

## Questionnaire (put reference #:page # after each entry)

### 1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Lepcha, Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Central Tibeto-Burman, Lepcha (1, p1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): lep

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): 27° - 28° N and 88° - 89° E (2, p1)

1.4 Brief history:

- “The Lepchas are considered the original inhabitants of Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills (Darjeeling hills were part of Sikkim and were annexed by British India in 1835).” (5, p41)
- “Sikkim was apparently colonized by the Tibetans at some date prior to the seventeenth century, but it would seem as though this original colonisation was little more than a feudal overlordship imposed by a small minority on the Lepcha population. From the time of the establishment of a Sikkimese kingdom the Lepchas became an ‘inferior’ subject race, under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhotias. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Lepchas fought with the Sikkimese against the continued invasions of the Nepali and Bhutanese. During the early nineteenth century a number of treaties were made between Sikkim and British India, and finally in 1835 the Darjeeling district, naturally together with its inhabitants, was ceded by the Maharajah to the British in exchange for annuity.” (15, p35-36)
- “The Lepchas are considered the original inhabitants of the state. The Lepchas call themselves "Rong" which means "ravine folk" or "Mutanchi" or Monri, but are referred by non-Tibetan speaking as Lepchas. Once the sole inhabitants of Sikkim hills, they managed their environment for making a living effortlessly. The lands were abundant and forests were rich. They were nomadic and subsisted mainly on the collection of roots, tubers, leaves, fruits, grasses, fishing and hunting and practised a primitive shifting cultivation with poor and simple technology. They were animists and believed in many gods and spirits of land, water and trees, the natural outcome of their surroundings. Environment played a great role in shaping their culture and society. The Lepchas or Rong were organized by one Turve, who was given the title of Panu or King. Turve Panu was killed during one of his frequent encounters with Kirats. He was followed by three Panus. With the death of the last king, the Lepcha kingship came to an end. Gradually local chiefs were elected, who also performed the duties of religious priests. With no strong organisation and cultural tradition behind them, they were ill prepared for outside contact.” (6, p3)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- “Around 1840 Christian missionaries were among the Lepcha establishing schools, and translated some of the gospels into Lepcha.” (5, p41)
- “Sikkim is one of the ten Special Category States, which receives central assistance on preferential condition owing to their strategic location and special requirements. Since 1999, it is a member of North-East Council and as such its development has been accorded a high priority by the Government of India.” (5, p41)
- “It is only in Zongu and in one or two small villages outside the reserve that there is a homogenous Lepcha society, practically undisturbed by alien influence. These survivals can be considered artificial, as without the indirect pacification of the British government and the benevolence of the Maharajah, these Lepchas would, like their fellows, have been ousted from the little and poor land which remains to them. But beyond the reservation of this piece of land for their exclusive use the society has not been interfered with, nor preserved as a museum piece; it is still in a state of constant modification.” (15, p37)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “The Lepcha inhabit the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas” (2)
- “They inhabit the slopes of the hills in the central and western Sikkim.” (8, p129)
- “The land is excessively precipitous; the rivers are at about 2,000 feet about sea-level and the average height of the hills is about 12,000 feet; but the peaks rise to more than double that height....Except for a few artificially leveled places there is probably not a hundred square yards of flat ground in the whole district; and the tracks are too steep and too uneven for it to be possible to employ mules, let alone horses; all travelling must be done on foot, and all goods transported by human portage.” (15, p51)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

- 50,600 in India (2001 census). Population total all countries: 55,430 (1, p1)

### 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- “The principle crops raised by the Lepcha include wet rice, dry rice, buckwheat, maize, cardamom (their cash crop), and several varieties of millet. Fresh vegetables such as tomatoes and chili peppers are grown in the backyard gardens and near the fields; wild vegetables and fruit are also collected” (2, p2)

## 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- “The Lepchas have herds of cattle, which are generally kept for their dairy products and for plowing the fields; cattle are also occasionally slaughtered for meat. Goats are kept but never for their milk, only for their meat and for sacrifice. By far the most popular and numerous of the domesticated animals are pigs, kept for food and sacrifice.” (2, p2)
- “They are gross feeders, eating all kinds of animal food, including the elephant, rhinoceros, and monkey, and all grains and vegetables known to us, with the addition of many roots and plants altogether excluded from our culinary list. Pork is their most favourite flesh; next to that beef, goat, and mutton. The yak is considered the best beef the next to that the flesh of the Sikim cow, a fine animal, and last the Bengalli an'd common cow. All birds are included in their list of eatable game. Of the carrion of wild animals, that of the elephant is most prized. The favourite vegetable food is rice; next to it wheat, barley, maize, millet, miurwa, and a fine species of yarn called "bookh", which grows all over these mountains, at elevations of from 1500 to 8000 feet. During the rains, when grain is scarce, they contentedly put up with ferns, bamboo roots, several sorts of fungi, and innumerable succulent plants found wild on the mountains.” (11, p147)

## 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?

- “The Lepcha makes his bow from the Ma-li-lang bamboo, the arrow is made from Po-rang bamboo.” (8, p201)

## 2.4 Food storage: No information found

## 2.5 Sexual division of production:

- “There is no rigid division of labor based on sex; women, however, are strictly forbidden to kill any animals. Groups of women and men work side by side in the fields, and although men generally weave the baskets and mats, and women spin yarn, if one of the sexes were to try one or the other activity, no stigma would be attached to it.” (2, p2)
- “The women are the “domestic and farm drudges of the men, performing all out and indoor work along with their husbands, and much besides. It is not unusual to meet a stout and active man, bow in hand, sauntering along the road, followed by his wife and sisters heavily loaded with rain or merchandise.” (11, p148)

## 2.6 Land tenure:

- “Each house has a field in front of it fenced in with bamboo where the family gardens. “The rest of the land of the household is scattered all over the surrounding district, and it is seldom that people own the land near their house. All possess some strips of land – often more than a dozen for a single household – on the warmer slopes of the valley, where the climate is suitable for the cultivation of wet rice, cardamom, and some of the earlier millets.” (15, p75) The big fields, which are cleared by burning once every eight years, are mostly above the level of the houses; so that it is by no means unusual for people to have fields three or more miles away from their houses, and three thousand feet higher up or lower down the mountain side.” (15, p76)

## 2.7 Ceramics:

- “The Lepcha of Zongu do not know how to make pottery. Plates are usually replaced by big leaves, but there are a certain number of rudely carved wooden plates which are used on ceremonious occasions...” (15, p67)

## 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: No information found

## 2.9 Food taboos:

- “.the only animals that they do not eat which some other races do are cats and dogs, rats and mice, horses, and snakes.” (15, p84)

## 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No information found

## 3. Anthropometry

### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- “In person the Lepchas are short, averaging about five feet in height; five feet six inches is tall, and four feet eight inches is a common stature-among the men. The women are shorter in the usual proportion.” (11, p149)

### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

- “The men are bulky for their height, but rather fleshy than sinewy.” (11, p149)

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- Puberty has no correlation with age for females, they depend on the intervention of a man; “the physical signs will start whenever a girl experiences copulation.” (15, p315)

### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): No information found

### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): No information found

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): No information found

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- “Girls are betrothed and occasionally married from age eight onwards, and boys from the age of twelve.” (15, p316)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- “Most consummated marriages are stable and divorce or separation is very rare. The chief cause of divorce is usually for incompatibility of character or refusal to work properly on the part of the wife.” (15, p157)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- “The Lepchas as well as the Bhotias have an old tradition of polyandry.” (8, 129)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?

- There is a bride price that the husband’s family is responsible for. “But until the large and expensive marriage feast has been performed, the wife and, possibly, her children, stay at her father’s house save possibly for short visits; and during this period the son-in-law is, as it were, his father-in-law’s servant, and has to go and work for him whenever he is summoned and cannot leave without obtaining permission; he is in a subordinate position, and, though he may be taunted, must never answer back.” (15, p154)
- “.when girls go to their husband’s village they take with them their private animals and the last year’s harvested grain as a sort of dowry.” (15, p108)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- “They use patrilineal descent to determine inheritance and group membership.” (5, p48)
- “The rules of inheritance follow the paternal line, and only the sons can inherit from their father, each of them getting an equal share. A man may also inherit his father’s brother’s share when the latter has died without any male issue.” (18, p107)
- If the father passes away it is custom for the eldest son to inherit the house, the animals and movable property are equally divided among the sons, and the land is also split evenly among the sons, with the eldest getting first pick. (15, p105)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

- “The father has the custody of the children, and this parental authority endows him with far-reaching privileges. The children are in every respect subject to him; he may punish them as he likes, and he can exercise this privilege even on grown-up children.” (18, p108)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No information found

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

- “The whole of Lepcha society is divided into named exogamous patrilineal Putso the primary function of which is to regulate marriage.” (6, p15)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

- The semen builds the bones and the brains of the fetus (15, p283)
- “Adultery, without really marked presence, is not a reason for divorce; and no anxiety is felt or expressed about the paternity of a man’s children.” (15, p158)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

- The vaginal secretions of the mother build the flesh and blood of the fetus (15, p283)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No information found

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No information found

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

- “Lepchas have no prescribed or preferential marriage arrangements in terms of kin-ship network. Instead Lepcha avoid marriage links with father’s or mother’s Putso for many generations. All the members within these generations are classified as brothers and sisters.” (6, p15)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

- “Until the husband brings his wife home, and indeed until the birth of the first child, Lepcha men and women have complete sexual freedom at every point where this freedom does not endanger the social fabric.” (15, p327)
- “In Lepcha theory a woman should never make direct sexual advances but in point of fact I found that in nearly every case men had had their first real sexual experience with the wife of an ‘elder brother’ or ‘uncle’ at the woman’s direct invitation and solicitation.” (15, p161)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: No information found

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? No information found

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades: No information found

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? No information found

4.24 Joking relationships? No information found

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

- “Among Lepchas, Putso is very important and Lepchas introduce themselves by their Putso name.” (6, p15)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

- “Incest for the Lepchas is horrifying” (15, p151)
- “Any sexual connection with blood relations for nine generations on the father’s side and four on the mother’s is considered incestuous; but children under the age of puberty, or, as the Lepchas say ‘who are not old enough to know shame’, are not considered capable of committing incest and no watch is kept on children’s play.” (15, p151)
- Incest is a very embarrassing subject to the Lepcha and most won’t even talk about it. It is almost completely non-existent. The Lepcha word for incest translates to an act producing a year of disaster; this is also the word used for sodomy. (15, p102)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

- There are two stages in Lepcha marriage: betrothal and bringing home the bride. “*Asek* is actually the validating ceremony at which the formal gifts from the family of the groom to that of the bride are presented; these gifts are called ‘the price of the bride’ and once they are accepted the groom has full access to his bride.” (15, p154)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

- “Except in the case of very young children people are almost always referred to by the proper kinship terms, or by their ecclesiastical or lay titles. Women are practically never named after marriage; they are referred to firstly as their husband’s wife, and, as soon as they have borne a child, as their child’s mother... Only occasionally do childless widows start using personal names again” (15, p144)
- “Personal names are of practically no importance to the Lepchas of Zongu and they have no sort of permanence. On the third day after birth, when the lama cases the infant’s horoscope, he will discover his ‘sacred name’; but this is never spoken by anyone, merely inscribed on the horoscope; it is never used subsequently; and nobody knows their own sacred name. On the third-day birth feast one of the people present will give the child some name; it may refer to some physical peculiarity, to some incident which took place while the mother was carrying the child, or may just be the day of the week on which it was born.” (15, p145)
- “It occasionally happens that as part of the cure of an illness the lamas will order their patient to change his or her name for a year; in such cases a new nickname is provided.” (15, p145)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

- “Owing to the wide application of the incest ban it often happens that a boy or girl has not a single potential spouse or unmarried love-partner in the same village; and consequently in the far greater number of cases a boy’s wife has to be sought from a distant village, and a girl has to leave her home far behind when she goes to her husband.” (15, p153)
- “There is a distinct tendency for several members of two families or neighborhoods to marry each other” Ex: two siblings marrying two siblings (15, p155)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

- “The father has also the authority to make any marriage arrangements for his children, and even if a child dislikes his father’s choice, the father has the right to impose his will on the child. It may happen that a young man and a young woman are forced into marriage by their respective fathers in spite of the fact that both of them may express their undisguised disinclination.” (18, p108)
- “Marriages are always arranged through the offices of two between-men, one representing each party. In theory the biological parents should have nothing to do with their children’s marriages; were they to do so either the children would die young or the marriage would break up. All the negotiations concerning a marriage are carried on by the paternal or maternal uncles of the children, but in point of fact the parents are always surreptitiously, and sometimes fairly openly consulted.” (15, p154)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No information found

## Warfare/homicide

4.31 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: No information found

4.32 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: No information found

4.33 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

- “Murder is almost unheard of; although there have been accusations of poisoning.” (2, p3)
- “The Lepcha attitude toward aggression is that it is not natural and that it is destructive to the community at large.” (2, p3)
- “They are wonderfully honest, theft being scarcely known among them; they rarely quarrel among themselves. I have never known them to draw their knives on one another, although they always wear them. For ordinary social purposes of talking, eating, and drinking, they have great unanimity, but for any more important purposes of resistance to oppression, the pursuit of indus. try or trade, their confidence in one another is at a low pitch; they fly bad government rather than resist it, and used to prefer digging for yams in the jungle, and eating wretchedly innutritious vegetables, to enduring any injustice or harsh treatment. They are singularly forgiving of injuries, when time is given them, after hasty loss of temper.” (11, p150)

4.34 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

- “Nowadays the Lepchas only set up the relationship with Sikkimese and Tibetans, for the exchange of crops and dye-wood for salt, carpets, and metal vessels; they are, they say, no longer friendly with the Nepali and will have no relationship with them.” (15, p119)

4.35 Cannibalism? No evidence

## 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- “The houses of a village are often scattered in isolated areas of the fields or the forests, and there are usually no more than three or four in a grouping” (2, p1)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- “Their habits are incur- ably erratic: they do not form permanent villages, and rarely remain longer than three years in one place, at the expiration of which they move into a new part of the forest, sometimes near, often distant, and there go through the labour of clearing a space for a house, building a new one, and preparing the ground for a crop. The latter operations consist in cutting down the smaller trees, lopping off the branches of the large ones, which are burnt, and scratching the soil with the " ban," after which, on the falling of a shower of rain, the seed is thrown into the ground.” (11, p151)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- “Each Lepcha village is traditionally headed by a village leader, who is responsible for keeping order and collecting taxes.” (2, p3)
- “Lepcha society is divided into named *putso* (clan). Lepcha clans claim to have mythical connections with particular mountain peaks which they worship as their deity” (5, p48)

5.4 Post marital residence:

- “It is not customary to allow the bride to leave her parents' house for that of her husband until the sum agreed has been paid; hence, as the marriage is permitted while the female is still under the father's roof, it is by no means uncommon to find the husband the temporary bondsman of his father-in-law, who exacts, Jewish fashion, labour from his son, in lieu of money, until he shall have fairly won his bride.” (11, p149)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- “The government has reserved the Dzongu area, in North and Central Sikkim, for the Lepchas only; and non-Lepchas are prohibited from settling here. Dzongu is a heavily forested region bounded by the rivers Tista and Tolung and surrounded by the mountain ranges...Till recent times the Lepchas of Dzongu were sheltered from all modern influences. Their main contact with the outside world was the market-place of Mangan, the district head-quarters of North Sikkim.” (17, p33)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- “the polite term of address to anybody you are not related to is ‘old man’; and there is a tendency to push anybody older than the speaker into a higher generation. Thus, when a man has had a child he calls his wife's parents ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’, and the parents call their own elder brothers and sisters ‘father’ and ‘mother’; the wife's elder brother, or her elder sister's husband are equated with her father.”(15, p143)
- “The first years of life are a period of relative obscurity; a young child consumes more than he gives, and is therefore a weight on his parents and the community. Children are not on the whole harshly treated, but once they have achieved physical independence very little attention is paid to them. Grown-ups do not talk to or play with children,” (15, p279)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No information found

5.8 Village and house organization:

- “Traditional Lepcha homes are rectangular buildings, raised 1 to 1.5 meters off the ground on stone piles, with the space underneath serving as shelter for farm animals; houses are often constructed of wood, plaster, and bamboo.” (2, p1)
- “When three or four houses are grouped together they are usually given a distinctive name. This grouping does not necessarily correspond to any emotional or kinship ties among near neighbors; people living in adjoining houses may be closely related, or they may be complete strangers, and full brothers may live separated by the full distance of the village.” (15, p54)
- “The ordinary household comprises the two generations of a married couple and their children. But frequently it also includes the parents of the husband, and sometimes the children’s spouses, and their offspring. It is always considered fortunate to be a large family; it ensures a carefree old age, and it gives the adult members economic strength and confers prestige on them.” (18, p107)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): No information found

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- “People sleep on a cloth, generally quilted, and have another blanket as covering; Lepchas never sleep with their heads under the bedclothes as they think they would then suffocate.” (15, p255)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- “They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans (ptso), which are believed to have originated from supernatural and mythological ancestry. At present, the main function of these clans is to regularize marriages and prevent incest, through exogamy.” (8, p129)

5.12 Trade:

- “Nowadays many of the Lepchas sell their agricultural products in bazaars from which, in return, they get cloths, household utensils, simple agricultural implements, and the like.” (18, p107)
- “Before the beginning of this century when money was introduced and shops set up in the neighbourhood, Lepchas had to travel abroad to obtain cloth and thread, salt and metal goods. They used to collect in the forest the red dye-wood called *vyim* and take that and whatever surplus crops they had up to the Tibetan border, where they would exchange it for salt and wool. Some of the salt they would then take to Darjeeling to exchange for thread and cloth. In order to be able to trade continuously and to receive hospitality and protection in foreign countries a formal relationship with religious sanctions was instituted. This relationship, and the two parties who entered into it, were called *ingzong*, which means literally ‘like a younger brother’. For the formal establishment of an *ingzong* relationship a pig must be killed and the intestines offered to the gods...then a feast is held and the pig is eaten, and the two contracting parties swear solemn oaths always to love and help one another, and never to do or thing evil.” (15, p118) “Once the full ceremony has been performed, the two *ingzong* are regarded as being in truth sons of one father, and intermarriage between their descendants is forbidden as incestuous for nine generations.” (15, p119)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? No information found

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

- “The important festivals of the Buddhists of Sikkim are the Tibetan New Year, the Sagadawa, the Pang-Lhabsol, the Losoong, and the Lhabab-Duchen. The Tibetan New Year which is known as the Lossar marks the preaching of Dharma by Lord Buddha to the devil, and is usually celebrated in the month of February-March for seven days with much merry-making.  
Sagadawa is an auspicious month for the Sikkimese Buddhists. Prayers are held throughout the month in various monasteries. On the full moon of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar is the main celebration. This religious festival is considered the most sacred, because it signifies the birth of Lord Buddha, his enlightenment and attainment of *Nivana*. A colourful procession of monks with geylings and rabdung go around the major thoroughfares of the town carrying the Kangyur texts on their heads.  
Pang-Lhabsol is a festival to worship Mt. Khanchendzonga, the guardian deity of Sikkim. It is held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar.  
Losoong, called Namsong by the Lepchas, is also known as Sonam Losoong. It is essentially the festival of the harvest. On this day, newly harvested paddy and fruits are offered to the gods. It is celebrated on the first four days of the eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar.  
Lhabab-Duchen is another important festival of the Buddhists of Sikkim, celebrating the descent of Lord Buddha from the thirty-third heaven.” (7, p78-79)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- “Their geographical conditions stimulate them to develop a unique health culture. In Sikkim, this is a mixture of Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali practices for the prevention of disease, promotion of health, and treatment of disease. These unique practices are undocumented and passed on from one generation to next by word of mouth.” (4, p183)
- “Lepchas constitute about 13% of the total population of the state they inhabit in the Dzongue reserve of North Sikkim district. The concept of health and illness among the Lepchas is entirely guided by belief in the supernatural. The Lepchas mainly

follow the Mahayana sect of Buddhism. They have their own script, and distinct costume, language, and culture. Uses of medicinal plants are described in the Lepcha epics called Namthar, Tengyur, and Domang. They acknowledge certain semidivine beings or guardian spirits known as “Lungzee,” who are not gods but worthy of respect like a huge tree, a cluster of trees, grass, a tarn, a cave or a special hillock, and other natural objects. If they are ignored or any disrespect is shown to them by defiling or polluting, by answering nature’s call etc., it may invite suffering to the village or the particular individual; they may suffer from serious sickness or even die.” (4, p184)

- “According to the Lepchas, the world is governed by good spirits – and evil spirits (Mung). All natural calamities such as bad harvests, draught, hailstorm, and other misfortunes are believed to be the actions of evil spirits, i.e., Mung. On the other hand, good health and vitality, good harvest, and prosperity are attributed to actions of good spirits.” (4, p184)
- “Pougorip/Totola (*Oroxylum indicum*) is a medicinal plant used in Ayurveda as an ingredient in Dashamula. It also plays an important role in the Lepcha culture. The Lepchas believe that it is not even touched by the bees, signifying the purity and chastity of a virgin girl, and it is used as liver tonic and anti-diabetic medicine. The fruit of the plant is shaped like a huge sword. The seeds from inside the fruit are flagellated like paper silk, and are used in any auspicious ceremony similarly to the use of haldi/turmeric in Hindu culture. Chi (millet beer) plays a very important role in Lepcha culture and used to drink to good health.” (4, p184)
- “...the Lepcha medicine man or the Lepcha healer, locally called 'Maon-doak', is known to restrict his medicinal practices and prescriptions only to Lepcha community, and he does not share or offer the same to the outsiders. The 'Maon-doak' believes that if his secret traditional knowledge of using plants is disclosed to any unauthorized person, the plants under use would produce adverse effects, and he may encounter ill-fate generated from the rage of the supreme deity of medicinal plants in the forest. This non-sharing attitude must have been one of the strongest reasons for the decline of this archaic system of medicine.” (12, p2)

## 6.2 Stimulants: No information found

## 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- “All ceremonial occasions among the Lepchas – birth, marriage, and death, religious ceremonies, exorcisms, and civil consultations – are marked by the consumption of extra large quantities of food and drink.” (15, p84)
- Nearly all ceremonies demand animal sacrifices; animals are essential for the socio-religious celebrations of birth, marriage, and death; and consequently people with few or no animals who get ill or have children or marry or die are at a considerable disadvantage and have to borrow animals for these ceremonies. (15, p100)
- Birth Feast: A baby is not ‘officially’ born until three days after the physical birth, and this official birth is celebrated with a ceremony in the house of the mother and newborn. Before strangers enter the house the family scrubs the floors, burns incense, and wash themselves for purification. When everyone arrives at the house, a chicken is sacrificed, presents are given to the mother, sacrificial prayer performed, and the lama casts the newborn’s horoscope. (15, p289)

## 6.4 Other rituals:

- “Intoxicating drinks play an important role in all sacrificial ceremonies and rituals observed by the Lepchas. One such drink is the ‘Chi’ or ‘Chiang’ which is prepared from millet and is looked upon as female. Another such drink is ‘Dyo’, an alcoholic drink which is made from medicinal roots, herbs, or other fermentable plants and is regarded as male. The origin of Chi can be traced to an old tradition. According to the tradition of the Lepchas, Chi is of heavenly origin. Tradition has it that at the very outset the ferment used in the preparation of the millet brew Chi was brought to mankind from the other world in a cunning manner by a special messenger. The Lepchas link up immortality with this drink. It is believed that just after the mythological ‘deluge’, the quail performed the Chi sacrifice, thereby heralding the beginning of a new world. Two birds are believed to have fetched this drink of immortality from the land of the gods. Chi is protected by a deity named Don-dyo-chi-log who is accorded the same homage as the supreme god of the Lepchas, Rum... According to Lepcha texts and rituals the Chi Sacrifice is indissolubly bound up with all auspicious occasions. The sacrificial cup containing Chi has its rim decorated with three little lumps of butter called ‘San-dyo’, and the ceremony is performed on the head of a bull. The drink has deleterious effects on snakes and demons, but for the gods it is a refreshing drink. It is said that through its sacrifice their rage is calmed. On ceremonial days, the Lepcha magicians work themselves into frenzy by partaking of Chi in order to attain the state of ecstasy. (10, p287)
- “Rituals...are social events with supernatural overtones. The Lepchas have accepted the rank hierarchy of Lamas according to the Hinayana Buddhism only for religious purpose, but it has no meaning in their secular life. Their society remains basically egalitarian. Lepchas have not incorporated the ethics of the adopted religion in their life, except that Lamas do not sacrifice animals” (6, p16)

## 6.5 Myths (Creation):

- “Stocks narrates the following myth of creation: ‘In the beginning there was only sea, and the creator Tashey-takbo-thing made two kinds of fish, -ngo, was the common kind, while the ngo-yang had a serpent form. From the sea we believe that a tortoise supports the world, and on it Tashey-takbo-thing created birds and animals. Then he tried to make a form of man from butter, but it would not stand up, as whenever he made it, it melted. (Had the butter only remained firm, we should all have been very

beautiful). Then he made a human form of earth and mud, and wind came into this resemblance of man and life was created. Then Tashey-takbo-thing made blood out of water which he put in it and the bones he created from stone. Then he moved away to see whether the creature he had made could answer him and speak, but as he had no nerves or veins he was unable to do so. So Tashey-takbo-thing picked a great many creepers from the jungle and from those which he spread all over the form, it spoke. Thus was the first male created, but as there was no female he was lonely, and could not reproduce himself. One day as he was catching birds with his snare in the jungle, Tashey-takbo-thing entangled a woman in one for him to catch. So the man caught her and brought her to his home; but at first they could not marry as there was no go between to help them to talk over the matter. But at last the Rum decided to send the owl down the country of creation.” (3, p36)

- “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 a 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.” (14, p 17-18)

#### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- “The Lepchas are expert craftsmen but their crafts are meant mostly for domestic use. The Lepchas manufacture articles like table, ornaments, clothes, fishing and hunting instruments out of resources locally available except iron implements. The iron implements were locally designed but the raw materials were by no stretch of imagination locally availed. Some of the major Lepcha crafts are listed below.
  1. Hats or *bu* in Lepcha. It has four variations in shape: circular, cone-shaped, woolen cap and boat-shaped. The sizes vary considerably but the basic raw materials bamboo.
  2. Weaving instruments. The weaving instrument is called *Thagrodam*. It consists of two tall and heavy stands and a number of wooden and bamboo pieces.
  3. Thread crosses. These are used purely for religious purposes by the priests for trapping the *mung* or demon; therefore often called *mung-li* or demon-houses. These are of three types: square, cruci-form, and octagonal. When a Buddhist Lepcha dies a Bongthing of Lepcha shomanist is invited to the house. He makes such thread crosses on bamboo splits to prevent the devil from causing another death. These are fixed against the skull of the dead.
  4. Iron implements. A dagger or *ban* is a common iron implement of the Lepchas. The hilt is made of wood and often decorated with flower designs. The sheath or *bangyam* is made of a single wooden piece tied around with a leather strip or iron wire at least at two places to hold the dagger. A loose string made of bamboo fiber or tree bark hangs along the sheath to tie it against the hip. Besides, they have scissors, flat triangular hoes, axes, hammer, needles, knives, and crooked implements for cardamom cultivation .
  5. Dress and ornaments
  6. Make-up kits
  7. Other domestic articles like winnowing basket, cylindrical box of wood for measuring grain, wooden bowl for powdering spices, rat-trap, fish-trap and panniers.
  8. Hunting instruments like bow and arrow
  9. musical instruments
  10. religious objects

Though the Lepcha crafts are chiefly oriented to domestic consumption many of them could be innovated for commercial use too. But they are an easy-going type, having a penchant for adventuring in the forests. This does not overrule the fact that they have enough talent and given proper incentives and training, they can equal the Bhutias in manufacturing commercial crafts, if not in selling them.” (8, p161-162)
- “The practice of using bamboo and cane for the household artifacts is as old as the tribe exists in the foot hills of Himalaya. They believe that keeping the cane and bamboo artifacts at their home keep them away from ill effects of evil spirit.” (13, p537)

#### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: No information found

#### 6.8 Missionary effect:

- “It seems more likely that the invention of the Lepcha alphabet was motivated by the religious activities of Buddhist missionaries. The Buddhist monks were keen to communicate with the Lepcha people in their own language, and as so often happens when the influence of a new religion spreads, religious texts were translated into the local language of the area, in this case Lepcha, for which an alphabet had yet to be created.” (14, p16)

#### 6.9 RCR revival: No information found

#### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “The Lepchas, like most true Buddhists, bury their dead; the presence of death in a hamlet is always regarded with temporary horror, and the house it has visited is almost always forsaken by the surviving inmates.” (11, p149)
- “Once a person is dead there are two things to do; the danger of the devil that has caused his death finding another victim in the community must be averted and the dead man must be got rid of as thoroughly and completely as possible. People who have left

this world never return to it benevolently; if they do have any contact with the living it is as malevolent supernaturals, as devils.” (15, p345)

#### 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- “A man should never mention the name of those women he calls daughter-in-law, more a women the names of those men she calls ‘son-in-law’. These prohibitions hold good even after a person is dead.” (15, p146)

#### 6.12 Is there teknonymy? No information found

#### 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- “Originally, the Lepchas were the followers of the Shamanism; they converted to Buddhism in eighteenth century, and since the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant number of Lepchas has converted into Christianity; although, indigenous Lepcha Shamanism has managed to exist till today.” (12, p3)
- “The Lepchas are Buddhists, following the Lamas of Thibet and of their own tribe indiscriminately. The former, from being generally better educated at religious establishments of repute, are considered the most holy and orthodox. The latter rarely leave Sikkim to study; when they do, they deliver the full advantages of the superior consideration accorded to the Thibetans, provided they also adhere to the whole rules of Monachism.” (11, p146)
- “The central religious roles in the Lepcha community are traditionally occupied by the mNu *mun* and VobV:T\_ *bóngthing*, who both function as shamans. The *bóngthing* 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 exorcises demons, helps to heal illness and guides souls to the afterlife. It is possible for a *bóngthing* to develop into a *mun*, in Sikkim such healers are known as pdMe *padem*. 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 *bóngthings* preside at many important ceremonies in Lepcha life, each to perform their own rituals. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, in the Darjeeling district a significant number of Lepcha people have converted to Christianity. Many Christian Lepcha people have lost their language and have distanced themselves from the old shamanistic rituals and beliefs. This stance occasionally gives rise to tension between Buddhist and Christian Lepcha.” (14, p9)
- “The local shamanic tradition, which has been called *monism*, is regarded as being one of the most authentic expressions of Lepcha culture, and it is based on the assumption that beneath the many and diverse Lepcha’s lineages (putsho) there are individuals, male and female, charged with the power to interact with the supernatural world. These people, called *mun*, are summoned to perform rituals in almost every phase of life of the Lepchas. Ancient ritual practices like those routinely performed by *mun* were not uprooted by the introduction of Buddhism. Conversely they have been severely jeopardized by the conversions encouraged by the British when they settled in the Darjeeling Hills. Christian Lepchas adopted the discourse and the point of view of an alien tradition, one devoted to ruling out diversity, equipped with a lexicon and a way of action molded centuries ago in Europe in the long battle against “paganism”, “witchcraft” and the “demonic other”. Recently, however, Lepcha ancestral faith was revitalized as an ecological and political tool to mobilize people in order to fight a dam construction project in Dzongu sacred land. The indigenous religion, deeply rooted in the physical feature of the land (sacred mountains, lakes, etc) is taken as an expression of national identity and the only system caring about the sacred environment on (16, p149) which the welfare of the Lepcha community ultimately lies.” (16, p149-150)
- “In most Lepcha villages and households, the Buddhist monastery and the monks play an important role, yet even today, a strong strain form their old animist tradition persists.” (17, p33)
- “Lepcha animism has little ‘black magic’ in it. There are the ‘*rum*’ the benevolent spirits or god-like deities and the ‘*mung*’ the malignant spirits. These *mungs*, the Lepchas believe, reside everywhere, in the tress, bushes, rocks and rivers. Occasionally they possess human beings and bring illness and misfortune. The daily lives of the Lepchas, their religious and healing ceremonies, are based in an effort to propitiate these mungs with ritual sacrifices and incantations.” (17, p33)

## 7. Adornment

### 7.1 Body paint: No information found

### 7.2 Piercings: See 7.5

### 7.3 Haircut:

- “The hair is worn long by both sexes, the younger men allowing it to hang loose over the shoulders, the elders plaiting it into a tail, which sometimes reaches to the knees. The women of rank wear their hair in two, and sometimes in three tails, tying it with braids and silken cords and tassels.” (11, p150)

### 7.4 Scarification: No information found

#### 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- “The Rong folk wear rings, bracelets, and necklaces as ornaments. But one will never come across a case of a Rong wearing any ornamentation to the nose, the feet and the toes.” (8, p205)
- “Although no attempt is made to add ‘beauty’ to the ordinary objects and surroundings of life, both men and women wear a certain amount of jewelry. The men wear turquoise earrings and rings, the women heavy and elaborate necklaces of big and usually unworked semi-precious stones, often with a charm-box of fretted gold or silver inlaid with turquoise and coral suspended from them, and also occasionally brooches and bracelets; but all these jewels are bought ready-made. They are considered to enhance beauty of the wearer; they are also a display of wealth and the only possible form of investment.” (15, p68)

#### 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

- “The *Sumok thyaktuk* or Lepcha traditional hat is an oldest form of craft, unique and exclusive to the Lepcha tribe living in the Dzongu Tribal Reserve Area of Sikkim. The hat is intricately woven with the *Ru* or cane, and *Po-young* – local bamboo. Each part of the hat and its artistic design hold its own traditional meaning and significance...Wearing the head gear in marriage ceremony, worships and other festivals is mandatory in the tribe” (13, p537)

#### 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: No difference found

#### 7.8 Missionary effect: No information found

#### 7.9 Types of clothing:

- “The traditional cloths of the Lepchas are woven in exquisite colour combinations. Men’s dress is called *thokro-dum* and the female’s dress is called *dumdyam* or *dumvum*. There is an obvious contradiction between *thokro-dum* and *dumvum*. One essential man’s wear making a complete *thokro-dum* is a white pyjama that reaches only up to the calf and resembles a karate player’s outfit. The short pyjama suggests that the Lepchas might have originated or lived long in a marshy land. However, the female at- tire negates this suggestion. *Dumvum* is an ankle length flowing dress suggesting dry land inhabitants. The male dress is almost always coarse, sturdy and durable fitting to the rigours of life in the open field and forest. The female dress is made of softer material and worn in the manner that is graceful.” (5, p47)
- “The traditional dress of the Lepcha men is called *gada*. It consists of a long, beautiful striped cloth loosely worn down to the knee leaving one or both arms free. The trousers which reaches up to the calf are called the *phomu*. Women wear the *dumdyan*, a full length robe, held at the shoulders by a pair of brooches and fastened at the waist by girdle of silver chains or simple hand-woven strip of cloth, known as the *namrek*. Over the *dumdyan* a loose coat called the *pago* is worn. A scarf (thorough) is tied around the head. Shoes for both men and women are called *hlom*.” (7, p71)

### 8. Kinship systems

#### 8.1 Sibling classification system: No information found

#### 8.2 Sororate, levirate: No information found

#### 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

- There are a very small number of kinship terms. The Lepchas exclude all categories of cousins. The same word is used for younger brother or sister, son or daughter, and niece or nephew. (15, p143)

### 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- “...the most common implement used by the women is the sickle. A bent sickle hook-shaped at the upper end is called *bahur* in the Lepcha tongue. It is used for cutting wood and the branches of trees. Another kind of sickle, in the shape of a half moon, is called *angsu*, and is used to mow grass and weeds. The third type has a toothed edge, and is used as a kind of saw. It is called *angsu*. A girl is given her sickle at the age of seven or eight, and the boy his knife, so that from a very early age they may be able to practice the use of the most universal of instruments. Usually it is carried in the belt and the back.” (8, p205)

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