

**Role of Pano Gaeboo Achyok  
in the Construction of Lepcha Identity**

**A Dissertation Submitted**

**To**

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

**Degree of Master of Philosophy**

**By**

**Rongnyoo Lepcha**

**Department of Anthropology**

**School of Human Sciences**

**February 2017**

**SIKKIM UNIVERSITY**

**GANGTOK- 737101**

**FEBRUARY-2017**

**DECLARATION**

I, Rongnyoo Lepcha, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “Role of Pano Gaeboo Achyok in the Construction of Lepcha Identity” is an original work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Charisma K. Lepcha. The contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute. This is submitted to the Sikkim University, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology.

Rongnyoo Lepcha

Research Scholar

Department of Anthropology

Dr. K.R. Rama Mohan

Head

Department of Anthropology

Sikkim University, Gangtok

Dr. Charisma K. Lepcha

Supervisor

Department of Anthropology

Sikkim University, Gangtok

## **PLAGIARISM CHECK CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that plagiarism check has been carried out for the following M.Phil Dissertation with the help of URKUND Software and the result is within the permissible limit decided by the University.

### **Role of Pano Gaeboo Achyok in the Construction of Lepcha Identity**

Submitted by **Miss Rongnyoo Lepcha** under the supervision of

**Dr. Charisma K. Lepcha** of the Department of ANTHROPOLOGY,  
School of HUMAN SCIENCES, Sikkim University, Gangtok, 737 102,  
INDIA

Signature of the Candidate

Countersigned by the Supervisor

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Charisma K Lepcha for the continuous support, for her patience, motivation, guidance and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this dissertation. I also extend my thanks to the head of the department Dr. K.R.R Mohan for and Dr. M. Samson Singh for their guidance.

My heartfelt thanks to all the people of Lungsyol and Dapling for sharing their wisdom with me during the course of this research. My special thanks to Mr. Ambrose Lepcha and his family and also Mr. Nimsingh Lepcha and his family for giving their precious time and allowing me to stay with them during my fieldwork. I would also like to thank Mr. Lyangsong Tamsang, Ren S.T Lepcha, Mr. N.T Lepcha and all those who have helped me and shared information with me during the course of this research.

I would like to thank my family, my parents and my sister for supporting me throughout writing this thesis and my life in general. My grandparents for their blessings. I thank my father Mr. Dup Shuzong Tamsang who has always been my true inspiration in life. I thank him for sharing with me his immense knowledge. I thank my mother Mrs. Sukmit Lepcha for being my strength and providing for everything in life. I would not have come this far without you two.

It would not be the same without the presence of my friends therefore I would like to thank all my friends for their support and suggestions especially Deepika Bhujel, Nisha Thapa, Sangay Diki Bhutia, Yogesh Sharma, Mongfing Lepcha, Suman Sarkar and Avishek Biswakarma. Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who have helped me to finish this dissertation, once again thank you all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>List of maps</b>	
<b>List of images</b>	
<b>I- Introduction</b>	<b>1-22</b>
Statement of problem	
Objectives	
Review of related literature	
Methodology	
Organisation of Thesis	
<b>II- Land and People</b>	<b>22-30</b>
The Lepchas	
The Land	
<b>III- A Biographical Account</b>	<b>31-69</b>
Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a King	
Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a Deity	
Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a Legend	
<b>IV- The Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival</b>	<b>70-85</b>
Origin of the festival	
The festival today	
<b>V- Conclusion</b>	<b>86-93</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>94-96</b>

## List of Maps

Map 1.1: map of Kalimpong

Map 2.1: Map of Kalimpong showing the forts of Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

## List of Images

Image 2.1: Dumdem: Lepcha female attire.

Image.2: Dumpra: Lepcha male attire.

Image 3.1: Ruins of the Damsang Fort.

Image 3.2: Water well which is said to be used by Pandi Nalimit.

Image 3.3 Ruins of a room in Damsang Fort

Image 3.4: The ruins of *Sutlyang Gree* in Dapling, Kalimpong.

Image 3.5: The walls of *Unthik Lyang*

Image 3.6: *Ramsubong* (jack fruit tree) at Katare, Dapling.

Image 3.7: The ruins of *Chyakung Gree* covered in vegetation.

Image 3.8: A clear view of the Jalpaiguri Plains from *Chyakung Gree*.

Image 3.9: The ruins of *Yang Gree* at Suruk, Kalimpong.

Image 3.10: Ruins of *Dalim Gree* at Gorubathan.

Image 3.11: The stones representing Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Image 3.12: The traditional worshipping of Pano Gaeboo Achyok on 20<sup>th</sup> December.

Image 3.13: Flags with the image of Lord Shiva.

Image 3.14: the portrait of Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Image 3.15: A Nausighge Bhale (Rooster) at the house of Kumar Basnet, Longsyol.

Image 3.16: Nausighge Rooster at the house of Mrs. Tika Devi Chettri. Lungsyol.

Image 3.17: A *Longchok* (erected stone) at Chyakung.

Image 3.18: Picture of Pano Gaeboo Achyok at the house of Mr. Ambrose Lepcha.

Image 3.19: The first ever sketch of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, eroded by time.

Image 3.20: The painting made by Mr. Bhakta Pariyar.

Image 3.21: Pano Gaeboo Achyok badges sold at the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival.

Image 4.1: Preparation of calendars to be sold during the Festival.

Image 4.2: Preparation of the stage for the programme.

Image 4.3: Youths from different villages helping in preparing food for the festival.

Image 4.4: *Bongthings* offering prayers at Damsang fort on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

Image 4.5: The *Amoo* (mothers) performing during the festival 2015.

Image 4.6: The men helping the *Deptong* women to lift the heavy vessels.

Image 4.7: One thousand youths danced for the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival 2016.

Image 4.8: Community feast at the festival.

Image 4.9: Speech by Mr. Lyangsong Tamsang, chairman of MLLDB.

Image 5.1: “King Gaeboo Achyok’s Decendents” a photo of Lepcha youths at Bong Busty from 1963.

Image 5.2: Pano Gaeboo Achyok School in Lungsyol, Kalimpong.

Image 5.3: The *Long Chyok* (stone marker) at Pano Gaeboo Achyok School.

Image 5.4: The Pano Geboo Achyok Magazine.

Image 5.5: The badge of Pano Gaeboo Achyok worn by the Lepchas.



**Map 1.1: Map of Kalimpong**

Source: [www.worldmarcopolo.com](http://www.worldmarcopolo.com)



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies on the Lepcha tribe since the time the British entered India. Most of the classic works on the Lepchas have been a detailed study about their social life. Many foreign scholars have also laid stress on the Linguistics of the tribe. A later wave of research was done by the Indian scholars who concentrated more on other aspects of the Lepcha society. Identity is one issue that have been in the limelight of discussions for the Lepchas and also for many scholars, this issue have been surfacing again and again.

Identity is multi-layered, an individual has different identities. An individual will have a single personal identity, but have several social identities, cultural identity, community identity, class identity, caste identity, educational identity, gender identity, etc. and at the top most the national identity. Social sciences lay much stress into the concept of “identity” as they explore the cultural politics of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and other social categories. We can find the concept of “identity” at the centre of lively debates in every major subfield, as it forms an integral part of any community, any society.

Identity is “that which makes something or somebody uniquely different and it is also that which makes somebody or something the same as, or identical with something or somebody else”(Brosius and Polit 2011). In a community, all members share similar cultural traits, values, norms, beliefs, etc. which give them a sense of belongingness to the community and a strong connection with each other above the personal level creating solidarity.

“Identities are understood in terms of how they are defined by others and in terms of their own articulations and self-definition in relation to land and sacred landscapes ” (Arora 2007: 197). However the meaning of identity has moved beyond the horizon of this definition today as we have a spectrum of conceptions that come to play when defining identity. It is not confined to a small group anymore but linked globally. In conclusion we can say that the notion of identity has always been the one surrounded by controversies and of much interest. Cultural and ethnic identity being one of the most infinite one. Identity is important to an individual as it gives him/her recognition of being in a group, a sense of belongingness. The identity of a community is formed with the constant use of the “we” concept. (Brosius 2011:52) The continuous use of “we” constructs an image of unity.

Today there are cases we see that people are going back to the traditional ways, what they call “in search of identity....” This is caused since many a time people belonging to a particular community are discriminated or they become isolated by the main stream population so they are left with no option then to stand up for themselves trying to portray their ethnic identity in front of the whole world as evidence of their existence. Today there are many ethnic communities who are struggling for their identities to be recognised.

The notion of identity is of great importance for all, it is the same for the Lepchas. The Lepchas lay great stress on safeguarding their language and also in the unity of the community, though in the recent past there have been many changes in terms of cultural traits, language, marriage system, religion, lifestyles, education, etc. still when it comes to the community as a whole the “we feeling” that they share comes to bind them and create the “Lepcha identity”.

If we look into the Lepcha history there have been many mentions about the Lepcha *Panos* (Kings). Turvey Pano was the first *pano* mentioned in the Lepcha history ruling from 1400-1700 A.D. After him, his reign was left with his three sons *Tur-Sang*, *Tur-Ageng*, and *Tur-Ayek*. Before the Tibetan invasion of Sikkim the last leader recorded to be ruling the Lepcha lands was Thikung Tek, though he was only a spiritual leader, he was of divine origin. The history of Sikkim is incomplete without mentioning this Lepcha leader. The Blood Treaty between him and Khye Bumsa; “paved the way for long lasting Tibetan suzerainty over Sikkim” (Roy 2014:10) which led to the downfall of the Lepchas.

Some scholars strongly believe that Lepchas were ruled by a chief and not necessarily a King. However the presence of the word ‘*Pano*’ in the vocabulary and in the language itself provides proof that there was a presence of kings who once ruled the people and some even left marks for infinity.

Anthropologist Elman Service (1975) distinguishes two stages of tribal societies: one, the simple societies organized by limited instances of social rank and prestige, and the other, more stratified societies led by chieftains or tribal kings (chiefdoms). Historically, tribal societies represent an intermediate stage between the band society of the Palaeolithic stage and civilization with centralized, super-regional government based in cities. Stratified tribal societies led by tribal kings thus flourished from the Neolithic stage into the Iron Age. Hence we can well see that Tribal kings did exist in the ancient times (Service 1975).

We know that every society and community goes through social evolution but not necessarily passes through each and every stage, as mentioned by the fathers of the classical evolutionary theory. Each society has its own degree of evolution and its

own time period of evolution, some evolve faster in comparison to the other and some slower so it is only obvious to think in lines as to may be the system of tribal kings had already evolved among the Lepcha community as they had independent territory as mentions in the pages of the Lepcha history.

Another argument is that though many scholars have already mentioned that the Lepchas had a chief to rule over them rather than a king as the people themselves claim. It can both be correct but only seen through their individual viewpoints. Through the Lepcha lens they had a King who ruled over them, and they see it in regards of the territory. On the other hand what the scholars who claim that Lepchas have a chief see the Lepchas as a tribal community and as seen in the evolutionary stage tribes are simple society having simple governance so it is easier to label them as having a chief. The argument of whether the Lepcha people had a chief or a king is still an on-going debate.

One of the important aspects to be viewed upon is the political scenario of the Lepchas. After the much argued chieftainship/kingship of the Lepchas the British entered the picture and then the Lepchas got involved into the new system of governing, Mandal system. Gorer also mentioned about the mandal system, “The office of the Mandal was hereditary, within the Lepcha meaning of the term; ..... The title resides in the extended family, and when the holder dies or becomes feeble through old age, it is next suitable male in the family, usually the eldest son” (Gorer 1987: 127).

In Darjeeling district the mandal operated as a landlord collecting revenues for the government, then the British government. Meanwhile in the country of Sikkim mainly the landlord system was under the Maharaja of Sikkim.

D.C Roy has traced about all the leaders in his work *Prominent Personalities among the Lepchas* (2014). Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang (1880-1940) was the first Lepcha Mandal of Bom village, Kalimpong. He was the mandal under the British rule and used to collect rent for the ruler on commission basis. After him both his sons K.P Tamsang and D.T Tamsang inherited the mandalship. This proves the hereditary nature of the Mandalship mentioned by Gorer.

Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang formed an Association for the Lepchas in 1925, known as the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA) in Kalimpong. The main focus on forming the association was reintroduction of Lepcha language and literature in the school curriculum and official use. Since the condition of the Lepcha language was deteriorating. After him there were many who carried on shouldering the leadership of the association.

The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association's purpose was to serve the need for the revivalism of the Lepcha language and literature, but later it evolved and now works for the development and the betterment of the Lepcha people of Darjeeling District. Today the Association works hand in hand with the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) provided by the West Bengal government, a step towards the greater development of the whole community.

Speaking of leadership, a community “expresses its dreams and desires through a leader” (Roy 2014: 7). People always support those who have similar interests. Leaders get the support from people as they want to express their needs, feelings through a person who has been elected by them. The Lepchas have a history of Kings with a number of Kings ruling them among them all; Pano Gaeboo Achyok

is believed to be the last king of the Lepchas of Kalimpong and also the most famous one.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok was the king of *Damsang Lyang*, what we know as the present day Kalimpong. The exact date cannot be pin pointed but according to many scholars he is said to have ruled between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. He is seen as symbol of the Lepcha people as he sacrificed his life for the protection of his subjects.

The present work will also look into the past events surrounding Pano Gaeboo Achyok as the past is an important gateway to the identities of the present and future populations of the world. Thapar (1975), states “history has often been used in the search for an identity. Each contemporary group seeks its own identity in the past”(1975:10). Thus, people believe that through history of the communities and their culture and tradition, they feel a sense of pride in their past and maintain their self-respect and dignity. The folklores, myths, legends, are very important part of the cultural identities to survive. It also provides great source to cultural history. “The view of the past depicted at these levels exercises a powerful hold on the popular imagination of the people” (Jain 2007: 131).

The Lepcha identity has mostly been labelled by many as a peace loving community they residing in harmony with nature. With migration a huge wave of communities arrived and dominated the land which threatened the identity of the community. With all the changes going on there came a need to establish the notion of identity out loud so that they would continue to flourish their culture and traditions not only in the present but for the coming future generation. And Pano Gaeboo Achyok has been a symbol of identity for the Lepchas, he is seen as a lighthouse to the Lepchas in the world a sea where everyone tends to get lost easily.

This research therefore tries to reconstruct the identity of Pano Gaeboo Achyok based on local, oral and written history about the last Lepcha King Pano Gaeboo Achyok. It is important to know that out of so many *Panos* (kings) of the Lepchas what was so important and special about Gaeboo Achyok that he has become a symbol of Lepcha identity today. A legend that today became an identity of the community as a whole.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The main problem one faces in trying to construct an image of Pano Gaeboo Achyok is that there are not enough available sources. Likewise, there are contrasting views about the identity of the Lepcha king. There are controversies whether Lepchas had a king or just a chief, since identities are moulded and remoulded at every stage by people, piling upon stories to relate to what was the original version.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok is called by different names, different identities, and different understanding of the people. The Lepchas identify him as their *Pano* or king, while the Nepali community calls him by the name “*Damsang Raja*”. The term “*Bhutey Raja*” or demon king is also referred to him as he is believed to have supernatural powers. The Bhutanese identify him as an evil spirit.

Building upon these identities given by various sources, Pano Gaeboo Achyok has today become a figure, a personality who was strong, efficient, and having magical powers. Today he is a legendary icon among the Lepchas. “A true symbol of faith, and culture, of solidarity and unity and loyalty towards the land (then *Mayel Lyang*)” (King Gaeboo Achyok Birth Anniversary, Souvenir 1996: 5).

It is indeed an irony as PanoGaebooAchyok is referred to as the “last king of the Lepchas” but though he was the last, he is remembered to as the greatest of all the other Kings. He was a great leader and hisforts (*Grees*) of Damsang near Pedong Kalimpong, the ruins of which still stand testimony of this brave king and proof that Pano Gaeboo Achyok and his legend is not just a myth but a historical truth, which screams out to the world for attention.

Today, the birth date of Pano Gaeboo Achyok is celebrated as a festival among the Lepcha community. The first celebration started in Bom Busty, Kalimpong. King Gaeboo Achyok is considered today as a legendary personality of *Damsang Lyang* (Kalimpong) who fought against the Bhutanese and dedicated his life for the protection and welfare of his people.

This festival serves as a unifying factor for Lepchas as a community. Lepchas from far flung villages, from Sikkim, Darjeeling, Bhutan and Ilam assemble at Mela Ground, Kalimpong for this annual celebration. It is in his honour and remembrance of his greatness and sacrifice that every year 20<sup>th</sup> of December is observed as Pano Gaeboo Achyok’s birth anniversary. It is an interesting event, a festival which is not only celebrated by the Lepcha people but has also become a symbol of solidarity among the Lepcha community.

It is this transition of a historical figure to a cultural personality that has become an integral part of the Lepcha society and become a symbolic icon representing the whole tribal identity. Since there has been a very limited study on this topic due to the lack of attention, this research intends to study the festival, the image and influence of Pano Gaeboo Achyok in the construction of Pano Gaeboo Achyok from his visual image to the image of the Lepcha identity.



## **OBJECTIVES**

- To provide a biographical account of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the legendary king of the Lepchas.
- To understand the importance of Pano Gaeboo Achyok as the symbol for Lepchas from the last king to a cultural icon.
- To see the importance of Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival in the construction of the Lepcha culture and identity.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

“The Lepchas owe their publicity largely to the European scholars” (Gowloog 1995: 12). This is indeed true since the British ruled India for two hundred years and in this time they explored around so in this explorative phase they tried and studied about every community in order to learn more about them so that it would be easier to rule on them. It was part of the whole colonisation process. Among these studies were the studies about the Lepchas, a Himalayan tribe. There are many works upon the Lepchas by many foreign writers as well as many from India and also the Lepchas themselves, touching upon the various aspects of the Lepcha life.

Among the various European scholars who worked among the Lepcha people the most prominent work is done by General G.B Mainwaring who is also celebrated among the Lepcha heroes. He is till date known as the “Lepcha Mad”, he immerseded himself into studying the Lepcha community so much so that he spent half of his life among the Lepchas, married a *Mun* (Lepcha priestess) also G.B Mainwaring devoted most of his life in learning Lepcha language and in teaching them, his work on the

*Grammar of the Rong as it exists in the Dorjeling Hills* (1876). He is one of the pioneers on which the Lepcha literature has progressed to great extent today.

Risley's *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1894) accounts of the various communities residing in Sikkim hills among which he also has studied about the Lepcha tribe. According to Risley's census of 1891 the Lepcha population of Sikkim was recorded to be 5,762 and was regarded the most dominant population at that time.

Morris in *Living with the Lepchas* (1938) wrote about the Lepchas as "a shy and retiring people, said to dying out rapidly" (Morris, 1938: 8). He started out looking to study the lives of people in the Tibetan border "to find out how they adjusted their lives when they came into contact with another" but eventually finds a "purely Lepcha palace" (Morris 1938: 8) where he stayed and studies the Lepcha people and their social life. He not only gathered information about the Lepchas but he also gives accounts of how other people outside the community perceive this tribe. An etic study about the religious life of the people sheds light on the dominant Buddhism already spread into all corners of the then country of Sikkim. He also mentions the family lives of the people also looking into their sex life of the people and the marriage system. Though he mentions "the Jongu people knew they are a dying race....." (Morris, 1938: 285) even after commenting on a similar type of statement from Mainwaring.

Gorer on *The Lepchas of Sikkim* (Gorer 1987) mentions the Lepchas as "Mongoloid people living on the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kanchenjunga" (Gorer 1987:5). He traces the origin of the Lepcha tribe as not being in the Sikkim Himalayas but in other places in the neighbouring territories and then to have migrated into these areas of Sikkim and Darjeeling.

Siiger 1967 gives a systematic Anthropological account of the Lepchas, their social and religious life. However he gives a different shade to the story contrasting to the many writers and scholar as well as the community itself, Siiger states that the Lepchas are not the original inhabitants “aboriginals” as to say of the Sikkim. He believed that Lepchas are not the original people of where they live in present.

Tamlong, gives the general nature of the Lepchas and states that generally the Lepcha people are “...simple, cheerful, open hearted, devoid of guile, kind and ready to smile always, trusting, trustworthy and faithful type” He goes on to call the Lepchas “the living Harischandras” (legendary generous Indian king) (Tamlong 2008:19). He also presents with a variation of views from different scholars regarding the Lepcha people.

There were also some Lepcha scholars who have contributed greatly to the community and its popularity. K.P Tamsang is widely known among the Lepchas as a founding pioneer who dedicated his life for the betterment of his community, though in a very strong nationalist approach. Yet his works have served as guidelines for many scholars who study about the Lepcha community. His work *Unknown and Untold Reality of The Lepchas* (1982), introduces with the basic ways and customs of the Lepchas about their beliefs.

The earliest of times did not see any chiefs or any kings, an anthropological article “life without chiefs” (1989) by Marvin Harris talks about when the people used to live a life without any governance by any leaders or kings or any chiefs. The only thing that kept the society running was the system of reciprocity; the continuous give and take had sustained the society without letting anyone go hungry.

Then came groups and bands that had a governing system where they were governed by leaders who were members of the group but had social and political responsibilities. Harris mentions that a chief or a headman worked hard for the people and encouraged them to do and be good.

Srinivas mentions the head of the village Rampura in his work "*The Remembered village*" to be a prominent one, "he was tall, well and muscularly built..." (Srinivas 1976:53). Similar to it Pano Gaeboo Achyok was also a prominent figure described as tall, muscular, and a daring figure.

According to Rudd, (2003) kings "have an obligation to protect subjects, to nourish and sustain. Kings have an elevated position because they are protectors of the society..." (Rudd 2003:6) Pano Gaeboo Achyok played similar roles by protecting his subjects and his motherland.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok is considered to be a Legendary King of the Lepchas. Many get confused between the differences of the terms like Myths, legends, folklores as these are often simultaneously used and have a very thin line of difference yet are in different in their own league. For anyone explaining the difference between these terms would be a difficult task. Since in understanding Pano Gaeboo Achyok we go deeper into understanding the meaning of legend. The term "legend" includes a broader field of concepts. According to the Oxford English Dictionary a legend is "the story of the life of a saint; a collection of saints' lives or stories of a similar character; a story, history, account; a roll, list, record; a book of readings or lessons for use at divine service, containing passages from Scripture and the lives of saints; an unauthentic or non-historical story, especially one handed down by tradition from early times and popularly regarded as historical" (Simpson 1884:45).

“Legends are more closely associated with a lower realm of religious philosophizing (that of saints—mere men.)” (Peyton 1969:32). Similarly in the case of Pano Gaeboo Achyok it revolves around a man like any other fused with the ingredients of the supernatural and what Peyton calls the people’s belief of explaining “the fundamental ideas about natural phenomena, supernatural occurrences, the goodness and order of the universe” (Peyton 1969:32). We can say that Pano Gaeboo Achyok fulfils the criteria of being a legend.

A.R Foning concentrates much on the historical factors, as much of his work is based on folklores, he talks about Gaeboo Achyok being a chief and not a king. Foning gives the life story about what he calls “A living legend” (Foning 1987:224) who was not an ordinary person but possessed supernatural powers and also Foning calls him a “natural leader” (*Ibid*: 226).

Foning, talks about a pregnant middle aged woman (though long passed child bearing age), seeking refuge in a cave outside a Lepcha village, upon seeing her a local villager took pity and used to supply her with food and water to drink. After a few days she delivered a baby boy. Days passed by and with every passing day she grew younger and younger as her baby grew up to become a strong boy. One day as the man visited the cave, he found that both the mother and child were being supplied by some mysterious person /being as the cave seemed to being overflowing with resources. The young one grew stronger, as what Foning calls a “veritable gentle young Hercules” (Foning 1987: 226).

Another version by D.T Tamlong is that Gaeboo Achyok is believed to be “half devil, half human being” (Tamlong 2008:42). Bhutanese source have mentioned that Gaeboo Achyok was a “malignant devil” (Foning 1987: 281). According to this

version, a woman while going to meet her husband in the field with mid-day lunch but was accosted on the way by an evil spirit in the form of her husband for a sexual relation; as a result of which a baby was born '*Achyok*', who grew into a man with iron and steel body and having magical powers. (Foning 1987: 281).

All the versions mentioned above differ greatly but all do agree on Gaeboo Achyok having supernatural powers. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the newly formed nation states of Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim were actively establishing their territories along the Himalayan chain so the small hill state of Kalimpong was continuously under attack from all sides. Since the main population of Kalimpong comprised of the Lepcha majority they were under constant threat of being exploited. He and his army fought bravely to defend the Lepcha territory of Damsang Lyang.

Tapan Chattopadhyay (1990) also claim Rongs to be under a chieftainship and not ruled by a king. Gaeboo Achyok is the most prominent chief of all who has carved his name into the pages of history among not only the Lepchas but can also be found in Tibetan chronicles and folklores. But as any other work, Chattopadhyay claims that the main gist about him is “unfortunately shrouded in mystery...” (Chattopadhyay 1990:16) as there are no rigid documents to prove when he existed and what was he exactly like. The identity that exists of him is moulded out of folklores and local oral histories passed down from generation to generation.

Indira Awasty (1978) has given a description of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, but also claims that the people have only a vague idea of the legends as she states Gaboo Achyok as being a “great warrior” “he may not have been a chief or a king but a brave and strong warrior who led primitive expeditions against the Bhutanese and the Nepalis. It may have been a later tendency to elevate in respect celebrated heroes to

the title of the king” (Awasty 1978:10). But as her content show that the informants have addressed to Gaeboo Achyok as being a King.

The *Lepcha Adivasi Ek Parichai* (2005) a Hindi work published by the ILTA mentions the Lepchas as having a *Desh*, a state and ruled by *Pano*, a king. To understand this it might be possible to be that those who claims that the Lepchas to be ruled by a chief looked into at the Lepchas as a tribe while on the other hand those who claim that the Lepchas were ruled by a king looked at the Lepchas as having a territory as in the sense of a state – Mayel Iyang.

The book portrays Gaeboo Achyok as a personality possessing supernatural powers based on the local myth. He is seen as the one who could throw big rock boulders at his enemies, slash a whole horse with the rider into half and pierce through full grown trees with his arrow. Many writers have claimed him to have close link to enjoyed the confidence of the then Dalai Lama of Tibet and is said to have received help many times in times of invasions from the neighbouring territories.

K.P Tamsang has talked about Gaeboo Achyok as being a great king in his article “Pano Gaeboo Achyok” published in the quarterly magazine King Gaeboo Achyok Birth Anniversary (1996:1). Though he has talked about Pano Gaeboo as being this ultimate Hero of the Lepcha people, a leader, a saviour and a legend, it is a much nationalist approach.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok’s kingdom was under constant attacks from all directions as Tamsang mentions “from the north by the Sikemese Bhotias, from the west by the Gurkhas, from the East by the Bhutanese and from the South by the British”(1996:3).

Dr. D.C Roy (2014) has made an attempt to analyse the nature of Lepcha leadership as he lists out all the leaders of the Lepcha world. He starts from the very first Tarvey Pano from the 1420 another prominent figure in the history of the Lepchas he mentions is The-kung Tek but The-kung Tek was rather a spiritual leader and not a Pano as D.C Roy calls him a “temporal administrator”, but his contribution as a leader still stands proud till date at Kabi (north of Gangtok) as *Kabi Longchok* a brotherhood blood treaty was signed with Khye-Bumsa.

D.C Roy mentions Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a distinct leader from Damsang area (Kalimpong). He writes “Among the leaders it was only Gaeboo Achyok who was successful in realizing the sentiment and the pulse of the Lepchas and got much popularity” (Roy 2014:8).

D.C Roy also gives a picture of the present day leadership among Lepchas to which he writes, the once influential community has now seen as a negligible minority in India, Nepal and Bhutan. They have what Roy states as completely lost their nature worshipping to either Buddhism or Christianity. But it is Christianity which created a wider gap between the past and the present than Buddhism (Roy 2014).

“The ILTA is trying hard in preserving and protecting their culture, custom, tradition, religion, *moo* (clan), language and literature..... It is the only forum where the members plan for the betterment of the community and keep the community is united under one banner. The association has initiated a revivalism of the culture, language and literature, an attempt to erase the tag upon them as the “Dying Race” or “Vanishing Tribe” but should be recognised as the “Flourishing Tribe” (Roy 2014:5).



D.C Roy also gives the argument that “geographical delimitation is one of the typical features of the leadership” (Roy, 2014: 18). He has deduced the whole chronicles critically. What he came up with is that “Gaeboo Achyok is a “title” rather than a name” (Roy, 2014: 25). He mentions that there might have been “more than one individual of this name/ title at different stages of history”(Roy 2014: 25).

Roy in his work *Lepchas Past and Present* (2012) mentions about Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a “historical figure” (Roy, 2012: 93) a “leader of the Lepchas of a particular region” but he also mentions Pano Gaeboo Achyok as not originally being a king but later regarded as a king he was “nothing but a mass leader of the Lepchas” (Roy, 2012: 93).

Ardussi (2014) has mentioned Gaeboo Achyok as a Lepcha “cultural hero”. He has reviewed the topic of the Lepcha king based on Tibetan and Bhutanese sources in the context of border events of Gaeboo Achyok’s era. According to the Bhutanese and Tibetan source mentioned by Ardussi. He brings out the account of Pano Gaeboo Achyok to be existing in 1668, where he comes to light when there was an onset of a major war between forces of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and Bhutan.

Kunchok Gyaltshan, a monk of the Barawa branch, a branch of the Drukpa School not alienated to the Zhabdrung Rioche (the founder of the state of Bhutan), was driven out of Bhutan in about 1634. He constructed several small monasteries in the region of Kalimpong and east Sikkim, including one named *Mon-lung* at Damsang. This monastery began gaining popularity within a community what he calls “*Loh-Mon*” (supposed to be the Lepchas or the Bhutanese), which means monks of crude behaviour (Ardussi 2014:2).

After living in Damsang for many years Kunchok Gyaltshan returns home. In 1663 he returns back to Damsang, while during his absence some lamas from Bhutan had already started to encroach upon his territories while a Lepcha chieftain named Monpa Amchok, in Tibetan *Mon-pa A-mchog* (a Tibetan name for Gaeboo Achyok).

Ardussi has carefully reviewed the Tibetan sources available and from the context and events he is certain that Monpa Amchog is non other than Gaeboo Achyok and based on this he mentions the rise of the Lepcha king to power to the period 1660-63 (Ardussi 2014).

From the given literature review, it can be concluded that Gaeboo Achyok was a leader, a king or a chief but there has not been enough research on this personality either as a leader or a king or a supernatural figure.

A recent article in published in memory of the celebration of the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2016 in a local nepali newspaper “*Himalaya Darpan*” titled “Gaeboo Achyok Ko Bhumika” talks on Pano Gaeboo Achyok being the Last King of the “Lepchas and who is still remembered by the Lepcha as being their king and the Bhutias of the region see him as a demon and worship him” (Himlaya Darpan 2015).

Though different scholars have provided information about this personality, the image they have moulded is very blurry and do not have a rigid base thus, creating a vague identity of the legendary last King of the Lepchas. This research aims to fill in the gaps and clear some doubt about Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a personality. This research will also try to look into the construction of a larger than life image has garnered following his death and the celebration of his birthday as a day for the entire

community to come together. It will also try to understand his influence of Pano Geboo Achyok in the construction of a pan Lepcha identity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research study will be conducted in Kalimpong where Pano Gaeboo Achyok ruled for a long time. The study will be based on intensive fieldwork indifferent Lepcha villages of Kalimpong, also including visits and collecting data from areas in and around Damsang fort where the ruins of the fort built by Pano Gaeboo Achyok still remain as evidence of the legendary king.

Visits to Damsang fort for archaeological reconnaissance and also the other forts situated within Kalimpong will be located, visited and recorded for this research.

Both primary and secondary data will be used to examine the dynamics of the topic related. Secondary data will be collected from various books, articles and journals, internet sources. Data will be collected through participation observation, interviews and involvement in organisation affairs, collection of folk lore, folk tales, myths and oral history.

Interviews will be focused on the political leaders of the community, experts in traditional folklore, *bongthings* (Lepcha shamans/ priests), the elderly members of the community and also the youths. Special focus will be laid on the collection of various oral histories and folklores and also historical background related to Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

To provide a biographical account of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, I will be interviewing the elders of the community as they have more knowledge on the

folklores about the King. *Bongthings* will be interviewed as they are the ritual specialist on the festival of Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Understanding the importance of Pano Gaeboo Achyok to the Lepchas is very important and for which I will be focusing on the Lepcha community as a whole. Data will be collected from different Lepcha villages of Kalimpong. I will also be using some questionnaire for some informants in Bhutan and for people required.

Participation in the festival of “Pano Gaeboo Achyok” on 20th of December where photography and video recording will be used in recording the highlights of the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival. Interviews will be conducted with the people involved in the organisation of the festival and also with the people who come to the festival. The focus will also be laid on the Leaders of the community to understand their vision of the Lepcha community and the aims of the festival at large.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THESIS**

The first chapter deals with the introduction of the topic. It also gives a glimpse of the community. Central to this research and the area covered for the research. This chapter also bring out the statement of problem which relates to the importance of doing this research. It also highlights the objectives of the research.

The second chapter explains about the study area and the people of the study area. The historical places covered for the research topic.

The third chapter gives a biological account of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, bringing in all the folklores and the beliefs of the people regarding Pano Gaeboo Achyok. It also shows the transition of Pano Gaeboo Achyok from a king to a deity to a legend.

Chapter four focuses on the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival and all the details concerning the festival. It brings out the origin of the festival and the change the festival has gone through till now. The importance of the festival is also portrayed in this chapter.

The final chapter brings in the summeries and discussion how Pano Gaeboo Achyok is shaping the identity of the Lepchas today.

## CHAPTER II

### LAND AND PEOPLE

#### THE LEPCHAS

While it is a known fact that Lepchas have been living in these hills for a long time, Mullard (2011), provides a series of archaeological findings to prove their existence with the many stone tools which he classified being of two categories. One category being much older which resembled the Hoabinhian culture of South East Asia, dating back to 10,000 to 8,000 B.C., the second category of tools much younger to the first one dating between 8,000 to 4,000 B.C. which shared similarities to the Suhan and South China cultural assemblage.

George Van Driem in 1998 and later in 2006 combined his knowledge of linguistic history of the Tibeto-Burman language family with archaeological evidences proposed a theoretical model of migration pattern of ancient Tibeto-Burman in which he estimated that the ancestors of the Lepchas may have migrated in the third and fourth millennium B.C. His model states that the Proto-Lepcha form part of the early southerly movement from the Majiayao cultural assemblage. So, these archaeological and linguistic finding point that Lepchas have been residing in the Sikkimese hills from “atleast C. 5,000 B.C” (Mullard 2011: 5).

The origin of the word Lepcha as many scholars claim to have been derived from the Nepali word “Lapce” or “Lapca”, which originally had a derogatory connotation after the advent of the British they started calling the Lepce “Lepchas” (Tamsang 1998:2). Tamsang writes “the name Lapchey is given to the Lepcha people by the Nepalese. Lapchey means scurrilous speakers, a very contemptuous term

referring to the Lepchas and therefore this term needs to be condemned outright because it is most derogatory and unfavourable to the Lepchas....” (Tamsang 1998:2) Today, the term ‘Lepcha’ is widely used without this connotation.

The Lepchas call themselves *Mutanchi Rongkup Rumkup* which means beloved children of Mother Nature. The Lepchas call themselves བུ་ཅོ་ལྷོ་ (རྩེ་ལྷོ་) རྩོལ་ལྷོ་ (རྩེ་ལྷོ་) *Mutunci Rongkup Rumkup* ‘children of the Rong and of God’ (རྩེ་ལྷོ་) *Rongkup*.

The Lepchas believe that *Itboo Deboo Rum* (creator) created the first Lepcha man, *Fudongthing*, and the first Lepcha woman, *Nazongnyoo*, from the virgin snow of Mt. Kanchenjunga. After creating them *Itboo Deboo Rum* sent *Fudongthing* to live at the top of *Tungeng Nareng Chu* (mountain peak) and *Nazongnyoo* to live next to *Naho Nathar Da* (lake). They followed *Itboo Deboo Rum*’s order and lived in isolation for many years. Their desire to see each other grew stronger and stronger with the passage of time. One day *Nazongnyoo* decided to leave her home and go meet *Fudongthing*. They fell in love, and their offspring are today the Lepchas or the *Rongkups*.

Formally there were ten divisions of the Lepcha families claiming decent from the ten sons of *Fudongthing* and *Nazaongnyoo* known as the *Rong Kati*. With the passage of time newer clans started to branch out from this old lineage roots.

The Lepchas like any other tribe have their own language, own script the Lepcha language is known as རྩོལ་ལྷོ་ *Rongring*. It comes under the Tibeto-Burman

language and is spoken in Sikkim, Darjeeling district in West Bengal in India, in Ilam district in Nepal, and in a few villages in south-western Bhutan.

## **THE ATTIRE**

In the olden days, the traditional clothing for both Lepcha men and women was made of fibre of the Nettle plant or *Kuzoo* in Lepcha language. Today these rare clothing are antiques and very costly. The Lepcha female dress *dumdem*, consists of one large piece of material that is folded over the left shoulder first, and then pinned at the other shoulder and held in place with a waistband known as *Namrek* over which part of the remaining material known as the *Dumpum* hangs; earlier thing was used as a bag to carry certain things. The ankle-length *dumdem* or *dumbun* is worn over a long-sleeved blouse known as *Tagao*.



Image 2.1: *Dumdem*: Lepcha Female attire

The native male dress is knee-length and consists of a multi-coloured hand-woven cloth called *dumpra*, which is pinned together at one shoulder and held in place by a *Namrek*. The *dumpra* is usually worn over a simple shirt known as *Ginjya*



and knee-length trousers. The men wear *Thyaktuk* 'cap', a flat round hat with stiff black velvet sides and a softer top of coloured material with a knot in the centre. The Lepchas also wear *Tamok*, a hat made of a specific specie of bamboo with rattan strips and is cone-shaped with a narrow brim. A Lepcha men carries a *Pathang*, a long knife with a flat tip.



Image 2.2: *Dumpra*: Lepcha male attire

## THE RELIGION

The Lepchas are nature worshippers. They have their own animistic beliefs with nature at the core. Nature is a provider, protector and a teacher for them. Though the Lepchas do not have a specific name for their Religion many scholars have labelled their religion as *Munism* and *Bongthingism*.

The central religious roles in Lepcha community are traditionally occupied by the *mun* and the *bongthing*, who both function as priestess and priests. The *bongthing* is traditionally a male shaman and priest who preside at recurring religious ceremonies and seasonal festivals. He also heals illness. The *mun*, often but not

necessarily a female shaman, is a healer who exorcises demons, helps to heal illness and guides souls to the afterlife. It is possible for a *bongthing* to develop into a *mun*. Today there is an on-going controversy on male *muns* as certain intellectuals within the community argue that according to Lepcha history only the women were *muns* and not the men, but with the decreasing numbers of the female *muns* many *bongthings* have turned *mun*.

In the eighteenth century, the Lepcha people were converted to Buddhism, although indigenous Lepcha shamanism managed to coexist with Buddhist customs and beliefs. Both Buddhist lamas and Lepcha *bongthings* preside at many important ceremonies in Lepcha life, each to perform their own rituals. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant number of Lepcha people have converted to Christianity.

## **POLITICAL SYSTEM**

The presence of kings among Lepchas is a debatable topic. Although Turve Pano is recorded as the first Lepcha king ruling from 1400 to 1700 A.D., some scholars strongly believe that Lepchas were ruled by a chief and not necessarily a King. However, the presence of the word '*Pano*' in the vocabulary and in the language itself provides proof that there was a presence of kings who once ruled the people and some even left marks for infinity.

D.C Roy has traced about all the leaders in his work *Prominent Personalities among the Lepchas* (2014). Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang (1880-1940) was the first Lepcha Mandal of Bom (a village in Kalimpong). He was the mandal under the British rule and used to collect rent for the ruler on commission basis. After him both

his sons K.P Tamsang and D.T Tamsang inherited the mandalship. This proves the hereditary nature of the Mandalship mentioned by Gorer.

Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang formed an Association for the Lepchas in 1925. The main focus on forming the Association was the reintroduction of Lepcha language and literature in the school curriculum and official use, since the condition of the Lepcha language was deteriorating.

The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association have been producing many magazines and works like the Achuley- a quarterly bilingual magazine, King Gaeboo Achyok Annual Bilingual magazine, Athing K.P Tamsang Lepcha Annual magazine and recently the Teesta Rangeet- a quarterly multilingual magazine. They have also come up with various Lepcha school books to be used in schools that teach the Lepcha language as a subject and also for Lepcha night schools established in villages for the Lepcha people.

The Lepchas also have a three tiered governing system starting from the *Kyong Sezum* that is at the village level then the *Thom Sezum* which is at the town level and lastly the *Pum Sezum* the highest governing body.

## THE LAND

Kalimpong was chosen as the area of my research as Kalimpong was ruled by Pano Gaeboo Achyok for a long period of time. Kalimpong or in *Rongring* known as *Kalen-pung* meaning our meeting place or a place where we gather.

Kalimpong is also known as *Damsang Lyang*. The place gets this name from the famous and historical Lepcha fort Damsang gree built by Pano Gaeboo Achyok. Kalimpong is an important area as it holds historical and territorial significance when it comes to tracing and constructing the image and history of Pano Gaeboo Achyok and the Lepchas of the area. The study is based on intensive fieldwork among different Lepcha villages of Kalimpong, also including visits and collecting data from areas in and around Damsang fort where the ruins of the fort built by Pano Gaeboo Achyok still remain as evidence of the legendary king.

Visits to Damsang fort for an archaeological reconnaissance and also the other forts situated within Kalimpong was visited and recorded for this research. Kalimpong also forms the centre since one of the most important aspect of the research that is the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival is celebrated ever year.

Different villages were visited in Kalimpong to collect data related to the research topic. Bong Busty in particular since it is a hub pioneers of the Lepcha world. The village was also chosen since the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival was initially started in this village by Ren Lupon Sonam Thering Lepcha and K.P Tamsang.

Mani Gumba Kyong at 11<sup>th</sup> mile and Ngasey kyong, 6<sup>th</sup> mile were also taken into account visiting all the important people who know about Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Lungsyol the birth place of Pano Gaeboo Achyok was one of my focus area. Lungsyol comes from the Lepcha word *long* meaning rock and *syol* meaning to spread. As the name suggests the place has abundance of rocks. And due to this some of the rocks attract lightning and Lungsyol faces a lots of lightning attacks. People in the village are terrified of lightning. I faced one such incident while still in the field. It was October and the weather was fine in the starting of the field work but eventually it went bad and one day there was heavy rainfall and lightning. My guide suggested we do not go out for work for the day. Everyone went inside their homes and stayed put. My guide closed all the windows and doors of the house and waited for the lightning to pass.

People in Lungsyol are very scared of lightning and the next day my guided showed me the many trees that were hit by lightning. The recent one was a tree a few meters in front of his house.

The village of Lungsyol had many clusters of population concentrated on different parts of the village. One cluster comprised of the non-Lepcha population and the other cluster comprised of mostly Lepcha population and the other parts had a mixed population. There are two schools in the village, a Primary school and Pano Gaeboo Achyok school. The villagers are involved in cardamom plantation in a mass scale. They also plant broom plants and chillies. They also grow vegetables to be sold in Gorubathan which is nearby.

The Lepcha population in Lungsyol follows Christianity and the non Lepcha population follow the Hinduism. The village has a Church but only for the Elsadai denomination. Much of the population also follow Roman Catholic denomination but

they do not have a church in the village. The people have to go all the way to Gidapling every Sunday to attend church.

Another area of interest is Dapling. Dapling comes from the Lepcha word *Dap Lyang* meaning the place where we first settled. If we look at the geographical placement Dapling falls at the centre from where Pano Gaeboo Achyok travelled to his other forts and places of importance.

The people who still know about Pano Gaeboo Achyok are scarce and scattered in different corners of the village, I was travelling from one corner to the other for information. The market place for the village is a tiring walk uphill from where I stayed. People travelled every Wednesday for the weekly ration and supplies from the *Budubare haat* (Wednesday market). The people are engaged in cardamom plantation and recently coffee plantation is coming up replacing the traditional crops.

Dapling holds many important historical sites related to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. I was fortunate to be able to cover all the important sites and uncover the picture of who Pano Gaeboo Achyok was, and what was he like.... These questions will be answered as this thesis proceeds forward.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT**

#### **PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK AS A KING**

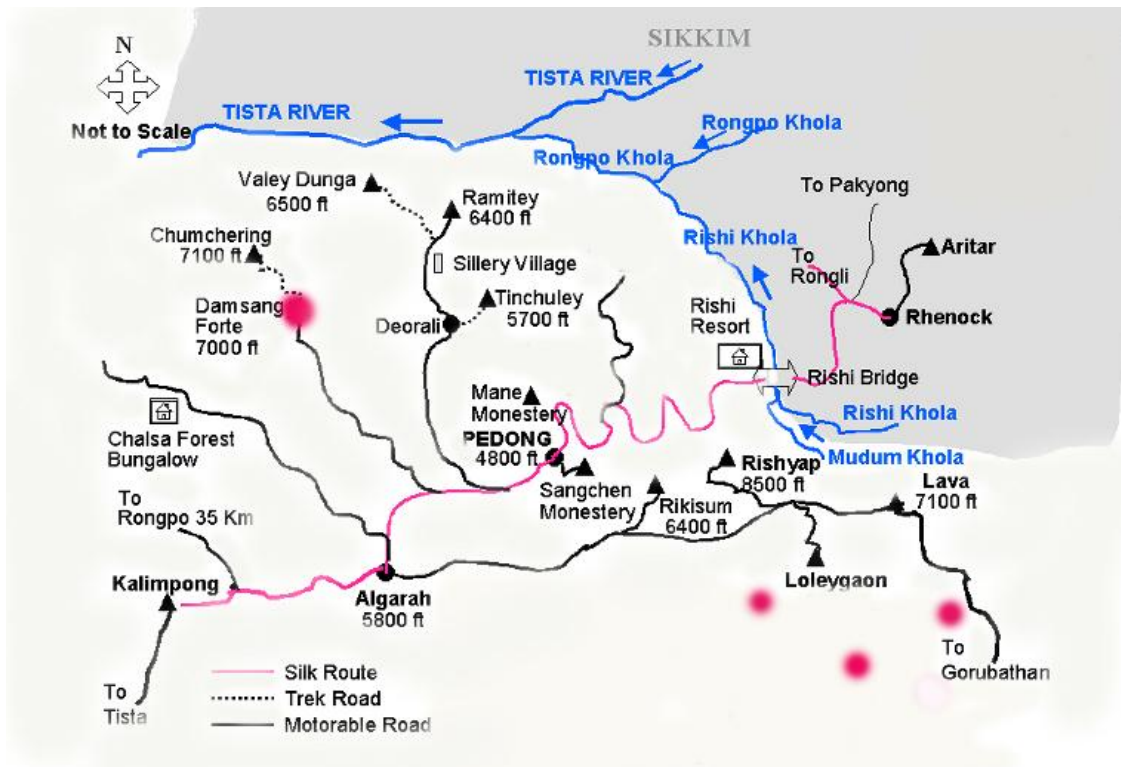
Pano Gaeboo Achyok is known as the Last king of the Lepchas. He is the most celebrated king among all others as the Lepchas honour and remembers him as a king who died for his people and his land. He not only sacrificed his life for his people but set an example. There is an on-going debate as to Pano Gaeboo Achyok being a king or a chief.

He could be an ordinary Lepcha but when there were numerous attacks on his land as Kalimpong falls on the border area of Bhutan. It is remembered how the armies would come and plunder the Lepcha people. Bhutanese attack, plunder, pillage of cattle, food grains, properties and molestation of women and children would be rampant. They would take away the cattle, the food and everything they had. The men had to run and hide in the forests as they would be killed. The Lepchas were small in number and they needed someone to protect them someone who would save them and this was when Gaeboo Achyok came along. He along with his army fought the enemy with the best forte that is guerrilla warfare. The Lepcha soldiers would fight with bow and arrows. They would poison the water where the enemy would be likely to drink water. The common people also fought alongside. They would cook wild yams, these yams would have to be handled with care as it had both edible and poisonous parts when the enemy would come to take away their food they would give the enemies only the parts that were poisonous thus killing them. Gaeboo Achyok raised an army

with him who fought to protect their land. He gave the Lepcha people hope and strength to fight against powerful enemies.

During his rule in Kalimpong Pano Gaeboo Achyok, built many forts as outposts to keep an eye on his enemies. One of the most popular one is Damsang Gree, which is situated above Pedong in Kalimpong. Damsang was named after Pano Gaeboo Achyok's father Damsang Pano. Besides Damsang Gree, Lepchas claim that they have constructed a good number of forts all over the Eastern Himalayan region where they were the rulers in ancient days. Within and around Mayel Lyang, several forts were constructed to protect the land from foreign attacks which in those days were very frequent and common. Forts in the eastern region were constructed to prevent Bhutanese attack; in the west to counter attacks from Nepal; in the north to protect the land from Tibetan attack. "The innumerable huge and rugged Lepcha forts of *Damsang, Daling, Fyung, Savong Dang, Mungzing, Laiti, Songsaw, Tusaychyok* and many smaller ones that are still proudly standing in Darjeeling district are the most typical examples of the art of Lepcha architecture" (Tamsang1983: 71).





Map 2.1: Map of Kalimpong showing the areas of Pano Gaeboo Achyok's forts in red.

Source: [www.mapofpedong.com](http://www.mapofpedong.com)

Damsang Gree or Damsang fort is one of the important historical and sacred places of the Lepchas of Kalimpong in particular and Darjeeling, Sikkim, Ilam and Bhutan in general. It was not only a fort but a palace of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the last Lepcha king of the region. "Achyok had his capital or headquarters at Daling Fort near the plains, and another, a subsidiary one, the Damsang Fort, in the hills near Pedong" (Foning, 1987:123). But most Lepchas believe that Damsang was the main and the only palace of Gaeboo Achyok. Kalimpong sub-division in those days was known as Damsang which "was an independent country ruled by Pano Gaeboo Achyok and his forefathers. After the death of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, Damsang was annexed by Bhutan until 1865 when the British defeated the Bhutanese at Daling Fort,

Damsang, and annexed it into British India” (Tamsang, 2008 : P-IV). As per the name of the fort and the region, the Lepchas residing in this region even today are known as Damsang Moo.



Image 3.1: Ruins of the Damsang Fort. Pedong.

In the relics of Damsang fort one can find separate rooms for the king, queen, their bath rooms and rooms for the guards or the soldiers. It is not a palace or a fort in the modern sense of the term and one needs to investigate it from the angle of a small community like the Lepchas who ruled in these remote, hilly areas of Eastern Himalayas in the ancient days. The fort was constructed absolutely with locally available materials like stone and mud and there is no evidence of any imported materials or skill. It is a fine evidence of typical architecture which Lepchas use and it simply supports the claim of the Lepchas that they are the builders of the fort. Strategically the fort was constructed at the top of the hill from where one can keep a close watch on the intruders from all sides. History witnessed frequent attacks on the Lepcha land by the Bhutanese from the east, by the Tibetans from the north, by the Nepalese from the west and by the British from the south.



Fig 3.2: Water well which is said to be used by the Pandi (queen) Nalimit

The location and the height of the fort favoured the Lepchas to fight with their traditional war equipment like bows and arrows and stones from the above. Naturally the hill top added some advantage to the Lepchas over their enemies. The importance of Damsang as strategic point for military post has also been recommended by British Colonel D.J.F.Newall. In one letter to the British government dated 04.01.1873 he wrote: “It occurs to me to remark that several very promising plateaux for sites for “military colonies” or “reserve circles” such as have at times been advocated as a means of frontier defence, exists in this district; such are found at “Damsong” “Kalingpoong” on the Bhootan frontier to the east across the Teesta”. (Sen 1989: 102). The letter speaks itself about the strategic importance of the place and the foresightness of the Lepchas in choosing the site as one of the military posts in those days.

As Roy (2011), states there are two schools of thought about the period when Damsang fort was constructed and the community who constructed it. The European writers, explorers, administrators believed that the fort was constructed by the Bhutanese. Such statements are simply due to the fact that this area for one hundred

and sixty five years (1700 – 1865) was under the Bhutanese control and naturally those who visited this place during the period witnessed the fort under the possession of the Bhutanese. In fact, writings on the Damsang fort, whatever fragmentary and meagre, are available only after the British took over Darjeeling in 1835. Again British captured the fort from Bhutanese in December, 1864 through the second Anglo-Bhutan war which is popularly known as Duars War. D.F.Rennie narrated the capture of Damsang by the British as: “Captain Perkings, with a few Sebundy sappers, proceeded across the hills and took possession of Dhumsong fort, a small quadrangular building constructed of stones and mud; its beautiful situation being the only thing worthy of note connected with it. No attempt at resistance was made, the place being quietly given up. Colonel Haughton proceeded there and arranged that it was to be occupied by a detachment of fifty men of the 17th Native Infantry, who were accordingly sent from Darjeeling under the command of Lieutenant Dawes, and reached Dhumsong with their baggage, after a journey characterised by no ordinary difficulty and fatigue” (Rennie 2005: 175). J.C.White also mentioned about the occupation of Damsang and other forts of the region by British. “Mynaguri, Daling, Damsong, Samtsi, Dongna, and Buxa were successively occupied by the two left columns, with but little loss on our side, and the military occupation of the Bengal Duars was completed by the end of the year” (White 1909, 2005: 278). But the mere occupation of Damsang from the Bhutanese by the British does not sufficiently prove that the fort was constructed by the Bhutanese. There are ample grounds to believe that before the occupation of this area by the Bhutanese in 1700, there were a number of forts including the Damsang fort in this part of the Himalayan belt.

Lepchas claim that Damsang Gree was originally constructed by them and later it was occupied by the Bhutanese by treacherously killing their last king Pano

Gaeboo Achyok at Daling. Later in 1864 British captured the fort by defeating the Bhutanese in war. Lepcha folktale narrates the treacherous killing of Gaeboo Achyok by the Bhutanese. Gaeboo, the Lepcha leader of Damsang area, fought for the freedom, liberty and peace. After several defeats the Bhutanese sent some presents and appealed for friendship. Gaeboo responded positively and attended a party given by the Bhutanese at Daling fort. “But that very night when everybody was in deep sleep, the treacherous Bhutanese General Ashyik Doogey killed the sleeping king Gaeboo Achyok by chopping off his head. But miraculously to the very eyes of the murderer, Ashyik Doogey, king Gaeboo Achyok’s chopped off head flew away and fell into a deep water gorge of the nearby ‘*Chel*’ river and until this day, this deep water gorge is well known by the name of ‘*Bhootey Daha*’, meaning devil’s pond” (Tamsang 2005:7). Even today both Lepchas and Bhutanese are scared of the place and offer prayer to the departed soul, which they believe to be present, while passing along the path.

Besides Damsang, Lepchas claim that they have constructed a good number of forts all over the Eastern Himalayan region where they were the rulers in the ancient days. Within and around Mayel Lyang several forts were constructed to protect the land from foreign attacks which in those days were very frequent and common. Forts in the eastern region were constructed to prevent Bhutanese attack; in the west to counter attacks from Nepal; in the north to protect the land from Tibetan attack. “The innumerable huge and rugged Lepcha forts of Damsang, Daling, Fyung, Savong Dang, Mungzing, Laiti, Songsaw, Tusaychyok and many smaller ones that are still proudly standing in Darjeeling district are the most typical examples of the art of Lepcha architecture” (Tamsang 1983: 71).

There is no doubt and by this time it has been well established and accepted that Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Eastern Himalayas which they call Mayel Lyang. Before the Tibetan occupation, Mayel Lyang was ruled by a number of Lepcha kings. “Tarvey Pano (king) or King Tarvey is the first notable figure in the Lepcha history. The period of reign of King Tarvey was 1420 approximately. After the death of King Tarvey, three successive Lepcha rulers (Tur-Sang Pano, Tur- Ageng Pano and Tur-Ayek Pano) sons of their royal father ruled the land. However, C. De B. Stocks, following Lepcha tradition, observed that Tarvey Pano and three other Panos ruled the land apparently at the same period. Then it can be inferred fairly that perhaps the old Lepcha land of Sikkim had more than one principality reigned under these Panos” (Roy, Das 1999:12). It is quite natural that these leaders took necessary steps in protecting their land and might have constructed a number of forts all over the region. One such fort might have been constructed by Gaeboo Achyok in Damsang.

The Lepchas consider Damsang as one of the sacred places of Kalimpong and offer their prayer during the birth anniversary of Gaeboo Achyok. In fact, it is one such occasion by which the marginalised Lepchas are trying to rejuvenate their community feeling and acquire energy to revive them.





Image 3.3: Ruin of a room of Damsang fort (which today is a popular Pilgrim destination for the Lepchas as well as the other communities).

Lepchas claims that Damsang was constructed by the Lepcha king Gaeboo Achyok while the Europeans narrate it as Bhutanese origin. But there is no scientific study to reveal the truth. Archaeological survey along with historical investigation is the answer left to reach to the truth and bring into light the fact behind Damsang, but again we should be more culture sensitive, Damsang Gree is a holy place for the Lepchas same as a temple for a Hindu or a monastery for a Buddhist and interfering with these may result in hurting the community as a whole.

We have *Setlyang Gree* in Dappling but by what is left it shows that there was an attempt to build a fort but due to some reasons they left it incomplete. Even though, there is a lot of history in Dappling above the main village of Dappling there is a place which is known as *Uunthik Lyang* it is believed that this was the place where Pano Gaeboo Achyok used to keep his horses when travelling. Seeing all the settings of the forts we can conclude that Dappling was a central point a place where Pano Gaeboo Achyok would take rest while travelling from one fort to the other.



Image 3.4: The ruins of *Sutlyang Gree* in Dapling, Kalimpong.

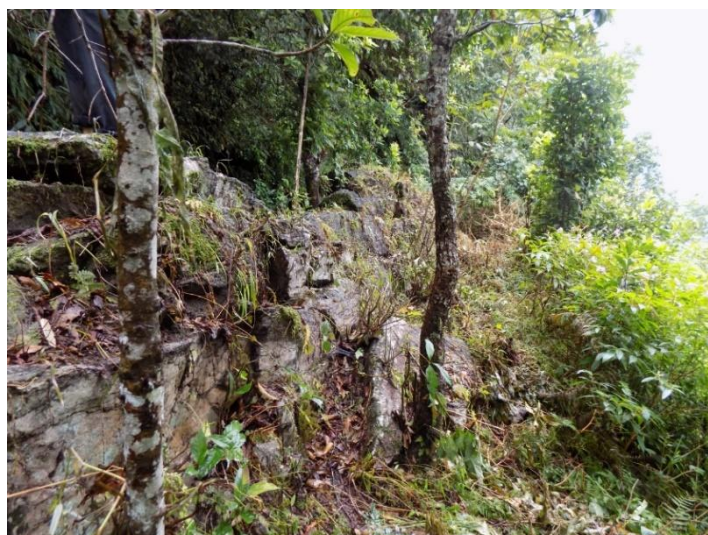


Image 3.5: The walls of *Uunthik Lyang*, where Pano Gaeboo Achyok used to keep his horses.

Besides *Uunthik Lyang* there are other evidences to prove this point. Below Dapling main village there is another small village Katare, a sub part of Dapling where there sits a *Ramsuu Bong* (Jack Fruit tree) which is believed by the locals to be planted by Aashekmit while travelling. The village derives its name from this very tree. It is a huge ancient tree with branches spread wide across the sky. The locals tell



that the tree was here even when they were children. Mr. Badan Singh Lepcha who is 92 years old says that his grandfather who lived till the age of 101 years also described the tree as it is today when he first came to the village many years ago. Today many of its branches are cut and its fruits taken to the local market by the villagers who live near the tree. The tree stands as proof of the age old tale that is told by the elders to the next generation.



Image 3.6: *Ramsuu bong* (Jack Fruit tree) at Katare, Dapling.

Dapling also holds the grave of one of the horseman of Pano Gaeboo Achyok named Targay of Pano Gaeboo Achyok who is said to have died due to high fever while travelling.

Another fort is in Lungsyol which is known by the name Chyakung Gree. The locations of the *gree* is same as in the case of the others we can see the similar patters as all the *grees* of Pano Gaeboo Achyok are built on a high hill with a flat top. Chyakung gree is believed to be the birthplace of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. There are arguments that it was not a fort but a monastery; others also say it's a house. A close look at the *gree* shows it being closer to a house and if we bring in the story of Pano

Gaeboo Achyok this was the place where Aashekmit gave birth to Pano Gaeboo Achyok, a place where a child is reared would be non like a watch tower so we can say it's more of a house of Pano Gaeboo Achyok where he was born and brought up and as he grew older he took control over the land.



Image 3.7: The ruins of *Chyakung Gree* covered by vegetation.



Image 3.8: A clear view of the Jalpaiguri palins from *Chyakung Gree*. The gree as an outpost to keep watch on enemy activities.

Another *gree* is the Yang Gree built on top of the highest hill in Yang Makum village in Kalimpong. The ruins are similar to that of Damsang fort and Dalim fort but they are now just stones and dust with the wilderness around them. They are lost to the human eye and known to only those few who still know about it.



Image 3.9: The ruins of *Yang Gree* at Suruk Kalimpong

The Bhutanese invasions and constant raids slowly dominated the Lepcha people to an extent that it was time to rise against them to fight for the freedom to fight for their existence and the one to rise was Pano Gaeboo Achyok thus making him one of the most famous *panos* of the Lepchas. Dalim fort at Gorubathan holds great importance and the sentiments of the Lepcha people as it is where the *Pano* was murdered. The Lepchas are trying their best to preserve these historical evidences of their *pano* and also safeguarding their heritage and identity.



Image 3.10: Ruins of Dalim Gree at Gorubathan.

Mr N.T Lepcha says that when other communities started migrating in, the Lepchas as they were small in population were dominated to the extent that they were ashamed to call themselves as Lepchas. They would be conscious to be identified as a Lepcha causing the downfall of the Lepcha identity and culture. To motivate the Lepcha people, a handful of concerned Lepchas decided to motivate them and to do so they introduced the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival. They told the Lepcha people of their king who had fought and sacrificed his life for the people, for his land and for his culture. Thus he has today become a beacon of light a symbol of the Lepcha identity

## PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK AS A DEITY

Pano Gaeboo Achyok has been seen as a very powerful person, someone who possessed supernatural powers. This is also the reason that he earned himself the title of “*Bhute Raja*” (Demon King). After his death his status raised from that of a king to a deity. A protector deity who protects his people from evil even after his death.

The Lepchas worship Pano Gaeboo Achyok in belief that he protects the Lepcha people and grants them his powers in times of need. But most of all *bongthing* Gaeboo Lepcha, a *bongthing* from 6<sup>th</sup> mile, Kalimpong states “he is worshipped so that his supernatural powers would not fade away with time. And eventually for him to be born again to this world in order to lead the Lepchas once again” (Fieldwork 2016).

Lepchas see him as a protector while others see him as an evil spirit. A supernatural connotation is always attached to him. Either ways Pano Gaeboo Achyok is feared and respected, making him powerful even today and people see him both as a benevolent and a malevolent deity who can bring misfortunes if failed to please.

Since he had supernatural powers, it is believed that with his death a curse was laid upon those who killed him. Legend has it that after Gaeboo Achyok was murdered the head and body of Gaeboo Achyok was found to be joining together. The Bhutanese general again chopped off his head only this time the head dropped into the deep water gorge of the Chel river which is till date known as “*Bhutey Daha*” (translated into haunted water George), never to be found. Now the general had received orders to present the head of Gaeboo Achyok as proof of the Lepcha

King's death to his superiors and since the general had failed he too jumped into the gorge and ended his life.

After a few days, an old woman who had come for pig fodder near the river saw that the body and head were floating in the river, and was about to join itself together. So she immediately reported to the Bhutanese authority, after which the body was minced to several pieces and thrown in different directions. Hence even after his death Gaeboo Achyok is believed to have not let his enemies live in peace. It is believed that the pieces of his body turned into leaches, bed bugs, fleas, and mosquitos.

*Muns* and *bongthing* worship Pano Gaeboo Achyok especially to ask for strength and power. *Muns* pray to him at time of the *Sakyo Rum Faat* (worship of fertility), and even during other rituals like the *Lee Rum Faat* which requires the *bongthing* to invoke Pano Gaeboo Achyok. *Mun* and *Bongthing* from Sakyong and Minchu (villages in Pedong) worship Pano Gaeboo Achyok every year without fail since the Damsang Gree is nearby.

In Damsang five stones are erected at the far corner from the entrance to the room, roughly in the shape of mountain peaks. The stone in the middle represents *Itboo deboo Rum* while the two stones on either sides represents *whek rum* that is the protectors and one on the far right represents a *chyö namthar whek rum*. The one on the far Left is *Wek Rum*. Here the *bongthing* calls upon the spirit of Pano Gaeboo Achyok asks his powers for the Lepcha people and to lead them as he had done many years ago.





Image 3.11: The stones representing Pano Gaeboo Achyok and the *Wek Rum* covered with a Buddhist prayer flag and a Hindu religious cloth at the Damsang fort.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok is also worshipped and feared by other communities. People from other communities often see Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a malevolent entity that can harm them if he is not pleased. So people come to Damsang Fort to offer prayers and prayer flags in attempt to avoid any misfortune.



Image 3.12: The traditional worshipping of Pano Gaeboo Achyok on 20<sup>th</sup> December at Damsang Fort.

The Dukpas or Drukpas fear Pano Gaeboo Achyok and see him as an evil spirit. Earlier any Dukpa passing by the Damsang or the Daling Fort would have to pay respect to the deceased king. They would get down from their horse and bow to the king, and then only they would continue with their journey. Failing to do so they believed that they would be met with unfortunate events. Today there are few who continue with this practice; even though they do not bow down anymore some Dukpas still pay respect to Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Bhutias from the neighbouring areas of Damsang Fort also come and offer prayer flags annually at the Damsang fort. And with the local tourists flowing in, they also present their own offerings to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. “*chunni*” (Hindu religious cloth) can also be seen offered at Damsang Fort. Recently there was addition of Hindu religious flags as sign of the place being a Pilgrimage destination where people from all religion visit.



Image 3.13: Flags with the image of Lord Shiva (The Hindu God of destruction and power) at Damsang Fort as people consider the fort also as a Pilgrimage site.



Lamaism believes in Gyalpos or guardian deities who provide protection to the people. In any monastery Gyalpos are worshipped as protector deities of the monastery, they are distributed in the four corners, in the East direction for protection, in the West for the power to debate, in the North direction for religion and faith and in the South direction for knowledge.

The Bom Gumba (monastery) in Lower Bong Busty Kalimpong, follows the Drukpa Red Hat sect of Lamaism originally brought to Kalimpong by the Bhutanese when they conquered it. Here the status of Pano Gaeboo Achyok is that of a Gyalpo. “Pano Gaeboo Achyok is seen as a protector, he is one of the main deities of this Monastery” says Mr. Rapden Lepcha, the head monk of the monastery.

To worship Pano Gaeboo Achyok a three tiered *torma* (an idol made of cooked rice) is made without adding any colours it is kept white representing purity. The lower most tier is made of small pillar like structure representing the supporters of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the middle tier is made of a moon and sun like structure representing twenty four hours and the last tier is made of spear like structures representing protection.

This ritual starts when the snow starts falling in the mountains that is between the months of November to March. This is practiced annually; people come from inside and outside the village and offer *cho* (offerings) the *Yekmun* asks Gaeboo along with other Gyalpos to protect the Monastery and the people. Besides this the head Lama also offers *Sarkem* (an offering of tea/ milk or *chi*) to Pano Gaeboo Achyok every morning to honour him and to ask for his protection.



Image 3.14: the portrait of Pano Gaeboo Achyok offered fruits and a *Fagorip Lyak* (traditional garland made of the *Oroxylum indicum* seeds).

The *Jhakris* (shaman used by the Nepali diaspora) also regard Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a deity. In order to start any important rituals they have to invoke all the deities and Pano Gaeboo Achyok is one of the important deities to them. They call upon *Hangmu Raja-Hangmu Rani*, *Tharo Raja-Tahro Rani*, *Damsang Raja* (Pano Gaeboo Achyok)-*Damsang Rani*, *Danuwar Raja-Danuwar Rani*, *Bijuwa-Bijuwani*, *Aojha-Aojheni*, *Gosa-Goseni*. All these deities are invoked so that they may grant powers to the *Jhakris* for their work.

Another important ritual that is conducted once a year is the puja of Damsange. People in Longsyol believe that Pano Gaeboo Achyok is Damsange, a deity who when displeased causes harm to the cattle, and also humans. When Damsange is angry he affects the cattle's first one can predicts this as there is presence of blood in their defecation and in humans he causes bleeding in urine. Kumar Basnet now 72 the head *Jhakri* in Longsyol keeps a *nausighge* rooster (a rooster having nine points on its crown) at Baisake Panchami (April) and Mangsire

Panchami (November-December) he worships Damsange by lighting incense made of tea leaves and corn flour (homemade), initially they used to sacrifice the rooster but today this practice have been stopped and the rooster is given away to another person after the ritual is complete and in its place another rooster (younger rooster) is kept for the next year. The rooster that is given away can be kept or kill by the person to whom it is given away.



Image 3.15: A Nausighge Bhale (Rooster) at the house of Kumar Basnet, Longsyol.



Image 3.16: Nausighge Rooster at the house of Mrs. Tika Devi Chettri. Lungsyol.

Mr. Kumar Basnet also worships Pano Gaeboo Achyok at Longthop, a place at the bottom of the Chyakung hill at Longsyol. *Longthop* derives its name from the Lepcha words *Long* meaning ‘rock’ and *Thop* meaning ‘to sit’ as there is a large stone on top of a large cliff. This is a very auspicious place for all shamans in Lungsyol they worship their main deity that is Singha Devi (the Lion Goddess). At *Longtop*, Kumar Basnet offers milk, flowers, fruits and incense to Singha Devi and Pano Gaeboo Achyok and ask for forgiveness.

If a human is affected by Damsange he/she has to get scratched with a rooster’s claws. Only then will the ailment stop. Though many people used to practice worshipping Damsange they used to rear roosters but today this is not so popular among the villagers. Rather they contribute by giving *chanda* (money) and give it to Mr. Kumar Basnet to do the rituals for them.



Image 3.17: A *Longchok* (erected stone) at Chyakung it is believed to be the birth place of Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Chyakung is the highest hill in Lungsyol where there are ruins of an old house, popularly known as the *Chyakung gree* which the locals believe to be the birth place of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The *Kyong Sezum* (village governing body) in Lungsyol has erected a *Longchok* (erected stone). Longchoks have been used by the Lepchas as symbols. In this case the *longchok* represents the memory of the birth place of the Last King of the Lepcha community.

Mrs. Sukumaya Tamang, a *Mata* (a female shaman) also worships Pano Gaeboo Achyok. She goes to Chyakung (the highest hill in Lungsyol) and offers fruits and milk for the ritual. She also like Kumar Basnet calls upon all the deities along with Damsang Raja and Damsang Rani.

Now there is confusion between Damsang Raja and Damsange being Pano Gaeboo Achyok. Since Pano Gaeboo Achyok's Grandfather was Damsang Pano some are of the belief that it is Pano Gaeboo Achyok's Grandfather who is worshipped as Damsange and not Pano Gaeboo Achyok himself, but digging deeper into the beliefs



of the people the evidences indicate that the Damsange and the Damsang Raja they are taking about is Pano Gaeboo Achyok. When asked for the reason they worship Damsange: Mr. Kumar Basnet says that he asks Pano Gaeboo Achyok for forgiveness for not letting his head to join with his body; this is a clear indication that Damsange is Pano Gaeboo Achyok. They all believe that Damsange or Damsang Raja was killed by the Bhutanese while on a feast; another evidence that to proof that the one they all worship is indeed Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

The *Meme* (Tamang monk) in Lungsyol Mr. Ram Bahadur Tamang also offers prayer to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. He says that before starting any ritual or celebrations they have to first pray to Pano Gaeboo Achyok or else the work won't end right. He mentioned one incident where the people of Lungsyol planned for a picnic on New Year's Day so the place they chose was Chyakung. Since the hill has a flat ground at the top. It was a bright and sunny day they went up the hill and started preparing for the picnic but they did not offer any prayer or ask for permission to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. While they were preparing suddenly the bright sunny day turned dark as the sky was covered with black clouds in an instance. There was rain, thunder and lightning all who had come for the picnic ran back to take shelter in the nearby houses. After that day they never dare to disturb the place which is believed to be the birth place of the last Lepcha king. They go for picnic just below the hill but before starting they pray and ask for permission to Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Another instance that the people of Lungsyol remember is the year of 1985. Sonam Thsering Lepcha also remembers this clearly as he was also present. He along with Sezum members after they had finished the celebration of "Pano Gaeboo Achyok Aagek Sakneem" on 20<sup>th</sup> December there was some ration left and with this

remaining ration they decided to go for picnic. The place they chose was Lungsyol the birth place of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The picnic was initially scheduled on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December but due to some reasons it was postponed to 15<sup>th</sup> March. On the day of the picnic they all arrived early and went to *Chyakung Gree* (Chyakung fort). They started preparing food... meat, rice, vegetables and as Sonam Thsering climbed on a small platform to give a speech when he saw a tiny black object flying towards him: as it got nearer it got bigger, it approached him and blasted and that was when the lightning started. That day there was no rain just lightning and thunder. The lightning started hitting the ground where they were having picnic and the people had to run for their lives. The villagers remember that day when there was heavy lightning and the people enjoying the picnic were fleeing with half cooked rice and meat in huge vessels carrying on their head.

According to Mr. Sonam Thsering and also the people of Lungsyol this was caused because people who were having picnic did something wrong and according to Mr. Sonam Thsering it was caused since they did not do the *Chi Faat* (offering *Chi* (traditional alcohol) asking permission and thanking the deities in this case Pano Gaeboo Achyok).



Image 3.18: Picture of Pano Gaeboo Achyok at the house of Mr. Ambrose Lepcha.

### Lungsyol.

From a person to a king and from a king to a Deity, the status of Pano Gaeboo Achyok has changed with time. Today he is fondly remembered and worshipped by the Lepchas of Kalimpong seeing him as a protector presently more of culture rather than of their territory. He represents the history of this place and the Lepchas living in Kalimpong or Damsang Lyang and more importantly of Lepcha identity. Along with the Lepchas he is also worshipped by other communities, to them he is a deity who protects. For some he is a source of power and for some he is a malevolent deity who has to be pleased so that they may remain safe.

He has given the Lepcha identity a new boost with his current status as more and more people are becoming aware of his powers. As a deity they are also becoming aware of the community he belong to. He is worshipped, feared and honoured by people. His fort in Damsang is becoming famous as a pilgrimage destination for



tourists who come to visit Kalimpong. Most of the tourists are from Siliguri, Kolkata, Gujarat when they pay visit they are here about the history of the place and how Pano Gaeboo Achyok is considered a deity so they relate him to their own deities (Hindu deities) this sometimes also causes clash between religious beliefs and is leading construction of new beliefs, enhancing the status of Pano Gaeboo Achyok as a Lepcha king and a deity.

## **PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK AS A LEGEND**

The tales of Pano Gaeboo Achyok started and came to the limelight with the battle that started a long time ago. The British troops were facing an attack from the Bhutanese troops. Captain C. White was in charge of the cannons. The hilly environment did not favour the established strategy, the British army built bamboo platforms to have a better overview of the enemy troops.

The platform in which Captain C. White placed his cannon was not strong enough. With the blast of the cannon, the platform collapsed along with the cannon and the captain. This was fatal enough to kill him instantly. The captain was buried in Dalim his grave was there till 1976 but later grave was later destroyed by grave robbers.

Along with the captain Tej Bir Rai who was the ‘Bomb Boy’ handling the cannon balls also faced this fatal blow but luckily he survived this ordeal and escaped with just a broken leg. With a broken leg he was no more useful to the army so he retired early. After the war, Tej Bir Rai decided to stay at Dalim Busty. As the time passed he learned the local culture of the village, he learned lots of local tales and folklores of the Lepchas. Later, his family moved in with him from Nepal to Dalim Busty and spent the rest of their lives in the village itself.

Tej Bir Rai used to tell all the stories to his grandson Ram Lal Rai as a child. Many years after Tej Bir Rai’s death, Ram Lal Rai wrote all the stories in his diary. This diary was later found by Dalim Kyong Sezum, the VLW (village level worker) of Gorubathan brought it over to the Bong Kyong Lepcha Headquarters where K.P

Tamsang and S.T Lepcha inspected it carefully. It contained the first ever written story of Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

The diary is described by N.T Lepcha as a “very old book covered with deer skin, it had the stories of Ramayana and quotes from Bhagwat Geeta and most of all it had the story of Pano Gaeboo Achyok” (fieldwork 2016).

The story was copied as proof of the Lepcha king’s existence and the diary returned back to Ram Lal Rai. At this time he was living in Ambyok where he lived till the age of 101 years.

In a time when the Lepcha community were facing a dilemma, this written evidence served both as a legit proof about the existence of Pano Gaeboo Achyok and also provided a written material. Now they could lay the brick of unity on a legit and strong foundation.

From all the literature provided on Pano Gaeboo Achyok it is clear that each one has a different versions of who Pano Gaeboo Achyok was but all these different versions have something in common. i.e,

- he was the Last king/chief of the Lepchas.
- he possessed supernatural powers.
- he sacrificed his life for his land and his people.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok is a historical personality whose name still echoes through the Lepcha land. His is a name carved into the pages of Lepcha history as a legend and a hero for his lifelong contributions towards his people. His very name Gaeboo in Lepcha means a lord or conqueror and Achyok means a man having

superior power. And he lived up to his name as a powerful warrior and a profound leader.

Gaeboo Achyok was the son of *Pano* (king) *Aparajhap* and *Pandi* (queen) *Ashyikmit*. It is said that there was time when Pano Aparajhap and Pandi Ashyikmit did not have any offspring, so they consulted a Lepcha *mun*, who blessed them with a boy whom they named Gaeboo Achyok. It is believed that the spirit of *Lyang Dok*, the Earth God had entered into the body of Gaeboo Achyok and he was no ordinary child.

In due time, Gaeboo Achyok and his kingdom of Damsang Lyang was taken over by the Bhutanese although it is remembered that Ashik Dugay, who murdered Gaeboo Achyok also committed suicide. (Foning, 1987).

According to the version given by Rong Lupun Mr. Sonam Tshering Lepcha, who is one of the prominent personality in the Lepcha world, he is well known for his music and was awarded the honourable Padmashree award in 2002. Based on his own research S.T Lepcha tells that Pano Turek's son Pano Tureng died without marrying leaving behind the kingdom without an heir. Seeing this Thikung Tek who was the most powerful *bongthing* at that time took over the kingdom under him with his eight jewels to look after the kingdom. Four learned Lepchas, who were expert in Lepcha script and speech and four expert *bongthings*.

Among the four learned Lepchas one was Godey. He had a son named Sanchyo who left the kingdom and married a girl from Mariya Busty (a village in Kalimpong). They settled in Kalimpong, together they had a son named Damsang. After his father Sanchyo died Damsang became the Pano of the land that is Kalimpong. He married and had a son by the name Aparajap who then married

Aashekmit daughter of a *phipun* (head of the village) of *Payonggong* (now *Payou* 13<sup>th</sup> mile Kalimpong).

This is where the story of Pano Gaeboo Achyok starts. Aaparajap and Aashekmit moved to Lungsyol and settled down. Time passed by and they both grew old but they still had no child of their own. Then one night Pandi Aashekmit saw a dream, an unusual dream. She saw a beautiful white flower slowly floating towards her and as it stopped right in front of her it spoke to her. It said “do not cry, you are going to bear a son soon.”

She woke up and told this to her husband, seeing this as a sign from the deities both the husband and wife were very surprised and happy. They went down to *Panodang* (Pano means king and dang means a place lower in altitude) situated below Lungsyol and prayed there for ten days. Their prayers were heard and they were asked by the deities to go to a place called *Chyadongrazo* (a hill near Lungsyol). Aashekmit went up to Geet *Khola* (Geet river) which ran at the bottom of Chadongrazo hill and prayed to the deities offering the water, the flower that had appeared in her dreams appeared again it spoke to her once more asking her to drink the water from the river, she did as she was asked and then the flower disappeared. They both returned to their home and after some time Aashekmit gave birth to a son, as the deities had promised. This son later became the most famous pano of the Lepchas by the name Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

As he was growing up he travelled to the plains and vanished for a few years. It is said that he went to the different tribes and learned their warfare skills. When he finally returned, he found that his parents were already captured by the Bhutanese. So he gathered all the Lepcha youths and with their help he was able to chase away the

Bhutanese and free his parents. This started a series of clashes between him and the Bhutanese. Aaparajap made him the next king and died peacefully after two years.

According to another story given by Gaeboo *bongthing* of 6<sup>th</sup> mile Kalimpong, Aashekmit was out in the woods alone searching for firewood when all of a sudden a hail stone fell on the ground right in front her, it was a perfect round, and very white as if something very pure, she ate it after a while she became pregnant and Pano Gaeboo Achyok was born. It is believed that this hail stone was a boon from the deities.

Foning, had talked about a pregnant middle aged woman (though long past child bearing age), seeking refuge in a cave outside a Lepcha village. Upon seeing her, a local villager took pity and used to supply her with food and water to drink. After a few days she delivered a baby boy. Days passed by and with every passing day she grew younger and younger as her baby grew up to become a strong boy. One day as the man visited the cave, he found that both the mother and child were being supplied by some mysterious person /being as the cave seemed to be overflowing with resources. The young one grew stronger, as what Foning calls a “veritable gentle young Hercules” (Foning 1987: 226).

Mr. Badan Singh Lepcha tells yet another story a much closer to what D.T Tamlong has also talked about. Mr. Badan Singh a 92 year old resident of Katare, Dapling tells that Pano Geboo Achyok is a “*Mung Pano*” a demon king as he is the son of a *Langzee* (a deity) and a Lepcha woman. He says that Pano Gaeboo Achyok is a “*LangzeeKup*” (son of a deity). This is the reason that he has supernatural powers. Because of his powers he conquered lands and became the *Rong Pano* (Lepcha king), protected his land from the constant attacks from the Bhutanese. At last he was

tricked and murdered by the Bhutanese. His head flew and dropped into Chel River (a river that runs below the Dalim Fort at Gorubathan). Mr Badan says that his blood scattered till China and then it turned into *ruba* (cockroach), *faat bu* (leech), *mongkong* (mosquitos) *sakfet* (flea), etc.

Described as a tall, handsome, bold, daring, brave and fearless man, Gaeboo Achyok had mastered all warfare skills at a tender age. He is believed to have supernatural powers, who could throw big rock boulders at his enemies, and could pierce through thick trees with his arrow. It is told he could slash a horse with its rider into two with his sword.

According to local legends, Gaeboo Achyok was so powerful that his enemies saw no way to defeat him and his army. They sent a general named Ashik Dugay with presents and pleaded for friendship to which Achyok agreed and to mark the friendship they organised a celebration at *Dalim* (a fort built by Gaeboo Achyok near Gorubathan) with plenty of food and *chi* (local alcohol). When Gaeboo Achyok was fully drunk, the general chopped off his head from behind and they threw his body and head near *Chel* river. (Foning 1987, Tamlong 2008).

Past is an important gateway to the identities of the present and future populations of the world. Thapar (1975), states “history has often been used in the search for an identity. Each contemporary group seeks its own identity in the past” (Thapar 197:11) Thus, people believe that through the history of the communities and their culture and tradition they feel a sense of pride in their past and maintain their self-respect and dignity. The folklores, myths, legends, are very important part of the cultural identities to survive. It also provides great source to cultural history. Many communities can relate to this statement given above, as every community has its own

history and this is one aspect which makes up their cultural identity and make them unique. Folklores, myths and legends can reconstruct the perspective of the community. Through this one is able to understand the world view of the communities, how they see the world, what are their concepts of life, etc.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok has become a legend, a hero who is fondly remembered by the People. They tell stories about him. Songs are sung about his legend and Lepcha children are encouraged to become like Pano Gaeboo Achyok, a protector of his mother land and culture even at the cost of his life.

### **THE PORTRAIT OF PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK**

Pano Gaeboo Achyok was a king who lived two hundred years ago and his legacy is still carried on till today. The Lepchas had followed him two hundred years ago and they still continue to follow him. But Pano Gaeboo Achyok did not become popular in the contemporary Lepcha world so easily though he remained in the folksongs and the folklores. In the folklores of the people, he was just a name lingering into the pages of history.

Most Lepchas have heard of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. They speak of him, but no one truly knew what he looked like, since there were no written records or any image of him and the ones who knew about him had long perished from this world.

Nandini Bhattacharyya (2015) writes “the symbolic presence of Gabu Achyok has been inspiring the people to reclaim their lost memory- memory which would encourage people to know about their roots and help them to live with self-esteem and distinct identity” (Bhattacharyya 2015: 21). This is one of the reasons why the



Lepchas had to establish a strong foot for their voice to be heard by the world. Second, as Bhattacharyya states the “memory” of the glorious past of a community helps build up who they are today. I would not say memory was lost especially concerning a community. They may be forgotten to some extent or the details may be blurred with time but in the end they manage to survive in many forms as folklores, oral histories and some where someone will always have that key to the forgotten.

All the while it was just the name Pano Gaeboo Achyok that was remembered but with the efforts of the community members he, is today a name and a figure larger than the Lepcha society. This all changed in the year 1982 as the Lepchas decided to raise Pano Gaeboo Achyok from just a name to a figure and for that they needed an image to look up to.

Two Lepcha (then) youths of Bom Busty Mr Dup Shuzong Lepcha and late Mr Norgay Thering Lepcha took up the responsibility and started it as a simple sketch building upon imaginations of what they had heard for so long through oral histories passed down from generation to generation, which their grandparents used to tell them as kids. This was the starting of a phase from where Pano Gaeboo Achyok started developing from just a blank canvas to an image that set the Lepcha world into new course.

The first festival was celebrated by keeping the sketch of Pano Gaeboo Achyok and reintroducing him to the Lepcha masses who came to be part of the festival. His achievements and bravery were reintroduced in the Lepcha society.



Image 3.19: The first ever sketch of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, eroded by time.

The portrait was brought to life by Mr. Bhakta Pariyar, a famous painter of Kalimpong Mr Bhakta Pariyar. He was given all the important details about Pamo Gaeboo Achyok, the facial features, scarce moustache and beard. A *Rong Dumpra* (Lepcha men's attire) was shown to the artist as an example of the dress Pano Gaeboo Achyok used to wear. A *Thyaktuk* (Lepcha men's head wear or hat) was also shown to him. The ornaments worn by Lepcha men of that era were also described in detail. A *Rong Patang* (Lepcha weapon) was also shown to the artist as to what weapon he used to carry sadly this part was never painted by the artist.

Pariyar was also given details and shown the tail of a *Numbaong Aong Panu Foo* by Dup Shuzong Lepcha. *Numbaong Aong Panu* or the Racket Tailed Black Drongo a species of the Drongo family is considered a King among the birds by the

Lepchas and in the olden days when the Lepchas had to differentiate their Kings from amongst the common folks the tail Feathers of the *Numboang Aong Panu Foo* worn on *thyaktuk* (hats) served as the symbol or a marker for the Kings.

Upon looking at the portrait one can easily make out that the dress Gaeboo Achyok wears in the portrait does not match the time period he lived in this is because of the fact that while making the portrait the details and the materials provided as example to the artist belonged to a much later Lepcha society and the garments from that time period were a lot different than what it is today. One can only imagine what he looked like And ask, what did he wear? Did he even wear those ornaments as shown in the portrait?

It took Bhakta Pariyar three months in total and three thousand rupees to complete a half painting of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The hard work and the imaginations of the Lepcha people came alive at this moment and forever remained imprinted in the minds of the whole community.

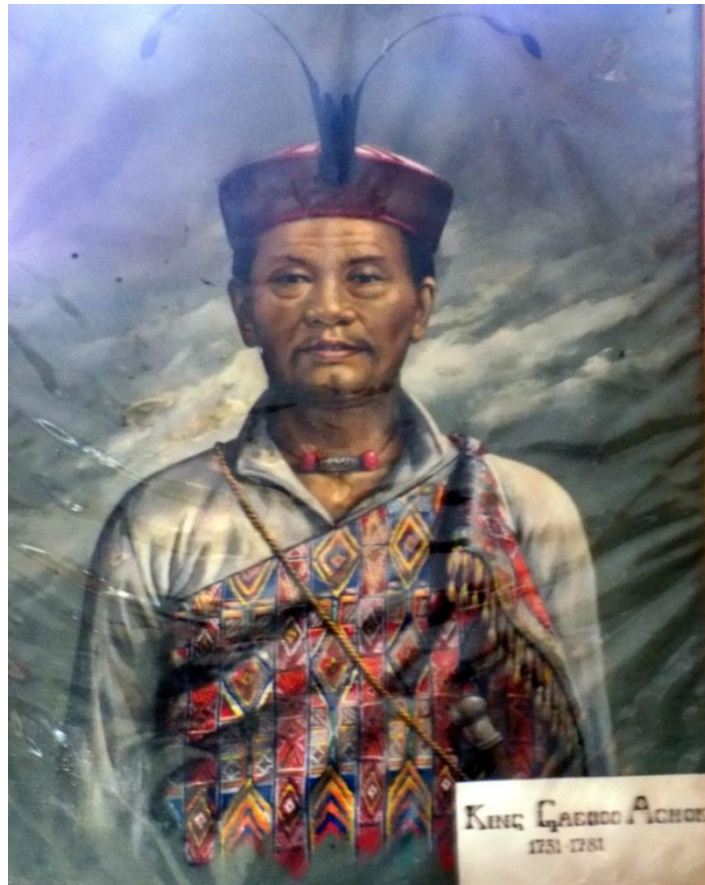


Image 3.20: The Painting made by Mr. Bhakta Pariyar.

The portrait is all that is left of the last Lepcha king of Kalimpong besides an old *Pathang* kept in the Lepcha Museum in Lower Bong Busty which is believed to be his sword. Some artists within the Lepcha world are trying to recreate the image of Pano Gaeboo Achyok once again this time a complete portrait. None the less, it was Mr. Bhakta Payiyar's contribution to the creation of Pano Gaeboo Achyok's portrait that gave a sense of visual identity of the king.

Some do not agree that the portrait have thoroughly justified what he actually looked like. While these disagreements still brew up within the community, this portrait has carved the imaginations of the Lepcha people since the day it was created. Today if any Lepcha young or old is asked about Pano Gaeboo Achyok the first thing

that strikes in their mind is the portrait, says Sannim Lepcha a young girl from Bom Busty.



Image 3.21: Pano Gaeboo Achyok badges sold at the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival, 20<sup>th</sup> December.

The image of Pano Gaeboo Achyok today can be seen in forms of posters, framed photos in walls of Lepcha houses, badges which the Lepcha people proudly put on their hats, bags and on their traditional attires. It is not just a portrait but the imaginations, expectations and vision of the Lepchas which has today become a symbol for the community.

## CHAPTER IV

### PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK FESTIVAL

One could hear the thrilling shouts of མཚོ་ལུ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ “Aachulay” in a distant fill morning air. I woke up enthralled and a little nervous, freshened up and struggled into my *Dumbun* (traditional Lepcha attire for Women). Hurling on my camera and a notebook, I left for Damsang Gree (fort of the Last King).

It was the 284<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Pano Gaeboo Achyok. Celebrated on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, every year it has always been an exciting and a special day for the Lepchas, especially for the children who find it amusing to run around and eat food. For the youths, it is an occasion to show their traditional attires, for the elders, a medium to transmit the cultural practice and tradition to the younger generation and for the leaders of the community it is a medium to reach out to the common Lepchas and share their vision for the whole community.

Anthropologists have often studied festivals since they reflect and justify contemporary values and social situations which offer a vision of the future about a community. They argue that the celebration of festivals have important functions like preserving heritage, fostering social cohesion, releasing tensions accumulated from daily life and inculcating pride and loyalty towards the community.

## ORIGIN

The initial celebrations were conducted at Mani Gumbu Kyong 11<sup>th</sup> mile Kalimpong but officially it was first started in the Lepcha Gumba Gaon in Lower Bong Busty, Kalimpong. A plot of land in front of the Lepcha monastery was donated by the then Mandal of the village Mr. D.T Tamsang. It was K.P Tamsang who had come up with the idea of celebrating the festival. But due to his sudden death, his younger brother D.T Tamsang, Barsing Mandal of Pudung along with Sonam Thesring Lepcha started the festival. At first it started in a small scale with less than hundred participants.

Youths of Bong Busty used to raise funds from what they had received from playing *Lasoo* (merriment) operating within a small youth organisation known as the *Anum Anom Jachong*. These youths organised the festival with the help of Tendup Lepcha who was responsible for the transport of goods. D.T Tamsang who provided with two bowls (*muri*) of rice and straw for the people to sit, and Barsing Mandal, the “Mandal” of Pudung who provided some money, vegetables, pulses, etc. Late Ongay Aden provided chairs for the some people to sit during the cultural programs and also blankets for the volunteers and the youth to sleep. Firewood was collected from wherever possible.

The Lepchas have a three tier system of governance; the *Kyong Sezum* or the village association, the *Thom Sezum* of the town association and the *Pum Sezum* or the highest association. The *Pum Sezum* was meant to be the highest level of governance. Each household contributed rupees 10 each month to the *Kyong Sezum* from which the *Kyong Sezum* kept rupees 4 and gave rupees 6 to the *Thom Sezum* and again the *Thom Sezum* kept rupees 2 and passed the rest, that is rupees 4 to the *Pum Sezum*. The collected funds were used in times of any functions and organisation of programs. The

Birth Anniversary of Pano Gaeboo Achyok used to be organised using these funds by the Lepcha Association.

Women used to prepare food for people who came to the festival and youths took charge of programs and different competitions. Competitions were held like archery competition, tug of war, sack race, dancing and singing competition were held and prizes were distributed. The amount of fifteen rupees was given to the first winner, rupees ten was given to the second winner and rupees five to the third winner. Lepchas from different villages of Kalimpong used to come to this festival in a small number but slowly its popularity increased and people slowly started pouring in great numbers in later years.

The festival started by first offering prays to Pano Gaeboo Achyok by Sangay Lama of the Lepcha *gumba* (monastery). Then it was followed by an opening speech by the president of the Lepcha Association and other Association members, it was preceded by the cultural program and the contention of dance, song and sports. Then the prize distribution ceremony was held. People were served food and beverages which the participants happily accepted as there were people who had come from relatively far places and this treat would do them a great blessing.

Celebration of this festival also started in Lungsyol and Byong villages of Kalimpong respectively. People started celebrating the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival which was introduced by Ren Lupon Sonam Thering Lepcha. People from neighbouring village also joined at this festival. They had *chi*, food, meat, cultural programmes and games the highlight being archery. Mr Mangal Singh Lepcha a resident of Lungsyol village states "Late James Lepcha was the most skilled archer of our time...." (Fieldwork 2016). Ren Lupon Sonam Thering Lepcha introduced this



festival by coming to Lungsyol and telling the story of Pano Geboo Achyok to the people making them aware of who Pano Gaeboo Achyok was and what he did for the Lepchas, though they knew the story of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, but they did not give much importance to the impact that this story had upon the Lepchas and was unaware of the rising wave for the need of identity that was in high demand. Sonam Tshering started with gathering the youths of the village and training them in Lepcha songs and dances and performing at the festival in the village.

Mr. Laku Thesing Lepcha had donated one of the biggest agricultural field to serve as a ground for the festival. Everyone in the village contributed for this festival, items like rice, vegetables, *chi*, and condiments. An ox or a pig would be contributed by villagers who could. They continued this for a couple of years then it slowly started to function effectively. Since Longsyol is situated on the outskirts, people from the neighbouring villages also had to travel far. Facing these problems this festival was later shifted to Byong in 1991 where it was celebrated with the same intensity as it's celebrated in the main town of Kalimpong. Here also slowly they started facing problems as people of the village happened to be busy at the time of the festival since the festival was in the harvesting seasons the date was shifted from 20th December to 28th December. Since Byong had many neighbouring villages, people poured in from Pakang, Samsing Pakang, Dapling, Katare, Pochock, Upper Pochok, Chyongdong, Toring, Upper Byong, Lower Byong, Middle Byong, Lapcho, Ponghril, Geet Kolbong, Kolbong, Pasangbong, Sangse, Nok dar and Sonagaon says Mr. Tendo Gowlukmoo the president of Kyong sezum Byong. This festival was celebrated in Byong till 2015, eventually ILTA stepped in and called for the festival to be stopped in Byong as it is already a huge celebration in Kalimpong main town. Byong today celebrates only "Athing K. P Tamsang Agek Saknim" on 19<sup>th</sup> of December.

The festival grew in intensity within a few years as other Lepcha villages of Kalimpong also joined for the celebration of this festival.

### **THE FESTIVAL TODAY**

The day of the festival has always been exciting for me. I still remember I would wait for 20<sup>th</sup> December to get into my new *Dumbun* and go to the festival with my Parents. But it was different this time as I was entering the field both as a Lepcha and also as a researcher.

Though the main event only lasts a day, preparation for the programme starts a long time before the actual date of the festival. The festival used to be organised by the ILTA till today it is organised by the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB). The festival has grown in intensity and also in amount. The location has changed from Lepcha Gumba to Mela Ground (the town ground of Kalimpong town) as the field where the festival initially started was no more capable of holding the growing population and the popularity of the festival.

The MLLDB book Mela Ground at the beginning of the year since the ground is always packed with different programs and if not booked early it is difficult to get the ground for the programme. Preparations starts from the month of October with the MLLDB Literary section starting to collect many articles, typing and printing magazines that is to be presented and sold during the festival. They also make New Year's Lepcha calendars.



Image 4.1: Preparations of calendars to be sold during the festival.

The cultural section under Mr. N. T Tamsang starts preparing dance and songs to be presented in the festival various months before the festival. Different villages also start preparing their own dance and song performances for the festival. Usually it is the different Lepcha night schools children who dedicate their time and energy to prepare their special performances for the Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival.

Every year a week before the great event *Bongthing* Mr. O. T Namchoo pays visit to the Damsang fort and places a *Lungdar* (prayer flag) in the name of the king and the Lepcha people all over the world.

The festival is a community event. A day before the festival that is, on 19<sup>th</sup> December youths from different villages gets together to help with the preparations of the program. Boys from Chibo Busty, 6<sup>th</sup> Mile, Tanek Busty, Purbong of Kalimpong helped in making of the stage with the bunked beds that they bring from the Lepcha hostel and also putting posters all over Kalimpong while the girls and also Boys from Suruk Samthar, Bong Busty, and Purbong helped with the peeling of onions, washing

and cutting vegetables that is to be prepared for the festival. Half also ready the altar for offering payers to Pano Gaeboo Achyok.



Image 4.2: Preparations of the stage for the programme.



Image 4.3: Youths from different villages helping in preparing food for the festival.

The morning of 20<sup>th</sup> December starts with the visit to Damsang Gree by *Bongthings* from in and around of Kalimpong who come to offer prayers in the ruined fort of Damsang which once Pano Gaeboo Achyok had built as a watch tower to keep an eye over his enemies. It is a forty five kilometres journey from the main town of Kalimpong in between the way to Pedong.

The old ruins of the fort are once a year lit up by lamps made of banana and bamboo oil lamps. The area is cleaned by the Pedong Lepcha youths a day before the festival. The offering of prayers and the offerings of fruits and *chi* to the stone erected in the old ruined room that representing the late Pano. Lepchas from near and far also come to pay homage to their Last king. Some were first timers to come to the fort along with their parents ensuring continuation of the tradition.

The fort of Damsang today only has a room half secured from erosion and human disturbance which today serves as a pilgrimage site to the onse who come to worship the last king. There are five stones erected at the far corner from the entrance to the room, roughly the shape of the mountain peaks. The stone in the middle resembling the *Itboo deboo Rum* two stones on either sides represents *whek rum* that is the protectors and one on the far right represents a *chyoo namthar whek rum*. The one on the far Left is also a *Whek rum*. The *Bongthing* first arranges banana leafs on an altar raised a few meters from the ground made of stones, this altar was made by the ILTA twelve years ago, where the offering are kept for Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The banana leaves in this case should be kept the veins facing the opposite direction as this is a ritual for someone already dead this should be followed strictly and kept in the correct order. Here the status of the king turns into that of a deity, a protector of

*Mayel Lyang* and the *bongthings* pray to him to protect the Lepcha people. They pray to him so that all the powers that he had, still have a deity does not fade away.

In the initial days they would offer *chi*, a rooster would be sacrificed, fruits were offered. Others remain unchanged to date but the sacrifice has been stopped. The *bongthing* keeps herbs like *Pasyor*, *Purmu*, *Sakpot*, *Mursyaang*, *Sunglok*, *Sakgrew*, *Mungsel*, *Sangaa*.

*Pasyor* is used in every ritual ceremonies of the Lepcha community. It is very important herb. *Purmu* is usually used when there is death related, it is usually used by *bongthings* and *muns* for calling on to the spirits. It is used in the festival as Pano Gaeboo Achyok is already dead, the *bongthing* invokes his spirit and ask for him to look after the Rong world. *Sakpot* is used to ward away any unwanted auras. *Mursyaang*, *Sunglok*, *Sakgrew* are also used for the dead. *Mungsel* like *Pasyor* is used in every ritual and *Sangaa* is used to invoke and call upon the spirits, in this case the spirit of Pano Gaeboo Achyok is called.

Rice is kept as an offering as a pinch is sprinkled towards the altar as the ritual starts. Along with the rice *chilok* s also kept it consists of a small bowl with *chi*, *ung* (water) and *more* (butter), the *chi* mixed with *ung* in a small bowl and *more* is place on the edges of the bowl making five points the one in the centre representing *Itboo debu*, the ones on either sides as *whek Rum* (guardian deities) and the others the guardians of the forest.

A small bow and some arrows are kept at the altar signifying protection and for power. A *chi pothut* is kept at the centre and then the *bongthing* calls upon all the



deities of nature welcoming them and *Itbudeboo* and ask them for protection and well fare of the Lepcha community.



Image 4.4: *Bongthings* offering prayers at Damsang fort on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

After an hour of offering prayers and the religious ceremonies at the fort, the MLLDB members return back to Kalimpong where Lepchas are gathered from in and outside Kalimpong gather at 10<sup>TH</sup> mile traffic point Kalimpong. They come together to sing the Lepcha Anthem of “*Achulay*” and with the joyful shouts of “*Mutenchi Rongkup -Achulay*” and “*Pano Gaeboo Achyok- Achulay*” young and old, men and women all start the rally to Mela Ground from 9:30 A.M.

When the rally finally enters Mela Ground the programme starts for the day. The celebration of the 284<sup>TH</sup> Birth Anniversary of Pano Gaeboo Achyok was celebrated in 20<sup>TH</sup> December 2015 the chief guest for this year’s program was S.K Thare, principle secretary of The Tribal Development, Department of West Bengal. Anurag Sriwastav IAS Development Minister Darjeeling, Sanjay Moktan Chairman

Tamang Development Board, Ren L.S. Tamsang Chairmen of MLLDB all the Thom Sezum and Pum Sezum Members, D.C Roy and Tapan Kumar Das.

The chairmen of MLLDB Ren Lyangsong Tamsang started the introductory speech followed by speech on the development of the Lepchas and also other tribes of Kalimpong. A Lama, a catholic Father and Bongthing offered prayers to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The King Gaeboo Achyok Magazine was released followed by the giving away of the K.P Tamsang Literary award to different Lepcha night schools this year thirty night schools received this award. Saibal Sen Gupta a researcher from the Don Bosco University of Shillong was given the title of “Ren”.

Lepchas from kalimpong, Darjeeling, Bhutan of different religious background and different age groups had gathered for this big event. Continuing with the programme after the inspirational and introductory speeches the cultural programme started with different groups from different villages presenting traditional song and dances. The main highlight of the cultural program was *Aboo's* (fathers) and *Amoo's* (mothers) traditional harvest dance.



Image 4.5: The *Amoo* (mothers) performing during the festival 2015.



Food prepared by the *Deptong* (meaning to put together), an all women organisation was served to all the people who came to the festival. The cultural programme continued by Dr. Harka Bahadur Chettri and Dr. Mahendra P. Lama who also used the platform to promote the demand for Gorkhaland and to spread the news of the newly formed Kalimpong District.



Image 4.6: The men helping the *Deptong* women to lift the heavy vessels.

After two hours of speech from the District leaders the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Birth Celebration continued till 6 P.M. Lepchas who had come from far and wide returned early as they had to reach their home. The ones who were from Bhutan stayed back in their allotted hotels as it would take longer for them to reach home.

In the end, this festival provided a platform that was not just about the last King but the community as a whole. It brought together Lepchas from all corners, who come with “love and concern for the community” as an informant says.

The Pano Gaeboo Achyok festival 2016 was also a grand celebration. This year the celebration started as usual with the *bongthings* performing a religious ritual and offering prayers at the Damsang fort. The rally started next, starting from the usual place at 10<sup>th</sup> mile traffic point till mela ground. This year the festival upgraded since one thousand youths from all the villages of Kalimpong gathered and danced for the festival making it a grand event.

Since last year it was the *Amoo* who participated in the festival this year it was the *Aaboos* who competed in the cultural festival. *Aaboo* from different villages competed with their own traditional music and dances. The festival continued with different cultural programmes and speech by the Leaders of the Lepcha world.

People came from all corners, they came “for their king and for the Lepcha community” says an informant at the festival. The festival once again brought the Lepchas together in one platform.



Image 4.7: One thousand youths danced for the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival 2016.



Image 4.8: community feast at the festival.



Image 4.9: Speech by Mr. Lyansong Tamsang, Chairman of the MLLDB.

Identity becomes very important when it comes to a bigger platform like a community identity, national identity or a tribal identity. Now that the world is

cramping in material and matter it becomes all the more important to show one's identity to be recognized and portrayed. For long, many are in this unending race and the Lepchas are no different. There has been a great deal of effort to stand out in the crowd and festival provides a perfect platform for communities to show their identity, culture and rituals.

Barkataki (2013) talks about the “traditional rituals generally being addressed to some deity, whereas the newer rituals are addressed to the audience”(2013: 224) where the “traditional rituals being both symbolic and performative and the newer rituals will be only symbolic” meaning. The Pano Gaeboo Achyok Festival has a mixture of both “symbolic” and “performative” factors and this is what is giving a purpose to all the Lepchas to come together as one and project their identity. This is creating a Pan-Lepcha identity showing the culture and uniting the community despite all the differences.

This coming together is the only occasion where Lepchas from different geographical territories, different religions, and different background gather in one place. This festival has also become a platform to unite the community in a way that pronounces the Lepcha identity in a different level. This annual festival not only brings together all the Lepchas but unites, congregates and exerts the community identity to the world. This research intends to find out the reasons behind the rise of such a phenomenon in the Lepcha society and the importance of the festival to the people not only in Kalimpong but of other places including Sikkim, Dajeeling and adjoining places.

Therefore the festival was born out of an urgent need to claim an identity to the world where every community seemed to have an identity of their own. To exert

their identity they needed a supporting platform with which they would achieve what they wanted. Pano Gaeboo Achyok served as a platform to do just that. He was the most popular the most remembered out of the many Panos of the Lepchas. In many folklores and folksongs he is depicted as a Legend a symbol that serves as a pathway where the Lepchas follow upon his footsteps and also symbol of Lepcha identity.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

With this, there also comes the dilemma of identity. Today there are cases we see that people are going back to the traditional ways, what they call “in search of identity....” This is caused since many a time’s people belonging to a particular community are discriminated or they become isolated by the main stream population so they are left with no option then to stand up for themselves trying to portray their ethnic identity in front of the whole world as evidence of their existence. Today there are many ethnic communities who are struggling for their identities to be recognized and in case of the Lepchas it is no different.

“The Lepchas were vanquished by the Tibetians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Bhutanese in 1700, by the Gorkhas in 1780 and by the British in 1835 and 1865” (Pradhan 2012:14). The Lepchas have been living with other communities. Time passed and the society also underwent many transformations Modernization brought about changes and most of all helped in the increase of education amongst the Lepchas. It brought awareness and increase in the literacy rate of the community promoting social mobility but the problem that they faced now was the process of change and detribalization of their culture. Their habits, practices and attitudes. Their cultural norms underwent sudden and rapid change due to the influence of various cultures surrounding them. The other communities are culturally dominant because of their numerical superiority. As a result there was rapid absorption other cultural traits creating a hybrid cultural pattern for example the Lepchas have learnt the Nepali language and use it more frequently than *Rongring*.

The Lepchas had to defend their culture and identity against the dominating cultures of Bhutia and Nepali cultures then again they had to defend it against the larger wave of population that came about and to which Pradhan refers to as “plainsmen” that is the Marwaris, the Biharis, etc. so to defend themselves they formed a “negative solidarity” (Subba 1990) with the Nepalis and the Bhutias coming under the Gorkha identity. “Ethno-cultural identities of individual ethnic groups succumbed within the umbrella identity as Gorkha invoking Nepali language to be the common heritage of all” (Bhattacharyya 2015:62).

It was the similar case as the Lepchas in Sikkim says Ren N.T Lepcha, cultural secretary of the ILTA says that most of kazis of Sikkim were from the Lepcha community. The Chogyal appointed Lepchas as ministers and given higher positions in the administrative field so slowly these Lepchas identified themselves as Kazis and not Lepchas. Ren N.T Lepcha also states that the Lepchas being a minority and being dominated by the dominant populations would rather identify themselves as a Bhutia. They were ashamed to identify themselves as a Lepcha or in those days a “Lapche”.

This whole process led to the loss of cultural traits and the downfall of the language and practices. Thus a time came when there was a realization and the need for them to claim their own identity. To revive and the old practices and develop what was on the verge of extinction and come out of the marginalized category they were in since the Tibetans came in. The Lepchas are eager to gain more recognition for their identity to be prominent as the others so that it will bring development to the community. They have to preserve and maintain their culture.



Pano Gaeboo Achyok is recognized as the last king of the Lepchas as a Pano who fought till his last breathe to protect his land and his people. Lepchas were in a scarce population still he went to the extent of building various watch towers on the border of his territories so that he could protect his people from the enemies. He is not only remembered as the last king of the Lepchas but in due course of time his status grew from a king to a deity. He is worshipped by the by the Lepchas as their protector deity. Other communities also recognize him as a deity and worships him for protection and power. They recognize him as a deity belonging to the Lepcha community.

Today the status of Pano Gaeboo Achyok is raised to that of a legend due to his selflessness and his sacrifice he has become a larger than life figure. Lepchas look up to him as their leader. He has become a symbol for the Lepchas. He is the symbol of their identity and unity. He serves as an emblem of loyalty towards the community and land. Lepchas feel proud in having a king like Pano Gaeboo Achyok and sometimes even recognize themselves as the descendants of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, like in the Image 5.1 Mr. D T Tamsang and his friends from Bong Busty identify themselves as the decedents of the king.



Image 5.1: “king Gaeboo Achyok’s descedents” a photo of Lepcha youths at Bong Busty from 1963.



Amidst all these, Pano Gaeboo Achyok helps Lepchas in defining themselves as the people belonging to this land. The proof of his existence and the ruins of his forts still stand as evidence of his rule provide tangible confirmation to the fact that the Lepchas had a king and that they once were the masters of the land. Pano Gaeboo Achyok is a symbolic representative of the Lepchas unity. Under the banner of Pano Gaeboo Achyok today Lepchas from all over pour in one place regardless of the territorial and religious background. It brings them together for their identity and unity.

The sentiments of the Lepchas towards their Pano can be seen clearly in various cultural activities like songs, plays, publications and other forms of media. In this song by Passang Lepcha a Lepcha folk singer from Kalimpong one can hear the need of Pano Gaeboo Achyok to be brought again.

*“Rongkup athing Gaeboo Pano ho*

*Lagekbo sek dum ka*

*Mayel amu la syot bamboo sarong*

*Aadom maseen ba....*

*Rong naan along la Pano adom go*

*Ho sibi fatnon teh...?*

*Aagek adosa sarong sakneem ka*

*Chembam saknon are...*

*Rongkup athing Gaeboo Pano ho*

*Lagekbo sek dum ka*

*Mayel amu la syot bamboo sarong*

*Aadom maseen ba....*

*Damsang, Dalim bamlayang adosa  
Geklyang Lungsyol lyang  
Aachong da nee Mayel karvong ka  
Rongkup ado abrang...  
Rongkup athing Gaeboo Pano ho  
Lagekbo sek dum ka  
Mayel amu la syot bamboo sarong  
Aadom maseen ba....”*

- Passang Lepcha

Translation:

“The greatest among the Lepchas,  
Pano Gaeboo, please be born again.  
Mother land (Mayel Lyang) also mourns today  
Since she does not see you.....  
  
I am still waiting for you oh king...  
Where are you?  
Today at your birth anniversary  
See the whole world (Lepcha world) is together.  
  
Damsang and Dalim are your home  
And Lungsyol is your birth place  
Your name still lies pure  
In the womb of Mother Land...”

Ren N.T Lepcha also talks about how Pano Gaeboo Achyok is seen as an ideal figure for every Lepcha and how he is perceived as a symbol for them. In his play titled “Pano Gaeboo Achyok” he talks about a small boy questions about who Pano Gaeboo Achyok was and to give him the most appropriate answer his teacher takes him and all his classmates to a house where a lady was holding a baby, the teacher tells them that the baby is Pano Gaeboo Achyok. So they go inside and took a closer look at the baby but instead of a baby the lady was holding a mirror. The boy gets confused this is when the teacher tells them “Pano Geboo Achyok is right here, every one of you is Pano Gaeboo Achyok, every one of you must be like Pano Gaeboo Achyok.”



Image 5.2: Pano Gaeboo Achyok School in Lungsyol, Kalimpong.

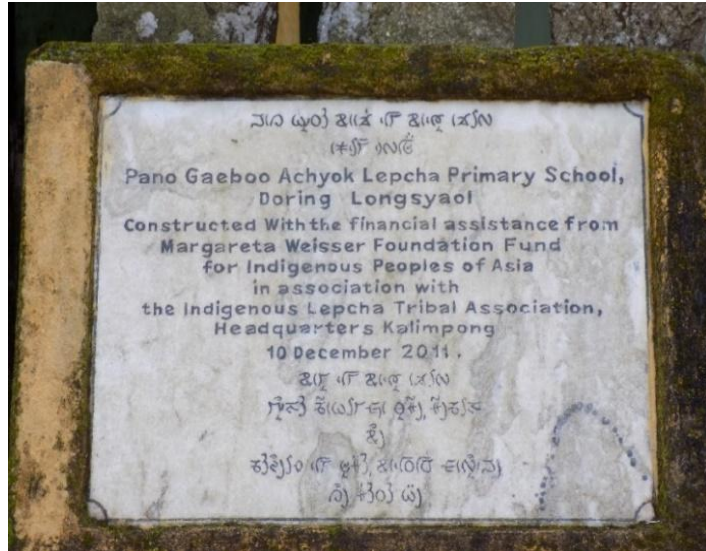


Image 5.3: the *long chok* (stone markers) at Pano Gaeboo Achyok School.

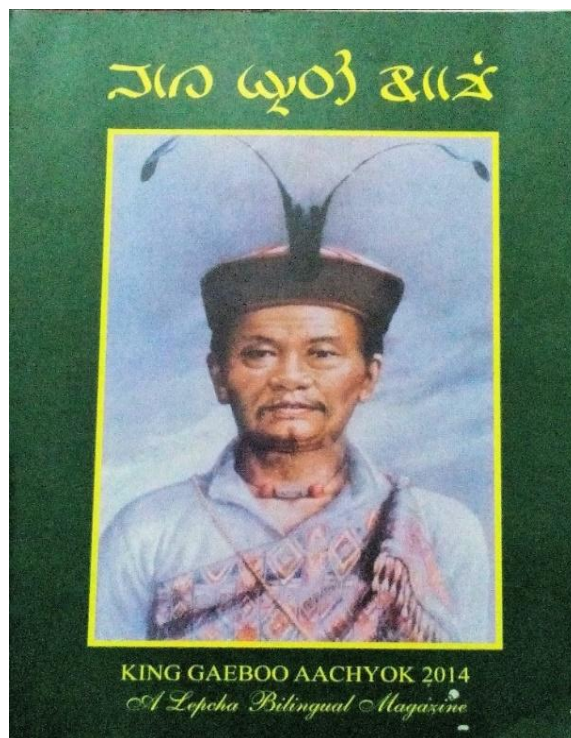


Image 5.4: The Pano Gaeboo Achyok magazine



Image 5.5: The badge of Pano Gaeboo Achyok worn by the Lepchas as the symbol of their King and their identity.

Pano Gaeboo Achyok has become a part of the everyday life of the Lepchas. In Lungsyol there is a village primary school by the name of “Pano Gaeboo Achyok School”. The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association have been producing “The King Gaeboo Achyok Annual Bilingual magazine”. He seen in posters, and badges adorn by the Lepchas a symbol for them and their identity and an icon of their culture since “to people culture is a vehicle of dignity, prosperity and progress” (Bhattacharyya 2015).

Amidst all this chaos and the rising need for identity, Lepchas have found the perfect symbol for exerting their identity and their cultural perceptions in the larger world with confidence. It is the larger than life personality of Pano Gaeboo Achyok that enables and empowers them to secure and develop their culture and identity as a community.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ Ardussi, J. 2014. *Lepcha Chieftains of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on Tibetan and Bhutanese Sources*. Kalimpong, King Gaeboo Achyok: A Lepcha Biligual Magazine 2014.
- ❖ Arora, V. 2007. *Assertive Identities, Indeginity, and the Politics of Recognition as a Tribe: The Bhutias, the Lepchas, and the Limbus of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Indian Sociological Society.
- ❖ Awasty, I. 1978. *Between Sikkim and Bhutan: The Lepchas and Bhutias of Pedong*. Delhi: B.R Publishing Corporation.
- ❖ Bhattacharyya, N. 2015. *Cultural, Heritage, and Identity: The Lepcha and Mangar Community of Sikkim and Darjeeling*. New Delhi. K. W publishers.
- ❖ Brosius, C and Karin, M. P. 2011. *Ritual Heritage and Identity: The Politics of Culture and Performance in a Globalised World*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- ❖ Chattopadhyay, T. 1990. *Lepchas and their Heritage*. Delhi: B.R Publishing Corp.
- ❖ Foning, A.R. 1987. *Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- ❖ Gorer, G. 1937 (1987). *The Lepchas of Sikkim*. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- ❖ Gowloog, R. R. 1995. *Lingthem Revisited: Social Change in a Lepcha Village of North Sikkim*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.
- ❖ Harris, M. 1989. *Life without Chiefs*. New Age Journal November/December.
- ❖ Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, 2005. *Lepcha Adivasi Ek Parichay*. Kalimpong: Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association.
- ❖ Himalaya Darpan. 17-12-2015. *Gaeboo Achyok ko Bhumika*. Siliguri.

- ❖ Jain, R. 2007. *Genealogy and Legend. Historical Anthropology.* New Delhi. Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Mainwaring, G. B. 1876 (2015). *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language, As It Exists in the Dorjeling and Sikim Hills.* Kalimpong: Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board.
- ❖ Morris, J. 1938. *Living with Lepchas: A Book about the Sikkim Himalayas.* Kingswood: The Windmill Press
- ❖ Mullard, S. 1979. *Opening of the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History.* Leiden: BRILL.
- ❖ Peyton, H. H. 1969. 'Myths and Legends', *Interpretations* 2 (1): 31-36. Indiana: Scriptorium press.
- ❖ Pradhan, A. 2012. 'Ethnic Awareness among the Lepchas of Darjeeling Hills': Indigenous Philosophies of the Himalayan Communities. *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Science.* 3: 2. Siliguri: Saliesian College Publication.
- ❖ Risley, H.H. 1894. *The Gazetteer of Sikkim.* Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press.
- ❖ Rennie, D.F. (1866) 2005. *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War.* Varanasi. Reprint Pilgrims Publishing.
- ❖ Roy, D. C. 2011. 'Damsang Gree – A Historical Holy Place of the Lepchas'. *Aachuley: A Bilingual Magazine.* Kalimpong. Myael Lyang Lepcha Development Board.
- ❖ Roy, D.C. 2012. *Lepchas Past and Present.* Siliguri: N.L Publishers.
- ❖ Roy, D. C. 2014. *Prominent Personalities among the Lepchas.* Kalimpong: Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board.

- ❖ Rudd, A.E. 2003. *Poetics of Village Politics: The Making of West Bengal's Rural Communism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Sen, J.1989. *Darjeeling: A Favoured Retreat*. Delhi. Indus Publishing Company.
- ❖ Service, E. R. 1975. *Origins of the state and civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- ❖ Siiger, H. 1967. *The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People*. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark.
- ❖ Simpson, J. 1884. *Oxford English Dictionary*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Srinivas, M.N. 1976. *The Remembered Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ❖ Subba, T. B. 1992. 'Interethnic Relationship in North East India and the Negative Solidarity thesis'. *Man in India*. 72:2.
- ❖ Tamlong, D.T. 2008. *Mayel Lyang and the Lepchas: About Sikkim and Darjeeling*, Darjeeling: Mrs. Amina Tamlong.
- ❖ Tamsang, K.P. 1982. *The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas*, Kalimpong: Lyangsong Tamsang.
- ❖ Tamsang, K.P. *A Study of the Original Lepcha Names of Places of Sikkim and Darjeeling and Their Names*, Kalimpong: K. P Tamsang.
- ❖ Tamsang, K.P. 1996. *Panoo Gaeboo Achyok*. Kalimpong: Panoo Gaeboo Achyok birth anniversary magazine.
- ❖ Thapar, R. 1975. *Past and Prejudice*. Delhi: National Book Trust.
- ❖ White, J.C. (1909) 2005. *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty One Years on the North East Frontier: 1887-1908*. Varanasi. Pilgrims Publishing.