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Lepchas the Animist: Nature Worshipper

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Abstract:

Lepcha consider themselves as the aboriginal Tribal community of the State of Sikkim and the Darjeeling & Kalimpong district of west Bengal. Lepcha by tradition are nature worshipper. They worshipped the spirits, mountains, river, forest and the natural outcomes of their surroundings. This simple nature worshippers and nature lovers, over the period of time, have converted either into Buddhism or Christianity.

Lepcha religion also known as Mun-Boongthimism. The role and position of the Mun and Boongthing makes the Lepcha religion distinct and unique. Within the board spectrum of nature worshipper, the role and prestige of Mun, the priestess Lepcha society kept in a high even in the modern world of Gender inequality. Some religious beliefs and practice like MUK-ZIK DING RUM FAAT and TENDONG LHO RUM FAAT aim at balance ecology and in true sense Lepcha becomes the real worshipper of nature.

Keywords: God, Nature, Provider, gratified, worship

Introduction:

The Picturesque hilly region of north eastern India, the habitat of the different aboriginal tribes, community, race and diversified population, among them Lepcha consider themselves as the aboriginal tribal community of the state of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of west Bengal. Later some portion of their population migrated to Illam, (Eastern Nepal) and lower valley of the Bhutan Country. The Lepcha communities have distinct rich socio-cultural character of which they are submissive, polite, humble, and hospitable and isolation preferred community (mostly confined in the remote areas) who have their own distinct language, script and literature of their own. Lepchas have their long and glorious history of their past.

Peep to Past: Lepcha called themselves Mutanchi Rongkup/Rumkup meaning the loving son of Mother Nature and God, the aboriginal tribal group of eastern Himalaya region confining the geographical Space of the district of Darjeeling, Sikkim and eastern Nepal (Illam District) and Bhutan. Shuffling and reshuffling of lands leads the Lepcha to become the inhabitant of three different countries.

The question arise that who are Lepchas? From where they belong to? Are they the primitive or aboriginal Tribal community and inhabitants of eastern Himalaya? Are they migrated from other place to present location? Different researchers have express different views regarding the origin, their original homeland or the place from they migrated. But Lepcha consider that their ancestors was created by the God from the snow of mount Kanchenjunga and sent then down to live, prosper and to spread all over the Mayallyang (present day Sikkim). Their first ancestors were the Fodongthing (male) and Nazaongnuo (female). Later on, this mythological story on the origin of Lepchas has been used by many authors working on the Lepchas.

Some interesting facts about Lepcha and their Land (Nay MayalLyang).

- Lepchas has their own culture, language, tradition and Script.
- Lepchas believed themselves that they are created by 'ItbuDebu Rum' meaning God "the creator" from the pure and virgin snow cap of mount Kngchumzoangboo (Mt. Kanchenjunga).
- Lepchas are considered only the original and indigenous people of Darjeeling hills of west Bengal, Sikkim state, south western part of Bhutan and Illam district of Nepal.
- Lepchas called themselves "Mutanchi Rongkup, Rumkup" meaning the beloved children of Mother Nature and God.
- Lepchas ancient homeland NeymayalLyang was consist of Darjeeling Hills and Doars region of West Bengal, Sikkim Himalaya, South western Part of Bhutan and Illam district of Nepal. Its boundary was abounded from Tibet in the north, Titiliya in south, Bhutan in the east and up to the Arun river of Nepal in the west.
- "Rongnue" –Teesta River, "Rongit" (Rangeet River) are considered as holy rivers by Lepchas.
- According to Lepchas history, the first foreigner who enter in Lepcha land was "Key Bum Sa" from Tibet
- "KawilongChoak" is the name of Blood Brotherhood Treaty between Lepchas of Mayallyang and Tibetans, in which the place still existed today in Sikkim.
- Almost 80% of the names of the places, rivers, hills, mountain, villages, toms, of the Mayallyangare originated from the Lepcha languages and their meaning found in Lepcha language.
- Lepchas has their own unique traditional customary law and constitution to maintain law and order in community.
- Lepcha language was the official language of Darjeeling district till 1911.
- Deed of Grant between the rajas of Sikkim and British were written in Lepcha and other language.
- The first British settlers mention Lepcha population observed by them in 1835 in present Darjeeling town.
- The last Lepcha king was Puno GaebooAchyok who separate Kalimpong from rajas of Sikkim and declared Lepcha kingdom. It is very difficult to present the actual date of his

reign but historian, authors and scholars imagine that it was the middle of 18th century. The King was killed by Bhutanese by deceiving at Dalim Fort; Gorubathan. The remains of the ruined fort has still existed today. Bhutan ruled over kalimpong up to the arrival of British. Still today Lepcha has strong holds in kalimpong districts and their majority of population found there.

Concept of Religion;

Religion is a strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that controls human destiny. Religion has been defined differently by various scholars. In the 18th century, Friedrich Schleiermacher defined religion as “feeling of absolute dependence” Otto defines the essence of religious awareness as awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before divine. The main characteristics of religious life are: traditionalism, myth and symbol, concept of salvation, sacred places and objects sacred actions (rituals), sacred writings, the sacred community(monastic order)and sacred experience.

All societies have values system: common beliefs, understandings, expectations, and controls- that unite their members, and set them off from other cultural groups. Such value system is called religion when it involves the system of formal and informal worship and faith in the sacred and divine. Religion like language is a symbol of group identity

Tribal Religion: According to Majid Hussain, Tribal or traditional religion are the special forms of ethnic religion distinguished by their small size, their unique identity with localized cultural group not yet fully absorbed into modern society . And close ties to nature. The belief of tribal religion is also known as the follower of animism believe in life exist in all objects of nature, lick rock trees, mountains etc.

Man-Environment (Nature) Relationship:

The relationship between man and physical environment is a theme that has held the attention of man from the beginning of civilization during the pre- modern phase. The general assumption of the worlds over was that nature sets the stage for the human development through the approach to the nature and man relationship varied from one society from the another depending upon weather nature of the habitat was friendly and therefore benevolent on the natural condition where hard from the view point of the machine of living.

Nature was viewed as the gift from the benevolent almighty god so that it needed to be preserved. It was necessary to develop a state of peaceful co-existence with nature so that in the process of their by mankind. The resource of natural environment was not disturbed beyond the capacity of environment to replenish itself.

In France the wide acceptance view of Man environment relationship says that: the physical environment offers opportunity for a range of possible direction of development and it is dependent of human initiation as to which particular direction of direction was chosen.

The advocates of environmental determinism Elsward Hurtington start his point by saying that “man is the product of earth surface”. This means not merely that he is the child of the earth dust but the earth has mothered him, set him a task, and directed his thoughts, confronted with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his will and give him his problem navigation, irrigation at the same time said hints for their solution.

The relationship between man and the nature has been interrelated. Nature consider as the storehouse of resources which provides the basic needs of the Man, i.e. Food, clothing and Shelter. Besides this nature provides the opportunity to determine his way. The possibilism approach tends to study the relationship between man and environment which can be sum up by following:

1. Nature does not drive men along a particular role, but it offers a number of opportunity from among which men is free to select.
2. For The possibilist, the work of man not the earth and its influence are the starting point. The most important is the freedom of man to choose.

According to possibilist, nature is never more than an advisor. There are no necessities but possibilities everywhere. But in reality nature not only provides the opportunity but also provides certain limitation on the action of men which can govern or limits the activities of men.

The philosophy of environmental determinism states that the physical environment controls the course of human action. The essence of the deterministic school of thoughts that the history of culture, living style and the stages of development of a social group or nation one exclusively or largely governed by the physical factor of environment.

LEPCHAS AND RELIGION

Lepcha by tradition are nature worshipper. They worshipped the spirit of mountains, river, forest and the natural outcomes of their surroundings. But recently Lepchas have converted either into Christianity or Buddhism. The Buddhist Lepcha still retain some of the rituals of traditional nature worshipping but Christians restricts their rituals within the church boundary.

Boongthing and Mun are the male and female priest and Priestess of the Lepcha traditional religion. Both Boongthing and Mun are not hereditary and any person well command in Lepcha culture and language can perform the activity of Boongthing and Mun. Boongthing may be created by training and educating but Mun cannot be. The divinely ordained power of the Mun should be gifted by God and the activities should come from within her heart spontaneously. Mun's status is higher in society than Boongthing. It is found that:

- Mun plays a very important role from cradle to grave. Although she loses her prime importance today, still Mun attracts attention.
- The selection of Mun never follows any heredity rules; divinely ordained power is the basis of becoming Mun.

- Mun never claims any special social status but people regard her as a respected member of the community.
- Mun used to perform spiritual acts that are of high religious values, whereas Boongthing only performs rituals to appease evil spirits.
- Mun acts as a mental healer and the bare footed doctor of the community.
- Mun represents highly strong religious personality protecting whole body of the Lepchas religious beliefs and rituals against all odds.

Lepcha Religion also known as Mun-Boongthingism. Lepchas are very pious and religious minded. From cradle to the grave they call Boongthing and Mun to perform their rituals and beliefs. There is no restriction on becoming the priests and anybody can act as mediator between common Lepchas and God, but should have perfect knowledge about Lepcha religion and should have command over Lepcha language and culture. It is only the Mun who can place the soul of the dead person in the lap of Kanchenjunga to meet their ancestors for eternal rest, The Lepchas also believes in the spirit whom they need to satisfy during house construction , farming , harvesting, hunting etc.

The Role and position of the Mun and Boongthing makes the Lepcha religion distinct and unique. Within the board spectrum of nature worshipper, the role and prestige of Mun, the Priestess Lepcha society kept in a high even in the modern world of Gender inequality. Some religious beliefs and Practice like MUK-ZIK DING RUM FAAT and TENDONG LHO RUM FAAT aim at balance ecology and in true sense of Lepcha becomes the real worshipper of nature.

This simple nature worshippers and nature lovers, over the period of time, have converted either into Buddhism or Christianity. Recent census document shows that none of the Lepchas are nature worshipper.

CONCEPT OF GOD:

Lepcha called the God by Name “ItbuDebu Rum” meaning “God the Creator”. They consider that all universes, nature, mountains, rivers, flora, fauna, human being all are created by God. They considered themselves as “Rum Kap” Meaning the “Loving children of God, the creator”.

ITBU MU:

They consider God as Itbu Mu meaning “the Mother Creator”. They consider God as their mother who is kind, caring, provider, helpful and merciful like mother.

RUMLYANG:

Rumlyang meaning “Heaven”. They not only believe God but also believe existence of heaven where God lives.

Before the impact of intrusion of Lamaism (Buddhism) they only believe in Rumlyang. But after the intrusion of Lamaism, the other objects that have enrooted in their beliefs like Nulyang-Hell, Nansyem Nulyang-Human Inhabited place of earth, Munglyang-The place of evil spirit, Thunchylyang- animal inhabited areas, Muknyamlyang- the world of spirits etc.

NO TEMPLES:

Lepchas never built any temples. They don't have any temple for worshipping the God. We do not found any description in the account of Lepcha authors as well as in their mythological history. They did not practice any idol worship, later on they started practice nature worship but initially they only worship God.

NO WRITTEN SCRIPTURE:

Initially they did not have any written scripture and written document. Later with the discovery of Lepcha alphabet, they documented some rituals and their literature. Like other tribal community, Lepchas have priest called Boongthing (male priest) and Mun (female priests). In Lepcha language Boongthing means "ABONG ATHING" meaning a person who perform their rituals without reading scriptures or written documents but by chanting rituals by mouth.

In the words of Lepcha scholar Ren. K.P. Tamsang, "The Boongthing and the Mun do not say their prayers and sermons by reading out from any written scriptures or prepared texts as of their religious, but they chant their prayers and sermons orally which flow out within their hearts of heart"

Lepchas were depending very much on the jungle. If the agriculture were not sufficient, G.B. Mainwaring remarks, "From the forest they obtained fruits of numerous descriptions. edible and otherwise useful; thus, all their needs were supplied". During British period Lepchas were forced to practice settled cultivation. O Malley wrote, "with the introduction of settled cultivation and the reservation of forest, they have had to gave up their old nomadic cultivation, and have lost much of their jungle craft. But they have learnt in its place how to make terraces for rice fields and the methods of agriculture practiced by Nepalese"

With the restriction on the use of forest, Lepchas were compelled to depend completely on terrace based settled cultivation. Their economy become agriculture based subsistence one and they started producing those crops which were needed for their consumption.

Here, some of the important nature related offering or festival which being observed by the Lepchas shows that they are the true nature worshipper or the true sons of nature.

MIK ZIK-DING RUM FAAT:

In Lepcha language, MIK means granary of nature which is surrounding to them. ZIK- DING means sprouting of vegetation, RUM means God, and FAAT means offering of prayer to the Mother Nature. MUK ZIK-DING RUM FAAT literally means offering prayer to the God for providing the vegetation as well as for the food crop. The boon thing (Male Priest) and Mun
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(Female priest) and the loyal follower of the mother nature offer the prayer to the ITBUDEBU Rum, the creator during the month of february each year for good weather condition (which makes soil fertile) for the cultivation, and as well as to save them from the natural calamities, disaster like draught, flood, landslide, famine and diseases.

Both priests offer the prayer to mother nature on behalf of the living creator for their growth, prosper and movement of their life. They further request to Rum(God)energy form God and constant and regular recycling processes and for the balance of the elements like soil, air, water and green plants in the earth.

The performance of MikZik-Ding Rum Faat in February which indicates that the coming of dry spell of summer. This is the time in which the sprouting of vegetation starts in the foothills of Himalayan region which requires the timely rainfall, insolation, and other favorable climatic condition. They not only depend upon the nature but also worship nature as the mother which provides all the needs and her care about them as a child. It is the example of their gratitude towards nature as a god and as well as mother. It is one of the festival that performed by the Lepchas in community.

TENDONG LHO RUM FAAT:

Tendong Lho Rum Faat is one of the oldest and most important festivals celebrated in Sikkim especially by the Lepcha tribe. This 3 day festival in Sikkim begins with prayers to Mount Tendong in Namchi in south Sikkim. Lepcha tribe still celebrates this occasion to commemorate the almighty that saved their ancestors and to pay respect to the hill. During the festivities, people make a model of the mountain in facade of their homes and worship it. It is exclusively made of nine stones and the people dance and sing wearing mask to get the blessings of the almighty. It is believed that the well wishes of the Lord are indispensable for keeping them wealthy and healthy.

A fiesta is celebrated all across Sikkim and on neighboring region where the Lepcha people live. on a grand scale every year, usually in the month of August, to commemorate the ascension of the ancestors of Lepcha tribe and to pay reverence to the creator for saving them by creating “The Hill of the Raised Horn.”

Significance of Festival: According to the folklore, Mt. Tendong had saved the Lepcha people during the great deluge which had flooded the entire Mayellyang country (now known as Sikkim).

Celebrations: Special programme of puja, folk songs and dances are organized to mark the festival. Various cultural and literary programmes are held in the state to commemorate the occasion. On the concluding day, traditional Lepcha food, ornaments and costumes are displayed.

Why Tendong Lho Rum Faat Celebrated?

Tendong Lho Rum Faatis related to the mythological story about the two main rivers i.e. Teesta and Rangeet which flow in the Sikkim and the North Bengal. As per the Lepchas mythological believes this two river viz. male Rangeet (in Lepcha -Rongeeet) and female Teesta (in Lepcha-Rongnyu) were originated from Mayallyang and were lovers. To leave their place and go down to plain to live together forever, they decided to meet each other at appointed place. As they did not know the way, they decided to take guide to lead them. The river Rongeeet, was guided by a bird 'Tut Fo' and the river Rongnyu were guided by the snake 'Paril Bu'. Their guide agree to take them into an appointed place "Pozok" meaning dense forest in Lepcha language, but now it pronounced as "Peshok" incorrectly, which is now located just above the confluence of Teesta and Rangeet river.

As the Rongnyu (Teesta) river was led by the snake, flow of the river seems like moving snake and reached the appointed place faster than the male Rongit. But the River Rangit was led by the bird, it travelled through the circuitous route in search of food and reached appointed place late than female. As we observed the direction of River Rangeet carefully it flow though twist and turns up to the Peshok.

When the River Rongit finally arrived at schedule Place, he saw that the River Rongnyu had already arrived. He was surprised and shocked while seeing that lover Rongnyu had already arrived faster than him and waiting for him asked "ThiSthaa" meaning 'when you arrived'. Today the word "ThiSthaa" mispronounced as 'TEESTA'.

Disappointed and ashamed by being male and late, the River Rongit decided to return back to his own place, the Himalayas. While returning to his native place, the surrounding areas began to submerge. As a result the flood and great deluge occurred in the land of Lepchas, The Ney Mayallyang (present Darjeeling and Sikkim). They went up to the mount Tendong to protect themselves from the flood and deluge. In the mean time, they pray the Creator Rum (God) for help and God appeared to save them from flood at mount Tendong.

Mount Tendong: the (8675ft high) Mountain peak located in the south Sikkim. Lepcha offer prayer to the mountain peak and the God every year to express gratitude for saving the Lepcha community from sever flood in Mayallyang.

CHU RUM FAAT:

Chu rum faat is related with special prayer to Mount Kanchenjunga. In Lepcha Language 'Chu' means *Mountain Peak*, 'Rum' means *God* and 'Faat' means *offering*. It is the offering gratefulness towards Mount Kanchenjunga for creation of their first ancestors.

Significance: Lepcha believe that the God "Rum" Created the first Male Fudongthing and female Nazumnuo from the virgin snow of the mount Kanchenjunga. Since that this mountain peak is godly to the Lepchas and they worshiped it in all occasions.



PEAK WITHOUT A PRIEST

The spiritual leader of the Lepchas, Sikkim's indigenous people, died last week without anointing a successor. This could just be the end of an 800-year-old tradition of worshipping Khangchendzonga, the guardian deity of the state

Jaljeen Mazumdar | 1708

Khangchendzonga, the third highest peak in the world, is now without a priest. The last Khangchendzonga Bonghthing—the high priests ordained to preside over the worship of the peak that's revered by the Lepchas and is considered to be the guardian deity of Sikkim—passed away at his native Nung village in the remote Dzongri region of north Sikkim last week without anointing a successor. The death of Samdup Taso, 63, on October 29 has brought the curtains down on an 800-year-old ritual of the Lepchas, the original inhabitants of Sikkim who now number close to 55,000 and are in a minority in the state.

Lepchas have been worshipping the peak since the 13th century, when they settled down in the Dzongri region at the base of the peak. Since then the Lepchas have been holding special prayers and rituals to worship the peak in the month of "Kursong" (February-March). Taso, believed to be a descendant of the first Bonghthing, used to lead these elaborate rituals that would commence with overnight prayers at his residence. The next morning, the Bonghthing would lead a large procession towards Lha-shu, an open air altar at Nung—the first Lepcha settlement—while singing songs that trace the history of the Lepchas and explain this ritual. This processional song was interpreted and translated by Heikkin Siiger, a theologian from Denmark who

published the translation in his seminal work *The Lepchas: Culture & Religion of a Himalayan People* published by the National Museum of Denmark in 1956. Siiger had travelled across Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan in 1947.

According to this song, *Itzhu*, Kong Chen (as the peak is also called) was created by the God. The song dwells on a girl who lived at Samtsok Patan in Upper Dzongri along with her six brothers who were hunters. The brothers returned from a hunting trip one day and declared they'd go away forever to become Khangchendzonga's soldiers, the song says, and the girl promised her brothers that when she bore children she'd ensure they worshipped Kong Chen and his soldiers. She moved to a neighbouring village, married and had a son but broke about her promise, which enraged Kong Chen who sent 'Payelba', a mythical serpent that coils itself at Kong Chen's feet down the Talung river that flows through Dzongri and blocked the river whose rising waters created ponds among the people. It was then that the lady's son started praying to placate Kong Chen and the waters receded. This boy became

the first Bonghthing. A few generations down the line, a Bonghthing didn't have a son and he adopted a relative's son from Nung and passed on the knowledge of the rituals to him. That's how Nung became the source of successive Bonghthings. And Taso was the last in this line of priests. For some unknown reason, Taso didn't pass on the mantle to his son or grandson.

The annual worship of the peak used to be preceded by a trek by the Bonghthings, accompanied by some 20-odd young men from Nung, to this erstwhile kingdom's capital at Tumlong near Dzongri (the capital later shifted to Rabdentse in West Sikkim and then to Gangtok in 1904) where they would be received by the Chogyal (the King) and hosted at the royal palace. "Siiger's translation of the prayers shows that they were more than just a worship of Kong Chen; they were an invocation to the peak to protect Sikkim from external aggression, namely from Bhutan and Nepal. Offerings from all parts of the kingdom used to be brought to Nung for this ritual," says Pema Wangchuk, who co-authored a book *Khangchendzonga: Sacred Summit on the Lepchas*.

The yak sacrifice was stopped in 1973 as the Chogyal felt the practice was against the tenets of Buddhism. "He (Taso) told me that ever since the Chogyal stopped offering the yak, the prayers lost their lustre and even the time stopped being good for Sikkim," says Wangchuk, who edits a newspaper at Gangtok and interviewed Taso extensively for his book. Incidentally, internal strife overtook the kingdom and the Chogyal was deposed in 1975, paving way for the kingdom's merger with India that year. Many Lepchas believe that the discontinuation of the traditional offering (of yak) by the Chogyal displeased Kong Chen and brought to an end the 300-year-old Namgyal dynasty of the Chogyals.

After 1975, state patronage to the rituals at Nung ceased and the prayers became perfunctory. An attempt to revive the rituals a few years ago didn't succeed either. "Very few Lepchas follow the traditional Lepcha Mani faith and most have converted to Buddhism or Christianity. So few care for the rituals at Nung and fewer still know about them," says Wangchuk. "The tradition of the Khangchendzonga Bonghthing has ended forever. It is not possible for another person to learn the rituals and take Samdup Taso's place," says Sherap Lepcha, a resident of Tingvong and former East Bengal footballer. Filmmaker Dawa Tsering Lepcha agrees: "This centuries-old lineage and ritual has come to an end".



WHO ARE LEPCHAS?

The Lepchas believe they're the original inhabitants of Sikkim. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmesic group and they are divided into many clans named after lakes and mountain peaks that each clan worships. The Lepchas trace their history to more than 2000 years ago. A local chronicler mentions a Lepcha king sending his army to Taksha to help Chandra Gupta Maurya fight Alexander the Great's army in 327 BC. They are peaceful people who rarely indulge in violence.



END OF AN ERA: Samdup Taso, the last Bonghthing (above); and Rum Vik, the traditional residence of Khangchendzonga priests at Nung village

Picture source: U made us proud: facebook group of Lepcha community

Concept of "Chu Da Lep":

In Lepcha language **Chu** means mountain, **Da** means lake and **Lep** means the final way that from which their soul return to the God and from that their ancestors takes their soul to the lap of God. There is a relationship between the Lepchas and the different peaks of eastern Himalaya region. Lepcha community is casteless but they are divided into different clan called "Moo". They believe that each "Moo" have own "Chu" or mountain peak in eastern Himalaya and they believe that after their death their soul return from their own "chu" where their ancestors waiting to receive them.

In all ritual the Boongthing and Mun utter the prayers and offer the "Chi" and other product that grow in the nature and thank her for creating the world, and make it habitable for the human being, sought blessing from the mount Kanchenjunga for the well being of community, family, individual member of family.



PERFORMING NATURE WORSHIP

Picture source: U made us proud: facebook group of Lepcha community

LYANG RUM FAAT:

It is the FAAT that related to the offering of prayer to the “Lyang” meaning the *Land* or habitable piece of earth. It is the offering to the Mother Nature. Land as a part of nature that provides as well as supplies all the necessary condition for the growth of plants and raised fruits, crops makes habitation possible and provides shelter. In short, land provides the basic needs of man i.e. food, clothing and shelter.

Celebration: In the month of April-May (month of initiation of cultivation in hills region of north-eastern Himalayan region), Lepchas together in the particular hill top in open air of the villages and offer the prayer to sky for rain (they also pray for the timely rainfall) and request to mother nature to save them from natural calamities i.e. from drought, flood, landslide etc.

Significance: It is the FAAT that celebrated at “Kyongsezum” meaning *Village* level Lepcha organization. They realized that nature not only provides the needs of men and direct them on the particular direction but also put some obstructers in their way. She looks after all natural elements which are essential for the cultivation and living being. They realize that the necessity of the co-relationship between the Mother Nature and the living being of the earth. So

they offer prayer to the Mother Nature for their prosperity in cultivation as well as to save from the natural calamities.

SUGI RUM FAAT:

Sugi Rum FAAT is associated with the thanksgiving ceremony of their respective teacher who taught them to perform religious performance and make them known to use the medicinal plants that are available in the forest.

Lepchas have good idea and knowledge about the flora and fauna of the nature. Initially they are hunters and food gatherers. They were directly dependent on what available in the nature. They lived on the edible roots, fruits, green leaves, fungi, flower-buds, which are available on the jungle before initiation of shifting and terrace farming.

They also possess the knowledge of medicinal values of different plants that found in the forest were solely rely upon their knowledge of medicinal plants when they need. They also taught uses of different medicinal plants to their people.

Boongthing is the bare footed medical person of the Lepcha community who make the use of different medicinal plants for the cure of different diseases.

Celebration: All the Boongthing and Mun assemble in one place and pay their respects to their first Boongthing Thikoong Azaor and Mun Nyookoong Nyoolik and other respective teachers. They ask their contribution and help and blessing in this regards so they can help for the development of community.

Sugi Rum faatis also offering that is related to the medicinal herbs. During the offering all the medicinal herbs kept in front of the FAAT place and Boongthing and Mun offer prayer to the Mother Nature and benevolent almighty “Rum” (God) for his kindness.

MUT RUM FAAT OR PONG RUM FAAT:

MUT RUM FAAT is the offering that related with Jungle spirit. Lepcha people offer worship to this spirit before the hunting. Initially the Lepchas were hunters and food gatherers. Later they settled down started the shifting cultivation and terrace farming.

Before hunting, they organized this offering for two purposes:

1. For Good Hinting and
2. For their safety return from the jungle.

After returning from the hunting, the hunted birds and animals are first offer to the spirit and then they make used of it for their domestic consumption. They also thank spirit for the fruits and roots that make available for them in the jungle. They also believe that the spirit also protects their cultivated land from wild animals, insects and pests.

This Faat is organized far away from village were all the male members of Lepcha community of village together and worship to Jungle spirit. They need to surrender their entire weapon before the spirit and pray for their power. In this offering female member of community is strictly prohibited from attending this prayer.

SAKYAO RUM FAAT:

SAKYAO RUM FAAT is related with offering to the good spirit. Sakyao Rum is the good spirit who protects the harvested grain in the storehouse and even in the field. This spirit also protects their kitchen garden or orchard farm from animals, human being, birds, insects and pests normally who can destroy the field.

Normally Lepcha community cannot fence their farmland but no one can dare to enter into their field due to the fear of this spirit. Entry of unauthorized person to their farmland gets several pain even they get handicapped in which only Boongthing and Mun can cure by offering prayer to this spirit.

CONVERSION INTO BUDDHISM:

The conversion into Buddhism started with the advent of Tibetans ruler in greater Sikkim in the seventeenth century. For smooth functioning of their rule, the first thing which the ruler did was to bring all the subjects under the same religious faith which deeply violates the Blood Brotherhood treaty.

With the advent of Tibetans in Sikkim during the middle of seventeenth century, the downfall of the Lepcha started. “they (Tibetans collected and destroyed the manuscript book of the Lepchas, and translated into Lepcha parts of their own mythological works, under the name of Tashi-Sung (history of Tashi), thus, giving the pure and unsullied name of Tashi (which is single and invisible God, The Lepchas had hitherto to worship with all the simplicity and purity of children), to a foul and fabulous incarnation, whose presented life, and published, and this ,(with the indoctrination of the host of other deities), they preached to the Lepchas as a gospel”. (Mainwaring 1876).

The Blood Brotherhood treaty has rightly been considered as the beginning of the downfall of the Lepcha kingdom’. Not only they lost their land but all round disaster took place to the community. They lost their land, demographic strength, religion, culture, language and what not. It was rightly been said that to destroy any community the first thing to do is to hit and destroy their culture. A community stands and identifies on its culture. Blood Brotherhood treaty can really considered as the turning point of in the history of Lepcha society and their downfall which once started still continues to an unending destination.

RUMTEK: Present day Rumtek a Buddhist monastery in Sikkim, famous for pilgrimage for Buddhist monks as well as for adherents of Buddhism. It has located on the east district of Sikkim just near to the Gangtok, capital of Sikkim. It is also famous for the tourism. But according to the history, the Rumtek is the mispronounce of the Lepcha word “*Rum Tet Non Pa Oo*” meaning “our God Leaves us”.

Initially, before conversion into the Buddhism, Lepchas used to have long hair, and practiced burial of dead bodies instead of burn. But the Tibetans have broken out the Blood Brotherhood Treaty (which sign between the Lepchas and the Tibetans) of kabi Lingchok and force the Lepchas to accept the Buddhism which was alien religion for them.

Tibetans brought Lama (Buddhist priest) from Tibet to convert Lepchas into Buddhism. They compelled the Lepchas representatives to save their hairs and to accept Buddhism at place where the Rumtek monastery is located today. The innocent Lepchas did not protest such a humiliating acts. On the same day the feast had been organized there. When conversion process accomplished, the Tibetan priest asked Lepcha representatives who were present there, how you feeling today? The Lepchas representatives answered on their own language, “ALANG KAYUSA RUM TET NONE PA OO” which means from today, our God leaves us, we accept alien religion”. Later on the word “Rum Tet” mispronounced as RUMTEK.

CONVERSION INTO CHRISTIANITY: started after the British occupied the Darjeeling track from the Sikkim Raja during the middle of nineteenth century. As per census of 1981, 57.11 Per cent of Lepchas of west Bengal were Buddhist while 30.70 percent were Christians and the rest were Hindus. The loss of religion on their own homeland and conversion into alien religion is the matter of concern for small communities like Lepchas.

It is true that Lepchas were known and popularize in the world by Europeans. They have played the vital role in the spread of education among the hill people. The European whatever reason behind, were the person who took the initiative in developing, safeguarding and popularizing the Lepcha language culture to outside world. The arrivals of Christian missionaries too have the contribution for the socio-economic development of the hill people. But the conversion of Lepcha people into Christianity, which leads the Lepcha community from nature worshipper to confine within the rituals of church.

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