

Tribhuvan University

**CHANGE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF LEPCHA
COMMUNITY**

(A Case Study of Kaputhang-Taza and Mamring-Amba GPU)

A DISSERTATION

Submitted To the Central Department of Geography, Faculty
of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Tribhuvan University

in the partial fulfillment of requirement of
Master's Degree in Geography

Submitted By

SANAM RINCHEN LEPCHA

Central Department of Geography

Tribhuvan University

Kathmandu, Nepal

September, 2006

Tribhuvan University
CHANGE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF
LEPCHA COMMUNITY
(A Case Study of Kaputhang-Taza and Mamring-Amba GPU)

A DISSERTATION

Submitted To the Central Department of Geography, Faculty of
Humanities and Social Sciences,
Tribhuvan University
in the partial fulfillment of requirement of
Master's Degree in Geography

Submitted By
SANAM RINCHEN LEPCHA
Central Department of Geography
Tribhuvan University
Kathmandu, Nepal
September, 2006

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY
CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

CHANGE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF
LEPCHA COMMUNITY
(A Case Study of Kaputhang-Taza and Mamring-Amba GPU)

Approved by:

Head of the Department



Internal Examiner



External Examiner



Dissertation Committee

Date: 10 Sept 2006

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|--------------|
| CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION | 1-3 |
| 1.1 Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Statement of Problem | 2 |
| 1.3 Objectives of the Study | 2 |
| 1.4 Significance of the Study | 2 |
| 1.5 Limitation of the Study | 3 |
| CHAPTER II : REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 4-22 |
| 2.1 Changing Conditions of the Eskimos, Aborigines and the Sherpa | 4 |
| 2.2 Origin of the Lepcha Community | 7 |
| 2.3 Socio-Cultural System of the Lepcha Community | 11 |
| 2.4 Economic Conditions of the Lepcha Community | 16 |
| 2.5 Language of the Lepcha Community | 18 |
| CHAPTER III : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY | 23-25 |
| 3.1 Selection of the Study Area | 23 |
| 3.2 Sources of Data | 23 |
| 3.3 Method of Data Collection | 25 |
| 3.3.1 Household Survey | 25 |
| 3.3.2 Key Informant Survey | 25 |
| 3.3.3 Field Diary | 25 |
| 3.4 Data Processing and Analysis | 25 |
| CHAPTER IV : INTRODUCTION TO STUDY AREA | 26-39 |
| 4.1 Sikkim | 26 |
| 4.1.1 Geo-Physical Setting of Sikkim | 26 |
| 4.1.1.1 Location | 26 |
| 4.1.1.2 Physiographic and Natural Vegetation | 26 |
| 4.1.1.3 Climate | 27 |
| 4.1.1.4 Soil | 28 |
| 4.1.1.5 Drainage System | 28 |
| 4.1.2 Socio-Economic Settings of Sikkim | 29 |
| 4.1.2.1 Population | 29 |

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| 4.1.2.2 | Agriculture | 29 |
| 4.1.2.3 | Animal Husbandry | 30 |
| 4.1.2.4 | Transport and Communication | 30 |
| 4.2 | Study Area | 31 |
| 4.2.1 | Geo Physical Setting of the Study Area | 31 |
| 4.2.1.1 | Location | 31 |
| 4.2.1.2 | Physiographic and Natural Vegetation | 33 |
| 4.2.1.3 | Climate | 33 |
| 4.2.1.4 | Soil | 33 |
| 4.2.1.5 | Drainage | 34 |
| 4.2.2 | Socio-Economic Setting of the Study Area | 36 |
| 4.2.2.1 | Population | 36 |
| 4.2.2.2 | Agriculture and Animal Husbandry | 36 |
| 4.2.2.3 | Infrastructure Development | 37 |

CHAPTER V : SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITION AND ITS CHANGE

40-60

| | | |
|--------|------------------------------|----|
| 5.1 | Population | 40 |
| 5.2 | Family Structure | 41 |
| 5.2.1 | Size of Family | 42 |
| 5.3 | Marriage | 43 |
| 5.3.1 | Types of Marriage | 43 |
| 5.3.2 | Marriage Age | 44 |
| 5.3.3 | Women's Child sex Preference | 45 |
| 5.4 | Family Planning | 46 |
| 5.5 | Education | 47 |
| 5.6 | Health Services | 48 |
| 5.7 | Food and Drink Habits | 50 |
| 5.8 | Religion | 51 |
| 5.9 | Language | 54 |
| 5.10 | Dress and Ornaments | 55 |
| 5.10.1 | Female Dress and Ornament | 56 |
| 5.10.2 | Male Dress and Ornament | 56 |
| 5.11 | Festivals | 57 |

| | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| 5.12 | Housing Pattern | 58 |
| 5.13 | Interactions with Other Ethnic Groups | |
| CHAPTER VI : ECONOMIC CONDITION AND ITS CHANGE | | 61-78 |
| 6.1 | Occupation | 61 |
| 6.2 | Farm Size | 63 |
| 6.3 | Ownership of Land | 63 |
| 6.4 | Crop Production | 64 |
| 6.5 | Foods Sufficiency | 66 |
| 6.6 | Livestock Farming | 67 |
| 6.7 | Horticulture Farming | 68 |
| 6.8 | Income Pattern | 68 |
| 6.9 | Expenditure Pattern | 69 |
| 6.9.1 | Expenditure in Food | 70 |
| 6.9.2 | Expenditure in Health | 71 |
| 6.9.3 | Expenditure in Education | 71 |
| 6.9.4 | Expenditure in Meat | 72 |
| 6.9.5 | Expenditure in Drinks | 73 |
| 6.9.6 | Expenditure in Vegetables | 73 |
| 6.9.7 | Expenditure in Electricity | 74 |
| 6.9.8 | Annual Expenditure in Religions/Festivals | 74 |
| 6.9.9 | Expenditure in Other | 75 |
| 6.10 | Natural Resource Use | 77 |
| 6.10.1 | Forest Resources | 77 |
| 6.10.2 | Water Resources | 77 |
| 6.10.3 | Cultivated Land | 77 |
| CHAPTER VII : DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS | | 79-83 |
| 7.1 | Problems | 79 |
| 7.2 | Prospects | 82 |
| CHAPTER VIII : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION | | 84-86 |
| 8.1 | Conclusion | 84 |
| 8.2 | Recommendation | 85 |
| REFERENCES | | 87-89 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sikkim is a land of diversification where there is a combination of different ethnic group having Mongoloid and Caucasian features and speaking Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language with different tradition, culture and languages. Among them the Lepchas are the first tribes who enter the footstep as earlier settlers in Sikkim. The Lepchas are scheduled tribes of India in the state of Sikkim and the district of Darjelling/Kalimpong in west Bengal. In both states the Lepchas are in minority of population with about 10 percent living in Sikkim (census 1991) and above 4 percent (not yet updated) living in Darjelling district of west Bangal. Ethnic majority in Sikkim and the Darjelling districts are considered to be Nepali. There is also Lepcha community in Ilam, a district of eastern Nepal and in the 'Ha' province of Bhutan. These areas are considered to be part of the *Mayel Lyang* and formaly belonged to Sikkim. The Lepcha word for this tribe "*Rong*" is variously interpreted as 'the son of god' and the son of snow. The word '*Lapche*' may be of limbu origin (Foning1987). They have a legend, which says that they originated from *Mayel Lyang*, a mythical land at the foothills of mount Kanchendzonga in Sikkim itself. They have own tradition, culture and languages. however their socio-cultural and economic conditions have been changing in recent years with the improvement in accessibility to modern technology and infrastructure services such as market, health, education, road etc. Dr. Pawan Kumar Chamling the leader of Sikkim Democratic front decided to enlist the Lepcha tribe as a primitive tribe. The proposal received the approval of the cabinet on 29th January 2005 whereby the Lepchas were recognized as primitive tribe.

Change is a universal and continuous process, which is inevitable in all societies. Change in societies occurs through different processes with different path ways. In some cases it leads to the complete disappearance of traditional

socio-cultural conditions developed based on the long experiences of the people within a specific environmental condition. So the major challenges are how to preserve such unique culture with improvement in livelihood condition of the local people. In this context this study was proposed to discuss the process of change of the Lepcha tribe.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The Lepchas are the oldest inhabitant of Sikkim, are mostly found in Mountain region i.e. Sikkim, and Darjelling. As in other aboriginal groups the Lepcha's socio-cultural and economic conditions have been changing. However, the processes of change have not been examined in details.

In this context, following research questions can be formulated.

- What were their socio-cultural conditions in the past and how they are changing?
- What were the main economic activities in the past and how they are changing ?

This study tries to solve the above research questions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the changes in socio-economic and cultural conditions of the Lepchas community. Following are the specific objectives of this study.

- a. To assess the changes in socio-cultural conditions of the Lepcha community.
- b. To examine the changes in the economic conditions of the Lepcha community.
- c. To discuss the development problems and prospects perceived by local people.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Sikkim is a multi lingual and multicultural state. The Lepcha are the oldest inhabitant in Sikkim now it is declared as a primitive and autochthons

race of Sikkim by analyzing semantic names of places, rivers, lakes, mountains through anthropological, geographical and cultural studies with duly consultation by *Mun-Boongthing* (Lepcha Sermans Priests) (Mainwaring 1876). It is a place where different races and tribes are inhabited; the social, economic and cultural condition of any community has its own significance for introducing them in the world likewise in Sikkim the socio- economic status of each ethnic group is somehow contributing to identify their status in the world. Besides that the changing socio-economic status of the community shows the changing living status of their family language, occupation, cultural practice, physical infrastructure and population size which are the main causes that affects the socio-economic and cultural condition of any society. It is very important to know the real history of past Sikkim but the truth is, history itself is like gems, wealth and heritage of one universe, nation or state one can imagine of shaping up future only if one knows about past. This study explores change and development in socio-economic condition of the Lepcha's relating to their past and present context. Similarly this study will help to identify the problems; they are facing and also seek its appropriate prospects. The results of this research would helps to know about the culture, tradition custom, and socio-economic condition of the Lepcha community for future generation.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

Every research has its own limitation and no research can be conducted without limitation. This study is mainly concentrated on the Lepcha community of a particular area of Sikkim and other limitations of the study are:

- This study covers a small area of Sikkim, where the Lepcha community is mostly concentrated so it may not represent the Lepcha communities of whole Sikkim.
- This study is limited to selective aspect of Lepcha economy and society due to time and financial constraints.
- This study is based on the preliminary exploratory research work, so it does not creates any working hypothesis. It is purely a descriptive in nature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literatures on the works came out for different world's indigenous people and their changing pattern in both socio-cultural and economic activities. Many researchers have carried out various ethnographic studies upon the several indigenous people in the world. In this work the only three of the world's indigenous people and their changing socio-cultural and economic activities has been reviewed. This chapter is broadly divided into two parts, first part is about the general background of indigenous people, and their changing condition in different areas of the world and second part is about the specific review of literature of the Lepcha indigenous people about their changing socio-cultural and economic conditions between 1975 and 2006.

2.1 Changing Conditions of the Eskimos, Aborigines and the Sherpa

The Inuit or Eskimos

The Inuits or Eskimo's are the indigenous people who live near the artic. Their homeland stretches from northeastern tip of Russia across Alaska and Northern Canada and Greenland. In the beginning the socio-cultural system of the Inuit was orthodoxy type, they had little contact with other people. They believed that all people, animal, thing and forces of nature had spirit. The spirit of people, and animals lived in another world after they died. The other spirits included those of the coined, the weather, the sun and the moon. The language of the Inuit comprises of two groups, majority of communities spoke dialects of the Inuit Inupiaq language. The clothing of the Inuit was usually made from the skins of animals. The Inuit preferred caribou, skin as a material for clothing. Skin from seals, foxes, polar bears and other animal served as substitutes for caribou. The hunting and fishing were the main occupations of Inuit. The size of the group depended on the amount of food available in different seasons. Their hunting tools were made of a stone, tree root and animal bones. Their houses are called igloos(encyclopedia 1995).

The nomadic life of Inuit has changed into permanent settlers in the early and middle 1900's where the people from Europe started to migrate in that area. Similarly, housing and clothing pattern has also changed into wooden

