



Bhutias of Sikkim

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ABSTRACT For the Bhutias of Sikkim, animal husbandry alone was not sufficient to sustain the population, so they indulged in marginal trading activities with the Tibetan across the borders. The barter of timber wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of that region for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. Bhutias of Sikkim (Lachung and Lachen) pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with pastoral activities. Thus, the trade, as long as unhampered by political restrictions, enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the borders in 1962, social life changed for these people. Political events beyond their control have led to the transformation of their traditional economic system, forcing them to reorient it. They lost large herds of yaks and sheep, when they were on the seasonal migration under the ancient transborder pasture usage agreements. They could no longer use pastureland in Tibet, causing heavy losses of their herds due to lack of alternative pasture area. Bhutias started to shift from a pastoral and trading economy to a more settled agricultural and small-scale horticulture and wage earning economy. The seasonal migration emerges as an activity organised by family and community structure. The Bhutias of Sikkim have adapted culturally to diverse natural landscapes and have established settlement patterns and production activities tailored to the limitation imposed by the region.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhatia's of North Sikkim are a tribe of agro-pastoral transhumance who migrate in the high altitude valleys of North Sikkim. The area, which they customarily inhabit are the two river valleys of Lachen and Lachung, situated on the banks of tributaries of the Tista Lachenchu and Lachungchu respectively, at the height of 3,000 metres. These areas are especially 'reserved' ones where the right to settle or own land is not allowed to outsiders, irrespective of their ethnic origin. The inhabitants of these valleys do not conform to the general pattern prevalent in Sikkim, even among other Bhutia communities. The Lachen and Lachung area has a special status with regard to settlement, land revenue and local administration.

The valleys of Lachen and Lachung were the private estate of the Queen at the time of Campbell's visit, but later it was reported by Das that these were assigned to the Dewan. In the administrative reports of 1911-1912, it has been mentioned that these valleys were put under the charge of Jerung Dewan of Chakung by the British political officer. As the people of the Lachen and Lachung were not happy with his administration the valleys came back under the rule of Maharaja Kumar of Sikkim (Sikkim 1912: 2).

Area and People

Lachen and Lachung have their own traditional local government system. The provisions of the 1965 Panchayat Act are not extended to this area. For centuries they had grazed their herds in Khama Dzong section of the Pahari district in Tibet during the summer and fall months. High up on the northern borders, marginal agriculture and animal husbandry is not sufficient to sustain a large population, so the people of Lachen and Lachung indulged in marginal trading activities with Tibetans across the borders. The barter of timber, wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of that region for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. The people of Lachen and Lachung pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with their pastoral activities. Thus, as long as trade was unhampered by political restrictions, it enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the Tibetan border in 1962, social life changed for these people. It deprived the Bhutias of their livelihood and had an adverse effect on their traditional crafts. As long as Tibetan wool was imported in large quantities, weaving flourished and they produced a variety of woven articles. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung were sufferers in another way because of the closure of the border. Many of their yak and sheep herds were seized by the Chinese in

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1962 during their seasonal migration under the traditional trans-border pasturing usage arrangements. Such partial transformations of economy have led to many changes in the Bhutia society. The situation of the Bhutias is unlike that of other ethnic minorities and it does not conform to the usual pattern of integration into larger economic and political systems. Political events beyond their control have led to the transformation of their traditional economic system, forcing them to reorient it. Variation in economic strategies of Lachenpas and Lachungpas emerge from several factors, showing interrelations of ecology, technology and social organisation. Limiting factors operating in the subsistence economy of the region are elements of the physical environment (Bhasin 2012).

Seclusion in the region was caused by political and ecological factors. Though this area is still reserved, factors of change have entered through different agencies. But these changes are few and people are still continuing their age-old lifestyle, unobserved and uninfluenced by outsiders. This area, though visited by a few scholars, remained unmapped and unexplored. The Lepchas and Bhutias of North Sikkim were introduced to ethnology by early travellers and officials. Dr. Campbell, the medical superintendent (1840, 1849, 1852, 1874) reported about the area through a series of articles. But no detailed accounts of the Lachen-Lachung exist up till now. Very few ethnographic accounts of this area are available and those too are generally travellers' accounts. Negotiations between the British Government and Tibet started (1887-1908) for the construction of a road through this area to facilitate trade. But the terms were unacceptable to the Tibetans, so the project never materialised. However, after the occupation of Tibet by China in 1962 this sensitive frontier area became highly important. Invasion of northern regions by Chinese forces induced the Government of India to improve transport and communication in this area. Army station units were established in Lachung valley. A fair weather road joining the State capital Gangtok with Lachen-Lachung was built. The development of defense establishments brought about significant changes in the economic and social climate of the area. The stationing of many civil servants as well as military units has also increased the demands on the natural resources of the area. The maps published by the Survey of India covering this area

are based on topographical survey and these are the only records of the region available to scholars while the results of more recent investigations have been withheld from circulation.

No anthropological fieldwork has been possible in this region after Sikkim's integration with India because of the turbulent political situation and the vulnerability of these people to outside forces.

Among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, it was difficult to elicit information. A different setup system of administration prevails there. Being very suspicious of outsiders, a *Dzumsha* (council) meeting was called to discuss the nature of the research work and whether permission was to be granted or not. For political and security reasons, permits are not issued for more than a few days at a stretch. The fieldwork was difficult, as the permit had to be restamped after every five or seven days. People residing in the area are transhumance, travelling from one ecological zone to another with their yaks. The whole area is under the military supervision, and strangers are not allowed to roam about the area. Hence, the data regarding the places of migration was gathered through interviews, and scattered information with the help of interpreters. This report, therefore, brings to the reader a representation of an archaic culture in an intact state that lies wholly outside of Hindu culture and ideology and that is different and distinct in many ways from the peasant economies of India.

This region is covered under the trans-axial belt and has not been properly investigated. Geologically, it has mobile belts and weak structural features, which are known to be the cause of thermal springs present in this region. Structural features such as faults, fissures, cracks, etc. that extend to great depth and react to the hot interiors, provide necessary channel ways for circulating ground water to become heated and find their way to the surface. Important hot springs are at Lachen (Tarun hot spring), Lachung and Yumthang.

Located in the southern slopes of western half of the eastern Himalayas across 27° and 28° N latitude and 88° and 89° E longitude, it is within the temperate zone not far from the tropics, yet the climate is influenced by the high Himalayas to the north and the Gangetic plain to the south. Sikkim itself lies within the watershed of the river Tista. Plants grow perennially, as there is ample water. There are two seasons, a short

dry season lasting from January through April, and a long wet season from May through December. In the Lachen and Lachung valleys the climate is cold and dry.

The temperature varies with altitude and slope aspect (generally 6 to 10°C per km). The temperature decreases with an increase in the altitude. Lachen valley in the west is wider whereas Lachung valley in east is rather short and steep. The areas comprising these two river valleys are comparatively dry, and are in many ways different from the rest of the state. The slopes here are gradual and valleys are broader compared to other valleys. Due to inhospitable climatic conditions and terrain, the area is sparsely populated.

Two streams Lachen-chu and Lachung-chu are the sources of water in Lachen and Lachung, respectively. These two streams join Tista at Chungthang, which arises from Zemu Glacier. The terrain being hilly, with frequent occurrences of landslides, major irrigation projects cannot be undertaken easily. There has been minimal exploitation of surface water. Apart from this, there is drainage problem in Lachen, as the village is so situated such that considerable amount of slush accumulates in the rainy season and when it snows. These conditions cause hygiene problems and pollute the otherwise healthy environment.

The high valleys of North Sikkim are inhabited by groups that have retained the Tibetan language and culture. The ecological milieu of these people is determined by high altitude, comparatively less rainfall (than in other areas of Sikkim) and violent local winter winds. The steppe vegetation is characterised by small shrubs. The Tista cuts across North Sikkim with its tributaries, namely the Lachungchu, Lachenchu and Lhanak, and has divided the region into separate valleys. Concentration of population is mainly restricted to the two valleys of Lachen and Lachung. The villages of Lachen and Lachung are the headquarters of their respective valleys. As the two valleys are separated by high mountain features, and they lead a more or less independent existence. The presence of lush meadows in the vicinity of Lachen facilitates pastoral activities. The highland communities of Lachen and Lachung are found at a height of nearly 3,000 metres, but these people lead a transhumance type of existence travelling from one ecological zone to another. They inhabit climate zones varying from temperate (2,000- 2,700 me-

tres) to sub-Alpine (2,700-4,000 metres) to Alpine (4,000-5,000 metres) and very high hills with Alpine climate above 5,000 metres. Lachenpas move approximately 15 kilometres upstream from Lachen to Thanggu, to their summer quarters. They have their agricultural lands at Thanggu and for grazing they come below Lachen.

On the Lachung side, the valley opens up to the pasture of Momo-Samdong and Yume-Samdong, and as Lachungpas follow a reverse cycle, they move upstream for grazing only and come to Khedum (below Lachung) for cultivation to their summer quarters.

There is no cultivable land in and around Lachen and Lachung. As the cultivable land in the region is at about 3,000 metres and far from valleys, the crops are generally rain fed. The Lachen area has not been surveyed. In Lachung though cadastral survey has been done, the results have not been finalised. The figures provided are only estimates. Forest areas for Lachen and Lachung are not surveyed, so no details are available.

The climate of the area is suitable for horticultural development, but nevertheless cultivation is restricted to limited regions, which are either below the village or much above the residential area. People grow small quantities of barley, wheat, maize and buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*). They raise yaks and sheep to supplement their subsistence economy. They have adapted their agricultural and pastoral activities to the demands of their natural environment. In this hostile environment, man has limited means available for agriculture so the production of a principal cereal crop is quite inadequate for the people's annual need, forcing them to depend on pastoral activities.

The vast open spaces between 4,483 and 5,824 metres and altitude are used for raising yak (*Phoephagus grunniens*), who are robust animals that require little care and are perfectly adapted to high altitudes. The yak provides its owner with milk, meat and wool (for saddle padding, blanket making), dung for fuel and transportation. The vegetation of the area consists of fodder plants, oaks, firewood and dye yielding plants. The oaks are used for house building, though people have no right to cut them. Around Lachen village, there is abundance of *Panisej* (*T. mynocarpa*), which is a plant used for firewood. The Lachenpas do not have to walk for long distances in search of firewood as the people of Lachung do. Dye yielding plants in

the vicinity provide another source of income to the local people. They collect the plants and sell them to cottage industry authorities in cash. The Lachen forests mainly consist of trees, shrubs, herbs and ornamental plants. The mountainsides are clothed with eight to ten species of brilliantly coloured rhododendrons.

The Lachung forest consists of both temperate and tropical plants. Some very wild grasses grow here. The Lachung forest abounds in dye yielding plants, important ones are *Juglana regia* (Walnut), *Rubia cardifolia*, and *Rumex crispus* or "*Chucha*", which yield dyes of different colours. People collect leaves and sell it to officials. Many medicinal plants like *Acanthumferox*, *Acorus calamus* and *Butea monosperma* are also found in the region. People collect them when pasturing their animals and sell them at Mangan market.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are called Ha-Pa. Like the people of Chumbi Valley in Tibet they claim descent from immigrants from Ha in Bhutan and follow a mixed agropastoral and trade economy. They claim themselves to be of the *Lopon I humdrub* caste. They are more like Tibetans than the Hlo-pa (south people of Bhutan) or other Bhutias of Sikkim. The exact date of their arrival in Sikkim is not known, though it must have been during one of the many invasions by Bhutanese. In 1676, the Bhutanese invaded the Chumbi valley, Sikkim and the area south of Sikkim. The Lepcha chief was killed, and in retaliation the Tibetan Government arranged the invasion of Bhutan, perhaps the most powerful undertaken during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama. At one time, the Ha-pa were amongst the richest people in Bhutan, but as Eden relates, they took to evil ways and fell on evil times. They were living in robber caves, *Pyak che* and *Au-pyale*, and used it as a base from which to issue orders to rob and terrorise peaceful merchants (c. f. White 1887-1908: 113, 1983).

The Bhutias of Lachen-Lachung occupied both sides of the border between Sikkim and Tibet while carrying on their pastoral and trading activities. They were paying taxes to both sides. The Tibetan influence is stronger on these people than that of Sikkim, although territorial limits to the north are disputed now. According to local tradition, the Chumbi valley on the other

side of the border only came into the possession of the Sikkim Rajah a little more than a hundred years ago as the dowry of a Tibetan wife. The people of the valley below Galing paid him no rent, but would carry for him and his *Amla* free of cost (White 1887-1908: 111, 1983). The Gumpa of Lachung had no land in Sikkim, but was connected with one assigned to monks at Digarchi in Tibet. The monks lived on donations by Bhutias. Monks earned the donations by providing services during sickness and death ceremonies. The greater part of this money went to Digarchi, the rest to the local monks.

Again, the *Phipun* (Headman) of Lachen was indebted to the Lama of Digarchi for a sum of money, which he was unable to pay. The debt of the capital sum was expunged but the interest, secured by a bond, was payable to the Lama and his successors, with a provision, that the obligation should be transferred to all Phipun official successors, who on taking office would receive this bond from predecessors and discharge its conditions. The interest was paid in a specified number of shingles for roofing, which were prepared annually by the Lachenpas.

Thus for centuries these people have been associated with the people of Tibet. The closure of the border in 1962 was a traumatic experience for these people but they bore it well. Along with their adaptation to new economic activities, they have retained their socio-cultural system and communal form of government.

Habitat and Economy

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are pastoralists by tradition. Before the closing of the border they used pastures on both sides of the border. Along with their pastoral activities they carried on barter trade. The forest formed an important part of their economic fabric. The Lachung people used to visit Tibet twice a year. They carried timber (*Shing-planks* of trees) and *Tchen*, a creeper, which yields a red dye and some cinnamon to Shigatse and Gyantse, and in exchange brought tea (*Cha*), salt (*Teha*), wool (*Pe*), blankets (*Nambu*), pottery (*Tamboo*), sheep (*Lug*) and goats (*Rha*). Some used money transactions selling in Darjeeling to buy corn, and others sold at Dzongu to buy corn and rice. The forest still plays an important role in their economic life and subsistence economy. It provides them with wood for houses, fuel, fodder and a

few edible items. After the closure of the borders they had to transform their economy to agriculture and horticulture in order to survive in this harsh climate (Bhasin 2012).

The environment in this area has no potential for increased production, as cultivation is extremely limited, and that too on small patches, as flat and level pieces of land are difficult to find. Poor soil, steep slopes and hilly terrain in the absence of irrigation make agriculture a difficult proposition. Because of poor technology, intensive cropping is difficult. Yields are always low. No well-kept terraces, no crop rotation and no weeding is to be seen in most areas. Because of this limited potential for energy extraction, the population of the area has adjusted to circumstances by seasonally migrating to different altitudes at different times of the year. For centuries these people have not only had to extract their own subsistence from the harsh environment but also find a surplus in order to maintain the large religious complex and their community organisation's obligation. This traditional social structure is an adaptation to the climatic and geomorphological limitations of the high altitude environment.

This landscape may have been modified by military settlements in the vicinity and introduction of roads, etc. but it cannot be altogether transformed. The natural environment sets limits to human intervention. To utilise the meagre natural resources, the people have created institutions based on sharing instead of competition. This has kept their society intact through the centuries.

In this region two major patterns of adaptation in subsistence are found, that is, one regional and the other local. The regional pattern is one of integration of several diverse agro-climatic belts, which are identified by climate and altitude. Because the belts are altitudinally arranged this type of integration may be termed "vertical control". This vertical ecological control is exercised by communal ownership and a pattern of extended migrations. These two autonomous villages base their subsistence from their isolated valleys through community control over local resources. In spite of the demographic factors and the consequences of the closure of the border and the transformation of economic system, the communal control over resources still holds good. The pattern of adaptation to the environment may be understood as

the local response to such environmental constraints as low energy availability and cold. The most important cultural adaptations to environmental constraints focus upon the subsistence system comprising crops, animals, agricultural and pastoral techniques designed to yield an adequate diet with local resources (Bhasin 1996).

Lachen

The Lachen revenue block is connected to Mangan headquarters by a 58-kilometre metal led road along the Lachenchu. Lachenchu is a gusty torrent and turbid from the vast amount of silt, which it carries along. It has to be crossed by three bridges to reach Lachen from Chugthang. Due to bad weather, the road remains blocked sometimes, for days together. At such times Lachen can be reached through a hill track. Lachen is a rectangular shaped place, surrounded by giant ridges, which protect it from high winds and give a feeling of security, and sometimes it rains for 7-15 days continuously, causing landslides. In times of calamity, people need each other, and that is why houses are clustered in the Lachen revenue block, without any planning. They are clustered, but not adjoining. There is a small courtyard in front of each house. There are no lanes, but only *Shranga* (footpath). Surrounding the house is a small kitchen garden and a few apple trees. The apple is not of a good variety and is usually given to animals.

Water comes from two springs, one on the northern boundary of the village and the other on the southeastern boundary. Two *Kholas* run through the village. Water is brought to individual households by polythene pipes. It is not used for drinking, but only for household work.

Houses in Lachen village, which stand on a grassy and bushy flat, are surrounded by a little cultivation of buckwheat, radishes, turnips and mustard. The houses are three to six metres high and twenty-five to fifty metres long. All are built of upright strong pine-planks, the interstices between which are filled with yak-dung. The only window is a slit closed by a shutter. On account of the damp climate, they are raised above the ground, and are tied with shingles. The roofs are either of wood or bark, held down by large stones.

For conducting religious ceremonies, there are two Gompas. One is the main Gumpa and the other is Manilhakhang or Nyama Laghang. Ny-

ma Laghang has a big water driven prayer wheel. It is for women and old men. The prayer wheel is a hollow cylinder about three metres in height and one and a half metres in diameter filled with about four tones of written prayers. It is fixed to a perpendicular shaft of wood, to the lower end of which horizontal flappers are attached, against which water is directed from a shoot, while the end is shod with iron, and revolves in an iron socket driven by the force of the stream. With each revolution the prayers are believed to be performed for the benefit of the builder of that particular wheel.

Although, Lachen is far off from the district headquarters, and has difficult terrain and harsh weather, the winds of change have reached this area. There are two primary schools and one adult education centre, and one primary health subcentre. Postal facilities are also available to these people. At present, there is no electricity in the Lachen revenue block. A few poles have been erected, but the connections are yet to be given. The Government has started one Cottage Industries Training Centre to encourage the arts and crafts of Lachenpas. Rice, wheat and maize are the staple food of the people, though they do not grow in the area. Cultivable land at Lachen is almost negligible. Their lands have to be reached by seasonal migration. Lachenpas have to procure money to fulfil their needs. With the closure of the border, things have become difficult for Lachenpas. Their pasturelands as well as trading facilities have been lost. They have to look for new sources of income to fulfil their economic needs. The opening of the cottage industries training centre provides one such opportunity, where along with the training, a stipend is also being paid. Transportation provides another source of income. Yak and mules serve as pack animals. Army units, residing in the area utilise the services of these people. Apart from this, they have agricultural lands at Thanggu, a very broad grassy valley with no snow in summer. They grow potatoes, turnips, radishes, buckwheat and cauliflowers. While a few houses have been erected here, rest of the people stay in their tents. The mean temperature of Thanggu in July is a little above 9° C. The Lachenpas gradually descend to their own valley as the winter season advances to Denga, grazing their flocks on the way at Tallum, Samdong, Lachen or Lamteng, Latong (Bhasin 2012).

Lachen revenue block has 234 houses and is inhabited by 919 Lachenpas, out of which 474 are males and 445 females. The total length of

their migratory route is about 25 kilometres. The whole family moves along. They lock and seal their doors. The member of the family comes back after one month and checks the property. There are about 15 *Sichepa* (Tibetan refugees) staying in Lachen. They have been staying there for a long time, but cannot own land. They work as labourers with wealthy Lachenpas. There is no rent system, and in return for being allowed to live there they work for their landlords. Lachen *Sichepa* are workers in General Road Engineer Force but they work free of charge for their benefactors. Thanggu is the meeting place of the migrating Lachenpas because of a presence of small Gumpa made of yak-hair. Public Pooja is performed here, which is attended by all the Lachenpas. Besides the Gumpa tent is a small tent, which serves as a community kitchen for the feast, which takes place after the Pooja. Public meetings take place twice a month at Thanggu. People from other settlements come and attend the meetings. It is compulsory for one member from each family to present himself at the meetings. Failure to attend is penalised by fines, but the date has to be fixed in advance. The *Gyapon* (village official) informs the people about the meeting (Bhasin 1996).

The growth of barley, maize and buckwheat is restricted in Lachen at up to 2,745 metres but root crops like radish and potato are grown well up to 3,660 metres as a summer crop. Till 1903, agriculture was practically unknown, and the people devoted themselves to their yaks and cattle. In 1903, there were 400 yaks, 40 cows, 100 ponies and 30 goats. However, they grew potatoes, turnips and a little buckwheat (Freshfield 1903: 94).

There is no social hierarchy among Lachenpas. They do not have artisan class. Previously Tibetan refugees, the *Sichepa*, were making utensils and agricultural implements for Lachenpas with raw material exported from Tibet. Nowadays, utensils and agricultural implements are available in Mangan market. These *Sichepa* were paid in kind and given food. Now they are attached to some wealthy Lachenpas. They reside near their houses and work for their benefactors.

There was one *Schinzopa* (carpenter) in Lachen. He was a Tibetan refugee and was working for Lachenpas. For the last 7 to 8 years a Nepali carpenter has been living here. He has come for the construction of the *Gumpa* and will remain here till the *Gumpa* is completed.

There is one *Tsemzopa* (cobbler), a Tibetan refugee. He is still a bachelor and lives alone. People have started buying shoes from Mangan market. The cobbler has started making *Bakhus* of yak hair and thus serves as a tailor also. Otherwise, Lachenpas weave and sew their own clothes.

There is one *Shempa* (butcher), a Tibetan refugee, who is paid in cash for butchering sheep and yak. Previously, Lachenpas refrained from butchering animals, as it was looked down upon. Now Lachenpas butcher animals. This *Shempa* stayed with his family at Menshithang. None of his family members have become *Shempas*. The Lachenpas can visit his house, but do not take food, etc. to his place. The *Shempa* is not allowed in the houses of Lachenpa, and he can come only to the door. The *Shempa* never cuts pork, which only young boys do. If he is invited to ceremonies he sits separately.

Every three years, the Lachenpas have to present a healthy yak for sacrifice to the Mandal of Chungthang as a customary gift for grazing yaks in and around Menshithang area. This custom is known as *Chareen* or payment of grass. The yak is sacrificed and divided equally among the villagers of Chungthang (Tsunghan).

The Lachenpas have not been able to take full advantage of education programmes because of their migratory habits. From June to November the Lachen area is totally deserted. They migrate up to high attitudes, where a few Tibetan refugee families are settled who look after the flocks of Lachenpas. Open-air classes are held without any blackboard, etc.

Similarly, these people have not been able to avail of the facility of the Primary Health Centre situated in Lachen. They have their own system of looking after the sick and treating illnesses. Postal facilities are also available but are not used much (Bhasin 1996).

Lachung

The Lachung revenue block is situated on the east bank of Lachungchu at 2,745 metres. It is connected to Mangan town by a 51-kilometre metalled road. Lachungchau is neither deep nor rapid and is only 13 metres broad. The houses are made of wood, raised on posts and clustered together without order. It is muddy, filthy and intersected by small streams whose beds make-shift the roads, and at the same time the com-

mon sewers of the people. About thirty years ago it was struck by a terrible flood and afterwards the area was divided into three parts, namely, Shertchu-the highest area, Singrig, the middle area, which is a flat piece of land two kilometres below Shertchu, and Beechch, which is the lowest.

The settlement pattern is controlled by the physiography of the area. Out of three *Busties*, Singrig and Beechchu are situated on road-river side and Shertchu is across the river on a small hillock. Houses are clustered in the *Busties*, but are not adjoining. There are no lanes. Houses are connected by *Shranga* (footpath). Recently a road has been built in Beechchu, for the military trucks. Productive land is limited to clearings in the narrow, rugged mountain valleys at different places at lower altitudes. Here scarcity of land level is enough for building and cultivation, and the need for protection against avalanches, and landslides, encourage the clustering of dwellings around a *Gompa*, which serves as the nucleus of the village. In these villages, the physical setting limits the effectiveness of government control. The Lachung revenue block, with an area of 2814.22 hectares, is inhabited by 328 households having 1,508 people of whom 787 are males and 721 females. The population includes institutional and household populations. Out of these only 647 males and 673 females are Lachungpas, 6 males and 3 females are Nepalese scheduled castes, and the rest are government officials. Like Lachenpas, all Lachungpas belong to one caste. Lachungpas belong to one caste. There are no groups or divisions in their society.

There is no artisan class among Lachungpas. Some Tibetan refugees (*Gava*) used to make utensils and agricultural implements for these people. Now, all these things can be procured from Mangan market. The *Gavas* are still there and work as labourers and work for their landlords free of charge. A Tibetan refugee *Shempa* (butcher) works for the Lachungpas. They are paid in grains. It is believed by these people that if animals are killed by *Shempa*, they are not tortured after death. In case of pig killing, he is paid according to the length of the tail, the bladder and some other internal organs. He is given *Chhang* (millet beer) and rice. These *Shempa* are looked down upon and marriages with them are not preferred (Bhasin 1996).

The Lachung revenue block is divided into three *Busties*, namely, Shertchu, Singrig and

Beechchu. Houses are clustered in all *Busties*, but are not adjoining. At the time of Hooker's visit "Rice was once cultivated at this elevation but the crop was uncertain" (Hooker 1855: 119). At present, there is some cultivation of wheat, barley, peas and raddishes. In the gardens hollyhock is seen, also *pinus excelsa*, peaches, walnut, etc. Some tropical grasses grow wild here. Water is brought to the houses through water pipes from the small storage tank. The agricultural lands of Lachungpas are at Khedum, Leema and Lothen, about five kilometres away at lower altitude. The 45 households of Shertchu and 33 of Singrig have cultivable land at Khedum and Lothen, while inhabitants of Beechchu have agricultural land in Leema and Khedum. All these places are nearby and the total cultivable land is about 13-16 hectares. The village of "Khedum is situated on a flat terrace several hundred feet above the river at an altitude of 2,135 metres above sea level. There are about 50 to 60 houses. Maize, wheat, *Kodo*, *Kouni*, plantain, peaches, and peas are grown. Lothen has a splendid pasture. There are about 50 to 60 houses inhabited by these people. Leema has about 40 to 50 houses and agricultural land.

There is one big Gompa in Shertchu and a smaller one between Singrig and Beechchu. The monks attached to Gompa live on alms and donations by Bhutias. Monks earn the donations during sickness and death ceremonies of Bhutias.

There are two primary schools, one Adult Education Centre, one Child Welfare Centre and one Primary Health Centre in Lachung. A Cottage Industries Training Centre is working in Lachung since 1976. Lachung and other small streams pass through the *Busties*. Water is transported to individual households through water pipes from small storage tanks. Postal facilities are also available to these people. Rice, maize and wheat are the staple food of the people. They have to earn cash to get these cereals. There is 666.36 hectares of unirrigated land available for cultivation. Some vegetables are also grown in house gardens.

In Lachung, there are three types of land, that is, land in the apple belt, land in the maize, wheat and millet belt, temporary land. Land in the apple belt and maize, wheat, millet belt are permanent. Each family, who is a member of the *Dzumsha* and fulfills all the duties of a member, is entitled to 55 x 55 *Dhams* (a unit of measure, 4 *Dhams* = 1 *Thakpe* and a *Thapke* is a rope by

which measurements are taken) of land in the maize, wheat and millet belt and an equal amount in the apple belt. The third category of land is not permanent, as it is kept for the future generation, but is temporarily allotted to each family an area of 55 x 55 *Dhams*. This allotment is redistributed and reallocated every three years in order to keep good and bad land in rotation. A family has 110 spans of length and breadth of permanent land and a total of 165 spans of length and breadth. If a new male member is born, he has to be registered in the *Dzumsha*. The *Phipun* and council members decide the allotment of land. A small piece of paper is given as the document with the measurements. Ownership of land is not very important to these people. The wealth of a person is not judged by the quantity of land he possesses but by the number of animals he owns.

In Lachen valley, the cultivable land is much less than Lachung valley. There is no apple belt as such, though a few apple trees can be seen. At Latong, all the land has been distributed equally since a long time. There is no temporary land for future generations in Lachen. In this case, public land beside roads is allotted to landless needy people at nominal rates. The money from the sale of land goes to a *Mongngu* (public fund) maintained by the *Phipun*. This fund is used at the time of some V.I.P. visit or any other general purpose. There is an area of two hectares of public common land, that is, Mangsha beyond the Dak Bunglow, but it is useless and used only as wasteland. Lachenpas have less fertile land at the places of migration also. It has been cultivated for the last 30-40 years without the addition of manure or other fertilisers. Nowadays, yield is much less than what it used to be. People are less enthusiastic about cultivation here. As such, the land is divided by the *Phipun* and council members according to people's needs. Childless couples receive much less than couples with children. There is no demand for more land at the places of migration because it does not yield good crops without the application of manure. People prefer local manure (Mal). The land here is used for grazing. Cultivation is around the houses in Lachen, and in the maize belt in Latong (Bhasin 2012).

Land Use in Lachen and Lachung Revenue Blocks

Exact statistics of land use for these regions are not available. People have houses and house gardens in the revenue village. In Lachung there

are small fields and some apple orchards. The apple orchards are spread over 115.28 hectares. Some statistics for Lachung are available. These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Land use in Lachung

Type of land	Area in hectares
Total dry fields	593.86
Banjo (Fallow)	69.50
Total area of <i>Bustiwalla</i>	663.36
Total government uncultivable land in Lachung	2150.86

Bustiwalla + government land = total area in Lachung
 663.36 + 2150.86 = 2814.82 hectares

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have adapted culturally to diverse natural landscapes and have established settlement patterns and production activities tailored to the limitations imposed by the region. Three major biogeographical provinces of human land can be identified in both the valleys:

- i. Fields and pastures at higher altitudes (5,173 metres to 5,824 metres)
- ii. The houses and small gardens in front of houses at Lachen and Lachung
- iii. The valley floor, peripheral valley bottom at lower altitudes for fields and pasture (5,000 metres to 4,601 metres)

Here too the different fields of a family are at different altitudes. All the land in the area cannot be used for agriculture because of rocky and precipitous slopes, poor fertility and absence of irrigation. Most of the land is under forest, and at some places the forest is dense while at others it is rocky with thin vegetation. Non-availability of manure, local or compost has resulted in the barrenness of land. Environmental hazards like hailstorms, excessive snow, erosion, landslides and landslips pose problems for these people. Bhutias perform many ceremonies to the gods to control environmental hazards.

Land distribution pattern among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung has influenced effective land use. Among Lachungpas, the land is redistributed and reallocated after every three years. People do not try to improve the condition of the land by using chemical fertilisers or making terraces, etc. No water channels have been constructed. They do not own the land but use it periodically. This system of redistribution was put in place in order to avoid un-

equal distribution of good and bad land, but the result is that now all fields have been rendered barren.

The people of Lachen and Lachung have agropastoral economy. In the arable areas, agriculture and pastoral lands are close together. Agriculture is carried out in the valley areas while the mountains supply pastures for the yaks and sheep. The nearby forest fulfils the fuel needs of the people.

They raise yaks and sheep to supplement their subsistence economy. The vast open spaces between 4,483 and 5,824 metres are used for raising the yak. The yaks are robust animals requiring little care and are perfectly adapted to high altitude. The yaks provide their owners with milk, meat, wool (for saddle padding, blanket making), fuel and transportation.

Lachen and Lachung present an interesting contrast as far as the movement for agricultural activity is concerned while both have more or less the same agricultural production. The movements though vertical in both cases are in opposite directions. They are controlled by the presence of arable land at different elevations and at different places.

This movement is necessitated by the fact that there is no arable land available in Lachen and Lachung. Out of 2,817.22 hectares of Lachung, 666.36 are unirrigated land available for cultivation and 2,150.86 hectares is not available for cultivation. The opposite directions of movement also explain some of the differences in the agricultural produce and harvesting times of the two areas under study. The Lachung people are on the move for the whole year. They do not move along with their families as the Lachenpas do. Their families are dispersed, fulfilling their allotted duties. The interesting offshoot of this is that their movement for fuel and grazing is also in the opposite direction, with Lachenpas going down and Lachungpas going upward (Bhasin 1996).

Even the season for each crop varies with altitude, soil, temperature and rainfall. Potato is harvested in September in the high zones of Lachen valley, while it is harvested in the valley of Lachung only in July. Crop rotation is another feature of the Lachung valley, which is absent in Lachen. In winter, the Lachen valley has practically no agricultural production, but in Lachung, maize is followed by barley and buckwheat as winter crops. Due to low temperatures

both the crops cannot be harvested within a single year. They take more than 15 months to mature, and after two crops the land is kept fallow for a few months.

The organisation of Bhutia migration and land use pattern is facilitated by the *Dzumsha* (village council). Bhutias follow their traditional routes in their seasonal migrations. They follow a traditional schedule of departures and duration of occupations of the different localities. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have communal forest/pastures and agricultural land with family ownership of land but with strong community regulation of land usage. The village is an important land holding unit. There is common ownership of grazing and forestland for the use of the villagers. Though, individual families hold the arable land, the sale of land to outsiders is forbidden by the *Dzumsha*. The sowing and harvesting are synchronised at meetings of the *Dzumsha* so as to utilise the fallow land as common pastures. The whole system of distribution of land is known as 'Sago', and in this form of land tenure, the communal authority overrides any claim the state might extend on internal sovereignty or state landlordism. Control over the land is exercised in relation to the social group. A Lachenpa and Lachungpa landowner drives rights in *Sago* land by virtue of his membership in Lachen and Lachung society. In its present form, *Sago* land is used on an individual basis though subject to the reversionary rights of the community as a whole. Members of the community are permitted to use the land, if it is not currently being used with the permission of the *Dzumsha*. If a member is away and not fulfilling his *Dzumsha* obligations then this land can be temporarily redistributed among the other members of the group. Rights on *Sago* land are therefore divided between the community and individuals belonging to the community, in the sense that each individual has an unchallenged right to use a plot of land. If he ceases to utilise it, the community can redistribute the land. The title to land has a communal character and it is usufructuary rather than absolute. Non-alienability constitutes the main characteristics of land held under this system.

Traditionally, *Sago* rights have been recognised not only on cultivable land, but also on waste and forestland. *Sago* rights therefore emerge not as a result of actual reclamation by voluntary individual efforts, but by appointment

of the existing area on a communal basis. The criterion was not the requirements of each family at any given time, for in that case ownership in wasteland would have been out of question.

Thus the two underlying characteristics of *Sago* as a form of communal land tenure are kinship and geographical location. The land under this system cannot be sold or otherwise permanently alienated outside the community. But there are no restrictions on alienation within the group itself. The geographical boundaries within which the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are permitted to retain these traditional holdings have been specifically demarcated. The entire area situated within these boundaries, however, is not under *Sago* tenure. The land for making houses is also allotted by *Phipun* and council members. The house site measures 58 x 58 *Dhams*.

The exact rate of assessment of land for revenue purposes is not known. It has been mentioned by Campbell that no money revenue is paid to the Rajah of Sikkim. The payments are in kind only, comprising ponies, yaks, blankets and salt, in quantities and proportions, which are not fixed. Added to this they furnish porters for the Rajah's use without hire, whenever they are called upon (Campbell 1852: 572). Until the last decade of 19th century, it had been customary for the Sikkim royal family to reside on their estates in the Chumbi valley during the summer months. Three of the most important of these enclaves were located in Dopta, Telling and Chumbi area but several other small haltings were scattered round Tibet. These estates were supervised for the royal family by a Sikkimese official called *Kutchhah*. When the royal family was in Lachen and Lachung the inhabitants had to provide free transportation for the royal couple. They took them to Geree in Tibet. From there the people of Dobta (who came in two journeys to Geree) carried them thence to Chumbi in six stages. The British stopped this practice when they took over control of the Sikkim administration in 1890. The yaks of the *Rajah* were quartered with the inhabitants of Lachen and Lachung. The Lachenpas and Lachungpas had to tend them, and manage the dairy products, receiving a small allowance per annum for the labour.

After the introduction of money, these people were paying a sum of Rupees 800 to the Sikkim *Rajah*, as revenue for the two valleys. At present the taxes are paid according to the government's rules.

The only real evidence of the economic condition of the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung is available from travel accounts. Campbell visited the Lachung valley in the last week of October (1852). He described the village as having numerous yaks and excellent pastures. He also wrote, "The cultivation here consists of buckwheat, which is cut in October, wheat sown in November and cut in May, turnips which are now in season, and a few peas which come in, in the rains. Buckwheat bread when hot has rather a tempting flavour, but it is bitter to taste and it is greenish coloured and spongy. Peaches grow, but do not ripen, as they are pulled now and partially dried" (Campbell 1852: 851-52). He further described the pastoral nature of their economy. "The people of this valley live principally on the milk, curd and flesh of their herds of yaks and a few cows, which they graze up and down according to the season, as in the Lachen valley already noticed, and by a small trade with Tibet. There are about 1,000 yaks among them. All the trade with the north is in planks, beams, rattans, bamboos, butter, endicloth, munjeet, rice and some dyestuff. They bring down salt, tea, blankets, some skins and yaks occasionally. Yaks range in Tibet from 8 to 12 per head" (Campbell 1852: 572).

The economic condition of the Lachenpas was described as being like that of the Lachungpas but with less agriculture. "The only cultivation was some turnips near the houses, and a little buckwheat higher up the hill. The inhabitants are all Bhutias, and are at present engaged in tending their flocks of yak and cows higher up the valley. The Lachen Bhutias graze their flocks over a great extent of country in Tibet and Sikkim, penetrating as far as Kambajong in Tibet to the north, and descending to Denga (three miles above Choonthang) in Sikkim in the South" (Campbell 1852: 497).

Hooker has also described a Lamteng (Lachen) house, which is surrounded by a little cultivation of buckwheat, radishes, turnips and mustard. They (Lachenpas) seldom descend to Choongtam, but yearly travel to Tibetan towns of Jigatzi, Kambajong, Giantchi, and even to Lhaso, having commercial and pastoral transactions with the Tibetans, whose flocks are pastured on the Sikkim mountains during summer, and who trade with the plains of India through the medium of these villagers" (Hooker 1855: 59).

These 19th century accounts show a multifarious economy, in which animal husbandry,

trading, and arable farming combined to provide a wide range of income. They were largely self-sufficient as far as clothing and food were concerned. Yet it is possible that despite their trading activities they were still basically a subsistence, non-cash economy, turning their profits from trade into goods before they reached the village. But their main trend in the last hundred years would seem to be predominantly pastoral. Even in the 1950s the Bhutias could be described as being chiefly pastoral people, but this would be incorrect now. With the closure of the border in 1962, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung suffered greatly. The Chinese seized many of their yak and sheep herds, when the Bhutias were on their seasonal migration under the ancient trans-border pasturage usage agreements. Their trading activities across the border also stopped. The Chinese have also prevented the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung valleys from using pasture lands in Tibet, causing heavy losses in their herds due to the lack of adequate alternative pasture areas. Military encampments, supply bases, and defense posts were set up in the northern border area. With the closure of the entire Tibetan border, the very lifeline of these people was sealed. In 1981, the Lachenpas had 690 and Lachungpas had 840 yaks. Both the communities lost over 8,000 sheep. Animals from Lachen valley spent about seven months in Tibet and Lachung animals were in Tibet for the whole year sometimes. The loss of pasture in Tibet is going to overtax the existing resources in Sikkim. The shift from a pastoral and trading economy to a more settled agricultural and small-scale horticulture is going to affect the socio-cultural system of these people (Bhasin 1996).

In the summer they crossed the border to Tibet with wooden planks, dyes, bamboos, butter and cloth, which found a ready market. In return they brought back wool, tea, salt and borax. They had their traditional trading partners in Tibet. 27 Lachenpas and 28 Lachungpas lost their investment in Tibet at the closure of trans-border trade (Lall 1981: 226). They switched over to agriculture, horticulture and transportation of goods for army personnel and road labour. Females have started working in the Indian Cottage Industries Centre. Their reliance on yaks, ponies and mules remains the same, as they serve as pack animals. Trade now occupies only a small part of their economy.

With the wool imported from Tibet, Lachenpas and Lachungpas wove blankets, tweeds, etc. on their indigenous looms. These traditional

handicrafts suffered a great setback. Their herds of sheep provide only enough wool for their own consumption. As a result, they have to depend more on agriculture and other ways of earning money. They cannot depend on agriculture alone, because the shortage of arable land in the vicinity of permanent villages and other environmental features restrict land use. Lachenpas had constant communication with Tibet through the Kangra Lama Pass. Now times they are cut off for five months of the year from Sikkim and Darjeeling when temporary bridges are destroyed and the tracks submerged at various places due to rising of the river when the snow melts. The road from Lachen to Chungthang, where it joins the Lachung to the Tista is very bad. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung who were very well off, at present, they have to look for every small favour to the Sikkim Government.

Lachenpas and Lachungpas have adapted mixed high altitude farming and animal husbandry. They raise yak, dzow, sheep, horses and mules. Pastoralism is still a major economic strategy. They move above and below the river valleys and exploit the grazing lands along these valleys and surrounding areas. The Lachenpas move along with their families, while among Lachungpas only the head of the household moves with his flock of animals. The Lachungpas have adopted to somewhat settled economic pursuits. They are trying to exploit new sources of income and job opportunities in the organised section.

Lachen Economic Cycle

The village Lachen at 2,700 metres serves as headquarter, from where their migration are directed through community organisation. In the months of December and January they come down to Latong, Denga and Geuma for grazing their animals. The migrations go down to Donking and Muguthong. Twenty houses of Sichepa Tibetan refugees are scattered here that take care of the Lachenpas flocks. They are paid in meat and liquor. The Lachenpas cultivate maize and wheat in small fields. Simultaneously, firewood is also collected. They remain here up to the second week of February. Then they return to Lachen for two months. In May, migration to high altitude starts, which takes place in two different stages. At their first halt, they occupy Yakthang, Samdong, Tallum and Kalep villages

on the tributaries of the Lachenchu at 3,660 metres, while flocks graze, and women cultivate fields and collect wood with the help of children. Men collect minor forest produce. From May to July they occupy these villages. Root crops like radishes and potatoes are grown here. From these villages, migration starts after the 15th of July to the next stage of migration at Thanggu area at 3,965 metres. Here the Lachenpas occupy five different villages, namely, Byamzay, Toga, Tseguk, Chopta and Divu Thang, along the tributaries of the Lachenchu. Cultivation of root crops is possible in Lachen valley up to this altitude. Lachenpas collect minor forest produce, especially medicinal roots from Thanggu area, which are sold at Mangan. But for many years the fields have not been manured nor looked after properly. The yield and crop is not good. People grow potatoes, radish, cauliflowers and buckwheat. From August to November, the Lachenpas stay here. Again women and children collect wood and men collect minor forest produce. In November, they start migrating back to Latong, Denga and Geuma (Bhasin 1996). Along with agricultural and other activities, the migration of yaks also takes place. In mid of February to April, the herders start towards cooler pastures with their yaks. The yaks graze at pastures at altitudes of 3,000 to 4,000 meters in Samdong, Yathang, Zeema and Yemathang, which is good for their health. From May to September, the period is good for calving and milking. Sometimes, the herders move with their yaks' further upto 4,000 to 5,000 meters, as yaks cannot stand high temperatures (the yak cannot tolerate above 15 degree Celsius temperature).

By mid-September to October yaks start their downward journey. During December-February, the yaks return closer to villages near Lachen and Lachung at altitudes of 2,750 and 3,000 meters. The Bhutias of this area are facing climatic changes. The area is receiving less snowfall, resulting in lesser yak milk productivity and reproduction. This change is disrupting migration pattern.

Lachung Economy Cycle

Most Lachungpa families make a living by pastoralism or by subsistence production of crops such as wheat, barley, buckwheat, potatoes and apples. The environment is energy deficient and the population solves this problem

by a variety of cultural means. The people of the area move to other valleys to seek additional resources by migrating seasonally. Pastoral activities do not conflict usually with agricultural activities. In cases where a delayed harvest or early planting causes production regimes to overlap, the extremely flexible division of labour between men and women permits the household to split up the labour force, maintaining activities simultaneously in both areas. The seasonal migration emerges as an activity organised by family and community structure.

As Lachung is at a high altitude, many crops do not grow at that height and people own land at different places in Khedum, Leema and Lothen in the valley at a much lower altitude. All these places are nearby and the total cultivable land is about 16 hectares. The village of Khedum is situated on a flat terrace a few hundred metres above the river at an altitude of 2,135 metres above sea level. There are about 50 to 60 houses inhabited by these people. Lothen has a splendid pasture and 50 to 60 houses. Leema has 40 to 50 houses and agriculture land. Boundaries of fields are marked by stonewalls and fences. Each enclosure has a small field house. It is occupied by a member of the family during planting and harvesting. Lachungpas own only yaks (no sheep and goats), which are kept further south where they graze in the winter, but in summer they go as far up to Yume Samdong. The livestock population of Lachung is local cows and bulls (25) and yaks (3,000) (only 25% families own yaks). At higher altitudes they are looked after by *Dukpas* (shepherds Tibetan refugees, residing in that area). Only males accompany herds on summer migrations (Bhasin 1996).

They cultivate wheat, barley, maize, peas, turnips, potatoes and other vegetables. Wheat and barley is planted in November-December. The male members of the family graze animals beyond these places. While animals graze, they collect grass and firewood. Usually people stay here for two months, but some families stay till harvesting time (March and April). Maize is planted after this, in areas in Lothen where apple harvesting has taken place. Maize does not grow at higher altitudes in Lachung. Pumpkins and cucumbers are planted between rows of maize and squash vines are grown on the trees as well as on the poles. Towards the end of April, other vegetables such as cauliflower, onions and tomatoes are planted. Nettles, a big source of food,

grow wild here, but are transplanted into fields. Lachungpas have adopted new ways of growing grains and vegetables, which have been introduced by the agricultural department. The better qualities are grown, which give better yield. With the change of season, they start moving upwards and go above the Lachung up to Yume Samdong. Those Lachungpas, who do not have houses here, stay in yak tents. By the middle of August, the downward migration starts. The family members staying at Lachung move towards Khedum, Leema, and Lothen to make preparations for sowing of wheat and barley. Maize is harvested. Maize grown here is not of good quality and is used for animal consumption. Apple harvesting takes place at Lachung. The males with animal herds come down during the last week of August and the middle of September. The harvesting of wheat and barley is over, and the animals can enjoy the butts of the harvested crops. During the next four months, the animal herds move further down to Mangan forest to utilise pastures. In January-February, they start moving upwards towards their own village and the cycle starts afresh.

A family that has fewer animals, and cannot spare a person to accompany the herd, can keep the animals in the village and stallfeed them with the *Phipun's* permission. A person has to pay compensation of as per rate per month to the *Dzumsha* for using the communal grazing land. The chief cash crops of the area are apples, potatoes and vegetables. A few varieties of peas, peaches and cherries have been introduced. On 115.23 hectares of land there are about 36,820 apple trees, out of which 3,065 are old, 18,755 young and new plantations are above 15,000 saplings. Apple production has come down for the last two years because of black spot disease. The healthy harvest of the area usually is around 1.75 lakhs kilogram (1979-1980). In 1981-1982, the harvest was around 1.50 lakh kilogram. The government has opened a buying agency at Lachung itself. Apples of the area are graded according to the variety as A, B, and C. The rates for these are fixed accordingly.

The Bhutias keep a variety of domesticated animals. Of far the greatest economic importance are yak, sheep and longhaired goats, the products of which provide the main subsistence. Other domesticated animals are horses, mules and dogs. Horses and mules are used for transport and riding. Horses are used by men and

mules by women and children. The dogs are used as watchdogs. Cattle are lacking, reportedly because of the length of the migration. Bhutias domesticate a species of ox, covered all over with a thick coat of long silky hair that of the lower part hanging down almost to the ground. There are two types of yaks, namely, *Hlono* (Lachen type) and *Pheno* (Donkyla Yak). The latter are more hairy and small in size and can withstand extreme cold. As a meat food it is consumed in large quantities, both fresh and frozen and both cooked and raw. Yaks are raised for their transportation value, milk and hide. *Khu-low* (Yak hair) is used for making *Thakpo* (rope). From long yak hair *Byah* (tents) are made, which are used during migrations to Thanggu. If the yak hair is extremely good, they make *Nambu*. The Yak-juk (yak tail) is used as *Chowri* in worship. A yak's cost is fixed according to their quality. Army units situated nearby hire yaks as pack animals and make payment. Very old yaks are sold for meat. Shearing of sheep is done in August, once a year. The yield is about 1 kilogram. *Phetta* (shearing) is done by Sichepa with a knife called *Tichung* and there are no shearing charges. Wool is for self-consumption, for making *Nambu* (blanket), *Bakhu* (dress) and *Lhum* (shoes). The products derived from sheep and goats are milk, meat, wool and hides. These products are variously obtained and processed, and are consumed directly, stored and consumed, or traded.

Milk and its products are most important. Sheep and yak milk is never consumed fresh, but immediately heated and started off by a spoonful of sour milk, and it then rapidly turns into sour milk or *junket*. Cheese is made from *junket*. Cheese production is less during periods of migrations and the best cheese is supposed to be made in the relatively stationary period of summer residence.

The Bhutias drink little milk from the goats or the sheep but make butter from both. This is usually donated to monasteries, who use it for burning in lamps on the altars. Only poor people consume the butter of sheep and goats. The gentry and the richer people generally eat only the butter from the *Dri* (female yak) and the *Dzow* (cross between yaks and ordinary cattle). The butter of the ordinary cow is held as inferior to those two kinds. Milk of the yaks, sheep and goats is brought in leather bags after milking. These bags, securely closed, are rolled backwards and forwards till the butter forms.

To make cheese (*Chu-ra*), the buttermilk is boiled and strained off. It is wrapped in a cloth, and when partially dry, is pressed down with weights to squeeze out more of the moisture, and to shape it after the prescribed pattern. Later on it is cut into cubes, and these cubes are hung on yak hair for drying. After the cheese has been made, the milk residue is given to calves and dogs.

Most males and many female lambs and kids are slaughtered for meat, and this is eaten fresh as well as salted and dried. The hides of slaughtered animals are valuable. The hides of adult are plucked and turned inside out, and used as storage bags for water, sour milk and buttermilk. The skin of small kids is utilised as containers for butter, etc.

Wool is the third animal product of importance. Lamb's wool is made into tweed, and sheep's wool and yak hair are sold, or spun and used in weaving and rope making. Goat hair is spun and woven.

In the further processing of some of these raw products, certain skills and crafts are required. Most important among these crafts are spinning and weaving. All locally used wool and hair is spun by hand on spinning wheels or spindles of their own. During their leisure time, Bhutias are mostly spinning. All saddle bags, pack backs and sacks used in packing the belongings of Bhutias are woven by the women from this thread, as are the rugs used for sleeping. Further more, the tents, which are used while travelling, are woven of yak hair, and have water repellent and heat retaining properties. All weaving and carpet tying is done on a simple loom.

Otherwise, simple utilitarian objects of wood such as tent poles and pegs, wooden tools and loops bent over heat, and yaks packsaddles are produced by Bhutias themselves. Ropes for the shelters, and for securing pack loads and tribbling animals are twined with 3-8 strands. Some of the broader bands for securing loads are woven. Various repairs on leather articles, such as the horses' bridles, are performed by the Bhutias, though there is no actual production of articles of tanned leather.

The staple diet of the Bhutias is yak's meat, mutton, barley-flour, cheese and tea. Meat is eaten both fresh and frozen. Sometime the whole carcase is kept, whiel sometimes the meat is kept and dried in strips, this being useful while travelling. Animals are usually killed in October, when they are fat after the good summer grazing and it

is easier to freeze the meat in winter. Bhutias relish soup. It is made with mixed meat, spices, and thin strips of dough or dough is cut up into thin squares and boiled with minced meat. Bhutias also drink flour soup made of chopped meat boiled and served with small pieces of flour rolled in to shape like cowry shells. The Bhutias diet also includes agricultural produce, part of which they produce themselves.

Although wheat is grown in Lachen and Lachung, the chief Bhutia grain food is barley, which is eaten in the form of barley flour (*Tsampa*). The grain is washed, fried, rolled in a bag, and winnowed. It is then ready to be ground in a water mill. There are so many rushing streams, which can be easily tapped for working of a water mill.

The barley-flour is mixed with butter and cheese, after kneading with fingers it is taken with tea, or with meat forms the staple food. People consume butter in large quantities. People, who can afford to take rice, usually take their potatoes and other vegetables with it.

A variety of mushroom grows at Yumathang in the Lachung valley. A day is fixed each year for plucking it. Bhutias relish mushrooms. Bhutias are fond of tea and *Chhang* (local beer). *Chhang* is made by washing and boiling barley, for about one to two hours. It is then strained through a bamboo basket, laid out on mats on the ground, and allowed to cool partially. A little yeast is mixed, and it is put in a jar covered with cloth for fermentation. Fermented barley is kept in a bamboo container and hot water is poured on the seeds. The freshly prepared hot drink is drunk with a bamboo straw.

In Lachen and Lachung, marginal agriculture and animal husbandry is not sufficient to sustain population. A great number of the necessities of life are obtained by trade. Sugar, tea, salt, spices, etc. are predominantly obtained by trade. Shoes, all glass, china and metal articles including all cooking utensils, and saddles and thongs are also purchased. Only wooden items are available in Lachen and Lachung. Luxury goods from jewellery to watches to travelling radios are all bought from the market. In return the products brought to market are timber, wood, dyestuffs, and dairy products of that region (Bhasin 1996).

Domestic Units

Households

The Bhutias household is the smallest and most important unit of social organisation. It is

the economic unit, as well as the unit of participation in all public, social and religious projects. Ideally, each household has a separate house but when two families share a single dwelling, the hearth symbolises independence. The houses generally consists of two rooms, one room serves as a kitchen and living room, and the other as the altar room. On account of damp climate, the houses are raised above the ground with lath and plaster walls. The ground floor is generally walled in with stones and is used for keeping goats, sheep and cattle. The kitchen is in one corner with a permanent stove made of clay. In the kitchen, utensils are hung or stacked on sides. The altar room has several statues of Buddha, bowls of water, a lamp, incense and other offerings. Along with the religious objects are wooden paddle carved figures of men and animals. These figures are filled with a paste of flour and water and after drying, they are taken out and used in exorcist ceremonies. It saves time, to have a symbol of evil handy in the hour of need. These images are taken out of the house and are placed at cross roads. Both rooms have lofts with ladders made of a log with steps hacked out with an axe. Bags of millet hang from the roof in bunches to dry, to be used in the preparation of *Chhang* (Bhutia beer). Many pieces of meat also hang from the roof.

Household goods and belongings signify the wealth of the people. Wealthier people have better beddings and rugs. Many families have expensive Tibetan rugs. In some houses, saddle bags and bridles, embossed and decorated, imported from Tibet during the many migrations are hung on the walls. Some possess beautiful silver and gold pitchers and teapots.

Other items of material culture include *Milang*, *Zhamow*, *Thebu*, *Dorjey*, *Chuming Cherthup*, *Podung*, *Paheep*, etc. *Milang* is a portable stove made of copper and is used for making tea and light beverages. *Zhamow* is a clay pot used for cooking meat, soup and vegetables. *Thebu* is a bell made of bronze used in rituals. *Dorjey* is a bronze object used during rituals. The worshipper has the bell in his left hand and the *Dorjey* in the right. *Chuming-Cherthup* is a bronze lamp used in rituals. *Podung* is used for making tea quickly. Tealeaves, yak butter and milk are mixed and stirred with a *Rak* (brass ladle). *Paheep* is made of wood and silver and is used for drinking *Chhang*. All these things have been imported from Shigatse, a town in Tibet. In earli-

er times through paying rent to the *Rajah* of Sikkim the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung considered themselves Tibetans and appeared so in language, dress and features. They travelled yearly to Tibetan towns of Shigatse, Khama-Dzong and Gnantchi carrying on commercial and pastoral transactions with the Tibetans, whose flocks pastured on the Sikkim Mountains during summer.

The economic activities (agriculture and pastoralism) of Bhutias demand relocation of families. They have a 'second' house at places of migration. At Samdong area (Yakthong, Samdong, Tallum and Kalep *Busties*) the houses are built of stones without any mud or mortar. It is single storied, roofed with shingles, and consists of only one room. Some of the houses are plastered with mud and all have a wooden door and shutter windows, which are tied up and sealed when not occupied. It contains neither furniture nor elaborate beddings, etc. The beds are merely planks and their utensils are bamboo churn, copper, bamboo and earthenware vessels for milk, butter etc.

At Thanggu the houses of Lachenpas are very small being about two metres high. They are made of stone with low-pitched shingle roofs, over which a covering of pine-bark is laid, the whole being held down by rows of stones. The shingles and battens are made of the wood of various kinds of pines and are prepared all along the valley above Lachen. The interior of the house corresponds in wretchedness with their exterior. The people sleep all huddled together on the planks laid on the ground, and have no furniture of any sort, and the fire is lighted on the floor, with upright stones placed in triangles for earthen cooking pots and for the large earthen teapots, which is always on the fire. Men and women dress alike in loose woollen wrappers with very long sleeves, woollen caps and boots. The men carry a small brass tobacco pipe, which they are constantly smoking. Juniper wood is used for burning, as it bums clearly and quickly with a fragrant odour and very little smoke or ashes. Those Bhutias, who do not possess houses, stay in yak hair tents. The black yak hairs tents are hexagonal, stretched over six short posts and encircled with a low stonewall, except in front.

Apart from bamboos, copper milk vessels, wooden ladles, tea churns, pots, goat skins and blankets, the Bhutias carry two types of churns an oblong box of birch wood in which cream is

churned, and the other a goat skin rolled about and shaken by four handles. The butter is made into great squares and packed in yak haircloth. The curd is eaten fresh, or dried and pulverised.

The household occupying a house or tent during migrations is a commensal and property owing group. Though title to animals and some other valuable items of movable property may be vested in the individual's members of the household, the right to dispose of such is controlled by the head of the household, and the products of the animals owned by different members are not differentiated but used in the joint economy of the household. In case of land ownership, Bhutias have no title to land but have only the right to use the fields. A family's land arid animals are considered the property of the householder in whose name the house is registered and who is the member of the *Dzumsha*. He is responsible for the payment of taxes.

To maintain the migratory mode of production, in addition to the tent, the household needs rugs, blankets for sleeping, pails and skins for milk, pots for cooking, and pack bags to contain all the equipment during migrations. Usually all these things are owned by individual households, as lending and borrowing of such equipment is minimal.

The household depends for its subsistence on the allotted fields at different altitudes and animals owned by its members. These must as a minimum as to only include local cows, sheep and goats as producers, yaks and mules to transport the belongings on the migration, and a dog to guard. Many households own horses and ponies to ride.

Among Bhutias today each household has about 2-3 yaks, 6-12 mules and horses, and on an average somewhat less than 200 adult sheep and goats. There is normally no loaning of animals except for weaning purposes, and each household keeps its flock concentrated. Bhutias generally act themselves as shepherds along with continuing their other activities, except Lachenpas who after their August to November migration at Latong, Denga and Geuma, Danking and Muguthong employ Sichepa (Tibetan refugees) as shepherds to look after their animals. They are paid in meat and liquor.

The household is the commensal unit and possesses its own hearth and provides its own fare. The type of families, which predominates in the social scene among the Bhutias of Lachen

and Lachung are either joint or nuclear, supplemented by some kin or widowed parent. All three types of marriage, that is, monogamy, polygyny and polyandry, are prevalent among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. Traditionally, polyandrous households were the norm but with changes in economic activities, changes in marriage and family patterns are also apparent. There were no nuclear families a hundred years ago. The nuclear family unit could not carry out the necessary mixed economic activities. Ecological constraints restricted the cultivation of land and its division was not appreciated. The parcels of land, when divided, became postage stamp size. The Bhutias were mostly engaged in pastoral and trading activities and were not at home the year round. The joint and polyandrous households had the size and composition to look after such diversified economic activities. Because of the nature of feudal labour U-lag (transportation service) the tax system, involving the need for male labour to fulfil tax obligations, the duties of *Dzumsha* the basic adaptive strategy was to prevent land fragmentation and to maintain a core of males in the family. Fraternal polyandry and joint families were the means to achieve this end. With new sources of income outside the traditional realm, there is no apparent need to stick to old customs, so brothers are opting out of the traditional marriage system and breaking up joint families. Land fragmentation and the nuclear family have become extremely common and today the norm and fraternal polyandry is the exception. In Lachen there are only three fraternal polyandrous households and in Lachung only four. Polyandrous households with four brothers are termed as *Jazhee*, with three brothers as *Jasoom* and with two brothers as *Janey*. Polygyny is not usual but is practiced when the first wife is barren (Bhasin 2012).

All households try to optimise the ratio of people to resources and incorporate males to supplement the workforce. Distribution of authority and division of labour among the members show a highly elastic pattern, and few features of organisation are socially imperative and common to all, while many features vary, and reflect the composition of each household and the working capacities of its members.

All families have a recognised head that represents the household in dealing with *Dzumsha* and *Busti* matters and strangers. In the joint family or incomplete family, the senior male is the

head. Only where there are no adult male members in the household is a woman regarded as its head.

With respect to decisions in the sphere of household activities there is much equality between men and women, and the various decisions, which affect the household, are taken by mutual adjustments. Where production and consumption is concerned, the man leads and in matters of kinship and marriage, spouses share the decisions. The division of labour is by sex and age but this is not a much-formalised division, except women do the weaving and men the herding. Out of the labour to be done it may be grouped in the categories of domestic, agriculture, herding, collecting and other miscellaneous activities. Women and girls generally do the work within the household. This includes food preparation, mending and washing the clothes and looking after the children. Men and women share the agricultural work. Herding is the man's job. It is true that women shepherds do not exist here. However, women look after their husbands and family and cook for them while on migration. When yak milk is brought home, women churn it and prepare butter, cheese, etc. Women and children collect *Arum-root* (Tong) and firewood. Firewood, grasses and minor forest produce are also collected by men when they are herding the animals. Both sexes participate in the ceremonies but men shoulder the major responsibilities.

Bhutia villagers collectively comprise a corporate land owning unit. Although land that has been cultivated or that serves as a house site is typically regarded as household property, the villagers at large hold wasteland in public tenure. Such land and its wild resources are closed to outsiders but freely accessible to all *Busti-wallas*. The *Busti* is not a productive unit either in the statistical sense of cooperation in a given undertaking or in the corporate sense that some enterprise is conducted in the name of the *Busti*. Occasions for feeding the whole *Busti* occur throughout the year, typically as the material side of the rites of passage, but also in conjunction with corporately sponsored ceremonies for the welfare of the community.

Possession of animals, fields, grazing rights, household effects as well as the house itself is normally vested in the household. Ownership of material property devolves jointly on a set of blood brothers. The eldest son inherits the pa-

rental house. Ideally, land and other wealth is equally divided among sons. The daughters inherit two yaks, clothes and jewellery. The rights of disposal are prerogatives of the conjugal family and implicit usufructuary privileges are extended to close kindred. If there are no sons, adoption (*Puchop*) of a close relative or anybody from the village is permitted with the consent of the *Dzumsha*. The official adoption is done using a scroll of paper *Khamza*. In special cases where there are only daughters, they inherit the father's property. Heirlooms and other valuables are divided amongst all the siblings upon the death of the surviving parent.

Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung the component households are economically independent from each other. Each household has its own animals, land and grazing rights by virtue of its *Dzumsha* membership, and community awareness is created by repeatedly arriving at consensus of opinion. The crucial problem of the continuation and replacement of the household units as a process spanning the generations show that the household units of Bhutias are based on elementary families. After a marriage, when the nucleus of the new family is established, this nuclear forms a new and independent household. A woman joins her husband or husbands upon marriage and lives with her in-laws. But the new couple's period of residence there is usually brief and rarely extends beyond the birth of the first child. After this they establish themselves in a separate household. As such they form an independent economic unit, and to be viable as such they must possess the productive property and control the necessary labour force to pursue the different economic activities. Bhutia society makes arrangements where by productive property in the form of land, herds and equipment, additional labour force are provided to secure the viability of newly established incomplete elementary families.

A family's land and animals are considered the property of the householder in whose name the house is registered and who is the member of *Dzumsha*. All sons inherit equally. The land inheritance pattern is such that a father's land is divided equally among his sons and their's among their sons. Though the herd of a household is administered and utilised as a unit, individual members of the household, usually hold separate title to the animals. When things are going good, fathers frequently give a few animals to their sons and daughters (Bhasin 1996).

Marriage is an important event in the life of Bhutias, and is indeed a financial problem for parents, who lose their children's labour, have to finance their weddings and give them their share of property. The expense of contributing directly, of setting up the new household is carried by the groom's father, who provides a cash bride-price, which the bride's father is expected in part to use to equip his daughters with *Bakhus* (gowns), rugs, blankets, jewellery and household utensils.

In cases where there are no sons, female inheritance is common. In the absence of male heirs, a female is kept in the natal family and an adaptive bridegroom is brought in (uxorilocal marriage). In a normal situation, females who marry out receive a portion of their family property in the form of a dowry or share. This share, however, does not include immovable property such as land.

These customs contribute to the setting up of the married couple in a separate house, but they do not provide the new household with the necessary flock. This is achieved by anticipatory inheritance, whereby the sons at marriage receive a number of animals from his father's herd, which he would receive as an heir after the death of his father. In such division, the right of the widow and unmarried children is recognised, and otherwise only sons are considered. A man often keeps for himself a share equal to that allots to each son.

After the death of the father, the remaining estate is divided. If the old man was living with a married son, or even a married daughter, all household property is regarded as the property of the resident spouses. If a household is dissolved by the death of its head, his heirs divide the property.

The married couple can claim the land, which is not already divided and kept for the future generation. An area of 55x55 *Dhams* (land measure) is temporarily allotted to the married couple. This allotment is redistributed and reallocated after every three years. As soon as a man gets fields and establishes a separate household, he becomes a *Dzumsha* member and has to fulfil his *Dzumsha* duties.

Through such practices, newly married couples are provided with the house, animals, equipment and land, which they require to set themselves up as an economically independent household unit. But to maintain themselves in

this position they must perform all economic duties. For this they require at least three persons in the form of one to work in fields, other to look after the animals and the third to do the trading and other miscellaneous jobs. An elementary family can do the job while there are adolescent children. When the family alone does not contain the desired labour team. Other arrangements must be made by incorporating a hired shepherd or servant, by adopting a brother's son or other close male agnate, or by entering into small cooperative herding units to secure additional labour by sharing the burdens.

The relationship between a shepherd or servant or his master is based on an explicit economic contract, whereby the former is supplied with food and shelter and few animals per year. He lives as a member of the household.

In case of a barren marriage, adoption (*Puchop*) is allowed in Bhutia society. These devices serve to maintain the isolated individual households as a viable unity supplementing its labour pool from outside sources. However, to facilitate herding and tending flocks, functional groups that migrate together to the same place are formed. The members of a functional group help each other in economic and social activities. The tents or houses of such a herding unit are side by side. It is with such close neighbours that Bhutias have friendship and constant interaction. These groups may contain friends, near relatives or distant ones. These groups are based on interfamily relations and its pattern keeps on changing as there are no institutionalised cognatic groups or segmentary system based on nestling principle. Married sons initially tend to retain their flocks in the old herd and stay in the herding unit of their father but these are freely broken at any time.

Marriage

Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, marriages are locally endogamous, but marriages with closely related individuals are prohibited. Few marriages have been conducted with non-local women. Tradition prohibited marriages between close kinsmen is a custom that appears to have been honoured till now. Thus minimal descent lines cannot perpetuate their affinal alliances across adjacent generations. In other words, the children of two sibling sets, united through one or more marriages, are barred from

marrying one another. The preferential local endogamous marriages influence the formation of institutionalised, intravillage affinal factions and raise a potential crop of helpmates in their affines. Analysed as a particular case of descent group organisation, the Bhutia structure would seem to be highly fluid, extremely "loose" and rather enigmatic.

In Bhutia society, the household and the *Busti* as an entity influence all aspects of social life. The whole Bhutia society is a composite of overlapping egocentric kindreds. The diversified kinship ties bind together the households in an emergent entity, that is, the *Busti*.

Traditionally, the parents of the boy and the girl arrange marriages, but the wishes of both are also respected. Three types of marriage pattern are prevalent among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, that is, monogamy, polyandry and polygyny. All three types of marriages have been arranged for many generations, and changes are only with regards to the relative number of each. The basic rituals and ceremonies performed for these marriage types remains the same. Marriage ceremonies are important social events where relatives and friends join. At the time of rites de passage presence of *Dzumsha* head and members is of great importance. During ceremonies the *Jyapon* go to nearest hilltop and invite the villagers to come and attend. The ceremony is financed by the boy's parents and held at their home. The initiative for the alliance is always from the boy's side. Perhaps a boy has seen a girl at a Gompa festival and is interested in her. The boy's father approaches the girl's parents, who weigh the pros and cons of the alliance. If it clicks, they agree to perform '*Nung-Chang*' (asking for a girl).

Marriage is the principal instrument for making strangers into relatives and distant kin into near kin. In families where there are few brothers, the marriage ties are more important. It is always good to have more kin. By permitting marriages randomly among equalised, exogamous units, the Bhutia society scrambles affinal bonds throughout the community and thereby forestalls the formation of enduring intravillage blocks.

Both Lachenpas and Lachungpas are endogamous groups. Before the closure of the Tibetan border, marriages used to take place with Tibetans as well. There are no structural groupings like caste or class among the Bhutias of

Lachen and Lachung. The individual households are related by unilateral consanguinal ties. The situation becomes more complex and relations overlap as the marriages within the society occur regularly. The Bhutia social structure is so adaptive and makes such good use of ecological conditions where there is no need for competition, that households are integrated to form a community without any visible mediatory corporations or groups. In such a situation the village emerges as an integrated entity, and as a rule there should be no place for factions. The whole social organisation of the Bhutias is based on avoiding intergroup rivalries and disruptive competition. In all the activities there is a 'formal' emphasis on equality. On the surface, one does not see the cleavages in this equality. But through the social processes one can see inequality and contradiction in the system. The endogamous marriages in the Bhutia society necessarily establish potential alliances, thus giving rise to factions. Though marriages are contracted randomly, the differences in family size or number of boys in a family do create latent affinal groupings. For example, at the time of marriage a bride price is paid. A family with few sons or only one son is able to pay a greater bride price and is always a welcome catch. A family with many sons is unable to pay the required bride price, and so naturally the boys cannot have desired girls. These 'little things' are the source of latent tensions. Though Bhutias emphasise that they have no preferential marriages, nevertheless preference for an only son offering a good bride price is always there. Similarly, the girl from a rich family is sought because at the time of *Yancyapshea* the bride's parents give *Bakhus* (the girl's dress) and the number of *Bakhus* increases with the status of the parents. They also give *Dyapa* (a kind of shawl made of local wool), a long coat, one or two yaks, one or two horses and a cash present. But the wedding expenses are borne by the boy's parents.

The so-called Bhutia equality can also be seen in the method of land distribution. In Lachung, people redistribute the fields every year by drawing lots. The richer people draw for the larger plots, and the poorer villagers for the small ones. Grazing lands are divided similarly. At the time of feasts sponsored by plaintiff and defendant or other community feasts the *Phipun* and village elders always receive preferential treat-

ment. In all these activities, there is only a formal emphasis on equality, which works to the advantage of the rich. As such the distinction between rich and poor does exist but it is not institutionalised and there is no structured class system. Apparently, all form of conflict is avoided. However, the differences in family size and wealth do create latent affinal groupings but they are not recognised as operative groups.

Earlier, Bhutias with more sons and limited resources went in for fraternal polyandry as the dominant form of marriage. Though fraternal polyandry functioned to conserve land and labour in the family yet it managed to produce a pool of unmarried females. However, according to traditional inheritance laws, each male has rights to a portion of his family's land. There is no rule of primogeniture. Consequently, the question arises as to why younger brothers opted for fraternal polyandry. Many reasons are given like land conservation (the resources remained in the family), or as the Bhutias have mixed economy, the need of labour. One male would go with the herds, another could look after cultivation, and the third could deal with the business. Then there are fewer children to share the inheritance. The most important reason was that the family could not arrange for the bride price for all the boys.

Despite the lack of development, the age-old system of utilisation of land and herds along with the isolation of the region, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung have undergone substantial and fundamental changes. New economic opportunities that do not require significant investment are available. The result has been the disintegration of the traditional polyandrous family and marriage system. Apparently, these areas look traditional and undeveloped, but this superficial appearance is deceptive. Their social and economic structures are in the process of irreversible change as an indirect consequence of changes of India.

At present the Bhutias are polyandrous, polygamous and monogamous, there are no hard and fast rules about it. The people who can afford to keep more than one wife are doing so. The others are giving in for monogamous marriage. Polyandrous marriages are still in vogue, but younger people are ashamed to admit it. The form of marriage practiced by the family depends on its economic condition. The younger brothers examine the relative prospects, of indepen-

dent existence versus polyandrous marriage and make their decisions. The other social force for independent existence is the membership of the *Dzumsha* and the need to fulfil its obligations. The members of the *Dzumsha* are obliged to attend the funeral of anyone in the village along with the essential contribution of one *Ching* (scented Juniper, kept on left shoulder), fifty *paise*, one *Pitha* (measure) or rice, one *Pitha* of roasted grain, one *Nyaga* (measure) of butter and a bundle of firewood. The *Phipun* keeps a record of attendance at funerals. Each family has to be represented by an adult male. Any absentee is fined by *Phipun*.

Marriage is indeed a financial problem for the Bhutias, who lose their children's labour, have to finance their weddings and give them their share of property. Thus, the apparently egalitarian nature of Bhutia society is lacking on close inspection. If the outside forces cannot create imbalances, the society will go working as it has been all along (Bhasin 1996).

Encampments

Lachenpas migrate seasonally while Lachungpas stay in one place throughout the year. Lachenpas inhabit Lachen from February to May and then they move towards Menshithang. Only young people accompany their herds to the grazing area (*Dekko*) but some people do take their families along. Dengu and Latong are two places on the way to Menshithang where *Kutcha* houses have been built. Lachenpas have their *Kenckongshieng* (maize fields) in Latong. All maize patches in Latong have been equally divided among the Lachenpas. Besides grazing, young people collect grass and firewood. The snowfall in Lachen begins in November and it snows till April. In the month of April, only young men and women migrate to the higher villages of Zemu, Tallum, Samdong, Yakhang, and Kalep and later to Thanggu area to sow potatoes. This month is not suitable for the migration of children and old members of the family, so after sowing the potatoes they come back to Lachen and then in late May, migrate with the whole village to these places. They lock and seal their doors. Only one member of the family comes to check after regular interval. From May to September they stay in the higher region and engaged in different activities like agriculture, pasturing, trade and collection of minor forest produce.

The most urgent need for these people is firewood. After harvesting in early October they come down to Lachen for the remaining months. The duties of household members keep on changing with the changing economic situations and activities.

By the middle of May, the migration to high altitudes starts. The Lachenpas migrate to different places with their flocks and families. The migration takes place in two stages. At the first stage they stay at four different places till middle of July. These places are Yakthang, Tallum, Saindong and Kalep at 4,000 metres, along the different tributaries of Lachenchu. The second migration starts after July 15th. They migrate to different fixed places in Thanggu region at an altitude of 4,500 metres along the same Lachenchu tributary. These places, Byamzay, Toga, Tseguk, Chopra, Divuthang and Thanggu, serve as their summer quarters. All these places are characterised by scarcity of cultivable land and availability of pasture, firewood and minor forest produce. Table 2 gives details of the number of houses and area of cultivable land.

Thanggu is the meeting place of the migrating Lachenpas because of a presence of small Gompa made of yak hair. Public *pooja* is performed here, which has to be attended by all the Lachenpas. Besides the Gompa tent is a small tent, which serves as a community kitchen for the feast, which takes place after the *pooja*. Public meetings take place twice a month at Thanggu. People from other settlements come and attend the meetings. It is compulsory for one member from each family to present himself at the meetings.

Table 2: Stages of Migration of Lachenpa

Name of encampments cultivable the place No. of houses land area in hectare			
<i>First Stage of Migration at 4000 Metres</i>			
Yakthang		22	6
Tallum		21	8
	1	15	
Samdong	11	30	16
<i>Second Stage of Migration at 4500 Metres</i>			
Toga	21	7	Tseguk 7 2 Chopta 2 1
Divvu-thang	16		8
Thanggu	15		-

Among Lachungpas, there are no encampments, as the whole families do not migrate seasonally. The Lachung revenue block is divided in to three

Busties (hamlets) of Shertchu, Singrig and Beechuchu. The 45 households of Shertchu and 33 of Singrig have cultivable land at Khedum and Lothen, while inhabitants of Beechuchu have agricultural land in Leema and Khedum. All these places are nearby and the total cultivable land is about 16 hectares. Leema has about 40 to 50 houses, while Khedum has 50 to 60 houses occupied by inhabitants of all the three blocks. Maize, wheat, Kodo, Kouni, plantain, peaches and peas are grown.

The male members go with the animals beyond these places. While grazing they collect grass and firewood. This migration takes place in the months of November and December. They stay here for two months and prepare for wheat sowing. Then they come back to Lachung with collected grasses and firewood. A few stay up to March or April (till harvesting time). From Lachung they migrate to Yumthang along the Yumthangchu at 3,660 metres. They stay in yak hair tents. There is good pasture here. The valley is nearly 3 kilometres broad with pine forests, rising up to 460-610 metres. On the eastern bank of Lachung, one and a half kilometres down the valley is a Taran hot spring. From Yumthang, they move to Yume Samdong at 4,880 metres. There is very good pastureland here. From Yume Samdong they move to Chholhamo. Thus the Lachungpas migrate 6 kilometres up the Samdong up to Chholhamo and 6 kilometres below Lachung to Khedum, Leema and Lothen.

The three *Busties* of Lachung are governed by two *Phipun* (headman), one looks after the Shertchu and Singrig *Busties*, and the other is the administrative head of the Beechuchu *Busti*. The migrations of Lachungpa to Khedum, Leema and Lothen for agriculture are important events. Both the *Phipun* take care of their respective *Busti* problems during migration and non-migration periods.

These encampments of Lachenpas are in real sense the primary communities of Bhutia society, and they correspond to *Busties* of Bhutias in Lachung. The members of encampment make up a clearly bounded Social group, and their relation to each other as continuing neighbours is relatively constant while other contacts are governed by chance.

A *Phipun* holds his encampment together by exercising his influence in establishing and formulating unanimous agreement within the encampment on dates of migration and begin-

ning of agricultural activities. The Bhutias of Lachen/Lachung have communal forest/pastures and agricultural land with family ownership of land but with strong community regulation of land usage. The encampment is an important land holding unit. Though the arable land is held by individual families, the work pattern is managed by the village council (*Dzumsha*). The sowing and harvesting are synchronised at meetings of the *Dzumsha* so as to utilise the fallow land as common pastures. There is no differential access to resources through private land ownership and no specialisation of labour beyond that by sex, hence no market system to intervene in the direct relationship between production and distribution. However, the direct relation between production and consumption is intimately connected with the organisation of authority. The basic principle of this type of society is that people make decisions about the activities for which they are responsible. Consensus is reached within whenever group is carrying out a collective activity.

Phipun is dependent on his ability to influence camp members, to guide and formulate public opinion in the group. The authority required for this activity is derived from sources within the encampment and the composition of persisting encampments reflects these sources. They are agnatic kinship in a ramifying descent system, and matrilineal and affinal relations. Both Lachenpas and Lachungpas are endogamous groups. There are no structural groupings like caste or class among the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. The individual households are related by unilateral consanguinal ties. The situation becomes more complex and relations overlap as the marriages within the society occur regularly. The Bhutia social structure is so adaptive and makes such good use of ecological conditions that there is no need for competition, and households are integrated to form a community without any visible mediatory corporation or groups. In such a situation the village encampment emerges as an integrated entity, and as a rule there should be no place for factions. The whole social organisation of Bhutias is based on avoiding intergroup rivalries and disruptive competition. In all the activities there is a 'formal' emphasis on equality. On the surface, one does not see the cleavages in this equality. But through the social processes one can see inequality and contradiction in the system. The

endogamous marriages in the Bhutia society necessarily establish potential alliances, thus giving rise to factions. The official relations are regarded as relations of solidarity and kinship and are effective in establishing political bands in the encampment. Tradition prohibits marriages between close kinsmen, a custom that appears to have been honoured till now. Thus minimal descent lines cannot perpetuate their affinal alliances across adjacent generations. In other words, the children of two sibling sets, united through one or more marriages, are barred from marrying one another. The preferential local endogamous marriages influence the formation of institutionalised, intravillage affinal factions and raise a potential crop of helpmates in their affines.

Patrilineal kinship is the vehicle for the transmission of some rights and bonds of solidarity. The matrilineal kinship is also important. The relation between a mother's brother and sister's child are important and familiar. The relationship between affine is thus a strong and important one, which people try to maintain through the generations and which is used to reinforce even close matrilineal bonds. The affinal relation in a sense implies shared rights in the woman herself. A woman's father or brother have certain residual rights over her, for example in case of widowhood, she can return to her parental house. Women frequently visit their father or brother's house. Her kinsmen thus retain interest in a married woman and maintain good relation with her husband.

Legally, a husband has rights over the wife's labour, but for the smooth running of the domestic life he is dependent on her willing cooperation in the daily routine. Bhutia type of economic cycle and division of labour in the area has given an important role to the woman. This economic role has enhanced the social position of women. The economic activities of women include all agricultural activities (except ploughing), looking after the house, children and cattle. When men are away for herding, it is the sole responsibility of women to look after the house and agricultural works, which are necessary for survival here. This considerable autonomy and authority of women in family economics, affects the husband's relation to his affines. Since parents have considerable influence over his wife, he is interested in maintaining a close and friendly relation with them. Among Bhutias, apart from these agnatic, matrilineal and affinal relations, a

network of mutual aid groups (*Chuchi, Daro*) is equally important to hold encampment as a social group (Bhasin 1996).

Social Network

Though the household is the smallest and most important unit of production and consumption in Bhutia society, there are activities that demand collective participation, like roofing, marriage, birth and funeral ceremonies, and communal works like repairing of paths, construction of Gompa, *Dzumsha* house, etc. In a narrow sense the household unit might be called the economic unit, but it is not self-sufficient, and participation in a wider group is necessary. It is also clear that a household cannot take its herd for grazing to distant places. Cooperation is found among neighbours who may or may not be kinsmen. There is also mutual assistance even when cooperation is not essential to the performance of a task, for example in weeding and harvesting, for it is conventional to ask people for help, the obligation to assist being part of customary relationships. It must be understood, that all economic activities in agriculture, grazing and migrations of the community are always in a sense collective actions, for even when there is no apparent cooperation between households, the whole community passively participates in them by the dictates of the head of the *Dzumsha-Phipun* and elders who decide the dates of departure and arrival to appointed places. All the Bhutias can carry out their economic activities, because they are members of the *Dzumsha* signifying their belongingness to community. The social organisation dictated by traditions and customs of the Bhutia community has potential strength for coordination and security necessary for accomplishing the functions of its productive system. It must be emphasised that environmental conditions and transhumant way of life necessitates relations beyond the limits of a village. However, the inherent need for cooperation is less evident but in case of need, standing groups larger than the households yet smaller than the village are available. These are adhoc gatherings of relatives and friends united to assist a person in whose interest the group carries out a defined job. *Chuchi* the mutual aid group consists almost entirely of groups of neighbours, kinsmen related in one way or another to the persons concerned. Peo-

ple from *Dara* (friendship) group, also supplement labour in case of need. The help extended by friends at marriages, funerals, etc. is called *Thogram*. It is with such close neighbours that Bhutias have friendship and constant interaction. These groups may contain friends, near relatives or distant ones. These groups are based on interfamily relations and its pattern keeps on changing as there are no institutionalised cognatic groups or segmentary system based on nestling principle. Some neighbours may be excluded from this group not for any stigma or status factors but because they just do not fall the customary line of relation formation. All families of the group are obliged to give each other gifts of foodstuffs, and personal labour at time of festivity or need. Help is needed at the time of house building or repairing, at various times of the agricultural cycle, and in the preparation and serving of large-scale hospitality. They give money and grains as contributions to each other at times of marriage, birth, illness and death. They may also be called upon for help or contributions in unusual situations of need. Contingent expenditure, contributions of gifts and labour are seen as investments and are entirely reciprocal over time.

A person can be a participant in more than one group. Whenever the situation arises for cooperative work, according to the nature of the work, a message is transmitted by the household member to the members of the group. On the stipulated day, the members arrive early in the morning and start working. No one is the leader of the party, everybody knows what to do and does it accordingly. If it is a male working group women will come to prepare the food to be served at the end of the work. Snacks and tea are provided during daytime and in the evening *Chhang* and a meal is served. The structure of the group exists in the "cognitive map" of the people. But it is not a regular, corporate and institutionalised group. In house building, one person from each household of the group, preferably a man, is informed. If the head cannot come, he sends his substitute. If the workload is heavy, both men and women are invited. A child cannot replace the adult helper, hence is not accepted. A paid labourer can replace the person provided he has a valid reason for his absence, and the wages will be paid by the person who is unable to reciprocate the labour. A person from another group may not be welcome as replace-

ment if relations between the host and replacement are not cordial. It may be concluded that as such there is no replaceability without a valid reason. If a person absconds from such reciprocal obligations without a valid reason he may be taken to *Dzumsha*. Though *Chuchi* is an informal group, violation of its rules may lead it to formal level. However, this rarely happens, as it is considered bad to create ill will in such a small community. Thus one may say that among Lachenpas and Lachungpas, these are customary "quasi" mutual aid groups based on reciprocity, bigger than the household and smaller than the village, which emerge at the time of need or some exigency. The environmental conditions and pastoral pursuits cause modes of dispersal and concentration and this seasonal movement causes wide interdependence, which is met within these customary quasi-groups, creating a sense of community and preparedness to cooperate.

These quasi-groups operate at the time of marriage, funeral, house building and repairing, and agricultural activities, and function in the same way as the Lepcha groups (Bhasin 1990). All families of these groups are obliged to give gifts in the form of *Khadas* (white scarves) and bottles of liquor. These relationships are somewhat asymmetrical to the economically autonomous nuclear family. Though family units are private property holding units, yet the production from that property has an important collective dimension involving the labour of neighbours, kin and friends. Besides, in these quasi-group involvements, each family is involved in *Busti* reciprocity with a wider group of the members of the *Dzumsha* with whom one has obligations of token exchange. Participation in this wider network, as well as the smaller group is basic to full membership in the community. The *Busti* reciprocity emerges at the time of death. It is compulsory for the members of the *Dzumsha* to be represented at the *Thurey* (cremation grounds) with their essential contributions of wood, grain and butter. The *Busti* people do not give personal labour to one another on reciprocity basis. If one needs labour beyond his *Chuchi*, one has to hire people from the *Busti*, who are ready to work for money or food. The boundaries of the *Chuchi* effectively mark the limits of one's reciprocal aid relationship.

Apart from the above, special friends are part of a cooperative enterprise. These persons may

or may not be from the same neighbourhood. A certain degree of intimacy is the basis of the *Daro* (friendship) relationship and involves the giving of help, including material items and services, as well as psychological support.

It is important to note that these mutual aid groups are not based on kinship in general, but on residential and customary lines. Kin are special people, who can be relied upon but mutual aid groups are more important in the working of society. Bhutias include relatives on both sides as their kinsmen. Close relatives like mother's brother, father's sister or father's brother are invited by *Dompo* (invitation).

In addition to these *Chuchi* and *Dzumsha* membership relationships, each family contributes money and labour to those *Busti* enterprises and institutions that operate for the general welfare of the people. Bhutias contribute for similar purposes. *Rubtih* are organised by the *Phipun* and the village official *Gyapon* are responsible for informing people about the details of the work. Fines are levied on absconders.

Each family contributes to the ceremonies performed at the *Busti Gompa*. Compulsory work and contributions are expected when festivals are held and ritual performed to ward off evil spirits and natural calamities.

It can be concluded from the above description that among Bhutias, '*Busti*' is an administrative and jural unit. It remains the most inclusive level of political activity. It is recognised by the Indian government as an electoral ward and within its limits as a self-governing community. It has its own headman called *Phipun*, its own means for settling disputes and effecting collective decisions. *Dzumsha* is the village body, formed by the head of each household. The *Phipun* determines the dates for agricultural activities and for seasonal migrations, which have to be followed by every villager.

Socio-political System

Bhutias have subsistence economy with a rudimentary differentiation of productive labour with no machinery for the accumulation of wealth in the form of commercial or industrial capital. If wealth is accumulated it takes the form of consumption goods and amenities and is used for supporting additional dependents. The regulation and consumption of money does not give rise to permanent class-division.

The indigenous systems of prestige and power in these two societies are based on relative egalitarianism, as these societies are largely unstratified. These systems differ from "kinship societies" as well as there are no divisive characteristics of a kinship system overpowering the socio-political system. There are no social classes, and the whole population carries out the same kind of economic activities. Normally there is no hereditary political authority, rank or status. It is largely open to any man to advance himself socially by his own merit and charismatic qualities. Here is a case of society where social and political systems overlap and the political systems have strains of democratic republic. Bhutias socio-political system still conforms to the age-old system of community organisation. Both communities are governed by headmen (*Phipun*), by the council of village elders and by an assembly of all the people. Though, it may appear that the office of *Phipun* has a coercive authority, in actuality, *Phipun* leadership has been diffusely exercised by a number of prestigious and influential men within the community. These elder men have distinguished themselves by their industry, wealth, generosity, oratory and wise counsel. Although their advice may be persuasive, but it is never coercive. Through informal and sustained conversations people continue to solve problems, air their differences, and arrive at collective decisions, which on occasions receives public enunciation in a formally convened meeting at the *Dzumsha* house *Mong-khyim* (Bhasin 2012).

Dzumsha (Village Council)

Lachenpas and Lachungpas are amongst the few tribal groups in India (and only one in Sikkim), who still have traditional territorial system of self-governance, known as *Dzumsha*. Specific territorial and ethnic identity activates the collective action among these people. The traditional organisation *Dzumsha* has a format setup to show an example of social cohesion between the people with range of activities. *Dzumsha*, which has been under operation for over 600 years, control resources and look after conservation of resources, pasture management for grazing, conflict resolution and community mobilisation, tradition and local governance.

Dzumsha exactly means a gathering place. It is an institution, which looks after the administration and organising activities within a given

territory. This institution is composed of male heads of the households of Lachen and Lachung respectively. It is an all-inclusive territorial institution, with gender and ethnicity exceptions. Women are allowed to attend *Dzumsha* only in exceptional valid circumstances. The others (Tibetans, Nepalese, etc.) residing in the area are not part of *Dzumsha*, although they have to obey the norms and conditionalities. They do not form part of the collective decision making process. As already mentioned that membership and affiliation in *Dzumsha* is founded on the formal recognition of both descent and residence rules. A person is allowed to attend *Dzumsha* if he has fulfilled his duties as a member of the society (Bhasin 2012).

This unique system of self-governance was established during the first half of the 19th century in these remotely located areas that are within the jurisdiction of central authority of Sikkim, to provide unity and consistency in structure and functioning of society. Historical accounts state that the ninth Chogyal Thuto Namgyal (the King of Sikkim) constituted the institution of *Dzumsha*. Hooker mentioned that presence of *Phipun* in Lachen and Lachung. Maintenance of law and order, offences and disputes are settled in *Dzumsha*. *Dzumsha* has various socio-cultural functions and roles during the rites the passage. The diverse functions of *Dzumsha* involve economics, political and socio-cultural activities. The economic functions contain collection of taxes and fines, distribution and redistribution of agricultural and grazing lands at different altitudes (Bhasin 2012).

Dzumsha Ghar or Mong-khyim

Dzumsha Ghar or *Mong-khyim* is a place where Lachungpas meet to discuss their problems, to hear the authorities, to elect a *Phipun* and to take important decisions. It is a square, roofless structure with one entrance. In the centre, there is a long pole with a white religious flag, *Iharzo*. The seat of the *Phipun-Youttee* is right opposite to the entrance. The people sit on concrete platforms about 10 feet wide along the walls of the *Mong-khyim*. This area is tin roofed. Right behind the *Phipun*'s seat is a kitchen and storehouse, used at the time of festivals, feasts or during long trials. The *Misey* (public) sit in the middle ground as well as under tin roof. Generally the '*Zomkha*' (meetings) are followed by

tea and snacks, which are brought by those attending the meetings.

Phipun Keshe (Election)

In this democratic form of government, the public elect *Phipun* by voting (*Damto*), in December after the Lama dance. The whole assembly consisting of all the heads of the households is divided into four *Kha* (parts) or *Chuchi* (among Lachenpas). Each *Kha* will elect one *Meshok* (a candidate for *Phipun*) separately, but this selection is not from their own part but from the whole group. The people discuss the candidature among themselves and then select one *Meshok* from each *Kha*. The person elected from more than one *Kha* will be elected as *Phipun*. If two persons get selected from the same *Kha*, then both will become *Phipun*, senior and junior, depending on their age. If there is no consensus on any candidate and all four *Khas* nominate four different *Meshoks*, then the whole house is again divided into eight *Kha* and new nominations are called for, whosoever is elected again getting more votes becomes *Phipun*. If all eight *Kha* nominate four different persons (each nominated by two *Kha*) then the four names are written on pieces of paper and a *Phipun* is elected by *Gyen* (lottery). Two pieces of paper are picked up and these two are elected as *Phipun*. Both *Phipun* are equally powerful and are complementary to each other. The other two *Meshok* nominated but not selected are kept on an ad hoc panel for the next year's elections.

In Lachung, as there are three *Busties*, one *Phipun* looks after Shertchu and Singring *Busties* and the other is the administrative head of Beechu *Busti*. Because of the topography of the revenue block and distances between the *Busties*, two *Phipuns* are essential for better administration. Moreover, the migration of Lachungpa to Khedum, Leema and Lothen, for agriculture can be better looked after by *Phipun*. Both the *Phipun* take care of their respective *Busti* problems during migration and non-migration periods.

In Lachen also, there are two *Phipuns*, selected as described above. Each *Phipun* is assisted by one *Gyapan* who acts as a constable, messenger and odd job man. The *Gyapon* are selected by the *Phipun*. *Chepa* are selected by the public using a lottery system. *Phipun lochee* (tenure) is for eleven months. In this short peri-

od he has to prove his calibre. The tenure has been reduced from three years to eleven months, as the post of *Phipun* does not carry any remuneration and a person has to sacrifice his own work in favour of public work. The post carries a lot of prestige, but no economic privileges, though the possession of greater than average wealth may be a criterion of the qualities or status required for *Phipunship*, for in this economically homogeneous egalitarian society, accumulation of wealth depends on personal qualities. The elders who assist *Phipun* are *ex-Phipun*, one *Ajopao* (shaman or sorcerer) and one Lama.

After his selection, the *Phipun* takes his seat, and people offer him *Khada* (scarves), etc. and then he addresses the whole assembly promising them good administration and care of the cultural heritage of the community.

Dzumsha meetings are called to make decisions regarding economic strategies of allotment of fields, grazing land and seasonal migration. Others social religious matters and of election of *Gen-me* are also decided by *Dzumsha*. The customary and traditional laws of *Dzumsha* recognised by the Government of Sikkim expand the power of *Dzumsha* within their territory. The Government of Sikkim and the Centre had to face opposition, when hydropower development projects were pushed in the area in 2003. These mountain development programmes are incompatible with the surroundings. The Lachenpas and Lachungpas were afraid that with the introduction of outsiders (workers, engineers, officials among others) their land, culture, traditions practices and identity will suffer.

Phipun, with the assistance of *Gyapon* collects government levies such as land revenue and forest tax, and is the representative of the community in government dealings. Nowadays, *Phipun* has to also regulate the collection of *Jatamanshi* and *Kutki* (minor forest produce). From the last ten to twelve years all start on the same day. Previously, people were not bothered with the minor economic activity because other sources of income were sufficient for subsistence.

Gyapon informs the people about the *Dzumsha* meeting, by shouting *Dzom-nyo* ("all of you, come here for a meeting") at different crossings. Everybody must attend the meeting. A *Megho chokse* (attendance register) is kept and roll call is taken. The absentees are fined. The fine is deposited in a public fund and *Chee-Dep*

(account register of public fund) is maintained. When *Phipun* finishes his term, he hands over the charge to the new *Chepa*. At *Cheen-Chete* (handing over the charge), one *maund* of rice, meat, teas etc. are provided by the old *Phipun* from the public fund to arrange a farewell feast. The balance is handed over to the new *Phipun* and his aides.

Disputes arising chiefly from the theft of garden crops, animals and women, that is, adultery and related offences are settled by *Phipun* and village elders. They always try to solve disputes at this level. If it cannot be solved at this level, then the case is officially brought to *Mong-khyim*. The prescribed cash and *Khada* is paid as a court fee by both parties. Even here, a committee is formed and mediation is tried to reach a compromise. If the settlement is not agreeable to both the parties, then the official procedure takes its course. *Trimptons* or a jury of ten persons including two *Phipuns* are selected, one of the *Trimptons* is head Lama (*Chutimpa*) and another the sorcerer *Ajopao*. They all come to *Mung-khyim* with their beddings, as they are not allowed to move out during the proceedings, which may last from two to ten days. All will take an oath from the *Chutimpa* and *Ajopao*. The house is divided into two groups of for and against. Both parties plead their case and the trial is held inside the *Mong-khyim*. If an agreement is reached the guilty party is fined. If the agreement is not acceptable to him he can apply to the Deputy Commissioner through the *Phipun*, but this rarely happens. The *Phipun* has a seal and he can forward the sealed papers of the proceedings of the case to the Deputy Commissioner at Mangan.

Traditionally, *Dzumsha* also functioned for regulating each man's share in *U-lag* (transportation service). The men giving *U-lag* used to receive small sums of money, which was deposited with the *Dzumsha* for a community feast. The rich people were exempted from *U-lag* by paying a yearly contribution to *Dzumsha*. But now *U-lag* has been abolished from the area. Another duty of the assembly is that of assigning who is going to join Gompa to become a monk.

Powers, Authority and Duties of Phipun

The *Phipun* and its council still administer the affairs of their community, though in other parts of Sikkim the supreme political and judicial

authority is the government administration. Nevertheless, the *Phipun*, as head of its people, is always treated by his subjects with a good deal of outward respect. He can decide on community policy and make regulations binding upon his subjects. However, the *Phipun* is more conceded in maintaining the existing laws than to alter them. He determines and arranges for the execution of all important public works. Much of his time is spent in the *Dzumsha* house, where he listens to news, petitions and complaints from people, and gives orders for whatever action may be necessary. He must protect the rights of his subjects, provide justice for the oppressed and punish wrong doers. He controls the distribution and use of the tribal land, organises large collective feasts, and regulates grazing timings and those for, sowing and harvesting crops. With the extension of the Indian Penal Code, the *Phipun*'s administrative duties have greatly increased. He is responsible to the administration for maintaining law and order, preventing crime and collecting revenue. He must carry out all orders and instructions issued to him, and render any assistance required from him, by officers of the movement. He is expected to cooperate with the District Commissioner and other members of the administration in all sorts of economic, social and educational schemes and developments. His formerly undivided control over every aspect of public life has thus been divided among various governmental departments with superior authority. To meet the individual expenditure of his own visits to Gangtok or Mangan, he has to spend from his own pocket. However, during the visits of V.I.Ps. or senior government officials, feasts are arranged from the public fund. People contribute to this fund in the hope that *Phipun* will persuade officials to provide for more developmental schemes and subsidies. Besides contributing money to this fund, people help in arranging the feast, erecting welcome arches, burning of "*Dhup*" and presenting scarves, etc. In this way people show their faith in *Phipun*'s and the elders (Bhasin 1996).

The *Phipun* has to generate funds by other means also. Every year, during *Lhosar* festival in the month of December, Lamas perform rituals and *Pooja* (prayer) for the community welfare. Everybody in the village participates in this by contributing one *Phe* (a measure) of rice, *Churrah* (parched cereals), *Chhang* (local drink),

Ghee (purified butter), vegetable, meat, etc. to the Gumpa. The *Phipun* and his family have to look after the people and the arrangements for the feast. The contributions are utilised for food and rituals, and what remains is auctioned. The *Dak* (auction) takes place at *Mong-khyim* after the completion of *Pooja* and other celebrations, and the highest bidder gets the things, while the money raised through *Dak* is deposited in the same public fund.

Collection of taxes is another duty of the *Phipun*. There is no prescribed schedule or rules for the imposing taxes. It is at the discretion of the *Phipun*. He has to deposit a lump sum of money as revenue to authorities. People have faith in the *Phipun*, that whatever he demands is fair. Similarly, while imposing grazing taxes it is at *Phipun*'s discretion. The people, who do not want to migrate with their animals to the winter place, have to seek permission of the *Phipun* and pay extra money for the grass, as the grass belongs to the community. People have to start moving for grazing on the date fixed by the *Phipun*. Whosoever breaks the rule is fined by the *Phipun* depending on the number of animals he possesses. The *Phipun* plays an important role in negotiating the compensation for the money due to the villagers from the government on the latter acquiring land of the villagers for road construction.

The *Phipun* also plays a crucial role in taking action against those who violate the law of their society. He has the authority to fine in cash or 100 strokes of the cane. The *Chepo* depends on the nature of the crime. The *Chepo* is to be deposited in the public fund. If a person refuses to pay fine, he is advised by the *Phipun* and advisors to act properly and honour their system. People appreciate the *Phipun*'s service and honour him by offering gifts such that "*Chang-Ring*" scarves, *Chhang* and money. This gesture from the villagers puts the *Phipun* in good spirits. People who pay no heed to the *Dzumsha* are threatened by social boycott and removal of their names from the *Dzumsha* roll call. Social boycott is a disaster in these areas, where the prominence of *Dzumsha* is supreme. This type of socio-political system derives from the cultural fact that all decisions, to a greater or lesser extent, involves people who are bound to each other in a network of common obligations and cultural goals. Law, as a social phenomenon, cannot be easily separated from its cultural matrix.

Kyarzthoo Dentuk (Impeachment of the Phipun and Selection of a New One)

Though the *Phipun* is an executive head, and has a lot of power and authority, he is not the supreme authority. To check him, the village elders are always there. If he tries to misuse his power or is corrupt, a vote of no confidence is passed and he is removed from office. In this regard village elders are more powerful than the *Phipun*. If people are not satisfied with the *Phipun*'s administration, village elders call the *Dzumsha*, and the *Phipun* is asked to appear. Each member of the *Dzumsha* has the right to vent his feelings against the *Phipun*, and place these grievances before the assembly. If the accusation proves right, the *Phipun* is removed from his post and a new one is selected, there and then. This process of impeachment is called *Pikshe* and election of a new *Phipun* before the completion of the term of old one is called *Kyarzthoo Dentuk*.

Hydropower projects led to such an unprecedented removal of *Phipun* in Lachung. The *Ushas* in Lachung and Lachen are non-political and do not allow individual party affiliation of *Zumaya* members, as these are considered as threat to collective unity and peace in the region.

With the announcement of the 50,000 MW Indian Hydroelectric Project in North District of Sikkim in the year 2003 (87), in an urgent meeting in both the *Dzumsha* respectively, a unanimous decision was taken between Lachen and Lachung Bhutias.

Notwithstanding the promise to say no to a hydroelectric project, a private company approached the *Phipun* of Khadum in Lachung who gave his permission for a survey and accepted money from the company. He distributed the money among *Dzumsha* members on the promise that the survey will be undertaken along the rivers only. However, the company employees were assessing land and mountain area, which started unrest among the people about the potential impacts of such development. Mountains and lakes in the area are considered the abode of the Bhutias' (Lachungpas and Lachenpas) guardian deities (*Lhasungs*) who are worshipped and feared by the locals.

An emergency meeting of *Dzumsha* was called to discuss the embezzlement of money by the *Phipun* of Khedum and a few of his aides. *Dzumsha* members were split between for and

against the *Phipun* of Khedum. Eventually, long meetings led to the ousting of the *Phipun* from his post.

Dzumsha showed combating unity to resist the hydroelectric power project by the State and Centre Government in the village. In Lachung and Lachen, *Dzumsha* enable local action and formation of community alliances, and with the hydroelectric power project, the Bhutias were more concerned about their traditional institution and their collective identity.

Apart from legal recourse, which people take against offenders, more serious offenders and serious offences move Bhutias to employ the services of the *Pau* (sorcerer) to discover by divination and punish the guilty party. The *Pau* performs *Cho-chapshe*, which is considered a very powerful weapon, the curse of which is believed to affect nine generations. *Cha-chapshe* is performed wherever an individual or group is accused of crimes against society, which have to be punished by the devils. The crimes could be embezzling of public funds, disobeying of the *Phipun*'s order, a big theft in the area or abduction of an engaged girl by somebody not engaged to her. *Cho-chapshe* can be employed against the *Phipun* also, if he betrays his people or is found guilty of fraud or nepotism.

Cho-chapshe is performed by writing the name of the person, if known, on a piece of paper called *Khe chik* while *Pau* invokes all the *Pholhas* (devils). People gather at the junction of three streams or rivers and place three stones (*Gheepao*) on which a *Zama* (earthen pot) is placed. The *Khechik* is placed in the *Zama* and the *Pau* invokes all the devils by chanting verses. The verses ask them to come and see the person who has betrayed the confidence of the people and pray to god for his destruction. A fire is lit under the *Zama* and all present stone it. Nobody touches the broken *Zama*. They clap hands thrice (twice is a bad omen). Then all those present go to the Gompa to worship *Sungma* (goddess like Kali).

Confronted with extraordinary or continually repeated offences, the villagers act as a corporate group and exact penalties, otherwise most transgressions are viewed simply as acts against individuals, which compel the person concerned to rally the support of his friends and close kinsmen, to a *Dzumsha* meeting for the mediation of the *Phipun* and elders. The *Phipun* and elders regulate current affairs and act as judges. The

elders advise the Phipun and guide him in his office, conduct public ceremonies and arbitrate any differences between headmen and the people. The Bhutias have Gompa society to look after ritual offences.

Intravillage violence, if not negligible, is restricted. Village elders and kinsmen exert informal influence upon both parties to exchange tokens of goodwill and cease hostilities. The parties, under the force of public opinion and village morality often suspend hostilities on their own. The coherence, integrity and solidarity of the village are preserved, as there are no intravillage groups and there are no institutions to give rise to rivalries. As there are no competitive groups, individual antagonists have no group backing. But in contrast, loyalty to the community takes precedence over any issue in which it is involved. To understand the organisation of the Bhutia society, the central role of an individual household in the conduction of daily life must be appreciated. A caste and/or class system has not developed, as there are no cultural and economic divergences (Bhasin 1996).

Mechanism that Lead to Settlement

Underlying these customary laws, which put pressure on the parties to settle a dispute, is the constant pressure of common residence. For common residence implies a necessity to cooperate in maintaining peace, and that peace involves some recognition of the demands of law and morality. It also involves mutual tolerance. These demands are backed by constant intermarriages, which go on in a limited area. The Bhutias are linked in a web of kinship ties and new meshes are constantly being woven in this web with each marriage. These webs of ties unite members to form groups. Local groups have common local interests. These common local interests are reciprocated by a category of arbitrators who may be called on to help settle disputes. The arbitrators are village elders. Though they have no forceful power of coercion, but related by kinship and common interests. The agreement is generally and easily reached and compensation paid or promised. The kinship status of 'elders' is the conjoint between kinship and politics.

Conflicts are a part of social life and custom appears to exacerbate these conflicts, but in doing so customs also restrain the conflicts from destroying the whole social order (Gluckman

1960: 2). Smaller societies have such well-established and well-known codes of morals and laws, of convention and ritual.

Mechanism, which leads to settlement of conflicts, are the ecological necessities that force people to cooperate, the narrow limits of economy, which force them to work in groups for the production of food, common residence and, code of conduct. On the one hand they have customary law and code of conduct and on the other their socio-political system has characteristics of a Democratic Republic where impeachment of the *Phipun* is possible, if his work is not satisfactory.

Status of Women

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung profess Buddhism. Buddhists on the whole have a more liberal attitude towards women, particularly in respect of their work. Buddhist women do not observe Purdah. In the matters of divorce and remarriage of widows too, they exhibit much less rigidity of attitude. In Hinduism, a woman has no individuality of her own and her position in the society is generally to others as a wife or mother. Buddhism recognises the individuality and independence of women and their title to salvation in their own right whether married or unmarried. Buddhism stands for individual rights for women and secular conceptions of marriage. Marriage, according to Buddhism, is essentially a mundane affair, something of a social contract with the right of divorce. Though marriage is not regarded as a sacrament, yet it plays an important part in the life of the people, as it is a contract as well as an institution with defined rights and duties. Buddhist law favours the equality of sexes and in many ways treats marriage as creating partnership in goods (Shyam Kumari Nehru's "Legal form of marriage in India" c.f. *Indian Woman Though the Ages* by P. Thomas, 1984).

The status of women can be ascertained by the educational achievements of women, legal rights and status given to them, employment opportunities and demographic characteristics of women in socio-cultural terms. If one sees Bhutia women in regard to the above-mentioned parameters, Bhutia women do not have high status. Literacy rate among Bhutia female is a low in comparison to Bhutia male against India's female's literacy rate of 24.82 percent. Girls are not sent to school, as they are needed at home to look after the small children or to do other odd

jobs at home. The sex ratio among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung is 965, which indicates the excess of males in the population.

The Bhutias woman's lack of control over resources and lesser say in a community life may give an impression of a lower status but their concealed power in the working of the society is not denied. In traditional Bhutia community, the women have an important role to play. Gender principles are central to the organisation of traditional communities. Gender and the division of labour that depends on its recognition, are decisive elements giving mountain societies stability and cohesiveness (Illich 1982). The analysis of the women's status in society is inseparable from the analysis of its social-economic structure as a whole. There are complex cultural and social processes, which are operative at the village level, and the linkage, which exists between them, affects the position of women. For instance, economic and social mobility affect those processes, and various development programmes of rural change introduced by the government and voluntary organisations affect the position of women at different economic and social levels.

All families have a recognised head that represents the household in dealing with *Dzumsha* and *Busti* matters and strangers. In a joint family or incomplete family, the senior male is the head. Only where there are no adult male members of the household, is a woman regarded as the head of the household.

With respect to decisions in the sphere of household activities there is much equality between men and women, and the various divisions that affect the household are taken to mutual adjustments. Where production and consumption is concerned, the man leads and in matters of kinship and marriage, the decisions are shared by spouses.

The division of labour is by sex and age, but this is not a very formalised division, except women do the weaving and men do the herding. Out of the labour to be done it may be grouped in the categories of domestic, agriculture, herding, collecting and other miscellaneous activities.

The work within the household is generally done by women and girls. This includes food preparation, mending and washing the clothes and looking after the children. Men and women share the agricultural work. Herding is the men's job. It is true that women shepherds do not exist here, however, women look after their husbands

and family and cook for them while on migration. When yak milk is brought home, women churn it and prepare butter, cheese, etc. Women and children collect Arum-roots (*Tang*) and firewood. Firewood, grasses and minor forest produce are also collected by men when they are herding the animals (Bhasin 2012).

In the making of clothes, men procure wool, and women dye, spin and weave it on indigenous handlooms, *Ogongs*. They weave colourful clothes for their traditional dress, *Bakhu* and *Pangden*. Nowadays women are working in cottage industry centres on daily wages. Embroidery, repairing clothes, etc. are female tasks. Cutting and storing the firewood, collection of wild fruits and dye plants, making *Chhang* (local beer) excepting mixing ingredients are the jobs of men. Women do pounding of cereals, milk processes sing, churning of curd, making cheese and butter and keeping house clean.

In Lachen and Lachung there is no recognisable separateness of tools and this relates primarily to the not so well defined division of labour. Both sexes can use all the agricultural implements except the plough, which can only be used by a male. Field implements and other utilitarian artefacts are made by household males.

In the ritual sphere men dominate. Both the sexes participate in ceremonies, but men shoulder the major responsibilities. Musical instruments are mainly played by men. Women do take parts in dancing but their movements are different from those of men. Bhutias place great emphasis on coercive rights of exorcising and destroying demons. Like male *Pau* (trained specialists), female *Nejohum*, also play a part in exorcising rights. Bhutia nunneries, *Manikhong*, are geographically separated from the Gompas and nuns do not perform ritual and funeral rights for the people. They are present only during festivals and certain ceremonies as spectators or at the time of earning merit for oneself. Men and women differ in the way they speak and what they talk about (Illich 1982: 137). Women talk about the home, children and emotions, while men talk about work, innovations, ideas and politics. Women in Lachen and Lachung are separated by language. They speak the Tibetan language. Hindi is mostly spoken and understood by men. Nowadays children who go to school can also understand and speak Hindi. But the number of schoolgoing children is not very high, especially among girls. Education is generally

conceived by Bhutias as a means of upward social mobility for men. The women's mobility on the social ladder is through marriage to a person who is likely to be socially mobile. It does not affect the woman's social position whether she is educated or uneducated. Thus, mostly boys are sent to schools. This discrimination against women is not because of their intelligence or ability to learn, it is only that it is not going to help them in the traditional lifestyle. The problem of conversing with women is that all questions have to be asked by men and getting the answers by men. Men translate, take things for granted and mould their answers to suit the occasion.

Economic activities of women like collection of fodder, fuel and wild plants permit them considerable time away from the home and village. At home or on hillsides, they are free to talk to whomsoever they please, male or female. As a consequence, communication among women and between men and women is as high as it is among men. In other parts of India, female communication network tends to be overwhelmingly confined to caste and kin, thus reinforcing differentiation among caste lines. It does not conform to de Schilppe's statement, about traditional societies in Africa of women working close to the homestead (1956: 40). Bhutia women are relatively emancipated as they appear before men. The generalised "principle of mutual" avoidance applies in Bhutia society to the extent where it does not hamper the economic activities. In Bhutia society, women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. However, these women are not backward. They have power in their own sphere, where no man tells them what to do. They are responsible for their own share of work and share the benefits of their own work as long as the unit of production and consumption remains the home. Their own perception and that of their men, is that women share major portion of socio-economic activities and consequently they are respected, well thought of and think well of themselves. The concept of patriarchy, which prevails in subsistence societies, conveys respect rather than envy between the genders (Illich 1982: 93). Women in subsistence economic households have far more power and independence than modern suburban housewives. However, Bhutia women live their lives as dependents throughout their lifecycle, as daughters, sisters, wives, or as mothers of sons. They

seldom have a voice in the political sphere. They are not ignored at the household level, but are not given the credit and importance at the political level, and in the matter of transmission of landed property. They are like invisible hands shaping and maintaining the structure of society. This social disability makes them dependent upon men. Possession of animals, fields, grazing rights, household effects as well as the house itself is normally vested in the household. Ownership of material property devolves jointly on a set of blood brothers. The eldest son inherits the parental house. Ideally, land and other wealth is equally divided among sons. The daughters inherit two yaks, clothes and jewellery. The rights of disposal are the prerogative of the conjugal family and implicit usufructuary privileges are extended to close kindred. If there are no sons, adoption (*Puchop*) of a close relative or anybody from the village is permitted with the consent of the *Dzumsha*. In special cases where there are only daughters, they inherit the father's property. Heirlooms and other valuables are divided amongst all siblings upon the death of the surviving parent (Bhasin 2012).

Among Bhutias the concept of women's space is where only women may sit, work or enter freely at any time, and is relatively informal and flexible and depends on the separation of activities that results from the sexual division of labour. It is a characteristic feature of traditional societies to set apart, or see a distinction in physical space, which is used by men and women (de Schilppe 1956; Edelberg and Jones 1979; Ladurie 1979; Illich 1982).

In Sikkim, there are no such private or intimate spaces for women, though men have public space to hold meetings, settle disputes, discuss political and farming issues, or just sit in the *Mong khyim* or *Dzumsha Ghar*. Women do not have a similar formal sitting space. The water source is another space, which interchangeably becomes the men's or women's. If women are at the water source it tends to be only women and children, but there are no fixed rules. When women occupy public spaces, water springs, fields, etc. men usually do not join them. The women interact with each other, not with their men as couples. The men only join them in the privacy of home. Interaction between individual men and women varies according to kinship relation and relative age, which ranges from relaxed informality to extreme avoidance. Men

who are not kin, especially elders, do not come closer to an area where a group of women is sitting. By these standards the Bhutias also maintain the integrity of the gender divide.

The courtyards are mainly the women's space (except during threshing when men and women work together in the courtyard). All food processing is done here. Washing of clothes, spinning of wool, embroidery, giving baths to children, etc. is all done here. The kitchen is a women's domain.

The grazing grounds in and around the village, near water sources, are areas where old women, young girls and small boys sit with babies, to mind cattle and young sheep and goats that are too young to go up to high pastures.

During the year there is a definite change of economic activities, and where and by whom they are done. Apart from agricultural activities, there are pastoral activities to be followed.

Both summer and winter pastures remain the elements of space and time when compared to village economy. That is to say, the pastures are spatially removed from the village. They are at a different altitude and far-removed from the village. Being seasonally used, they bring in the concept of time. They provide gender differences in the utilisation of resources and tools such as sheep and goats as opposed to field crops, male instead of female labour.

The beliefs and ideas held by the villagers have a vital influence on the lives of the men and women and children. For one thing, it reinforces the gender division for workplace, tools and language. According to religious beliefs, women are considered impure, that is why they are not allowed to use a plough and visit high altitude passes, as these places are considered to be inhabited by supernatural beings.

The role of Bhutia women in childbirth and funerals is an important part of village life. Here women are carriers of village life. Here women are carriers of traditional information in absence of written records. Women appear to have their own place in society.

The economic cycle and division of labour in the area has given an important role to the women. This economic role has undoubtedly affected the social position of women, who have social freedom, which is quite remarkable in its scope. The economic value and worth of women is therefore as an independent and necessary unit of economic activity without which

the given economic system will not survive, and complementary to the men as work force, in organised functioning of the whole economic system consisting of agriculture and herding.

The role of women is not only of importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Formation and continuity of family hearth and home are the domain of women. Women's role as wives, mothers, organisers and as the basic foundation other dimensions of social life is of utmost importance. Although Bhutias are patrilineal and patrilocal, yet due to the various factors listed the family assumes a mother's centreness with the children and some important decisions falling to the sphere of women's intervention. Men are out for pastoral activities, so the socialisation of children automatically becomes the mother's business, in the early years of their lives at least.

Bhutia women are very strong and courageous in the handling of environmental imperatives as can be demonstrated in the trekking and work pattern under the severe limitations of the harsh environment. Several studies dealing with pastoral societies indicate that the position of women in such societies is not very high because the actual care of the livestock and handling of economic affairs is entirely a male domain. However, in the Bhutia society, women occupy an economically significant place, which is reflected in the generally high position and importance that they have. The comparatively high position of women in Bhutia society is the result of her economic value to her family.

The socio-economic equality of sexes can be seen in the attitudes and practices concerning marriage, divorce and household harmony. The ideal is the arranged marriage between an unrelated pre-pubertal boy and girl, both coming from different villages. She should remain married to the boy for life, though she may marry his brother if the husband should die prematurely, more so when there are children from the first marriage. A dowry system, in its true traditional sense, is not prevalent among Bhutias. At the time of marriage certain essential items are given to the girl as gifts by her parent. These may consist of a few *Bakhus* (the girl's dress) and the number of *Bakhus* increases with the status of parents (for details of marriage, see Bhasin 1989). They also give *Dyapa* (a kind of shawl made of local wool), a long coat, one or two yaks, one or two horses and cash present.

But the wedding expenses are borne by the boy's parents. Jewellery, not endowed to daughters-in-law by a woman during her lifetime, is inherited by her unmarried daughter or daughters. Otherwise, these ornaments are divided equally among the married daughters and daughters-in-law. Unmarried girls are socially secured otherwise also. They are allowed a reasonable share of livestock owned by her deceased father, and her marriage expenses are to be borne by her siblings. The wife's personal belongings are her own property and are inherited according to her wishes (Bhasin 1996).

Because of automatic levirate, once married, a woman has a social security. Traditionally among Bhutias, fraternal polyandry was practiced and in such a polyandrous social structure, women are never insecure. If the eldest husband dies she remains the wife of the other brother. Young widows are rare in Bhutia society. If a younger brother wants to opt out of the polyandrous arrangement, and marry someone else, the girl's father has to pay compensation in the form of a head and a thigh of yak, *Chhang* (millet beer) and cash payment. The outgoing husband cannot claim children, because children regard the eldest brother as their father (*Apa*) and call other brothers as *Aku* (uncle). On the demise of the wife, the husband if he wants to remarry, he has to abide by the custom of sororate. If he does not abide by rules and wants to marry somebody else, he is liable to pay compensation to his deceased wife's family. If he refuses, then the deceased's sister's husbands can claim compensation. In case of widow remarriage, some compensation is paid by the new husband to her former husband's family in accordance with the possibility of her bearing children again, as well as her age. There is another system, which permits a woman to take on a new husband, if he pays the former husband the amount incurred by him on his marriage. The consent of the former husband is considered essential. As a general rule, the bride price has to be paid before the marriage takes place. Because of demographic reasons it is harder for a man to find a wife than for a woman to find a husband. Moreover, the man has to bear the cost of the marriage much more heavily than the women. Also a girl's father has little responsibility for making a monetary outlay for his daughter by compulsion although he often does give substantial gifts to his daughter at the time of

the marriage. If a father wants to avoid that too, he can permit his daughter to elope. In Bhutia society, the custom of paying bride price in case of widow marriage or second marriage is related to her economic importance. Women are not viewed as life partners in the usual accepted sense, but also as economically indispensable co-partners in the subsistence economy of the Bhutias.

A woman always has it in her power to leave her husband if she is angry, dissatisfied or unhappy. She has great freedom of movement as children, if any, remain with the husband. Her labour is sufficiently in demand so that she can move not only back to her natal family but also to a sister's house. She can stay there till such times as she returns to her husband or finds a new one. There is no great need for her to return to the natal village, although this is the usual practice.

Divorce by mutual consent is permitted but there is no special form of divorce as such. A divorcee may, however, remarry. Whenever a man in this region acts on an assumption that his authority will be accepted simply because he is a male and fails to take into account the wishes or feelings of his wife, sister or daughter, he often gets himself into trouble. There is no way for a man to force a woman's compliance with his wishes. Her economic ability and consequent social position has resulted in special institutional privileges that are bestowed on the women.

In case of the birth of a child after the husband's death irrespective of the time gap, the child if it is born in the husband's house has full inheritance rights. Women are responsible for the continuity of patrilineage. As replacement of woman is not easy in Bhutia society because of demographic reasons, right of sexuality are ignored, but the right on the womb is there. In case the child is born after the husband's death and away from the husband's house, the child gets a share of property from the woman's father or brother, and in the case of remarriage the child is entitled to inheritance rights from her new husband. In case of the latter, the extent of the property settlement is divided before the woman agrees to remarry.

With polyandrous social structure while men have restricted choice, married women enjoy wider scope of legitimate sexual gratification. But she is not absolutely free in making her own selection for sexual gratification. Like all men,

Bhutia men also want their women to be virtuous yet female promiscuity in Bhutia society is a well-known and accepted fact. There are no cases of women being punished or sent away on charges of promiscuity and immorality. This tolerance is obviously related to her economic importance.

However, there are a few conditions under which marital status is ambiguous. A promiscuous woman who stays with a series of men, and if she bears a child the genitor may not be willing to accept it as legitimately his.

There is also a question when a woman leaves one man for another without obtaining a divorce. The first man may object and demand a substantial compensation that the second cannot pay. Under such circumstances the *Dzumsha* is likely to support the claim of the first man but public sentiment usually is that nothing can be done to force the girl to return to him.

Yet, the economic power of women in the household is not translated into corresponding community authority. They are not ignored at the household level but are not given due credit and importance at the official level. This economic superiority has resulted in more power for women. However, the power is restricted within the family domain and does not extend to social or political spheres. The family finance is managed by the male head of the household, who is the custodian of the property. Selection of the bridegroom for the daughter or sister, acquisition or disposal of property are all domains of the eldest male. In spite of substantial contribution in the subsistence economy, the women's right is not recognised in the transmission of landed property and this makes them dependent upon men. The village council, *Dzumsha* is constituted of males only. In the absence of a male member, a female can represent her family unit. If a male head is absent from a *Dzumsha* meeting, he is fined. However, if represented by a female head, she is liable to pay only half the amount for his absence. This shows that women have secondary importance in public affairs and community decision-making. Even a difference is made between men and women funeral pyres. In the case of female and male funeral pyres, eight and seven tiers of firewood are laid respectively, for consuming the body into flames. Bhutias explain this discrimination in a way that women are one degree below men in the society. To complement this lower status of women, her pyres are raised higher.

It may be concluded, as it is observed, that ecology and environment factors existing in Lachen and Lachung have given to Bhutia women a special economic power, an elevated social status and an authority almost equal to men. However, there are certain domains in which men continue to dominate, as is culturally required. Moreover, community authority still is in the hands of men. There is a kind of duality observable here. Men dominate in public and community affairs, and continue to play the role of the head of the family and the breadwinner, while women enjoy greater say in family life, a great deal of social freedom and several of their actions are condoned or tolerated. Here one may say that the public/domestic dichotomy is not the only criterion for determining the women's status in society (Bhasin 1996).

This is a patriarchal society in which men dominate in the public sector. However, in their own world women have a freedom, and a self-expression. They can only be understood on their own terms. With the onset of development programmes economic changes are taking place but Bhutia women remain traditional in their dress, language, tools and resources because they grow food crops rather than cash crops. Modernisation is bringing changes, which affect men and women differently. Modernisation brought by outside agencies is set in a male-biased ideology, women are seen as inherently 'incapable', and the new techniques are aimed at men by men. Male values are also reflected in the view that development is solely dependent on technological and economic advances. Such values exploit both the environment and vulnerable groups such as women (Hewitt 1989: 351).

Rituals and Festivities

The main function of religion in these societies is to help cope with the problems of suffering and provide means for relief from the suffering. Bhutia rituals primarily serve to insure that a person will have a long and healthy life and suffer few misfortunes. Bhutia perform curing and purification rites, and maintain similar beliefs about the supernatural and man's responsibility to it. The rites are held to produce a harmonious relationship between man and the supernatural. They also serve as social occasions where large a number of people come together

for conversation, drinking and general gaiety. Some of these rites are expensive and the household must plan the event and start accumulating the animals for sacrifice and grains for the feast to be held. Rituals are social events with supernatural overtones. Rituals generate a given view of the world and engender commitment to existing institutional structures and modes of social relationship. Rituals restore equilibrium in an unstable or antagonistic situation or validate the *status quo* (Bhasin 1996).

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are Buddhists and believe in basic principles of merit and sin. They also believe in a vast array of gods and spirits that must be propitiated at appropriate times for the general welfare of society. The sect they belong to is *Bka'brgyud*, which appears to have been the first school to gain a broad measure of control over western Bhutan. It was introduced by its founder *Gyalba Ha-nang-pa alias Gzibrijid rje* (1164-1224) from whom this school takes its name. It remained very much a family interest allied to the important clan of the *Giryos*, which provided its royal abbots. The Ha-Pa, unfortunately, has never come to light in the records.

Though there are few options for eking out a living in this environment, but permissible latitude for deploying surpluses is wide. The use of surplus time and resources is not socially or culturally stipulated or economically dictated. Bhutias have a choice in the way they utilise their surplus time and resources. They pour their surplus time into religion and the maintenance of it.

The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung place great emphasis on coercive rites of exorcising and destroying demons. The execution of religion is in the hands of trained specialists *Pau*, *Nejohum* and Lamas. *Pau* is a male and *Nejohum* is female. *Nejohum* wears an *Uzasyr* (white shawl). Bhutias permit its Lamas to marry. One finds both married Lamas and celibate monks in the village. *Pau* and Lama do not perform rituals simultaneously. Probably no more than two or three percent of Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung are actually under monastic vows, although many of them have had some instruction in monasteries, whether as vows, or as full-fledged monks who broke the vows, or simply as students who took instruction in reading, writing and fundamentals of religion from a Lama. Bhutia nunneries (*Manilkhang*) are geographically

separated from the *Gompas*, and nuns do not perform ritual and funeral rites for the people. Lamas do not live in the *Gompa* all the time. They are present only during festivals and ceremonies, or at the times of earning merit for oneself. The *Gompa* is never closed or empty, and there is always a caretaker or *Konye* who lives closeby with his family or in a small single quarter. He takes care of the altar, changes fresh water in the bowls every morning and empties them each evening. He also keeps butter lamps filled with oil or butter and checks that everything is kept neat and clean (Bhasin 2007).

There are frequent services in *Busti Gompas*, conducted by the local Lamas on a variety of ritual occasions at specified times throughout the year. Such services entail the construction of complex altar arrangements (destroyed at the completion of event), and the reading of texts, but every service culminates with a distribution of food, for which all the villagers come together. Once a year there is a big festival of *Losar*, where Lamas dress up in impressive costumes and dance the roles of appropriate gods. All the Bhutias attend the *Losar*, which goes on for three days and nights.

In addition to public Gompa events, village religion also consists of privately sponsored services, usually held in the sponsor's home, on the occasion of birth, marriage, illness and death. A household may sponsor the performance of ceremonies in the absence of any life crisis, simply for the purpose of gaining merit, good luck, protection, or all three for the household. All religious services have a broadly common base, centering on offerings and petitions to the gods, and offerings and threats to the demons, and closing with a distribution of ritual foods to all present.

Finally, village religion includes the primordial tradition of shamanism. The *Pau's* primary function is to cure illness. He goes into a trance and communicates with spirits in order to find out why they have afflicted the patient with illness and how to appease them. Sometimes he performs *Motapshe* (diagnosis) with the help of a *Lide* (plate) full of *Chum* (rice). He goes on shaking the rice plate till the symbol of the evil spirit appears on the plate. The *Pau* performs *Phiphi* by offering money, eggs and clothes, which have been circulated thrice over the patient's head to the malignant spirit. These things are thrown out and only the clothes are brought

back. It is believed that the person will then get cured within three days. Only if he is not cured will he go to Lama or a Primary Health Centre. This rite is not accompanied by any sacrifice. If *Pau* wants to capture the evil spirit, he will do so by tying the *Phetho* (thread) around the patient's arm.

In the patient's house, the *Pau* and patient sit in separate rooms. *Pau* performs *Motapshe* and after identifying the evil spirit, walks to the patient's room with a *Khee* (knife). Then the *Pau* performs *Dakche* (knife is heated red hot and licked by *Pau*) and then he carries this heated knife to the patient and performs *Photopashe* (blowing off the hot air near the patient's body with the knife). Then he drinks *Chhang*. The whole process takes about half to one hour.

In case of *Shinde's* (old man spirit) mischief, stomachache, miscarriage, etc. happen. Lamas help in this by performing *Ginse* (*Havan*) for three consecutive days in the patient's house. Big Lamas charge more cash for this and small Lamas take less.

Shamanism in the greater Tibetan culture has a long and complex history. Many of its distinctive ritual forms and basic functions continue to be appropriated by Lamas, wherever they can manage it or by local Shamans (*Pau*). Over the period of centuries Shamanism itself also underwent much change, but it has recognisably survived into the present among Bhutias, as a marginal but tenacious institution. However, with the introduction of Western medicine, it seems to have gone into rather serious decline. There are two *Paus*, 40 Lamas and 35 *Nejohum* in Lachung. Sheratchu *Pau-Pau* Sonam, Bichchu *Pau* and *Pau* Tensing, out of these Tensing's rather was also a *Pau* and was believed to be possessed of many powers. A *Nejohum* can treat sterile women and perform *Pooja* during complicated deliveries. The *Pau* cannot enter the delivery room, and can provide holy water (*Naama*) or Ghee (*Naachu*) for the easy delivery. The presence of *Pau* and *Nejohum* is not necessary at the time of marriage, naming or funeral ceremonies. If by mistake, *Pau* enters the delivery room, *Thip* happens that is he has committed a sin. Then he is prohibited to visit any person for forty days. After this period he performs a purification *Pooja*. The old *Pau* is called and holy water is sprinkled in the house and outside (Bhasin 2007).

The office of *Pau* and *Nejohum* is not hereditary. It is assigned to a person who sudden-

ly starts showing symptoms of extraordinary behaviour (aggressiveness, irritation, etc.). The person goes to *Chaam* (small house for meditation) far away from the village for three years with his own provisions. During this period he is forbidden to drink. After three years of meditation he can start visiting people. *Pau* performs *Pooja* for short periods. Chujela, the *Pau* of Lachen, is married and with children worships the Tibetan Goddess *Lankoo Thengo*. This worship is performed for the general welfare of the family by burning a hundred butter lamps and chanting verses. For the welfare of the village *Pohayah*, *Ghogenyboh* and *Rambapoh* are worshipped at the time of *Dukpasezhi* festival, which happens around August, at the place of migration, *Thanggu*.

The ancestral god *Pho-pha* (male god) whose cult reinforces the group's unity is worshipped biannually at Chuba-Lhasol in June and December four kilometres beyond Lachung. These ceremonies are performed by Lamas on the 5th or 8th of these months. They reach the place one day before the actual ceremony to make preparations. On the appointed day, one male from each household gets to Chuba by 8:00 AM to participate in the ritual. Twelve *Tharzo* (religious flags) with *LhaGya-Lho* (wishing a long life) inscribed on them are hoisted for the better life of the people. On Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, these flags are not raised, as it brings bad luck. At Chuba, there is a holy tree *Tha-Gri*, which is the abode of the celestial beings. The assembled crowd shouts "long live" and by 1:00 PM returns to their homes. This ritual is performed for the long life and stable climate conditions of normal rain, sun and snow. The presence of *Pau* is essential for the yak or pig sacrifice. *Nejohum* cannot carry out this (Bhasin 2007).

Family members worship Goddess *Yanglahmu* for wealth, with gold, butter, milk, etc. for one or three or seven days. Each family performs this *Pooja* once in a lifetime. Outsiders may also participate in this. If there are frequent deaths in a family, severe loss of livestock or failures in any sphere of life, *Wangchu-chambo* goddess is worshipped. This *Pooja* is performed by very learned Lamas because it involves long rituals and lore. Sometimes Lamas from Rumtek and Anche monastery in Gangtok are invited for this ritual. *Tha* (animal blood), *Phungsaa* (soil sample) of the place where a large number of people died, *Chushiambu* (a type of food available in

the jungle), and *Tingchu* are required for the appeasement. Also used is *Gulang* (male genital organ), made of wood or clay by the Lama's *Sepchi* (assistant). All these things are kept in the *Chosem* (Pooja room) where only the Lama and the head of the household are allowed. All others have to stay outside. A curtain is put up to prevent the ritual being witnessed by mistake. It continues for three to seven days. On rare occasions it goes on for a whole month. *Sepchi* may also attend the ritual. The performers take only rice and tea. It is a very expensive ritual, as the people who come to participate (though they sit outside), are to be fed. This ritual is always performed by *Gomchen* (powerful Lama). The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung believe in *Sodimepa* (ritual pollution). Those living in the house where death, delivery or abortion takes place are considered unclean for three days. They are prohibited from joining any ritual or ceremony.

Many Lamas are married and stay in the *Busti* with their wives and children. They work in their fields like ordinary persons when they are not in the Gumpa. They can wear any sort of clothes at home, but during ritual festivities they don dark reddish brown long robes and tall red hats trimmed with gold. As already pointed, that a household having more boys is in a precarious position in finding brides for the boys. If one boy succeeds another in birth, he is ordained to become Lama. The household spends the initial expense for his initiation, but afterwards he lives on Gumpa expenses and ritual alms (Bhasin 2007).

In Bhutia religion, after the orthodox calendrical events, exorcisms rites are highly popular. In addition to being held annually, exorcisms are also connected with funerals, and personal and public problems. The variety of malicious aggressive, violent and unpleasant beings in the Bhutia world is somewhat overwhelming. The weight of the system, in terms of sheer number and types, is on the side of evil. The majority of Bhutia rituals is connected with combating the various evil beings and the modes of dealing with them are almost as diverse and numerous as the types of evil beings themselves. In one kind of ritual the Bhutias invoke the *Pho-Iha* (gods), give them offerings and ask them to join their side in getting rid of offending spirits. When the *Deh* (evil spirits) see how powerful their side is, they go away. In another kind, evil spirits are asked what they need to satisfy them, and their wish is fulfilled. Exorcism also includes threats,

forcible rejection and attempts at outright destruction as well. In exorcism there is always a direct enactment of confrontation with the forces of evil.

Cho-chapshe rites (for details see Bhasin 1990) are performed as attempts at outright destruction of the person who embezzles the public funds, or the *Phipun* or Lama who commits a sin by betraying his public or are responsible for major thefts in the area. *Cho-chapshe* is a powerful weapon in which all *Pho-lhas* are invoked for the destruction of the offender. The presence of *Pau* is required when a decision is taken to perform *Cho-chapshe* against someone. The *Re-tho-goo Phariheru* (the curse) can go up to nine generations. Occasionally, the offenders vomit blood and die immediately, while others die after some time. It is believed that if *Tsiloo*, a ritual for longevity is performed when the blessed person cannot be affected by *Cho-chapshe*. The first half of the *Cho-chapshe* is performed by *Pau* and second by the Lama. He performs a ritual to appease *Sungma* (goddess). *Pau* can come to the Gumpa but cannot participate in the ritual in the same way that the Lama can participate in the *Pau* ritual. *Pau* gets cash payment for *Cho-chapshe*. In cases where the offender is not known, the *Cho-chapshe* is performed by writing down that whosoever has committed the crime may be punished.

An individual household performs *Mindiri-mi-Khange-So-tangshe* for safeguarding itself. This ritual is performed by small Lamas. It is a safeguarding ritual and is not meant for outright destruction of the offender, but only a little uneasiness for him. Offenders may lose their livestock or suffer decrease in yield. This ritual is performed in the evening by four people. Some of the soil bearing the footprints of the offender is brought and placed where the ritual takes place. Lamas are paid cash payment for their services.

In all Bhutia households in the altar room among the religious objects is a wood paddle carved with forms of men and animals. The forms are filled with dough and dried, and are taken out and used in ceremonies for casting out evil. It saves time to have a symbol of a devil handy, for if any effigy had to be made each time it would take time. The ceremonies are long and complicated and the figure represents a devil, which must be exorcised. This dough figure is taken out of the house and put at the crossroads so that it will not know where to go. Figures are

never put near anyone's house. Sometimes, figure made of cloth are also used.

Paus, Lamas and monks all perform exorcistic rituals, that is, rituals involving direct confrontation and struggle with evil forces (*Deh*). *Paus* and Lamas do similar curing rituals with very similar structures, but the *Pau* work is never considered religious and Lama's work is not considered exorcism. Further, exorcism is performed in villages for lay people, by *Paus* or Lamas, and must not be attended to by monks. The only lay village ritual in which monks participate at all are funerals, and they leave at the end of the proper funeral, leaving the village Lamas to conduct the exorcism with which every funeral concludes. Yet every Gumpa has an annual exorcism that is very similar to the annual village exorcism in form and content. Villagers attend the *Gompa* festivals while monks do not attend the village festivals.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Bhutias of North Sikkim are a tribe of agro-pastoral transhumants who migrate in the high altitude valleys of North Sikkim. The area, which they customarily inhabit are the two river valleys of Lachen and Lachung, situated on the banks of tributaries of Tista-Lachenчу and Lachungчу, respectively. The description available from travel accounts of the nineteenth century of Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung show a multifarious economy, in which animal husbandry, trading and arable farming combined to provide a wide range of income. They had a domestic industry for weaving clothes for themselves and were largely self-sufficient as far as clothing and food were concerned. Yet it is possible that despite their trading activities they were still basically a subsistence, non-cash economy, turning their profits from trade into goods before they reached the village. Their main trend in the last hundred years would seem to be predominantly pastoral. Even in the 1950s, the Bhutias could be described as being chiefly pastoral people, but this would be incorrect now. With the closure of the border in 1962, the Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung suffered most. They lost large herds of yaks and sheep, when they were on the seasonal migration under the ancient transborder pasturage usage agreements. They could no longer use pastureland in Tibet, causing heavy losses in their herds due to lack of ade-

quate alternative pasture areas. Military encampments, supply bases and defense posts were set up in the northern border area. The loss of pastures in Tibet caused the Bhutias to shift from a pastoral and trading economy to a more settled agricultural and small-scale horticulture and wage-earning economy. At present, Lachenpas and Lachungpas are practicing high altitude farming and animal husbandry. They raise yak, dzow, sheep, goats, horses and mules. Pastoralism is still a major economic strategy, but agricultural activities are also carried on alongside. They move above and below the river valleys and exploit the grazing lands and arable land for cultivation along the village and surrounding areas.

Lachen and Lachung present an interesting contrast as far as movement for agricultural activity is concerned while both have more or less the same products. The movement, though vertical in both cases, is in opposite directions and is controlled by the fact that they have arable land at different elevations at various places.

The opposite directions of movement also explain some of the differences in the agricultural produce and the harvesting times of the two areas under study. The Lachung people are on the move for the whole year. They do not move along with their families as the Lachenpas do. Their families are dispersed, fulfilling their allotted duties.

Agricultural potentiality of the area is less. With the simple technology of the people, an intensification of crops is also difficult, and yields are low. As a result of the limited potential for energy extraction, the people have adjusted to the harsh and rigid environment by seasonally migrating to different altitudes at different times of the year. For centuries, these people have not only had to extract their own subsistence, but also had to produce surplus to maintain the large religious complex and community organisation. In small societies, high consumption levels on ritual and other social occasions produce the levelling effects.

Contrary to the bleak prospects for agriculture, horticulture has a tremendous potential in Lachung. The climate, the soil and the topography are all favourable for fruit plantation. For the raising of orchards, not much initial expenditure is needed for preparation of the ground and at the same time the fruit trees check the soil erosion, but spraying them annually is costly. The investment on an orchard of 200 trees is approximately in some thousands Rupees be-

fore it bears its first fruit, which appears after five or six years. However, the development of horticulture remains vitally linked with the improvement in the means of communication and marketing facilities.

There are about 15-20 peach trees and this yield is not enough for sale. Plums and walnuts have also been introduced in the area. Among the vegetables, potatoes, radishes and cauliflowers do well. The produce is sold at Lachung, Chungthang and Mangan. The sale of vegetables forms an additional source of income.

Other sources of income are the government cottage industries centre, road labour and transportation of goods on yaks. The ten-year-old centre has given employment to 40 girls, 24 students and 16 employees. During the training period, the girls receive some cash payment per month whereas employees' salaries range as per qualifications in cash per month. Most of the houses in the Lachung have looms, but this source of income is closed to the Lachungpa because of wool shortage. They do not have sheep themselves. Previously, wool was imported from Tibet. After the border closure, the lack of wool has stopped the weaving industry. Women's primary occupation was weaving cloth and making *Bakhu* and blankets for the family. Now the wool comes from other parts of India. The quality is not as good as Tibetan wool and its supply is irregular. The women are now mostly working in the fields, and collecting firewood or working as road labourers. Working as labourers they can earn cash per day. The ancient techniques and customs peculiar to their society are on the verge of extinction. The needs of the people and the economic imbalance created by the closure of the trans-border trade have forced them to work on daily wages.

However, like most other tribes, which have increasingly adapted to and adopted modern culture, technology and education, the Lachenpas and Lachungpas still by and large, zealously cling to their traditional mores. But this does not mean that these people have not felt the thrust of Indian society at all. Changes can be seen in a number of Bhutia houses. One sees people walking to the nearly cooperative store to buy things.

The most encouraging change in the Bhutia way of life is the new enthusiasm for education in the young. At the turn of the century when Swiss missionaries opened a school, people were afraid to send their children to school. They vehemently resisted for fear that the children would

learn English and forget their own language and culture.

Resistance to formal education has not completely died down, but a great many Bhutias have come to realise its benefits, and have accepted it as part of a new reality. Bilingual schools subsidised by the Indian government, with Bhutia teachers have been established, so that they can be integrated into their culture.

Education has given them choices. Before they had access to education, they were pretty much relegated to occupations that already existed like animal husbandry, trading, marginal farming and crafts. But education has opened up new fields for them. In Lachen alone, there are forty government officials.

Because of the migratory nature of Lachenpas education here poses a big problem. To overcome these difficulties, a mobile school system has been introduced in the area. The school also migrates in two stages, first to Yakthang and afterwards to Thanggu area. The school shifts to Yakthang and starts functioning on the 15th of June and stays there up to the end of July. In Thanggu, the school functions till the 15th of September and then returns to Yakthang till October 25th. From Yakthang the school shifts to Lachen and works till the winter vacation, which falls during December. It starts snowing in October in Lachen. If it snows heavily, there is no school, and the children stay indoors. During school shifting only the attendance registers and teachers migrate. No blackboards are carried along. The attendance is very low, as students try to avoid attending the classes. The students have to come from far off places like Tallum, Samdong and Kalep where their families have settled during this migration. When school is at Thanggu, students come from Byamzay, Togo, Tseguk, Chopta and Divu-Thang. While coming to school, children wander to other places and forget to attend the school. Only children up to the age of 13-14 years attend school, after which they have to contribute their share of economic activity.

There is still a keen tussle between the conservatives and the progressives among the Bhutias. While the traditionalists insist on keeping the old ways intact, the progressives emphasise that the only way they can survive in today's world is to move with the times, and imbibe and integrate change into their culture without losing their individuality.

It is generally believed that the progressive will have the last word. Bhutias are witnessing

the advantages of contact with the outside world. What is most encouraging is the fact that even when educated Bhutias work outside their homeland, they retain their roots and are proud of their cultural heritage.

They enjoy complete internal autonomy, and liaison with the State Government is maintained by the *Phipun*. Bhutias think that their own system of deciding problems and issues is more democratic. The traditional way of settling issues is to discuss matters until public opinion has crystallised out one solution or another. In substance, the changes that have occurred among Bhutias show that they have remained primarily in touch with the Tibetans and have changed their style in a limited economic sense. The opportunities as far as government sponsored programmes are concerned have been offered to them but Bhutias placed as they are in an ecological setting where new inputs are not viable are obviously in a disadvantaged position.

The landscape has been modified by the settlement of military personnel in this area but it has not been altogether transformed. There are natural limits set to human intervention. To utilise the natural resources, which are meagre, the people have devised institutions based on sharing instead of competition. Perhaps in situations having harsh environmental effects, the values of competition are minimised by the processes of social selection. The people make out their livelihood by combining various forms of traditional economy. Non-traditional sources of income have come in the form of road labour, transportation of goods on the yaks, and the jobs and opportunities provided by the government cottage industries centre.

Lack of resources is threatening the traditional occupations. For instance, most of the Bhutia houses have looms, but shortage of wool (it was actually imported from Tibet) has almost paralysed the household industry. The women, who were working on their looms in spare time, are now working as labourers on daily wages. The ancient techniques and evidences of their workmanship are on the verge of extinction. Here, it may be added there is an urgent need to retrieve them lest they are lost forever.

The Bhutias did lead of a life seclusion, which as said earlier, was a result of both ecological and political factors, although no reserve was formed for them as it was for the Lepchas. Their main occupation of trading received a setback after the border closed. The economic alternatives that were

available did not quite fulfill their basic existence, and they had no option but to enter the modern system in some marginal occupations, mainly as labourers.

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