

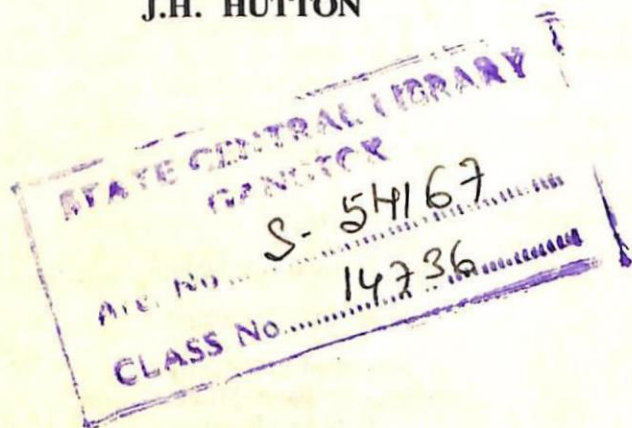
# **THE LEPCHAS OF SIKKIM**

**GEOFFREY GORER**

# THE LEPCHAS OF SIKKIM

GEOFFREY GORER

*With an Introduction by*  
J.H. HUTTON



**GYAN PUBLISHING HOUSE**

New Delhi-110002



## List of Contents

★

	PAGE
LIST OF CONTENTS	7
LIST OF PLATES	19
REFERENCE LIST OF THE INHABITANTS OF LINGTHEM	21
INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR J. H. HUTTON	25
FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	29
CHAPTER ONE. THE LEPCHAS AND SIKKIM	35
i. The Lepchas original inhabitants of southern and eastern slopes of Kinchenjunga—a subject race for at least three centuries—submerged in Sikkim and British India except in the Lepcha reserve of Zongu in Sikkim—Lepchas in India converted to Christianity.	
ii. To make converts the Baptists revived the artificial Lepcha script, invented in the eighteenth century for the lamaist converts, and almost forgotten—General G. G. Mainwaring took the Lepchas under his protection in the nineteenth century—in 1926 Miss Stocks collects Lepcha folklore.	
iii. The Native State of Sikkim: peaceful in the last seventy years—indirect British protection abolishes slavery: effect on Lepchas.	
iv. Lepchas an unusual society because they have been influenced by more highly developed non-European societies but untouched by Europe—insoluble questions of culture contact.	
v. The position of Zongu and Lingthem.	

### BOOK ONE. LEPCHA LIFE

#### *Relations with the environment*

CHAPTER TWO. THE HOMES OF THE LEPCHAS	51
i. Physical description of Zongu—temperature—clothes: Lepchas no longer weave—villages of Zongu—derivation of names—the serpent eaters of Pantoong.	

- ii. Description of Lingthem monastery.
- iii. The construction of Lepcha houses—internal disposition—absence of decoration except for some private lamaist altars in the *de-ong*—painting and wood-carving alien arts—lama's attitude to painting—use of knife and bamboo.
- iv. New houses rarely built nowadays—native traditions—choice of house-site chiefly dependent on lamaist metaphysical desiderata: details—methods and ritual for building and repairing houses—all building done co-operatively without payment and without an overseer—the 'house goblin' *Thyak dum*: how he has to be treated if he cannot be controlled.
- v. Except for the garden in front of the house individual land is scattered all over the neighbourhood.
- vi. Incorrect to describe Lepchas as animists—supernaturals live in various phenomena but are quite distinct from them—rare exception of supernaturals' dwelling places being worshipped: the lakes which are the 'mothers' of family lines, *ptse*—devils sometimes seen and heard.
- vii. The landscape of the Talung valley.

### CHAPTER THREE. GETTING FOOD

83

- i. Impossible to overestimate the importance of food-getting in primitive society—food-getting not of much religious importance to Lepchas but of very great emotional importance—Lepchas nearly omniverous—hunting falling into desuetude—rituals and rules connected with hunting.
- ii. Lepchas have two types of cultivation—permanently cultivated land and land cleared once every eight years—permanent cultivation, rice terraces and cardamum, a new social feature with great implicit economic changes—no exploitation so far—prosperity desirable but fraught with supernatural danger—story of Ginoo *moong* the devil of jealousy.
- iii. Details of Lepcha agriculture—alien ceremonies imported with cardamum, bringing with the Nepali ban on menstruating women—Lepcha agricultural calendar—groups of field-workers.
- iv. Lepcha food and drink—millet grown exclusively for *chi*,—methods of fermenting and preparing—Lepcha fondness for alcohol—methods of cooking food—Lepcha high standard of living.
- v. Animals more important for prestige and sacrifices than for eating—attitude to and treatment of cattle—goats—pigs: all boars castrated young as a Lepcha who ate boar-flesh would commit sodomy: instances—pigs scavengers—dogs—cats



- women must never kill animals : to eat an animal killed by a woman is supernaturally dangerous—lamas also must not kill them.
- vi. Land and property belongs to the houseowner—divided if joint families separate which is rare—women cannot own land—if there is no direct heir a suitable person is designated as *ké-tsop* by Mandal : examples—in a household consisting of more than three people the dependents, women and children have a certain amount of animals and land as their own private property—methods of working and examples—in Zongu land can only be owned by Lepchas and transferred by Court permission.
- vii. Possible history of Lepcha agriculture.

*Relations with Foreigners*

## CHAPTER FOUR. MONEY LENDERS AND TRADING FRIENDS

113

- i. The stores in Mangan owned by money lenders, *kanya*, who have control of the cardamum trade—their methods of exploiting and cheating the Lepchas : details—only Lepcha co-operation and the benevolence of the Court have prevented the Lepchas being completely enslaved by debt—the richest people also the most indebted—regulation of inter-village debts.
- ii. The institution of *ingzong*, trading friends, between Lepchas, Sikkimese, Nepali—its mythological origin and ceremonial—after performing *ingzong* ceremony two *ingzong* are considered as blood-brothers and inter-marriage for nine generations becomes incestuous—relationship now less important and term used loosely between Lepchas to indicate 'special friends.'
- iii. Lepchas have to send boys to Gangtok to act as servants to the Maharajah and to be trained as state carpenters—decreasing necessity of travel for Lepchas.

*Relations with other Lepchas*

## CHAPTER FIVE. LAW AND ORDER

123

- i. Zongu administered in Gangtok by a Kazi—internally divided into twelve villages under Mandals—the recently invented position of Muktair, the local superior to the Mandals—originally two Muktair, one on Teesta one on Talung side—Talung Muktair father of Tafoor—why Tafoor did not succeed him—Tempa gets given post—history of Tempa—became overweening—deposed by joint action of the Mandals.

## CONTENTS

II

PAGE

- vi. Lepcha marriage contract between two groups—sororate and levirate rights in theory and practice—list of hereditary spouses—a man or woman may and usually does sleep with all potential hereditary spouses during their husband's or wife's life-time—how this should be done—by this rule most boys are sexually educated by older women—suggestion that regulations were made to prevent in-group jealousy and splitting of group—mythology shows absence of jealousy among brothers—no word in Lepcha for jealousy—Lepchas not aggressive—rights not used outside Zongu—readjustments if two brothers marry two sisters—disadvantage of levirate marriages through disparity of age—example of Chélé who inherited his aunt.
- vii. Right to take second wife if first wife is sterile: methods and examples—second wives taken when first wife has produced children—very disruptive situation—examples—Lepchas try to ignore personal and passionate love—they separate love and sex—a weak man or one who travels much may coopt a younger brother as co-husband—arrangement unpopular and rare.
- viii. Bastards from unmarried women a great disgrace—what must be done—after birth neither mother nor child suffer disadvantages—great sterility and low fertility rate of Lepcha women: some suggested causes.
- ix. Childless people can adopt children—methods of doing so—examples—children gain property by adoption but appear to be warped psychologically and unhappy—six out of seven adopted men with abnormal characters—Lepcha life arranged on the hope of regular births and deaths—households too small—only two in Lingthem approach ideal.

### *Relations with the supernatural*

#### CHAPTER SEVEN. RELIGION I: LAMAISM

181

- i. Lepchas practise simultaneously two contradictory religions—lamaism and the old Mun religion—points of contrast—points of agreement: ambivalent attitude of supernaturals—meaningful character of dreams: details and examples—cross-identification of lamaist and Mun supernaturals owing to the fact that names are unimportant to Lepchas—all supernaturals have at least two names—confusions and reconciliations—usually ceremonies of two religions performed simultaneously—veiled rivalry between priests.
- ii. Sikkim converted to lamaism about 1641—Lingthem monastery built 1855 belonging to the subsect Lhatsun-pa of the sect Nyingma-pa 'Red Hats.'—importance of lamaist scriptures—lamaist ethics founded on aim at individual freedom from



- reincarnation—lamaist attitude to the repeating of prayers orally or mechanically—lamaist beliefs about the soul—social organisation of lamas—converted Lepchas have accepted scriptures, mythology, view of priesthood and social organisation but have rejected individualist ethics—suggested rule about imported complexes into integrated cultures.
- iii. Lamas designated by birth-horoscopes and by being the sons of lamas—education—the different grades of lamas, with their special duties and feasts to validate each rise in grade—corresponding grades of nuns less important.
  - iv. Duties of lamas personal and individual, set monthly and calendrical services, and ministering to the sick or threatened—rosaries—description of bi-monthly monastery feasts and calendrical feasts—the killing of the quarrel demon.
  - v. Enormous variety of exorcisms and apotropaic rites for the benefit of individuals—generalisations—parallel between Lepcha's attitude to religious ceremonies and supernaturals and a hypochondriac's attitude to doctors, germs and vitamins—employment of lamas depends on personal inclinations and wealth—great importance of and belief in horoscopes: obligatory on many occasions.
  - vi. Mystic practices of the higher-grade lamas—Tafoor's training for stopping the rain falling: details.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT. RELIGION II: THE MUN

- i. The Mun have no social organisation: priesthood by possession of supernaturals resident in family lines—padem, pau, yama less important parallel priests—'black Mun' and 'white Mun'—the Mun Gongyop describes his possession by Padem and Mun spirits, his training, his feelings during the biennial festivals when he is possessed by the spirit and prophecies in trance, what he sees when he sacrifices—possession accompanied by sense delusions.
- ii. Validating mythology of the Mun: the sacred story of Genesis only known in full by Mun—the sacred story of the origin of marriage—other stories of origin—story of origin of menstruation—peculiarities of Lepcha stories.
- iii. Most Mun ceremonies performed for individuals—some calendrical ceremonies performed together with lamas—description of Cherim ceremony to avert illness from the community.
- iv. Mun more often necessary in the lives of individuals than lamas—ceremonial cleansing by pek-ing—the sacrament of *sakyou faat*—generalisations about Mun exorcisms—some examples.

## CONTENTS

13

PAGE  
235

### CHAPTER NINE. RELIGION III: THE PEOPLE OF MAYEL

- i. The worship of the People of Mayel in connection with the rice and millet harvest shows some such anomalous features as to suggest that it was originally a different religion—description of the mythology of the People of Mayel—their country visited by human beings in olden times.
- ii. The rites of sowing and harvesting rice—the blighting effect of a person who has seen crops drying in the sun before the sacrifice has been offered.
- iii. Sacrifices to Pong *rum* the god of hunters, who is the guardian of the road to the country of Mayel—how the god persecutes those who displease him with poltergeist phenomena—examples—daily food sacrifices.

### BOOK TWO. LIFE OF THE LEPCHAS

#### CHAPTER TEN. THE RHYTHM OF LEPCHA LIFE

249

- i. Relationship of the author with the Lepchas—present giving—unselfishness of Lepchas.
- ii. The Lepcha working day: household life—Lepcha feasts a continuous interruption of ordinary life—description of monastery feast—food and drink and their results.
- iii. Lepchas' constant verbal preoccupation with sex—examples—suggested reasons for this—sex is always funny.
- iv. Speech of very great importance to Lepchas as their art and their intellectual entertainment—the elegant speaker: honorific words and symbolical words (*tang-bor*)—the story teller—importance of stories, when told and by whom—Lepcha tendency to monologue.
- v. Speech also social sanction—people shamed by speech—social rebukes may drive people to suicide: why externalised social disapproval has so much weight—the great importance of malicious gossip and scandal a strong urge to social conformity—Lepchas' emphasis on behaviour and lack of interest in individual character differences.
- vi. Characteristics of the average Lepcha—vivid and exact memories—no number sense—do not dramatise—extremely tolerant—lack feelings of inferiority—contented and indifferent—antithetic emphasis on social conformity and individual liberty produces different types of behaviour in the privacy of the home and in public—Lepchas much dislike hurrying—do not allow for quarrelling or aggression but admit sulking—differences in squeamishness—very low disgust reactions—physical dirtiness.



- vii. The Lepcha standards of physical beauty—care of the body.
- viii. *No sharp contrasts in Lepcha life*—relative obscurity of childhood and extreme old age—the best time of life is youth.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN. BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

283

- i. Lepcha theory of conception and development of foetus—second five moons of pregnancy a time of great watchfulness for both parents who have to observe very many pre-natal precautions—sex of infant fixed after five months but can be altered willingly or surreptitiously—miscarriages—Mun ritual—special *chi* prepared against delivery—women delivered in their homes—treatment of newborn child—disposal of afterbirth—birth accidents and their significance—multiple *births very rare*—still-born babies and infants turn into dust-devils—babies seldom reared if the mother dies at or soon after childbirth—children witness birth of subsequent siblings.
- ii. A child only officially born on the third day—the third day Birth Feast—the child's bracelet and necklace:
- iii. The nursing situation—children seldom weaned before they can talk—weaning sometimes accompanied by physical separation—children normally only suckled by one woman—Lepcha women lactate with great facility—only or youngest children occasionally continue sucking till puberty—examples—babies fed whenever they cry—teaching of sphincter control starts early by the baby being carried out on to the verandah—not treated with strong emotion—Lepcha expectation of the development of infants—children almost always carried—training in passivity—cradles not used except by Mrs. Datoop—Lepcha babies cry very little: guardian will try to find out why baby cries and gratify it: if it continues it is threatened with devils—babies not much talked to or played with—kissed and caressed—Lepcha babies rely a great deal on elder siblings—three-year-old babies have mostly acquired the typical Lepcha character.
- iv. Lepchas consider children small adults, capable of committing crimes but needing training to become good members of society—childishness no excuse—ambivalent attitude towards children because if they die they become of great supernatural danger—parents recognise child's physical independence in various ways—gifts of knife and knapsack—education—moral maxims—children hit in anger if they get in the way of or annoy adults—really severely punished if they commit crimes, such as stealing—technical education in various tasks—children useful from about the age of six—Lepchas

- explicit about the aims of education—two categories of children : only fixed about the age of ten—signs that a child may develop badly.
- v. Childhood a relatively unpleasant period—a time of neglect—children do not make a group opposed to adults—adult status a desirable aim—childish bashfulness—little boys have more freedom than little girls—choice of companionship limited—Lepcha children have no toys—play by themselves or in groups but not organised play—Lepcha plays imitations of adult life—special childish language—some sexual plays considered funny by adults—children liked the author playing with them : reactions—excessive fear of devils a childish trait—fear of devils not obsessive—occasional bullying stopped by elders—few children have a choice of homes—except for lonely children and exceptional cases childhood is not an actively unhappy time but a time of obscurity.

## CHAPTER TWELVE. SEX, MARRIAGE AND MATURITY

315

- i. Lepchas' contrasted attitude to male and female puberty—belief in the necessity of external intervention for women to attain puberty—no formal marked entry into puberty—no word for puberty—children given a socially sexual role very early : usually betrothed before puberty—parents play no rôle in children's marriage—method of demanding a girl as wife—bride-price gifts : dedication—visits of the groom to his bride : the two are meant to copulate under the supervision of their uncles but often refuse to—hostility to betrothal frequent, especially on the part of the girl who will have to leave home—examples Nariya, Kondé, etc.—boys want to grow up but are uninterested in marriage—the period between betrothal and marriage the most humiliating in a man's life—a groom is the servant of his father-in-law.
- ii. Most Lepcha boys start their sexual life with the wife of an elder brother or uncle—this is considered desirable education—great sexual freedom of Lepchas until the birth of their first child—different types of sexual experience—behaviour when a couple are unrelated and unmarried : these unions occasionally achieve social recognition—sex not part of hospitality pattern—seduction not elaborated in any way—no overt jealousy of fathers and brothers about the sexual life of daughters and sisters—sex not made a secret of except for very recent adultery—remarkable potency of Lepcha men—methods of sexual intercourse—Lepcha theories of sexual physiology—danger of menstruating women—menopause not recognised but sexual activities of very old people considered slightly ludicrous—Lepchas' separate sex and emotion—sexual activity not a reason for social obligations.



- iii. The feast and ceremonies of bringing home the bride and the post-nuptial visits.
- iv. Marriage makes little difference to the social position of the husband, but more to that of the wife—young married people still in a subservient position—the birth of a child alters their status—the ideal gradual development of responsibility is falsified by a very uneven death rate.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN. DEATH

345

- i. The Lepchas have entirely antagonistic attitudes to death and the dead: death is contagious and the dead only return as devils—after a death the two things to do are to get rid of the dead man's soul and to prevent his death affecting the living—danger of death local and nothing is done if people die abroad except in the case of young children—the clash between lamaism and the Mun religion is most obvious in the attitudes towards and the ceremonies surrounding death and their views of the afterlife—Mun perform no ceremonies for lamas and nuns—lamas and nuns usually cremated and never buried—laymen usually buried and never burned—both may be thrown into the river—position and hour of death important for horoscopes—lamas instruct and feed dead man before body is disposed of—treatment of corpse.
- ii. Cremation—burial—disposal by water.
- iii. Exorcising the devils of death—the ceremony of *Sandé moong*—of *Shidook moong*—of *Arot moong*—the ceremony of *Dek Flee* for the death of a child.
- iv. The *sanglion*, the speeding of the soul—the lamaist ceremony—the Mun ceremony—the treatment of the dead man's clothes and possessions—the memorial services held a year after death.
- v. The Lepchas formalise grief very little.

## BOOK THREE. LIVES OF LEPCHAS

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN. DEVIANTS AND DEFECTIVES

365

- i. The Lepcha stereotype a compromise between the ideal personality and observable behaviour—types of deviation—*Rigya*, the horder.
- ii. Mental defectives—*Sangkyar* the cretin—the subnormal “wanderers”—*Kanden* the wanderer—are the clinical symptoms of insanity culturally determined?

# CONTENTS

17  
PAGE  
376

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN. THE LIFE OF KURMA

- i. Reasons for collecting primitive life-histories: the link between psychology and sociology—advantages of the method.
- ii. Kurma offered his own story freely—his character—his atypical traits and circumstances.
- iii. Kurma's story of his own life.
- iv. Journal of Kurma's actions and sayings.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN. THE FIRST DORJÉ LAPOON, HIS FAMILY AND JIROONG

415

- i. The author regrets that he was unable to get the life-history of a well-adjusted Lepcha to counterbalance Kurma's obvious maladjustments—well-adjusted Lepchas have inadequate self-feeling.
- ii. Story of the first Dorjé Lapoon—of his son Datoop—of Mrs. Datoop—of their children Pembu and Pichit.
- iii. Story of Jiroong, his wives and sister.

## CONCLUSIONS

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN. SOCIAL EVOLUTION AND AGGRESSION

431

### APPENDIX I.

455

- (a) Vital statistics of Lingthem.
  - Table I. Distribution by age and sex.
  - Table II. Distribution by sex in ten-year groups.
  - Table III. Fecundity of married women.
- (b) Plan of the village of Lingthem.
  - Table IV. Distribution of households by *piso*.

### APPENDIX II. LEPCHA KINSHIP TERMS

463

### APPENDIX III.

467

- (a) Birth Horoscope
- (b) Marriage Horoscopes
- (c) Death Horoscope
- (d) Lama's divination by horoscope of illness
- (e) Performance of ceremonies indicated in (d) and also accompanying Mun ceremonies.

### APPENDIX IV. THE SACRED STORY OF THE ORIGIN OF MARRIAGE

481



	PAGE
<b>APPENDIX V. LEPCHA STORIES</b>	<b>485</b>
(a) The story of Lyang-Mok <i>moong</i> , a frightening story about devils	
(b) The story of Meloan <i>moong</i> , a comic story about devils.	
(c) A legend of the Kings of Tibet and Sikkim (commencement only).	
(d) Fables: Why the Leopard and Monkey are enemies; The origin of eating fish; The story of the Blackbird and the Crab.	
<b>APPENDIX VI. A NOTE ON THE LEPCHA LANGUAGE</b>	<b>493</b>
<b>VOCABULARY OF LEPCHA WORDS</b>	<b>497</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>503</b>

## List of the Inhabitants of Lingthem

★

NOTE : This is a list of the inhabitants of Lingthem mentioned in the text and is made to avoid the constant repetition of age, sex, social position and chief relationships in the body of the text. This list is not exhaustive, and only the chief operative relationships are named; further relationships can, if desired, be discovered by inspection of Appendix I, Table 4. Those people most often mentioned in the text have their names printed in capitals. The following social classifications, which are fully elucidated in the text, are used : Muktair, Mandal, *youmi*, *gyapōn* are village officials (see Chapter Five); lama and nun are priests of the lamaist religion (see Chapter Seven); *Mun*, *padem*, *Nandjēmu* are priests of the old Lepcha religion (see Chapter Eight).

The number immediately after the name is the age in years of the person in 1937. Women are designated either by the prefix 'Mrs.' when they are listed immediately under their husband, or by feminine kinship terms. The following abbreviations have been used :

Kinship term in quotes—e.g. 'grandfather'—signifies that the relationship is classificatory and operative.

*d.r.* signifies 'distantly related to' in those cases where a distant relationship is socially operative.

*Ph. pl.* followed by a number signifies that there is a photograph of the person mentioned on the plate of that number. Some people appear in several photographs, but only one is given.

- Adér, 71. 'Grandfather' of Chano, China, Aga (Ph. pl. 25a).  
 Aga, 37. Son of Hlatam, 'brother' of Chano, China.  
 Mrs. Aga I, 37. Mother of three children.  
 Mrs. Aga II, 43. Sterile widow, should be wife of Zumba.  
 Agyung, 29. Adopted son of Serving. Married with one son.  
 Aplung, 29. Brother of Rigya and Gyatso. Son of Ashyok *youmi*.  
 Mrs. Aplung, 35. Formerly stepmother of Tobgé.  
 Ashyok *youmi*, 50. Father of Rigya, Gyatso, Aplung (Ph. pl. 11e).  
 Atyook, 16. Adopted son of Tingkep *youmi*, real son of Ongden, q.v. (Ph. pl. 30).  
 Bahada, 23, carpenter. Son of Ongden, brother of Chanko, Atyook, Kanchok.  
 CHALA MANDAL, 59. Head of village (Ph. pl. 7).  
 Mrs. Mandal I, 28, nun. Sterile. *d.r.* Chélé's wife, Dadool, Kanden (Ph. pl. 19).



- Mrs. Katel I, 56. Mother of three children. d.r. Chala Mandal.  
 Mrs. Katel II, 18.  
 Kolok Tyong, 15. Son of Datoop, q.v. (Ph. pl. 29).  
 KONDÉ, 16. Daughter of Pargeut. d.r. Datoop, Tafoor (Ph. pl. 29).  
 KURMA, *gyapôn, padem*, 37. d.r. Mrs. Datoop (Ph. pl. 27).  
 Kutt'r, 18, lama. Son of Lumba (Ph. pl. 13b).  
 Lumba *chithembu*, 51, lama. Father of Kutt'r (Ph. pl. 11a).  
 Mrs. Lumba I, 47, *Mun*. Daughter of Pumri, sister of Mrs. Tempa.  
 Mrs. Lumba II, 38. d.r. Mrs. Lumba I, q.v.  
 Mikmar, 13. Son of Chano, brother of Pursang; betrothed, studying to be a lama (Ph. pl. 24).  
 MUKTAIR. Dead father of Tafoor, Chudo; first husband of Mrs. Dunbi.  
 Nahyeun, 41. Bastard son of Dunbi.  
 Nandjému, 66. Elder grandmother of Patek.  
 NARIYA, 30. Adoptive brother of Rigya, son of elder brother of Ashyok *youmi*.  
 Mrs. Nariya, 14.  
 Ongden, 52, lama. Father of Chanko, Bahada, Kanchok, Atyook; brother of Tinkep; 'brother' of Chelim (Ph. pl. 25a).  
 Mrs. Ongden, 22. Widow, very recently married to Ongden.  
 Pankek, 6. Daughter of Dunbi and Mrs. Dunbi (Ph. pl. 21a).  
 Pargeut, 44. Father of Kondé, Tangvoong, old mother a nun, d.r. Datoop, Tafoor.  
 Mrs. Pargeut, 38.  
 PATEK, 17. Head of household of six, including two grandmothers, a *Nandjému* and a *Mun*; brother of Ribu (Ph. pl. 9b).  
 PEMBU, 29, lama. Son of Datoop, q.v. (Ph. pl. 29), father of Dugoo.  
 Mrs. Pembu, 23. (Ph. pl. 29).  
 Pichi, 23. Son of Datoop, brother of Pembu, carpenter (Ph. pl. 28a).  
 Pongring, 83, lama. Monastery custodian. d.r. Jiroong (Ph. pl. 9b).  
 PRUMTU, 15. Daughter of Dunbi and Mrs. Dunbi, lives with half-brothers Tafoor and Chudo.  
 PUMRI, 74, *Mun*. Mother of Mrs. Lumba I, Mrs. Tempa. Recently married second Dorjé Lapoon, being widow of his "uncle" (Ph. pl. 15b).  
 Pursang, 11. 'Son' of Chano, brother of Mikmar.  
 Ribu, 12. Brother of Patek, q.v.  
 RIGYA, 23. 'Brother' of Nariya, whose parents adopted him. Son of Ashyok *youmi*, brother of Aplung, Gyatso (Ph. pl. 26a).  
 Mrs. Rigya, 26.  
 Samblyou, 60. Sister of Mrs. Takal and Mrs. Gongyop, a promiscuous woman at present living with Zumba.  
 SANGKYAR, 36, a cretinous defective. Brother of Satéo, nephew of Gongyop and Thyak Thimbu, with latter of whom he lives.  
 Satéo, 27, a cripple. Brother of Sangkyar, q.v. lives with Chala Mandal (Ph. pl. 17b).

## Introduction

By J. H. HUTTON

(*William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology at Cambridge*)

★

Early writers on India tell us of a strange people living about the sources of the Ganges, mild and gentle in manners and of blameless life. Some of their other strange attributes are scarcely human, but it is perhaps permissible to recognise in this account of a gentle race living in a remote valley of the Himalayas an echo of some contact with the Lepchas, who differ very remarkably in this quality of mildness from at any rate their more immediate neighbours. No one who has had to deal administratively with the Nepali grazier, for instance, would impute to him an immoderate regard for the property or the predilections of his neighbours, nor is it at all a quality of the Gurkha in general; eastwards, on the other hand, the Bhutanese are not particularly noted for benignity and still less the Daflas and Akas beyond them. To find a cis-Himalayan society in any way comparable to that of the Lepchas in its successful elimination of aggressiveness from its members and the reduction of jealousy to a minimum it would be necessary to go west of Nepal to the districts of Lahaul and Spiti. How far it would be possible to find it there it is not easy to say, for our recorded knowledge of the social and domestic life of the peoples of the Himalayas is scanty. Even the officers of the Assam Government have not yet produced any monograph on any of the tribes on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Now, however, we are well informed at any rate about the Lepchas, for Mr. Gorè's *Himalayan Village* follows only by two or three months Major C. J. Morris' *Living with Lepchas*, dealing with just the same area and the same individuals as are treated of in this volume.

Mr. Gorè has been at some pains to examine the source of the absence of aggressiveness among Lepchas. He came to the con-



clusion that 'the Lepchas' failure to develop any pattern of external aggression' is to be put down to 'their isolation, their low material development and the difficulty of wresting a livelihood from their environment'. He considers that although these reasons may be adequate for 'the lack of destructive aggression outside their group, the lack inside it cannot be explained in such general terms'. It is permissible perhaps to doubt whether any distinction can be drawn between the causes of a lack of the aggressive disposition outside and inside the group, but the author makes the interesting and attractive suggestion that an important factor in the latter aspect is the immediate and willing satisfaction of all an infant's expressed physical desires accompanied by a considerable degree of physical restraint, as infants spend most of their time 'firmly tied to the back of their guardian', and a refusal to encourage, but rather the contrary, any efforts of the child to acquire bodily technique, speech and physical independence. 'Young babies get no social approval from their attempts to crawl and walk; on the contrary a mobile baby is more likely to be picked up and replaced on its guardian's back, since there it is easier to control.' When, however, Mr. Gorer goes on to trace a connection between the 'partial extinction of self-assertion in early childhood' and the tendency which he points out in Lepchas to judge their fellows in their rôle of members of the society and not as personalities, and to emphasise this impersonal attitude as 'the chief operative factor for the suppression of competition and aggression in adult life' I must confess to scepticism. Instances of this 'impersonal' attitude, e.g. in the case of Katel, will be found on page 271 of Chapter Ten, and I have several times had just the same experience among Nagas and Kukis, where self-assertion and aggression are a *sine qua non*. It seems to me likely that this impersonal attitude, in which men are regarded as members of a society rather than individuals, is a necessary condition of the very corporate society in which such tribesmen live. Such a society, straitly limited in number and rigidly restricted in area, is in many respects, particularly in such activities as cultivating or house-building, and in Naga or Kuki communities of course warfare, dependent for its immediate existence on the spontaneous mutual co-operation of its members. If this is so, it seems unnecessary to hold that this impersonal attitude has any particular connection either with the attitude to children described, or with the absence of aggression among adults. Probably the same impersonal attitude is traceable



in our own society among members of a team, for instance, where the suppression of personal preferences or dislikes is required in the interests of successful combination.

Another aspect of Lepcha life which is almost as striking as the absence of aggression is the apparent obsession of the whole community with sex. I was tempted to suppose that the author of this book had over-emphasised the Lepchas' attitude to sex through an unconscious dramatisation, a journalistic dramatisation, if I may call it so, of a want of reticence on sexual matters of all kinds in a degree quite unfamiliar in his own society. The perusal however of Major Morris' book (and Major Morris is well acquainted with India, so that I can in some measure judge by his standards) shows that I did Mr. Gorer an injustice. At the same time I am rather inclined to feel that the apparent preoccupation of the Lepchas with sex does not necessarily imply that the importance attached to it by them in their lives is proportionately theatrical. One is inclined to wonder whether this consciousness of sex is the cause or the result of the Lepchas' declining population, a decline of which the Lepchas themselves are acutely aware. Probably, if there is any such connection at all, it is by now a vicious circle, but either alternative seems possible. Perhaps the whole complex of want of aggression, sex-obsession and sterility arises from the effects of a long period of undisturbed isolation in an uncovered terrain where no necessity for self-defence against external enemies was experienced. If this be so it should be possible to find parallels for Lepcha psychology in some island communities in Oceania. In spite of what the author describes as their 'fundamentally optimistic character' a certain lack of belief in their own efforts and future seems indicated among the Lepchas by their cynical attitude to their own beliefs; the way in which a rite should be performed, the occasions on which it is required, the correct precaution to be taken in many events are all known, but if they are not followed with any particularity (and commonly, it seems, they are not) well, *Ket ma-nin*—'It does not really matter.'

A similar attitude is suggested by their apparent proneness to suicide and there is ample evidence that the Lepcha is very conscious of his inferiority to the encroaching Nepali in the struggle for survival and of his dependence not on himself but on state protection for his continued existence as a tribe.

It is not then surprising that the Lepchas are a dwindling race, and it is fortunate that someone has been found to study their



**GYAN PUBLISHING HOUSE**

**NEW DELHI-110 002**