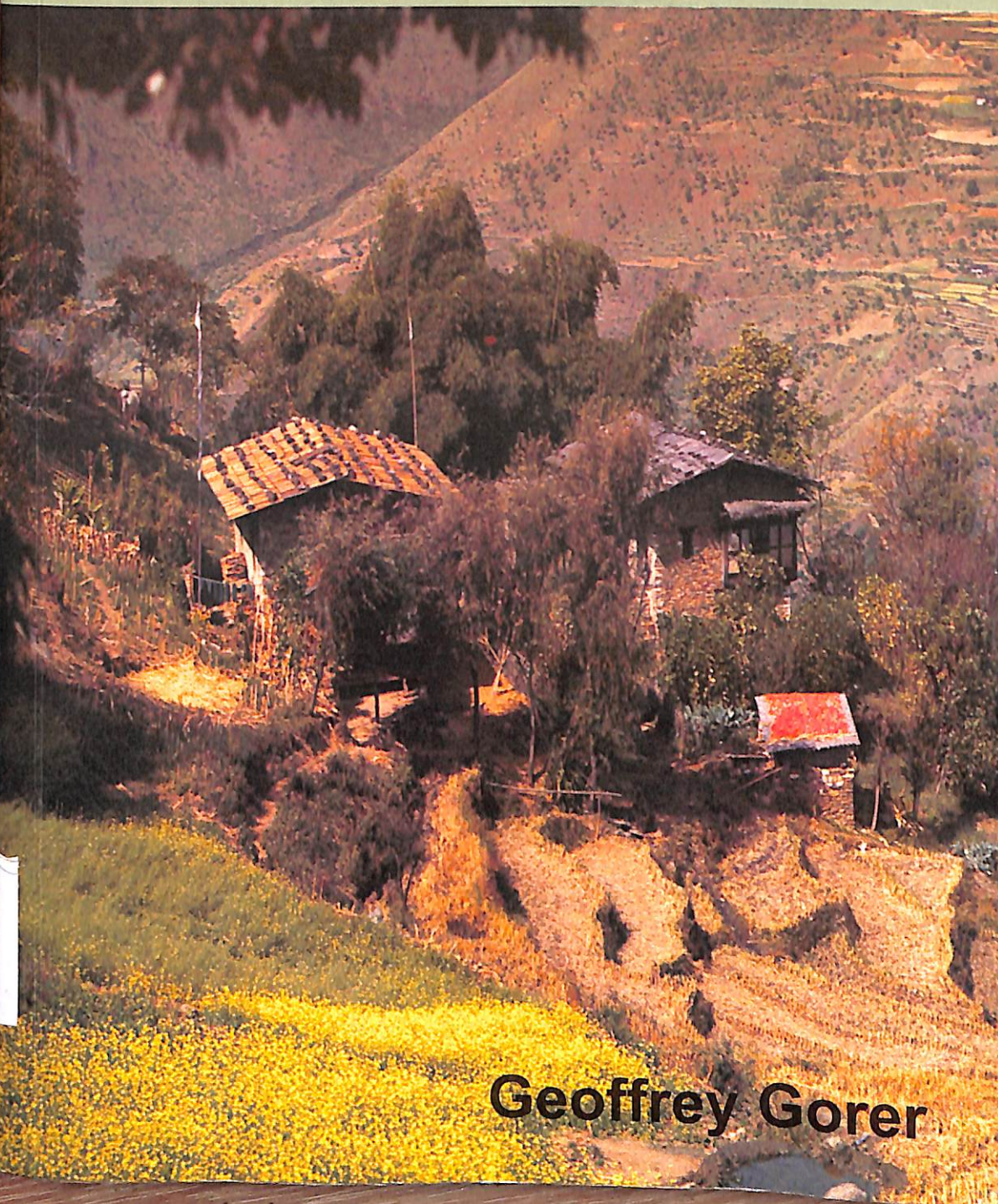


# HIMALAYAN VILLAGE

An account of the Lepchas of Sikkim



**Geoffrey Gorer**

# Himalayan Village

*an account*  
*of*  
The Lepchas of Sikkim



GEOFFREY GORER

Second Edition

*With a new Foreword by the author*

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## PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

Sikkim stands on the eastern flanks of the Himalayas. It is a land of icy peaks, tumbling glaciers and verdant ridges. Below fairytale-like rhododendron forests lie the terraced hillsides of the Lepcha people. Here a pastoral, sedentary life goes on, where subsistence farming is the backbone of existence.

But it is the culture and traditions of the people that this book addresses, as well as their more common traits. The people are believers in both Lamaism from Tibet and their own local faith, called Mun by the author, after the priests of the sect. This faith is similar in many aspects to the Jhankri or Shamanistic 'faith healers' of Nepal. It is in these aspects of the religion that some of the unusual traditions are found.

*"As opposed to Lamaism, the Mun religion carries with it no social organisation; the mun and their parallel priests are simply individuals who, through their possession by a spirit, have certain gifts and duties; unlike the lamas and the civil officers their position carries with it no sort of title in ordinary life."*

The author lived among the people of a village known as Lingthem, and his knowledge gained there brings into play an unusual feature of the book. Having learnt the language, he introduces us to a number of the village inhabitants. Each of these local characters helps us to build up a broader picture of the relationships, traditions, cultural aspects and of the nature of life in a typical Lepcha village.

This comprehensive book also features information on the people, housing, cultivation, social events, birth, marriage, death and all aspects of traditional life. Geoffrey Gorer has produced a remarkable work about the Lepcha people for those needing a source of detailed background facts. It is a unique source, an overflowing reservoir of information about Sikkim's Himalayan Villages.

Bob Gibbons  
Siân Pritchard-Jones  
Kathmandu 2004

M.S-2013-14  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LEPCHAS AND SIKKIM

i

THE Lepchas<sup>1</sup> are a Mongoloid people living in the Himalayas on the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kinchenjunga. It seems certain that they were originally the only inhabitants of this large tract of mountainous land, but during the last three centuries, or possibly longer, their land has been taken from them by conquering invaders, the Tibetans, the Nepali, and finally the English. At the time of the 1931 census the 25,780 registered Lepchas were almost evenly divided between the Native State of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of British India, 13,000 being in Sikkim and the rest in Darjeeling, with the exception of 66 who were employed, chiefly as gardeners, in Calcutta.

There is no generally accepted theory among those anthropologists who believe that every tribe originally came from somewhere else as to the place of origin of the Lepchas. Various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialect spoken in Indo-China. The Lepchas themselves have no tradition of migration and place the home of their ancestors—the people of Mayel—in one of the inaccessible valleys of Kinchenjunga.

The Lepchas do not appear ever to have resisted invasion of their own accord. Sikkim was apparently colonised by the Tibetans at some date prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Lepchas do not call themselves Lepchas; they call themselves *Rong*. 'Lepcha' is said to be a derogatory Nepali term—*lap-che*—meaning, though the philology is doubtful, 'nonsense talkers.' A parallel could be found in the Russian name for Germans—*nemetski*, which means 'the dumb ones.' Since all books dealing with the people and district refer to the Lepchas as Lepchas, it would seem merely pedantic and confusing to use the term *Rong*. The word would appear to have no other significance in Lepcha.

<sup>2</sup> I take the suggestion that Sikkim (which at that date included the present Darjeeling district) was colonised or at least dominated by the Tibetans before the beginning of the seventeenth century from *An Account of Tibet* by the

But it would seem as though this original colonisation was little more than a feudal overlordship imposed by a small minority on the Lepcha population. After the internal revolution and Chinese wars in Tibet in the early seventeenth century three 'Red Hat' lamas fled to Sikkim, speedily converted the Lepchas and what other inhabitants there were, and created a Sikkimese Tibetan king; from this king the present Maharajah of Sikkim is indirectly descended. A subsequent legend puts back the conversion of Sikkim to lamaism some centuries earlier; it is said that one of the lamaist saints lived in the country and deposited sacred writings in various caves, where they were subsequently discovered.

From the time of the establishment of a Sikkimese kingdom the Lepchas became an 'inferior' subject race, under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhotias, to which society the Maharajah and the big landowners belonged. For a considerable period the Lepchas were debarred on account of their race from entering the lamaist monasteries, and, though this rule is now relaxed, it is questionable whether a Lepcha could today obtain an important position in the big monasteries outside the Lepcha reserve. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Lepchas fought with the Sikkimese against the continued invasions of the Nepali and Bhutanese; the country was then in a very uncertain state, and there was continuous slave-raiding; the memory of this is still kept lively by the threat which older people will make to a crying child that 'If you don't keep quiet a Tibetan (or Bhutanese) will come along with a big bag and take you away.' During the early nineteenth century a number of treaties were made between Sikkim and British India, broken, and re-made; finally in 1835 the Darjeeling district, naturally together with its inhabitants, was ceded by the Maharajah to the British in exchange for an annuity.

It can be seen that the Lepchas have been for a considerable period a subject race, under the domination of the Bhotias and English. They are agriculturists and hunters, but in Sikkim the best land has been taken by the Bhotias, and later by the Nepali who have immigrated into the country in great numbers; in Darjeeling much of the jungle and agricultural land has been turned into tea-estates, and the Lepchas have become workers on the

Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (edited by Filippo de Filippi. London. George Routledge. 1932). Writing in the early eighteenth century Desideri speaks of Sikkim (p. 118 and *passim*) as a province of Tibet, which had to pay tribute to Lhasa, and he makes no mention of its relatively recent conquest. He calls the province Brêe-mê-jong, which means, 'the rice country.'



tea-plantations. In this district too there has been very considerable infiltration of Nepalis, coming from their crowded and relatively infertile country ; more industrious and better cultivators than the Lepchas, the Nepali are continuously displacing them everywhere.

The Lepchas also appear to be a dying race ; there is a difference of about 5,000 between the 1901 and the 1931 census ; but the figures for Sikkim are perhaps not altogether reliable. As a society, with its unique conglomeration of attitudes, the Lepchas are certainly disappearing, for their culture presupposes a homogeneous interlocking community, and this, as well as their almost complete suppression of competition and aggression, causes an inevitable breakdown of their culture in any mixed community. This book would have been impossible if the Maharajah of Sikkim had not made the part of his estate called Zongu into a Lepcha reserve, where he has made a law that only pure-blooded Lepchas may become landowners. It is only in Zongu and in one or two small villages outside the reserve that there is a homogeneous Lepcha society, practically undisturbed by alien influence. These survivals can be considered artificial, as without the indirect pacification of the British government and the benevolence of the Maharajah, these Lepchas would, like their fellows, have been ousted from the little and poor land which remains to them. But beyond the reservation of this piece of land for their exclusive use the society has not been *interfered with, nor preserved as a museum piece* ; it is still, as will be seen later, in a state of constant modification ; indeed the economic changes of the last thirty years are likely to be particularly far-reaching.

Of the Lepchas outside Zongu I can say very little, for I only had slight opportunities of observing them. In Sikkim they appear to subsist fairly well in the mixed communities, to a very great extent adopting the habits, culture, and even the language of their neighbours ; they share with them the religion of lamaism, which is the official religion of the State. In India they constitute only a tiny minority of the population of the district ; they appear to have lost almost all corporate unity ; they have practically completely forgotten their own language, and it would appear that none of the children round Kalimpong at any rate can speak anything except Nepali. Lost in the overwhelming mass of alien people, the Lepchas have no social organisation ; and since Lepcha life is based on the social group they have been left with little except their appearance and their gentleness which can be called specifically Lepcha. All



the Lepchas' ethics and attitudes which go to make a culture are founded on a community of equal citizens ; divorced from such a community the Lepcha culture is meaningless. To some extent the Lepchas have adapted themselves to the changed conditions, accepting the way of life and language of their neighbours. But compared with the Nepali and Plains Indians they are wasteful agriculturists and they have a relatively high standard of living ; despite some legal protection—the Lepcha cannot be dispossessed of his last five acres of land—it seems as though they must disappear fairly rapidly, either through want or through absorption. In India a certain amount of intermarriage goes on between Lepchas and Nepali ; the Lepcha woman is esteemed for her physical appearance and her mild and yielding character.

In the last census nearly all Lepchas are entered as Buddhists ; a little over a thousand had been converted to Christianity. Despite the small numbers the Lepchas represent one of the most fruitful fields of missionary endeavour in Northern India ; and the conversion of individuals to Christianity seems to have modified the converts' character far more profoundly than the earlier group conversion to Buddhism. The Christians with whom I came in contact exhibited a strong sense of individual sin (an attitude lamaism has been unable to implant) and excessive prudery, with which was coupled a tendency to snigger at excretory functions.

## ii

In an endeavour to gain converts the Baptist mission went to the length of translating and printing in the artificial Lepcha script three books of the New Testament. This seems to have been a work of almost complete supererogation, for the Lepcha script, never widely known, has now completely fallen into disuse ; in order to read the scriptures Lepchas have to learn a new, and otherwise completely useless, alphabet ; most of them are far more familiar with Nepali.

The Lepcha alphabet was invented at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century by King Cha-dor of Sikkim. According to Albert Grünwedel the Lepcha alphabet is derived from a form of the Tibetan U-med alphabet.<sup>3</sup> Some sort

<sup>3</sup> This resemblance is not very obvious to the lay eye ; out of the 56 Lepcha characters 18 have no parallel in the U-med alphabet, and, of the 38 signs common to both, over half have very different forms.

of literacy is absolutely essential for the practising lama, and until the Lepchas could be taught Tibetan it was necessary that translations of the scriptures should be available in their own tongue. All the existing Lepcha manuscripts of which I have heard are translations of the Tibetan lamaist scriptures ; it is said that some specifically Lepcha compilations of mythology and anecdote have been made and possibly some may have escaped the destructive zeal of fanatical lamas. In Lingthem only one very old lama possessed or could read a Lepcha book.

Nowadays religious instruction is given in Tibetan. In Zongu literacy is exclusively confined to the reading of Tibetan scriptures and has no sort of influence or use in everyday life ; lamas who can read religious books and write religious formulas are quite incapable of reading or writing a letter in any language. As will be seen later this factual illiteracy puts the Lepchas at a considerable disadvantage in their commercial transactions. Some of the lamas of Lingthem read the Tibetan scriptures with ease and even fluency ; others appeared to me to have learned portions of the scriptures by heart and to know when to turn over the pages ; but I was never able to prove this. Tibetan books are printed from wooden blocks in long narrow rectangular pages ; to learn to read the pupil gets by heart the contents of one page at a time, only passing on to the next when he has completely mastered and is able to recite the first.

During the second half of the last century one Colonel (later General) G. G. Mainwaring took the Lepchas and their language under his special protection. General Mainwaring was, judging by his literary remains,<sup>4</sup> so perfect a type of the eccentric Indian officer who supports freak religions and fantastic prophecies derived from the pyramids that he seems almost to be an invented caricature. After profound thought General Mainwaring came to the conclusion that not only were the Lepchas the descendants of our first parents, but that—as could be simply shown by a device of the General's called the Power of Letters—Lepcha was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden. Of the people and the language he writes<sup>5</sup> :

' It is impossible that a people with language so comprehensive ; with manners, though primitive, so superior, as to entitle

<sup>4</sup> *A Lepcha Grammar*, by Col. G. G. Mainwaring. Calcutta 1876.

*Dictionary of the Lepcha Language*, compiled by the late General G. Mainwaring, revised and completed by Albert Grünwedel, Berlin, printed and published by order of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council. Berlin 1898.

them to rank high among civilised nations, could be engendered amidst the wilds and fastnesses of the Himalayas. They retain, in so marked a degree, all the simple ways of the patriarchs of old, as to lead to the conclusion that they must have remained isolated ever since such customs were in vogue. The type of features indicates that before settling in the Himalayas, they had probably resided in Mongolia and Manchuria and in, or near one of these countries, the body of the people might still be found. The language is a monosyllabic one (though not altogether an isolating one, as it possesses in a degree—as all languages however primitive do—an agglutinative structure) and is unquestionably far anterior to the Hebrew or Sanskrit. It is pre-eminently an *Ursprache*, being probably, and I think, I may without fear of misrepresentations, state it to be, the oldest language extant. It is a most comprehensive and beautiful one; and regarded alone, as a prolific source of the derivations and etyma of words, it is invaluable to the philological world. It however recommends itself to us on higher grounds; it possesses and plainly evinces the principle and motive on which all language is constructed.<sup>5</sup> But like everything really good in this world it has been despised and rejected. To allow the Lepcha race, and the language itself to die out would indeed be most barbarous, and inexpressibly sad.'

Although, or perhaps because, the good General was so conscious of the invaluable qualities of the Lepcha language, he was inclined to be severe with the Lepchas who spoke, to his mind, incorrectly. He constructed a huge grammar on Indo-Germanic principles (Lepcha is an almost completely uninflected language) in which he administers severe reproofs to casual speakers; thus

'The Lepchas are apt to pronounce o as u, and hence when writing to confound it with u; this error should be avoided and corrected in the Lepchas.'

'Different local pronunciations, however, and often ignorance, etc., render the change, in the first syllable of dissyllabic words, very common, and sometimes, very irregular; this disorganising tendency should be, altogether, discouraged; and the proper

<sup>5</sup> *Note by Gen. Mainwaring*: In the structure of the Lepcha language I have discovered the system on which, I consider, all language is based. By an exegesis which I have, in part, prepared (combined with a diagram showing the rudimental power of letters), the root and true signification of all words in all languages, are, at once, apparent.



prefixed syllable, when decided upon, should be adhered to. The principle should be laid down as a canon, and systematically impressed on the Lepchas.'

The General was so occupied with his teaching—he founded a sort of college for Lepchas near Darjeeling—that he died before he had time to publish *The Power of Letters*, and the Lepcha dictionary which was to illustrate his points. After his death his manuscript was edited and published by a German Tibetan scholar who knew no Lepcha and not too much English; all the General's fantastic etymological derivations were cut out and the Lepcha script abandoned in favour of an almost incomprehensible system of phonetic transliteration. The government official in charge wrote to Herr Grünwedel 'The so-called Lepcha alphabet used by General Mainwaring is a pure fiction. The language has properly speaking no written character, though it is possible that on a few occasions a debased variety of the Tibetan character may have been resorted to. There is however no necessity whatever and no real justification for incurring the expense of starting Lepcha type, nor as a matter of fact can a complete fount of such type be constructed.' Considering that there were then numerous Lepcha books in manuscript in existence, and that the Baptists had already founded a complete Lepcha type, the instructions are, in a small way, a fine example of Imperial diplomacy. The dictionary is almost entirely Lepcha-English, and is chiefly useful for its indication of Tibetan loan-words; the identifications of plants and animals are in many cases questionable.

As far as I know the only other person who has paid more than passing attention to the Lepchas is Miss C. de Beauvoir Stocks, who made two tours in Sikkim in 1925 to collect folktales; she spent three days in Lingthem. I came across a number of the stories Miss Stocks had printed<sup>6</sup> and though many of them had been bowdlerised almost out of recognition (probably through the prudery of her interpreter) the almost word-for-word similarity of passages of no particular dramatic interest was striking. Miss Stocks also added some notes on Lepcha customs which correspond in practically no particular with my observations; many are the same as those made about the Sikkimese in the *Gazeteer of Sikkim*.

<sup>6</sup> 'Folklore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim.' By C. de Beauvoir Stocks. From the *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (New Series), Vol. XXI, 1925, No. 4.

## iii

Sikkim is today an independent Native State ruled by an hereditary Maharajah ; in his work he is assisted by a number of large land-owners and hereditary ministers called *Kazi*, and also by the advice of a resident British Political Officer. The state, which is less than the size of Wales, lies between 27 and 28 degrees north and 88 and 89 degrees east ; its population at the last census was 109,808 persons. It has no railways and no organised transport, but a motor road leads from the capital Gangtok into British India and there is a regular postal service. British India coinage is used.<sup>7</sup>

It is unnecessary for me to discuss in any detail the major policies of the State of Sikkim. The Maharajah is a fervent Buddhist and gives active encouragement to the lamas ; and with a couple of exceptions<sup>8</sup> there are no Christian missionaries in the state. There are only half-a-dozen resident Europeans in Sikkim ; and for Europeans to enter the state it is necessary to get permission from the political authorities of Gangtok or Darjeeling. Permission for a short visit of a fortnight or so is usually easily given, and Sikkim is a favourite spot for camping holidays among the inhabitants of the plains of India. There are a number of well-appointed *daik*-bungalows along the main routes and it is very seldom that travellers leave these routes. The chief reason for the partial closing of the State is that Sikkim acts as an, as it were, buffer state to Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. The frontiers to these completely closed States are relatively unguarded and much embarrassment and annoyance has been caused by adventurers or notoriety seekers entering those countries without permission. Consequently nowadays all applicants for passes to Sikkim have to make a written

<sup>7</sup> The basis of British India coinage is the rupee, a large silver coin worth a little over  $\frac{1}{4}$ , or about 32 American cents. The rupee is divided into sixteen annas, worth about a penny or two cents each ; there are coins of one, two, four and eight annas, of nickel. The anna is again subdivided into pice and pies, represented by small copper coins. Sums larger than one rupee are paper banknotes, worth Rs. 5, 10, 50, 100, etc. The silver content of the rupee is said to equal its purchasing power. The usual method of denoting sums in rupees is to place first the sign Rs. then the number of rupees, and a bar with on the right side the annas. Thus two rupees, eight annas is printed *Rs. 2/8*. As this method is already customary in works dealing with India, I am employing it in this book.

<sup>8</sup> For a great number of years the Hon. Mary Scott, D.D., has represented the Church of Scotland in Gangtok ; and I am told that there are a couple of women missionaries of the Finnish Churches in Lachung.



declaration that they will not pass the frontiers of Tibet, Bhutan or Nepal; those who break this obligation are liable to imprisonment and punishment if caught.

As far as I can see the State of Sikkim is well and paternally administered; the extremely precipitous nature of the whole country has rendered road-building extremely difficult; but the main mule roads into Tibet are kept up in a good state, and solid bridges have been built on these roads. Sikkim has few natural resources except for some small copper mines in the south and (as far as I could tell, undeveloped) large quantities of mica-bearing stone in the north. Sikkim is strategically important as being on the main road between Tibet and India, and nearly all the trade between the two countries passes through it. The Political Officer, assisted by trade agents inside the Tibetan frontier, overlooks this traffic; he also advises the Maharajah on questions of policy.

Since the middle of the last century Sikkim has been free from war and the fear of war, and its history has been as uneventful and as happy as the poorness of the country allows. The only diversion of a military nature in which Sikkim has been involved was the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa in 1905-06 in which several Sikkimese and Lepchas took part. In recent years there has been so great an immigration of Nepalis into Sikkim that it is probable that in the southern part of the country these invaders outnumber the original inhabitants; laws have been passed prohibiting their settling to the north of certain fixed points, but it is not certain to what extent these laws are enforced.

The pacification of the whole country through the British protectorate has given the Lepchas general security; besides abolishing slave-raiding it has also put an end to the mild peonage which formerly existed among the Lepchas themselves. One day in Lingthem the lama Jiroong, when he was rather drunk, embarked on a widely applauded panegyric of the beneficial influence of the British, and of their confirmation in power of the Maharajah. Before the English came, he said, we Lepchas were harried by Tibetans and Nepali and could not settle anywhere for fear we should be sold as slaves; now we have our homes and can cultivate our crops.

Jiroong himself is the descendant of former slaves. Some generations ago his ancestor, then a small boy, was kidnapped by Bhutanese; but the boy was rescued by the then head of the village

—Serving's father—and brought up as his peon. Such Lepcha slaves were either the children of slaves, orphans, or the children of very poor parents. A man would bring up such children and they in turn had to serve him all their lives. If the owner got a child on a female slave the child would be treated as his own, and, if a boy, would inherit, though a smaller portion than the legitimate sons. Slaves could only marry slaves, but otherwise were not distinguished by any special treatment; they received religious attention like ordinary people, and could not be sold or transferred. As in all other cases of emotional relationship among the Lepchas, there was no fixed or expected attitude between masters and slaves; if the master was kind, he was loved like a father. There was a fixed limit to the number of slaves one person could own.

A modification of this situation continues today. If there are children with nobody to look after them, as occasionally occurs, the head of the village, the Mandal, will take them into his household. When they are young they work for the Mandal like a servant, but when they grow up the Mandal arranges a marriage for them and they are then independent; there is at no time any coercion.

## iv

In some respects the Lepchas are in a different state to most groups hitherto described by anthropologists. A few studies have been made of tribes who have only had contact with other tribes in a similar state of development, but far and away the greater number had already been more or less seriously influenced by Occidental culture, either through colonisation, missionaries, or traders. Sometimes this external modification is taken into account, sometimes practically ignored; in either case the extent and direction of European influence is easily calculable and understandable. The Lepchas on the other hand have not been in any way directly exposed to European colonisation or missionary influence. Except for an occasional tourist to Talung monastery, and the passage of a couple of mountaineering expeditions attempting to climb Kinchenjunga, Europeans have not entered Zongu. A few of the men had seen Europeans prior to our arrival through trading expeditions to Gangtok and Darjeeling, but practically none of the women; they considered us 'amazing,' particularly on account of the colour of our skins and the shape of our noses.

Although they have not been influenced by Europeans the Lepchas have been very greatly influenced and their ways of life much modified by the contact and pressure of their more highly developed neighbours, the Sikkimese, the Nepali, and above all the Tibetans. The extent of this modification is almost incalculable, owing to the fact that there is no precise information available about these neighbouring societies. Tibet is, I suppose, the most written-about country in the world, but none of the literature that I know of is sufficiently detailed to allow comparisons between the Lepchas and any equivalent Tibetan group. Although there are many books on lamaism I have found none which describes the Lhatsun-pa subsect of the Nyingma-pa sect—the variation followed in Lingthem monastery—so that it is impossible to state definitely whether the Lepchas have ignored or considerably modified any aspect or aspects of the religion to which they have been converted. It is as though an investigator were trying to find out about Baptists and could only get information about Christianity in general, with some of the more obvious distinctions between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism noted.

With regard to the Sikkimese and non-Gurkha Nepali the situation is in some respects simpler ; there is practically no information of any sort available about them. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* published over forty years ago, contains some generalised statements about the habits of the Sikkimese ; and the writings<sup>9</sup> and conversation of Major C. J. Morris who had studied the Gurkha soldiers under his command have given me information on certain points. Despite this slight help it is impossible in nearly every instance to state with any sort of certainty whether a given custom, belief or story is confined to the Lepchas, is shared by them with some other tribe, or has been relatively recently introduced from without. On the whole the only available source of information has been Lepcha tradition. Until other tribes in the same area have been studied (and the fact that Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet are practically closed to Occidentals makes such studies in the near future problematical) precise questions of culture contact must remain unanswered.

The Lepchas are a mongoloid people, with, it would seem, slightly more pronounced Mongolian features, fairer complexions and greater stature than their present neighbours. Many of the children have carrotty or auburn hair, but the hair of adults is always

<sup>9</sup> *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Gurkhas*. By Major C. J. Morris. Delhi 1937.



dark brown or black. I took no measurements, for such behaviour would have been too disconcerting, but I calculate that the mean height for men is about 68 inches, the women being three or four inches shorter. The people are solidly and rather squarely built, with, like most mountain races, very strongly developed calves and leg muscles. The men, with the exception of the lamas, wear their hair in a long plait reaching down to the waist; the women also plait or braid their hair. Although the dresses of the two sexes differ in detail both wear skirt-like garments down to the knees with the legs and feet bare, and it is often extremely difficult to guess a person's sex when seen from behind. Very few Lepcha men have any facial hair, and when I have shown my photographs to friends there have usually been a great number of mistakes in the sex of the subjects.

## v

The first two stages of the road from Gangtok to Tibet are Dikchu and Singhik. The mule-road follows the left bank of the Teesta river; a little before Dikchu on the right bank starts the reserve of Zongu. About a mile before Singhik there is a tiny settlement called Mangan; it is situated about a thousand feet above the river. Mangan is a halting-place for muleteers going to and from Tibet; it is a small bazaar and contains the only stores within a radius of about twenty miles. There are half-a-dozen stores with a cheap stock of mixed goods; they are owned by members of the Indian Mahawari caste; their dealings with the Lepchas will be described later. There is also there a government-trained dispenser, a postmaster (the post from Gangtok is brought out twice weekly, on which days the post-office is open), an elementary schoolmaster, all these three government officials, a couple of Tibetan prostitutes for the use of the muleteers, and some liquor shops where the native commercial spirit, *arak*, can be bought. There are perhaps thirty houses.

Branching off from the main mule road on the left is a narrow and extremely precipitous path which descends to the Teesta; at this place the river is crossed by a plank bridge with steel supports; this has recently replaced the fragile and giddy-looking Lepcha bridge made entirely of bamboo, and represents the only permanent link between Zongu and the rest of Sikkim. For a little while the path on the other side skirts the river, passing on its way a substantial wooden shed which has been erected to receive the

cardamum fruit<sup>10</sup> at the time of harvest, and which some Lepchas hope will be converted into an elementary school. A little after this the track shoots sharply upwards, barely indicated by the presence of rocks and felled trees, running through poor and ragged stony ground sparsely sown with maize. The path leads directly to the crest of the hill which is surmounted by a small stone cairn or *choten*, perhaps three thousand feet above the river and five thousand above the sea-level. This cairn is almost opposite the junction of the Teesta and Talung rivers, and from it paths wander west and south, to the different villages of Zongu.

Proceeding westward from the cairn you reach in a couple of miles the small village of Panung; a couple more miles and you come to the village of Lingthem. Without our knowledge—we were only making for Zongu, and until the last hours believed that was the name of a village—it had been arranged that we were to stop there, and the first storey of the monastery had been placed at our disposal, in such a manner that it was almost impossible to refuse. As a place to live in the monastery suffered from several disadvantages; it was extremely cold and draughty, and fires were forbidden because the smoke would defile the images of the Gods; smoking was forbidden, except on the balcony which for my special benefit was temporarily considered outside holy precincts; the place was overrun with rats, which it would have been the greatest possible sin to kill in the monastery, and which could not be driven away supernaturally because none of the lamas knew the correct ritual, which involves the use of sand, ashes, and paper charms; there was never any privacy for at any time people might feel impelled to come to worship the images which were housed in this upper chamber, and regularly at dawn and sunset a young lama came to arrange the altars; and during big monastery feasts sleep was often impossible for two or three nights. But some of these disadvantages had compensating advantages; and as the focal centre of Lingthem, and to a lesser degree of the whole Talung side of Zongu, our living quarters were ideally situated for constant observation.

<sup>10</sup> Cardamum is the money crop of the Lepchas. Cardamum is a spice consisting of the seed-capsules of the perennial plants of a species of *Amomum* and is much used as a stomachic and condiment.



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