

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF LEPCHA  
IN SHREE ANTU VDC, ILAM**

**A Dissertation**

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## Acronyms

<i>Ardhali</i>	Orderly
<i>Athu</i>	High
<i>Bala</i>	Bangle
<i>Bamphok</i>	A type of weapon which is twisted and can be used for cutting woods, bamboo etc.
<i>Bansuri</i>	Flute
<i>Bari</i>	Productive land around the house
<i>Bhanjyang</i>	Pass
<i>Bongthing</i>	A religious priest
<i>Chakku</i>	Type of knife
<i>Chiyabari</i>	Tea Planted area
<i>Cholo</i>	Blouse
<i>Chulesi</i>	Tool used for cutting vegetables
<i>Churidar Salwar</i>	Modern Indian dress worn by ladies
<i>Dhanuban</i>	Bow and Arrow
<i>Gadhi</i>	Fort
<i>Gaza</i>	Nepali musical instruments which are played by rubbing the wires
<i>Ghanta</i>	An instrument which is played by shaking
<i>Guleli</i>	A means with which, especially a stone or other things can be thrown
<i>Jee Mala</i>	Bead
<i>Jhyamta</i>	Musical instrument composed of two plates
<i>Jormurali</i>	Two pieces of flute
<i>Juka</i>	Insect (leech)
<i>Kaji</i>	Position given to Lepcha
<i>Kandamul</i>	Edible root of plant
<i>Khukuri</i>	Dagger
<i>Kippat</i>	Area covered by Lepcha when they had the authority to rule in the past
<i>Kurkur Tarul</i>	Edible root of plant

<i>Lepcha Utthan Manch</i>	Lepcha organization
<i>Madal</i>	A typical Nepali musical instruments
<i>Mane</i>	Mane is physically like a temple, build by Buddhist for the remembrance of dead person
<i>Manolom</i>	Old religion of Lepcha
<i>Marwadi</i>	Ear rings
<i>Menchu</i>	Now Mechi river
<i>Murali</i>	Flute
<i>Nagara</i>	A stick used for playing instrument
<i>Pakhabari</i>	Steep barren land
<i>Patuki</i>	Girdle
<i>Pela</i>	Bowl
<i>Pheta</i>	Turban
<i>Phyat-phyate baja</i>	A musical instrument
<i>Pupalo</i>	Bead, Amber
<i>Rong</i>	Peak, wait
<i>Sarangi</i>	Typical Nepali Musical instrument
<i>Silauto</i>	A stone use for grinding spices and pickle
<i>Subba</i>	A position given to Lepcha
<i>Sugauli</i>	Name of treaty of Sugauli
<i>Suruwal</i>	Trouser
<i>Tambok</i>	Instrument like a guitar with strings
<i>Tope</i>	Canon
<i>Voto</i>	Tshirt with out sleeves
<i>Sisnu</i>	Shrub which pricks like hot water

## CHAPTER - I

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

The structure of Nepalese Society consists of different tribes. These different tribes live in different geographical area of Nepal. The different tribes from different places have their own type of characteristics, existence, social and cultural status, economic status, size and customs which differ from one to another. Lepcha is one of the major tribe among these different tribes, but some of the Lepcha tribes are going backward due to the lack of proper education and not taken interest on these tribes by any external agencies.

Most of the Lepchas live in the far eastern V.D.C, Shree Antu of the far eastern district Ilam of Nepal. It has now become important to study about the fact of 'Lepcha-tribe.' It has yet not been found about the fact that who the Lepchas actually are, where was their place of origin etc. Different researchers have explained these tribes differently according to the sources they had gone through. Due to the lack of adequate resources regarding 'Lepcha' tribe, much information on it has been collected from folk tales and oral traditions.

Most of the researchers have said that these tribes have been living on the lap of 'Kanchandzonga'. These people themselves used to say 'Rong' to each other. After the war between India and British these people did not live only in the Kanchandzonga and went to different places just because of the change in border. Some of them lived in Ilam, some lived in Tibetan Border, and few of them lived in Kalingpong, Sikkim and Darjeeling of India.

It is also said that the English name 'Lepcha' derives from Nepali *l pce* or *l pc* , which originally had the derogatory connotation of 'inarticulate speech'. Nowadays, the term 'Lepcha' is widely used without this connotation. The Lepcha call themselves *mútuncí róngkup rumkup* 'children of the Róng and of God'.

It has not yet been found the fact of the 'Lepcha' tribe of 'Shree- Antu' about who these Lepchas really are, where they came from etc due to the lack of proper

resources. It is proved that in the ancient period they lived in different places such as Tibetan Border, Kalingpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim and many parts of Ilam District of Nepal. In the historical period when British ruled over India; Nepal was extended from Tista in the east to Kangada to the west. After the British ruled over India; the border was changed. The change in the border also affected the life cycle of Lepcha of Kanchandzonga. That's why they settled in different places. Therefore, Kanchandzonga is taken as the original place of Lepcha (key informant Chandra Kumar Lepcha 2062). It is also said that the original place of Lepcha is 'Shree Antu' where these people had ruled in the ancient period. (Jagat Bdr Lepcha. 2062)

The Lepcha (also called as Rong) are the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim, India. There are about 46,000 Lepcha people. They are thought to be the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. Traditionally, the Lepcha were hunters and gatherers, but now they show signs of farming and cattle breeding. In some British sources, they were described as forest dwellers. The Lepcha people usually live in the most remote valleys. They isolate themselves from other Indian societies and they speak their own language, which is a sub-dialect of Tibetan. They are monogamous, although there have been cases when a man may have more than one wife.

The Bhutia converted the Lepcha people to Tibetan Buddhism. The Lepchas still retain their beliefs of spirits and shaman, who communicate with the gods, cure disease, and watch over the ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death.

(Lepcha International Institute for Asian Studies: Himalayan Language Project)

Since different researchers have claimed differently regarding Lepcha people, it is not possible to ascertain the one fact about them. After my completion of study about Lepcha people through different ideas, methods and data collection techniques, I found the various facts that they were only the aboriginal people of Ilam district. To prove the above statement, the Lepcha people in Ilam themselves have collected the weapons and other materials which were used by them in the ancient period while they were working as administrators and soldiers. These weapons and materials have now been kept collectively in a museum. Mr. Jagat

Bahadur Lepcha, who has broad knowledge about his community, has expressed his view that his forefathers and ancestors were actually inhabitant of the same place. It is also said that the place Antu and the name of other neighboring places are also derived from the Lepcha language. For example, 'Menchu' now Mechi is derived from the Lepcha language which means hot spring.

The museum which has been taken as evidence that they were the original inhabitant of Shree Antu VDC of Ilam district is also under the supervision of Jagat Bahadur Lepcha.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Nepalese society is made up of different types of people. But some of the tribes are going backward due to the lack of proper research, study and security for that tribe. In order to protect these tribes, the existence of these tribes should first be protected; if no one pays attention to these tribes they might remain only in the history. Among different people of Nepal, only one tribe who has been living since the ancient period in the eastern part of Ilam is "Lepcha". Even though, but again, Ilam is claimed as an original place of Lepcha, many people inside and outside Ilam is still unknown about the tribe Lepcha. Therefore, the proper research and study should be done on the Lepcha tribe only then they can remain forever.

The study is done in order to extract adequate knowledge on the causes of the backwardness of the Lepcha tribe. The most important and significant reason for the backwardness of the Lepcha is low population which has resulted in the domination by the other majority tribes. They seem to be backward and out of reach to different services and opportunities due to their socio-economic and cultural backwardness. Lack of education is another severe problem of the Lepchas. They even are lacking of experts of their own Lepcha script. Another problem that the Lepchas are facing is the domination they are suffering from the modern culture influencing other cultures and tribes.

It has become important to study deeply on the Lepcha tribe because the population of the tribe is decreasing. The Lepchas have their own type of rites and rituals, culture, social and economic status. Because Lepcha are getting mixed up

with other community socially, culturally, as well as religiously. So, they are now facing various problems to protect their culture, tradition and their purity. Thus the present study makes a survey of the economic and social status of Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study generally studies regarding Lepcha Myth, past and present context, their origin, social setting, education, religious practices, economic activities, protecting the Lepcha culture, institutional set up etc. Apart from these, the specific objectives are as follows.

1. To study the socio-economic status of Lepcha in Shree Antu.
2. To show the present situation of Lepcha in Shree Antu.
3. To analyze the reasons for the backwardness of Lepcha in Shree Antu.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

It is obvious that the society is a group of different communities, tribes, people etc. Likewise Nepalese society is consisting of different tribes, communities etc. All of these have their own impact and importance in the history of Nepal. Among them, Lepcha tribe is the one which even though, had a great importance in the history of Nepal, are now going to lose their identity due to the facts like mixing up with other communities, inter caste marriage, following other's culture, religion, language etc. Although many researches have been done regarding Lepcha people of different places, these researches have not covered about Nepalese Lepcha people. That's why; I have tried my best to study on Nepalese Lepcha people in order to keep their existence alive in the society of Nepal. For this propose I have done research on this tribe of Shree Antu VDC. Antu VDC is situated in the far eastern part of Ilam district of Nepal. Lepchas are considered as original inhabitants of this VDC. They have a significant role in the history of Nepal. In the ancient period they worked as administrators in the different states and they were given the positions like 'Subba' and 'Kaji'. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the whole eastern part from the 'Kankai River' was Lepcha state.

But not any proper research and study have been done regarding these tribes. This study will help those who are trying to uplift the backward people. This study explores change and development in socio-economic conditions of the Lepchas relating to their past and the present context. It will also help giving identification of their culture, tradition, custom, language, education and socio-economic condition.

### **1.5 Limitation of the Study**

This study mainly studies the Lepcha community of Shree-Antu VDC which is situated in the far eastern part of Ilam district of Mechi zone. In Ilam, there are 48 VDCs and one municipality. We find Lepcha settlement only on 15 VDCs of Ilam. But here, I have limited my study only within the Shree Antu VDC. Thus I have collected information about Lepcha tribe of Shree Antu VDC only among the 15 VDCs. This study is only related to socio economic status of Lepcha. Apart from this, this dissertation studies regarding the Lepcha origin, their culture, language and the Lepcha script, educational and social status as well.

Though the study area lies in my home village, I had to face many problems during the field survey. Because of the shyness, illiteracy, hesitation and busy-ness of the respondents, I initially was not able to get information in detail. It was hard to find the female Lepchas at home. Some of the female who were at home were not willing even to talk. Male Lepchas were also not interested giving information in detail. Some of the old male said “*hami ta padha lekha chaina jandungna*” (we are not literate, we don’t know anything).

## **CHAPTER - II**

### **Literature Review**

Literature review is the most fundamental process for any research which helps researcher to determine the actual topic. It specially helps to collect different information and knowledge about the study area. Literature review can be obtained by studying different type of publication and visiting different sites with the relevant information about the research area. The different literature reviews I did for my study are as follows.

#### **2.1 Literature Related to Lepchas in India**

Tamsang (1998) has written on the reality of Lepchas which are still not Known and told. After he studied many different books of Lepchas and visited the whole Lepcha settlement of India and Nepal he found that they are common on scripts, languages, arts, culture, religion and tribe. He describes the Lepcha mythology on creation.

Chemjong (1969) has written about how Lepchas gave the name for their tribe "Lepcha". He also has written in this book that during the fourth century, the Mongolian of Ilam of South Parsiya had gone towards the hilly mountainous Jungle after being defeated in the war with Kirats. They, then destroyed the jungle and made their homeland there and gave the name 'Ilam' to that place just in order to remain in the original place from where they had come.

Kotturn (1976) has written some folktales from the old Lepcha tribe. In his folk tales, the tale of towar Daramdin is also mentioned. George has described about the history of Daramdin in this tale. Daramdin was a big pond. One day Lepchas reached the place 'Daramdin' when they were trying to escape from the fear of the ghost. They decided to make their home land thinking that the pond was the suitable place. So, this tale has proved that Lepchas were origins of Daramdin.

Tshiring (1971) has explained regarding the word 'Lepcha', the origin of Lepcha (gotra), Religion, Birth, marriage, Custom, language, literature and folk tales. He has stated that Lepcha were first interested to say themselves 'Rong'. But

the full meaning of this word was 'A-rong' which means the higher place, that's why Lepchas believed that their origin was also first started from the highest place 'Kanchandzonga'.

Rizal (2003) has stated that Lepcha people are simple and they are the original inhabitants of Sikkim. They are said to have come to Sikkim from the East Mountains of Asham and Upper Burma (now Myanmar). She has done research on the Lepcha community of Daramdin Block of west district (Sikkim). The sex ratio of Lepcha population in Daramdin is dominated by the female population.

According to her, the source of economic livelihood of the Lepcha of Daramdin in the past was agriculture, they were fully dependent on it and due to the low population they needed no other source for economic livelihood. Their life was simple and easy. The other ethnic groups migrated to Daramdin gradually and interfered with the lives of the simple Lepchas. The other tribes like Bhutias, Nepalese and Christians etc. influenced them. The other ethnic groups were quite clever as compared to these simple Lepchas so they started influencing the Lepchas to a great extent. Due to the influence of other ethnic groups, some of the Lepchas started following other religions like Christians and Hinduism. They started learning the language, culture and tradition of the other castes.

The educational status of Lepcha is quite different from that of the past Lepcha people. In the past, the Lepchas were illiterate; there was no need of education. But at present, most of the Lepchas have become literate. The main cause behind this was the development activities and modernization which took place in the study area.

Gupta (2001) has concluded that the Lepcha people who were under the sovereignty of Sikkim, shifted into Buddhism from their belief of natural god, like river, trees, Mt. Kanchandzonga to get favour from the palace of Namgyal Dynasty who ruled over Sikkim. Other Lepchas who lived out of Sikkim were in the impression of British rule so they adopted Christianity. Lepchas are originally Mongolian by the tribe.

Pandey (2002), in his study of socio economic condition of the Lepcha in Dzongu area of North explains Lepchas as the earliest settlers of Sikkim, which earlier comprised of the present district Darjeeling and eastern Nepal. As according to his research, Lepchas have a legend which says that they were originated from *mayel Lyang*, a mythical land at the foothills of Mount Kanchandzonga in Sikkim itself. While the Lepchas themselves have no legend of their own to show their migration from any distant place, the Limbus have a legend which says that Lepchas and Limbus are descendants of two brothers who migrated from the North. While the Limbus settled in eastern Nepal and established a Limbu kingdom, the Lepchas went farther and settled in Sikkim.

Bhasin (1989) noted that Lepchas were the original inhabitant of northern part of Sikkim and they were ruled by Bhutias. They practiced farming in the lower altitude where as Bhutias used to live in higher altitude practicing the various farming and pastrolism in various degrees. The Lepchas gradually started scattering from the state of Sikkim to other places due to the domination of Bhutias.

Foning (1987) has described about how Lepchas shifted their belief from 'Boongthingsom' into other religion, mostly towards Buddhism and few of them towards Christianity. Apart from this, he also has described about the traditional customs, rights, and historical stories and as well the origin of clan, marriage custom, customary lanes of Lepcha people which they have been performing since their birth to death. The reason behind their conversion in belief is due to the impression of Bhutanese culture and British colonial rule.

Lepchas are the first tribe who put their footsteps as earlier settlers in Sikkim. The Lepchas are scheduled tribes of India in the state of Sikkim and Darjeeling district, Kalingpong in West Bengal (Lepcha 2006). In both state, the Lepchas have minor of population with about 10 percentage living in Sikkim (Census 1991) and about 4 Percent living in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. It is believed that the Lepchas are of the Limbu Origin. The writer has defined the present context of Lepcha community, how they are developing in the human

society, impression of western culture and modernization. They are now gradually participating in education and social services.

The oldest mythology of Lepcha people is adjoined with the story of a brave soldier who killed a terrible demon to save the lives of people of a certain community who finally had come into the existence as Lepcha Community. (Lepcha 2005)

## **2.2 Literature Related to Lepchas in Nepal**

Vaidhya, Tuinstra, Schwerzel (2000) write about the Lepcha of Nepal. These three authors have proved that Lepcha are the aboriginal tribes of Ilam. They also have claimed that Lepcha were not migrated from Sikkim. These authors have collected information regarding Lepcha lifestyle from generation to generation and on the basis of religion and culture.

Bhattarai (1998) writes about the socio cultural changes among the Lepchas of Shree-Antu VDC in Ilam district of Nepal. He has studied the changing pattern of family status, marriage, festival, tradition and language. He also has described about the way of thinking, socio economic condition, agricultural systems, history and cultural pattern of the Lepcha.

Sharma (1993) has claimed that Lepcha are not aboriginal tribe of Ilam. The meaning of 'Lepcha' is '*Deurali*' where they used to stay was situated in the Lepcha *Bhanjyang* of Humla, that is why he has stated in his dissertation that Lepchas at first used to stay in the higher hilly region .

Bhattarai (2003) claimed that Lepcha tribes are the aboriginal tribe of Ilam. He has further said that after Nepal's integrity, Lepchas had got the right to work as administrators. But now Lepchas are going less in number. These Lepcha tribe themselves have established, '*Lepcha Sangh*' in order to protect their existence. The government has not made any plan for protecting Lepcha tribe till now.

Karki (1998) has done study on the Lepcha tribe of Shree Antu VDC. According to her; Lepcha are the original people of Kanchandzonga. She has claimed that the post of 'Kaji and 'Subba' was taken as the superior than other

Lepcha people so karki agreed upon that Lepchas are going less in number because of the post discrimination within their tribe.

About the Lepchas' culture, Karki has said that Lepchas were affected by the people outside the country so this has changed the Lepcha's social, culture and economic status. She has finally suggested to study and research deeply about the Lepcha tribe to protect their existence in the history.

Karki (2001) stated that Lepchas are the aboriginal tribe of Ilam. According to him, Lepchas can not be found in other places except Ilam. There was the Lepcha kingdom in the eastern part of kankai river of Ilam. This fact was written in the letter which the Lepcha kaji yuklathup had received in 1884. The different places of Ilam such as Fikkal, Ilam, Aitabare, etc were used as capital. Due to this, Prithvi Narayan shah had given the post "Kaji" after the integration. Karki has also stated that since Lepchas are Buddhist, they have their own type of language, customs, culture and they are simple and honest as well.

The Rong script which had been used by the Kirati king 'Ma warong' was also used only by the Lepchas and they then started to call themselves '*Rong Banshi*'. The old religion of Lepcha was 'Bungthinglom' and 'Manolom'. They later, also followed the religion 'Buddhism' after the Kirati king Mawrong spread out this religion. Chemjong has also described about Lepcha language in his book.

'From Mechi to Mahakali (part 1)' described Lepchas as simple, hard working, honest, enjoyable and optimistic. They specially make them happy by hunting, dancing, singing and eating with others. Lepchas think that the life of any human starts from the pregnancy. Similarly this book has also discussed about marriage ceremony and death ritual of Lepchas.

Subedi (1993), in his study of continuity and change in population movements noted the simplicity of Lepcha people. He stated that Lepchas are the children of Mt. Kanchandzonga and they call themselves 'Rong'. According to him the main area of Lepcha settlement was Sikkim. He, however, stated that there are a considerable number in Eastern Nepal, Darjeeling district in India and Bhutan.

### 2.3 Common Ground

Different researchers have explained in different ways regarding the Lepchas, few of them have explained from the mythological point of view, where as others have tried to give the statement based on the scientific and practical views.

After the study of different researchers, writers and scholars one concluded view can not be traced out. The different writers have claimed the different places as the origin of Lepcha people with their strong argument and evidences. The different places that they have claimed as the origin of Lepcha people are Sikkim, Kanchandzonga, Daramdin, Ilam, Asham, Upper Burma etc.

In order to prove their findings, they have taken the support of relative culture, language etc. Most of the Lepchas had scattered to other places from their original places. For the reason behind the scattering of Lepcha people given by them are the sovereignty of Tibetan and British impression on them, the search of cultivable land, their culture, habit and faith on nature were the feature of Lepchas. Because of these, they were attracted towards jungles and hilly regions. Although the different views are found, mainly the strong argument are presented by those writers who claim that Lepcha people were originally originated from Sikkim and there from, they scattered to different places.

Most of the Nepalese writers have introduced the whole Nepali Lepcha in brief, some of the writers have written regarding the Lepcha of Ilam named '*Ilam Jillaka Lepchaharu*' and in other topics like '*Lepcha Jatiko Sanskritima Aayeka Parivartanharu*', '*Ilam Jillama Lepchaharuko Pravesh*', '*Socio-Cultural Change Among the Lepchas*'. These all topics have just introduced Lepcha only as according to the topics. The study of mine is about the socio economic status of Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC. This study studies about the Lepcha origin, language, culture, religious practices, education, social setting and economic activities. As well, this dissertation has also introduced about the past and present life pattern of Lepcha people which yet have not been covered by other Nepalese writers.

## **CHAPTER - III**

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Several research methods have been used to collect necessary data and information in this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected. The main field methods and instruments include field observation, household survey, questionnaire, key informant interview and informal discussions.

This research on vanishing tribe Lepcha is mainly based on primary information collected from the field using various instruments. The information collected through household survey also include details on life cycle, economic condition, literacy and educational status, family structure as well as cultural practices and history of Lepcha tribe. Changes in life style of Lepcha and factors of changes are also taken into account while discussing life-style of Lepcha tribe. The secondary information from published as well as unpublished documents were collected during the course of study primarily in Kathmandu.

#### **3.1 Qualitative versus Quantitative**

Both the qualitative and quantitative sources of information have been given almost equal weightage in this research. However, the description of life-cycle, events, culture, individual's experiences and thoughts are based on qualitative information. On the other hand, economic and demographic information used in this study comes primarily from quantitative and survey methods. Therefore both qualitative and quantitative methods are used here as complementary rather than competitive ones.

#### **3.2 Primary versus Secondary**

In most cases, the primary sources provide most reliable data for the study. This study uses primary data as the main source of information. For this purpose I have conducted household survey of every house using structured questionnaire. The in-depth interviews, field observation and participation in some of their rituals and festivals also provided insights for this study. Besides I also have used

secondary sources of information to support and substantiate findings of my study. The secondary sources include published and unpublished books, statistical profiles, previous studies and articles. In Nepal, data on caste/ethnic composition of population is available only from 1991. However, census data has its own limitations especially for studies like this. As a result, this researcher collected information from every Lepcha households from the required study area.

### **3.3 Field Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Household Survey**

Household survey was carried out to get information on household and family information, education, health and use of health services, family information including marriage, cohabitation and fertility, income, demographic information about household members including migration.

The information has been collected from house hold respondents during the field work through questionnaire. This method of data collection is useful when the huge amount of information is to be carried out. Through the use of questionnaire, I visited each and every house of Lepcha and collected various information during day time. Since the Lepcha people are less in number and there are only 31 Lepcha houses in my study area I collected most of the information through the use of field survey. I first tried to get information from the head member of every house. They were not convinced initially. I, that's why collected the information through different stages only after I convinced them about my purpose to collect information. I collected information regarding their family structure, origin, historical importance and demographic structure. I also got information from their sons but I didn't get any information from females. The detail is given later in the annex 1.

Similarly, in the next stage I collected information about their religion, social relationship and life cycle rituals. There were few females of other caste married with Lepcha male who did not have in-depth knowledge regarding the Lepchas' community. They had settled mixing up with others' community. They said that even though their main religion was Buddhism, other religions like

Hinduism and Christianity gradually influenced them. Their children were influenced by others' children in celebrating Dashain and Tihar festivals and wearing new clothes. They also said that they use to wear their own dresses in special occasions.

Thirdly, I collected information regarding their socio-economic status including income pattern, their occupational pattern, land holding and livestock. Some females were the household head when I collected such information. They said that they were facing the problems in fulfilling the requirement of their children like good food, education, health, clothing etc.

In the next stage, I collected information about their education, language and Lepcha Script. They also gave information about their poverty, inter-caste marriage and the compulsion to mix up with other community. They also convinced me that their original Lepcha Script has continuously been disappearing due to the maximum uses of Nepali language.

Lastly, I collected information regarding the activities being done for protecting their identity. In order to protect their existence, they have opened an organization as well as Lepcha museum in their own success. The detail information has been presented later in the annex 1.

### **3.3.2 Interview**

A research interview is a structured social interaction between a researcher and a subject who is identified as a potential source of information, in which the interviewer initiates and controls the exchange to obtain quantifiable and comparable information relevant to an emerging or previously stated hypothesis.

Social research interview is part of Qualitative research methods, there are many types of interview methods to use, but the most commonly used are structured, semi structured and unstructured interviews, although a structured interview comes more under Quantitative research methods as it is more like a questionnaire. Unstructured interviews is when the researcher asks little questions and lets the interviewee do all the talking, to find out as much information as

possible, this type of interview is also known as 'Life History' Interview and is the favoured approach for a history researcher, it attempts to achieve a Holistic understanding of the interviewees point of view. Semi Structured Interviews is perhaps the most commonly used interview technique in qualitative social research, the researcher will want to know certain information which can be compared and contrasted with information from other interviews, the researcher may produce an interview schedule which is a list of questions the researcher will want to find out from the interviewee.

In-depth interview gives a clear picture of over all condition of the study area. This method of data collection is also very suitable for illiterate population. I applied key informant interview method. I interviewed five key informants from my study area. As the key informants for my study I have taken four Lepcha and one non-Lepcha. Four Lepcha people were taken as key informants to obtain an internal picture of Lepcha and their community. They were of 45, 75, 85 and 26 age group respectively. This method helped me collecting the fact and reliable information about the Lepcha tribe. The old group of Lepcha helped me providing their past and present informations. The other two provided an internal data regarding their origin, social relationship and economic status. Similarly one non-Lepcha, about of 56 years who is the researcher of a Lepcha tribe helped me obtaining the information regarding Lepcha origin, their past and present condition, economic changes, relationship with other castes, administration role etc. The key informant interview had specially been carried out also to be sure whether the information collected through field survey was reliable or not and to find out the missing information. I also have used informal interview to collect some information regarding the 'Lepcha tribe'. The informal interview was generally carried out to get the information in unstructured ways. The questions asked to key informants are given in the annex 2.

### **3.3.3 Personal Observation**

The observation is accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur. Observation is the outcome of active choice; we never observe everything

there is to be seen. We always have an active role in the observation process in two questions; what to see and how to see it. That means the observation is a way of taking part in the world not just representing it (Hay, 2003).

Field observation is the most important and reliable method for any researcher. It is a direct interaction between the respondents and the researcher. Whatever the information the researcher wants to obtain, it all depends on how the researcher behaves to the respondents. So to obtain the accurate and precise information, the researcher himself should establish a good relationship with the local people of the study area. Taking information from these local people is not an easy task as their private life has to be investigated, they may hesitate, be in-cooperative and angry or sometimes ignorant. They would also be indifferent if they are not convinced. In such cases they had to be convinced in a very good manner. As such it had been a difficult task to get the appropriate information. After they were convinced, many more information had been collected applying this method.

Various types of information have been collected by visiting and observing activities of each and every household. By applying this method, the settlement pattern, economic and social status, fooding, lifestyle, relation with other castes in the society, educational status of Lepcha etc have been observed. During the field work, this tool was also used to test the reliability and validity of the information collected through other techniques.

### **3.4 Data Analysis and interpretation**

During the field survey I have collected different information which I analyzed through tabulation method, photographs and maps using Arc view GIS. Many more important things which were not expressed through above tools are presented in a descriptive way.

## CHAPTER - IV

### Lepcha, their Origin and Social Setting

#### 4.1 Introduction

It is obvious that most of the Lepchas have been living in the eastern part of Ilam in Nepal. Although Lepcha tribe is less in number in Ilam, we find them living there since long time ago by the use of data collection techniques like interview, questionnaire, observation, etc with the present living Lepcha tribe. However, it is not found yet that where they had come from, where was there original place, due to the lack of historical background, manuscript and any other fact regarding the Lepcha tribe. That's why it is difficult to get the fact about the Lepcha tribe.

Some researchers on Lepcha tribe are Chemjong 1969, Tshiring 1971, and Vaidhya, Schwerzel and Tuinstra 2000. According to Chemjong 1969, during the fourth century, a king named Shankaldwip expanded the boarder of his country from Asham (eastern part) to Kabul (western part). At that time, the name of a country of South Asia was Ilam. The king of Ilam was Afrasiyab who was very proud of his power. So the king of Ilam Afrasiyab ordered the king Shankaldwip to pay the tax. Instead of that, king Shankaldwip sent the message to the king Afrasiyab that they are ready for war.

Shankaldwip was kiranti king whereas Afrasiyab was Mongol king. They fought with each other. Afrasiyab was defeated the war; he that's why went towards mountainous jungle of Northern part in order to protect his life. Later on, they destroyed the jungle and settled there by building the houses.

They gave a name for that place 'Ilam' in order to remain in the place from where they had come because the name of the place they had come from was also 'Ilam'.

According to Tshiring N, Lepcha tribe doesn't believe that their tribe was originated from any others blood relation. After the God created earth, peak, mountain, Jungle, insects etc, also created man and woman (male & female). To create male and female, God had taken snow from a high peak Kanchandzonga on

his both hand and created male (pha-Dong-Thing) from the snow of his right hand and female (Jyo-n-new) from the snow of his left hand. They were created like a brother and sister. God ordered them not to live together and said; if they live together they will be punished. They did not care about the god's suggestion and started to live together, secretly. The female (woman) became pregnant. But God knew about the fact that female was pregnant. That's why God ordered them to live under the mountain. The children born by them were continuously thrown by the male in the Jungle due to the fear of the God. But after the eighth birth, they kept the baby with them. All the children after the eighth birth are now called as Lepcha.

The thoughts of Tshiring G about the Lepcha are also same as that of Tshiring N. He has also said that male and female were created from the snow of god's hand. Regarding the actual meaning of Lepcha, different intellectual persons have kept different thoughts. Some have said that the word "Lepcha" became popular by its own language 'Lapcho'. The meaning of Lepcha was "*Deurali*" in the Lepcha language.

According to researchers like Vaidhya, Tuinstra and Schwerzel, Tshiring N and Tshiring G Lepcha people used to go to Tibet in order to bring salt. They had to go to Tibet passing the long path of Jungle where they had to face many difficulties, like robbery, theft and wild animals attack. They therefore, used to go into groups Tibet after gathering way in the place called 'Lapcho'. They used to come back through the same way and used to go to their own different places after they had reached at the place called 'Lapcho'. So, they were named as 'Lapcha'.

Tshiring N writes that the people of different countries nearer to Sikkim, couldn't pronounce the word 'Lapcho' and started to say 'Lapche'. Later on; British people changed the word 'Lapche' into 'Lepcha'. One historical story has claimed that, one Lepcha people called Imepya had married with the daughter of Limboo. After his marriage, he had gone to his further spouses' house and presented them with a chicken. After he presented the chicken, the brother and sister of his wife started to tease him with the word 'Lapche' by catching the wings

of the chicken. According to Limbu language 'Lapche' means something like wing-eater. It is since this time that the Lepcha are called "wing - eaters".

Vaidhya, Tuinstra and Schwerzel have also said that the word 'Lepcha' was given to them by the English colonizers. They further have said that the meaning of 'Lep' connotations with 'cave' in their own languages, so they are called as "cavepeople".

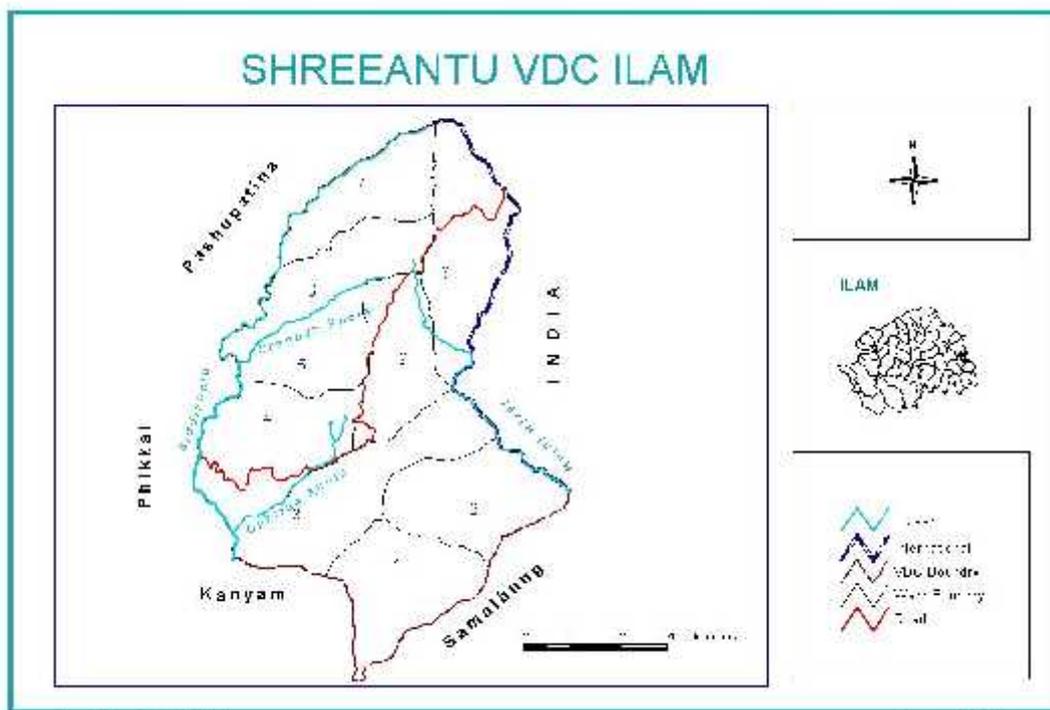
#### **4.2 Introduction of the study area**

I have concentrated my study region within the boundary of Shree Antu VDC in Ilam. It is a hilly region which is located in the eastern part of Ilam district of Mechi zone in Nepal. The elevation of this area ranges from 1100 to 1827 meter. It is situated between 88° 6' East to 88° 10' East longitude and from 26° 51' North to 26° 56' North latitude.

This VDC is surrounded by Pashupatinagar in the North, Samalbung in the South, Fikkal and Kanyam in the West and west Bengal of India in the East. This land is important from the ancient time. Besides Lepcha people, different tribes and people also live there such as Brahmin, Kshetries, Rai, Limboo, Kami, Damai, Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Sunuwar etc. In the history of Nepal, Lepcha has the great importance. They were the administrative people. Even though they are now least in number they have been taken as the most important tribe living there from the ancient period. The total number of Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC is 155 i.e. 3.4% of the total population i.e. 4452 of Shree Antu VDC. This information has been extracted from the CBS. It has shown that the total number of Lepchas in Shree Antu is 155, where as the Lepcha Uthan Manch has shown that the total number of Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC is 183.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Lepcha Uthan Manch* 2004.

**Map 1: Study Area**



Source: Survey Department, Government of Nepal

### 4.3 Lepchas in Shree Antu

Shree Antu is a place consisting of different types of tribes, among which one of the most important tribe which have been there since the ancient period till now is the “Lepcha”. There are 31 Lepcha houses in Shree Antu VDC and 155 Lepcha population. They have their own type of special culture, religion, customs and tradition.

Most of the places and rivers of Shree Antu as well as the eastern part of Ilam has got their name from the Lepcha language. That’s why this tribe has its own historical significance.

One of the most known rivers among many rivers which were named from Lepcha language is "Mechi River". The Lepchas used to say "menchu" for this river in the beginning which meant hot spring where they used to bath. After some period, the ‘menchu’ river changed into Mechi River. Similarly, the place Antu got the name ‘Antu’ from Lepcha language which came from ‘*athu*’ meaning for high. Similarly the places like Samalbung, Kattebung etc were also named from the

Lepcha language and these places were named from the Lepcha word ‘Fong’ which means ‘bottom of the tree’.

Similarly, the different neighboring places and VDCs like Shreebung, Pandam, Namsaling etc were also derived from the Lepcha language. This aboriginal tribe of Shree Antu is very simple and peaceful. Some people hesitate to talk even to one another because of the community-feeling and lacking of proper plans and initiatives for their upliftment. Though they have their own language not every Lepcha speaks Lepcha language.

The lifestyle of ancient period Lepcha has been changed. So, the present living Lepcha are spending easy life style than that of the ancient period. But the main occupation these tribes have been implementing since the ancient period till now is ‘Agriculture’.

Source (Jagat Bahadur Lepcha)



Old Lepcha people of Shree Antu VDC.

#### **4.4 Lepchas in Ilam**

Lepchas are basically found in 15 VDCs of Ilam district. The total number of Lepchas of these 15 VDCs of Ilam is 2559. The largest numbers of Lepchas live

in Fikkal VDC. Similarly the 2nd largest numbers of Lepchas are in Samalbung VDC and the 3rd largest numbers of Lepcha are in Iroutar VDC. Likewise the less number of Lepchas are in Laxmipur VDC and Gorkhe VDC respectively. The Lepchas of Shree Antu live in 33 different houses and the total number of Lepchas of these 33 houses is 183.

The reason behind less in number of this caste is because of the low fertility rate in these castes and it is because they used to eat food like '*kukur Tarul*' which slightly affected in the fertility rate. (Vaidhya)

The table below shows all the number of Lepchas of 15 different VDCs of Ilam.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of HH and Population of Lepcha in Ilam**

VDCs	HH	Female	Male	Total
Fikkal	71	197	171	368
Samalbung	61	169	127	296
Iroutar	61	142	131	273
Kolbung	59	168	142	310
Panchakanya	40	184	110	224
Kanyam	42	128	100	222
Shree Antu	33	92	91	183
Jirmale	29	84	73	157
Shantipur	28	69	76	145
Godhak	23	60	66	126
Namsaling	7	24	18	42
Gorkhe	3	8	8	16
Laxmipur	2	4	6	10
Pashupati Nagar	13	33	40	73
Jogmai	27	87	57	144

Source: *Lepcha Uthan Manch* (Fikkal 2004)

#### 4.5 Lepchas in Nepal

Even though the aboriginal place of Lepcha tribe is Ilam and the large numbers of Lepcha people have been living in Ilam district since the ancient period, we find some of the Lepcha people living in other districts of Nepal as well which is shown below in a tabular form.

**Table 2**  
**Lepchas in Nepal**

<b>District</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ilam	1340	1194	2534
Jhapa	84	75	159
Morang	13	7	16
Sunsari	4	12	16
Terhathum	4	2	6
Okhaldhunga	2	1	3
Saptari	43	43	86
Siraha		5	5
Dhanusha	2	–	2
Mahottari	–	4	4
Sarlahi	2	4	6
Sindhupalchok	3	5	8
Lalitpur	31	29	60
Kathmandu	23	17	40
Nuwakot	4	3	7
Chitwan	1	3	4
Kaski	3	3	6
Mustang	348	286	634
Rupandehi	–	1	1
Kapilvastu	4	3	7
Arghakhanchi	1	–	1
Pyuthan	–	1	1
Dang	1	1	2
Banke	-	2	2
Bardiya	1	1	2
Surkhet	1	–	1
Doti	1	-	1
Kailali	–	2	2
Kanchanpur	–	1	1

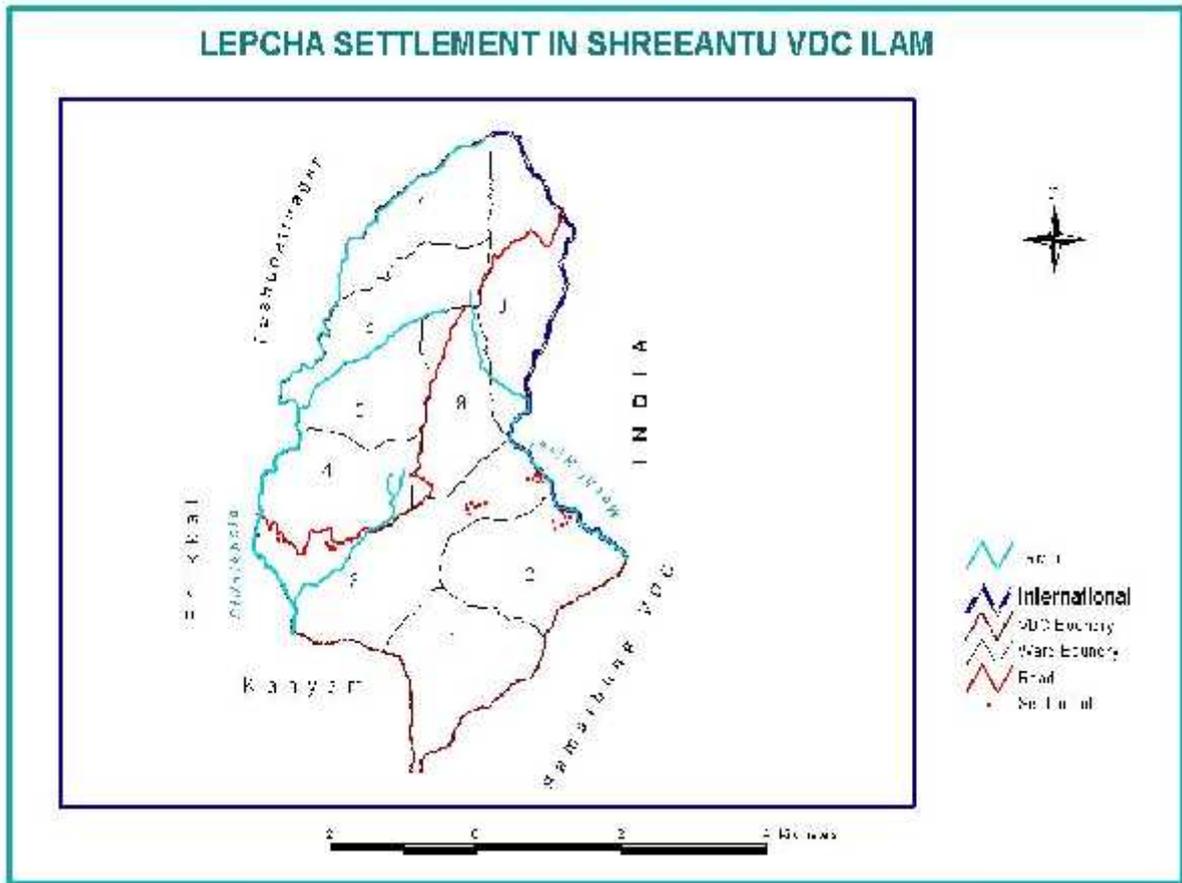
Source: Population Census, 2001 (CBS)

#### **4.6 Social Setting**

Lepcha people are simple and peaceful. The settlement pattern of Lepchas is scattered. These people are co-operative to other tribes too. Even though the religion of Lepchas is Buddhism, they have the good relationship with the people of other religions too, because there is not a single Lepcha community. They are mixed up with other communities. Lepchas are affected by Hindu religion. Some of them also celebrate Dashain and Tihar festival. Most of the Lepchas have started to call the Brahmin priest too in order to give a name for their children in a naming ceremony. The main specialty of this caste is not to believe in touchability and untouchability. They believe that men and women all are the same members of the same god.

Lepcha people basically live in the hilly region making the houses or hut by the use of bamboos, mud and grass roof. The main occupation they adopt is the agriculture. They think that hilly area is the suitable places to cultivate the land. That's why many of the Lepchas are found in hilly region. So, their choice of location is where they see suitable place like hilly area for the agricultural practice. Lepchas have now improved their economic status, so they also have changed their living standard into something good. That's why they are making houses using woods, cement, and iron roof. Some of the Lepchas have also made the attached toilet and bath room whereas they, in the past used to empty their bowls in the springs, big stones and jungle near their cottage. Some of the Lepchas are now migrating to roadside and towns, building the modern and well furnished houses with modern materials. The location of Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC is shown below.

**Map 2: Distribution of Lepcha Settlement in Shree Antu VDC**



Source: Survey Department, Government of Nepal

#### **4.7 Lepcha Mythology**

The entire complex of Lepcha myths, legends, fables and fairy-tales that has been orally transmitted throughout the centuries is known as *lungten sung* 'mythology, legends'. Traditional Lepcha narratives contain views and statements on fundamental matters of life and are aimed at the survival of the traditional values of the Lepcha community that they reflect. Some of these accounts deal with universal issues like the origin and destiny of the human world or with matters of life, death and the afterlife. Many myths contain religious truths or explain different aspects of religious teachings, such as the functions and tasks of gods and goddesses. These narratives are sometimes closely related to religious rituals, but not all myths are of religious nature. Some myths may attempt to explain the history of the Lepcha community, their ethics and moral philosophy,

their places of pilgrimage and traditional Lepcha customs, such as family laws, marriage customs, hunting techniques and dietary proscriptions.

#### **4.8 Way of life**

Lepchas had their own '*kippat*' in the past. These Lepchas were given the post of Kajis and Subbas, who used to work as administrators and tax collectors. Lepchas in the past used to hunt animals to sustain. They also used to practice cattle grazing. They had and now have kept animals for milk, meat and transportation. They now, as an occupation use to produce maize, wheat, millet, potato, vegetable, cardamom, broom grass, zinger, and tea-leaves and have maintained a good status in the society. They are nature loving. In the past, Lepcha had also run their life by practicing bee farming. The Lepchas basically like potatoes, sweet potatoes and other kinds of '*kandamul*' instead of rice. They also believe in herbs. They have the well knowledge of herbs as well as the using of these herbs in the local village. (Poudel Deepak 1997)

#### **4.9 Relationship with other castes**

Since Lepcha people are very rare; there is not a single Lepcha community that's why their community is mixed up with other community too. Even though Lepchas have their own culture, rituals, dresses, occasions, they are influenced by other caste, culture and tradition and religion. They have a good relationship with other castes. They co-operate with others and they are co-operated by other as well. Lepcha people also celebrate Dashain and Tihar festivals in Shree Antu. These people are simple and peace loving.

#### **4.10 Religious practices and Festivals**

The central religious roles in the Lepcha community are traditionally occupied by the *mun* and *bóngthín*, who both function as shamans. The *bóngthín* is traditionally a male shaman who presides at recurring religious ceremonies and seasonal festivals and may heal acute illness. The *mun*, often but not necessarily a female shaman, is a healer who exercises demons, helps to heal

illness and guides souls to the afterlife. It is possible for a *bóngthíng* to develop into a mun.

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



### Religious Practices

There are religious differences in Shree Antu VDCs. The present Lepcha people, Tamang and Gurung follow Buddhism where as other castes like Brahmins, Chhetri, Damai, Kami, Sunuwar etc follow Hindu religion. Even though different castes of people have been adopting different types of religion depending upon their caste, these castes have maintained a good and natural relationship with each other.

The Lepcha used to follow 'Boongthingsom' in the ancient period as the religion. The religion 'Boongthingsom' was also called as 'Bung- thinglom', which was the oldest religion of Lepchas. They used to call 'Bung thing' as their priest. They used to call these priests in any cultural and religious occasion they used to perform. These 'Bung-thing' could easily read Lepcha script. That's why these 'Bung-Thing' were invited to perform their birth, death and marriage ceremony. Only the Bung-thing could read the Lepcha script. Lepcha script was difficult to read for the common people.

Even though the Lepcha script was very popular in the past, it is now not being used as it was used in the past due to the lack of Bung -Thing. That's why the new religion Buddhism has taken a place instead of 'Boongthingsom'. So, as the 2nd religion of Lepcha, Buddhism became popular. The Lepcha of Shree Antu are also the follower of Buddhism. Although the resident Lepcha of Sikkim, Darjeeling and kalingpong have adopted the Christian religion in great number the Lepchas of Ilam have not done so. But a small number of Lepcha living near Pashupatinagar are however Christian. After 'Bungthingsom' became unpopular, the Buddhist Lamas entered into their culture gradually. (Vaidhya, Tuinstra, Schwerzel 2000)

Lepcha people also have belief on '*Mane*' which they basically build for the remembrance of the dead people where they use to keep ornaments, gold, silver, copper, and some other precious things of a dead body. Inside Mane, the different weapons like '*khukuri*', '*khunda*', riffle etc are also kept. They also use to keep '*Dhaja*' written with '*bed mantra*' near to the Mane. The Lepcha people worship the dead body in every '*Dashami tithi*' going to the Mane. The 'Mane' of Shree Antu VDC located in ward no 2 is shown below.



Mane and 'Dhaja' written with '*bed mantra*'

## **Festivals**

Even though Nepal is the country of Hinduism, we can find many people following other religions. The different festivals are celebrated according to the religions. Lepcha people also have their own type of festivals under Buddhism such as '*Kanchanjonga pooja*', '*Naulo pooja*', '*Nwagi pooja*', '*Namwan pooja*', '*Silli Tangbu pooja*' etc.

As according to the different scholars and the Lepcha themselves one of their most important festivals is '*Kanchanjonga pooja*'. They celebrate this festival thinking it as a nearest and dearest god. Lepcha people celebrate '*kanchanjonga pooja*' on 4<sup>th</sup> day of 4<sup>th</sup> month every year. They not only worship the kanchanjonga peak, but also organize dancing and party while celebrating this festival. Lamas and Bunthing wish peace and security for all the people in this festival.

Similarly '*Namwan*' is another festival of Lepcha people which means New Year. This festival comes once a year in Mangshir. The New Year of Lepcha people start from that day. On the occasion of this festival, Lepcha people also enjoy organizing the parties, dancing and singing which have made strong relationships within their castes. Similarly Lepcha people celebrate '*Nwagi pooja*' once a year at the time of harvesting or within Mangshir to Falgun. '*Nwagi*' means to eat new grain or to worship it to the god. Since Lepcha people think that their originality is from the god, they first would like to worship the god with their new grain before eating. Likewise '*Naulo pooja*' is carried out in two or three years if anyone is suffered from the disease, so no special date is defined for this *pooja*. They however basically do this *pooja* in Baishakh and Ashwin.

Lepcha people also celebrate '*Silli Tangbu pooja*' in two or three year's duration worshipping the weapons, riffle, '*Dhanuban*', '*Guleli*' with which they used to hunt animals and dig their food like '*Tarul*' and '*Bhyagur*' in the ancient period.

#### **4.11 Life Cycle Rituals**

##### **Birth Culture**

Even though the life of a person starts only from his/her birth, Lepcha people think that the life of a person starts from the pregnancy. Because Lepcha people assume the life of a person from the pregnancy, the Lepcha people who have become the father have maintained strong discipline for not to make any bad impact in the life of their children. They do not use to do the activities such as killing animals by the weapons, fishing in the river, building walls with the big stones, eating meat of accidentally killed animals, touching horse '*lagam*' etc are not done by the Lepcha people.

Lepcha people think that the children are still in the pregnancy stage even after his/her birth for three days. Only on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of child's birth, they formally accept him/her as a child.

They, then bath their children and his/her mother. After that they call the Lama Priest and give a name for the children according to the day the child is born. Because 'Bungthing' Lamas are decreasing these days and the structure of the society is changing gradually, mixing up and close relationship with Hindus as well as inter caste marriage some of the Lepchas have started to call the 'Brahmin' priest in the ceremonies. Due to the changes in the society, some Lepchas themselves have started to name their children on their own.

### **Marriage Ceremony**

The marriage is negotiated between the families of the bride and the groom. If the marriage deal is settled, the lama will look through the Tibetan almanac to check the horoscopes of the boy and girl and to schedule a favourable date for the wedding. Then the boy's maternal uncle, along with other relatives, approaches the girl's maternal uncle with a khada, a ceremonial scarf and one rupee, and gains the maternal uncle's formal consent.

The wedding takes place at noon on the auspicious day. The groom and his entire family leave for the girl's house with some money and other gifts that are handed over to the bride's maternal uncle. Upon reaching the destination, the traditional Nyomchok ceremony takes place, and the bride's father arranges a feast for relatives and friends.

There were seven types of marriage Lepcha used to follow in the ancient period such as Nyomnet, Nyom khyomm, Nyom Tadgod, Nyom Abek, Nyom Ramfan, Nyom Libyom (Taknilmu 1968)

The marriages which are now being implemented by the Lepcha people are as follows.

Arrange Marriage

Love Marriage

Inter Caste Marriage

Because Lepcha society is female dominated, the person who marry a lady had to present different gifts to his mother-in-law, sister, father differently. The

position/status of female is normally higher than of the male in the Lepcha society. These people use to marry each other even from within their caste. The groom had stay at bride's home for eighteen months before the marriage ceremony to check what ability the groom can perform. But now this type of tradition is disappearing due to the modernization in the society.

## **Death Culture**

The death culture of Lepcha is little bit different from other castes. After the death of Lepcha people, the priest either 'Boongthing' or 'Lama' make a guarantee that a dead body doesn't have any relation with the living ones. The priest also decides through which direction the dead body should be brought out. Whatever the direction the dead body has to be brought out, the wall of that direction must be broken to make a gateway. The dead body then is usually kept by digging the land inside the box. The Lepcha people then do different traditional works for seven days and complete the death ritual.

### **4.12 Customary System**

Dresses are affected by the climate, environment, cultural and economic status. In the past they used to wear their own dresses like '*Bakkhu*', '*Cholo*', '*Patuki*' and '*Pheta*' by the ladies and '*Patani*', '*voto*', '*Suruwal*', '*Patuka*' and cap by the gents.

But nowadays they are using these cloths occasionally or in the auspicious function. Their economic status being developed and influenced by the modern fashion, the Lepchas also use to wear modern and fashionable dresses like shirts, pant, coat, jacket, *churidar*, *salwar*, sari, blouse and suits also.

In the past, the ornaments of ladies Lepcha were of special types like '*Bala*' (bangle) on the hand, '*Marwadi*' as the ear rings and '*Jee Mala*' and '*Pupalo*' on the neck. They now are using common ornaments like that of others' and modern fashion.

Due to the effect of the modernization they also are influenced. As a result of development of education and developed economic status and deep relationship with other kind of people/caste a change is seen in their cloths and the ornaments.

## CHAPTER - V

### Economic Status of Lepcha

#### 5.1 Occupational Status

Lepchas were very good at archery. Hunting of wild animals using bows and arrows and fishing were favorite pastimes of the Lepchas. But now the Lepchas of Shree Antu are engaged in different occupational activities like Agriculture, Business, Labor, Government service etc. The table and photograph below shows the distribution of the occupational pattern of Lepchas, where the age group of 15 to 59 has been included.

**Table 3**

**Occupational Pattern of Surveyed Household**

Occupation	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Wage Labor	6	4	10	8.6
Army	1	0	1	0.9
Business	3	1	4	3.4
Private	1	0	1	0.9
Government	2	0	2	1.7
Agriculture	53	45	98	84.5
Total	66	50	116	100

Source: Field Survey, 2062.



Lepcha People making Basket with the Bamboo split.



A Lepcha woman using a mortar to prepare Grain



Traditional way of Farming.



A priest (left), a medical practitioner (middle), and a hunter (right)

## 5.2 Agriculture as an occupation

The Lepchas who had first started the shifting agriculture, have now entered into cash-oriented agriculture. That's why the economic status of Lepcha is growing day by day. Lepcha in the past used to live where the land was slope. In the slope area, they used to farm after slashing and burning the jungle. They also used to graze cattle and hunt animals. In the past they had their own Lepcha '*kippat*' which they had got as a '*Birta*' so that they could live wherever they like. But after the year 1959 A.D, the '*Birta*' system was no longer in practice. Lepchas in the past were given authority by the government too, so that they had an administrative power. They used to collect tax. They also had the authority to punish people, award and collect fines.

In the past, Lepchas used to rear cattle in order to get milk and meat. Cows were especially for meat and milk. At that time, they used to graze their cattle in

the 'Ok Tea Danda' (now of India). But after the British ruled over India, they planted tea in that place. Lepcha therefore couldn't graze their cattle in "Ok Tea Danda", Lepcha then started to plant cardamom in wet lands and paddy, maize, wheat etc. in productive area.

The cardamom plantation was also first started by the Lepcha in Shree Antu VDC. They first brought the plant of cardamom from Kattebung, Pashupatinagar VDC. But they had to pay taxes after selling the product of cardamom. So it was not beneficial for them and they stopped this cultivation and started to graze their cattle in those areas. After a certain period, the process of taxes was stopped; Lepcha again started to plant cardamom in the free land which then became profitable for them. The product from cardamom used to be 2000kgs of a Lepcha, from which they could earn more. Due to the lack of education; however the income from cardamom did not effect their economic status (Chandra kumar Lepcha - key informant). This tribe, that's why was found to be back only due to the lack of education and the domination from the upper class even within their caste like Subba, Kaji etc.

As the time changed, Lepcha also continuously changed their life style into something new. These people became interested to make more profit with the small amount of investment. They changed their traditional agriculture system and entered into cash-oriented agriculture. Even though the main focus of Lepchas was on the cardamom agriculture, later on they started planting tea leaves as cash crops which helped them to make their economic status strong. They are now a days practicing the terribes agriculture system. This system of agriculture is helping them to make more profit than the shifting system of agriculture. They are also practicing the cereal crops like maize, potato, wheat and other cash crops like zinger, broom grass, and vegetables these days.

### **5.3 Farming Land of Lepcha**

There are basically five types of land owned by the Lepchas in Shree Antu VDC. These are '*Bari*', '*pakhabari*', '*alainchibari*', '*chiyabari*' and others. Other land of Lepcha is surrounded by jungle and grass. Their farming land is not

sufficient for them. All the land they possess is not useful for farming. They mostly have ‘*pakha-Bari*’.

They now are changing their system of farming system into some profitable ways. They are starting cutting down the jungle and planting the cash crops. They have become successful to make a good profit from the cash crops. Few of the Lepchas are also starting to run business of trade. The following table shows the types of land being held by Lepchas.

**Table 4**  
**Land Holding Size and Types (in Ropani)**

<b>Type of land</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Bari</i>	238	31.5
<i>PakhaBari</i>	168	22.2
<i>AlainchiBari</i>	105	13.9
<i>Chiyabari</i>	165	21.8
Other	80	10.6
Total	756	100

Source: Field Survey, 2062.

#### **5.4 Livestock**

Lepcha are now following livestock farming as their secondary occupation. They have kept the domestic animals like cow, buffalo, ox, goat, chicken, pig, horses etc. They have kept the horses especially for transportation of goods and for the purpose of business. Similarly they keep chicken, fish, pig and goat for meat and agricultural purpose. Therefore livestock is another important income source of the Lepchas.

Because they are backward in education, only a few no of Lepcha are involved in government services. Those Lepchas, who are unskilled and uneducated, work as labors on wage. Some Lepcha also work as shopkeepers.

They also have practiced vegetable and fruit cultivation. They plant lettuce, radish, cabbage, peas, bean, carrot, ‘*iskush*’, pumpkin, cucumber, etc and sell some of the products to the merchants and also use to take these vegetables to Mirik bazaar. They fulfill their basic needs like salt, kerosene, oil, sugar, rice, flour and

clothes from the income they get by selling such products. The table below shows the live stocks of Lepcha.

**Table 5**  
**Number of Live Stock Kept by Surveyed Household**

<b>Live Stock</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cow	51	11.8
Goat	75	17.4
Chicken	276	64.0
Pig	16	3.7
Horse	10	2.3
Buffalo	3	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2062.

### **5.5 Income Pattern**

Cash income is normally earned by cash crops, business, job, wage and some food grains. This income is an indicator of economic status and livelihood status. The table below shows the annual income of the Lepcha people in Shree Antu VDC.

**Table 6**  
**Income Pattern**

<b>Annually Income in RS</b>	<b>House Holds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 40000	17	54.8
40000-60000	6	19.2
60000-80000	4	13.0
Above 80000	4	13.0

Source: Field Survey, 2062.

### **5.6 Food Sufficiency**

Food sufficiency status helps determining the economic condition of house holds, society and country. The food grain production of Lepcha community in my study area is low but they have maintained sufficiency in food. The table below shows the food sufficiency status of the Lepcha community in the study area.

**Table 7**  
**Food sufficiency of Lepcha community in Shree Antu**

<b>Food sufficiency status</b>	<b>No of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Up to 9 month	10	32.2
9 to 12	15	48.4
Surplus	6	19.4
Total	31	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2062

The table above shows that out of total households only 19.4% have surplus food, 32.2% have food sufficient for 9 months and 48.4% have food sufficient for 9-12 months. Those who have low food sufficiency fulfill their requirements by working as labors, purchasing from the markets or borrowing cash or even the things from their neighbors or relatives.

### **5.7 Role of Birta System**

Before the national integration of Nepal, Limbus used to live in the western part of the Kankai-Mai and Lepchas in the eastern part. According to the Lepcha history, Ilam is the aboriginal place of Lepcha since the ancient period.

According to the treaty samvat 1831, the border of Nepal was up to the Tista in the east. The '*Gadhi*' at that time was in Nagari which now is situated in Darjeeling district. After the treaty of '*Sugauli*', the '*Gadhi*' was transferred to Karphek (now Panchakanya VDC) and after two years it was again transferred to Ilam.

After the '*Gadhi*' was transferred to Ilam, there was a great necessity to make strong management to take care of the border. Prthvi Narayan Shah was the king of Nepal at that time and he gave an authority to work as administrators to the local Lepcha people. Since this time Lepcha people started working as administrators for a long time. These Lepchas at that time were also given the title of '*Subangi*'.

The Lepcha people were given the title of kaji as well as the authority to work such that “*Bhot Munglanbata Raiti Lyai, Basti Basai Rasti Chalai Nimakko Sojho Chitai Jani Bhogya Gara*” (i.e. they were given the authority to settle and rule that place, bringing the people for helping from Bhot Munglan (now in Tibet), without misusing whatever the things they were provided as ‘Birta’ by the government). Along with this authority they were given many facilities to handle their area.

After capturing the eastern part of Mechi, the British started conflicting with Nepalese people. The main role of solving these problems was of the Lepcha people. But only the authorized Lepcha of ‘*Gadhi*’ were not able to solve the problems so the kajis and subbas who had the good knowledge regarding the border of the eastern part and Sikkim, were given authority to solve that problem providing many more facilities. Thus these people were given the authority such that “*Ilam gadima rahyaka Bhardarharule lagai arahyako kajma samel rahi nimkko sojho chitai manachamal jani bhogya gara*” (i.e. the soldiers of Ilam fort were authorized to regularly handle whatever the task given to them by the government without misusing the ‘Birta’ which had been provided to them by the government). ‘*Manachamal*’ is specially a kind of ‘*Birta*’. ‘*Manachamal*’ is given to a person which is equivalent for eating two times. This ‘*Birta*’ is basically given to those persons who have served the government as service holders. The actual time is not known when that custom first started, but the record that Prithvi Narayan Shah started to reward his sword holding soldiers by giving ‘*manachamal*’ is taken as evidence.

They could use a certain part of land to fulfill their needs which they were given as ‘*manachamal*’. However, some Lepcha people were given cash as ‘*manachamal*’.

Nepal government had given the authority to the Lepcha people to collect three rupees per house and to hand over one rupee to *Shree Nath Palton* as taxes every year in a distinct area. They had to keep the audit report every year. Kaji had the authority to keep twenty “*Ardhali*” and subba had the authority to keep five “*Ardhali*”. Kaji and Subbas could discount the total taxes to those twenty

houses. Kaji Deep Kshiring was also given the '*manachamal*' as pension. The present Lepcha Mr. Jagat Bahadur Lepcha is also a member of Deep Kshiring Lepcha. (Vaidhya 2004)

### **5.8 Market and Transportation Facility**

The main market of Lepcha of Shree Antu VDC is Mirik in India and Fikkal in Nepal. They can reach India within an hour, so India has become easier for buying and selling the products for the Lepcha tribe. The Indian culture has also affected this tribe. Some of the Lepchas of Pashupatinagar have started to adopt Christian religion too.

The facility of transportation is not so good in Shree Antu. The road is narrow and it has not been grabbed, so only one or two vehicles are used during winter season. The major means of transportation in the rainy season are horses. Almost every household of Shree Antu possess horse. After the bridge in the Siddhi River was constructed, people of Shree Antu are enjoying the facility of transportation through vehicles. Even though the problem of river has been solved, there is still problem on the road because road is not like what it should really be.

The main road is from Fikkal to Shree Antu .The road traces up to Samalbung VDC. Next bazaar of Shree Antu is Fikkal.

## CHAPTER - VI

### Educational Status

#### 6.1 Education

As a whole, the educational status of Shree Antu VDC is satisfactory. Most of the people are literate. Both the private and public education institutions are available in Shree Antu. There are one high school, one lower secondary school and five primary schools and some other English Schools. People of Shree Antu have been successful to achieve education from these institutions. The following table shows the educational status of Lepcha people of Shree Antu.

**Table 8**  
**Literacy**

	Male		Female		Total
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Literate	13	9.0	10	6.8	15.8
Illiterate	71	48.6	52	35.6	84.2

Source: Field Survey, 2062.

The table above shows the literate Lepcha population of Shree Antu VDC. But it is seen that the number of literate male are greater than female. The percent of literate male is 48.6 and female is 35.6, which shows that the percent of literate female is lower than that of literate male.

If we see on the educational status of Lepcha of Shree Antu VDC, we don't find it to be good. Lepcha people are not as educated as how much they had to be. Only a few numbers of Lepcha have passed SLC.

The numbers of Lepcha who are studying primary level are 20 and studying secondary level are 23. Similarly the numbers of Lepcha who have passed higher secondary level are only six and the number of Lepcha passing Bachelor level is three. Also, only Five Lepcha girls have passed SLC till now but have not got chance to be admitted to the college. By this data it can be analyzed that the

educational condition of Lepcha is not satisfactory. Because of their educational backwardness they are missing many opportunities. The educational backwardness has also made them backward on social, economic and other status. There is not even a Lepcha who has done or is doing master degree after passing Bachelor degree. These days many of the Lepcha people have admitted their children in local English schools.

Data show that 85.4 percent of the total population of Shree Antu VDC are literate (Source: Sungabha Club, Ilam, 2062). In comparison to this, a very minimum, that is 3.1 percent of the Lepcha population are literate. This vast difference between the literacy rate of the people residing in the VDC and the Lepchas has dragged the Lepcha tribe towards backwardness. This backwardness is a result of the following reasons:

- Low status of Lepchas in comparison to other tribes.
- Unable to be involved in the opportunities that they get.
- Though their main occupation is agriculture, they are unable to apply perfect knowledge and modern technologies due to which they are unable to extract maximum profit.
- Unable to utilize the income properly.
- Less idea in employing the resources they have got.
- Though they have access to minimum transport facility, they are unable to take advantage.
- Out of reach to other services like transportation, communication, health, etc.
- They seem to be backward due to their simplicity and their backwardness as compared to other tribes.



Lepcha Student

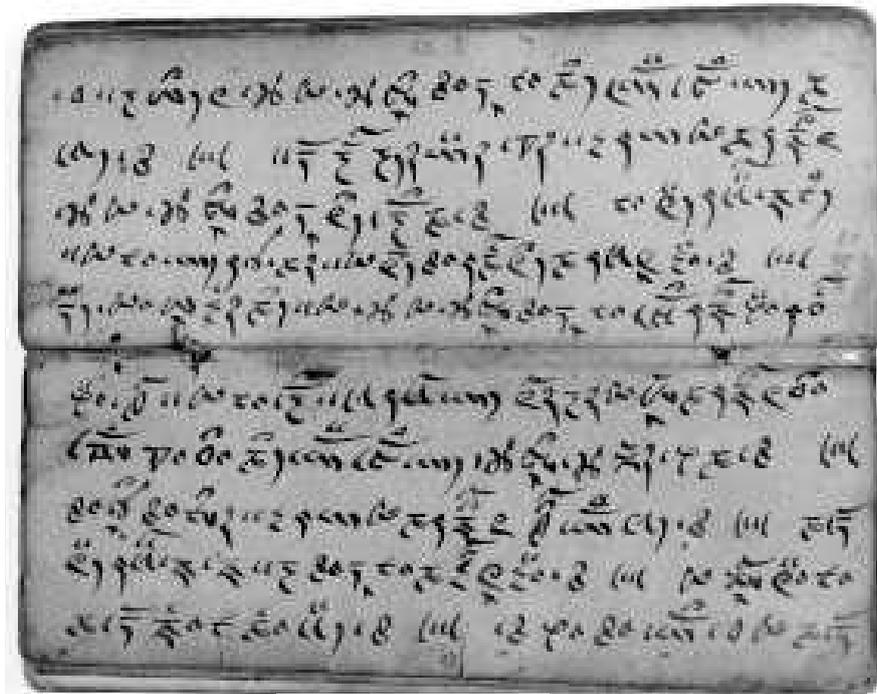
## 6.2 Language

The Lepcha have their own language, also called Lepcha. It belongs to the Tibeto-Kanauri group of the Tibeto-Burman languages. The Lepcha used to write their language in their own script, called *Róng*, which is derived from the Tibetan script. It was developed between the 17th and 18th century by a Lepcha scholar named Thikúng Men Salóng. But now most of the Lepcha people in Nepal use Nepali language and very less of Lepcha language. Most of them have forgotten the Lepcha language but all Lepcha people can speak Nepali language easily. These people also have religious book in Lepcha language (script), but no one can read this book now a days. That's why the Lepcha language is disappearing. Every Lepcha can't speak Lepcha language because of less use of Lepcha language within their caste, inter-caste marriage, use of Nepali language, mixing with other castes, less in number etc. (Chandra Kumar Lepcha 2062).

Source: <http://www.languagehat.com/archives/001976.php>

### 6.3 The Lepcha indigenous script

Lepcha people have their own Lepcha script. But the present Lepchas can't read even their own script properly. Due to this reason, present Lepchas are learning their script from the experts. A separate class for learning the script has also been established. They are now becoming aware on protecting their Lepcha script. The Lepcha script is shown below.



Lepcha Script

According to Lepcha tradition, the Lepcha script was invented by the Lepcha scholar Thikúng Men Salóng sometime during the 17th century. The inventor of the script was probably inspired by Buddhist missionaries. Another theory is that the script developed during the early years of the 18th century.

Today the Lepcha script is used in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, collections of poetry, prose and plays.

## Notable features

- ) Lepcha is a syllabic alphabet - each letter has an inherent vowel /a/. Other vowels are indicated using diacritics. When vowels appear on their own or at the beginning of a syllable, separate letters are used to write them.
- ) Vowels can be used either at the beginning or end of a syllable. Consonants can all be used at the beginning of a syllable. Only some of them appear in syllable-final position and are written with special diacritics when they do.
- ) Lepcha is written from left to right in horizontal lines and there are spaces between words.





𑌛	𑌜	𑌝	𑌞	𑌟	𑌠	𑌡	𑌢	𑌣
pa	ka	kha	ga	nga	ca	cha	ja	nya
𑌤	𑌥	𑌦	𑌧	𑌨	𑌩	𑌪	𑌫	𑌬
ta	tha	da	na	pa	pha	fa	ba	ma
𑌭	𑌮	𑌯	𑌰	𑌱	𑌲	𑌳	𑌴	𑌵
tsa	isha	za	ya	ra	la	ha	va	
𑌶	𑌷	𑌸						
sha	sa	wa						
𑌹	𑌺	𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿	𑍀	
kla	gla	pla	fla	bla	m̄la	hla		

Diagram 1: Consonant letters

𑌠	𑌡	𑌢	𑌣	𑌤	𑌥	𑌦	𑌧	𑌨	𑌩
a	á	â	i	í	o	ó	u	ú	e

Diagram 2: Vowel signs

All Lepcha consonants may occur syllable-initially. All Lepcha vowels may occur at the end of a syllable, but there are a limited number of consonants that can occur in syllable-final position.

The Lepcha script is written from left to right, with spaces between words. In Lepcha, no distinction is made between capital and other letters. Similarly Lepcha also have Rong Lepcha Script, which is shown below.

### Lepcha (Róng) script

#### Consonants

											
ka	kha	ga	ña	ca	cha	ja	ña	ta	tha	da	na
											
pa	pha	ba	ma	tsa	tsha	za	ya	ra	la	va	wa
											
śa	sa	ha	a	fa	kla	gla	pla	fla	bla	mla	hla
											
kra	gra	ñra	mra	pra	fra	bra	hra	kya	thya	tya	gya
											
mya	aya	pya	dya	bya	fya	phya	lya	rya	khya	vya	hya

### Vowel diacritics and final consonant diacritics

kâ	ká	ki	kí	ko	kó	ku	kú	ke
kak	kam	kal	kan	kap	kar	kat	kang	

### Numerals

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Source: <http://www.ancientscripts.com/lepcha.html>

## CHAPTER - VII

### Institutions and Their Roles

Due to the regular domination by other tribes and other cultural and religious practices, Lepchas are obviously disappearing. They have started to forget their own traditional cultural and religious practices. On the other hand due to their regular touch with other tribes and religions, they have been able to uplift themselves economically to some extent. They are also experiencing an upliftment of their social status as compared to the past, though of minimum level. In spite of these backwardness, the Lepchas are trying to give continuity to their own practices. Establishment of different institutions, related to their culture are examples of their effort made till now. The main objective of these institutions is to preserve their culture and tradition. The modernization and changes have given negative influences too. To overcome these negative aspects, they are to be unified and institutional. As a result they are forming institutions for the protection of their purity and preservation of the tribe as a whole.

The Lepchas' institutions such as *Lepcha uthan manch*, Lepcha museum and discussion on weapons and musical instruments used in the past and at present and changes and the effects of modernization are discussed under. The life styles of Lepcha in the past and at present, settlement pattern, changing economic conditions are summarized. The history of Lepcha, their regular activities and their attempts to protect their identity is also discussed here under.

#### **7.1 *Lepcha Uthan Manch (Rong-se-jum- thee)***

Lepcha themselves, after realizing their backwardness became active to protect their existence when the democracy was re-established in 2046 B.S. They established Lepcha organization, which in Lepcha language is known as 'Rong-Se-Jum-Thee', in 2050 for the purpose of organizing all the Lepcha people. The organization was registered in 2052, in which 10 bodies are involved and all other are given membership of that organization.

The organization which was established on their own success is providing many facilities for Lepcha people. Help taken from some donor organizations is aimed to be used by this 'Lepcha organization'. Similarly this organization has been performing different programs for Lepcha people. This organization has also collected the information of Lepcha people of Ilam.

By the help of '*Lepcha Utahan Manch*' the charmness of Lepcha culture has become successful to be established in the museum of 'Nepal Tourism Board Kathmandu Brhikuti Mandap'. In the museum the statue with Lepcha dress with '*Tungana*' and statue dancing by catching the '*Bansuri*' has been kept. To exhibit this scene the *Lepcha Uthan Manch* of Sikkim government as well as the 'Renjung Matanchi Tarjung' Lepcha association had donated Rs 40,000 and Rs 30,000 respectively. Thus *Lepcha Utahan Manch* has done many important works for protecting the existence of Lepcha people and to make them active in the society.

## **7.2 Lepcha Museum**

Lepcha museum has been established in order to collect all the traditional weapons, pots and other precious things in a secure way. Jagat Bahadur Lepcha of Shree Antu VDC has made museum collecting all their cultural and traditional things in one of his own rooms in 2060 B.S. Mr. Lepcha in his museum has collected some traditional things from his own home and some other precious things from other Lepchas' houses of Shree Antu VDC. The things kept in the museum are musical instruments like '*Gaja*', '*Ghanta Baza*', '*Nagara*', '*jormurali*', '*Jhyamta*', pot (used for killing insects), traditional '*Pela*' (used for drinking tea and water), '*Stone Lohoro and Silauto*' (used for making pickle), traditional '*Lota*' (used for keeping water) and weapons like '*Katti*' '*Dhanukand*', '*Bamphok*', '*Tope*' (made by the leather of rhino which will not be damaged by the rifle),' etc. According to J.B. Lepcha the weapons kept in this museum like '*Dhal*', '*katti*', sword, '*Sangin*' etc were used when the war between Nepal and Bhot (now Tibet) took place.

In the same way, the rare things of Lepcha tribe have also been collected in *Phensong Gumba* of Fikkal VDC. For the protection of these things, the national

academy has donated fifty thousand rupees, Ilam DDC has donated twenty thousand rupees and Fikkal VDC has donated five thousand rupees. After the collection of these amounts, a separate building has been built for the museum. Most of the things in this museum are same as that of J.B Lepcha's museum. Apart from that, 'Sarangi', 'Tambok', 'Jormurali', 'Dhol', 'Binayo', 'nagara', and other religious books have been collected in this museum.

Collecting and protecting the important rare and traditional things by establishing the museum in their own home is really the good work. The museum has helped to protect the racial existence of the Lepcha tribe. The weapons which were used in the ancient period and other things that have been collected now in J.B. Lepcha's museum are shown below.



Weapons and some other things kept in the Museum



The founder of Lepcha Museum Mr. Jagat Bahadur Lepcha

### 7.3 Weapons and Musical Instruments

Lepcha people use different types of weapons. In the ancient period, these people used to settle by destroying the jungle. At that time, Lepcha people used to hunt animals and shift agriculture in their own '*kippat*'. They had weapons for both the purpose of hunting animals and security. The weapons they had used were '*Guleli*', '*Dhanuban*', '*Bamphok*' etc. These weapons were in every Lepchas' home. Similarly the weapons that the Lepcha people had used in the ancient period were '*Wooden-Ankushe*' (used for digging fields, to take out '*kandamul*' from jungle), '*Bambo-chimta*' (used to take out the *sisnu*). These people now, use '*khukuri*', sword, riffle, '*sikkal*', '*hasiya*', '*chulesi*', '*chakku*' as their major weapons.

Similarly Lepcha people have their own traditional dancing style. They are also interested in music. They also have traditional musical instruments such as '*Phyat-Phyate Baza*', '*Bimstack Baja*', '*Murali*', '*Sarangi*', '*Jor murali*' etc. But the present Lepcha people have now started to use other modern musical instruments too such as guitar, '*madal*', piano etc.

#### **7.4 Modernization and Change in Economy and Lifestyle**

The life of Lepcha originally was very simple. They used to hunt animals in order to survive. They did not have proper houses to live in. Few numbers of houses were made only in the slope area. They gradually have changed their difficult lifestyle to better one up to now. The living standard, eating, clothing, culture etc has totally been changed from that of the past. They have now made strong houses and have started to live nearer to the town area too. They in the past used to talk with each other in their own 'Lepcha' language but now most of them have forgotten it. They speak Nepali language. They feel Nepali language easier than the Lepcha language.

There are differences in their culture from that culture they had in the past. Hindu culture has affected their culture. They also celebrate Hindu festivals like 'Dashain' and 'Tihar'. They have started to call Brahmin priest to give a name in a naming ceremony of a child (Karki, S. 1998).

Lepcha tribes have also been affected by external environment. Since India is their neighbor country, they are affected by Indian culture. Even though, their main religion is 'Buddhism', some of them have followed 'Christian' religion too. Especially the Lepchas of Pashupatinagar have followed 'Christian' religion. They also have a good position in agriculture. They have practiced both cash crops and cereal crops. They sell their product in India and make more profit. They have made their economic status very good than that of the past. The present Lepcha house of Shree Antu VDC is shown in the figure below.



Present Lepcha house

## **CHAPTER -VIII**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

#### **8.1 Summary**

Lepcha people could not take the benefit of modernization like other people have. Because of the poverty, simple nature and lack of education they are not entertaining the maximum consumption of opportunities. It is therefore found that as compared to other tribes and the facilities they have; they haven't improved their life style.

The vanishing but one of the most important tribe in Nepal is 'Lepcha'. Lepcha people have their own identity but because Lepcha is a vanishing tribe they seem to have remained only in the history. Most of the Lepcha tribes have been living in the far eastern district Ilam of Nepal since the ancient period but few of them also live in other districts of Nepal. This study helps any person to know about the historical importance of Lepcha tribe as well. The other areas Lepcha people use to live are Kalingpung, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Mirik of India and in Bhutan. Extinct

The main religion of these tribes in the past was 'Boongthingsom' but they gradually entered into Buddhism due to the impact of Tibetan Lamas, difficulties in reading Lepcha script and vanishing of the experts in reading Lepcha script. These tribes nowadays use even to call Brahmin priests in naming ceremony and in other many occasions. That's why many researchers have suggested to make the identity of Lepcha tribe alone and to focus in racial protection for protecting their existence forever.

Besides that, Lepcha people have changed in many aspects from that of the past. They have changed in eating, clothing and social, cultural and in economic aspects gradually than that of the past because of which the life style of present Lepcha tribe is seen completely different. In the past, their life style was very simple. The starting phase of these tribes had developed from hunting, fishing, and bee farming. They then gradually started living in slope areas shifting agriculture. Now they are living, handling many occupations like that of other tribes. Similarly,

comparing the things and materials which they had used in the past like weapons made up of bamboos and woods, wooden pots for carrying water and for killing insects etc to the present things they are using, we can easily analyze the economic changes of Lepcha tribe. It is Important to note that Lepcha call themselves rong. (Vaidhya, Tuinstra, Schwerzel). Interestingly the name 'Rong-pa` given to the Lepcha by the Tibetan people which mean "Varine-folk" carries the connotations of the Lepcha life style which encourages them to live at a distance from roads, and to depend extensively on wild plants as a source of food, fiber, fodder, fuel and for medicinal and other aromatic purpose. Besides gathering these products from forest, the Lepcha still practice slash and burn cultivation (Jhum-Agriculture) in the upper riches of Dzangu, where they grow rice, buck wheat, millet and barley following a seven year rotational cycle. (S.K Jana and A.S. Chauhan page 121 to 122). They have now maintained a good status in the society. The main reason of such changes in the economic and in other aspects is due to the modernization, mixing up with other tribes in the society, road construction and continuous touch with India.

The change in time and the achievement of democracy also have helped these tribes in enhancing the knowledge regarding the present context of themselves and preventing their identity. They similarly started doing cash oriented agriculture, businesses, work as labors and have got many other opportunities for earning. They consequently have changed their economic condition. As cash crops, they are producing tea leaves, zinger, cardamom, broom grass and some vegetables from which they have become able to achieve a good income. Whatever income they earn, they have started investing it in different fields such as education, health, agriculture, fooding, clothing and for maintaining the good status. Many Lepcha people have become educated as compared to the past and most of the Lepcha students are sent to the private schools. As their earning is increasing due to the cash oriented agriculture, they also have changed in making housing pattern i.e. they have built houses with cement, concrete and iron with attached bathroom whereas they in the past had houses made up of bamboos, mud, and grass roof. Similarly the things they are using now are far

better and modern than the past used materials which also showed the improvement in economic condition of Lepcha tribe.

Similarly, the clothing style of present Lepcha people also indicates that they are moving towards modernization. Even though they have their own special dresses, they have now completely become able to dress up in modern and fashionable clothes but they use to wear their own dresses in special occasions. They also enjoy in special occasions and festivals gathering together by eating, drinking and conducting dances and singing programs which have helped in maintaining the unity within their tribes. After the achievement of democracy and after they have become conscious regarding themselves, they established Lepcha organization and are doing many more activities for protecting their existence by calling experts to learn Lepcha script and taking training class time to time in their VDCs; which is known through the use of field survey.

Though Lepchas were active and powerful in the ancient period, they are now going backward due to the fact of mixing up with other communities, inter caste marriage, diversification in other religions, practicing others' language etc. In the ancient period they had power over administration. They had their own special type of language, religion and culture. They had their own '*Lepcha Kippat*' which they were given as a '*Birta*' so that they could live wherever they liked. But the Lepchas of present seem to have vanished due to the lack of proper research, study and security for this tribe. In order to protect this tribe, the existence of this tribe should first be protected. If no one pays attention to this tribe they might remain only in the history.

Though Ilam is claimed as the original place of origin of Lepcha, many people inside and outside Ilam are still unknown about the tribe 'Lepcha'. Therefore, the proper research, study and many more activities should be done for protecting 'Lepcha' tribe only then they can remain forever. Not any national writings about 'Lepcha' tribe are found till now. Some magazines and newspapers have been written only including the basic things about the 'Lepcha' tribe of India. The government is not concerned with protecting these tribes. The foreign writers

have published some books regarding the Lepcha tribe but they are only limited to the Indian Lepcha. They, in the past used to talk using their own Lepcha language but now most of the Lepchas have forgotten their language and speak Nepali language.

Although the life style of Lepcha people has improved than that of the past, they are not developed as much as other tribes are. Lack of education is the main reason of backwardness of Lepcha people. Not going to schools, incomplete study, poverty etc are the main factors of being uneducated. It is obvious that nothing can be developed easily without education. Even though they had administrative power over Ilam in ancient period, they are not developed now as compared to others. It is said that Lepchas were dirty in the past and did not use to speak openly. Some of the Lepcha male are passing unmarried life. Most of the Lepcha girls left their home marrying with others. Married Lepchas have limited children and some of them don't have even a single child. That's why Lepcha people are less in number. According to key informants they have low fertility rate because they used to eat food brought from the jungle.

Comparatively, the present Lepcha people are conscious than in the past. Their economic status has also improved but not like what others have maintained. They have started producing the cash crops but they do not have a good idea to utilize such products at the right time and at the right condition. They are not able to exploit all the opportunities they have. They are not taking benefit from the development of transportation. Even though they have maintained a good relation with other tribes they are not going upward unlike others. Because Lepcha people are uneducated and simple in nature, they are poor, backward and less in number as compared to others. It therefore has now become important to carry out in-depth study on 'Lepcha' tribe because Lepcha is a vanishing tribe.

## **8.2 Recommendation**

As my research on Lepcha tribe is on the point of completion, it has confirmed that Lepcha is a vanishing tribe. These people are compelled to face most of the problems in order to protect their existence. Although Lepcha people

themselves are attempting a lot of activities to protect their identity; all those activities are not well enough. So, on the basis of the conclusion derived from the present study the following recommendation have been suggested.

- Most of the Lepcha people are illiterate. Female Lepcha are busy only in farming and household work. Because of their poverty they are not able to get the education. However, few of them have admitted in educational institutions but not continuous involvement in such institutions and leaving before the completion of their study are the factors they are lacking education. It is obvious that education is must for the progress of any society. Therefore external agencies should support and motivate these people to acquire a good education. A proper environment should be created for them so that they themselves can be motivated to achieve the education.
- Government should also provide scholarships for Lepcha students. Informal literacy classes for the adults should be conducted. As well as illiterate Lepchas should be provided skill development training so that they need not be dependent on others.
- To preserve their language and script, they should be guided by the specialists.
- Also providing such an environment to interact with other community people without hesitation would be beneficial for them to build up their carrier.
- Likewise, government should encourage the researcher by providing the necessary facilities to them. Government should also provide scholarship for Lepcha students.
- Similarly providing income oriented training to them like bee farming, making basket with bamboo split, keeping livestock etc can be helpful to boost up their economic condition.

- They should also be made aware of good health, hygienic fooding, sanitation etc by which they can live a long healthy life.
- Medias like radio, television, newspaper etc will be the best way for any matter to introduce externally. But Lepcha people are not highlighted in these media till now. Therefore Medias and Nepal Tourism Board should focus on them, their historical importance, religion, custom, language and script by which they can be the attraction in the field of tourism.

**ANNEX –I**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Section- A**

1. Name of the Respondent

a. Age

b. Sex

2. Family Composition

S.N.	Sex	Age	Relation with household head	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Language

3. Where is your original place?

**Section 'B'**

1. Which religion are you following?

2. What are the festivals you are celebrating?

3. Are you following the festivals that your ancestors had followed?

4. How is the relationship with other community and other caste?

5. What are the life cycle rituals?

6. What type of dresses are you wearing?

7. Are you using any ornaments that were used in the past?

**Section 'C'**

1. What are your economic sources?

a. .... b.....c. .... d.....

2. Income pattern

S.N.	Sources	Total amount in Rs.
1	Agriculture	
2	Business	
3	Services	
4	Labor	

### 3. Land holding size in Ropani

S.N.	Types of land	Bari	Pakha bari	Chiya bari	Alinchi bari	others

### 4. Live stocks

S.N.	Types	Number	Use

### 5. Food sufficiency

- i. Less than 6 months
- ii. 6 to 9 months
- iii. 9 to 12 months
- iv. Surplus

## Section 'D'

### 1. Education

S.N.	Numbers
1	Primary
2	Secondary
3	Secondary above

2. Can you speak your own language properly?

3. Do you speak same language like other people in the village?

4. Can you read your own script?

5. Can you write your own script?

6. Why can't you read and write your script?

7. What are the attempts made for the protection of your tribe?

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.

**Annex-II**  
**Key Informant Interview**

1. What are the thoughts about original place?
2. What are the causes of backwardness?
3. How is the social relationship between other groups/castes?
4. What was their past administrative role?
5. What about their changing socio-economic lifestyle?

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