



**THE  
HIMALAYAN  
HERITAGE**

**M.K. RAHA**

# THE HIMALAYAN HERITAGE

*Prof. A. C. Sinha*

*Edited with An Introduction*  
by  
**MANIS KUMAR RAHA**



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## INTRODUCTION

The vast mountainous tract of the Himalayas in India, with its varying ecological conditions, has not only acted as the centre for meditation for the sages, saints and other holy men, but also has given shelter to a large number of ethnic groups with diverse cultural identity and social formations. These ethnic groups have organised their life and activities in these terrains over a long stretch of time. For centuries most parts of the Himalayas were almost out of reach to the outside world. Thus the inhabitants were able to keep their life style and tradition undisturbed. They could master the difficulties created by the inhospitable environment of the rugged, unkempt, mountainous terrains of the Himalayas they dwell, and could adapt themselves accordingly for their mere survival. The culture built by these sturdy denizens of the Himalayas in such an environment is somewhat different from that prevalent in the plains areas. This difference in their culture exists not only in their material life but also in various other aspects of their life such as economy, social organisation, political activities, religious beliefs and practices and even in their value-judgement. This has happened in spite of the little contact that was maintained by both the mountain dwellers and the inhabitants of the plains.

The human habitations in the Himalayas are spread over different altitudes. Considering the ecological characteristics of different altitudinal position the human habitations in the Himalayas may be classified into three zones—(i) high altitude habitation (above 8000 ft above mean sea level) (ii) middle altitude habitation (between 5000 ft to 8000 ft above mean sea



level) (iii) lower altitude and foothill habitations (below 5000 ft above mean sea level).

The high altitude habitations have an arid or semi-arid climate. The vegetation growth here is quite low. The area is inhabited mostly by the Bhot, Bhotia, Bhutia or Bodh or such group of people having Buddhism as their religion. It is a generic name and includes people inhabiting high altitude regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Chamoli, Uttar Kashi, Pithoragarh, Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti and Leh areas. Here settlements are very small in size and situated on the hill slopes or on a small patch of a flat land. The people are mostly mongoloid in character and depend more on pastoralism, but less on agriculture. A few of them are hunters and gatherers. They lead a nomadic or transhumant mode of life. Cultivation is done on small patches of unfertile terraces and inferior cereals are produced. Irrigation mostly depends on snowfall as water sources like springs, streams are very few and rainfall is very insignificant or nil. Earlier, during pre-Indo-China conflict era (1962) many of them had trade link with Tibet, trade was one of their main sources of income. Another interesting character of some of the people here is the seasonal migration. During winter when agricultural activities are suspended because of the severe winter and heavy snowfall, many of them migrate to down hills or even plains with their livestock. They return to summer settlements with the approach of summer season. In the past they used to make tribes to Tibet for trade during summer season. People here are mostly Buddhists as already said, and this area could be treated as the last stronghold of Buddhism in India. Buddhism is surviving here ignoring the threat of the post-Buddhist Hindu renaissance and also the influence of Islam and Christianity. Polyandry and primogeniture are the basic societal profiles of many of them. In pre-independence era they had very little contact with the people of the plains even with the lower hills. With the development of modern communication and transport systems, they are now coming in regular contact with the people of down hills and the plains thereby the long preserved traditions indicate signs of rapid change. People inhabiting this zone include the Monpa, the Khamba, the Ramos, the Pailibe, the Boojar Bori,



the Bokar, the Tagin, the Sulung and others of Arunachal Pradesh. In Sikkim the high altitude dwellers are mostly the Bhutia. In the Central Himalayas only the Bhot or Bhotia and the Anwals reside in the high altitude valleys. In Jammu and Kashmir the Bodh or Bhot, the Argon, the Dard, the Mon, the Gara, the Beda and others of Leh and Zaskar areas and the Shia Muslims of Kargil are high altitude dwellers. The Bodh of Spiti, the Zad of Kinnaur, the Pangwala of Pangi valley (Chamba) belong to the high altitude zones of Himachal Pradesh.

In the middle altitude zone reside a large number of tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh, namely, the Aka, the Apatani, the Miniang, the Sherdukpen and others, both tribal (the Bhotia and the Lepcha) and caste groups in Sikkim and Darjeeling. In the Central Himalayas mostly the Hindu castes and a few tribes like the Jaunsari and the Raji (the Jaunsaris of Jaunsar-Bower area of Dehra Dun district though a scheduled tribe, yet basically include the Brahmin, the Rajput and different lower castes) inhabit in this zone. This zone in the Western Himalayas is resided by the Muslims, various Hindu castes and some non-mongoloid tribals. The caste groups here lack some important caste characters as prevalent among the caste groups of the plains. The people living here follow Hinduism or Islam except a few who have accepted Buddhism. The settlements here are either agglomerated or dispersed type and situated on the hill slopes or on the valleys. The inhabitants are mostly agriculturists. There are some tribal groups (of Arunachal Pradesh) who practise shifting cultivation. Some groups in this middle altitude zone depend on pastoralism and lead transhumant life, while a few others are hunters and gatherers. For irrigation they depend on rainwater though irrigational facilities are also available. Monogamy is the general rule though polyandry is also practised only in a few pockets like Jaunsar-Bower (Dehra Dun), Purula (Uttar Kashi), Rewin-Jaunpur area (Tehri) of U.P. and Sirmur district of Himachal Pradesh. The people of this middle altitude zone always keep contact with high altitude people on one hand and plains on the other. A large number of developmental and constructional works have brought new



dimension in this region and have given the people a new meaning of life.

The lower altitude and foothill areas have accommodated a number of tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh such as the Pasi, the Padam, the Nocte, the Wancho and others, both tribes and caste groups (the Nepalese) in Sikkim and Darjeeling, a large number of caste groups like the Garhwali and the Kumaon castes, tribes like the Bhotia, the Bhoksa and the Tharu and some Muslims in U.P. hill districts, mostly caste people in Himachal Pradesh and both Hindu and Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir. People here are followers of either Hinduism or Islam, of course in Arunachal Pradesh mostly they follow tribal religion or christianity and in Sikkim and Darjeeling both Buddhism and Hinduism. The settlements are built on the flat land, hill sides or on the valleys. The size of the settlement is quite big and usually multicasite in nature. People here are mostly land owners or landless cultivators. Some of them are labourers also. Irrigation depends on rainfall, river and canal water. Shifting cultivators, pastoral nomads and hunter-gatherers are non-existent. Monogamy is the general practice among them though the trace of polygyny is also not wholly uncommon. Polyandry is totally absent. The people here have larger interaction with the people of the plains and this has compelled them to imbibe 'culture of the plains'. The caste groups here bear most of the caste characters as are prevalent in the plains areas.

With his brief observation on the cultural dimensions of the people living in three different altitudinal zones, let us now shift our attention to the cultural variability that exists between the Eastern, the Central and the Western Himalayas and delineate the cultural parameters of the people living there.

The culture of the Eastern Himalayas is basically a 'tribal' culture. The whole of Arunachal Pradesh, where over one hundred ethnic groups (scheduled tribes) live, has a distinct tribal culture. Some of the numerically important tribal groups are the Abor, the Aka, the Apatani, the Bagi, the Bangni, the Bokar, the Dufia, the Deovi, the Karka, the Khampti, the Miji, the Millang, the Miniyong, the Miri, the Mishmi, the Momba, the Monpa, the Nishang, the Nissi, the Nocte, the Padam, the



Simong, the Sulung, the Tagin, the Tangsa, the Wancho and others. Of these tribal people those who live in the high altitude zone are Buddhist by religion though these Buddhists along with other tribal groups follow basically a distinct tribal culture. Some others who have embraced christianity, have also distinct tribal cultural base.

Similarly the Lepchas and the Bhutias of both Sikkim and Darjeeling have distinct 'tribal' base though they profess Buddhism. Of course unlike Arunchal both Sikkim and Darjeeling have a large number of Nepali castes like the Rai, the Limbu, the Newar, the Magar, the Gurung, the Chettris, the Sunwar, the Tamang, the Damais, the Kami, the Sarki and others. The term Bhutia in both areas is a generic name of a number of ethnic groups like the Sherpa, the Yolmo, the Kagate, the Dukpa and others.

But when we reach the Central and the Western Himalayas we find these 'tribal' culture groups living in the high Himalayas do not show the so called 'tribal' cultural features except one or two ethnic groups like the Raji of Pithoragarh. Even the 'scheduled tribes' of both Uttar Pradesh (the Bhotia, the Raji, the Jaunsaris, the Bhoksa and the Tharu) and Himachal Pradesh (the Lahaula, the Swangla, the Jad or Bhot, the Pangwala, the Gaddi, the Kinnaura and the Gujjar) do not bear any major tribal characteristics. Rather many caste characters are distinct among most of them. The Gaddi include different castes like the Brahmin, the Rajput, and the Dom groups who include different artisan untouchables, the Kinnaura or Kinnara similarly do not mean a distinct ethnic group but cover the Khosia or Kanet, the Koli, the Lohars, the Badhi and the Nangalu. Identically the Jaunsaris identify the Rajput, the Brahman, the Kolta and some other lower castes. The 'caste system' is prevalent all over U.P. Hills, Himachal Pradesh and some areas of Jammu and Kashmir regions. Even the high altitude Buddhists living in Leh and Zaskar regions of Jammu and Kashmir, Spiti and parts of Lahaul of Lahaul and Spiti district and Pooh sub-division of Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh and the Jad or the Bhotia of Uttarkashi are closer to the caste fold. The Bhotias of other two areas, Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts of Uttar Pradesh are mostly Hindus.



It is thus seen that the Himalayan culture bears both altitudinal and regional dimensions; different altitudes, high, middle and low, have distinct cultural entity. The regional culture of the Eastern Himalayas is quite different from that of the Central and Western Himalayas. While the Eastern Himalayan culture is basically a 'tribal' culture, the same of the Central Himalayas bears the 'caste' characters. In the Western Himalayas while we find the same 'caste' feature all over, in some parts both 'caste' and 'Islamic' cultural features co-exist.

## II

As our readers have already seen that I have divided the whole of the Himalayas into three distinct regions, the Eastern Himalayas, the Central Himalayas and the Western Himalayas. These divisions have been made basing on the diversity of the culture of the people living there and not purely on geographical or geological consideration. I have included under the Eastern Himalayas, the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The Central Himalayas cover all the eight hill districts of Uttar Pradesh, namely, Tehri, Pauri, Uttar Kashi, Chamoli, Dehru Dun, Nainital, Almora and Pithoragarh. Of these former five districts come under Garhwal Division and the latter three form Kumaon Division. Our Western Himalayas have included the states of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. My classification of the Indian Himalayas is mostly based, as already stated, on the socio-cultural features of the region, and thus may not coincide with the geographical or geological classification of the Himalayas. The geographers and the geologists may dispute this classification.

## III

I have incorporated altogether twentyseven articles in this book. Of these I have included seven articles under the heading the Eastern Himalayan Perspective. Of these seven articles four are from Arunachal Pradesh covering four tribes, viz., the Wancho, the Khamti, the Kamang Mishmi and the Sherdukpen. These four articles have focussed various aspects of culture of some Arunachal tribes. The two articles from Sikkim, discuss two important aspects of the Sikkimese culture.



One discusses the political activities there while the other is about the traditional arts and crafts which are gradually vanishing. In both articles ethnicity and identity of the Sikkimese have been dealt with. The Lepchas have represented the lone hilly district of West Bengal—Darjeeling. The author has dealt with the Lepcha socio-economic life.

Largest number of articles have come from the Central Himalayas. There are twelve articles in this part. These articles have covered almost all hill districts of Uttar Pradesh except Nainital. A glance in the contents of the articles shows that these articles have covered various aspects of the culture of the ethnic groups like the Bhotia the Kumaoni (the Rajput), the Jaunsari, the Rajput of Rewain-Jaunpur (Tehri) and Purula (Uttar Kashi) and the Garhwali. Though I have covered the varied aspects of culture of this region, I have given stress, for obvious reasons, on the *chipko* movement, the movement that started over a decade ago for the preservation of environment and keeping ecological balance in the Himalayas which later on has stirred the mind of people at the local, regional, national and even international levels. While I have included two articles from two protagonists of this movement, two other articles pertain to two research papers. All these four articles on the *chipko* movement have touched various dimensions of this apolitical movement for the preservation of the Himalayan environment and resources.

Eight different articles have covered the Western Himalayas. Five of these articles are from Himachal Pradesh and three from Jammu and Kashmir. In Himachal Pradesh districts of Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti have been covered and in Jammu and Kashmir districts of Leh, Kargil and Srinagar have been highlighted. Through these articles three religious groups, the Muslims, the Hindus and the Buddhists have been covered. Ethnically the people covered in these articles are the Gaddi of Chamba, the Khasa (Kanet) and Jad of Kinnaur, the Lahaula and the Bodh of Lahaul and Spiti, the Shia Muslims of Kargil, the Sunni Muslims of Kashmir Valley and the Bodh of Leh and Zaskar of the erstwhile Ladakh.

The contributors of this volume are all eminent scholars of different disciplines like anthropology, sociology, political



science, linguistics, psychology, comparative religion etc. All of them have long experience of the Himalayan region and understanding of the Himalayan culture. They have depicted their experience and understanding about the people of the Himalayas and their culture in these thought provoking and interesting articles.

#### IV

My interest in bringing out this book on the Himalayas is of two fold. One is to fill up the gap on the study of the Himalayan culture and secondly to move a step ahead in building a new discipline of the Himalayan studies.

Though I worked among the Lepcha and the Bhutia of Darjeeling district as early as mid-sixties my actual Himalayan study began in the first quarter of 1970 when I took up a research project in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India. Thereafter I was involved directly or indirectly, in different other research projects on the Western and the Central Himalayas. My experience gave me this idea that the Great Himalayas stretching from Jammu and Kashmir in the north-west to Arunachal Pradesh in the north-east are not well represented in the anthropo-sociological literature. The lack of adequate anthropo-sociological materials on the Indian Himalayas has created a gap in professional understanding of this region.

The second reason of my editing this book on the Himalayas is to contribute a little towards building up a new discipline of the Himalayan studies. The Great Himalayas have a distinct culture, a distinct entity, much different from the culture of the plains and even other hill people of other parts of the world. This distinct culture of the Himalayas, surviving in peculiar eco-systems for centuries, requires to be studied thoroughly and methodically. A multi-disciplinary approach would help in bringing out various facts of the Himalayan culture and help in building up the discipline of the Himalayan Studies.



**SECTION ONE**

**THE EASTERN HIMALAYAN PERSPECTIVE**

## CHAPTER I

# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE WANCHOS OF TIRAP DISTRICT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

P. C. DUTTA

### *Introduction*

The Wanchos of Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh are one of the various tribes composing the 3.7 lakhs population of the Territory. Their homeland is the western part of the district on the border of Nagaland. The Patkai hills form the southern border while Sibsagar district of Assam is in the north. To their east live the Noctes, a tribe well known for their frequent contact with the plains since the Ahom days. Upto the time of the British administration the Wanchos were known as the Nagas of the East or the Banforia Nagas. During the Ahom days they were called the Bar Mithunias, Haru Mithunias, Banerias, Bor Banchang, and Haru Banchang and so on. The name Wancho became popular only after the administration of the area was taken over by our own government. The massacre of the Survey party led by Captain Badgley and Lieutenant Holcomb, in the Wancho village of Ninu (also called Nginu) more than a century ago, has brought the Wanchos into prominence even though they were known as headhunters earlier. Closer contact with this tribe was made only when various developmental programmes were taken up by the Government.

The Wancho society is characterized by the existence of class distinction, a system uncommon amongst tribal people.







Social distinction between these classes is very clearly recognizable in every sphere of life. For example, in the village festivals, the Wangpans are not allowed to take their meal sitting in the same row with the Wanghams. They are also not allowed to marry girls from the Wangham family, though there is no restriction on the part of a Wangham to marry a Wangpan girl. The Wanghams, Wangsas and Wangsus practically control the village, in which the Wangpans have no say. Leaving aside all these internal classifications the Wanchos in general are a very simple homogenous tribe, having less variation in their general outlook and culture, though the linguistic difference, which is a common factor with the hill tribes, is remarkable.

With this general introduction about the formation of the society we will now go into some of their social institutions.

### *Family*

The smallest unit of the Wancho society is the family, consisting of the father, the mother and their children. This nuclear unit transforms into an extended family when the sons get married and stay under the same roof forming a bigger household.

The grown-up boys of the family sleep apart in the *morung*. There is of course, no separate *morung* for girls who sleep in the houses of some widows not related by blood. An exception to this is found in the chief's families, where girls cannot go to sleep elsewhere but in a separate compartment in the chief's house itself meant for them called *nausa-jip-ham*.

Finally, the family breaks up when the parental roof becomes insufficient to accommodate all the persons including the married sons, their wives and offsprings. In such cases, the married sons establish their individual households except the eldest one who by custom, continues to live in the parental house to support the family and the old parents. Even after marriage, the other sons sometimes stay with the father, till they have two to three issues when they depart. Though the sons establish separate households yet the attachment and the general tie of the of relationship never ceases to exist throughout their lifetime. Girls, however, depart from the family after their marriage and also when they become pregnant. According



to the custom the delivery cannot take place in the father's house.

While living in a common household, all the members take their meal from a common hearth. The food is cooked by the mother, or by the wife of the eldest son, if the mother is too old. In case of the chiefs, who generally marry more than one wife, the system is a bit different. There is a particular wife, called *chatonnu*, who cooks for the chief, and the other wives take their meals at individual hearth. Each wife of a chief has her separate accommodation called *noi* in the same house.

All the members work together for the common cause of the family.

In the chief's family also all members except the Wangsia married from another chief's family work in the field to earn their livelihood.

#### *Family Property and Rules of Inheritance*

All movable and immovable properties, such as cultivable land, bamboo groves and palm leaf (*tokopat*) gardens, livestock, granary, utensils, ornaments and guns are held in common by the family. The father who is the head of the family, is the sole owner of the property, though the other members can also show their attachment to them. Authority over the property lies with the father and is inherited by the eldest son after his death. The female members have no claim over the family property excepting the articles given to a girl in her marriage, which are her own. Besides the family property, the individual members can possess individual property, which is confined to the bare requirement of a person. Such articles are given as grave-goods after the death of a person. This is to say that the personal effects are one's own and are not left behind to be inherited by others. No property held by the family, can be sold or distributed without the expressed permission of the head of the family.

Primogeniture is the general rule of inheritance, and the eldest son becomes the sole heir of the property. When the family breaks up due to the establishment of separate households by the other sons, the family property is never distributed. The sons also cannot demand or claim any part of the family property. But the eldest brother who inherits the property, generally



gives shares till the parting brothers become self-sufficient. At the time of establishing separate households, they are helped with all the requirements, including plots of land for cultivation. Girls do not get any nor can they exercise authority over property. A girl is entitled only to the ornaments, clothings, one basket, one scraper, one iron stick, one *dao* and the grass rain-cover which are given to her at marriage. Even at her husband's house, she cannot claim authority over the property of the husband.

### *Kinship System*

The Wancho society is patrilineal. They reckon their relationship through the male line. But an analysis of the kinship terms reveals that their system of kinship terminology is a classificatory one, where they recognise the cognatic persons, as well as affinal relatives. Most of the terms are applied to persons of both cognatic and affinal relationships. Only a few terms are used to denote some particular persons, which are generally not applied to others. For example, *apa* and *ao* are terms for father and mother respectively which are not applied in case of other persons of one's father's and mother's age. Similarly, *pachong*—father's elder brother, *apasa*—father's younger brother, *nisongnu*—father's elder sister, *nosongsa*—father's younger sister, *hosongsa*—mother's younger brother, *aonu*—mother's elder sister, *konaupa*—younger sisters's husband, *minu*—wife, *mipa*—husband, *nauli*—wife's younger brother, *naupa*—husband's younger brother's wife, are the terms which are not applied to mean any other persons, than those whom they denote.

The terms applied to one's own elder and younger brothers, are also applied to certain other collateral relatives.

Persons, who are junior in age, for example, one's son, daughter, elder or younger brother's or sister's son and daughter, younger brother's wife mother's brother's daughter, wife's younger brother, wife's father's sister's daughter, grand children are generally addressed by name, though they are referred to others by the term. Some persons of both father's and mother's sides are also grouped in one class and a common term is applied to all of them.



Responsibility and behaviour, towards each other in a particular group denoted by a common term, varies according to the degree of affinity and relationship. The term *hosong*, applied to the mother's elder brother, is also applied to the father-in-law of both husband and wife.

Thus it appears that the maternal uncle enjoys similar honour like the father-in-law and is entitled to a certain portion of the bride-price. The existence of cross-cousin marriage of MBD type is hereby indicated.

Again, both parallel and cross-cousins are denoted by common terms, but marriage with the cross-cousin is permitted whereas, parallel-cousin marriage is not only forbidden, but is also considered a crime.

The kinship terms vary to some extent amongst the different *jans*, according to the dialectical variation though all fall within the general framework of classificatory system.

### *Clan Organization*

A study of the clan organization shows that the two original groups or classes, Wanghams and Wangpans, are based on the union of a number of exogamous clans. These clans, locally called *jans*, can more conveniently be called lineage groups, as the very name of the clan signified the names of the families and ancestors from whom the members have descended. It is an obvious fact that most of the tribal people identify themselves with the name of the ancestors and the families to whom they belong.

Amongst the Maujan group, the two main sub-groups are Wangjans and Panjans, corresponding to Wanghams and Wangpans respectively. The Wangjans have three main clans or lineage groups namely Wangjan (the chief's clan), Khama-hamjan and Sanjahamjan. Similarly the Panjans have six different clans, namely, Wangnauhamjan, Nganam(ham)jan, Lo hamjan, Look hamjan, Jo long hamjan and Poi hamjan. Of these clans, the women of Nga hamjan, Lo hamjan, Look hamjan and Poi hamjan cut their hair short.

At Pongchaw also there are two main groups, Wangas and Pansas. The Wangsa group has five clans, namely Wangsa, Wangsu, Dok ham, Wangnauham and Ting loi-sajan, whereas



the Pansa group has only three—Wangpanjan, Agihamjan and Wangnauhamjan.

A large number of clans are found amongst the Nijans, the villages under the chiefs of Nimu. At Longkei, the chief's groups has four main clans and the Pansa—seventeen. The clans of the chief's group are, Wangham, Kamsa Wangham, Kamsa Kamsa-ham, and Sinju-ham, and the Pansa clans are—Baunu-ham, Paina-ham, Ganunu-ham, Gannu-ham, Hau fan gan-ham, Khi-ham, Sang-ham, Kham-ham, Gi-ham, Sankoi-ham, Khang-ham, Na-ham, Fangto-ham, Hamoi Napu-ham, Khangnu pa-ham, Nagopa-ham and Khangpa-ham. Of these Khangnu pa-ham, Gannu-ham, Sankoi-ham and Gi-ham are regarded as superior clans amongst the Pansas.

Another peculiarity of the organization is found at Wakka. Here the village has two divisions Singki and Singkhov. Besides the main chief of the village, each division also has its own chief called Singki Gangham and Singkhov Gangham respectively. The people of the chief's group are called Gangsa, and the commoners, Pansa. The Gangsa group has eleven clans, and the Pansa, fourteen.

A study of the different clan groups reveals that the Wancho clans can more conveniently be called lineage groups. An analysis of the different clan names clarifies that the first name indicates the name of the ancestor from whom the family name is derived, the second word *ham* means house, and the last word *jan* means the group rather than clan. For example, Khama ham-jan means people of the Khama's house. Similar is the case with all other *jan* names.

Moreover, if the two groups, Wang-jan and Panjan, are taken as forming two lineage groups, all other smaller groups can very well be considered as sub-lineages. There is sufficient reason also to consider the smaller groups as sub-lineages because one of the important characters found is that marriage between Wangjan males and Panjan females can always take place, but not conversely. Another factor is that these different groups do not also possess a common plot of land—an important feature to be considered in clan organization. Whatever may be the case, it is important to note that these groups regularise the marriage organization of the Wanchos. There are particular



groups between whom only, marriage can take place.

Descendants of each group closely identify themselves as relatives and many taboos and restrictions are observed between the members of a particular group.

### *Life Cycle*

A Wancho from the very day of his coming into the world to the last moment of leaving it and even after that, passes through many rituals and ceremonies, performed in different spheres of life for various occasions and purposes. These rituals, ceremonies, feasts and festivities make their life more romantic, charming, virile and picturesque. They are happy and cheerful with their own way of life, content with their mode of living. The rituals and ceremonies performed in different spheres of life together contribute to the formation of the Wancho culture.

### *Pregnancy and Birth*

The security of matrimonial union between a husband and his wife, amongst the Wanchos, depends mostly on the number of children she can bear to him. A barren woman is not only looked down upon, but also divorced soon after she is found to be so, or it will lead to polygyny, if she is not divorced. As a matter of fact, procreation is found to be one of the reasons of marriage to which the Wanchos give more importance.

The idea of conception is common amongst all the different *jans* of the Wanchos, in that they believe that some measure of God's blessings will help in the formation of a baby in the womb of a woman, along with physical intercourse.

Though premarital sexual relationship is not restricted and remains an open secret, yet a girl's pregnancy is socially recognised and considered legal, only when conception takes place after the performance of the usual marriage rites. It is however, a common practice for the husband to cohabit with the wife in her mother's house or in the *morung* where she sleeps, though they never disclose the fact to others. At the time of confinement, however, she goes to her husband's house where delivery must take place.

During pregnancy a Wancho woman has to observe many restrictions and taboos in regard to food and movement. Even



after delivery, there are certain restrictions to be observed for a short period.

### *Ceremonies after Delivery*

After the birth of a child, a number of ceremonies are performed.

On the 6th day after delivery a ceremony called *nauman mania o'* is performed, when the hair of the child is shaved. In the early morning the father accompanied by a few male members of the family and clan, goes to the nearby river for fishing and tries to bring at least a few fishes. An expert called *khau gu manu* shaves the hair of the baby before the party returns from fishing.

After hair-cutting, the name-giving ceremony is performed. This is called *nauman*. An old man, called *taikia*, observes the divination with some jungle leaves, uttering the names of the deceased persons of the family, either in the male or in the female line, according to the sex of the child. If the divination is found to be inauspicious with a particular name, several names are uttered, and the one which the divination indicated as good, is kept. The name is disclosed by a particular woman, called *gamnu* who is remunerated with rice beer, meat and a basketful of cooked rice, but the diviner is not given anything. A feast is arranged on this day, with rice-beer, cooked rice and meat, a pig being killed for the purpose.

Then comes the day of *naugam*, the ceremonial visit of the relatives of the girl's side on the seventh day. On this day the relatives of the girl come to visit the house and the new born child. They bring with them about a dozen rats and one fish and give these to the members of the girl's husband's family. The relatives are entertained with rice-beer and meat.

The 8th day called *kanju*. On this day the child is taken out to the front porch of the house. A male child is carried by a boy and a female by a girl.

On the 10th day, the mother can go to the water-point to wash herself properly and to fetch water.

On the 11th day, the child is taken to the nearby cultivable land where the mother offers a little quantity of rice-beer to the deity of the field. But this depends on the result of the divina-



tion observed by an expert. If the result is not favourable, the child is not taken outside the house. The period upto 11th day is *genna* for the child. The death of a child within this period is considered abnormal. The *genna* period is called *nan mocha*.

Another ceremony, called *nau thom*, is performed between the age of one to three months when cooked rice is placed in the child's mouth ceremonially by the maternal grandparents for the first time. On this day, the parents of the mother, and the uncle and aunt (mother's side) are specially invited. The uncle brings some cooked rat meat for presentation. They are entertained with cooked rice, rice-beer and meat, for which a pig is killed. The parents of the girl first put the rice in the child's mouth.

On the following day, the girl goes to her parents' house where a feast is arranged by the parents to feed her. It is a great pleasure on the part of the parents to see their daughter becoming a mother. This is called *fong sa wang*. Only after these two ceremonies can the girl eat elsewhere. She returns from her parents' house on the same day.

### *Marriage*

In the Wancho society much freedom is given to young boys and girls; they can mix freely with each other without any reservation, but observing only the rules of clan exogamy. Boys and girls of different clans select their friends freely and meet each other generally in the place where the young girls sleep. This unrestricted mixing helps them in selecting their partners of life. The girls are, however, not allowed to enter the boys *morungs* but the boys usually and regularly meet their girl-friends in private houses where they collect.

In most cases marriage is arranged by the parents, though young people are at liberty to have their own choice.

### *Rules of Marriage*

Clan exogamy is the fundamental and basic rule of marriage. Intra-clan marriage is considered to be a serious crime. If any one violates this rule and marries within his own clan he will not only be ex-communicated but also be exterminated. Their clans are exogamous, but the tribe itself is endo-



gamous, and marriages are mostly confined to the same village excepting in the case of the chiefs, who by custom has to marry at least one wife from another village.

Monogamy in the general rule, but polygynous marriage is also prevalent among the chiefs. The polygynous marriage appears to be to show the importance, personal influence and power of the chief concerned, and to have enough hands to work in the cultivable field. There is no restriction on the part of the commoners in having more than one wife, though this depends mainly on the economic condition of the person concerned. Besides, class-endogamy is also very apparent by which a boy must marry a girl of his own status, else the children will belong to a lower social class.

The children of the chief's families should normally marry into other chief's families in villages outside their own village groups or *jans*. This rule, however, does not apply to any group other than the Wanghams. The commoners are to marry from their own village.

#### *Types of Marriage*

Marriage with cross cousins is the most favourite and widely practised type. A man may marry his mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter, who by custom are considered as potential mates. In the absence of a mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter, a youth selects his mate from outside.

Widow marriage is prevalent but sororal polygyny is not allowed. A man can marry the sister of his deceased wife, but not during her life time.

Marriage by exchange of sisters is also prevalent and it is considered to be the best type. This type of marriage is called *songlai-mainlai* (Wakka).

#### *Forms of Marriages*

Negotiation between parents is the common form of marriage in vogue amongst the Wanchos. Betrothal is done during the young age of a girl. Examples of betrothal even prior to delivery are also found in many cases, where the father of both the boy and the girl extend their willingness. In such



cases, of course, the marriage may not take place afterwards.

Besides negotiation, love marriage is also widely practised. Love marriage takes place as a result of free mixing and free choice of the youthful couples, who make most of the arrangements by themselves. When both the partners decide to marry each other, parents are considered.

Sometimes love marriage leads to elopement, when the young couple fail to obtain the consent of their respective parents. They take shelter in some neighbouring villages; they return to their own village to establish a new household when their parents are found to be agreeable.

### *Age of Marriage*

There is no fixed age of marriage, but child marriage is not prevalent and never practised; only adult marriage is in vogue. Marriage takes place when both boys and girls have become sufficiently grown-up and attained the ability to run a household independently, and to work in the agricultural field.

To confirm the attainment of different stages of life, girls are tattooed in different designs and on different parts of the body. When such tattoo marks are put on the calf, a girl is considered betrothed, and other boys generally do not cut jokes nor mix freely with her.

### *Marriage Procedure and Rituals*

Marriage finalised after the negotiation between parents is performed through the regular procedure, social customs, rituals and ceremonies. In levirate, sororate and love marriages no such ceremonies and rituals are performed, but achieved at the sweet will of the partners, keeping in view the general rule of clan exogamy.

In love marriages, exchanges of gifts of *pan* (betel and nut) is of foremost importance. Acceptance of *pan* offered by a boy or a girl indicates willingness on the part of either person to accept him or her as mate, just as refusal means unwillingness, and marriage cannot then take place between them.

### *Marriage by Negotiation*

Marriage is called *siko asamle* or *minulam* and the process



of negotiation, *onupa kakole* or *nausa kam*. Negotiation is carried out between the parents after the betrothal in the young age of the boy and the girl. At first the betrothal remains limited to verbal discussion only and when the girl attains the age of five years or so the mother of the girl puts tattoo marks of two cross lines over the umbellious. After the girl becomes sufficiently grown up, a ceremony called *hawanle* or *toi-mon-mok* is performed. A day is selected by the parents in consultation with the diviners. The girl accompanied by some of her friends goes to her proposed husband's house on this day carrying a basketful of fuel. A feast is arranged at the boy's house for the occasion. After the feast she comes back to her own house. From this day onward, she can freely talk to and associate with the boy and on all festival days can visit that house and even spend a night or two. She is considered, earmarked for the boy, and cannot be married by any other person. Similarly, the boy pays frequent visits to the girl and they may indulge in sexual intercourse also. When the girl conceives tattooing known as *be-huta* on the thigh is done. A feast is arranged on the occasion to which relatives are invited. After this the girl is taken to the boy's house, accompanied by relatives and friends. There too, a feast is arranged and for this, articles such as cooked rice, fish, rice-beer and cooked pork, etc., are taken from the girl's house. Tattooing on the breasts of the girl is done on this day at the bridegroom's house. This tattooing is called *kha-huta*.

The articles are carried by four persons of the girl's family. The parents of the girl also go together. The bridal party returns but the bride stays behind. After staying for about a week or so in the groom's house, the bride pays a visit one day to her parents. She brings with her some articles of food such as cooked rice, rice-beer and meat, etc. from her husband's house. These articles brought from the boy's house, are shared by all the relatives of the girl. Thus, exchange of articles of food continues for three times, after which only the marriage is cemented. Every time the girl visits her parents she takes such articles from her husband's house and also carries back similar articles of equal quantity from her parent's house.

At the time of marriage the girl takes with her the following articles from her parents—bead necklaces, *endi* (silk) cloth, a few



pieces of white 'markin' cloth, armlets, bangles, a basket, a *dao*, a sleeping mat and seeds of arum, millet and paddy.

There is no ritual performed to indicate the marriage, other than tattooing done at different stages. The days are selected by a ceremonial process of divination.

The marriage procedure is a bit different in case of the chiefs and involves some more rituals. The chiefs and their sons and daughters by custom take their partners from villages other than their own village group.

The negotiation between two chiefs' families is undertaken after observing divination, performed by *opa* with an egg. If only the portents are good, the negotiation starts, otherwise the case is dissolved. The process is called *chule*. Thereafter a party is sent to the chief's house to negotiate for the Wangsa—which is called *wangsa kaje yang*. They meet the parents of Wangsa and express their desire. If the girl's parents also agree, a day is selected to send out the Wangsa, which is called *ham nap Wangang*. On this day a feast is arranged at the groom's house. A buffalo or a mithun and a pig are killed for the feast. Sufficient-rice beer is prepared. The bride is accompanied by a large party, and the whole village accompanies her up to the village boundary. A mithun or a buffalo with several *chungas* or rice-beer is taken to the groom's house along with the bride. The villagers from the groom's village also come forward to the village boundary to welcome the bride. From the point where the groom's party welcomes the bride, all articles brought from the bride's house are carried by the groom's party. Before entering the groom's house, a dog is killed just at the entrance by an old man from the bride's party. He utters some ritual incantations at the time of sacrificing the dog. He is presented with a *dao* by the groom. The groom offers a feast to all the members present on that occasions. After the feast the inhabitants of both villages dance and sing in the night. Next day the bride's party returns and the bride stays in the groom's house for a day or two more, during which dancing and feasting continue.

A presentation of *dao* and *endi* cloth by the groom to all persons both male and female, who accompany the bride symbolises the grooms respect for the guests. Moreover the



*wangsampa* or the persons who carry out the negotiation and perform all other functions for the chief are also presented on this day. The one who does all the work when the chief dies is the *wangda*.

The girl after this ceremony, continues to visit the groom's house, and every time she pays a visit, she is accompanied by a few girls who carry articles of food such as rice-beer, rice and meat.

Tattooing, in case of the chief's daughters does not signify the different states of marriage though it is done at different stages of life.

Among the Wanchos, there is no system of paying brideprice or dowry but presentation of articles such as *endi* cloth, rice-beer, *pan* and meat is made at the time of negotiation and actual marriage. But in case of love marriage and elopement, where the parents do not agree, some amount of fine in cash as well as in kind is imposed on the boy who marries the girl. There is also a custom of giving presents to the girl by the boy. The presentation is made after negotiation and before actual marriage, and is continued for three years consecutively. Articles such as baskets for paddy and fuel, and armband made of coloured cane, are included in the present. In return the girl also gives ear ornaments of wool and chains of the fine slip of reed made by herself.

After completion of negotiation with due observance of the usual customs, the girl concerned, cannot be married by any other person. If the girl elopes with some other person than the one for whom she has been negotiated, the matter takes a very serious turn and may lead to a feud. If such a thing happened in the case of a chief's daughter it used to lead to head hunting, in the old days. Nowadays, the village council imposes a heavy fine on the offender which amounts to payment of a portion of cultivable land, gun, gong, and palm groves. Instances of such offences are very rare nowadays but in the old days it was one of the causes of head hunting.

Illicit connection with girls, if exposed, is dealt similarly but it is more seriously viewed when a person has such relations with a married woman or a negotiated girl.



### *Divorce*

Divorce is allowed on payment of a fine and is permissible only in some justified causes such as the wife is barren, or not active and cannot help the husband in cultivation, or if she is quarrelsome or possesses an immoral character and indulges in illicit sexual connections with another person. A wife can also divorce her husband on such grounds and if she is not happy. But cases of a wife divorcing her husband are very rare. The case is put up before the village elders who decide it and give their verdict. The fine imposed varies according to the nature and degree of the case. The fine is paid to the chief and compensation to the aggrieved party only after which the divorce can be achieved.

### *Death and Disposal of the Dead*

The Wancho idea about death, varies according to its nature. When a person dies in old age, it is considered as natural, but death due to illness is attributed to the evil action of the earth god, Baurang who, they believe, devours the person in the shape of illness. Accidental or sudden death is always taken as due to bad luck.

The funerary custom varies from village to village insofar as the minute details are concerned, but in general it appears to be similar.

### *Custom in Normal Death*

A dead body in normal cases, such as in death due to old age is called *mang* (Pumas), *mangjiga* (Longkai), *mi due* (Wakka) and so on.

The corpse is kept inside the house for about twenty-four hours during which the relatives assemble and express their sorrow. In case of a chief, a wooden coffin is made but a commoner's corpse is wrapped in cloth and matting. The disposal is called *mangu*. Relatives, both men and women together, go to the cemetery, which is generally near some path, leading out of the village. The place is called *jak kha*. There the wrapped corpse is placed on a platform constructed at a height of about five to six feet from the ground. A small shed is made over the platform. An effigy either of wood or bamboo is made where



the possessions of the dead are kept hanging. Sometimes the possessions are hanged on the tomb itself. The effigies or images made for the purpose are disposed of in various ways. Sometimes these are placed in front of the tomb, sometimes several such images are kept together under a small shed.

In many cases, it has been found that the relatives of the dead keep guard near the tomb for a few days.

After disposal of the dead, a feast is arranged at which a pig or a *mithun* is killed. Till the skull of the corpse is finally placed under the earth, members of the family offer a share of each meal they take in the name of the deceased.

After about a month when the dead body has completely decomposed, the skull is detached by an old man called *tai-songpa* (Pumao). It is washed carefully, wrapped with a piece of red cloth and put under a stone. The skull-placing day is a great festival and is called *rapolev* or *ja foatle*. Before the ceremony, a number of people go out to catch fish, they cook the fish caught with rice and take the food to the ceremony. They tie a bundle of fish and rice to the skull saying: "We give this to you; eat and go away, O Lumpu! Go and do not return, do not let us see you again."

In many villages, the skull is put inside an earthen pitcher before being placed under a stone.

Every year at the *poatakle* festival (a festival for taking new rice), the villagers offer rice-beer and other cooked food to the skulls of the deceased members of every family. On this day the whole village collect near the cemetery and the skulls are taken out.

The custom of disposal of the dead body in Longkai and Wakka area is slightly different. At Longkai when a man dies, during the days of dearth the corpse is kept only for about twenty-four hours, otherwise it is kept for two days. The dead body is called *mangjiga*. During these two days, the relatives come and weep near the dead body. On the third day which is called *manggu*, it is taken to cemetery. Relatives and other mourners, both men and women, join in the procession.

The *gampa*, a ritual expert, does all the work of disposal. The corpse is placed on a bamboo platform called *liatan*, over which a shed (*gangs*) is constructed. The disposal platform is



constructed by the *gampa*. The corpse is wrapped in a piece of cloth and the mat on which the dead person used to lie down. An wooden effigy called *sapa* is fixed near the tomb on which the belonging of the deceased such as beads, hat, loin cloth, *dao*, gun and spear are hanged. The articles of foods and utensils are hanged on the tomb itself. On the day following the day of disposal, a ceremony called *latau* is performed. A feast is arranged with rice, rice-beer and meat. A pig or a *mithun* is killed for the purpose. All relatives and other persons who attend the disposal are invited. On the day following the *latau* ceremony, called *guntai*, the relatives sit near the tomb for the whole day. In case of the chief or his wife, the whole village sit near the tomb.

After about one year, the skull-placing ceremony called *go-chau* is performed. The skull is taken out of the tomb, washed carefully and buried underground at a place called *galong*. Before burial, it is put inside an earthen pitcher.

Rice-beer and other items of food are offered to the skull on this day. Valuable articles such as gong, elephant tusk and beads are put in the pit along with the skull. The pit is covered with a stone, over which a gun, a *dao* and a spear are kept.

#### *Disposal of a Chief's Dead Body*

The dead body of a chief is first kept near the house for about seven days. On the eighth day the skull is removed with a *dao*. The body part is taken to the common cemetery and the head to a place called *ruk tran khra*, situated in the centre of the village. It is then boiled in water in an earthen pitcher. The flesh is removed and placed with the body in the cemetery.

After the removal of the flesh, the skull is washed, cleaned and kept on a stone. The whole village dance and sing around the skull. Side by side, a feast is arranged. Pig, buffalo and *mithun* are killed. All village under the chief come to join the festival. Each village brings pig or buffalo, rice-beer, rice, vegetables and the like. Heads of the sacrificed animals are kept hanging at the *ruk-tram*. After the ceremony the skull is buried in a stone pit. Valuable articles are buried along with the skull.

In case of the chiefs of the big villages of each *jan*, another ceremony called *lung pong wan*, is performed after six or seven



months. In this ceremony all the neighbouring villages, including big villages of other groups, are invited. This is a very big festival performed for a deceased chief. Each village sends presents of pig, buffalo and rice-beer and join the festival. Feasting, dancing and singing continues for several days. The dancers put on their ceremonial dresses.

#### *Disposal in Abnormal Deaths*

In abnormal, unnatural and accidental death, no ceremony is performed. The corpse is disposed of in the jungle. It is wrapped in a mat and tied to a tree in the jungle. All the personal belongings of the deceased are thrown away or placed together near the corpse. Nothing of his belongings is kept in the house. No offering is made to him afterwards. In such cases, the corpse is generally disposed of as soon as possible. In some villages, after disposal of the corpse the fire in the hearth of the house is extinguished and the fire is lit afresh.

At Wakka, a feast is arranged on the day following the disposal even in abnormal cases. This is, however, not done in other villages. This day is called *gunku*. A pig is killed, and the *gampa* and *taikia* offer a portion of the meat and a share of the meal to the deceased. The clan members are invited for the feast.

The third day is called *guntai*. On this the whole village observes *genna* and refrain from work. The members of the deceased's family do not move out of the house.

A woman who dies at the time of delivery is disposed of in a similar manner. No precaution is taken in case of abnormal deaths.

#### *The Soul after Death and its Destination*

The Wanchos do not have a clear idea about the soul and its destination after the death of a person, but they believe that there is some place where man goes to live after death. This imaginary place is called *junpu*, *lompu* or *yumpu* where, they believe, all the dead forefathers are living. According to some, *junpu* is in the sky but the majority believe it to be under the earth. The soul is called *sab*. It lives inside the human body. If one sees in a dream the *sab* of ones forefathers or deceased rela-



tives coming home, one will die very soon, or at any rate some one of the village will die.

At Wakka, the people believe that the shadow of a man is his soul. It vanishes as soon as the person dies. The shadow which they think to be the soul, is called *sab*. It dwells inside the body so long a man is alive and at death goes to *junpu*, a place under the earth. There are two paths through which the *sab* goes. In normal cases the path is good but in abnormal cases it takes a very bad path.

The *sab* comes out from *junpu* on the day after disposal to meet the parents, friends and relatives. At first it comes out from *junpu* in the shape of a man, but while crossing a small river which they believe is on the way, it slips on a mossy slippery stone and becomes a kite. So, when they see a kite flying over the village after the death of a person, the members of the particular family throw some rice grains outside. In case of a child the bird is very small.

There is a village at *junpu*, called *aujum sia* or *chu-sa* where the *sab* of different persons construct individual houses and live, just as they lived in the earth. At *junpu*, there are three rivers from where the *sab* takes water. The *amai si jin* is the good river meant for the *sab* of good people, while the *ganma si jin* is for bad ones and the *angon si jin* is for diseased ones, specially lepers.

There is a story about the existence of the village at *junpu*. Once upon a time a man went to bring paddy from *Aujum sia* village. While coming back he saw his pig was going towards the village following an old woman. He went near the woman who was just like his mother, and in fact he could recognise her as his mother. She, however, did not talk to him. He was surprised to see his mother there and at her not talking to him. On reaching home he found his mother had died. Then he told the whole story to the villagers. Since then people believe that after death the *sab* of a person goes to *junpu* and lives in *aujum sia* village.

### *Morung Organization*

The Wanchos have well organized *morung* system for men which, in the good old days, when the people were ardent head-



hunters, was the centre for training for the youths in the art of fighting, or for holding meetings and discussions with the villagers and also serving as guard houses to protect the village. Since the abolishing of head-hunting, these *morungs* are becoming centres of recreation and sleeping houses of the bachelors. In the old days each *morung* was equipped with all the available arms for fighting. The young boys of the village used to stay there in ever-ready position and guard the village from the attacks of the enemy.

*Pa* or *Pau* is the Wancho word for the *morung*. Each village has several *morungs*. It has been mentioned previously that the Wancho villages are divided into two main divisions. In many villages these divisions are again subdivided into a number of smaller zones consisting of a few houses. These smaller zones are called *jong* which is similar to the Assamese word *chuburi*. Each *jong* in the village has got a *morung*. Thus the number of *morung* in different villages varies from six to eighteen, depending on the size and the number of houses in the village. The chief's *morung* is called the *wangham-pa*, below which are two *morungs*, *panu* and *pass*. The *panu* is the biggest *morung* in a village. In the *wangham-pa*, important discussions and meetings are held whereas at the *panu*, all the heads collected during head-hunting days are kept. In fact the chief's *morung* is a sort of 'Darbar hall' (assembly house) of the chief. The *panu* is the main *morung* where community meetings and similar other gatherings are held. The different *morungs* are named after the name of the *jong*.

Each *morung* of the Wanchos is well decorated with various wood-carvings and heads of buffaloes and other animals killed on various occasions. But all the people give more attention to decorate the *wangham pa* and the *panu*.

There are small raised bamboo platforms constructed for sleeping purposes. In many *morungs* small compartments are made where the sleeping platforms are arranged in rows and stairs, one over the other just like a shelf. This can, in fact, be called sleeping shelf.

There are several fire places around which the youths and in many cases the old men also sit and gossip in groups. They exchange their thoughts and experiences, hear adventurous



stories from the old people and learn different arts and crafts in the *morung*. On the rear side of the *morung* is a well screened place which serve the purpose a latrine.

In the *panu morungs*, the human skulls are kept in a particular place, some times arranged in rows on some bamboo shelf, and sometimes dumped in a heap.

During day time, the youth of the *morung* stay there in batches, to guard the *morung* as well as the village. If any accident occurs during the watch of a particular batch of young men, either in the village or in any of the houses under that *morung*, all the guards are severelly dealt with and heavily fined.

There is no age limit for entering the *morung*, but generally young children do not stay in the *morung*, though there is no restriction to their entering it. Women of any age, excepting children, are not allowed to enter the *morung*. Only on the day of construction of a *morung* can young girls and women enter for the purpose of distributing food at the feast arranged on this day.

The *morung* is constructed generally by the members of the particular *morung*, but in many villages members of one or two neighbouring *morungs*, also help in the work, if they are invited. The chief's *morung* and the *panu* are, however, constructed on a cooperative basis by the whole village. The *morung* construction is community work, and at the completion of the work, a big feast is held at night, followed by dancing and singing, sometimes throughout the whole night.

A big long-drum called *kham* is kept in each *morung* on one side of it. The size of the drum varies from 12 to 30 feet in length. Sometimes the drum is decorated with carvings of the human head, and motif's depicting various animals, snakes and birds. In the old days, when head-hunting was in full practice, the drum was mainly used to give the alarm to the village to be ready for a fight. Nowadays also, besides being used as a musical instrument, it is used on many other occasions as when some accident takes place in the village or some big animals have been killed or to invite people to any gathering and on festival days. There are different ways of playing the drum each indicating a different meaning. The villagers recognize the



different sounds, and accordingly they can understand the purpose for which the drum has been played. Each sound has its particular name. For example, when it is played on festival days—the sound or variety of tones is called *kham chu u*. Similarly, there are others like *khou kham tap*, *tham sayu*, *khong khan tap*, etc., which indicate sudden outbreak of fire or accident, killing of animals like the tiger or the bear and approaching of an enemy, respectively. The *khong khan tap* is not played nowadays.

The chief of each big village has a long drum of his own, kept at his house. To bring this drum, a festival called *kham dak le* is performed by the chief at which the whole village and sometimes neighbouring villages too, join. It is one of the grand festivals of the Wanchos. Each chief, after he is declared as chief, has to perform this festival. The *kham dak le* festival is performed on the day when the drum is finally brought to the village, but smaller rituals are performed at every step of the making of the drum, right from the selection of the tree.

There is no separate *morung* for the young girls of the village. But according to the custom, the girls generally congregate in some houses, preferably those of old widows and sleep there. Young men come to meet the girls in these places, gossip with them, make exchanges of gifts and some times pass the night with the girls. The place where the girls sleep together is called *nausa jup ham*, which means young girls' sleeping house. Though there is not even a rudimentary *morung* for the girls in the true sense, yet the custom indicates the existence of a rudimentary *morung* organization, because the girls who sleep together, work on many occasions in a cooperative way. They collectively go out to bring fuel and supply to each house under the *morung*. They also celebrate their own festival for bringing firewood.

Boys of a particular *morung* also work collectively on a cooperative basis, helping widows in cultivation, in constructing houses and on occasions of need. They together clean village paths, water points and do such other works in the village.

There is a particular person called *wangsam-pa*, who is in charge of the *morung* and is responsible for all works required to be performed by the *morung*. He directs the youths to do



different kinds of work, as conveyed to him by the villagers or the chief. It is his duty to see that the *morung* boys regularly bring firewood and water to the *morung*. He is the only man who can touch the skulls and other valuable articles kept in the *morung*, other people are not allowed to touch them normally. Thus the *wangsam-pa* is the acknowledged leader of the *morung*.

Though there is no system of the *morung* exogamy and the organization does not exert direct influence on marriage, yet the girls do not usually sleep with the boys of their own *morung* whom they consider as their own brothers.

Previously the *morung* were generally constructed near the entrances to the village to guard it against the attack of the enemy, but nowadays *morungs* are constructed within the village itself.

The *morungs* are also centres of arts and crafts. The boys while talking with their friends may make baskets, weave mats, carve on wood and gather many useful experiences from experts and old persons. Thus the younger generations learn the different activities of life through association with others in the *morung* which are nuclei of the society and the basic and fundamental institutions of the people to guide the new generation for the well-being of all.