





LEPCHAS AND THEIR HERITAGE

TAPAN CHATTOPADHYAY

B.R. PUBLISHING CORPORATION
[A Division of D.K. Publishers Distributors (P) Ltd.]
DELHI - 110007

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Foreword</i>	V
1 Description of a Journey	1
2 The God Departs	13
3 Anatomy of Strange Beliefs	24
4 Rong Life Cycle	39
5 Face to Face with Tangbor	59
6 Mystique of Music & Dance	68
7 Heard Melodies	79
<i>Index</i>	103





CHAPTER ONE

DESCRIPTION OF A JOURNEY

Across the Sangclang bridge the road takes a sudden turn from the Tista. The azure hills beyond look serene and composed like the people it leads up to, in Dzongu. Above them, the snow-clad ridges of Pandim and Kanchenjunga ('Treasury of Five Snows') seem to continue their fabled existence as tireless sentinels. 'The grains here are aplenty, vegetation rich, lustily does the ground await germination'. This is where Rongs, who call themselves Kanchenjunga's children, celebrate their birth and brimfulness of their bushels. Here even the chirp of their love-birds *tongkleng* and *kharyak* acts like a metaphor. You can almost believe that the legendary Tut, partridge, and the Serpent will resurrect here now from their mythological past and lead you to these people's new place of abode—far away from *Mayellyang*, just as they showed way to their forefathers ages ago to *Nemayel Renzong*, the new rocky land of a worthy folk, when they had to leave *Mayellyang* obeying a divine edict. The Tut and the Serpent have become more than archetypal symbols in the Rong psyche and are in an explicable way irrevocably associated with these imaginative, nature-worshipping hillmen in search of an identity. *Mayellyang*, their motherland! The word rings a bell deep down in the Rong mind and can seriously interfere with their emotions—in a manner that can possibly be understood by a people or a tribe that has undergone similar privation. It pervades their life and rites, dances and songs like a mantra even today. Like everything concerned with their past, their *Mayellyang* too has a feeble anchor in their mythology as a place situated in the Talung valley somewhere in the snows of Kanchenjunga. Close to this place the sacred rivers Rongit and Tista (Rongnyu to them), whose amorous misadventure brought deluge upon Renzong (Sikkim), had taken their birth. Yes, simple natural phenomena like an ancient flood or the confluence of two rivers at Peshok (*pa-jok*, deep forest) near Kalimpong can excite their

imagination and open the vista of a love story. Simply told, the story runs like this: Rongit and Rongnyu (Tista), the darlings of Itbomu or the Creative Mother, deeply fell in love with each other in their heavenly abode near *Mayellyang*. The situation came to such a pass that they decided to meet in the deep forest, *pa-jok*. As usual, they had as their confidants the Tut and the Serpent respectively, who agreed to show them the way to the rendezvous. By the time Rongit could reach the place of tryst traversing a meandering path due mainly to his erratic guide, Rongnyu was already there, nursing her injured pride. 'Teestha-nom-tho (When did you come)?' Rongit asked her. At this, Rongnyu gave vent to her outrage in no uncertain terms. This made Rongit angry and turn back towards Renzong (Sikkim)—now followed by Rongnyu in a vain bid to pacify her lover. This unexpected development brought the 'great deluge' upon the new-found land of Rongs, who could save themselves in the strikingly biblical way by taking shelter on the top of the *Tandong* (lit. 'an upland staircase') hill and building a *kru* (ark). Those among them who climbed on top of the nearby Ma-nom (lit. 'no dwelling', now known as Mai-nom) cliff were all drowned in water. Rongs believe that the word 'Tista' has derived from 'Teestha-nom-tho' and not from the Sanskrit word 'trisrota' ('a river having three tributaries') as the plainsmen would claim. We have seen both Tandong and Mainom on our way to Gangtok and found nothing spectacular about them. The business hub that has sprung now at the Tandong foothill is not even aware of the great event. Geographically speaking, the mountain-girdled basin of Sikkim is the catchment area of the headwaters of the Tista river and its affluents like the Lachen Chhu, the Lachung Chhu, the Zemu Chhu, the Talung Chhu, the Rangpo and the Rongit. The Tista basin, occupying the axis of an overfold, is structurally inverted, the five peaks of Kanchenjunga representing the core. The Tista drains all of Sikkim and travelling through Darjeeling district joins the Brahmaputra river in Rangpur district of Bangladesh. The Rongit, chiefly fed by the rainfall of the outer ranges of the Senchal and the Singali hills, is the most important tributary of the Tista.

To the left, still on a higher hill-top than Tandong, is Rum-tek — celebrated for its monastery where a yearly festival is held. In earlier days, the chogyals of Sikkim used to take a bath on the occasion in the holy water collected in a reservoir throughout the year to stave

off evil. Though the holy water still accumulates, the custom understandably has fallen in disuse.

Rongs believe that their fall from the divine grace and loss of *Mayellyang* were caused by the eternal weakness nagging humanity: sex. Obversely, the progress of humanity is made possible by this weakness. In *Mayellyang*, Fau-dang-thing and Nar-jyong-nyu, like Adam and Eve, were created by Pumthing-Rum-Adom, God Almighty, in His own image. When they grew up and developed fondness for each other, they were told to live separately. While Fau-dang-thing was given shelter on a mighty peak, Thund-shend-narim-chu of the Himalayas, Nar-jyong-nyu was allotted a foothill abode at Na-hona-thar-dau. But Nar-jyong-nyu used her own logic and ingenuity in building a staircase to reach Fau-dang-thing and got herself pregnant. Thereafter, banished from *Mayellyang*, Nar-jyong-nyu gave birth to seven male children over the years and allowed her husband to leave all of them in the jungle apprehending divine retribution. When her eighth son was born, she was determined to risk the divine wrath and brought him up and eventually started a race. Her seven elder sons understandably became monsters with huge goitres, whose progeny kept on harassing Rongs in Renzong (Sikkim) till they were finally defeated by Tamsund-thing, the Redeemer, in a fierce battle at Tar-kol-tam-e-tam in Renzong. Tamsund-thing had been created for this purpose by Pumthing-Rum-Adom in response to their fervent prayers with a handful of snow from the Pandim peak. Lasso-moong-panu, the leader of the demons, was slain by Tamsund-thing and his followers at Sak-verpartam ('place of death') near the hillock Mau-ro-lillu ('formidable') and is still offered prayers and sacrifices, along with the seven Mayel ancestors. In fact, Rongs are more concerned with pleasing *moongs*, demons, than worshipping *nums*, gods. Their obvious logic betrays the psychology of a chronically tormented people.

* A comparable ark, the Tandong hilltop to protect the creation, the presence of Itbomu or the Creative Mother and Tamsund-thing's Samson-like deliverance of his people make the similarity with the biblical tradition rather striking. Whether this aspect of the Rong mythology was the product of the preachings of Padre Antonio de Andrade at Tsaparang in Central Tibet in the first half of the seventeenth century and of Padre Desideri a century later¹ or the outcome of the meeting of minds in the hoary past is yet open to question. But there can be no two opinion that this harmonious

blend is an index of a live and fecund mind. Such adaptability has characterised their religion too, which is a cohesive mix of their original Bon worship and lamaism inducted by Tibetans.

Ironically, for a tribe of such cultural precocity these people are commonly known as *Lepcha* (*lep-cha*) or 'vile speakers'. The term was first used about them by Nepalis when they marauded their lush valleys in Renzong (Sikkim) in the eighteenth century and has since been accepted by us without so much as a second thought. A proud brood of people whose total strength today will hardly be eighty thousand in Sikkim, Darjeeling district of West Bengal, eastern Nepal and western Bhutan, they are denied even today the three things they have sought most for ages: honour, peace and identity. More than five hundred years ago their wise ancestor Thikungtek made a truce with Khye Bumsa, a Tibetan fortune-seeker of royal blood, in exchange of a promise that Khye Bumsa and his successors would preserve these virtues for Rongs. Thikungtek obviously knew about Tibetans, and especially about Khye Bumsa, whose reputation as a ruthless contender must have reached his ears, and did not want to involve his people in a fruitless war. Khye had travelled far from Lhasa and settled at Chhumbi, almost on the door-step of Sikkim, while his three brothers had proceeded towards Bhutan. The same logic might have induced the Rong chieftain Nangfa, popularly known as Sambar, to extend his help to Khye Bumsa's descendant Phuntsog Namgyal, who became the first chogyal of Sikkim in 1642, in winning over the Tashi-Teng-Kha and the Tsong clans. Later, when Khye Bumsa's promise was conveniently forgotten by the successive chogyals, Rongs shrugged it off with their usual indifference, except on a couple of occasions when they took recourse to *ta-lok*, insurrection.

Ahead of us lie the Tarbong and the Narip hills, their peaks connected with a saddle. They represent eternal lovers—Tarbong-bo and Narip-nyu. As noted by J W Edgar who as the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling district visited Sikkim in 1873, Rongs believe that hills and lakes are wedded to each other. For instance, the Calsuperry lake is the wife of Kanchenjunga and Cholamo of Donkya, while the pretty little lake below Yangong is imagined to be the consort of Mai-non.² If nothing else, this is an indication of the intellectual mobility of these strange people. Their favourite pastime is *tangbor* or the innovative use of periphrasis, which is a carefully inculcated art necessary on all social occasions, especially while

arranging marriages. In their society, good speakers are held in high esteem and elegant vocabulary is considered essential to intellectual entertainment. Story-telling is the greatest social diversion and stories are usually told by the fireside in the evening after the day's dusty toil. Precision and vividness are dominant features of story-telling. To term such a people as Lepcha is ludicrous. But if this fact is pointed out to a Rong, he will simply smile or, at the most, say, *Ket ma nin*, it does not matter. Nothing can affect the innate calm of these people, whose peace and aspirations have time and again been wrecked by ungodly people. They pray: 'we burn incense in golden vessels, we sprinkle holy water for you, O Pumthing-Rum-Adom'. Their ancient invocation to Narok, their god of music, vibrates in the air:

'O Narok! Creator of songs for the Rong world!
Grant me long life, so that I may worship you,
and fetch melodies from falls and streams,
from animals, winds and the rain.
I take flowers in my folded hands
and pray to you to cleanse the world with music,
and take away evil from the heart.'

With the murmur of the Tista gradually fading into the void, our journey to an ancient culture begins. It may not just be another day.

Sonam Tsering walks unhurriedly to us. The road is blocked a kilometre ahead by landslide and is not jeepable. Sonam is a local bard endeavouring to popularise Rong culture among compatriots who speak and act Nepali. In the late fifties Sonam had formed a troupe of folk singers with La Tsering of Darjeeling and two women artistes—Khar Sangmu and Nimkit Lepcha of Kalimpong and organised shows in different parts of Darjeeling district with a measure of success.³ Over the years the troupe has disintegrated without the necessary financial and logistic support. During the last couple of years, Sonam and a few other like-minded persons have made the Lepcha Association of Darjeeling district pull its resources to celebrate the birth anniversary of the legendary Gaebo Achyuk of Damsanglyang (Kalimpong) with some aplomb. But the extent of

interest generated among common people on these occasions has not been enough to enthuse the organisers. The Kurseong and the Siliguri stations of the All India Radio refused even to mention about the celebration, let alone cover it, presumably for fear of offending the local Nepalis. Contrary to his usual attitude to life, Sonam now feels that Rongs will require to be somewhat aggressive in order to survive. Awarded the title of 'Nye-Mayel-Kohom' by the Lepcha Association of Darjeeling district for his contribution to the Lepcha cause, Sonam is not happy. He mentions with a wry smile that he had also the not-so-flattering distinction of being the first author of a Lepcha book after Independence when he published his songs in 1977.

On the road men and women are at work removing reluctant boulders. Women are mostly pretty. No, they are not Rongs, for they would not usually undertake such a 'base' job. They employ Nepalis even to carry loads for them, whenever possible. They are proud of their origin and heritage. And laziness. They can also look you in the face without embarrassment, as Dr Joseph Hooker has recorded as far back as 1848. Here is an excerpt from his famous *Himalayan Journal*: 'In disposition they (Rongs) are amiable and obliging, frank, humorous and polite, without the servility of the Hindus; and their address is free and unrestrained. Their intercourse, with one another and with Europeans is scrupulously honest; a present is divided equally amongst a party; without a syllable of discontent or grudging look or word; each, on receiving his share, coming up and giving the donor a brusque bow and thanks. They have learnt to overcharge already and to use extortion in dealing, as is the custom with the people of the plains; but it is clumsily done, and never accompanied with the grasping air and insufferable whine of the latter. They are constantly armed with a long, heavy straight knife, but never draw it on one another: family and political feuds alike are unheard of amongst them'.⁴

Rongs are generally of two types: those who live in high hills and are tall, lithe and fair; and those living on land in lower regions who are swarthy, not so tall and robust. We have seen the latter type in Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Gangtok. Dzongu in northern Sikkim now will give us an opportunity to see both. On the way we have spent a few hours with a pleasant Rong family at Singhik. Sonam tells us that in ancient times Rongs were favourites of gods and looked like them. Later, gods took away much of their beauty to

protect their womenfolk from being carried off by demons. Demographically, this sounds plausible.

The duration of Rongs' traverse from *Mayellyang* to *Renzong* (Sikkim), the rocky land of a worthy people that they eventually found for themselves, is still open to conjecture. As a tribe their origin is shrouded in mystery. The word *Rong* means 'people' (according to some, 'king') and may have originated from the *Mawrong* who ruled the ancient *Kirat* kingdoms in the north-eastern region including Nepal. They also address themselves sometimes as *Mutanchi* or 'mother's love'. It is generally believed that they came to Sikkim along with the Mon, Pa etc tribes at the beginning of the Christian era from Mongolia via Tibet or through Burma along the Assam and Nepal foot-hills. Some believe that prior to their advent, Sikkim was inhabited by three tribes—Naong, Chang and the Mon, whom they later absorbed completely. Interestingly, they are still referred to as Mon by a section of Tibetans. Other tribes that were either indigenous to Sikkim or that might have entered the country from the trans-Himalayas in the pre-historic period were Mongolia's Magars and Tsongs. Magars are mentioned as one of the groups to have celebrated the coronation in 1642 of the first chogyal of Sikkim, Phuntsog (Penchoo) Namgyal. They are renowned warriors and formed an important part of the erstwhile Sikkim Guard. As regards the Tsongs, it is strange that the name believed to have been given by them to this land, namely, *Sukhim* meaning 'new house' or 'happy home', has survived those given by Rongs and later by Tibetans. More down to earth, Tibetans called this place *Denzong* or the land of rice.

Rongs themselves do not have any tradition of migration except from the mysterious *Mayellyang*. But their mythology is full of stories of their oppression in the hands of demons and ungodly people — who might have been members of their own clans or other tribes—till their saviour Tamsund-thing delivered them at Tar-Kol-tam-e-tam in *Renzong* (Sikkim). After the battle was won against demons, Tamsund-thing formed a government with ten chiefs—Rongs' patrilineal ancestors — having first conferred upon them various titles in accordance with their merit. For instance, when Lasso-moong-panu, the demon chief, fell, the warrior who first went to him to feel his pulse to ascertain whether he was actually dead was given the title of *Lut-som-mu* for his valour. The title of *Sau-mik-mau* was awarded to the person who took out the eyeballs

of the still breathing enemy. In fact, in the best traditions of a worthy chief, no one whoever contributed in some manner or the other to the victory was ignored, including the one who made a wooden throne for Tamsund-thing. The day of the victory is still celebrated as Nam-ban or the New Year's Day that falls after the Rong month of Mar Nyom (November-December) and at the beginning of Kurnyit Nyom (December-January), i.e., around 21-22 December. For the last couple of years the birth anniversary of the legendary King Gaebo Achyuk of Damsanglyang (Kalimpong) is also being observed on the occasion.

Since the day of Tamsund-thing's triumph, the Rong calendar of months has come in vogue. It has thirteen months including the Tafa Nyom (month), an intercalary month entering every third year. The months are calculated by the moon, called *lavo*, with *layonet* added every third year to regulate the lunar month with the solar ones. An interesting feature of the Rong calendar is the presence of a twelve-year cycle, each month having the name of a different animal and in one case a natural phenomenon, namely, Mouse, Cow, Tiger, Eagle, Thunder, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Bird, Dog and Pig — the shapes that Lasso-moong-panu is imagined to have taken one after another while fighting his adversary. Each year has, again, a distinct import. For instance, *Lang Nam* or the Cow Year signifies peace, while *Suhu Nam* or the Monkey Year indicates restlessness. The year 1987 is *Kamthang Nam* presided over by the eagle and is considered very auspicious. This is now followed by *Sader Nam*, or the Year of Thunder characterised by Peevish ways.

According to legends, the earliest Rong ruler in Sikkim was Rungbong Pun, whose kingdom extended to Thangla beyond Phari in Tibet in the north, Tsegongla near Paro in Bhutan in the east, Ruchong on the Timar bank in Nepal in the West and Tentulia now in Bangladesh, in the south. His queen, Lingjemit Pandi, became a favourite subject of folklores for her beauty and courage. In the first century, this tract is supposed to have been ruled by a king called Nangfa, who was succeeded by Punpok Pun, Rungdong Pun, Rungi Pun etc. The last named king defeated the monarch of Jalousi (Jalpaiguri?) and married his daughter Gyajomit (Gajamati?). He is also believed to have cleared the jungle near the existing Coronation Bridge at Sevok in Siliguri sub-division and settled with his forces there for some time. The present name of the place may have had its origin in *Shoofok* credited to the king. Between 739 and 1211, a

number of Rong kings took to the throne of Sikkim till the advent of Tibetans in the wake of Mongol depredations in Tibet. While the situation improved in Tibet around 1250, Tibetans were reluctant to let go their hold on Sikkim and finally consummated it by installing the Namgyal dynasty in 1642. The early Tibetans had sought the friendship of powerful Rong chieftains like Thikungtek in consolidating their influence in Sikkim. Later, when Tibetan marauders started carrying off their wives and children and using them as slaves, it was too much even for the stoic Rongs to bear and they occasionally rose to revolt. But usually they preferred to retreat to deeper mountains to escape depredations. Tibetan marauders have left so indelible an imprint that even today the Rong mothers invoke the fear of Tibetans in taming their wayward children.

From the hill-top the valley of Tingbong looks a picture of placidity. Like Lingthem, this village also has a past. In the latter half of the thirteenth century, N-tWang-Ton-Grub, a native of Kham-Aden who had been brought to Tibet by Kublai Khan's guru hGromGon-hPhags-pa and then asked to seek his fortunes in the Sikkim hills, came as far as Talung. The same guru was responsible for introducing the theocratic rule in Tibet when he prevailed upon his pupil to put the high priest of Sa-sKya in charge of central Tibet in 1270 AD.⁵ Ton-Grub's son Tse-twang-ram-rGyal made this village (then called Tung-sBong) his home. He married a Rong maiden and started a family which gradually spread to other parts of the country including Lingthem. Though not as lucky as Khye-Bumsa's, his descendants were powerful in their own way. One of them, De-Chhen-Kyab, was among the first to hail the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal at Yok-sum nearly four hundred years later.⁶

By this time we have seen a bevy of Rong maidens trudging towards the village with loads on their back carried in a style that curiously did not mar their beauty. Dr Joseph Hooker correctly says that a group of Lepchas is exceedingly picturesque. More so, if they are women. On the way, we have seen the track to Lingthem and the bleak visage of the hill, below which it is situated. Geoffrey Gorer visited this place in 1937 to study Lepchas. When we descend upon Tingbong after the long trek, an old man with wrinkles like mountain ridges on his forehead greets us home and takes us to hearth offering a cup of *chi*, liquor. Children around us are plainly surprised at our stupidity, but good-naturedly accept lozenges from us after initial hesitation. Girls giggle. Yonder is a school on a hill-top. A

young teacher from the plains approaches us for getting him transferred to town. Life is impossible here, having nothing to do after school hours. People are dull, not like Nepalis, and speak long in monotone, laughing at their own jokes. No, he did not have to learn the Lepcha language to teach in the school here. We have noticed that road-signs even in Dzongu are in Nepali or Tibetan. When asked the old man smiles and says, Why, the word *Dzongu* (*Dzong*, fort) itself is Tibetan, meaning 'fortified'.

Strangely, language and tradition have remained closest to the heart of Rongs for ages which they have sought to protect from outside influences. When this has not been possible, they have allowed these to co-exist in their religious tenets and practices with characteristic lack of aggression. Thus, there is no war between *muns* (Bon priests) and *lamas* and no dichotomy in their having to appease numerous *nums* and *moongs* in birth, marriage, disease or death and worshipping the Buddha. As a language, Rong belongs to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan group of languages, whose script appears to have been a derivative of a system of writings from which both Tibetan and Burmese developed.⁷ The fact that the old Rong script was written in vertical columns in the Chinese manner from right to left and that single words were written in the Tibeto-Burman style in normal horizontal direction indicates that the old Rong script was shaped at a time when Rongs were under the Chinese influence.⁸ Imansingha Chemjong, whose researches on the Limbus of Nepal have earned him accolade, held it to be a Kirat or 'Maurong' script from which the Limbu script developed, probably in the ninth century.⁹ According to legends, Rongs had their own ancient script devised by five scholars — Targe, Sayung, Gole, Thonggrab and Duringale, but their manuscripts were all destroyed by Tibetans to popularise lamaism among them.¹⁰ They even translated part of their mythological works under the name of *Tashi-Sung*, history of Tashi, till then the single and indivisible god of Rongs. The present script handed down to them by Chagdor Namgyal in the early eighteenth century might have been based on the ancient one. The findings of linguists like Erik Haar and Grierson seem to point in this direction. It was General G B Mainwaring, then a Colonel in the British Army in the protectorate of Sikkim, who first drew the eyes of the civilised world to these people by publishing a Lepcha grammar in 1876.¹¹ He even opened a Lepcha School in Darjeeling and faced the ridicule of

his countrymen when he held the language to be an ancestor language of humanity, evincing the principles and motive of which all languages are constructed. He wrote : 'The Lepchas can tell you the names of all, they can distinguish at a glance the difference in species, in each genus of plants, which would require the skill of a practised botanist to perceive, and this information and nomenclature extend to beasts, to birds, to insects, and to everything around them, animate and inanimate'. Even as late as 1938 Geoffrey Gorer brushed aside Mainwaring's claim in just three pages of his 488-page book on the Lepchas of Sikkim, although he could not seriously contend any of his postulates.¹² But for Albert Grünwedel, a German scholar and fellow-traveller who edited and published Mainwaring's more ambitious grammar in 1898 after his death, we would not have known today that Rongs require four hundred and fifty-four closely written pages of a book to assemble part of their vocabulary.¹³

Mainwaring's desire to set up a cheap Rong press at the government's expense in Darjeeling still remains unfulfilled. Shortly after his death when some pressure was put on the government concerning this matter, the bureaucrats came out with a convenient lie that the Rong script did not exist and that the script thought to have been processed by the nutty General was his own invention. Nobody considered it necessary to check the information with more reliable authorities, e.g., at the British Museum where a few Rong scripts were lying then. Even today there are no more than three Lepcha presses in the country—two in Gangtok and one run by a Nepali businessman in Kalimpong. None of them is cheap or within easy reach. Their total turn-out will hardly be half a dozen books in the last forty-one years.

Outside there is a flash followed by a deep rumble of thunder—precursor of storm and rain. It is strange how swiftly the scenario changes in the hill: the languid becomes volatile, Medea replaces Aphrodite without ado. The light has now become dull, opaque and the atmosphere suddenly chilly despite the deliciously warm *chi* and Sonam's often embarrassing bawdy jokes. A while ago he was facetiously narrating the story of their first parents and the birth of humanity. His inspiration, as far as I could see, stemmed from the presence of a newly wed. I, too, have often wondered how these people can be so engaging to look upon, especially when they are usually devoid of any singularly good feature. It is perhaps due to the absence of anything unpleasant than to the presence of direct

grace or beauty. Sonam is emphatic about one cardinal aspect of the Rong morality: nothing that has been created out of the inexorableness of a passion can be kept out of it. So, one has to live with it, transcreate it in different forms and hues and if possible, transcend it. He does not accept my argument that all this is nothing new as a concept and that it is easier professed than performed. No, on the contrary, the Rong psyche is such that it is easier performed than professed. This has been the strength of these unique aborigines and their weakness too.

The rage of the storm has reached a crescendo. The deceptively pretty hill-side is now perilous for people not accustomed to its travails. Sonam has a vote in favour of prolonging our stay. However, there are others who prefer the safe shelter of civilisation. We are unanimous on one point: the storm should cease. *Ket ma nin*, assures the old man of the hearth, we need not worry, the storm will pass. Till then, we can pursue our tale: the wisdom of the Thikungteks, the Sambars and the De-Chhe-Kyabs who always have to support an alien force; impossible events inexorably affecting their destiny that always seem to happen on misty mornings; and the unfolding of the day when their god would depart. Nor are we overly concerned with the storm, for we know that storms do pass. But we know all the same that if the cross must be carried and not merely kissed, this journey may never end.

REFERENCES

1. Lama Angarika Gobinda, *The Way of the White Clouds*, B1 Publications, 1977, pp. 296-297.
2. J Ware Edgar, *Report on a Visit to Sikkim and the Tibetan Frontier*, 1873, p. 67.
3. Amal Kumar Das and Swapan Kumar Banerjee, *The Lepchas of Darjeeling District*, a Government of West Bengal Publication, 1962, p. 127.
4. Joseph Hooker, *Himalayan Journal*, c. 1848, p. 120.
5. V V Gokhale, *Expansion of Buddhism : Tibet, Ladakh and Mongolia*, op. cit., 2500 years of Buddhism, ed. P V Bapat, p. 80.
6. *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, pp. 33-34.
7. Erik Haar, *The Lepcha Script*, Acta Orient, XXIV, 3-4, 1959, pp. 107-122.
8. Ashit Chakraborty, *Read Lepcha*, 1978, p. xxi.
9. Imansingha Chemjong, *History and Culture of the Kirat People* (Part I and II).
10. G. Tshering, *Lepcha Jatiko Sangsipta Parichari*, Shyam Brothers, Darjeeling, 1971.
11. Col. G.B. Mainwaring, *A Lepcha Grammar*, Calcutta, 1876.
12. Geoffrey Gorer, *Himalayan Village—An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, Thomas Nelson & Sons, first published in 1938 and reprinted in 1967.
13. *Dictionary of the Lepcha Language*, first published in 1898 and reprinted in 1979.

