

SECOND EDITION



HIMALAYAN
KINGDOM
BHUTAN

Tradition, Transition
and Transformation

A.C. SINHA

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INDUS
PUBLISHING COMPANY

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	9
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PART ONE: TRADITION

Chapter 1: Physical Features, Ethnicity and Social Structure	17
Physical Features	
Ethnic Groups	
Bhutanese Social Structure	
Chapter 2: Legends, Religion and History	37
Legendary Kings	
Tradition of Sectarian Myths	
Zhabs-Drung Ngawang Namgyal—The Founder of Bhutan	
Chapter 3: Theocracy, Monarchy and Administration	62
Dukpa Theocracy	
Zhabs-Drung's Successors	
Wangchuk Monarchy	
Administrative Structure	

PART TWO: TRANSITION

Chapter 4: Birth of a Kingdom and the British Policy	101
The Two Men of Vision and the British Policy to Bhutan	
Bhutan as an Indian Princely State	
Conflict Between the Maharaja and the Dharamraja	
Shifting British Emphasis on Bhutan	
Bhutanese Apprehension and the British Concern in 1940s	
Chapter 5: Managing the Frontiers: Herdsmen, Migrants and Farmers	127
Transhumance Across the State Boundaries	
Extradition of Nepalese Immigrants	
Soldiers from Among the Immigrant Marginal Farmers	
<i>Annexure A</i> —A Report on the Immigration of Gurkhas into Bhutan	
<i>Appendix 1</i> —Details of the Chirang District	
<i>Appendix 2</i> —Details of the Samchi District	

Chapter 6: The Lhotshampas or the Bhutanese Nepalese	162
The Pioneer Settlers	
Lhotshampa Social Scene	
Political Awakening and Bhutan State Congress	
Politics Behind Ethnic and Linguistic Statistics	
The Dissidents' Political and Human Rights Fora	
Lhotshampas and the Game of Gorkhaland and Greater Nepal	
The Lhotshampa Leadership	
Chapter 7: Growth of Education System in Bhutan	188
Indigenous Educational Tradition	
Early Efforts of Modern Education	
Introduction of Modern Education	
Structural Hurdles	
Higher Education in Bhutan	
Ethnic Catharsis and Setback to Educational System	
PART THREE: TRANSFORMATION	
Chapter 8: Political Culture and National Dilemma	213
Drukpa Political Culture	
Bhutan under the British Colonial Fold	
Predicament of the Bhutanese Nation State	
Drukpa-Lhotshampa Ethnic Conflict	
Chapter 9: Ethnic Stalemate and Crisis of Confidence	226
Assertion to the Dukpa Supremacy	
The 'Green Belt Policy'	
Issues Involving the Lhotshampa Refugees	
The Dukpa Perception of the Nepalese Leadership	
Categories of the Refugees	
Chapter 10: Unsettling of the Ethnic Applegate	236
Fiscal Health of Bhutan	
Drukpa Reaction to the Lhotshampa's Flight to the Refugee Camps	
Plight of the Loyal Lhotshampas	
Dissident's Plan of Action	
ULFA and BLTF: The Unwelcome Guests in Bhutan	
Council of Ministers	
Glossary	251
Bibliography	253
Author Index	256
Subject Index	257
Postscript	261

Introduction

I could not realise when did the Himalayan bug bite me. Once I identified that the Bhutanese portion of the Himalaya was a little explored academically, I decided to try my hand on it. I read that Bhutan, the unspoiled, exotic and *Shangri-la* in the hidden Himalaya, is the only Buddhist Kingdom in the world. Known to its people as the *Dragon Kingdom* (*Brug or Drugyul*), she has stood on guard as a trustee of an other-worldly tradition of *Lamaist* Buddhism. She possesses unparalleled and breathtaking scenic beauty and claims to be the only South Asian country without a population problem. The King, his court, theocracy and the *Dukpas* are projected as unique, ancient and a rare human heritage. Similarly, the Bhutanese sites of interest—the *dzongs* (forts), monks and snow-capped mountains—all are located in the northern portion of the kingdom. Bhutan is reluctant to open-up to the world outside and only select visitors are welcome to the land. With its *Lamaist* religion, mythical traditions and an exotic pattern of culture, it impresses on its visitors as a reluctantly modernising, future-oriented and environment-friendly country.

It all began three decades ago in an exploratory way. Having read works on 'community power structure' of the American cities, I felt the need to test the method of data collection on the Himalayan cities, in a different setting. An idea occurred to me that a comparative study of power structure in the capitals of Sikkim* and Bhutan, the two Himalayan kingdoms, would be challenging. Having drawn a tentative research plan, I began corresponding to the relevant contacts. It took me no time to learn that none of the two kingdoms had centres of higher education, newspapers, radio stations, and other means of communication in the contemporary sense. No doubt, their capital towns were connected with

* No longer a kingdom, and now a state in the Indian Union.

the wheeled transportation immediately in the past, but the interior areas—mostly forested and snow-capped hills and mountains—remained in splendid isolation. These were under the charges of the most oriental, despotic rulers, whose whims and eccentricities were legends. Naturally, the persons in authority, whom they were addressed to, acknowledged none of my numerous letters. Fired with an adventurer's zeal to accomplish the impossible, I decided to visit the two state capitals for first-hand contacts and laying out the ground level local logistics for the study. The very first trip to Gangtok, the capital town of Sikkim, cost me among others a near physical assault by a drunk jeep driver at Teesta Bazar, a first lesson of friendship with the Nepalese from the Eastern Himalayan region. As a whole, my trip to Sikkim was rewarding in the sense that it helped to draw a reasonably concrete plan to proceed with the fieldwork.

Fired with this initial success and having secured some introductory letters to the potential 'contacts' in Bhutan, I took the bus from Siliguri in West Bengal to Phuntsholing, the gateway to the entry in Bhutan. It took me no time to realise that Bhutan was an altogether a different story compared to Sikkim. Phuntsholing was a small, dusty, settling, upcoming frontier town on an unknown Bhutan. One needed an entry permit to travel in Bhutan. Buses to Thimphu, the capital of state, plied only in the morning of the day and it was difficult to get a seat in them for a commoner. Private jeeps and taxis plying on the roads in Bhutan were not heard of and, if they did exist, they were certainly beyond the modest financial reach of a researcher. Furthermore, there were no public accommodation available in Thimphu for a traveller, whose job was to research—an unknown and obscure occupation to the Bhutanese. With a bundle of apprehensions, I travelled to Thimphu in the autumn of 1969. It was an eye-opener to me. I found the Bhutanese capital like a labour camp, in which some casual construction was on. It was not an urban centre, had no market but had a few shops. The 'town' was huddled within a few lived-in buildings in one street. The royal court was secluded away in the *dzong* (fort) at a distance. It was cold, windy, desolate and a starving welcome. Unlike Gangtok, there was no crowd in Thimphu at any time of the day. There were very few persons to talk to, and those who were available, were shy, uninformed and reluctant companions. I was informed in the *dzong*—the district headquarters in the fort—that population of the capital inclusive of the palace guards was around three thousand. Naturally, I decided on the spot that Thimphu was not a

suitable universe for a comparative study with another capital, e.g., Gangtok. Thus, Bhutan and I, both had to wait for a more opportune time for each other.

Meanwhile, I shifted myself from my alma mater, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IIT Kanpur) to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT Delhi) and then to North Eastern Hill University, Shillong (NEHU, Shillong). The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi had granted me funds for studying the transformation of Bhutan from a theocratic structure to a monarchical one. It was closer from Shillong to reach Bhutan and my Bhutanese contacts found it convenient to entertain my unusual request to help me in my research endeavour. By then, about a decade after my misadventure to research in Bhutan, things had changed for better in late 1970s. The road between Phuntsholing and Thimphu had turned out to be more communicable; more buses were plying regularly; taxis and jeeps could be hired by private travellers; there were thriving markets at both ends of the road with hotels and motels and population at both the urban centres of Phuntsholing and Thimphu had risen beyond ten thousand each. The Bhutanese were more open to the outside worlds; a larger number of foreign tourists were reluctantly admitted to the pristine alpine land. And to top it all, the regime of the third Wangchuk ruler, *Druk-gyalpo* Jigme Dorji, was replaced by his son, *Druk-gyalpo* Jigme Singye Wangchuk in 1972.

It so happened that the dynamic third Wangchuk ruler passed away in the prime of his youth and activities on July 21, 1972 at Nairobi in Kenya on way to Switzerland for a medical treatment. As if he had a premonition of his impending death. And that's why he had consecrated his son and successor as the crown prince (*Tongsa Penlop*) a few days before his demise. But the succession was not free from rancour. Yangki, an alleged companion of the third king and a Tibetan refugee, tried unsuccessfully to install her son as the King to the Bhutanese throne. Such efforts created some ripples in the print media. Otherwise, the succession was smooth and the *Tongsa Penlop* was crowned as the fourth *Druk-gyalpo* on June 2, 1974. With the assumption of power by a younger king, the kingdom appeared to have infused with a new momentum in its multifarious developmental activities and accordingly the Bhutanese system was opening-up more and more to the outside world. *Druk-gyalpo* Jigme Singye, educated abroad and guided by his perceptive father in the affairs of the state, was conscious of the world-

wide appeal of the '*Shangri-la*' image of his *lamaist* kingdom. However, he decided to project it less and less exotic and more of a welfare-oriented and environment-functioning monarchy. Thus, some steps were taken to drop some of the despotic moorings and encourage more participation in the working of the political system.

With a view to collecting data from the Bhutanese functionaries I undertook about half-a-dozen trips to Bhutan between 1977 and 1981. While the field-data were being analysed, the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge invited me in 1983 as a Smut scholar, where I talked on Bhutan in the famous Friday seminar of the Department. I took this opportunity to spend sometime to consult archival data on Bhutan in the India Office Library in London. While working on the draft report on my study, I identified four levels of national dilemma in Bhutan: National Identity versus Ethnic identity; *Druk-gyalpo* versus *Tshongdu*; elitism versus populism; and frontier particularism versus universal modernisation. And I found that the set of above dilemma was getting more and more crystallised as a part of the social transition in the Bhutanese society.

I noted that while the traditional elite consisting of nobility, clergy and aristocracy emphasised the ethnic-religious-pastoralist-past-oriented Dukpa identity as uniquely Bhutanese, the commoners-populists-*Lhotshampa*-modernising elite desired more of democratisation, human rights, written constitution and transparency in the state of affairs. Perhaps unknown to the functionaries and policy-makers, Bhutan was scaffolding day-by-day on the horn of dilemma. This national dilemma was to be resolved quickly through reconciliation; otherwise body politic of Bhutan was destined to explode with a bang. Unfortunately, the traditional elite was cock sure of themselves and instead of reconciliation with care and understanding, they turned out to be rash, callous and dismissive of the natural and genuine concern of their adversaries.

In such a situation, the clash of the vision could not be avoided in late 1980s. The idealic paradise of the only *Lamaist* monarchy in the world was as if on fire: the King, the people, the governing process and the image of the peaceful dragon—all got a drubbing. A considerable size of the Bhutanese population was dismantled; public and private assets were vandalised; all types of assaults on the human dignity were perpetrated; an articulate, educated and experienced set of the *Lhotshampas* were forced to move to the refugee camps outside Bhutan. The

cost of human misery, unsettled citizenry and emerging economy was incalculable. And reluctantly, but surely the inter-national human rights such as United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and Amnesty Inter-national (AI) stepped in and then the localised conflict in a small and distant land was no more under the carpet. If not internal-national, it certainly turned out to be a regional issue in which the two Himalayan kingdoms—Bhutan and Nepal—have locked their horns.

The ethnic conflict in Bhutan led to a series of human rights and academic conclaves in which activists and academics rubbed their shoulders: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London; University of California, Berkeley (UC, Berkeley); Centre for South Asian Studies, Jaipur; India International Centre, New Delhi; Centre for Himalayan Studies, Siliguri; etc. I was a participant in almost all these conclaves and was asked to contribute article in most of them. Then the *Asian Survey*, (UC, Berkeley) invited me to write a country profile on Bhutan for two years in 1994 and 1995. With a view to updating and enriching my field-data, I also undertook an annual pilgrimage to Bhutan between 1993 and 1998. All these opportunities provided me with the possibilities to re-examine my data afresh. This book is the result of such an involvement.

The book is divided into three parts and ten chapters. Besides the Introduction, *Part One on Tradition* consists of Environment and Ethnicity, Religion and History and the given political system under Theocracy, Monarchy and Administration. *Part Two on Transition* from the traditional structure has four chapters: Emergence of the Wangchuk Principality, Managing the Frontiers, Advent of the *Lhotshampas* and introduction of Modern Education as an instrument of effective transition in society. *Part Three on Transformation* reports on the contemporary Bhutanese scenario in terms of Political Culture and National Dilemma, Ethnic Stalemate and Crisis of Confidence and speculative exercise on Unsettling the Ethnic Applegate in Bhutan.

At the end as an observer of the Bhutanese political development for the last three decades, one must take a note of the two far-reaching steps of the king indicating the shape of things to emerge. Firstly, the *Tshongdu* elected Council of Ministers have been appointed responsible for running the state administration, leaving the king to remain as the head of the State. Secondly, on the event of Silver Jubilee Celebration of his reign, the king granted pardon and set Tek Nath Rizal, the symbol of the

Lhotshampa dissidence, free on December 17, 1999 to start afresh the ethnic reconciliation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank friends, well-wishers and acquaintance for their invaluable support in completion of this study. They include late Dr. Michael Aris and Michael Hut, U.K.; Leo Rose (UC, Berkeley), Jigmi E. Thinley and Dawa Tshering (Thimphu, Bhutan), Kanak Dixit (Kathmandu), Sanjay Hazarika (New Delhi). I shall be failing in my obligation if I do not record my sincere gratitude and appreciation of the *Druk-gyalpo* Jigme Singye Wangchuk for providing opportunities to understand the working of the Bhutanese system from a close quarters. At last, I record my appreciation to Krishna, my better half, who has willy-nilly become witness to my involvement with Bhutan.

PART ONE

TRADITION

1

Physical Features, Ethnicity and Social Structure

I

PHYSICAL FEATURES

An aerial view on southern slope of the Eastern Himalayan ranges gives the impression of the lofty, snowy, misty and glistening peaks, verdant forests, snaking rivers and a limited human settlement far from maddening crowd of urban-industrial or peasant setting of the south Asian scenario. One gets the impression of remoteness in time and space, exotic and unmolested natural beauty and reluctantly hurrying for the change to catch up with the world. This is the land, where the Indian Buddhist ascetic Padmasambhava and the Tibetan prince-abbot, *Zhabsdrung (Dharamraja)* Ngawang Namgyal, laid the sound foundation of the Bhutanese state religion—*Brugpa or Drugpa*. This is the dragon kingdom—*druk-yul*—of the Wangchuk rulers, who would like to call it *lHo-mon-Khabzi* (the southern Mon country of four Approaches) in the medieval Tibetan tradition. Though there are alleged to be less fashionable Persian/Arabic and Sanskrit appellations of the land, the world settled for 'Bhutan' after a series of innovations in spelling its nomenclature. Present Bhutan, centrally located in the Eastern Himalayan zone is placed in the catchment areas of rivers Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh and Manas, which drain them in the river Brahmaputra. It lies between latitudes 26°45' and 28°30' north and longitudes 88°45' and 92°10' east. It is about 200 air miles in length and about 100 air miles in breadth and occupies approximately an area of 18,000 square miles (*Kuensel*, Vol. VI (12), p. 12, November 14, 1971). It is bounded by Tibet region of China

from north and north-west and from India in west, south and east. The undemarcated northern boundary of Bhutan with Tibet is based on traditional usages recognised by history. For the most part it follows the crest of the Great Himalayan ranges. Between the Chomo Lhari and Kula Kangri peaks, it follows approximately the line of watershed.

The western slopes of the Khung-dugang mountain and Merug-La separate Bhutan from the Chumbi valley of Tibet. Torsa river (Amo-Chu) cuts across the international boundary to the north of Merug La. To the east of Kula Kangri group of high peaks, the traditional border cuts across the Lhobrak drainage basin and runs northwards to the high peak of Kharchu (16,500 ft). From this point it runs south-east, then turns south and joins the border between Tibet region of China and Arunachal Pradesh of India. There are five important border passes leading into Tibet, which have influenced the settlement pattern and trade. Needless to add that rivalry among tribal chiefs for the control of trade flowing through passes has had significant impact on the historical development of Bhutan. China has disputed parts of its border with Bhutan and shown some 300 square miles of the Bhutanese territories as her own, a point of on-going negotiation between the two countries.

Southern border of Bhutan with India lies close to the Himalayan foothills in the *Duar*. Annexation of the Assam *Duar* in 1841 led to the establishment of Bhutan-Assam boundary. Between 1837 and 1864 a number of raids were committed by the Bhutanese on the Bengal *Duar* along the border of Bhutan and Bengal. Then the British envoy, Ashley Eden, was coerced into signing a treaty favourable to Bhutan in 1863 at Punakha. As a punishment to this alleged act of outrage, the British annexed the Bhutanese territory of Ambari-Falla Katta (present Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district). "In November, 1864, the British troops attacked and occupied *Duar*, forcing the Bhutanese to sue for peace. Under the terms of a treaty signed in 1865 at Sinchula near the Indian border, Bhutan assented to the formal cession of the *Duar* area to British India in return for an annual subsidy (of Rs. 50,000, which was to be increased to Rs. 1,00,000 and, in fact, was fixed at Rs. 5,00,000) to be paid from the revenue of the territory. These annexations fixed the present southern boundary between Bhutan and Bengal (India)" (Karan, 1967: 11). However, as a gesture of friendship after the Treaty of Friendship between India and Bhutan, 1949, India returned 32 square miles of territory in the Dewangiri area on the Assam-Bhutan border to Bhutan.

After reporting that Bhutan is drained from west to east by Amo-Chu (Torsa), Wangchu (Raidak), Mo-Chu (Sankosh) and Manas rivers, J.C. White describes a series of parallel ranges in a general direction from north to south (White, 1971: 3-5). These were enumerated as (i) the Singillila forming the border between Sikkim, Chumbi (Tibet) and Bhutan, (ii) the Chola range forming the watershed between the Tista and Amo-Chu, (iii) the Massong Chung-jong range from Chomo-Lhari to Buxa separating Amo-Chu from Wang-Chu, (iv) the Dokyong-la range dividing the water system of Wang-Chu and Mo-Chu, (v) the Black Mountains, separating not only Sankosh from Manas water-shed, but also dividing Bhutan into equal halves, and (vi) the Tawang range forming the eastern boundary of Bhutan.

Among all the six mountain systems mentioned above the Black Mountain ranges, midway between Punakha and Tongsa, extending from the Great Himalaya to the foothill zone, is typical of the Inner Himalaya. These ranges, which almost divide Bhutan climatically, ethnologically and geographically into two distinct regions, are traversed by only the Pe-Le-La (pass). Writing some nine decades back, J.C. White informs us that "the people to the east (of these ranges)... are directly under the jurisdiction of the *Tongsa Penlop*, while on the west they are of almost pure Tibetan origin and under the jurisdiction of the Thimboo (Thimphu) Jongpen and *Paro Penlop*" (White, 1971: 5). Again, to the east of the range "the people have greater affinity with the population of the Assam hills (Arunachal) with a smaller, darker stature; and, to the west, they remain more of Tibeto-Mongloid features. The Black Mountains range also allows deeper penetration of the monsoon currents into the north of the country and, consequently, the wet zone in the east extends as far as the snow line, while in the west it stops in the valley" (Coelho, 1971: 58).

Ecological Zones

Physically, Bhutan can be divided into three lateral zones from north to south and each having a quite different ecology: the Great Himalaya, the Inner Himalaya or the middle range, and the sub-Himalayan outer-most ranges. The Great Himalayan ranges along the border of Tibet extend from 18,000 feet to more than 24,000 feet in some places. The peak of Chomo-Lhari (23,997 feet), known as the mountain goddess Dolma, worshipped in Bhutan and Chumbi Valley, is located in the north-west

corner of the country. The highest peak of the country, Kula Kangri (24,740 feet), considered to represent the Kuvera, the king of the Tibetan mountain demons, is lodged in almost the centre of the north. The ranges separating Tibet from Bhutan are pierced at six major passes and among them only on one place by a south-flowing river, Lhobrak. "North of the Great Himalaya are several 'marginal' mountains of the Tibetan plateau. These mountains are lower in elevation than the Great Himalaya;... (They) separate the complicated structure of the Himalaya from the flat or undulating table land of Tibet. Dry climate dominates the landscape north of the great Himalaya, and in consequence there are no large valley glaciers in the Tibetan marginal mountains... Long undisturbed in their ways, Bhutanese traders carried out cloth, spices, and grains across the mountain passes into Tibet and brought back salt, wool and sometimes herds of yaks" (Karan, 1963: 28-29).

These northern frontier passes are "inhabited by groups of pastoralists known to the western Bhutanese as '*bzhop*' and to other groups in the east as (*brokpa*), both forms clearly deriving from Tibetan '*drokpa*' (*brokpa*). In addition to the herding of yaks, these people also cultivate a few grain crops and potatoes... (They) are heavily dependent on barter trade with the south to supplement their own produce. Particularly, interesting are the communities of the Gling-bzhi La-yag area, who live north-east of the great peak of Jo-mo Lh-yi (Chomo-Lhari) and preserve a very distinctive language and dress of their own" (Aris, 1980: xiii). On the southern slopes of the Great Himalayan ranges, where alpine vegetation occurs, winters are very cold and the summers short and cool. Plants are adapted to extreme cold and short growing season; they are short and stunted. This region along with the northern part of the Inner Himalaya is as if "the last retreat of the native Bhutanese, (and) it is characterised by primitive frontier settlements that maintain themselves by herding yak and sheep and raising potato and barley."

The inner or the middle Himalayan range may conveniently be located just south of the Great Himalaya at an elevation of 5,000 feet and above. Generally, these ranges run from north-west to south-east in western Bhutan and roughly north-east to south-west in eastern Bhutan. In such a situation the land level is narrow with valleys such as Paro and Thimphu. The Black Mountain located north to south divides Bhutan into two parts, both administratively and ethnologically. Again, while eastern Bhutan is most humid and receives a high precipitation, the

western part is dry, cold and devoid of vegetation for want of sub-soil and rainfall. Naturally, the western part along with the Great Himalayan region is the area of dry pasture economy based on transhumance. Central Bhutan, e.g., Inner Himalaya is made up of several fertile valleys drained by Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh and Manas and their tributaries. Some of the valleys such as Paro and Punakha are broad, flat, populated and well cultivated. In such a situation, cropping pattern keeps on changing. Again, while the southern section produces rice, banana, orange and other tropical products, the cold northern one is known for its barley, potato and dairy products.

This region may conveniently be termed as Bhutan proper in the sense that what is known as the Bhutanese is identified with it. Again "this is the economic and cultural heart of the country and is bounded on the east and west by two corridors of what used to be Tibetan territory which cut across the ethnic divisions: the valley of Chumbi in the west and Monyul corridor to the east, now part of Arunachal Pradesh... between these corridors lie the principal Bhutanese valleys" (Aris, 1980: xiv). One of the unique features of distinct Bhutanese landscape is that of the practice of building *rDzong* (forts) on commanding landscape such as Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangdi-Phodrang, Tongsa etc. Such *rDzongs* are the monasteries, seminaries, administrative centres, regional banks, royal treasuries, pay offices, departmental stores, defensive forts, etc. all together, presently head-quarters of the *dzongkhags* (districts).

The sub-Himalayan or outermost ranges consist of the narrow foothills rising gently from the *Duar* (foothills) to about 2,000 feet, and then steep rise upto more than 5,000 feet. This is a thin strip of land of about 10 miles in width and cuts into deep gorges by fast flowing rivers. The core of these ranges consists of clay and fine-grained gray stones. Further northwards sandstones become coarser and then pebbly. A humid subtropical climate like that of the Assam-Bengal plains prevails upto 5,000 feet in the foothills. The annual rainfall, ranging upto 200 inches, provides not only luxuriant vegetation of banana, tropical forests full of wildlife, but also a hot, steamy and an unhealthy tract. In the past these 'negative areas' functioned to the isolation of the Inner Himalayan valleys. This was the area where "the rain forests and malarial swamps, inhabited by such wild animals as the tiger, elephant, rhinoceros, and wild bear, serve as barrier to easy access."

The "*Duars* may roughly be divided into northern and southern

portions. The southern portion is covered mostly with heavy banana grass and bamboo jungle. In certain areas the banana grassland has been cleared for rice cultivation. The northern portion of the *Duars*, or that immediately bordering on the Inner Himalaya are marked by spurs projected into the plains from the more lofty mountains on the north. Deep valleys and open area are, in some instances, found amongst these subordinate ranges" (Karan, 1963: 30-31). Another aspect of southern Bhutan is the famous *Duars* cut into foothills by numerous river streams. There were 18 such *Duars*—11 on the Bengal and seven on the Assam frontiers bordering with Bhutan. The British Indian rulers and the Bhutanese authorities spent major part of their time (1770s to 1860s) in settling down the ownership of the *Duars*. Ultimately, Bhutan lost all the 18 *Duars* in the plains as per provisions of the Sinchula treaty signed in 1865. For nearly a hundred years, she shrunk her activities within the Inner Himalayan region. However, from 1960s the things began to change fast. The *Duars* are no more negative land barriers. In fact, Inner Bhutan has been linked by modern means of transportation through these foothills with that of the Indian plains. With this ends the isolation of the *Bruk-yul* from the rest of the world. Industrious Nepalese settlers, known as the Lhotshampas who now inhabit these foothills, once covered by dense tropical impregnable forests, are turning this erstwhile no-man's land into a thriving land of peasantry since 1975.

Climatic Zones

There are three climatic zones in Bhutan: tundra type in the Greater Himalaya, cold temperate in the Inner Himalaya and hot and humid tropical one in the foothills. Accordingly, three distinct vegetation regions of alpine, sub-tropical temperate and tropical are recognised. Alpine forests are on both sides of the snowline, which may be above 4,000 metre sea level. Vegetation conforms to the topography. While the southern slopes have stunted bushes and grass, the northern one is found with lichen and bare rocks. Among the floral types silver fir (*Abies densa*), rhododendrons, junipers, reed-like bamboos (*Arundinaria*) etc. are found in plenty. The vast areas of temperate forest upto 3,000 metre above sea level consist of the most valuable forests of the country. Among the main trees spruce, fir, kail (*Pinus excelsa*), cypress, junipers, oak, maple, pine, *takpa* and *takma* (white flowered and red flowered rhododendrons respectively) may be enumerated. Of late, they are growing apples in the

region for export, a horticultural success story. This is the region where there are flat meadows, ideal for pasture land and farming. All the Bhutanese valleys from Ha in the west to Tashigong in the east are located in this region.

The tropical moist deciduous forests in the foothills abound in sisoo (*Dalberia sisoo*), khair (*Acacia catechu*), simul (*Bombax malabaricum*), sal (*Shorea robusta*), birch etc. The saranna grass is so high and dense at places that even elephants find their way through with difficulty. However, such grass causes forest fire frequently, a process, which reduces the tree growth. These forests along with Manas and Sankosh rivers have formed a forest wildlife sanctuary, where a host of wild animals such as rhinoceros, elephant, sambher, gaur, etc. are in plenty. Upto 2,000 metre above the sea level farming is intensive in the river valley and the natural vegetation is restricted to the mountain slopes. This is the region, which produces cash crops such as orange, cardamom, paddy, maize, pulses and oilseeds. All Bhutanese industrial establishments are located in this region because of the availability of natural agricultural raw materials, inexpensive labour and a better infrastructural facility.

The two Tibetan cultural corridors at the western and the eastern extremities of Bhutan may be identified with that of the Chumbi valley and Tawang (Mon-Yul) respectively. Western Bhutan has intimate links with Chumbi valley in terms of trade and commerce, social intercourse, political affiliation, religion and culture. This region is also ethnologically Tibetan in origin; it is known for its dryland and pasture economy, dairy farming and herdsmanship, and practice of transhumance. Western Bhutan again provides the cultural base to the nation because this is the region where the important cultural-political centres such as Parö, Punakha, Tashichho Dzong (Thimphu) and Wangdi Phodrang are located. The region, traditionally under the Paro Penlop, may broadly be identified with that of the strong Tibetan sphere of influence.

The present Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, traditionally known as the Tawang tract, is placed on the trade route between Kham (eastern Tibet) and the Brahmaputra valley. Like the western corridor, upper portion of Kameng district in the upper and middle mountain ranges has pasture economy. The region was the link between Kham and 'U' provinces of Tibet and the Himalayan foothills and the Brahmaputra plains; but its contacts had been limited to religion and

culture. There was also an amount of commercial transaction. However, social, political and even a higher level of economic interaction was very much limited. Possibly, high precipitation, dense forests and animist non-Tibetan population of the eastern Bhutan were important reasons for the limited contact between the two regions. The eastern Bhutan from the Pe-Le-La pass on the Black Mountains to Kameng district is an extensive area, much bigger than that of its western counterpart. It receives more precipitation; is densely forested and populated by the communities (*Sarchhops*) similar to that of the non-*Lamaists* of Arunachal Pradesh. Though there are patches of pasturelands in the higher, colder and drier uphill, this region is known for rice terracing, rotational type of shifting cultivation (*Tseri* cultivation) and various wild animals as prey. The Tongsa Penlop Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, who had been by tradition in the effective control of the region, extended his domain to the foothills, carving out a strong base for himself. Ultimately, he unified the three district regions into one and laid the foundation of monarchy in Bhutan.

Against the distinct zones of the eastern and the western Bhutan, there may be identified a third zone in the steep height of the Bhutanese foothills, and their sudden slope towards south. Numerous rivers, dense forests, wild beasts, hot, humid and unhealthy climate had turned it as an unwelcome and inhospitable zone for the highlander Bhutanese. However, there were a number of attractions in these areas. The region was inhabited by Koch, Mech, Kachari, Rajbansi and Toto tribesmen who could work and survive the vagaries of the *Duars* and could be enslaved for working in the rice-terraced land in central Bhutan. The region provided the required amount of rice, tobacco, dried fish, areca and betel nuts for the highlanders. Because of its inhospitable climate, the region was also not under the effective control of rulers of the Brahmaputra valley. Consequently, it provided extra attraction to the *Bhutia* highlanders to raid the settled habitations and extract tributes in kinds. We also know that the Bhutanese from the *Dharamraja* to the modest householders had been engaged in trading. The southern foothills opening to more thickly populated Brahmaputra valley provided good market for woollen, yak tails, dogs, horses, precious stones, dairy products, etc. Lastly, when Bhutan was emerging as an effective and organised *Lamaist* polity, with a whole-time ruling class, it needed a region, which could produce surplus not only for the maintenance but also for the luxurious display of power and authority to those who occupied the positions of importance. That

was the period *when Lhotshampas*, the ethnic Nepalese, emerged on the Bhutanese scene. Their contribution in economic development of Bhutan is salutary.

II

ETHNIC GROUPS

It appears that the *pre-Lamaist* ethnic groups of Bhutan lost much of their identity with their conversion to the Brugpa sect. The religious, political and social assimilation was achieved to the extent that now the Bhutanese social structure presents almost the same features from length to breadth of its expanse. Only small, isolated, and less assimilated tribal stocks are identified as different from the mainstream of the Bhutanese society. However, the primordial attachments of various Bhutanese social groups suggest that at one time, they might have possessed their distinct individuality. In this context, ethnologically the Bhutanese society may be identified at various levels: the pre-Brugpa Mons, predominantly found in the eastern Bhutan, *Ngalong* ('The earliest risen' and converted to Bhuddhism and thus civilised) of western Bhutan and Koch, Mech and descendants of the other communities from *Duars* in the high hills. Another and perhaps the most easily identified ethnic group are the *Lhotshampas*.

Leo Rose identifies four broad but not necessarily mutually exclusive ethnic categories in Bhutan: "The first is composed of several groups of people of Tibetan (*Bhotia*) origin, some of whom may have migrated to Bhutan as early as the ninth century and others as recently as 1959-1960. Second, there are a number of distinct but related communities in eastern Bhutan which, according to some observers, are related to similar Indo-Mongoloid groups in the Assam Himalayas and which presumably migrated to Bhutan from that area in the past millennium. A third element in Bhutan's population consists of a number of small tribal groups such as the Drokpas, Lepchas and Doyas, which are sometimes described as the aboriginal indigenous inhabitants of the country, to which can be added the families of ex-slaves, often from similar tribal communities in the areas of India adjacent to Bhutan. This later group tends to be concentrated around the *Dzongs* where they once constituted the labour force for the government offices. Finally, there are the Nepali Bhutanese, most of whom have been resident in Bhutan for only three or four

generations, representing a new, still somewhat alien element in the population structure" (Rose, 1977: 44-45).

Among the pre-Buddhist settlers of Bhutan, Mon, Khen, Koch, Brokpas, Doyas, Birmis, etc. are enumerated. Besides them, Wang aristocracy of west Bhutan as well got it assimilated among the Brugpas. The western Bhutan besides its northern alpine extensive tracts and southern foothills (*Duars*) is identified with Ha, Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangdi Phodrang and Shar valleys. The inhabitants of these valleys have been able to evolve *dzongkha* as the standard tongue, which has been accepted as the national language of the country now. These *dzongkha* speakers from the above six valleys are known as the '*Ngalong*'—the earliest risen. This identification has a historical background stretched to pre-Brugpa phase of the Bhutanese history. Since then the region has played significant role in the church-state of Bhutan. With the establishment of *Dharamrajas* theocracy initially in the western Bhutan and subsequently to the eastern and southern regions, his followers came to be known as the *Brugpas* (*Drugpa*). Needless to add that Punakha, Thimphu and Paro had been centres of important religious and political interactions not only during the reign of the *Dharamrajas* but even before and after the establishment of the dynastic rule.

Though conceptually there is a necessity to separate the term 'Bhutanese' from that of the Bhotia, in case we examine the social organisational aspects, we find that kinship, genealogy, endogamy and lineages are rarely maintained among them. It is a fact that there has been no systematic study of the clan organisation of the Bhutanese. However, it has been noted that with the conversion of the ethnic stocks to *Lamaism*, the clan organisation got lost, as if their genealogy is replaced with their identification with generation of incarnations and pantheon. In this context, some empirical studies have been made on *Bhotias* of Sikkim, which is an adjoining area of Bhutan. It has been found that *Bhotias* are not greatly interested in their genealogy, and that their genealogical memory is generally poor. In addition, there is a strong tendency towards geographical mobility. It is quite rare of married members of three generations to stay in the same community (village). The traceable genealogy among the *Bhotias*. . . were extremely shallow (Chie, 1978: 238).

Brugpa or Dukpas

Brugpa is one of the sects among the unreformed *Nyingmapa* (*rNyig-*

ma-pa) identified with the red gear (red hat) against the yellow attired *Gelugpas* (*dge-lugs-pa*—yellow hats) school of Mahayan Buddhism prevalent in Tibet. Tsampa Jarey Yeshey Dorji (1161-1211), an outstanding monk, founded a monastery at Ralung in 1189. While the monastery was being consecrated, “the thunder dragon (*brug* or *drug*) said to have resounded through the sky on the occasion”. The monastery, the sect, its followers and in course of time the land, where its mainstay could be established, came to be known the *Druk* or *Brug*, thus *Brug* or *Drug-pas*. The Brugpa sect follows the ancient teachings of the Guru Padma-sambhava (Guru Rimpoche) besides ascetic traditions from a variety of sources. The famous Ralung monastery passed on to the control of the prince-abbots, who turned the sect into an important and powerful school of *Lamaism* in Tibet, which spread upto western Bhutan. It could acquire extensive land holdings, followers and political patronage, which led to serious factional conflicts.

Shabdrung (*Dharamraja*) Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) (also spelt as *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal) was consecrated as the 18th prince-abbot of the *Brugpas* in 1606. He was driven away from his ancestral monastic seat at Ralung at the age of 23 years because of political strife. Once he was in *IHo-Mon*, he did not look back to Tibet. He consolidated his Brugpa monastic estate in the new land into a unified, organised and dynamic order to counteract all types of Tibetan incursions. Various friendly monastic estates and establishments were taken over into the Brugpa fold and hostile ones were simply vanquished. With establishment of a series of defensive forts at strategic locations and raising an effective fighting force, the *Dharamraja* unified *IHo-Mon* into the Brugpa people and nation. His followers, the country, his religion—all came to be known as the Brugpa, a real tribute to his charismatic personality and magnetism of the religious order. Thus, today the dominant ethnic group is the Brugpa, who follow Brugpa sect of *Lamaism* in the *Drug-yul*, e.g., the land of the dragon country Bhutan.

With the signing of the Sinchula Treaty in 1865, the *Duar* war between India and Bhutan came to an end. A side effect of this development was the large-scale immigration of the Nepalese, first to Darjeeling, then to Sikkim and then to the *Duars*. The Nepalese expansion to Bhutanese southern foothills could not wait long since these were the regions inhabited by a few Mech tribesmen with a distant Bhutanese control. This was the time, when Kazi Ugyen Dorji emerged as a significant person

in the Bhutanese power structure, Indo-Bhutanese relationship and in the authority system of western and southern-western Bhutan. Ugyen's father, the *Kazi* of Jungta was an influential figure in the western Bhutan and the Bhutanese court in 1860s. It appears that his services were frequently commissioned by the Bhutanese rulers to settle matters of importance relating to the south-western borders. As a mark of recognition of his services, he was known as the *Kazi* (the one who settled the disputes). A similar practice had been noted by Sarat Chandra Das on the Indo-Sikkimese frontiers and such officials were designated as the *Kazi* on the Muslim fashion of Purenea and Dinajpur courts in adjoining Indian plains (Das, 1969: 13).

The Bhutan Government deputed Jungta Kazi to the Eden Mission in 1864. His young son, Ugyen, accompanied him on this mission. After the cessation of the hostility, Ugyen Kazi settled down at the emerging trading mart of Kalimpong with his estates in the British territory of Kalimpong as well as western Bhutan. The British made all possible efforts to cultivate Kazi Ugyen Dorji, as he was related to the then Bhutanese strongmen, the Tongsa Penlop (Ugyen Wangchug), through his grandfather. Kazi Ugyen Dorji was given administrative responsibilities and he turned to be reliable consultant, and adviser on Indo-Bhutanese relation to the *Tongsa*. In 1898, he was appointed *Ha Thrungpa*, chief of Ha (district), with rights over the whole of southern Bhutan and vested in him was the authority to settle immigrant Nepalese in his territory. He was also made the Bhutanese Agent in Kalimpong, besides being the official Bhotia interpreter of the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling on the customary practices among the settlers within the district. Sir Charles A. Bell had cultivated the agent of the Bhutanese Government and used him to carry the Viceroy's letter to the Dalai Lama in 1903 during Lhasa expedition. Kazi Ugyen Dorji provided valuable services to the British during the Younghusband Expedition to Lhasa, 1903-1904. As a recognition to his services rendered to the British, the title of *Raja* was conferred upon him. By 1910, he had already been made the chief of King's household (*Deb Zimpom*), the chief chamberlain (*Gongzim*) and Governor (*Jongpon*) of western Bhutan. The *Druk-Gyalpo*, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, the *ex-Tongsa-penlop*, left the entire administration of the western Bhutan and Indo-Bhutanese relations in the able hands of his trusted ally, Kazi Ugyen Dorji.

Lhotshampas

Ugyen Dorji was an enlightened person, closely observing the economic transformation brought about in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong sub-division through the help of industrious and preservative Nepalese. "The administration of southern districts of Bhutan was somewhat on the old Tibetan pattern, under which the chief administrative officer, in this case the Bhutan Agent, was responsible for paying in a fixed amount annually to the central exchequer, with no questions asked as to how much actually was realized from the people. He received no regular salary and was expected to maintain himself out of the proceeds of his charge" (Rustomji, 1971: 161). Charles A. Bell was deputed to survey the western fringe of Bhutan on Torsa river for construction of a road from the Bengal *Duars* to Tibet. He found Sipchu and Tsangbe Kazis, Nandlal Chetri, Garjman Gurung and Lalsingh as *thickadars* (contractual landlords) controlling 2,730 houses and about 15,000 persons. Out of the above figure, 14,000 were reported to be the Nepalese (Bell, Charles, 1904). Within no time, the Nepalese got themselves organised as cultivators in the southern foothills, after clearing the thick vegetation. No sooner had it been accomplished, than the herdsmen *Bhotias* and agriculturist Nepalese found themselves opposed to each others' vital interests. John Claude White, who visited Bhutan in 1905, found "that for the last fifteen years (since 1890) their (Ha-pa, the highlander and pastoralist Bhotias) winter grazing grounds near Sipchoo and the lower hills have been seriously curtailed by the increasing interruption of Nepalese settlers, and then the chief source of their wealth—cattle rearing and dairy produce—has begun to fail, while constant quarrels arising between them and the *Paharias* (Nepalese) entail much worry and expense" (White, 1971: 113).

The Nepalese cultural commonwealth comprises of three important social groups, e.g., the *Thakuris* (strictly divided among themselves on the Hindu *varna* system with the concept of purity and pollution) of predominantly western Nepal; the *Newaris* (divided among themselves into a number of occupational castes and following Hinduism and Buddhism and a combination of both); and the *Kiratis* (a generic term for a number of animist, *Lamaist* and Hindu tribes) of eastern Nepal and Sikkim. The Nepalese are also broadly divided into two: the *tagadharis*, those who wear the sacred thread (such as the Brahmins)—the higher castes in ritual and social hierarchy; and the *matwali*, those who are by tradition

not permitted to use the sacred thread and thus normally not prohibited intoxicant drinks. So far the Dukpa of Bhutan are concerned, the *taga-dharis* considered them a rude, barbarian, beef-eating pastoral community. No doubt there has been political alignments between them, specially during Prithwi Narain Shah's last days. So much so that the Bhutanese theocracy was granted estates in Nepal, which continued to be governed by the Bhutanese officials upto Rana Jung Bahadur's emergence in 1840s. In return, the Bhutanese *Dharamrajas* were the partons of the famous Swambhunath temple in Kathmandu. However, it is a fact that no Nepalese Brahmin or Kshatriya is officially reported to have settled down in Bhutan prior to Raja Dorji's efforts leading to the Nepalese immigration to Bhutan. Not only that, unlike Sikkim, where Newar traders extended their mining and minting enterprise, besides the commercial transactions, they were not encouraged to penetrate the Bhutanese southern hills.

The Nepalese in Bhutan belong predominantly to the *kirati* stock consisting of Rai, Gurung, and Limbu tribes. There are two separate regions of the Nepalese concentration in Bhutan: south-western and south-eastern, e.g., Samchi and Chirang districts. Capt. C.J. Morris of the Gurkha Rifles was commissioned to investigate the possibility of the Bhutanese recruits for the armed forces in 1932. He made an extensive tour of the two Nepalese settled districts and gave a rather crude estimate of the Nepalese population in Bhutan. One point of interest in his report is that of the large size of the Nepalese families. That is how he found 1,493 houses in the eastern and 4,000 houses in the western district with an estimate of 60,000 Nepalese out of three lakh total population in Bhutan (Morris, 1932). However, it goes without saying that the above figures cannot be taken as more than an empirical guess work. Since then immigration is on and there are large Nepalese villages. However, there is an acute shortage of arable land in the region inhabited by them. Though the Nepalese immigration to Bhutan has been banned since 1958, the Government wanted to integrate them into the mainstream of the Bhutanese society upto 1990. However, they are banned from settling north of foothills, an imaginary line drawn from east to west.

The bamboo and thatch houses of the Nepalese are less substantial than the stone and multi-storeyed houses of the highlanders. Their areas are predominantly agricultural, raising rice, maize, wheat, pulses, oranges, pineapples, ginger, etc. and domesticating cattle. This is the area, which contributes substantial amount of revenue to the central exchequer. With

polygamous families, the prosperity of a Nepalese family in Bhutan is synonymous with its numerical strength. There are families with the head of household along with four to seven wives with four to five children each. They live a frugal life and consume edibles drawn and picked up from the neighbouring hills and forests.

Sarchhaps

The Indo-Mongoloid people of south-eastern Bhutan speak Sangla, the language of the area south of Tashigang, and several other dialects. For their livelihood, they practise the slash-and-burn-type of rotational cultivation locally known as *tseri* cultivation. They clear the bush by burning the vegetation; grow dry rice, maize, millets and vegetables on it for three or four years, and then move to another patch of forest for the same. By a recent order, the shifting cultivation is prohibited and such marginal tribal farmers are being settled on permanent village sites. Even in the past, some of the southerners were settled permanently in large villages. Their houses are on the pattern of the Arunachal Pradesh tribals, built on stilts or piles on the slopes. Similar to the practice of their eastern neighbours, they pipe water in bamboo conduits from a nearby spring or stream for miles. *Mithun* is the most prized animal along with pigs, which is a measuring rod of their prosperity and is frequently sacrificed on communal festivals. Even today, in spite of their conversion to *Brugpa Lamaism*, they are able to retain a number of pre *Brugpa* animist religious practices. The western Bhutanese frequently refer to their eastern counterparts as very much choosy in their matrimonial alliances. It simply means that clan organisation, endogamy and communal identity is more prized among the easterners. They have developed a regional identity based on language and they claim to be *Sarchhap*.

Of late the *Sarchhaps* have shown some signs of disquiet, which may be symbolised by Rongthong Kuenley Dorji, the President of the Druk National Congress (DNC). He expressed his sympathy with the *Lhotshampas'* cause, for which he was arrested, convicted, pardoned and again he is being sought to be extradited from India to be tried for treason. One among other reasons for the *Sarchhaps'* political unease is the *Dukpas'* disregard for faiths of other religious groups. For example, late Jamji Jagar, the Home Minister in the Royal Government in 1970, who followed the *Nyingmapa* practices, built a shrine Jangtoplri at Kunglung, Tashigang. The shrine has presently been taken over by *rJe Khanpo*

and assigned to the *Brugpa Tashigang Dratshang*, and the presiding *lama* (Kurtoe Lopen of the Nyingma) has been forced to officiate as the household priest in the nearby village.

A more dramatic take over from the other orthodox Lamaist sects to that of the *Brukpa* has been reported from that of Mongar district in last 1990s. It was rumoured that with the police looking for sympathisers of the Rongthang K. Dorji, the *Sarchhaps* were getting restive. It was alleged that the head lama of Dremtshe *dzong* in Mongar district was caught crossing over to China with as much as Rs. 80,000. His apprehension by the Royal Bhutan police led to the closer of the shrine in the *dzong* for over six months. Surprisingly, once the shrine was opened to the devotees as a religious establishment, it was discovered to house a branch of the Mongar *Dzongkhang* Dratshang of the *Brugpas* to the dismay of the local *Nyingmapa* believers.

III

BHUTANESE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

By tradition, social structure within the Tibetan cultural sphere such as Bhutan was a three-tier system consisting of clergy, aristocracy and peasantry in the descending order of importance. Firstly, every family was duty bound as far as possible to send an intelligent and physically fit child to the lamasery to be trained as a *gelong* (*lama-monk*). Training to the lama novice included a series of instructions in learning scriptures, religious and secular affairs, manners and etiquettes and the various vocations ranging from book binding to specialised theological disputations. Lamas could perform several roles from household priests to the head of the state on the basis of their ability. They could rise in the hierarchy to the highest position in the church-state without social disability. So much so that it was considered a sin to touch a lama violently or kill a monk, though many Lama state functionaries were physically annihilated in the long history of Bhutan. Their theology prescribed an intricate and mystic cycle of rebirth and incarnations. Such incarnate religious functionaries commanded great respect and extraordinary privileges. They were maintained by the village community (*lakhangs*—temples) or the state (to those who had official status and lived in the *dzongs*). By virtue of their learning, skill and achievements, some of them commanded extraordinary influence, power and respect. It

must be added that besides *Gelukpa* celibate monks, there were sects, which permitted monks to marry and lead the life of a householding monk. Furthermore, the Lama state functionaries residing in the *dzongs* were permitted to take lesser religious vows with a view to marry and raise their families. Such families with a claim to noble lineage (*chhoje—grihaswamis*) were held in reverence even after physical end of the lama functionaries. Such families played significant roles in the strife-torn history of Bhutan.

Secondly, there were secular regional chiefs, who could establish their sway through their martial and strategic skills; carve out their principalities; build *dzongs* and *lakhangs* and patronise monasteries. Descendants of such regional chiefs had an aura of significance in the name of their families. Many of them drew their descent from significant monks, even from monks' unusual liaison. Furthermore, the families of the significant incarnations were naturally elevated to status of nobility and aristocracy. Progeny of such families along with that of the *chhoje* would ordinarily rub shoulders with the commoners in everyday life in mundane affairs. However, in case of the descendants of unusual excellence, their family background added to their advantage. For example, the Wangchuk rulers of Bhutan drew their genealogy from the legendary Lama Phazo (1161-1211 AD) and the ancient 'text discoverer' Padma Glingpa (1450-1521 AD) adding an aura of reverence and historical significance. Similarly, Rinzin Dorji, a significant administrative functionary in the state, traces his descent to the legendary monk of Bumthang valley, Pema Lingpa. Finance Minister Yeshey Zimba's great-grandfather was Alu Dorji, who had fought hand to hand with Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk at Chamli-mithang near Thimphu some hundred years back to contest the Wangchuk's supremacy.

Thirdly, it goes without saying that the mainstay of the Bhutanese society continues to be peasantry (*mirab*) from which clergy and aristocracy emerged. In the pastoral economy of almost self-sufficient rural units, agriculture and animal husbandry were inseparable occupations of the peasants. Cultivation continues to be strenuous exercise, carried on by ploughing and raking, terracing intricately and arranging for irrigation channels on undulating terrain. It is the village *zopon* (head carpenter) who helps to build farm houses or other buildings out of rattle, stones, clay, slate and shingles. Interestingly the Bhutanese architect is marked by the absence of iron nails. Normally store-rooms and cattle-

sheds are constructed on the ground floor and living rooms on the upper floor. The peasant's life is marked by joint and extended family and village corporate life. A village normally has a common *lakhang* (temple), grazing ground, and water stream for irrigation and turning prayer wheels.

Agrarian Structure

The Bhutanese commoners could be divided into two: the farmers and the serfs, which were further divided into a number of local variations. Furthermore, various districts (*dzokhangs*) had different land tenure practices. For example, Tashigang *dzokhang* paid taxes to the King. There were regions, which paid taxes to the queen mother, queen, King's sisters, uncles, crown prince and other relatives. There were aristocratic families with free land grants, dependent peasants and hundred of serfs. The important monasteries had their estates for their maintenance. Then there were tracts of land, which paid taxes directly to the state treasury. We have noted above that southern Bhutan was in the charge of the Dorji family, who depended on the Nepalese *thikedars* for revenue collection. Furthermore, incarnate lamas with estates were special charge of the King. For example, Tulku Gangtey, a constant companion of the second Druk gyalpo, had died in 1931. His estate in Bhumthang valley lapsed to the royal household because of delayed discovery of an incarnation.

All the households in a village were subjected to an obligatory labour tax (*chunidom* or *woola*) to the state, which could be allotted for a number of assignments decided by the local level functionaries. There could be three types of households in a Dukpa village: *trelpa* (liable to pay taxes), *Zurpa* (splinter households not yet liable to pay taxes) and *suma* (the households paying taxes to the members of the nobility, e.g., royal family). There were two types of grain taxes: *wangyon* (levy for blessings) and *thojab* (grain tax on land output). There were numerous other taxes to be paid such as textile tax, butter tax, etc. A typical taxpayer would pay annually the following items to the state functionaries: 462 kg of paddy, 28 kg butter, 120 pairs of wooden shingles, besides textiles, baskets, paddy straw, mustard, dry chillies, dry sliced pumpkins, bark for the paper and ash for the field. They had to till the land for monasteries and local officials in varying man-days between summer and winter without payment. On an average, a Bhutanese farmer spent half of his time working for the state without an express benefit to himself.

There were royal, aristocratic and even monastic herdsmen, and slaves grazing cattle. These herdsmen had to provide butter, calf, wool, hide, meat, and yak tails in taxes. Though there were regional variations, but in effect, there were two types of slaves: *drabas*—who worked for masters in lieu of land granted to them for their up-keep and *Zaba*—who worked only for the sake of food and cloth. *Suma* were privileged serfs, who paid taxes in kind to the aristocracy and ran errand for them. *Key, Jou, Jaom, Pongyer, Zaden*, etc. were select group of indentured slaves and servants. It was an extremely violent, unequal and exploitative system in which commoners had a hard time. No wonder many of them, turned to monasteries for a life of clergy. Legendary Lama Phazo very aptly summarised the traditional Bhutanese social scene:

“Half the (Bhutanese) people are Dukpas,
Half the Dukpas are beggars,
And half of the beggars are Saints”

In such a situation one may easily surmise the welcome waiting for the members of the mission (*Bangchen*) sent to levy fines/penalty to the defaulting peasants. Though the rules for their conduct were elaborate, such a mission turned out to be rapacious, tyrannical and exploitative. As the conventional theocratic pattern of administration was not abrogated at large in spite of establishment of the monarchy, there existed a number of lay and religious officials at district level, who consumed bulk of the revenue paid in kind. For example, there existed till 1960s in very *dzong* the post of a fodder master, a chief of stable, a cattle master, a meat master, a gate collector, a senior store master, a chamberlain, a chief attendant, a guest master, a fort governor and so on. Needless to add that all these significant functionaries had an impressive array of staff under them to help them perform their official duties. Evidently any tax reform intended to alleviate the sufferings of the peasantry equally demanded an administrative reform.

Interestingly, the *Lhotshampas* were subjected to a classical tenancy pattern. As the ‘hot, humid and malarial’ region was assigned to the Dorji family since 1890s to develop through the migrant Nepalese labour, these newly settled tenants did not have to pay the taxes in kind. However, they were also not free from labour tax. The Dorjis collected the taxes from the heads of the families through their contractual officials in cash on the basis of cultivated land, number of cattle, fruit trees and other

consideration. Even Dorjis did not transmit regularly the collected taxes direct to the King. However, they were supposed to provide cash requirement of the ruler, and his establishment as and when desired. The entire region was unsettled and unexplored 'frontier' in which newly immigrant tenants led the life of chattels.

The third Wangchuk ruler Jigme Dorji (b. 1928; r. 1952-1972) is rightly called the father of modern Bhutan. He initiated the tax reforms in 1960s from Bhumthang valley through a small but dedicated band of officials directly working under him. The variety of taxes paid by individual tenants were calculated and rationalised. The taxes in kind were abolished, and when some of them were to be continued on a temporary basis, they were converted into cash. The cash payment of tax was introduced as a rule and rates were lowered considerably. Slavery was abolished and serfs were freed and settled elsewhere with state support so that they did not suffer from social disability in future. Administration was as well rationalised and a number of redundant offices were abolished. After watching the pace of tax reform in Bhumthang valley, the King got it extended to Tongsa *dzongkhang*, then to Tashigang, and ultimately, to the entire country. The country was divided into 15 *dzongkhangs* (districts) for revenue and development administration, which have turned into 20 districts and 196 development blocks (geogs) at present. Every tax payer was provided with a 'tax circular' (*cheta kasho*) on 2'5'' by 2'5'' bark paper containing details of his tax liabilities in cash, kind and labour.

We have identified in this chapter the *Shangri-la* image of Bhutan, an image of being other-worldly *Lamaist* monarchy on the snowy Himalayan ranges and forested ravines free from maddening crowd of other South Asian countries. Secondly, we have delineated the ethnic complexity of Bhutan in which the Dukpa, the *Sarchhap* and the *Lhotshampas* have their distinct locales of north-western, eastern and southern part of the country respectively. Thirdly, we have made a hint at the end of the chapter on the nature of social stratification in Bhutan. We have noted how traditional subsistence economy was being turned into a market one. We hasten to add that the dominant image of Bhutan is that of the only *Lamaist* country in the world, an issue wrapped in myths, legends and hoary past. We intend to analyse these aspects in the next chapter.