

Dynamics of Material Culture of Lepchas in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling

A Thesis Submitted

To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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DECLARATION

I, Rongnyoo Lepcha hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Dynamics of Material Culture of Lepchas in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling" is an original work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Charisma K. Lepcha, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University. The contents of this did not form basis of award in any previous degree to me to the best of my knowledge. This thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University /Institute.

This is being submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Material Culture

Material culture is the tangible and physical aspect of a culture. It is the things you can see and touch -a visual and concrete representation of culture. It focuses on what archaeologists call “artefacts”, collectors call “relics” and art historians call “Objects d’art”. Though people do not pay a good deal of attention to objects, they are very central to our everyday lives. “Within an hour of walking we move from the paraphernalia of interior furnishing through the decisions to be communicated over choices of apparel through the moral anxieties over the ingestion of food stuffs out into the variety of modern transport systems hold within vast urban architectural and infrastructural forms” (Miller 1998:6). Thus forging a symbiotic relationship as “objects are the material things people encounter, interact with and use” (Woodward 2007: 3).

“Material Culture, deals primarily with material things- include such factors as food, dress, dwelling, implements, arts and industries. They are elements of culture which are tangible, readily open to observation and capable of objective presentation...” (Dixon 1928:1). It is the physical evidence of culture especially in objects and architecture people make, including tools, bottles, beads, coins, paintings, pots, etc. However, it is not just the materials but the materialistic aspects attached to them which become significant in understanding an individual or a society. Historical backgrounds, usage, creation and trade of these materials or objects as well as the relationships and norms that they take part in, forms a mode where the culture is transmitted from community to community and generation to generation. “Tools, weapons, monuments and objects of every sort are the material supports for a mode of

social life” (Godelier 1988: 4). They support us as we try and operate especially today in a ‘materialistic society’. Materials that are created do not exist in isolation but are engraved with meanings and significance. “Objects carry social and personal information within a larger framework. They communicate relationships and mediate progress through the social world. Although artifacts are produced at particular moments, their persistence creates histories. In addition to information and ideas they can convey hidden cultural constraints, moral standards, and social fears” (McCracken 1988: 28).

To begin with, materials and objects in addition define the relationships we share with other people, for example the practice of “gift” giving as what Mauss (1967) explains, forms alliances or relationships. According to Mauss, the giver never leaves the gift but becomes part of the receiver’s future by including the gift into their life. A gift leads at some point to another gift in response, which creates a special reciprocal bond between people. “The obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms a part of him” (Mauss 1967: 9). The same can be applied in terms of the materials, objects or artefacts the tangible forms are layered with meanings and objectives. In many cases even after the maker or producers (a community/culture) have evolved the materials and their objectives remains the same.

It not just stresses on the relationship between people but additionally material culture also looks into the devised bond between nature and culture. In other words, “inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purpose of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity” (Woodward 2007:3). Environment

affects human behaviours and this in turn affects the way people think. In turn producing knowledge resulting in the production of culture including material culture which assist them cope with the environment around them. “Material, energy and information move from social system to ecosystem as a consequence of human activities that impact the ecosystem” (Marten 2001: 2). We can take an example of the Inuits, living in a very cold environment and how it affects their way of thinking thus producing material culture like warm clothes, sleds which make it easier for them to travel in the snow. Harpoons and fishing rods were used as the areas do not support adequate vegetation, so they largely depended on hunting and fishing. The Inuit of the Arctic have realized effective cultural adaptations to cold stress in terms of clothing and shelter. They wear layered clothing, trapping air between these layers which acts as an insulator. On the other hand human populations in dry, warm environments have adapted effective cultural adaptations to heat stress using clothing and shelter designs to reduce heat production, reduce heat gain from radiation and conduction. Typical clothing is light and loose. Shelters are frequently built compact, light colours reflect the sun rays, and doors and windows are kept closed during the day (Relethford 1990).

These tangible objects or materials exemplify the intangible aspects such as beliefs, norms, traditions and the worldview of a given culture, projecting the cultural beliefs surrounding it. Material culture sheds light on how people understood or presently understand themselves. The objects themselves convey their own stories by the way they look, how they have worn out, the places they are torn, the way they are used, all put in the picture of their relationship with people. Objects construct memories as they are invested with meanings and emotions, through their associations and usage. These are capable of illustrating social changes, biographies, memory

studies, life histories, etc. “Objects and their combinations can evoke the atmosphere of a house or room. Artifacts can convey a sensory perception of the past through sight, smell” (Grassby 2005: 594). Say for example an old post card or photograph can stir up many interpreting stories surround the settings of the photograph or can tell us about the writer or the recipient of the post card. This helps in understanding the people better as “objects play a central role, evoking memories and underpinning numerous family traditions” (Miller 2012: 830). Similar example can be seen in a recent article by C. K Lepcha (2020), where postcards were used as a visual medium to invoke nostalgia and a means of communication. The relationship between the tangible and intangible are perfectly depicted in the materials people produce and use thus making the study of material culture an important aspect in unravelling and linking culture as a whole.

The use of materials started with stone tools and grew in complexity involving evolved technologies. And as technology developed, it created new and complex cultures. “Technological behaviors of people is seen only through forms of pottery, lances, stools, hats, arrows, headbands and so on” (Lemonnier 1986:148). These physical aspects of culture can be seen as a tangible narrative of how people of a particular culture interact with them, it portrays the norms attached to the material objects as where, when and for what purpose they serve.

However the value ascribed to material culture is dynamic in nature. This can be multilayered in sentiments and functionality, the more amounts of emotions invested in an object the more its value. For example a silver bracelet is just an object at first, and then you pass it on to your children and grandchildren only then it becomes an heirloom. But then a pair of jeans, you wear it for a long period of time it

gets old and you ultimately throw it away. Different people attach different meanings to objects for some; value of one object may be greater than the value of another object. So we cannot entirely divide the lives of objects and the lives of people, as we all live in a symbiotic relationship. Sometime we outlive the objects and other times the objects outlive us, but the bond is forever lasting in the physical embodiment and in memories.

Material culture therefore can be seen as an imperative part of human history and culture. It allows us to reconstruct and understand past events, civilizations, and cultures. Material culture has been used to recreate the past but it exists in all three different timelines i.e. the past, the present and the future “All kinds of materiality have projections and trajectories from the past through the present into the future. The past exists in the present” (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2004: 27), helping us see what was, what is and what can or will be. Going back to the example of heirlooms; it is an object of the past but its materiality conveys through time. The past, the present and then passed on to the future. But then again it only applies to selective objects as mentioned before people construct different values towards different objects.

One of the reasons why Material Culture studies came to limelight was its “capacity to reach back over the millennia to reconstruct and explain cultures and life ways of unimaginably ancient societies as they change over many centuries...” (Fagan 2003: 40). This was central to many disciplines such as Archaeology, History, Anthropology, Major sciences, social sciences and their sub fields. What became important as a field of research was how people in the past or present were invested with an object, how they used it and for what, etc., “we look through objects to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture-above all, what they

disclose about us. We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts” (Brown 2001: 4). Not only does it help in reconstructing the past but also helps keep track of the changes as it evolves in forms and meanings in different society differently. We can take the example of different stool tools and the changes seen as more advanced technologies were used and then came the era of metal. Different tools produced in different evolutionary phases can be distinguished and clubbed under the various geological time frames.

As we have already addressed to the question of what Material Culture does, but the question that is often not adhered to is why we as humans need materials or objects? And the answer is quite innate but often neglected that Material culture is created by humans in order to maintain their notions and cultural practices that is, the intangible aspects. “Their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things” (Appadurai 1988: 5). Objects support us to carry out our daily activities. Material culture is everywhere starting from our day to day lives where we interact with daily objects for instance a cup; a cup of coffee, tea, water is an innate activity for most of the global population. To specific objects which have certain religious or cultural connotation attached to it, we can take the example of a simple stone but when poured with cultural and religious meaning becomes a symbol of what Woodward calls “markers of aesthetic and cultural value” (Woodward 2017:15) like the ‘Shivalingas’ (obelisks of religious importance in Hinduism) or a tomb stone. Objects gives form to the belief patterns of those who use them and this relationship is what gives birth to the meaning between the object and the community using it. According to Geertz (1973), the specific

patterns created by systemic relationships between diverse phenomena can be expressed either by artifacts or by performances. The inherent meaning of goods is then dependent on knowledge of beliefs and perceptions external to the objects involved. Ideas, beliefs, and meanings interpose themselves between people and things (Geertz 1973).

In similar lines the material culture of Lepchas shows the culture and knowledge of the community. Tools, ornaments, clothes, accessories, pots, etc. are created according to their day to day needs which in turn become a part of their culture. How the Lepcha community interact with these materials giving them meaning to assert their norms; which then becomes a web of links of the intangible with the tangible thus making up their culture. Material culture provides a record of a culture's worldviews, values and beliefs helping understand the society much more exclusively. "Goods are subject to both etic and emic analysis, the study of their objective attributes and their significance to those who use them" (Grassby 2005: 592).

Like other populations, the Lepchas have also adapted to their surrounding which can be seen in the clothes they wear and the food they eat as a response to the environment. Lepcha culture is also reflected in instances like the kind of house they live in, the dress and ornaments they wear, the technologies they use, the instruments they play and thing they use during performances be it religious or social. Material culture thus communicates, expresses meanings, and conveys experiences. "Their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" (Brown 2001:5), provokes the thought that any simple object or thing given a deeper meaning can convert into

something of greater value to an individual or a community. These meanings can change overtime as the community keeps adding more and more meaning to it. The very fact that the material culture of a community holds more information and deeper understanding of culture as a whole makes it much more significant. The use of objects and why they use them are some of the questions that can provide meaning to the whole culture of a community.

The Study of Material Culture

Material Culture as a subject of study emerged through various foundations, and has a “multidisciplinary history” (Woodward 2007: 17). At the beginning materials were fondly seen as collections by private collectors and for museums in the “the museum age” sometime between 1880-1920 (Jacknis 1985: 75). These initial studies classified, “catalogued and described objects, generally of non-western or more specifically non-European origins [...]. The manifest goal of these studies was to use such artefacts as a means for retrospectively understanding human behavior and culture” (*ibid* 2007:17).

Though objects have been included in many ethnographies, and researches, it was not enough to bring this subject into the limelight. It was only recently that the field of what Woodward (2017) states as “Material Culture Studies” has surfaced. The term Material Culture is fairly new, it “is a recent nomenclature that incorporates a range of scholarly inquiry into the uses and meaning of objects” (Woodward 2017:3). Though the terminology is much recent the study itself can be traced back to the nineteenth century where European or western collectors started systematically studying ancient and exotic objects and relics, this resulted in the rise of the theoretical basis of the subject of Archaeology. In contemporary scenario, artefacts and objects are considered important sources of information to study former contexts

of situations or scenario for example, a new research on ‘The Great Depression’, or ‘Feminism’ or even ‘The Caste System’ of India, through the viewpoint of materials and objects sheds a different light on the past movements or events.

The field of Archeology and History can be seen as having a major contribution to the rise of this new field of study and it became central to these disciplines. Archeological theory explores how people lived through interpreting the symbols and functions of artefacts. “Archeological inquiries into material culture are logical extensions of archeological theoretical approaches to the meaning of objects....” (Gerritson and Riello 2015:3). The study of Material Culture also started in the historical sector. The Historical approach was mostly confined to the realm of the investigation of the remote past or non-western societies, similar to the case of Anthropology. However there was a shift in this approach and more and more studies leaned towards “understanding the everyday lives of ordinary people who lived in the past” to “[...] trace their lives through the Material goods they left behind” (*ibid* 2015: 4).

Material Culture attracted economists mostly after the boom of capitalism. For the field of economics, Material culture gained interest with the Consumer Culture Theory and with the consumer revolution where material culture was extended to the market. These materials were used to attain a lifestyle, which created a particular relationship between the consumer and the goods or services he or she uses or consumes. Consumer culture also focused on study of consumption patterns, the buying and selling of goods (Miller 1988). In all societies objects or things accompany human beings and as described by many our society is a “consumer society” (Sassatelli 2007: 2) started with the industrial revolution and accelerated after

the Second World War. It was a time dominated by “a growing and uncontrolled passion for material things” (*ibid* 2007:2), and “ the flow of commodities became more complex, global and above all, long distance they brought with them the flow of more articulate yet unequal knowledge which provided new arenas for the construction of value that engaged producers, traders and consumers” (*ibid* 2007: 33). According to Sassatelli material objects always implicate forms of social knowledge and this exchange and flow of goods diffused immense knowledge not just knowledge of the modern era but cultural knowledge as well. For instance we can look at the availability of ‘Asabikeshiinh’ or dream catchers as popularly known belonging to the Native American heritage. These are easily available online or can be made since the knowledge was made available and capitalized globally. Similarly, there is availability of images or figurines of Indian deities used globally as decorative pieces or religious idols.

Initially many criticized and denied the study of Material culture, as they argued that Material Culture Studies actually deals with the idea behind the artefacts and not the artifact itself. However this bias was lifted later, as more interest garnered around this field of study and without the objects themselves there is no medium to transact the said idea. Materials and objects became an important link to understand people and societies. It also received criticism with the rise of the non-human material culture studies as more scientists observed the use of tools in the case of primates. The question that rose was an attack on the very idea of culture itself. Many scholars argued “culture” as being a human attribute yet here they were observed outside the human domain. There are more inquiries attached to the study of material culture now in contrast to its beginning where it was just classification and recordings. Presently

the focus is more on the materiality of the materials and what determining factors are attached to the materials and people, etc.

For Anthropology it was as part of studying the “other”, especially the non-western cultures that laid foundation to the beginning of material culture studies. Tools, attires, art and technologies were studied and collected to be a part of ethnographic museums. Morgan (1877) was one of the first to study the materials produced and the technologies used to produce them to arrive at his Unilineal Evolutionism Theory, based on the tools and technologies, a major contribution in understanding the cultural developments. Another anthropologist who focused on material culture was Boas 1927, laying much stress on the tools and objects to understand a community. Structuralism also stressed on the materials culture as Durkhiem and Mauss 1903 saw objects as “reproduction of the worldview and social order of subjects” (Sanchez, 2020:29) where relationships were defined as people “encounters with objects” (*ibid* 2020:29) represented by “psychological approaches that emphasize the central role of objects in persons, as fetishes and providers of new sensory experiences” (*ibid* 2020:29)

Later many anthropologists focused on different aspects and relations of material culture and thus a new field of study was born. Contemporary anthropologist such as, Appadurai (1988), combines economic aesthetics and material culture, likewise the subject itself has various levels and depths of understanding and approaches. Since then the field has been growing its roots in the varied multidisciplinary milieu of social and human sciences including Anthropology.

Review of Literature

The study of material culture came to life alongside Archeology and Anthropology as it began with the study of non-western cultures in general. The western societies set out to study the culture of non-western “primitive” societies with material culture in focus as it was the most visible and obvious of their documentations. Anthropology has always been studying about humans and culture across time and space. One of the first anthropologists who took interest in studying material culture as mentioned prior was Lewis Henry Morgan in the mid-19th century. He laid stress on the technology, on the evolution of the society. This kind of study put cultures in an evolutionary approach that propagated human evolution from savagery to barbarism to civilization. The material culture also evolved from stone tools (hand axe) to iron tools (swords, spears) to more complex weapons (guns, tanks). Boas (1927), on the other hand believed that to understand a society one must understand and analyze the physical evidences in that society. He recorded material culture along with non-material culture of the Eskimos like igloos, harpoons, dolls, fishing rods, spears, baskets, ornaments etc. and illustrated them with sketches.

Durkheim (1858) wrote about material culture as a social fact -a collective effort that functions to maintain solidarity in a society. Likewise Leslie White, in *The Science of Culture* (1949) states that the history of human technology could be understood through the study of human produced material. He came up with the simple formula where energy (E) multiplied to technology (T) produced culture (C) i.e. $E \times T = C$. White contributed to the school of universal evolutionism along with Julian Steward (1972) who proposed the theory of cultural ecology as he studied the Shoshone of the Great Basin and noted that hunter-gatherers were heavily dependent on the material they found in their surroundings (Steward 1972). These materials

spread as cultures came in contact with one another, and the theory of diffusion can be understood by studying the distribution of cultural traits through time and space via these materials. In similar lines Australian archeologist V. Gordon Childe (1920) focused on cultural history of archeology. Where he and his contemporaries defined distinction in societies according to their material culture.

While early anthropological theories discussed material culture in terms of environment and technology, the cognitive approach focuses on the thoughts and the thinking processes of humans as they stressed on how people in social settings conceive of and think about objects and events that make up their world. The theory mainly looked into the knowledge system that makes up culture and which is projected through objects produced from the acquired understanding. As artefacts such as tools, cloths, ornaments, pots were all created according to the cultural needs they clearly portray the understanding of things from a cultural viewpoint. Since all these traits are learned/ shared from one generation to another or from one individual to another we can observe a pattern of transfusion across cultures.

Cultures around the world having their own way of classifying their surroundings and the materials in it. Saussure (1998) argues that this process is reflected in the linguistic use of the people as a union of not only “things and name but of a concept and a sound image” (Saussure 1998: 832). The physical aspects often classified are imprints of the “impressions that it make to our, senses” (*ibid*: 832). He discusses the theory of concepts and ideas as “signifier” and the image as “signified” thus explaining how people assert their ideas, values and cultural traits into objects and images to portray their worldviews. Using an ethnographic approach helps

anthropologists understand how that given culture views and categorizes their own foods, animal kingdom, medicines, as well as plants.

Appadurai's take on *The Social Life of Things* (1988) allows us to look at the economic value of things that confer them with meanings. "Economic exchange creates value," (Appadurai 1988:3) and he proposes that "the commodity situation in the social life of any 'thing' be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, future) for some other thing is its socially relevant factor" (Appadurai 1988:13). His definition of the commodity situation is based on an understanding of the commodity not as a thing-in-itself but as a certain social relationship with the thing. He mentions "we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (Appadurai 1988:5). Kopytoff (1986) also stresses on the economic value of things but he focuses more on the biographical account of things as biographies tells stories of what and how these things came to be. Their journey is greatly engraved as we understand and study the things and objects in depth, as it reveals about the culture and the individual who has acquired it. Kopytoff, (1986) states that "biography of things make salient what might otherwise remain obscure. For example, in situations of culture contact, they can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about adoption of alien objects- as of alien ideas is not the fact that they are adopted, but they are redefined and put to use" (Kopytoff 1986:67).

Colonial administrators in the Eastern Himalaya can be credited for beginning to write about the life and culture of Lepchas. Risley (1894) gives an account of Lepcha tribe along with various communities residing in the Sikkim by describing the eating habits, dress code, marriage system, religion, death rites, sexual life, agricultural practice and housing pattern. There were many other scholars after him who studied the Lepchas but the material aspects was not given much attention. Exception may be made of Siiger (1967) who provides a series of photographic documentation of the material culture of Lepchas and also drawings including hats, knives, ornaments, household items, hunting tools, agricultural tools, baskets and religious objects (*ibid*: plates I to XVII).

Architecture:

“Architecture, in any society, constitutes one of the most important and often one of the most enduring cultural artefacts” (Vellinga 2005:3). The architectural structure and the process of making counts in the cultural mechanism through which skills needed to build them are transmitted and also relate to the development of social identification. For example a Greek architectural monument is recognizable from a Persian one due to both their distinct characteristics and designs. They not only relate the identity of their makers but also the time and space they were set in.

Vallinga (2005) also talks about the relationship of anthropology and architecture as at a certain point anthropology has the power to “remind architects, planners and engineers of the cultural embodiment of architecture, helping them to increase their understanding of local economies, values and practices and the bearing these have on pressing issues like resources management, technology transfer,

conservation, planning regulations and building standards” (Vallinga 2005:6). This indeed points towards the transfer of knowledge system.

Lepcha architecture is a form of material culture that includes the physical structures resulting as an outcome of cultural constructs. Lepcha architecture to begin with, can be focused first on the foundational stones. “Lepchas use huge flat boulders as foundation stones while constructing their houses. These are used as base stones upon which erect stones are positioned before wooden pillars are placed atop these stones. Since stones can also be seen as marking one’s territory, usage of stones in the foundation of their houses can be seen as a marker of their territory too” (Lepcha 2019:10). “Stones are special to the Lepchas since prehistoric times. The Neolithic tools they collected and revered as charms and gifts are known as *sader longs*. Foning mentions the *sader longs* or thunder stones used “both as medicine and as a charm” (Foning 1987: 31) –it is put into the foundation of any Lepcha house as it is said to protect the house from evils and more importantly it prevents the house from being struck by lightning. Lepchas also erect *Longtsaoks* (obelisks) to mark special occasions as Foning says “to us Lepchas these *Longtsaok* are holy and sacred symbol” (Foning 1987:37). One of the famous landmark in Sikkim history is Kabi Longtsaok which marks the blood treaty between the Lepchas and the Bhutias where the Tibetan noble Khye Bumsa and Lepcha spiritual leader Thikung Tek swore a blood brotherhood treaty between the Lepchas and Bhutias as equals. Hence “the history of Sikkim actually begins with the megalithic tradition of erecting stones at a place called Kabi Longtsaok, 17 kilometres north of Gangtok” (Lepcha 2019). Lepchas also regard Khangchendzonga as the original stone for the Lepchas is seen as “the eldest brother and the first creation of *Itbu Mu*” (Wangchuk and Zulca 2007:29). From it the Lepchas believe to have originated thus making it value very vital in the Lepcha

culture. While there were and still are numerous *Longtsaok* in Lepcha society they have been neglected for a certain period of time as their importance is being revived today.

Tamsang (1982) mentions various forts built by Lepchas and their leaders. Lepchas claim to have constructed a good number of forts all over the Eastern Himalayan region where they were ruling in ancient days. 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 1982: 71).

The architecture of the Lepcha house is mentioned in *Living with the Lepchas* (1938) where Morris mentions how “no nails are used in the construction of houses, all woodwork being mortised and tied where necessary with canes. Even large buildings like the monastery are constructed entirely without nails” (*ibid* 1983:173). He gives a detailed study of a Lepcha house including the structure of the house to the things present in the house including the traditional utensils and tools found in it. A Lepcha house is known as the *Dokeymoo Lee* and he said that the “ordinary Lepcha house is extremely simple and generally contains but two rooms, one of which is used as a kitchen. In appearance it does not differ, except in size, from the monastery, which I take to be the prototype of Sikkim domestic architecture” (Morris 1938:165). He adds that there is an absence of furniture in Lepcha houses; beds, tables and chairs being unknown. “The kitchen stove is merely a platform of earth, on which some half-

dozen large stones are placed as supports for the cooking pots. These are generally of copper or brass, and I never once saw any kind of earthenware vessel and was told they were never used. Stores of maize and millet hang from the rafters, and other grains are kept in baskets stacked against the walls” (*ibid* 1983:176). The study of Lepcha architecture is scattered and scanty. There has not been a systematic way of looking at this aspect of material culture.

Attire and Fashion:

Another of Lepcha material culture is the attire and fashion which has garnered quite a bit of attention. Attire represents the identity of a community as it sets them apart in their appearances from all the others. It is an important material culture of the community Eicher, (2000) provides a list of anthropologists who have worked on attire, dress and fashion, from tribal to the modern societies; these studies contributed greatly in understanding their cultures and patterns of social practices through their use of attire “with dress expressing self through ongoing processes of redefinition and re-performance” (Eicher 2000: 65).

More and more studies have been carried out with the theme of attire, clothing and fashion. For example the study of Feminism, it can also be seen to better understand the LGBTQ communities and gender as a whole. If we look into gender movements the use of attire and fashion is of great significance. It is used as a form of expression of identity or to oppose one. The fact that women for a long period of time struggled for the right to wear trousers is one of the many aspects one can indulge in from the viewpoint of attire as material culture. And with the rise of early Feminist movement adapting to more masculine styles or styles outside the norm has been a key point to their movement.

To look into the area of attire and fashion “spinning, weaving, embroidery, knitting, quilting and tailoring, and the whole process of production of clothing and attire” (Sassatelli 2007:1), were considered as “highly feminized forms of labor” (*ibid* 2007:1). In the early eras it was also seen as a form of passing to womanhood as a girl who would enter into adulthood was expected to tailor cloths for themselves and their families. On the other hand the “products themselves have been used to systematically construct gender” (*ibid* 2007:1). Sassatelli gives the example of suits helped construct the definition of masculinity in the 19th century. Fabric and clothing became an important form of expression and statement of community identity, class identity and caste identity, etc., as it forms intimate relations with the body. Cases can be seen among the caste communities of South India (Cohn 2007, Shrinivas 1978) where certain communities were prohibited to wear clothing that past their knee and above their waist in length. Women were not allowed to cover their breasts and to appear bear chest in the presence of a Brahmin (the highest caste in the Hindu Verna or Caste System), as a sign of respect or what Cohn calls “code of respect and avoidance behavior enforced by the state” (Chon 2007:88).

In the previous era clothes also determined the class one belonged to. In the 1800’s of the European or more of western settings ladies would wear many under layers of cloths and the puffier the gown (more number of under layers and garments), it was considered to be a proclamation of a higher status. It was similar with the men’s wearwigs, ruffled collars, lace, heels were all used by people of upper economic status. Whereas the lower strata of people were permitted more subdued color palates and courser fabric, no under layers of clothing, shorter outer coats, etc. The perspectives changes as we shift to other parts of the world but the hierarchy persists even among the egalitarian societies, however the level of the use of these

hierarchical materials may differ in different societies. The use of attire was in addition seen as a form for distinguishing gender. Furthermore among some communities it was also used as a symbol of coming of age. For example the Himba community of Namibia and Angola, the women wear a head gear or accessory as they climb up to womanhood.

Many European scholars Gorer, Siiger, Morris and Indian anthropologists have given a descriptive but not a detailed account on the attire of the Lepcha community. Siiger (1967) gives an extensive description on the Lepcha attire including the clothing and ornaments. He mentions in detail about the clothes and ornaments used by the Lepcha men and women of Tingbung village in Sikkim describing the colors, materials used for making the attires and the diameters of the clothing. The clothes were made of the fibers of nettle plants found in the forest. The Lepchas used to collect nettle plants and soak them in water for many days. Then the plants were taken out of water and beaten until the outer layer of the plants come out and finally the fibers start to appear. These fibers were then processed a little more and finally turned into the clothes that they wear. Morris also describes what the Lepcha men wear, “a pair of loosely-cut cotton shorts and a cotton shirt of Tibetan pattern. The shorts are made unnecessarily large in the waist, the surplus being folded over and tucked in order to keep them up. On top of them they generally wear the Lepcha *dum-dyum*, an attractive home-spun garment woven from imported white cotton with a typical striped design in red, blue, and yellow” (Morris 1983:173) the *dum-dyum* which is known to be the Lepcha female attire but if we look into the literal meaning of the words *dum* means clothes and *dyum* means to wear, so the word can be seen as being free from any gender inclination. Morris takes pity in the fact that the production of Lepcha traditional garments was dying out due to the

introduction of readymade clothes available in the markets. He notes that hats are not often worn by the Lepchas. “Boys usually wear only the *dum-dyum*, with nothing beneath, a form of costume which leaves little to the imagination” (Morris 1983:173) Today this has changed as men have started wearing *Tamo* a type of quarter pants underneath the *dumpra*. “Women wear a one-piece cotton shift with a blouse of brightly colored silk on top. Over this is worn a sleeveless one-piece garment reaching to the ankles. It is usually made of black or some dark-coloured velveteen, and fastened at the waist with a silken sash in the same way as the men's garment, so as to form a pouch or pocket. Women are always bareheaded; and neither sex wears any form of footgear” (Morris 1983: 175). On the contrary Lepcha women have always seen to be wearing a *taro* a small piece of cloth tied on their heads. A Lepcha male attire is not complete without a *thyaktuk* or hat, *Tanggip* a traditional bag and *Baanpaok* a weapon shorter than a sword but longer than a knife which they hang on their waist. Tamsang (2015) mentions the types of weapon carried by a man, an essential part of the attire without which it is believed to be incomplete. “In earlier days it was a necessity but today it has become a tradition and fashion of the Lepchas” (Tamsang 2015: 29-30). The traditional attire was usually woven by the women - “each village produced *Dumpra* for their men. *Dumpra* has dual roles in the day they are worn as garments and during the night it was used as blankets” (Tamsang 2015: 29). Today the material is changing as due to the rise in the temperature the thick cloth is been replace by thin clothes.

Tamlong (2008) while describing the attire also gives a brief account of the different types of hats worn by Lepcha men. He classified the Lepcha male hats *Thayktuk* into two types one for general use and the other for military use. It is believed that “in the ancient days, the weavers used to weave the hat and chanting

mantras and prayer for the would be owner of the specific hat. These hats were woven for specific personalities and symbolized status and responsibility. High priest (*mun/bongthings*), chieftains and generals mainly wore this hats. During the reign of the *Chogyal*, the king of Sikkim, these hats were a part of the dress of the Royal Army of Sikkim” (Tamsang 2015:32). “Lepchas hat are the representation of their skill in crafts work. Lepcha hat are different in size and shape. The hats are *Sumok-Thaktuk*, *Papri-Thaktuk*, *Seyraaboo-Thaktuk*, *Soring-Thaktuk*. Most of the hats are made of wood and used for different purposes. The *Baanpok*, a short knife also have good decoration *Tunggip*, Lepcha handbag & *Tukvil Lyak* Lepcha women’s necklace are example of their handicrafts. It shows skill of Lepcha artisans” (Jha 2015:13). But the dying practice of weaving was mentioned by Gorer (1938), “Lepchas used to weave their own cloth, but nowadays only a couple of women bother to weave; people wear instead readymade cloths” (Gorer 1938: 53). But there has been a change in the use of traditional attire of Lepchas recent events like the Himalayan Ethnic Lepcha Fashion Event (2012 and 2013) that was organized by Lepcha youth as traditional wear has become fashionable and younger generations have come up with new ways to restore the cultural practices and maintain the Lepcha attire.

Artefacts:

The third aspect this research focuses on is Artefacts. Art is seen as the expression of human creative skills and takes the form of an artefact. These expressions among many cultures tend to reflect their cultural meanings and values conveyed in a visual form. The significance laid upon here is the process of how an object transforms into art. However for communities such as the Lepchas it is much harder to determine what art exactly is as the concept does not necessarily exist in their culture and is merely an etic perception. In terms of artifacts, they are objects of significance

produced by humans. Although a historian may define it differently than an Anthropologist, most artefacts are objects of historical significance having a specific back story in a certain period of time or belonging to very noteworthy people in history. For long the artefacts were also under the microscope of many researchers seeking answers to unravel the ancient way of being and to understand the environmental settings. We have already discussed Morgan and his contemporaries using artefacts to understand humans and their evolution. We have also seen Boaz with his study on artefacts to understand a community. Later other theories such as Diffusionism in the late 1890's also brings into light the importance of objects and artefacts in tracking the exchange of culture across the globe.

These objects and artefacts carry various meaning and links to the era, community and place they belong to as is as important to take them into consideration in order to understand populations and their behaviors. According to Lepcha legends, they had once built a stairway using pots stacked on top of one another to form a hill kind of structure in order to reach to the heaven In *Lepcha Adivasi Ek Parichai* it is mentioned that the Lepchas built this in *Talom Partam* (Daramdin, West Sikkim) (Lepcha Adivasi Ek Parichai 2005:55). Stocks also mentions the tower in his *Sikkim Customs and Folklore* (1975) and said it was a result of stupidity “when the world was full once more, some of the Rong-folk, a tribe called the *Na-ong* or Ignorant persons prepared to ascend to the Rum Country, and began building a tower of earthen pots...” (Stocks 1975:35). But Lepchas believe it to be the result of their creative genius. Lepcha artisans can be found in various walks of life and the men are considered good with bamboo works such as baskets and hats. The men made baskets to carry fire woods and fodder from the forest also to carry the crops that they

harvested in their lands. Some baskets were for household purposes as to contain food grains and even make *chi* (traditional Lepcha alcohol).

The connection between the two concepts of art and artefact is an intricate one as a piece of art is most likely always an artifact and an artifact can become an art if enough meaning is ascribed upon it. Art can be reflected in the artefacts as they convey cultural and historical significance. Tools are essential for survival Siiger describes the various tools and traps the Lepchas use for hunting like the bow or *Sa-li*, the *sa-lu* or quivers to carry the *chong* or arrows he also mentions Lepchas using *cinggi* or spears for hunting (Siiger 1967: 97). Risley mentions about the Lepcha people as “woodsmen” referring to the close relationship they have with nature. He mentions the different types of trees the Lepchas use for making walking sticks and knife handles. One of the most “important material for the Lepchas is the bamboo...” (Gorer 1987:67), and the Lepcha society is incomplete without bamboos -most of the utensils are made of bamboo the reason behind this is that bamboos are found in abundance and fast growing. The Lepchas recognize different varieties of bamboos, which is used for different purposes, it is used for making drinking vessels like *Pathut* for drinking *chi* (traditional drink) and also *pahip* or a straw made of bamboo to drink the *chi*, it is also used for making water carriers. Risley (1894) also gives an account of the different species of bamboos used for different purposes like *Dendrocalamus Hamiltonii* called *po* in Lepcha used for building huts and carrying water. *Dendrocalamus Sikkimensis* called *pagriang* in Lepcha and *Bambusanutans* called *Matilu* in Lepcha used for building huts and *Arundinava Hookeiriana* called *prong* in Lepcha used for making roofing mats.

Bamboo is also used to make their musical instruments. Chattopadhyay (1990), provides a list of eleven musical instruments used by the Lepchas. He mentions the *Palit Keng* (flute) as the “simplest” of the musical instruments used by the Lepchas. According to him Hooker mentions about it in his travelogue and Gorer thought it to be a solitary diversion of Rongs unaccompanied by any vocal rendering (Chattopadhyay 1990:70). He gives a description about the various flute and other musical instruments used by these Lepchas like the *Pantong Palit*, *Nibrok Palit*. A four stringed instrument known as *tangbok*. He further mentions about the drums *tangdar* a small drum and *tangdar bong*, a still smaller drum. A “tiny whistle like instrument called *nampathyut* and a mouth organ, *tangdyu*”. He also mentions *Chakpanjar* a big trumpet and *banga*, a round drum (Chattopadhyay 1990: 70, 71). Jha also mentions a little about the musical instruments according to him “some notable are *Sut-saang* (Played like violin) *Tung-bok* (Played like a pass mandolin) *Bangho*, *Tangdyu*, *Bampathut*, *Pan thongtalitsuno*, *palit-kheng* etc. The themes of the most of Lepcha songs are based on their culture and tradition which include birth of the child marriage, death, returning soul to the lap of Kanchenjunga and other natural surroundings” (Jha 2015: 12).

The above literature on Lepcha material culture shows a hopeful yet undocumented aspect of Lepcha material culture that has been scarce and scattered. The richness of Lepcha material culture has not received much attention and has only been mentioned in passing as they write about Lepcha social life. Some scholars have mentioned about attire and artefact but topics like architecture, megaliths, and bamboo implements have not been studied at all. Scholars have often written about them in very limited amount and more focus upon material culture is needed for a better understanding of the community. In case the material culture has been

mentioned, there is no detail regarding the meaning or the origin of the same. The dearth of studies on Lepcha material culture makes us realize how less we know about the community in terms of their objects and worldviews. We can even say how the material culture has not been studied at all. This research therefore makes an attempt to give an ethnographic study on the material culture of the Lepcha community.

Statement of the Problem

If we look at the studies on Lepcha community, material culture have only been mentioned as subordinates to the non-material aspects of the community. Their presence and documentation have been overshadowed by the non-material counterparts. As both are equal parts of the culture, both require equal attention and documentation. A culture becomes unique in the way they show their tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible gives a concrete understanding of the past, while the intangible adds significance to the Lepcha culture along with the changes in both form and meaning that has occurred in the material culture of Lepcha society.

Material culture of the Lepchas gives a visible picture of the community's traditions and cultural practices. The material culture is affected by ecology, economies, and political changes in both the form and the meaning. It evolves in the values attached to it, changing in patterns and interpreting differently in different stages of time. The Lepcha population have encountered change in the forms and meanings in both their intangible and tangible culture, and this has occurred at different times based on especially in the territory the Lepcha population is scattered in. The material culture moves from one place to another and with the Lepcha population spread in territorial regions of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong excluding the international territories. The study is an attempt to look into the

descriptive aspects of material culture; secondly it will look into the variations within the same community but living in different areas and the meaning in their differences. The material culture will reveal records of the Lepcha worldviews, values and beliefs, as materials produced in a represents its understanding of its social and cultural milieu and how these materials are used gives a deeper understanding of the Lepcha community and its culture.

The research focuses on three aspects of Lepcha material culture which is Architecture, Attire, and Artefact. Firstly, architecture will include housing design and patterns of the *Dokeymoo lee* (Lepcha house), specifically the foundational flat stones used in Lepcha houses. These architectural structures and tools used by the community must be studied as much as the modern architecture and technology practices have already become endangered with modern materials replacing the traditional. In such a scenario, the need for documenting this aspect of material culture is of utmost importance as to record the knowledge which is rapidly slipping away with the influence of changing society.

Secondly, it will focus on the traditional dress and ornaments of the community. Gorer mentions the change that had affected the clothing of Lepchas in Dzongu (North Sikkim), as the women had “completely given up the indigenous type of dress in favor of the Tibetan costume...” (Gorer 1987:52). The change in attire of Lepchas, was greatly influenced by the dominant culture at that time -still today in remote villages of Sikkim we can find elderly women wearing the “Tibetan costume”. The Lepcha attire also come under threat with the politicization of dress when the dominant Gorkha dress was imposed on the people of Darjeeling. So the Lepcha attire stands at an interesting place as Lepchas are reclaiming their identity through dress

and also improvising to cater to the needs of the younger generation. New fashions are emerging which adapts to the people's need and sophistication as this development needs to be studied. Ornaments form a part of attire as popular silver and bamboo jewelries are replaced by gold these days. It therefore looks into the changes that has taken place in both form and meaning when it comes to attire of Lepcha community.

Lastly, the Lepcha art and artefact will be discussed where bamboo, wood and other materials are used for its creation. The most important raw material for the Lepchas is the bamboo, as they use it for various purposes like making utensils, jewelry, baskets, bow and arrow as the study makes an attempt to see why bamboos occupies a special place in Lepcha society and the meaning behind its usage. Hunting implements like bow and arrow are also made of bamboo. Lepcha musical instruments are also made of bamboos, it is used in certain rituals and also for recreational purposes. Lepchas believe in *Narok Rum* or the God of music who gave them the boon of music. Each musical instrument has a special purpose and meaning in the Lepcha society. These instruments are not only used for recreational purposes but play great part in the rituals and ceremonies of the community. There are various other musical instruments used by the Lepchas which needs to be studied.

In all three material cultures discussed above, there has been many influences in various forms that has either changed or affected the Lepcha material culture. This research aims to bring into light the past as well as the day to day objects that makes up Lepcha society. The Lepchas have an interesting material culture with many variations and similarities in the region withstanding and adapting to the changes that has come either due to the influence of modern cultures or the rapidly changing

environment. This research aims to document as much of the material culture before it is lost forever and also looks into the changing dynamics of the material culture. While Lepcha material objects are losing its visibility and value, the meanings behind them have been completely ignored. This research aims to focus on the objects, the meaning and the interpretation of Lepcha material culture.

Objectives:

- To describe the material culture of Lepchas in terms of Architecture, Attire and Artefacts.
- To explore the usage and patterns of Lepcha material culture.
- To study the change and continuity of Lepcha material culture.

Methodology

The research study is based on intensive fieldwork in Gangyap West Sikkim, Tingvong in Dzongu North Sikkim, Yang Gairi Gaon, Suruk and Lumgsyol in Kalimpong and Dhajea in Darjeeling. Villages with traditional Lepcha houses still existing were chosen along with villages where traditional handlooms and art and artefacts still in practice was chosen using purposive random sampling. The research is an ethnographic approach on the Lepcha architecture, attire and arts and artefacts as to understand Lepcha material culture and their symbolic interpretation. In many ways it is also an auto-ethnographic study.

The primary data was collected through census of the village, participant observation, interviews both formal and informal interviews using snow ball sampling method with elderly folk, artisans, weavers, carpenters, and musicians. However, the elderly members of the mentioned villages were less in number. As in the case of artisans, weavers and carpenters, attempts were made to interview each and every

artisans available in the village, which was successful to some extent but in case such as in Tingvong, in Dzongu most of the artisans were out of reach and could not be contacted. Dhajea and Suruk have very less number of artisans, and non in case of the former. *Bongthings* (Lepcha shamans/priests) and *Muns* (Lepcha female shaman) were interviewed for understanding the religious and symbolic interpretation of certain objects. It was also an attempt to get more insights on the meanings of the objects used by the community from a religious perspective. One of the reasons they were also chosen for interviews were the fact that they are the store houses of oral histories and philosophical understanding of cultural aspects in the community.

Interview schedule was used in all the field areas. Focus Group Discussions were conducted during gatherings especially during festivals mainly focused on the youths of the community. Photographic records of architectural structure such as *longtsoak* (megaliths), and traditional community dwelling were taken. Photographs of the attires, arts and artefacts were also to keep proper visual records of the material cultures. Alongside studying, describing and analysing the stone structures and monuments, Lepcha forts of Damsang, Dalim, Pendam, Lungsyol, and Suruk were also located, visited and studied under the political architectural structures.

Illustrations and artwork as method of visual narratives and self expression was used in the research. It was also used as a means to recreate material cultures that were impossible to reach by means of photograph. Oral histories from the field and community history were used as references for the illustrations. Secondary sources were consulted. Various archival documentation done by the colonial administrators, anthropologists and scholars who worked on material culture of the Lepchas were looked into. Local, national and international museums were referred both physically

and virtually for objects, things and any archival documents. Community Museums with Lepcha material culture were also located and consulted during the entirety of this research.

Organization of Thesis

The first chapter introduces the topic with the general background of the study area. It tries to introduce the research with theoretical backgrounds, objective of the study and also the review of literature. Besides this it introduces the study area, materials and methods used to achieve the desired objectives. The chapter also highlights the data collection methods and techniques. The introductory chapter thus generalizes the concepts and ways to fit the concepts and techniques to carry out the research.

The second chapter provides a background of the physical and cultural settings of all three field areas along with the demography. It highlights the natural settings of the Lepcha community in relation to different environmental and cultural adaptability. Second chapter also dwells upon the cultural histories of the field areas based on the Lepcha oral traditions.

The third chapter dives into the Lepcha architecture and stone structures with classifications and categorizations of the megalithic culture, stone tools, administrative structures and traditional housing structures. This chapter tries to understand and Lepcha architecture in light of their environmental settings and the various trajectorial evolution of the community with time.

Chapter four tries to analyse the Lepcha traditional attire and adornments. It looks into the evolution of the Lepcha traditional attire as it molds into various fashion statements, personal expressions and as a form of identity in the present date. The chapter also gives a detailed classification of Lepcha attires, jewelry and

accessories. It touches upon the concepts of amalgamation and assimilations within the entirety of the Lepcha traditional attire.

Chapter five categorises, analyses and describes all traditional material artefacts used by the Lepchas in all three field areas. It looks into the relationship between the materials and the community and how the multi-layered meanings ascribed by the Lepchas to different artefacts. The chapter tries to understand the usage and evolution of these artefacts within the Lepcha world.

Finally a summary and conclusion of the study along with the limitation of the exercise has been included in the last chapter. It concludes by giving a summary of the main arguments and insights on the material culture of the Lepchas.

Chapter 2

Land and People

The Lepchas:

“The Lepchas or *Mutanchi Rongkup Rumkup* as they call themselves are the indigenous people who have been residing the valleys of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills for a long time” (Lepcha and Torri 2016:147). “The Lepchas are the original inhabitant of Sikkim and prominent character in Darjeeling” (Hooker 1984: 47). Lepchas call themselves *Mutanchi Rongkup Rumkup* which means beloved children of Mother Nature or children of the *Rong* and of God *Rumkup*, *Rum* here meaning God and *kup* comes from the Lepcha word *aakup* meaning child or children.

Today they are known as the Lepchas. 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, as the *Rongkups* have adapted Lepcha as their last names.

According to Stocks (1975) which he quotes from the *Imperial Gazetteer* describes the Lepchas being “members of the Mongolian race, while certain peculiarities of language and religion render it probable that the tribe is a very ancient colony from southern Tibet” (*ibid* 1975:7). Gorer gave comparable suggestions where he states “various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain

similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialect spoken in Indo-China” (Gorer, 1987:35) though it is a known fact that the Lepchas themselves have no record of migration in their oral histories. 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 Chyu* (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. Nevertheless 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*. According to the oral history, formally there were ten divisions of the Lepcha clans claiming decent from the children of *Fudongthing* and *Nazaongnyoo* known as the *Rong Kati* meaning ‘ten Lepchas’. With the passage of time newer clans started to branch out from this old lineage roots, currently over hundred clans can be found in the community.

If we look into the history of the community, initially the Lepchas were hunting and gathering society often indulging in scavenging and small subsistence farming, “they are agriculturists and hunters” (Gorer, 1987:36). Highly skilled in laying traps for hunting some of which are on display at the ‘Sonam Tshering Lepcha Museum’ in Bom Busty Kalimpong. The Lepchas are also highly skilled in foraging, wild roots and plants were their staple until horticulture and settled agriculture were introduced in the community. Their skills were acknowledged by Hooker on his journey to Sikkim the famous portrait of him painted by Frank Stone which quotes “An 1854 illustration showing Hooker with his Lepcha collectors in Sikkim” is

publicly available on the internet (<http://muscicapa.blogspot.com>). This was one of the ways the Lepchas were introduced to the world, they were often hired as collectors by various botanists, lepidopterologist fondly hired the Lepchas who would collect plants and butterflies for their research works. Shyamal (2016) gives a list of the various Lepcha collectors who had major role in some celebrated research works of the colonial period. Later this led to more interest on the community itself and attracted further researches on the Lepchas.

Mayel Lyang: The Lepcha oral history speaks of a territory which the community calls *Mayel Lyang* meaning “the land of hidden paradise or delightful region or abode” (Roy 2012: 17). The Lepchas recognize this as the abode of their ancestors. Comprising of now Sikkim, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, “their land extended from the Himalayas down to Titaliya in the vast plains of India[...] in the east, it was extended up to Gopmochi Mountain, the tri-junction of Sikkim Bhutan and Tibet (now Chinese Tibet) and to the west it was extended as far as the Arun river, now in Nepal....” (Tamsang, 1983: 1). The areas mentioned can be conceptualized as the areas where the Lepchas were actively travelling and limited their activities. With similarities of some materials in the given area it can be positively said that the Lepchas have had cultural contact with the communities under this geographical zone and a converse cultural diffusions can be observed especially in the tangible culture of the community.

Today *Mayel Lyang* is an idea of a state of the Lepchas a constant belonging and connection to their ancestral land. It is as important to the community as any physical boundary and is still remembered in oral histories, stories, poems, songs and

prayers. It has come to be known as *Nye Mayel Lyang* the *Ney* a borrowed Tibetan word meaning holy or sacred, as it is considered to be a sacred land of the Lepchas.

Family: Lepcha families are organized by clan which they call as *Ageet* or *Putsho*, and are mostly nuclear. However joint or extended families can also be found in the community. “Originally and normally we derive and acquire our clan names from the village or locality where our ancestors had originally lived- such as *Sadam-moo*, *Namchu-moo*, *Kalhet-ram-moo*, etc. the first part being the name of the village or locality and the second part *moo* meaning dweller of” (Foning 1987:5). This is indeed true but additional to this the Lepcha also used to derive their clan from the occupation they performed for example *Bree-moo* got their name as they used to braid the bow string during wars, *Luksom-moo* comes from the word *Alut* meaning the heart and *som* meaning to feel or check, they get their title from the legend where the Lepchas successfully kill the demon king *Laso Mung Pano*¹ and the first to check if he was truly dead were the *Luksom-moo* who checked his if his heart was beating or not.

¹According to Lepcha folklore as *Nuzongnyoo* and *Fudong thing* met and fell in love they had children but as they had defied *Itbu debu Rum* who had strictly ordered them to never meet each other they abandoned their first eight children in the forest. Unable to abandon their children anymore *Nuzongnyoo* and *Fudongthing* were ready to accept any punishment they would receive from *Itbu debu Rum* so they decided to keep their remaining children who became the *Rongkups*. However the abandoned children survived and became *mung* (demons) led by the eldest abandoned son *Laso Mung Pano*. He and his demon siblings reeked havoc for the humans as they killed and plundered villages. The *Rongkups* prayed to *Rum* for help and *Rum* answered them by sending *Tamsangthing* a champion who helped the *Rongs* defeat *Laso Mung Pano*. The battle went on for several years and ultimately *Laso Mung Pano* was defeated as he lay on the ground unmoved the *Rongkups* were unsure of his death. A brave *Rong* approached the body to check the heart beat and reported the others that the demon king was dead. Some decided to blind him, so in case he resurrects he will not be able to see them. Some cut up his body into pieces. Fearing his powers would join his body and bring him back to life some *Rongs* minced his body further and scattered them in different parts of the land. From this event the *Rongkups* received their clans: the *rongs* who prayed to *Itbu debu Rum* were names *Munlaom-moo*, those who prepared the weapon would receive the title *Karvo-moo*, those who served *Tamsangthing* were called *Aden-moo*, the *Rongs* who help construct bridges and roads and strings for bows were given the title *Bri-moo*, the *Rong* who check the heart of *Laso Mung Pano* was given the title *Lutsaom-moo*, the ones who blinded him were named *Simik-moo*, the *Rongs* who cut him to pieces were known as *Sungngoot-moo* and the ones who minced him were called *Sungdyang-moo*.

The Lepchas are known to follow parallel lineage system where the son follows the lineage of their father and the daughter follows the lineage of their mother. But with time the practice have been abandoned and more and more lean towards the Patrilineal system. The Lepchas in Sikkim follow patrilineal system where the children take the lineage of their father. Where as in Kalimpong and Darjeeling the Lepchas are found to follow the bilateral system of lineage. The recent revival of this system can be seen as community leaders specifying on women using their mother's clan. Dorjee T. Lepcha, President Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), Kalimpong on the 287th Pano Gaeboo Achyok Birth Anniversary, 2018 urging the Lepchas using their "clan name alongside the Tribe title, father's clan for the sons and mother's clan for the daughters" in his speech.

Each clan has their own *chyu* mountain peak and *Dha* lake which they worship and have to remember as according to the Lepchas this will be their final resting place. For example for *Song-moo* their clan peak is *Kongchen Konglho chyu* and *Kanglha Kunghool Dha* as their lake, for *Mongmoo Putshomoo* they have *Kasor Kongchen Chyu* as their clan *chyu* and *Naphong Payar Dha* as their clan lake. The Lepchas also have two mountain pass or what they call as *lep*; *Shyom Marko Lep* for the male and *Chehem Marko Lep* for the females.

Marriage: The Lepchas follow clan exogamy and tribe endogamy. The Lepchas do emphasize greatly on tribe endogamy, however there are many cases of inter-community marriages. The Lepcha word for marriage is *bree* meaning to braid. As two ropes/strings braid and become stronger the Lepcha marriage symbolizes the same. In rare cases of clan endogamy the Lepchas prefer to skip seven generations on the patrilineal side and five on the matrilineal side. Often the bride is bestowed a new

clan as to avoid the endogamous nature. This is also one of the reasons the Lepchas have divided into various new clans.

Language: The Lepcha language, is known as *Rongring* derived from the two Lepcha words *Rong* meaning ‘Lepcha’ and *aring* meaning ‘spoken words/ language’. It is classified under the Tibeto-Burman language group and is spoken in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling districts in West Bengal in India, in Ilam district in Nepal, and in a few villages in south-western Bhutan. The Lepchas also have their own script known as *Rong Chyoming* but the origin of the script is still debatable among many scholars inside and outside of the community. “The Lepcha alphabets was invented at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century by king Chador Namgyal of Sikkim. According to Albert Grunwedel the Lepchas alphabet is derived from a form of Tibetan U-med alphabet” (Gorer, 1987:38). Which Gorer cancels out in his footnotes (Gorer, 1987:38 footnotes). However the Lepchas believe their script is much older.

Introduction of Lepcha language in schools of Sikkim has greatly supported the use of the language, where as there are few schools in Darjeeling and Kalimpong which introduces the language until quite recently so the Lepcha speaking population in these two regions is quite low especially among the younger generations. The Lepchas have more inclined towards Nepali and English which are more common languages spoken in these parts of hills.

Religion: Due to their close connection with nature the Lepchas are nature worshippers and have their own animistic believes. “The indigenous religion, very deeply rooted in the environment, centered on the physical feature of the land (sacred mountains, lakes, etc.)” (Lepcha and Torri 2016:148). Many scholars who have come

to research on the community have termed their animistic practices after the ritual specialists as *Munism* and *Bongthingism* as the Lepchas themselves do not have a specific name for their religious affiliations.

As the nomenclature suggests the fundamental religious roles in Lepcha community are traditionally occupied by the priestess or *mun* and the priest or *bongthing*. The *bongthing* is traditionally a male shaman and priest who preside at recurring religious ceremonies and seasonal festivals. He also heals illness. The *mun*, initially a female shaman, is a mediator between the spiritual world and the human world, 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 adopted the role of a *mun*. In the eighteenth century, the Lepcha people were converted to Buddhism, but simultaneously the indigenous Lepcha shamanism has 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. These practices which Siiger describes “closely connected with old Central Asian Shamanism” (Siiger, 1956:45), though this is still a contested theory. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant number of Lepcha people have further converted to Christianity.

The major traditional ceremonies celebrated by the Lepcha community presently are as follows:

Chyu Rum Faat: The Lepcha society being deeply rooted in nature, mountains occupy one of the central positions as the place of their origin and the final resting place the Lepchas regard mountains with utmost respect. *Chyu* in Lepcha means ‘mountain or peak’ *Rum* meaning ‘God or deity’ and *Faat* ‘to worship’. It is one of the major annual ceremonies to commemorate the Mountains both at a clan and at a community level.

Mukzikding Rum Faat: *Mukzikding* or *Muk zik Rum Faat* is celebrated for the fertility of the land. *Muk* means greenery here applied to the flora and *zik* meaning to sprout, this is especially performed asking the deities for the flora to flourish and to have bountiful harvest.

Lyang Rum Faat: It is celebrated for the prosperity of the land, *Lyang* in Lepcha means ‘Land’. The Lepchas perform this at a community level as well as can be independently celebrated by each village praying for the prosperity of their village. In often cases it is mainly performed asking for protection against evil spirits, diseases and misfortunes.

Lee Rum Faat: Observed at a family level it is to commemorate the house deity or the *Lee Rum Lee* here means house and *Rum* meaning deity asking for protection and prosperity of the family members and family lands.

Tendong Lho Rum Faat: Another major ritual festival celebrated at a community level is *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* especially by the Lepchas of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. *Tendong* is a hill situated in South Sikkim and according to oral history it saved the Lepchas in times of a great deluge and thus the Lepchas commemorate the hill till date on 8th August every year.

Political System: Next to their independent religious system the Lepcha society have their own governance system alongside the country's political structure. Initially the Lepchas were believed to be ruled by *pano* or kings, there is an ongoing debate on whether the Lepchas had chieftainship or kingship. D.C Roy has traced about all the leaders in his work *Prominent Personalities among the Lepchas* (2014) including *panos* who once rules the community. He also mentions the last Lepcha King Pano Gaebboo Achyok to the hereditary Mandal system which is also mentioned by Gorer (1987). 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.

Alongside the three tiered system the Lepchas follow the Panchayat system in the villages. Additionally there are various non government associations such as the Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum in Sikkim (RMRT), Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) in Kalimpong and Darjeeling Lepcha Youths (DLY) in Darjeeling. These look after the requirements of the community in the fields of educational assistance, village developments, indulging young minds with the cultural heritage, protection of rights, etc.

Fieldwork for this course of research was carried on two different villages of Sikkim Gangyap in the West district and Tingvong in the North district. However there have been various encounters in other Lepcha villages along the way. Yang Gairi Gaon, Suruk in Kalimpong and in Dhajea, in Darjeeling. All the villages will be discussed in detail further in the chapter.

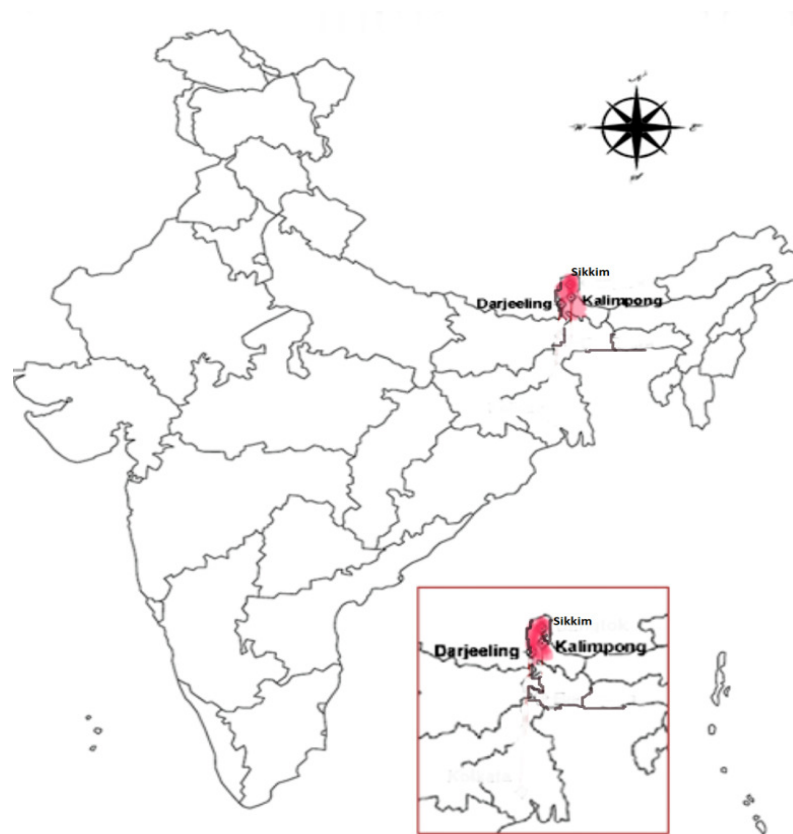


Fig 2.1 Map of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling

Lepchas of Sikkim

The Lepchas call Sikkim *Renjyong Lyang* which according to Tamsang (1998) means a place where the noble men reside (Tamsang 1998 (1982)). The terminology *Renzyong* comes from the two Lepcha word *Ren* meaning noble man/men, *zyong* meaning to sit or in this case to reside and *lyang* meaning land. Late Rong Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha stated that the name originated since the last Lepcha *panos* of Sikkim *Turvey pano* and *Tursang pano* in their end of days handed over their land to the spiritual leader *Thikung Tek* to be looked after hence the word *zyong* here also means to hand over. However Sikkim was placed into the world map much later as “References regarding Sikkim do not appear earlier than roughly 150 years ago [...] Sikkim was known to early European travelers such as Horace della Penna and

Samunel van de Putte, under the name Bramashon, while Bogle called it Demojong” (Stocks, 1975:2)

Various scholars who worked on the Lepchas extensively focused on Dzongu in North District known as the “Lepcha reserve” where “the he (Maharaja) has made a law that only pure blooded Lepchas may become landowners” (Gorer 1987:37). “Dzongu used to be the private property of the queen who wanted only Lepchas to reside in the area. The King fulfilled her wishes with a royal proclamation” (Sikkim Code Vol III: 38), “Dzongu is a name given by the Bhutias and its literal meaning is ‘nine districts’” (Gowloog 1955: 26). Though Gorer calls it an “artificial survival” (Gorer 1987:37), it was and is still considered a safe haven for the community. The Lepchas population is scattered all over the four districts of Sikkim (now five as of 2021 Pakyong was declared as the fifth district of Sikkim) with the majority concentrated in Dzongu, North Sikkim. Dzongu has long been under the microscope of various colonial and post colonial researchers.

The Lepchas of Sikkim are predominantly Buddhist with a few following later religions such as Christianity and rarely other religions . “The creation of the kingdom of Sikkim in 1642 brought the area under the influence of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which soon became enmeshed with the Lepchas’ indigenous religious practices and beliefs, i.e. *munism* or *bóngthingism*. The existence of polycentric religious systems of this kind was, and still is, very common in the Himalayas” (Lepcha and Torri 2016: 147). Herein we look into the two villages of Sikkim taken for the research in more light; one is Gangyap in West district of Sikkim and Tingvong in Dzongu, North Sikkim (fig 2.2).



Fig 2.2 Map of Sikkim

Gangyap: Hills Beyond the Hills

Since North Sikkim has been much popular among numerous scholars, this research aims at inclusion of Lepcha villages outside Dzongu. The first village chosen for the research was Gangyap from West Sikkim due to its homogenous demographic nature. Gangyap is situated between Tashiding and Yuksom and is around 110 kilometers from the capital of Gangtok. The journey took around five hours in three different service vehicles, the first from Gangtok to Jorethang, second from Jorethang to Tashiding, finally from Tashiding to Gangyap. The village can be accessed through another route via Singtam which is a much shorter route. A semi-pucca road diverges from a well constructed one that leads to Yuksom. This one was full of ditches, the top layer of tar and pebbles worn off from places too many to count. Construction groups clearing off heaps of red mud that has gathered from cutting into the hill to open up a wider road to the village. It had rained the previous day and the road was beyond recognition, with paste of mud and water. As vehicles tried to get through the muddy mess the messier it became.

The village of Gangyap looks like an old oil paintings of hilly terrains resounding with its name which means ‘hills beyond the hills’, the village is situated one hour uphill from Tashiding, with magestic snow clad mountains seen at its crown. Most days the mountains are shrouded in clouds but at night especially during fullmoon nights Mt. Narshim, (fig 2.3) is revealed in its full glory.



Fig 2.3: Mt. Narshim

According to the people of Gangyap these mountains were once humans or human in form. They were six brothers and one sister. One day all of the brothers went off for hunting leaving their sister at home. However they did not return home that night, days passed by and many nights were gone still there was no sign of them. Then one day suddenly they came home to meet their only sister. Upon asking where they were for so many days they narrated that they were kept by the forest diety. They also informed their sister that the forest diety had asked them to be back and that they had to go, never to return back to their home. But before going they requested their sister that after they were gone she must arrange for an annual ceremony in the name of all of her brothers. This ceremony had to be conducted yearly so the people of the

village still continue this ritual in the form of *Chyu Rum Faat*. Worshiping the mountains as guardians of the place.

The Lepchas of Gangyap, practice subsistence farming, their annual crop cycle includes maize, buck wheat, wheat, millet, mustard in the spring. Wet rice cultivation could be noticed in the lower parts of the village. Seasonal vegetables and wild edibles form a staple dietary pattern. The Lepchas often practice slash and burn on smaller scale to cleared off with fire for plantation during spring. Through the duration of the fieldwork the black parched soil and tree stumps now almost hidden with white buck wheat blooming in the sunlight, one more month and it would be ready for harvest.

The village is governed by Panchyat system, the panchayat head chosen from the most influential family or via collective dicission for a suitable candidate which usually are members from influencial families.

Religion

Gangyap is a Buddhist village with the Lepchas practicing the tradional nature worshipping practices along side the dominant religion. Silnon Gombu (*Gombu* is the Lepcha version of Gumpa or Monastery) the village monastery is situated one and half hour away on foot through a forest trail, a narrow off beat road which can be considered as a well constructed road from its era. Well arranged flat stones put together to form a pathway between a bollavarch of tall pine trees. It can also be accessed by a wider kaccha road that goes straight to the monastery. As we neared the monastery the offbeat pathway again meets up with the kaccha road that leads to Silnon Gombu (fig 2.4). A huge Chorten sits at the entrance of the monestary with stones similar to *longtsoak* on top of it, erected upright in a coloum. Flat stones placed

at the walls of the chorten with verses engraved on them in Tibetan scripts and Buddhist dieties engraved excentricly. The monastery also has a monastic school, allotted by the state government for monks to train there from an early age.

As Silnon Gombu gets closer, the path gets narrow, flat stones engraved with scriptures and mantras lays allined parallel to the path. A small gazibo structure holds within it a menhir with engravings, a memorial for a deceased renowned *yukmun* (monk) of the monastery. *A Step Away from Paradise* by Thomas K. Shor mentions this monastery as he introduces Guru Tulshuk Lingpa, an extraordinary monk who travelled from Tibet to Sikkim to open the gates of ‘Beyul Demazong’ or what famously believed to be the eternal paradise. Below the monastery a shrine sits in the middle of a flight of stairs diverged into two going around the shrine. It was here preserved in as small shrine Guru Tulshuk Lingpa’s footprint on the stone which Shor mentions in his chapter ‘The Miracle’ (Shor 2011:176). It would have been a redemption for all the people who decided to follow him to Sikkim in hopes of going to Beyul. As he travelled to Sikkim, the then monarch and officials of the state asked him to prove his divinity and as a result he left an imprint of his left foot on a stone in front of a huge audience. The footprint exists till date serving as an evidence of events that occurred in the past. Unfortunately, Guru Tulshuk Lingpa’s expedition was laid waste to an avalanche.



Fig 2.4: Silnon Gombu, Gangyap

Bum kor

Gangyap being a Buddhist dominated village the village follows all Buddhist festivals. One of the most important and grand event to be celebrated in the village is *Bum Kor*. The terminology '*Bum Kor*' come from the two words *bum* meaning house and *kor* meaning to visit. The event is a part of the 'Buddha Purnima' celebrating the birth of Lord Buddha.

On this annual event of 'Buddha Purnima' in the village, one household takes the responsibility as host for the event. Arranging lunch and refreshments for the participants who participate in this religious ceremony as well as those coming as guests from nearby villages. Each household take turns as hosts every year. The preparations starts weeks ahead of the ceremony with each household collecting funds. Women gather to prepare *khapze* (deep fried traditional decorated biscuit), *ziro* (fried snacks made of rice flour shaped as a flat round bread) and other edibles the men collect firewoods and help pound the rice. After everything is prepared the

snacks are neatly arranged in bamboo baskets and carried to the house hosting the event for the year.

On the day of the event all villagers came together, volunteers take the holy documents or the ‘Pustak’ or *Chyo* as called by the Lepchas and make rounds of the village in order to bless the village. The volunteer carrying the holy books are accompanied by *Yukmuns* (fig 2.8). The sound of *songtangar* (drums), bells, cymbals, trumpets and verses of the tibetian mantras echoes within the village. As the holy books go round the village people stand on the way to receive blessings, touching the books and bowing their heads before the holy texts.



Fig 2.8 Monks and Volunteers circumambulating with the holy texts

As the program proceeds people pour in from all corners of the village. Special guests from outside the village are also invited for the event. Most women were in ‘Bakhu’ (traditional attire of the Bhutias) and casual cloths, only a handful in *dumdem*. On the other hand the men were in Lepcha half coats and *kado* (shirt that is worn under traditional attire *dumpra*). Both traditional and non-traditional cuisines were served. *Sarong bi* (nettle), *khuri khu* (buck wheat breads), *Zo* (rice), home grown local vegetables, *chi* (traditional alcohol), beer and Red Bull energy drinks for those who did not take alcohol.

Pintuk Thick

One of the interesting findings in Gangyap was an altar. The altar was a huge ‘Y’ shaped branch a rope drawn horizontal in the middle from which numerous wooden carved phalluses hung along with offerings (fig. 10 and fig.11). It was carved to give a rough shape of the male genitalia and some carved carefully, and more defined. The lower part of the ‘Y’ had two strips and a rhombus shape carved into it. By the looks of it, it’s not wrong to guess that it represented the vagina. According to the people in the village the ritual takes place annually and is known as *Pintuk Thick*. It is observed during spring. Each household contributes fifty rupees for this ritual. *Hiktee* (Eggs), *chi*, the first harvest of the season, fruits and crops are offered at the altar. This ritual started in earlier days when there was a huge epidemic. People used to die from vomiting blood or due to excessive blood flow with their excreta, in local term it is known as ‘masi’ and *Vee-laot-du/ luk maa* in Lepcha. The ceremony of *Pituk Thick* came into practice due to the need of the people during a certain time that was caused by environmental factors.



Fig 2.10 and Fig 2.11: Altar prepared for Pituk Thick

The first hypothesis after seeing the altar, was pointing towards the worship of fertility. But the true meaning behind it is something a little more different than what

meets the eye. After the village started observing this ritual every year, it is believed that the epidemic receded and it has not affected any of the village members as they continue to observe *Pituk Thick*. Similar to the phallus paintings and monuments of Bhutan, which is believed to be a representation of “maverick Tibetan saint, or lama called Drukpa Kunley” (Lyer 2018). Parallel to what Richardson (1972 :27) wrote “phallic symbols are by no means an obstructive feature, in the Tibetan scene.[....] part of ancient geomantic practices, influenced perhaps by those of China.” but the stories related to each is totally different and has their own unique essence.

It is significant to see how people of a culture residing in different areas have different factors influencing them. And how it leads to the rise of different features that make up some variations within the culture itself. As in case of *Pintuk Thick*, it is not seen among the Lepchas of other districts of Sikkim, or in Kalimpong or Darjeeling. It is the same as how some practises cease to exist with time and new aspects are born and borrowed. It was the need of the people of Gangyap at a given time, so it emerged and has stayed with them and will continue to be a part of their culture for many years to come until there is the need for another aspect adding as part of their culture and society.

Education

Gangyap has two ICDS providing elementary education to children both for upper and lower Gangyap respectively. The ICDS was situated at the end of the village. A small two roomed structure, one for the children and one used as a storage and kitchen. The roof had fallen on the inside creating a huge hole. A pool of water stood stagnant at the room just below the hole. This was where the children would come and

study. According to the ICDS worker many requests had been made for the repair but due to lack of funding the renovation has been delayed.

The village also has Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS), (fig 2.13) which is a model boarding school under the government of Sikkim, almost all children from the village and neighbouring villages go to this new model school. There is also a Government Primary School located at lower Gangyap (fig 2.14) and other neighbouring schools with less students at the time of this research. There were only three students in the school and recently the school is scheduled to be closed as there are no more students.

Health Care

The village has a health center, which is regularly visited by the people for supply of iron tablets, and primary treatment of minor illnesses. A nurse is appointed by the state government, usually from Gangtok. For major treatments people are referred to Tashiding hospital and further to Gangtok and Siliguri. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers constantly looking after the women and children of the village. They go on constant visits to houses with newborn babies to check on the health of the mother and the infant. They also play a major role in maintaining family planning and maternal health. Once a baby is born ASHA workers visit the mother and child frequently. They also encourage the mothers to take temporary family planning measures, Copper T being the most common measure. The health system in the village was functioning smoothly with lot of mother bring their new borns for check up.



Fig 2.13: Eklavya Model Residential School



Fig 2.14: Government Primary School

Tashiding Gombu

Tashiding Gombu (fig 2.15), is situated in Tasiding, around it stands a compilation of buildings all part of the monastery itself. Just behind the *gombu* lies an array of stupas (fig 2.17), facing opposite to the stupas hangs a newly installed huge bell with mantras engraved all over it. Three strikes of it is considered auspicious. Below the area of stupas there is a huge collection of stones with engraving and carvings of buddhist dieties set in a retangular area. Cairns accumulated through years by faithfuls, menhirs erected at places, painted in red and yellow can be seen at various intervals.



Fig 2.15: Tashiding Gombu

When one crosses the collection of stupas a huge stone sits at the end of the path. This is the very stone the monastery obtains its name from, the Tibetan words, Drakar Tashiding. Drakar meaning ‘White Rock’ and Tashiding meaning ‘Auspicious Centre’ interpreting to White Rock of the Auspicious Center in Tibetan. This is the very stone believed to be the famous opening to Beyoul Demazong. The rock has a small square shaped cavity (fig 2.18) which is believed to be the door way to Beyul in Sikkim. According to the belief there was a stone inside this cavity which only a person with the purest of heart could take out. A tempting story to atleast try getting our hands inside the cavity with the most faintest of hopes that one could be the ‘chosen one’ to open the door. We took turns putting our hands inside the cavity to see if anyone of us could get the key. I too got my hands inside the cavity and as many before, failed to pass the test. While at our shot to get the key we were told about an incident in the past where a person had forcefully tried to open the door using a hammer. His attempt was unsuccessful and after a few days the person died a painful death by vomitting excessive blood. Since that incident no one has ever tried to open the doorway forcefully in fear of angering the gods.



Fig 2.17: The key hole to another dimension

Apart from this auspicious stones there are other stones here that are believed to have special abilities. One stone is believed to have the ability to cure back pain. Another stone with a small concaved cavity is believed to cure knee pains if one puts their knees in it. Another stone laid in the areas with the chortens believed to be the head of a snake and the people believe that the body of the snake lies somewhere else. As we ventured further, we came across a cave believed to be a *ney*, a pilgrimage site. Once upon a time, this cave sheltered sages to attain enlightenment. At the entrance is an engraving of a Buddhist diety fashioned in red, green, yellow and blue. Infront of it are auspicious offering of water in seven bowls. A small space for meditation and a small hollow space could be seen blocked by huge boulders no one know how deep this santrum runs. There were many such smaller caves all around the monastery.

“Don’t take food from random houses”, were the frequent warnings in the village in terms of consumption of food. People of the village greatly feared *Nung* a form of food poisoning. It is believed to be given to people who are offered as sacrifices for prosperity. Known as ‘*Kapat*’ in common Nepali term. No one knows what it is, or how it looks like. Nobody knows what illness one acquires after coming in contact with the poison. Just the fact that if one is affected by *nung* if not treated in time it consumes the individual spiritually and ultimately kills them. So we were cautioned and warned abot certain areas of the village to refrain from.

Tingvong: The Plateau

Tingvong in no stanger to both colonial and post colonial scholars. Halfdan Siiger, spend significant time studying the Lepchas of Tingvong which he writes about in his 1967 work *The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People*. Tingvong is located in Upper Dzongu and is about 22 kilometres from the state capital of Gangtok.

Located at upper Dzongu, Tingvong gets its name from the shape of elevated landscape. It resembles almost a plateau shape so the name *Tungvong* which later evolved to *Tingvong*. Tingvong has five wards namely, Tingvong gets its name as the place is raised at a certain elevation. It consists of five wards namely *Tingvong*, *Nung*, *Linko*, *Namprik* and *Kusung*. Out of the five wards *Kasyong* was the furthest, almost two hours of uphill trek from Tingvong ward.

The *Gombu* of the village is situated ten minutes uphill from the Government Secondary School in Tingvong ward. A flight of innumerable stairs were built between a dense flock of pine trees, leading to the monastery. At the entrance was a long old wooden cottage house which serves as a monastic school as well as housing structure for the *yukmuns*. A small path lead to the main *gumbu* building. We came across an old *gombu* (fig 2.19) with faded paints and broken windows. The village was getting ready to renovate the structure at the time of our visit, materials for restoration was already being brought in. The area around it was open, green and serene as prominent in most cases of village *Gombus*.



Fig 2.19: Tingvong Gombu

Ren Tshering Dorjee Lepcha the village *bongthing*, who lives in *Payel* states of a war that broke out in the past. According to the story passed down from generations when Junga Bahadur invaded from Nepal aiming to extend their boundaries around the same time the Butanese were also attacking. In this the Lepchas were compelled to defend their lands. The ancestors from Tingvong used a war strategy where they used a huge *samrang kung* (*Schima wallichii*) as catapult to throw huge boulders at the advancing fleet of enemy. In these remote areas the Lepchas had some advantage as they were familiar with the terrain. The Lepchas were successful in driving away a small troop of the Bhutanese army who had come to attack the villages. According to the story the Lepchas chased the Bhutanese beyond *Rongli* now known as ‘Rangli’ and erected a *longtsoak* there as a marker for their victory. Half of their ancestors settled there and half traveled to Tingvong and settled here.

There are many such stories, and oral histories which not only enrich the culture but also defines the importance of the land community relationships. One of the main feature of the village is the Lingzya Falls situated near the village. According to the people once a hunter came travelling to the area near the village for hunting. After waiting for an extensive period of time he grew thirsty so he came to the falls to drink some water. As he cupped his hands and let the falling water fill his hands he noticed something dark. On further inspection it turned out to be a very long strand of hair. He was mesmerised by this strand of hair so much so that he decided to go upstream to look for the woman who it belonged to. As he thought to himself “this one strand of hair is so mesmerizing, then the person who it belongs to would certainly be beautiful”. He finds a girl taking bath upstreams and found out that she was more beautiful than he had imagined. He fell in love with her on first sight so he

confronted her to marry him to which she agreed and she asked him to meet her parents and get their permission foremost. So she took him to her village. When they learned about what had happened the parents turned to snakes and wrapped themselves around the body of the hunter. Seeing him unfazed by their supernatural form they were impressed, as this was just a test of courage for their whould be *myok* or son-in-law. Many Lepchas are of the belief that this hunter was the great Lepcha sage Thikung Mensalong.

Another version mentions “Legends speak of a time many years ago when a hunter named *Kolokthing* came travelling from the South and reached the Lingzya falls” (Lepcha and Torri 2016:155). And additional story after the task “Having thus passed the test, he was able to marry the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. For the occasion he was asked to bring a pig, *ci* (Lepcha traditional homemade brew), a cockerel and other objects and offerings to be used in rites, which are still inscribed in the rocks of *Kap lingen*. These inscriptions are still found in the caves located behind the Tingvong Secondary School today. Their offspring are believed to be the clan of *Araampuzet Ptso* (interestingly, they do not take the male lineage because nobody knew where *Kolokthing* had come or originated from, and here the lineage is traced in the female line). This is the origin of the *Araamipuzet* clan, the first settlers in the village of Tingvong, Dzongu” (*ibid* 2016:155).

Religion:

Alongside Buddhism Lepchas in Tingvong continue to follow their traditional nature worshipping. One interesting event that takes place in the village is *Pano Rum Faat*. It all started with the first Chogyal of Sikkim who used to give away Yaks to different villages once a year. The yak was used as a sacrifice in a ceremony which came to be

known as the *Pano Rum Faat* in the name of the chogyal. The chogyal was hailed as close to a deity. The meat from the sacrifice used to be distributed within the village. The practice of this ritual has been receded as there are no chogyals who once ruled these lands and to allocate yaks to the villages. This practice seems to be integrated into the culture as part of cultural assimilation. When the first wave of people from Tibet settled in Sikkim the first community they came in contact were the Lepchas and as cultures come in contact there is bound to be interchanges of cultural traits from one to other.

The people of Tingvong follow the tradition of commemorating the mountains in the annual event of *Chyu Rum Faat*. The mountains will forever hold an important place among the Lepchas as according to their belief system the mountains gave them life as *Itbu debu rum* (the creator) created them from the fresh snow of *Kingchumjongbu Chyu* (Mt. Kanchenjunga). The event takes place in many levels. First at a clan level, then at a village level and lastly, at a community level. Dzongu recently has erected *longtsoaks*, a set of three menhirs at Passingdang as representation of the sacred mountains. The whole North District will be celebrating the *Chyu Rum Faat* at this new shrine for many years to come.

Another ritual that Tingvong follows is *Satap Rum Faat* a ritual to minimise the damage caused by hail stones. Sikkim gets its own share of hail storms after the spring season when the newly planted crops start to sprout. The hail can cause a lot of damage to the crops and subsistence farmers like the Lepchas only depend on small amounts of crops and vegetables which can be reduced to dust by just one hail rain. However today the Lepchas have moved to large scale farming and commercial farming for livelihood it becomes all the more important to safeguard their crops. So once a year during spring or exactly during the *Sosa lavo* (winter month) they perform

Satap Rum Faat offering grains and sacrifices to please the land deities that control the weather and pray for no harm to befall their crops.

Different land deities like the *Sugi Rum* (known as Guru Puja in common term to commemorate their teacher) and *Dang Rum* (deity of the lower lands) are also worshipped and evoked by the *bongthing* once a year in ceremonies commemorating them and asking them for their protection. Ren Tshering Dorjee invited us to look at his prayer room. A mixture of both Buddhism and traditional religion was visible. On the far end facing us was the potrait of many buddhist deities and Buddhist scriptures. Right infront of it, adorned by various flowers and crops was his separate alter where he envoked the local deities.

Education:

The village has three schools each at three wards; *Tingvong*, *Namprik*, and *Nung*. The Government Secondary School Tingvong (fig 2.20) was the first to be formally established in 1951 . With each passing year it seems that the number of students are decreasing as many parent opt for schools outside of the village in hopes of better education. The village also has ICDS centers spread across the five wards, Each ward also has it own ASHA incharge who looks after the maternal and child health. During our time of visit the health center of the villgae was out of staff due to lack of trasportation facilities. This was an alarming situation, if anyone would fall ill the chances of getting medical attention or first aid was scarce to none. While traveling in and out of the village many pregnant women travelling out of the village was noticed. This was a precaution against the unavoidable adversity to come, which they already were acquainted with.



Fig 2.20: Government Secondary School, Tingvong

The village also follows the panchayat system “With the introduction of the panchayat system, where the panchayat is an elected head of the village, the headman’s legacy still lived on as the office of the panchayat of Tingvong was the first-born son of the headman” (Lepcha and Torri 2016:157). And as stated prior the position of the panchayat usually goes to the most influential family “Due to his position as headman, the panchayat still holds most of the say in the village. He was also of the opinion that since their family used to have control over the affairs of the village that control should not fall out of their family’s hands.” (*ibid* 2016:157)

Lepchas in Tingvong follow settled agriculture including wet rice cultivation, but wild edibles such as mushrooms and vegetables like various ferns/ fiddle heads, wild seasonal vegetables, fruits, animals and insects are included in their dietary practices. Near autumn when the rice would ripen it was the season to harvest grasshoppers. Frying is the best way to cook these local delicacies “the heads are the most delicious part” *anom* Tshering Kipu our guide would often state.

Mantam

On 13th August 2016, there was a massive landslide due to slope failure in Dzongu near Mantam village in Passindang, which formed an artificial lake in Mantam. This

created a series of problems for people on the “Other side of the river” (Lepcha 2018). Water slowly covering the residential areas, houses near the banks were getting pulled in and people were forced to evacuate their homes and their land. News of rise in water levels at the Mantam Lake travelled fast, all transportation was halted till the rain stopped. The bridge that connected the village with the main road was submerged (fig 2.25). Initially the people would be able to cross the lake on foot. But after a series of relentless downpour the water levels rose dangerously in the artificial lake and had to be cross on life boats (fig 2,24). For a period of time people in Tingvong were dependent on inflatable lifeboat for their supplies and transportation till a huge amount of silt gathered in the water bed which prevented the boat to navigate in the water properly. This left the Lepchas with only one option, to cross an incomplete bridge.



Fig 2.24: The raft used as means of communication



Fig 2.25: Half submerged bridge that once led to Tingvong

Traveling in and out of the villages got challenging and with that the costs of commodities entering the villages rose. There were problems in replenishing the depleting rations. At first there were rafts provided for crossing the river but the rising silt accumulations stopped the rafts from moving in a few days. The people then had to depend on an incomplete bridge being built to cross the river. No bars on either

sides of the bridge for safety, some of the planks were missing leaving a huge gap in between to cross it. The locals had tied bamboos very roughly in places that had the planks missing. These were very slippery, one wrong step could lead to a dangerous fall. There were two cylinders tied to the bridge to prevent the bridge from swinging too much. A long rope running almost to the other end of the bridge this was the only available safety measure. A resident of the village while trying to cross the bridge slipped and fell. Fortunately she survived but with severe lacerations as she had held a rope that broken the impact of the fall. There were around eight pregnant women in the village out of which six had left for Mangan foreseeing the situation. The major concern for the village due to the landslide was the availability of medical facilities. Mainly during monsoon as the water makes it difficult to travel and the sick were unable to avail medical services.

Lepchas of Kalimpong:

Kalimpong is a newly declared district in West Bengal since 2017 “Honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, has officially announced Kalimpong as the 21st district of West Bengal, with effect from 14th February, 2017” (<https://kalimpongdistrict.in>). The name is derived from the Lepcha word, *Kalempung*, an blend of the Lepcha word *Ka* which comes from *Kayu* meaning 'we/us', *lem* comes from *lem* means to play and *pung* for ridge; therefore it means “the ridges where we play” (Foning 1987: 13). In the Lepcha world the Lepchas of Kalimpong call themselves *Damsangmoo*. As per the name of the fort and the region, the Lepchas residing in this region even today are known as *Damsangmoo*. It is said that the fort is named after the grandfather Damsong Pano of the last Lepcha pano of Kalimpong Pano Gaeboo Achyok.

Two Lepcha villages Yag Gairi Gaon in Suruk and Lungsyol were chosen for the research (fig 2.26).



Fig 2.26: Map of Kalimpong

Yang Gairi Gaon, Suruk: The Village in the Valley

The village of Yang Gairi Gaon is situated approximately 83 kilometers away from the main town of Kalimpong. It is a part of the larger GPU of Suruk. For a long period of time there was no road connectivity to the village so the people of the village had to commute via walking. The usual routine would be to ride a bus travelling towards Siliguri and drop at 27th Mile on NH10, and then take the ropeway to cross river Teesta. The ropeway was a single seat with the capacity to hold two to three people with nothing but a single thin iron bar in the front as the only safety feature. It would travel to the far end of Shep Khola. People then had to walk hours on a rough forest route. The journey used to take several hours of trekking. For years, this was the only route to Suruk and neighbouring villages. Then, slowly a kutchra road was sculpted through the hills which went through Lava, Kafer and finally reached Suruk. It took almost five hours through this route. After some more years, another route was

opened through Relli and this shorted the travel time to three hours. Now, with the NHPC Dam on Teesta, from 27th Mile Suruk can be reached within two and half hours. This saves a lot of time for the people and with this accessibility; the village was finally blessed with electricity.

There are three service vehicles to the village usually running around 1 p.m. to Suruk, but as it is often with the vehicles from far off villages, it leaves no passenger behind. And everyone always comes with their own set of works to complete. Some come for medical checkup. Parents come to supply food and vegetables to children who are staying in rents and in hostels. And some to replenish their supplies back home or shops back at the village. Recently the vehicles have started commuting two times a day once at early morning 7 a.m. and the other at around 2 p.m.

Suruk has had electricity only for three years even though it was promised ages ago. Electricity reached the village only in 2016, ten years after all the preparations and promises were made. As roads came, many received employment in 100 Days Employment Scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNAREGA), and the opportunity to earn beyond subsistence farming. People started leaning towards more profitable products and are slowly casting aside the traditional crops and agricultural practices. Cardamom and Tiger Grass are the main produce of the village which is sold to merchants from Siliguri. The Tiger grass is carefully plucked during the harvest season in the winters, and dried for several days, and then sold. Orange was another winter fruit that was grown in abundance in the past but with time they were infected by diseases. The harvest went down and today the productivity is few. And by the time they hit the market competing with the new hybrid varieties of oranges decreases their market value.

The population of Yang Gairi Gaon village is approximately 150 but with many out migrating in search of better opportunities the current population is considerably low. For many years, the village had its own struggles connecting with the outside world and now, with the road being built finally, the dream has become a reality. Many smaller developmental schemes are also being operated within the village like construction of footpaths. But the same road that connected it to the outside world has also taken away much more. The younger generations have all travelled out of the village in search of better education and better employment opportunities. The village is left only with the older generation and children, creating a gap of knowledge as there is no one to pass the knowledge to. The traditional knowledge is held by the older generation, which, by the time people realize will have passed away and since the next generation is not present to grasp the knowledge it will not be transferred. The road also takes away the important plant species that are present in the area. Sometimes ‘pani amala’ or the Himalayan ground gooseberries being taken in huge bundles, sometimes it’s the wild orchids and sometimes its wild yams or plants with medicinal values. These are sold in the market or medicine companies for far greater price than given to the people in the village.

Above the village of Gairi Gaon is a small market, roughly fifty houses clustered to make a small market the locals call ‘Haat Dara’, a name that was given to the place as it used to be a spot for the weekly ‘Haat’ or market in the past. People would come together and sell vegetables that they had grown in their fields; some even foraged from the nearby forest that used to cover nearly 70 percent of the areas around the village. The forest covering has gone down considerably as time passed. Merchants came to sell cloths, utensils and to do business with the locals. Slowly

people started building houses and in no time it became a full-fledged residential area with concrete shops, schools and dispensary nearby.

The village has many seasonal and some perennial water bodies *Simbong Ungkyong*, is one of the seasonal water body which provides the supply of water in the village. Despite its seasonal nature the large amount of water stored by the ravine keeps a constant supply of water. Another water body which sustains the village is *Rongnyot ungkyong* which is a perennial water body. The dam has affected the atmosphere of the village. People in the village state they are facing much colder and severe winds during the winter. People of Yang have also noticed, migratory fishes no longer travel upstream to the tributaries to lay their eggs so there are no more fishes in the streams because of the dam.

Religion:

The noticeable landmark of the village are two hills at the top of the village, one with a large crucifix on it. The Lepchas call them *Hiktee Pandi* (fig 2.27), directly translating to ‘Queen of Chicken eggs’ derived from the Lepcha words *Hik* meaning chicken, *tee* comes from the Lepcha word *Aatee* meaning egg and *Pandi* meaning queen. According to oral history in the past, Lepchas used to perform *lyang rum faat* or the worship of the land deity in the hills by offering eggs annually thus the name was imparted. Later the lands were divided among the Buddhist and Christians converts. Both the religions came to this part around the same time period it seems. The village follows the ‘Kagyupa’ or the yellow hat sect of Buddhism.



Fig 2.27: *Hiktee Pandi* on the Left and *Cruss (Cross) Dara* on the right Fig 2.28: The *Suruk Monastery*

The first *Gombu* of the village was built in 1890 (fig 2.28), now headed by Ren, Dursing Lepcha. Later a second *gombu* was built in the lower part of the village in 1920 now headed by Ren, Ong Tshering Lepcha. The second *gombu* is a part of Ren Ong Tshering's house itself.

Christianity extended to this village around the same time as Buddhism, the first church, *Suruk St. Maurice Church* (fig 2.29) that was first built in the 1800's as well. Presently there is an additional convent for nuns and a cottage for the priests locally called 'Father's Kothi'. Alongside the two major religions the Buddhist Lepchas continues to practice their traditional animist religion. The present *bongthing* of the village is Ren Lawa Tshering Lepcha who succeeded his father's position after his father's demise. Born into a large family with four brothers and a sister he was the only one inheriting his father's gifts. He used to accompany his father as his assistance and had learned everything from him. As adolescence hit he used to feel the urge of something calling out to him that was beyond his understanding. He took this as a sign to become a *bongthing*.



Fig 2.29: St. Maurice Church

He used to visit the forests and water bodies in search of answers. One incident he sates is when he was meditating deep inside the forest of *Simbong Ungkyong* when he heard whistles. First on his left then on his right ear and this continued for quite some time. This was the first time he made contact with a spiritual entity. Thus he understood his true calling was as a mediator between the human and the spiritual worlds.

Education:

The oldest school in the area is the Suruk Mandodari Higher Secondary School (fig 2.30). Previously situated in ‘Haat Dara’, it was a wooden house, one roomed school. However it was shifted up hills in 1979, above the market area in a more suitable place. The other schools presently operating in the area are St. Maurice Primary School and Suruk Dong Basic Primary School.



Fig 2.30: Mandodari Higher Secondary School

Lungsyol: The Land of Stones

Lungsyol is believed to be the birth place of the last king of the Lepchas Pano Gaeboo Achyok. The *Chyakung gree* (fort) atop the *Chyakung lho* or hill is where the *pano* is believed to be born and raised. The village is situated about 82 km away from the main town of Kalimpong. The name Lungsyol comes from the Lepcha words *Long* meaning rock and *syol* meaning to spread. As the name suggests the place has abundance of rocks. The population being assorted, Tamang, Chettri, Lepcha, Rai are the communities living here. All the communities know all the languages spoken in the area. A Tamang person could speak in Lepcha and the Lepchas speak Tamang language which showed the kinds of exchange, these communities had among themselves.

People in Lungsyol largely depend on agricultural products. Cardamom being their primary cash crop followed by chilli and tiger plant or broom plant. There were other agricultural products also which they sent to Gorubathan the nearest town. Traditional crops like maize, domesticated yams, cucumbers and other vegetables are also grown by the people. Due to demand and necessity people in Lungsyol use their ancestral fields for horticultural purposes growing seasonal vegetables for commercial

purposes. Since Gorubathan and Siliguri are the nearest town and city people have access to medical facility and would prefer to go to the city of Siliguri rather than to travel to Kalimpong.

Electricity was introduced in the village only in 2015, despite all the development going on some parts of the world seems to be developing at a much slower rate due to the issues with availability of resources. In Lungsyol they use generators for electricity and for that they transported kerosene from Siliguri. Only a few houses own this facility as most cannot afford to buy generators. Majority of the population in the village still use oil lamps. The generators provide electricity maximum till an hour or two just enough to charge your mobiles. One of the major problem the village faces is scarcity of drinking water, which had to be drawn from a source far away from the village and distributing it among all the members which made the amount coming to each house very less.

Religion:

Lepchas of Lungsyol believe due to the abundance of rocks they often attract lightning which the People of Lungsyol are terrified of especially the Lepchas. The whole Lepcha community fear lightning immensely. Children, adults and elderly are not permitted to laugh at animals or insects for fear that lightning would strike them, but with time believes fade, now this is not much in practice rather than in villages or people who are bound by the old practices in their family. With the mix demography the people in Lungsyol follow Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. The few Lepcha families that follow Buddhism also practice traditional animistic practices, but most have converted to Christianity and shares their church with Dapling and Gidabling Kyong (village). The one thing that is common among all the communities living here

is that they believe and fear Pano Gaeboo Achyok. They see him as a deity who when displeased unleashes wrath upon the whole village.

People share ritual specialists such as *bongthing* and ‘jhakri’ (Nepali ritual specialist) especially among the Hindus and the Buddhists. There are not many restrictions regarding religious beliefs and people belonging to different faith are usually seen together during any religious ceremonies between the three religions in the village.

Education: A school named after the last king of the Lepchas, Pano Gaeboo Achyok Lepcha Primary (fig 2.31) was being expanded in the village by Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) and Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA). Another school in the village is, Lungsyol Primary School both these schools also provide Lepcha language as one of their subjects.



Fig 2.31: Pano Gaeboo Achyok School

Lepchas of Darjeeling

Darjeeling is known all over the world for its flavorful tea and to India as the “Queen of Hills” but the Lepchas know Darjeeling as *Darzyulyang* meaning the abode of the Gods (fig 3.32). Continuously shrouded in fog, Darjeeling seemed hidden from the

rest of the world and for those who could get into this misty land would be spellbound by its beauty. Perhaps this was the reason the Lepchas named it as a place befitting the Gods.

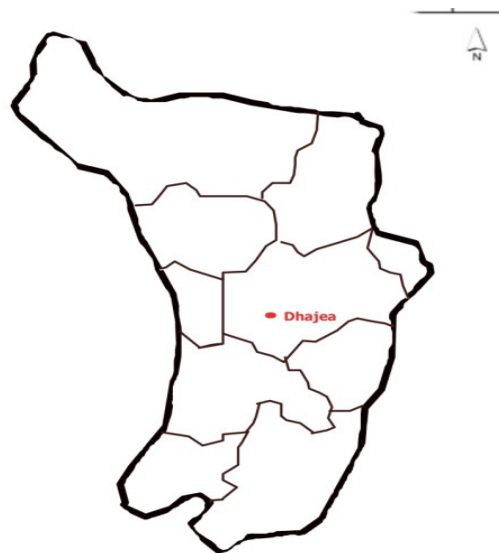


Fig 2.32: Map of Darjeeling

Lepchas are spread across the district often living in heterogeneous environment along with other communities. The Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) Darjeeling Branch is situated at Mall Road, an old British heritage building (fig 2.33) with stone and bricks. The entire interior is lined with woods, ages old. The window panes, mostly broken with no sign of repair a sorry sight made of such a beautiful structure. Along with the MLLDB office the building hosted association offices belonging to various communities in Darjeeling as well. This branch looks after the Lepchas in Darjeeling district under the main MLLDB in Kalimpong.



Fig 2.33: Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) Darjeeling Branch.

With time the town has grown more than its capacity as the clusters of houses began to outgrow the natural resources. One of the main resources that receded was water. Now water is available only on wooden carts in buckets of blue yellow and white to be sold. Many assume that the Lepchas culture of Darjeeling has been diluted on a rapid rate due to cultural contact with a huge influx of communities migrated attracted to the booming tea business it was only natural for continuous contact with neighboring communities. While in certain cases such as in the field of language it can be said that the dilution is higher than the other two regions but constant efforts are being made by the community and the many associations to revive and get back in touch with the traditional roots.

Dhajea: The end of the hills

Dhajea means “the end of the hill” true to its name the village lies at the boarder, marking the end of Darjeelng and lies a vast stretch of flat land. From here onwards Darjeeling shares its boarders with Mirik and Siliguri, sperated only by *Bula-chen* river, believed to be the daughter of the two famouse rivers *Rongnyoo* and *Rangeet*. The road conectivity till Sukhiya bazar is fairly smooth but as the roads leading to Dhajea from there on is a semi kaccha road, highly eroded at intervals. The

construction of these roads continues as each year the monsoon takes its toll on them. There is a constant contact with wildlife as the road runs through a dense corniferous vegetation. Yellow Throated Marters, wild peasants, deers and foxes can be commonly sighted crossing the highway.

The village of Dhajea is relatively warmer compared to Darjeeling as it is situated at a lower altitude. After crossing the Chamong Group of Garden under the Nagri Farm Tea Co.Ltd the village comes into view. Tea trees replaced by tall drumstick trees blooming in the suitable warm weather. Ren Buddha Tshering Lepcha the secretary of Sukhia Thom Sezum is one of the influential figure in the village and looks after the needs of the village.

The village is small and sparsely populated and has a mix population. The Lepchas make up majority of the village population. The place is full of stories, at the bottom of Dhajea Busty near the border to Mirik lays *Zey Dum* a treasure box made of stone sealed away which according to the Lepchas carries the treasures from Mayel Lyang, Left there by *Bula Chen* river. The details of which will be discussed in the chapters to come. A little further *Suhu-ji* which today is known as cap dhunga as it looks like nature's cap. The view of *Namsoong Partam* (fig 2.34) was a memorable one. *Namsoong* is the celebration of Lepcha new year and *partam* means a flat land. Kurseong sitting right above it, on the right was Mirik and on the Left was Darjeeling town and in the middle sits a huge plain ground where the Lepchas used to celebrate *Namsoong* (yearly celebration on the advent of new year). Today it is used for picnics and small scale *namsoong* celebration. Though the scale is smaller the effort is still exists and until this continues there is always hope that it continues on to the future.



Fig 2.34: A view of *Namsoong Partam*.

Religion:

Buddhism and Christianity have had a profound effect among the Lepchas of Darjeeling. The Buddhist Lepchas can be seen cohabitating both the Buddhism and traditional practices similar to that of Sikkim and Kalimpong. But it comes with no surprise for them to share their prayer rooms with Hindu deities as well. Despite this there are still families worshipping the mountains on a daily basis when most of the Lepchas have already adopted Buddhism and its deities.

For instance Ren S. M Lepcha has a huge collection *Namthars* or what can be called the Lepcha holy text books. Though the concept and the name as well can be said to be borrowed from Tibetan culture these holy texts are records of oral histories and philosophies of the Lepcha community, some are amalgamations of the Buddhism philosophies. His collection included *Tasey Namthar*, *Karma Ongden Namthar*, *Tangku Namthar*, *Pazuk Namthar*, *Du Namthar* and many copies of revised versions of the same. Their prayer room was designed as the normal Buddhist ‘Chyosum’ or prayer room but devoid of idols of deities rather a large poster of Mount Kanchenjunga, seven bowls of water kept in front of it as offerings. A similar alter at the end of the varena outside facing the direction of the mountains (fig 2.35). Ren S.

M Lepcha explained that this had been the practise of their family as far as he could remember.



Fig 2.35: An altar at ren S. M Lepcha's residence

The Lepchas of Darjeeling follow all the Lepcha annual festivals the newly formed associations such as Darjeeling Lepcha Youth (DLY) makes sure to actively involve youths from various villages in Darjeeling in various festivals such as *Namsoong* (Lepcha annual festival to send-off the old year and welcoming of the new year).

Education and Health Care:

Just as in the case of Kalimpong, Lepchas of Darjeeling have had access to formal Lepcha language courses whereas informal institutes have been providing this facilities. Ren S. M Lepcha., he has offered a part of his house as Lepcha teaching classroom at Gandhi Gram since the problem of finding a space in Darjeeling is very evident. Ren S. M Lepcha lives with his wife and daughter, the second floor of their house had been converted to Athing K.P Tamsang Memorial Night School (fig 2.36). Chairs and tables all funded by him personally. Students of all age groups come to learn at this Lepcha night schools as Ren S.M Lepcha wishes to supporting those willing to learn. His only request now is that the MLLDB Headquarters take his vision

and the visions of many alike his and establish a full fledged Lepcha night schools in his and other Lepcha concertrated villages in Darjeeling.

Dhajea has a government primary school (fig 2.37), for higher education students often go to Sukhiya or furthur to Darjeeling. Many migrate annualy to Darjeeling the same as education in Darjeeling is seen to be superior due to the british influence. Health care facilities on the other hand is quite far from the village as one has to travel to Sukhiya or to Siliguri as it is nearer and provided better facilities.



Fig 2.36: Athing K.P Tamsang Memorial Night School



Fig 2.37: Dhajea Primary School

Conclusion

The introduction of the Rongs or the Lepchas in Darjeeling was no different than that of Sikkim. Originally the colonial scholars and collectors were interested in them as they were exceptionally knowlegeable of their land and of its flora and fauna. This made them popular as guides and the ones who were actulally doing first hand collections of samples for the researchers in addition to this it was cheap labour. It was not until 1951 when the community was enlisted under the Schedule Tribe Commission of India 1951, that the community was officially recognised. And is presently recognised as a Scheduled Tribe in the state of “Sikkim, West Bengal and Tripura” (Roy 2012:18).

On one hand it is considered within the community itself that the Lepchas of Sikkim have had the advantage of preserving their culture and traditions. One of the main reasons was being granted the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu allowing only the homogenous population to thrive there. Another reason was that the new Buddhist state provided conditions where both traditional and new practices could be followed without much obstruction. Though assimilation was unavoidable the absorption was subtle. And due to the strong hold of the Buddhist kingdom Christianity was not initially as impactful as in the case of Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

On the other hand Kalimpong and Darjeeling had much higher intensity of cultural contact. Darjeeling as being a British favorite as a hill station as well as a booming hub for tea industry, more communities from within and outside India migrated to this hill station in search of livelihood so much so that it has overwhelmed the hills beyond its capacities. Due to this constant contact and exchanges among the various communities soon the common form of communication was shifted to Nepali. The Lepchas had to catch up as the competition for livelihood was fierce. This led the community to shed their traditional ways in order to adapt. But this also led to the realization among the Lepchas of the rapid change and thus various Lepcha associations were born out of the need to preserve and revive their culture and practices. Some are of the belief that the Lepcha culture of Darjeeling has been changed and watered down on a rapid rate, there are numerous unnoticed cultural pools that are alive and still working.

Each of the three areas has their own share of influences that affected the Lepcha community in many ways. The only difference being in the intensity of the impacts and rate of change the community went through. For some it was much

slower and for some the change that occurred was hasty. But in all the three areas the process of preservation and revivalism is constant.

Chapter 3

Architecture and Stone Structures

Introduction

Architecture forms an essential part of human culture. From a simple monolith to complex monuments the tangible structures which are the product of cognitive mapping, falls under the umbrella of architecture. Varying from culture to culture, it depends on the environment they live in and the cultural necessities. The first thing humanoids encountered in the environment as they evolved, were the elements of nature the most tangible among them, being stones. Stones have been used as the earliest form of tools. Molded into various physical structures to represent “symbolic” and “social actions” (Stout 2011:49).

The start of Lepcha architecture can be seen initiated from stones. All cultures at one point of time have used these stones in different forms, the Lepchas were no different. The stones were and are still actively being used in building their houses, marking territories, graves and their sacred landscapes. Soon it grew in usage and found its way into their social, political and religious aspects as “sacred symbol” (Lepcha 2019) with “symbolic understanding” (Foning 1989: 43). Stones were always important to the Lepchas, as they represent and hold layers of meanings and symbolism. From boundary markers to marking of auspicious locations and events, they are used in every significant occasion. They are also used to represent deities and *dokhs* (protector/guardian deities) of an area. It has symbolic meaning in a house in the form of *ter* or (treasure). Among the many usages of stones by the Lepchas, the first and foremost use can be seen in the form of “*longtsoak*” which is defined as “stone monument” (Lepcha 2016: 456) and grave stones within their culture pre dating the advent of Buddhism. However, with time the practice of burial system has

been stopped by the Lepchas. As per their conversion to Buddhism, they started cremating their dead. Therein, the use of grave stones was also given up. With Buddhism came several changes, but the usage of stones still continued within the Lepcha culture. Now the stones came in the form of *chorten* (a Tibetan word for a stone monument built for religious purposes or in memory of a deceased pursue in practices in Buddhism) which were erected in the memory of the deceased and for religious purpose. The *chorten* itself is made of stones in a dome shape with an erect stone places atop the monument.

The changes did not just stop with the grave stones it was seen in their megalithic culture and other architectural structures as well. This chapter is going to discuss and try to have a better understanding of these architectural structures starting from the most simple forms that is the “*longtsoak*” (Lepcha 2016: 456) or megaliths to their *dokeymoo lee* or houses and political structures like *grees* or forts.

The *Longtsoak* and Megalithic Culture of the Lepchas

Lepchas have been living in these hills for a long time, and the stone tools are a proof of their habitation. Mullard (2011) provides a series of archaeological findings of many stone tools resembled the Hoabinhian culture of South East Asia, (10,000 to 8,000 B.C.), and also shared similarities to the Suhan and South China cultural assemblage. Stones in the Lepchas society is a key feature, they hold much more significance in their society, as the saying goes in Lepcha “*Amoo long-bong, aaboo kung-bong*” according to the saying the Lepchas, they consider trees as their father and the stones as their mother. Similar megalithic culture can be traced in Meghalaya, among the Khasi where Mitri, 2019 defines it as a “Living Practice” of the tribe (Mitri, 2019: 4). But where the earliest reports of the Khasi Megaliths can be traced

back to 1832 provided by H. Walters the Lepcha Megaliths were just breezed upon and more importance were laid more on the intangible social aspects of the community. The existence of stone structures and the erecting of *Longtsoak* is actively present in the Lepcha tradition. Defined as “an upright monumental stone standing either alone or with others, erected in memory of some important event” (Tamsang 2009: 764). The terminology *longtsoak* comes from the two Lepcha words *Long* meaning ‘stone’ and *tsoak* meaning ‘to plant’ or in this case ‘to erect’.

Longtsoak is used in rituals and during important occasions like marking of auspicious places. In the more recent forms it is also used to represent Kanchenjunga from which the Lepchas believe to have been originated. “This ancient culture practiced even before the Birth of Christ, the Buddha and the coming of Prophet Muhammed is deeply ingrained inside the psyche of the natives of Darjeeling and Sikkim” (Molommu 2018). These materials have been brought to life by the community which lays their belief in them, thus giving it a place and meaning in their culture as Ian Woodward states they “establish social meanings” (2007:134). Thus, making it as what Mitri describes as a “living practice” in itself which creates the needs to study and understand these structures all the more important.

Types of *Longtsoak*:

There are various kinds of *longtsoak* depending on their shapes and also in the number in which they are erected, as mentioned by Tamsang (2009). The *Longtsoak* or megaliths found in Sikkim Kalimpong and Darjeeling can be classified into two classes one based on morphology. The second category is based on their functionality and cultural significance to the community.

1. Based on their Morphology

- i. Menhir
- ii. Cairn

The most popular megaliths used by the Lepchas can be seen in the form of menhirs and cairns. Though there have been mentions of other structures like dolmens, in the Lepcha oral histories, the latter have fallen out of practice.

- 2. Based on their functionality
 - i. Markers
 - Boundary Markers
 - Sacred Markers
 - Grave Markers
 - ii. Ritual stones
 - iii. Monolith and stone seats
 - iv. Foundational stones
 - v. Watch towers

Menhir:

The most popular and the earliest type of megalith in the Lepcha community are the menhirs. They are also what Lepcha (2019: 82) calls “are the most popular megaliths of our imagination” Including the Lepcha culture it can be understood that “these stones, were the first culturally fixed and enduring points in the Landscape” (Tilley 2004:33). These are upright stones often erected singularly also most commonly in groups of twos and threes. Menhirs are regarded as a sign of markings, the reasons behind it varying from either a boundary marker, or a mark of any auspicious even, or even marking for a holy ground, etc. “their character was fundamentally different in terms of materials, mass, permanence and meaning” (*ibid* 2004:33). They can be

found in and around residential areas, near monasteries, in forests, hilltops, etc. most commonly used as markers. As stated earlier these stone structures pre date any religious amalgamation for the Lepchas. Prior to the advent of Buddhism these were used to mark frequently visited areas for example a hill where travellers would often take rest in local terminology known as *lapcho* meaning a resting place, thus acknowledging the place. Or to mark boundaries demarcating one's land.

Though the *longtsoak* existed before Buddhism, the assimilations of these stones into the prevailing religion can be clearly noticed. As the community adapted the religion the merger was inevitable. Most of the Menhirs that were encountered during the course of this research were while visiting Monasteries especially in Sikkim.

If we take a look at the religious landscape of Sikkim, the then kingdom of Sikkim was predominantly a Buddhist empire, after the Chogyals took over. After the advent of Buddhism, Lepchas readily accepted the new religion, and monasteries became an important landmark in villages so Lepchas started erecting menhirs and identifying an area as sacred lands. This can be acknowledged as the functionality of *longtsoak* of identifying sanctified lands, in this case for building monasteries. The menhirs were used as inauguration stones, laid to mark the place for starting a new religious structure. Thus the *longtsoak* quickly merged into the new religious system. However this pattern is not prevalent in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Given the history that the Lepchas of Kalimpong were under the Bhutanese Buddhism sect or the Kagyupa sect, and for a long period of time resisted the absorption.

Coming back to Sikkim section of menhirs, including the use of *longtsoak* as scared markers, these megaliths can also be found at places of residence as territory markers. This section of the chapter lays focus on the longtsoak or the “standing stones” as “monuments of considerable complexity belying their apparent simplicity of forms” (Tilley 2004:35). The Lepchas of Gangyap, West Sikkim (fig 3.1) erected a huge menhir in 2016 as a boundary marker at Silnon monastery. Now this monastery has a very interesting history. If anyone has read the book “A Step Away from Paradise” by Thomas K. Shaor, 2011, this is the very monastery that Tulshuk Lingpa the famous monk from Tibet, travelled here to open the west gate of what the Tibetans and the Bhutias believe to be *Beyul Demazong*. This is the very monastery where the great monk left his footprint upon a rock as to prove his aptitude and powers to the people and the ones who questioned his competence.



Fig, 3.1: Menhir in Silnon Monastery Gangyap,



Fig. 3.2: Menhir in Tashiding Monastery

There are other *longtsoak* in the forms of Menhirs and cairns in and around the *Gombu*, which will be discussed in detail shortly. This eight to ten feet tall *longtsoak* (fig 3.1) in particular sits on the outskirts of the monastery, at the very edge of the

monastery boundary. Though when interviewed the monks as well as the Lepchas of Gangyap, did not seem to know what a *longtsoak* is, they still practice this ritual as part of their religious and cultural integration. Almost triangular in shape, one can easily make out the places where it was rectified, chipped and flaked, giving it a desired shape to the menhir.

The next marker is a marker at Tashiding Monastery (Fig. 3.2), about three feet tall, it sits near the entrance of the Monastery, bound by ceremonial scarf and prayer flags changed each year. The history of when and who placed it has been long forgotten by the people and the ones who exchanged dialogues came up with the *longtsoak* being there since the time the monastery was established. The *longtsoak* is different from the other stones in and around the monastery. As it stands secluded from its other counterparts, which can be found in the huge collection below the monastery, past the array of chortens covered in engravings of Tibetan scripts, imprints of deities carved into them. These are placed in a huge rectangular area for the people to make the usual number of rounds as a sign of respect to the holy engravings. Most of the stones present within the rectangle are decorated with red, yellow and blue color pallet often followed in Buddhism. On the contrary, the solitary *longtsoak* is plain, but hard to overlook as it stands at the entrance of the *Gombu*. Looking at the stones present in the area, belonging to different eras, diverse beliefs, yet all carrying the same intentions. Communicating symbols and projecting a physical embodiment of human beliefs. It is only with time that histories overlap and are merged with one another.



Fig.3.3: Menhir in Pentok Monastery, Mangan

There is another menhir that sits at the centre ground in front of Ringhim Monastery (fig 3.3), near Pentok, Mangan North Sikkim which used to be a center stone where the old monastery once stood. Since the construction of a new monastery building it sits at the ground in front of the main monastery building. The *longtsoak* is offered ceremonial scarf during main Buddhist festivals and important ceremonies and commemorating the old monastery as well in the process.

Another account given by the people of Pentok as they remembered was a story of a different *longtsoak*, according to them there is another *longtsoak* that sits amidst the forest in-between Pentok and Kalaw, Mangan. In the past this *longtsoak* was supposed to be brought to the monastery but due to its sheer size and weight they could not carry it and had to cut a portion of it. The portion was left behind and it still sits in the same place it was left behind. Unfortunately a visit to this *longtsoak* was not possible as it was difficult to get to it during monsoon season during which the field work was conducted in Sikkim.

Menhirs in the Lepcha culture are mostly pre Buddhist structures, and after the advent of Buddhism most sacred lands were occupied by the new religion including the megaliths. Gradually Buddhism merged with the existing animistic believes of the Lepchas. After the amalgamation the erecting of these structures went simultaneously with the practice of the dominant religion in the community in all three field areas.

Within the Lepcha landscape there are many forms of *longtsoak*, the singular erected stones known as menhirs are in many and most cases are erected with the help of supporting stones laid at the base of the menhir. They can also be seen with cairns that are stacked around the menhir forming a group of stones. These are stones that have been placed around a singular or group of menhirs. The number of stones used for *longtsoak* may vary, some are arranged in support of the menhir (fig 3.5), (fig 3.7) and (fig 3.8). While some *longtsoak* are set as additions to the previous existing cairns (fig 3.6). in other cases menhirs appear in groups, the number of the erected stones may fluctuate.

Ren Gaeboo Lepcha, a *bongthing* from 6th mile Kalimpong has a small *longtsoak* accompanied by supporting stones erected near the entrance of their front yard (fig 3.4). It was erected by Ren Gaeboo, to offers prayers to their land and house deities. Most *bongthing* have such *longtsoak* erected acknowledging the land and house deities sometimes even additional deities that they worship.

Another *longtsoak*, which is an integral part of Lepcha folk history was erected at Tendong. Standing almost ten feet tall, the *longtsoak* (fig 3.5) is situated at Tendong Lho or Tendong hill, at the south district of Sikkim. It is considered a very holy place and is visited by many pilgrims annually. The special occasion of *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* commemorates the hill for saving the Lepchas at the time of the great

deluge². Tendong lho holds a very respectful place in the hearts of the Lepchas and are eternally in-depth to the hill. Thus the Lepchas have marked the hill with *longtsoak* as a holy place. The legend of Tendong Lho is known by all in the community; they view the hill as their savior and have garnered deep respects for it.



Fig. 3.4: Megalith at a residential area in Kalimpong. Fig. 3.5: Menhir with cairns at Tendong

Chyakung lho (hill) now known as Chyakung Gree, in Lungsyol Kalimpong houses an important marker in the form of a *longtsoak*. A place where according to the people of Lungsyol once stood a small *gree* (fort/ watch tower). The Lepchas believe it to be the place where Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the last king of the Lepchas was born. The *longtsoak* (fig 3.6), is clearly erected at a later date as an acknowledgement of the *gree*; which once stood there, currently devoured by nature. Upon closer inspection an array of neatly arranged almost circular stacks of stones can be seen covered by the undergrowth of ferns and needle grasses. It can be seen

²According to the Legends, during the great deluge when the two major rivers, *Rongnyoo* and *Rangeet* flooded the whole of *Mayel Lyang* the only place safe from the raging waters was tendong hill. So up climbed all the Lepchas whoever could make it and they prayed to the *Itbu Rum* (the creator) for help. After praying for many days, a partridge bird appeared and offered *chi* (traditional millet alcohol) to calm the spirits, only then the water level lowered and the ones who had climbed the hill were saved.

this was a foundation to a structure which can be deduced to be a house, or if we take the inputs of the people, a small *gree*. The place is considered sacred and no one dares defile the area. An annual commemoration ceremony is held by the Lepchas at the *gree*.



Fig 3.6: Menhir at Chyakung Gree, Kalimpong

Menhir Appearing in Groups

Another form of Megaliths is menhirs arranged in groups. Usually two or three in number but this number can vary as more longtsoak are being erected currently by the Lepchas presently. In case of three menhirs arranged together the stone in the middle is always taller than the ones at the sides this arrangement is popular in many parts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling. They can also be found in pairs. If we look into the functions, these are used as markers as well. Like the menhirs shown in (fig 3.6) and (fig 3.7), are used to mark the inauguration of the bridges built at Suruk, Kalimpong by the MLLDB (Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board) with the aid of the Michael Way Charitable Trust UK, in 2011 and 2012 respectively for the convenience

of the village and the villagers during the harsh monsoon season as the seasonal rivers become harsh to handle.

A *bongthing* presided over the session as the inauguration took place. The *bongthing* performed a ritual, asking the deities for their blessing and protection. Thus, attaching sacred overtone to the stones which then becomes a *longtsoak*.



Fig.3.6 and Fig 3.7: Megalith in Suruk, Kalimpong

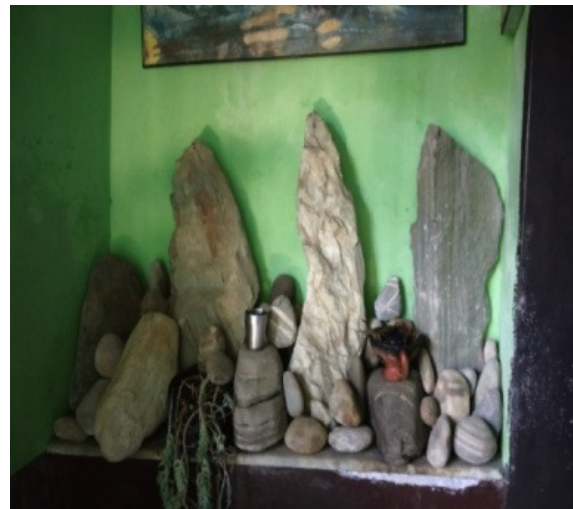


Fig 3.8: marker for a school in Lungsyol, Kalimpong. Fig 3.9: a collection of menhir and cairns in Gangtok.



Fig 3.10: *Longtsoak* from Bong Busty Kalimpong

In the present day *longtsoak* is being used in occasions such as inauguration of schools (fig 3.8), where a set of three menhirs have been used as marker at the Pano Gaeboo Achyok Lepcha Primary School, Lungsyol, Kalimpong. The school was constructed under the supervision of MLLDB in 2013. Out of the three menhirs, the middle one is taller than the ones at its sides. As Lungsyol is believed to be the birth place of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the school was named after the legendary last king. Thus the *longtsoak* that stands in front of the school bears acknowledgement to the name of the king. Likewise the Lepchas also keep these menhirs at their place of residence, these are usually three menhirs aligned together representing *Kongchen chyu* (Mount. Kanchenjunga), also known as *Kingchumzongbu*, the most sacred mountain peak for the Lepchas and believed to be the place of their origin. It is viewed by the Lepchas as what Foning calls the “original big stone” (Foning 1987: 43). According to some Lepchas, they erect the *longtsoak* because people who could not view the sacred peaks from where they resided so the stones served as replicas. These stones would be the physical replicas to which the people would offer prayers and commemorations. Often these stones also represent the clan peaks. As each Lepcha

clan has its own mountain peak and lake as their clan symbol. The *longtsoak* would also represent individual clan totem respective of who has erected them. Thus, a sentimental bond is formed where the community or a clan within the community recognizes the stones as their guardians and representation of their clan.

The *longtsoak* at the house of Mr. N.T Lepcha and Mrs, Chunni Lepcha in Burtuk, Gangtok represents the same sentiments. The *longtsoak* (fig 3.9), was set to represent the sacred peaks of Kanchenjunga, and sits at the entrance of their home. An elevated space is created for the *longtsoak* to sit. Three stones the one in the middle slightly taller than the ones at the sides. Over the time many other stones have found their place in the collection of stones. These collections of stones are either from sacred sites, or holds some significance to the resident of the house.

Another set of *longtsoak* can be found in Lower Bong Busty, it was erected at the inauguration of the newly built Lepcha community multipurpose hall beside the famous 'Sonam Tshering Lepcha Museum' of Kalimpong. The *longtsoak* (fig 3.10) represents the sacred peaks of Kanchenjunga and the ancestors. The *longtsoak* comprises of three erected menhirs, the middle one is about two feet tall and the two at the sides are smaller. This is the perfect example of *longtsoak* popularly seen in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The challenges these megaliths faces today as Foning stated "These big upright stones, or Long Choks, which were obligatory in the long past, as being the replicas of the all-important Kongchen and other Chyu Rums or gods, have now become miniatures" (Foning 1987: 48). "The size of these replica stones has gone down considerably and... a renowned bongthing used stones about half a metre in height. And now, one of his sons, who is a bongthing is satisfied with only small ones. It seems that at this rate, by the turn of the century maybe only

pebbles will serve the purpose; and eventually, the whole thing is sure to fade out” (*Ibid*: 1987). Lepcha testifies to Foning’s statement “It is true that smaller stones are raised in contemporary times and bigger *longtsaoks* are nowhere to find” (Lepcha 2019: 49).

As mentioned prior in this chapter the largest *longtsoak* encountered during the course of this research is from Gangyap. It cannot be said that the magnitude of these stones have gone down completely. Despite the descending size of these megaliths, they are actively in practice by the Lepchas. They can be seen erected during inauguration ceremonies especially of significant public spaces like schools, bridges, community halls etc., they have also been adapted in the private spaces of Lepcha families. More and more Lepcha families can be seen adapting *longtsoak* as part of their tradition and identity. The recent erection of *longtsoak* at Pendam gree, East Sikkim, in 2019, not only acknowledges the place as sanctified grounds but also affirms the place as being the part of the Lepcha landscape. The same year the SLYA (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) also erected *longtsoak* at Pangthang in Sikkim, as part of *Mukzukding Rum Faat* (celebration for prosperity of the land). Similar *longtsoak* can be also found at Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary or otherwise known as Tin Jurey is a famous for its hiking trail running through the wildlife sanctuary, once one gets to the top of the trail, there is a small offbeat secluded place where there can be seen three distinct menhirs erected covered in ceremonial scarves. The place can be seen offered flowers, incenses by the many visitors visiting the place, a small trident can also seen among the many offering as part of individual religious faith. Most menhirs existing in Lepchas culture are permanent and tangible representation of the Lepcha megalithic culture, with a range of functionality depending on the necessity these *longtsoak* culture continues to be practices by the community actively.

Cairns:

Another form of megaliths found among Lepchas are the cairns. They are usually piled up stones which has been described as “a heap of stones or rubbles of smaller but somewhat regular slabs either enclosed within a circle of small or considerable sized boulders” (Marak 2010:43). In case of the Lepchas megaliths, cairns always accompany menhirs or are found in close immediacy to menhirs. With time people who visited these places started placing stones as offerings, as part of themselves trying to leave physical evidence to their presence at a place of historic or religious significance. Through time these stones accumulated and became a structure. It takes shape and thus the importance of the place is amplified. What once was a singular substantiation is now supported by a collection of believes. A group of cairns sits at the entrance towards the main marker of the Blood Brotherhood Treaty at Kabi, North Sikkim (fig 3.11). Another collection of stones placed by believers over a period of time it may seem at first glance and one cannot unnoticed some newly placed smaller stones stacked on top to each other. The process of growth and belief still an ongoing process.

Similarly, at Damsang Gree in Kalimpong the cairns continue to accumulate in and around the ‘chorten’ that sits a little further from the main *gree* (fig 3.12). The fascinating thing with cairns is that, it continues to grow. With the inflow of pilgrims one can always add more cairns by stacking up stones. And there is no telling when this process will be abandoned.



Fig 3.11: cairns at Kabi



Fig 3.12: cairns at Damsang Gree, Kalimpong



Fig. 3.13: cairns at Gangyap, West Sikkim

The cairn in Silnon monastery, Gangyap (fig 3.13) is a collection of flat stones accompanying menhirs sits at the far entrance of the monastery at the place where the kaccha road diverts to a pakka road leading to the monastery, forming three pathways, including a rough trail on the opposite side leading to the *detut* or the funeral ground. There are three small menhirs surrounded by accumulation of flat stones forming into cairns. Recent additions can be noticed, as the stones accumulated and grew as people kept stalking them to pray for the departed souls.

The cairns have been popular religious marker all over the Himalayan belt including Sikkim and adjoining hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. People from

different religious backgrounds use these stone structures to pay homage in sacred places commonly found around monasteries, chortens, lakes, even temples, sacred caves, springs, etc. With the absorption of Lepchas into Buddhism what most would “assume that cairns are of Buddhist significant, but are pre-Buddhist material culture that still exist today” (Lepcha 2019) but this has been completely overshadowed.

***Longtsoak* based on their function**

The megaliths can be further categorized depending on the functions they perform. The *longtsoak* can be used for different purposes depending on the need of the people. For generations they have been mostly used as various markers and for ritual purposes which will be discussed herein in this chapter.

Markers:

Longtsoak initially started as markers, and are actively used as one in the present by the Lepchas. They can be used for in the form of different markers; listed below are three variations of markers:

1. Boundary or territorial Marker
2. Sacred Markers
3. Grave Markers

Boundary Markers

This form of marker is used by the Lepchas to mark their territories and ancestral land and is the most common form of markers. They are mostly used in the form of single menhirs erected with supporting flat stones on boundaries of properties to mark the starting or the end of family lands. This type of *longtsoak* was found in all the three field areas of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

The *longtsoak* below the entrance of the Chawang Gombu, in North Sikkim (fig 3.14), is accompanied by other flat stones stacked against it to support the erected stone. As one trails up the multiple steps towards the Gombu one can encounter a huge chorten where a small offering of whatever thing you are carrying is to be made thus, with this pre existing knowledge everyone carries with him/her leaves or flowers of plants on the side ways. Upon going further uphill the *longtsoak* can be seen sitting clearly as a boundary marker.

Another menhir, around two feet tall, stands at the entrance to where the famous Blood Brotherhood Treaty was signed at Kabi, North Sikkim (fig 3.15). This menhir is part of a collection of menhirs and cairns present at the sacred site. This can be seen as a later addition as it stands individually away from the main collection of megaliths. Rather than the marker for the treaty which is placed at the center of the place along with cairns, this seems to be a boundary marker for the sacred place. The menhirs present at Kabi are testimonies of the pre Buddhist practices of the community and also they mark the advent of a new era in the history of Sikkim as we know it.



Fig 3.14: Menhir in Chawang, North Sikkim.



Fig. 3.15: Menhir at Kabi, North Sikkim

Sacred Markers: *Kabi Longtsoak*

The other form of marker is the sacred markers used to acknowledge sacred landscapes and sanctified lands or even historical events. One of the famous landmarks in Sikkim history is *Kabi Longtsoak*, which marks the Blood Brotherhood Treaty between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. This is where the Tibetan noble Khye Bumsa and Lepcha spiritual leader Thikung Tek swore a blood brotherhood treaty between the two communities Lepchas and Bhutias. Hence “the history of Sikkim actually begins with the megalithic tradition of erecting stones at a place called Kabi Longtsoak, 17 kilometres north of Gangtok” (Lepcha, 2019).

As one enters the sacred grounds of Kabi few menhirs are seen places in front of the gate as one walks further a collection of cairns can be seen on the right hand side (fig 3.16), (fig 3.17). The main marker is placed further inside with has a huge collection of menhirs and cairns (fig 3.18), (fig 3.19) adorned with ceremonial scarfs. An altar has been constructed place offerings and to be used during the festival of ‘Pang lhabsol’. A few steps further from the main marker is an open concrete structure usually used by the *yukmen* (monks) during the festival to perform the Buddhist ceremonies.

For a place of historical importance³ there has been very little mention about it in the government texts that are produced each year alongside other pilgrimage sites that are flaunted in these texts. It could also be a good thing in a way for retaining its

³According to oral history Khye Bumsa and his wife were unable to bear children so they were in constant search for a miracle. One day Khye Bumsa heard of a powerful spiritual person somewhere among the misty hills of Sikkim. This person was Thikung Tek a *bongthing*, a ritual and spiritual specialist of the Lepcha community. So he began to search for this *bongthing* and started his journey from Tibet. As he and his wife were seeking blessings for a child. After meeting with Thikung Tek and receiving his blessings he and his wife went back to Tibet where he was blessed with three sons. Much time had passed and he decided to visit Thikung Tek with his sons. Upon meeting with the Lepcha spiritual leader once again, Thikung Tek had foreseen that one of his sons would become the ruler of Sikkim in the future. In distress for the future of his people Thikung Tek signed a blood treaty with Khye Bumsa at Kabi, originally known as *Ka-Vi* (meaning *Kayusavi* or our blood) solidifying the bond of brotherhood and assuring that no ill treatment would be done to the Lepcha people.

sacredness and serene location and ironic on the other hand as once again the history and importance of the place goes unnoticed. Once a year during ‘Pang Lhabsol’, the Lepchas and the Bhutias come together to pay homage to the very place which marked the brotherhood of these two communities and the history of Sikkim began. The Bhutias perform the ritual to pay homage to the guardian deities of Sikkim which is Kanchenjunga and the Lepchas come to offer commemoration and worship to nature and the spirits of the ancestors. Both communities extend warm greetings to each other but the places they perform each of their rituals remain far apart from each other’s. The monks have their own concrete altars to sit and carry on their rituals whereas the *bongthing* and the *muns* perform their rituals in the open-air. Though the religious beliefs differ, these communities work together to retain the importance of the place, their history and their rituals. If one looks at the picture of *kabi longtsoak* given by Foning in his book *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe* (1987), page 145 the *longtsoak* comprises of the original menhir and a few stones but since then the place has grown and is overflowing with cairns which keeps growing with the inflow of pilgrims each year.

There still are numerous *Longtsoak* in Lepcha society which have been neglected for a certain period of time as their importance is being revived today. These are the simple and earliest form of architecture. They were placed to serve certain functions as required by the community at a given time and situation. They amplify symbolism and reflect ideas and beliefs.



Fig 3.16: Cairns at Kabi



Fig 3.17: additional stones at Kabi



Fig 3.18 and 3.19: *Kabi Longtsoak*

Burial Stones

The last form of markers the Lepchas used is for marking graves. One of the earliest use of stones by humans were as grave markers, communities marking their graves by placing stones sometimes singular or in groups. The Lepchas in the past used bury their dead, and to mark a grave they used grave markers. “Over the grave, flat stones are used as cover. With the earth around, a low spherical mound is raised, on top of which, normally, four longish flat stones are balanced; this is considered the normal outside arrangements of a grave” (Foning 1987: 40). According to oral histories, the stones were placed according to the clan of the individual buried, which has been mentioned in the oral history of the community. In the past there are said to have been

four types of burials and grave markers. Since the Lepchas don't bury in this fashion anymore and photographic evidence was impossible I have illustrated it below accordingly.

1. *Chyok-boom*: in this burial type the deceased is buried in an upright position facing, east. A deep pit is dug and then lined with flat stones covering on all side (fig 3.21). Stones are placed in a rounded form almost like a bud of a flower (fig 3.20), as the word originates from the Lepcha word *aboom* meaning a bud.



Fig 3.20: illustration of *Chyok Boom*



Fig 3.21: illustration of a pit dug and lined
with stones

2. *Chyok-blee*: a deep pit is dug and lined with stones; in this the deceased is placed half upright from the waist above, in a reclined position facing the east. The stones that are placed on top of the grave are also in the same position as the body inside, (fig 3.22).



Fig 3.22: illustration of a *Chyok blee*

3. *Chyok-deir*: similar to the other burial practises a deep pit is dug lined with stones, and then the body is completely laid in a horizontal position facing the east. The stones used for this type of burial are flat stones (fig 3.23).



Fig 3.23: illustration of a *Chyok deir*

4. *Chyok-deir* for children: if a child passes away in the Lepcha community they still practice burial. The stones used for this type of burial is a dolmen (fig 3.24). Though the Lepchas continue to practice burial for children the practice of burial stones are exercised no more.



Fig 3.24: illustration of a *Chyok Deir* used for burial of children

The practice of burial stones was a pre Buddhist custom. It has been lost to the Lepchas since the advent of the new religions. Today only *muns*, *bongthings* and children are buried, but the practice of grave stones is no longer exercised. The

Lepchas believe that the powers of the spiritual healers that is the *bongthing* and *mun*, which is passed down within a kin, will perish forever if they are cremated. Only after the death of the existing *bongthing* or *mun* can a new one take their place from within the kin and if they are cremated their powers will perish as a result there will be no next *mun* or *bongthing*. According to the elders of the community, earlier the deceased were taken to the forest and hung on a tree with the help of *ru* (Cane) and left for the scavengers to eat them. Another method was to put the deceased in large and deep natural holes, pits or gorges. In the case of still born or death of an infant, they would put the body in a box. It would then be taken to caves or cracks on cliffs and left there. Ren D. S Lepcha, from Kalimpong remembers seeing one such box at the cliff near Relli while grazing cattle. The cliff later came to be known as the ‘Nirala Dhar’; named after the name of its owner of the area where the cliff stood. If one looked from above nothing could be seen, but from a certain angle from the ground they could see small caves and cracks. He remembers seeing one such box.

Ms. Chozang Lepcha an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker from upper Gangyap, west Sikkim, also remembers deceased infants being put in boxes and left in caves or sometimes in gorges. The box would be put in a cave then a line was constructed out of stones like a barrier.

In case of adults as Foning writes “along with the dead body, grains of various types, *chi*, and various other things are lowered down” (Foning 1987:40). He further adds to the description of the graves “over the grave, flat stones are used as cover. With the earth around, a low spherical mound is raised, on top of which normally, four longish stones are planted. On top of these upright, two or more longish flat stones are balanced; this is considered the normal outside arrangements of a grave”

(*ibid* 1987:40). Though the Lepchas have stopped the practice of traditional burial and grave stone after adopting Buddhism, and later to other religions, there have been instances where members of the community have gone back to their traditional practises especially in the case of the ritual and religious specialists. *Bongthings* and *muns* are required to be buried and not cremated as the Lepchas believe that this allows and ensures their spiritual powers to be passed on to the next generation. The most recent case of burial was observed for Lt. Ren Sonam Tshering Tamsang who passed away in 2020 and was buried in his own ancestral land. There has also been accounts of burial practices being actively practised among the Lepchas in Kamdong village of Kalimpong which has yet to be verified.

Ritual stones:

Lepchas first started using *longtsoak* as markers, marking territories and important places. Then as their socio-religious system advanced, they took to representing various deities, *Lamgzee lunglong* (deity of an area) and *dokhs*. These spirits are territorial in nature and protect everything and everyone falling within its jurisdiction. For example there are tales of hunters encountering these *langzees* and *dokh*. According to the encounters these deities would show up in the form of animals, humans and sometimes in an unknown alien forms. So, as a gesture of respect and also to ask for permission to enter the *dokh*'s territory, the hunters would often place a stone and pray to it offering a portion of their kill as a barter for trespassing in its territory. Not doing so sometimes led to unfortunate events. The hunters, mostly male members perform an annual event where they worship the forest deities for this they set up an altar in the forest and erect stones to represent the deities they commemorate.

Male members of a village go into the forest to offer prayers and sacrifices to the Forest deities to please these entities. Since men were the hunters, women are not allowed to partake in this ritual. Men from different villages in Dzongu still follow the ritual every year. Stones representing the *dokhs* are offered blood sacrifice often a rooster and in some cases even a pig. The rituals are preceded over by a *bongthing* but in the absence of one, any elder of the community can perform the ritual. This is also one of the reasons the *Punzok Rum Faat*, where the deities of the forests are commemorated, came into existence. These stones acted as a connection with the spirits and ancestors, which then becomes a symbolic representation of their belief systems. The megaliths and stones will be discussed in more details henceforth.

Often temporary these stones are erected during any ritual ceremonies in the community. These are often kept as the physical representation of the deities the community is evoking during a particular ceremony. Two stones are erected during the *Rongnyoo Rangeet Sumsu* (fig 3.25), usually performed during the month of December and January is the ceremony of commemorate the two major rivers of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Lepchas from all over gather at this ceremony. The ceremony can be held at an individual level and also is celebrated in a community level. Two small stones from the river bank itself are placed facing the river one represent Rongnyoo or Teesta the female and the other represent *Rangeet* the male. Fruits, crops, milk and prayers are offered thanking the river spirits and asking them to continue to prosper the lands.

Clan rituals or *Chyu Rum Faat* also requires the setting of *longtsoak* representing the deities and the *chyu*. Each clan has its *Chyu* (mountain peak) and *deh* (lake) and to commemorate their own clan and their ancestors the *Chyu Rum Faat* is

performed firstly at an individual level and then at a clan level. This was from the *rum faat* of the *Tamsang-moo* clan (fig 3.26) and (fig 3.27) where an altar is made and two stones places the bigger one represents Mt. Kanchenjunga the most important peak of all and from where all Lepchas came into being the smaller one represents *Pandim Chyu* the clan totem of the *Tamsang-moo* clan. A *bongthing* presides over this ceremony. Roosters and eggs are sacrificed as offerings to the clan peak. Another *longsoak* on the way to Passingdang in Dzongu North, Sikkim, (fig 3.28) is for a similar purpose. They are four feet tall and stand on an elevated alter made of stones. Each year *Chyu Rum Faat* is celebrated here by the whole of Dzongu. It is celebrated as a huge festival commemorating the sacred mountains mainly Mt. Kanchanjunga.

Similarly *Damsang gree* in Kalimpong, has stones erected to commemorate the last Lepcha *Pano* and the deities of the area in a permanent stone altar (fig 3.29). A pan Lepcha ceremony to invoke and commemorate the last king of the Lepcha Pano Gaeboo Achyok is conducted each year at the 20th of December by the ritual and spiritual specialists of the community. *Bongthings* and *muns* from nearby areas come here early to commemorate the *pano* and request for power and protection.



Fig 3.25: stones used for *Rongnyoo Rangeet Sumsu*. Fig 3.26: stones used at *Chyu Rum Faat* at Bong

Busty Kalimpong



Fig 3.27: stones erected for *Chyu Rum Faat*



Fig 3.28: *Longtsoak* from Passingdang
Dzongu, North Sikkim .



Fig 3.29: *Longtsoak* at Damsang Gree

The Natural Monoliths

The natural monoliths discussed here consists of stones that has not have been erected or placed by the community and has been sitting in its natural or original form and place. The same cannot be found in the case of stone seats, which can be a natural stone seat and also consists of those altered by the community. Discussing about the natural occurring monoliths and stone seat first, these are usually huge boulders occulting naturally in the environment which were later ascribed socio-religious meaning by the Lepchas as they got acquainted with their geographical settings. The

use of stones as markers can be assumed to have been inspired by these structures. For the Lepchas these monoliths or natural monoliths that already existed was a form of identifying territories or mapping their geographical terrains. Later they gave these stones names befitting their morphological structure and with this came their reasoning of their acknowledgement of these stones which will be discussed further in the chapter. If one would describe a natural monolith they knew exactly where it was situated and thus making it easier to navigate.

“The very moment a person removes a boulder from its natural position and puts it in use- functionally, ceremonially, or otherwise -it transforms from a natural object into a cultural artefact the derives a contextual meaning and significance” (Wouters 2019: 165). Throughout the duration of this research many natural monoliths has been observed within the Lepcha landscape. It can be highlight that one need not necessarily “remove” a boulder from its “natural position”. There are plenty of evidences among the Lepchas that they have been putting into use boulders or stones in their “natural position” and ascribing them as symbolic expressions.

People have attached myths and meanings to these monoliths appearing in their natural form and position which has made them an important part of their culture. As suggested in the title these exists most likely in singularity. Some of the monoliths will be discussed in detail herein.

Zey Doom of Darjeeling:

At the bottom of Dhajea Busty near the border to Mirik lays *Zey Doom* a treasure box made of stone sealed away which according to the Lepchas carries the treasures from *Mayel Lyang* and was left there. The treasure chest is believed to be left there by the daughter of *Rongnyoo* and *Rangeet*. She too like her mother and father wanted to

explore the plains and for her journey she carried all the jewelries given by her mother *Rongnyoo* and left home. As she reached the border of *Mayel Lyang* she realized her mistake of bringing the valuable jewelries, so she left it at the border of *Mayel Lang* and continued her journey. The stone is shaped like a gigantic box with a cover (fig 3.30). It perfectly makes sense why people consider it as a *zey doom*. However the name *Zey Doom* came from the original name *Zer Doom*. *Zer* here would often be understood as gold but further investigation led to the conclusion that the word *zer* was associated with things of very high value in the Lepcha society and not just gold. Some even tried to open the stone in hope of getting the river spirit's riches. This is a perfect example how the Lepcha community relate and attach sentimental and cultural values to certain structures in this case a stone structure.



Fig 3.30: *Zey Doom*, Dhajea, Darjeeling.

Suhu-ji:

A little further *Suhu-ji* which today famously known as ‘cap dhunga’ as it looks like nature’s cap (fig 3.31). The view of *Namsoong Partam* was a memorable one, Kurseong sitting right above it on the right was Mirik and on the Left was Darjeeling town and in the middle sits a huge plain ground where the Lepchas used to celebrate *Namsoong* (yearly celebration on the advent of New Year) today just used for picnics

and an annual small scale. Though the scale is smaller the effort is still exists and until this continues there is light at the end of the tunnel.



Fig 3.31: *Suhu-Ji*, Dhajea, Darjeeling.

Mung Anchu:

Situated in Pentok, Mangan a huge stone sits in the middle of a presently privately owned cardamom plantation with deep huge scars (fig 3.32). It resembled the cut marks like the ones from a Tibetan sky burial ritual only much deeper and larger. As if someone or something had been using it for cutting something with a lot of force and with a very big and sharp object. According to folklores surrounding it, locals believe it to have been an *anchu* or a chop board used for cutting meat by a *mung* (demon). The demon used to cut meat of the deceased and then consume them. The elders of the village state that according to their parents, if one listened carefully enough into the deep, dark moonless nights one could hear the demon cutting the meat *thukthukthuk*.....

Is it just another story to keep people from wandering off at night? One can only assume but the stone has become an important part of their village folk history and also a place where people feared to go until recently where the area has been

converted into a cardamom field. Still the stories live on and may be if we listened more carefully, one might actually hear the demon cutting his meal in the depth of night.



Fig 3.32: *Mung Anchu*, Pentok, Mangan (Sikkim).

The Param stone:

The second and third encounter of natural monoliths was at Dzongu, North Sikkim in two villages of Safo and Gor. The footprints in both the villages are believed to belong to Guru Padmasambhawa as he travelled to Sikkim on his way to Tibet introducing his version of Buddhism. Both villages have great faith in their stories and in the footprints. According the people in Saleem Pakyel/Safo, one of their first ancestors was hunting for boars in the forest near the village. As he chased a boar from the jungle, he was able to capture and kill in atop a huge rock (fig 3.33). The rock by default became a sacrificial ground. As Lepchas strictly follow offering a share of their kill to the forest deities and spirits, the hunter did the same. From that day forth each year *Param Rumfaat* is performed on the very stone a form of ancestral worship where have to sacrifice a pig for the ancestors. Failing to do so would lead the village into adversities.

An image of a ‘chorten’ is carved atop the stone (fig 3.34), with resemblances of two to three pairs of footprints which the villagers believe to be the footprints of Guru Padmasambhawa. Below the stone a huge ‘chorten’ is built marking it as sacred grounds. Each year a *bongthing* performs the *Param Rum Faat* followed by a ritual by the *yukmun* or the monks. Both religions commemorate the place and the stone. It is alarming yet fascinating to see how a religion can take over another with such ease and give birth to hybridized rituals, and new tales begins to infuse to compensate for the changes. Sadly, the last *bongthing* of the village has passed away a few years back leaving his students still under training to take over the rituals of the village. The village still follows the blood sacrifice without fail each year.



Fig 3.33 (left), Fig 3.34 (right): the stone where *Param Rum Faat* is performed, Safo, North Sikkim

Longmit Longbong:

Another story that was mentioned frequently by the elders of my village Bom Busty, Kalimpong was that of *Longmit Longbong*. A huge stone stood inside the Teesta River at what is today known as 27th mile on National Highway 31A. The stone stood right at the spot where NHPC Stage 3 Dam is built. According to the tale when Ranzi Pano (Ranzi King) of Sikkim eloped with Zolasi Pandi (Zolasi queen, the Lepcha name given to the new queen from the plains a place where there is abundance of zo

or rice) of Jalpaiguri, they came and rested near the stone. As an offer of appreciation the Pandi planted a single broom grass or tiger grass on top of the stone with the help of a bird. The pandi then requested the river to never cross the stone and the broom plant. It was believed that *dokh* (protector spirit) of the area are resided within this stone. But in the 1950's the Punjab Regiment broke down the stone and built a bridge on top of it. That same year the bridge was swept away during the monsoon and the remaining part of the *longmit longbong* covered by silts never to be seen again. Even today the stones are mentioned in prayers by *bongthings* just to commemorate them.

Though these stones had almost lost their significance and usagetoday the community itself is coming up to restore and revive these practices and to preserve what already exists. These material culture will unfold records of the Lepcha worldviews, values and beliefs, as materials produced in a represents its understanding of its social and cultural environment and how these materials are used gives a deeper understanding of the Lepcha community and its culture. Just a little awareness is needed as to make people aware of the significance of these structures which only seem simple to the eye but have strings of sentiments attached to them. As discussed above these naturally occurring stones have been used by the Lepcha community as natural markers to navigate their surroundings. If we look into Suruk there are various such natural stones identified by the Lepchas for example the *Satheem Zo Longkyok* a huge stone named as the stone where the porcupine eats, (*satheem* here means porcupine, *zo* meaning to eat and *longklyok* meaning a huge stone). This stone is a place where porcupines in the area usually steal food grains from the field and eat them atop the stone thus the stone acquired its name. Another stone is the *Kanthurur-bong Longklyok* meaning the stone near the *Kathur-bong* which according to the Lepchas is referred to wild mango tree. Another one is the

Simbong Dang Longklyok, *simbong* is the name of a seasonal ravine in the village which provides drinking and irrigational water to many parts of the village *dang* in Lepcha means flat land or plain. The stone lies at a flat land near the ravine at the bottom of the village usually used for grazing cattle.

These stones are acknowledged in the day to day conversations of the Lepcha elders in Suruk as to identify the geographical setting of the area. These stones still sit in their original places though some are at the verge of being removed as the construction of a *pakka* road has been started in the village. With the various changes occurring in the village the stones also face the transformation as many younger generations do not recognise these stones nor use it in their daily conversations. On the other hand there is a *ride* in the *longtsoak* as they can be seen being used during inauguration of schools, important buildings, monuments, etc.

The foundational Stones:

After the usage of stones as markers the Lepcha architecture evolved and stones were significantly used by the Lepchas as foundational stones while building their traditional houses. Here we can see the Lepchas getting into more complicated structures in relation to architecture. The foundational stones known as the *kaden long* are usually flat stones usually but not necessarily massive in size are laid atop which wooden pillar are erected and then the *dokeymoo lee* is built. These stones are usually used for the purpose of preventing the wooden pillars from erosion. The *Kaden long* are usually acquired from the rivers and ravines where the stones are found in abundance. Previously it used to take a lot of effort to carry the stones so the Lepchas used to choose a place abundant in rocks and stones to build *dokeymoo lee*. The rocks were carved out to flat and desired size the bigger boulders were moved with the help

of leaver made of many wooden trunks placed underneath and then rolled to its destination. The smaller ones were on the other hand carried. Presently they are easily carried from the rivers sides with the help of vehicles; the cost however is not as small

The *kaden long* (fig 3.36) is from the *dokeymoo lee* in Dhajea, Darjeeling. According to Ren, B. T Lepcha, who was one of the people who supervised the construction of the *dokeymoo lee*, the stones to make the *Kadenlong* were brought in from the Bula Chen River with the help of utility vehicles. The next picture shows the *kaden long* from Suruk, Kalimpong from the house of Ren M. S Lepcha (fig 3.37), according to him; the stones were brought from the nearby *Rong nyot river*. These stones will be discussed further in the chapter under the subtopic of ‘Housing structures’ as they are a very important part of architecture, it can be said that a Lepcha house without *Kaden long* is incomplete.



Fig 3.36: *Kaden Long* from Dhajea, Darjeeling



Fig 3.37: *Kaden Long* from Suruk, Kalimpong

Watch towers: Administrative and Territorial Structures

The next use of the stones by the Lepchas can be seen in construction of watch towers, what the Lepchas call *gree*. As Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling falls under border states there have been a constant tension with the neighbouring states and

kingdoms as a result the Lepcha who were the indigenous inhabitants came up with constructing watch towers known as *gree* as a form of political retaliation to keep an eye of their territories and enemy movements. The Lepchas used stones for administrative structures in the form watch tower, for the then political body has been recorded among the Lepchas.

Damsang Gree:

During his rule in Kalimpong Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the last Lepcha king is believed to have built many forts as watch towers 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. It is one of the important historical and sacred places of the Lepchas of Kalimpong in particular. "Achyuk 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 fort belonging to Pano Gaeboo Achyok. In the relics of Damsang fort one can find separate rooms, a remnant of a wall (fig 3.38) which could have been a wall of a higher watch tower. A well with attached drainage system which leads the water into a small spring outside, famously known as the 'Queen's Bath' (fig 3.39), is situated a few meters away from the main structure of the *gree*. It is now covered in ferns and lichens; the well like structure is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. A small tunnel (fig 3.40), leads to the outside from where water runs out and down from the well. The water is collected and carried by the Lepchas in small bottles as holy water.



Fig 3.38: ruins of the *Damsang Gree* Pedong

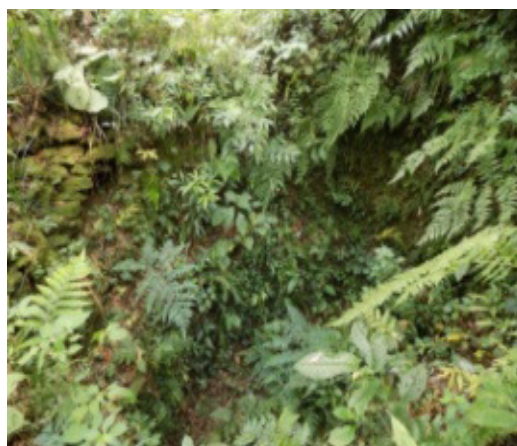


Fig 3.39: stone well at Damsang gree

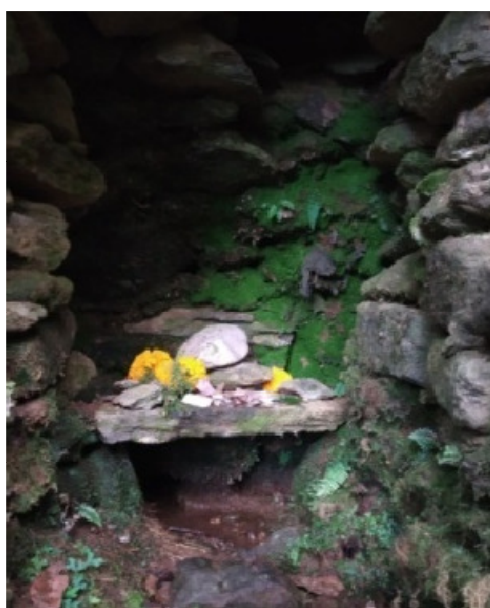


Fig 3.40: tunnel which leads water out of the well

The fort was constructed absolutely with locally available materials like stones and mud. 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. 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”. (Quoted by J. Sen 1989:102).

The Lepchas consider Damsang fort as one of the sacred places of Kalimpong. As the last King of the Lepchas has been believed to have spent most of his life in Damsang out of respect for the legendary king who scarified himself for the people, Lepchas have reconciled the place as holy and sacred (fig 3.41). 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. Lepchas claims that Damsang was constructed by the Lepcha king Gaebboo Achyok. *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.



Fig 3.41: ruin of a room of Damsang fort which today is a popular Pilgrim destination for the Lepchas as well as the other communities.

Daling Gree:

Another famous *gree* of the Lepchas is *Daling gree*. The *gree* is popular as per Lepchas oral history the Bhutanese army treacherously killed their last Pano Gaeboo Achyok at Daling and later it was occupied both the watch towers of *Damsang* and *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. Pano Gaeboo, fought to protect his ancestral lands and maintain peace. After several defeats the Bhutanese sent some presents and appealed for friendship. Pano Gaeboo responded positively and attended a party organised by the Bhutanese at Daling fort in Gorubathan (fig 3.42). “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 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 through the route.



Fig 3.42: Ruins of Daling Gree at Gorubathan

Pendam Gree:

Pendam gree is situated at Pendam East Sikkim. At first glance we could see the renovation work that had been carried out by the tourism department of Sikkim. There were two distinct rooms; the walls had been cemented to bind the walls together to prevent it from further erosion. There were wooden seats in the middle of the rooms, stone stairs connecting one room to another also had been refurnished. The walls of the fort had been remodeled and it continues to a shrine below the fort. The rooms had many corners, small and big, which seemed unusual to the design of any fort or residential setting. The corners of the room were shaped into a funnel and the ends were projecting forward with a small opening at the bottom of each funnel. The purpose of these inclined more towards serving as a drainage system to allow the rain water to run off rather than accumulate inside the fort rooms. The structure of the fort is comparatively different to the other forts belonging to Pano Gaebou Achyok, among the neighboring area or any other forts in Sikkim. The fort stretched over a large area, more like a boundary demarcating the frontiers of the fort. A little uphill to the fort is a flat ground and a little further is another set of walls, again renovated by the tourism department finished with a trident at the gates, a religious symbol. The walls extend further down to a small view point. The view point gives a clear view of Pedong, in Kalimpong where *Damsang Gree*, is situated.

Going further inland, another part of the fort which was a little aloof from the main structure, a part untouched. This part of the fort showed a lot of resemblance to the forts of *Damsang* and *Daling* in Kalimpong. There was a long wall (fig 3.42) and a small room (fig 3.43) attached to it. The room was below the ground; a store room perhaps. There are also evidences of more extended walls which are now covered in vegetation.

Pendam gree is a much contested *gree* always wrapped in controversies is the *Pandemgree*. A newspaper article in Sikkim Express of 21st April 2017 titled “Nishani Kali statue to be built at *Gadi* hill top”, the article states that “*Gadi* is famous for its ruined fort of the former Nepali Mulkazi Damodar Pande”. According to the article “a 54 feet copper statue of Goddess Kali is to be built atop *Gadi* hill in central Pendam east district. The Nishani Kali statue would be constructed in 18th century fort to promote Pendam as a tourism destination.” The article also reads that “the project will create tourism opportunities for Pendam with locals engaging in homestays and travel business,” Now the only problem is that the Pendam fort or *Pendam Gree*, as the Lepchas call it, is believed to be built by the Lepcha Pano (king), *Pano Gaeboo Achyok*.



Fig 3.42: and fig 3.43: Pendam Gree, Pendam, South Sikkim.

The Lepcha community in Sikkim, strongly believes that Padam Gree was built by their leaders but they do not have any documentation to prove it. Ren O. T Gawloog had written about Pendam Gree in a book “Lepcha Namkaran” in which he states that ‘Pano Gaeboo Achyok had built one more fort that is situated in Padam and known as Padam Gree. The meaning of Pandam in Lepcha language is a plant which is available in abundance in the area, thus the fort was named after the area as Pandam

Gree’ (Gawlogmoo 2014: 18). If we consider the locations of all the forts of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the fort of Damsang is situated close to the fort of Pendam. There can be a possibility that the last king had extended his territories to this parts at that point of time when all the land had no restricted territories as such. The untouched parts of the Pendam fort has shown much similarities to the other forts in Kalimpong.

The history of Sikkim has shown that there have been many invaders and one of them was Mul Kazi Damodar Pande. If he captured parts of Sikkim they should have built many other forts on their way. Whereas if we look into the Lepcha history Pano Gaeboo Achyok has many forts in Kalimpong and on the borders of Sikkim and there is a strong possibility that he had extended his territories to the fringes of Sikkim closer to Kalimpong for example Pakyong and Pendam as they lie closer to Pedong the headquarters of the last Lepcha king.

According to the Lepchas of Sikkim, Pakyong also had a fort that was taken away by a landslide recently. So looking into these accounts all the forts both from Kalimpong, Pakyong and Pendam connects like dots. We cannot discount the earlier part of history of this region before the Tibetans or the Nepalese invasions. We also cannot ignore the part played by the Bhutia and the Nepali communities in the construction of Sikkim history. On one hand the fort of Pendam is said to be built by the Nepali general on the other hand the Lepchas claim to be the fort of their king. There are many arguments about the origin of the “Gadi” but there is no scientific study to justify any of the claims. As both communities equally believe their claims, and it would be difficult to prove either of them wrong since both communities have developed a deep sense of belonging to the area and the fort, any manipulation and interfering with these may result in hurting the communal sentiments.

Besides *Damsang Gree*, Lepchas have constructed a good number of forts all over the Eastern Himalayan region where they were the rulers of 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” (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 of Mayel Lyang, it 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 and Das 1999: 12). It is quite natural that these leaders took necessary steps in protecting their land and might have constructed a number of watch towers all over the region.

Besides the two popular *gree* there are others watch towers scattered around Kalimpong. According to the Lepchas there is *Setlyang Gree* in Dapling, Kalimpong. As the fieldwork and investigation progress it was clear by what is left it shows that there was an attempt to build a fort but due to some reasons they left it incomplete, it looks more like a cairn formations. Another watch tower is in Lungsyol which is known by the name *Chyakung Gree* which has been already discussed in the starting of the chapter to some extent. The locations of the *gree* is same as in the case of the others we can see the similar patters as al 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. Another *gree* is the *Yang Gree* built on top of the highest hill in Yang Makum village the ruins are similar to that of Damsang fort and Daling fort but they are now just stones and dust with the wilderness around they are lost to the human eyes and known to only those few who still know about it. Today only the people of the village remember the fort which once stood there.

***Saderlong* (Thunder Stones)**

Saderlong are thunderstones. The terminology is derived from the two Lepcha words *Sader* meaning lightning/ thunder and *long* meaning stone. As the name bluntly put forth *saderlong* are stones believed to be reminiscence of the lightning as it hits earth. The Lepchas believe that not every thunder strike turns into a stone. Only if the thunder hits something and accidentally get scared, it is left behind in the form of a stone, otherwise the thunder returns back to its abode in the sky. The Lepchas are also anxious, in knowing whether any *saderlong* or thunder stone is left behind.

The origin of *Sader* and Why Lepchas fear Lightning

The Lepchas fear thunder profoundly and it is a taboo to laugh at animals, insects and any inanimate objects lest it will bring the wrath of *Sader* or lightning. The root of this taboo goes back to the story of how Lepchas came to fear the *Sader*. Once there was an orphan boy strolling in the forest gathering food. He came upon a forest fire, and saw a white snake amidst the fire. The snake was in the middle of a fire circle and was unable to move because of immense heat. As the boy watched, the fire got close to the snake and it was on the verge of dying. The boy immediately gathered a bunch of branches and started hitting the fire at one end. He was successful in making an opening through the fire for the snake to pass through. Once the snake was out of danger it took the form of a human and thanked the boy for saving his life. As payment for saving his life the snake asked the boy to come with him to his home and meet his parents to which the boy agreed so the snake took him to a huge lake. He then asked the boy to close his eyes tightly and hold on to his tail and not to let go of his tail no matter what. They dived in and the snake was a water *langzee* (spirit or deity) and lived at the bottom of the lake with his family. As they reached the bottom it, there was a whole another world -a world of magical beings and spirits or what the Japanese would call a world of 'yokai'.

Upon reaching his home the snake instructed the boy that when snake's parent would ask that he may demand anything for saving their son's life, he must ask only for a puppy that sits beside his father and not anything else. The snake told its parents how the boy had rescued it from the fire and saved its life. The parents, expresses their heartfelt gratitude and demanded the boy to ask for anything that he desired. As the snake had previously instructed, the boy asked for the puppy. Bewildered the

parents asked the boy to ask for anything other than the puppy but the boy stuck to his demand.

The parents were in a dilemma. They dreaded letting their savior go empty handed, so they agreed and gave away the puppy to him. The boy was sent back to the human world. He went straight to his home and placed the puppy inside his home. To his bewilderment, the puppy turned into a beautiful maiden, who was actually the snake's sister. The boy and the maiden started living together as husband and wife and soon the rumors of the maiden's beauty spread like wild fire and would soon reached the ears of a king of the nearby province. Out of curiosity one day the king himself ventured out to see this profound beauty. Upon seeing the maiden the king was dumfounded as she was nothing like he had seen before. He desired her more than anything. He then challenged the husband to compete with him. Each performing similar task, and the winner would take the maiden. The husband had no other choice then to comply with the king. The first task was a duel between roosters. The king brought his best fighting rooster and the boy brought a jungle fowl given to him by his wife. Both roosters fought profusely, in the end the boy won the duel. Displeased by his failure the king threw in another task.

The second task was to see who among the two would be able to excrete the whitest stool. The boy grew very nervous because the task had increased. He came back home and told his wife about the second challenge. The wife reassured him and started preparing for her husband's victory. She filtered ash water in a bamboo container and made her husband drink it all. Soon he would have dysentery, till nothing remained in his stomach. Next she went to the forest and brought wild yams which she boiled and made her husband eat them all. On the other hand, the king

made his men bring in all the rice, and pork fats available in the kingdom and ate them. Finally the day of the second competition came. Both parties came and started excreting, the king failed on this task since he was unable to produce white stool, whereas the boy was successful in producing one white stool. Out of pure rage the king ordered that they would battle for the maiden in three days. The boy was terrified. He rushed home and informed his wife about the battle. The wife then came up with a solution, she asked her husband to go to her parents and ask for two boxes hidden in the treasury of the palace. He did as he was instructed but failed to complete the part where his wife had specifically asked him to not open the boxes at any cost no matter what noises he heard coming from inside the boxes. As he was returning home with the boxes, the boxes began to rattle and make loud thuds. Out of curiosity he opened one of the boxes. Out came thunder (male) and asked “where should I hit? What should I hit?” to which the boy replied “hit on the stones and trees”. Just as the boy instructed the thunder destroyed nearly all the forest covering on its way. The wife immediately knew what her husband had done and scolded him for his foolishness.

Finally the day of the battle came and the wife instructed the husband that upon opening the box he must instruct the thunder to hit on the king and his army. As he headed to the battlefield the king and his army laughed at him as a single pathetic man was facing the king’s might army. So he was given the first chance to draw his weapon. The boy opened the box and out came thunder (female) and asked “what should I hit? Where should I hit?” to which the boy replied “hit all those who are laughing” and the whole army was turned to ashes with a single bolt of lightning. Thus the boy and his wife lived in peace thereafter.

From that day onwards it is believed that the Lepchas must not laugh at any living and certain non-living objects doing so would be calling thunder to strike. Even if by mistake the Lepchas happen to laugh upon any insect the elders take out few strands of hair from the middle of our head and burn it or throw it outside asking thunder not to follow us. Some even use the *saderlong* (thunder stones) to hit on the pillars of the house saying “I have arrived here first, so no need for you to come”. As the lightning strikes, the Lepcha people are always anxious asking children not to laugh during a rainy day and thunder storm. As even if they laugh by fault most Lepchas can be heard saying “*thout*” and spitting lightly while looking upwards as a way of ward off the possibility of avoiding getting hit by lightning.

Types of *Saderlong*

The Lepchas believe there are different types of *Saderlong* depending on the color and elements they possess. They can be categorized mainly into two different categories:

1. Based on color and element:
 - i. *Mi-Saderlong* or the Fire thunder stone; which are darker in color.
 - ii. *Ung-Saderlong* or water thunder stones; which are light in color.
 - iii. *Sakmut-Saderlong* or wind thunder stone; which are light in color with a shade of blue.
2. Based on gender:
 - i. *Sader-Aabu* or the male which while hitting produces a lot of sound, like throwing a fit of rage.
 - ii. *Sader-Aamot* or the female thunder which produces a lot calmer sounds, giving calmer but unyielding warnings.

The *Mi-saderlong* is considered to be extremely dangerous and destructive. It is darker in shade ranging from almost black, reddish black, dark greenish, dark grey, etc. (fig 3.35, fig 3.46, and fig 3.48). This can hit on anything -humans, cattle, stones, trees, houses, etc. while the *ung-saderlong* is believed to be subtler and does not hit often. If it happens to hit, it is usually near water bodies. They are lighter in color shade ranging from light mustard, beige, light grey or skin tone, (fig 3.44), (fig 3.45), (fig 3.46) and (fig 3.47) and are hard to find. Based on this their gender is appointed the *mi-saderlong* being the *aabu* or the male and the *ung-saderlong* being the *aamot* or the female stones.

People have reported to find them near water bodies. Ren Ong Tshering Lepcha, the head *yukmun* (lama or monk in Lepcha) of Yang Pelling Gombu, Suruk, Kalimpong narrated how he came across an *ung-saderlong*. He was conducting another one of the annual ritual that each household had to carry out. The ritual as usual had taken the whole day. It was usual for the *yukmuns* to return home late at night since the houses in the village are spread widely. Sometimes they also have to cover other nearby villages. On this night after the ritual was complete, he and his apprentices had parted ways and he was walking home alone. It was a well lit night as the full moon followed him. The path could be clearly seen as Suruk has an abundant of light grey soil that moonlight illuminated perfectly. As he continued his journey back home, he noticed something was illuminating brighter than its surroundings on the path. He grew curious and as per human instinct went to examine it. This was then he found the light beige colored stone (fig 3.45). He at once knew what it was, so he brought it home and has kept it for medicinal purposes ever since. The other *saderlong* in the same picture, a *mi-saderlong* also owned by him was passed down by his father. People are not willing to show these *saderlongs* to anyone as they are

considered sacred and a family treasures and heirloom. The pen is used as to give a sense of measurement in the pictures taken.

Another *saderlong* discovered by Ms. Mangalmit Lepcha was also an *ung saderlong*. It was mid-summer she, along with all the village members were preparing field for rice cultivation. As she was tilling the field she noticed a stone among all the mud. This was like no other stone “it was smooth, beige and shaped like an axe”, she described. She had seen *saderlong* before to unmistakably recognize one. She kept it till many years until it was collected by a relative to be a part of her new home in Sikkim.



Fig 3.44 and 3.45: an *Ung Saderlong*, a *Mi* and *Ung Saderlongs* from Suruk Kalimpong

The *saderlong* (fig 3.46) is a family heirloom passed down to Mr. S. M Lepcha the former *Thom sezum* president of Darjeeling, by his in-laws in Kalimpong. His in-laws converted from Buddhism to Christianity thus the old practices were give up, but they couldn't just give up the stones so they passed it on to their son-in-law in Darjeeling. The stones he inherited consist of a male and female *saderlong* recognized by their colors. He keeps it safely in his cupboard.



Fig 3.46: *Ung* and *Mi saderlong* from Darjeeling

One of the main places one can surely hope to find these stones are in possession of a *bongthing*, as they keep it for medicinal purposes and also for protection. The ritual specialist will offer a mixture of the stone's powder mixed with water along with other medicines. It is also used for making sacred pendant, to ward off evil. The stones have been scrapped at places (fig 3.47) and (fig 3.48), this was used by the *bongthing* of Gor, Ren Dorjee Tshering Lepcha, in talismans he made for people asking him for protection from evil forces and *nung* (food poisoning). He scrapped the *saderlongs* into a small piece of paper, along with other ingredients, including human bones, horns, bones and claws from different animals and birds, details of which will not be given as to maintain some confidentiality. Other ingredients used were *sathim chya* (porcupine quills), shells, moult from a *Pamol Bu* (cobra), parts of a vehicle that was in an accident, a rope used for suicide, walnut having three parts, and other unique seeds, etc. these are collected or passed down from generation to generation as part of their practice.



Fig 3.47: *Ung saderlong* from Gor, North Sikkim. Fig 3.48: *Mi Saderlong* from Gor, North Sikkim

Another *bongthing* from Tingvong, Dzongu sharing almost a similar name Ren Tshering Dorjee Lepcha, identifies one more category of *saderlong* alongside *ung-Saderlong*, *air* or *sakmut-saderlong* and *mi-saderlong* based on their elements and their colors. It is the *sakmut-saderlong* are very light in color, almost white. According to him the *ung-saderlong* is also light in color but with a hint of *afong* that is blue spots or shades. According to him the *ung saderlong* come out of water and are found near water bodies. The *mi-saderlong* is dark almost black in color, this along with *sakmut-saderlong* comes from the sky. He further describes *sader* or lightning as something that roams the sky and has wings, its form, undefined. However human cognition collectively with the forces of nature tries to give a form to the reasoning of what is going on around them; this might be a similar instance. He, like the other *bongthings* also uses these stones to cure illnesses and ward off evil auras. One occasion he often gives away medicines made of these stones is for lactating mothers with coagulated of breast milk. According to him, the other use of the stones is, if by mistake they laugh at any animals or insects, especially children they take the stone and strike it on the main pillars of the house as to prevent lightning from striking their houses.

Other than being used for medicinal purposes and as talismans they are placed under the foundation of a house to be built to keep the house safe from lightning. One or many can be used in the foundation of a house as part of the whole architecture. Even our house was laid on a foundation of *saderlongs* on all corners. Foning (1987) writes among the Lepchas “this so called thunder stone is an object which must be possessed; in fact one could go as far as to say that a house without one of these objects is not a complete house at all.” (*ibid* 1987:29-30).



Fig 3.49: Saderlong from Ram Gauri Museum

Some are of the belief that these are pre-historic stone tools, remnants of the past civilizations. Foning calls them “as all educated people now know, are nothing but tools used by prehistoric men” (Foning 1987:36). But no one exactly knows enough about them as not much archeological study has been carried out on them till now, and to put these sacred objects through the tests would also be unethical as they hold very important place in the socio-cultural and religious lives of the Lepcha community. The *saderlong*, as determined by the ASI as stone tools from the Neolithic period (Mishra 2008), gives away hints for the tribe’s migration history. The Lepchas have no memories or oral history of using these stones other than as *saderlongs*, meaning they must have travelled to these areas after the Neolithic time

period. With the Neolithic tools there is a possibility that Sikkim and adjoining hills was used as a passage for the Neolithic culture into India. There were people coming to this area but clearly they did not stay for long. As for the Lepchas they are visibly the first settlers to settle and acquaint with the land as they were the first ones to identify and assimilate these stones into their own culture which was left behind by the perished mobile civilization that passed through these lands long-ago. As most stones are found in fields and near water bodies, it is safe to assume that the fields are suitable land for small scale agriculture even in the past so it may have been a site of horticulture or agricultural activities. Water bodies are another crucial part of human survival, so the major water sources must have been used in the past as well. The stones left behind as evidence of activities near major water sources. A proper study has to be carried out to identify the proper age of these celts as the Neolithic period in itself is under scrutiny.

Today *saderlongs* are kept by other community members as well, but does not hold as significant importance as the Lepchas. They are either part of display or collection for collectors and enthusiasts. The examples are quite evident in the “Archeological Explorations of Sikkim 2008”. They call it ‘Chatyang Dhunga’ translating to thunder stone, the same meaning as *Saderlong*. Mr. Ganesh Kumar Pradhan, curator of the Ram Gauri Museum in Renok, East Sikkim, has in his display a ‘Chataryang Dhunga’ he collected from his village long ago (fig 3.49).

Houses: Foundational Stones and Traditional Housing Structure

The Dokeymoo Lee

Touching upon the final and most important architectural structure of the Lepchas, the traditional houses known as the *dokeymoo lee*. While stones formed the backbone of

architectural structures among the Lepchas their housing pattern wholly integrates them into its design. As the populations moved from nomadic lifestyle into structured settlements their residences evolved to cope with the environment around them. Facing the cold and unpredictable weather of the hills, the Lepcha houses also evolved keeping in mind the environment around them. A traditional Lepcha house is known as *Dokeymoo Lee*, *dokey* meaning to ‘sit on top’ and *lee* means ‘house’. The Lepcha house has interesting structures, it is built using huge flat stones on which pillars are erected and then the house is built on top. The whole structure is built usually only using an axe to cut the trees and carve the woods. No nails are used to join the wooden panels and pillars rather all the pieces are put together like puzzle pieces (fig 3.51).

Morris described *dokeymoo lee* “generally raised about six feet above ground, and is supported by wooden pillars resting on stones. It is entered by means of a ladder, which usually takes the form of a roughly notched bamboo, the space beneath the house being occupied by the cattle” (Morris 1983:166). The stones are laid as foundation to the house, which stands on large wooden stands raised above the ground. “The Lepcha house, moreover, has a wooden floor, through the joints of which, since the house is raised off the ground, air can also enter” (*ibid* 1983: 171).

Excluding the population, who have already shifted from subsistence farming to large scale farming. The populations who still depend on subsistence farming can be seen residing in areas with large availability of stones. Mr. Dup Shuzong Lepcha states “in the olden days people would choose a place with ample availability of huge stones and huge trees to build a *dokeymoo lee*”. They then cleared the area most appropriate for constructing the house and they use the materials already available around them. The stones are molded into the desired shape and size and then laid

down as foundation known as *Kaden long*, on top of which the *kaodampu*, wooden pillars are placed, this also helps rise the main structure above the ground. This could have been a defense mechanism to avoid encounters with wild animals. Also this allowed them house their domestic animals close by. Mostly the number of wooden pillars varies from eight to thirteen to the maximum of eighteen. But this may differ from house to house. But there is only one huge main pillar in the middle (fig 3.50).

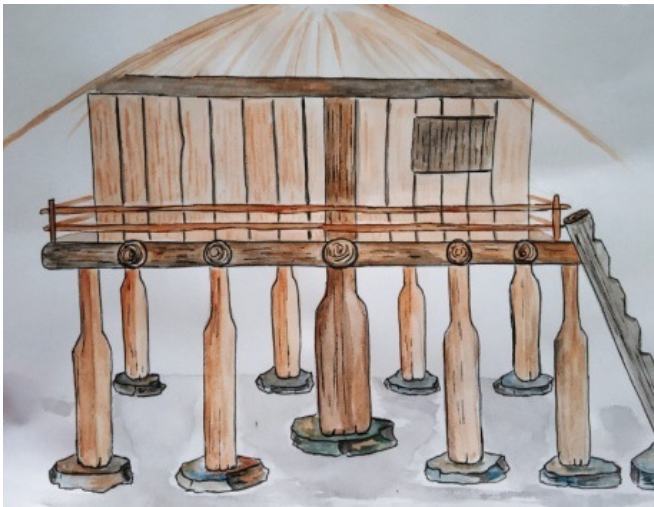


Fig 3.50: An illustration of a Dokeymoo Lee



Fig 3.51: illustration of how the posts are put together

The initial structure of the house is prepared using whole tree trunks, placed horizontally joined to each other and with the *kao-dampu* which is placed vertically, like a puzzle piece, known as *salen*. Next the huge wooden panels are prepared and used for dividing rooms or *bo* and the flooring.

The wooden panels often used to have a strategic gap between some in the past as it acted as an opening and used as a functioning lavatory. The walls were later built with either a mixture of grass, and mud and bamboo or just wooden panels in the earlier days known as *damchyok*. As more animals were domesticated they used cow dung mixed with red soil. The bamboos are cut in desirable lengths and size and

interwoven between the pillars and then the mud mixture is layered until a thick wall is formed. In other cases wooden panels are used for the walls. A *dokeymoo lee* also consists of a balcony known as *aayo*, in-front of the main door often extending to other two sides of the house, laid with wood or bamboo and a safety measures taken by securing the balcony by a slightly elevated bamboo wall. The roof is initially structured with bamboos giving the basic shape of the roof then, *nyong* or thatch grass is laid over them, this grass is used in places with moderately high temperature and lower altitude, like Kalimpong and lower parts of Darjeeling. Places with high altitude and colder temperature, like in Sikkim use smaller species of bamboo for the roof.

Kaden Long and Kao Dampu

By now the importance of stones among the Lepcha community is evident. The Lepchas use huge flat stones known as *kaden long* to lay the foundation of a *Dokeymoo Lee* on top of which *kaodampu* (huge wooden pillars) are raised and then the house built. And because of the *kaden long* the house often times come to be called as *Kadenmoo Lee*. There are the two names, the community tends to use for the traditional house. The wooden pillars can be of any number depending on the size of the house. It can range from eight to sixteen, and up to eighteen pillars (mixture of both bigger and smaller posts) or sometimes also in odd numbers. The *Kaden long* ensures the *kaodampu* does not get rotten easily because the moisture from the ground. (fig 3.55) is a *dampu* from Safo, in Dzongu North Sikkim, the *dampu* clearly passed its test of time and have starting to degrade soon enough it will be replaced by a concrete one.

It is of the popular belief among the Lepchas, that these pillars makes a *Dokeymoo Lee* an earthquake and landslide resistant house. It is believed that when an

earthquake occurs the house would just tumble on top of the foundational stones and not collapse. The other theory is that if there is a landslide the impact would be a lot less and would not directly hit the house as the impact is broken with the empty space below the house from where the mud can escape.

The other purpose for which the space between the ground and the main house is used as mentioned previously is from housing cattle. Now with the application of health reforms the domesticated animals are kept at a distance and the space is used as storage for firewood, hay and other materials. (fig 3.52) is a *dampu* from Gangyap. The house belonged to Mr. Yukchung Lepcha, now abandoned. The house was constructed around 1980's by his father and grandfather. It contains two rooms, one kitchen, and one prayer room. They did not use *saderlongs* for the house. He and his family had recently moved to a new concrete house built a little distance from their *dokeymoo lee*. The *lee* is no more in the shape to house people so they shifted to a new home. This is the last *Dokeymoo lee* existing in the village of Gangyap, the request of Mr. Yakchung Lepcha, put forth to the village authorities, to safeguard and restore the house, have met with disappointment and ignorance.



Fig 3.52: a *Kaden Dampu* at Gangyap, West Sikkim. Fig 3.53: *Kaden Dampu* at Kaluh, North sikkim

The *Kaden Dampu* (fig 3.53), belongs to the *dokeymoo lee* belonging to Lt. Ren. Sam Tshering Lepcha located at Kaluh in Mangan, North Sikkim. This is the main pillar placed at the middle of the house running all the way up to the ceiling. It is placed on a huge rock shielded from view by the rods and coils of wires. Supporting it are six smaller *dampu*. The space underneath the house is today used as a storage for keeping construction materials. This *dokeymoo lee* was occupied for a considerable amount of time before the family shifted. Presently the house is only used occasionally to look after their ancestral land since their family has moved to Pentok, near the town of Mangan, an hour away from Kalaw via car. (Fig 3.54) and (fig 3.55) are from Tingvong, Dzongu, North Sikkim. The main pillar (fig 3.48) sits at the middle atop a massive stone, supported by ten smaller pillars.



Fig 3.54: Kaden Dampu at Tingvong, North Sikkim



Fig 3.55: A *dampu* from Safo, Dzongu, North Sikkim

The Rooms:

A *dokeymoo lee* can be categorized as having the stones, pillars, two to three rooms and the kitchen as shown in the blueprint (fig 3.56). Usually a *dokeymoo lee* consists of a big *thop* or kitchen, two and in some cases three *bo* or rooms and an additional *Kingkhor* or prayer room which was a later addition.

***Thop* / The kitchen:**

The kitchen befits an important part of a *dokeymoo lee* as it is where most of the activities takes place. It is also a place where the whole family gathers, share food, and talk. It is here where the generation gaps are layered with sentiments, stories are shared, emotions spilled, opinions put up and knowledge passed down. It is a place where decisions are taken. The kitchen (fig 3.57), serves a similar purpose. It belongs to Mr. Ambrose Lepcha and his family. The blueprint (fig 3.56) gives an overview of the *dokeymoo lee* in Lunsyol. They gather around the kitchen after a day of individual chores like collecting fodder, harvesting chillis, winter vegetables and cardamoms.

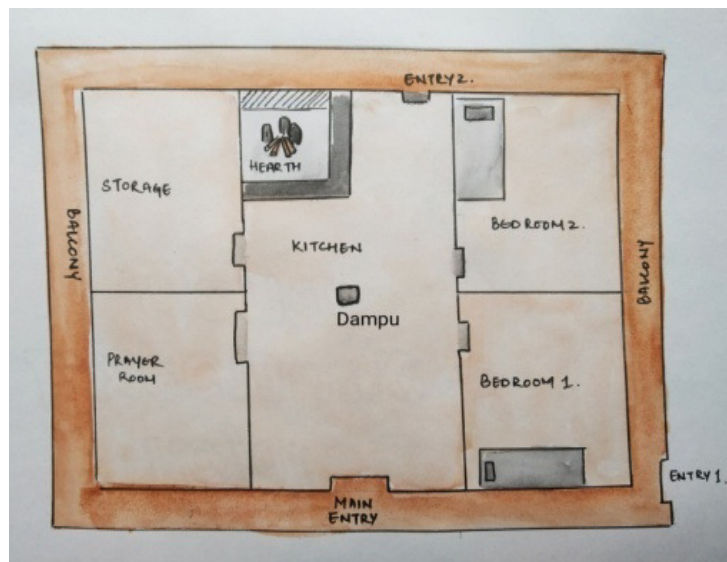


Fig 3.56: blueprint of a *Dokeymoo Lee* from Lungsyol, Kalimpong.

The main hearth is a little elevated from the ground where three stones are erected in a triangle making space for the firewood to go in and also to support the pots and vessels. Usually the hearth is at one corner of the kitchen making room for the people to assemble and settle in the room. The kitchen also has a small granary where seeds are stored; this is a much later addition to the traditional structure of the architecture as settled agriculture gained more popularity. The granary usually is made out of wood. Other times a *thop* consists of an attic known as *palhong* which is

used both as a granary and as storage for seeds and food. The *palhong* is connected to the *thop* with bamboos and wood. It can be accessed with a *tungrung* or ladder. All special rituals usually take place in this room and is also the focus of many ceremonies. During Marriage the bride is supposed to carry a couple of firewood and light the fire at the hearth symbolizing the start of a new household and entering a new phase of life.

The *thop* is traditionally made of *thop long* consisting of three stones erected in a form of a triangle in a platform elevated a few inches from the floor made of mud and stones as seen in (fig 3.58). But the design has changed, borrowed and evolved overtime. *Panthop* is the upper part of the main hearth. It is where the firewood is dried which is later used to cook and to stay warm. It is also a spot where food especially meat is smoke dried and which can be reserved for times when there is scarcity of food. The seeds to be planted the next year are dried here. As the Lepchas usually practice subsistence agriculture they keep indigenous crops which are reliable and climate resistant, like *kamdakzo*, *Kodo*, *mong*, *kuchung*, beans, vegetables etc. it is a place which ensures the sustainability of the family and the continuation of the culture.



Fig 3.57: *Thop* from a *Dokeymoo Lee* at Lungsyol, Kalimpong. Fig 3.58: *thop* from a *Dokeymoo Lee* at Suruk, Kalimpong.

Aang-bo:

Aang-bo or which we today know as the drawing room in most cases it is part of the kitchen but the recent *dokeymoo lee* include a separate room where visitors and guests may leisurely spend time talking and discussing important matters. The room consists of short wooden two legged chairs and usually no table as the sitting height is not higher than the ground level so refreshments are served kept on the floor itself. As stated before most *Aang bo* is a continuous part of the *thop* in case of the house being mentioned here consists of a similar feature. The *Aang bo* is part of the *thop*. The hearth oftentimes is situated in one corner of the room thus leaving a huge part empty which is filled by wooden chairs where guests come and sit.

Aada-bo:

The word *Aada* means to sleep here *Aada* means sleeping room. According to Lepcha oral history initially all members of the family used to sleep in the kitchen itself, around the heat of the hearth. However the use of *aada bo* was also prevalent. Some *lee* have two to three *aada bo* depending on the number of family members. The rooms are often shared among many family members and no individual rooms are allotted.

Kingkhur:

The word *Kingkhur* comes from the Tibetan word for altar or here used to describe the whole room, or a prayer room. With the adaption of the new religion, added changed in the structure of the house and the status of the most important room in the house transferred from the *thop* to the *Kingkhur* room. Today the traditional structure of the *thop* has had many additions and renovations depending on the necessity of the individuals using it.



Fig 3.59: A *thop* from Gangyap, West Sikkim



Fig 3.60: *thop* from Tingvong, North Sikkim.

While some still follow the traditional structure, many *thops* are built at a height making it easier to stand and cook (fig 3.59) and (fig 3.60). Some are being replaced by LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) stoves and gas. Along with the *thop*, the existing *dokeymoo lee* have been subjected to transformation and part by part they have changed. Old wooden pillars gave way to concrete pillars and the thatched roof was replaced by steel or an entirely new house. People no more engage in making a *dokeymoo lee*, its more time consuming and tiresome. The availability of materials are also a great challenge even if one desires to build a *dokeymoo lee*.

Past and Present of the *Dokeymoo Lee*

Though people are still trying to revive the traditional houses, it requires a lot of time, energy and investment. This is often time not rewarded back and the house returns to its original state of limbo and no one knows what to do with it. But the recent trend of homestays have been a blessing for these houses to come alive and be operative a few times in a year, which is good as it ensures the flow of income as well as the use of the traditional heritage. More *dokeymoo lee* are being built in the recent years

supported by the community associations also confirming the continuity of the heritage and the technology among the community.

On 2016 a *dokeymoo lee* was constructed under the Thom Sezum of Darjeeling funded by the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board, West Bengal (MLLDB) (fig 3.61) and (fig 3.62). Builders from Kalimpong were hired and manual labour from the vilage itself was used. A plot of land was allotted and the resources brought in from nearby areas some were donated, others were bought. It cost almost 8 lakh rupees for the complition of the house. It is today used as a homestay, and venue for special funtions of the *Kyong* and *Thom Sezum*.



Fig 3.61 and Fig 3.62: *Dokeymoo Lee* recently constructed at Dhajea, Darjeeling.

The huge foundational stones wear brought in from the nearby river and had to manually tansported to the location as it is a little furthur from the road. Thatch grass is used for the roof as the area is relatively warmer and suitable for the growth of the grass. The roof provides good insulation of air inside the house. This project has provided an opportunity to provide economic inflow as well as to recover the age old architectural practices of the community, “a part of reviving and continuing the tradition of the community” says Ren Buddha Tshering Lepcha, Secretary Sukhiyam *Thom Sezum*, Darjeeling.

Kalimpong has quite a number of *Dokeymoo lee*, but with time they have all been gradually replaced by modern concrete houses one wall at a time. Some have been converted into *Rong lee* which are houses sanctioned to below poverty line members of the Lepcha community which is overlooked by the MLLDB. A few modern twists added to the traditional design, the windows or *rapsey*, also made of wood were designed creatively giving an arched top almost like a design from a palace only simpler. Electricity and other furniture like table, cabinets alongside the traditional small wooden seats. The roofs layered with thatch grass which allowed the free filter of smoke from inside and prevented rain and cold from entering the house, this roof had to be renovated every five to ten years. But according to some of the elders in the past the roof had to be renovated once in thirty to thirty-five years. The walls are layered with bamboo and mud mixed with cow dung which kept the house warm the floors and the posts were made of wood, a whole tree used for each post. Though the Lepchas did not use nails for building their traditional houses this being a relatively new one had used some nails. The space below the house was used to store thatch grass for further usage. The house was also being installed with a western toilet for the convenience of the guests often times a ‘westerner’. It was in fact good to see the continuation of traditional ways with modern touches.

With more rooms are added, the owners invest quite a fortune being an individual depending only on agriculture for their income this served as an alternative means of earning for the family other than agriculture.



Fig 3.63: *Dokeymoo Lee* of Lungsyol, Kalimpong. Fig 3.64: bamboo roof at Tingvong, North Sikkim.

The architectural design changes with the change in altitude as a mode of coping with the environment. The *dokeymoo lee* of Sikkim use a bamboo roof (fig 3.64) since it is colder and also in the past to endure snowfalls in contrast to the Kalimpong *dokeymoo lee*, which is made of thatch grass (fig 3.63). Though these houses have more or less a similar design only varying in the personality of the owner which could be seen in the design of the house which was made according to the needs and convenience of the owners. The other change came about with time as it progressed so the *dokeymoo lees* also had to. The thach roof and bamboo roofs have been replaced by more durable steel roofs (fig 3.65), and (fig 3.66). The *dokeymoo lee* (fig 3.62) has already been abandoned. The house belongs to Ren Tha Tshering Lepcha of Suruk Kalimpong, it was built by his grandfather taking into consideration the necessity of that time. Presently they have shifted to a new home beside the old *dokeymoo lee*. The abandoned house had one big room with the hearth at one corner of the room. The room was partially divided into two making another room. Their family grew and necessities increased while the house grew old, so they had to shift to a new residence. The only thing the *dokeymoo lee* is used for is preparing *chi*, and boiling bath water.



Fig 3.65: *Dokeymoo Lee* of Safo, North Sikkim.



Fig 3.66: *Dokeymoo Lee* from Suruk, Kalimpong

With time and modern materials, more concrete houses started becoming a popularity and many changes were made to the traditional houses. The *Kao dampu* replaced by concrete pillars, floors replaced with cemented flooring and later by more polished and marbled floorings. The roof replaced by tinned roof which had to be renovated once in a very very long period of time. The *thop* and hearth replaced by stoves run on LPG cylinderd gas and electricity. Thus the architectural structure changed and evolved gradually. Those that remain are a mixture of both traditional and modern, halfbreeds which can be neither categorised as a modern house nor a traditonal one. But we can surely put them under a different evolving category, since they are still under the process of change. Some are stuck like in a limbo frozen in time forever, abandoned. Used only for storage and by researchers like myself to understand the past and the state of transision in between.

Conclusion

It is evident from the discussions above that Lepcha architecture is incomplete without stones. These stones have significant role in the political, cultural and religious spears of the Lepcha society. The *longtsoak* can be seen erected to mark important historical events like the “Blood Brotherhood Treaty” at Kabi. The

longtsoak are what Lepchas can identify as central to their identity as it marks the very first evidences of their cultural life. Seen as contemporary too the megaliths of Northeast India the megalithic culture of the Lepchas can be assumed to be relatively younger as well. The earliest mentions of it recorded only in folktales of the community. The most popular one is the passed down by word of mouth as the famous blood brotherhood treaty among the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Later it was depicted in the ‘thanka’ (a religious painting usually depicting important deities and stories used in Buddhism) painting which hangs today in the Namgyal Institute to Tibetology Museum (NIIT) made for the Chogyal of Sikkim. *Longtsoak* are prevalent in Kalimpong and Darjeeling as the new wave of revivalism of these megaliths is being brought back to practice with them used during different events and ceremonies. The lack of studies in this area can be profoundly seen, unlike the Northeastern megaliths in Meghalaya, the stones of this region has been little mentioned about and documented, though works of Morris and Gorer do provide a modest mention of these stones it is only with the recent works of native writers like Foning (1987) and auto ethnographers like Lepcha (2019), and some non-native writers. But there still anenormous gap to be filled and much more *longtsoak* to discover.

It can also be seen erected at places of political importance like the *grees* of kalimpong including *Damsang gree*, and *Daling gree* as the area was a buffer zone. Materials differ according to the need of the people, as there were constant attacks from the neighbouring territories there was a need for watchtowers in the area to keep an eye on enemy movement. Today this has become an integral part of the community’s political history and identity. No Lepcha history is narrated without mentioning the *Damsang* and *Daling Gree* in Kalimpong. The two *Grees* were

recently declared as Cultural Heritage sites by the state government of West Bengal in 2019. The effort of the community members in safeguarding their heritage is immense but this in addition has to be supported equally by documenting the importance and emotions community members attach to these monuments.

These monuments are not only seen as watch towers but as a symbol of the once glorious history of the Lepchas and their *Panos*. There is constant flow of audience in the area some to offer commemoration to the last *pano* of the community, some offering constant maintenance of the areas as youths of the community organises cleanliness drives annually. *Mun* and *Bongthing* (traditional ritual specialists) offer prayers to the deities of the area asking for power and protection of the people.

The fact that the stones takes key part of the Lepcha cosmology, almost every ritual involves a stone representing the *dokh*, spirits, or deity the community are commemorating. These are used as a tangible manifestation of what is intangible. Customs and beliefs are brought alive by adding a physical presence in a ritual and here that comes in the form of stones. In Kalimpong and Darjeeling the revival of the use of *longtsoak* has been seen with the increase of the erection of menhirs in the sets of three representing Mt. Kanchenjunga, during many auspicious events and celebrations. In Sikkim fewer new *longtsoak* are being in use and though it is one of the hotspots of the megalithic culture of the Lepchas there some of the stories related to their megaliths have been perished, with the growing generation gap. Some of them have been completely overshadowed by the newer stories for example in the village of Gor, in Dzongu stories of Guru Padmasambhawa of visiting the village is prevalent. The stories states that when Guru Padmasambhawa visited the village he

used to tie his horse to huge stone pillars. Later the stone pillars were dismantled and used for making some of the houses near the areas, where the pillars original were placed. Tracing back to these stories the stone pillars that the people mentioned about, may have been potential *longtsoak*. Today nobody remembers about the pillars before the advent of Buddhism. They have been completely eclipse by the new cultural and social practices. As some people revealed that some of these megaliths were dismantled in order to make up new houses.

The cultural aspect of Lepchas can be seen centred around stones, as the *saderlongs* have been a part of the Lepcha society since time immemorial as something which came from the sky and has become a part of their society as a *ter* (treasure) a sign of great fortune and also protection. It has also been used in the Lepcha architecture it has both cultural and architectural significance. It is more than a simple stone or a stone tool with cultural sentiments attached to these stones make them all the more 'treasure'. The *Saderlong* is used in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling even if most people do not own a *saderlong* since its scarce finding the village *bongthing* always keeps has two or three stones with him which he uses as a medicine and to ward off evil. "Neolithic Celts" (Lepcha 2019) (Mishra 2008) and "stone tools" (Foning 1987) as they have been called by researchers, there is still an array of cultural relationships between people and these *saderlong* to be uncovered. This research is an attempt to connect the space left unspoken by works like Mishra's, true to their methodologies but fails to uncover the people's perspectives in depth.

Lastly, all these architectural structures of the Lepchas are under rapid phase of change as most parts are engulfed by the concrete. What remains now requires utmost attention if we have any chance in understanding the community's way of life

and the evolution of culture. As humans have evolved the object around them also evolves, to preserve what remains if not possible physically it can be done in the form of knowledge. It is important to not just view these objects only from one point of view as layers upon layer of meaning are attached to them it becomes all the more important to look onto these material cultures from all notions and try to understand the centrality of the objects in the community.

Chapter 4

Attire and Fashion

The first thing we notice about a person is their appearance; what we wear and how we wear it. Attire is not just what we wear but also what it represents. It may represent a personality, an identity, a class, or culture etc,. “Dress represents the nature of culture of any community” (Roy 2017: 229). It is a form of communication, wearing the same clothes represents identity like in terms of community members wearing their traditional attire. It can also represent time and space, it becomes a form of expression and how people interact with the world. For instance, in some cultures black clothing is used for mourning while in some cultures, white is used for the mourning period. Different cultures have adapted different forms of materials as well as process to deal with their surroundings and how they express it through is seen by the way people choose to represent themselves. The way people dress plays a significant role in addressing people’s opinion of their belief and how they choose to see and be seen in this world.

The traditional attire of the Lepcha community represents their distinct cultural identity. The Lepcha women attire is known as *dumdem/ dumvun* and the men wear the *dumpra*. Hunter (1984) has described the Lepcha attire as being “scanty” (*ibid* 1984:49), while describing the Lepcha male attire. Hunter’s description might seem slightly downbeat with the whole connotation to the meaning of the word he chose to address the attire, as he compares it to the adequate layers of the Englishmen “wearing woolen undergarments and hose” (*ibid* 1984:49). He goes on to describe the attires of both Lepcha men and women quite elaborately. Hooker seemed to be at awe of the *dumdem* as he describes it as being “extremely ornamental and picturesque” (Hooker 1855: 122) Campbell and Risley both describes the attire as “simple” and

“graceful” (Campbell 1840:383) (Risley 1981: 13). Which leads us to the concept of “exoticization” (Theodossopoulos 2012:592) coming with its own positive and negative influences, the former being “the positive re-evaluation of traditional attire” (Conklin 1997: 712). The problems that come with exoticization is the notion of authenticity attached to it. “The view that only authentic tradition is one uncontaminated by western culture” (Theodossopoulos 2012: 593). And the same is applied to the Lepcha attire where people both inside and outside of the community expect a certain level of authenticity to their cultural aspects, first and foremost to their attire.

There are many components that make up the entirety of the Lepcha attire. From the clothes worn, to the jewelries used and how they are styled all shapes the attire in whole. Lepcha men and women both kept long hairs which were braided into one pigtail for the men and one or two for the women known as the *Do-chohem-Chombree*. Which according to the community is inspired by the tail of *Chohem-fo* (a Drongo Bird). “The Lepcha men used to keep their hair long and plaited in a single braid adorned with a hat” (Lepcha 2013: 45). Most Lepcha oral histories talk about Lepchas having long hairs irrespective of their gender, which changed with the introduction of new religion and education. The earlier appearances of the Lepchas can be seen in the journals and works of western travelers, researchers, and missionaries the most popular being the illustration of a group of Lepcha men alongside Dr. Hooker (<http://muscicapa.blogspot.com>), illustrated with long hairs in their traditional attire.

***Dumdem*: Lepcha Female Attire**

The Lepcha female attire is known as *dumdem* (*dum* meaning cloth and *dem* means to wear), also known as *dumvun* (*vun* meaning to wrap). It is a long dress which covers the whole body till the ankles, sometimes worn a bit shorter till the calves. The shorter *dumdem* was functional for example the shorter length made it easier while working in the fields, or going to foraging, running after cattle, etc. while the longer style of *dumdem* can be seen presently as a form of fashion. And the “tension between fashion and functionality” (Grey 2014: 29) can be seen at the present as the want to re-evaluate traditional attire and fashion is on the rise.

Initially the fabrics used for *dumdem*, were either black or neutral incolour, plain with no patterns given the production of fabrics at that time. But gradually this change and brightly coloured fabrics became popular. Patterns were preferred more than the plain ones. The course, thick nettle and wool fabrics were replaced by lighter cotton and smooth satins and silk. The use and disuse of these fabrics can be looked into from two perspective one being the environmental factors and the other consumerism. Environment is one of the influential factor in shaping the cultural patterns of a community and as Lepchas lived in a much colder climate, they used thick materials for their traditional attire. With the rising climatic condition in the last few decades, the community opt for much lighter alternatives such as cotton. The second factor that influenced the Lepcha attire was the availability of more variety with the mass production of fabrics coming in the market with the boom in the consumer and market patterns. The Lepchas no longer had to go through the long process of production of plant fibers to make cloths as it was available in the market conveniently. This applies in case of the male attire *dumpra* as well.

The Lepcha female attire includes *Taro* which is used to cover the heads. Next is the *Tago* or a long sleeved blouse worn underneath the *dumdem*. Third is the *dumdem*, which is a long piece of cloth usually four to five meter in length and the breath adjusted to the height of the person. An undergarment or ‘petticoat’ is worn underneath which helps tug the long fabric of the *dumdem* to be maneuvered properly. The undergarment was a later adaptation to the Lepcha female attire, the elderly of the community does not remember using them until much later in life. Initially thick, black or nude coloured cloths were extensively used for making *dumdem* and were usually “plain in colour” (Roy 2017: 221), these were made of nettles and wool. Later with the increased in exchange with other communities, led to used of other materials like cotton, silk, polyester, nylon, etc., colours started being extensively used, cloths with patterns were also preferred. The cloth is chosen according to personal preferences depending on the desired colors, patterns and fabric of the cloth. Herein, the different components of *dumdem* are discussed in more detail:

1. *Taro*: “the women used to braid their hair in double plaits and used a headscarf called taro” (Lepcha 2013:44). It is a scarf usually plain or white in color used by Lepcha women to cover their head. Darker colours are used as daily wear and lighter colour as special wears. The scarf is folded into a triangle shape and then worn over the head, fastened the two elongated ends with a knot at the back of the head (fig 4.1). Presently *taro* is only used by the elder generations while the younger age groups have more or less discarded the use of the *taro*. However, it is still used during important events like festivals or rituals. Women and girls wear them during cultural performances like dance and musical performance (fig 4.2). They are also seen in religious places such as the church as women use them to cover their head as sign of

respect “Today, the usage of scarves to cover the head is rare (except in the church)” (*Ibid* 2013: 44). The “use and disuse” of these cultural traits leads to the evolution of the attire in entirety, new components are added and discarded with time.

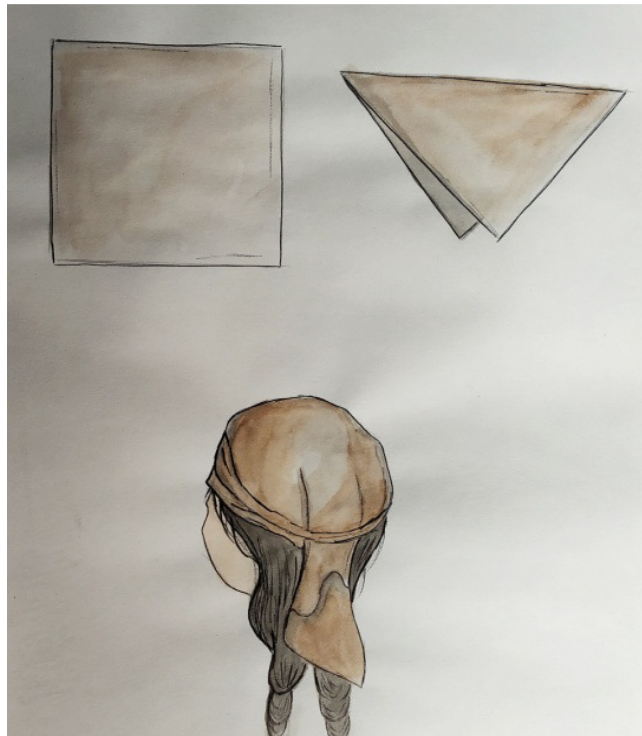


Fig 4.1: Illustration of *Taro*



Fig 4.2: A group of girls wearing white *Taro* (scarf) to cover their head and red *tago* in contrast with their white *dumdem*..

2. *Tago* is the blouse worn underneath the *dumdem* (fig 4.2), initially *tago* was not used with the *dumdem*, it can be seen as an assimilated aspect in the Lepcha attire. The design for the *tago*, varies from designs influenced from the Chinese ‘cheongsam’ (fig 4.3) which was in popularity in the late nineteen hundreds. Before this blouses with short or quarter sleeves with puffed shoulder (fig 4.4). The most popular is the long and broad sleeved design borrowed from the ‘gyado’ or the Tibetan inner blouse. Today the design depends on personal style and expression and can vary from a simple t-shirt, to flamboyant shaped sleeve tops being worn, or even go without a *tago*. All forms of individuality alongside community identity.



Fig 4.3: *Tago* with the “chinese color”



Fig 4.4: *Tago* with puffed shoulder sleeves

3. *Zyerdongmu-tago*: is a form of *tago* worn as an outer coat, used especially by married women. The word *Zyer* means big or huge not in size but in connotation. Among the Lepcha community there is practice of bride price and marriage being an important rites-of-passage, the *zyerdongmu-tago* can be seen as a symbolism for the high standing ascribed to the bride. The *Zyerdongmu-tago* is not allowed to be worn by people other than the bride as

it is seen as a very important symbolization of marriage. It is treated as an important asset for the bride. A physical and emotional bond is formed between the wearer and the attire that lasts a lifetime. They are not passed down to the next generation and is only restricted to one generation.

It is the bride groom and his family that gives the *dumdem* and the *zyerdongmu-tago* for the wedding or bares the whole cost for the *dumdem* the bride chooses in some cases. But more recently the brides themselves chose their own wedding *dumdem* to their liking and personal styling. According to the community members initially it used to be made of thick black fabric, but later it became more fashionable and other materials like lace is used extensively (fig 4.5). The *Zyerdongmu-tago* is worn by the brides on the day of their wedding as to symbolize the rites-of-passage. Some even choose to wear similar style of outer coats as symbol of their married status, (fig 4.6).



Fig 4.5: lace used as a common fabric for *zyerdongmu-tago*. Fig 4.6: Bride with her *Zyerdongmu-tago*

4. *Nyamrek* is the belt worn with the *dumdem* for women and *dumpra* for the men respectively. The word *Nyam* means to tighten and *rek* means to tie. It is

a long strip of belt used to hold the whole attire together, both men and women use *nyamrek* as part of their attire, (fig 4.7). Initially it was just a strip of cloth (any cloth), used as a *nyamrek* but later it evolved to a specific structure or requirement for the *nyamrek*.

The women don't necessarily use the *nyamrek* as the men, most women prefer the same coloured *nyamrek* as their *dumdem* and more recently they prefer belts in contrasting colour to their attire as to make it more distinct. And some just use one *nyamrek* for all their attire as they believe that it is a good to just use one *nyamrek* as it symbolizes endurance and retains positive affluence. Apart from the main outer *nyamrek* there is an inner *nyamrek* used by the women to hold the *dumdem* together. This inner *nyamrek* is used first to arrange all the pleats and smoothen out the *dumdem* only then the outer more decorative *nyamrek* is tied.

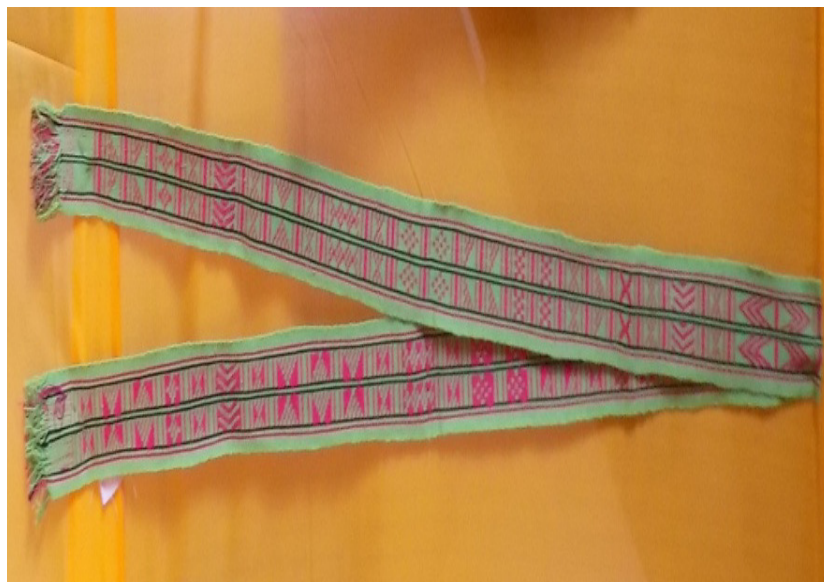


Fig 4.7: *Nyamrek*

5. *Dumdem*: Lepchas style their *dumdem* in three different ways. Each comes with their own functionality applicable to them which will be discussed below.

A. The first one is the *Dumdem*. It is the traditional dress worn by the Lepcha women. As discussed earlier, it consists of one long piece of cloth, usually about four to five meters in length or as desired by the wearer. An inner blouse or *tago* is worn underneath, and an undergarment or petticoat below the waist. While wearing the *dumdem* it always starts from the left shoulder. The long piece of cloth is draped onto the left shoulder first then folded and draped over the right shoulder fastened with the help of a long pin called *zet*. Thorns, bamboo pins were used initially then it shifted to *zet* made of iron, silver or bronze, today this is done with the help of safety pins. The *dumdem* makes a 'X' pattern around the neck and the back. This also makes the attire fold in such a way that it does not restrict the movement and makes it easier to move about. Then the cloth is brought from under the right arm and folded into many drapes and fastened at the waist with the help of a *nyamrek*. An initial *nyamrek* is used first usually a rough strap of fabric, then all the last minute touches are made and finally the main *nyamrek* goes over the first *nyamrek*. The upper part of the *dumpyum* is left to fall from above the *nyamrek* in the front (fig 4.8).

Wearing the *dumdem* has its own rule, the first end always goes over the left shoulder. The second piece goes over the right shoulder, also held by a pin then the rest of the cloth is pleated and gathered at the front. A part of cloth hangs under the right arm in a crescent shape, known as the *dumpyum* (*pyum* means to gather). According to Lepcha women earlier this part was used for carrying various items from food grains, fruits, vegetables, etc. while gathering or foraging. It also includes

the *dumpim* (*pim* meaning boarder). The whole attire is held by a *nyamrek* or belt at the waist.



Fig 4.8: *Dumdem*

B. *Mangan* is similar to *dumdem* but is a little shorter coming up to the calf. Currently women prefer to wear *mangan* to full length alike the *dumdem*. The material used for *mangan* is usually thick but it again depends on the wearer. It is worn in the similar manner as the *dumdem*, the only difference being that it has no *umpyum*. Here, Mrs. Ongkit Lepcha is wearing a *mangan* (fig 4.9), during the *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* 2018 at Saramsa, Sikkim. Made of nettle fibers or known as the *thokrodum*, the neutral shade of the fabric comes from the natural fibers used. Mrs. Ongkit works in an all women weaving association along with other Lepcha women like her from her village in Lung, Dzongu North Sikkim and from neighboring villages. *Mangan* can be seen as a more casual form of *dumdem* and worn at home and as a daily wear.



Fig 4.9: *Mangan*

C. *Sitling* is a style of *dumdem* consisting of two parts, first the *tago* or blouse which is worn separately, second, the bottom half is a long piece of cloth which is draped. The bottom is a long piece of cloth which wraps around the waist, then folded and gathered at the front. It is usually worn at a midi length. To complete the attire a shawl is carried by the women (fig 4.10). This style of *dumdem* is a result of assimilation as the Lepchas came in contact with neighboring communities. This was naturally adapted by the Lepchas as they came in contact with the more communities coming from Nepal and neighboring areas. Elderly of the community remember wearing *sitling* more often than the *dumdem* during her adulthood.



Fig 4.10: *Sitling*

A pattern of shift can be acknowledged regarding the Lepcha female attire as the point of contact with a different culture as can be seen in the case of the Lepchas of Sikkim came in contact with the Tibetans and the Bhutias and naturally borrowed from their attire. Not only because the later were the dominant community for a period of time in the then Kingdom of Sikkim but one of the reason was also that the ‘Bakkhu’ (Bhutia female attire) was comparably easier to handle according to the interviews. Lepcha (2013) gives an account of her fieldwork “In Tingvong, most women wore the Tibetan bakkhu at home and around the village. Only a few elderly women were seen to be wearing the traditional dumvun of thicker material without the pleats in front known as dumpin. They said that the pleats only came to vogue in Dzongu after they attended a wedding in Kalimpong and copied from them” (*ibid* 2013: 115). Where as in the case of Kalimpong and Darjeeling the Lepchas were more influenced by the Nepali cultures, so they adapted the ‘Phariyacholi’ a two part clothing the upper half comprises of a blouse and the lower a wrap around garment usually worn of saree. It was only much later with the dire need for representing the

community was felt in the community traditional attire came back in popularity. And with the availability of new fabrics and more options the recognition of the attire accelerated, especially among the younger generations. Describing the Lepcha female attire D.C Roy writes “A group of Lepcha female with their traditional dress comprising of *dumdem*, *dumbun* or *Tamaam dam* with *tago* or *Jyoordong Tago*, loose blouse: *zet* a safety pin; *nyamrek*, a waist belt; *dumpyum*, a pocket; *taro*, a scarf; *banhoor*, Lepcha sickle; *pansanpalan*, jewelry and ornaments is exceedingly picturesque, beautiful, gorgeous, polite, elegant, attractive, pretty, cute and charming” (Roy 2017: 223).

Currently there is a rise of ready made *dumdem* as it is “time constraining and difficult to put on a *dumdem*” as many of the younger members of the community states. The ready made *dumdem* comes in a set of three pieces; the first piece goes over the left shoulder with a hook to attach the piece together, a small piece of fabric on both ends of the cloth is used to tie the two ends and prevent them from moving. The second piece goes over the right shoulder this also comes with the attached piece of tying strings. The third piece which is also a part of the second piece but here I have explained it individually as an attempt to better clarify it. It consists of the *dumpyum* and *dumpim* also with the pleats which will sit in the front of the body (fig 4.11).

Many boutiques have opened up specializing in traditional clothing including *dumdem* and *dumpra*, (fig 4.12) readymade set of *dumdem* placed in front of a store in Gangtok, Kanchenjunga Shopping Complex popularly known as ‘Lal Bazaar’. There are a few more stores selling these sets of *dumdem* in Gangtok and recently in Kalimpong. All three ladies (fig 4.13) wearing the readymade version of *dumdem* for

different festivals etc. The different components of the *Dumdem* will be discussed in detail further hereafter.

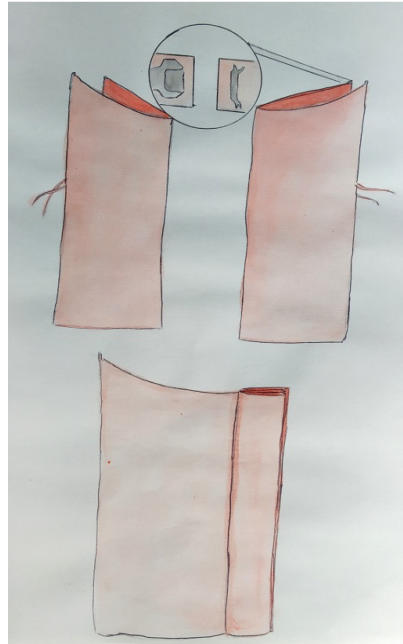


Fig 4.11: illustration of ready-made *dumdem*



Fig 4.12: A readymade *dumdem* on display
outside a shop in Gangtok.



Fig 4.13: Readymade *dumdem* worn for the festival
of *TendongLho Rum Faat* 2018.

Dumpra: Lepcha Male Attire

The *Dumpra* or the Lepcha male attire is a single piece of woven cloth approximately three meters in length and the breadth is adjusted to the liking of the wearer. The word *dumpra* comes from the Lepcha words *dum* meaning cloth and *pra* meaning lines, according to the Lepchas, in this case it comes from the parallel line patterns made in the cloth. It is usually worn over the left shoulder and held in place with the help of *zet*. But it can be seen worn over the right shoulder as well, depending on the preference of the wearer. The Lepcha male attire also comprises of various elements starting from the head wear all the way to the full attire which they call, the *Dumpra*. The components will be conversed in detail below.

Thyaktuk: Lepcha Hats

Starting with the headwear, the Lepcha men wear various hats or *Thyaktuk* to cover their heads. The word *thyaktuk* comes from the Lepcha words *athyak* meaning head and *tuk* meaning to wear roughly translating to head wear. There are different versions of *thyaktuks* which are being discussed below. The Lepchas adorn their hats with diverse feathers; colourful, extravagant feathers are preferred, porcupine quills are also used for the adornment. The most desired feather is the tail of the *Nambong Ong Pano Foo* (Racket Tailed Drongo) which is believed to be the king of birds according to the Lepchas. The different Lepcha hats will be discussed below.

Thuri:

It is the most commonly worn hat among the Lepcha men. The upper part is made of fabric usually satin with various designs, the rim is decorated with velvet and on the very top is adorn with an infinity knot made of beads and small glass beads this can also be of cloth (fig 4.14). This head wear as some community members states was

adapted from the head wear the Chinese gifted to a Lepcha representative from the Kingdom of Sikkim who was on a political assignment to China.

The *thuri* resembles the head wear from the Qing Dynasty, in China. The hat was given to him as a gift from the Chinese, as a symbol of friendship and well-wishing, thus the Lepchas adapted this hat into their attire. There is also a possibility of adaptation of the hat as the ancient trading route was not far away from the abode of the Lepchas.



Fig 4.14: *Thuri*

Samok:

The most extravagant of all hats and is made of *ru* (cane). It is what Hunter describes as “extravagant broad and flat brimmed” (Hunter 1984: 49). It is usually seen worn during special occasions, like festivals and special rituals and “was mostly popular during the time of the Chogyal worn by the Lepcha home guards” (Lepcha 2013: 45) in Sikkim. The hat is made out of three layers (fig 4.16) the first or the inner most layer is more casual and loosely weaved, constructing the shape of the hat. After this a layer of *tuklop* which is the dried leaves of the *Ta-fyer* plant (4.15) is laid. The *Ta-fyer lop* has big leaves and produces tuber plant which the community consumes.

Some *thyaktuk* also uses *kafer lop* or the leaves from the *Kafer book* (*Canna indica*. L) a tuber producing plant consumed by the Lepchas. *Pago-rip* (*Oroxylum indicum*) is also used for the inner padding.

Then the outmost layer is weaved which is very intricate and decorative (fig 4.17). This layer also consists of different parts which comprise of the following:

- i. *Sundyong song*: it is the topmost section of the hat; it is a design inspired from the spider web. Divided into eight divisions, the finely prepared *ru* mold the shape of the web.
- ii. *Aa-mik*: the second layer is called the *Aa-mik* meaning eye in Lepcha. It is named after the hexagonal shaped spaces in the second layer of the hat. The shape and the hollow space represents the eyes and thus is known as *Aamik*. This layer is looser with the weaving pattern and is molded into the same shape of the hat as the outer layer and sits on the interior of the *samok*. The two layers are gathered with the *tuk-lop* in-between them to act as a water repellent material.
- iii. *Samok-Tsum*: in the third layer more intricate designs are woven. Horizontal strips of *ru* and bamboo are interwoven with vertical strips creating a diamond shaped design. According to community members this design symbolizes auspiciousness (fig 4.17). There are three types of shape and style to the *samok-tsum*. These three are shaped in a diamond shape but the plain one is known as *amot* meaning female, the second type is adorn with intricate patterns and is known as *abu* or the male and the last one is small in size but holding the same shape which is known as *akup* or the child.

- iv. *Aa-fyet* is the bottom most part of the *Samok* which literally means ‘the end or bottom’. Two thicker strips are attaches and interwoven with the help of smaller strips of *ru* and held in place as an exoskeleton to hold the head wear together (fig 4.16).

The final part of the *samok* is the small strap made of *ru* to hold the hat under the chin of the wearer. This is optional, some prefer their hats with the strap and some without it. As the other two head wears the *Samok* are also adorned with feathers.



Fig 4.15 : *Ta-Fyer* plant



Fig 4.16 : the weaving process of *Samok*



Fig 4.17: *Samok* at display.



Fig 4.18: An old *Samok* from North Sikkim.

Pabbri:

Hat made of bamboo and cane. The shape of this head wear is cylindrical with a rounded top and is smaller in size (fig 4.19). According to Lepchas this hat is used for daily purpose as a casual wear. But the hat can be seen worn by only a handful of people in recent days as the *thuri* and *samok* are more popular within the community. The weaving pattern is similar to that of the *Samok* but less elaborate and much simpler without any intricate patterns. It is also worn with feathers in the front (fig 4.20). The *Pabbri* are made within villages by a handful of weavers and the knowledge passed down from generation to generation.



Fig 4.19: *Pabbri* from Gangyap, West Sikkim



Fig 4.20: *Pabbri* also known as *Sayrabu-thyaktuk*

Na-rek Thyaktuk is a hat which is worn during a cultural performance for example a dance. The name *Narek* comes from the deity of dance and music *Narek Rum*⁴ who according to Lepcha folklore blessed them with the talent for music and dance. The

⁴After the victory over Laso Mung Pano the Lepchas celebrated for seven days and seven nights, they danced and sang and feasted. One day they were visited by an unusual person they had never seen him before. As he joined the dance his elegant, swift and smooth movements soon mesmerized every one. The chief of the Lepchas asked the person who he was to which he replied that he was the deity of music and dance *Narek Rum*. He was very pleased with the Lepchas and asked them what they wanted as a blessing to which the Lepchas added they wanted the extravagant hat he was wearing adorned with colourful feathers. Thus giving them the hat he blesses that the Lepchas would have a natural for music and dance.

head wear is loosely woven and slightly conical in shape. It is held in place with a thin strip under a dancer's chin (fig 4.21).



Fig 4.21: *Na-rek Thyaktuk* from North Sikkim

The Lepcha hats have been a material of interest for those outside the community. The famous British Museum houses a *samok* in their collections, collected in 1960 by Dr. J. D Hooker, under registration number, 1960, 10. 251, described as “hat woven from bamboo and leaves. Tall hat with wide, outwardly flaring brim: peacock feather affixed to the front of hat, twisted fiber affixed to underside of hat and would run under wearers chin” (www.britishmuseum.org). It is available online for access. The Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, Sikkim includes in its premises, a small museum showcasing the traditional attires and crafts of the different communities of Sikkim. It has in its collection a fishing hat of the Lepcha community a flat hat made of *ru* and bamboo worn during fishing to block the sun. Smaller community museums all around Sikkim and Kalimpong like the ‘Sonam Tshering Lepcha Museum’ in Bong Busty Kalimpong also houses various Lepcha *thyak-tuks* in their display. ‘Namprikdang Museum’ in Namprikdang Dzongu, North Sikkim also has their own collection of *thyaktuks*. The ‘Eklavya Model Residential School’ (EMRS) Gangyap West, Sikkim also displays few *thuri* in their Lepcha language class.

The production process of these hats is meticulous and very time consuming and needs meticulous work that is why they are extremely expensive ranging 15 thousand rupees and above and is not affordable by most, thus the majority stick to using the *thuri*. The knowledge of weaving is passed down from generation to generation in a family, and in some cases it can be transmitted by any individual who is willing to train under a master. Since the process of making these hats is painstaking the production of these hats is limited to a small number of weaver families in all three villages of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Among some of the weavers from the village of Tingvong and Gangyap, Ren Kongchen Lepcha from *Kusung* Tingvong learned to weave from his father. He makes various other bamboo crafts besides *thyak-tuk*. According to him the best time to harvest bamboo for their *pali* or sleeks is the months between April to June as after that the bamboos harden and is very difficult to handle. He sells his products both outside and inside the village and are made on order. The village of Gangyap, West Sikkim, Ren Kidup Lepcha weaves all the bamboo objects along with Lepcha hats. He also makes his products on order and sells them both inside and outside the village. The market in the main town of Gangtok is gaining much popularity and has gained much demand as a result training programs are carried out for making these Lepcha hats. One of the center is at the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, Gangtok, Sikkim. The produced hats are displayed during important events and festivals, as a symbol of identity of the Lepcha community and outside the state as an identity of the whole state.

Ren Dursing Lepcha in Suruk, Kalimpong who works as monk in the Yang Peling Gambu also makes bamboo crafts as a part time hobby. He weaves various baskets and hats which are made on demand and is sold within the village and also to

neighboring villages. The village of Dhajea does not have a weaver and is dependent on the produce from Kalimpong and Sikkim which are imported.

Dumpra:

Dumpra is the Lepcha male attire and consists of a one to one and half meter piece of cloth specially woven in intricate designs draped over the shoulder. There is no specification as to which shoulder the *dumpra* drapes over but some community members strongly believe that it should be draped over the left shoulder as doing this would allow the dominant hand to be free from any possibilities of restrictions while hunting, working or at war. The fabric makes a round from the waist below forming a tunic shape covering the body. The Lepcha men like the women did not use any form of covering underneath the *dumpra* but later the Tibetan ‘*Gyado*’ gained popularity and was adapted to be worn underneath the *dumpra*. The length of *dumpra* varies and depends on the wearer. A simple *tamu* or pant and a shirt usually of the same colour and material is preferred as an undergarment inside the *dumpra*.

Initially “each village produced *Dumpra* for their men. *Dumpra* has dual roles in the day they are worn as garments and during the night it was used as blankets” (Tamsang 2015: 29). Today the material is changing due to the rise in the temperature; the thick cloth is being replaced by thin machine made clothes. These are mass produced and the intricate hand woven designs have been replaced by their newer prints. Though the new materials have made the *dumpra* available for the majority it has also restricted the production of the traditional designs and clothing. Today they are produced by cottage industries funded by the government especially in Sikkim. In case of Kalimpong and Darjeeling with the decline of the Industrial handlooms, which once trained many in weaving and loom in the past, the production

of traditional weaves has declined. Today they depend on fabrics produced from Sikkim and handlooms outside the districts.

Designs:

The Lepchas use different patterns in their attire and it is inspired by nature. In the “*Lepcha Indigenous Lepcha Weaves*” (Lepcha and Lepcha 2010), they have listed out nine different patterns that are used in the Lepcha *dumpra* which are still used in the attire presently and will be discussed in detail. There are few more designs added to the collection. These designs can be seen in a vertical structure going through the length of the material. Here I have attempted to illustrate the designs accordingly as to have a closer and isolated view on the patterns.

1. *Aa-shyer*: the most basic pattern that can be seen in the male attire and probably the pattern that gives the *dumpra* its name. Generally multicoloured stripes which are usually in the group of eight or ten. A base colour is selected for example blue or white upon which other colours are weaved. These are the initial weave upon which later patterns are added. They appear mostly in the combination of yellow, red, black, green and white colours (fig 4.22).



Fig 4.22: *Aashyer*

2. *Po-chyak*: this design is inspired by the bamboo knot pattern. The name of the pattern comes from the Lepcha words *po* meaning bamboo and *chyak* meaning the node or the eye. Thick and thin lines are laid horizontally (fig 4.23). The number of these lines depends on the weaver. These patterns are inserted along with others to form a mosaic of colours in the fabric.



Fig 4.23: *Po-chyak*

3. *Samok* and *Subok*: this design is a much later addition to the attire. It “symbolizes the headwear *Samok*” (Lepcha and Lepcha 2010) as it is a triangle shaped design made out of minute squares arranged in an ascending order to form a triangle (fig 4.24). Coming to *subok* is another design inspired from the headwear only this is laid horizontally. Both the designs mentioned above and being discussed here are identical only their placement differs, while the one is placed vertically the other is laid horizontally.



Fig 4.24: *Samok* and *Subok*

4. *Tsulot-tyet*: this design is inspired by the arrow tips sharp “V” shaped pattern laid sideways (fig 4.25). This design may have gained importance as the importance of bow and arrow became more evitable in the Lepcha culture as a hunting and gathering community they depends mostly on their hunting gears for survival and subsistence so it is quite understandable why they chose to include this pattern in their attire they use.

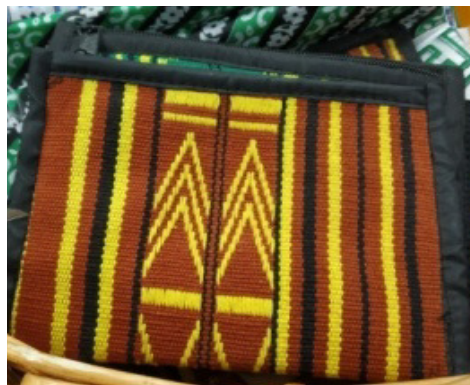


Fig 4.25: *Tsulot-tyet*

5. *Tungbrik* is another design inspired by insects or “stylized insects” (Lepcha and Lepcha 2010:5). It does resemble an insect (fig 4.26) but it is not completely confirmed that it was inspired by the shape of an insect, as these are recent designs incorporated in the *dumpra*.



Fig 4.26: *Tungbrik*

6. *Tungblyok*: the design is said to symbolize “stylized butterfly” (Lepcha and Lepcha 2010:5). But according to some this design is taken from the spider web. Few kinds of spider found in the Himalayan region of Sikkim, Kalimpoing and Drajeeling, especially the *Argiope magnifia* makes a prominent ‘X’ shaped design in its web (fig 4.27), to allure various insects. Since most of the patterns and design the Lepchas use are heavily inspired by the spider the deduction that this design is taken from the spider’s design as well.



Fig 4.27: *Tungblyok*

7. *Tungtoksor*: this has been as “the fern leaf pattern” (Lepcha and Lepcha 2010:5). Upon observation it can be seen as the upward facing leaves of the fern (fig 4.28). Some even believe that this design represents the arrow heads and as a design being incorporated recently the argument of whether it being a fern or arrow are on debatable ground.



Fig 4.28: *Tungtoksor*

8. *Aa-thyap-alyot*: the final part of the *dumpra* is the *aa-thyap-alyot*. When a fabric for the *dumpra* is made, the ends of the fabric on two sides are left with the ends of the threads hanging (fig 4.29) for a certain length which forms the adornment of the *dumpra*.



Fig 4.29: *Aa-thyap-alyot*

The *Dumpra* would be woven at their homes by the women, and each household used to produce their own fabrics. This changed with the introduction of machine made goods. The *dumpra* is mass produced using convenient materials like cotton fibers instead of nettle fibers. Other materials and designs also gained

popularity such as the Bhutanese traditional designs and fabric were also in use during the early 20th century.

But the constant need and desire to revive the traditional heritage have led to a shift again, currently it is mostly produced by cottage industries and machine made *dumpra* fabrics are used extensively. In Sikkim there are many small cottage industries set up in different villages funded by the state government. Directorate of Handicrafts and Handlooms is one of the many industries in Gangtok which produces these fabrics. Training programs have been carried out in the past in collaborations with the local associations to train women of different Lepcha villages in Dzongu, North Sikkim with “focus on traditional methods of extraction, processing, spinning and knitting of unique fiber” (Sikkim Now, 2011).



Fig 4.30: (Top) machine made *dumpra* and (Bottom) a hand woven *dumpra*.

In Kalimpong the training and production of *dumpra* was done in ‘Industrial’ a cottage industry set up during the British period in Kalimpong main town. It produced various fabrics and materials for export and used within Kalimpong. Lt. Renue Peggy Lepcha who used to work as a staff in Industrial received training in weaving. She later used her skills to produce *dumpra* for her own home and village. The handmade

dumpra (fig 4.30) was made by her inspired by the various designs that were taught in the Industrial from various parts of the country. An un-intentional assimilation of the patterns into the Lepcha attire is clear here. Later there can be seen a shift to designs that represents the Lepcha identity and which were inspired by things which were related to the community as discussed in detail by Lepcha and Lepcha (2010). Recently the machine made fabrics are imported from bigger industrial cities like Kolkata, and hand-made fabrics exchanged within the states of Sikkim and West Bengal.

Like the *dumdem* the male attire that is the *dumpra* was worn as a single piece which was later added by a shirt worn underneath the *dumpra*, further supplemented by a *tomu* a trouser worn underneath. Some version consists of the wearer wearing the *dumpra* till their knee or calf with a long socks underneath and then shoes.



Fig 4.31: Different versions of *Dumpra*.



Fig 4.32: A personal stylized *Gyado*

Another version consists of the *dumpra* coming up to the wearer's thigh worn above denim jeans or other pants. Recently the stylizing of the *dumpra* has become more experimental with the youths coming up with individual styles, some wear it as a tunic and a sleeveless coat made of the same material in is used as the upper part in

place of the original design (fig 4.31). Further the younger generations have come up with their own styling of the traditional attire. The inner wear or the 'gyado' is also styled according to personal preference (fig 4.32), the combination of the patterns and fabric used for the *Dumpra* fused with 'gyado' can be commonly seen and is in trend currently.

The Making and the Materials used:

Originally the material used for making Lepcha attire were retrieved from nettle plants or *Kuzu*. Although the extensively used fiber came from the nettle plants there were other plants as the *hyangmong-bor* meaning elephant fence (a direct translation, being a foreign species it does not have a name in within the Lepcha language) or century plant (*Agave Americana*), were also used. The process were similar to that of the nettle plant, the huge leaves are submerged in a marshy are for about a week or two till the epidermis decays away. The veins are extracted and used to make ropes and fiber.

Cloth made from the fibers of the nettle plant are called *thokro-dum*. According to the Lepchas, mature parts of the nettle plant are collected from the wild. The leaves, branches are cut off only leaving the main stalk of the plant is collected in a bunch and immersed in water usually in stagnant pools of streams. The outer epidermis of the stalks would erode away exposing the fibers inside.

Mrs. Ongkit Lepcha one of the producers of *thokro-dum* from Dzongu, North Sikkim explains the process of making the fabric in the small cottage industry run by the *Amu Sakchum Noom*—a self help group for the mothers of the village. According to her, the stem of *Kuzu Surong*, (fig 4.33), are collected from the wild. The bark of the plant is stripped and boiling them mixed with wood ash, then beating the boiled

mass with a wooden musket and constantly washing them in a stream. This process exposes the fibers of the plant. The cleaned fibers are then rubbed with clay and sun dried. The dried fibers are then dusted and loosed and spun into yarns (fig 4.34), then used for knitting, weaving various items. These fibers can also be mixed and blended with other fibers such as cotton and silk to make fabrics.

Various initiatives are being taken by the state government and NGO's to revive the *thokro-dum* art of weaving. The process of extracting fibers from nettle plants and especial trainings are provided to knit mufflers with nettle fibers (fig 4.35). After the training the process was used to construct *thokro-dum* for *dumpra* and *tangip* or Lepcha bags (fig 4.36).



Fig 4.33: Nettle plant used for the fibers



Fig 4.34: nettle fibers made into functional strands



Fig 4.35: Mrs. Ongkit Lepcha weaving a nettle fabric.



Fig 4.36: nettle *Tangip* (bag)

Apart from the revival of the *thokro-dum*, materials like cotton and raw silk which is coarser than the high quality fine silk is popular especially for *dumdem* (fig 4.37). In case of the *dumpra* with the introduction of cotton and wool the cloths grew more vibrant in colour. The Lepchas used natural elements for extracting colours to make their garments, presently this has changed to a great extent with the availability of more options it has indeed created more variations and made the process easier. The establishment of cottage industries and reintroduction of looms is a boost to the traditional technologies (fig 4.38). Though it can never be the equivalent to what it used to be originally, it cannot be helped as change is always progressing only subtle enough to be prevented. We can only understand, observe and document what we can.

Bamboo is another material that plays a very significant role in the Lepcha culture as it is used in almost every aspect from social and religious facet of Lepcha milieu. Abundantly available in the wild, extremely agile, easy to work with and light made it easier for the community to depend on this plant as an intricate material to sustain themselves. From utensils, weapons to food, attire and adornment bamboo is used in everything. One of the central part of the Lepcha male attire, that is the *thyakthuk*, is woven with bamboos, *ru* and *tuklop*. New materials are being introduced time and time again some even re-introduced, whatever it may be the end products still remains the same and with the current revival and interest retracing the traditional procedures and products it may be assumed that it will stay the same for a long period of time in the future as well.



Fig 4.37: Different fabrics for making *Dumdem*



Fig 4.38: Loom at the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handlooms

The Accessories:

Accessories may be seen as additional aspects that is worn to enhance the wearers appearance or functionality for example a bag, it is used for carrying various items and now has also become a fashion item, used for making a statement in the tangible form like in the case of carrying a particular brand or the way of stylizing the bag to express individuality. For communities as the Lepchas the usage of an accessory would directly depend upon its functionality rather than the concept of fashion and stylization. Here we discuss some of the accessories used by the community:

Bagup:

It is a small pouch made for carrying money and other valuable items, especially carried by women on their *nyamrek* or belt. The main function of the *bagup* was for the purpose of carrying money as the Lepcha attires don't usually possess pockets, it was only natural for the community to adapt this object due to its functionality. The *bagup* (fig 4.39), is a possession of Ren S.M Lepcha from Darjeeling, belonged to his mother. It is made of cotton and has designs which is not commonly seen used by the Lepcha community. It can be safely considered to be a borrowed object as a result of cultural contact.



Fig 4.39: *Bagup* from the collection of Ren S. M Lepcha, Darjeeling.

Tangip:

Tangip are bags with single strap. The sizes may differ according to the functionality. Big ones are used while carrying or transporting bigger objects, food, grains. Smaller *tangip* is used for carrying money, smaller objects. It can be of any stronger fabric or material like leather, *ru*, bamboo, nettle fabric, or the fabric used to make *dumpra* etc. and no specific emotion attached to it other than its functionality. Later as the idea of identity became more significant, cultural symbolism began to be attached and the concept of ‘ours’ was assigned. Thus the ‘Rongtangip’ became a part of the whole attire.

Today the diversity of *tangip* has accelerated now it comes in many colours, shapes and sizes (fig 4. 31). A modest size of fabric is folded in half and stitched on three sides leaving one side which is used as the mouth of the bag. A long strap of the same fabric is used which can be carried as a side bag, with one large compartment. The *tangip* today are all made of similar fabrics of the *dumpra*, carried sideways across the shoulder by men. The women prefer the smaller sized *tangip*.



Fig 4.40: *Tangip*.



Fig 4.41: *Tangip* at display at the TendongLho Rum Faat Celebration

Jewelry:

Another form of accessories is the jewelry. The Oxford dictionary defines jewelry as “personal ornaments”. Jewellery have been used by all cultures of the world as a form of adornment and enhancing their appearance. The question we need to adhere to is why do we wear jewelry? Some may say to enhance the appearance, or to enhance personal expression. Delicate gold chains are considered “classy” or “elegant” while bold big pieces are termed as “statement pieces” these all reflect the wearer’s personality. So in a way they are used as expressions of the self. It may be used to express marital status in case of ring worn on a special finger, or to express coming of age, in other cases it also has religious or cultural affiliations. For example the Native American war bonnets, are both used culturally and religiously. For closer reference we can take the example of the beads from Nagaland and most of North east India. These also indicate different meanings, among them the most evident is wealth and social status. Some use to make a statement whether be it about their unique styles and personalities or their classic taste, jewelries are used by many to voice their individuality and enhance their appearance. But in case of a group or a community they represent collective identity and worldviews.

Both men and women wear jewelry among the Lepchas, but it is the women who use them the most. Many reports and journals describe the Lepchas using silver, for instance Hunter writes “all the Lepchas are fond of ornaments, wearing silver hoops in their ears, necklace made from cornelian, amber and turquoise brought from Thibet, and pearls and corals from the south” (Hunter 1984:50). As we trace back in history the Lepchas do not have much mention about the use of jewelries, except for the use of feathers, in the past in their oral histories. As time passed by, the community got acquainted with the various precious stones via traders, travelers which can be in a way linked to the famous ancient trading route the Silk road. There are various forms of jewelries used by the Lepchas which will be discussed below:

Takvil:

They are *Ru* ornaments used by the Lepcha women. The community prior to the introduction of the various precious stones and metals adorned themselves with the whatever was available from the natural environment. *Ru* is one of those materials which is exceptionally agile and can be molded easily. The lepchas constructed various adornments like *lyak* or neck pieces, *zet lee* (safety pins), waist bands and *kagyer* (bangles). This was developed further and various designs were incorporated (fig 4.42) and (fig 4.43).



Fig 4.42: *Takvil*



Fig 4.43: A group of dancers wearing various *ru* ornaments during the *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* 2018.

Amel :

Amel or feathers, is another important and earliest form of adornment known by the community. Mostly used by the men of the community on the Lepcha hats (Fig 4.15), (fig 4.19) and (fig 4.20). Various feathers are used by Lepchas especially colourful or extravagant feathers are preferred but the most desired one is that of the *Nambong Aong Pano Foo* or the Racket Tailed Drongo which is believed to be worn by the *pano* or the kings. “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” (Lepcha 2017:67).

Achya:

Quills have been used alongside feathers as a form of adornment *Achya* means quills or sharp bones like in case of fish bones. *Sathim* or porcupine *achya* (quills) is commonly used by the Lepchas as it falls under the dietary pattern of the community its quills are collected and used as ornaments and medicines. It can be seen as an ornament, used to adorn the *samok* by Lepchamen. It was also used as *zet lee* to hold the fabric together by both men and women in their attire.

One of the specific uses of the feather and quills are in the religious field. They are used by the both *muns* and *bongthings* to adorn their *chet* or crown/ head gear. They believe this *chet* channels them their powers from nature. Before any ritual the *Mun* and the *bongthing* offers *chi* (alcohol) to their personal *chet* and pray for power and protection. After they put them on their head, they enter a trance. The *chet* are kept carefully in sacred places like the prayer room in the house.



Fig 4.44: A *mun*'s *Chet* made of *Amel* (Feathers) and (porcupine quills)

Dzi:

It is one of the precious stones used as ornaments in the himalayan belt. Its history can be traced back to Central Asia mainly Tibet and China. Made from rocks such as agate and amber, these can range in colours and pattern. To pinpoint the origin of *Dzi* is uncertain, its name comes from Tibetan meaning “shine” or “brightness” and in Manderin it is called “tian zhu, meaning heaven’s bead” (MODII 2017: www.owlcation.com). Its diffusion into these parts of the himalayas may have been a result of trading as Agate reservoirs can be traced in northern India and its borders since the Harappan era (www.ancientbead.com). These beads were found by the Lepchas while foraging or ploughing fields or near religious places thus leading to them believing that these beads were naturally formed in the certain shape and design. The contrary being that these stones were just remnants of prior civilization or a prior economic trade mode.

The Lepchas used these stones as amulets for protection as it is believed to have medicinal properties and can ward off evil. The most commonly used *Dzi* by the Lepchas is the black and amber coloured *dzi*, some are black with white patters that resembles an eye this is believed to be a counter measure for evil eye. The price of

these beads depends on the number of eyes the *dzi* has the lesser number of eyes is considered the most valuable and has a very high market value. The Lepchas use these elongated elliptical cylinders along with the other precious stones in necklaces (fig 4.45). It is also used in rings by both men and women.



Fig 4.45 :*Dzi*

Eyu:

Torquise has long been used in many cultures across the globe as a form of adornment. It is considered one of the oldest gemstone known to humans, From the Native Americans, Egyptians, Persiansto the Mayans it can also be seen in many Asian cultures including the himalayan communities. As mentioned by Hunter previously these blue stones were brought in from Tibet. The nomenclature is from Tibetan ‘Yu’ meaning essence of a lake (Berllezza 2013:1).

The Lepchas use *Eyu* with other valuable gemstones and mineral stones like pearls and *dzi* (fig 4.35) and (fig 4.36). As in the case with *Dzi*, *eyu* were also found in various places especially near religious places before it was brought in the market. Both men and women use these stones in the for of necklace or rings for personal adornment.



Fig 4.46 And Fig 4.47: *Eyu* (blue) worm with *Dzi* (black), *Phiru* (red) and pearls

Phiru:

Another significant ornamental stone used by the community is the *Phiru* or coral. The red coloured stones, also known as Tibetan Corals, which was adapted by the Lepcha community. In addition many communities also use these stones as jewelry along the North East belt of India. Communities in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal, etc use the coral beads extensively for their jewelries.

The Lepchas used beads in various sizes mostly in the form of rounded beads (fig 4.47) and (fig 4.48). Like the above two gemstones, *Phiru* is used by both men and women in the community, as neck pieces, rings and earrings.



Fig 4.48: *Phiru* (red)

Mutik:

Mutik or pearls are mostly used by the women in the community, it can be said that the Lepcha women adore this valuable carbonate mineral which is evident as almost all Lepcha women have *mutik lyak* even if not original a look-alike is always an option. It is preferred by all age groups, from small children to elderly *mutik lyak* is always a desired form of adornment. Lepcha (2013) mentions in her thesis “Women in Tingvong wore pearl necklaces. From a young girl to an elderly grandmother, the beads would be from scanty to ornamented with precious stones” (*ibid* 2013: 115). The diffusion of these valuable minerals can be attached to the trading routes from Eastern Asia and other coastal countries, as pearls are not indigenous to the hilly topographies.

These bio minerals are used as *lyaks* or necklace (fig 4.49), earrings, *kakups* or rings, sometimes even in the attire itself. As more the attire get stylised, people have found ways to incorporate artificial pearls in the *dumdem* to enhance its aesthetics, especially during marriages.



Fig 4. 49: *Mutik* with *phiru* (red)\

Designs used in the ornaments:

As the types of ornaments have been discussed it is all the more important to converse about how it is used or in this case stylized. The most common designs used by the Lepchas are as follows:

1. *Samrang bur*:

One of the most popular designs adapted by the Lepchas is the *Samrang burbur* here meaning flower. Based on the flowers of the *Samrang Kung* (tree) or *Sachima wallichii* ('Chilauney' in common language). This design is usually used for earrings and waist belts. Some even incorporated the design for *zet lee*. The design originally consisted of five petals forged in silver but the number of petals can vary depending on the desire of the wearer. This design has today been improvised into layers of petals being added to the original design (fig 4.50).

Initially they were popularly molded in silver but as gold became gained popularity these designs were also shifted to gold ornaments.

2. *Yel bur*:

Another design the Lepchas use is the *yel bur* inspired by the flowers of the *Diploknemabutyracea* tree ('chiuri' in common language). Though it is not as popular as the *samrang bur*. This design is used mostly for earrings (fig 4.51).

3. *Saret Aalee*:

The name of this design comes from two Lepcha words, *saret* meaning cucumber and *aalee* which comes from the Lepcha word for tongue but also it means the seed. As the name suggests it is inspired by the cucumber seed design, it is depicted as elongated diamond shaped design used in earring and waist band attached to a *samrang bur* design (fig 4.50).



Fig 4. 50: *Samrang bur* earring



Fig 4.51: *Yel bur* earring

Kagyer:

Are bangles used by the Lepcha women. Commonly made of silver and preferably worn one on each hand. One single hoop not fully joint to make a circle but a small gap is kept as a means of adjustment. Various symbols can be inserted according to the choice of the wearer like *theyel bur* design (fig 4. 44) and (fig 4.45). Other designs such as flowers, elephant heads, etc., can also be incorporated (fig 4.46). Silver *Kagyer* are very popular however with the introduction *Zer-kagyer* or gold bangles have raise in popularity simultaneously (fig 4. 47).



Fig 4.44: And Fig 4. 45: *Kagyer* with *yel bur* design



Fig 4. 46: Silver *Kagyer* with flower patterns.



Fig 4.47: Zer (Gold) *Kagyer*

Kakyup:

Kakyup or the ring was a later addition to the jewelries used by the Lepcha community presently it is worn extensively for various reasons. One among the many is to symbolise marriage. Some even used as a protection amulets integrated with various valuable stones and minerals. Usually gold and silver are the preferred choices.

Waist belt:

Also known as *Samsang bur*, it is usually used to carry *ban kup* (a small knife) or a scikel. The *samrang bur* is attached to a long chain which is then attached to knife (fig 4.48). As the name suggests the design is inspired by the flower of the *samrang* tree (fig 4.49) and is usually made of silver. The functionality of carrying a knife or usually a scickle as it would be convenient of the Lpecha women to work efficiently during harvests and not lose their scikles as it would be fastened to the *samrang bur*.



Fig 4. 48 And Fig 4. 49: Silver *Samrang bur* or Waist belt

Zet lee:

It is a long pin used to hold the garments (*dumdem* and *dumpra*) on the shoulders, also sometimes known as the *Pin Zer*. Initially sharpened bamboo pins were used to hold the *dumdem*. Later this was adapted into iron, copper, and silver *zet lee*. Since the material used for the *dumdem* earlier happened to be thick using *zet lee* would not have a damaging effect, while the current materials are more delicate so instead of using *zet lee* the Lepcha women use safety pins which do not damage the fabric much.

Mr. Dursing Lepcha from Suruk, Kalimpong showed a collection of his mother's *zet lee* (fig 4.50). He remembers his mother wearing the *zet lee* to hold her *dumdem*, the *zet lee* she used also had additional adornment to it three pieces of leaf shaped ornaments with hoops (fig 4.51), (fig 4.52) and (fig 4.53), which he describes were attached to the *zet lee*. The set also has two hooks which were most probably used for waist adornment.



Fig 4. 50: *Zet lee* from Suruk. Kalimpong.



Fig 4. 51: The set of additional jewelry from Mr. Dursing Lepcha.



Fig 4.52: Leaf shaped jewels used to adorn the *zet lee*. Fig 4.53: Two hooks used for the waist jewelry.

Kaa-woo:

It is box shaped centre piece attached to a necklace which can be of pearls, silver or gold, depending on the wearers' choice (fig 4.54). They can be seen adorned with *phiru*, *eyu* and other precious gemstones. It can be regarded as an assimilated jewelry as it greatly resembles the jewelry used by the Tibetan community and the Bhutias known as 'khau'. Silver *kaa-woo* are rarely seen presently as gold is preferred. They can be seen used in marriages in Sikkim it includes into the movable property inherited by the bride.

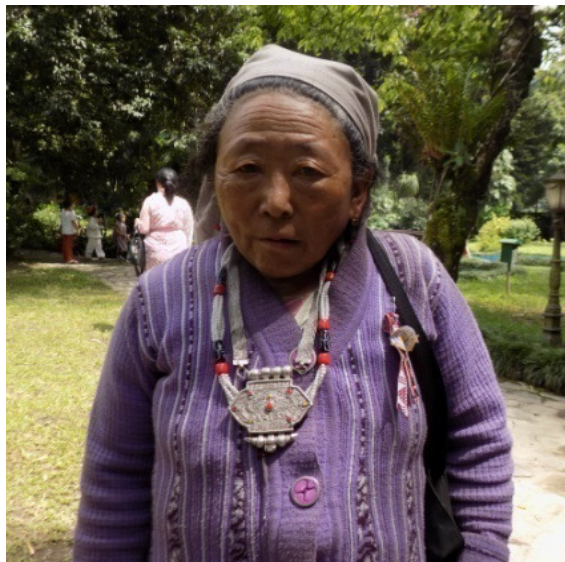


Fig 4.54: *Kaa-woo*

“*zet*, a pair of silver safety pins to hold *dumdem* on both sides of the shoulders; *kakyoop*, a ring, *kaawo* an amulet, and especially *sambrang bur*, silver chains with a *samrang* flower design fastened by the side of her right waist; *kakel*, a bangle and *takvil lyaak* a necklace made of fine, intricate cane splits, designs, and patterns enhance her charm, beauty, and personality” (Tamsang 1998: 13). Ornaments became important to communities like the Lepchas and especially to the women, as women were considered an important asset in the households and thus gifted with various movable properties such as jewelries. Due to its movable nature it was easier to take a

part of their inheritance with them as they travelled to another place after marriage. This would become a part of their heritage, a part of them which then they passed to their daughters or the next female inheritor in line. On the other hand the Lepcha men have lower amount of jewelry they wear. However, precious gemstones were worn by both genders in the community.

Coins as personal adornments

Coins have more significance than meets the eye. Since in the beginning they have identified as a medium of economic exchange and naturally has a higher value. They came in various precious metals like copper, silver and gold, etc. People started turning them into jewelries. Making it a part of the statement pieces incorporated into their traditional fashion. If we explore other cultures of the world, it is the evident that coins have been extensively used as jewelries. Men and women started integrating coins into their jewelry⁵, specially the elite section as statement of their class and positions, as statements of an individual's class representations.

Among the Lepchas the *com lyak* gained popularity as more and more influx of various communities started pouring into their territories. Another form of amalgamation can be seen as aspects of different cultures influence one another. Cultural traits are borrowed and adapted as their own. As these jewelries were of great

⁵ Among the Himalayan communities this form of jewelry can be found among various communities. The Gurungs call it *Reji*, Limboos call it *Yangitchi*, Lepchas call it *Com Lyak*, the Tamangs call it *Hari*, Rais, Newars, and other communities know it as *Athani* or *Charani Har* depending on the value of coins used in the jewelry, etc. One similarity that can be found in the coin jewelries used by all these communities is that the coins they use, all belong to the British era in India. Both the diffusion and evolution of these jewelries can be seen in many parts of India as well. In the North east many tribes like the Digaru Mishmi, Adi, Galo, Wancho, etc. also were coin jewelries in North India we have the Kinnaura, of Himachal Pradesh also adapting jewelries made of coins. The Himachal State Museum has in their display a handsome collection of coin jewelries used by the different communities in Himachal Pradesh. There are numerous other tribes and communities all over India who similarly use coin jewelries.

value they would be included in a women's movable property when she marries. They form family heirlooms handed down from one generation to another.

The Lepcha community has three levels of coin ornaments. First is the *Suki Lyak* made of 4 ani silver coins (fig 4.45) and (fig 4.46). Next is the *Thala Lyak* made of 8 ani silver coins and the last one is the *Com Lyak* made of one rupiya silver coins. The *Suki* and *Thala Lyak* were more common where as the *Com Lyak* is considered a luxury. The *com lyak* is still popular among the community worn by the women more and more women wish to craft one for themselves to make it a part of their heritage and movable property. But due to it being quite expensive, majority cannot afford it since the crafting of the neck piece is charged separately and the crafting of the silver coins is charged additionally. For most inheriting it as a movable property is the only option to get wear it, that is in case their ancestors possessed a *com lyak* in the first place.



Fig 4.55 And Fig 4. 56: *Suki lyak* used by the Lepchas

The coins

As coins were actively used as part of the Lepcha female attire, the familiar things that came across frequently during the field work were coins. Old coins dating back to the British empire and even before that. Many Lepcha families owned these coins as part of their family heritage in all three field areas of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Many families kept these coins in their 'kingkoo' room or the prayer room of their house, some have tucked them carefully in their private rooms.

Mr. Ongyel Lepcha, of Suruk, Kalimpong presented their family treasure in a small white handkerchief pouch they drew out of a wooden box. It contained a red coin with the engravings of Hanuman (deity from the Hindu epic Ramayana) in one, another coin had Radha-Khrishna (Hindu Goddess and God) engraved in it. Another coin have Kali (Hindu Goddess), and one was a small round coin with a hole in the center, some had even lost their engravings and most from the British era (fig 4.58). The coins have been passed down from their great grandparents and would be passed down to his children in the future. The biggest problem faced by the people in Suruk were that the merchants would often take these coins on a very low price from them. There were incidents where these coins have been taken free of cost making the families who own them believe these coins had no market value. Instances in the past, where coins were taken by conmen who presented themselves as merchants were well known to them. Many of the families in the village had been robbed this way.

Darjeeling and Sikkim had similar stories behind the coins in their family. Ren S. M Lepcha in Darjeeling had in his family collection three coins (fig 4.57) one of the British empire, one with the Hanuman engraving similar to that of Kalimpong and the last one is a square shaped coin which he states was given to his ancestors and was used in the Sikkim Kalimpong partition deed.

These coins infiltrated societies which knew only of systems like barter prior to the introduction of money in their societies created dependency as money became a commodity which could buy everything else. And they were greatly valued some even have collection of old coins hidden in safe and sacred places as family heirlooms and *ter* or a sign of the family's prosperity/ good fortune. Often people are not willing to show these to anyone as they believe the good fortune can be taken away. Only a few families were willing to show these antiquities during the period of fieldwork, but almost every family mentioned of possessing them as their family *ter*. It is interesting to see the transformation of an object from its original state to the position people ascribe them through the implementation of different meanings to it. The coins acquire the status of a wearable piece of jewelry, becoming a part of the community's traditional attire and a part of their culture through the means of ascribing different values. Then ultimately it is given the status of a family heirloom since it has been passed down from generation to generation surviving and reviving with the tolls of time. It brings a piece of the previous wearer giving the present owners the sense of link with their ancestors.



Fig 4.57: coins from Darjeeling



Fig 4.58: Coins from Suruk, Kalimpong

Changing fashion

Since it is inevitable to resist change, the same can be said in case of the attire and fashion of the Lepchas. With the present era where the society demands so much, a community like the Lepcha can only try and keep up with the pace as the world around them changes rapidly. The traditional attire has come a long way from its original form in means of style and stylizing. Change can also be observed in a conversely manner as more people have taken to revive the traditional attires as Lepcha (2013) mentions “Instead of the wedding gown and the suit, the bride can also be seen wearing the traditional gada in white and the groom is seen to mix the modern suit with the *dumpra*. Those at the wedding are also seen to wear the traditional attires” (*ibid* 2013: 145). With the younger generations taking much interest in reviving their traditions, they cannot help but add a little flare of their own. To find a position for themselves in the society without disregarding their traditions and thus a new form of personal expressions originates. Each with their unique form of expression and representation of their culture. Suits made of using the fabric and traditional patterns can be in popularity and more and more Lepcha men prefer to wear them especially the younger generation (fig 4.59). Though a modern touch is given to the fabric it is still considered traditional because of the used of the traditional materials and patterns. Different interpretations of *dumpra* is quite in fashion currently (fig 4.60) and (fig 4. 61). These interpretations are often personal and on an individual level. Expressing their personal preference and their style but staying inside the idea of what is considered as being traditional and affiliated to their culture. The evolution is equivalent as in case of the *dumdem*, from the colours, to the material and the style progress to the presently two piece *dumdem* (fig 4.62) all comes down to the purpose of functionality of the attire for the community. Though there is

raising concern among the community that this will cause the traditional process of wearing the traditional attire to perish. It is a significant concern but the fact that this has also provided the opportunity for the *dumdem* to be worn by those who could not wear it prior due to the same very reasons cannot be disregarded.



Fig 4. 59: a suit made of traditional material and pattern



Fig 4.60: personal stylized *dumpra*



Fig 4.61: personal stylized *dumpra*



Fig 4.62: two piece *dumdem*

The change is not only recognized in the attire, but the whole stylizing process, as Hunter states “the women always wear two braided pigtailed and this it is

by this they are mostly readily distinguished from their effeminate looking partners, who wear only one” (Hunter 1984: 50). Today braided pigtails can hardly be seen among women unless for special occasions. Shorter hairs became popular among the men. At some point of time it was necessary due to the introduction of educational and religious institutes. They were pressurized in some form or other to follow the mass culture. But recently it can be seen that more Lepcha men have been trying to comeback with the braided long hairstyle. There are still many forms of restrictions and norms for this to be a major movement yet.

Amalgamation of traditional attire into the present time and space can also be associated to entrepreneurs like Ms. Tshela Leezum who aims in reviving the ethnic fashion and make it more accessible for the current age. Private businesses like House of Fashion, Tshela’s Traditional One Stop at M.G Marg, Gangtok and Himalayan Indigenous Design, Kalimpong are some of the significant parts to making this possible. As Ms.Leezum stated in an interview with Sikkim Chronicles “old ethnic cloths will have to change according to time”.

The processes of making these attires may differ or may be similar to many other communities but what really set it apart is the end product. Who is wearing it? how? and where? A community member wearing the *dumpra* or *dumdem* has a different reception than an outsider. The significance also differs from a community member wearing a *thyaktuk* and say the chief minister of a state wearing the *thyaktuk*. Shri. Narendra Modi the present prime minister of India while on his visit to Sikkim in 2018, was offered the *Pabbri* to wear. Former Chief Minister of Sikkim Shri. Pawan Kumar Chamling has worn both *samok* and *thuri* on many occasions and Lepcha festivals in the state. Thus the hats not only served as a hat to be worn by also

carried the significance of the Lepcha community in Sikkim and how the state connotes significance towards communities as political identities.

This was also evident with the current pandemic striking in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling cultural responses could be seen in the form of various masks made from the fabric used for the *dumpra* (fig 4.65). And most community members preferred to wear this mask, often an unconscious form of response when it comes to representation and cultural expression. Similar cases can be seen in the sudden rise in the usage of the *dumpra* pattern and fabric to make pencil bags, file covers, wallets, (fig 4. 63), (fig 4.64), giving people more options of demonstration their cultures in tangible form.



Fig 4.63: use of *dumpra* fabric for making file covers. Fig 4.64: Use of *dumpra* fabric for making purses

Identity has a significant effect to a community's attire especially in the present day and age where the world has become very sensitive. The attire intensifies the identity, in turn the use and production of these cloths also increases. Another aspect to keep into consideration is the process of change itself. As time passes by the public responses to the surrounding also changes which includes the traditional attires, it also changes over time. Let's take the example of men's wear. The present era is such where the many things and concepts do not have a specific or concrete boundary

thus the *dumpra* on many instances can be seen worn by the women in the community. Thus attire based on the gender of an individual may seem to be on the change as the concept of gender itself undergoes transformation.



Fig 4.65: mask made of *Dumpra* fabric.

As in the case of the attire, jewelry changes and has changed through the ages as well. As time progresses the concept of adornment also changes. For a period of time jewelry may have been used for beauty but then the concept of beauty also changes. Beauty through the ages is different for different communities and to different individuals. Today it is more about representation and expression or individualism but retaining within the umbrella of the culture and tradition. For instances the *Kagyer* can be seen in various styles and made of metals depending on the interest of an individual. Thus “the direction of change does not inevitably lead to the total replacement of indigenous forms by modern or exogenous elements” (Theodossopoulos 2012: 592), and still retains its sense of authenticity. For the most part the view concerning tradition and culture is “the view that the only authentic tradition is one uncontaminated by western culture” (Theodossopoulos 2012 :593) which relates to the traditional attire alike but the concept of authenticity in itself is an ambiguous one as the what we tend to discard the “dynamic and adaptable process” (*ibid* 2012:593).

Chapter 5

Artefacts

Artefacts were first used by Morgan to measure evolution. The more complex the society became the artefacts that were produced and used became complex as well. Artefacts are physical embodiment of time and space. The evolutionist saw artefacts as indicators of the time period and the process of evolution. Historians saw them as objects that have the ability to convey histories, explore a time line, and indicate change. Now there may often raise the question demanding the difference between the two that is objects and artefacts. To put it simply objects are any material thing that is tangible and can be seen, they can be of natural origin or human made. Whereas artefact on the other hand are produced or used by humans and have cultural significance, for example a stone is an object but the same stone flaked, polished and used in hunting becomes an artefact.

So why are they important to human society? Other than assisting humans, there are stories hidden beneath each layer of an object or an artefact. They are the “markers of aesthetic and cultural values” (Woodward 2007:15). An object in many ways defines cultural values be it at a community level or a larger pan view of an era or a civilization. For example we can talk about typewriters as being or defining a certain era or period in time and the industrial culture that was on the rise in that particular age. We can take another example of ‘Shiva Lingas’ or usually called as ‘Shiv Lings’ which are obelisks of religious importance in Hinduism. Prior to becoming a Shiv Ling it is just a stone but poured with religious and cultural meaning it becomes symbolic or what Woodland calls as a ‘marker’. Thus objects or artefacts give form to the belief pattern of those who use them.

Apart from markers of cultural values, artefacts can also be seen as “identity markers” (*ibid* 2007: 15) in many layers in fact. Like a special ring or a brand can relay self-identity, traditional attire as community identity, the national flag for national identity, a specific idol, or a monument as religious identity, a symbol for political identity, and many more. Object not only identifies these markers but also help trace the changes in them over time. Thus, they are like age markers in a wooden pillar of a house, the objects being the mark and the pillar the time space. Artefacts also help trace is the “reproduction of inequality” (*ibid* 2007: 16) Woodward talks about the classification of objects and the preferences of a certain object over the other creates class distinctions, as class factions have distinctive taste preferences for certain object over other. Thus, social status and class division could be traced through these objects. We can take a daily object as the mobile phone it can be observed the difference in preferences over a certain brand of phone by different class of people. But again this can be contested and debated over taking into consideration the additional variables in the society today, yet other artefacts that surround an individual can reveal a lot about him or her. For example the lipstick you use, or the type or even brand of shoes you wear, the bag you carry, etc.

Miller (1987) has given four classifications of artefacts that distinguish the various purposes for which they are made and used:

Artefact and function: these are based on the various functionality of the materials some specific and some inclusive. Discussed below these artefacts have different functionality based on their symbolic and aesthetic values for example shapes, design and usage, etc. For example certain types of baskets are used for particular purposes

Tangar is used for collecting small grained crops and *Tangzyang* is used for collecting fire woods and other bigger crops.

Artefacts and Property: Miller talks about the development of personal property rights. More of the ‘self’ and ‘self-identity’ is being mentioned here. In a community like the Lepchas the self-identity often translates to the community identity as a whole. As we talk about material culture, objects reflects the ‘self’ or in this case the community distinctiveness and characteristic which helps them stand out from the rest and helps define the collective persona.

Artefact, space and time: Miller states that “social spaces acquire symbolic potency through the existence of particular objects and their location within space. Objects must also be contextualized in time. He gives the example of “a bus stop bench might be used for a variety of functions throughout a 25 hour period”. (Miller 1987)

Similarly artefacts attain certain degree of status depending on their functionality and this depends on all the variables around it, including the community and their usage of the artefacts. Things cannot exist in isolation there has to be someone or something giving meaning or purpose to objects to attain certain status. Let’s take the case of *Tukshyor*, it is used for straining *Chi*, here the along with the object the variables *chi* is very important alongside the community. As *chi* is an integral part of the Lepcha culture, everything related to it becomes all the more important including *Tukshyor*, *Pthuth*, *Talu*, etc. these all objects used in the preparation of a traditional beverage and thus they hold great significance. Thus, a change in its status can be observed according to a given time and given situation.

Artefacts and Style: the last dimension laid out by Miller, according to him style is the “capacity to arrange and order objects in an individual or unique way”. Here we view it from the community’s perspective; there are certain objects and traits that are only exclusive to the community. For example, the traditional attire defines the community identity and is exclusively unique to the community.

Here we discuss artefacts as markers, since the most significant we can see an artefact is as an identity marker, the question of which will raise in this chapter as artefacts and objects related to the Lepcha community identity will be discussed. For a better understanding the artefacts will be classified and sub classified into many categories depending on their functionality.

Baskets and Utensils

One of the key functionalities of the artefacts in human society is to assist humans in their day to day activities and make it more efficient. Here we look into artefacts and objects that are used in daily Lepcha life which includes household artefacts used in the kitchen to artefacts used for agricultural purposes.

Sl no	Bamboo	Cane	Stone	Metal	Others (leather/pottery)
1	<i>Talyung</i>	<i>Palung</i>	<i>Tukvar</i>	<i>Tapu</i> (copper)	<i>Tafep</i> (bottle gourd)
2	<i>Tanzyang</i>	<i>Tung free</i>	<i>Anchu</i>		<i>Faatfeetyok</i> (pottery)
3	<i>Tangar</i>	<i>Tukshyor</i>	<i>Nincher</i>		<i>Faatchambree</i> (pottery)
4	<i>Kyodyung /Sukmoo</i>		<i>Homu</i>		<i>Za tey</i>
5	<i>Sher</i>		<i>Sankar thuk</i>		<i>Tung free</i> (leather)
6	<i>Talu</i>				
7	<i>Zip</i>				
9	<i>Po thyuth</i>				
10	<i>Kark</i>				
11	<i>Tingshit</i>				
12	<i>Tungfyuk</i>				
13	<i>Durshibu</i>				

14	<i>Dalo</i>				
15	<i>Fyet</i>				
16	<i>Taful</i>				

Table 5.1: House hold Artefacts

House hold Artefacts

The Lepchas are known for their close relationship with bamboo. It is one of the plants extensively used by the community both for edible, building and household purposes (Table 5.1). Various species of Bamboos are used for making various household artefacts such as baskets, weapons and even attire. Another important plant extensively used is the *Ru* (*Calamus acanthospathus* Giff).

Wood and bamboo objects can be seen as the first to be used by the community; pottery came a little later in the scenario. Metal was introduced with cultural contacts, not necessarily the major influx of in migration that came in later in history, but we can also take into account the cultural contact that was persistent even before that. We can take evidences from the oral traditions and folktales, there are numerous examples of cross cultural contact and even conjugal alliances established between the Lepchas and other communities. One of the famous tales is that of Zolasimit a famous princess⁶ from Jalpaiguri, in North Bengal, India who married a

⁶There was a Tribal king in Jalpaiguri (in West Bengal, India) by the name Raja Devchand. He had a daughter. He arranged a marriage by trial for his daughter and invited all royalties and noblemen from in and around his kingdom. Many kings, princes, chiefs from different corners came to participate in this trial, among them was a Lepcha king Rangzee Pano from Sikkim. When the princess saw Rangzee Pano, she fell in love with him at first sight. For the princess he was different from any man she had ever seen. She requested her father to allow her to marry this *pano*. But it was not possible as many guests had arrived for the trial and it would offend the nobilities. However the king and the queen loved their daughter very much so they arranged for their daughter and Rangzee pano to elope. Under the dark cloak of night they sent away their daughter with Rangzee pano along with her movable properties and a few guards. However the next day, news of the elopement was out and the outraged guests perused the couple relentlessly. The new couple fled all the way to *Suphuk*, now Sevok where they pitched a tent to rest *suphuk* means to clear the place. Today it is famously identified for the Coronation Bridge, also known as 'Bagh Pul'. The princess sent news of her well being via river Teesta. According to the Lepchas there is a place near the Coronation Bridge where the waters of river Teesta flows still with no movement this place is known as '*Gyazo-sung-nen*' *Gya* comes from the Lepcha name for India that is *Gyakar* meaning plains, *sung* meaning story and *nen* meaning to listen which roughly translates to 'listening to *Gyazo*'. The princess came to be known as Zolasimit, (*zo* meaning rice), named after the place she came from (the land of rice).

Lepcha *pano* (king) from Sikkim. There are various tales that suggest the cultural contact, with various communities and vices versa. And with that also came the assimilation of cultural aspects and most easily and evidently to be affected foremost was the material culture of the community. The contest between retaining the original structure and the new forms was unconscious to the community as the appropriation of the new materials was not seen as a threat as of recently. Recently the community is more aware at an individual level and this awareness has led to small pockets of museums coming up in different regions. Especially in Sikkim various small community museums can be seen still on the rise. This can be seen as a more inclusive way of community initiated cultural conservation.

The house hold artefacts listed here are the ones used on a daily basis for various household works. Thus, here I discuss artefacts from the three field areas which I have tried to classify the artefacts into various categorizes based on functionality, materials used, the time and space they belong to and the various meanings ascribed to them by the Lepchas. The following materials discussed below are from the three different field areas.

Talyung:

The *Talyung* is used as a daily house hold artefact for the purpose of separating food grains from additional foreign materials like stones, weeds, other particles, etc. The grains are placed in the *Talyung* and held at the sides, an upward movement of the wrist allows the grains to lift the grains temporarily. As the grains fall, the movement separates the husks and the grains, as the husk is lighter the air movement pushes them out from the grains. The grains are then spread out in the *Talyung* to look for foreign praticles such as pebbles, weeds etc.,

There are two types of *Talyung* used by the community based on their shape; one is square with elevated ends and curved sides (fig 5.1). The elevated end has rounded corners that hold the food grains within the *talyung*. It is made of bamboo and *ru* the corners are covered with leather usually cow or goat skin. To make a *Talyung* first a base is made out of *ru* then the form is constructed out of bamboo. Usually *Pali Po* (species of bamboo comonly used making baskets (fig 5.3)), is used for making *talyung*. The next *talyung* is round and, made of bamboo, the edges are elevated about two centimeters, to hold the grains within the *talyung* (fig 5.2). It is commonly used by all communities in the hilly regions of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling including the Lepchas.



Fig 5.1 (left) taditional *Talyung* made of *ru*, bamboo and leather



Fig 5.2: *Talyung* intoduced later made of just bamboo.



Fig 5.3: *Pali-po*

The Lepchas produce the first type of *talyung* within the community by certain members who are expert in bamboo works and skilled at making *talyung*. Mostly they are members who have learned to make these baskets from their older generations. It was mainly seen used in Sikkim where as the use of the second type of *talyung* was observed in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The second type can be seen as an acculturation, and a later addition by cross cultural contacts, for the various communities in the Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills.

Takvar:

It is made of two concave stones or *longs* which comes together to make a single roughly circular or elliptical piece of stone (fig 5.4). A small circular cavity known as *long sum* is carved on the top stone and a wooded handle known as *kacham* (*ka* comes from the Lepcha word for hand *aaka* and *cham* meaning to hold or catch) is attached which is used to move the *takvar* around. Another circular cavity is carved at the center of the top stone four to five centimeter in diameter and held by a small iron rod known as *Tingi* (meaning small) attached to the lower stone, this is where the grains (for example *kuchung* or maize or *Khuri* or buck wheat) are put in for grinding. The *tingi* holds both the stones together while grinding the grains.

The top stone rotates while the lower stone remains fixed; this movement grinds the food grains. The stone crushes the grains and the speed of the *takvar* can be controlled to get the desired size of the grains. The Lepcha community ascribes gender identity to these stones. The Lower and bigger part is considered to be the *long-amot* or the female while the top half is identified as the *long-abu* or the male.

Takvar is used all over in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong, still predominant in most part of the rural areas where agriculture is practiced. Each house

used to own a *takvar* as each family produced their own food and processed them, and *takvar* was an integral part of a household. But as societies evolved and technologies improved there were easier and faster means to process the food products and the use of *takvar* is just limited to the villages or even to certain households currently.



Fig 5.4: *Takvar* rom Gangyap, West Sikkim

Tangjyang:

It is a bamboo basket, with big holes or gaps seen as points in the basket known as *amik* (translating to eye or eyes) of the basket. They come in various sizes and shapes and serve different purposes. Some are smaller in size with smaller holes usually used for harvesting cardamom. Some are bigger in size with wider mouth and more closed at the bottom (fig 5.5). It is mainly used to carry larger goods or larger amount of goods for example, fodder, firewood, fruits.

It is a collective believed among the Lepcha community that *tanzjyang* should not be kept empty as seeing an empty *tanzyang* is considered to be a bad omen. This is not just believed by the Lepchas but mostly all communities in the hills, but the diffusion of this norm cannot be pinpointed to one community. In case it is empty it is always kept upside down or at least one object is placed inside the basket, in most cases it is a scikel or a *bantok* (big knife).

Another use of *tangzyang* in the Lepcha society earlier was to carry dead bodies from the house to the place of burial. The deceased would be placed inside the *tangzyang* with folded legs and then carried to the burial site. Presently, as burial is no more in practice within the community the practice of carrying the deceased in a *tangzyang* is also stopped but this artefact has still earned its significance in the ritual of *amak* or death ceremony. The *tangzyang* can be seen hung from a tree branch during the death ceremony symbolising the use of the basket in the ritual of *amak*.

The current baskets can be seen as a later influence to the Lepcha society which came as a product of borrowing as most neighbouring communities also predominantly used this type of basket. Commonly known as ‘Doko’ in Nepali. The shift can also be closely associated with the introduction of new crops to the community there was a need to shift to the new form of *tangjyang* to the contemporary one.



Fig 5.5: *Tangzyang* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Tangar:

Tangar is similar in structure to *tanzyang* but with no *amik* or holes. It is tightly woven and is conical in shape (Fig 5.6). This is used to store or collect crops with smaller grain size. If we look back in time there first crops to be domesticated by the community were those with smaller grain size like, *kodoh*, *kamdak*, etc. and the enclosed basket is perfect for collecting or harvesting these smaller crops. Similar to *tanzyang*, *tangar* is also placed upside down when its not in use. *Tangar* also comes in various shapes an sizes. Some are more elongated and used for harvesting cardamom (fig 5.6). Whereas some imitates the shape of the contemporary *tangzyang* and is used for storing various small grains such as *Kalah* (lentels), *mong* (millet), *zo* (rice) etc. (fig 5.7). Both differ in shape and size but the aesthetic retains its initial design. It is locally known as ‘thumchey’ in Nepali and is used by all communities in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong.



Fig 5.6: *Tangar* from Tingvong North Sikkim



Fig 5.7: *Tangar* from Kalimpong

Palung:

It is a bowl, made purely of *ru* with very elaborate and detailed pattern (fig 5.8). *Palung* consists of very intricately designs and woven by skillful hands usually trained to make these artefacts. It is considered to be very durable and extreamly

flexible. There are training centers which provide training in making *palung* along with certain other intricate designed baskets and bamboo objects. It is usually used to store precious items, for example jewelries, ritual objects etc,.In some places it is also seen used to serve food to *yukmuns* (fig 5.9), as a sign of respect. It is observed used extensively in many parts of Sikkim where as not so much in Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

Since *ru* (fig 5.10) is very hard to handle and construction of these artefacts is time consuming, the artefact such as *palung* become of more valuable. Today the economic and market value of these artefacts have been elevated as they are commodified and outsourced in the market.



Fig 5.8: *Palung* from Gangyap, West Sikkim



Fig 5.9: food served in *Palung*



Fig 5.10: *Ru*

Kyokdung and Sukmoo:

Are used for the purpose of making butter and butter milk. The *kyokdung* is made of bamboo (fig 5.11) especially with the bigger species of bamboo known as *Po-dyang* (*Dendrocalamus sikkimensis* Gamble,) (Fig 5.12) commonly known as ‘Bhalu bass’ in Nepali. The *Sukmoo* is made of wood, a long handle is attached to a circular wooden disc. Milk is poured in the *kyokdung* and *Sukmoo* is used in an up and down movement at different speed to draw the fat from the milk which accumulates and forms *mor* or butter.

This can be seen as a later addition to the community after the community was introduced to pastoralism and agriculture. According to the community before the introduction of the *kyokdung* and *sukmoo* the Lepchas used to store the milk fat and let it accumulate into butture or sometimes simply use their hands to shake or move the milk and make butter. The use of *kyokdung* and *sukmoo* is still predominant in all the three field areas but is also gradually losing its significance as more and more community members are giving up cattle rearing practices.



Fig 5.11: *Kyokdung* and *Sukmoo*



Fig 5.12: *Po-dyang*

Sher:

Also known as *song* is a weighing scale made of bamboo attached to a wooden handle held together with the help of ropes. A small plate shaped basket, similar to *talyung*

is attached to a wooden handle which has a weight in the shape of a knob carved with the handle (fig 5.13). The wooden handle is marked with scales of one kilograms and two kilograms respectively. The scale can go up to five kilograms depending on the size of *sher*. The *sher* is held horizontally (Fig 5.14) to get the weighing measurement. The knob at the end of the handle balances the weight and the thread used to check the weight. The thread is adjustable and can be moved in the marked scales to weight the desired weight within the designated measurement in the *sher*.

The name *sher* comes from the hindi word 'sher' a form of weighing measurement, one sher is equivalent to one kilogram. There are later versions to *sher* in which the bamboo basket are replaced by metal plates which came into popularity later during the nineteenth hundreds. This was later replaced by scales and now by digital scales. But there are still places where *sher* or *song* continues to be used, though the manufacturing is not so progressive as much as the actual use of the scales, as the community has already shifted to other means of measurements. *Sher* is used in all the three field areas, it is predominantly used in Tingvong (Sikkim), and suruk (Kalimpong). However, in case of Dhajea in Darjeeling the Lepchas do not use *sher* anymore.



Fig 5.13 (left) and Fig 5.14 (right): *Sher* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Talu:

It is made of bamboo usually *Po* (*Bambusapalida Munro*). It is a flat rectangular shaped bamboo mat, usually six to seven feet in length, and around four feet in breath. Though the size and length can differ from place to place or according to the maker manufacturing it. *Talu* is used for drying crops (fig 5.15), food grains, vegetables and *chi*. The food grains are spread in *tal* to help them dry faster . *Chi* the most significant beverage of the Lepchas is prepared using *tal*. Millet is cooked and spread in *tal* to lower the temperature, when it cools down to warm then the yeast is mixed properly with hands and then the *tal* is folded on both sides and left overnight. Next day the *chi* is put in airtight containers to ferment.

Talu is widely used in all three field areas, demands from within the villages are higher. Newly made *tal*, could be noticed in many houses in Sikkim (fig 5.16) as well as in Kalimpong, suggesting its extensive use within the community.



Fig 5.15 (left) and Fig 5.16 (Right): *Talu* from Gangyap (West Sikkim)

Takcham and Taling:

It is a wooden mortar and pestle used to pound grains into powder or to husk certain food grains like rice, millet, wheat, etc, (fig 5.17). A whole tree is cut in the determined or desired length and a deep cavity is carved at one end using a scraper. The mouth of the *takcham* is wider and the bottom being narrow, this is lengthened

over time due to its continuous usage. A motor or *taling*, also made of wood is used with rounded ends on both sides, the place where one handles the motor is carved out to be narrower from the rest of *taling* as to fit into the hands of the user for proper motion. The food grains are poured into the *takcham* and *taling* is used in an up and down motion to pound and separate the husk from the grains. Usually controlled individually or sometimes even two person can access it at a time for more efficient and faster results (fig 5.18).

It is believed that the *takcham* should not be used when empty since that would be a malevolent omen, and is usually kept upside down or with small amount of grains inside it, while not in use, making a gesture that it is not entirely empty thus omitting the bad omen.



Fig 5.17 (Left) and Fig 5.18 (Right): *Takcham* and *Taling* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Anchu:

Is a wooden chop board used especially for cutting and mincing meat (fig 5.19). It can differ in size ranging from thirty centimeters to two feet in length. Also different types of woods are used to make *Anchu* such as the *Samrang kung* or commonly known as ‘Chilauney’ (*Schima wallichii*). The desired part of a tree is taken out,

usually a bigger and older part of the tree is preferred as they are durable. If a younger tree is used it chips off easily, making it difficult to use over a long period of time.

They are essential for domestic use and each house retains one, not just in the villages but also in semi urban and urban areas in the Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling hills.



Fig 5.19: *Anchu* from West Sikkim

Tenghi:

Is a bamboo container used to contain spoons and *tali* (spatula) (fig 5.20). Usually bamboo is used to make this container as they are easier to obtain and to handle. Some are even constructed from wood but bamboo is used widely and preferred for its easy accessibility and easy maneuvering. The time spend in making a bamboo *tenghi* requires less time and effort thus it is widely used.



Fig 5.20: *Tenghi*, from Dzongu North Sikkim

Nincher:

Nincher are wooden and bamboo containers resembling a small bucket and used for storing milk. The word *Nincher* translates to milk and the process of milking, *Nin* meaning ‘milk’ and *cher* meaning ‘to milk’. Woods such as those of *saldong kung*, and different trees are used to make *nincher* according to availability of resources (fig 5.21). Similar *nincher* are found in North Sikkim, whereas Lepchas of Kalimpong mostly use *nincher* made of bamboo *pothyuth* (bamboo long cup). Recently this have been replaced by plastic and metal buckets.

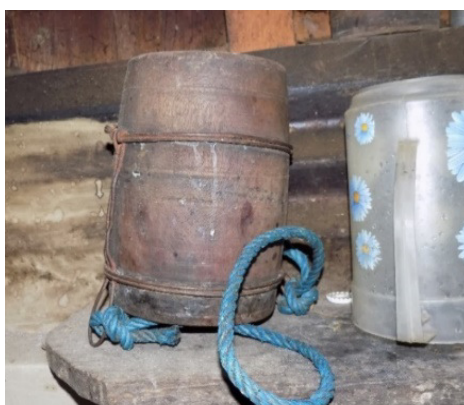


Fig 5.21: *Nincher* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Homu:

This is a wooden granary used domestically. It is also known as *Baho* in certain regions especially in Kalimpong. The size can range from household to household or village to village. It is mostly a big square box, (fig 5.22), used to store corn and rice. The *homu* ranges in size, they can be three to five feet in height. The popularity of *Homu* has exclusively decreased as agriculture has gone down in many areas of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

Most *homu* are made according to the requirement of the household ordering it. Some are homemade, wooden planks are arranged in a square shape, then smeared by a mixture of cow manure and mud to block any openings, cracks, or gaps in the

granary. According to the Lepchas prior to the use of wooden *homu* or *baho* bamboo *homu* were weaved. A huge basket was weaved and then smeared with the mixture of cow manure and mud to block out all the pores (fig 5.23). In other cases a big *tal* was folded and made into a cylindrical shape (fig 5.24). The ends were stitched with leather and then placed on the ground. Bamboo sticks two on each side were placed for support and then smeared with mud and manure like the other two. The size of the granary, often suggest the status of the household, especially for communities depending on agriculture as subsistence. The bigger the granary the household is believed to be higher in status.



Fig 5.22: *Homu* (granary) from Tingvong, North Sikkim



Fig 5.23: illustration of *homu* shaped like a basket



Fig 5.24: *homu* made of *tal*

Sankar tyuk :

Is a smaller wooden mortar and pestle (fig 5.25). The name comes from the Lepcha words *sankar* meaning ‘chilly’ and *tyuk* meaning ‘to hit’ or in this case to hit and make a paste. It is also known as *kokdung*, and is used to grind chillies, and spices. The mortar is made of wood and the pestle can range from being made of wood itself, to something made of stone. The *sankar tyuk* is still used extensively in all three field areas.



Fig 5.25: *Sankar Tyuk*

Zip:

Is a bamboo basket with big *amik* or holes. It is used for drying meats (fig 5.26). The meat is put inside the *zip* and then placed on top of the hearth to be smoked and dried. The *zip* can also be seen as a carry bag for transporting meat from one place to another and domestic livestock like chicken. It is also an integral part of rituals for carrying meat and other offerings.

During rituals it is also seen used popularly to carry offerings for rituals such as ‘guru puja’ or ritual observed by the *bongthing* and *mun*, commemorating their teachers. This is observed once a year and some shamans use small *zip* to carry different materials as offerings and are also hung at the altar (fig 5.27).



Fig 5.26: *Zip* from Gangyap, West Sikkim



Fig 5.27: *Zip* used in rituals

Taphu:

It is a measuring cup made of wood or bamboo used to measure rice and other food grains. It is the smallest means of measurement for cereal grains. This can be seen as a later assimilation into the Lepcha society as prior to this the Lepchas used bamboo or wooden cups for measurement. These days the wood and bamboo has been replaced by tin, copper (fig 5.28) and plastic.



Fig 5. 28: *Taphu*, from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Po thyuth:

Are bamboo containers used to serve *chi*, the traditional beverage (fig 5.29). The word *Po* meaning ‘bamboo’ and *thyut* meaning ‘to cut’. The use of *pothyut* is as significant as the *chi* itself. From daily usage to being used in rituals and ceremonies the use of *pothyut* is diverse and very important in the Lepcha community. It is used in

important events for instance during *Lyang Rum Faat* or the worship of the land deities, three *pothyut* are used representing Mt. Kanchenjunga, *chi* is used as it is believed to be a powerful medium to connect to the spiritual and the human worlds. The size can differ for various events some rituals require smaller *pothyuts*.

The use *Pothyut* is interchangeable as it can be used both as a daily item and also a ritual item, which will be discussed later in the chapter.



Fig 5.29: *Po thyuth* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Kark:

A raincoat made of bamboo and leaves (fig 5.30) used during the monsoon season. Two layers of bamboo is weaved and big leaves are used in between as two layers as water resitant. Mostly worn as a raincoat but it can also be used to shield oneself from the sun while working in the open agricultural fields.

Kark has been in the Lepcha folklores as well. According to Lepcha folklores, once there were four *mung* (demon) brothers and their wives. One day the brothers went for hunting after a very long time. They searched the forest but could not find any prey. As they were scavenging, they came upon a graveyard, left with no other option all four brothers decided to feast upon a recently buried corpse. As they ate the corpse the eldest asked his brothers not to mention this to their wives and not to take

any meat for them as well. But despite this, the youngest hid a small portion of meat intended for his wife. Back at their dwelling the youngest brother gave the meat to his wife and soon the wife was overwhelmed by the taste of human flesh. She was now addicted to the taste and asked her husband to bring it for her again and again. For long the husband brought back corpses. But soon his efficiency to feed her became insignificant the wife in her spree, killed and ate her own husband.

Despite eating her husband, she started killing humans to satisfy her hunger. The humans started disappearing mysteriously, soon a hunt was started to find the monster responsible for all the disappearances. As their younger brother had disappeared the remaining three brothers also started searching for him. Eventually they discovered that it was their youngest sister-in-law who killed and ate their brother. Upon being discovered the youngest brother's wife ran away. They chased after her and she landed on a *palong* (an attic above the kitchen where Lepchas store baskets and food). She then took a *kark* and flew away in the form of a *Lakyo*, a species of owl, with long protruding horn like structure. She later came to be known later as a *Lakyo-Mung* (*mung* meaning demon). Till date if the Lepchas hear the *Lakyo* at night they consider it as a bad omen.



Fig 5.30: *Kark* from Kalimpong

Tafep :

Is a vessel made of bottle gourd which is used as a container for safe keeping seeds (Fig 5.31). To put it in use a ripe *Tafep* or bottle gourd is taken and the base of the gourd is cut off, then the inner softer portion of the vegetable is scrapped out. It is then dried and then used for various purposes such as container to hold seeds, water bottle, a ladle, etc.

It is also seen used as a ritual item by the shaman of the community which will be discussed in the later section of this chapter under the ritual artefacts. Apart from being used as a ritual artefact it is also a domestic object used in the day to day life of the community. The use of these containers have seen a downfall as the domestication of the vegetable is mostly for commercial purpose and also the variety of *tafep* once grown by the community has been taken over by the new variety of seeds.



Fig 5.31: *Tafep*

Faat-Feetyok:

Refers to an earthen pot (fig 5.32), the name *faat-feetyok* comes from the Lepcha words *faat* meaning the earth and *feetyok* meaning a vessel, in this case a pot. The oral history of the community points evidences that can be deduced, that the community did practice pottery at some point of time. Pots were a part of the community's daily

social life. The *Faat Feetyok* ranged from size to various shapes, and was used for cooking food, brewing *chi* or sometimes even store grains, *chi*, milk, water, etc.

The Lepchas have been using pottery as part of their culture since as very long time. The first mention of pottery in the community is mentioned in a folk narrative now famously known as ‘stair way to heaven’. According to the folktale the Lepchas wanted to go to *rum lyang* or the abode of the gods so they built an earthen tower. The Lepchas dried a huge lake in Darumden, in West Sikkim then known as Dah-rum-den *Dah* meaning lake, *rum* here means to destroy and *den* meaning to sit. The Lepchas built huge pots out of the mud from the lake bed. These pots were stacked on top of one another to built a tower. After the tower reached a certain height a small misunderstanding cost the Lepchas their entire hardwork. The ones at the top asked for a *kokving*, (a hooked stick) to try and pull at the clouds, but the ones at the bottom misheard it for the word *chyektah* (to fall). So the ones at the bottom fell the entire tower. Since this day the Lepchas have been often associated with the stereotype of being “fools” or as Stocks (1975:35) quotes “na-ons” meaning dumb. Most *faat feetyok* were made with rounded bottoms so in order for them to sit upright round structures were made known as *Za-tey*.



Fig 5.32: *Faat Feetyok* from Yang, Suruk Kalimpong

Za Tey:

Is a round coster or vessel holder (fig 5.33), *Za* comes from the Lepcha word meaning a planet, in this case it refers to the shape that represents the shape of the planet that is round and *Tey* meaning support. It is made of bamboo *Balee* (bambo sleek), molded into a round shape big enough so that a vessel can be placed ontop of it. It can also be fashioned out of vines. This is used for hot vessels and also so that the black shoot does not come into contact with the floor. Usually the wooden floors or mud painted floors become charred when it comes with direct contact with the vessel with shoot from being in the fire. The *za tey* helps avoid this and keep the floors clean and ensure the vessel's safety. It acts as a supporting system helping the vessels to sit firmly despite having a round base (fig 5.32).



Fig 5.33: *Za Tey*

Faat Chamblee:

Translating to 'earthen kettle' (fig 5.34), is from the collection of Rongdong Museum, displayed at the *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* festival 2018. This is infact the only *Faat Chamblee* to be observed from all field areas. The word *Faat Chamblee* traslates to 'earthen kettle' *faat* meaning 'earth' or in this case 'earthen' and *cham* meaning to hold, here refering to the handle of the kettle and *blee* meaning 'kettle'.



Fig 5.34: *Faat Chamblee* from North Sikkim

Free:

Is a measuring container usually made of *po* (bamboo), *ru* (fig 5.36), *kung* (wood) or leather (fig 5.35). Eight *Taphu* would measure upto *Free Kat* (One *free*) that is one kilogram and was also used as a means of barter system. *Free kat* of corn would be exchanged for *free kat* of rice or millet etc. The earlier versions of *Free* can be seen made of leather a specimen of which is also at display in the Rogdong Museum. *Ru* and *bamboo* were also popular materials to construct *free*, which was then replaced by metal like copper and bronze.



Fig 5.35: (left) *Tung Free* made of leather from Gangyap West Sikkim



Fig 5.36: (right) *Tung Free* made of *ru* from Suruk Kalimpong

Tundung:

Refers to stair cases used domestically by the Lepchas in their houses sometimes also called *Tongrong* (fig 5.37). They are made of either bamboo or wood, a whole tree or bamboo is used with their desired size and length and then carved in the shape of stairs. These are usually seen in the kitchen where there is a *palong* or small attic above the hearth where the food grains are dried and stores (fig 5.37). Along with the food grains the community also stores many things in the attice and the *tundung* is used to access these materials from time to time.

Other than the domestic usage they also have riligious and symbolic significance. *Tundung* is used by the *bongthing* during *amak* or the death ceremony. When an individual passes away a *bongthing* is called to perform the initial rites before the *Yukmun* or the monks come to perform the buddhist rites. The *bongthing* constructs a small stair case out of bamboo and places it near the head of the decease a symbolic artefact which according to the *bongthing* allows the soul to pass on to the spiritual realm.



Fig 5.37: *Tun-ung* from Yang, Suruk Kalimpong

Tangshit:

This is a small square basket made of bamboo with the base having calculated *amik* or holes (fig 5.38). It is used as a strainer to filter certain food materials or separate powdered elements from solid particles. For example separating flour from other solid particles that may be in it. In common language *tangshit* is known as ‘Chalni’ referring to the process of filtering.



Fig 5.38: *Tangshit* from Gangyap, West Sikkim.

Tukshyor:

A strainer made of *ru* due to its flexibility and durability. Usually used to strain *chi* or the traditional alcoholic beverage. It is also used for straining other beverages like tea or butter milk, etc. It is even reported to be used for extracting mustard oil. The seeds are put in the *tukshyor* and is crushed with weights, due to its flexibility, the *tukshyor* can be easily maneuvered and the weight does not have any effect whereas the mustard seeds are crushed and thus the oil is released and extracted. In case of *chi*, the *chi* is put in *tukshyor* and soaked in hot water and then squeezed along with the *tukshyor*.

Tukshyor switches between a daily household object to a religious object which will be discussed later as well under the religious artefacts. *Tukshyor* come in many sizes and various shapes. They are popularly of ‘U’ shaped tube like structure (fig

5.39), they are about six to eight inches in length. Some are rounded and even with lids to cover them, some are in the shape of inverted cones (fig 5.40). The sizes also differs depending on their usage and the individual using them. The *tukshyor* bigger in size are generally used for straining *chi* and the smaller ones are used for purposes like straining tea. Recently smaller *tukshyor* have gained popularity as artefacts of commercial value as they are sold as souvenirs or as models for private collectors.



Fig 5.39: *Tukshyor* from Gangyap west Sikkim



Fig 5.40: *Tukshyor* from Suruk, Kalimpong

Tungfyuk:

These are similar to *Pintok* but more intricately woven. Made of bamboo, these baskets are used to hold small objects and other items like spices, chillies, seeds, etc. (fig 5.41). Each kitchen holds one *tungfyuk*. They are usually placed upon the *panthop* used for storing or drying seeds to be used later.



Fig 5.41: *Tungfyuk*, from Suruk, Kalimpong

Durshubu:

Is a stick made of bamboo or sometimes wood. It is usually handmade individually within the family (fig 5.42). The name *durshubu* in Lepcha language translates literally to mixer. They are usually self-constructed exclusively for the daily use of the family. It is used for making food items like lentils, porridge etc.



Fig 5.42: *Durshubu* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

‘Dalo’:

Similarly to *durshubu* the ‘dalo’, is a borrowed object as a result of cultural contact with other communities. There is no word for ‘dalo’ in the *rongaring* so the original name for the object is used by the Lepchas along with other communities in the hills. It is similar to the *free* but smaller in size and has four small legs or stands to support the basket sit upright (fig 5.43). It is used to hold various household items or foods grains, or anything else that can fit in, usually kitchen items.



Fig 5.43: *Dalo* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Fyet:

Also known as *Pun Fyet* is a bamboo tong used in the kitchen. *Pun* comes from the Lepcha word meaning near and *fyet* meaning to grip using a pinching motion. A bamboo piece is shaped into a shaft into a desired length and then heated and bent in the middle to make the tong (fig 5.44). It is a daily artifact used by the Lepchas in the kitchen to handle firewood in the hearth.

Taful:

Is also daily household artefact used in the kitchen. It is a bamboo blower (fig 5.45) used by the community to enhance the fire in the hearth. A desired size of mature bamboo is cut in about three to four inches in length. Bamboos with the nodes far apart are preferred for making *taful*. The hollow space of the *taful* allows the user to blow oxygen into the hearth which enables acts as a catalyst for fire.



Fig 5.44: *Fyet* from, Dzongu, North Sikkim



Fig 5.45: *Taful* from Suruk, Kalimpong

Daily used artefacts

Here I intend to categorize objects that do not fall particularly under the groupings of household, ritual, agricultural or hunting artefacts. These are integral part of the

Lepcha society as the person material interaction is present on a daily basis but cannot be categorized into a particular classification depending on their functionality (table 5.2).

Sl. no	Bamboo	Cane	Wood	Stone	Others
1	<i>Phandoh</i>	<i>Uoo-Thyak Kro</i>	<i>Chintey</i>		<i>Inga Kyong</i>
2	<i>Taryon</i>		<i>Ngantey</i>		

Table 5.2: Daily used artefacts

Phandoh:

Is a traditional comb made of bamboo sticks and looks like a short broom (fig 5.46). Bamboo is shredded into thin sticks in a desired length and then tied up together in a bundle. This is used to comb hair by both men and women (fig 5.47). It is an earlier form of comb used by the Lepcha community.



Fig 5.46: *Phan doh* fom Kalimpong



Fig 5.47: illustration showing the use of *Phan doh*

Uoo-Thyak Kro:

A more advanced version of *Phan-Doh*. *Uoo* in *Rongring* means ‘to comb’ *thyak* is the word for ‘head’ and *kro* is the word for comb. Intricate strands of bamboo are tied carefully together with a thread to another bamboo handle. This pattern forms an array of fine bamboo strands on both sides which acts as a comb (fig 5.48). This was also

used to get rid of lice as the close teeth of the *Uoo-Thyak Kro* would comb out lice and other foreign particles from one's hair.



Fig 5.48: *Uoo Thyak Kro* from Kalimpong

Chintey:

Is a form of table usually used at a sitting height (fig 5.49) and is made entirely of timber. With its short height it is easily accessed while sitting and is regularly used during special occasions for example a ceremony or a ritual. Firstly, in case of religious rituals the *chintey* is used to hold the holy scripts and offering both in case of Buddhism and the traditional religion of the Lepchas referred to as '*bongthingism* and *munism*'. The rituals require the shamans and monks to operate while sitting thus the *chintey* is used to keep the sacred documents for the monks and sacred artefacts for the *bongthings*. Refreshments for the rituals specialists are offered in the as well. The etymology itself is derived from the Tibetan word and was introduced to the Lepchas with the advent of Buddhism.



Fig 5.49: *Chintey* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Ngantey:

As the name suggests *Ngan* in Lepcha means ‘to sit’. It is a short wooden seat usually fashioned to fit individual person (fig 5.50). However the *ngantey* can be designed in any size and length, but the usual preference is short and the long enough to fit one personal. These are exclusively used on all the three field areas, especially used in the kitchen.



Fig 5.50: *Ngantey* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Taryon:

A bag made of either bamboo or *ru* (fig 5.51). *Ru* is the preferable choice as it is very flexible and durable. It is used for various purposes from storing items, to using it in daily routine to carrying and transporting smaller objects and also used in hunting and fishing to collect smaller preys. *Taryon* is not very much used presently as the practice of hunting has gone down extensively.



Fig 5.51: *Taryon* from Tingvong, North Sikkim

Inga Kyong:

Is a homemade cradle swing for babies to sleep, the word *inga* comes from the Lepcha word for baby or a child and *kyong* means to cradle. The *Inga Kyong* swings in a side to side motion.

Most houses use rice sacks to make *inga kyong*, the sides are tied on the four corner with durable ropes and hung in a the room (fig 5.52). Some *ing kyong* are tied at two ends and shaped as a boat, two short bamboo sticks are placed on the two ends of the *kyong* to widen the area for the baby to be placed inside. In some cases the stick is used on all four sides making even wider space. Cloths were used to make these cradles but with the introduction of rice sacks the durable material was preferred and it came at a cheaper price. Thus the transformation of an ordinary object into the day to day lives of the community where it becomes an artifact used by the community can be observed.



Fig 5.52: *Inga Kyong* from Yang, Suruk kalimpong

Hunting, Fishing and Agricultural Tools

Here all the hunting and agricultural implements will be discussed. The artefacts that are going to be discussed here are categorised under tools depending by their functionality. These are part of the daily used items but as the community depends on

these implements in acquiring food and help in the sustainability of the community, increasing the rate of survival. The implements (table 5.3) in use and found during this research was less in number which will be discussed below.

Sl no	Bamboo	Cane	Wood	Metal	Others
1	<i>Dabryo Slee</i>	<i>Tungkoong</i>	<i>Dabryo</i>	<i>Kor veo Ka Thee</i>	<i>Gin</i> (leather)
2	<i>Ngu Tangdong</i>		<i>Bik ngoo</i>	<i>Slee</i>	<i>Sulokbik Saloo</i> (leather)
3	<i>Tsaong</i>			<i>Ban</i>	
4				<i>Kurzyo</i>	
5				<i>Surdo Banhur</i>	
6				<i>Feet</i>	
				<i>Zoyor</i>	

Table 5.3: Hunting, Fishing and Agricultural Tools.

Dabryo Slee:

A hunting equipment which can also be used as a weapon. *Dabryo* refers to caterpol and *slee* means a bow. A long bamboo shaft almost like a bow is used as the main body (fig 5.53), as the name suggests it is called *slee* which is the Lepcha name for a bow. The only feature that sets it apart from the bow is that it was used as a caterpol (fig 5.54), for throwing mud balls, stones, and later metal balls. The main purpose of this equipment was for hunting, the handle is almost used as a bow while the leather is steached as far as intended to aim and then a rounded stone or compact mud marbles were shot at the target. Though there are mentions of it being used during wars and other territorial conflicts..

The *Dabryo Salee* shown here is longer than a normal *dabryo salee*, according to the community a normal one is said to be no longer than a ruler and could be carried around in the waist.



Fig 5.53: *Dabryo Slee*

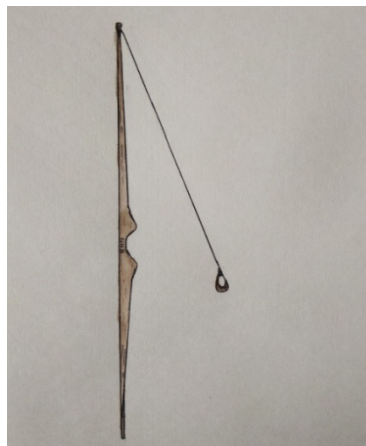


Fig 5.54: illustration of *Dabryo Slee* showing the *dabryo* or the caterpol

Kor veo Ka Thee:

It is an agricultural tool used for digging tubers and yams, the word *kro* comes from the movement of combing which is imitated while using this tool. It resembles a sickle but the curve is only at the tip giving a hook like feature which helps in digging tubers without harming them. A long rod with a hook at the top is attached to a wooden (fig 5.55) which is also part of Rakdong Kyong Museum, North Sikkim. Since it is sleek it can go around plowing out the roots easily.

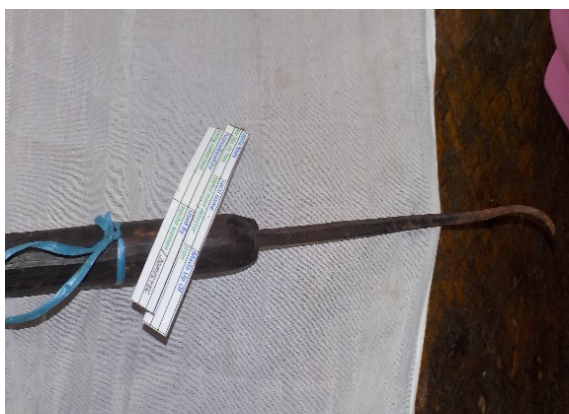


Fig 5.55: *Kor veo Ka Thee*

Ngu Tangdong :

Made of bamboo it is a small basket used to carry fish as the name suggests *Ngu* meaning ‘fish ‘ and *tangdong* is a form of basket (fig 5.56). When Lepcha men go for fishing they carry the *ngu tangdong* tied to their waist. If they catch a fish they collect it in the basket. It is still in use today in all three field areas of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong, though their production is little to none at the moment the once currently in use are mostly passed down from the previous generation.



Fig 5.56: *Ngu Tangdong* from Gangyap, West Sikkim

Gin:

It is described as a long whip with a wooden handle with several leather straps attached to it and *sangli apot* (metal balls) hanging at every end of the leather straps (fig 5.57). A *Gin* has mostly five straps of leather. It was used as a weapon during war, but mostly used for punishment against individuals who break laws or criminals. No one has encountered this artefact but narratives of it are still present among community members of Kalimpong. Since Kalimpong was a buffer zone as closer to what Lepchas of ancient time would consider as *Gyakar lyang* or the plains they were in contact with the communities of the plains. *Gin* could be one of the weapons the Lepcha came in contact with and borrowed.

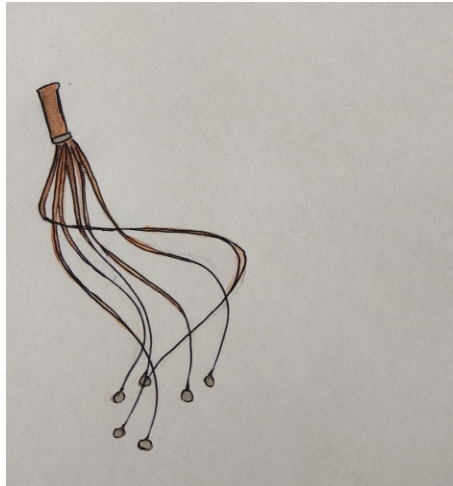


Fig 5.57: illustration of *Gin*

Tsaong and Slee:

Tsaong is the Lepcha word for arrow. Suitable sized bamboos are chosen carefully for making the *tsaong-dee* or shaft. The straighter the bamboo, the better but in case of any failing to reach the desirable requirement they are heated and straightened till they are perfectly straight. *Doh* or the feathers used for the arrow, usually chicken feathers are preferred they help with the movement of the arrow to travel through the space easily. Metal is used for making the *tsaong nyak* or the arrow heads, small metal points are used for the arrows. Earlier it is described that the arrows were shorter and smaller and they Lepchas extensively used poison for hunting and later during war.

Slee means bow in Lepcha. Its shaft is made of a single piece of long bamboo (Fig 5.58) or two pieces of bamboo joined together. A sturdy thread connects both ends forming a 'D' shape. The thread is the contact point of the weapon from where the arrow is fired and the bamboo shaft is pulled together to gain momentum and energy. It is said that only bamboos from the places where there is an excessive movement of winds are used as they are considered to be more flexible and appropriate for making *slee*. The *aagrums* or bow string is made from threads braided

together or what the Lepchas call *bree* or to intertwine or join together. Lepchas are believed to be great archers and they have many festivals and events dedicated to archery as a sport. At the present the Lepchas have shifted from traditional bows to bigger bows made of bamboo some even to fiber bows for long distance shooting. In the past it is believed they used smaller *salee* for hunting as it was easier to carry and use it unnoticeably.

According to oral history during a confrontation at Ranglee Ronglyot between the British troops, and the Lepchas. The exact time frame could not be pinpointed as no one remembers it yet this tale still lives in the memory of many elders in Kalimpong. The conflict occurred as the Lepchas took the British as intruders, which was a given as they saw foreign troops advancing within their lands. In any political conflict or war the indigenous population is easily swept into the chaos as they are the first contacts with the invading troops. However in Ranglee Ronglyot, it is said that a single Lepcha individual killed hundreds of the British Troops. According to the tale, The Lepchas tried their best to protect their land and as the troops were advancing a full war broke out between the Lepchas and the British Troops. As the Lepchas were small in population they opted for poisoning water sources, traps and other means were their only option to face the huge army. As the conflict got more intense, so was the community's effort to protect their lands. It is said that there was a certain point in the landscape from which the British Troops were having a hard time crossing over as any individual who tried to cross over were shot down by an arrow and they didn't know who was shooting them or the directions the arrows were coming from. More and more soldiers continued to die and the hunt for the one responsible started. By the time they are able to determine the direction of the arrows many men had lost their lives it is described that a huge heap of bodies laid as a wall and a spring of

blood flowed from there. The British Troops determined that the arrows were coming from inside a huge tree shot down the one inside of it. As it was that the tree was hollow from the inside and a person could fit there easily. After they finally defeated this one man army; they were very inquisitive to know how he was sustaining himself for this long, so they performed an autopsy on him. It turned out that he had eaten only a few leaves, he had a lot of arrows dipped in poison and a small bow, small enough to fit into the tree trunk with himself.



Fig 5.58: *Tsoang* and *Slee* from Tingvong, North Sikkim

Dabryo:

Is another version of catapult used by the Lepchas. It is smaller compared to the *dabryo salee* and used mostly for small hunts like birds or rodents. It was a later introduction to the Lepchas through cultural contact. A small catapult used for hunting small games like birds, rodents, etc. usually made of wood, a 'Y' shaped intersection branch is selected then given the desired size then dried for several days. After it reaches the certain amount of drying period, it is polished. Rubber straps are attached on both ends of the 'Y'. A small leather strap is added designed for holding

the marble is placed in between. Rubber straps are also tied in the lower end of the ‘Y’ (fig 5.59) as to give better grip.

The shapes of the *dabryo* can vary, in addition to the shape ‘Y’ some *dabryo* can be seen in the shape of ‘X’. They can be constructed of two different pieces of wood used for it and in some cases a single piece of wood is used to attain the shape ‘X’ (fig 5.60).

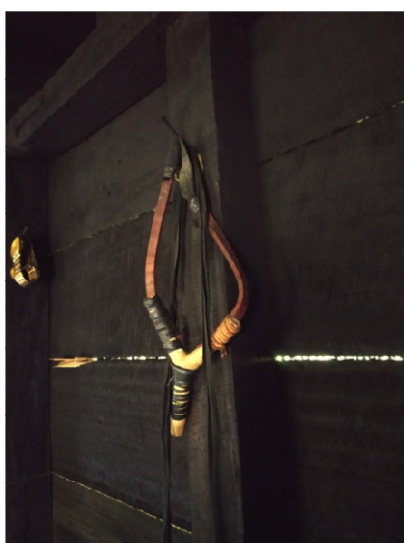


Fig 5.59: ‘Y’ shaped *Dabryo* from Suruk Kalimpong Fig 5.60: ‘X’ shaped *Dabryo* from Kalimpong

Ban:

Refers to the varieties of swords and knives used by the Lpecha community. The different varieties are as follows:

1. *Ban-kup*: refers to knife used in the kitchen. *Ban* is referred to a bigger ‘blade’ and *kup* comes from the Lepcha word *Aakup* which means ‘child’ or in this case a ‘small blade’.
2. *Ban-mok*: these are blade with a pointed tip (fig 5.61). Used as swords by the community.
3. *Ban-tok*: these are blades bigger than the *bankup* (fig 5.62), but it is not big enough to be called a sword nor small enough to categorise as a knife either.

They are use to collect firewood, collect fodder for cattles and also in household activities. It is believed that the Lepchas carry the *bantok* with the blade facing the carrier and the blunt side facing outside. The Lepchas explain that this is to prevent them from killing anyone or anything unnecessarily, it is believed that the first strike should be as a warning and not intended to kill. It is usually the men of the community who have access to this implement but the woment also use it from time to time.

4. *Ban-pok*: these are blades that are shorter than the *Ban-tok* and are used as a kitchen artefact for the purposing of dicing and mincing meat.
5. *Ban-payuk*: these are swords and are longer and bigger in size (fig 5.63) usually used in hunting and during war.
6. *Ban-hur*: are small sickel (fig 5.64) exclusively used by the women of the community for harvesting crops. They are usually carried at the back inside the *namrek* or the waist belt and are held by *samrang-boor* waist chain to keep them from loosing.



Fig 5.61: *Ban-Payuk*



Fig 5.62: *Ban-tok*



Fig 5.63: *Ban-mok* from Gangyap, West Sikkim



Fig 5.64: *Ban-hur*

Tungkoong:

It is described as a thickly plated shield made of *ru*. *Ru* is carefully plated and made into a shield (fig 5.65), which was used during war as a shield. The *tungkoong* is particularly constructed with *ru* since it is considered to be very strong, durable and flexible. Not many of these artefacts have survived the few that have been able to persist are parts of privated collections in all field areas.



Fig 5.65: *Tungkoong* from Darjeeling

Sulokbik Saloo:

It is a shield made out of rhino skin. *Sulokbik* refers to rhino and *saloo* means a shield (fig 5.66). *Alik gin* it is a later addition to the community as wars over territory

broke too often, the shield made of *ru* was replaced by *Sulokbik Saloo* which was much more impenetrable. Another indicator that the *saloo* is a borrowed item is the fact that there are no rhinos found in the geographical territory where the Lepchas inhabit.

Only a few shields can be found specially owned by private collectors and smaller community museum. Ren S.M Lepcha is one such collector from Darjeeling. He has in his collection a *sulokbik saloo* handed down to him from his parent's collection. According to him the shield is from the time period of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the last Lepcha king of the Lepchas and can possibly be from one of his soldiers.

Some of the museums in Sikkim, like the Rakdong Kyong Museum also house these shields, it can be seen as part of diffusion from the low lands as rhinos can be found in the lowlands and the only thing to be deduced is that there must have been some cultural contact at some point of time.



Fig 5. 66: *Sulokbik Saloo*

Kurzyo:

It is a small digging implement (fig 5.67), used in agriculture and foraging wild roots and tubers from the wild. It has similar functionality to *Kor veo Ka Thee*. While still in use limitedly its popularity has considerably gone down as the community are more reliant on domestication of cash crops and new varieties of vegetables.



Fig 5.67: *Kurzyo*

Surdo Banhur:

This agricultural equipment is a form of sickle (fig 5.68), habitually used by the women of the community in agricultural activities as harvesting crops. This is bigger in terms of size that the normal *banhur* mentioned above and can also be used for collecting fodder.



Fig 5.68: *Surdo Banhur*

Feet:

It is a fishing trap made of bamboo it is designed as a simple basket from the outside but has a second layer of bamboo inside it with a narrow edge near the mouth and widening inside the basket (fig 5.69) and (fig 5.70), which makes it easier for the fishes to go inside but impossible to come out of the trap. These traps were usually set near water falls and extensively used in the past. As the number of craftsmen of these traps are going so is the number of *feet*. Today there are only the old *feet* that can be found in assemblies of private collectors and small community museums.



Fig 5.69 (left) and Fig 5.70 (right): *Feet*, fishing trap

Zoyor :

It is a scraper, with two wooden handles (fig 5.71), which is operated with both hands to scrape away woods. This was specially used for carving, carpentry and architectural constructions. Since it had to be operated by hand it was very time consuming. Later more efficient equipments were introduced to the community and the use of *zoyor* was ultimately placed out of usage.

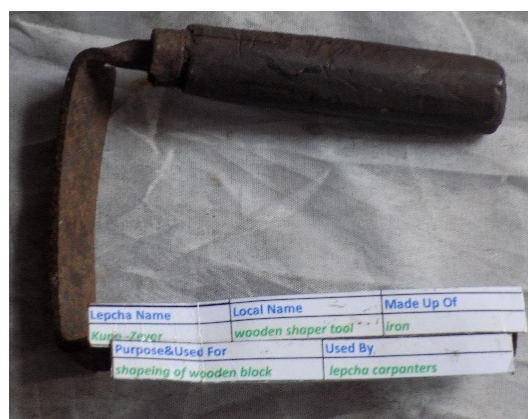


Fig 5.71: Zoyor

Bik ngoo:

It is an important agricultural implement introduced to the community along with the introduction of large scale agriculture like rice cultivation. It is used to plough the agricultural fields to be prepared for plantation (fig 5.72). *Bik*, usually refers to both female and male cow but in this case it specifically refers to ox and *ngoo* means to plough. The implement is maneuvered with the help of a pair of oxen. Major part of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling extensively used *bik ngoo* but few field areas in Sikkim still practices small scale horticulture and agriculture so the use of *bik ngoo* is not so popular.

The *Bik Ngoo* includes various parts like the *nyaa sying* which is used to fasten the agricultural impliment to the oxen. Known as ‘dadey’ in common language it is made of a long piece of wood with four protruding wooden parts which is attached to the neck of the oxen (fig 5.70) on the right. A piece of leather is attached to the *nyaa sying* in which the main *bik ngoo* is attached. The main body of the *bik ngoo* is made of wood and has a sharp metal tip which helps dig the ground known as *bat panzyang*. Another part of the *bik ngoo* is the *Long bat fo* here *fo* comes form the Lepcha word for *afo* meaning teeth, used specifically for wet rice cultivation which requires the field to be prepared with mud and high containts of water. The *Long bat*

fo is also made of wood and smaller pieces of wood are attached to it resembling a rake. This is used to mix the water soaked mud thoroughly and make ready for the rice to be planted.



Fig 5.72: *Bik Ngoo*

Musical Instruments

When it comes to music the Lepchas take great pride in their music and dance. The music and dance is all related to nature. If we look into music majority of sounds are inspired by nature and animal sounds. There is a famous folktale related to why the Lepchas are very fond of dance and music.

This story takes place after the defeat of the great *Laso Mung Pano*, who had antagonised the Lepchas for decades. The Lepchas rejoiced and to celebrated their great victory they organised a huge event. Everyone was welcome to join the celebration. Young, old, singers, dancers from all over *Mayel Lyang* came together for this event. They enjoyed the festival to its full extend as they had been living in constant fear for so long. Their laughter mixed with music echoed throught out the Earth the god of music *Narok Rum* decended from the *Rum Lyang* (the place where the gods reside).

The Lepchas danced and sang for days and nights. Men, women and children alike ignored all their work submerging themselves in eating, drinking and merry

making. *Narok Rum* was very intrigued by the event and he and his courtiers quietly joined in. The Lepchas were so absorbed with their joyous situation that they did not notice *Narok Rum* amidst them. But *Narok Rum* was not someone who could be easily missed, he was charismatic and the most striking of all was the *chat* (a crown), he was wearing. The *chat* was made with the feather of the *Nambong-Ong Pano Fo*, a Racket Tailed Drongo which is considered to be the king of the birds. As the *rum* started dancing his beautiful movements mesmerised everybody and soon everyone was following him.

They all danced for seven days and nights. *Narok Rum* was pleased by the festival and on the last day as a token of appreciation he granted the Lepchas one wish. The Lepchas were so taken aback by the feather crown of *Narok Rum* that they could not take their eyes off it. The *rum* called upon their chief and introduced himself as the god of music. Astonished by this sudden encounter a wave of surprised whispers rippled through the crowd. He asked the chief to ask for a wish as he was very pleased by the Lepchas. So the chief immediately asked for the *chat* and the *rum* happily granted it. *Narok Rum* asked the chief to take the *chat* from him and blessed him with the words “from today onwards, all of you present here will excel in singing and dancing and everyone will like your performances”. After the blessing *Narok Rum* and his courtiers returned back to *Rum Lyang*.

From that day on, the Lepchas wear feathered hats. The seven days of celebration came to be known as *Namsoong*. Here we discuss some of the musical instruments used by the Lepchas from the different villages chosen as field areas.

Bom Pothyut:

These can be assumed to be the earliest versions of a *palit* (flute), the name *bom* means short and *pothyut* means a bamboo cup (fig 5.73). Small short pieces of bamboo are cut and is used to make various whistle sounds. These were earlier used to mimic the sound of birds, during hunting and gathering as “the hunters use this instrument do pass on coded messages to their fellow hunter” (Lepcha 2020). Later they were included as musical instruments.



Fig 5.73: *Bom Pathyut*

Palit:

Is referred to a normal and most common flute. It is a short, bamboo flute (fig 5.74) and go on describing. Looking at the diffusion of the musical instrument this form of *palit* flute came to be a part of the Lepcha society through cultural contact. There are other forms of *palit* some we will be discussing in detail in the coming verses.

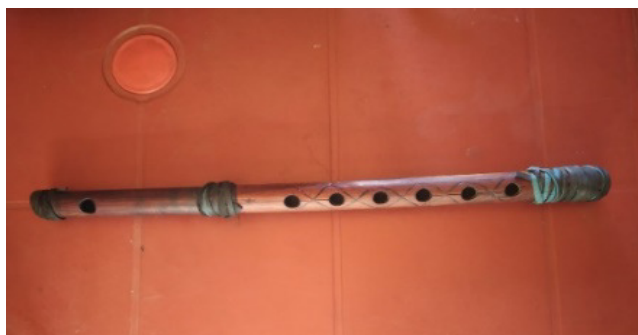


Fig 5.74: *Palit*

Pantong Palit:

Is unique to the Lepchas, this is a long flute with five holes (fig 5.75), one blowing hole and four finger holes. Usually low frequency tunes are produced with a rythem and vibrato. This is usually used in different events and ritulas as well in daily used depending upon the usuage of an individual.



Fig 5.75: *Pantong Palit*

Nyebrok Palit:

It is double barreled flute with six holes. It looks like two fluets joined together with the help of some rope (fig 5.76). A flat blower is attaced on top through with one can puff air into the fluet while the original blow holes of the two fluets are blocked away by the ropes. It is specially used during important rituals to communicate with the deities “to inform them of their well being” (Lepcha 2020). It was extensively used during marriage ceremonies to welcome the bride and the froom. Currently it is used while welcoming guests during special events for example a festival.

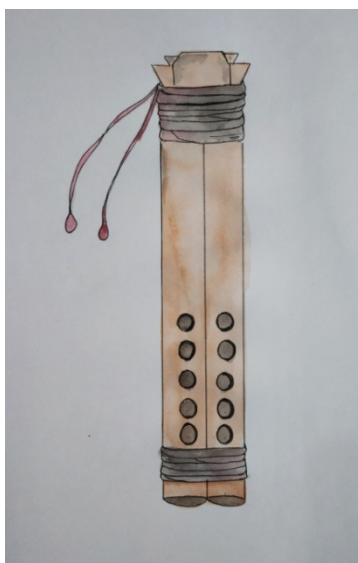


Fig 5.76: *Nyebrok Palit*

Po-Posong:

Also known as *Po Potek* is a musical instrument made of bamboo. Prior to its used as a musical instrument it was seen used as an instrument to ward off animals such as monkeys from the fields. A long bamboo is taken and split in the middle but not all the way through (fig 5.77). Then it was hung on trees. As the wind blew it colided with the tree branches etc which created sound and scared the animals away. Contemporary Lepcha music have started including this as a musical instrument.



Fig 5.77: *Po-Posong*

Tangbuk:

This musical instrument is the most common one that is used extensive by the Lepchas in their music. It is a stringed instrument made with timber, leather and strings (fig 5.78). A *tangbuk* comprises of three to four strings but just three tuning pegs. Which means the fourth string goes together with another string. A wooden pick is attached to the *tangbuk* nowadays and it is upon the user to decide, to use it or not. It operates totally on notes and not on chords as it would be in the case if a guitar.

There is no sound hole but the cavity in the tanbuk is covered with leather which forms a thin layer over the cavity thus it produces amplified sound and notes when the strins are struck. The *tangbuk* is used very extensively used in the community, there are specially trained individuals to manufacture these instuments

and a normal one would cost around twentyfive to thirty five hundred rupees. But a custom order could cost about above ten thousand rupees.



Fig 5.78: *Tangbuk*

Sut Sung:

Another string instrument used by the Lepchas, it can be seen quite close to the ‘Sarangi’ used by some of the Nepali speaking community. With three strings (Fig 5.79) which uses a bow to operate it and similar to the tangbuk. The body is made of wood and leather. The bow uses bamboo and nilon stings.



Fig 5.79: *Sut Sung*

Tang-Dyu:

Made of *po* bamboo, usually made of mature part of the bamboo usually five to six inches. A very thin layer of bamboo is carved out within the five inch instrument, almost a string of bamboo (fig 5.80). The instrument is designed as to tie a thread on one end and desired design is given. The instrument and is placed between the lips

and the thread on one end and given a thrust and the mouth is used to produce the intended tone and note.



Fig 5.80: *Tang-Dyu*

Bling Thoap:

It is a leaf shaped wooden instrument which comes along with a stick attached to it used in especially by *bongthing* or *mun* “to keep rythem during their recitation” (Lepcha: 2020). The name *Bling Thaop* could have been derived from the Lepcha word *Loap* meaning a leaf based on the shape of the instrument (fig 5.81). The stick is struck on the larger leaf like structure to produce a sound. Like the *Po-Posong* this has also been incorporated into the Lepcha musical field.

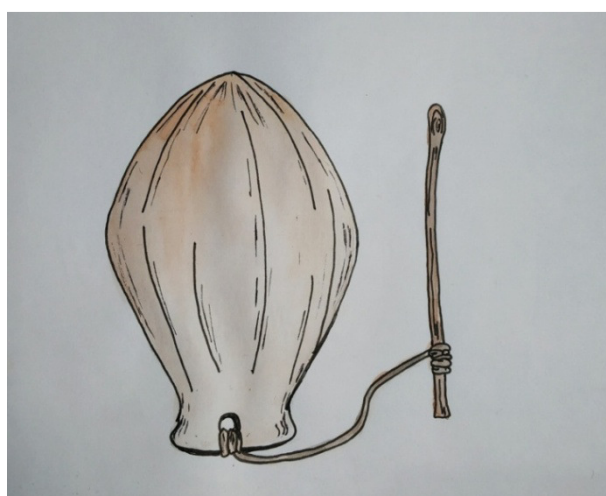


Fig 5.81: *Bling Thoap*

Tungar Bong:

It is a drum made of wood and leather. *Tungar* means a drum and *bong* means *short* (fig 5.82). It is used as a musical instrument by the men of the community.

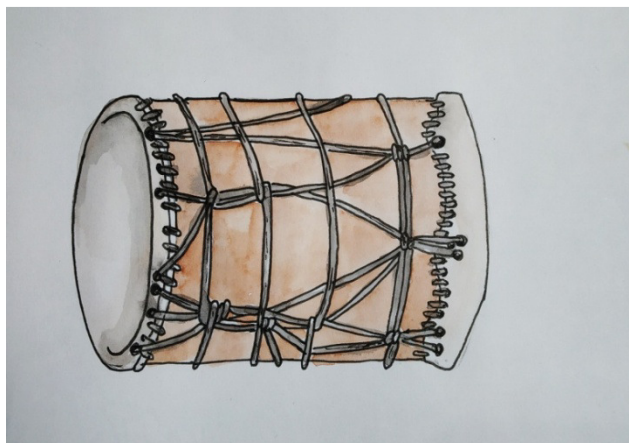


Fig 5.82: *Tungar Bong*

Ritual Artefacts:

An ordinary thing becomes an important object when ascribes with certain cultural and ritual aspects. Anthropologist Gilbert Lewis states that “the idea of the deeper significance of ordinary things is familiar to those who take part in the study of rituals” (Lewis 1988: 30). “The special qualities of the objects are identified, these often have no relevance in the ordinary economy of our perceptual and practical dealings with it, but on close inspection and attention may provide an in animation or mystery” (Lewis 1988:31). In this way, rituals create the sense that the object attended to something memorable, complex and symbolic of deeper value. The Lepchas use many different things in their day to day life and by asserting sacred symbolism to certain things they become the objects of importance (table 5.4).

Sl no	Bamboo	Cane	Wood	Metal	Stone	Others
1	<i>Pintook</i>	<i>Tukshyor</i>		<i>Song Phyu</i>		<i>Tafep</i>
2	<i>Pothyut</i>			<i>Song-tangdar</i>		
3	<i>Padam</i>					

Table 5.4: Ritual Artefacts

Tukshyor:

Used as a daily household artifact as well as a ritual artifact. It is used to strain *chi* (millet alcohol) specifically during rituals. Though its daily use has been minimized drastically, but its importance is observed during rituals. The *chi* is put in the *tukshyor* and put in warm water the juices starts to mix with the water without the husk. This is then used as *chi chok* or an offering to the deities. Every *bongthing* or *mun* has his or her personalised *tukshyor* (fig 5.83), it can vary in size and depends on the convenience of the carrier (fig 5.84).



Fig 5.83: *Tukshyor*, used during *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* Fig 5.84: *Tukshyor* used in rituals

Tafep:

Is another artefact used for religious and ritual ceremonies by the community. They are a part of every ritual as *chi* is an important component in the Lepcha traditional religion *tafep* (fig 5.85) completes the whole set of artefacts used by the *bongthing* and *mun* ritual specialists and shamans of the community.

Similar to *tukshyor* each shaman owns a *tafep* which they use for serving the *chilok* or alcoholic drink to the various deities (fig 5.85) and (fig 5.86). The gourds come in different sizes and shapes. The smaller ones are specially used in rituals

whereas the bigger ones are used to store seeds of crops. The cultivation of the smaller species of the plant has been out of practice as new and HYV (High Yielding Variety) seeds came to popularity. With the rise in invasion of the new varieties of crops some *bongthings* and *muns* have resorted to growing their own *tafep* as to safeguard the species and the traditional practices.



Fig 5.85: *Tafep*



Fig 5.86: *Tafep* used by *bongthing* during *Rongnyoo*

Rangeet samsu

Song Phyu:

Song Phyu is a large copper vessel used during festivals and ceremonies the name *song phyu* comes from the Lepcha word for copper that is *song* and *phyu* means a vessel. Lepchas use it during important festivals such as *Namsoong* or the Lepcha New Year where *song phyu* are decorated with ceremonial scarves, water is placed inside some even prefer to mix it with milk, flowers are added and then it is placed near the entrance to attract good fortune to the house and the family (fig 5.87). *Song Phyu* are also used during *bri* or marriage ceremonies and even during important house ceremonies for example ‘rapney’ which is the worship of the house deities and the purification of the house especially a new house performed under the Buddhist religious customs. The use of *song phyu* in this approach was extensively observed in Sikkim whereas it was absent in case of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In Kalimpong

song phyu is used during certain rituals like a cleansing ritual or during *Allyu Setambu* (against any which craft *Allyu* here means cat which is referred to a witch). It was performed by a *bongthing* which required water to be boiled in a huge *song phyu* (fig 5.88). The *bongthing* then collected twelve different kinds of medicinal plants. A bundle was made which was then dipped into the boiling water then splashed on to individuals who were required to wear thin cloths and sit in the middle of the room. Each individual from the family would take turns to be cleansed. The medicinal plants combined with, hot water from the *song phyu* is believed to cleanse the body as well as the spirit from evil auras. The water has to be boiled in a copper vessel specifically as it is believed to contain therapeutic properties.

The *song phyu* was also seen to be passed down from one generation to another through the matrilineal line, as a form of movable property after marriage. It was passed down from mother to daughter during marriage or given from the maternal family to the bride. Such cases were seen in Gangyap, West Sikkim.



Fig 5.87: *Song Phyu* from North Sikkim used during *Namsoong* Fig 5.88: (right) *Song Phyu* from

Kalimpong used in rituals

Song Tangdar:

The name *Song-tangdar* comes from two different Lepcha words *Song* meaning ‘copper’ and *tangdar* meaning ‘drum’. The copper vessel or the *song phew* is taken and converted into a drum. A rope tuned skin covered musical instruments usually used during festivals, in rituals, marriages and special occasions as was in the cases of (fig 5.89), from Gangyap West Sikkim used in the annual *bom kor* Buddhist ritual festival observed in the village by different families each year. The leather is usually used of cow or goat. It is beaten using short sticks, known as *saangaobuk pating*, *saangao* meaning the drum, *buk* means to hit and *pating* means stick, which translate to ‘drum beating stick’

This particular drum is used both as a musical instrument but mainly used during rituals and festivals. It was observed extensively used in Sikkim in events like the *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* to initiate the festival and to welcome the chief guests as a sign of respect. It is also seen used during marriage in some cases for welcoming the bride and groom.



Fig 5.89: *Song-tangdar*

Pintook :

It is a small basket with big gaps or *amik*. It can be seen hanging at the entrance of houses especially above the front doors. The Lepchas believe that this is used as a protection against the malevolent spirits. According to Ren Tshering Dorjee Lepcha, from Tingvong (Dzongu) the many big holes in the basket “looks like many eyes and the spirits are scared of it”. It is believed that the spirits see this an object always keeping a watchful eye as they don’t come near the houses with *pintook* hanging.

The *Pintook* can be hung at any time, but it is especially hanged when someone passes away in the village. It is used as protection against the malicious spirits. There were many houses in Tingvong with a *pintook* hanging either at the front door (fig 5.90), or at the balcony. In case of Kalimpong and Darjeeling *pintooks* could be scarcely seen.



Fig 5.90: *pintook*

Pothyut:

Pothyut are part of every ritual and ceremonies. They are not just used to offer *chi* to the deities but other offerings such as water and rice are also offered using *pothyut*. Certain ceremonies require miniature versions of the *pothyut* these have their own identity. During *Chyu Rum Faat* the *bongthing* used small bamboo cups with a

pointed end known as *Pa-thar* (fig 5.91) which allows it to be inserted in the ground with the offerings usually *chi* is offered in this. Next is *Po-chong* (fig 5.92) with a flat bottom in which water or rice is offered, sometimes it is also used to make butter lamps for various rituals.

The significance of *pothyut* is parallel to the importance of *chi*. *Chi* is regarded as a powerful drink by the Lepchas, because it induces a trance like state it was used as a medium by the *bongthing* and *mun* to connect with the spiritual realm. The significance of the *pothyut* comes with the symbolism it is attached to for instance while performing *lyang rum faat* or *chyu rum faat* three *chi pothyut* are placed representing the mountains. During *bri* or the marriage ceremony *chi pothyut* are offered to the bride and groom as a sign of union. *Chi pothyut* are also offered to the maternal and paternal representatives of both the bride and groom as a sign of respect. Similarly it is used during the *amak* or the death ceremony as an offering to the deceased and the ancestors.



Fig 5. 91: *Po-chong* and *pa-thar* used to offer *chi* and *ung* (water) during *Chyu Rum Faat* in Kalimpong



Fig 5.92: *Po-chong* used as butter lamps during *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* in Sikkim

Padam:

Padam is another daily or household object invested with cultural and religious meanings. The *Padam* use for carrying water in day to day social life is used during marriage or other religious events signifying purity of the events, as it holds *ung* or water which is believed to be or to purify. *Padams* can be seen at the gate during marriage or any event they are adorned with flowers and filled with water to the fullest (fig 5.93) and (fig 9.94). According to the Lepchas the *Padam* is kept outside the gate at the brides house representing that the bride was going away from her house after the marriage. It is place inside the gate at the grooms house representing that the bride was coming in the hpusehold from that day forth. This system is no more in use currently and the *padam* can be seen placed in only one direction but the original placement of the artefact was ascribed with symbolic connotation.

Though the uages of *padam* in the daily lives of the Lepchas have diminished considerably to the point where we can say they are not used at all in this day and age. It is very much used in the religious sphere of the community and can still be seen during event like *Tendong Lho Rum Faat* outside the gate of the main altar marking the auspiciousness and purity of the grounds.

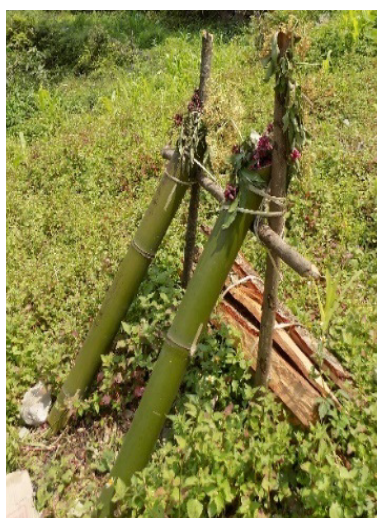


Fig 5.93: *Padam*



Fig 5. 94: *Padam* used in religious ceremony in Sikkim

Conclusion

Here I derive few points from Miller's outline a series of contextual dimensions of material.

Artefact as Manufactured objects: Miller perceives objects as being “functionally and symbolically flexible” (Miller 2012:100) where some objects are intentionally produced for particular purpose, like *chong* and *salee* initially used for hunting and sustainability has been initiated with more and more meaning both functionally and symbolically. Overtime it was used as a symbolic representation of the masculinity among the community after that, it was represented in the ritual practices of the Lepcha culture. The *chong* and *salee* was used to represent *Kathong fee* the male guardian deity who is seen placing a bow and arrow upon the birth of a son in a family. According to the Lepcha oral traditions, each Lepcha individual is guided by the two guardian deities *Kathong-Fee* for the males and *Nongleng-Nyu* for the females.

It is believed that when the baby is still inside the womb of the mother both *Kathong-Fee* and *Nongleng-Nyu* perform a rite to confirm whether the baby is a male or a female. *Kathong- Fee* prepares a bamboo quiver, and a bow, bow specifically as it represents maleness as it is a symbol of power and protection which is carried on by the male members of the society, and also using *Katneem* (a plant) he makes a circle. Simultaneously on the other hand *Nongleng-Nyu* also readies a thread made of *Kafaat-Kee* (a variety of cotton), this is kept in a circular structure, she then also makes a circle using another plant *Kanda* (a plant). These two plants are specifically used as it is believed that when *Rum* first created *Fudong-Thing* and *Nuzong-Nyu*, *Fudong-Thing* was given *Katneem* to cover himself and *Nuzong-Nyu*, *Kanda* to cover herself.

After all things are ready, if the baby is a boy, automatically water starts flowing from the quiver prepared by *Kathong-Fee* and the circle made of *Katneem* starts to open up slowly, from that moment onwards it's the responsibility of *Kathong-Fee* to look after the individual till his last breath. And if it is a girl, water starts accumulating in the circular structure made up of the thread prepared by *Nongleng-Nyu* and the circle made of *Kanda* starts to open slowly, and till death she is taken care of by *Nanleng-Nyu*.

The naming ceremony is presided over by *bongthing* who then welcomes the baby into the society. Rice, butter, *mong-chi* (local alcohol made of millet), fruits and water is kept as offerings to all the deities along with prayers and incenses. Like any other tribe the Lepchas also are very intimate with nature so, offerings are also made to *Lyang-Langzee* which includes mud, trees, plants, water bodies, and the environment around them to all insects and animals, the Sun and the Moon. The young born is introduced to all and the *Bongthing* asks all the deities to look after the young one, for he/she is now acknowledged as one of the shareholders of the world along with many already in existence.

Another ritual of the *Panzok Rum Faat* or the worship of the forest deities, also requires to worship the weapons and ask for power from the forest deities. Which leads us to the current production of objects, for certain works as in case of agricultural implements, as agriculture was introduced and was adapted by the community the implements used for this was produced and reproduced for a certain purpose of using it for agriculture.

Artefacts based on Materials

Here I am adding an additional dimension of objects based on the different materials used to produce them, the evolutionary pattern can be sketched based on the different materials used in a given era and how they were used is also a profound characteristic in understanding the social lives and interactions between the community and materials.

Artefacts made of stone: as we have already discussed in previous chapters stones are one of the earliest materials that the community started using whether be it in hunting or as household items. As the evolutionary journey accelerated these objects acquired more meanings and significance.

Artefacts made of wood: the other material the community used from the early days was wood. It was durable, and lighter than stones so the popularity grew. Many objects like the *Takcham*, *sankartyuk*, etc.

Pottery: A very interesting story that surrounds the aspect of pottery in the community. a very famous and controversial one in fact, it is about the stairway to heaven. It has passed down in the community that at some point of time the Lepchas wanted to go to what is believed to be “heaven” so they build an earthen tower made out of pots to reach the heavens. To build this tower they first needed to find a flat land where this earthen structure could be fashioned. And as they searched for a perfect piece of land they came across Daramdin where there was a huge flat land with a lake, they named this land *Talom Partam*. One of the reasons they chose this land as some Lepchas believe is that the sky seems to appear closer from *Talom Partam* so they thought they could reach to the heavens faster from there. They emptied the lake and out of its wet mud fashioned thousands of pots and stacked them

one on top of another to build a tower. In-fact the name Daramdin comes from the act of emptying the lake in order to get to the smooth and wet mud at the bottom.

They build numerous pots and stacked it one on top of another to build the monument. The architecture rose higher and higher as more and more pots kept getting stacked higher. As they got to a certain height they got nearer to the sky so they wanted to try if they could reach out and grab the other side. So the ones on the top asked to pass a *kokvim* (hooked stick). “*Kokvinmyang tah*” (pass the hooked stick), but due to a mishap the ones at the bottom heard “*Chyek tah*” (smash it). They workers at the bottom took their axes and sticks and started smashing the pots at different directions. Soon the whole structure was crumbleling down and it took all the men with it. The devastation was so huge that the pot shreds could be found over a large radius even today (fig 5.72), a small pot shread found in the area of Daramdin.

The important aspect to note here is that material used in the construction of the tower. It could have been any other material depending on the availability of material at that time. It could have been stones, or woods however pots were chose for making the tower since they are hollow and lighter and easier to carry up as the tower rose.



Fig 5.72: Pot shread from Daramdin Fig 5.73: the new pots for the”stairway to Heaven” in Daramdin

The famous “Stairway to Heaven” (fig 5.73), an ongoing project in Daramdin, West Sikkim is being built to commemorate the famous folk history of the community when the Lepchas tried to build an earthen tower to reach to the heavens. Many have called it stupidity like Stocks mentions the tower in his *Sikkim Customs and Folklore* (1975) and said it was a result of stupidity “when the world was full once more, some of the Rong-folk, a tribe called the *Na-ong* or Ignorant persons prepared to ascend to the Rum Country, and began building a tower of earthen pots...” (Stocks 1975:35).

This is not just a folktale as shards of pottery still found at Daramdin hold evidence to the story. Even if the stories were to be considered as myths, one thing very clear that the Lepchas practiced pottery making. And this is not a sign of a community as what the world has called ‘fools’ or *Na-Ongs*. This story has been told many a times passing from generation to generation, and has also earned the Lepchas the title of what Stocks mentions *Na-Ong* or the foolish people. But how could a community who fashioned an earthen tower out of pots and tried to reach at what was beyond the sky be foolish? Given the time period in which the tower was constructed I say it was ingenious. What we have to do now is look into other possibilities that lies underneath the title of *Na-Ongs*.

Many researchers have perpetuated the same tag for many generations. The problem with most is that they come with a preconceived notions of their own which often clouds their research as they fail to see the communities from the communities’ view point. The other problem comes with misinterpretation and sometimes it’s the stories itself with time being molded and remolded into actually believing for being the *Na-Ongs*.

Artefacts made of Bamboo: Bamboo is one of the important material used by the Lepchas till date. It was lighter and more flexible it could be molded into much any shape. Later the community expertise into elaborate designs with bamboo objects.

Later materials: as the community came in contact with other communities there were exchanges and borrowings. Durable and more efficient objects were introduced to the community. One object that acquired importance in the Lepcha culture was the *Song Phew* or copper vessel. Not just copper the Lepchas have been in contact with other metals like *sato* or bronze, *Fyo* or brass and iron.



Fig 5.74: use of *Tangzyang* in daily life



Fig 5.75: Comodification of Artefacts

Objects matter and are very central to everyday lives. It is not just the materials itself but the values attached to them that really counts. And it is not just the relationship between the object and the community or an individual it is also central to the relationship between communities or individuals. How we use these objects in relation to other people. This again bring back the famous example of Mauss's 'Gifts'. When objects are invested with meanings through different associations and usages overtime and since the contact or interactions is constant there is a fine line

between calls the “Social lives of Things” (Appadurai 1986) and the lives of humans. Appadurai discusses about each object has an economic value ascribed to it but the so called “economic value” may differ or mean differently from each individual and communities alike.

Through the course of all the discussions of the artefacts, the journey of a mere thing to an object significant to the community as their status changes over time with more and more meanings are attached to them. Then we come to the current time and space, where most of these artefacts or objects have been reproduced and mass produced as commodities or products (fig 5.75), are wooden mugs and bamboo pothyuths being sold in various events. Though it repurposes the objects and also provides a platform for the community members to retain their traditional knowledge and craftsmanships, the aesthetic value of these artefacts in some way is diminished.

With the growth in demand of certain objects, the influence on the community level cottage industries get a push of maintaining their knowledge. Many cottage industries have been initiated in various villages, especially in Sikkim most under the state government. Whereas in Kalimpong and Darjeeling it is more privatised or community owned cottage industries.

Here one important aspect that has come again and again is the major roles of community museums in retaining most of the artefacts till date. Though they still require a lot of maintenance still the effort they have put in preserving the community knowledge is astounding despite being at a smaller scale, indicating to the community's awareness of its social aspects is evident, and what they choose to safeguard and let go can be seen in their effort and in the objects that exist with the community in their social and cultural domain.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Materials exist in every culture but how a certain community ascribes meaning to the various objects and artefacts is important to understand, as materials give the intangible ideas and belief system of a community a concrete and tangible form. Woodward (2007) gives three different aspects under the light of which the materials can be seen. Firstly the **cultural** aspect where the “symbolic capacities of the objects offer to think through and about diverse aspects of social life” (Woodward 2007: 171). The cultural aspect can be seen where material culture portrays through them the social interactions and performances of the actors in a society. For instance the use of certain objects signifies the social status of an individual in a society. Or the use of traditional attire represents the identity of a group of people as a community. The second is the **interpretive** aspect, where the relation between humans and objects are focused upon. Lastly, is the **pragmatic** aspect which looks at “materiality as a fundamental platform and media of sociality” (Woodward 2007: 171). It is the functionality that counts, the “physical presence” (Jacknis 1985:14) which objects were intended for in the first place. For example a bamboo cup is used to drink tea, water, etc becomes its pragmatic aspect. While how it is made, used, and who uses it becomes its interpretive aspect. Thus, this research touches upon these three aspects and tries to understand different characteristics of the Lepcha material culture.

Culture is society’s shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and generate behavior and are reflected in that behavior. Culture is socially constructed and learned rather than biologically inherited. It is learned, shared and is dynamic (Haviland 2007: 150), which applies to materials equally. It is the symbolism ascribed to an artefact that is of

significance but along with it comes the artefact itself and its usage within the community. As it is that there can never be just one account of interpretation of an artefact. This research endeavours to comprehend the cultural understanding of artefacts in different perspectives within the Lepcha society. Objects and artefacts can be seen as culture itself, living and interacting with people. It looks into the capacity of the artefacts to correspond and establish meanings within the social order.

There have been many studies on the Lepcha community since the time of the colonial era. However, the Lepcha material culture has not been focused on much, this is another reason for the gap in retaining the knowledge on the material culture of the community. Despite the fewer research conducted on them, native writers like Foning (1987), Tamsang (1998) and auto ethnographers like Lepcha (2013), Molommu (2018), Lepcha (2016) and some non-native writers have been writing in their own capacity discussing about Lepcha material culture. The lack of extensive study on the material culture of the Lepchas points us to how less we know of the community and their material culture. Materials and artefacts acquire spaces in the society where the intangible aspects of the culture require illustration. How materials interact with the community and how the community interacts and engrave meanings to them is unbounded moreover ever changing. Thus, it is imperative that each stage of evolution of the materials be recorded and studied for a deeper understanding of the community. They are witness of the community's identity and testimony to the Lepcha way of life.

The material a community produces largely depends on the environment they interact with. Environment affects human behaviours and cognition resulting in production of materials to cope with their surroundings and assist communities to

survive the conditions they are exposed to. This helps to carry out social functions, and in regulating social relations. This leads to invention of different cultures in different environment. As for the Lepchas the hilly terrains, rich flora and fauna have greatly impacted the Lepcha way of life. From their social structure to the material culture, all are reflections of the way the Lepcha community interacts with their surroundings. This is very evident in the architecture they practice, attire they wear and artefacts they use in their everyday life, which were the main focus of this dissertation.

The research shows that the architecture of the Lepchas is regaining its significance with their various uses as cultural, political, and religious markers intensify their position within the Lepcha society. Lepcha architecture can be understood in terms of the use of space by the community. The megalithic cultures of the community have had specific use of space in relation to the environment and availability of resources in their ecology. The fact that stones take key part of the Lepcha cosmology is integral to this research. Stones are present in almost every Lepcha socio-religious rituals and festivals. They represent the spirits, deities and ancestors. They give physical form and embodiment to these spirits and deities thus, acquiring meaning, symbol and structure finally becoming or taking a form of the embodiment itself.

The architecture of Lepcha community starts with their megalithic culture of *longtsoak*. The key components which constantly come up here are the stones in relation with the ecology of Lepcha landscape. Their various uses as cultural, political, and religious markers intensify their position within the community. The *longtsoak* have been used as markers often in areas with the connotation of sacredness

so the object itself acquires the state of sacredness and becomes an artefact of importance. *Kabi Longtsoak*, *Tendong lho longtsoak*, are examples of stones set as markers in relation to the sacred symbolism ascribed to the place by the community. Likewise the natural monoliths, acknowledged by the community, are very much alive and interacting with the people in the Lepcha culture. These are ascribed with a certain level of sacredness and folk narratives sometime malevolent and others benevolent which helps understand the cultural norms and settings of the community. Not just in the religious sphere but they are used for identifying geographical landmarks. Mapping the Lepcha landscape and ascribing recognition to their land.

For a certain period of time they have been overshadowed by the introduction of new religions especially Buddhism and later Christianity. But lately the revival of the use of *longtsoak* has been seen with the increase of the erection of new menhirs during festivals and marking sacred landscapes. Despite *longtsoak* playing important role in the natural settings currently, a shift can be noticed with the change in the setting of the community and their ecology. Today *longtsoak* can be seen erected in residential areas, and important architectural structures like schools, community halls, monuments and bridges etc. This has given a fresh purpose for the *longtsoak* in the rapidly changing setting as the community progresses to more urban environment.

Another stone important to the Lepchas are the *saderlong*. The *saderlong* are used as *ter* (treasure) and also has architectural significance. This is another example of how a basic object as the stone gains subjectification via interaction with social actors that is the community members into meaningful artefacts. The journey of a stone believed to be special by the community ascribes an identity of sacredness to the stone eventually leading it to be a mystic and extraordinary artefact. These stones

reflect the world view of the Lepcha community as it embodies in itself their believes. This makes it important for the community and solidifies its position within the Lepcha society and culture.

Other than the megaliths the Lepchas architecture comprises of *dokeymoo lee* the Lepchas traditional house and *gree* or watch towers. The famous *Damsang gree*, and *Daling gree* in Kalimpong and *Pandam gree* in Sikkim are the result of political strategies and the need to keep an eye on enemy movements, as there were constant attacks from the neighbouring territories. Today these structures have become an integral part of the community's cultural, political history and identity. The use of stone is evident in the construction of the administrative structures of the Lepchas as well. The symbolic significance of the *gree* has evolved from a political and administrative structure to a symbol of identity and cultural heritage for the Lepchas. Today these *gree* are considered sacred places and treated as pilgrimage sites which the Lepchas celebrate as integral part of their identity.

Lepcha traditional architecture which includes the *dokeymoo lee* on the other hand is an important link to reconnecting with the roots of Lepcha culture. The *dokeymoo Lee* is unique to the community and forms a distinctive cultural marker for the Lepchas. An architectural structure such as the *dokeymoo lee* gives away much information of a community's social structure than that meets the eye. Its structural design helps understand the immense knowledge of the community as they deciphered ways to sustain in the unpredictable Himalayan environment. In addition the artefacts within a household talk about the subsistence pattern, dietary habits, religious affiliations and ecological settings in which the community is set. These are not just concretes but the collective cognitive conscience of the community's

understanding and performance in the world. They also serve as a mode of identity marker as the specific practices highlights the community's unique characteristics. We can take the example of the Indonesian Tongkonan house of the Toraja community which today serves as a national identity (Adams 2017: 93). This not only elevates the community's status but in addition glorifies the national history and culture. Likewise for the Lepchas the *dokeymoo lee* is part of their unique culture, a result of their intimate understanding of nature.

Lately, the revival and the use of *longtsoak* has been seen with the increase of erection of new menhirs during festivals and marking sacred landscapes in all three areas of Sikkim (fig 6.1), Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The Introduction of modern resources and technology in addition to depleting natural resources led to the decline of the use of *Dokeymoo lee*. However the community is taking initiative to revive the traditional houses, attempting to retain the traditional architectural knowledge and to protect the remaining *dokeymoo lee*.



Fig 6.1: illustration of *longtsoak* from Sikkim

The next aspect the research discusses is the past and present scenario of the Lepcha attires. Clothing is considered one of the basic needs of human kind. But its meaning has greatly evolved overtime. For communities like the Lepchas it is regarded as a form of identity and distinctiveness at the present. It is something that sets them apart from the rest and makes them unique. For long the original imagery of indigenous community such as the Lepchas has been pointing to the lower level of development in the community, often described only wearing little clothing for instance described by Hunter (1984). This has currently evolved of what people would note as ‘decent’ clothing. Today the Lepchas have clothing fully covering them, shedding the connotation of savagery to that of more civilized standing. Thus, the traditional attire has evolved both aesthetically, perceptively and symbolically. For example the Lepcha men prefer to wear a shirt and a *tamo* (trouser) underneath the *dumpra*, or the women adopting the *tago* to wear underneath their *dumdem*.

The changes are acknowledged in the attire and the whole stylizing of it. Amalgamation of traditional clothing due to cultural contact could be traced with the variations of attire the Lepchas adopted over time. *Sitlying* is one of the preeminent examples for this argument. As the influence of cultures outside the community is evident with the attire the Lepchas adopted at a certain period of time. These evolved depending on the needs of the community. Similar to architecture, ecology has great influences in the approaches the Lepchas acquired in relation to their traditional attires. As their environment altered so did the trajectories the community adapted and changed with it.

Lastly, the dissertation talks about Lepcha artefacts, and the relation between the community members and the artefacts. Every object and artefacts in the

community was made for a purpose to assist in the daily activity. The artefacts were produced based on their functionality with the conscience of making their everyday tasks easier. With time more symbolic meanings were attached to some. As a result these artefacts obtained more value in the community. All artefacts are objects but not all objects become artefact. A selective pattern is noticed within the community as to which artefact ascribed with more meaning. In similar lines it is important to note not just the relationship between the object and the community but also how we use them in relation to other people both inside and outside of the community. When objects are invested with multiple meanings through diverse associations and usages overtime. The constant interactions leads the “Social lives of things” (Appadurai 1986) and the lives of humans to overlap. This often leads to overriding the niche of artefacts in human society.

We come back to the significance of ecology in the production of artefacts. It is all the more important to see the ecological setting and its effect on the material culture of the community. An overview of the artefacts the Lepchas utilize and the material used for making them, artefacts made of bamboo and wood are extensively used by the Lepchas, as these materials are found in abundance in their landscape. Whereas traditional artefacts made of other materials such as iron and copper are limited, suggesting the contact with foreign materials which came in much later into the Lepcha society. In addition this gives us an synopsis of how deeply depended the community is on the environment around them. The dilemma that have to be adhered to here is that some of the artefacts are losing their functionality, most have lost them already. This is caused by both internal and external factors, The internal being the selective process by the actors, as to which artefact are more useful to the community be it through their functionality or symbolical. On the other hand the external factor

being the influence of the constantly changing milieu. At some point these two variables inter-depend on each other, the external factors affect the modification of an artefact thus leading the community to discard the use of it entirely. Example the use of *uoo-thyak-kro* by the Lepchas have been discarded as new versions of comb was available. Similarly the use of *dokeymoo lee* was minimised with the availability of modern infrastructure. This collectively led to the loss of functionality and the artefacts as well.

Discussions

The materials discussed in this study in terms of architecture, attire and artefacts have their place engraved in the socio-cultural lives of the Lepcha community. However it is important to see the dynamic trajectories the artefacts have taken in different circumstances. Each of the three study areas has their own share of influences that affected the Lepcha community and their material culture in various aspects. And as discussed in prior chapters, the only distinction to remember is in the intensity of the impacts and velocity of change the community has undergone in various parts of the social, ecological, political and dimensional settings. The dynamics of material culture of the Lepchas has been affected by the various adversaries in different areas differently.

Historically the Lepchas of Sikkim have had some form of advantage in retaining their material culture. As the state grants a level of special provisions to its indigenous communities and in the state of Sikkim the Lepchas are recognized as one of the “Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group” (PVTG) of the state, under Article 371(f) of the Indian Constitution. The “Lepcha reserve” of Dzongu also allowed its homogenous population and their cultural practices to continue. On the other hand if

we look into Lepchas of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, they have had higher intensity of cultural contact. And due to this constant contact and exchanges among the various communities was higher affecting their material culture as well. The rate of change in both the tangible and intangible aspects of Lepcha culture was much rapid in comparison for the Lepchas of Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

Darjeeling in particular was affected the most as it flourished under the British and their summer retreat. The favorable climate and landscapes was ideal for tea plantation and the world acknowledged it for their aromatic and subtle beverage. With all the attention Darjeeling grew in size and in numbers with more in migration. The constant competition for livelihood soon distracted people including the indigenous communities such as the Lepchas to this new path of subsistence. This greatly impacted their culture alongside the material culture practices which were slowly grew redundant with time as it could not cope with the rapid change. On one hand the Lepchas had to compete in every field be it for housing space, education, subsistence which led to neglect of the cultural aspects and at a rapid pace. Competition On the other hand the dominant cultures soon absorbed the Lepchas.

It is evident with the community facing imposition by dominant cultures for instance the recent agitation in the hills of Kalimpong and Darjeeling for the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland dawned on the obligation to adapt to the dominant cultural traits. Bimal Gurung, leader of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) demanded everyone including the Lepchas to wear *daura sural* in Darjeeling hills because it was the traditional dress of the Gorkhas. “It was seen as an ethnocentric move by the dominant majority to dilute Lepcha culture with Gorkha culture through

a dress code diktat and that did not settle well with the Lepcha community.” (Lepcha 2013:195)

The Lepchas have always struggled to voice their identity and find a place for themselves a place of their own even among their own homeland which they are indigenous to. It is evident that throughout history Lepchas always had to fight and protect their own ground and interest in order to protect their culture and identity. This has only escalated with time as the community struggled to stand their ground in the political milieu. They have refused to be integrated and swallowed up by the dominant culture. The Lepchas have protested which was visible as they chose to wear their own traditional attire to express their version of distinctiveness. This process is still ongoing as visible structures can be seen all around Lepcha landscapes such as *longtsoaks*, *dokeymoo lee* and the traditional attire are being repurposed for the “politics of identity” (Lepcha 2013:197).

Along with the three aspects from Miller discussed in the beginning of the chapter, there are other central variables and concepts the study dwells upon in relation to the Lepcha material culture, which will be discussed hereafter:

The Notion of Originality:

When it comes to the topic of culture the notion of originality can be seen obsessed upon largely. “The concept of authenticity encompasses diverse sets of meaning that range from genuineness and originality to accuracy and truthfulness” (Trilling 1972); (Handler 1986); (Lindholm 2008). In many ways, authenticity includes the belief of “truthful representation” (Theodossopoulos 2013: 339). “It is concerned with the identity of persons and groups, the authorship of products, producers, and cultural

practices, the categorical boundaries of society: "who" or "what" is "who" or "what" claims to be" (Handler 1986:4).

This is ascribed to material culture as well; the idea of belonging to a community has given rise to the conception of authenticity of materials. These materials then represent the authenticity of the community itself. All in all it is the idea that a culture is “uncontaminated” (Theodossopoulos 2012: 593) that becomes a conscious selection. The 1972 World Heritage Convention the notion of authenticity was discussed upon greatly as some proposed that “in order to ensure preservation of a structure, its original function could in many cases not be maintained, thus allowing for adaptation. Others noted that functions could change, but only in cases when the forms and structures changed would authenticity be lost. Even terms such as progressive authenticity, which would allow for certain modifications while maintaining some form of authenticity, were discussed” (Rossler 2008: 47-48). According to Herb Stovel “Human existence is complex; the material vestiges of that complexity are inherently rich in layered and interwoven meanings...” (Stovel 1995: 398).

This notion of originality and authenticity is directly related to identity and it's many under layers. For an indigenous community like the Lepchas identity is imperative, as it preserve their existence as a community. Materials on the other hand help exert their identity in a physical form. For instance, the *longtsoak* are central to Lepcha socio-cultural distinctiveness as they mark the initial verification of their cultural life. Same can be said in terms of the Lepcha attire. The *dumdem* and *dumpra* intensifies the identity of a community as it communicates distinctiveness. Thus great caution is laid in the features of attire that distinguishes one community from another.

The perception of loss:

With the various interactions and influences a community has from the outside gives rise to the notion of loss in terms of cultural aspects. In the words of the community members it is often times heard that their culture has changed and not authentic anymore. In a BBC article (2011) titled “India’s Lepcha Tribe may lose Kanchenjunga Ritual” many community members have expressed the loss of their tradition as the last *bongthing* to perform the Kanchenjunga ritual passed away without leaving a successor to his knowledge. Sherap Lepcha states “the tradition has ended forever” (<http://bbc.com/news/words-asia-15626993> : 2011). The sense of loss stronger as the variable of ‘forever’ comes into picture. According to the community members “a large part of the oral tradition and knowledge is lost irrevocably” (*ibid* 2011).

For instance the use of *dokeymoo lee* has minimized due to unavailability of construction materials and the main factor, as community members have switched to the current architectural infrastructure. The shift to modern materials has greatly minimized the usage of traditional artefacts alike. Household artefacts such as *sankartyuk* have shifted to modern day blenders, *faatfeetyok* have been replaced by metal pots. Where these can be seen as extreme shift from the so called ‘original’ materials, in case of attire *dumdem* and *dumpra* made of nettle fibers are rare and not extensively used by the larger masses of the community today. Thus the notion of mixture or a certain degree of inauthentic is always attached to the artefacts. “The tragedy of the impending disappearance of indigenous knowledge is most obvious to those who have developed it and made a living through it. But the implication for other can be detrimental as well, when skills technologies, artifacts, problem-solving strategies and expertise are lost” (Woodward 2007:173).

The Ecological Setting:

One variable that constantly play a central role in the production of Lepcha material culture is ecology. Right from the use of stones to the attires the community wears are all reflections of the ecology the community is set in. Special reference can be taken of the Lepcha architecture; with the use of *longtsoak* the Lepchas acknowledge the importance of their environment through symbolic representations. The *longtsoak* are seen present in places with cultural and political importance as already discussed. Same can be said about the *saderlong* or the thunderstones. As a place experiencing immense monsoon and thunder storms, it became a part of their ecology and thus is reflected in the use of *saderlong* in their culture as protection against *sader* or thunder. The *dokeymoo lee* is another strategically set architectural construct, in the unpredictable terrains of the hills, the Lepchas dwell in.

The attires used by the community also reflects the same cognitive process as materials are directly derived from the environment and the way the community carries it also depended on the environment alike. Coming to the artefacts the community uses, is greatly depended on what was available to them from their environment. Most daily artefacts are constructed from natural available objects. Most of the material culture developed, within the specific environment setting in the Lepcha society were designed to function in harmony with the environment, yet as a subsistence approach against it. Take the housing pattern for instance the *dokeymoo lee* is constructed using the available materials in the surrounding yet as a refuge from the same environment. A diversely complimentary relationship shared for survival.

Adaption to Change:

As cultures change so does their material culture. Objects and artefacts evolve in a collective fashion in time, but often in a non-linear manner, here I mention the term

collective keeping in mind the collective use and disuse of artefacts by a community in certain period of time and discard of it and adapt to another, according to the community's needs. A "selective adopt and elevate artefacts associated with the past glories" (Adams 2017: 93) "to advance their legitimating projects" (*ibid* 2017: 93). For instance we can take the Lepcha attire. In an attempt to keep up with the pace as the world around them changes fast, the traditional attire has come a long way from its initial form in means of style and stylizing. Different interpretation of *dumpra* is in fashion currently. The evolution is equivalent as in case of the *dumdem*, from the colours, to the material and the style progress to the presently two piece *dumdem*. All comes down to the purpose of functionality of the attire for the community.

Though there is raising concern among the community that this new stylizing of *dumdem* will cause the traditional process of wearing the attire to perish. Then there is the adaptation and amalgamation of cultural aspects such as Lepcha men and women adopting the tibetian attire as they got assimilated into the dominant cultures. Which leads us back to the notion of authenticity; the remolding of attire leads to original aesthetic to get lost. Which is a significant concern but the fact that this has also provided the opportunity for the *dumdem* to be worn by those who could not wear it prior due to the same very reasons cannot be disregarded. The invention and the original always overlap one another as culture itself is inventive and constantly shifting.

These changes can be seen coming from an individual level leading for the whole community to adapt to the changes collectively. The younger generation of the community is eager and taking much interest in reviving their traditions the degree of revivalism can be acquainted to current needs and functionality of the materials. The different interpretations of architecture, artefacts and attire are often personal and on

an individual level today but also staying within the idea of traditional and affiliated to their culture. “Shape and reshape by human users through the interplay of physical and symbolic manipulation” (Woodward 2007: 174)

Community Museums:

Recently there has been a growth in the number of small Lepcha community museums starting up at a village level. This mushrooming of community museums is beneficial to the material culture of Lepchas. The idea of loss gives birth to the urge for preservation in the community. But as it is there is no complete loss; the past always retains in the memory of the community members and carried with them in the future. Narratives of the past material culture still live on with the community which help the Lepchas reconstruct the present and future cultural aspects. These narratives in regard to the material culture of the community are seen preserved in private and community collections. Community museums can be seen as significant store houses of these narratives. Despite their colonial past, museums are “cultural institutions in which heritage is being preserved and promoted, a means to remember the past and preserve the heritage” (Lepcha and Lepcha: forthcoming).

Small scale collection of artefacts could be noticed in village schools and Lepcha classes. They were also kept as private collections in all the field areas many in the form of heirlooms. Opening museums is also one of the ways the Lepcha community have chosen to preserve their material culture. Namprikdang Lepcha Museum, Dzongu, North Sikkim has a small collection of Lepcha artefacts which are showcased annually during the ‘Namprikdang Tribal Carnival’. Rakdong museum, another small museum at the Rakdong village, North Sikkim has a rich collection of Lepcha artefacts. Lepcha Cultural Heritage Center, situated in Yangyang, South

Sikkim, has a small collection of bamboo artefacts. The Sonam Tshering Lepcha Museum in Bong Busty, Kalimpong a private museum belonging to Lt. Sonam Tshering Lepcha has a very affluent collection Lepcha artefacts. And the latest addition to this list is the recently inaugurated ‘Lepcha Bhavan’ a multipurpose infrastructure in New Town Kolkata which houses a museum displaying the Lepcha traditional artefacts.

There are currently few community integrated museums and many private collectors in all three field areas, who have endeavored on the task of preserving the Material culture. It is not just these community museums but there are private collectors, enthusiasts and concerned community members who are keen on preservation. The Tingvong school has a small collection of artefacts displayed in their Lepcha class. Likewise, the Lepcha class at ERMS, Gangyap also displays artefacts and models of *dokeymoo lee* for their students.

All this have ensured the transfer of knowledge and narratives to the next generation. It also invokes memories, through the mode of vision and touch. For instance, on the occasion of Baisakhi, 14th of April 2021, a huge display of artefacts was arranged by the Sikkim Anthropological Society (Adhoc Body) at Manan Kendra, Gangtok. A collective display from three different museums in Sikkim was presented, Rakdong museum from North Sikkim, Nepali Ghar at Aho, East Sikkim and Ethnographic Museum belonging to the Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University. As guests came in to look at the displayed artefacts they recognized the artefacts. One of the visitors even stated “oh my mother used to carry these type of bags, who knows one of these might have belonged to my mother”. Some enthusiastically offered the different names and the ways they were used and made.

The interaction of people with the displayed materials were on a personal level for some as they eminence about the past, but in doing so they also pass on the knowledge. This is evidence enough that knowledge and memories live on though their form may alter. Artefacts trigger memory and facets that we think are lost surface in form of narratives that can be an important link to understanding human culture both past and present.

Conclusion

From all the above discussions it is evident that objects are installed with multiple meanings. And the question of why Material culture is important to us? can be addressed from multiple angles. We cannot subsist without the company of objects. They are part of our everyday lives. “Objects functions as mirrors that reflect both individuals and societal images” (Glacken 1976:1). So the materials produced in a society such as the Lepchas reflect the Lepcha way of looking at the world around them, in summary the Lepcha perspective. “Object fill our everyday lives and are our constant companion” (Yanagi 2018). Thus, it becomes important to note the process of how they are produced and used in the society. An object becomes an artefact by the layers of sentimental and symbolic meanings attached to them by the community. It becomes all the more important to look onto these material cultures from all notions and all trajectories they take. And also the relations they share with the community members and the multiple variables that the objects are affected with in specific settings. For the Lepchas these sentiments and meanings are all based on their intimate relationship with nature.

The subject of authenticity has been a solemn aspect affecting the aesthetic of materiality as a whole. But the notion cannot be isolated in itself. The various

variables such as change and loss are key components that give rise to the idea of originality. The idea that something can be affected by exterior forces and alter. Which can never return to its previous state of originality instills the fear of loss. This loss produces the instinct to preserve. Thus, all variables are inter-connected to one another producing and reproducing culture as they interact with each other. Here the exterior forces are stressed over since the changes from within the community it is not viewed as completely contaminated but rather invented.

But what truly is originality? And how do we distinguish between the authentic and what is borrowed. It is a given that there are various trajectories of human actions objects and artefacts pass through. They are interconnected with the lives of people at various phases of time, and the multiple interactions ascribes different meaning to different artefacts. Especially in the current day and age the notion of originality is indistinct. The journey of a mere object to an artefact significant to the community as their status changes over time with more and more meanings attached to them. The example of *pothyut* can be taken here, used as a domestic object, its symbolism elevates for rituals and ceremonies where it is used as a ritual item. Importance is laid on the types of *pothyut* used for different purposes.

As humans have evolved the object around them also evolves, to preserve what remains if not possible physically it can be done in the form of knowledge. It is important to not just view these objects only from one point of view as layers What remains now requires utmost attention if we have any chance in understanding the community's way of life and the evolution of culture. Understand the centrality of the objects in the community.

Within the Lepcha ecology the changes were recognized in all the three areas the process of preservation and revivalism can be seen on the rise. Today more and more interest is being garnered into reviving the traditional culture which includes the material culture and makes it more accessible to the present generation. The notion of authenticity comes back again to question these new versions of cultural representation. However culture always seems to project itself in times of peril be it as a form of resistant or sustenance. Thus the perception of loss is never truly exercised as it tends to come back in varied forms. For instance, the rise in the consumerism of the *dumpra* pattern and fabric to make file covers, wallets, masks leading to outsourcing of these materials. Provides the Lepchas a larger platform to express their cultures through tangible form. These selective artefacts have gained much economic value as commodities for aesthetic consumption. Used for cultural tourism, these artefacts have become representation of culture which is being trailed into mainstream consumerism.

The roles of influence can be seen reversed at this point. Where it was the exterior forces influencing the community's culture it is now the cultural aesthetic of the community that is influencing the exterior. But to what extend can we say the Lepcha culture is not influenced? The very objects produced here clearly shows the "inventions" were based upon the current scenarios of the world around. Most of these artefacts or objects have been reproduced in mass as commodities and outsourced. It has repurposes the objects and also provides a platform for the community members to retain their traditional knowledge and craftsmanships. And the community members identify these objects are their own, as belong to their culture "in the end objects cease to be external to the individual" (Woodward 2007: 174).

Thus objects and artefacts become important aspects in accessing “the nature of the attachments and affiliations is why material studies is valuable for understanding the curx of the social: the balancing of individuals with society, embodiment, meaning and action, with collective values, cultural discourses and solidarities” (Woodward 2007:175). The intangible aspects of the Lepcha society have been pondered upon many times strating with colonial writers. Infact they are one of the very first ethnographic studies from the Sikkim and Darjeeling himalayas. The material culture of the Lepchas is immense and is still alive in the ‘living practices’ of the community and needs more attention to understand and interpret them fully. This research is an attempt to fill in the gap like many other researchers, especially the native writes and auto ethnographers to bring into light the tangible culture of the Lepchas which greatly influences the intagible culture.

The Material culture of the Lepchas are living evidences of their rich culture heritage. It allows them to reconnect with their roots in form and in practice. This is evident in conciousness and the way the Lepchas choose to wear their traditional attire, preserve their traditional artefacts and revive their architecture. The need to retain their identity in many ways is voiced though their Material culture which help shape the relations between the community members, thus shaping their identity as a whole.

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