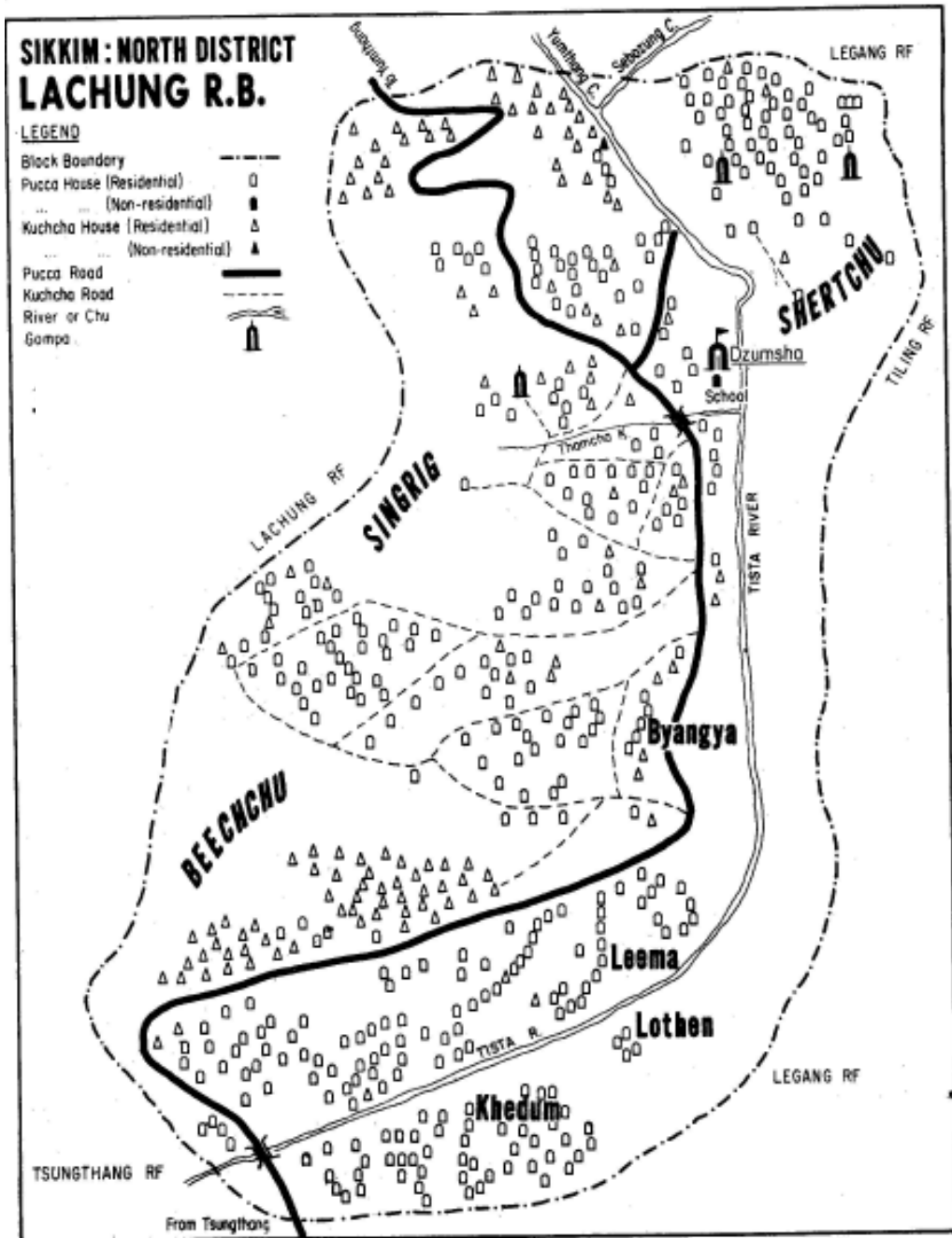


Fig. 4. Sikkim – North District- Lachung Revenue Block

bursts, and other geomorphologic hazards unique to highland regions may influence settlement and land-use patterns. And extreme altitude may also affect human physiology, influencing fertility and diet requirements in ways that also have repercussions on lifestyles and basic subsistence requirements (Moran 1979: 142, 147-161).

Like the Lachenpas, all the Lachungpas belong to one caste. There are no groups or divisions in their society. There were no artisan castes among Lachungpas. Some Tibetan refugees (*gava*) used to make utensils and agricultural implements for these people. Now, these entire things can be procured from Mangan market. The *gava* were there but had changed their profession. They were working as labourers but still worked for their landlords free of charge. One of them worked as the *shempa* (butcher). He was paid in kind. The Lachungpas believed that if animals were slaughtered by the *shempa*, they are not tortured after death. In case of pig killing, he was paid according to the length of the tail, the bladder and some other internal organs. He was given *chhang* (millet beer) and rice.

There was one big gumpa in Shertchu and two small ones between Singrig and Beechchu. The monks attached to gumpa live on alms and donations by the Bhutias of Lachung. The donations were earned by monks during sickness and death ceremonies of the Bhutias.

There were two primary schools, one Adult Education Centre, one Child Welfare Centre and one Primary Health Centre in Lachung *Chu*. A Cottage Industries Training Centre was working in Lachung since 1976. Lachung and other small streams pass through the *busites* (hamlets). Water is transported to individual households through water pipes from small storage tanks. Postal facilities are also available to these people.

In recent years, Lachung has gained prominence as one of the major tourist destinations of Sikkim. As a result, there is a profusion of lodges and hotels in and around Lachung. This has facilitated infrastructural development in the village and has brought affluence to the villagers who joined tourism industry as lodge-owners, taxi-owners and tour operators. The newfound prosperity of the villagers has improved the quality of life and raised their aspiration level.

## HABITAT AND ECONOMY

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung practice marginal agriculture and yak, sheep and goat rearing as a part of their subsistence. Forest, land, livestock, manpower and the considerable knowledge of the skills necessary to exploit them effectively are the principle economic resources. Supplementary but nonetheless of considerable importance, is the income from trading and non-traditional resources. Traditionally, animal husbandry was a way of life, and the Bhutias' whole existence revolved around the migration of their flocks in search of pastures. Their production system involved raising yaks, sheep, goats and horses; harvesting their products; paying a portion to gumpa as taxes; consuming a portion; and bartering yet another portion to obtain grain and other necessities like tea and other consumables. Animal husbandry is still a way of life but equal importance is given to subsistence agriculture and other non-traditional ways of earning money. The younger generations are shifting towards alternative sources of livelihood like government jobs, transportation, hotel business and other activities related with tourism. The Bhutias follow a number of conscious strategies which aim at coping with the hazards of agro pastoral life and survival in the cold climate. Animal husbandry and agriculture in Lachen and Lachung is found effectively exploiting the single short growing season during which, high-velocity winds are common. In Lachen and Lachung valleys green foliage appears in late April or early May on snowmelt or spring-fed wet meadows, riverbanks or lake banks that forms grazing areas.

Ecological factors and extreme weather conditions of Lachen and Lachung restrict land use. Steep hills, valleys, grasslands and tableland plateau however, well suitable for mobile pastoralism and is being managed by the Bhutias as such. Like all societies, the Bhutias also have a set of institutions that combine natural resources, technology and labour to produce foods and goods. Division of labour, co-operation and labour play their part in the production of food and goods. The climate, the flora and fauna, water supply and vegetation are the controlling factors of agro-pastoral economy, which are used according to the cultural sanctions. Resource management in a risky environment illustrates the skills of the Bhutias for survival.

Small-scale agro-pastoral production in the Lachen and Lachung is oriented toward guaranteeing a subsistence livelihood by efforts to attain self-sufficiency in food production and to reduce environmental risks. Production strategies involve the simultaneous use of several ecological zones each with characteristic crops or types of pasture. Households are the basic units of production which allocate land, labour, and capital at their disposal to meet short-term production goals. The Bhutias have communal pastureland with strong community regulation of land usage. The headman (*pipon*) manages communal pastures and agricultural lands by scheduling agro-pastoral activities and enforcing rotation schedules,

The forest still plays an important role in their economic life and subsistence economy. It provides them with wood for houses, fuel, fodder and a few edible items. In Lachen and Lachung forests and hillsides herbage supports the flocks and herds, which in turn sustain the population of the area. The Bhutias have neither crop-residue option nor any institutional arrangement with other communities for grazing their animals. They have only access to their traditional grazing in different valleys in summers and winters. Single resource competitors always have framework to overcome scarcity and conflicts due to internal pressures (population growth, growth in herd size and change of activity) and external pressures (climate changes, political factors and environmental degradation) as their resources are limited. Spatial mobility is required to achieve a balance between man, animals and pastures. The organisation of spatial movements is important in pastoral communities. Among the Bhutias these movements are regular and cyclic between the areas of summer pastures and winter pastures.

Poor soil, steep slopes, and hilly terrain in the absence of irrigation make agriculture a difficult proposition. Because of poor technology, intensive cropping is difficult. Yields are always low. No well-kept terraces, no crop rotation and weeding is to be seen in most areas. Because of this limited potential for energy extraction, the population of the area has adjusted to circumstances by seasonally migrating to different altitudes at different times of the year. This traditional social structure is an adaptation to the climatic and geomorphologic limitations of the high altitude environment.

This landscape may have been modified by military settlement in the vicinity and introduction of roads etc. but it cannot be altogether transformed. The natural environment sets limits to human intervention. To utilise the meagre natural resources, the people have created institutions based on sharing instead of competition.

In this region two major patterns of adaptation in subsistence are found—one regional, and the other local. The regional pattern is one of integration of several diverse agro-climatic belts which are identified by climate and altitude. Because the belts are altitudinal arranged this type of integration may be termed “vertical control”. This vertical ecological control is exercised by communal ownership and a pattern of extended migrations. These two autonomous villages base their subsistence from their isolated valleys through community control over local resources.

The pattern of adaptation to the environment may be understood as local response to such environmental constraints as low energy availability and cold. The most important cultural adaptations to environment constraints focus upon the subsistence system: crops, animals, agricultural and pastoral techniques designed to yield and adequate diet with local resources. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung follow *Alpwirtschaft* type of strategy, associated with the movement of peoples and animals in vertical space, communal control of land and pastures with social institutions that schedule the complex movement in time and space. During the summers, yaks are set free in mountain pastures. The female yaks (*bri*) ewes and female sheep and goats are kept with households and taken out each day for grazing. The winters are difficult times for human as well as livestock population. The Bhutias rely almost entirely on standing forage during winter at lower altitude. The livestock are fattened as much as possible during the summer, so that they can withstand the long winter with only scant vegetation, supplemented by fodder that has been cut locally or purchased ahead of winter. Different animals also provide diversified products for self-consumption or sale. In terms of productive roles, yaks are main milk producers as they have long lactating period. Goats and sheep are kept mainly for wool, meat and barter. Only during difficult times, they resort to selling sheep. They slaughter animals from the flock before the winter, so as to avoid wasting

scarce fodder on animals which have outlived their usefulness.

Crop production of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung is intimately linked to pastoralist even for those families who own little or no livestock. Annual fertilization of potato fields is an essential activity of the Bhutia agriculture. Everything from composted weeds, forest-floor litter and animal manure is added to the fields. The availability of fire wood (from the forest) makes it unnecessary to use dung for fuel as is done among Changpas of Changthang, Ladakh. Animal manure is so important that the route and timing of herd movements is decided in part on the basis of where household fields are located and when the optimal times are to supply them with manure. Families without sufficient livestock of their own either scour the slopes for dung or spend cash to purchase it. Crop production in turn contributes to pastoralist. No fodder crops are grown although chaff and stalks are occasionally fed to them. The animals subsist on wild fodder, which they forage from the forest trees, brush and grasslands. Thus animals are crucial link in the mountain ecosystem. "In effect, the animals broaden the food resource base of human through the ability to ingest and convert vegetal materials which humans cannot assimilate into forms they can assimilate" (Andress 1966: 214; c.f. Berreman 1978). They do so by transforming wild fodder into food for people:

- (i) Production of manure for good yield of crops,
- (ii) cultivation and thrashing (by providing energy for traction),
- (iii) providing milk and meat, and
- (iv) earning money from sale of wool (food and other goods can be purchased).

### Lachen Economic Cycle

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have permanent houses at their respective villages, but they also use *byah* (tents) made of yak hair during migrations to high altitude pastures. The village Lachen at 2700 metres serves as headquarters of the Lachenpas, from where their migrations are directed through community organisation. Lachenpas migrate seasonally and have encampments at different places.

From May to October-November, they stay in higher region and engage themselves in dif-

ferent activities like agriculture, pasturing, trade and collecting minor forest produce. In Lachen it snows from November to April. After April, only young men and women migrate to higher villages of Zemu, Tallum, Samdong, Yakhang, Kalep and later to Thanggu (Table 2). Almost every family of Lachen has a piece of cultivable land and a semi-permanent residence. They live in houses made of wood of *Rhododendron* from the surrounding forest (Fig.5). During the summer months when the ground snow melts, Lachenpas sow potatoes, radishes and leafy vegetables. The herd owners move even further north in search of fresh pastures. This month is not suitable for the migration of children and old members of the family, so after sowing the potatoes they come back to Lachen and then in the late May, the entire village migrates to upper ranges to their respective destinations. The migration takes place in two different stages, the first stage at 4,000 metres, and second stage at 4,500 metres along the different tributaries of Lachenchu.

At their first halt, they occupy Yakthang, Samdong, Tallum and Kalep villages on the tributaries of the Lachechu at 3,660-4,000 metres, while flocks graze, women cultivate root crops like reddish and potato (from May to July) and gather wood with the help of children. Men collect minor forest produce. From these villages, migration starts after the 15<sup>th</sup> of July to the next stage of migration at Thanggu area at 3,965 metres. The Lachenpas occupy five different villages-Byamzay, Toga, Tseguk, Chopta and Divu Thang along the tributaries of the Lachenchu. Cultivation of root crops is possible in Lachen valley up to this altitude. From August to November, the Lachenpas inhabit this area. As they do not apply manure to the fields the yield is not good. Again women and children collect wood and men collect minor forest produce. In November, they start migrating back to Latong, Denga and Geuma.

Thanggu is the meeting place of migrating Lachenpas as they have a yak-tent *gumpa* and a communal tent kitchen for feast. *Dzumsha* meeting takes place twice a month at Thanggu. It is compulsory for all Lachenpas to attend these meetings. After harvesting in early October they come down to Lachen for the remaining months. The duties of household members keep on changing with the changing economic situations and activities.



**Table 2: Stages of migration of Lachenpa**

Name of the place	Encampments No. of houses	Cultivable land area in hectares
<i>First Stage of Migration at 4000 metres</i>		
Yakthang	22	6
Tallum	21	8
Samdong	I 15	2
Samdong	II 30	
Kalep	16	3
<i>Second Stage of Migration at 4500 metres</i>		
Toga	21	7
Tseguk	7	2
Chopta	2	1
Dirvu-thang	16	4
Thanggu	15	-

They migrate to lower altitudes during winter months (from second week of November till the onset of summer). In the months of December and January they come down to Latong, Denga and Geuma for grazing their animals and cultivating their fields. The Lachenpas cultivate maize and wheat in small fields. As a rule, young people accompany their herds to grazing area (*dekkko*), but some of the Lachenpas do take their families along as they have built houses there. They go down to Donking and Mensithong where 20 families of *sichepa* (Tibetan refugees) are residing who look after the Lachenpas flocks. They are paid in meat and liquor. Simultaneously, the Lachenpas collect fire wood and grasses. They remain here up to the second week of February. After sowing the fields, they come back to Lachen. They inhabit Lachen from middle of February to middle of May (Fig. 6).

They have no grazing rights and pay a nominal payment of Rs.1.50 per yak and 0.50 per sheep to the State Forest Department. These sheep graze in the open pasture during the day and are enclosed in the stone fenced barns during the night. Fodder is scarce during the winter months. Till a few years back the entire village would migrate from Lachen to Thanggu during the summer months. However, now due to more settled life, few herders go to Thanggu. Some of the Bhutias go further down to comparatively warmer places where they own cardamom plantations. They also indulge in trading activities when they are on move. Their mercantile includes raw wool, blankets, rugs, *churpi* and other dairy products, potatoes, cardamoms and a host of consumer goods that they collect during their visits to towns. The wealthy Bhutias prefer combination

of traditional culture and modern lifestyle. The table 2 gives details of the number of houses and area of cultivable land.

The North-South movement of people is not a strategy resulting only due to inadequate local pasture, but climatic conditions also play part in the movement.

### Lachung Economic Cycle

Among Lachungpas there are no encampments as the families do not migrate seasonally. The Lachung revenue block is divided into three *busties* (hamlets) Shertchu, Singrig and Beechuchu. The three *busties* (hamlets) of Lachung revenue block have cultivable lands at Khedum, Leema and Lothen.

Lachung is chiefly a farming village. At the time of Hookers visit "Rice was once cultivated at this elevation but the crop was uncertain" (Hooker 1855: 119). Most of the Lachungpas own farmland. Out of the total area of 2,086 ha, 660.13 ha are cultivated (unirrigated), 878.17 ha are culturable waste (including gauchars and groves) and 1,267.52 ha are not available for cultivation. In Lachung, there are three types of land: (1) Land in the apple belt; and (2) land in the maize, wheat and millet belt; and (3) temporary land. Land in the apple belt and maize, wheat, millet belts are permanent. The agricultural lands of Lachungpas are at Khedum, Leema and Lothen about five kilometers away at lower altitude. The 45 households of Shertchu and 33 of Singrig have cultivable land at Khedum and Lothen, while inhabitants of Beechchu have agricultural land in Leema and Khedum. All these places are nearby and the total cultivable land is about 13-16 hectares. The village of Khedum is situated on a flat terrace several hundred feet above the river at an altitude of 2,135 metres above sea level. There are about 50 to 60 houses. The crops cultivated are maize, wheat, barley, *kodo*, *kouni*, plantain, potatoes, peaches, and peas. Lothen has a splendid pasture. There are about 50 to 60 houses inhabited by these people. Leema has about 40 to 50 houses and agricultural land. Surplus production and export of potato and cabbage have brought prosperity to the village, especially after the introduction of regular vehicular traffic. The cool temperate climate of Lachung is also favourable for the cultivation of a variety of temperate fruits, apple in particular, and if grown on a larger scale, apple can be a major cash crop of the region in a



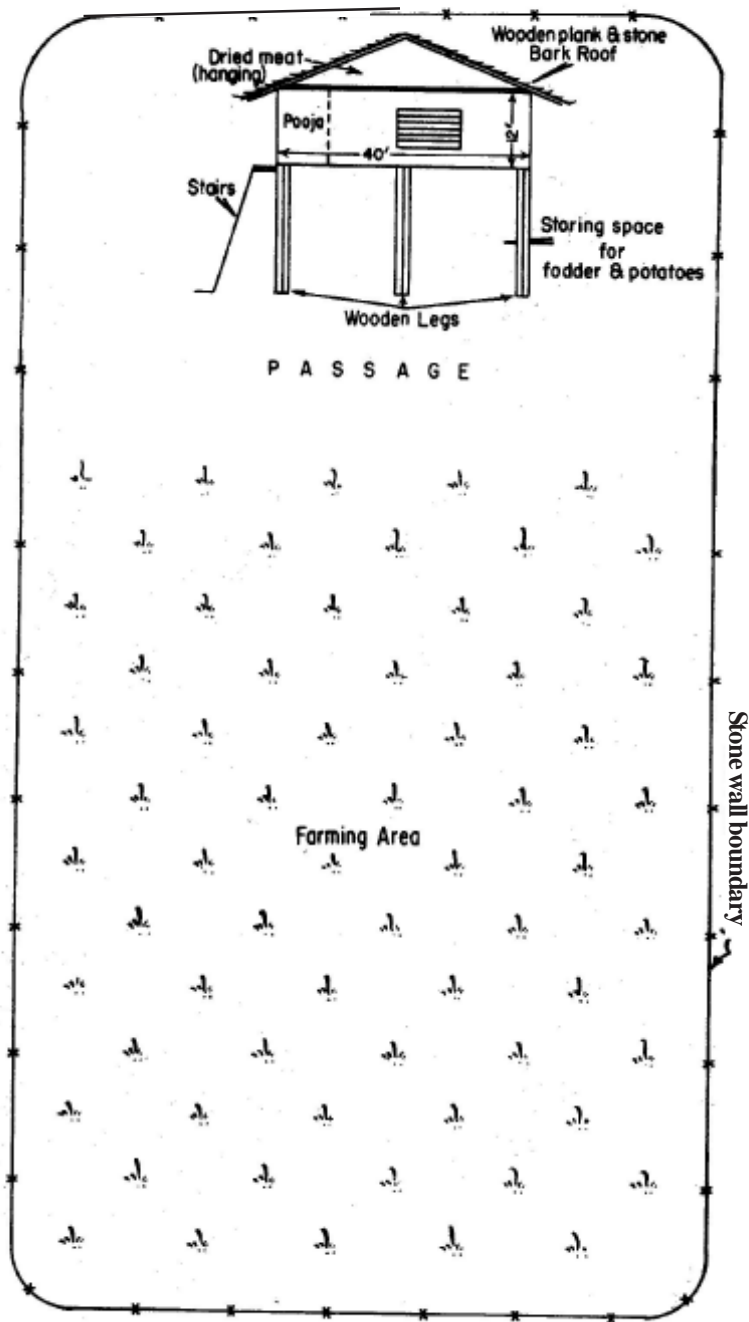


Fig. 5. North Sikkim – Bhutia: House Type (at Migration place)

few years' time. A section of villagers traditionally graze yak, sheep and cattle. The alpine pastures in and around Lachung facilitate animal grazing. The people of Lachung are hard working and active. The main workers in the village account for 69.18 percent of the total population while 9.28 percent are marginal workers and 21.54 percent are non-workers. As farmers the Lachungpas are well-off. They grow and sell potatoes, cabbage and apples in nearby towns. They also sell processed dairy products derived from the milk of yak. On average a household owns 15-20 yaks, one-two *dzo* and pigs. Many of the Lachungpas own Jeep and other vehicles and take their agriculture and dairy produce to nearby markets themselves. During tourist season they transport tourists to and from Chungthang and Mangan

During the months of November-December, male members go with animals beyond these places. While grazing they collect grasses and firewood. They stay there for two months and prepare for wheat sowing. Some stay there until March-April for harvest, while others come back to Lachung. In May they take their animals to high altitude pastures halting at Yumthang (3,660metres), Yume Samdong (4,880metres) and Chholhamo. Lachung is more developed than Lachen. Thus the Lachungpas migrate 6 kilometres up the Samdong up to Chholhamo and 6 kilometres below Lachung to Khedum, Leema and Lothen (Fig. 6).

They cultivate wheat, barley, maize, peas, turnips, potatoes and other vegetables. Wheat and barley is planted in November-December. Maize is planted after this, in areas in Lothen where apple harvesting has taken place. Maize does not grow at higher altitudes in Lachung. Pumpkins and cucumbers are planted between rows of maize and squash vines are grown on the trees as well as on the poles. Towards the end of April, other vegetables such as cauliflower, onions and tomatoes are planted. Nettles, big sources of food grow wild here, but are transplanted into fields. Lachungpas have adopted new ways of growing grains and vegetables, which have been introduced by the agricultural department. The better qualities are grown, which give better yield. With the change of seasons, they start moving up wards and go above the Lachung up to Yume Samdong. Those Lachungpas who do not have houses here stay in yak tents. By the middle of August, the down-

wards migration starts. The family members staying at Lachung move towards Khedum, Leema and Lothen to make preparations of sowing of wheat and barely. Maize is harvested. Maize grown here is not of good quality and is used for animal consumption. Apple harvesting takes place at Lachung. The males and animal herds come down during the last week of August and the middle of September. The harvesting of wheat and barely is over; the butts of the harvested crops can be enjoyed by the animals. During the next four months, the animal herds move further down to Mangan forest to utilize pastures. In January-February, they start moving upwards towards their own village and the cycle starts afresh.

A family that has fewer animals, and cannot spare a person to accompany the herd, can keep the animals in the village and stall feed them with the *pipon's* permission. A person has to pay compensation of Rs. 60-70 per month to the *dzumsha* for using the communal grazing land.

The chief cash crops of the area are apples, potatoes and vegetables. A few varieties of peas, peaches and cherries have been introduced. On 115.23 hectares of land, there are about 36,820 apples trees, out of which 3,065 are old, 18755 young and new plantation is above 15,000 saplings. Apple production has come down for the last two years because of Black spot disease. The healthy harvest of the area usually is around 1.75 lakhs kilogram (1979-80). In 1981-82, the harvest was around 1.50 lakh kilogram. Government has opened a buying agency at Lachung itself. Apples of the area are graded according to the variety as A, B, and C. The rates for these are Rs.1.60/kg Rs. 1.35/ kg and Rs. 0.75/kg, respectively.

Marketing problems have hindered the development of horticulture. The means of communication and transportation pose problems. The apples undergo considerable damage on account of carriage of the produce. Due to rain and landslides, the road gets blocked for days together.

It can be observed from the Lachen and Lachung economic cycle that though both the communities carry out more or less similar economic activities, but their movement is in opposite direction. The opposite directions of movement also explain some of the differences in the agricultural produce and harvesting times of the two areas under study. The Lachung people are on the move for the whole year. They do not move



along with their families as the Lachenpas do. Their families are dispersed, fulfilling their allotted duties. The interesting offshoot of this is that their movement for fuel and grazing is also in the opposite direction- Lachenpas going down and Lachungpas going upward.

This movement is necessitated by the fact that there is no arable land available in Lachen and Lachung. Out of 2817.22 hectares of Lachung, 666.36 is unirrigated land available for cultivation and 2150.86 hectares is not available for cultivation.

Even the season for each crop varies with altitude, soil, temperature and rainfall. Potato is harvested in September in the high zones of Lachen valley, while it is harvested in the valley of Lachung only in July. Crop rotation is another feature of the Lachung valley which is absent in Lachen. In winter, the Lachen valley has practically no agricultural production, but in Lachung, maize is followed by barley and buckwheat as winter crops. Due to low temperatures both the crops cannot be harvested within a single year. They take more than 15 months to mature, and after two crops the land is kept fallow for a few months.

Two *pipon* look after the affairs of these encampments, which are primary communities of Bhutia society.

A *pipon* holds his encampment together by exercising his influence in establishing and formulating unanimous agreement within the encampments on dates of migration and beginnings of agricultural activities (Bhasin 1989, 1996).

In the arable areas, agriculture and pastoral land are close together. Agriculture is carried out in the valley areas while the mountains supply pastures for the yaks and sheep. The nearby forest fulfils the fuel needs of the people. It is well known that in agro pastoral economy, technology involves an adaptation to different climate and biotic belts, agricultural technique and settlement.

The organisation of the Bhutia migration and land use pattern is facilitated by the *dzumsha* (village council). The Bhutias follow their traditional routes in their seasonal migrations. They follow traditional schedule of departures and duration of occupations of the different localities. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have communal forest/ pastures and agricultural of land usage. The village is an important land hold-

ing unit. There is common ownership of grazing and forest land for the use of the villagers. The sowing and harvesting are synchronised at meetings of the *dzumsha* so as to utilise the fallow land as common pastures. As encampment organisation is looked after by the *dzumsha*, the individual Bhutia's economic organisation is managed by the family members with their division of labour.

The Bhutias' women have adapted themselves to play multiple roles as producers, reproducers and consumers. For this they developed and maintained their integrative abilities to deal with complex system of household and migration, community and environment.

### Economic Development

The agro-pastoral production system of the Bhutias, with its adaptive strategies, is a highly well-organised response to the insecurity of their unpredictable natural environment. The augmented menace is not related to climatic changes, as often has been stated in the past, but is more a result of events that took place in last fifty years. The economy was at subsistence level. The incorporation of Sikkim into national streamline called for designing of developmental interventions in Lachen and Lachung.

Since 1954, development programmes financed and largely administered by the Government of India were put in to effect. The development in Sikkim was set in motion after 1962 by the government agencies. The emphasis was on communications and introduction of essential services for the people. In the wake of conflict between India and China, this area being of strategic importance caught government attention and was exposed to high military activity. Military posts were set up and roads were constructed for easy movement of heavy machinery and troupes. Construction of roads, improvement in the means of transportation and opening up of Sikkim for tourists has contributed to the exposure of these people to outsiders.

Literacy has increased from less than 5 percent in 1950 to 50.6 percent in 2001. There is notable disparity in the rates of literacy between male and female and between rural and urban. The literacy rate among males is 55.5 percent while in females it is only 45 percent ([http://www.Sikenvis.Nic.In/ Repoortspercent 20and 20percent Publication](http://www.Sikenvis.Nic.In/Repoortspercent20and20percentPublication)).

In Lachen and Lachung, the foremost objective of the government was development of animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture. For development of animal husbandry, infrastructure like fodder banks and animal husbandry stations in different parts of North Sikkim have been started. Sheep Husbandry Department is helping with feed banks, lambing shed facilities and enclosures on the lines of *tsapkaks* (reserved pastures). The government is seeking help and opinions of western development experts'. The impetus to increase live-stock productivity by scientific methods is strong in Lachen and Lachung. However, intervening in fragile environments with complex ecological systems is a difficult undertaking.

However, all programmes for development and subsequent changes were largely centered on Gangtok and other parts of east Sikkim. Even after five decades of independence, the planning commission, central, state and district governments have not been able to find the precise development strategies for areas like Lachen and Lachung, where environment is harsh and population is scarce, scattered and mobile. It is difficult to maintain education and health services in these areas.

### **New Sources of Income**

The Bhutias who cease to pursue their traditional occupation either become wage earners or find government jobs like peons, teaching in schools and in the military. They have opened small shops to supplement their incomes. Lachung has emerged as a tourist destination with the soaring popularity of Yumthang Valley which is just 25 kms from here. Yumthang is a summer grazing ground, adjoining Singba Forest Reserve. The high altitudes destinations of Lachen and Lachung- Gurudondmar Lake, Chopta valley Singba Sanctuary, Yumthang<sup>3</sup> valley and Hot springs with curative properties and healing power are attracting many tourists, trekkers as well as those on four wheels. Lachen is the base from where tours to Guru Dongmar Lake and Chopta valley are organised. The popularity of Guru-Dongmar Lake is changing the fortunes of the Lachenpas. They have tourism sector to themselves as outsiders are not allowed to buy property in these restricted areas. Lachen now has about a dozen lodges and nearly 50 taxis, which are used to ferry tourists. These locations are also visited by organised three-

four days tours by tour operators from Gangtok and outside. Tourism has brought local people in contact with outsiders. Tourism is a prominent sector of earning money. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are part of it in a big way. Till 1997 Lachen and Lachung were traditional villages, after that these high altitude villages were opened to tourism. The North Sikkim Highway, built and maintained by Indian Army for security reasons has brought many opportunities for these people and hospitality trade is one of these. These traditional villages are changing fast with motor roads, vehicles and traditional wooden homes (Tibetan style construction with colourful faceted window frames and carved doors) being replaced by concrete hotels. They have started making private boarding and lodging arrangements for trekkers and tourists who come privately on motorbikes etc. A series of hotels with basic facilities have sprung up in Lachen and Lachung. Though these hotels and lodges have been started by the Lachenpas and Lachungpas, they are being managed by the outsiders as local people are not trained in the hospitality trade. Many Lachenpas and Lachungpas have converted their road side shanties into food stall to supplement their meagre incomes.

Lachungs on the other hand, is the base for tours to Yumthang valley. Almost the entire zone of North Sikkim comes under the restricted territory; foreigners' visit beyond Thangu is prohibited. Tourism in the region is at a nascent stage and guests may not get the same level of service in north-Sikkim as they would in other parts of the region. The State Government declared the Year 2010 as the Year of Tourism. Coinciding with the inauguration of International Rhododendron festival in North Sikkim on 25h April 2010, the Year of Tourism was launched. The year witnessed a series of tourism activities all over the State. The inauguration of International Rhododendron Festival on at Singbha Rhododendron Sanctuary Gate on 25th April 2010 was marked by flag off for biking at Yumthang- Lachen and also other activities like trekking, nature camp, bird watching, angling and short treks amidst the forest.

### **SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

The social structure, social organisation and community life of the Bhutias has emerged out of the needs of its individuals and social groups. A



transhumant society like that of the Bhutias who traverse the difficult terrain all the year long is bound to have social and functional groups to provide social security to all its members. Among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, household, village/ *busti*/ encampment are a level of social organisation, which is an administrative and jural unit. Power and authority is diffused among members. The different aspects of social organisation and social control of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are household, village and *dzumsha* (an administrative organisation). These are units of social organisation that are explicitly organised and precisely defined by the Bhutias. The Bhutias are bundled into units that are multi-purpose, but adjusted to meet different scales of uncertainty. The village or *busti* elders deals with local problems, *pipon*-the *dzumsha* head deals with problems in larger area and with regional issues.

Based on economic activities, the Bhutias have functional groups like herding unit, group of household migrating together (friendship groups). At the time of crisis in the lives of the people, members of these groups which are a strong institution of reciprocal mutual assistance, extend help. An administrative organisation constituting *pipon* (headman), members and elders to look after the interests of transhumant, maintains relations with sedentary societies and Indian administration apart from resolving disputes, organising grazing pattern and other community problems. These three aspects of social organisation and social control- the household unit, *busti* or encampment support network and the role of *pipon*-play an important role in the social and economic life of Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung.

### Household

The Bhutias household is the smallest and most important unit of social organisation. All families have a recognised head, which represents the household in dealing with *dzumsha* and *busti* matters. In the joint family or incomplete family, the senior male is the head. Only where there are not adult male member in the household, a women is regarded as the head of the household, till her son attains maturity.

Household is the economic unit, as well as the unit of participation in all public, social and religious projects. Ideally, each household has a separate house but when two families share a single dwelling, the hearth symbolises indepen-

dence. The house generally consists of two rooms, one room serves as a kitchen and living room and the other as the altar room. On account of damp climate, the houses are raised above the ground with lath and plaster walls. The ground floor is generally walled in with stones and is used for keeping goats, sheep and cattle. The kitchen is in one corner with a permanent stove made of clay. In the kitchen, utensils are hung or stacked on sides. The altar room has several statues of Buddha, bowls of water, a lamp, incense and other offerings of grain and butter. Along with the religious objects is wooden paddle carved with figures of men and animals. These figures are filled with a paste of flour and water and after drying; they are taken out and used in exorcist ceremonies. It saves time to have a symbol of evil handy in the hour of need. These images are taken out of the house and are placed at crossroads. Both rooms have lofts with ladders made of a log with steps hacked out with an axe. Bags of millet hang from the roof in bunches to dry, to be used in preparation of *chhang* (Bhutia beer). Many pieces of meat also hang from the roof.

Household goods and belongings signify the wealth of the people. Wealthier people have better beddings and rugs. Many families have expensive Tibetan rugs. In some houses, saddle bags and bridles, embossed and decorated, imported from Tibet during their many migrations are hung on the walls. Some possess beautiful silver and gold pitchers and teapots which form part of the household goods. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung cooked food in Tibetan pots of red clay. In addition they used to barter these for grain with Lepchas of Dzongu and surrounding areas. They acted as middlemen between Tibet and lower areas. Cups and bowls were made of wood and bamboo. The village's only piece of iron was used together with a flint to make fire which was shared by all households. Lachen's main trade with lower areas was Tibetan salt against grain, rice, maize, buckwheat between regular trading friends. This trade later expanded to include pins, needles and metal tools that came from Tibet as well as blankets and other dairy products that were produced in the valleys of Lachen and Lachung.

Other items of material culture include *milang* (a portable stove made of copper and is used for making tea and light beverages); *zhadow* (a red clay pot used for cooking meat, soup and vegetables); *thebu* and *dorjey* (are

bronze objects used during rituals, *thebu* is a bell which is held in the left hand of worshipper and *dorjey* in the right hand); *chuming cherthup* (is a bronze lamp used in rituals); *Chuming-cherthup podung* (is used for making tea quickly, tea-leaves, yak butter and milk are mixed and stirred with a *rak* (brass ladle); and *paheep* (a wood and silver pipe used for drinking *chhang*) etc. All these things have been imported from Shigatse- a town in Tibet. They travelled yearly to Tibetan towns of Shigatse, Khama-Dzong and Gnantchi carrying on commercial and pastoral transactions with the Tibetans, whose flocks pastured on the Sikkim Mountains during summer.

As Lachen and Lachung are so high, many things do not grow at this altitude. People own land in different sections at different altitudes. They have a 'second' house at places of migration. At Samdong area (Yak-thong, Samdong, Tallum and Kalep *Busties*) the houses are constructed of stones without any mud or mortar. It is single storied, roofed with shingles, and consists of only one room. Some of the houses are plastered with mud and all have a wooden door and shutter windows, which are tied up and sealed when not occupied. It contains neither furniture nor elaborate beddings etc. The beds are merely planks and their utensils are bamboo churn, copper, bamboo and earthenware vessels for milk, butter etc.

At Thangu, the houses of Lachenpas are very small being about two metres high. They are made of stone with low pitched shingle roofs, over which a covering of pine-bark is laid, the whole being held down by rows of stones. The shingles and battens are made of the wood of various kinds of pines and are prepared all along the valley above Lachen. Those Bhutias, who do not possess houses, stay in yak hair tents. The black yak hair tents are hexagonal, stretched over six short posts and encircled with a low stone wall, except in front.

Apart from bamboos, copper milk vessels, wooden ladles, tea churns, pots, goat skins, blankets, the Bhutias carry two types of churn- an oblong box of birch wood in which cream is churned; the other a goat skin rolled about and shaken by four handles. The butter is made into big squares and packed in yak hair cloth. The curd is eaten fresh, or dried and pulverized.

The household occupying a house or tent during migration is a commensal and property

owning group. Though title to animals and some other valuable items or moveable property may be vested in individual members of the household, the right to dispose of such is controlled by the head of the household, and the products of the animals owned by different members are not differentiated but used in the joint economy of the household. In case of land ownership, Bhutias have no title to land but have only the right to use the fields. A family's land and animals are considered the property of the householder in whose name the house is registered and who is the member of the *dzumsha*. He is responsible for the payment of taxes.

To maintain the migratory mode of production, in addition to the tent, the household needs rugs, blankets for sleeping, pails and skins for milk, pots for cooking, and pack bags to contain all the equipment during migrations. Usually all these things are owned by individual household as lending and borrowing of such equipment is minimal.

The household is the commensal unit and possesses its own hearth and provides its own fare. The household depends for its subsistence on the allotted fields at different altitudes and animals owned by its members. Among Bhutias each household has about 2-3 yaks, 6-12 mules and horses and on an average about 200 adult sheep and goats. There is normally no loaning of animals except for weaning purposes.

### Type of Families

The type of families which predominates in the social scene among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are either joint or nuclear, supplemented by some kin or widowed parent. All three types of marriage viz. monogamy, polygyny and polyandry are prevalent among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. Traditionally, polyandrous households were the norm but with changes in economic activities, changes in marriage and family pattern are also apparent. There were no nuclear families a hundred years ago. The nuclear family unit could not carry out the necessary mixed economic activities. Ecological constraints restricted the cultivation of land and its division was not appreciated. The Bhutias were mostly engaged in pastoral and trading activities and were not at home the year round. The joint and polyandrous households had the size and composition to look after such diversified

economic activities. Because of the nature of feudal labour U-lag (transportation service) the tax system, involving the need for male labour to fulfil tax obligations, the duties of *dzumsha* the basic adaptive strategy was to prevent land fragmentation and to maintain a core of males in the family. Fraternal polyandry and joint families were the means to achieve this end. With new sources of income outside the traditional realm, there is no apparent need to stick to old customs, so brothers are opting out of the traditional marriage system and breaking up joint families. Land fragmentation and the nuclear family have become extremely common and today the norm and fraternal polyandry is the exception. In 1982, there were only three fraternal polyandrous households in Lachen and four in Lachung respectively. Polyandrous households with four brothers are termed as *jazhee*, with three brothers as *jasoom* and with two brothers as *janey*. Polygyny is not usual but is practiced when the elder brother dies leaving behind a wife or the first wife is barren.

### Inheritance

Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung the component households are economically independent from each other. Possession of animals, fields, grazing rights by virtue of his *dzumsha* membership, household effects as well as the house itself it normally vested in the household. Ownership of material property devolves jointly on a set of blood brothers. The eldest son inherits the parental house. Ideally, land and other wealth are equally divided among sons. The daughters inherit two yaks, clothes and jewellery. Among the Bhutias the father divides his property prior to his death. Marriage ceremony acts as a pre-inheritance with both partners receiving share of livestock from their parents and close relatives. The rights of disposal are prerogatives of the conjugal family and implicit usufructuary privileges are extended to close kindred. If there are no sons, adoption (*puchop*) of a close relative or anybody from the village is permitted with the consent of the *dzumsha*. The official adoption is done by a scroll of a paper *khamza*. In special cases where there are only daughters, they inherit the father's property. Heirlooms and other valuables are divided amongst all the siblings upon the death of the surviving parent.

### Division of Labour

Patterns of gender division are location specific and change over time. Among the Bhutias both the men and women share the economic activities but they do not share the burden equally. The men are responsible for herding and economic transactions and women are responsible for agricultural production and looking after the small animals kept at homestead. In the Bhutia household, distribution of authority and division of labour follows highly elastic pattern, depending on the composition of each household and the working capacities of its members as was observed by Niamer-Fuller (1994). According to him, the actual gender roles in livestock production are not always rigidly defined, and the women are called upon to perform male duties more often than men are called upon to perform female duties. The male Bhutias following orders of the *pipon* take decision about migration dates and the Bhutia females look after the needs of the household members and help their spouses. Both the spouses and other adult members deal with matters of kinship, marriage and socialisation of children. Decision to broaden their economic base and look for earning other means of earning money is an individual family's concern.

Among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, economic activities are clustered into following categories: domestic, herding, collecting, trading and other miscellaneous activities. Men usually care for the herds of yak and flocks of sheep and women look after subsistence agriculture with the help of children. Women involved in agricultural activities, are also responsible for providing and managing the fundamental necessities of daily life (food, water, fuel, clothing) and are charged with health care, cleaning and children in the home.

The division of labour is by sex and age; but this is not a much formalised do the division, except women practice agriculture and weaving and men the herding. Out of the labour to be done it may be grouped in the following categories: domestic, agriculture, herding, collecting and other miscellaneous activities.

The primary economic and co-operative unit is the nuclear family with every member taking on responsibilities as soon as he or she is old enough. In most households the husband and wife can efficiently do all the work, although it is not easy during the period when there are young

children who must be constantly watched by the mother until an older child is able to do it for her. A child of ten is considered capable of taking sheep and goats to graze for the day or to watch younger children. Infants are tied into a shawl and carried on the mother's back while she weeds the crops, collects fuel and fodder. It is also the job of the adult women and teenage boys to clean the animal pens of manure and take it to the fields. Almost all the women work in the fields. The only agricultural activity they do not carry out is ploughing.

The work within the household is generally done by the women and the girls. This includes food preparation, mending and washing the clothes and looking after the children. Men and women share the agricultural work. Herding is men's job. It is true that women shepherds do not exist here, however, women look after their husbands and family and cook for them while on migration. When yak milk is brought home, women churn it and prepare butter, cheese etc. Women and children collect arum-roots (*tong*) and firewood. Firewood, grasses and minor forest produce are also collected by men when they are herding the animals. Both sexes participate in the ceremonies but men shoulder the major responsibilities

There is practically no task, other than minding small children, which does not require cooperation of both sexes. In the fields the duties of the males include preparing soil, digging, ploughing and sowing seeds. While women help the men by beating soil after ploughing, manuring, weeding, reaping and winnowing.

Instability is relatively constant in the balance between the Bhutias and their livestock. As Stenning noted: Within the life-history of a family and its herd ... [T]here arises a whole range of temporary, partial or potential disequilibria which require resolution. (1958: 10). In Lachen and Lachung, the different biological characteristics of herd or flock species; each species requiring particular kinds of human management, has certain biological limitations and advantages. The social prescriptions and practical considerations that govern the division of division of labour, the organisation of labour with regards to livestock is also affected by another set of biological and social factors, which being time-dependent, are continually in flux both internally and in relation to each other. The family development cycle, with its shifting age and gen-

der structure results in changing labour availability and subsistence needs.

All households try to optimise the ratio of people to resources and incorporate males to supplement the work force. The necessary balance between labour and agro-pastoral activities is achieved in the subsistence economy of the Bhutias. This balance is inherently unstable due to dynamics in human and livestock population. It is essential to maximise the adult labour force in order to accomplish both agricultural and herding responsibilities and recently added tourism undertaking. Thus, decisions have to be made accordingly about the number of people, ratio of sexes and ages and allocation of duties to extract maximum from the available time and resources. However, the Bhutias have certain mechanisms for gaining temporary balance. The labour force can be maximised in these patrilocal families by birth, adoption and incorporation. Marriage is not a good option for increasing the labour force among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, as it has the opposite result. Subsequent to the marriage of the son, after some time the father has to part with share of the property to his married son, so that the son can start a new household with his spouse. However, it is good for girl's parents as the boy comes to do service for the girl's parents for specified time period. To keep labour force in the family, incidences of delayed marriage and delayed separation of offspring from parental households were observed among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung like the Malian Tamasheq (Randal and Winter 1986), the BaKgalagadi of Botswana (Jerve 1981) and the Gabra of Kenya (Torry 1977). Incorporation of young male relations and practice of bride-service, whereby the bridegroom is obliged to perform bride services, such as tending livestock, for the wife-giving family for a specified period. When a wife is infertile, polygyny is a means to seek an heir; when a woman is widowed, polygyny (through the mechanism of levirate that is, the fraternal widow inheritance) is a means to provide her a husband within the family retaining her labour and avoiding her separation from the children she has produced from the previous marriage. In case of barren marriage, adoption (*puchop*) is allowed in Bhutia society. A couple may adopt a close agnate of the husband with consent of *dzumsha*. Children are adopted from relatives or close friends. These devices serve to maintain the isolated individu-



al household as viable unit by supplementing its labour pool from outside sources. This also solves the subsistence problems of those with many children and fulfills the labour requirements of those without. Apart from the need to retain labour in the household, these social institutions effectively delay the splitting of a family through bride price and pre-inheritance which typically results in imbalances between labour and livestock.

However, to facilitate herding and tending flocks, functional groups, which migrate together to the same place, are formed. The members of a functional group held each other in economic and social activities. The tents or houses of such a herding unit are side by side. It is with such close neighbours that Bhutias have friendship and constant interaction. These groups may contain friends, near relatives or distant ones. These groups are based on interfamily relations and its pattern keeps on changing as there are no institutionalised cognatic groups or segmentary system based on nestling principle. Married sons initially tend to retain their flocks in the old herd and stay in the herding unit of their father but these are freely broken at any time.

Distribution of authority and division of labour among the member show a highly elastic pattern, and it is characteristic that few features of organisation are socially imperative and common to all, while many features vary, and reflect the composition of each household and the working capacities of its members. Sperling has shown that the birth order of females and males in a pastoral family has a critical influence on a family's access to appropriate labour at the right time, given that livestock management is gender and age-specific (1985). The redistribution of labour is mediated through specific forms of social and economic organisation which also acts as mutual support system.

### Family Formation

New families are formed and old families change in type when family members adopt new arrangements. Families change in type through demographic changes. The gain or loss of members as the result of births, marriages and deaths often change a family type. The crucial problem of the continuation and replacement of the household units as a process spanning the generations is that the household units of Bhutias

are based on elementary families. A woman joins her husband or husbands upon marriage and lives with her in-laws. But the new couple's period of residence is usually brief and rarely extends beyond the birth of the first child. After this they establish themselves in separate household. As such they form an independent economic unit, and to be viable as such they must possess the productive property and control the necessary labour force to pursue the different economic activities. The Bhutia society makes arrangement whereby productive property in the form of land, herds and equipments and additional labour force are provided to secure the viability of newly established incomplete elementary families.

A family's land and animals are considered the property of householder in whose name the house is registered and who is the member of *dzumsha*. All sons inherit equally. The land inheritance pattern is such that a father's land is divided equally among his sons and their's among their sons. Though the herd of a household is administered and utilised as a unit, individual members of the household, usually hold separate title to the animals. When things are going good, fathers frequently give a few animals to their sons and daughters.

Marriage is an important event in the life of Bhutias, and indeed a financial problem for parents, who lose their children's labour, have to finance their weddings and give them their share of property. The expense of contributing directly, of setting up the new household is carried by the groom's father, who provides a cash bride-price which the bride's father is expected in part to use to equip his daughters with *bakhus* (gowns), rugs, blankets, jewellery and household utensils.

In cases where there are no sons, female inheritance is common. In the absence of male heirs, a female is kept in the natal family and an adaptive bridegroom is brought in (uxorilocal marriage). In normal situation, females who marry out receive a portion of their family property in the form of a dowry or share. This share however does not include immovable property such as land.

These customs contribute to the setting up of the married couple in a separate house; but they do not provide the new household with the necessary flock. This is achieved by anticipatory inheritance, whereby the sons at marriage re-



ceives number of animals from his father's herd which he would receive as an heir after the death of his father. In such division, the right of widow and unmarried children is recognised; otherwise only sons are considered. A man often keeps for himself a share equal to that allotted to each son.

After the death of the father, the remaining estate is divided. If the old man was living with a married son, or even a married daughter, all household property is regarded as the property of the resident spouses. Heirlooms and other valuables are divided amongst all the siblings upon the death of the surviving parent. If a household is dissolved by the death of its head, his heirs divide the property.

In addition to flocks and household property, the land is passed on while the owner is alive, but is divided by his heirs on his death. The married couple can claim the land which is not already divided and kept for the future generation. An area of 55x55 *dham*s (Land measure) is temporarily allotted to the married couple. This allotment is redistributed and re-allotted after every three years. As soon as man gets fields and establishes a separate household, he becomes a *dzumsha* member and has to fulfill his *dzumsha* duties.

A Bhutia of Lachen and Lachung first belongs to a household that gives him an inherent right to become member of *dzumsha* and that in turn gives him right to live in the village and to cultivate the land of his forefathers and graze his herd in the forest. He also belongs to a patrilineage from which he inherits a network of kinship that distinguish relatives from potential affines. Patrilineal kinship is the vehicle for the transmission of some rights and bonds of solidarity. The patrilineage forms an exogamous unit. The maternal uncle (*ashang*) has long term responsibilities towards his sister children, particularly his niece after marriage. He is her supportive relative. He is like a god father, who will look after her in case she loses her parents. The same type of special relationship was observed among the Gaddis of Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh between maternal uncle (*mama*) and sister's son (*bhanja*). Newell (1962) described this special relationship as method of reconciling the conflict inherent in any rigorously enforced unilineal descent system (Bhasin 1988). The relationship between affines is thus a strong and important one, which people try to maintain through the generations and which is used to reinforce

even close matrilineal bonds. The affinal relation in a sense implies shared rights in the woman herself. A woman's father or brother have certain residual rights over her for example, in case of widowhood, she can return to her parental house. Her kinsmen thus retain interest in a married woman and maintain good relation with her husband. They are: agnatic kinship in a ramifying descent system, and matrilineal and affinal relations.

### Marriage

Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, marriages are locally endogamous, but marriages with closely related individuals are prohibited. Few marriages have been conducted with non-local women. Tradition prohibited marriages between close kinsmen—a custom that appears to have been honoured till now. Thus minimal descent lines cannot perpetuate their affinal alliances across adjacent generations. In other words, the children of two sibling sets, united through one or more marriages, are barred from marrying one another. The preferential local endogamous marriages influence the formation of institutionalised, intravillage affinal factions and raise a potential crop of helpmates in their affines. Analysed as a particular case of descent group organisation, the Bhutia structure would seem to be highly fluid, extremely "loose" and rather enigmatic.

In Bhutia society, the household and the *busti* as an entity influence all aspects of social life. The whole Bhutia society is a composite of overlapping egocentric kindreds. The diversified kinship ties bind together the households in an emergent entity—the *busti*.

By tradition, marriages are arranged by the parents of the boy and the girl, but the wishes of both are also respected. Three types of marriage patterns are prevalent among Bhutias viz. monogamy, polyandry and polygyny. All three types of marriages have been taking place for many generations, and changes are only in regard to the relative number of each. The basic rituals and ceremonies performed for these marriage types remains the same. Marriage ceremonies are important social events where relatives and friends join. The ceremony is financed by the boy's parents and held at their home. The initiative for the alliance is always from the boy's side. Perhaps a boy has seen a girl at a gompa

festival and is interested in her. The boy's father approaches the girl's parents, who weigh the pros and cons of the alliance. If it clicks, they agree to perform '*nung-chan*' (asking for a girl). Marriage rituals are traditionally elaborate and festive, officiated by a *pipon* (*dzumsha* chief) as opposed to Buddhist lamas.

Both Lachenpas and Lachungpas are endogamous groups. Before the closure of the Tibetan border, marriages used to take place with Tibetans also. There are no structural groupings like caste or class among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. The individual households are related by unilateral consanguinal ties. The situation becomes more complex and relations overlap as the marriages within the society occur regularly. The endogamous marriages in the Bhutia society necessarily establish potential alliances, thus giving rise to factions. Though marriages are contracted randomly, the differences in family size or number of boys in family do create latent affinal groupings. For examples, at the time of marriage bride price is paid. A family with few sons or only one is able to pay a greater bride price and is always a welcome catch. A family with many sons is unable to pay the required bride price, and so naturally the boys cannot have desired girls. These little things are the source of latent tensions. Though Bhutias emphasise that they have no preferential marriages, nevertheless, preference for an only son offering a good bride price is always there. Similarly, the girl from a rich family is sought because at the time of *yancyapshea* (marriage) the bride's parents give *bakhus* (the girl's dress) and the numbers of *bakhus* increase with the status of the parents. They also give *dyapa* (kind of shawl made of local wool), a long coat, one or two yaks, one or two horses and cash present. But the wedding expenses are borne by the boy's parents.

The so-called Bhutia equality can also be seen in the method of land distribution. In Lachung, people redistribute the fields every year by drawing lots. The richer people draw for the larger plots and poorer villagers for the small ones. Grazing lands are divided similarly. At the time of feast sponsored by plaintiff and defendant or other community feasts the *pipon* and village elders always receive preferential treatment. In all these activities, there is only a formal emphasis on equality, which works to the advantage of the rich. As such the distinction be-

tween rich and poor does exist but it is not institutionalised and there is no structured class system. Apparently, all form of conflict is avoided. However, the differences in family size and wealth do create latent affinal groupings but they are not recognised as operative groups.

Earlier, Bhutias with more sons and limited resources went in for fraternal polyandry as the dominant form of marriage. Though fraternal polyandry functioned to conserve land and labour in the family yet it managed to produce a pool of unmarried females. However, according to traditional inheritance laws, each male has rights to a portion of his family's land.

Despite the lack of development, the age-old system of utilisation of land and herds along with the isolation of the region, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have undergone substantial and fundamental changes. New economic opportunities that do not require significant investment are available. The result has been the disintegration of the traditional polyandrous family and marriage system. Apparently, these areas look traditional and undeveloped, but this superficial appearance is deceptive. Their social and economic structures are in the process of irreversible change as an indirect consequence of changes in India.

### Encampment

These encampments of Lachenpas are in real sense the primary communities of Bhutia society; they correspond to *busties* of Bhutias in Lachung. The members of encampment make up a clearly bounded social group; their relation to each other as continuing neighbours are relatively constant while other contracts are governed by chance. Every day the members of the encampment must agree in their decision on the vital question of economic strategies, such as division of cultivable land at different places, grazing facilities, seasonal migration of communities and other social matters.

Such agreements are achieved by mutual consent through compromise by all concerned. The composition of encampment will thus indirectly be determined by the available means whereby the movements of economically independent household can be controlled and ordinate. In a sense, an encampment does not consist of permanent members, but is always a stable group. This is simplified by the existence of

*pipon* (headman) and *dzumsha* (village council). Both the communities are governed by headmen (*pipon*), by the council of village elders and by an assembly of all the people.

As previously discussed that the Bhutias of Lachen/Lachung have communal forest/pastures and agricultural and with family ownership of land but with strong community regulation of land usage. The encampment is an important land holding unit. Though, the arable land is held by individual families, the work pattern is managed by village council (*dzumsha*). The sowing and harvesting are synchronized at meeting of the *dzumsha* so as to utilise the fallow land as common pastures. There is no differential access to resources through private and ownership and no specialisation of labour beyond that by sex; hence no market system to intervene in the direct relationship between production and consumption. The basic principle of this type of society is that people make decisions about the activities for which they are responsible. Consensus is reached within whenever group is carrying out a collective activity. However, the system does not depend on any delegation of power from high to low.

### Social Network

Though the household is the smallest and most important unit of production and consumption in the Bhutia society, there are activities that demand collective participation viz., roofing, marriage, birth and funeral ceremonies and communal works like repairing of paths, construction of gumpa, *dzumsha* house etc. In a narrow sense the household unit might be called the economic unit, but it is not self-sufficient, and participation in a wider group is necessary. The Bhutia households supply and receive goods and services, to and from each other on regular basis. They range from consumer goods, food items to labour. Between family and friends there is no question of charging money for such things. These relations are of exchange and reciprocity type. Polanyi (1944) defined three types of exchange: reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange. Among the Bhutias, it exists in the form of reciprocity and it means the non-economical transfers between friends and relations. The Bhutias' reliance on family and friends is great as they count these people as resources.

During periods of relative stability or prosperity households are likely to invest in these institutions (through gift giving etc.) as a means of conforming their right to make claims against them in time of needs. Lomnitz described it as "the reciprocity network." According to Lomnitz, "this is not a social group or institution; rather it is a social field defined by an intense flow of reciprocal exchange between neighbours" (Lomnitz 1977: 20).

Co-operation is found among neighbours who may or may not be kinsmen. There is also mutual assistance even when co-operation is not essential to the performance of a task, for example, in weeding and harvesting, for it is conventional to ask people for help, the obligation to assist being part of customary relationships. It must be understood, that all economic activities in agriculture, grazing and migrations of the community passively participates in them by the dictates of the head of the *dzumsha-pipon* and elders who decide the dates of departure and arrival to appointed places. All the Bhutias can carry out their economic activities, because they are members of *dzumsha* signifying their belongingness to community. The social organisation dictated by traditions and customs of the Bhutia community has potential strength for coordination and security necessary for accomplishing the functions of its productive system. All the people of the village have common economic interests. It must be emphasised that environmental conditions and transhumant way of life necessitates relations beyond the limits of a village.

Though, the inherent need for cooperation is less evident among the Bhutias but in case of need, standing groups larger than the households yet smaller than the village are available. As households are in need, they tend to make claims for assistance (in the form of labour or resources) on other households within the *busti*. These are *ad hoc* gatherings of relatives and friends impermanent united to assist a person in whose interest the group carries out a defined job. *Chuchi*, the mutual aid group consists almost entirely of groups of neighbours, kinsmen related in one way or another to the persons concerned. It is important to note that these mutual aid groups are not based on kinship in general, but on residential and customary line. Kin are special people, who can be relied upon but mutual aid groups are more important in the

working of society. The Bhutias include relatives on both sides as their kinsmen. Close relatives like mother's brother, father's sister or father's brother are invited by *dompo* (invitation). People from *daró* (friendship) group, also supplement labour in case of need. The help extended by friends at marriages, funerals etc. is called *thogram*. It is with such close neighbours that Bhutias have friendship and constant interaction. These groups may contain friends, near relatives or distant ones. These groups are based on interfamily relations and its pattern keeps on changing as there are no institutionalised cognatic groups or segmentary system based on nestling principle. Some neighbours may be excluded from this group not for any stigma or status factors but because they just do not fall in the customary line of relation formation. All families of the group are obliged to give each other gifts of foodstuffs, and personal labour at times of festivity or need. Help is needed at the time of house building or repairing, at various times of the agricultural cycle, and in the preparation and serving of large scale hospitality. They give money and grains as contributions to each other's hospitality expenses at time of marriage, birth, illness and death. They may also be called upon for help or contributions in unusual situations of need. Contingent expenditure, contribution of gifts and labour are seen as investments and are fully reciprocal over time.

A person can be a participant in more than one group. Whenever the situation arises for co-operative work, according to the nature of the work, a message is transmitted by the household member to the members of the group. On the stipulated day, the members arrive early in the morning and start working. No one is the leader of the party; everybody knows what to do and does it accordingly. If it is a male working group, women will come to prepare the food to be served at the end of the work. Snacks and tea are provided during day time and in the evening *chhang* and a meal is served. The structure of the group exists in the "cognitive map" of the people. But it is not a regular, corporate and institutionalized group. In house building, one person from each household of the group, preferably a man, is informed. If the head cannot come, he sends his substitute. If the work load is heavy, both men and women are invited. A child cannot replace the person provided he has

a valid reason for this absence, and the wages will be paid by the person who is unable to reciprocate the labour. A person from another group may not be welcome as replacement if relations between the host and replacement are not cordial. It may be concluded that as such there is no replace ability without a valid reason. If a person absconds from such reciprocal obligations without a valid reason he may be taken to *dzumsha*. Though *chuchi* is an informal group, violation of its rules may lead it to formal level. However, this rarely happens, as it is considered bad to create ill-will in such a small community. Thus we may say that among Lachenpas and Lachungpas, these are customary "quasi" groups- mutual aid groups based on reciprocity, bigger than the household and smaller than the village which emerge at the time of need or some exigency. The environmental conditions and pastoral pursuits cause modes of dispersal and concentration and this seasonal movement causes wide interdependence, which is met within these customary quasi-groups, creating a sense of community and preparedness to cooperate.

All families of these groups are obliged to give gifts, *khadas* (white scarves) and bottle of liquor. These relationships are somewhat asymmetrical to the economically autonomous nuclear family. Though family units are private property holding units, yet the production from the property has an important collective dimension involving the labour of neighbours, kin and friends.

Besides these quasi-group involvement each family is involved in *busti* reciprocity with a wider group- the members of the *dzumsha* with whom one has obligations of token exchange. Participation in this wider network, as well as the smaller group is basic to full membership in the community. The *busti* reciprocity emerges at the time of death. It is compulsory of the members of the *dzumsha* to be represented at the *thurey* (cremation grounds) with their essential contributions of wood, grain and butter<sup>5</sup>. The *busti* people do not give personal labor to one another on reciprocal basis. If one needs labour beyond his *chuchi*, one has to hire people from the *busti*, who are ready to work for money or food. The boundaries of the *chuchi* effectively mark the limits of one's reciprocal aid-relationship.

Apart from the above, there are special friends who are part of a co-operative enterprise. These persons may or may not be from the same



neighbourhood. A certain degree of intimacy is the basis of *daró* (friendship) relationship and involves the giving of help, including material items and services, as well as psychological support. Loans of basic food stuffs (small amounts of barley, salt, tea, candles and matches) occur regularly within the encampment and reflect the need for mutually supporting exchanges in an environment isolated from the market. The loans are taken and paid back on frequent basis. Loans of meat and dairy products are less common. However, wealthier neighbours or relatives do make the gifts of meat and dairy products to poorer household. Although characterised as loans, they in fact constitute a food security net for the receiving households who usually are not able to pay back. Among close relatives, such relation is implicit rather than explicit but such relations between non-related households are based on the exchange of labour for live-stock products. The exchange of goods and services through informal networks of kins and friends is significant in the life of the Bhutias. The pattern of such networks is the key element in the economic structure. These social networks can be seen as an adaptive response to variability of transhumant way of life that is both predictable and unpredictable change.

Each family contributes to the ceremonies performed at the *busti* gompa. Compulsory work and contributions are expected when festivals are held and ritual performed to ward off evil spirits and natural calamities.

### SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM

The indigenous systems of prestige and power in these two societies are based on relative egalitarianism, as these societies are largely unstratified. These systems differ from "kinship societies" as well as there are no divisive characteristics of a kinship system overpowering the socio-political system. There are no social classes, and the whole population carries out the same kind of economic activities. Normally there is no hereditary political authority, rank or status. It is largely open to any man to advance himself socially by his own merit and charismatic qualities. Here is a case of society where social and political systems overlap and the political system has strains of democratic republic.

The socio-political system of the Bhutias of Lachen and still conforms to the age-old system

of community organisation. Both communities are governed by the *dzumsha* (village council). The *dzumsha*'s council of representatives (*lhey-na*) is composed of the headmen (*pipon*), the council of village elders and an assembly of all the people. The administration through *dzumsha* started in these societies in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to provide structural cohesiveness in these far-flung societies which were away from the rules of the Sikkim's central authority. Similar cases of self-governance were reported among Te of Nepal (Ramble 1990) and Nyi-Shang of Nepal (Sagant 1990); the Changpas of Changthang Ladakh (Bhasin 2011). Traditionally, the *Chogyal* of Sikkim recognised the *dzumsha* and *pipon* (village chief) of Lachen and Lachung and used these means of delegating his authority. Though, the administrative system *dzumsha* is inherited from the past, it has survived to this time by adapting itself to changing circumstances. After the integration of Sikkim with the Indian Union, the valleys of Lachen and Lachung were spared the imposition of the *Panchayat* system. The *dzumsha* was officially recognised by the Government of India in 1985 and continues to prove its worth till today by adapting itself to changing conditions. However, in case of Nyi-Shing in Nepal, the *Panchayat* system was imposed on the obtainable system in 1977.

### *Dzumsha* (Village Council)

The *dzumsha* is the traditional administrative system of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, which literally means gathering place. It is an assembly composed of the heads of the separate household. The *dzumsha* corresponds to the council of members referred to as *lhey-na*. It is composed of *pipon*, *gen-me*, *chepas* and *gyapon*. These heads of the households have a voting right to select two *pipon*. Membership and affiliation in *dzumsha* is founded on the formal recognition of both descent and residence rules. A person is allowed to sit in the *dzumsha* assembly, if he has fulfilled his duties as a member of the society. This assembly meets in a public hall-*mong-khyim*. Special community events are celebrated here and it serves as a focal meeting place for the people. The *dzumsha* election takes place yearly. It elects two *pipon* (headmen), two *gyapans*, who act as constables, messengers and odd job men and two *chepa*, who act as store-



keeper assistants. The *chepa* are recent addition to village administration, as no previous accounts are available about these. Village elders *gen-me* (*Gen*-elder, *Me*-men) and *genthilenge* (respectively known among the Lachenpas and Lachugpas) assist *pipon* in the effective working of village administration. Their number varies from three to five. Previously there were eighteen elders among the Lachenpas.

### Functions of the *Dzumsha*

The *dzumsha* exercised three functions: land holding, resource management and community organisation. However, all three functions are in fact normally exercised through committee, the community representatives. Another duty of the assembly is that of assigning who is going to join gompa to become a monk.

The *dzumsha* has many social responsibilities to fulfill. It has strong judicial role. It set up rules to be followed by all the people. The implementation and enforcement of the rules is also the duty of the *dzumsha*. As these rules were not compiled, the enforcement was not proper. In 1991, these rules were on paper in the register-*deb-chen*. The Bhutias abide by the rules of the *dzumsha*. Before the opening of Police Station in the area, the *dzumsha* had the authority to arrest the person in case of his criminal activities. The Bhutias can be fined for being late for the *dzumsha* meeting or being absent from it without a valid reason; for not following the dates of migration for agricultural and pastoral activities; for not participating in community work or for not contributing cash or kind to the community cause; for not contributing butter for the gompa's lamps and for their absence at *thurey* (cremation ground) with their essential contributions of wood, butter and grain. In the course of time, some new rules have been added like the people are not allowed to attend the *dzumsha* meetings or dances at gompa under the influence of alcohol. The Bhutias are fined for fighting, gambling etc.

After the integration of Sikkim with India, there is change in the administrative set-up and the duties of the *dzumsha* have increased. The *dzumsha* has to look after the interest of its people for using resources in the area as these resources are also being shared by the army establishment. The loss of Tibetan pasture after the closure of border is overtaxing the existing

resources in Sikkim. New forest rules and restrictions on collection of natural forest produce have continuously reduced the extent of forest use by the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. As a result of this the Bhutias are opting for tourism, contract work and government jobs.

### *Dzumsha ghar* or *Mong-khyim*

*Dzumsha ghar* or *mong-khyim* is a place where the Lachungpas meet to discuss their problems, to hear the authorities, to elect a *pipon* and to take important decisions.

### *Pipon keshe* (Election)

In this democratic form of *government*, the public elect *pipon* by voting\* (*damto*), in December after the Lama dance. The first election of the *pipon* took place in 1978-79, before that the *pipon* was nominated by the group of respected, responsible and honest people (*theumi*). In Lachen two *pipon*, are elected for the administration of the society. There are no official members in the *pipon* system. However, each *pipon* is assisted by one *gyapon* who act as constable, messengers and odd job man. The *gyapon* are selected by the *pipon*. The *chepa* are selected by the public by lottery system. The *pipon* lochee (tenure) is for eleven months. In this short period he has to prove his calibre. The tenure has been reduced from three years to eleven months, as the post of *pipon* does not carry any remuneration and a person has to sacrifice his own work in favour of public work. The post carries a lot of prestige, but no economic privileges, though the possession of greater than average wealth may be a criterion of the qualities or status required for *pipon*'s post, for in this economically homogeneous egalitarian society, accumulation of wealth depends on personal qualities. The elders who assist *pipon* are ex-*pipon*, one *ajopao* (shaman or sorcerer) and one Lama.

In Lachung, as there are three *busties*, one *pipon* looks after Shertchu and Singring *busties* and the other is the administrative head of Beechu *busti*. Because of the topography of the revenue block and distance between *busties*, two *pipon* are essential for better administration. Moreover, the migration of Lachungpa to Khedum, Leema and Lothen, for agriculture can be better looked after by *pipon*. Both the *pipon*

take care of their respective *busti* problems during migration and non-migration periods. (For details see Bhasin 1990). The *gen-me* are also elected.

The *dzumsha* meetings are called to conduct public business. The most important decisions regarding the economic strategies are taken by the *dzumsha*, such as division of cultivable land at different places, grazing facilities, seasonal migrations of communities and other social matters. The *dzumsha* is the perfect form of democratic government, wherein all decisions are taken by the consent of the people of the community.

Disputes, arising chiefly from the theft of garden crops, animals and women that is, adultery and related offences are tried to solve by the *pipon* and the village elders informally. They always try to solve disputes at this level. If it cannot be solved at this level, then the case is officially brought to *mong-khyim*. A rupee and *khada* is paid as a court fee by both parties. Even here, a committee is formed and mediation is tried to reach a compromise. If the settlement is not agreeable to both the parties, then the official procedure takes its course. The *trimptons* or a jury of ten persons including two *pipon* are selected; one of the *trimptons* is head Lama (*chutimpa*) and another sorcerer-*ajopao*. They all come to *mong-khyim* with their beddings, as they are not allowed to move out during the proceedings which may last from two to ten days.

All will take oath from the *chutimpa* and *ajopao*. The house is divided into two groups for and against. Both parties plead their case and the trial is held inside the *mong-khyim*. If an agreement is reached the guilty party is fined. If the agreement is not acceptable to him he can apply to the Deputy Commissioner through the *pipon*, but this rarely happens. The *pipon* has a seal and he can forward the sealed papers of the proceedings of the case of the Deputy Commissioner at Mangan.

#### **Powers, Authority and Duties of Pipon**

The *pipon* as head of its people is always treated by his subjects with a good deal of outward respect. He can decide upon community policy and make regulations binding upon his subjects. However, the *pipon* is more concerned with maintaining the existing laws than to modify them. He determines upon and arranges for

the execution of all important public works. Much of his time is spent in the *dzumsha* house, where he listens to news, petitions and complaints from people, and given order for whatever action may be necessary. He must protect the rights of his subjects, provide justice for the oppressed and punish wrong doers. He controls the distribution and use of the tribal land, organises large collective feasts, and regulates grazing timings and those for sowing and harvesting crops. With the extension of the Indian Penal Code, the *pipon*'s administrative duties have increased to a great extent. He is responsible to the administration for maintaining law and order, preventing crime and collecting revenue. He must carry out all official orders and instructions from above. He is expected to co-operate with the District Commissioner and its office in all sorts of economic, social and educational developmental schemes. His formerly undivided control over every aspect of public life has thus been divided among various governmental departments with superior authority. To meet the individual expenditure of his own visits to Gangtok or Mangan, he has to spend from his own pocket. However, during the visits of VIPs or senior government officials, feasts are arranged from the public fund. People contribute to this fund in the hope that the *pipon* will persuade officials to provide for more developmental schemes and subsidies. Besides contributing money to this fund, people help in arranging the feast, erecting welcome arches, burning of "*dhooop*" (incense) and presenting scarves etc. In this way people show their faith in the *pipon* and the elders.

The *pipon* has to generate funds by other means also. Every year, during *lhosar* festival in the month of December, Lamas perform rituals and *pooja* (prayer) for the community welfare. Everybody in the village participates in this by contributing one *phe* (a measure) of rice, *churrah* (parched cereals), *chhang* (local drink), *ghee* (clarified butter), vegetable, meat etc. to the *gompa*. The *pipon* and his family have to look after the people and the arrangements for the feast. The contributions are utilised for food and rituals, and what remains is auctioned. The *dak* (auction) takes place at *Mong-khyim* after the completion of *pooja* and other celebrations, the highest bidder gets the things and the money raised through *dak* is deposited in the same public fund.

Collection of taxes is another duty of the *pipon*. The *pipon*, with the assistance of the *gyapon* collects government levies such as land revenue and forest tax, and is the representative of the community in government dealings. There is no prescribed schedule or rules for the imposing taxes. It is at the discretion of the *pipon*. He has to deposit a lump-sum of money as revenue to authorities. People have faith in the *pipon*, that whatever he demands is fair. The individuals, who do not want to migrate with their animals to the winter place, have to seek permission of the *pipon* and pay extra money for the grass, as the grass belongs to the community. People have to start moving for grazing on the date fixed by the *pipon*. Whosoever breaks the rule is fined by the *pipon* depending on the number of animals he possesses. Nowadays, the *pipon* has also to regulate the collection of *jatamanshi* and *kutiki* (minor forest produce). From the last ten to twelve years all the villagers start for collection at the same time. Previously, people were not bothered with the minor economic activity because other sources of income were sufficient for subsistence.

The *pipon* plays an important role in negotiating the compensation when the government acquires land of the Bhutias for road construction. The *pipon* also plays a crucial role in taking action against those who violates the law of their society. He has the authority to fine from Rs.20 to Rs.5000 or 100 strokes of the cane. People appreciate the *pipon*'s services and honour him by offering gifts- "*chhang-ring*" like scarves, *chhang* and money. This gesture from the villagers puts the *pipon* in good spirits.

People who pay no heed to the *dzumsha* are threatened by social boycott and removal of their names from the *dzumsha* roll-call. Social boycott is a disaster in these areas, where the prominence of the *dzumsha* is supreme. This type of socio-political system derive from the cultural fact that all decisions, to a greater or lesser extent, involve people who are bound to each other in a network of common obligations and cultural goals. Law, as a social phenomenon, cannot be easily separated from its cultural matrix.

#### ***Kyarzhoo Dentuk (Impeachment of Pipon and Selection of New One)***

Though the *pipon* is an executive head, and has a lot of power and authority, he is not the

supreme authority. To check him, the village elders are always there. If he tries to misuse his power or is corrupt, a vote of no confidence is passed and he is removed from office. In this regard village elders are more powerful than the *pipon*. If people are not satisfied with the *pipon*'s administration, meeting is called by village elders, and the *pipon* is asked to appear. This process of impeachment is called *pikshe* and the election of a new *pipon* before the completion of the term of old one is called *kyarzhoo dentuk*.

Apart from legal recourse, in case of more serious offences the Bhutias avail the services of the *pau* (sorcerer) to discover by divination and punish the guilty party. The *pau* performs *cho-chapshe*, which is considered a very powerful weapon, the curse of which is believed to affect nine generations. *Cho-chapshe* is performed wherever an individual or group is accused of crimes against society which have to be punished by the devils. The crimes could be embezzling of public funds, disobeying of *pipon*'s order, a big theft in the area or abduction of an engaged girl by somebody not engaged to her. *Cho-chapshe* can be employed against the *pipon* also, if he betrays his people or is guilty of fraud or nepotism.

Confronted with extraordinary or continually repeated offences, the villagers act as a corporate group and exact penalties, otherwise most transgressions are viewed simply as acts against individuals, which compel the person concerned to rally the support of his friends and close kinsmen, to a *dzumsha* meeting for the mediation of *pipon* and elders. The Bhutias have gompas society, to look after ritual offences.

Intra-village violence, if not negligible, is restricted. Village elders and kinsmen exert informal influence upon both parties to exchange tokens of goodwill and cease hostilities. The parties, under the force of public opinion and village morality often suspend hostilities on their own. The coherence, integrity and solidarity of the village are preserved as there are no intra-village groups and there are no institutions to give rise to rivalries. As there are no competitive groups, individual antagonists have no group backing. But in contrast, loyalty to the community takes precedence over any issue in which it is involved. To understand the organisation of Bhutia society, the central role of individual household in the conduction of daily life must

be appreciated. A caste and/ or class system has not developed as there are no cultural and economic divergences.

### **Mechanism Which Lead to Settlement**

Underlying these customary laws, which put pressure on the parties to settle a dispute, is the constant pressure of common residence. For common residence implies a necessity to co-operate in maintaining peace, and that peace involves some recognition of the demands of law and morality. It also involves mutual tolerance. These demands are backed by constant inter-marriages which go on in a limited area. The Bhutia are lined in a web of kinship ties and new meshes are constantly being woven in this web with each marriage. These webs of ties unite members to form groups. Local groups have common local interests.

These common local interests are reciprocated by category of arbitrators who may be called on to help settle disputes. The arbitrators are village elders. Though they have no forceful power of coercion, but related by kinship and common interests. The agreement is generally and easily reached and compensation paid or promised. The kinship status of "elders" is the conjoint between kinship and politics.

Conflicts are a part of social life and custom appears to exacerbate these conflicts: but in doing so customs also restrain the conflicts from destroying the whole social order (Gluckman 1960: 2). Smaller societies have such well established and well known codes of morals and laws, of convention and ritual.

Mechanism which lead to settlement of conflicts are the ecological necessities which force people to co-operate; the narrow limits of economy which force them to work in groups for the production of food; common residence and; code of conduct. On the one hand they have customary law and code of conduct and on the other their socio-political system has characteristic of a Democratic Republic where impeachment of the *pipon* is possible, if his work is not satisfactory.

### **Status of Women**

Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are followers of Buddhism. Buddhists on the whole have a more liberal attitude towards women, particu-

larly in respect of their work. Buddhist women do not observe *Purdah*. In the matters of divorce and remarriage of widows too, they exhibit much less rigidity of attitude. In Hinduism, a woman has no individuality of her own and her position in the society is generally as wife or mother. Buddhism stands for individual rights for women and secular conception of marriage. Marriage, according to Buddhism, is essentially a mundane affair, something of a social contract with the right to divorce. Though, marriage is not regarded as a sacrament, yet it plays an important part in the life of the people, as it is a contract as well as an institution which defines rights and duties. Buddhist law favours the equality of sexes and in many ways treats marriage as creating partnership in goods (Shyam Kumari Nehru "Legal form of marriage in India" c.f. Indian Women Through the Ages- P. Thomas).

The status of women can be ascertained by educational achievements of women, legal rights and status given to them, employment opportunities and demographic characteristics of women in socio-cultural terms. If we see Bhutia women in regard to their educational achievements, legal and political rights, employment opportunities and demographic characteristics, they do not have high status. Literacy rate among Bhutia female is as low as 13.35 per cent in comparison to Bhutia male literacy rate of 37.33 (Bhasin 1990) against India's female's literacy rate of 24.82. Girls are not sent to school as they are needed at home to look after the small children or to other odd jobs at home. The sex ratio among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung is 965 which indicate the excess of males in the population.

The Bhutias women's lack of control over resources and lesser say in a community life may give impression of a lower status but their concealed power in the working of society is not denied.

In traditional Bhutia community, the women have an important role to play. Gender principles are central to the organisation of traditional communities. Gender and the division of labour that depends on its recognition, are decisive elements giving mountain societies stability and cohesiveness (Illich 1982; Abu-Lughod 1985). The analysis of women's status in society is inseparable from the analysis of social-economic structure as a whole. There are complex cultural and social processes which are operative

at the village level, and the linkage which exists between them, effect the position of women. For instance economic and social mobility affect those processes, various development programmes of rural change introduced by the government and voluntary organisation affect the position of women at different economic and social levels.

All families have a recognised head, which represents the household in dealing with *dzumsha* and *busti* matters and strangers. In the joint family or incomplete family, the senior male is the head. Only where there are no adult male members in the household, is a women regarded as the head of the household. The male control of animals creates a predilection for patri-orientation in residence, filiations and heritage. It also tends to reduce the social role of the women though not their economic value. In respect of decision in the sphere of household activities there is much equality between men and women and the various divisions which affect the household are taken to mutual adjustments.

It can be concluded from the above description that among the Bhutias, '*busti*' is an administration and jural unit. It remains the most inclusive level of political activity. It is recognised by the Indian Government as an electoral ward and within its limits as a self-governing community. It has its own headman *pipon*, its own means for settling disputes and effecting collective decisions. *Dzumsha* is the village body, formed by the head of each household. *Dzumsha* is a local community-based village-governance system. *Dzumsa* is a formal legal body that is elected/selected by the villagers, and has well defined role (written in *deb chen*) on socio-religious and socio-economic prospects and issues, socio-political situations and challenges, resource ownership and land use systems, and resource extraction and use.

### CONCLUSION

Communities like Lachenpas and Lachungpas whose food production activities involve variable localities and settlements "are actually conceptual isolates rather than being fully self-sufficient system" (Frantz 1982: 57). It seems more probable that ecological adaptations are the determining variable (in the sense of a limited number of options available) and the Bhutias responded by exploiting one or another adapta-

tion based on economical, political and other considerations. Here, adaptation has been understood as a process whereby the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have modified their social, cultural and economic life to suit the needs of the new setting that is, after the closure of the Tibetan border and integration of Kingdom of Sikkim with Indian Union.

In a land use strategy perspective, these adaptations are necessarily interdependent. Historically, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have proven resilient to pressures. However, in the last century, their economic systems have experienced many socio-economic changes that have increased vulnerability of local livelihoods. The current drives of changes that affected the system's components and indicators of vulnerability are the socio-political factors. The key factors of socio-economic changes have been the change of governance and introduction of development plans in the area. The livelihood of the Bhutias has always been dependent on the natural resources and sensitive to climate change. However, such events can be easily separated from the major issues like pasture degradation and policy changes. The Bhutias have always known and felt that their lives are affected by harsh climate and variability in the climate in the past also. However, social-political factors of closure of border after Indo-China war, shrinkage of pasture, stationing of army, restriction of grazing in border areas and opening of area to the tourists have brought changes in the Bhutias' life. Adaptation is a necessary strategy at all levels to compliment changes. According to Burton et al. (1993), the term adaptation covers eight categories: bearing losses (doing nothing), sharing losses, modifying the threat and thus preventing effects, changing use, changing location, assessing new research based technologies, disseminating knowledge through education to behaviour and restoration. Others have classified adaptation as anticipatory and reactive adaptation, private and public adaptation and autonomous and planned adaptation (IPCC 2001).

In high altitude areas like Lachen and Lachung where ecological production is highly variable over time and heterogeneous in space, indigenous land tenure systems rests on maintaining flexibility of access to critical grazing, browse and other resources by means of mobility over a large grazing source which is held in



common. This common grazing source is actually undividable, in view of the fact that risks are pooled at the level of the social group as a guard against individual failure. It is true that common property rights are constraints on development, but compared with alternative (private) forms of land tenure, indigenous tenure arrangements represent the best guarantee of sustained optimal resource exploitation by herding communities under unpredictable varying ecological condition (Standford 1983; Swift 1988; Dyson-Hudson and McCabe 1990; Niamir 1990).

This line of reasoning suggests that the planners for development should start from and build on indigenous land tenure arrangements that are adapted to ecological variability (PALD 1993).

The recently emerging 'new ecology' questions the core assumption of the science of ecology, including that of equilibrium ecological theory (Botkin 1990; Allen and Hoekstra 1992). Classical equilibrium theory is unable to capture the uncertainty and variability in arid ecosystem (Behnke et al. 1993; Scoones 1994) making such concepts as carrying capacity and stocking rate ineffective in predicting ecosystem productivity and dynamics at the scale necessary for local level management. Davis (2004) makes a distinction between 'coping strategies' (fall back mechanisms to deal with short-term insufficiency of food) and 'adaptive strategies' (long term or permanent changes in the ways in which households and individuals acquire sufficient food or income). Coping mechanisms involve social, economic and institutional preparedness to deal with social effects of climatic disasters. In case of excessive snow, the government and non-government organisations come to their rescue. However, after the closure of border and stationing of army in the area, the Bhutias faced supply-induced scarcity, when the previously used resources across the border declined in quantity, individuals and households faced difficulties in gaining and maintaining access to sufficient food, they did not rely on short terms of coping, they also looked for alternative means of earning livelihood. The domestic livestock of Lachen and Lachung was threatened due to the reduced grazing niche already occupied by large bodied herbivores.

During the reigns of *chogyals*, these areas were isolated due to its geographical position and lack of communication. For their sustenance the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung depended

on the natural resources which were managed in an institutionalised way through *dzumsha*. The *chogyal* gave concessions for grazing and wild harvesting. The *dzumsha* strictly banned poaching of musk deer and other animals. If poaching rules are broken, one would have to pay fine or even could face extradition from the *dzumsha*. To conserve bioresources, the *chogyal* regulated hunting with the help of religious belief, which disallowed the consumption of meat at a specified time which coincided with the breeding season of birds and animals. When the Indian Wildlife (protection) Act 1972 became applicable in Sikkim, the State Forest Department along with the *dzumsha*, declared ban on hunting, organised trap demolition and apprehended Musk Deer poachers. The *dzumsha* along with gumpa authorities banned wild extraction of honey. These institutions were also responsible for conservation of water sources-*chulumbo* or *devithans* for wildlife. Like the Changpas of Changthang, Ladakh, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung consider the migratory Black-necked crane (*Grus nigricollis*) a holy bird. It is known as *Tcha-Tung-Tung* and is not hunted. Likewise, another migratory Bird- Bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) is also protected by *dzumsha* order. The traditional system of sky-burial practiced by the Bhutias was instrumental in conserving the different species of high altitude vultures such as Bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Himalayan griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*).

The Bhutias animatedly adjusted themselves to changed socio-political environment. Their own social and livelihood pattern played an important role in making alternative ways of earning money a viable way of life. Their traditional economy was agro-pastoral associated with trade. However, they were not highly dependent on agriculture and pastoralism though these were very important parts of their economy. The Bhutias specialised in long distance trade. Their trade relations with Tibet helped them to keep a high standard of living which otherwise would not have been possible through agriculture and pastoralism. After the closure of border, there was a difference between the strategies of the Lachenpas and Lachungpas, one reduced its number of small flocks and carried on with yak herds only and played more attention to agriculture and tourism while the other maintained both agriculture and pastoralism. In the study area, livestock are a depository for saving, a reserve for con-

tingencies, a self-reproducing asset, a source of subsistence and current income and a source of energy for fields (through the cycling of nutrients through crop residue and manure).

With the recent changes in the region, the traditional Bhutias society practicing an overpoweringly barter economy with socially fixed economic exchanges has transformed to an economic system characterised by monetised trade and specialised exchanges. Need for cash has increased among the Bhutias as they have to buy grains from PDS shops, fodder from government agencies at Rs. 898 per quintal, pay for schooling of children, clothes, tents, equipments and shoes, health care, medicines and veterinary care. *Pashmina*, which was a traditional barter product, has become like a cash crop and is sold for cash.

It may be noted that the Bhutias of these two valleys are a close knit and very cohesive group of people. They help their fellow men in times of need. Their participation in the *dzumsha*- the socio, economic and political institution at the group level and societal level has helped them to adapt to the new set-up. The association of clustering of the Bhutias through the *dzumsha* institution has helped to perpetuate their culture. The dominant geographical feature of the surrounding nature strengthens their positive image and signifies continuity.

Because of above-mentioned factors, the Bhutias have to look for new strategies in addition to traditional strategies of mobility and herd diversification to make ends meet. Reducing herd size and increasing the number of goats in a herd and wage earning are strategies to cope with population growth, and conservation policies and shrinking winter pasture. Income diversification is an important means for herders to manage risk. In order to maintain household viability, individual members may migrate to seek employment elsewhere in order to relieve their pastoral household of a member and to earn money to contribute to overall household income. If the household losses are too great, entire households are compelled to migrate, leaving a few animals with the relatives. There is a difference between strategies of the poor pastoralists who have lost a major part of their herd, and often look for other sources of income and those better off who remain in the sector but are diversifying to complement and sustain their resources.

Units such as the household, the village or *busti*, encampments, and *dzumsha* defined by

predominantly local interaction patterns between kinsmen and friends are the most important institutions which anchored these Bhutias to a specific community and territory. This traditional organisation (*dzumsha*) has a formal set up to show an example of social cohesion between the people with range of activities. *Dzumsha*, which has been under operation for over 600 years, controls resources and looks after conservation of resources, pasture management for grazing, conflict resolution, social and community mobilisation, traditions and local governance.

A great deal of their life still proceeds independently of outside influence. However, these three structures are being transformed by an interrelated series of changes. Outmigration, the acceptance of a wide range of technological innovations, changing pattern in education and communication, commercialisation of and introduction of tourism appears to be more relevant combination of factors which are making for a reorganisation of patterns of living. Once the local economy is linked through the market with family consumption and family consumption standard linked directly to constantly raising aspirations, a powerful impetus for change has been introduced.

There are many features that demonstrate both continuity and change in the Bhutia society. Beliefs, values and life styles: gender roles and status of men and women; social institutions and family life show continuity and change. The basic structure remains the same but the actions of individuals, organisations and social movements have an impact on society and may become the catalyst for social change. Social continuity cannot be simply defined as the absence of change, things remaining the same, because social change is a continual process in all societies. In his study, Datta-Roy (1980: 212) shows the transformation of local village leaders into national democratic leaders by ironically pointing to the enormous gap between the local way of governing and talking to the people about their own affairs, and the complete brainwashing which must be learned by those who want to appear on national scene.

The transhumant herders in this region are facing many problems because of restrictions on entering with their herds in traditional grazing areas near international border. Apart from this army has occupied many of their traditional

pastures for making army camps. There is no proper fencing of landmine areas; consequently, many herders have suffered landmine casualties without any compensation. As the area is rich in medicinal plants, the transhumant herders have been carrying out collecting activities along with their pastoral duties. It was an additional way of earning money in this extreme climate. The Bhutias have special values, practices and regulatory frameworks governing access to natural resources and other customary and/or formal institutions governing the management of the agro-ecosystem and its benefits. However, there has been over harvesting of medicinal plants, poaching of wildlife plants and timber by outsiders.

With the outside help like subsidies and ration supply, the Bhutias who have shown resilience in difficult times are succumbing to easier access to basic amenities by State Government. They have started depending on military establishments for small favours. Their dependence on military resources of date expired tinned food-stuffs and other amenities is another matter of concern. Stricter vigilance by field staff of Forest Department, which should make sure that staff, has incentive, plus all the basic field equipment, training rules, regulations, procedures and good transport for high altitude. They should provide trainings and skill development for Wool Industry (sheep wool; yak hair, under wool) Milk Processing Centre (viable only in summer) Cheese Plant (viable only in summer) Solar Energy Appliances, Wind Energy Appliances, Leather processing, Handicraft and Handloom, Herbal Gardens and products.

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are no longer in favour of isolation. There was a time when the Bhutias looked up to the Tibetan aristocrats and religious leaders for their worldly as well as spiritual developments. There were regular exchanges across the northern and eastern borders and every Bhutia family of the region aspired to adopt the life style and standards set by the Tibetan elites.

With the closure of borders, the focus gradually shifted to the south. The merger of Sikkim with India took some time to settle in the psyche of the local communities. Reservation and inhibition in adopting Indian ways of development is still not uncommon. But after more than three decades of association, the trends are changing and there is a conscious effort to learn and adopt

the best of methods suited to their well-being. Nowadays, even the remote villagers are getting used to electricity instead of oil lamp, concrete building instead of wooden cottage, flush toilet instead of pit toilet, cooking gas (LPG) instead of fire wood, packaged

Current educational problems and dilemmas testify to the ever-present tension between education for cultural continuity and change. School attendance inspires children to question and challenge traditional social roles. Herding families in Lachen and Lachung, for instance, may want their sons to gain the skills of basic schooling in order to better defend their interests or bargain with traders, but they still expect the boys to assume the ritual responsibilities of the society and master the herding enterprise. Yet the boys learn about the wider world and often aspire to professional careers in the larger cities. Their individual mobility up the social ladder may be perceived as coming at the cost of solidarity with the kinship group or village. Likewise, girls aspire modern careers, and cite the aspirations of their school peers, to press for permission to pursue advanced schooling instead of embracing the culturally traditional option of early childbearing and domestic proficiency. The Bhutias are in favour of infrastructure development but not at the cost of losing the traditional life style and culture. They value their religion and culture much more than material comfort. As long as there is no conflict between their religiosity and technology, the local people do not interfere with the developmental activities.

## NOTES

1. Now many Lachenpas have started butchering animals.
2. Sikkim suffered a massive earth quake on 18th September 2011.
3. In Yumthang hot water rich in sulphur emanate from a small spring and are diverted inside a hut where two pools are made for the bathers.
4. Sagant (1990) reported that in other Himalayan Buddhist Societies the village chiefs were chosen by the ritual.
5. The members of the *dzumsha* are obliged to attend the funeral of anyone in the village along with the essential contribution of one *ching* (scented Juniper, kept on left shoulder), fifty paise, one *pitha* (measure) or rice, one *pitha* of roasted grain, one *nyago* (measure) of butter and bundle of firewood. The *pipon* keeps a record of attendance at funerals. Each family has to be represented by an adult male; absentees are fined by the *pipon*.

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